Perspectives on Women's Studies from India: Strengths, Struggles and Implications for Programs in the U.S.

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Perspectives on Women's Studies from India:
Strengths, struggles and implications for programs in the US

By Aditi Mitra[1], Manjeet Bhatia[2] and Sobha Chatterjee[3]

Abstract

An important goal of Women's Studies (WS) is the advancement of womens' rights not just locally, but on a global scale. How well this goal is accomplished will ultimately depend on the current WS curricula adapting to include international and transnational perspectives. This paper investigates how Indian-WS programs, with some comparisons to WS programs in the US, are meeting this challenge. It begins by tracing the development of WS and examines its curricula by conducting a content analysis of ten syllabi from Indian universities and offers reflections from WS practitioners in India. The research yields important insights on institutionalization of WS programs, its interdisciplinarity, pedagogy, theories, methods, and effects of globalization on societies on the curricula. It also reveals strengths and struggles of India-WS programs, which are compared directly to those of US-WS programs. Such a comparison of the programs will prove fruitful in developing effective transnational theories that truly address women's issues on both a global and local scale and impact the long-term advancement of WS programs.

Keywords: Women's Studies, India, content analysis.

Introduction

Women's Studies (WS) originated in the US as "feminist (as opposed to simply focusing on content about women or gender) . . . interdisciplinary (rather than working within a single traditional discipline), and . . . had its own distinctive methodological and pedagogical approaches grounded in new epistemologies" (Orr et al, 2012: 15). These premises have "constituted the field's core assumptions for more than forty years" (ibid). However, over time WS courses in the U.S. evolved to reflect an "increasingly diverse and multicultural world" (Grewal and Kaplan 2006: xx). In spite of this, the "emphasis . . . [on] international perspectives on the women's lives and concerns" was missing from the U.S. curricula until more recently (Grewal and Kaplan 2006: xx; also see Elliot 1986; Maparyan 2012).

One way to address this deficiency is to study the evolution of WS in other international settings. Therefore, as academics involved with WS courses and programs in the US and India, we embarked on a project to propose comparative insights into the emerging status of WS in Indian universities. This paper begins by tracing the development of WS in India and conducts a content analysis of syllabi from ten Indian universities that offer WS degrees and certificates.

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Further, our hypothesis and analysis were substantiated by professors and senior fellows in the WS programs in India. This enabled us to offer a critical assessment of some of the complexities experienced by WS practitioners and strategies to overcome them. Our hypothesis was that aspects of WS, such as institutionalization, pedagogy, interdisciplinarity, methods, theory, activism, impact of transnationalism and globalization enhance as well as hinder the scope of WS as a viable discipline of higher education in the Indian university system. Therefore, this paper discusses WS in India with two broad research questions:

a. Are WS programs in India institutionalized? Are these programs interdisciplinary? Do WS curricula in India rely heavily on western pedagogies, theories and methods? Are there any traceable efforts toward developing indigenous feminist frameworks and theories to study local issues that women confront in their daily lives? Do the syllabi / curricula explicitly or implicitly make a clear connection between feminist theory and women's social activist networks (nongovernmental organizations or NGOs)?

b. Has WS curricula in India accomplished the goal of making people aware of connections between their lives in transnational settings? Has Globalization impacted the WS curricula in Indian Universities?

Origins of WS in India

Elliot (1986) states that the WS movement in the U.S. started differently than in India. In the U.S. "there was rapid growth of higher education for women after the Second World War" (Elliot 1986: 43). In the 1960's, "there were many progressive social movements . . . for equal opportunities for women and minorities" (Elliot 1986: 43). Further, the origins of U.S.-WS began on "university campuses where students rebelled against education policies and the political system in general" (ibid). Out of these movements came women's 'consciousness-raising groups' who were self-examining their status and roles in society. This examination extended to the traditional academic curricula which lacked women's contributions in almost all disciplines. This assessment was the early impetus for founding WS programs. "Faculty members in the 1960s and 1970s drew upon a new pedagogy that was more participatory and personal, which later became known as 'feminist pedagogy'" and led to the concept of "student centered learning" (Berger and Radeloff, 2011:33, also see Elliot, 1986). Institutionalized WS became valued in higher education for some unique features, such as "the concept of integrating research, theory, and praxis . . ." (Berger and Radeloff, 2011: 41).

Bhatty (2002: 51) says "the contemporary feminist movement in India may find its genesis in the report on Status of Women which was published in 1975." The Indian constitution offered equality to women in all aspects of life; it provided the benchmarks for assessing women's status and condition. However, "the committee's report, *Towards Equality*, presented a grim picture of social reality . . . that sharply contrasted with the goals of equality laid down by the Indian constitution" (Mazumdar 1994: 42; also see Bhatty 2002). The alarming decline in sex ratio, increase in violence against women, the rising illiteracy among women, and the lack of political and economic participation of women were highly discouraging (Bhatty, 2002). Patel (1998) points out that the comprehensive report noted gender bias in academia and ". . . highlighted that instead of changing social values and attitudes regarding women's roles, the educational system had contributed to strengthening and perpetuating traditional ideas of

women's subordination through the 'curricula, the classification of subjects on the basis of sex, and the unwritten code of conduct enforced on their pupils'" (*Towards Equality*, Government of India, 1974 cited in Patel, 1998: 161).

The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) in 1976 initiated a new program in WS with three objectives: 1) initiate policy change, 2) develop new perspectives in social science concepts, methods and theories, and 3) renew the discourse and debate on women's social condition (Mazumdar, 1994). It was against this background that the First National Conference on WS was convened in Bombay in 1981, which ultimately culminated into the Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) – a National Forum for bringing together academics, activists and policy makers concerned with women's development. In the years following, this association organized many seminars and workshops on curriculum development, syllabus revisions and research programs (Mazumdar, 1990, 1994; John, 2005, 2008). The guiding principles of the committee were significant as they may be read as the manifesto of WS-India.

WS in Contemporary India

WS-India emerged out of women's movements in post-independent India. Consequently, "the growth of this discipline was propelled by an interest in equity and justice, and drew inspiration from the grass-roots level experience of women's organizations" (Jain and Rajput 2003:18). It was not until 1986-7 in the UN decade for women that University Grants Commission (UGC) of India invited proposals from universities to establish WS centers. Institutionally, WS has "taken the shape of research centers and women's studies centers in universities." (John 2005: 56). John (2008) discusses the evolution and growth of WS centers in India. Initially, there were only four centers, some of which began as independent from all other disciplines while others started as part of a particular department. Mainly, the centers had the mandate to raise awareness, do independent research and community action. Now there are about sixty-six such centers in different phases of development. Over the years, the centers' work expanded and even modified thrust areas that are ". . . disciplinary, interdisciplinary and often transdisciplinary . . ." (John, 2008:11; also see John 2005).

In the beginning there were mainly two approaches of establishing WS programs. The first was to establish independent centers, while the second was to follow the "sprinkle effect" strategy of having faculty in existing disciplines introduce components of WS (Bhatia in IAWS Newsletter, 2012: 04). Most centers followed the second strategy to prevent ghettoizing WS. In the last decade that UGC started emphasizing teaching WS courses, WS centers' had their names chosen carefully. For instance, Kaushik (2003: 151) notes that the Women's Studies and Development Center (WSDC) at Delhi University, was so-named "so as to include academicians as well as community action and interaction."

From the late 1980s onwards, the ICSSR and UGC have actively guided the development of WS within the university system. Now, WS is included in the list of disciplines supported by UGC. Although starting as a "critical perspective" that "required articulation in every discipline" with "no *identifiable institutional* location" (John 2005: 45; also see John 2008), WS has developed into a discipline with its own distinct curriculum over the years. But the centers "are all extremely small, often with no full-time faculty, fragile and under-funded" (John, 2005: 51). It is important to note that "even though the founding mandate had been against the idea, one now comes across frequent references to the 'discipline' of WS" (John, 2005: 56). The discipline

"includes WS units in colleges . . . centers that have been funded by the ICSSR, and finally those . . . in the NGO sector . . ." (Jain and Rajput, 2003: 18). Given the uncertainty and limited funding, a degree in WS in India still lacks the status of other degrees in humanities or social sciences (John, 2008). Since education (according to the constitution of India) is controlled by both the state and central government, the curricula differ accordingly. Individual states create courses relevant to their regional needs. This situation lends to a non-formalization and non-standardization of these degrees and courses that are usually taught by self-motivated faculty, with or without remuneration.

In spite of this limited funding and relative marginality, the potential of WS courses are well-recognized by the distant learning Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). Recently, IGNOU has offered courses in gender studies and appointed permanent faculty to offer research degrees. They are also in the process of making new syllabi. Thus, even though the traditional departments/universities have treated WS as interventionist and on the fringes of mainstream teaching, its potential is realized by new and progressive institutions (John, 2008).

Methodology and Data Collection

Being academics in WS-US and WS-India, we have connections with several WS centers. Ten WS syllabi from Indian universities (Calcutta, Jadavpur, Utkal, Gauhati, Berhampur, Pondicherry, Lucknow, Pune, Delhi and Panjab) form the crux of our data. A few were collected personally while others were collected via voluntary response to the mass email request posted on the WS email list-serve through the British Council (Office of British High Commission) in Kolkata. Though a somewhat limited sample, it offers a broad sample from diverse regions of India. The syllabi were studied carefully for content analysis (both quantitative and qualitative information). This paper mainly focuses on patterns and themes that emerged based on the research questions of this project. In addition, directors and professors of WS centers were contacted for clarification and additional inputs on the structure of their programs, certificate and degree requirements and their reflection on the location of WS in the university system. Further, newsletters of Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) were consulted for articles and opinion editorials by WS practitioners in India.

Analysis and Discussion of Data [4]
Institutionalization of WS

In the US, the institutionalization of WS as Rowe (2012: 294) points out is "often vexed by fundamental contradictions in relation to power". Further, WS was seen as representing feminist theories but seemed limited by certain challenges, which included the ways of handling gender-relations, institutional power and activism, and racism in transnational discourses (Rowe 2012). These internal contradictions do not appear in the context of India, probably because Indian WS practitioners are still struggling for basic respectability in the university system. But the introduction of WS in Indian universities is now more than two decades old, with many new centers being sanctioned by UGC in recent years. Yet, institutionalization of WS as centers and as teaching bodies has had variant experiences in universities. So much so that, for instance, a newly formed center could get the sanction from UGC to start graduate courses in WS, but Delhi

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[4] Although this research was initiated prior to 2012, the analytic categories in this study overlap those found in the book edited by Orr et al (2012) *Rethinking Women's and Gender Studies, NY: Routledge.*

University (which is one of first centers started in a university and placed in the highest phase of development by UGC) was not allowed to start any long term WS courses by university authorities. This speaks more to the perception of the decision-makers, than of progress of WS in Indian institutions. However, at Delhi University, most of social sciences and Humanities departments have introduced components/optional paper on WS in their courses (which universities teaching full degree courses in WS would not have done). So Delhi University has achieved the sprinkling-effect, but has failed to introduce substantive courses in WS.

The volatile and sporadic growth of WS may be due to general apathy by the public and the academics towards women's issues. Such negative perceptions and the ongoing debate about whether or not WS is only a critical perspective or a discipline may also create hurdles in its institutionalization as an independent degree of higher education (John, 2008; Datta, 2007). Moreover, it is much easier to introduce WS components in existing disciplines rather than starting a new degree program.

WS in India can trace its roots to socio-political events, such as the Indian national independence movements, women's movement and the United Nations initiatives for global women. Discussions with professors and senior fellows at some of these WS centers revealed that early WS courses had a rebel face and incited a lot of ground work, something that has diminished since the 1980s due to institutionalization and *NGOization*. With this change of focus, the implementation and reach are becoming more complex and elitist (vide 11th Plan UGC Guidelines on WS). Thus, to some extent the original aims and perspectives of the WS movement seem to be defeated. Nonetheless, there are certain advantages and disadvantages arising from this situation.

For WS to survive in the larger academy, institutionalization had to come – but it did so at a cost. WS became more system-oriented and structured under the rigid Indian university system. Despite this drawback, the discipline of WS is unique in that it emerged from activism and experience and underlines a connection between theory and praxis. As it is interdisciplinary by nature, Kusum Datta (2007:218) points out, "in addition to alliance with other intellectuals across various disciplines, WS centers have sometimes . . . [worked] with the NGOs to study and understand the lives of the poor and disadvantaged women in urban slum and rural areas." Thus, the search for legitimacy both within the intellectual mainstream and the grassroots activism has serious implications for its own future. While the former, being male-dominated is difficult to penetrate, the latter has an ethos which is not always receptive to the high moral ground from which WS practitioners often operate. Although experiences of grassroots organizations are important for the WS movement, their impact on academic discourses remains negligible given the conservative institutional structures within which WS centers operate (Datta, 2007).

Pedagogical practices and teaching tools
The pedagogical goals of U.S.-WS point to a desire to intellectualize matters that bring about political and social change; "this orientation towards . . . [teaching and] learning differs significantly from the more common reduction of pedagogy to a concern for *teaching* (and its techniques)" (Luhmann, 2012: 66). But in India, the problems with pedagogy seem to be directly related to a lack of resources and infrastructure. This is consistent with our discussions with WS professors and practitioners. It became apparent that teaching was a "weak-point of the WS movement [in India] until the late 1990s" (Datta, 2007: 219). This was not so much as having substandard instructors but as a result of the centers "lacking full teaching strength . . . qualified

staff, teaching materials, relevant data, funds and appropriate environment within the host departments and universities" (ibid.). Mostly, they had to manage with no faculty positions or with just one full-time Professor, some temporary lecturers employed on project-fund and several adjunct (part-time) professors or visiting scholars. Moreover, the centers were directed by a professor from another discipline, who bore the double burden of discharging the duties of his/her own department along with those of the WS center. Jadavpur Women's Studies Centre is a classic example of such a scenario where faculty from different departments of the university started the MPhil course, entirely on a voluntary basis. It is only recently that Jadavpur university WS center secured a full-time position for a Director. Hence WS centers avoided initiating teaching programs primarily due to shortage of faculty and staff. They would only offer short-term diploma and certificate courses, orientation and refresher courses. While some centers started graduate programs (MA, MPhil, Ph.D), they found it difficult to introduce undergraduate courses. Faculty have informally striven to engender their teaching material and syllabus for undergraduate students. At some universities, "a feminist perspective was almost completely absent from the rest of the [undergraduate] curriculum" (Niranjana cited in Ashar, 2002: 26).

There are other obstacles that WS centers face. WS often do not have "the funds, personnel or institutional apparatus to establish itself as an autonomous discipline with its . . . [undergraduate] and postgraduate teaching and research . . ." (Bhagwat et al (2004) in Datta, 2007: 220). Nonetheless, instructors usually encourage students to participate in discussions and interactive sessions and organize seminar presentations, beyond introductory lectures. Importantly, faculty ensure that the courses are multifaceted by using films, videos, advertisement clips, popular television shows and such, with a view to develop a critical and gender-sensitive perspective towards the books discussed. At the same time, they endeavor to make the teaching as field-based as possible - in keeping with the original purpose and mission of WS-India (as propounded by the founding members). Panjab and Gauhati University centers have offered very intense courses with many options. If the centers have the experts to teach these options, then they would have the richest resource of experts in WS.

Transferability of western theories/methods and developing indigenous framework
Meanings of words often change when used in different cultural settings. The term 'indigenous' in this study's context refers to any 'home-grown' framework developed in a non-western setting. Due to constraints of culture, religion, finances, infrastructure, scope of study, local agenda and setting, it has been a challenge to transfer western theories and models of research to non-western settings. Indian WS students know western feminist and gender theories, but they often face difficulties in applying them in non-western or eastern context. Hence, faculty strive to think in terms of application and implementation, while linking theory to their own life-experiences. For example, in the Pune University graduate certificate course, paper 3 is about basic concepts of Gender, Culture and Ideology. But instructors use examples of myths and religious practices—Hindu Mother Goddess, Women in Islamic tradition or the Buddhist Bhikunis or therigathas—that are more geared to Indian cultural traditions (please note some university-curricula and syllabi may have been revised or updated since collecting this data).

Theories and methods in US-WS address gaps in other disciplines with their own unique methodologies, at the same time WS does not claim them to be their "own"; but it may be inferred that "this position . . . is a source of intellectual and institutional anxiety," even as it is the foundation for "invigorating possibilities" and application (Side, 2012: 53). By extension,

this aspect makes them viable for studying cases in non-western settings. This is evident from the data, where all WS syllabi in India do offer Feminist Theory and International Women's Movements as two important components. All courses offer the main feminist theories in a historical manner, though some also offer Eco-feminism and Psychoanalytical theories. This is ostensibly reflected in the syllabi of Jadavpur and Pune University, but less overtly spelt out in the syllabus of Lucknow and Calcutta University. They were inadvertently missing in the Pondicherry syllabus but upon contacting the director, it was clarified that both Feminist theory and International Women's Movements are major components in their MPhil classroom teachings. In addition, Gauhati University's MPhil course innovatively teaches theory by exploring conceptual underpinnings with discussions on topics such as self/subject and the other, the critique of patriarchy, representations of women, the question of the gaze; black/third world/Indian feminism and such. Insights offered by these theories do open the canvas for students of the WS courses, although their personal lives or lived-reality may or may not be touched by these insights.

Initially, WS curricula drew heavily on western feminist theories and methods, keeping abreast with academic debates at a global level while at the same time tracing women's movements in India. Over the years, the focus has shifted towards diverse feminisms, Third World feminisms and shaping of indigenous frameworks and theorizing in South Asian and Indian contexts. For example, in Pune University's graduate certificate course, Paper 4 (Gender and Social History) tries to evolve new debates on feminist historiography—doing social history from a gender-caste perspective with case studies on the 'Vedic Dasi' or 'the prostitutes' in colonial India (please note that Pune university has updated their curriculum since this data was collected). Thus, they study women's experiences from women's locations in an effort to develop new frameworks. Professors at universities strive to develop feminist theories and frameworks that are indigenous / local to India (such as *dalit* feminism, grassroots feminist theory) to study issues that diverse Indian women confront in their daily lives (Chaudhuri, 2004).

Theorizing has been dealt with differently in America, Europe and some non-western settings. In the context of theorizing in India, the question remains – is it essential to develop indigenous or local feminist theories after all? Beatrice Kachuk Lever (2003:55) opines, "the practice of categorizing theories as a method of enquiry into feminist projects is more common in the West than in India." In the United States the extant literature on theories "is attributable to the larger number of academics expected to engage in theorizing while also doing research and teaching women's studies courses… which in turn encourage theoretical writings" (ibid.). Thus, it is safe to say that there are both advantages and resistance in adopting western models to Indian settings.

The syllabi analyzed in this paper have not explicitly referred to any specific Indian theory. Most social science disciplines taught in India do refer to western theories. And it is in this background that the formal feminist theories are taught. But if we analyze classroom teachings, WS offers much greater space to contextualize these theoretical insights than any traditional courses. Interdisciplinary courses, like WS, deal with the critique of development models and bring in human development as the main concern. It also includes discussions on the nature of political participation and women's concerns, politics of identity and exclusion of groups. Unfortunately, these remain as critiques and are not adapted as mainstream academic concerns. Nevertheless, in such a process, WS-India contextualizes the western theoretical underpinnings in much greater depth than the classical courses.

Taking this discussion further, to attain/teach gender justice in India, ideas, strategies and policies from one context are 'transplanted', 'translated' and localized to fit others (Merry, 2006: 134). Merry (2006) identifies two general types of approaches: one based on legal provisions and human rights advocacy, the other on a social services model. The first focuses on legal provisions and enforcement of human rights through national institutions such as human rights and women's commissions. The second is more closely associated with developing local initiatives to support women by feminist activists and NGOs. Both these models are in operation in India.

A more specific example in this context would be legal intervention on the issue of domestic violence in India. The Feminist movement has struggled for over two decades to mandate a law on domestic violence, but other international legal approaches already exist. While local law establishes the paradigm for justice, it may not be able to reach all those who are suffering from injustice due to local settings of culture, religion, caste and ethnicity. That's when laws guided by the international system of justice opens a window of thinking beyond local laws. Thus, a new space is created for gender justice, which confronts traditional patriarchal norms and questions men's control over women's bodies in Indian households. This aspect of law would not have been addressed with only local laws. However, international laws also come in direct confrontation with the local customs and basic gender ethos. Here, the perspective of researcher/instructor takes precedence. A feminist would find the implementation of this law a progressive step, whereas others, who enjoy certain privileges, status and power in the Indian cultural context, may see it as an imposition of western values on Indian culture.

Research degrees and advanced courses at the Delhi University center offer comprehensive training in research methodology. The Delhi center, in particular, offers an entire course to train researchers by encouraging exposure to latest techniques of presentation of data. But an important difference in research methods with regard to the ethical use of human subjects is the lack of enforcement of the Institutional Regulatory Board (IRB) principles. Unlike in the US, IRB principles are not considered as being a necessary part of social science research in India. In fact, Purkayastha et al (2009: 98) point out that social science research is "perceived as not directly inflicting harm on respondents or as being intrusive." This difference makes international comparative and collaborative research somewhat complicated. In India, the emphasis is on reflecting "a diversity of voices" rather than conforming to "the positivist notions of objectivity" and as such "in many cases, the methodologies and methods of data collection are designed to provide grounded data and theory rather than generalizable objective data" (ibid.).

Western models of research take the societal unit as an individual, whereas typically cultural traditions, community structures and religious sanctions of Indian society do not treat women (or men) as individuals (see Lever, 2003; Chitnis in Chaudhuri, 2004). Significantly, even the women do not treat themselves as individuals (ibid.). Other peculiarities that are specific to the Indian context that are hard to analyze using a western theoretical lens due to multivariate layers of social realities are caste, religion, ethnicity and class. Unless these intersections of overlapping gender identities are addressed, research cannot be inclusive and comprehensive. For instance, when state interventions are gender-blind or lacking gender-sensitivity, lower caste dalit women are not only exploited and marginalized by upper caste Brahmanical patriarchs (Chakravarti, 2004), but it is alleged that dalit women are also marginalized by mainstream feminist movements. As pointed out by Rao (2003: 5), the "demands by dalit and other lower-caste women are not merely for inclusion, but for an analysis of gender relations as they are inflected by the multiple and overlapping patriarchies of caste

communities that produce forms of vulnerability . . ." As this had been a challenge for Indian women's movement, inclusion of these realities by western models may prove even more daunting. So in teaching/research using western models, one simultaneously impacts the context and locale. Such actions/exercises are doubly edged as they question and also modify the subject of inquiry, more so if the models have originated in other countries/cultures.

Interdisciplinary Challenges

Feminists in the US "espouse an interdisciplinary perspective that redresses fragmented and dichotomous viewpoints by recognizing the interconnectedness of reality . . . [as] disciplinary approaches to research and teaching result only in partial and thus distorted knowledge . . ." (Latucca, 2001 in Lichtenstein 2012: 37). Likewise, WS-India sustains itself by critically engaging other disciplines. The interdisciplinary nature has enabled WS centers to successfully integrate gender issues and women's perspectives into other disciplines, which was remiss in the curricula. The 1990s newsletters published by the School of WS at Jadavpur University included articles on how WS enlivens other disciplines and how gender-alive spaces are shared. Collaborative researches have started dismantling barriers between the social science and humanities departments. They have started imparting a new gendered-perspective for analyzing society, particularly noticeable in MPhil and PhD dissertations. The process has been successful in departments such as literature, history, sociology and anthropology. The fact that many of their seminars and workshops include films, documentaries, poetry-reading, short plays, classical music, dance and even painting shows the extensive outreach of WS as a legitimate area of study. They teach how the tools of gender-analysis can be effectively applied to different areas, exposing oppression and exploitation of women in every aspect of human life. At such seminars, professors of history and social sciences in a joint commentary (on Art and Women) would elucidate the hidden gendered nuances in paintings and other artifacts. However, in disciplines like economics and political science, the new gendered-perspective was incorporated rather gradually.

Although the strength of WS is its interdisciplinarity (McCall 2005), teaching interdisciplinary courses have their in-built problems because there may be different approaches to teaching similar topics with specific textbooks. This causes difficulty in standardizing WS courses, however, multiple approaches can both enrich or dilute, depending upon the expert. Absences of interdisciplinary degree programs in most universities means proactive faculty are scarce for teaching these courses. Another challenge is that WS courses are closer to lived-realities; hence, the courses often have extension/training components. For instance, Delhi University's Women's Studies and Development Centre incorporates training/exposure to activism in its courses. Students enrolled in these courses, who have had their first level degree in a single discipline, find it difficult to transcend that training to develop an interdisciplinary perspective. Contrarily, if the WS course is toward the first degree for the student - it would at best offer applied knowledge, lacking rigorous training in any given subject. Typically, WS involves a "double journey . . . the internal journey, where the person herself grows into what can be informally called a 'feminist' or a women's activist," and then the second is the external journey when formally teaching WS (Jain and Rajput, 2003: 23). Only those who balance on both fronts and continue to self-reflect as well as theorize are ideal instructors/learners. Others may not be able to develop a holistic approach in teaching. Thus, different approaches can crystallize only for a few but not many such instructors are easily available to teach WS.

Some of the centers may have to struggle to find their place in the overall university system. Thus, some syllabi have innovatively included additional applied training opportunities in its curricula to attract a critical mass to make the program viable. Utkal University center, for instance, offers computer training, while Panjab University center offers options for training in management skills, gender analysis and planning, advocacy, lobbying and women entrepreneurships. They evaluate their students on the basis of written reports on practical work completed by them. Thus, vocational training opportunities are created during the completion of the WS degree.

A point to note is that the syllabi examined here are taught by these special centers of different universities. The traditional departments of these universities may have introduced some components or even a special a paper in Women/Gender Studies. Delhi University, for one, has introduced several components in WS in different humanities and social sciences disciplines - which were initiated by Women's Studies & Development Centre at the university. The syllabi analyzed are either for graduate degrees (MA) or a research degree (MPhil). However, the center also runs undergraduate certificate courses in WS in collaboration with the undergraduate colleges.

Academic research versus community-based activism

In the U.S, "when activism is the focus . . . the issue under scrutiny is almost always about activism's demise at the hands of academic excesses" (Orr, 2012: 87). However, in India that does not seem to be the case. WS courses seem to have a good balance between theory and practice. The syllabi at Jadavpur and Pune University make an explicit connection between feminist theory and local women's social activist networks. The 2005 Pune University Prospectus says that "the center is a part of the national network of women's organizations, activist groups, NGOs and institutes committed to human rights advocacy", as corroborated by Bhagwat (Lal and Kumar, 2002: 287). Students have the options of engaging in field-training or working as interns or doing assignments with these groups (ibid). At both universities, the visiting faculty include famous scholars and activists from India. At Jadavpur Univeristy, the WS syllabus was designed after discussion with local NGOs like 'Sachetana' 'Jeevika' 'Childline' 'Cini' (this is as per inputs from the WS professors). The syllabi from centers at Jadavpur, Calcutta and Pune University indicate projects with such social activist organizations, and outputs from these projects are incorporated in their teaching. Moreover, illustrations are drawn from the teacher's personal experiences with various NGOs. WS students start interacting and becoming part of these networks (like SEWA in Gujarat). The instructors also refer to international organizations like 'Equality' 'Maitreyee' 'Sakhi'(New York) or South Asian Women's Organizations and other activist groups. Also, Jadavpur University had a project with the Rosa Luxemberg Stiftung Institute (Germany). WS students assist with these projects by writing reports. Most of the research scholars are ex-students of the centers which often run 7 or 8 projects at any given time. Thus, references are made to global activist networks, though the actual models are local.

All the course outlines (except two courses of Delhi University) are for graduate and higher levels. Research/writing assignment/project work is inbuilt in all the courses. Empirical research leads to connecting with activists and their work. Moreover, Delhi University graduate courses encourage students to be placed with NGOs. As the instructor themselves are members of some women's groups, this scenario not only brings in real concerns of women but also

motivates instructors to carry on with their commitments of running these courses against heavy odds. If we "include work based on a social justice model, the themes would multiply, as they would if we considered the broader field of 'women's writing'" (Purkayastha et al, 2009: 105). As Purkayastha et al (ibid) go on to note, even the most cursory review of websites, feminist presses, and academic journals in India reveals that a remarkable amount of activist work already exists.

Transnational frameworks and impact of globalization

While there have been steps toward making curricula in the US-WS programs more global, one outcome has been a confusing use of terms and ideas. For example, Parisi (2012: 311) points out that "the terms 'internationalize,' 'globalize,' and 'transnationalize' are often used interchangeably, with little regard to either the implications of adopting any of these terms, or one over the others." But in India, WS faculty have not yet felt the pressure to transnationalize the curricula. This is most likely due to the existence of a rich multiplicity of regional, national or caste-based women's movements in India. In other words, there are several issues raising women's questions and making context-specific strategies to address them. State universities like Utkal, Berhampur and Gauahti cannot overlook their regional conflicts and concerns. Hence, there seems to be little space left for including global movements in some of the syllabi. Most of the courses either do not address international movements or do include it in a very specific way. Gauhati syllabus, for instance, deals with WS as a movement. It also traces women's movement in Indian history. However, most of the courses talk about international interventions, such as CEDAW, international women's conferences and the likes. So, most courses are focused on Indian movements but cover international movements, interventions, and other third world feminisms only as an addition. Only Panjab University center offers a compulsory paper on United Nations (UN) and women, while Delhi University includes UN interventions specific to issues taught.

In the context of globalization and development, to attract more students, some universities (like Pondicherry with a winter course) are beginning to emphasize technology rather than issues like ideology, gender empowerment, human rights and equality. This is due to the present global job market where technology is attracting most students. Likewise, Utkal University center has been innovative in offering women and technology as a paper. If it develops a critique of pure sciences research, it could include those areas absent in the majority of WS syllabi but are important from development and policies points of view. For instance, the department of science and technology (Government of India) does research in technology to facilitate women's work. Some innovations are making gas stoves, cheaper sanitary pads and silk culture (cultivating insects making silk threads). Pure sciences had not been incorporating gender approaches in spite of its formal acceptance. One other way to make these sciences sensitive to gender perspectives would be to highlight these issues when teaching WS.

The impact of globalization on WS curricula in Indian Universities has been broadly taken up by all the syllabi. Both the positive and negative aspects of the impact have been somewhat covered, for example, commodification or objectification of women, impact of new technology on women's health or technology and livelihood. However, aspects of globalization, such as its linkages with theories of development, are often not adequately addressed. Students are sometimes not exposed to the linkages of globalization with transnational banks and ongoing projects by international financial institutions or related global debates while locating India in the

big picture. It appears that not all the WS syllabi contain topics that would help students make connections between transnational and national movements. There is also a need to incorporate debates regarding citizenship, social agency, migration, displacements and the global care economy (Poonacha, 2004) when discussing globalization.

Conclusion

This paper offers a glimpse into how a non-western country has embraced WS. Content analysis of the syllabi and discussions with WS studies professors and directors sheds light into the successes and struggles of Indian WS centers. While WS originated as a discipline of study in the US, in India WS has taken its own trajectory based on conditions unique to India's gender-stratified society.

In this critical analysis, it was found that certain aspects of WS, such as institutionalization, pedagogy, interdisciplinarity, methods, theory, activism, impact of transnationalism and globalization do enhance as well as hinder the scope of WS as a viable discipline of higher education in the Indian university system.

The advanced level of institutionalization of US-WS has introduced certain contradictions in power-relations (e.g. contentions with regard to teaching race and transnationalism as discussed by Parisi (2012)) within programs. This dynamic was not apparent in WS-India. Even though institutionalized to some extent, WS-India have endeavored to remain dynamic and alert in keeping women's issues at stake alive and firmly grounded in reality and practice. In this context, NGOs play an important role in achieving a level of praxis, unlike in the US where focus tends to be on theoretical analysis. Since WS-India is relatively less institutionalized than US-WS, it has not encountered problems of power-relations within the centers that can prevent advancement of the field.

In the US-WS pedagogical practices desire, in addition to teaching, to intellectualize political and social change matters, while in India pedagogy focuses mainly on teaching in the face of limited resources and infrastructure. So much so that most faculty create and teach courses with a vision for social change but without much institutional support and any pay.

While the syllabi analyzed in this paper have not explicitly referred to any specific Indian theory, most social science disciplines taught in India do refer to western theories. Such an approach offers both advantages and resistance in adopting western models to Indian settings. Insights offered by these theories do open the canvas for students of the WS courses, although their personal lives or lived-reality may not be touched by these insights. Moreover, western models often come in direct confrontation with the local customs and basic gender ethos. Here, the perspective of researcher/instructor becomes important. If he/she is a feminist, then that person will find the implementation of this law a progressive step, whereas others, who enjoy certain privileges, status and power in the current Indian cultural context, may see it as an imposition of western values on Indian culture.

As in the US, the strength of WS in India lies in its interdisciplinarity. However, problems have appeared. It is difficult to standardize teaching WS because there can be different approaches to teach similar topics. Thus, multiple approaches can help or hinder, depending upon the expert. It was found that even when traditional disciplines have incorporated components from WS, it has been a struggle for WS to find adequate recognition and respectability in the overall university system. Innovative and additional training are being incorporated within WS syllabi to attract enrollment, for sustaining the centers.

An explicit connection between feminist theory and women's social activist networks (both local and global) was found in the syllabi. In WS-India centers, illustrations are drawn from the instructor's experiences with various NGOs and community-based activism, allowing WS students to become part of these networks. Thereby, vocational skills and opportunities are created through the course requirements.

In US there has been a trend toward transnational studies in the curricula, but WS-India centers have not yet felt the pressure to transnationalize. This is probably due to the existence of a rich multiplicity of women's movements in India. Although most of the syllabi allude to international interventions, international women's conferences and globalization, they have not been adequately dealt with. It was found that not all the WS syllabi contain topics that could help students make connections with transnational movements and local movements.

Analyzing syllabi to study WS courses has its limitations. A lot depends on the actual classroom teaching of these courses and who is teaching them. It is possible that a male instructor would have a different take on the topic on masculinities or feminisms (Mitra, 2011) when compared to a female instructor or a feminist with their own personal experiences of oppression. Moreover, we have not included syllabi from other major centers (such as those at Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey (SNDT) Women's University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and more) in India that are active in promoting WS. In India, jobs are still linked to academic accreditation and formal degrees. Therefore, some students opt for these courses merely to get a degree without having any real interest in women's issues (men hardly opt for these courses unless they improve their job-prospects). Thus, it is difficult to ascertain what draws all students to get a degree in WS – making it difficult to assess the popularity of WS. However, these limitations of the study have been addressed by including reflections from WS practitioners (professors and directors) in India.

Comparatively, WS-India is at a less advanced stage of institutionalization, infrastructure and access to resources. But this state of affairs allows them more flexibility in terms of options for future research and direction, although their current status within the university system remains somewhat tenuous. As a result, WS in India is a growing discipline of study that has managed to maintain its interdisciplinarity and keep activism alive within academic scholarship by using innovative ways. According to the professors who were contacted for inputs, the future of WS in India appears fairly bright. New centers are being added by the UGC and new positions are gradually being created. Flood-gates are opening for new project-funding on curriculum development by private investors and agencies (such as grants by Sri Ratan Tata Trust that Jadavpur School for Women's Studies has procured). At the undergraduate level, universities like Calcutta and Jadavpur are in the process of offering WS as an optional minor to students pursuing other majors. WS practitioners opine that there is considerable scope for expansion of WS in India, while the WS-US had to diversify to incorporate other areas of studies beyond women's issues, such as sexualities, disabilities and other minorities in order to sustain itself. Practitioners in the US would benefit from learning the strategies adopted by those in India, as an effort to understand how WS sustain and develop in international settings.

By comparatively studying WS programs in both India and US, this paper offers insight on key differences and similarities. While US-WS programs tend to be more oriented toward theoretical analysis, the Indian centers (in addition to a theoretic basis from the West) have a strong connection to praxis via the vibrant work of NGOs in the country. In this sense, while both Indian and US programs have similar goals, advancement of women's rights, they pursue somewhat different approaches. For US-WS understanding these differences, such as stronger

role of activism (NGOs) and providing vocational opportunities, will be crucial as they help to develop truly transnational theories and international perspectives on women's lives – something currently not fully addressed in their curricula. Likewise, WS-India would gain from studying the effects of institutionalization on WS curricula in the US. It offers them insight on how to pursue and achieve institutional recognition and infrastructure, without the potential encumbrances. By understanding the strengths and struggles of WS programs in US and India, one can see how they contradict and complement each other. This understanding is a crucial first step toward building new transnational theories that address women's issues, while crossing international boundaries – an important goal for the long-term advancement of WS programs around the world.

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