‘Feminism’ in Print Media

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Locating the issue of feminism in the institutional context of the print media, we discover two popular versions of feminism that the media promote, a ‘feminism of choice’ and a ‘traditional feminism’. At the same time, they express hostility, both covert and not-so-covert, to organised women’s movements. This simultaneous cooptation and backlash is seemingly a sign of a consensus over some of feminism’s demands, such as equality, while it also perverts the agenda of feminism itself—in the interests of a newly liberalised economy and a resurgent majoritarian religious political party movement.

Introduction

Twenty-five years ago the Indian media tended either to ignore women altogether or confine its attention to the problems of middle-class domesticity. But when women’s organisations initiated major movements against gender violence in the late 1970s, the media had its own role to play. In the 1990s we not only had a much greater visibility of ‘women’ but also explicit deployment of the term ‘feminism’ in the media. The women’s question today is part of the public discourse. As Butalia notes, ‘At the national level today, it is no longer possible to ignore women. Whether it is with regard to planning documents, policy decisions, electoral politics and so forth, the question of the specific needs of women has to be addressed’ (1993: 590).

I agree, but would like to suggest that today, along with greater visibility, there is also greater hostility. In the 1970s the feeling broadly was that since the women’s question had been so far neglected, it was entirely in order that redressive measures be taken. For it was widely believed that in India ‘the national legacy’ was one where men fought along with women for women’s rights. This is not the place to dispute this nor offer instances where the demand for women’s rights did meet with substantive opposition.

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The point that I seek to make is that there was an overt stated position of consensus and agreement that gender equality was desirable on the agenda of both the national movement and the state. As the women's movement intensified, and as the Indian state re-awoke to the women's question when the United Nations declared the International Women's Year and Decade in 1975, there was no expressed resistance or hostility at the national level. This was quite unlike the United Kingdom at the turn of the century when feminism was 'ferociously attacked' (Walby 1997: 165).

Today the story is different. A comparison with the backlash in the US (Faludi 1991) and the UK (Faludi 1992) is in order. Alongside the strength of the women's movement in India we now have a more vocal opposition. The most dramatic instance of this has been the repeated failure of different governments to steer the Women's Reservation Bill through parliament. Less dramatic but equally clearly discernible are the negative views expressed in the popular media. This paper takes note of the wider spread of feminist ideas but believes that this dissemination is both complex and mediated. Academic/expert discourse and popular discourse intertwine and refashion themselves, often in an unintended form. I also contend that there is an intended resistance, but almost invariably this is couched not as direct opposition but as alternative formulations of 'feminism' and as 'reasoned' calls for 'restraint'.

The two important social processes within which any meaningful reading of popular media and feminism can be attempted today are the women's movement and the process of economic liberalisation initiated in India. The two have very different geneses and very different trajectories. But as is the wont of history, there are times when disparate social processes meet and new social forms take shape. While the Indian state heralded the policy of liberalisation and the opening up of the Indian market in the 1980s, the tangible impact on the media, on the lifestyle of a new middle class, on urban life in general made its presence felt only in the 1990s. Increasingly visible now are the more upmarket magazines' projection of a post-liberalised post-feminism, where the individual corporate woman is the icon. And more middle-class magazines' enunciation of an authentic and traditional 'feminism' criticises 'so-called feminism' on the grounds that it portends ill for the family and the Indian woman—apart from being a Western luxury that a poor country like India can ill afford. The newspapers carry both versions. I begin with an interpretation of 'feminism' understood essentially as a matter of 'choice', an articulation more visible in the upmarket magazines. I seek to locate the rhetorics of choice within the larger process of economic liberalisation and its particular effect on the media. The second kind of representation, the positing of false versus authentic or traditional versus Western feminisms, I turn to later. I am less certain of where I ought to locate it. There are three possible contexts, all of which bear upon it. The first is a 'national' legacy of...
'traditional' feminism articulated over the years by the 19th-century social reform movement and the national movement, which sought to distinguish itself from Western feminism and brought in new forms of patriarchy while allowing for new spaces for women. The second is the rise of the Hindu right with its call to return to 'tradition' and its aggressive defence against 'outsiders'. The third is a backlash opposed to the achievements of the women's movement and a general fear that feminism will destroy the extant patriarchal family, society and culture. All three could coalesce in popular voicing of 'traditional' feminism, though analytically and politically the three historical strands need to be addressed separately.

This paper seeks to survey popular writings and their use of the term 'feminism'. I confine myself to a small slice of the print media, that is, some English popular magazines with an emphasis on women's magazines and newspapers apart from the newly emergent residential magazines of the large urban colony that I live in. I have followed these almost continuously since January 1993, apart from a break between 1995 and 1996. The two newspapers I perused are The Times of India (TOI) and The Hindu. TOI was an early starter in this process of commercialisation. It underwent dramatic transformations with the management deciding on increased circulation, a cut in prices, an explicit thrust on procuring advertisements, a shift from tenured editorial staff to contractual—to a point where they only had a managing editor. As the paper took on the looks of a tabloid the circulation figures also soared. The Hindu remains more conservative, but at the same time seeks to construct a profile for itself through advertisements, marketing it as a serious person's newspaper where the successful corporate executive would find the information he requires in these globalised times. The magazines I covered extensively were Femina, Women's Era, Savvy, Cosmopolitan and, lately, Elle. Femina was among the first women's magazines in India with the upper-middle-class urban woman as its intended audience. After a market research agency study in 1989 the management of Femina decided that the reader's interest had shifted from family and home to personal care. In the editor's words 'Femina worked to establish a genre of superwomanhood in India, so that nothing would stop ordinary women from achieving and acquiring extraordinary success' (Srilata 1999: 67). Yet, unlike Savvy, which the management of Femina defines as aggressively feminist, 'Femina takes a balanced position' (ibid.: 66). Femina thus seeks to locate itself between the very upmarket Savvy and the middle-class Women's Era. Cosmopolitan advertises itself as 'Honest.Sexy.Smart', and is priced at Rs. 50 as compared to Femina's Rs. 25. Elle targets an even more upmarket audience with a thrust on glamour, fashion and sex, and features often taken from the Western media. Thus, liberalisation led not only to a massive growth of the media business but also to increasingly differentiated market needs and distinct target audiences. As in the West, feminism tends to be represented to target audiences more in keeping with various publications'
highly specialised market needs that affirm the existing social order determining those needs (McDermott 1995).

**Liberalisation, Media and the Matter of Choice**

The print media underwent dramatic transformations with the onset of liberalisation. The term ‘liberalisation’ refers to the opening up of the Indian market by the Indian state to enable it to be more integrated into the global economy. As commercial imperatives of the media intensified in an unprecedented manner, at the beginning of the new millennium we are in a better position to judge the impact of these changes in the Indian media. The central debate within the media world today is about the impact of liberalisation. A special issue of *Gentleman*, India’s oldest magazine for men, carries this debate. As vice-president of Bennett and Coleman & Co. Ltd. Bhaskar Das puts it, commercial imperatives have clearly gained central ground:

The advertiser, thus, becomes the primary customer of the print media, and he uses the print media as a vehicle to reach his customer who happens to be that medium’s reader. So, *I, the print media am not trying to get readers for my product, but I get customers, who happen to be my readers, for my advertisers. My target audience becomes those whom the advertiser wants to reach out to...people who are young at heart—15 to 35. People who have the disposable income, who have the attitude to buy and to spend...readers who are successful, who celebrate life, who consume, who are early adopters, who believe in experimentation, who are hedonists.* (Das 1999: 58, emphasis mine)

The ‘trouble with print media is the high gestation period for returns and the high cost of production’ (ibid.). The newspaper’s or magazine’s ‘cover price alone doesn’t cover these costs and...print media cannot do without advertising as it accounts for 80 per cent of your revenue’ (ibid.).

Journalists of a pre-liberalised era had seen role of the media differently. The print media in independent India had envisaged a constructive role for itself in the establishment of a successful fledgling democracy and the alleviation of poverty. The present Director of the Press Institute of India, Ajit Bhattacharjea, bemoans the change:

The responsibility of the media in a democratic developing country is not the same as in affluent advanced countries, where there is less of a gap between the privileged few and the under privileged many, and society has stabilised. Until the few, who include the policy makers and executors, are made aware constantly of the condition of the rest the gap will widen until the system breaks down. (Bhattacharjea 1999: 48)
The overall transformation of the media lies in the fact that today it is the sponsors who lay down the rules. It is not just advertisements that are witnessing dramatic growth but features on ads, sales and market strategies. Accompanying this are frequent write-ups on child-rearing, housekeeping, domesticity, professional attire and demeanour that are presented as news items or researched pieces but are really sponsoring certain products. Articles on the lifestyles of the rich and famous, interviews with models and fashion icons, and cover stories on consumption patterns of the new generation Indian fill an increasing section of the English print media until we no longer know where the advertisement ends and the news begins.

I draw attention to this because it has a direct bearing on the manner in which a rising trend within the English print media represents women and ‘feminism’. Feminism here mostly refers to the ability of an individual to make choices. I use just one instance to show how this blurring (of ads and features) takes place on the one hand and how feminism is invoked on the other. The first is an article titled ‘CORPORATE Elegance’ in éLAN: The Magazine for Successful Women (August–September 1999). A piece on ‘women at work’ initiates the discussion by suggesting that ‘dressing for work must rank high in the list of life’s arduous-but-inescapable chores...a dilemma’, but suggests that better days are here now, for, Savio Barretto presents workwear that will ease your journey into the boardroom.... Women over the ages have learned to use their ingenuity, creativity, even daring to adapt—centuries ago, a cave woman somewhere would have discovered that soft fluffy rabbit fur, while nice for a stroll through the jungle, was no good near the cooking fire. Quite the same way, one imagines that a woman today would discover that the sari, while a sophisticated ensemble, isn’t refined after a train journey, or a drive through hot, grimy city roads. So, is the Indian woman condemned to a lifetime of endless inevitabilities? Must she quietly resign herself to helplessness when choosing to dress to work? Not really. Especially not if designer Anita Dongre has her way.... And while what you choose to wear is really a very personal choice...it’s up to us designers to cater to that.... Today’s Indian woman is different from her predecessor. She is more comfortable with herself and her body. She doesn’t find a need to shy away from expressing herself. She is not afraid of trying new things, even what the close-minded call ‘western’. And what’s more, she is doing it all looking good. (éLAN, August–September 1999: 62, emphases mine)

The phrase that reiterates ‘what you choose to wear is a very personal choice’ but ‘it’s up to us the designers to cater to it’ is illustrative of the
thesis that the concept of identity is necessarily defined by two opposites: sameness and difference. To be unique is to be the same in two senses: to be identical to others in your class (and different from those in other classes), as well as be identical to yourself over time (Heckman 1999: 5). As a proposition this would be generally valid across time but it needs to be reiterated that an individual identity understood as a self-conscious, choice-filled, reflexive project defines the existential terrain of late modern life.

This point needs elaboration. No culture eliminates choices altogether, yet tradition or established habit orders life within relatively set channels. Modernity confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices. Unlike the West, in India a colonially-mediated modernity followed by a Nehruvian model of development with a public stress on thrift and austerity offered not too many choices to the middle class. Liberalisation brought in its turn a public discourse redolent with ideas of 'choice'. It has been argued that modernity confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices but offers little help as to which options should be followed. A central consequence of this is the primacy of lifestyle and its inevitability for the individual agent. It is true that the term 'lifestyle' need not be solely associated with consumerism. In India, however, the association is obvious, for the entry of this entire package of ideas had a sudden and deliberate character. The corporate sector, advertising copywriters, management gurus and media barons, worked towards the dissemination of a concept of selfhood defined by choice and consumption. Hence my insistence on explicating the language of sponsorship and the rhetorics of choice to emphasise that it is not just a particular product that is being sold but a worldview. Independent India's tryst with planned development is clearly over. We now have a simultaneous focus on 'selling' and a construction of the ideology of consumption, individualism, free choice, the good life and 'feminism'. The new ideology celebrates the burgeoning growth of the market and also reminds the Indian middle class of the long years of denial under Nehruvian socialism. Both ads and features articulate the upper- and aspirant upper-middle-class desire to break away from where a past public discourse spoke of thrift and of obligations to society—now perceived as an obstruction to the individual's desires and potential. The entry of a large number of transnational companies has led to the real possibility of young men and women entering the corporate sectors at salaries that their fathers did not dream of at retirement. A new culture of work ethos has entered Indian public discourse, and India's middle class has learnt to exchange safety and security for success and upward mobility.

Surveys on new customer profiles, another new facet of the media, confirm this. I quote from a 'Response Feature' in The Times of India as an illustration:
Some of the answers by the middle-income respondents to a recent indepth media survey conducted by India Today (April 15 1995) were ‘at least buying a washing machine will make us feel like we have achieved something’. Now knowledge that ‘living is not just a question of income but also of attitude’, get educated not just about your purchasing power, but instead about your choice over the purchase.... It emerges clearly from the India Today MARG poll conducted this month that, apart from the metropolitan cities, even in the rural areas, and in emerging metros like Trivandum, Jaipur and Chandigargh, and the much smaller towns of Nadiad, Thanjavur, Cuttack, Muzzafarnagar and Ratlam, there exists a need to possess more as much as the simple need to try and keep up with the price curve. (TOI, 16 June 1995, emphasis mine)

I argue that liberalisation broke down a more traditional system of marking identities within the middle class. The sensualist replaced the intellectualist paradigm. ‘The shift from producer to consumer capitalism has meant its disruption, which...has brought the transience of new styles, the introduction of a new flattening temporality and the reduction of the self to the mere politics of presentation’ (Lash and Friedman 1996: 18). I would hazard that this politics of presentation of self can be evidenced in the corporate feminism of choice that I discuss below.

**Feminism is ‘Choice’, Women’s Activism is Imposition**

Concepts like ‘autonomy’, ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’ can be read only within the historical context of their utterance. It is important to recall that the language of self-reliance and non-alignment of a pre-liberalised era also stemmed from a desire for freedom and dignity. There is a clear break with this notion of ‘freedom’ in the collective feeling today of the nation (read middle class) that at last the individual (read consumer) is free to choose. The break, I argue, also holds good for the manner in which the women’s movement and feminist scholarship in India visualised freedom for women.

Issues of class, caste, tribe, poverty and social justice formed an intrinsic part of feminist struggles in India, both in colonial and independent India. Autonomous women’s groups which emerged in the 1970s debated with women’s organisations of the left about the centrality of class in the latter’s formulation, a matter which tended in their view to obsfuscate the specificity of the women’s question. Both groups have moved a long way since then. While left groups have played a visible role in the women’s movement, autonomous groups have increasingly taken up questions of economic deprivation and matters of class. The Dalit women’s movement in turn has expressed dissatisfaction with upper-caste women activists in
both the left and the autonomous women's movements. But the core concern with social justice and inequity, however defined, has remained constant. In contrast, the popular representation of feminism in the media reflects a retreat from questions of class, caste and social justice. Quite clearly, feminism is read here as a matter of the individual woman's right to choose. The woman concerned is either the corporate woman or the high-powered consumer. A deliberate break is sought to be made with the women's movement, but the language used for the construction of her image is, however, often appropriated from the women's movement. And this works, as all cooptions do, 'as simultaneously a form of sharing in the spoils and a displacement' (Sunder Rajan 1993: 132).

One noticeable and significant example is the way International Women's Day itself is marked in the media. International Women's Day has been traditionally celebrated by women's organisations and other political forces that aligned themselves quite unambiguously with democratic and progressive forces. We now have a riot of ads with the specific day's messages appearing on 8 March every year. Ponds has an ad titled 'The Millennium Miracle: A Curtain Raiser' with an image of a woman's mask, an hourglass and some paintbrushes. The text reads:

As we are poised for a flight into the year 2000, what does it portend for women? A closer look at the trend-setting explosions on the careers, fashion, fitness and beauty minefields.... She's what makes the world go round. Yesterday. Today. In the new millennium. And for eternity.

We have then the logo, with 'there's tomorrow because there's you', 'Woman's Day—A Celebration of Womanhood, March 8th'. The ad is representative of high-powered beauty shows that have been marketed over the last decade as matters of choice, upward mobility, success and agency. For,

Girls who had the looks, the intelligence, the right style and confidence realised that it was possible to dream of fame and fortune...the show has become a festival...devoted to the quest of the complete woman.... Over the years the Miss India title has been the glitzy razzmatazz world outside—both nationally and internationally. (Patil 1992)

A very similar process took place with a host of ads celebrating India's 50 years of independence. The legacy of the freedom struggle was appropriated and endowed with a completely new set of meaning. Beauty pageants are presented in a historical continuum with the women's movement. By association therefore the goals of the women's movement and the goals of women participating in the pageants become one. It is not surprising then that protests by women's organisations and right-wing
groups against the Miss Universe pageant held at Bangalore a couple of years ago evoked negative responses. It appeared illogical for the women’s movement, which had been demanding ‘liberation’ of women, to oppose pageants that were actually offering them avenues for unprecedented success and wealth. Even the local *Vasant Kunj Times* (December 1996), one of the neighborhood magazines of the vast new urban middle-class colony where I live, carried an article titled ‘The Miss World Contest: A Missed Opportunity’:

Remember the ecstatic moment when Aishwarya Rai was crowned Miss World 1994—the whole country was proud to see her looking beautiful throughout the event and most of all in the swimsuit competition. Then where did this ecstasy disappear when India decided on hosting the event on November 23? Suddenly the women’s lib activists sleeping from the day of their origin, woke up. They saw this even as the ideal moment to gain world wide publicity and TV coverage. Why don’t these activists protest when a wife is battered badly by her husband? A girl is barred from getting education? When a bride is burnt to death and her parents-in-law acquitted? A woman made to abort her child? Have these people corrected the dresses which their girls wear or the eve-teasing by their own boys or the vulgar films which they all watch? Perhaps not. (p. 10, emphasis mine)

The *Rashtriya Sahara* (December 1996) wrote:

When the big ‘B’ [actor Amitabh Bacchan] took the cudgels [sic] of bringing the biggest beauty show—[the] Miss World Contest—to India desi feminists and the women’s organisations were all out to stop him. This was taken [as] an attack on the Indian culture and even linked to the ‘culture imperialism’ [sic].... [W]omen’s organisations declared the contest a joke with a woman’s body and chastity. These epitome [sic] of [the] bharatiya nari came forward with their claims of indecency and vulgarity attached with the contest. (p. 29)

Further, the report says:

Those supporting it argued that in this era of Bay Watch [sic], Cybersex, feminists the world over are redefining their agendas and are looking at their exploitation as a systemic factor. Hence the cultural invasion represented by the ever-expanding satellite network is certainly less lethal than a beauty contest. Some put it differently, ‘beauty contests may be degrading to the body and soul but the degradation is certainly less obnoxious than sati and rape’. (p. 32, emphasis as in the original)
Bachi Karkaria, a well-known journalist, attacks feminist arguments that 'the deification of glamour makes suckers of women' and says:

There is an authoritarian ring to these arguments because they are made by our appointed liberators and our anointed protectors. One couches its prejudice in the language of liberation, the other in that of morality. But both end up endorsing a stereotype that, in fact, has vanished like yesterday's pimple.... To start with, it's arrogant in the extreme for feminists to insist that empowerment can be measured only against their authorised, approved, ISO-rated parameters. Look at the sleek self-confidence of today's girls. Granted some of it comes from the doors open to them by the lib, but not a little stems from the example of our highly successful beauty queens and models.... Alas, protesting mahila mandals don't further the cause of women; they further male-driven repression.... Yes, the status of women remains a cause for concern. But beauty contests are the least of our problems. Our indignant do-gooders should summon the courage to attack the real demons instead of tilting at the glamour-miles if they want to safeguard their daughters. (Karkaria 1998; emphasis mine)

Objections to women's issues that such organisations appear to be three-fold: that there are more serious issues that women's organisations ought to take up; that beauty pageants are legitimate and viable modes of empowerment; and that women's organisations have no business to be 'appointed liberators' just as others have no business to be 'anointed protectors', thus blurring distinctions between defenders and opponents of patriarchal control. The new self-propelled woman belongs to the wider notion of unfettered selfhood discussed earlier. This I would argue further is antithetical to the concept of organised collective action. Women's movements (and I would think all collective movements) violate the idea of untrammelled selfhood and choice that late capitalism endorses. I would like to extend the argument by suggesting that the rhetoric of the liberalised 'self' coincides with certain recent trends in both Western sociological and feminist theory.

Sociological analyses of the self in production-centred capitalism identified 'discipline, control, "clock time", deferred gratification, and calculative rationality and the related values commonly understood as the Protestant Ethic' (Wearing 1998: viii). In more recent times the 'pursuit of selfhood in such a society has been theorised as equally dependent on the complementary consumption-centred, hedonistic ethic that encourages the pursuit of selfhood through self expression, leisure, consumer goods and pleasure' (ibid.). Trends within feminism project 'leisure' as a 'heteropia', 'a personal space for resistance to domination, a space where there is room for the self to expand beyond what it is told it should be'.
While this formulation of leisure challenges the idea of non-work as leisure, I would argue that in the Indian context possibilities of 'resistance' are undermined as leisure itself is engulfed within the agenda of liberalisation. In practice we have a mockery of liberation where, as Editor of Femina, Sathya Saran, says: 'Now men are grooming themselves, they're turning sensitive to what women expect of them.... Finally the new male gaze has surfaced because the female gaze has surfaced' (Outlook, 9 July 1997).

If organised movements are abhorred for denying choice, women's movements are loathed because they usually breach the normative order, the taken-for-granted reality. This taken-for-granted reality refers to the world of daily life known in common with others and, with others, taken for granted. These 'natural facts of life' are through and through moral facts of life (Garfinkel 1967: 35-37). For a patriarchal society the patriarchal arrangement, norms and behaviours are therefore both natural and moral. The women's movement, by questioning this, can thereby only be unnatural and immoral. Representations of feminism in the print media surveyed are therefore replete with terms like 'unnatural', 'excessive', 'irrational' and 'berserk'. It could be argued that it was only during the 1970s, when a significant new phase of the women's movement came into being, that a distinct 'allergy' attached to feminism grew (Desai as cited in John 1998a: 4). This is perhaps true to the extent that the more radical modes of protest and a more direct attack on patriarchy may have alienated a section that would feel more comfortable with a 'patriarchal' version of women's issues. But even a cursory examination of the Hindu Code Bill debate in the 1950s, the right to vote debates in the 1930s, the Age of Consent Bill debates in the 1890s or the widow remarriage debates in the 1850s, would show that patriarchal resistance to change in the social order is severe and singularly unimaginative.

To return to the broader question of middle-class hostility to organised movements, I would like to claim that India's colonial history of struggles, whether by reformers, nationalists, peasants, workers or women, were seen as part of the larger anti-imperialist struggle and perceived as inherently moral and worthy. Therefore, unlike in the West, in India a formal consensus existed about the legitimacy of oppositional movements and organisations. Concern for the dispossessed formed part of the rhetorics of nationalism and entered the consciousness of independent India's middle class. Liberalisation ushered in the new Indian who disassociates himself or herself from movements unless it is a question of celebrity endorsements of causes. The strength of dominant ideologies is their 'naturalness'. Where advertisements defining how we ought to live appear natural and celebrate choices, a campaign by a women's organisation to oppose this would appear as a violation of choice and a killjoy attack.
This aversion towards the women's movement and its protagonists finds more than an echo in the editorial comments of *New Woman* (October 1999), a popular woman's magazine edited by film star Hema Malini:

There has been so much talk about economic empowerment for women lately. It's a big difficult word, which many of our simple women folk in the interiors would hardly understand, a ubiquitous term in all feminist jargon that is thrown about from Beijing to New York in all women's conferences. (p. 5; emphasis mine)

Another editorial (*New Woman*, February 1999) comments on the case of a woman who had charged the former advocate of Orissa of molestation:

First, her husband deserts her, next she is branded insane, some dismiss her as a publicity monger, and still others gang rape her.... After a studied silence over the issue, it took a gang rape for our women activists to wake up to the issue, barely a month away from International Women's Day. Isn't that a shame?... *On March 8, this year, most Mahila Aghadi leaders will cut ribbons, stage token protests, make speeches laced with new fangled jargon, because it would be politically correct to do so. Post gang-rape, it may now seem 'politically correct' for them to also add Anjana to their agenda.* (p. 5; emphasis mine)

A recent study that had interviewed media personnel found a similar aversion to the women's movement:

Papers are very anti-women organisations. My boss... says that these people are all publicity conscious and like themselves to be photographed. Most... senior people look at these activists as shrill women who keep screaming, and call them devious'. (Bathla 1998: 124–25; emphasis mine)

‘Feminists are rabble rousing, dogmatic, West oriented, not rooted in [the] reality of India, not open-minded, anti-family and pro-divorce’ (ibid.: emphasis mine). Women's mode of campaigning is seen as 'unnecessary... shouting and screaming and jumping over gates'. And:

I found all these women wearing very good saris, all collected together, smoking cigarettes and *discussing women's issues* and holding rallies to get some publicity, that's all. (ibid.: 126; emphasis mine)

Every day water goes, electricity goes and we do not make an issue out of it. So *why on a vague issue like women*?... I do not think these are women's issues and sooner you remove the gender bias... the better. (ibid.: 129; emphasis mine)
I am more keen on how people have been treated by law and society as human beings and not as men and women. In fact society does not need feminism as much as the inter-relation of both men and women into humanism. (ibid.; emphasis mine)

Feminists of ‘choice’ criticise women activists for their ‘self-appointed role as liberators’ and their ‘protest mode’, but not for its ‘Westernness’. The more middle-class opposition, however, is made on grounds of ‘elitism’, ‘Westernness’, ‘cultural rootlessness’, ‘publicity seeking’ and the alleged failure to take up ‘real’ issues. I have argued earlier that concern for the poor was part of the nationalist discourse. Repeated mention of ‘real’ issues can therefore be read as part of a legacy of a society so marked by poverty and despair that any demands other than that of amelioration of poverty may be viewed askance. This, however, would be untrue, for this plea for ‘real’ issues is usually pitted against women’s issues.

Of Traditional and Authentic Feminism

In the representation of ‘feminism as choice’ and ‘corporate feminism’ we discern the more tangible impact of liberalisation. At the other end of the representation, which speaks of ‘a false (Western) against a true (Indian) feminism’, we come upon a mix of attitudes. I have suggested at the very start that I am less sure of offering any one social cause as an explanation for ‘traditional’ feminism. I would like to understand it within a contemporary Indian context, which is informed by many factors: 25 years of a growing women’s movement; a colonial history wherein the women’s question was also articulated as a return to an authentic and ancient tradition of liberated Indian womanhood and not an aberration; and finally the rise of the Hindu right wing, which has accompanied the processes of economic liberalisation. It is important to emphasise that Indian public discourse has been altering dramatically with the onset of economic liberalisation on the one hand and a concomitant process to contain its cultural fallout by a call to return to an authentic/traditional Indian culture. This culture can of course be saved and nurtured within the authentic/traditional patriarchal Hindu family by the Hindu mother and wife. It can certainly be argued that this ideological current of cultural revivalism has always been part of Indian public discourse. And so it has. I would, however, maintain that it is the relative ascendancy, the historical specificity, the emergence of new forms and finally the hegemony of a particular ideological trend at a particular historical moment that need to be identified. The change in public discourse is therefore not that the constituent ideas themselves have radically changed but rather it is the relative placement and endowment of new meanings.
I have contended elsewhere that the three distinct ideological tendencies in the nationalist discourse were liberal, socialist and cultural revivalist (Chaudhuri 1996). At an earlier period the main contest was between the liberal and socialist vision with cultural revivalism playing a more muted and also a benign role. We now have a very clear demise of socialist ideas. Public discourse is dominated by aggressive cultural revivalism and a liberal worldview increasingly underwritten by consumerism, community politics and the assertion of marginalised groups, be it caste, tribe or women. We also have in our public discourse an unprecedented role for the media, an industry that saw rapid growth since the mid-1980s. The increasing prominence of the media, it has been argued, signalled ‘an industrialisation of not only material cultural goods but also of “culture” in general’ (Rajagopal 1994: 1660). The desire to splurge is accompanied by a consumerist celebration of ‘Hindu’ culture. In this vision the ‘women’s movement’ and ‘false feminisms’ are the villains responsible for the erosion of the qualities of traditional Indian womanhood.

Therefore, just as we discern a hedged response articulating fears of a backlash against the ‘extreme’ positions that feminism takes, its Western roots and cultural alienation, we can actually sense a recoiling, a more overt fear that feminism is endangering the family, motherhood and culture. It can well be argued that ‘liberalisation’ is responsible for the growth of an unbridled individualism that alters the parameters within which Indian women have always learnt to behave. We are therefore witnessing a worked-out attempt to redefine simultaneously a more traditional (read family-oriented) and market-friendly ‘feminism’.

Through India’s colonial history an attempt was made to construct a lineage of feminism that was traditionally authentic and derived its roots from an ancient past. Academic feminism and feminist movements may have interrogated the idea of an unsoiled glorious past. But this is one area of ‘expert’ knowledge (see next section) which seems to have passed by the popular media.

The editorial of an issue of Parenting (February 1999) applauds a Supreme Court ruling in favour of women’s empowerment thus:

Women were revered in this country when our ancient civilisations led the world. Writers, thinkers, reformers of this century are again urging the same lost focus—women’s uplift. In fact the contemporary need is to celebrate the Rig Vedic times, who had the choices and reveled in her complete liberation [sic]. A society that respects its women is twice blessed—as nurturer and mother she brings to it a sense of emotional and social well-being. Now with documented assertion of women’s rights and emphasis on the development of the girl-child, we can hope to dream again. (emphasis mine)
The overriding view expressed is that while feminism is an acceptable ideology, some of its inadvertent or deliberate misuse ought to be condemned. This kind of writing is more evident in middle-class women’s magazines, but is also found in English language newspapers. Women’s Era (2 February 1999), which claims that it makes ‘happy homes’, argues that ‘25 years ago, feminism’—which is defined as ‘a change in the traditional role and image of women’—was comparatively well advanced in our country—but only as far as the highest levels of society were concerned’. Today ‘though feminism has spread much further...the emphasis on the upper echelons persists’. But there is still ‘a deeply ingrained male resistance to the granting of parity of women.... Men seem extremely reluctant to change their views about women’ (p. 34). This may be in part because there are too many educated girls who think feminism means freedom to smoke, drink, wear vulgar clothes and indulge in free sex. And in rural areas, centuries-old-men-dominated society does not let modern male egos accept the equality of sexes.

This is wrong. Women have certain functions (such as motherhood) which men cannot perform, and without which the race would perish. Therefore feminism today should mean making women realise they are different from men, but not inferior to them. It should also make men realise that women are better than them in many respects, and hence are an integral and equal segment of society.

This can only be done by constantly exposing the hollowness of anti-feminism in males—gently yet firmly. Mothers can do this during the formative years, wives after marriage and daughters later on. (ibid., emphasis mine)

Modern India has witnessed the ‘metamorphosis of a submissive, oppressed and uneducated Indian woman into an independent and able administrator’. Earlier, ‘the Indian woman’ was looked upon as an epitome of love, patience and endurance, but a ‘frog in the well with little general awareness and personal feelings’. Education ‘played a vital role in bringing about a change in her physical attire and mental attitude’ (ibid.). However,

there are always 2 sides of a coin. The development of [a] questioning attitude has reduced her capability to adjust [to] her surroundings which in turn has been one of the causes of the rise of nuclear families. As a result, many a senior citizen is compelled to lead a lonely life or put up in an old age home. Similarly, children of working mothers also long for her attention and care. Ironically, her confidence and economic independence have only helped her come out of an incompatible matrimony to lead a solitary life. (Women’s Era, 2 January 1999: 38, emphasis mine)
Other articles are more forthright about the male backlash.

Even as women fight gender bias and role stereotyping, men are forming organisational fronts to fight aggressive females. Are we heading for a backlash from men whose efforts to help are being rebuffed by feminists? (TOI, 9 December 1998, emphasis mine)

Talking of the double burden on women, the article points out that the aim of gender is to show that this sort of sexual division of labour is unfair because it puts an unequal burden on women. But

the trouble is that, in order to put this point across, a section of women have gone to [the] extreme. There was even a phase when being a mother and wife was decried. They bashed you on the head with extreme ideas, and came across as man-haters...we were regaled with stories of bobbitisation...and also of women attacking men with knives.... We might dismiss these... as aberrations. But all said and done, they make one distinctly uneasy. It is as though feminism is suddenly going berserk. The shift from passive victim feminism to power feminism is welcome; yes but who is to draw the line between rational and irrational? Obviously women themselves, or the gains made up till now will be wasted. (ibid., emphasis mine)

Warning of backlashes, it contends that ‘the trouble with too much feminism is that it says little of women who routinely harass husbands and children; and, short of rape, perpetuate every sort of torment’ (ibid., emphasis mine). We saw that even self-professed voices of feminism expressed dissociation with women’s movements. With the more cautious views that laud women’s improved status in society and also address the issue of male resistance to change, we find concern for what they term as the ‘other side of the coin’ of feminism. Others are overtly hostile and actually caricature the idea of women’s liberation itself.

Another article sharply attacks ‘warped feminists’ and contrasts them with ‘authentic feminists’. We are told that ‘the Wist [warped feminist] is “bold” and “beautiful”’, but are warned to ‘look out for the guile behind’:

The Wist is really a woman in limbo...that’s exactly how she would want it.... So, she is highly educated.... She has probably refined all her latent skills in expensive polytech institutes. She is hardly independent.... But because her entrepreneurial ventures sometimes work, sometimes bomb, it’s still her dad who foots all her bills.

She does not want the traditional roles of women.... The very idea of having a child is offensive. Why should women sacrifice their figures... their individuality.
Marriage...appeals to our Wists because it can lead to an economic promotion, a lifestyle overhauls...a car, a privately owned apartment, a good business or job and total independence...a Wist will not tolerate imposing [on their] in-laws or their kids.

Their idea of individualism only leads to more questions. The working-woman-Wist will rely more on feminine wiles than actual hard work to make her presence felt.... Is there anything wrong in exploiting femininity to get what you want? No. But our Wists only appear to have a superficial notion of femininity itself. They understand the male of the species as a fundamentally privileged lot, the people in power. They haven’t really questioned that assumption. Hence, they indulge in petty, sexual politics, squabbles that give them an artificial sense of power.

A straight feminist is basically, by contrast, far more in touch with the real implications of female roles. The ability to bear children, to shape young personalities, can also be considered the highest power. The hand that rocks the cradle, as they say, rules the world. The Wist who chooses to have no children for ‘freedom’ may actually be desisting from exercising a rare, natural privilege.

As self-proclaimed feminists, they’ll explain to their husbands how important it is to be occupied. So the artist will hold her art exhibitions, the novelist will write, the hobbyist will start a cottage industry. Against the backdrop of the husband’s titanic income, they’ll shine in their own light.... The availability and affordability of servants actually creates a unique condition for Wist-liberation. (Society, September 1994: 112, emphasis mine)

In contrast, we have the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) high-profile leader Sushma Swaraj, an icon of what a modern Hindu woman ought to be, presenting herself as a role model in a write-up titled ‘Wife, Mother, Politician: A Woman of Our Times’. She says:

I was never discriminated against [for] being a woman and I have never been a victim of intrigues. The party has never denied me anything because I am a woman.... For two years, I took a break when my daughter was born because I did not want to keep an ayah. I have never kept an ayah for my daughter. The complete supervision was done by me and my mother-in-law.... I have breastfed my daughter for one and a half years.... I always feel that if one is dutiful towards the family then they will also support you. When I see the happiness on my devar’s [brother-in-law] face if I give him a gift it fills me with happiness. If I give some thing to my father-in-law, he feels very happy and his age gets lessened by two years. (Bal 1999: 12-13; emphasis mine)
Sushma Swaraj emphasises the fact that she had no obstacles from any quarter—family, community or party—to her success. She in turn has given time, labour and devotion to her family, community and party. Significantly, no mention is made of ‘feminism’ or the women’s movement or of any attempt to link her fortunes with other women.12 

A recurrent feature in many of the writings is an attempt to suggest that there is an acceptance of real feminism. But it is not hard to discern the attitude of cynicism and denunciation of feminism. Derogatory asides are made even when feminism is referred to only in passing. A review of the film Woh Chokri remarks, ‘That both the casualties of the politician’s ambitions in the film happen to be women is purely chance. The director has gone on record to say that he is no feminist (nobody is any longer)’ (TOI, 20 October 1994).13 Women’s Era (2 January 1999) carries a story recalling how ‘during the 60s, there were several lovelorn students in our college but they did not have the courage to have a love affair openly’ (p. 48), but ‘now some decades later, the love scenario of the college campus has undergone dramatic changes’ with ‘permissiveness in sex relationships, women’s liberation and also the (bad) influence of candid, sex-oriented films and TV programmes’ (ibid., emphasis mine). A story entitled ‘Other Side of the Coin’ narrates the frolics of ‘wives’ and ‘kitty parties’, and recounts how one such woman was initially taken in but ‘finally she comes to realise that women’s lib has been thoroughly misinterpreted by the modern woman. Aj ki nari, kitty party mein bhagidaari’ (today’s woman, holders in ‘kitty parties’) (ibid.: 49, emphasis mine). Yet another article entitled ‘Emergence of a New Khalnayika’ (anti-heroine) decries the interference of the girl’s mother in her married life and blames both women’s organisations and the media for the ‘direct onslaught on the very basis and foundations of this hitherto sacrosanct relationship: that of the husband and wife (Women’s Era, 1 August 1994). 

How Feminist Ideas have Travelled 

A premise that informs this paper is that ideas of feminism have entered public discourse, but ‘ideas’ and ‘concepts’ tend to change their meaning and emphasis as they travel. Academic and/or expert discourses of all kinds do filter into popular discourse14 and the popular also influences the academic.15 Both feminism of choice and traditional feminism are replete with such instances. This was evident also in a mix of writings: reportage of new lifestyle, which were informed by more gender-equitable concepts of marriage, parenting and work; frequent invocation of ‘feminist expert knowledge’ and caricatured depictions of feminists.

The significance of lifestyles in late modernity reflects itself in a growing genre of writings about changes in notions of marriage, family and
parenting. With voluntary childlessness emerging as a reality, Pinki Virani investigates the alternative family pattern. She finds that there is a growing acceptance that maternal instincts do not come naturally to women. Citing experts, the report argues: ‘Childless women don’t feel motherly because there is no such thing as maternal pangs and...nature initiates the maternal instinct only post-pregnancy in a woman so that the offspring is instinctively looked after’ (Virani 1998). ‘A Father’s Touch’ suggests different ways fathers get involved in parenting and discusses how ‘gender myths’ can be ‘destroyed’ (Parenting, February 1999: 78–79). ‘Men Behaving Broodily’ reports on how ‘males succumb to...nesting urges’ as ‘today’s females choose to put careers first’ (Gladrags 1999: 122).16

On occasion all three trends (lifestyle, expert knowledge and caricature) would coexist. An instance of this is a debate on ‘women bosses’. The critical male view states that ‘male bosses have schedules and goals by which their competence can be judged’, but ‘female bosses have an additional agenda-propagating the ideology of feminism in management’. The female boss ‘has a designer chip on her shoulder.... If she fails in her task, it was a male conspiracy that did her in. It’s win–win situation (The Sunday Times of India, 7 February 1999):

Female bosses have two excuses for their bouts of bad behaviour—their body and their mind. Their body—which makes them females and feminists—is [a] hindrance, they claim. (ibid., emphasis mine)

Labelling women bosses as ‘among the most graceless creatures in nature’ the article goes on to say:

A feminist can succeed only if she becomes a pseudo-male. That’s hilarious. I love it. The ancient Amazon warriors must have given some such justification when they cut off one breast, so that they could hold a bow and arrow comfortably.

Female bosses are like ideological or religious fanatics.... Managing has little to do with the sex of the boss, except in bordellos where a feminine touch is necessary. (ibid., emphasis mine)

The defence, written by a woman ‘boss’, anticipates a response where a woman boss conjures images of ‘a command-spewing dragon’, a ‘woman with a cigarette holder dangling between her lips’, ‘a feminist flag-raiser’. She argues that since in ‘a male-dominated world, they constantly have to apply their emotional faculties to succeed’, and this ‘makes them more stress friendly than men’.

The so-called pinstriped wearing gruff chairman, presiding over an industrial empire may never have to stretch himself emotionally. For, at home he goes back to a pampered and cushioned existence. While the
woman boss who hardly wears the pants at home, and sits gently on a swivel executive chair, might have survived a day of no-gas, sick child, errant domestic, and a major deadline! (ibid., emphasis mine)

The woman writer who happens to be the editor of Verve magazine invokes a feminist analysis of the public and private split. The male columnist brings the biological cycles of female bosses centrestage. Feminism is posited an unnatural, ridiculous and fanatic ideology. The passing reference to Amazonian women cutting off one breast is a particularly powerful deployment of an image of feminists that sticks long after the article ends. Contrast that with the alternative image of the woman boss who has ‘survived a day of no-gas, sick child, errant domestic, and a major deadline!’

An article by Visa Ravindran (1999), ‘The Two Sides of Femininity’, explores why ‘successful women in public life are branded aggressive’ and answers by saying that ‘research says that masculinity and femininity are not a matter of social conditioning but biology’. She quotes, among others, Betty Friedan, who says, ‘It is not easy for a woman to transcend or question the masculinism of a powerful, successful male institution. The first woman there will necessarily try to succeed according to the male model.’ In an interview with the New Femininity group (available on the web) one woman says:

We have special qualities that belong to us as women, and we do not intend to suppress those special qualities in the rat race for equality with men. We think the world would be a much poorer place without femininity, and we are worried that the world is going that way. (Ravindran 1999, emphasis mine)

 Approvingly, Ravindran observes:

This warning not to discard the feminine values in the name of a false equality was sounded by a clinical psychologist who considers the break-up of the modern family one of the sad outcomes of the race to achieve this false equality. It must be pointed out here that encouraging feminine values in a world getting overly masculine would bring a better balance and replace the masculine with the feminine. It would in addition remove the unnecessary pressures of having to compete in a man’s world in his own manner, stifling the more natural ‘other voice’. (ibid., emphasis mine)

A letter talking of ‘women’s power’ articulates the same point:

Women have every right to choose the profession they want to pursue and their enthusiasm cannot be undermined. Yet, besides displaying an
interest in such jobs, one wonders if another reason that eggs them on is simply to prove that they are on par with men. (Savoy, October 1998: 12, emphasis mine)

The theme that women are 'equal but different' is a recurrent one. It has been argued that 'while the logic of aggression that governs the market including media cannot be wished away', 'there's no denying that the female agenda is reconciliation rather than conflict, for when men swagger into battle, it is the women who die' (Karkaria 1999, emphasis mine). An article titled 'Gender Talk' mentions that 'involvement is a quality which men could learn from us, women' (New Woman, May 1999: 42). Yet another titled 'Politics: Women's Domain?' champions the participation of women in politics as 'this profession suits women eminently because they are nurturers by nature' and 'this work is part time and endowed with a definite purpose' (ibid.: 26, emphasis mine). On International Women's Day the TOI asked six 'high profile men why they'd like to be a woman'. The men reaffirmed that 'women have many innate qualities like endurance, determination, resilience and the capacity to give more love than they receive'. Women's 'strength lies in softness' (The Sunday Times of India, 8 March 1998).

Liberal feminist ideas of equality have been counterposed to radical feminist ideas of 'difference'. Significantly, this appears to be more acceptable to both feminists of choice and traditional feminists. The reason for this is the double-edgedness of the concept itself. The tendency to gloss over 'difference' has been a problem in feminist thought that cannot be easily dismissed. But radical feminist assumptions of essential differences between women and men, and their call for separate women's spaces and communities, are equally problematic. They imply a return to an ontological explanation of human differences, introducing a tyranny of biological destiny historically used to circumscribe women's place in society. Not surprisingly then, traditional feminists read in it an affirmation of traditional gender division of labour, while corporate sector feminists celebrate 'feminine' qualities of caring and sharing that have been traditionally marginalised in patriarchal societies. Feminist philosophers and historians have pointed to the historical specificity of the idea that men are political and rational, while women are more personal, emotional and inclined to nurture. Landes (1988) locates the origin of these ideas in the work of Rousseau, Montesquieu and other philosophers of the French Revolution, who inspired Republicans to banish women to the home and called men to their supposedly natural fulfilment in the world of politics. Thus, it could be argued that not only had the French Revolution banished women to the family, it also succeeded in imprisoning feminist theory and politics in its philosophical framework (van Zoonen: 1991).
I would go further to argue that management theory itself is deploying ideas about women's 'emotional' nature for its own purpose. Part of corporate sector's familiarity with feminist ideas generally, I suggest, is mediated by management literature. The West has seen (as India is seeing) an unprecedented growth of the service sector, which is characterised by a very large female workforce. In this changed context service sector employers have been not only recognising but privileging 'emotional labour'. In a way it means the acknowledgement of values traditionally associated with women but marginalised in a patriarchal culture defined by other skills. 'Feeling management, as part of the valorisation process, is a predominant aspect of the new service sector workplace' (Taylor 1996: 84). Total Quality Management (TQM), one widespread form of service organisational restructuring mechanism, argues that it 'empowers' employees to employ emotional autonomy during interaction with customers. Studies have shown that the management has devised intrusive supervisory and evaluative systems, which attempt to prescribe this 'natural' manner in line with perceived customer expectations (ibid.).

Occasionally an article can be more unabashed about power, arguing that powerful women are like powerful men. 'Difference' in such cases is clearly set aside. 'The Phenomenon of the Younger Man' in Elle (October 1999) narrates how 'the younger man is increasingly becoming the perfect accessory for powerful, older women'. And how 'it isn't a whatever-guys-can-do-we-can-do-better game but a question of choice, and whether one exercises it with freedom and a complete lack of self-consciousness'. While most of the stories covered are drawn from the West, we have a specific entry for India:

Feminist writer Sonal Shukla points out that the younger man, in a more basic version, has always existed in India. 'In certain villages in North India it was a common practice for a younger brother to marry the wife of his brother, if his brother died. The age gap between the two could very often be quite a bit.' She believes that what is happening in cities is only a more globalised version of the same phenomenon. 'But let's not forget it's also a power-thing. Just as younger women would look towards an older man for security and patronage, a younger man would do the same with a woman in power.' (ibid., emphasis mine)

This invocation of a 'feminist' writer is disconcerting. The oppressive nature of levirate practices is well known (Chowdhry 1994: 12). Academic discourses therefore do filter down, but often in a quite unanticipated manner.

While acknowledging that there is no one pure definition of 'feminism', and also that it is to the credit of the women's movement that many demands once thought of as feminist are no longer considered so, I do
not think distinguishing between feminisms and anti-feminisms is too difficult a task. While feminism of choice does offer new spaces for some women, its attempts to disassociate itself from the women's movement in particular, and democratic movements in general foreclose any collective possibilities. 'Traditional feminism', while seeking legitimacy in invoking 'tradition and 'history', also prefers to render invisible India's history of women's struggles and progressive movements. I contend therefore that the affirmation of feminism evident in what is clearly anti-feminist writings in the media could perhaps be explained by the apparent 'national consensus' that exists about commitment to women's equality. Such a formal avowal of commitment to a principle while substantively reworking the principle itself is a strategy that the Bharatiya Janata Party has used very successfully with the concept of secularism. The coining of the term 'pseudo-secularism' rendered the secular project itself suspect. Few would disagree with the proposition that 'secularism' can be interpreted in either of two ways: the state's non-interference in religious matters or equal treatment of all religions. But this does not mean that ideological hegemony of the majority religion seems self evident. And yet such a successful displacement has taken place. I fear that denigration of the collective feminist enterprise and hostility towards the women's movement in a language of 'authentic' feminism may lead us on to similar path. As Winch puts it: 'The world is for us what is presented through ... concepts. This is not to say our concepts may not change; but when they do our concept of the world has changed too' (Winch 1958: 15).

Notes

1. The media has had no mean role to play in bringing about the stream of legislations, a new sense of judicial, prosecutorial and police accountability, and an increased demand for preventive and support services.

2. Both Faludi and Walby have shown that one of the features of the contemporary backlash is that it works by reversal. The feminist movement is blamed for the problems of women's lives rather than considered a potential solution. Instances of this are common in the Indian media, too, as are strategies of ridicule, trivialisation and demonisation. But what cannot be overstressed is the specificity of our history—the legacy of colonialism, our difficult relationship with the West, the concerns of Indian women's and national movements, and more recently the rise of Hindutva forces coupled with economic liberalisation—which shape the nature of the backlash.

3. According to the Indian Readership Survey conducted between July 1997 and June 1998 by the Media Research Users Council in collaboration with ORG-MARG, only 6.6 per cent of readers accessed English publications (The Hindu, 19 October 1998).

4. An ad in the Brand Equity supplement of The Economic Times (sister publication of TOI) reads: '[We] hate to admit it, but there's hardly any difference between The Hindustan Times and The Times of India'. A graph of comparative circulation figures accompanies the text, which reads further: 'Not editorially, of course. What we are talking about are the numbers': 546,212 copies in circulation. In 1993 the TOI figures were 171,079 as compared to HT at 343,763.
5. *The Hindu* (12 November 1999) has an ad depicting a young male executive saying: 'My days are so packed that there's no time for shopping. This is where living-room-shopping comes handy. Through the pages of my newspaper, laptop, microwave or the stereo system. I first found them in the columns of *The Hindu*, before seeing them on the showroom shelves. So if you can't buy time, I suggest you buy *The Hindu*. It's a one-stop-shop for news and information.' According to the NRS 1997 findings, people with higher purchasing power have found a popular showroom. So have advertisers. A showroom that opens at sunrise.

6. For instance, well-known socialite and columnist Shobha De has a weekly column, ‘The Sexes’ in the magazine *The Week*. A typical column would be: 'Be Smart and Shut up à la Hillary Clinton' (De 1999).

7. For extensive discussion, see John (1998b).


9. Interestingly, Madhu Kishwar’s (1990) argument of why she is not a feminist articulates similar issues.

10. For a detailed discussion of the transformation of India’s post-liberalised Indian middle class, see Deshpande (1997).

11. This understanding expressed itself in the recent controversy about the Congress (I) president Sonia Gandhi’s foreign origin, when the Shankaracharya of Prayagpeeth argued that ‘Sonia is as pure as Sita in the Ramayana and the BJP was committing a grave sin by raising doubts on her being Indian’. Quoting an instance from the epics he said, ‘Those who had disrespected women in history, like Ravana, Kansa and Duryodhana, have had to pay dearly for their sins’ (*The Hindu*, 15 September 1999).

12. In the last Parliamentary elections (1999) Swaraj contested against Sonia Gandhi on the basis of the slogan desi vs. videshi (national vs. foreign).

13. The declaration of a premature demise of feminism and the women’s movement has been a recurring theme in the West. See Rhode (1995).

14. By way of examples, genetics, psychoanalysis and feminism.

15. This paper itself can be read as such, and is a good example of the over-determination of academic and popular discourse.

16. *Gladrags*, run by Maureen Wadia, wife of a leading industrialist and herself a well-known socialite, also conducts a very high-profile ‘Man Hunt’.

17. *Ascent*, a supplement of the *TOI*, which advertises jobs, often carries features reflecting this. A feature on ‘a brave new world’ thus claims that companies of the 21st century will have to offer more progressive policies that will understand key family issues. And prospective employers are warned that the future employee may legitimately ask questions about ‘how women progressed in the company and what care the company had for them’ (*TOI*, 16 August 1995).

18. For instance, equal wages in the West (Walby 1997: 163). Walby also makes the interesting point that there are women who say ‘I am not a feminist but’ and then say and do things usually identified with feminists. So feminism is not dead even if the word is not used in some quarters.

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