

WESTERN FEMINISM AND BHARTIYA FEMINEITY: COMPARISON OF TWO IDEOLOGIES

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Abstract

Feminism, as a global movement, seeks to establish gender equality by addressing social, economic, and political disparities. However, its manifestations differ across cultural landscapes. Western feminism, rooted in individualism and the struggle for legal and political rights, emphasizes autonomy, gender neutrality, and systemic restructuring. In contrast, Bhartiya femineity (Bharatiya Naari Shakti) derives its strength from dharmic traditions, emphasizing complementarity rather than conflict between genders. This study exhibits the comparison between these two concepts. The main purpose of this paper is to show the roots and different perspectives of Indian femininity and also the perspective of Western feminism. This study explores how these perspectives shape gender discourse, identity, and empowerment. While Western feminism advocates equality through rights-based activism, Bhartiya femineity upholds a balance of duties and responsibilities, fostering harmony within familial and social structures. By comparing these ideologies, this paper aims to highlight the strengths and limitations of both.

Keywords: Bhartiya, Femineity, Feminism Western

Introduction

The role of women in Indian society has been multifaceted and evolving, deeply rooted in cultural traditions while also embracing modernity and progress. From ancient times to the modern era, women in India have played crucial roles as educators, caregivers, and bearers of cultural values. The concept of Bhartiya femininity, which emphasizes a balance between tradition and progress, offers a unique perspective on gender roles that complements and sometimes contrasts with Western feminist ideologies. As India aspires to become a Vishwa guru Bharat, the empowerment and participation of women in all spheres of life become increasingly vital.

Although the Indian women's rights movement has been greatly impacted by Western feminism, it is important to acknowledge the distinct cultural, social, and economic circumstances of Indian women. The path ahead is to adopt a form of feminism that takes into consideration the various realities of India. Since caste, religion,

and class have a significant influence on Indian women's experiences, these issues should be addressed in the struggle for women's rights. Therefore, the foundation of the Indian feminist movement should be intersectionality.

Western Feminism: Western feminism is a broad movement that mainly emerged in Western societies and promotes women's equality and rights. Its characteristics include a preference for political and legal reform, an emphasis on individual liberty and rights, and a propensity for universalism.

(<https://blog.lukmaanias.com/2024/08/31/analyze-the-influence-of-western-feminism-on-the-womens-rights-movement-in-india/>)

To address women's unequal status, Western feminism has inevitably allied itself with the emancipatory path of Western liberalism, which feminists have found to be an effective instrument for achieving gender equality. Nevertheless, it has also necessitated conformity to the idea of individual similarity, which has

frequently come at the price of a more pluralistic view of women and their differentiation.

There are two primary ways to talk about how Western feminism evolved and distinguish between the different feminisms that make it up. The first provides a system of classification of the primary forms of feminist thought and activity within Western feminism, while the second provides a chronological treatment of Western feminism from its emergence in the nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century. (<https://soas.academia.edu/SianHawthorne>)

Objectives Of Study

1. To Show The Roots And Different perspectives of Bhartiya femineity and Western feminism.
2. To highlight the comparison between ideologies of Bhartiya femineity and Western feminism.

Research Methodology

This research paper is a conceptual paper based on secondary data. The researcher has gone through existing literature related to this concept. Various Books, journals, research papers, and other relevant online information are also analyzed for writing this paper. This paper is based on secondary data only. No statistical tools are used for the analysis of data. Because of a lack of time, primary data is not collected by the researcher. This is a conceptual paper based on qualitative analysis.

Evolution of Western Feminism:

Western feminism: In both Europe and North America, Western feminism rose to prominence in the 19th and 20th centuries. This movement, which is often characterized by its emphasis on gender equality, individual freedoms, and secularism, is the result of several "waves" that have each targeted different types of women's oppression. (Evans, E., & Chamberlain, P. (2015).

- The first surge, which started in the second half of the 19th century, was mostly concerned with legal matters such as women's suffrage, voting rights, and property rights. The United States' 1920 ratification of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, was a significant accomplishment during this time.

(Origin of Feminism: From Early Struggles to Modern Movements, December 2024)

- The second wave of Western feminism, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, expanded the conversation to include issues like domestic abuse, gender inequality in the workplace, sexuality, and reproductive rights. The catchphrase "The personal is political" often connects this wave, highlighting the relationship between women's personal experiences and broader social and political structures. The invention of the birth control pill and the landmark Roe v. Wade ruling in 1973, which made abortion legal in the US, were significant occasions during this time. (Four Waves of Feminism Explained, February, 2024)
- The 1990s saw the emergence of the third wave of feminism, which strongly emphasized inclusivity and diversity. It attempted to address and integrate conversations about sexual orientation, class, and race into the feminist movement. This wave acknowledged that women's lives are shaped by their overlapping identities, challenging the notion of a single experience of womanhood. A key component of this movement was the concept of intersectionality, which was first put forth by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. It offers a framework for understanding how various forms of discrimination, including those based on gender race and class interact and exacerbate each other. The intersectionality of gender and race must be taken into account to completely understand the experiences of a Black woman. (Feminism: The Third Wave, June 2020)
- The fourth wave of feminism, which emerged around 2012, set itself apart by organizing and amplifying feminist issues through digital media and technology. Social media plays a significant role in bringing feminist

issues to the attention of people worldwide, as demonstrated by campaigns such as #MeToo, which highlighted the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault.

Influence of Western Feminism

Introduction of Feminist Theories: Indian intellectuals were exposed to a variety of feminist theories by Western feminism, including intersectional feminism, radical feminism, liberal feminism, and Marxist feminism. These theories then impacted how Indian intellectuals approached gender issues. *Under Western Eyes: (Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses.)*

International Solidarity: Women's movements around the world have become more united as a result of Western feminism. Connecting with their Western counterparts would allow Indian feminists to share ideas and tactics. For instance, India saw a boom in the formation of women's rights organizations as a result of the 1975 International Women's Year and the UN Decade for Women. (UN Women Archives; Kumar, Radha. *The History of Doing.*)

Women's Suffrage Movement: Indian women fought for their right to vote after being inspired by the Western suffrage movement. Soon after India gained its independence in 1947, women were given the right to vote. (Forbes, Geraldine. *Women in Modern India.*)

Legislation and Policy Changes: The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005 and the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 are two examples of laws that have been amended and passed in India as a result of Western feminism. (Indian Government Legislation Archives; Kumar, Radha. *The History of Doing.*)

Gender Equality in the Workplace: Similar movements in India were influenced by the Western struggle for equal rights and compensation in the workplace. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013 is an example of this influence. (Indian Government – Ministry of Women and Child Development.)

Impact on Education: Gender studies was incorporated into academic curricula in India as a result of Western feminist ideas that prompted a reevaluation of the country's educational

material. (Chakravarti, Uma. *Gendering Caste through a Feminist Lens.*)

Empowerment Movements: The Gulabi Gang, a group of women in pink sarees who use bamboo sticks to combat gender violence and corruption, is one of the women's empowerment movements in India that has been influenced by Western feminism. (Chaudhary, S., & Ranjan, P. (2018).)

Knowledge of Sexual and Reproductive Rights: The conversation in India about women's sexual and reproductive health was impacted by the sexual revolution and the fight for reproductive rights in the West. Progressive laws such as the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971 resulted from this. (Government of India – Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; UNFPA Reports.)

LGBTQ+ Rights: The activism that preceded India's decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018 is an example of how Western feminism's support for LGBTQ+ rights has impacted the Indian feminist movement's acknowledgment and acceptance of queer rights. (Rich, Adrienne. 1980)

Critique and the Rise of Indian Feminism: Western feminism's impact has also been criticized for failing to comprehend the intricate sociocultural realities faced by Indian women. An Indian brand of feminism that emphasizes intersectionality—considering not only gender but also caste, religion, and socioeconomic status—arose as a result of this critique. (Dr. Prakanshi, 2024)

Bhartiya Femininity

"Bhartiya" means "Indian" or "relating to India," and "femininity" describes how Bhartiya's femininity is intricately entwined with Indian customs, cultural values, and social orders and traits that are typically associated with women. With its emphasis on dharma (righteousness) and karma (action), Bhartiya femininity frequently relates to spiritual and religious ideas. A few instances are:

Sati: The custom of widow immolation, or Sati, is a gloomy illustration of patriarchal oppression, but it also emphasizes a cultural value placed on the devotion and selflessness of women. (Mani, Lata. *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India.*)

Devotion to Goddesses: A complex and multidimensional view of femininity can be seen in the rich tradition of Indian culture's goddesses, who represent various facets of strength, compassion, and power. (Kinsley, David. *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*.)

The Role of Women in Religious Practices: It is possible to argue that women's spiritual significance is demonstrated by their significant participation in a variety of religious practices, including rituals, prayers, and storytelling. The concept of Bhartiya femineity is not an opposition to feminism but offers a different perspective on gender roles. Its key aspects include:

Traditional Role

Women are often viewed as the backbone of the household, embodying various qualities like patience, sacrifice, and devotion. Women have a huge role to play in the concept of Vishwa guru Bharat. Women are very indispensable contributors to the education system, both as educators and as learners.

The role of women in promoting education is very essential to create a knowledgeable society that can lead the world. Historical figures like Gargi and Maitreyi were very prominent scrollers in ancient India. They showcase the tradition of women's contribution.

The role of mothers in Indian society

In Indian culture, mothers hold a very respectful position, often called the heart of the family.

The concept of 'Matru devo bhava' is deeply rooted in our Indian philosophy. Mothers are not just caregivers but they are the ones who are primary educators for the children, one who provides moral guides to children. This role is very indispensable in a society where family bonds are valued. (Basu, A. 1995).

Family members usually place a lot of expectations on mothers, especially in India. They are expected to be nurturing, self-sacrificing, etc, often required to prioritize the needs of the other members of the household over their own needs.

Multitasking ability refers to the ability to manage or handle various multiple responsibilities. In the context of motherhood, managing day to day needs of a family like

cooking food, cleaning, caring, etc. By managing so many diverse responsibilities, women set a very powerful example of leadership, and resilience and encourage the empowerment of future generations. (Smith, S. (2024).)

Historical context

In ancient India, women had comparatively higher status, particularly Vedic period. They were educated, they had the freedom to even participate in different religious ceremonies, and they had the freedom to choose their husbands. Women like Gargi, and Maitreyi were renowned scholars, participating in debates. (Chakravarti, U. 2006)

During the medieval period, especially during the time of Islamic rule, more restrictive practices were introduced such as purdah (the seclusion of women) and child marriages etc. However, there were also powerful women such as Razia Sultana etc, who ruled places like Delhi. The British colonial period saw a further increment in rights of the women. People like Raja Ram Mohan Roy have also done various campaigns against sati. These movements become the foundation for women movement rights in modern India.

Transmission of cultural and ethical values

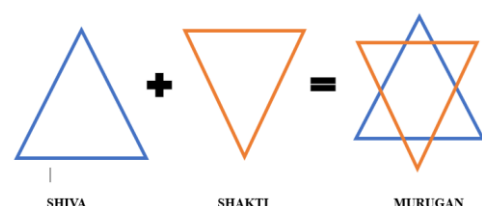
Indian mothers play a significant role in transmitting cultural values to the next generations. They teach their children about the traditions of India, festivals, etc. She ensures that these practices are passed down to the next generation in a proper manner.

Ethical guidance is another important aspect of a mother's role. Mother teaches their children the difference between right and wrong etc. they use various stories from the lives of the saints and sages to impart lessons on

The concept of Shakti, the divine power is central to Hindu philosophy.

Shiv honesty, humanity, etc. (Desai, S., & Banerji, M.2008)

Divine feminine & Shakti: Not Conflicting but Complimentary



Shiv is a symbol of masculine energy while shakti represents feminine energy. In individualism, shiv represents consciousness, stillness, and the unmanifested potential. Moreover, Shakti embodies dynamic energy, creation, and the manifested world. The relationship between the two is also well defined in various Puranas and the tantras etc. (Brooks, D. R. 1990).

These are not contrasting concepts but they are complementary to each other. Just like the sun and moon, day and night, etc. without each other, they are directionless. They together are a symbol or represent balance and harmony between the two. They are not opposing forces but two halves of a whole, each is incomplete without the other one. This interdependence highlights that without each other they are not effective. They together emphasize the need to maintain balance within the society i.e. within the genders of the society. We need to recognize the indispensable role of Shakti; empowering women is very essential for the overall balance of society. It's a holistic process that requires creating a societal balance between both genders, it's not about uplifting women in isolation. Feminine energy is not secondary but it's something that is deeply rooted in our tradition and culture.

To maintain this balance, firstly we need to break the stereotypes. This can be challenging. Traditional roles often restrict women from certain behaviors. By breaking down this stereotype, this behavior we will be able to create a more inclusive society. The complementary nature of Shiv and Shakti can also be explored in the context of modern gender roles, where both men and women can embody aspects of both energies, leading to a more equitable and balanced society. Everyone needs to understand empowering women leads to empowering the society which will help not only in community development but also, in economic stability.

Shakti as a dynamic energy, reflects the role of women in bringing up the society as well as community. Empowering women is indispensable to recognize and foster his dynamic energy. There are even many cultural practices that reflect the importance of women in society, like the Navratri festival where people celebrate the power of Shakti. We should

recognize the contribution of women in every sphere of life. We should integrate the principle of equality in our society and our culture because a society that integrates this is most prosperous and harmonious. We often see women's empowerment as a struggle where women try to attain the same rights as a man. Flood, G. (1996). Empowerment can't be seen as competing with males but finding a proper and stable balance between both of these genders. The balance is for the harmony of the nation and the society as well. This concept of Shiv and Shakti is the foundation for the understanding of the dynamics of gender relations and the importance of women's empowerment in society. These are complementary energies which together promote equality.

Influence of Indian Feminism

Educators- They are often called as first educators of children. They teach children various moral and ethical values through different means such as stories etc. (Spectrum: Modern India)

Caregiver-Indian mothers are often called caregivers because they are responsible physical and emotional well-being of the family. Moreover, their caregiving roles extend to elderly members of the family. (Spectrum: Modern India)

Economic contributor- In many families, mothers contribute economically as well through different means like farming and handicrafts or working outside the home, etc. The economic role of women has increased especially in modern India. (Spectrum: Modern India)

Social movements -Women are a part of various social movements as well, moreover, they also advocate various causes, from education to environmental issues. (Spectrum: Modern India)

Political representation- Women's participation in local governance has improved their representation especially due to the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. (Spectrum: Modern India)

Comparison between Western Feminism and Bhartiya Femininity

Based on Foundation: Western feminism and Bhartiya femininity represent two distinct paradigms of understanding and empowering women, each rooted in different cultural and

philosophical traditions. Western feminism finds its foundation in individual rights, liberalism, and modernist thought. It emphasizes systemic restructuring to achieve legal, political, and social equality. In contrast, Bhartiya femineity is deeply rooted in dharmic traditions and a holistic worldview, focusing on harmony, balance of duties, and complementarity between genders rather than conflict. Tong, R. (2009) & Nanda, M. (2009)

Based on Gender: The approach to gender in Western feminism often advocates for gender neutrality and seeks to dismantle traditional structures perceived as patriarchal. Bhartiya femineity, on the other hand, embraces gender complementarity, where roles are seen as different but equally valuable, grounded in cultural and spiritual significance. Empowerment in the Western model often comes through rights-based activism, protests, and policy change, while in the Bhartiya framework, it has been derived from inner strength, spiritual values, and fulfilling one's dharma within society. Butler, J. (1990) & Chaitanya, K. (1997)

Based on Tradition: Tradition is another point of divergence. Western feminism tends to view tradition with skepticism, often seeing it as a source of historical oppression. Bhartiya femineity, however, regards tradition as a reservoir of strength, identity, and harmony. Women in the Western feminist discourse are often portrayed as striving to break stereotypes and achieve parity with men, whereas in the Bhartiya view, women are celebrated as educators, nurturers, and upholders of cultural and spiritual values. Freedman, E. B. (2002) & Kinsley, D. (1988)

Based on Symbols and Ideals: The symbols and archetypes also reflect this contrast. Western feminism often draws inspiration from suffragettes, activists, and rebels. In Bhartiya femineity, the ideals are reflected in goddesses (Devi), sages, and revered figures like Sita, Savitri, and Gargi. While Western feminism operates within a secular and individualistic framework, Bhartiya's femineity is spiritual and community-oriented. Evans, J. (1995) & Sharma, A. (2000)

Based on Purpose: Ultimately, the goal of Western feminism is to transform society toward

egalitarian ideals, focusing on equality and dismantling hierarchical structures. In contrast, Bhartiya femineity seeks empowerment through self-realization, emphasizing growth within the framework of dharma and cultural values. The relationship with men, too, is differently framed—often adversarial or competitive in Western feminism, but rooted in balance, interdependence, and mutual respect in the Bhartiya perspective. Walby, S. (2011) & Gautam, M. K. (2001)

Conclusion

The analysis of Western feminism and Bhartiya femineity demonstrates that women's empowerment discussions heavily depend on cultural and philosophical as well as historical elements. Western feminism remains essential for dismantling oppression but Bhartiya femineity creates its foundation from spiritual dharma alongside peaceful coexistence and natural dignity of women. The research demonstrates how gender cannot be seen as a single universal experience because it reflects many social viewpoints. Different power models exist to empower women since such processes should follow native frameworks that preserve cultural identities while providing full participation to women in every life domain. A genuine inclusive feminist goal accepts multiple narratives so that various feminine strength expressions can develop together within an accepting framework.

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