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The Women's Movement in India (III): Feminist figures at the beginning of the fourth phase

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Abstract

Today's feminist movement in India is more varied and active than ever before. A wide range of concerns, including sexual abuse and harassment, reproductive rights, and labor rights, are being worked on by different grassroots organizations. The women's movement is becoming more intersectional as a result of the efforts of numerous activists to defend the rights of Dalit women, Muslim women, tribal women, and other underrepresented groups. There have been a number of significant demonstrations and campaigns over the past few years that have aided in increasing awareness and bringing about change. The #MeToo movement, the #Justice for Our Daughters initiative, and the widespread demonstrations against the Kathua and Unnao rape cases are a few instances. This paper describes the public figures' profiles who fight against inequality which is still suffering in a contemporary period in the country influencing the fourth phase of the Women's Movement.

Keywords: Women's Movement, India, 2012, fourth phase, feminist figures

Introduction

Since 2012, the Women's Movement in India has been gaining strength. It has come up with the beginning of its fourth phase. This is largely because of the Delhi gang rape case, which triggered widespread protests and elevated the conversation about women's protection. Since then, the movement has fought for tougher women's protection laws and stronger enforcement of already-existing laws. In addition, campaigners have been attempting to alter social mores and mindsets that support violence and discrimination against women. Although the movement has made considerable strides, much work needs to be done before India can really attain gender equality. This paper focuses on a selection of activists who have set up the basis of this phase and have contributed to the cause, classified according to their birth they are Manasi Pradhan, ElsaMarie D'Silva, Barnita Bagchi, Nandini Sahu, Meghna Pant, Kirthi Jayakumar and Angellica Aribam, describing their work and influence within the Women's Movement.

Public activists who influenced the fourth phase of the Women's Movement in India

One of the essential women to point out is Manasi Pradhan (1962). She is an author and activist for women's rights in India. Manasi Pradhan was born in the Indian state of Odisha in 1962. She founded OYSS Women in 1987 as a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women in India, addressing topics like as women's safety, vulnerability, refugee crises, and more recently, fights for Covid-19 rights. In 2021, she posted in her Facebook timeline: "tune in for a conversation on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on women, speaking of the unspoken/differentiated needs of women and girls across the world, especially in the country" (Pradhan, 2020) ^[17]. She uses social media to promote her interviews, seminars, and events, stimulating interest among the Indian public and providing a forum for women to address their current problems.

Another inspiration for women nowadays is ElsaMarie D'Silva, born about 1970's. She is Safecity's founder and CEO, Elsa Marie D'Silva, crowd maps sexual harassment in public settings, being "sexual assault in public transportation venues hardly [...] a phenomenon exclusive to India" (Lea *et al.*, 2017: 228) ^[10]. Safecity is a website that allows users to anonymously submit their sexual harassment and assault stories. D'Silva is a social entrepreneur with over a decade of experience in the field of gender violence.

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She has developed and implemented programs for boys and men on gender violence prevention and response, gender sensitization and online safety for young people, and sexual harassment and abuse prevention for girls and women. D'Silva has also been working on the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) a project supported by scholars, workers and scientists to improve women's situation in India, which:

Strives to promote women's full and effective participation at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life, provide universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action (D'Silva, 2017) [4].

Her novel *She Is: Stories of women advancing the sustainable development goals in India* (2021) she tells the stories of several working women and all their problematic circumstances and invisibility as leaders, who "Through their unique perspectives they have shared on how despite one's backgrounds one can achieve one's goals, overcome socio-cultural barriers and contribute to the collective good" (NotionPress, 2021) [15]

Barnita Bagchi is another example of a feminist activist relevant for contemporary women. She was born in 1973. She is a literary and cultural critic as well as a feminist translator from India. She has been an associate professor of Comparative Literature at Utrecht University's Department of Languages, Literature, and Communication. As a critic, she creates an exceptional job in the comparison of earlier writers' Indian narratives from a feminist perspective. In one of her articles included in her extensive bibliography she highlights that as the second wife of Krupabai's husband and the author of various biographies of notable Indian women, including Toru Dutt, Padmini Sengupta oversaw the Indian Ladies' Magazine, where Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain published "Sultana's Dream", which is her now-classic feminist utopian story (Bagchi, 2015: 13) [1]

She studies women's educational narrative writing and agency in India during the 18th and 19th centuries, the history of education in colonial and postcolonial India, women's fiction in Britain and India during the long 18th and 19th centuries, utopian, dystopian, and speculative fiction from South Asia, and contemporary postcolonial fiction. Her research analysing and reflecting about East and Western narratives is crucial to understand Post-colonial fiction. In her book *The Politics of the (Im) Possible* (2019), Bagchi writes:

If from a white imperial feminist perspective, it seems heroic as well as competent to exercise female agency in the white settler colonies, equally, some colonial Bengali men frequently view female professionalism and competence as demonic and sexually licentious. We stated earlier that one (wo) man's utopia is very often another man's dystopia (11).

In a transnational and transcultural viewpoint, with South Asia and Western Europe as nodes, she is regarded as an international expert on women's literature, the cultural history of women's education, and utopian studies. Nandini Sahu is also pertinent to today's movement. She is

born in 1973, is an Indian poet and feminist writer who has explored her personal difficulties in her creative literary work, "Dr. Nandini Sahu's preoccupation with poetry began very early in life, and today she is a major voice in contemporary Indian English poetry" (Karmakar, 2017: 209) [9]. She is a popular figure representing current English literature. She is also a lecturer at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi National Open University. Several papers on post-colonialism, critical books, novels, and a poetry collection are among her writings. Furthermore, "Nandini's creative output has been widely published in India, U.S.A, U.K., Africa and Pakistan. Her published volumes of poetry include *The Other Voice; The Silence; Silver Poems on My Lips*, and *Sukamaa and Other Poems*, and *Sita (A Poem)*, and most recently an edited anthology of women poets titled *Suvarnarekha*" (Karmakar, 2017: 209) [9]. She has won several honors, including the *All-India Poetry Contest* and the *Shiksha Ratna Purashkar*. Although she represents a symbol of progressivism since her poetry and her person are recognized even writing about alternative concepts far from the conservative Indian perspective Karmakar admits she doesn't deliberately subscribe to any "isms" because living for more than ten years in a big city like Delhi has allowed her to see a broad spectrum of life, from tribal Odisha. As a result, women in her poetry also represent a variety of life experiences, exhibit human reactions to various circumstances, express interiorized ideas, and existential agony, as well as firmly praise the creative delight of womanhood (Karmakar, 2017: 220) [9]. Even if Sahu does not openly identifies herself with the feminist movement her actions help to build the path of those who have been defending and trying to change the situation of a violent country such as India. Nevertheless, Sahu unconsciously advocates the feminist cause since she declares:

Feminism is after all a significant feature of humanism and condemnation of one gender is of course not going to make the circle complete and successful. Gender Equality - that is the spirit of my writings. I try to sensitize the society about solidarity. My idea of feminism is three-dimensional-Feminist Studies, Masculinity Studies and Queer Studies (Karmakar, 2017: 221) [9].

Still significant for the Women's Movement is Meghna Pant (born around 1980), a contemporary Indian writer who has won numerous literary honors for her feminist take on the pressures of being a single woman after the age of 35 in today's society, as well as the contempt and condescension directed towards women in this condition. Giving attention to a path for women outside of motherhood is critical in deconstructing and reflecting on women's independence as people, as well as assuming equality amongst all groups. She has two novels: *One & a Half Wife* (2012) and *The Terrible, Horrible, Very Bad Good News* (2021), the latter of which has gained a lot of attention because she portrays a part of herself in the main character Ladoo. She has also taken part in the educative TEDx due to her background as "a physical abuse survivor, she has spoken at several platforms, [...] on her personal experience, urging women to speak out against domestic violence. She is credited for urging women to speak out and popularizing the slogan "Stop The Silence. Stop The Violence" (Pant, 2021) [11]. One of the characteristics of the fourth phase of the Women's Movement is the join of people with different

backgrounds. In the case of Kirthi Jayakumar, she is a feminist lawyer, writer, artist, and social activist from Bangalore, born in 1987. Her contributions as an author, she has led young people and inspire scholars to carry on their research on the role of women and the nationalist movement in India. According to Jayakumar (2018)^[18]:

While there is no singular defining point to ascertain the birth of patriarchy or the gender-based division that we see around us, it stands true that the discrimination remains real. When women began to go beyond the ascribed role of keeping home or raising and nurturing a family, it became imperative for workspaces to accommodate the needs of women – one manifestation of which is the world of maternity benefits (178).

Besides, in order to offer an alternative education, Jayakumar started The Red Elephant Foundation, a toddler-focused program that works on principles like peace, education, and gender equality. They are exposed to technology, peace initiatives, and storytelling. Jayakumar also runs The Gender Security Project a platform supporting gender issues, gathering all kinds of women digitally to discuss and propose initiatives to contribute to the deconstruction of gender roles and the relearning of social relationships and interactions “with a focus on gender, security, justice, and peace through research, reportage, and documentation” (Gender Security Project). Kirthi Jayakumar has received many awards thanks to her career as a worker and volunteer in relation to entrepreneurs’ projects. Finally, there are also political figures such as Angellica Aribam (1992)^[20], an Indian “political activist working on issues of gender, race, and the democratization of politics. She was named one of Forbes India’s “30 under 30” in 2017 for her work on policy and politics” (Seshamani, 2020: 3)^[18]. Aribam was born in the Indian state of Manipur in 1992. She worked as a journalist in Northeast India after completing her undergraduate education at Delhi University. She launched the Femme First Foundation in 2019, which is “a non-profit organization committed to amplifying women’s leadership in Indian politics [...] who believes that greater representation of the marginalized sections in decision-making diversifies the process, which in turn enriches the institution and society. Keeping this in mind, we aim to nurture and groom women political leaders” (Femme First Foundation). She is one of the youngest people, taking part in the students’ division of the Indian National Congress worried about the problems with racism in India due to Covid-19 arguing that “while racism and discrimination against people from the North-East has always existed, in the context of Covid-19, it has sharpened” (Seshamani, 2020: 5)^[18]. She is currently working through social networks to empower women to increase their presence in public organisms, she has “worked hard to encourage the desire to join politics amongst girls and young women, and ensured that the doors of the party I joined were always open to anyone with the desire to join politics. Representing the people always comes with a lot of responsibility, especially when you belong to a minority community” (Women in Foreign Policy).

Conclusion

The fourth phase of the Women’s Movement in India is marked by an increased focus on women’s rights. It can be

said it starts in the 2012 as a response of the Delhi gang rape case as the straw that broke the camel’s back and continues into the present day. During this phase, women’s organizations began to focus on the issue of violence and the legal system’s response to it. In addition, the fourth phase of the Women’s Movement in India has seen an increase in the number of women’s organizations and the formation of new types of organizations, such as women’s collectives and support groups. The growth of the Internet and social media has also played a role in this phase of the movement, providing new platforms for organizing and networking.

The goals of the fourth phase of the Indian women’s movement are similar to those of the previous phases, with a focus on gender equality, women’s empowerment, and an end to discrimination and violence against women. However, there is also a new focus on issues such as the environment, economic justice, and caste discrimination. The fourth phase of the women’s movement in India is ongoing, and it is unclear what the future holds for the movement. However, the movement has made significant progress in achieving its goals, and that it will continue to be a powerful force for change in India.

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