

Amitava Chatterjee [Ed], *Historicizing Gendered Modernities in India*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2020 pp. 284, Rs. 1150. ISBN: 978-93-89850-00-0

Santanu Ghosh

Historicizing Gendered Modernities in India edited by Amitava Chatterjee is an anthology of a wide range of essays which covered varied aspects of enlightenment, rationality, industrialization, democracy and other important aspect of modernity. In her introduction Charu Gupta clearly emphasized that fast modernity in its trust sense of the term is always incomplete without active participation of women. With the expansion of urbanization and dissemination of print culture formal education of women helped these deprived citizens to become more active in their social involvement which created both constructive and destructive potentialities. Numerous debates regarding masculinity and femininity are still on in the academia. In her introduction Gupta took certain significant issues of gender while analyzing the interactions between the social subjects.

The traditional believers considered modernity as masculine. Anirban Das in his essay tried to portray gendered dimensions of modernity in a different perspective. City comprises of social factors, economic factors as well as political factors. Social reality according to the author can be highlighted through literature. Even imagination speaks of two entities such as city and country. He highlighted the fact that the transition from the national culture and provincial culture to city culture became a major concern of the historians. City according to him created a new cultural construct.

Ritu Sen Chaudhuri argued that India wanted to come out of the cage of colonialism and became a free bird. Thus, modernity tried to focus on the Independent Nation. The subalterns were of the opinion that nationalist ideologies may be considered as a key to open the cage. All the evil customs were imposed upon women. Colonialists claimed to bring reforms for women by offering them education. The author has used the term “New Women” by which she emphasized on the Bhadramahila. The elite ladies were restricted to the private domain and the rules and regulation of the private domain were decided by the moral guardians of the society. As far as nationalist discourse was concerned during the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements, large section of women participated in the mass movement. Women started raising their inner voice for their rights and this unequivocally suggests an amalgamation of feminism with nationalism. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani has been emphasized in this respect.

The paper entitled “Toward a Phenomenology of The Flesh: -The Women and The Ethics of Resistance” by Anirban Bhattacharjee is based on theoretical perspectives focusing on texts. The term “phenomenology of the flesh” speaks about flesh which is blatantly feminine and that can create a change in the authoritarian patriarchy in various ways. The concept of flesh is very much attributed to the femininity. Author tried to portray a life of *pativrata nari*, who has sacrificed her

entire life serving her husband but ultimately gains nothing and commits suicide. Even suicide has its own words to speak.

Koushiki Dasgupta's article speaks about the concept of peace building which was divided into three broad aspects such as political peace building, structural peace building, social peace building. UN has given propositions on peace building such as conflict resolution, post-conflict planning, post –conflict financing, gender responsive civilian capacity, women's representation in post-conflict governance, Rule of Law, Economic Recovery. In case of North- Eastern India and Kashmir, rape became most common crime. Lot of development took place in the post-independent India due to migration. Women were basically portrayed as peace maker both in the political and domestic sphere. Research shows that women should have the position in the executive, legislative, judicial, non-political bodies. The questions of women in the north-eastern India were also taken up by Prof. Sajal Nag. Where he mentioned that Naga Mothers association was one of the significant women's organizations in the region. Its main role was to bring about peace in the region and its motto was Human Integrity with the main objective to uphold womanhood, human rights as well as welfare of the Naga people. Many Assamese groups worked hard for the empowerment of women.

Bhaswati Chatterjee in her article on divorce mentioned that legal zones were confined only to men. In this context, All India Women's Conference demanded equality of men and women. During this period various acts were introduced like Indian Divorce act of 1869, special marriage act of 1923, Baroda Divorce Act. By emphasizing the case of Bengal, Dr. Chatterjee highlighted women like Anurupa Debi who opposed the basic idea of divorce where as Anindita Debi supported divorce even before 1923. Many women were even converted to Islam because divorce was not permitted in the Hindu law. According to Sreejith K. middle class were just a minority in the 19th century Malabar. Mentality of the new middle class was different from other classes. New middle class tried to create New Women. In Indulekha, education of women was given utmost importance. Middle class tried to change their cultural, social, domain of the society.

Binayak Dutta focused on the fact that Violence is a part of the society, even violence is gendered. He emphasized on three important factors-politics of partition, displacement and rehabilitation. He has always tried to argue that Eastern zones were often deliberately neglected. Women tried to organize groups to raise their voice against the deteriorated communal relations. Dr. Dutta focused on the emotional sentiments of the people where he examines the emotional attachments of the women to their ancestral soil. In certain situations, only male members of the family had the right to take decisions about their migrations. The author expressed real concern about preserving the diaries of women. These narratives can be considered as treasured sources for reconstructing the history as well as sentiments of women in the patriarchal world.

In his article "Women in Patriarchal Bastions: Historicizing Bengali Female Participation in Sports" the editor of the anthology, Amitava Chatterjee argued that there is a common notion that sport is restricted to masculine world. But the idea underwent certain transformation from the first decade of the twentieth century. Female body was not spared by the colonizer as an anxiety on their part to control the juvenile bodies. Thus, the girl's institutions were exposed to regular

physical trainings. Different unexplored facets such as public events, dress code as well as the issue of gendered spectatorship have been analyzed by the author. This study will open up new vistas in the domain of physical culture of women subjects in colonial Bengal.

Maroona Murmu analyses the autobiographical account of Kailasbashini Devi. Her diary reflects the happiness of married life and also throws innumerable light on various historical episodes of Bengal. From her writings, we get varied information about the “western ideal of a compassionate marriage”. Samrat Sengupta explored about the agonies of women in their inner domain. According to him transcendence of women is considered as a fairly new concept in Indian philosophical system. Education nevertheless gave her the power to develop a self–identity which in turn was again reflected in her writings.

Aparajita De’s article on scripting the Indian – Heroine in Bollywood argues about the fact that women were just scripted according to masculine perspective and the female characters were just objectified. Women themselves according to the author played an important role in breaking stereotypes that are inherent in each and everyone’s mentality. Prof Manorama Sharma added a perfect finishing touch in the epilogue. She identified gender and gender relations which are considered extremely essential for the modern society. The question of gender equality is also stressed by Prof. Sharma. She also highlighted the gendered feelings as a part of history often neglected by historians.

The book attempted to examine about the diverse aspects of the study of gender. Editor tried to incorporate almost all the important gender issues ranging from colonial perspectives to the post-colonial one with a brilliant introduction and abalanced epilogue. But there is no denial of the fact that some other aspects like narratives of marginalized women, transgendered perspectives would have enriched the volume. Certain cultural issues such as art and aesthetics in gender perspectives would have added a new flavour in the corpus. Keeping aside all criticisms, it is nonetheless a bold attempt to focus on the analytical perspectives of gender in the Indian context.

