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The Indian Feminist Trajectory: Navigating Womanism Beyond the Western Lens

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ABSTRACT: Indian feminism has long struggled with the unease of foreign theoretical frameworks. To understand the progression of feminism in Indian literature, it is essential to examine the extensive history and characteristics of women's movements in India, which are intrinsically linked to exploring the influence of tradition, culture, religion, and various institutional frameworks, including family and marriage, on women's experiences. Womanism in India surpasses the confines of feminism as it is an integrated notion that continually incorporates the experiences and realities of Indian women. Womanism originated in African American culture, although it possesses considerable significance and relevance to Indian society. Considering the myriad identities and cultures present in India, the challenges and issues faced by various individuals varies accordingly. The concepts proposed by Alice Walker, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, and Clenora Hudson-Weems jointly formed the basis of womanism. Womanism in India lacks the comprehensive theoretical exploration seen in the literature and dialogues around African American women; yet, it is fervently adopted and practiced in the everyday experiences and challenges of individuals beyond those who label themselves as 'womanists. Recognizing Indian Womanism as a distinct, indigenous paradigm allows scholars and activists to address gender inequity while upholding the fundamental sociocultural structures that sustain Indian communities. The paper tries to navigate Indian Womanism while exploring the various trends and movements of Indian feminism.

Feminism in India has consistently grappled with the disquiet of foreign theoretical constructs. For an extended period, the primary discussion about women's emancipation in India has been influenced by Eurocentric perspectives—models that tend to value individual independence and gender opposition over communal existence, cultural intricacies, and community solidarity. Yet, the realities of Indian women cannot be sufficiently interpreted through a uniform or Western viewpoint. Grasping the multifaceted gendered landscape of the Indian subcontinent necessitates an exploration of The Indian Feminist Trajectory: a historical, social, and ideological movement that transitions from colonial reforms to present-day localized activism. This course signifies a persistent commitment to understanding Womanism outside of the Western viewpoint. Throughout history, Indian women's opposition—from local environmental demonstrations like the Chipko Movement to anti-liquor movements and labor organizations—has infrequently attempted to separate the individual female from her community ties. Alternatively, these groups have engaged at the crossroads of caste, class, religion, and ecology, aspiring to effect transformation from inside the family and community. With the maturation of the movement, the deficiencies of Western mainstream feminism became increasingly clear, revealing an essential theoretical lacuna.

Within this chasm, the idea of 'Womanism' gains notable prominence, yet it demands precise re-grounding. Formulated by Alice Walker to tackle the combined oppressions of race and gender that African-American women endure, Womanism highlights the importance of community cohesion, cultural roots, and maternal fortitude. Adapting this idea to the Indian framework demands a specific theoretical progression. While African-American womanism was shaped by racial adversity, Indian Womanism is rooted in the experiences of post-colonialism, multifaceted religious traditions, and persistent caste

divisions. Through the analysis of pivotal historical movements, societal dynamics, and existing gender imbalances, this study delineates the progression of Indian feminist thought beyond Western frameworks. It reveals that moving toward a localized, indigenous Womanism serves as an independent analytical instrument—one that acknowledges the particular cultural intricacies of Indian femininity while affirming a unique identity within the global theoretical context.

To understand feminist trajectory in Indian literature, it is essential to examine the extensive history and the characteristics of women's movements in India, which are intrinsically linked to the exploration of the influence of tradition, culture, religion, and the framework of various institutions, including family and marriage, on women's lives. The Bhakti movement, a religious movement of the 16th and 17th centuries, established the groundwork for Indian feminism by challenging Brahmanical dominance and social inequality in its pursuit of an equitable society. The Bhakti movement unified numerous regional movements opposing long-standing oppression linked to hierarchies. It was spearheaded by various saints, including women from lower castes, who challenged contemporary conventions at multiple levels. They engaged in devotional songs to attain salvation for marginalised classes, particularly women, through a mystical union and a personal relationship with God, thereby rejecting the intermediary role of Brahmin priests. Mirabai, a Rajput princess, poet, singer, and saint, wholeheartedly embraced the Bhakti Movement to attain her inner strength by merging with the divine essence of Lord Krishna, while simultaneously contesting the traditional conventions that oppressed women.

Indian feminism flourished in the 19th and 20th centuries, closely aligned with the Indian independence movements against British colonialism, spearheaded by prominent male figures such as Raja Rammohan Roy, Jyotiba Phule, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Rabindranath Tagore, who integrated it into their broader agenda of eradicating social injustices like Sati, child marriage, polygamy, and female infanticide, alongside women activists such as Tarabai Shinde, Savitribai Phule, and Pandita Ramabai. During this period, Indian women endeavoured to escape domestic confines to seek education and simultaneously advocated for civic and political rights. Numerous pre-Independence female authors, as previously noted, advocated for women's rights and endeavoured to educate and emancipate the women in their vicinity. Tarabai Shinde's book *Stri Purush Tulana* (A Comparison between Women and Men), published in 1882, represents one of the earliest literary critiques of the upper caste patriarchal society. It is regarded as the first Modern Indian feminist text that contested the dominance of Hindu religious scriptures and their contribution to the perpetuation of male superiority. Early feminists denounced the conflicting moral standards imposed on women of different strata and opposed the hardships faced by widows in their restrictive society.

Savitribai Phule founded India's inaugural school for girls in 1848 and dedicated herself to women's education and social reform. Her resistance to the oppressive caste system and untouchability, courageously confronting repercussions including physical assaults and social ostracism, is unique in Indian history. Pandita Ramabai, an educationist and advocate for women's emancipation in the late 19th century, was an early feminist who promoted the principle of 'self-reliance' for women and established institutions that provide shelter and sustenance for widows experiencing homelessness and other women. She was the founder of Arya Mahila Samaj and Sharada Sadan, institutions where women convened for education and acquired skills for self-reliance and responsible citizenship. She was actively involved in assisting famine victims and established a new Christian institution, Mukti Sadan, in Kedgaon, Gujarat. In her piece titled "Women, Emancipation and Equality," Meera Kosambi states: "It was Pandita Ramabai who paved the way for women's emancipation and led to the hope of their eventual equality" (49).

During this period, various feminist ideals evolved, exemplified by prominent personalities such as Anandibai Joshi, the trailblazing Indian woman who studied abroad. Kamini Roy was another notable proponent who vigorously championed women's education. Kadambini Ganguly made notable advancements as the first woman to study Western medicine, while Cornelia Sorabjee accomplished the extraordinary milestone of being India's first female lawyer.

Awareness of the diversity of feminisms in the Indian context is essential, as India encompasses numerous religious and ethnic groups, each possessing unique norms and legislation that negatively impact women within those communities. Given its evolving nature and cultural disparities, it is unfeasible to consolidate a diverse array of struggles under a singular framework; however, it is crucial to comprehend how they intersect variably with the core concepts of power and freedom, which are two principal concerns pertaining to women in general. As accurately stated in *Indian Feminisms*: "Feminist theory is not one but has several different theoretical approaches and positions, whether it is socio-economic, psychological, or literary, power and freedom are its two primary concerns" (Jain and Singh 82). During the pre-Independence era, numerous women

poets and authors, like Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, made substantial contributions to highlighting women's issues in poetry, novels, and various literary forms. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, a writer and social reformer advocating for women's empowerment, significantly transformed society with her impactful feminist novella, *Sultana's Dream*. In the preface to the book *Indian Women Novelists: Feminist Reverberations*, Bijender Singh states: "With the turn of a new century, the first feminist novel in the true sense of the term was published in the year 1908 by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain who in her novella *Sultana's Dream* portrayed an imaginary world where men are closed inside the house and women play the role of men...The novella portrays a utopian society where the roles of men and women have been reversed to satirize the inefficiency of men (10)".

A collective national identity developed throughout the early 20th century, which was dominated by India's struggle for independence. From a historical standpoint, Indian women's extensive participation in the Independence movement—previously confined to the home—was its most important component. In India's struggle for independence, women were crucial players. They promoted khadi, organized rallies against businesses that sold imported goods and alcoholic beverages, organized public events, and actively participated in national efforts to free their country from colonial oppression. They bravely took part in every kind of battle, even going to jail and confronting the police. The *All India Women's Conference* (AIWC), which was founded in Poona in January 1927 with the goal of advancing social welfare and women's education, was a historic event in and of itself. As a result, nationalist movement trends became more and more entwined with women's concerns and issues. The AIWC then expanded its scope of work to include a social change agenda. The organization's members actively participated in legislative lobbying efforts to, among other things, end child marriage and protect women's rights to divorce and inheritance. During this time, a number of different feminist movements arose that addressed the particular challenges faced by women as well as women's issues in conjunction with more general social issues.

Early in the 1940s, Bengal became the center of radical women's organizations led by Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti, which had a large network of workers opposing colonial tyranny throughout the state. Many states, including Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and others, had similar women's organizations that actively opposed drug and alcohol abuse (in Andhra Pradesh), child marriage (in Rajasthan with the "Sathin" movement), and eviction as part of "Narmada Bachao" (in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra). The growing prominence of women's involvement raised important issues as the movement moved toward widespread mobilization. The 'gender' question was seen to have been settled with the achievement of freedom in 1947, the creation of the notion of equality in the Constitution, and the expansion of women's rights to education, the opportunity to vote, and the ability to enter professions, public services, and political offices. Even though many middle-class women benefited from government efforts, a sizable majority went unnoticed.

Women's issues were mostly uninteresting and not discussed in public for about 20 years after independence. In her book *Women in Indian Society*, Neera Desai claims that "women's position was worsening in practically every sphere with the exception of some gains in education and employment for middle class women and [at the same time] the declining value of women was surfacing in almost every aspect of life" (6). In 1975, the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare of the Government of India was tasked with submitting a report on the status of women in the country for the United Nations Women's Conference in Mexico, although no national report was available. The Government formed a committee to perform surveys and produce a report for the UN summit. A discerning part of the populace recognized the necessity to evaluate the condition of women, leading to the establishment of the Committee for the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1971. It was established in alignment with UN guidelines and delivered a report to the parliament in 1973 under the leadership of Prof. Vina Mazumdar, which was subsequently published as "Towards Equality" in 1974. The research, as indicated by its compelling title, highlighted the persistent quest for equality in a complex society such as India and positioned gender concerns at the forefront of the nation's growth. The report's primary features encompassed a shocking depiction of the realities faced by Indian women, evidenced by the country's declining sex ratio, alarmingly high female mortality rates, economic marginalization, and discriminatory personal laws.

Prof. Vina Mazumdar, a prominent committee member and an unwavering advocate for women's equality and social justice, subsequently founded the Centre for Women's Development Studies, commonly referred to as CWDS, in Delhi. The concept of 'action-research' was developed by CWDS in its initiatives to organize landless peasant women in the Bankura region of West Bengal. It swiftly attained notoriety as a pivotal institution that significantly impacted the evolution of Women's Studies in India. Professor Vina Mazumdar, who is appropriately regarded as the fountainhead of Women's Studies in India, she was

instrumental in establishing the Indian Association of Women's Studies in 1982; other colleagues and scholars, including Neera Desai, Maithereyi Krishnaraj, Madhuri Shah, Kumud Sharma, Hemlata Swarup, and Ashok Mitra, significantly advanced the discipline of Women's Studies.

The subjects addressed in Women's Studies throughout the final two decades of the twentieth century encompassed a broad spectrum of issues, including political representation, divorce legislation, sexual assault, workplace harassment, land rights, and child custody. The 1979 Mathura rape case brought women's issues to public prominence. It enhanced the public's understanding of the rape statutes. Notwithstanding its constraints, the anti-rape campaign signified a new era in India's feminist movement. The 'Shah Bano case' and other incidents of violence, such as the 'Roop Kanwar' case, highlighted communal, religious, and cultural identities. It depicted the theme of violence in various manifestations and has been a prominent subject since the 1980s. In 1985, the Supreme Court granted Shah Bano financial support under Section 125 subsequent to her divorce.

The Protection of Rights on Divorce Act was enacted in 1986 to grant alimony to a divorced wife from her estranged husband. In her article "Shahbano," writer Zakia Pathak, in collaboration with Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, contends that from a feminist perspective, the minority community's acute sensitivity to any infringement on their personal laws complicates the adoption of a resolute position against such behavior. Moreover, it has been suggested that minority perspectives have a unique justification that must not be overlooked: "The paramount objective is to thwart Hindu communalists from exploiting women's rights issues to incite communal animosity against Muslims and other minorities" (Kishwar 12).

In a Rajasthan village in 1987, Roop Kanwar, a teenager, was ruthlessly immolated on her husband's funeral pyre. Despite the government's enactment of the Sati Prevention Act in 1988, incidences of Sati persisted, and the administration failed to implement substantial measures to eradicate the practice of Sati worship. The government's lack of resolve is the primary reason for its frequent inability to address women's issues. The Chipko movement, a pivotal environmental and social initiative in northern India during the early 1980s, is often cited as a quintessential instance of successful grassroots activism globally. At the core of this movement lies eco-feminism, as articulated by Maria Mies. Vandana Shiva emphasizes the integration of theory and practice, gaining popularity in India. Other rallies, including the reinstatement of reparations for Bhopal gas victims, anti-inflation movements, the campaign for water access (especially potable water and opposition to water privatization), abuses by the apparatus, and drug addiction, were prevalent.

During this period, various journals developed, many of which constituted alternative media and received assistance from political organizations. The feminist journal *Manushi*, established in 1979, provided a formidable platform for the emerging movement, subsequently followed by other women's issues-focused publications such as *Samya* and *Equality* in the 1990s by the 'All India Democratic Women's Association'. *Kali for Women*, a publishing press, was established in 1984 by Ritu Menon and Urvashi Butalia to include a diverse array of content, encompassing academic literature, activist writings, and fiction. *Kali's* initial commissioned projects included several works of women's literature on the subcontinent, such as a volume on *Women in Media*, a compilation of narratives by Indian women writers titled *Truth Tales*, and *The History of Doing and Staying Alive*. The writings were scholarly, focusing specifically on development, creative writing, and activism.

Regarding the representation of Indian women's challenges and experiences in 'Indian Writing in English,' numerous female authors have addressed subjects pertinent to feminine sensibilities. The works of Kamala Das, Nayantara Sehgal, Jhumpa Lahiri, Mrinal Pande, Manju Kapoor, Namita Gokhale, and numerous more female novelists have profoundly influenced the in-depth examination of women's lives and interactions. Their contributions facilitate a thorough comprehension of the Indian female mind. Amrita Pritam, significantly, explores the partition of India from a female perspective in her work, *Pinjar*. Mahasweta Devi elucidates the subjugation and exploitation of a woman's body by local British authorities in her novels and short stories, such as "Draupadi" and "Aranyer Adhikar." Anita Desai demonstrates exceptional proficiency in portraying the social realities of women through a psychological lens. Similar to Shashi Deshpande, the majority of her characters are middle-class women. Namita Gokhale, a distinguished female author, employs the notion of female camaraderie to develop her female characters.

A multitude of Indian women writers have articulated their anguish and challenges in regional languages, with defiance emerging as a prevailing motif in their vernacular writings. The conventional Indian framework of womanism is distinctly evident in the imaginary realm described above. Progressive women writers who do not advocate for the destruction of the

current order or the institutions of family, marriage, and motherhood, but instead aim for a societal reorientation that facilitates more equitable and compassionate interactions. Given the myriad intricacies of women's lives, the primary focus is on maintaining interpersonal relationships both within and beyond the family unit. The feminist and womanist claims were inherently present in the lives and daily activities of these women writers, and these claims concurrently became an essential component of their writings.

At the onset of the twenty-first century, Indian feminism expanded to encompass a diverse array of previously marginalized subjects, particularly concerning various manifestations of violence against women, such as 'honour killings,' 'acid attacks,' domestic violence, marital rape, consent issues, matters pertaining to women's bodies and sexuality, the representation of women in media, and numerous legal reforms. The collaborative endeavors have resulted in the establishment of several legislation, including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005 and The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013. The post-feminist movement evolved, emphasizing achievements rather than oppression in women's struggle for equality. Jasbir Jain and Avadhesh Kumar, in their work *Indian Feminisms*, contend that: "Post feminism shifts the issue from identity to relationships, from a concern with oppression to one with the concept of freedom" (91). Contemporary authors Githa Hariharan, Leela Gulati, and Nabaneeta Sen; Dalit women writers Urmila Pawar and Baby Kamble; and transgender writers A. Revathi and Laxminarayan Tripathi have concentrated on their socio-cultural and personal narratives, endeavoring to reassess their familial and communal connections while chronicling their experiences in their literary works.

The discussion concerning women and their difficulties in the postfeminist age is highly pertinent for female novelists such as Githa Hariharan, who believe that the concept of modernity is perpetually evolving across various temporal and socio-cultural settings. As the roles of women and men change across time, the author contends that each age features its modern female equivalent, but not necessarily as a 'new woman.' The author depicts modern educated women who contend with loneliness and alienation in her creative works. Women who deviate from traditional story structures are widely showcased in the author's novels, which primarily emphasize not on the narrative focuses not on the events or facts that transpire, but rather on her answers, which encompass moral, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of her lived experiences. Nabaneeta Dev Sen's oeuvre demonstrates her profound understanding and expertise in a multitude of social, political, and psychological subjects, expressed through a diverse range of genres, including poetry, novels, short stories, plays, literary criticism, travelogues, translations, and children's literature. Her books, essays, and critical pieces specifically endeavor to examine her preoccupation with the notion of the contemporary Indian woman. She exemplifies a unique mode of self-expression, illustrating complex social, political, and psychological challenges encountered by post-colonial, middle-class Bengalis, often including women as the central figures.

Postfeminism does not represent a complete rejection of feminism; instead, it denotes a subsequent phase in its evolution. The study primarily examines mass media and its representation of women in the digital domain. The ideology advocated for individual liberty and freedom over collective well-being and society advancement. Jasbir Jain asserts in *Indian Feminisms*, "Post-feminist is at one level an attempt to demolish the binary oppositions and at another an effort to redefine power and freedom" (83). The postfeminist ideology of the West, which asserts that women have achieved liberty and equality with men in modern society, is not applicable to Indian culture. Anju Jagpal asserts in *Postfeminism in India* that "to talk about post feminism in the present-day context appears to be a myth rather than a reality...it remains far from a real state in the Indian context" (241). Indian society, characterized by its caste and class stratification, remains burdened by biases and stereotypes related to gender, rendering true equality for women an elusive aspiration. Despite the numerous challenges faced by women's movements in India, which have achieved notable progress and dismantled some obstacles, the journey towards attaining gender parity and justice remains extensive.

One cannot contemplate womanism without recognizing feminism and its progression into postfeminism. They are interconnected as they provide reciprocal assistance in combating the patriarchal system and fostering transformation. Both parties benefit by recognizing and valuing their distinctions while assisting one other in thriving. Consequently, "to say that one is a womanist is not to say that one is a feminist, even if the two are not mutually exclusive; a person can be either, neither, or both" (Phillips xxxiii). One is not obliged to adhere to a certain philosophy to align with the principles of womanism, as contrast to feminism. It is, instead, a viewpoint accessible to everyone as "womanism is an interpolated perspective rather than an ideology" (Phillips xxxiv); It operates by always incorporating viewpoints from individuals.

Womanism in India holds considerable importance as it expands upon feminism and surpasses its constraints. Consequently, every kind of feminism embodies womanism, although not all womanism qualifies as feminist, because “feminism is like a particular kind of magnifying lens that highlights certain womanist political concerns but not others” (Phillips xxxv). In contrast to feminism, womanism does not prioritize a singular form of oppression; instead, it advocates for the elimination of all oppressive systems. Embracing tradition and domestic responsibilities is regarded as a source of pride rather than a hindrance, a perspective that was not prioritized by feminists. This is seen in *Feminism and Its Relevance in South Asia* where the feminist Kamla Bhasin emphasizes that “: “a feminist can choose to be a full-time housewife, if that is what satisfies her, provided she can retain her independence and her individuality and provided her partner does not wield power over her because she is not earning” (19). According to Layli Phillips, Womanism can be viewed as a melody, while feminism serves as one of the various instruments that can produce it. Much like a melody can be performed adeptly with separate instruments yet reveals its fullest resonance when all are combined, womanism can enhance feminism and is not only an extension of it. The complete significance of womanism can only be grasped when all its concepts and traits are considered collectively rather than from a singular perspective.

In contrast to feminism, Womanism does not rely on governmental or institutional authorities to initiate and resolve issues on their behalf. It seeks to identify methods for women to independently address their challenges, as aptly stated by Layli Phillips in *The Womanist Reader*, “the tradition is longer than the terminology is old” (xxxviii). In India, a greater number of women have experienced it in practice rather than articulated it theoretically. It is seen in multiple examples such as the 'Tebhaga Movement', where impoverished landless peasant women opposed aristocratic landowners. The Peasant Movement in Andhra witnessed women undertaking vital roles in the emancipation of their community. The peasant movement in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, marked the inaugural occasion when women addressed land concerns and gained recognition. their rights. Women expressed their affection for nature by embracing trees during the Chipko Movement in Uttarakhand. The Ganga Mukthi initiative in Bihar, the APPIKO (Hug) movement in Karnataka, and the Gulabi Gang in Uttar Pradesh exemplify social movements that tackle various societal concerns in distinct areas of India, which were previously overlooked and disregarded by conventional historical narratives.

The rural women were inspired to engage in structured eco-restoration efforts because of their vulnerability to environmental deterioration. Indian women have shown a pronounced tendency to cultivate fruit, fodder, and fuel-wood trees near their homes and communal spaces. They have engaged proactively in alleviating the excessive exploitation of forests by commercial organizations. They have engaged proactively in initiatives to protect pastures and woodlands from intrusive operations like mining. The participation of women is crucial in improving the output of communal lands. Considering the robust association between women and natural resources, they act as a beneficial and protective force for the environment. They possess the capacity to significantly alter detrimental patterns into virtuous ones.

Vandana Shiva thinks that the connection between women and the environment is predominantly seen via an ideological perspective. The writer asserts that there are notable connections between the oppression of women and the domination and exploitation of the environment. Given the simultaneous prevalence of women and nature, women have a unique stake in alleviating the overexploitation of the natural world. Bina Agarwal contests the eco-feminist perspective that emphasizes the importance of women's relationship with nature, “particularly in terms of its natural and spiritual aspects” (*Structures of Patriarchy* 237). She argues that the notion categorizes women as a homogeneous entity and fails to differentiate among them depending on variables such as class, caste, race, and others. As a result, it neglects other forms of oppression that profoundly affect women's standing. The ideology-centric perspective of eco-feminism fails to acknowledge the non-ideological underpinnings of power that are intricately woven into economic and political frameworks. Certainly, even when examining ideological frameworks, it neglects to explore the mechanisms through which particular dominant factions effectuate ideological transformations that serve their interests, as well as the processes that solidify these changes. Indian women endeavor to establish equilibrium by attending to their families' needs. and advocating for their rights by cultivating the capacity to handle several situations concurrently. Womanism perpetually embraces and honors the perspectives of individuals from many social backgrounds. It holds the conviction that: “as long as the job of social justice gets done, it scarcely matters what label it falls under; the more perspectives contributing, the better” (Phillips xxxiii). Consequently, womanism possesses a global scope and cultural influence.

Alice Walker, a prominent African American author, first used the term 'womanism' in her collection *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down: Stories*; particularly in the short narrative "Coming Apart", released in 1979. The narrative unfolds inside an African milieu, where the main character realizes that her spouse finds sexual pleasure in seeing a pornographic publication named *Jiveboy*, which features images of "white blondes and brunettes" (Walker 43). She had pain due to her dissimilar appearance and questioned her husband regarding it. He only defended himself by claiming that the sexual images were harmless and she was "being a.) silly, b.) prude, and c.) ridiculous" (43). To enhance her mood, he presented *Jivers*, a Black adult magazine, the following day. The publication highlighted Black women among numerous other women of color. It depicted Black women in a manner so dehumanizing that they resembled animals. Her spouse acquired it, convinced that his partner would like it for featuring ladies of diverse ethnicities, in contrast to the White women portrayed in *Jiveboy*. Upon gazing at her reflection in the mirror, the protagonist realized that no publication could capture the full spectrum of challenges faced by Black women. Walker clarifies the differences in the representation of White and Black women in periodicals. She asserts that although both are illustrated in confrontational stances, the Black lady is often represented as beastly, arranged in a manner that she resembles "a human turd at the man's feet" (43).

Upon acknowledging the exploitation of Black women in the magazine, the protagonist endeavoured to sway her husband's views on African American women by sharing various writings by Black female authors such as Audre Lord, Luisah Teish, and Tracey A. Gardner, which depicted the authentic experiences, challenges, and courage of Black women. Ultimately, the husband recognized that he had inflicted distress upon his wife and other Black women for an extended duration and conceded that pornographic magazines had established a divide between him and his wife, hindering his ability to fully comprehend and value her being. In the narrative, Walker presents the concept of 'womanist', since the main character identifies as a 'womanist' rather than a 'feminist' (Walker 49). Walker employed the term to denote African American women's profound dedication to the integrity and welfare of all humanity. She asserts that feminism highlights the gender dimensions of discrimination, but womanism addresses the triad of race, class, and gender, particularly emphasizing the challenges and experiences of African American women and women of color. Alice Walker explicated the concept of 'womanism' in her renowned publication *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, released in 1983, to enhance its clarity and comprehensiveness. Walker proceeds to provide a fourfold definition of the term womanism. In the initial segment, she elucidates that "'Womanist' is from the Southern folk expression 'womanish'. It usually refers to outrageous, audacious, courageous or wilful behaviour...Responsible. In charge. Serious" (Walker xi). The second part of the definition describes the admiration of women towards other individuals: "A Womanist is a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually...committed to the survival of and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not separatist, except periodically, for health" (xi). The third part of the definition goes on to describe the things women love: "[A] Womanist is one who loves music, loves dance. Loves the moon, loves struggle, loves the folk, loves herself. Regardless" (xii). And the fourth and final part relates to the significance of color purple: "Womanist is to Feminist as Purple is to Lavender" (xii).

The initial segment of the term illustrates women's audacious and accountable conduct, whereas the latter segment conveys esteem and regard for fellow women, alongside a pledge to the collective welfare of the community. The third section pertains to the preferences of women, while the fourth emphasizes the significance of the color purple. In her view, the manner in which women forge connections through sisterhood, motherhood, and enduring friendships is of great importance. She believes that womanism surpasses feminism since it acknowledges the previously overlooked struggles and experiences of African American women while also advocating for the dignified existence of society as a whole, encompassing individuals of all races, classes, and genders.

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Clenora Hudson-Weems are further trailblazers of womanism who have expanded upon its definition. They have independently established their terminologies, however their concepts appear to be consistent. In *The Womanist Reader*, the writer contends, "Significantly, none of these authors created something new; rather, each named something that had been in existence for some time" (Phillips xx). Ogunyemi's perspective ultimately gained recognition as 'African Womanism,' whereas Hudson-Weems' stance was designated as 'Africana Womanism.' Nigerian writer Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, in her 1985 work titled "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English," articulates her views on 'African Womanism.' From the author's perspective, Black women are significantly more disadvantaged, weak, and oppressed than White women, so the challenges and campaigns of White women cannot adequately address the concerns faced by Black women. According to her statement, "More often than not, where a white woman writer

may be a feminist, a black woman writer is likely to be a ‘womanist’” (Ogunyemi 64). Alongside her understanding of sexual identity, she recognizes the importance of incorporating racial, cultural, national, economic, and political elements into her philosophical perspective. In a comparable manner, bell hooks, in *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, accurately claims that “Black woman could not join together with White woman to fight for women’s rights because they did not see ‘womanhood’ as an important aspect of their identity” (1). Consequently, when the women's movements addressed the issue of sexist oppression, they argued that sexism was trivial in comparison to the graver and more horrific reality of racism. They were reluctant to acknowledge that sexism was as repressive as racism. Chikwenye Ogunyemi asserts that the primary aim of womanism is the unification of Black people worldwide, achieved via the informed leadership of both sexes. She asserts that African womanism is a philosophical ideology that celebrates the heritage of Black individuals, the tenets of Black life, and offers a fair representation of Black womanhood. The aim is to cultivate unity by guaranteeing that each Black person has a reasonable degree of power to be the “brother, sister, father or mother [to the other]” (Phillips 28).

The phrase 'Africana Womanism' was introduced by African American writer Clenora Hudson-Weems in her 1989 publication "Cultural and Agenda Conflicts in Academia: Critical Issues for Africana Women's Studies". In contrast to the womanist perspectives of Walker and Ogunyemi that originated from feminist contexts, Hudson-Weems' 'Africana womanism' was formulated within a nationalist Africana studies paradigm. She maintains that “Feminism cannot be simply fixed by adding women of color” (Maparyan 26) without attempting to incorporate their cultural perspectives. Consequently, she asserts that women from ethnic minority groups, specifically Africana women, should create and establish their own frameworks that are focused on and relevant to their cultural contexts. Certain of her concepts coincide with those of Chikwenye Ogunyemi, as she asserts that Black women endure a triad of oppression stemming from their ethnic background, socio-economic conditions, and gender, contending with both the subjugation imposed by White society and the injustices perpetuated by Black men. In her publication *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, she introduces further facets to her idea by asserting that “Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent and their unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires” (Hudson-Weems 24). She asserts that the Black and other excluded groups necessitate a framework that resonates with their challenges and experiences and is capable of addressing their issues. Moreover, Hudson-Weems asserts that feminism does not adequately incorporate the beliefs and issues of Africana women inside its structure. The writer contends that Africana womanism is authentic framework that integrates an emphasis on family with a basis grounded in ethnicity. This framework emphasizes the analysis of Africana women's autonomy within the texts, considering their societal positioning and historical context. Clenora Hudson-Weems articulates 'Africana womanism' as a paradigm that underscores familial relationships and empowers individuals according to their ethnicity, socio-economic standing, and gender. Her main goal is to provide a definitive understanding of Black women that recognizes their intrinsic value as persons and engaged contributors to their own lives and historical accounts. The writer contends that for Africana women to accurately acknowledge and assess themselves and their movement, it is essential for them to properly define their identity and their movement as “Africana womanist and *Africana womanism*” (Hudson-Weems 55).

The theories of Alice Walker, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, and Clenora Hudson-Weems collectively established the foundation for womanism. Given that it is a viewpoint articulated by various authors, these contributors have facilitated the explication of the concept of womanism. Chikwenye Okonjo emphasizes the injustice and subjugation faced by women in Africa. She asserts that feminism predominantly pertains to White women, and African women cannot entirely identify with it. Consequently, she contends that African womanism holds greater significance and is essential for the Black women. She thoroughly examines the differences in obstacles faced by White women and African women. The writer contends that although White women may advocate against sexism, Black women encounter numerous extra obstacles tied to race, culture, and economy that exacerbate their dehumanization and further undermine their authority. She maintains that the primary aim of womanism is the global solidarity of Black people, guided by the wisdom of both genders. Her reflections closely mirror those of Alice Walker, as she admits to being inspired by her as she was “pleasantly surprised to discover that my notion of its meaning overlaps with Alice Walker’s” (Ogunyemi 72). Ogunyemi's primary objective is to establish an ideological structure that distinctly differentiates African womanism from White feminism and African feminism. She asserts that solely African women qualify as African womanists. She not only delineates a clear separation from African feminism but also explicitly declares her disconnection from Walker. According to her statement, “The womanist praxis in Africa has never totally identified with Walkerian precepts” (qtd. in Phillips 28).

Layli Maparyan succinctly put it, “Walker’s womanism is expansive and inclusive; spiritually, sexually, and emotionally open and fluid...Ogunyemi’s African womanism is maternal and cooperative, diplomatic and nurturant...Hudson-Weems’s Africana womanism is stringent and uncompromising, protective and warriorlike, traditional” (Maparyan 29). Their distinct but related perspectives represent a common womanist architectural framework. When taken as a whole, they could be considered as “three weight-bearing pillars of the womanist idea, each with different yet equal strengths” (Maparyan 29). Rather of creating divisions within the notion of womanism, these different points of view and perspectives generate constructive tensions that allow more people to participate in womanism as a unifying and cooperative endeavour.

In her book *The Womanist Reader*, Layli Phillips lists five general characteristics of womanism : “(1) it is anti-oppressionist, (2) it is vernacular, (3) it is non-ideological, (4) it is communitarian, and (5) it is spiritualized” (xxiv). It is adamant about eradicating all forms of oppression, whether they are anti-racist, anti-sexist, or something else entirely. The goal of womanism is to eliminate all forms of oppression that are yet “unnamed” or unclear. It gives voice to those on the margins. The goal of womanism is to free all people. It emphasizes everyday activities and home tasks while respecting and allowing for a variety of viewpoints. It recognizes the daily experiences of individuals and endeavours to link them, considering their varying perspectives and objectives. Regardless of wealth, all individuals have fundamental concerns such as sustenance, shelter, health, physical well-being, affection, and mortality, which unites them. The author perceives this variety, “is not problematized; rather it is viewed favourably” (Phillips xxv). She contends that womanism is non-ideological, as it does not adhere to a one objective, but rather honours and embraces diverse viewpoints and beliefs. It endeavours to address problems by attentively listening and engaging in dialogue with people possessing diverse perspectives as “one does not need to resolve internal disagreement to function effectively” (xxv).

Womanism is communal in nature, advocating for the collective well-being of all beings, encompassing humans, flora, and fauna. It seeks to enhance the connection between humanity and the natural world, as well as with one's inner spiritual essence. It posits that the human, spiritual, and natural realms are interrelated, and true harmony can only be achieved by aligning with each of these dimensions. Consequently, womanism represents a comprehensive perspective that advocates for the societal transformation of all individuals through daily actions influenced by ordinary experiences. It posits that 'everyday life' serves as the primary arena for the formation, reinforcement, and materialization of consciousness; it is the optimal venue for enacting change, altering energy, and implementing interventions.

Womanism emerged within African American culture, however it holds significant relevance and applicability to Indian civilization. Given the diverse identities and cultures of India, the challenges and issues encountered by different individuals vary as well. Although issues such as male dominance and gender bias may appear analogous at first glance, their social, cultural, and political expressions can vary significantly across Africa and other nations. Consequently, it is infeasible to categorize these various conflicts under a singular classification; rather, they must be analyzed within a framework that appreciates the multitude of challenges and resistances faced by women from different categories and regions of India. Womanism occupies a significant position in comprehending these conflicts through their many intersectional viewpoints.

Womanism in India lacks the comprehensive theoretical exploration seen in the literature and dialogues around African American women; yet, it is fervently adopted and practiced in the everyday experiences and challenges of individuals beyond those who label themselves as ‘womanists.’ It is defined as an essence and a lifestyle, rather than a structured theory or dogma. Its influence persists irrespective of whether humans consciously recognize or designate it as such. Numerous categories and collectives persist in engaging in womanism without identifying as womanists. Indian Womanism seeks to include love, tranquility, compassion, and interconnectedness into the everyday existence of individuals. These traits and behaviors compel individuals to abandon violence, discord, exploitation, and the commodification of human necessities in pursuit of tranquility, restoration, sustainability, and self-fulfillment. These are the cognitive frameworks, psychological dispositions, and states of motivation that enable individuals to transform into a more sophisticated iteration of themselves. It reinforces the notion that individual metamorphosis and society change are interrelated. In the context of India, womanism underscores the significance of women affirming their independent existence via their deeds. It provides importance to their 'experiential essence', their individuality, and positions them as catalysts for transformation through their deeds. Their daily behaviors, emphasis on familial principles, forgiving nature, and mindfulness contribute to their establishment as women of importance.

The links between the narratives of Indian women and African American women are evident in the shared motifs of defiance, resilience, and the quest for honor and equity. In a manner akin to African American women leveraging literature to challenge and dismantle oppressive structures, these Indian women employ their autobiographies to scrutinize and resist the intersecting oppressions of caste, class, and gender. African American women found it difficult to relate their personal experiences and struggles to those of White women. In a like manner, Indian women struggle to connect their experiences and issues with those of women in Western societies. African American and Indian women emphasize humanitarian qualities and exhibit a profound commitment to the welfare and solidarity of all individuals. These women commence their individual journeys by first valuing and respecting their own cultures and the obstacles they encountered. They subsequently broaden their attention to include the struggles and experiences of women of color.

Indian women and African American women both emphasize compatibility with men as a crucial attribute, as they firmly believe that males significantly contribute to societal development. Both conform to a family-oriented paradigm and uphold the principle of honoring their elders, mothers, sisters, and other relatives. Both champion the elimination of all types of subjugation and the reestablishment of the bond between the natural and spiritual domains. Both exemplify womanism through their daily action and endeavors, therefore connecting with the commonplace experiences of individuals. Their endeavors in writing and vocalizing have significantly influenced their standing and circumstances, by challenging traditional norms and inspiring collective movements for transformation. They possess certain resemblances; nonetheless, they face unique obstacles and undergo varied experiences due to the diverse array of cultures and identities. Prominent figures in African American culture, like Alice Walker, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, and Clenora Hudson-Weems, have contributed the notion of womanist language to scholarly discourse.

In India, the acknowledgment of women's agency within academic discussions is still being developed. Indian women have predominantly exhibited their autonomy by their deeds rather than overtly articulating it in scholarly discourse. Indian women, in contrast to African American women, acknowledge feminism's contribution to paving the way for womanism, which addresses all the concealed obstacles and experiences. African authors such as Chikwenye Ogunyemi and bell hooks have unequivocally dismissed the participation of Black women in the feminist movement, pointing to their differing priorities and disconnection from White women. On the other hand, Indian Women have persistently participated in feminist and women's movements aimed at enhancing the welfare of all women, irrespective of their socio-economic standing. Women, particularly those from disadvantaged and destitute backgrounds in India, have taken a prominent stance in rallies and marches championing women's rights. Unlike African American culture, the feminist movement in India has been launched in partnership with Indian men like Raja Rammohan Roy and Jyotiba Phule. They have been instrumental in advancing women's emancipation by championing women's rights, founding educational establishments, supporting widows' rights to remarry, and striving for the eradication of the Sati tradition.

The prior feminist endeavors and movements expressed through music, literature, and demonstrations have played a crucial role in fostering a society with reduced inequalities and biases against women. Their difficulties and adversities have contributed to improving the circumstances of women by offering them options that were previously inaccessible in both public and private domains. It has granted women a degree of autonomy in both private and public domains, and has progressed towards balancing educational, professional, and political prospects for women to a certain degree. Their involvement influenced the dialogue surrounding women's rights, national identity, and social equity. Although numerous conflicts in the pursuit of an equitable and inclusive society have been triumphed, women today still encounter a multitude of challenges and adversities. These accounts illustrate a persistent and recurring series of obstacles that women face, as they are still regarded as inferior to men even in modern and current society.

The progression of feminist ideology in India illustrates that gender discussions are dynamic and not universally consistent. This study contends that examining The Indian Feminist Trajectory signifies a deliberate and essential divergence from Eurocentric feminist frameworks that have traditionally overlooked the diverse, caste-oriented, and communal intricacies of the subcontinent. Through the examination of the transitions from initial social change to grassroots activism and contemporary internet dialogue, it is evident that the movements for Indian women have consistently functioned on a framework of collective strength rather than solitary individualism. Ultimately, transcending the Western perspective is not an exercise in scholarly solitude, but rather a pursuit of theoretical genuineness. Acknowledging Indian Womanism as a unique, indigenous paradigm enables academics and advocates to tackle gender inequality while preserving the essential socio-cultural

frameworks that maintain community existence in India. As the course progresses into the future, this localized womanist perspective provides a more comprehensive, culturally significant, and sustainable route to genuine emancipation.

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