Disabled Women, Feminism and Movements *(presentation by Janet Price)*

- Introduction
- Note on Naming
- Disabled Women in Movements:
  1. Understanding aspects of Gender & Disability
  2. Disabled women organising autonomously
  3. Exclusionary practises and normative roles
  4. Austerity, rights and justice
  5. Disabled women involved within feminist organising

Politics of Naming

- Social Model (UK origin) –

  Disabled Women (DW)

- UNCRPD, Rights Model –

  Women with Disabilities (WwD)

1. Understanding Aspects of Gender & Disability

- Who is a Disabled Woman/ a Women with Disabilities?
- How do they define themselves?

A. Woman : a.Physical Sex AND

b.Social Gender

B. Disability:

a. **Non-political** explanation

  a. Fate/Superstition
  b. Charity/Welfare
  c. Medical

Contd

…. <u>aspects of Gender & Disability</u>$_2$

…. Disability:

■ **Political** Definitions

   a. <u>Social Model/Rights Model</u>

- <u>Impairment</u> – lack/defect in part, mechanism or whole of the biological body =>' broken body'

- <u>Disability</u> – disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by contemporary societal organisation, and by societal prejudice and discrimination that takes no account of people with impairments. Thus, they are excluded them mainstream social activities. Disability is socially constructed.

- The argument is that if all barriers were removed, disabled individuals would be able to live freely and without discrimination in the world

<div align="center">OR</div>
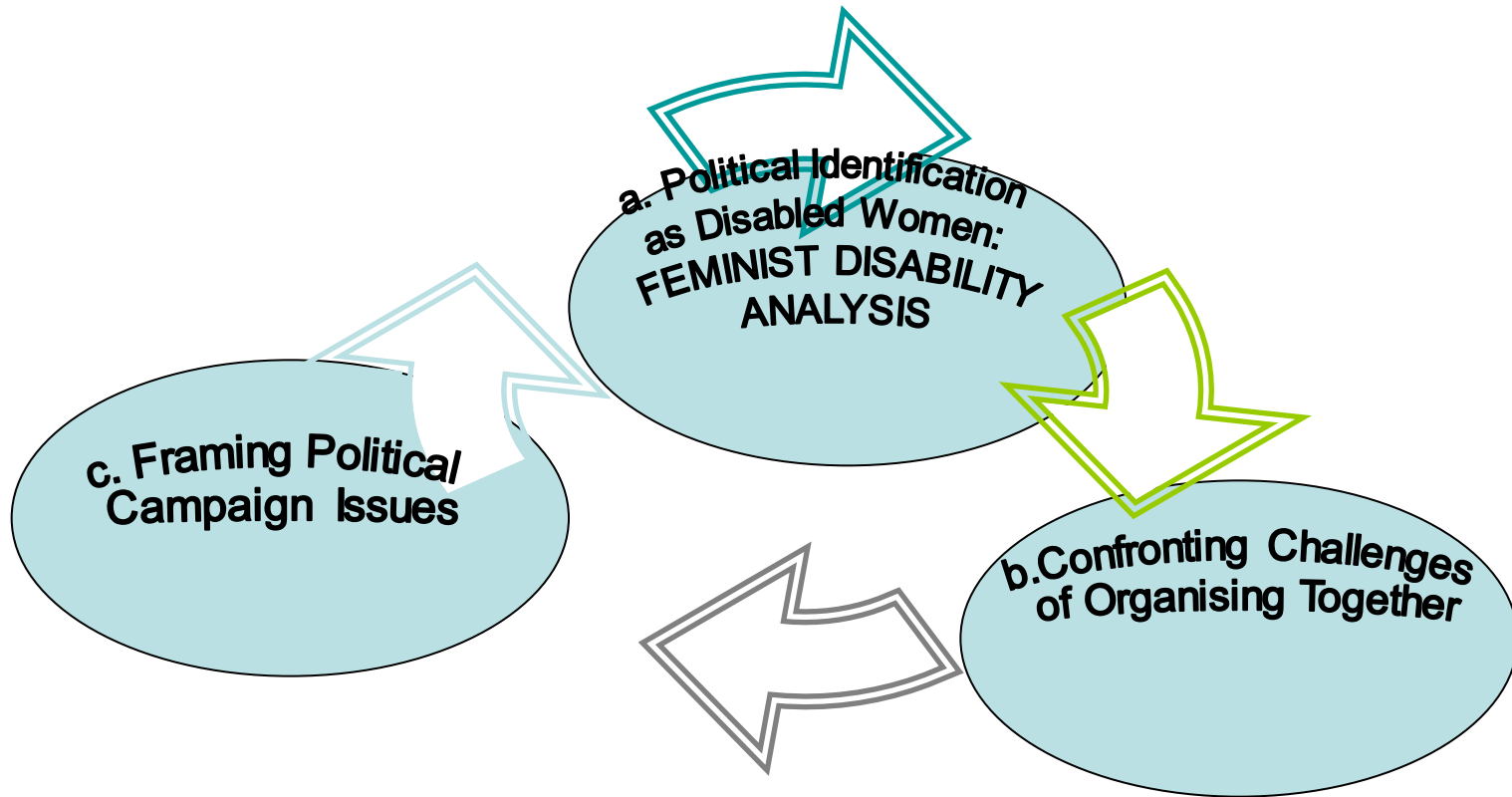
…. aspects of Gender & Disability$_3$

.... Disability:

■ **Political** Definitions

b. Critical feminist disability

- Disabled feminists pointed out that Impairment to Disability takes no account of sensation & feelings, whether negative e.g. pain, exhaustion or positive e.g. desire, pleasure

- Embodiment challenges the mind-body separation. We live in and through our bodies, in relation with others, in dynamic reciprocity between our changing body, bodies of others and the changing cultural/physical/socio- political world.

- Disability incorporates an unstable & changing embodiment, constructed through physical effects, our emotions, relations with others, environmental limitations and their discriminatory attitudes and prejudice towards us.

- Ethics of relation Rather than individual autonomy, the focus is an ethics of relations, on *'becoming in the world with others'*.

2. Disabled women organising autonomously

a. Political Identification as Disabled Women: FEMINIST DISABILITY ANALYSIS

b.Confronting Challenges of Organising Together

c. Framing Political Campaign Issues

a. Political Identification as Disabled Women

- Establish identity – not BORN 'disabled' or born 'a woman' but:

- One **becomes** a disabled woman.

- Consciousness raising
  - to Recognise identity of oneself and of others – not only of those with similar embodiment, but of those who also face diversity of disability and gender prejudice/discrimination
  - to Identify commonality of patterns of inequality and discrimination against Group AS disabled women
  - to Recognise political implications, beyond the day-to-day personal issues, but at social, community, state level i.e.
  - A FEMINIST DISABILITY ANALYSIS

b.Confronting Challenges of Organising Together:

To ALL the challenges of Feminist mobilisation:

<div align="center">FIRST PRIORITY ➜   ACCESS</div>

Disability Access Requirements

- Physical requirements:
- Audio access:
- Visual access:
- Language access:
- and MORE

Meeting & co-ordinating together

- One disabled woman does not automatically know how to deal with issues of other disabled women – awareness of access
- View as 'increased' access – information from more directions, in more formats
- Access planning is expensive to do properly – but it matters to get it right or you exclude some women from the very beginning

c. Framing Political Campaign Issues

Working from a disability feminist perspective **:**

Analyse all feminist issues from disability perspective and vice versa

Incorporate disabled feminists critiques of these and <u>additional</u> issues as you prepare action plan

You may have to throw out some of your preconceptions about priorities and **start again**, from a disability feminist perspective

1. Identify issue :

2. Build analysis of Gender and Disability impact

3. Propose campaign strategies

4. Build skills to implement strategies

→ 1. E.g. Violence against Deaf women

→ 2. Impact in family, home, community, health care

→ 3. Document events; Research legal rights; Meet with community leaders, police, health care managers: Propose definitions & access changes

→ 4. Gender & disability analysis, participatory research skills, legal documentation, negotiation skills

Swabhiman – Indian Deaf women's group working on building skills around gender, sexual violence and gender and sexual rights. Their initial training was with a non-disabled feminist.

3. <u>Exclusionary practises and normative roles</u>

Where do disabled women belong?
Excluded from:

- **Disability Movements'** Agendas
- Male dominated, focus on achieving normative masculine roles
- Work towards **norm** of strong, healthy man, thro education, skills and hard work.
- Movement dominated by disabled men, who strive towards masculine ideals. Disabled women's issues not a priority.

- **Feminist/Women's Movements'** Ideals
- Feminist dominated, focus on gender **ideal** of strong, healthy, independent woman.
- DW seen as dependent, needing care, support.
- Feminists, majority non-disabled, focus on normatively Abled women's issues. Impact of disability not a concern.
- Do not recognise impact of 'compulsory ablebodiedness'

Dis/Ability Identities

- Disabled identity – thro' facing prejudice. Can be both singular and multiple
  - Faces exclusion, oppression and prejudice
- Non-disabled individual – experiences vulnerability and fear of the Other i.e. PwD.
  - Lives life unaware of Abled Privilege
  - Experiences no necessity for Dis/Ability Identity as part of normative majority – the Same

Dynamic Embodied Relations

- <u>Disabled Woman</u>
- Gendered life, lived disabled
- Living disabled female
- EmBodiMent engendered disability
- Thinking/living through gendered anomalous (non-normative) body

- <u>Non-Disabled Woman</u>
- Gendered life, lived non-disabled
- Living female normate
- EmBodiment norma- tive & engendered
- Thinking/living through gendered body norms

4. <u>Austerity, rights and justice</u>

- Colonial era led:
  - to definition of 'able-bodied' label thro East India company work practices;
  - to creation of famine conditions and destitution/death of many;
  - to war and displacement of indigenous communities;
  - to eugenic policies.
- *Disability-like* conditions and contexts were created for many, within colonised countries
- Current era led:
  - to Global downturn & neoliberal economics leading to reduction in welfare spending on health, disability, education, employment support
  - to Economic squeeze leading to increase in prejudice against minority groups – GLBTQI, disabled people, indigenous groups

Austerity and the Dis/Organisation of Disability

- <u>State</u>: Determination of limits of disability thro disciplinary projects eg CBR, Special Education
- <u>Metropolitan</u>: Naming of *People with Disabilities, post-colonial* determined by Conferences, Reports, communication, UN system. Divorced from indigenous naming of non-normative or *anomalous* bodies
- <u>Queer</u> <u>Crip</u>: Challenge to identities, to normative definitions, to creation of alternatives and challenge to increased prejudice
- <u>Disability Feminist</u> tactics in face of these changes – resistance, question, negotiation or alliance?

5. <u>Disabled women involved within feminist organising</u>

- Disabled women are about 15% of all populations. They should be MORE than 15% of feminist movements as amongst the most disadvantaged groups of women.

- Yet, disabled women often say they feel unwelcome in feminist groups.

- And feminist groups say that disabled women do not respond to their invitations to take part.

- But disabled women form a vital part of feminist constituencies – as women, as victims of violence, as activists with experience of campaigning.

- They are a necessary part of movements because of their skills, because of the misogynist/antiwomen disablism they face, because they face severe discrimination

Practical Approaches

- Consult with disabled women's groups at planning stage – go to them rather than expecting them to come to you.
- Create Initiatives that include disabled women as one group amongst other women.
- Ensure that the plans address an issue of concern to disabled women.
- Set Access in place, in consultation with disabled women.
- Network and share information widely amongst disabled women's groups.
- Support disabled women to gain skills from the initiative
- Plan a range of initiatives of relevance to DW's needs.
- Ensure that sufficient time is given to the development of connections and alliances.
- The concerns of disabled women must receive equal attention in different panels and plenary sessions throughout the conference.

Disabled Women at Count Me In!

- Violence against women with disabilities is not given priority in State agendas, women's rights movements, nor sexual rights movements.

- The widespread misconception, prejudices, and stigma surrounding the lives of marginalised women affect the services that disabled women are provided from the State and non-State actors. These are seldom informed by women's lived experiences.

- For example, the misconception that disabled women are asexual defines the programmes made for them, which do not touch upon aspects of their sexual rights at all. In reproductive and sexual health programmes for women, disabled women are excluded because of the same misconception.

CREA had networked with many disability rights organisations in Bangladesh, Nepal, and India for its research study on violence against marginalised women. These organisations helped CREA to disseminate information about the CMI conference.

Jeeja Ghosh and other participants looking at art work displayed on the floor during a session on using art as therapy.

What Was Put In Place

- The conference venue, Hotel Crowne Plaza, had the maximum number of disabled-friendly rooms in Kathmandu.

- The hotel also made some of their ordinary rooms accessible for people on wheelchairs.

- Ramps and wider bathroom doors were constructed to make the conference space more accessible.

- Volunteers and CREA staff members assisted each disabled participant.

- Sign language interpretation, along with language translations, were provided.

- The conference introduction and agenda were provided in Braille.

A participant on wheelchair being given a tour of the photography exhibition by a volunteer.

Sign Language Interpretation in progress at a plenary session.