

Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, and Practices.
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Intro, Historical Background Leading to the Present

And hello again, we're about to start our sixth topic, Chapter 6 in the set book. And our sixth topic is feminism, and that's what we're going to do next on our NPTEL ideologies course 2019-20.

Right, I'm going to be completely blunt about this. The condition of almost one half of humanity, that is women, is an obscenity. It is as great an obscenity that almost all of the world's societies and political systems and economic structures are such as to resist and [any] prevent any significant change to this state of affairs, this obscenity.

It hardly needs saying that poverty or an economic and social structure which enforces and requires large-scale poverty is an overwhelming factor here. Poverty is one of the decisive factors. And that is so not least because it keeps girls and young women from education. Consider the 15 to 19 age group in India's lowest two income quintiles. Only half the girls in that age group 15 to 19 in India's lowest two quintiles by income, only half the girls have even completed the fifth standard in school. That figure is from the World Bank, 2011. The figures may have improved since then, and since the right of children to Free and Compulsory Education Act was passed by India in 2009.

Even at that time, 2009, they were shocking - the figures were really startling. The median length of time girls spent in school in India at that time was 1.9 years. That's a median figure. It means that one half of girls in India spent less time in school than 1.9 years; they spent less than 1.9 years in school. That's one half of girls. For boys, the figure was 4.9 years. That too was not a great record, didn't show a great record in education, but in school time alone, let alone education. But that is over two and a half times the figure for girls.

Other things are inflicted on girls and women which are even worse. I quote from the World Bank; more than 1.3 million girls are not born in China and India every year because of overt discrimination, and the spread of ultrasound technologies that allow households to determine the sex of the foetus before birth.

We are of course aware of the extent of female foeticide and female infanticide in, according to the evidence, both India and China. Over and above that, mass rape is now a standard weapon of war. It always was a weapon of war. But it's now a standard mass weapon of war. Indiscriminate mass rape of women by combatants, by people carrying out war, is now a standard weapon.

It's also carried out by other men present in war and in war zones. It's now a standard weapon in war, and has included the deliberate transmission of HIV and AIDS. Now that, if I'm not mistaken, is from a UN or UN-funded report, the sources are in the set book.

And quite apart from that, women do the overwhelming bulk of the world's work. What does that mean? It means running family homes in addition to working outside the home. They spent twice, at least twice as much time as men, doing unpaid work in the home. Women's participation in the global labour force, that is not the workforce, which refers to people in work, women's participation in the global labour force, that is availability for work, women's participation declined from 57 percent in 1990 to 55 percent in 2012. And women workers are paid between 10 and 30 per cent less than men for the same work. And this applies at every level of work in apparently all occupations on the planet. Now these figures say nothing about other forms of inequality, such as the ownership of wealth in the form of capital or land.

The World Bank does recognise that, I quote again from the World Bank, women remain heavily concentrated into lower-paying jobs, including less productive and less profitable entrepreneurship and farming than men. Occupational segregation is enduring, as are wage gaps; that too is from a World Bank report.

It is also the case that women writers, scientists and philosophers, by philosophers, I mean virtually everyone working in the humanities, have never had the attention or the opportunities given to their male counterparts. Even the impact of particular women on our world has been grossly underacknowledged. In the early 1840s, Ada Lovelace, the great - the daughter of the great poet Byron - Ada Lovelace wrote what was probably the world's first computer programme. It was an algorithm for one of Charles Babbage's calculating machines. She saw that such machines could be used for purposes which went far beyond arithmetical calculations and nothing else.

She invented the first computer programme. Other examples, they abound, there are plenty, but they get grossly insufficient recognition. Well, we might say, well, Marie Curie's discovery of the element radium in the late 19th century is famous, but it is less widely noted that Marie Curie was, or Skłodowska-Curie to remember her earlier name, her birth name, she was not allowed to deliver scientific papers to many famous bodies. She was not allowed to take academic posts in at least one famous university.

And that's the inventor of radium. Think of the uses of radium in everyday life today. One of the early figures in the development of the science of radioactivity. And she wasn't even allowed to deliver scientific papers. She was not allowed to take academic posts in at least one famous university. In political life, we are at least belatedly, very belatedly, starting to take note of and give credit, if not yet due credit, to women's role in historical developments, such as the French and Russian revolutions.

So the position and role and part played by women are not only materially, but in our understanding of it, in effect, a gross obscenity. We ignore women's role, we ignore the amount of work women do just to keep human life, to sustain human life in all its forms. This is an obscenity and I, I am not, I fear that I can't see evidence to make me change my thinking very soon.

But - there have been plenty of criticisms of this state of affairs. There's nothing new about feminism, and there's nothing new about the knowledge of the condition and situation of women and there's nothing new about the will to do something about that condition. One of the earliest known statements of feminism is by Christine de Pisan, an Italian woman who wrote her critique in the early 15th century.

In addition, countless other works around the world written over many centuries often say things about the position of women in society. Even if they do so while expressing other concerns, they still demonstrate this, they still show the position and condition of women in society.

What we need to do is to understand the ways in which the present situation has been explained and challenged; that it needs to be challenged hardly needs saying, and that's been said again and again. Potentially, almost all of human society as we know it could be transformed; take it further and say would be transformed.

Emma Goldman's comment is both anarchist and feminist. I quote:

First, by asserting herself as a personality and not as a sex commodity. Second, by refusing the right to anyone over her body, by refusing to bear children unless she wants them, by refusing to be a servant to God, the state, society, the husband, the family, et cetera. by making her life simpler, but deeper and richer. That is, by trying to learn the meaning and substance of life in all its complexities, by freeing herself from the fear of public opinion and public condemnation. Only that and not the ballot will set women free.

Goldman is telling us exactly how comprehensive and far-reaching are the changes we need to end the captivity of women, the global oppression of women. Now historically, feminism does not seem to have developed as a single ideology, even though today it is much more like one, and it is a very significant one at that. It could, as Goldman has shown us, transform the world. I'd go further and say it would transform the world.

The development of feminism parallels and illuminates historical periods. For example, what is taken to be the first text of modern feminism was written shortly after the French revolution had effectively reshaped Northern Europe by abolishing the French monarchy and by stating the doctrine of universal rights. The book I am referring to was Mary Wollstonecraft's book, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, I beg your pardon, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; that was published in 1792.

Over the next half century or so, that is, into the early 19th century, the demand for women's rights gained momentum as forms of democracy spread, and they spread particularly as the elites, however reluctantly, accepted the spread of the vote to other classes. The franchise was still restricted to men; the vote was still restricted to men. Even though in industrial countries trade unions were very much part of the struggle for the vote, they were still largely male organisations. Women rightly demanded the vote too, and the franchise seemed to be a vehicle for the emancipation of all women from earlier restrictions and oppressions. Many of its advocates thought that the franchise would cause all other forms of prejudice and discrimination against women to disappear.

Now since 1893, in contrast to what may well have been millennia of discrimination against women, much of which continues, since 1893, the vote for women has been achieved relatively quickly. New Zealand gave women the vote in 1893. Australia followed suit in 1911. In 1920, the United States gave women the vote, and that was with the 19th amendment to its constitution.

The amendment process for the United States Constitution is extremely complex. It requires, if I'm not mistaken, a two-thirds majority in every State Assembly - and, again if I am not mistaken, a two-thirds vote in favour in both the chambers of the Federal Congress. The United Kingdom equalized voting rights in 1928.

And since then, almost every country which has adopted democracy has almost unquestioningly started with equal voting rights for women and men. This was also the case in India, even though in India, the universal franchise was the subject of considerable dispute for some decades before Independence and even after Independence. But the vote for women, was almost unquestioningly introduced.

Some countries have taken gender equality in the electoral process very seriously. Tunisia is where the Arab Spring famously started in January 2011. It requires, Tunisia requires, that all parties field equal numbers of men and women in elections to the national parliament, and the names of male and female candidates are alternated on ballot papers, with each woman candidate's name coming before the corresponding man's name.

Now, Tunisia, if I am not mistaken, takes this further, or provides wider opportunities for women to be elected, because if I am not mistaken, it has a fully proportional electoral system. We don't need to go into the details of fully proportional systems here, but there is strong evidence that they provide much wider representation because [candidate,] because voters can choose from a wider range of candidates in multi-member constituencies.

There are different proportional systems. But what we need to note about Tunisia is just how seriously it has taken equal opportunities, equal candidature opportunities for male and female candidates, the ballot papers are actually written to favour this, to bring about this. And, by putting women's names first before the corresponding men's names, the electoral system itself serves to reduce the extent of discrimination against women.

Well, this achievement of equal voting rights, which has taken place fairly quickly, and is now virtually global in all democratic states, this achievement of equal voting rights has often been called first-wave feminism. There is a second wave or what's been called second-wave feminism. It is more recent and it stems from the fact that by the 1950s, it was clear that achieving the vote had not been enough to end systematic structural and social disadvantage for women.

It was becoming clearer and clearer that more fundamental changes were needed. Mere voting systems, the vote itself simply was not enough. What kind of changes were needed? Among the first pointers to these was a book by Betty Friedan, an American writer. She wrote a book called *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963.

Friedan examined the lives of suburban American women. To the rest of the world, such women may have seemed to be living the American dream. They had husbands in relatively secure jobs. Certainly in those days, the idea of a settled job for life, whether in the private or the public sector, seemed to go relatively unquestioned, with the state as the major guarantor of the economy, with the economy expanding very rapidly after the war, and so on.

So - such women seem to be living the American dream, husbands in relatively secure jobs, comfortable homes in comfortable suburbs, children in good local schools, access to all the goods and appliances of American consumerism, such as mass ownership of the motor-car, such as mass ownership of television sets, high-quality refrigeration for the home, and so on.

Instead, Friedan found something very different. She went around and listened to women living what looked like the American dream or the suburban American dream. Friedan found among large numbers of the women a sense of boredom, frustration, and depression. This resulted from their effective confinement, a condition of what was in effect confinement to the roles of housewife and mother.

Many of the women's doctors were prescribing antidepressant medicines for what was in fact a social condition. The American dream was nevertheless spread and reinforced with immense power and effect by Hollywood movies, by television programmes, and the rapidly [advertising,] expanding advertising business. All of these spread the vision of the American dream - the 2 children or 2.4 children or whatever the figure was with mummy running the home, and daddy going out to work, all living a perfect life in leafy American suburbs. Instead, what Friedan found among the women was a sense of boredom, frustration, and depression.

Needless to say, medication - antidepressant medicines - were not going to change that because that was a social condition, the result of social structures and social systems. We are also aware, and have become aware since then, that many of the antidepressants used whether today or in those days can be highly addictive, and there have been serious scandals to which we've referred briefly before.

Now, what are the implications of Friedan's work? One is that women need much greater access to education and careers than they have had so far. Others took the arguments much further. Kate Millett wrote the book *Sexual Politics* in 1970. And in the same year, Germaine Greer published *The Female Eunuch*, a global bestseller.

Both books had a huge impact, with fierce criticisms of the ways in which the oppression of women is not only educational and occupational, but also has personal, psychological and sexual dimensions. Millett and Greer argued that legal reforms and legislative changes were not enough; they [those] did not address those legal and legislative reforms, did not address much wider and globally powerful forms of oppression.

The roots of those lay in whole societies, including their structures and political systems and the attitudes prevalent across whole societies. You will no doubt recall that at the end of our topic on conservatism, our conservatism topic, we looked at very recently published findings from 19 states of India. This survey was carried out by the centres for, the Centre for the Study of Developing Studies in New Delhi and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the Konrad Adenauer Research Foundation in Germany.

19 states, a population aged between, if I am not mistaken, if I remember rightly, 15 and 34, and what emerged were very deeply conservative attitudes across the entire sample and by implication across the entire population surveyed. These were attitudes to women's work, to authority within the family, to the upbringing of women, to matters sexual, and to conduct, including conduct between boys and girls and men and women. So we shouldn't be surprised that legal reforms and legislative changes are simply not enough.

Millett and Greer put forward extremely powerful, highly passionately written arguments with disturbing and very powerful examples to show that changing the system by law, changing institutions by law, is simply not enough. In whole societies, the issues lay in social structures, political systems, and attitudes across entire societies.

What they did, what Millett and Greer did in effect was part of a process which greatly expanded or very greatly expanded our sense of the political - because what they did showed that something which had previously been, at best, a minor part of public discourse or had been kept to the private realm, the private space of the family, was in fact a crucial element in the way whole societies work, and that that element should therefore be a major focus of public concern.

This kind of insight was perhaps best encapsulated by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, because they in 1969 gave the title 'The Personal is Political' to a paper by Carol Hanisch. Firestone and Koedt were editing papers from a feminist conference for publication. Hanisch, for her part, was already very active in what had come to be called the women's liberation movement, and she had organised protests at the Miss America and other contests.

Now the women's liberation movement started, succeeded in challenging many of the most basic assumptions of social and political thought at the time. And it was a decisive advance in the spread of feminism around the contemporary world. Well, the point that they the campaigners at that time brought to global attention was that the structure and shape of the family, apparently a private space and regarded as a private space in liberalism or liberal thought, was shaped by social structures, by economic systems, and by legal systems. And it expressed nothing less than the global [expression,] oppression of women.

Around that time, a great deal of feminism-inspired research expanded very greatly. Among other things, it exposed domestic violence which might otherwise have gone unknown. And it has been, this kind of research has been complemented by work in other fields in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, in around that period, the psychiatrists R.D. Laing, Aaron Esterson, and David Cooper, all challenged the assumptions and methods of mainstream psychiatry, and they used detailed observation to show that the family, far from being a universally caring and nurturing context, was very often the site of terrible conflict and cruelty.

Now that is the kind of contribution made by second-wave feminism. It exposed the conditions in which half of humanity, the great bulk of half of humanity, lived. It also reminded us rightly that what looks like a private space, the family, is itself structured, shaped, permeated and informed by social attitudes, economic and political systems, and so on.

In other words, saying that the personal is political does not reduce the political space to matters of personality or to personal preference. What it does is very greatly expand our sense of the political space.

Well, since then, various analysts have said that there is such a thing as a third wave of feminism. And in this, women feel sufficiently empowered to readopt some of the clothes, such as, high heeled shoes, cosmetics like lipstick, for example, which for example, second wave

feminists often reviled and rejected. And third-wave feminism seems to say, yes, it is all right to use some of those and have them and enjoy them without feeling oppressed or constrained.

This may be an expression of a general, or perhaps postmodern even, refusal to accept fixed identities or the sex gender divide or other concepts, which have featured in feminist and other debates. I have drawn that point from Rampton, published in 2008. Now many of the structural problems which women face, nevertheless, have not been altered. And that is in the same work by Rampton.

In many ways, these problems have grown even worse, particularly for women in the developing world. I will offer example, my former colleague on the national newspaper, *The Hindu*, P. Sainath has often pointed out both in his writings and in public lectures that women on whose lives he has reported, who are out working very long hours are in the workplace, but they're paid terribly badly often working 10 and 12 hours a day, paid very badly because of gender discrimination in the workplace, even if they're working in the public sector. I've seen this myself when I talk to people who come and collect my pre-sorted rubbish in my own neighbourhood. I talk to them, ask them about their working days, ask them what they are paid and it is inevitably less than the men doing the same job are paid, even though they're doing exactly the same job.

Sainath brings out another equally serious point. The women invariably, almost without exception, run their homes as well. Some were in effect working 20 hours a day, and getting four hours' sleep before they had to get up, often travel very long distances to work, work all day, often in subordinate positions for wretched, obscenely poor pay, and then go home and run the house all over again.

Sainath has written about that and you may wish to look at his writings. I make the point because it's an example of how the structural problems women face have in many ways made things even worse, even if women are starting to play a greater part in the workforce in various parts of the world. There may be regional variations in certain parts of the world, but that's a matter for the social science investigators. But nevertheless, the structural issues have often simply not been altered.

Well, whether or not a third wave has emerged, and irrespective of the range of issues and approaches which shape and inform feminism, certain concerns are common to all forms of feminism. What are they? I'll list them here and we'll have a slide on them when we resume next

time. I'll list them here and spend a short time reviewing some of them, and we will refresh our memory on those when we meet next time.

What are these common issues, common concerns, which run through all forms of feminism, the public-private divide, that's the first one, patriarchy, the second one, sex and gender, the third one, equality and difference, the fourth one. We'll spend a little time on the public-private divide, because that follows on naturally from Carol Hanisch's insight that the personal is also the political. In other words, the political space has to be recognized as shaping, informing and permeating the family itself.

By that, we mean not just party politics, but legal and institutional systems, social attitudes, historical and cultural inheritances. In other words, the public space is the whole of society, and shutting the family out enables women's oppression to go unexamined and unknown. So the public-private divide is an obvious, examination of that is an obvious consequence of the kind of insight that Hanisch crucially provided and which we are fortunate to inherit.

Well one of feminism's great achievements then has been to put very firmly on the contemporary political agenda the fact that politics extends far beyond the purportedly, the apparently conventional, arena of elections, parliaments, governments, art, literature and so on. Instead, any spaces where human power relations are involved, such as the workplace and the family, are also political spaces.

What happens within such spaces is also shaped by the wider political forces in any society. For example, inequalities of wealth and power within the family and the different male and female roles within the family are themselves not natural. They're the result of political and economic systems and structures and cultural and social attitudes and so on.

Now the consequences of our recognition that the shape, form and relationships, the shape of the family, the form of it, the relationships within it, are themselves part of our wider political and social culture, the consequences could be - of that insight could be very far reaching. Many industrial countries have recognized that state-funded childcare enables women to resume working when a traditional family structure would prevent them from doing so, either completely or until children were much older.

Some countries have legislated to grant paternity leave for varying lengths of time too. Now in addition, the earlier traditions of political understanding, our understanding of the political or

public space, grossly undervalued and demeaned and even obliterated the contributions women have always made to keeping even traditional societies function at all, functioning at all.

These contributions still include the overwhelming bulk of childcare, and the care of the elderly or the sick. They also include the bulk of early years and elementary schooling, and nursing care and hospital or other organised forms of health care. Women are overwhelmingly involved in these areas of life.

Now, what that tells us is that what we thought was a private or familial space is political, and that women are crucial to keeping entire societies, entire countries and cultures functioning - and that they do far more of the work keeping societies functioning than men do. Much of this work, in addition, goes almost completely unrecognised.

Well, I'll pause this topic here. We'll go on to look at the other three major issues in feminism - that is, patriarchy, the sex and gender divide, and equality and difference when we meet next time.