

of the book then goes on to give specific examples of how psychotherapeutic models of intervention can be used within a feminist framework to ensure that the survivors of violence are equipped with the emotional resources necessary to stand up for themselves.

The third section deals broadly with issues related to intersectionality. Women are oppressed in myriad ways by the various axes of power in society: caste, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, marital status and location. Feminist counsellors must not only be aware of this diversity, but must also remain alert to the possible power relations inherent in the ensuing counsellor–counsee relationship. Moreover, since patriarchy manifests itself differently for women across the variables mentioned above, counsellors have to individualise their strategy for each woman, instead of following a general therapeutic approach.

The last section of the book focuses on the quality of counselling, the training of counsellors and the need to establish indicators to monitor counselling. In addition, organisations need to be equipped to provide support to the counsellors themselves so as to prevent burnout and facilitate sharing. This section also gives an empirical account of guidelines on setting up a crisis centre for domestic

violence. This covers setting standards for counselling, ensuring the safety of the staff, interfacing with referral agencies, documentation, and interaction with researchers and the media.

This book provides a much-needed critique of mainstream counselling in the field of domestic violence, and more importantly, offers an alternative feminist perspective by interlinking theory and praxis in a way that is relevant to the diversity of women's lived experiences. By attempting to conceptualise feminist interventions in the field of counselling and documenting the existing practices across India, the authors display a strong commitment to expanding feminist literature in the Indian context. The book also gives us a clear picture as to how and why the various "actors" involved in cases of domestic violence against women, ie judges, protection officers, non-governmental organisations, social workers and health professionals, need to understand feminist counselling and incorporate it in their approach. Thus, by producing knowledge that has emerged from people's lives, knowledge that challenges the existing ways of "knowing" and "doing", this book can potentially inspire significant change, especially in the existing approaches to counselling victims of domestic violence.

Feminism and ethics of care

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Kanchana Mahadevan, *Between femininity and feminism: colonial and postcolonial perspectives on care*, New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research and DK Printworld, 2014. Rs 600.

This book adds to – or, to be more accurate – draws upon the enormous body of feminist writing that has emerged around the "ethics of care" after the publication of Carol Gilligan's path-breaking *In a different voice*. Scholarship in this field has been conspicuously interdisciplinary, benefiting from distinguished contributions from psychology, sociology, political science, philosophy, history, literature, and law and jurisprudence. This ambitious book provides a survey of parts of this debate, such as that around Gilligan's work, and the tension between justice and care, as addressed in the work of Susan Okin. It attempts a re-reading of de Beauvoir and places her closer to the advocates of the integration of perspectives on care and justice. The book also attempts to participate in the reformulation of the notions of autonomy and justice from the perspective of care, but without Eurocentric assumptions.

The book examines the "the struggle between femininity and feminism" in the work of feminist thinkers, namely Pandita Ramabai, Mary Wollstonecraft, Carol Gilligan, Susan Okin, and Simone de Beauvoir. The debate on the ethics of care provides

an anchor for this effort. The early chapters focus on the work of Pandita Ramabai and Mary Wollstonecraft, arguing that given the colonial and elitist constructions of the notion of domestic care and feminine care-giving during their lifetimes, they could only treat it with suspicion. The later chapters focus on three prominent feminist theorists, namely Gilligan, Okin, and de Beauvoir, placing them, especially Gilligan, quite questionably to my mind, in "a non-patriarchal and postcolonial context". Since the specific meaning attributed to the latter term here is not clarified, the former remains the leading term that determines meaning. The question that strikes the reader at the outset is whether this framing – "the struggle between femininity and feminism" – is not a catch-all that may be too broad to yield any new insight. Nevertheless, there is an effort to capture the feminist articulation of the ethics of care, the feminist dilemmas in integrating care and justice, and possibly, through a re-reading of Simone de Beauvoir, an effort to place the concern with care at the heart of second-wave feminism. The book ends in a conclusion that considers the possibilities of non-Eurocentric, global feminism. Here a major argument is that the emphasis on care in feminist theory of western origin should not fail to take into consideration the fact that the larger burden of care-giving now falls on the non-western woman care-worker. An effort to undo the deep inequalities

between western and non-western feminisms in knowledge is commendable indeed. However, the book remains inadequate in several respects. Only a few of these are discussed below, given the constraints of space.

First, the discussion of care in the book seems to be rather thin. Probably because most of the chapters are centred on major theorists, the focus of the discussion is almost always on the relevance or irrelevance of their work for a genuinely non-patriarchal society and not so much on the debate of the ethics of care. This leads to confusion, as totally different notions of care – such as the explicitly non-reciprocal ones shaped in colonialism, governmental notions of care shaped in discourses of welfare state, the oppositional ones shaped in feminist discourse, those implicit in the work of male social theorists and so on – enter and exit the narrative without sufficient clarification. Objections to these notions and their re-writings simply flow in and out, and not surprisingly, the conclusions reached seem fairly banal.

Even if one were to read the book as a series of studies on particular theorists, which attempts to grasp their significance for debates on care, there are too many hurdles for the reader. A large part of the discussion in the chapters on Ramabai and Wollstonecraft does not rely adequately on primary sources. This gives the reader the sense that she is reading not a full-fledged, finalised work of research but at best a set of interesting research notes and summaries of ongoing, published debates that are yet to be developed into a book, or at worst, a series of term-papers that meander endlessly through the literature without giving any fresh insight. The reader has the curious experience of mostly agreeing with all that has been written (with conspicuous exceptions, some of which I shall mention below) because most of these are already part of the debate. The conclusion of the book shares this quality of being banal without being insightful: "Hence feminist thought does not necessarily renounce the feminine ... women do not voluntarily undertake feminine practices but are socialized into them. Hence, as feminists, they need to work towards liberating interpretations of the feminine such as that of Gilligan's critical concept of care or Okin's affective justice and de Beauvoir's relational autonomy" (p240). This is followed by the by-now deeply familiar caution against romanticising care work given the global context in which non-western women carry ever heavier burdens of care-giving.

A barrage of questions may arise about linking Ramabai and Wollstonecraft – the similarities noted by the author may not be irrelevant but are certainly insufficient. Similarly, the author's claim in the Introduction that the intersections of western and non-western feminisms are "explicitly discerned during periods of pioneering feminism and the second wave" needs much elaboration to be convincing. Even if one were to set this aside, there are other issues. For example, while Ramabai's feminism is incontestable, it is not clear why she, and not, say Lalitambika Antarnjanam, should necessarily represent "Indian feminism". Is this choice dictated by the transnational quality of Ramabai's feminism? If so, the question of why transnational

feminism should be more Indian than others would arise. Both these early chapters contain sections which gesture very non-rigorously to "female ancestries". These were avoidable as they do not contribute substantially to the themes under discussion. In Ramabai's case, this seems to raise another set of questions as to the transnational roots of her feminism attributed earlier in the text.

A frustrating aspect of the book is the author's apparent lack of preparedness for this thoroughly interdisciplinary project. This is evident wherever the author tries to make references to developmental phenomena that shape women's lives. Clearly, the fairly large feminist debate on women's agency and the impact of women's work under globalisation and neo-liberalised welfare is not reflected upon. Statements such as this one, about SEWA, reflect a rather naive understanding of the political effects of bargaining with patriarchy: "SEWA's primary aim is to teach self-employment to poorer women, rather than function as a critical body ... SEWA draws support from existing economic, social, and political institutions." (footnote 11, p 233). There are shocking, sweeping claims, too, which seem rather unforgivable to me, such as footnote on page 164 (footnote 26) which says: "Feminists have been divided over the prioritization of the dowry issue [in India]. Poor women hardly experience dowry as an evil because of their lack of property." There are many such breath-stopping, casual claims especially in the footnotes. While there is a brief discussion on the question of birth control and the agency of non-western women, it is poorly integrated into the discussion on global feminist perspectives on care. Vague statements abound, for instance: "Social conditions such as abject poverty prevented women of colour from supporting the blanket endorsement of abortions" (p 218).

The single biggest failing of the book is that it lacks thorough editing, both of ideas and language. Many footnotes are unnecessary and too long or casual; the chapters have so much repetition that if properly edited, the length of the book would come down by at least half. The book does try to pursue certain themes and does offer some suggestions on how they could be explored, which however gets mired under too many repetitions and digressions. The connection between footnote and text remains unclear in more than one instance. For example, footnote 42 on page 97 mentions that abortion of female foetuses is rampant in India and among the Indian diaspora – in the text, it appears as a footnote to the following statements: "Wollstonecraft's narration of the difficulties of becoming political, like Ramabai's, can be traced to obstacles that confront women at their very birth. Despite the passing of centuries these lived experiences persist even today." Many errors in the text alter the meaning of sentences, such as when we are told that in canonical mainstream masculinist philosophy, concepts are "historical" and gender-neutral.

The publisher, the Indian Council of Philosophical Research, ought to consider these aspects. Much improvement would definitely have been secured, had the manuscript been put through the process of proper peer-review and editing.