

INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES

XV National Conference on Women's Studies

Sub-theme:7

Interrogating and Expanding Feminist Questions on Sexuality and Gender

Feminism and Women's Studies in Indian contexts have addressed issues of sexuality and gender to some degree of complexity. Both in movement spaces and women's studies academia, there has been a recent attentiveness as well as critical articulation about translives, non-heteronormative sexual choices, the ways in which discrimination operates, as well as the ways in which the heteronormative stands challenged from these spaces. Sometimes, the articulations have also been status quoist, showing a willingness to speak of marginality and vulnerability but not of alternative models of life, loving and politics that may displace existing ones.

This session seeks to engage with questions that have extended from these feminist enquiries into sexuality and gender, but have continued to remain on the margins of critical enquiry within feminist politics in our contexts. This emerges from ideas and instances of lived experience of othering within society of both the sexual and the gendered experience that 'deviate' and continue to deviate from the normative: an emerging nomenclature include those of queer, aravani, lesbian, intersex, gay, trans*, bisexual, genderqueer, hijra, and so on. Some of these questions have emerged from the articulation of transmen and transwomen among others through engagements with the state and judiciary for citizenship rights; of sex workers seeking a space within the labour market; of two women seeking to form a life together challenging marriage and family, of asexuality and intimacy – challenges and questions that do not necessarily speak a uniform language either. This 'queering of feminism' adds to these questions through engagements with anti-caste/race, labour, ability, mental health, gender and sexual rights' movements and interrogating state efforts.

Another strand the session would like to set forward for critical debate is the tensions between 'queering' and 'feminism', inviting discussion on the ways in which a certain language of both

feminism and queering that work in the post-globalisation scenario – as individual politics, as identity questions that cannot be shared, or as ways of life that may not question dominant communitarian agendas.

Constantly foregrounding the feminist expression of “the personal is political”, as well as the feminist recognition of experience as mediated through structures, the session seeks to complicate our understanding of sexual desires and gender expressions with these questions emerging from the margins of dominant feminist debate.

Coordinators:

Meena Gopal
TISS, Mumbai
meena.gopal@tiss.edu

Asha Achuthan,
TISS
Mumbai
asha.achuthan@gmail.com