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Feminism in the Indian Context: From Mythology to the Modern Period

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Abstract
Feminism in India has deep roots in the historical, cultural, and religious traditions of the nation. While post-independence activities, colonial resistance organizations, and ancient mythological works have had an impact on Indian feminism, contemporary feminism is mostly associated with Western philosophy. This essay explores how feminism has evolved in India, from its symbolic representation in mythology to its contemporary expressions through activism and legislative change.

Keywords: Feminism, Mythology, Modernity.

Introduction
Feminism is a complex and multidimensional movement in India that is impacted by caste, religion, class, and regional variance. Rather than following a strict Western paradigm, Indian feminist rhetoric is intertwined with traditional values, nationalist tensions, and modern rights-based approaches. Beginning in mythology, when women are commonly viewed as representations of virtue and strength, the trip continues into the modern age, when feminist movements oppose institutional patriarchy and advance gender equality..

Mythological Foundations of Feminism in India
Indian mythology is full of strong, wise, and independent female characters. Durga, Kali, and Saraswati are goddesses that symbolize wisdom, power (Shakti), and the annihilation of evil, respectively. In religious traditions, these divine symbols serve to support the idea of feminine power (Kinsley, 1988). The same texts, yet, also demonstrate patriarchal authority. The Ramayana's Sita, who is admired for her faithfulness and purity, is a prime example of how gendered expectations of women's conduct manifest. After being humiliated in the Kaurava court, Draupadi in the Mahabharata challenges patriarchal standards, making her an early feminist voice against injustice (Tharu & Lalita, 1991). As a result, mythological feminism in India is contradictory; it celebrates divine femininity while yet upholding strict gender norms in the world of mortality.

Feminism in the Colonial and Reformist Period
The social reform movements that addressed women's issues such as widow remarriage, sati, and child marriage emerged throughout the colonial era (18th–20th century). Jyotirao Phule, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Raja Ram Mohan Roy were among the reformers who emphasized the importance of empowering women via legal and educational change. One of the pioneers of Indian feminism was Savitribai Phule, the country's first female educator. She fought against gender and caste inequality and

promoted girls' education alongside her husband, Jyotirao Phule (Omvedt, 1994). Similarly, Bengali Muslim reformer Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain criticized patriarchy in Muslim society and advocated for women's education. By tying women's rights to more general issues of social justice, these reformist initiatives established the groundwork for Indian feminism.

Feminism During the Nationalist Movement

The late 19th and early 20th century Indian nationalism movement gave feminist expression a new forum. Under the direction of Mahatma Gandhi, who promoted women's active political participation while upholding traditional roles, women took part in protests, civil disobedience, and large-scale activities (Kumar, 1993). Aruna Asaf Ali, Kasturba Gandhi, Annie Besant, and Sarojini Naidu were among the notable women who rose to prominence. However, nationalist rhetoric frequently put the country before women, ignoring feminist demands in favor of more general anti-colonial objectives.

Post-Independence Feminism

After 1947, India enacted a Constitution that guaranteed equality irrespective of gender. However, official policies often fell short of influencing societal attitudes. Events such as the Mathura rape case (1972), which brought attention to prison abuse and the judiciary's prejudice against women, sparked a new wave of feminism in the 1970s (Agnes, 1999). Autonomous women's organizations like Saheli and the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) emerged at this time, addressing topics like dowries, spousal abuse, and labor exploitation. The institutionalization of gender discourse in academics and policymaking was aided by the release of reports such as Towards Equality (1974).

Contemporary Feminist Movements

Intersectionality has been adopted by Indian feminism in recent decades, emphasizing the interdependence of gender, caste, class, and religion. Advocated by individuals such as Ruth Manorama and Bama, Dalit feminism challenges the Savarna bias present in mainstream feminism (Rege, 1998). As seen by the Narmada Bachao Andolan and Dongria Kondh resistance, tribal and rural women's movements have fought against sexual abuse, ecological degradation, and displacement. Feminist advocacy has increased thanks to digital channels. Campaigns that address sexual harassment, moral policing, and campus safety include #MeTooIndia, Pinjra Tod, and Bekhauf Azadi. Nonetheless, there is still a lot of opposition to feminism, which is sometimes characterized as "Western" or "anti-traditional."

Conclusion

In India, feminism has changed from mythological symbolism to actual resistance in contemporary sociopolitical life. Globalization, nationalism, colonialism, and religion have all influenced it. Despite advancements in understanding and legislative reforms, issues like casteism, religious orthodoxy, and entrenched patriarchy still exist. Indian feminism must continue to draw from its varied history while aiming for a fair and just future if it is to be truly inclusive.

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