

Feminist engagements with the Law: Reflections from India

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Feminists in India have a complicated relation with the law. Historically feminists have been successful in getting the state to formulate laws to protect women against various forms of violence be it dowry, sexual violence, domestic violence or sexual harassment. However, the law has been a double-edged sword for women—both protecting women and regulating women within certain gendered, sexual and familial norms. This seminar will discuss feminist engagement with the law in terms of the question of sexual violence in India. Feminist engagement with the question of sexual violence has centered on rape law reforms in the country since the 1980s. In the recent context, the 2012 rape of a woman by a group of men in a moving bus in Delhi brought international attention to the issue of sexual violence and led to huge protests in the national capital and the country. This event reiterated a colonial version of Indian women ‘who needed to be saved,’ in the international context. The Indian state too rushed to intervene by passing amendments to rape laws, which established more stringent punishments and increased power of the state in controlling women’s sexuality. In the process, sexual violence once again reiterated a naturalized sexual difference without engaging with the diverse ways in which bodies are made vulnerable to violence.

Bio:

Papori Bora is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for Women’s Studies in JNU. Prior to this, she was a Postdoctoral scholar at the Department of Women’s Studies in Pennsylvania State University. She has a BA in Political Science from University of Delhi, a Master’s in Social Work from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and a PhD in Feminist Studies with minor in Development Studies from the University of Minnesota.

Her research is at the intersection of politics, sociology, history and feminism. Her research interests are in the areas of: political representation, citizenship and the postcolonial nation-state, the politics of indigeneity and ethnicity. Her feminist focus is on gendered violence, sexuality studies, gender, nationalism and the nation-state and postcolonial and transnational feminist theories

Her research has been published in journals such as the International Feminist Journal of Politics, Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies and as book chapters. Currently she is working on two manuscripts, one on the political history of citizenship in India’s Northeast titled *Inclusive—Exclusion: A Political History of India’s Northeast* and second *Bodies, Vulnerabilities and Resistances: Reading Feminist Politics at the Margins of the Nation-State*.