

Feminist. Mama. Immigrant. This is what my bio on Instagram reads. It may strike you as odd that I would choose to share that information in a motivation letter to a winter school program but becoming a mother has currently reduced my feminist engagement to merely that – Instagram captions. Once, a vibrant academic scholar with three master's degrees in gender studies, engaging in elaborate discourse across continents about the multiple patriarchies that shape our lives and experiences, now all I have the emotional bandwidth for, is vomiting my lived experience of motherhood into a 500 word Instagram caption and bask in the momentary glory of comments from friends and acquaintances: "You're so inspiring" "I relate to this so much" "Thank you for sharing".

I was born and brought up in an upper caste middle class family in urban India. When I found feminism at 18, it was much needed balm to simultaneously sting and ease the raging fires inside me (much like witch hazel on postpartum hemorrhoids). At 21, I went on to do a master's in Gender Culture and Development at University of Pune. Learning about feminisms – radical, Black, Zapatista, South Asian, Iranian and others showed me the best and worst that humanity has to offer. It broke my binary thinking of 'good and bad' and forever ruined the experience of watching a Bollywood film. But it also gave me a life purpose and a sense of belonging and identity. Since then, life has offered me the opportunity to pursue a master's in Gender and Human rights at the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague and has currently led me to half a decade long career of working with INGO's to ensure bodily autonomy and sexual reproductive health and rights of minorities in the global south.

Two years ago, when I became a mother amidst a pandemic, I wasn't sufficiently prepared for the massive change in identity that I was about to experience. While all the books I was reading minutely detailed the changes in the ability and function of the fetus growing inside me, no one warned me about the sudden loss of identity that would come about in mine or the onslaught of clashing 'feminist' ideologies that would be thrown my way in search for a new identity. A certain kind of western feminism claimed that birthing a baby was akin to merely pushing a pumpkin out of my body, that I should make sure to divide tasks 'equally' with my partner so that I could find my way back into the neoliberal capitalist labor system. While another kind, engulfed by the pandemic 'throw-all-old-ways-out' mentality urged me to quit my job and become a new kind of stay at home mom, a 'SAHM', that makes Montessori toys and fills her child's days with activities that entertain and stimulate their growing brain. When I reached out to knowledge from my homeland I found that globalization that pushed the 'work hard, play hard' mentality into my urban Indian circles too, all that drove home one message – mom's can do it all (and if you can't something is wrong with you). Days turned into months as I scrolled through the barrage of discourse and endless advice from mom bloggers on good ol Instagram, while being mind numbingly bored as a baby latched onto my sore nipple, when I suddenly realized that I didn't recognize myself in these feminisms anymore.

Since then, I've been on a journey to find my home back in feminism: one that encompasses the nuance of having to share your body and mind so completely since the moment those two pink lines show up on a pee stick, of being grateful for the privilege of being able to become pregnant (in a world where so many of your friends struggle with IVF), of having a choice to either carry or not (in a world where abortion rights are being repealed) and of realizing that just because you love your baby doesn't mean that you're happy all the time. At the same time I want a feminism that recognizes the depth of love, joy and pride that this new identity can bring about. My hope in joining the winter school workshop at LOVA is that I can continue to have some of these conversations with other mother-feminists, find new insights, community and perhaps even a sense of belonging back in my feminist identity. As I write this, I am 38 weeks pregnant, about to give birth to my second daughter. And while I comfort my nervous heart with the thought that becoming a mother is a never ending journey and I realize that maybe, becoming a feminist is one too.