

# Engendering Research

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# Engendering Research

- If we look at the beginnings of women's studies in India, we realize it emerges out of a need
- The need to intervene into the androcentric knowledges and disciplines of the social sciences
- Thus, "Engendering Research" is at the heart of Women's Studies
- It is a continuing battle

# Committee on Status of Women Report 1974

- Committee on the Status of Women in India Report (CSWI, 1974)
- How its findings throw open the biases in policy and development in Independent India
- women and gender have been ignored in studies of society and cultural production, what questions are asked or what is not asked

# Objectivity – Power Relations

- One of the major interventions of the women's/feminist movement has been a critique of the categories such as 'objectivity', neutrality
- And the distance between the knower and the object of knowledge
- Uncovering the relationship of power—feminist research

# Self Reflexivity

- Awareness of privilege is central to research
- Moments of discomfort and doubt, failure to communicate are not to be ignored, critical to self reflexivity
- Often researchers smooth over failures and hesitations
- “They can guide us to more thoughtful renderings of participants’ lives...” (Kirsch, 1999)

# Feminist Research Ethics

- Feminist research ethics
- Self reflexivity....what is it?
- Begins with reflections of one's own "positionality"
- Critical awareness of social, cultural, economic locations, experience, embodied presence in the world
- Eg. How middle class women might patronize working class women.
- This is not always conscious but normalized.

# Feminist Standpoint

- While feminist standpoint is important, in practice, it is often reduced to ‘women’s standpoint, thus reducing “woman” to an essentialist category
- That is why Sharmila Rege’s intervention “A Dalit Feminist Standpoint” is important
- Draws attention to the structural and societal differences in the way violence is experienced for instance

# Case Studies

- Two case studies that are illustrative
- First, from Ann Arnett Ferguson's recording of an African American mother's outpouring after she is arrested on charges of child abuse
- The interview is like a monologue, without interruption. Written up like a poem
- Both form and content centre the Black mother's experience



(This was spoken to me. You must read what Mariana had to say aloud. You cannot understand it unless you hear the words.)

## I. THIS IS MY CHILD

They pulled the guns out  
what did I do?  
This is my child!  
Don't tell me how to raise my child.

I was so upset at that time. The lady cop she was checking his  
elbows and his knees. He was scratched up

but I didn't do that.

[Her voice is thick with tears.]

A n d they write down  
he has a hairline scratch on his back  
so many inches long.

I was like,  
I didn't do that  
his sister did that  
they was fighting one day and she did that.

They read me my rights,  
put my hands behind my back, put handcuffs on me.  
and I was like—  
Why?

# Research by Lakshmi Kutty.

- The second example is from the research conducted by Lakshmi Kutty in the old city of Hyderabad among Muslim domestic helps
- Why are they routinely sick even though free government healthcare is available?
- In order to conduct this research, Lakshmi took months to make herself 'acceptable', the process could not be hurried.

# Critical listening and empathy

- The gap between the ideal patient from the perspective of medical science and the lives of the women
- Through ‘critical listening’, empathy and self reflexivity, the researcher is able to understand the decisions of these women
- “Gulcose chada ke aa gaye”

# Intersectionality

- Intersectionality (introduced by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw) is a critical tool
- Speaks of intersecting and overlapping identities

# cont

- The violence that women experience is shaped by
- Other dimensions of their identity—race, class, caste, community etc

# Pandemic and Exclusion of women

- I will end by very briefly raising some questions relating to our current moment—the pandemic and migration
- How does one study this moment?
- We hardly see any women in the narrative of the migration or pandemic
- The stories we get are stories of extra-ordinary women



<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/22/world/asia/india-bicycle-girl-migrants.html>





# Women's Questions

- The invisible actors/survivors of the pandemic
- Often as wives or care-givers then taking on additional responsibilities
- What did the mass reverse migration do to them, and their already minimal right to privacy, nutrition or hygiene
- Why would a 15 year old drop out of school and take on responsibility way beyond her age?
- Do pre-existing frames of the 'girl child' help us to understand?