

Feminist Visions for a Constitutional Democracy: Women's Contribution to the Framing of the Constitution of India.

The historical narrative of the framing of the Indian Constitution is dominated by male figures, most notably of BR Ambedkar. In my lecture, I shall provide a corrective to this dominant understanding by focusing on the contributions of the women members of the Constituent Assembly of India (1946-1949) to the framing process.

By drawing attention to the direct contribution of the most active of these women members—Amrit Kaur, Durgabai (Deshmukh), Hansa Mehta, Amrit Kaur and Renuka Ray— and reading them against the backdrop of the women's movement in India I will show that women's voice in the Constituent Assembly articulated a consistent feminist vision for a constitutional democracy. These women had participated in the founding process with distinct moral imaginary—a set of internally consistent ideas about the value the relationship between state, law and the individual that were conceptualized during their movement for gender justice and equality—which was eventually adopted by the Constitution of India. Thus, for example, I shall argue that some crucial sections on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles would not have been incorporated had these women not been members of the Constituent Assembly.