

LeelaDube: Biography, Works, Contributions and Achievements

Fondly known as Leeladee, LeelaDube was an anthropologist, sociologist, feminist, teacher and above all a mother and a homemaker. Along with IrawatiKarve, VinaMajumdar, and Lotika Sarkar, she worked in anthropology when the field did not even recognize women as a subject in male-dominated academia. She explains gender biases through her own examples, that how being a gendered person she suspects everything unaware of the suffering and strengths of women. Post-1960s, if you analyse any sociological piece on women and gender, her name comes up with unfailing regularity.

LeelaDube: Early Life

LeelaDube was born in a Marathi Brahminical family, which was fairly modern. Dube's parents were considerably affectionate and she grew up with four siblings. Her autobiographical essay titled *Doing Kinship and Gender* talks about instances of her mother highlighting the importance of cooking and caring skills in the life of a woman.

LeelaDube: Feminist Anthropologist Works

Dube understood at a very early age that marriage was unavoidable so, she decided to find herself a groom and married. Dube encountered on her quest to find 'an intelligent man with nationalist inclinations', she met ShyamaCharanDube while pursuing M.A in Political Science at Nagpur University. He was an anthropologist and helped Leeladee to understand the subject better.

She had unlimited access to the libraries and documents, and their home was always a place of open discussion. However, her married life did not fulfill to provide the same advantages as it did before which resulted in her being better renowned than her husband. The path of a professional was not an easy one for Dube as the responsibility of the household and the children were on her shoulders. This led to interruptions in her profession and sidetracked her from her aims.

LeelaDube's CONTRIBUTIONS

CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER:

Dube explains in her article "The Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India", the social construct that passively forces women to create their image in their minds that are inferior to men. She highlights the role of rituals, cultural practices, ceremonies, and the use of language in the life of a Hindu girl.

She uses cultural expressions and idioms to showcase the significance of language as a tool through which women have been put to a subsidiary position in daily life. She provides an example of a Telugu expression which translates into “Bringing up a daughter is like watering a plant in another’s courtyard” to provide insights about the aforementioned. This particular sentence sums the problems of inequality, dowry imposed on women, and the lack of support from family if the daughter experiences troubles with her in-laws. Gender socialization prevails in the Indian sub-continent underlined by the norms of patrilocality. Therefore, women experience a temporary membership at their natal home. She also set forth various religious rituals to show how systematically people are involved in belittling a woman’s position. The idea of a good wife and lack of autonomy on part of the woman is undesirable.

WOMEN AND KINSHIP

Gender relations are not constructed alike in different cultures. LeelaDube says that a prominent area to give birth to this diversity of cultures is kinship, which forms a system of significance importance to locate gender relations. She is often seen focusing on the viewpoint that kinship has important cultural and structural dimensions. There is ignorance regarding kinship which fails us to understand gender studies. According to Dube, Kinship systems can better show gender relations in various cultures through specific gender ideology.

In her book, she mentions the implications that kinships have for understanding gender in terms of differing productive and economic roles that women can have, differing patterns of seclusion and segregation, management of female sexuality, and the limitations imposed on the female body. It provides a comprehensive reading of the intersections of gender, religion, kinship, location, economic and political implications, etc. It talks about the facets of power and control through ideology- women’s bodies and sexuality through ideology, exercising control over the distribution of resources.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND GENDER

The 1970s marked the beginning of the women’s movement and women anthropologists throughout the nation led the search for the initiation of gender subordination to gather evidence for gender transformation theory. Traditional texts such as Manusmriti and Puranas were majorly used as references for these explorations because they provided examples of practices like gender discrimination. Through ample anthropological investigations, it had been proved that there had always been scarce studies on gender socialization processes. Then finally in 2011, LeelaDube’s ‘Anthropological Explorations in Gender: Intersecting Fields’ began the process, a book which used South-Asian women’s circumstances describing patrilineal backgrounds and matrilineal traditions of women in India. The book shows over 50 years of LeelaDube’s insights. A common notion found in the essays is the diverse and complex interrelation between gender and other social aspects such as caste, religion, and the prominent role of kinship organization in subordinating the position of women in the family and the society. The contents provided by Dube marked the beginning of

feminist theory building in India. Along with it, she also provided an important array of sources like ethnographies, autobiography, texts, rituals, etc. that should be used while analyzing women's stand and kinship relations.

LeelaDube's Achievements

Dube was positioned as a member of the Committee on the status of women in India. Ample studies were taken focusing on women and areas like kinship, religion, marriage, sexuality, prostitution, tribes, and purdah among other themes. 'Towards Equality' report was submitted in 1974 and during this time there was an urgent need to recognize women's experiences. The anthropology of women studies has been distinguished by the critics and is now referred as feminist anthropology. LeelaDube became the chairperson of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) Commission on women (1976-1993) and worked with many other associations on women's problems, undertook massive research, events and campaigns. The history behind her famous book, *Women and Kinship*(1997), was initially her study as a part of a UN Project on *Women's Work and Family Strategies in South and South-East Asia* .

Her research and publications on gender resulted in numerous gender-related scholarship. In training programs and study circles, her publication in the *Economic and Political Weekly* (1988) titled 'On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India', is still used as a source of primary information. Amongst various social sciences courses her work in the volume 'Women, Work, and Family (1990)' is taught nationwide.

Dube, in her list of achievements, held many fellowships from, Teen Murti, ICSSR, and Centre for Women's Development Studies. In 2005, LeelaDube achieved the UGC National Swami PranavanandaSaraswati Award and in 2007, she was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Indian Sociological Society. Dube was an active participant in the academic arena and debates until her last breath in 2012.

CONCLUSION:

LeelaDube's feminist approach originates not only from her own life as well as anthropological studies of different groups as the relationship between them provides a new horizon of comparison and correlation. Her methods of feminist research go hand-in-hand with the phrase 'personal is political' and that the position of a researcher and life history plays a key role in contextualizing the framework of the research undertaken. LeelaDube's way of feminist social anthropology helps to investigate the myriad of situations in which women are submissive. As discussed before, she also analyzed the lack of awareness, inadequacy, and exclusion of concepts about the existence of women in academic literature. Providing a new analytical framework, her work revolves around the lack of representation of women in society which shows numerous ideological and cultural loopholes. Dube's work on kinship opened up a whole different point of view about universally accepted patriarchal practices and theories. Adding to it, social factors like caste, class, religion were also highlighted as the causes for the subordination of women.

She began research in areas that had gone unnoticed within the scope of social anthropology, which earlier was included in the study of tribes. She untangled knots of the well-known 'exotic nature' of anthropology by comparing and relating it with lived experience of a person in society. The discussion and debate of 'value of work' done by women resulting in economic contribution were started first by her analysis of the gender-based division of labor of work. An inclusive framework of analysis of social realities was better understood by it. It provided a more inclusive framework of analysis of social reality.

Dube played a role in enrichment in the arenas of social anthropology by delving into the subject and provided for a plethora of sources of knowledge: symbolic representations and the ideological significance they inherit, the perpetuation of kinship in sexual asymmetry in lives of women, and generalized notions and theories. Her work helped in the understanding that theories developed in regional contexts should not always be considered as universalities.

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