

= Feminism in India =

Feminism in India is a set of movements aimed at defining , establishing , and defending equal political , economic , and social rights and equal opportunities for Indian women . It is the pursuit of women 's rights within the society of India . Like their feminist counterparts all over the world , feminists in India seek gender equality : the right to work for equal wages , the right to equal access to health and education , and equal political rights . Indian feminists also have fought against culture @-@ specific issues within India 's patriarchal society , such as inheritance laws and the practice of widow immolation known as Sati .

The history of feminism in India can be divided into three phases : the first phase , beginning in the mid @-@ nineteenth century , initiated when male European colonists began to speak out against the social evils of Sati ; the second phase , from 1915 to Indian independence , when Gandhi incorporated women 's movements into the Quit India movement and independent women 's organisations began to emerge ; and finally , the third phase , post @-@ independence , which has focused on fair treatment of women at home after marriage , in the work force and right to political parity .

Despite the progress made by Indian feminist movements , women living in modern India still face many issues of discrimination . India 's patriarchal culture has made the process of gaining land @-@ ownership rights and access to education challenging . In the past two decades , there has also emerged a disturbing trend of sex @-@ selective abortion . To Indian feminists , these are seen as injustices worth struggling against .

As in the West , there has been some criticism of feminist movements in India . They have especially been criticised for focusing too much on women already privileged , and neglecting the needs and representation of poorer or lower caste women . This has led to the creation of caste @-@ specific feminist organisations and movements .

= = Definition in the Indian context = =

Women 's role in Pre @-@ colonial social structures reveals that feminism was theorised differently in India than in the West . In India , women 's issues first began to be addressed when the state commissioned a report on the status of women to a group of feminist researchers and activists . The report recognised the fact that in India , women were oppressed under a system of structural hierarchies and injustices . During this period , Indian feminists were influenced by the Western debates being conducted about violence against women . However , due to the difference in the historical and social culture of India , the debate in favour of Indian women had to be conducted creatively and certain Western ideas had to be rejected . Women 's issues began to gain an international prominence when the decade of 1975 ? 1985 was declared the United Nations Decade for Women .

Historical circumstances and values in India have caused feminists to develop a feminism that differs from Western feminism . For example , the idea of women as " powerful " is accommodated into patriarchal culture through religion , which has retained visibility in all sections of society . This has provided women with traditional " cultural spaces . " Furthermore , in the West the notion of " self " rests in competitive individualism where people are described as " born free yet everywhere in chains . " In India the individual is usually considered to be just one part of the larger social collective . Survival of the individual is dependent upon cooperation , and self @-@ denial for the greater good is valued .

Indian women negotiate survival through an array of oppressive patriarchal family structures : age , ordinal status , relationship to men through family of origin , marriage and procreation as well as patriarchal attributes . Examples of patriarchal attributes include : dowry , siring sons etc . , kinship , caste , community , village , market and the state . It should however be noted that several communities in India , such as the Nairs of Kerala , Shettys of Mangalore , certain Maratha clans , and Bengali families exhibit matriarchal tendencies . In these communities , the head of the family is the oldest woman rather than the oldest man . Sikh culture is also regarded as relatively gender

@-@ neutral .

In India , of communities recognised in the national Constitution as Scheduled Tribes , " some ... [ are ] matriarchal and matrilineal " " and thus have been known to be more egalitarian . " According to interviewer Anuj Kumar , Manipur , " has a matriarchal society " , but this may not be a scholarly assessment . This is because though mothers there are in forefront of most of the social activism , the society has always been patriarchal . Their women power is visible because of historical reasons . Manipur was ruled by strong dynasties and the need for expansions of borders , crushing any outsider threats , etc. engaged the men . So , women had to take charge of home @-@ front .

In Muslim families , women and men are considered equal , but not in the westernised sense . The Quran teaches that the minds of males and females work differently and are generally different biologically . Therefore , Islam grants different rights to the husband and wife . One such right which the wife owes to her husband is being head of the household .

The heterogeneity of the Indian experience reveals that there are multiple patriarchies , contributing to the existence of multiple feminisms . Hence , feminism in India is not a singular theoretical orientation ; it has changed over time in relation to historical and cultural realities , levels of consciousness , perceptions and actions of individual women , and women as a group . The widely used definition is " An awareness of women 's oppression and exploitation in society , at work and within the family , and conscious action by women and men to change this situation . " Acknowledging sexism in daily life and attempting to challenge and eliminate it through deconstructing mutually exclusive notions of femininity and masculinity as biologically determined categories opens the way towards an equitable society for both men and women .

The male and female dichotomy of polar opposites with the former oppressing the latter at all times is refuted in the Indian context because it was men who initiated social reform movements against various social evils . Patriarchy is just one of the hierarchies . Relational hierarchies between women within the same family are more adverse . Here women are pitted against one another . Not all women are powerless at all times .

There have been intense debates within the Indian women 's movements about the relationship between Western and Indian feminisms . Many Indian feminists simultaneously claim a specific " Indian " sensitivity as well as an international feminist solidarity with groups and individuals worldwide . The rise of liberal feminism in the West in the 1970s focused deeply on demands for equal opportunities in education and employment , as well as ending violence against women . To a large extent , the emerging feminist movement in India was influenced by Western ideals . These called for education and equal rights , but also adapted their appeals to local issues and concerns , such as dowry @-@ related violence against women , Sati , sex selective abortion and custodial rape . Some Indian feminists have suggested that these issues are not specifically " Indian " in nature but rather a reflexion of a wider trend of patriarchal oppression of women .

= = History = =

Unlike the Western feminist movement , India 's movement was initiated by men , and later joined by women . The efforts of these men included abolishing sati , which was a widow 's death by burning on her husband 's funeral pyre , abolishing the custom of child marriage , abolishing the disfiguring of widows , introducing the marriage of upper caste Hindu widows , promoting women 's education , obtaining legal rights for women to own property , and requiring the law to acknowledge women 's status by granting them basic rights in matters such as adoption .

The 19th century was the period that saw a majority of women 's issues come under the spotlight and reforms began to be made . Much of the early reforms for Indian women were conducted by men . However , by the late 19th century they were joined in their efforts by their wives , sisters , daughters , proteges and other individuals directly affected by campaigns such as those carried out for women 's education . By the late 20th century , women gained greater autonomy through the formation of independent women 's own organisations . By the late thirties and forties a new narrative began to be constructed regarding " women 's activism " . This was newly researched and expanded with the vision to create ' logical ' and organic links between feminism and Marxism , as

well as with anti @-@ communalism and anti @-@ casteism , etc . The Constitution of India did guarantee ' equality between the sexes , ' which created a relative lull in women 's movements until the 1970s .

During the formative years of women 's rights movements , the difference between the sexes was more or less taken for granted in that their roles , functions , aims and desires were different . As a result , they were not only to be reared differently but treated differently also . Over the course of time , this difference itself became a major reason for initiating women 's movements . Early 19th century reformers argued that the difference between men and women was no reason for the subjection of women in society . However , later reformers were of the opinion that indeed it was this particular difference that subjugated women to their roles in society , for example , as mothers . Therefore , there was a need for the proper care of women 's rights . With the formation of women 's organisations and their own participation in campaigns , their roles as mothers was again stressed but in a different light : this time the argument was for women 's rights to speech , education and emancipation . However , the image of women with the mother as a symbol underwent changes over time ? from an emphasis on family to the creation of an archetypal mother figure , evoking deep , often atavistic images .

= = = First phase : 1850 ? 1915 = = =

The colonial venture into modernity brought concepts of democracy , equality and individual rights . The rise of the concept of nationalism and introspection of discriminatory practices brought about social reform movements related to caste and gender relations . This first phase of feminism in India was initiated by men to uproot the social evils of sati ( widow immolation ) , to allow widow remarriage , to forbid child marriage , and to reduce illiteracy , as well as to regulate the age of consent and to ensure property rights through legal intervention . In addition to this , some upper caste Hindu women rejected constraints they faced under Brahminical traditions . However , efforts for improving the status of women in Indian society were somewhat thwarted by the late nineteenth century , as nationalist movements emerged in India . These movements resisted ' colonial interventions in gender relations ' particularly in the areas of family relations . In the mid to late nineteenth century , there was a national form of resistance to any colonial efforts made to ' modernise ' the Hindu family . This included the Age of Consent controversy that erupted after the government tried to raise the age of marriage for women .

Several Indian states were ruled by women during British colonial advance including Jhansi ( Rani Laxmibai ) , Kittur ( Rani Chennama ) , Bhopal ( Quidisa Begum ) and Punjab ( Jind Kaur ) .

= = = Second Phase : 1915 ? 1947 = = =

During this period the struggle against colonial rule intensified . Nationalism became the pre @-@ eminent cause . Claiming Indian superiority became the tool of cultural revivalism resulting in an essentialising model of Indian womanhood similar to that of Victorian womanhood : special yet separated from public space . Gandhi legitimised and expanded Indian women 's public activities by initiating them into the non @-@ violent civil disobedience movement against the British Raj . He exalted their feminine roles of caring , self @-@ abnegation , sacrifice and tolerance ; and carved a niche for those in the public arena . Peasant women played an important role in the rural satyagrahas of Borsad and Bardoli . Women @-@ only organisations like All India Women 's Conference ( AIWC ) and the National Federation of Indian Women ( NFIW ) emerged . Women were grappling with issues relating to the scope of women 's political participation , women 's franchise , communal awards , and leadership roles in political parties .

The 1920s was a new era for Indian women and is defined as ' feminism ' that was responsible for the creation of localised women 's associations . These associations emphasised women 's education issues , developed livelihood strategies for working @-@ class women , and also organised national level women 's associations such as the All India Women 's Conference . AIWC was closely affiliated with the Indian National Congress . Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi ,

it worked within the nationalist and anti @-@ colonialist freedom movements . This made the mass mobilisation of women an integral part of Indian nationalism . Women therefore were a very important part of various nationalist and anti @-@ colonial efforts , including the civil disobedience movements in the 1930s .

After independence , the All India Women 's Conference continued to operate and in 1954 the Indian Communist Party formed its own women 's wing known as the National Federation of Indian Women . However , feminist agendas and movements became less active right after India 's 1947 independence , as the nationalist agendas on nation building took precedence over feminist issues .

Women 's participation in the struggle for freedom developed their critical consciousness about their role and rights in independent India . This resulted in the introduction of the franchise and civic rights of women in the Indian constitution . There was provision for women 's upliftment through affirmative action , maternal health and child care provision ( crèches ) , equal pay for equal work etc . The state adopted a patronising role towards women . For example , India 's constitution states that women are a " weaker section " of the population , and therefore need assistance to function as equals . Thus women in India did not have to struggle for basic rights as did women in the West . The utopia ended soon when the social and cultural ideologies and structures failed to honour the newly acquired concepts of fundamental rights and democracy .

= = = Post @-@ 1947 = = =

Post independence feminists began to redefine the extent to which women were allowed to engage in the workforce . Prior to independence , most feminists accepted the sexual divide within the labour force . However , feminists in the 1970s challenged the inequalities that had been established and fought to reverse them . These inequalities included unequal wages for women , relegation of women to ' unskilled ' spheres of work , and restricting women as a reserve army for labour . In other words , the feminists ' aim was to abolish the free service of women who were essentially being used as cheap capital . Feminist class @-@ consciousness also came into focus in the 1970s , with feminists recognising the inequalities not just between men and women but also within power structures such as caste , tribe , language , religion , region , class etc . This also posed as a challenge for feminists while shaping their overreaching campaigns as there had to be a focus within efforts to ensure that fulfilling the demands of one group would not create further inequalities for another . Now , in the early twenty @-@ first century , the focus of the Indian feminist movement has gone beyond treating women as useful members of society and a right to parity , but also having the power to decide the course of their personal lives and the right of self @-@ determination .

In 1966 Indira Gandhi became the first female Prime Minister of India . She served as prime minister of India for three consecutive terms ( 1966 ? 77 ) and a fourth term from 1980 until she was assassinated in 1984 .

The state of Kerala is often viewed as the ideal progressive leader in the women 's rights movement in India among states . Kerala maintains very high relative levels of female literacy and women 's health , as well as greater female inheritance and property rights . For example , a 1998 study conducted by Bina Agarwal found that while only 13 % of all women in India with landowning fathers inherited that land as daughters , 24 % of such women were able to do so in the state of Kerala . This is important because it has been shown that measures to improve such access to property and economic independence through channels such as education not only directly improve women 's wellbeing and capabilities , but also reduce their risk of exposure to marital or any sort of domestic violence .

In 2014 , an Indian family court in Mumbai ruled that a husband objecting to his wife wearing a kurta and jeans and forcing her to wear a sari amounts to cruelty inflicted by the husband and can be a ground to seek divorce . The wife was thus granted a divorce on the ground of cruelty as defined under section 27 ( 1 ) ( d ) of Special Marriage Act , 1954 .

In 2016 a judgment of the Delhi high court was made public in which it was ruled that the eldest

female member of a Hindu Undivided Family can be its " Karta " .

= = Issues = =

Despite " on @-@ paper " advancements , many problems still remain which inhibit women from fully taking advantage of new rights and opportunities in India .

There are many traditions and customs that have been an important part of Indian culture for hundreds of years . Religious laws and expectations , or " personal laws " enumerated by each specific religion , often conflict with the Indian Constitution , eliminating rights and powers women should legally have . Despite these crossovers in legality , the Indian government does not interfere with religion and the personal laws they hold . Religions , like Hinduism , call for women to be faithful servants to God and their husbands . They have a term called pativrata that describes a wife who has accepted service and devotion to her husband and his family as her ultimate religion and duty . Indian society is largely composed of hierarchical systems within families and communities . These hierarchies can be broken down into age , sex , ordinal position , kinship relationships ( within families ) , and caste , lineage , wealth , occupations , and relationship to ruling power ( within the community ) . When hierarchies emerge within the family based on social convention and economic need , girls in poorer families suffer twice the impact of vulnerability and stability . From birth , girls are automatically entitled to less ; from playtime , to food , to education , girls can expect to always be entitled to less than their brothers . Girls also have less access to their family 's income and assets , which is exacerbated among poor , rural Indian families . From the start , it is understood that females will be burdened with strenuous work and exhausting responsibilities for the rest of their lives , always with little to no compensation or recognition .

India is also a patriarchal society , which , by definition , describes cultures in which males as fathers or husbands are assumed to be in charge and the official heads of households . A patrilineal system governs the society , where descent and inheritance are traced through the male line and men are generally in control of the distribution of family resources .

These traditions and ways of Indian life have been in effect for so long that this type of lifestyle is what women have become accustomed to and expect . Indian women often do not take full advantage of their constitutional rights because they are not properly aware or informed of them . Women also tend to have poor utilisation of voting rights because they possess low levels of political awareness and sense of political efficacy . Women are not often encouraged to become informed about issues . Due to this , political parties do not invest much time in female candidates because there is a perception that they are a " wasted investment . "

The female @-@ to @-@ male ratio in India is 933 to 1000 , showing that there are numerically fewer women in the country than men . This is due to several factors , including infanticides , most commonly among female infants , and the poor care of female infants and childbearing women . Although outlawed , infanticides are still highly popular in rural India , and are continuing to become even more prominent . This is due to the fact , most especially in rural areas , that families cannot afford female children because of the dowry they must pay when their daughter gets married . Like infanticide , the payment of dowry is also illegal , but is still a frequent and prevalent occurrence in rural India . Women are considered to be " worthless " by their husbands if they are not " able " to produce a male child , and can often face much abuse if this is the case .

= = = Birth ratio = = =

Between the years of 1991 to 2001 , the female @-@ male ratio of the population of India fell from 94 @.@ 5 girls per 100 boys to 92 @.@ 7 girls per 100 boys . Some parts of the country , such as Kerala , did not experience such a decline , but in the richer Indian states of Punjab , Haryana , Gujarat , and Maharashtra , the female @-@ male ratio fell very sharply ( the female @-@ male ratios in these states were between 79 @.@ 3 and 87 @.@ 8 ) . This is evidence of natality inequality , and an indication that sex @-@ selective abortion has become more pervasive . The Indian parliament has banned the use of sex determination techniques for foetuses due to this , but

enforcement of this law has been largely ignored .

= = = Marriage = = =

Most of the average Indian woman 's life is spent in marriage ; many women are still married before the legal age of 18 , and the incidence of non @-@ marriage is low in India . Childbearing and raising children are the priorities of early adulthood for Indian women . Thus , if they enter the workforce at all , it is far later than Indian men . Urban Indian men reach the peak of their labour force participation between the ages of 25 and 29 , while urban Indian women do so between the ages of 40 and 44 . Because of this , women have less time for the acquisition of skills and fewer opportunities for job improvements .

There is a poor representation of women in the Indian workforce . Females have a ten percent higher drop @-@ out rate than males from middle and primary schools , as well as lower levels of literacy than men . Since unemployment is also high in India , it is easy for employers to manipulate the law , especially when it comes to women , because it is part of Indian culture for women not to argue with men . Additionally , labour unions are insensitive to women 's needs . Women also have to settle for jobs that comply with their obligations as wives , mothers , and homemakers .

= = = Muslim personal law ( MPL ) = = =

One of the major issues are aspects of sharia ( Islamic law ) known as Muslim personal law ( MPL ) or Muslim family law . Some of the thorny issues regarding the way in which MPL has thus far been formulated include polygyny , divorce , custody of children , maintenance and marital property . In addition , there are also more macro issues regarding the underlying assumptions of such legislation , for example , the assumption of the man as head of the household .

= = = Dress code = = =

Another issue that concerns women is the dress code expected of them . Islam requires both men and women to dress modestly ; this concept is known as hijab and covers a wide interpretation of behavior and garments . There is mixed opinion among feminists over extremes of externally imposed control . Women from other religions are also expected to follow dress codes .

= = Theology = =

= = = Hindu feminism = = =

In the Hindu religion , there has been partial success in terms of gender equality reform laws and family law . While this is a major advancement relative to other religions in India , it is still not a complete triumph in terms of feminism and relieving oppression . Gandhi came up with the term stree shakti ( women power ) for the concept of womanhood . In the Hindu religion , Gods are not exclusively male . Hinduism sheds a positive light on femininity ; females are considered to complement and complete their male counterparts . It is important to note that both the deity of knowledge and the deity of wealth are female .

There has been some criticism from Dalit groups that Indian feminism tends to represent " upper caste " and upper class Hindu women , while ignoring and marginalising the interests of Dalit women . Debates on caste and gender oppression have been furthered by Other Backward Class ( OBC ) members of different political parties , arguing in state assemblies that " lower caste " women 's interests are best represented by women from these castes . Working towards this end , women within Dalit castes have formed organisations such as the All India Dalit Women 's Forum and the National Federation of Dalit Women and Dalit Solidarity , which focus on the gendered implications of caste based violence and oppression , such as the ways in which Dalit women suffer from urban

poverty and displacement .

= = = Islamic feminism = = =

The Hindu and Muslim communities in India were treated differently by the government in that separate types of concessions were made for each community in order to accommodate their separate religious laws and regulations . The case of Shah Bano begun in 1985 was one such example of Rajiv Gandhi attempting to make " concessions " for the Muslim community to in turn secure support for the Congress . Shah Bano , a 73 @-@ year @-@ old Muslim woman , was divorced by her husband after forty @-@ three years of marriage . According to the Sharia or Muslim Law , her husband was not required to pay her alimony . Shah Bano challenged this decision in the Supreme Court , which ultimately ruled in her favour and ordered her husband to pay her a monthly maintenance allowance . This caused chaos amongst the Muslim clerics who denounced the judgement and suggested that their religion , Islam was under attack in the country . In a fear of losing overall Muslim support , Rajiv succumbed to the pressures of the Conservative Moulvis from Muslims community and his own party and backed the Muslim Women ( Protection of Rights on Divorce ) Bill which restricts alimony for Muslim Women only for 90 days after divorce . This caused an outcry from Muslim feminists and Hindu nationalists who found the appeasement of Muslim males by the Congress for political purposes wrong and opportunistic .

Feminism was challenged by various minority groups for not entirely addressing the needs of minority populations . It was suggested that ' mainstream ' feminism was upper caste and Hindu in its orientation and did not address the concerns of minority women . This led to the formation of the Awaaz @-@ e @-@ Niswaan ( The Voice of Women ) in 1987 in Mumbai in largely Muslim part of the city . The Muslim community has personal laws that often were considered harmful to the rights of Muslim women . The Muslim personal law allows Polygamy but not Polyandry .

= = Impact = =

Western @-@ educated Indians introduced equality in the early nineteenth century . However , the term did not gain meaning or become an operational principle in Indian life until the country gained independence in 1947 and adopted a democratic government . The Indian Constitution then granted equality , freedom from discrimination based on gender or religion , and guaranteed religious freedoms . Also , seven five @-@ year plans were developed to provide health , education , employment , and welfare to women . The sixth five @-@ year plan even declared women " partners in development . "

= = = Employment = = =

In general , in the uneducated and rural sections of Indian society , which form a major percentage of the total population , women are seen as economic burdens . Their contributions to productivity are mostly invisible as their familial and domestic contributions are overlooked . Indian women were contributing nearly 36 percent of total employment in agriculture and related activities , nearly 19 percent in the service sector , and nearly 12 @. @ 5 in the industry sector as of the year 2000 . High illiteracy rates among women confine them to lower paying , unskilled jobs with less job security than men . Even in agricultural jobs where the work of men and women are highly similar , women are still more likely to be paid less for the same amount and type of work as men .

In 1955 the Bollywood group Cine Costume Make @-@ Up Artist & Hair Dressers ' Association ( CCMAA ) created a rule that did not allow women to obtain memberships as makeup artists . However , in 2014 the Supreme Court of India ruled that this rule was in violation of the Indian constitutional guarantees granted under Article 14 ( right to equality ) , 19 ( 1 ) ( g ) ( freedom to carry out any profession ) and Article 21 ( right to liberty ) . The judges of the Supreme Court of India stated that the ban on women makeup artist members had no " rationale nexus " to the cause sought to be achieved and was " unacceptable , impermissible and inconsistent " with the

constitutional rights guaranteed to the citizens . The Court also found illegal the rule which mandated that for any artist , female or male , to work in the industry , they must have domicile status of five years in the state where they intend to work . In 2015 it was announced that Charu Khurana had become the first woman to be registered by the Cine Costume Make @-@ Up Artist & Hair Dressers ' Association .

= = = Globalisation = = =

Feminists are also concerned about the impact of globalisation on women in India . Some feminists argue that globalisation has led to economic changes that have raised more social and economical challenges for women , particularly for working @-@ class and lower @-@ caste women . Multinational companies in India have been seen to exploit the labour of ' young , underpaid and disadvantaged women ' in free trade zones and sweat shops , and use " Young lower middle class , educated women , " in call centres . These women have few effective labour rights , or rights to collective action .

In addition to this , multinational corporations are seen to advertise a homogenous image of ideal women across the country is argued to cause an increase in the commodification of women 's bodies . This is also manifested in the form of nationalist pride exhibited through Indian women winning international beauty pageants . According to some feminists , such developments have offered women greater sexual autonomy and more control over their bodies . However , many other feminists feel that such commodification of female bodies has only served the purpose of feeding to male fantasies .

= = = Education = = =

Some of the main reasons that girls are less likely to reach optimal levels of education include the fact that girls are needed to assist their mothers at home , have been raised to believe that a life of domestic work is their destined occupation , have illiterate mothers who cannot educate their children , have an economic dependency on men , and are sometimes subject to child @-@ marriage . Many poor families marry their daughters off early to get the dowry money so she is unable to complete her education .

In 1986 , the National Policy on Education ( NPE ) was created in India , and the government launched the programme called Mahila Samakhyas , whose focus was on the empowerment of women . The programme 's goal is to create a learning environment for women to realise their potential , learn to demand information and find the knowledge to take charge of their own lives . In certain areas of India , progress is being made and an increase in the enrolment of girls in schools and as teachers has begun to increase . By 2001 literacy for women had exceeded 50 % of the overall female population , though these statistics were still very low compared to world standards and even male literacy within India . Efforts are still being made to improve the level of education that females receive to match that of male students .

= = = Modernisation = = =

Modern influences are affecting the younger generations in parts of India , where girls are beginning to forgo the more traditional ways of Indian life and break gender stereotypes . In more flourishing parts of the country , the idea of " dating " , or more specifically openly dating , has come into play , and the terms " girlfriend " and " boyfriend " are being used . Some women have landed highly respectable careers , and can be seen across Bollywood billboards and advertisements . However , this is not the norm throughout the country ; such modernisations and the women behind them face serious resistance from anti @-@ liberals . The country is still severely male @-@ dominant and unwelcoming to such movements that go against sex and gender traditions in India .

= = Indian feminists = =



Bina Agarwal - deals especially with the connectedness of gender inequality , social exclusion , property , and development . She is also the ex @-@ President of the International Association for Feminist Economics .

Lalithambika Antharjanam ? author and social reformer whose work reflected women 's roles in society .

Barnita Bagchi ? scholar and sociologist with a focus on women 's education .

Jasodhara Bagchi ? founder of the School of Women 's Studies at Jadavpur University .

Rita Banerji ? Feminist author and founder of The 50 Million Missing Campaign , an online , global lobby working to raise awareness about the female gendercide ( femicide ) in India .

Durgabai Deshmukh - She was a public activist for women 's emancipation and was also the founder of Andhra Mahila Sabha .

Sarala Devi Chaudhurani ? early feminist and founder of the Bharat Stree Mahamandal , one of the first women 's organisations in India .

Prem Chowdhry - social scientist , feminist , Senior Academic Fellow and critic of violence against couples refusing arranged marriages . She is a Life Member of the Center for Women Studies . She is a well @-@ known scholar of gender studies , authority on the political economy and social history of Haryana state in India and daughter of Hardwari Lal , the renowned educationist and Indian National Congress member of parliament for Haryana .

Saroj Nalini Dutt ? early social reformer who pioneered the formation of educational Women 's Institutes in Bengal .

Mira Datta Gupta ? activist for women 's issues and one of the founding members of the All India Women 's Conference .

Padma Gole ? poet whose writings faithfully depicted the domestic lives of Indian middle @-@ class women .

Devaki Jain ? founder of the Institute of Social Studies Trust and scholar in the field of feminist economics .

Brinda Karat ? first woman member of the CPI ( M ) Politburo and former Vice President of the All India Democratic Women 's Association ( AIDWA ) .

Madhu Kishwar - Founder President of Manushi Sangathan , a forum that will promote greater social justice and strengthen human rights , especially for women . She founded the magazine Manushi : A Journal about Women and Society devoted to feminism as well as to gender studies and activism in 1978 with Ruth Vanita .

Vina Mazumdar ? secretary of the first Committee on the Status of Women in India and founding Director of Centre for Women 's Development Studies ( CWDS ) .

Uma Narayan - feminist scholar , and Chair of Philosophy at Vassar College .

Asra Nomani - Indian @-@ American journalist , author of Standing Alone in Mecca : An American Woman 's Struggle for the Soul of Islam

Medha Patkar - feminist social worker and politician who advocates for women 's rights in post @-@ independence India .

Manasi Pradhan - Founder of Honour for Women National Campaign , a nationwide movement to end violence against women in India

Amrita Pritam ? first woman to win the Sahitya Akademi Award for literature .

Pandita Ramabai - social reformer a champion for the emancipation of women in British India .

Kamini Roy ? poet , suffragette , and first woman honours graduate in India .

Gita Sahgal - writer and journalist on issues of feminism , fundamentalism , and racism , a director of prize @-@ winning documentary films , and a women 's rights and human rights activist .

Manikuntala Sen ? politician in the Communist Party of India whose memoir described her experiences as a woman activist .

Tarabai Shinde ? activist whose work Stri Purush Tulana is considered the first modern Indian feminist text .

Vandana Shiva ? environmentalist and prominent leader of the Ecofeminist movement .

Sophia Duleep Singh - prominent suffragette and daughter of Maharaja Duleep Singh . She was a

firebrand feminist and is best remembered for her leading role in the Women 's Tax Resistance League , but she also participated in other women 's suffrage groups including the Women 's Social and Political Union . Secret documents revealed her identity as a firebrand " harridan law breaker " for her diaries revealed that she maintained contacts with the leaders of the Indian nationalist movement like Gopalkrishna Gokhale , Sarala Devi and Lala Lajpat Rai .

Ruth Vanita - academic , activist and author who specializes in lesbian and gay studies , gender studies , British and South Asian literary history . She founded the magazine Manushi : A Journal about Women and Society devoted to feminism as well as to gender studies and activism in 1978 with Madhu Kishwar .

Ramarao Indira - academic , critic , rationalist who is an expert in modern feminism thoughts . She has written many articles and books on feminism in Kannada and English .

Theilin Phanbuh - Chairperson of the Meghalaya State Commission for Women and Padma Shri awardee