How Media Representation Shapes Perceptions of Feminist Discourses: An Analysis of Gender Roles, Slut Shaming, Gen- Z Anti-Feminism and Feminism in India

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ABSTRACT

This essay uses creative writing and Indian culture to explore the interplay between media representation and generational perceptions of feminist discourses. While opening each subsection with a stanza of original poetry, I focus on gender roles, slut-shaming, Gen-Z anti-feminism, and the evolving landscape of India's unique brand of feminism. My analysis unveils how the previously mentioned aspects depict contemporary feminist attitudes. Furthermore, this research explores the role of media in perpetuating anti-feminist sentiments. Collectively, my research contributes a nuanced, contemporaneous perspective to the developing discourse of women of color feminism.

When I was 14 years old, two other boys and I were selected to perform in a prestigious event hosted by our school. Our task was to record and edit a five-minute play representing our school in front of a large audience. I was thrilled to be chosen as one of only three participants, and my excitement peaked when I discovered that I would be playing the role of Joe March, a character from *Little Women* known for her fearless voice in a world that often tried to suppress her. Once I finished my recording, I eagerly sent in my videos, shortly followed by the other two boys from my group. After an hour, our teacher responded to the boys, praising their performances. However, her response to me was different. She informed me that my videos had a small issue and that I needed to redo them. Trusting her guidance, I proceeded to reshoot the scenes. However, to my dismay, the issue she observed was not resolved, and she asked me to redo the videos four times. Feeling confused and frustrated, I finally mustered the courage to ask for specific feedback to address the problem directly. That is when she dropped a bombshell. She told me that the full-sleeved, high-necked shirt I was wearing in the videos was considered too tight and that it accentuated my body and chest. She said that "girls from good homes" should not dress like *that*, as it did not align with the image they wanted to portray of our school. Indian culture dictates that women and girls dress modestly or be held responsible for men's misbehavior.

My high school infraction does not begin to scratch the surface of a multitude of gendered mistreatments I have faced. And, remarkably perhaps, these occurrences are typically perpetuated by people professing progressive ideals like feminism within their respective institutions. Their avowed commitment to women and girls' bodily autonomy evades practical comprehension of its essence and goals. The policing teacher–an unabashed, self-identified feminist—hearkens back to the 1980s with her punitive scolding of my self-expression. Her gatekeeping highlights the common contradictory position of liberal thinkers in ways that underscore a profound dissonance between beliefs, self-conception, and action. Indeed, rather than fostering an environment of equality and mutual respect, her policing stifled my autonomy while suppressing the very behavior and voices feminism seeks to amplify. But as glaring as this issue may be for me, it feels uneasy to blame her for not matching speech and practice in the broader social landscape. She does not grasp how to practice feminism within the small world of our local school, which could mean she does

not understand how it is intended to function within our shared cultural world(s). I mean, feminism is not one size fits all–-specific geographic and cultural ideals shape it. That is to say, she, like many others, may not have grappled with the ways her behaviors can impact young, impressionable, and precocious teenagers like me. Our schools and digital social spaces constitute the vast makeup of our everyday landscape.

My generation's–Gen Z or people born between 1996-2010–constant exposure to media impacts how we engage our world. We unconsciously consume contradictory ideas because of the perpetual receipt of fast-paced messages (Pozner, 2010). Shows like Euphoria promote a contradictory romantic objectification of women accompanied by toxic expressions of femininity to indicate their progressive status. The show's intended grappling with feminism's successes and failures is supposed to captivate audiences to inspire deep critical engagement with how we define and employ liberatory ideas. The toxicity manifests as disdain for all men or attention-seeking, trivial protests. Characterizing feminist concerns as frivolous depictions distorts feminism's intended function and definition. My work addresses this misrepresentation by exploring the media's role in re-presenting and shaping perceptions of feminist discourses. In this essay, I examine gender roles, slut shaming, and Gen-Z antifeminism. Specifically, I aim to highlight the unique dynamics and challenges faced by Indian feminism.

The Impact of Toxic Feminism on Gen Z's Social Behavior and the Rise of Anti-Feminism

It is essential to clarify what exactly feminism is before delving into the concept of toxic feminism. Throughout history, feminism has evolved as a social, political, and cultural force advocating women's rights, equality, and liberation. It seeks to empower women, challenge patriarchal systems, and dismantle oppressive structures that perpetuate gender-based discrimination. While at its core, feminism strives for a society where all genders are treated with equal respect, dignity, and opportunities, it does not have a singular, universally accepted definition. Feminism is subjective and shaped by personal experiences, perspectives, geographies, and cultures. Simone de Beauvoir's groundbreaking work, *The Second Sex* (1949) dives into the social and cultural construction of womanhood, highlighting how societal norms and expectations shape women's roles and identities. Her existentialist approach acknowledges that women's experiences are not monolithic but are influenced by their unique contexts, thus laying the groundwork for the idea that feminism is inherently subjective.

Furthermore, the concept of "intersectionality," coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, reinforces the notion that feminism must encompass a range of experiences and perspectives. In her critical essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (1989), Crenshaw argues that the intersection of various social identities, such as race, gender, and class shapes the experiences of individuals. This intersectional lens acknowledges the complex interplay of different forms of oppression and privilege, emphasizing that feminism must account for these nuances to be materially effective and inclusive.

Feminist ideas can be traced back to ancient civilizations. However, during the late 18th and 19th centuries, the first organized feminist movements emerged in Western countries. The feminist movement is often categorized into waves, representing distinct periods of feminist activism and focus. The first wave (late 19th to early 20th century) primarily centered on suffrage and legal rights for women. World War 1 marked a significant turning point for feminism. Women stepped into roles traditionally held by men during wartime, transforming societal perceptions of gender roles. In the aftermath of the wars, a significant surge in feminist activism marked the advent of the second wave of feminism (1960s to 1980s). During this period, the movement's scope broadened, shifting its focus beyond suffrage to encompass various gender-related issues. However, as society's channels of communication expanded, propelled by the rise of various media forms as alluded to in the title and introduction, the landscape of feminist action once again underwent discernible transformations. The increasingly interconnected world facilitated a more profound understanding of the diversity within the global feminist movement. It highlighted the distinct struggles faced by women

across different nations, each struggle uniquely influenced by the cultural, religious, and political contexts in which it unfolded.

Within this evolving framework, the experiences of feminist movements in various countries gained prominence. Nations like India, Iran, and South Africa grappled with localized battles. As the third wave (1990s to early 2000s) surged forth, feminism's trajectory underwent yet another shift in response to this amplified interconnectedness. This wave bore a distinctive hallmark – an ardent emphasis on intersectionality and inclusivity. It emerged from an acknowledgment that gender discrimination was intricately interwoven with other forms of oppression – race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class (Crenshaw's intersectionality). The evolution of feminism mirrored the expansion of global interconnectedness through various media channels. As the lenses through which society viewed itself and the world became more diverse, feminism also adapted, recognizing the multifaceted dimensions of oppression and the need for a more inclusive, compassionate approach.

Today, toxic feminists are a relatively small but vocal group that often uses aggressive language and actions to express their frustration with existing gender disparities. The collective, or the ideology, emerges from a perceived power imbalance or shift away from patriarchal norms that involve economic disparities and social expectations that oppress women. Expectations for rigid gender roles, notions of masculine-read-men discrimination, and a romantic nod to decontextualized traditions as a way of coping with the rapid changes technology presents are a few factors contributing to the development of toxic feminist ideas. These aspects lead some individuals to adopt confrontational and exclusionary tactics. In our contemporary media landscape, toxic feminists propagate a "kill all men" vibe, which undermines feminist ideas.

Firstly, excluding men essentializes them through an assertion that they cannot genuinely support gender equality. For example, in 2013, a group of self-proclaimed feminists disrupted a men's issues event at the University of Toronto, shouting down speakers and using derogatory language towards men in attendance. The feminist protesters chanted phrases like "F your toxic masculinity" and "Cry me a river," creating a hostile environment that made it difficult for any constructive dialogue to take place. This incident received significant media coverage and backlash, illustrating how such confrontational behavior can alienate men who may otherwise be supportive of gender equality efforts. When feminism is perceived as an ideology that aims to harm or vilify men, it becomes challenging to build a united front that addresses gender issues collectively. That is to say, men can also be victims of societal pressures, toxic masculinity, and patriarchal expectations. Ignoring their experiences perpetuates harmful gender norms and goes against everything feminism stands for. Collectively, then, the toxic rhetoric also damages the reputation of the feminist movement as a whole. Media attention often focuses on sensationalist individuals, leading to negative portrayals of feminism. This misrepresentation deters individuals from understanding the real objectives of feminism and may prevent them from becoming advocates for gender equality.

In 2014, a video went viral on social media showing three young women from Rohtak, Haryana, India publicly beating up two men on a local bus. The video gained widespread attention and was celebrated as an act of bravery by many, portraying the women as "Rohtak Sisters" who stood up against harassment and molestation. The incident received extensive media coverage, with several news outlets hailing the women as heroines and symbols of women's empowerment. The media initially presented the incident as a courageous act of self-defense against molestation. Many news outlets like NDTV and Popxo released articles with the headlines, "Men Who Harassed Rohtak Sisters Have 'No Place in Army" and " #GirlPower: How Two Sisters from Rohtak Thrashed the Men Harassing Them!" The Popxo article described the incident in a very different light to what took place:

> Pooja and Aarti were on their way back home from Rohtak Government College, when they were verbally abused and harassed on a bus by a group of three men (apparently, they were soldiers in training). They began throwing chits with their phone numbers on them at the two girls, despite being asked repeatedly to stop. They continued to lech at the sisters and then began to grab them, in full view of the other passengers. But it was when they also started targeting a pregnant woman on the bus that the two girls took to hitting their abusers with a belt.

The article discussed how no one else stepped in to help the sisters, compiling a list of people who *should* have stepped in but did not, ultimately leading the sisters to stand up for themselves. The article ended with the phrase, "*They're right. It's time to fight back.*" However, subsequent investigations revealed that the women instigated the altercation by harassing and verbally abusing the men on the bus. The video showed only part of the confrontation, conveniently excluding the initial aggression by the Rohtak Sisters. This revelation of their aggressive behavior led to a significant backlash. Some argued that the early media coverage as biased and sensationalized, highlighting the dangers of relying solely on viral videos without verifying the complete story. However, when a more rounded narrative emerged, the women faced legal consequences, including charges of assault and filing false claims.

The Rothak Sisters incident was a setback for Indian Feminism and gender dynamics as it had broader implications for women's credibility in cases of harassment and violence. Some individuals used the Rohtak Sisters' case to discredit women who come forward with genuine complaints of harassment, claiming that such incidents may also be fabricated or exaggerated. For example, in a subsequent workplace harassment case, a woman reported a senior colleague for making unwelcome advances and creating a hostile work environment. However, some coworkers and managers, influenced by the Rohtak Sisters' narrative, began to doubt their account. This environment of skepticism not only created additional challenges for the woman pursuing her harassment complaint, but it also had a chilling effect on other women who were considering reporting their own experiences. Fear of being disbelieved or labeled as seeking revenge or attention led some to remain silent, perpetuating a culture of silence and allowing harassment to go unchecked.

Our exposure to social media has influenced toxic feminism within the unique context of Gen Z's digital upbringing. Constant connectivity to diverse viewpoints has shaped perspectives on feminism and gender issues. However, alongside progress, the rise of toxic feminism has become prominent, particularly evident in online communities. Within these circles, the proliferation of online misandry, epitomized by hashtags like #MenAreTrash, has fueled resentment and amplified anti-feminist sentiments among Gen Z, causing many of them to distance themselves from the idea of feminism as a whole.

One well-known example of Gen Z anti-feminism is the "TradWife" movement. This online subculture glorifies traditional gender roles, encouraging women to embrace domesticity and reject feminist ideals. It emerged in response to what some perceive as extreme feminist rhetoric that rejects the value of traditional family structures. While not representative of the entirety of the Gen Z population, this movement highlights the influence of toxic feminism in shaping anti-feminist attitudes.

Stop Dressing Like a Slut or You're Just Asking for it... Even if You are Not

The word "slut" has a complex and evolving history, marked by changes in its meaning and usage over time. Its origins date back to Old English, where it was initially used to describe a careless or slovenly person, regardless of gender or sexual behavior. Its antiquated use appears relatively neutral towards gender while lacking strong sexual connotations. However, over time, the meaning of "slut" has undergone a significant transformation, particularly concerning women. It gradually acquired a derogatory tone, associated explicitly with promiscuity or sexual immorality. Today, "slut" indexes a complex history and contemporary reframing of gendered stigma.

"Slut" is a powerful symbol of the persistent double standards women confront in today's society. Its use manages to undermine women's 21st-century advancements in politics and the workplace while dictating their professional–attire, behavior, and emotions. The word denotes sexual promiscuity that goes against pious ideals to which women are beholden. Alternatively, such perceived promiscuity is celebrated for men and carries labels like stud or professional rewards. This gendered sword-wielding archaic perspective and its accompanying consequences are deeply concerning because of the term's potential to derail further women's right to defend their bodies.

Victim blaming demonstrates how such a storied language undermines our liberal progression. It is commonplace to shift attention away from victims in cases of assault and rape, while deflecting focus on perpetrators. Outdated ideas surrounding clothing choices and behaviors emerge as invitations or justifications for assault. It is not unusual to hear the victim, especially if she is a woman, being labeled a "slut" based on attire. Such drifting displaces the victim while trivializing her trauma and while excusing the perpetrator's actions. The impact of victim blaming is not abstract–it has material consequences.

A study published in the Journal of Community Psychology in 2010 explored victim-blaming attitudes related to acquaintance rape. The findings indicated that victim-blaming attitudes were prevalent, with participants often questioning the victim's actions and suggesting they were partially responsible for the assault. Victim blaming construes slut shaming as a particularly heinous gendered act that obscures harmful behavior and perpetuates women's and girls' vulnerability. A 2011 New York Times article recounts the harrowing story of a pre-teen girl's gang rape by a group of 18 boys. Throughout the article entitled "Vicious Assault Shakes Texas Town," the word "rape" never appears. Neither has mention of the impact of this incident on the victim or the victim's family members. Instead, McKinley rambles on about how badly affected the entire town has been by this incident. The author even goes so far as to mention how those *poor, promising* boys have to live with this for the rest of their lives.

It's just destroyed our community," said Sheila Harrison, 48, a hospital worker who says she knows several of the defendants. "*These boys have to live with this the rest of their lives*.'...The students who were arrested have not returned to school, and it is unclear if they ever will. Ms. Gatlin said the girl had been transferred to another district. "*It's devastating, and it's really tearing our community apart*," she said. "*I really wish that this could end in a better light.*" The article went as far as to try to place the blame on the 11-year-old child and her mother.

Residents in the neighborhood where the abandoned trailer stands, known as the Quarters, said the victim had been visiting various friends there for months. They said she dressed older than her age, wearing makeup and fashions more appropriate to a woman in her 20s. She would hang out with teenage boys at a playground: "*Where was her mother? What was her mother thinking*?" said Ms. Harrison, one of a handful of neighbors who would speak on the record. "*How can you have an 11-year-old child missing down in the Quarters?*" Needless to say, the millions of people who read this paper will unconsciously be impacted by the careful language it uses, and they may begin to question the victim in such cases instead of the one who committed the heinous crime.

Just like the article, other forms of media, including television shows and social media, also play a big role in shaping societal attitudes. From scrutinizing the dynamics of slut shaming, we inevitably venture into a broader exploration of the media's impact on our perceptions. This is particularly evident when considering influential television series such as *The Cosby Show* and their ability to mold collective mindsets and reinforce existing stereotypes. In 1992, the University of Massachusetts conducted a major qualitative audience study to evaluate how watching *The Cosby Show* affected people's attitudes. The results showed that "many viewers were so engaged with the situations and characters on television they naturally read beyond the scene or program they were discussing and speculated about them as real events and characters. The implications of this are profound. We can no longer assume the content of TV fiction does not matter simply because TV viewers understand this is fiction" (Jhally and Lewis, 1992 p. 35). If the UMass study is to be taken seriously, we can suspect that such depictions affect the perception of women in the eyes of viewers. Even in Reality television–which is heavily scripted and the furthest thing from reality– shows like The Bachelor expand the logic that women are sexual objects for gratification.

The Tale of an Indian Girl and Feminism

My country places great importance on its religion. Every single person in our country (even those who are not religious) have grown up hearing and watching the mythological epics of "Ramayan" and Mahabharat." Ramayan is often perceived as a quintessential portrayal of ideal husband-wife relationships. However, it also reflects certain aspects of patriarchy. Ramayan was about Lord Rama, who was banished to the forest for 14 years, accompanied by his brother Lakshman and his wife Sita (Janki- daughter of Janak). Despite being the princess of a large kingdom, she

was named after her father. Her father first defined her identity and then her husband. In these 14 years, she was kidnapped by the Demon King Ravana, who fell in love with her, and the rest of the tale is about the grave lengths Lord Rama went to get her back. Once again, portraying women as weak damsels in distress who needed a knight in shining armor to come and save them. At the end of the story, Ram abandoned the pregnant Sita in the forest. After being held captive by a demon for so long questions were raised about her purity. Even though Sita had proven her purity by walking through literal fire unscathed (Agni Pariksha), it just did not matter because she was a woman. Hence, it was her fault Ravana fell in love with her, and after all she has been through, she must be punished again (Ahuja, 2018) The biggest festival in India, Diwali the festival of lights, as well as Dussehra, are celebrated to mark the victory and return of Lord Ram after successfully 'rescuing' Sita.

Even in the Mahabharat, Panchali, originally named Draupadi (daughter of Draupad), was married off to 5 husbands. While men had multiple wives without an contestation, Draupadi's action (through no choice of her own) created quite a scandal. She was given a "blessing" that each time she would share the bed with her other husbands, she would once again be a virgin. Of course , her husbands took other wives but the story takes a turn when her husband *lost her* to a rival king in a game of dice. And since she was *his property* what he said goes. This king then tried (and failed) to take off her Sari (clothes) in a council room with multiple men watching. This behavior is justified because one of the most ancient Hindu texts 'The Manusmriti," or "Laws of Manu," written in 200 BCE states that a woman must be under the authority of her father in childhood, her husband in youth, and her sons in old age.

These are the stories we have grown up hearing, reading , watching , celebrating festivals about and learning morals from, our entire lives. The impact of these myths on societal views of women is substantial. The ideas of purity and the treatment of women, as depicted in these epics, can also have implications for legal and social justice. Perceptions surrounding issues such as victim-blaming, dowry, and marital disputes can be influenced by the cultural narratives found in these ancient texts. The recurring themes of women as subordinate figures, subject to the authority of fathers, husbands, and sons, contribute to the reinforcement of patriarchal norms. These familial structures in these epics often reinforce traditional family hierarchies. Concepts like paternal authority and adherence to prescribed gender roles are reflected in everyday family dynamics, impacting how decisions are made and responsibilities are distributed among family members. The glorification of male actions while scrutinizing and blaming women in these epics shapes perceptions, potentially influencing how women are perceived and treated in various aspects of life. Even depictions of arranged marriages and the idealization of certain marital norms in these epics influence how marriages are approached in contemporary India. The emphasis on duty, sacrifice, and loyalty, as seen in the stories of Sita and Draupadi, shapes expectations within marital relationships as well. .As these stories are celebrated during major festivals, they become integral to cultural identity, inadvertently contributing to the persistence of gender biases in society.

In her Book "Palace of Illusions" Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni , adds a feminist spin to this heavily misogynistic epic, and rewrites Mahabharat from Panchali's (Draupadi) point of view. Instead of suffering in silence like a typical lady, Draupadi challenges the injustices meted out ,finally identifying and calling out the inherent patriarchy in these tales. Divakaruni transforms Panchali from being an object to a subject. This move connects the readers to not only a mythological but also a contemporary understanding of feminine identity." The Palace of Illusions portrays Draupadi as a skeptic of old myths and rituals despite the whole production featuring heavenly figures and god and goddess manifestations. Draupadi in Divakaruni is stronger, more rebellious, and more realistic in character. She rejects the terrible fate of being wedded to five men, as the great foreseer Vyasa prophesied. (Divakaruni, 2021).

During colonial rule in India, the subordination of women was inspired by religious traditions. Hindu society legally endorsed extreme social stratification, subjecting women and lower castes to humiliating conditions. The organizing principles of Brahmanical social order are caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy. Interestingly, scholars of the caste system and feminists rarely analyzed the close interconnections between the two. Dr. Ambedkar, an early Indian political thinker, identified the link between casteism and the control of women's bodies. In "The Annihilation of Caste," he argued that casteism relies on the practice of inter-marriage, and breaking this control over women is crucial to overcoming caste barriers. The caste structure is maintained through restricted women's movement and

seclusion, viewing women as gateways into the caste system. Some feminists accept this perspective, while others criticize Ambedkar for allegedly denying women agency and framing caste struggles as conflicts over upper-caste women.

Post-independence in India initially fostered hope for significant improvements in women's status and the condition of marginalized groups. However, when these expectations were unmet, various movements addressing land rights, wages, employment security, and equality emerged. The Constitution of India, framed during this period, incorporated crucial provisions for gender equality in Articles 14, 15, 15(3), and 16. Legislative efforts, such as the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 and the Hindu Succession Act of 1956, aimed to bring about legal reforms, addressing aspects like marriage, monogamy, guardianship, and inheritance rights for daughters. Despite this, the women's movement in India played a crucial role in bringing about change.

In 1970's India, while socio-political reforms were prioritized, gender discrimination persisted. The constitution promised no sex-based discrimination, leading to social complacency. The "Towards Equality" report (Gov, 1974) exposed significant gender disparities, marking a turning point for the women's movement. The rise in political consciousness during the 60s and 70s didn't necessarily lead to a developed feminist consciousness. However, in the 1980s, the movement against dowry gained momentum, especially in Delhi, addressing crimes related to dowry. Before this movement, dowry-related deaths were often misclassified as suicides, highlighting legal and social challenges. While dowry-related incidents reduced, other issues like workplace harassment, sex-selective abortion, and honor killings persisted. Despite strides made by the women's movement in India, issues like dowry and child marriage persist in many rural areas. These practices are often perceived as integral to local culture, predating foreign influence. The disruption caused by outsiders, particularly during colonial rule, has not completely erased deeply ingrained cultural norms.

In December 2012, the brutal gang-rape and subsequent death of a female medical student in New Delhi, known as Nirbhaya (the fearless one), ignited a transformative movement in India and neighboring countries. The media's extensive coverage of the incident created a space for victims to speak out against sexual violence, leading to a notable increase in reported rape cases. Nivedita Menon, in "Seeing Like a Feminist," highlights the differing perspectives on rape, with patriarchal forces viewing it as an attack on family honor, while feminists emphasize its impact on a woman's autonomy and bodily integrity.

This movement extended beyond the specific incident, fostering discussions on overlooked issues like caste-based sexual violence and marital rape. Social media platforms became avenues for conversations about sexual politics and violence, focusing on the experiences of 'unknown Nirbhayas.' Activists emphasized the term 'survivor' over 'victim' to shift the narrative, framing rape as a form of violence rather than the worst possible infliction. The aftermath prompted India to overhaul outdated laws governing sexual assault proceedings. Justice Verma, leading the committee, crafted a new Sexual Assault Act, incorporating insights from the women's movement and marking a significant shift in addressing sexual violence in the country.

As an Indian feminist, I am acutely aware of the challenges I may face in advocating for gender equality, especially considering the historical context of feminism in India. Many feminist movements in India, including the abolition of "sati," (an ancient practice where a woman was buried alive with her husband if he died), were influenced by Western ideas and interventions, particularly during British colonial rule. This historical association with Western influences can sometimes create tensions and skepticism around feminism in India. Some may view feminism as a foreign concept that seeks to undermine traditional values and cultural identity. This perception can hinder the acceptance and progress of feminist ideas within certain segments of Indian society.

Additionally, the diversity within India itself poses unique challenges to the feminist movement. The country is a tapestry of cultures, languages, and traditions, each with its own nuances regarding gender roles and expectations. A one-size-fits-all approach to feminism may not effectively address the specific needs and struggles faced by women across different regions of India.

As an Indian feminist, I believe it is crucial to contextualize and adapt feminist principles to the Indian context while being sensitive to the cultural complexities. Emphasizing intersectionality and understanding how various forms of discrimination intersect, such as caste, class, and religion, is vital in addressing the diverse experiences of Indian women. It is essential to recognize that feminism, at its core, is about challenging power imbalances and advocating for equal rights and opportunities for all genders. Indian feminists can draw inspiration from their history of strong women leaders and reformers in the present and the past—such as Queen Lakshmibai (Queen of Jhansi,1835-1858)—who fought for social justice and equality within the Indian context.

I consciously write *Indian* feminist instead of just feminist because my background and my culture define who I am as a person today. It is my identity as much as being a feminist is. My culture informs my motivations and struggles that led me to write this paper today. By reclaiming our stories and celebrating our unique feminist history, we can all build a more inclusive feminist movement in India. Through genuine collaboration and solidarity, we can strive towards a more equitable and just society for everyone by embracing the voices of women from all walks of life.

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