This proved to be politically damaging and attention now turned to the sterilization of women. The Indian Family Planning programme was now called the Family Welfare Programme (Rao 2004).

By the late nineteen eighties, international agencies like the World Bank were admitting that Population Control as a solution to the problem of poverty had been a failure. There are indeed profound problems with the underlying arguments. By focusing on numbers, what Population Control did not do was to investigate who was consuming resources. It was increasingly being realized that there was a need to move away from a demographic approach to the issue of poverty and that the new paradigm had to respect reproductive rights (International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) 1995).

Further reading: Ahluwalia 2008; Connelly 2008; Hodges 2008; Rao 2004.

—MOHAN RAO, *Professor, Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*

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Feminism

Feminism in India emerged and developed as an inextricable part of India's colonially mediated modernity. This is not to argue that India was innocent of ideas concerning women's subjugation prior to the advent of the British. Research on early Indian history (Tharu and Lalitha 1993) shows that Indian women did experience 'feminist' urges, and importantly also articulated both their sense of exclusion and denial as well as their desire for freedom and fulfilment. However, the specificity of Feminism, as a vision that rests on the idea of universal and equal citizen rights (irrespective of gender and creed, to be ensured by the state), is certainly located in a modern context. Likewise, the British nineteenth-century idea of the need to educate women for national progress, which left a deep imprint on Indian Feminism, also presents a historically specific, modern formulation.

Yet modernity ushered in by colonial rule was premised on—and operated within—structures that were deeply unequal and unjust, while the discourse of modernity spoke a language of freedom and equality, of progress and the inalienable right of people to self-rule. It is within this inherent contradictoriness and ambiguity of colonial modernity that Feminism emerged and took shape in modern India (Chaudhuri 2011).

Indians, though aspiring to a western modernity, simultaneously wanted to mark themselves off as distinct, different from, and even superior to the West. Indian women desired to rid themselves of the oppressive structures of tradition but, at the same time, wished to reaffirm the ancientness and wisdom of that same tradition. Some have, thus, argued that the woman question, such as exemplified by sati in nineteenth century India, was simply an incidental site to debate questions of tradition and culture, nation and modernity (Mani 1989). Moreover, attaining India's freedom from colonialism was seen as a necessary prelude to the freedom of women. Hence, given the close interface between Feminism and western colonialism, many Indian women in both the women's and national movements disavowed being feminist (Chaudhuri 2011).

This disavowal may be read as a denial of feminist visions or as bowing to patriarchal and orthodox critiques. But it is perhaps more productive to read it as a search for a different language in which the cultural specificities of Indian feminist desires could be articulated at a time when the discourse of 'difference' was both absent and illegitimate in the dominant public sphere. This disowning can be understood as a quest for 'authentic indigenous' cultural grounds for Feminism, a desire which persists in a twenty-first century still marked by global inequalities and western aggression. Contending power struggles between the 'western' and 'non-western' hemispheres have too often been fought over questions of the rights of women and the rights of culture. The 'western perspective' of women as 'nature' and men as 'culture' provides a different counterpoint to Indian women as emblems of culture (Chaudhuri 1995).

The above narrative is an important albeit a partial story of Feminism in India. For western colonialism was not the only unequal structure that marked Indian society. Indian society itself was deeply unequal, defined by caste and class. The rise of Dalit Feminism in the last decades of the twentieth century has drawn attention to the fact that Dalit women speak 'differently' and that an 'upper-caste' women's movement has erased their struggles from the story of the nation (Rege 2006).

It is argued that the nationalist framework—and the cultural making of the nation—shaped by the dominant upper castes and Hindu middle classes, has subsumed the woman question (Geetha 2004). In other words, questions of community and women's rights, of nationalism, secularism, and the state, did not crop up as a posterior add-on to the woman question; they were a bone of contention from the nineteenth century. For instance, it was debated whether *purdah* (lit. 'curtain', veil worn by women, also 'female segregation', for further discussion, cf. Chaudhuri 2011) was a Hindu or Muslim practice. Significantly, members of both communities blamed its origins on the other community, thereby claiming the right of 'their' women to be free from *purdah*. Even in the Constituent Assembly, which first met in 1946, it was debated whether religious rights would clash with women's rights (Chaudhuri 2011). This past history of Indian Feminism is symptomatically illustrative of the perspective of a twenty-first century West itself, often caught between contending claims of multiculturalism, the concept of the state bound to secular visions, and notions of the individual rights of citizens (Asad 2006; Chaudhuri 2012).

This past remains part of Indian Feminism's present. A bill proposing to reserve 33 per cent of the seats in the Indian parliament for women failed to be ratified in 2010 because leaders of a new and assertive middle class constituted by middle-caste communities saw this as a ploy of upper castes to retain hegemony over the state and Indian public life (Teltumbde 2010). Although women's organizations firmly backed the proposed measure, its realization seems to be a retreating possibility. Feminism is thus caught in the crossfire of hegemonic struggles even as they are fought in a language of social justice.

Feminism in twenty-first century India is therefore challenged by two forces: first, from a patriarchy that defends honour killing on grounds of cultural rights; second, from a neoliberal vision, which deifies the economy and demonizes collective and emancipative politics. Often both sets of views emerge from the same factions. In cases such as honour killings, the state is asked to follow the writ of patriarchally controlled communities (Chowdhry 2007). At other times, it is asked to shun social welfare measures for poor women and instead to facilitate financial institutions to deal directly with women as creditors (John 2004). The language of rights of women as citizens and workers to which the state must respond is replaced by the language of the market which is accountable to none other than the imperatives of profit maximization. Thus, the ongoing fight of 'indigenous' women to protect their livelihoods—against global mining appropriations—can be viewed as an impediment to development. If politics earlier sought to tame markets, proponents of this new form of global capitalism now use markets to tame politics. Images of individuated women, for whom an unbridled market provides endless opportunities, feed a dominant public discourse that celebrates the idea of an unfettered self—unfettered by the nation or family, community or state, or by the ideology of Feminism itself (Chaudhuri 2010). Female foeticide in such climes can be defended on the grounds of individual choice. In contrast, dominant real politics witness patriarchal assertions, be they overtly defending honour killing, concertedly opposing the Women's Reservation Bill or favouring lenient handling for those accused of rape. Feminist opposition persists even as challenges mount and become more complex and insidious.

Further reading: Chaudhuri 2004, 2010, 2011; Rege 2006; Sangari and Vaid 1989; Teltumbde 2010; Tharu and Lalita 1991, 1993.

—MAITRAYEE CHAUDHURI, *Professor, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*

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Freedom

India achieved Freedom at midnight on 14–15 August 1947. As Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) famously put it, when the world was asleep, India woke up to life and Freedom. This meant the end of nearly two hundred years of British rule, for which the Indian National Congress