UNDERSTANDING

INDIAN SOCIETY

PAST AND PRESENT

Essays for A. M. SHAH

Edited by

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Disciplinary reviews are periodic and necessary exercises in our intellectual projects. They usually focus on a particular theme, sub-discipline, or perspective and start from varied questions, through which the published and, at times, unpublished literature are examined. Occasionally, they may be conjoined to a study based on primary data.[1] Reviews of sociology from a feminist perspective or from feminist social science have focussed on theoretical and empirical blindness and/or conceptual confusion in the dominant paradigms,[2] or on the new analytical conclusions, advances, challenges and interests of feminist social sciences.[3] A critical aspect of the history of feminist sociology/social anthropology has been a battle for recognition, even to the point of disciplinary rupture. Thus, an issue common to most review projects has been the extent to and manner in which feminist questions, perspectives, concerns and persons have been incorporated within the discipline.[4] The answers rest on the intellectual, pedagogical, organisational and institutional dimensions taken into account. Reviews have looked at the extent to which women and feminist themes are present in articles published in professional journals, books displayed at professional fora, and at the number of women who are members

or holding positions in professional associations or in faculties, even as they have examined the critique, concepts, and arguments of feminist sociological research and writings. The attempt has been to assess the shifts and continuities in the discipline through these discussions.

STUDYING CURRICULUM CHANGE

Part of such an assessment has also to be whether and how the concerns and analyses of feminists of various hues enter university syllabi. However, most reviews do not attempt an overview of shifts in course structure and the teaching of sociology in universities and colleges.[5] Teaching reflects current disciplinary content and boundaries as we4His influences future research agendas and thereby directions in the discipline. Of course, this is not an easy task even if the varied curricula of the innumerable universities in India alone could be collected and collated.[6] As most university teachers know, there can be a gap between the written document and the practice—not necessarily negative—making the project even more complicated. Further, sociological interest lies not only in the shifts in content and style of teaching, but in the dynamics which enabled or hampered disciplinary shifts and ruptures. That syllabus revision and teaching gender studies is an exercise in the widest and critical sense of politics, and movements for change is almost a truism for feminists and others (though some may describe it as a political exercise in the narrow sense of a jockeying for position and pelf)- An understanding of this process requires that more actors and agents are interrogated—students, teachers, academic officials', among others.

In this paper, I make an attempt in this direction through one case study, that of the Department of Sociology, IJniversity of Delhi, where A. M. Shah was a professor for many yeafs and encouraged the study of women and gender. I explore the dynamics of the engendering of a syllabus through a narration of the process in this department, primarily in the years 1987-91, based largely on the first-hand experience of a then new and temporary faculty member, along with material from interviews of different generations of students, group discussions and folklore. The narration may be seen

as a coded transformation of the story of the struggle and politics to change gender relations and transform society beyond the university, an experience which parallels it, is structured by it, and feeds into it.

In reviewing the process of curricula change and looking at the shifts and inertias, the successes and failures, a number of interacting features emerged and can be delineated, (i) The structure of the university in terms of a series of committees through which new or revised courses must traverse.[7] This tiered system is entailed in the federal structure of the university (DU henceforth) in undergraduate teaching, is an academic review and monitoring mechanism, ensures a semblance of democratic functioning, and can become a bureaucratic nightmare. The cumbersome procedure also means that individually initiated changes can come to fruition most easily in MPhil/research courses (where the number of committees is at the minimum as discussed below). At the graduate and undergraduate levels, radical syllabi changes are possible only if a number of colleagues in the discipline, Department, and elsewhere in the university are sympathetic to the concerns and are carried along—in other words if there is a movement within the discipline. There are few shortcuts to this, (ii) The discipline of sociology in terms of articulated boundaries—with other disciplines, between academic versus activist, applied versus theoretical, published and unpublished work, and the closures of professionalisation. This of course directly feeds into and is determined by the validation of issues and the content of the discipline, which is explicated and embodied through teaching syllabi, (iii) The specificities of a department in terms of theoretical and political orientations of individuals who make it up and the institutional culture and history, which may or may not amount to a 'school', (iv) The strength, spread, visibility, and nature of the women's and other movements outside the university and among various sections of the university community. Owing to limitations of space, this last aspect is unfortunately the least discussed in this paper.

INITIATING SYLLABUS CHANGE IN THE UNIVERSITY

The Department of Sociology in DU was set up in 1959 under the headship of M. N. Srinivas with an MA programme. An

undergraduate programme was introduced in 1964. An MLitt programme was also started but was replaced by the MPhil in 1976, which included course work. In 1981-82, a course on 'Women in Indian Society' was offered as part of this programme jointly by the Sociology and History Departments of the university. Before this paper was introduced in the Department, there had been an occasional dissertation—MPhil, MLitt, or PhD—which had looked at aspects of middle-class women's lives or women-related concerns of social reform and, in the immediately prior period, the registration of two doctoral students whose research questions pertaining to rural women were explicitly rooted in current streams of feminist thought and theorisation.

The MPhil 'Women' paper had been designed and was run at the initiative of a research associate in sociology and a professor in history, both of whom were women, one who was at the entry point of recruitment to the faculty and the other in a senior position. Given the total intake in the MPhil programme, a respectable number of students, largely from the Department of History, opted for it. After a few terms (about two to three), it was not offered for some time, though, like most of the existing courses, it was retained as an optional paper in the restructured MPhil, in which two compulsory papers were introduced. The 'Women' paper was subsequently revived and taught by two other members of the sociology faculty in separate years—again a research associate and a professor and, again, both of them women—with different relations to feminism and the political edge of women's/gender studies, and the orientation they gave to the course. Except for once, there were always keen takers, though in varying numbers. In one term, the lone student who opted for the course refused to change her option, though it was suggested that she might find it either too hard or not rich enough in discussion as she would have no classmates.

It may also be mentioned that this cooperation between the History and Sociology Departments also saw the formation of a Gender Studies Group in the mid-1980s. It consisted largely of teachers and research students from these two disciplines and emerged as a response to the need that research students had expressed for a group interested in gender studies in which they could discuss their work. For a couple

of years it was active in holding discussions and workshops where students, faculty and visitors presented their research. The GSG was reborn later in the early 1990s—at the initiative of some MA students in sociology and with a more activist orientation.

That the first teaching paper in the Department was at the MPhil level—the highest decree to include course work rather than the lowest, the BA—was not surprising. It is very easy in DU to introduce a new course in the MPhil programme. Officially, only the Department's MPhil committee has to pass it and the printed syllabus does not carry a reading list, which signals that MPhil papers are research oriented, flexible, and can be constructed afresh each year by the teacher and students. Unofficial practice, as in the Department, may require that the Staff Council vets and passes a new course and that the proposer circulates a suggested reading list on which discussions in the committee will be based. There is a strong notion that each course becomes part of the public documentation and profile of the Department, likely to remain forever on the books for which all faculty members are held 'accountable'. Furthermore, in subsequent years, teachers other than the original designer may offer the course. This is seen to necessitate a collective discussion and 'approval'.

In the oral histories of the Department and in oft-reiterated views of its institutional culture, the MPhil is the point for experimentation, innovation and specialisation in syllabi. The MPhil committee can allow for a catholicity not possible in lower-level degree courses, which are taught separately at a number of colleges with diverse faculty but a common examination. Thus, not only women/gender but also courses on agrarian structure, development, environment were first offered in the MPhil programme. The point at which themes can be introduced is where sociological research is 'young'—or where faculty introduce previously untaught interests, where disciplinary boundaries may be transgressed, where the Parsonian division of subsystems or the original course divisions into 'system, structure, change, problems' are put aside. It is here that one can move beyond the classics in heretical directions. The naming of the Department as a Centre of Advanced Study in Sociology by the UGC also means that it has to ensure that it is at the cutting edge of the discipline, important to the self-image of the Department.

The introduction of the MPhil course on women was not before its time. Since the publication of *Towards Equality* in 1974, the International Year of Women in 1975, and the renewed women's movement in India from the late 1970s, issues of growing gender and class inequalities, women's rights, and violence against women (rape, dowry deaths) were in the public domain again. The ICSSR had instituted doctoral fellowships to encourage research in women's studies, which had directly led to the registration in the Department of the two doctoral students mentioned earlier. Not only was the struggle for a women-sensitive academics about a decade old internationally, many studies and documents had been published in India.[8] An Indian Association of Women's Studies (LAWS) had been formed in the same year as the course was begun, and courses had already been initiated in other universities. Its path of entry into the formal teaching programme and the changing levels of student interest in the MPhil 'Women in Indian Society' course indicated the acceptance of 'women's studies' in Indian social sciences, but as an empirical specialisation rather than a remaking of any of the disciplines.[9] One sees here the legitimacy given to a theme by the active support and position of individual teachers[10] and of the creation of intellectual interests within academia by social movements outside it.

DESIGNING GENDER

Already registered in the Department as a doctoral student, I joined it as a research associate in the mid-1980s, after earlier short stints as an ad hoc lecturer during which the Department had completed a long overdue revision of the BA (Honours) syllabus, in which women/ gender did not figure anywhere. Others who had been engaged with gender in their work were no longer in the. Qepartment. While the number of PhDs or MPhil dissertations which'was women-/gender-/feminist- focussed could still be counted on the fingers of one hand, the issue was visibly present in discussions in the public arena, in movements, in academia at large, and in sociology. By this time, Srinivas, the founder of the Department, but no longer in Delhi, had written a couple of academic papers on women in India, as had other faculty members. Women formed a large percentage of the faculty

(though not of professors) and an even larger percentage of the students at all levels, underlining the absence of a necessary link between the presence of women and a gender-sensitive/feminist sociology.

Discussions on revising the MA papers had started and immediately there were contentious issues, as is bound to be. Some detail is necessary here, if we are to understand the problems and possibilities of the engendering process. First, leaving aside the first step in revision, which is what I focus on, the remaining steps (outlined earlier) before a new course gains approval and becomes part of the university's curriculum can take up to a year or more. Redesigned courses and papers as well as new papers can only be taught to students admitted to the university in the year after the entire procedure has been completed. This of course not only means that by the time a course is taught in a mushrooming area of research, much new and exciting work has been published which is not part of the official course readings. It also means that for the department faculty 'unofficial' change in their teaching and suggested reading list is easier and can be continuous, so that the urgency to change the written, authoritative document is experienced in an attenuated manner. The printed syllabi, however, have to guide the examinations which 'must be in course', thereby putting a break on radical change.

As I have mentioned earlier, the syllabi are repeatedly described as public documents. The MA and BA course structures can be read not only as a take on the state of the discipline but as a charter for sociology's future in the university and the country, that is, the Department's manifesto. It gives status and legitimacy to the sociology practised by individuals and the Department as a unit. Every faculty member, even those who say that they eschew politics and that their academics is non-ideological, feels s/he must have her/his say on arriving at the manifesto, particularly since any and all may have to uphold it and teach any part of it subsequently. Given the university structure, a consensus has to be arrived at. Thus intellectual engagement, academic commitment, and democracy are equally significant when syllabi are discussed in DU, making it a slow process. Further, experience made it clear that there had to be a specification of both collective and individual rights and responsibilities—in this case of the Staff Council and the individual designer/subcommittee. At times these were pitted

against each other, not least because of differences in theoretical approach and views on sociology of the individual members. In such a context, changing syllabi can be educative like research seminars, a consciousness-raising exercise, and a lesson in democracy, hegemony, and hierarchies in universalistic institutions.

In the revision process which developed, the most contentious issues and papers were the compulsory as against the elective papers, the number of compulsory as against elective papers, and which papers were to be compulsory and which were to be elective, as well as who had the right to revise an old paper or design a new one. Simultaneously, it was oft asserted that if courses on which consensus could not be arrived at were not to be stopped, colleagues should propose as many new electives as they wished. Of course, the more eminent and senior you were in the Department, the more likely that the course would be accepted in the form you had designed, despite serious misgivings on the part of other colleagues. Or the more junior you were, the more necessary it was that either you carried more than the majority with you or the course was seen as peripheral and yet desirable, with nobody else ready to do the job. As is well known in institutions and universities, the numbers and position in the faculty of advocates of one or another sociology do influence the directions in which sociology will be pushed.

These battles raged, and first and second drafts of individual courses were discussed. As a junior faculty member I would mumble about gender and, along with other newly joined faculty members, assert the desirability for more and newer electives. Many of my colleagues, including professors designing courses on stratification, development, and India, recognised that 'Women had to find a place in the MA course of the Department and would talk to me about it. Finally, the professor coordinating, syllabus revision asked me if I would design an elective course on women and I jumped at the suggestion. I deliberately did not get into issues of the course title as it would mean a discussion on perspective—women or gender—and ignored the pointer that it was to be an elective paper. I was asked to name two colleagues to join my subcommittee. By now, I had realised that strategy was important. I asked for a colleague whose research focus at that time was not on gender and who was even

more temporary than me, but who had taught courses on women, gender, and feminism elsewhere. The second name I proposed was one of the two senior professors who I knew had strong views, as all professors do, and who would raise objections. I decided that I would prefer to engage with them in the subcommittee rather than the departmental forum and thereby work out my arguments for the course I proposed. Also of importance, I knew that the senior professor would ensure that my design was not so out of keeping with the Department s sociological philosophy that the course would be killed at the start.

The institutional culture was my starting point. The closest there is to a DU 'school'of sociology or a sociological philosophy can be described through nine elements which make a disciplinary orientation, culture, or style. These are: (i) an emphasis on ethnography (and on intensive fieldwork at the doctoral level); (ii) on the classics, which are to be read in the author's own words, albeit translated; (iii) the difficulty if not impossibility in demarcating sociology from social anthropology in a postcolonial time and context. This was important for there was more of gender in anthropology than in sociology; (iv) that the comparative and an India-focus are both important; (v) an emphasis on sociological debates rather than 'facts' in the teaching (more at the postgraduate than at the graduate level); (vi) that undergraduate and postgraduate courses are best structured through the device of the four subsystems reified by Parsons; (vii) only readings labelled as sociology or social anthropology and (viii) published work may be included in the official syllabus; and (ix) finally, that on these points, especially iii—vii, there may be dissension and debate, which, however, may only be aired or allowed a marginal space in practice.

These elements are extracted from the discussions on various courses during the syllabus-revision process. They became most apparent to me when designing, presenting and defending the gender paper through the subcommittee, the department council, and the committee of courses. It was an intense learning and socialisation process. I give only some of the details regarding the process and the debates. I tracked down and looked through a vast array of gender/ women courses in sociology and social anthropology and in women's

studies departments in India and in other countries and talked to colleagues working on courses elsewhere (cf. Uberoi 1989). Not only was it necessary to distil all this, there was a need to delicately balance the above nine elements and make a break with them. Feminist and Marxist work had been questioning the canon and what was designated as the classics, the four subsystems, and the boundaries of disciplines—it was also not finding it easy to be published (Delamont 2003; Rege 2003). The social construction of gender as a possible title was rejected at a very early stage within the subcommittee itself. The simple title of 'Gender and Society' reflecting the move from the description of women to that of relations between and among women and men was settled on. The ban on unpublished material was turned into a tool to help us delimit what was already too vast a field for such a general paper.

From the start, there was a consensus that the course must be comparative and rich in ethnography, theory, and debate. It would not only be consistent with the other MA papers, this also seemed necessary if the paper was to arrive at some sort of feminist pedagogy. The teaching of gender and women had started in the Department with an MPhil course oriented to the empirical/substantive in India. In designing the MA course, I wished to move from the study of 'facts', to encourage critical thinking regarding the common sense on gender among the students who opted for it, about the world around them, their own lives, and the sociology they had done so far. We felt that to further this, we needed to include materials which integrated the comparative and theoretical with the ethnographic and picked up on themes, concepts, and authors that they would have tackled in other courses in their MA programme. Thus, we framed the course to start from the point of looking at the history of the discipline as a sociology/anthropology of men. It would then broadly trace developments from women's studies to gender studies, articulating and making visible women in society and turning to the study of gender relations. Selected readings, such as that by Douglas (1970) on purity and danger or by Uberoi (1971) on men, women, and property in Afghanistan, were not necessarily feminist. Encouraging critical thinking also meant that the course should demand hard work and excellence from the students, rather than allow them to

float through it! Despite continuous pruning, the final approved course was thought to have rather a too long reading list, including some work by students, some of whom had hoped to opt for an easy and marketable elective (see below).

Needless to say, there were queries about the logic of topics and the justification for readings. Why was there a topic on feminist politics when there was none on feminist economics or culture? I delineated how other topics incorporated feminist analyses of economics, family, and culture. I argued that De Beauvoir, a philosopher rather than a sociologist, was included in the reading list on the grounds that The *Second Sex* was a classic for any study of gender in contemporary social sciences. This perhaps formed a real break in one element of the Department's sociology. Ethnographies on India, such as Sharma's study on women, work, and property, were not questioned. The authenticity of Mead's ethnographic comparison of gender and personality in three societies had been aggressively questioned in recent years[11] and had become a point of contention. However, the necessity of including a reading by her in a course which introduced students to the social anthropology of gender and the comparative dimension of that particular book finally made it acceptable. That there had to be a balance of classics and contemporary readings allowed the inclusion/exclusion of some readings as did the argument that they should/would be covered in other courses.

GENDERING THE MA PROGRAMME

Pedagogical concerns meant a continuing insistence that a gender paper cannot be the only place where gender enters the syllabus and that it had to be an issue in compulsory papers in particular. Despite my socialisation into the department pedagogical practice and growing realisation of its sacred cows, the apparent encouragement of discussion I perceived here made me rush in where angels feared to tread. Undoubtedly, the extent and quality of scholarship on women/gender that was by then available, the questioning of the silences on women in the social sciences, institutional measures such as the ICSSR Programme for Women's Studies, research committees in international professional bodies, the increasing

visibility of women's issues in public life, and a long history of excellent and vocal women academics were arguments supporting my contentions.

Women/gender was included as sub-topics or readings in a few papers. Was the inclusion merely tokenism? Women (and class) were a minor sub-topic in one of the two papers on India. Broadly, these two papers divided the sociology of India into two—India as the land of caste, tribe, village, family, and religion and India as a nation in the making. It was in the latter paper that a sub-topic on 'Women in Indian society' had been included. Its wording had been revised in response to comments in the department committee, but not the readings. Gender and race were the two sub-topics under 'Natural differences and social stratification' in a paper titled 'Social Stratification' and framed around occupation. The readings listed—statistical and positivist—was in keeping with the overall structure of the paper, which it was decided could not be tampered with. In the development paper there was no topic, but a chapter from an empirical macro-study on women and the environment had been included. Kinship, a natural for engendering, had neither topic nor reading, and with other battles being fought over that paper, the issue of gender could not be raised. Another surprise was the continuing absence of gender in the paper on political sociology. The elective on population could not but have age and sex as a sub-topic of elements of population analysis, but no reading which had emerged from feminist sociology or demography was included. And the elective on the sociology of science, another area in which feminist scholarship had raised critical issues, remained silent on the matter, as did all the other papers, compulsory and elective. Wanting to ensure that the gender paper was passed with some feminist scholarship forming its core, the battle over the inclusion of gender in other electives was not always pushed very hard.

One aspect became evident. It is at the point of working out the frame and the principles which will organise the topics and readings of a paper that gender has to be part of the discussion. Thus, the orientation of the stratification paper made the particular reading chosen seem the most suitable. The silence in the political sociology paper can be related to its framing in terms of state and local political

systems, a perspective which had been gender-blind, though feminist analyses of these concepts were available. The absence was furthered by the idea that movements and resistance were more appropriately discussed in a separate paper, in keeping with a perspective that system, structure and change are to be treated as distinct fields of study.

A vital issue in looking at the MA programme is the implications of the division between compulsory and elective courses. One of the factors which opened the doors to a course on gender and society in the late 19S0s, in the design of which temporary members of the faculty were primarily involved, was that it was an elective course. On the one hand, it thereby became part of our charter and showed that we were at the cutting edge of sociological scholarship and teaching. On the other hand, it did not threaten the non-gendered interests and concerns of other members of the faculty. In any case, there had been a long and bitter discussion over many weeks as to the compulsory-elective combination, the numbers having been finally settled. Which courses would be compulsory had now to be decided. In a short and sharp exchange, my request that the gender course be made compulsory was rejected. This had as much to do with views on the centrality or otherwise of the study of gender to sociology, a valuation of the scholarship on gender, and contending claims. What was gender to replace? The theory or India papers, methodology, one of the subsystem papers, or symbolism, stratification or development, the three specialisations which were included in the compulsory list? All were more basic and central to the MA programme it was averred. Further, the scholarship in gender studies, it was argued, did not as yet match that which any of these other papers could call on.

Did this mean that the sociology of gender was marginalised or that it was able to retain its critical edge? Neither and both! A few years later there were sharp attacks on the declining standards in universities following feminisation and the lack of rigour in feminist scholarship (Beteille 1995; Gupta 1995). These pieces, by two male sociology professors, one an eminent and senior scholar and member of the Department, who had written on gender, and the other also well known and associated with it, have many implications. As others have commented, the backlash against gender and feminist studies seen worldwide suggests that even as feminist scholars feel they have

a long way to go, things have moved. Whether owing to the specific efforts of scholars in academia or the wider impact of the movement, sociologists have to take account of work by women and feminists. Yet the backlash can also have negative effects on our labours. Attacks by important people in the discipline affect new and aspiring entrants to the profession, to the study programmes, and to those who administer them. Undoubtedly, by and large a woman sociologist still has to be better than a man and much more 'professorial' before she will be considered for an equivalent post. Even now, when research proposals are examined, questions regarding the absence of a gender dimension can be labelled as group and identity claims, rather than as issues of epistemology and methodology.

TEACHING GENDER

What a written syllabus means in terms of pedagogical practice depends not only on what is in the public document, but on the orientation and interests of the teacher, official pedagogical instruments and the under-life of the institution. As emerged from the practice of teaching in subsequent years, even a token sub-topic can pave the way for further questioning and provide more space to do so than a reading not attached to a topic. It does not necessarily get sucked into a larger unchanging discourse. A topic can be given more time within the span of a course than a visual impression of the written outline conveys. Thus, in the papers on India and stratification, as more faculty members developed an interest in or a concern with gender, it became one of the lenses through which they discussed many topics and one of the points of view in the various debates which ran through the substantive and theoretical issues in each paper. This was also the case for the kinship paper where, though gender was not mentioned in the topics, the debate on nature/culture was central and topics on political/jural and personal kinship gave an entry point to a teacher or students who wished to look at the growing field of kinship and gender. In the papers on development, on population, and on education, gender/feminist studies could again seep beyond its stated space, but was rarely articulated as fully formed separate examination questions. This influenced the attention students gave to the issue.

The shift in interest and the growing visibility of the scholarship in the sociology of gender emerges if the tutorial topics that students were asked to work on are examined in the papers mentioned earlier. Hie tutorial programme in the Department is intensive, more so since continuous internal evaluation was begun about a decade earlier. It is a critical pedagogical instrument and central to the self-valuation and image of the Department. Each semester, students write essays after discussing the topics in a group of four to six classmates and a tutor. The lecturer in each course suggests the topics with readings, which an individual tutor may modify or add to. Through the tutorial topics, readings, and discussions, teachers introduce new writings, issues, perspectives and debates beyond the bounds of the printed syllabus which determine the annual examination. Student seminars are another pedagogical tool which can and were put to use in this manner.

The significance of the theoretical and pedagogical orientation of the teacher means that the reverse can also occur—a course may be bleached of its gender content or feminist interrogation. Despite being a sub-topic or reading, there may be no lectures on it, leave aside it^ influencing the rest of the paper. The students may be asked to read up on it on their own and pick up mixed signals on the relevance of the topic or reading, depending on their own orientations. Examinations are critical to the attention they give to readings and topics, and if they pick up the signal that 'there won't be a question', they may leave it aside. Student interest in gender has also grown and waned over the years, but their demands on particular courses seem to take into account the interests of the teacher. Thus one year, in teaching the paper on India, I had not suggested a student seminar on gender. Some students, however, pointed out that they had heard that in previous years I had done so and that they would like to make a presentation. The teaching of sociology in general and gender in particular is tied to responses from students as discussed further below.

WHY STUDY GENDER?

Gender has been a concern expressed by a range of students, but not necessarily their focus, partly, it seems, because the idea has percolated that it is a sub-question in any area of research. In the

MPhil programme, I have been finding over the years that while students may not choose an elective on women, they choose ethnographies on gender or with a strong gendered theme for their seminars and term papers within a rubric of theoretical orientations in sociological research in India. Most of them would actually read the gendered ethnographies which others were to analyse than those on other themes! They did not wish to specialise in gender, but wanted an acquaintance with gender theory and ethnography. This of course supported what has long been my pedagogical contention. Rather than depending on separate women's studies courses and programmes alone, making the themes and perspectives part of existing disciplinary and more general programmes and courses can go further in fighting the silence on women and gender and encouraging a critique of intellectual work and social relations. However, not only is that the more difficult exercise, as the experience of introducing a gender course and gendering other courses in the Department illustrated, it depends on the interests and orientation of both teacher and student.

The number of students opting for the gender course in MA has varied greatly. In recent years, enrolment has been relatively high. As the number on the faculty interested in gender issues increased, so have the number of MPhil courses with a gender content, and the sum of those opting for one or the other are a good part of the total intake.[12] It is important to recall that at all levels in DU, the majority of students in sociology are women, more so than their proportion in the university as a whole. This is also true for the faculty. Both in the faculty and in study programmes, however, the balance shifts as one moves up the hierarchy of positions (research associate to professor) or courses (MA to PhD). Thus, it is not surprising if most students who opt for an MA elective on gender are women. Parallel to this, as far as I have been able to ascertain, except for the first year and perhaps one other year, the proportion of boys in the course have been in accordance with or more than that in the class as a whole.

Students in their final semester of the MA and in the MPhil expressed a variety of reasons for their choices and of their experiences of the MA programme and the gender course. MPhil students, in particular, mentioned the teacher as an important factor in their

options. One MA student said he had chosen the gender elective as he had thought it would be 'scoring,' and because it was an important area in sociology. He compared the 'gender' studied in this paper as against that in the compulsory ones such as in the India paper. He said the latter was more empirical and on women, whereas in the elective the focus was more on relations between men and women and it was more 'ideological'. He confessed, however, that he had attended few classes and this was his take on the topics and readings as printed in the syllabus. While he was very comfortable with the fact that the majority of the teachers in the Department were women, he felt that they were stricter evaluators than the male teachers! Some students chose the gender elective for personal and intellectual reasons. One girl spoke of how she had perceived gender discrimination in her family. The gender paper had helped her to understand much more about gender relations and structures in her everyday life, clarifying aspects she had been 'sort of aware of'. This was a view expressed by a number of women students and was reflected in the deathly pall which fell in the classroom one year as we discussed de Beauvoir's critique of the idea that love marriage expresses gender equality or emancipation. For a couple of students, the MA course confirmed for them that they would like to undertake research in gender studies. A number spoke of how male classmates had changed over the two year MA programme with the discussions inside and outside the classroom. However, some pointed out that there were those who continued to make a division between women as 'girlfriend or good wife material'![13]

For a number of students, the paper was not practical enough—as they felt was true for most of the M.A. programme. Among the latter were students who had come to MA sociology in search of a course on social work. For some, this was a response to the constant interrogation of their everyday lives and assumptions in the gender course and the MA programme as a whole, leaving them with few certain answers or those which were difficult to live by. One student said she had not chosen the gender elective as gender was discussed in other compulsory and elective courses, such as the papers on kinship, India, stratification and urban sociology. Not only did she feel that she could read about it on her own, she participated in discussions

in her hostel organised by women's organisations and the union, as well as activities of the GSG in the Department. She chose electives on themes which she felt had been little touched on otherwise in the programme. Furthermore, given that two of her other electives were 'heavy', she wanted some which did not involve as many readings as did the gender paper!

Thus, choices are made on a number of grounds. Intellectual engagement, personal interest, toughness and scoring possibilities, future plans, and employment possibilities all play their role, as do developing significations of 'gender', informal ratings of teachers and their position in the academic hierarchy. Discussions with their 'seniors', oral histories, and local mythologies are important in their assessments on 'scoring and toughness' and teacher ratings. Intellectual engagement and personal interest are linked to what students have studied in previous programmes and papers and to extra-curricula discussions around them. While there seems to be no clear connection between the presence of gender in earlier papers and programmes and their opting for electives on the theme, explicit running down of gender issues as serious and central to the discipline does dissuade uncommitted students from opting for the elective.

The impact on the teaching programme made by active feminist groups within the campus is more complex. On the one hand, they help create an awareness and build discussions around gender, become support groups for students and teachers interested in researching and teaching gender, and take up feminist issues within the campus. On the other hand, given the other factors which influence the choice of electives, students may opt for the vibrant extra-curricula discussions on gender along with formal courses on other specialisations. Furthermore, the greater visibility created by activists for gender issues can be seen as threatening to some who become sharper in their ridicule. Choices made by students of study programmes are clearly linked to past life experiences and future aspirations too, and this is undoubtedly tied to the direction and strength of the women's movement outside academia—both in the direct impact on the nature of research undertaken by feminist or anti-feminist scholars and in opening up questions and validating concerns.

Time and again, students have said of others that they made a choice for or against a particular course because of its marketability, because it was scoring, or because it was not tough. The marketability of the gender course has grown with the expansion of the NGO and development sector and the shift from voluntary to paid activism in the women's movement. Sociology students who choose not to continue in academics or teaching are going into journalism, publishing, NGOS, and market research—all areas which have been impacted by the women's movement and where various institutions have leapt into the spaces created by the movement. On the one hand this is disturbing—the critical edge of gender studies had to be blunted if it was so easy or chosen instrumentally. On the other hand, whatever the reason for which students chose a course, could they be left unaffected by the constant interrogations of lived assumptions and sociological certainties which the readings made explicit? Would it not ensure that feminist and gender concerns spread into fields beyond academia and committed activism? A twist to this is that since attendance is not compulsory, students can miss much of the critical thought, debate, and discussion. Thus, marking examination scripts can be very hard on the spirits!

HOPEFULLY NOT A CONCLUSION

This narrative could now elaborate on the recent changes in the undergraduate programme in sociology, in order to examine the impact of gender teaching in the MA programme and also the influence of the growing feminist scholarship within the discipline. However, I will be very brief on this. The overall structure of the programme remains the same—India, theory, method, subsystems, stratification—but with the introduction of four elective courses, including one on gender and society. Gendered topics have been brought into the introductory and kinship papers as well as a number of others, particularly those in which the theme was introduced many years ago in the MA programme—India and stratification. Thus, gender concerns have spread across the syllabi and teaching of sociology in DU. Certain bastions seem to remain—such as the study of the sociological masters—partly because the departmental

style dictates that commentaries are not part of the written syllabus unless it is by a thinker in her/his own right. This is also to do with the continuing difficulty of accepting the theoretical power of a feminist thinker, especially within sociology,[14] and the growing number of those who may be considered contemporary 'masters' (cf. Delamont 2003).

The case study of DU sociology demonstrates that sociology has changed over the last two decades. However, if efforts to engender sociology are to move forward, they have to begin from the point when teaching programmes and papers are being framed, rather than being added later on. Generally, gender-sensitive and feminist sociological writings are still asked to prove themselves as twice as good and rigorous—on the basis of pre-gendered criteria—to be included in reading lists. As with any attempt to change an existing structure, it requires extra labour from advocates of the change and a readiness to take on more than one's share of responsibilities. Personal and intellectual interest in gender studies has grown and diffused among many of the faculty as well as the student body, whose profile has changed. The enjoyment by a subsequent generation of young women of openings made possible by earlier collective struggles has much to do with the ebbs and flows in feminist interrogation. The hope that as a specialisation it will enable employment and the fear that it will mean marginalisation in the discipline are simultaneously present, with contradictory pulls in making student choices. This has much to do with the environment within and outside the Department and particularly the ongoing processes and debates within the institutional context of the university. Finally, gendering sociology means pushing debates over the modes of apprehending and theorising social relations and culture, the central concepts of the discipline, and indeed of the relationship between sociology, the university, and society.

Endnotes

[1] Of the last genre, A. M. Shah's *The Household Dimension of the Family in India* is a premier example. Over the years, students have returned to this

book time and again for its classification and analysis of fieldwork data and through this its review of the then state of the art within this area of study anJ the elaborate critique and clarification of the various concepts used in this literature.

- See Acker (1973), Oakley (1972), Millman and Kanter (1975), Smith (19~*4) for early feminist critiques of sociology, and Lutz (1990), Rapp (1970), Rosaldo (19S0), Strathern (1987), and Collier and Yanagisako (1989) for discussions of anthropology. Dube 1997 and Palriwala 1994 review what gender studies can draw on in a specific area—kinship in South (and Southeast) Asia. Rege (1994) and Uberoi (1993; 1994) look at Indian developments in gendering sociology.

* Barrett (1980) and Moore (19S8) were widely read 'review' texts which pulled together themes and debates in feminist sociological and anthropological research (in the 'west') respectively. Delamont (2003) is a more recent review of feminist sociology.

4 Delamont (2003) and Rege (2003) make this the central query of their reviews.

W hile teaching was not the main focus of either Delamont (2003) or Rege (2003), both these overviews carry critical discussions regarding sociology as a profession, as institutions and teaching departments which are relevant for issues raised here.

" Uberoi (1989) and a number of unpublished papers by sociologists, such as N. Desai, and presented at conferences focus on the theme of the teaching of gender sociology or womens' studies through individual case studies. These are among the examples which an overview could draw on as Rege (2003) does to an extent.

Starting from the first step, the general body of teachers in the discipline for undergraduate courses or the Staff Council of the university department for graduate papers, the Committee of Courses and Studies, the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Academic Council Standing Committee and the Academic Council. Recently, another tier has been introduced before the last but one—the 'peer review'—consisting of three persons within the discipline, but outside the university.

A large number of studies had been commissioned by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CS\VI) and many of them were published in various collected volumes.

From the mid-1980s, and after, a number of UGC- or ICSSR-sponsored centres for women studies and women's development centres were set up inside and outside the university structure. However, almost none was engaged in teaching or syllabi development in the first decade, and in Delhi they did not have a direct impact on teaching in the universities.

" That one of the original designers of the first MPhil course on 'Women' was a professor was important.

[11] Freeman (1983) queried Meads presence in the fields she discusses (1935) and suggested that her ethnography and analysis were fiction.

Thus, in recent years a course on masculinities and another on reproductive rights, sexuality and power have been introduced and taught.

[13] Not only is this a reflection on those male students, it is a commentary on the dynamics of interaction between young women and men—where current or future sexual engagement appears as the master principle.

[14] As seen in the superficial reading of feminist texts reflected in Gupta (1995).

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