

The links between feminist theory and activism are at an exciting new juncture amidst the growth of transnational women's movements. Feminist theory grew out of women's movements. As it evolved and became institutionalized—through state agencies, women's studies programs, and women's NGOs—its links to activism attenuated. What to some represented feminism's coming of age, to others represented cooptation. The growth of transnational women's movements has reinvigorated the relationship between feminist theory and activism. This has not put to rest difficult and productive debates. Transnationally as well as domestically, feminists continue to dispute the value of mainstreaming gender, the meaning of feminism, and the alliances women's movements should forge. But questions concerning the demise of feminist theory and activism seem antiquated in face of women's vital roles in challenging state repression, religious orthodoxy, civil wars, and neoliberal policies. Women and women's movements are at the forefront of democracy and human rights movements in the Middle East, South Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Their activism has generated new ways of thinking about the relationship between the local and the global, the cultural and the political, and the state and civil society. If the strength of women's movements, like that of all social movements, ebbs and flows, feminism and women's movements remain the most enduring and powerful forces for social justice and social change.

*Amrita Basu is Professor of Political Science and Women's and Gender Studies at Amherst College. She is the author or editor of several books, including Two Faces of Protest: Contrasting Modes of Women's Activism in India (1994) and Women's Movements in the Global Era: The Power of Local Feminisms (2010).*