

The Third Wave of Feminism in India: A Disruption of Family Values and Marriages

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Abstract: The third wave of feminism in India has introduced significant ideological shifts that challenge traditional family values and marriage structures. Influenced by Western individualism, Bollywood cinema, legal frameworks like domestic violence laws, political activism, and ideological movements such as wokeism and modernization, this wave of feminism has sparked intense debates on gender roles and social stability. Bollywood movies such as "Pink" (2016) ; "Thappad" (2020) and "Mrs." (2025) have played a crucial role in reshaping perceptions of marriage, often portraying it as an oppressive institution. Additionally, the misuse of domestic violence laws, particularly Section 498A, has led to false accusations, wrongful arrests, and growing fears among men regarding marriage. Political figures like Renuka Chowdhury have played a key role in enacting stringent gender-based laws that have often prioritized punitive measures over reconciliation. Cases such as the Atul Subhash incident further highlight the gender biases embedded within legal structures, emphasizing the need for balanced judicial reforms. Wokeism, with its emphasis on extreme inclusivity and identity politics, has contributed to the rejection of traditional gender roles and the increasing alienation between men and women. The rise of modern feminist narratives, coupled with the influence of Christian theological thought, has led to the adoption of Western ideals of personal freedom over collective familial duty. This has resulted in a decline of joint family structures and an increase in divorce rates, reflecting the cultural transformation underway. While feminism is essential for ensuring gender justice, its current trajectory risks dismantling the core values that have historically sustained Indian society. A more nuanced and culturally rooted approach to gender equality is necessary to preserve the integrity of marriage and family life while promoting genuine empowerment for women.

Keywords: Third wave, Feminism, disruption of family values, Bollywood influence, wokeism, modernization, Christian thoughts.

INTRODUCTION

The third wave of feminism in India has been marked by radical shifts in gender discourse, heavily influenced by Western ideals of individualism and modern feminist thought (Patel, A., 2019). While feminism initially emerged as a movement to secure fundamental rights and equality for women, its latest iteration has increasingly been associated with disrupting traditional family values and marriage structures (Rao, N., 2023). This shift has been significantly influenced by Bollywood movies, legal frameworks such as domestic violence laws, political figures like Renuka Chowdhury, high-profile cases like the Atul Subhash case, and ideological trends such as wokeism, modernization, and Christian thoughts (Chatterjee, R. 2024). The intersection of these factors has played a substantial role in reshaping the social fabric of India, often at the expense of its deeply rooted traditions.

Bollywood's Influence: The Glorification of Individualism and Rebellion

Bollywood has always been a powerful medium for shaping public consciousness, and in recent decades, it has become a significant driver of feminist narratives. The portrayal of strong, independent female protagonists has evolved from stories of resilience and empowerment to ones that often depict traditional marriage and familial roles as oppressive institutions. Films like "Pink" (2016); "Thappad" (2020) and "Mrs." (2025) exemplify this shift by presenting narratives where women are encouraged to break free from marriage and family in the name of self-respect and individualism. While advocating for women's rights is crucial, these movies often depict men and traditional family structures as inherently exploitative, reinforcing a one-sided victim-oppressor dichotomy¹¹.

The romanticization of single motherhood, divorce, and the rejection of traditional gender roles has become a recurring theme in many contemporary Bollywood productions (Singh, M., 2024). This cultural messaging subtly conditions women to prioritize personal ambition over familial bonds, leading to increased marital discord and a decline in stable family units. The narrative that prioritizing one's happiness is superior to familial duty erodes the very foundation upon which Indian society has thrived for centuries¹⁶.

Domestic Violence Laws: A Legal Framework Enabling Misuse

The enactment of laws such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) in 2005 was intended to provide necessary protection for women facing abuse. However, these laws have been increasingly criticized for being weaponized against men in marital disputes (Mohanty, S., 2009). The broad definitions of domestic violence, which include emotional and economic abuse, have allowed for subjective interpretations that often favor women in legal proceedings (Dube, L., 2018).

Many cases have emerged where women have used these laws to file false cases of domestic abuse to gain leverage in divorce settlements or to harass their in-laws¹⁵. The misuse of Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, which deals with cruelty by husbands or their relatives, has led to wrongful arrests and the breakdown of many marriages (Jaiswal, P., 2024). The Supreme Court of India has acknowledged the misuse of these laws, yet corrective measures remain largely inadequate. This legal landscape, rather than fostering genuine gender justice, has contributed to an environment where men are increasingly wary of marriage, fearing legal entanglements that could ruin their lives (Sharma, P. & Banerjee, A., 2023).

Renuka Chowdhury's Role in Shaping Radical Feminism

Former Union Minister Renuka Chowdhury has been a vocal proponent of stringent legal measures for women's rights. Her advocacy has been instrumental in pushing forward laws that prioritize women's grievances, sometimes at the cost of due process. She has been one of the key figures in reinforcing the idea that Indian women are perpetually oppressed by patriarchy, often promoting narratives that do not

consider the complexities of marital relationship (Verma, K., 2016). Her public speeches and legislative initiatives have contributed to the perception that men are the default aggressors in any domestic dispute. This has led to policy decisions that prioritize punitive measures over reconciliation, thus furthering the fragmentation of Indian family structures. Instead of fostering dialogue and mutual understanding, this brand of feminism promotes a rigid binary of victimhood and villainy, where traditional family dynamics are cast as regressive and in need of dismantling¹⁷.

The Atul Subhash Case: A Landmark in Gender Bias in Law

The case of Atul Subhash, a young man who was falsely accused of domestic violence¹⁴, is a glaring example of how feminist legal frameworks have been misused. Despite evidence proving his innocence, he endured legal harassment, societal alienation, and emotional trauma. His case highlights the vulnerability of men in a system where the presumption of guilt often rests solely on gender.

The media coverage of his ordeal sparked debates on the misuse of gender-specific laws, but feminist groups dismissed concerns by reiterating that the number of false cases is negligible compared to genuine cases. However, even a single instance of legal misuse indicates systemic flaws that warrant scrutiny (Jaiswal, P., 2024). The Atul Subhash case is a testament to the fact that laws meant to protect can also be wielded as weapons, further discouraging men from entering into marriages and undermining the stability of Indian families.

Wokeism and the Rejection of Traditional Values

The rise of wokeism—a socio-political movement advocating extreme inclusivity and identity politics—has played a significant role in shaping the third wave of feminism in India. Woke ideology promotes individual self-expression at the expense of collective well-being, leading to a rejection of traditional gender roles and familial responsibilities¹³.

Concepts such as "toxic masculinity" and "patriarchal oppression" have become mainstream discourse, often vilifying traditional male roles in family structures. This has led to increasing alienation between men and women, with many opting for singlehood over the perceived burdens of marriage. The emphasis on

personal freedom without accountability to family or society has resulted in weakened family bonds and a rise in broken homes.

Modernization and Christian Thoughts in Feminist Discourse

Modernization, coupled with Christian theological influences, has also contributed to the shift in feminist discourse. The Christian model of marriage, which often emphasizes individual spiritual journeys over collective familial duty, contrasts sharply with the Hindu conception of marriage as a sacred duty (dharma). The Western emphasis on romantic love, personal space, and individual fulfilment over familial obligations has gradually infiltrated Indian feminist thought, leading to a preference for nuclear family structures over joint families and an increase in divorce rates (Sharma, P. & Banerjee, A., 2023).

Christian missionary-led NGOs have played a subtle but influential role in reshaping gender narratives in India. Many such organizations promote the idea that traditional Hindu customs are inherently oppressive to women, advocating for Western models of empowerment (Sharma, V., 2021). This ideological shift has further estranged young Indian women from their cultural heritage, fostering resentment towards traditional familial roles and promoting individualistic aspirations that often clash with Indian societal norms¹².

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF INDIAN FAMILY STRUCTURES

The third wave of feminism in India, heavily influenced by Bollywood, legal structures, political activism, wokeism, modernization, and Christian ideological thought, has undeniably reshaped societal expectations of gender roles and marriage. While women's empowerment is a necessary and laudable goal, its current trajectory risks dismantling the very foundation of Indian society—the family.

The increasing prevalence of divorce, delayed marriages, and single parenthood are clear indicators of the unintended consequences of radical feminist policies. While advocating for gender justice is essential, it must be done with an awareness of India's unique cultural and social fabric. A more balanced approach that fosters dialogue, mutual respect, and the strengthening of family bonds rather than their

dissolution is imperative to preserve the sanctity of marriage and family in India. The challenge ahead is to reclaim feminism as a movement for true equality rather than an instrument for social fragmentation.

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