

Key concepts

- Historically Hindu culture has been patriarchal, meaning that the men hold primary power and predominate in roles. Within the Laws of Manu in 300CE, it states that women do not need to have money as their father will support them, and once a woman is married her husband will support her. However, this idea is being rejected as a result of the economic changes within Britain and India. Indian culture has provided many rights for women over the last two centuries, however, they are not always followed.
- Males within the top 3 varnas holds the main dharmic duties. They have to follow both their Varna Dharma and Ashrama Dharma. It is the men that fulfil all the Samskaras (rites of passage) and especially the last stage of the Antyesti (funeral) customs.
- Women are expected to marry; they have a religious duty to have a family, preferably sons and they are required to support their husbands in the performance of his Varna Dharma. As a wife, the Hindu woman was expected to live up to the ideals of the Stri Dharma, the duties of the good wife; they are required to bring up the children to understand their dharma and religious duties.
- Indira Gandhi was a role model to the women of India that they did not have to follow the traditional norms of Hinduism, by staying at home, caring for their husband and proving that they can be independent of men and work just as well, if not better than the men in parliament. However, not everyone favoured her in such a positive light.
- Contemporary feminist groups are fighting against the patriarchy that is still seen in India and the abuse that women see daily.
- One of these contemporary feminists is Madhu Kishwar, an Indian academic writer and a professor in Delhi. She has written many books on freedom and independence of women and has published many articles that fight for women's rights.
- Feminism has gained both positive and negative reaction in India and the UK. Hindu male reactions vary. Most Hindu males have ignored the ideals of equal roles of women and adhere to patriarchal values. However, with the rise of second and third generation Hindus who immigrated to Britain, they are moving towards more liberal ideals.

Key quotes

- "Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence."* **Laws of Manu (Manusmriti) 9,3.**
- "women in the Hinduism are the true gatekeepers of dharma and culture."* **Dr Amrutur V. Srinivasan: 'Hinduism for Dummies', John Wiley and Sons, (2011).**
- "Someday I am going to lead my people to freedom just as Joan of Arc did!"* **Norman, D. Indira Gandhi: Letters to an American Friend, 1950-1984, (1985).**
- "I am in no sense a feminist, but I believe in women being able to do everything...Given the opportunity to develop, capable Indian women have come to the top at once."* **Norman, D. Indira Gandhi: Letters to an American Friend, 1950-1984, (1985).**
- "Several Hindu communities in Britain tend to foster patriarchal values, and these impose considerable constraints on the behaviour patterns and social activities of their womenfolk."* **Warrier, Maya, 'Faith Guides for Higher Education, A Guide to Hinduism', Alden Group Limited, (2006).**

Key words

Ashrama Dharma	Indira Gandhi	Stri dharma	norms	varna
Madhu Kishwar	Varna Dharma	Laws of Manu	dharmic	culture
patriarchal	rights	feminist	liberal	roles

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some argue that feminism has always been a part of Hinduism.

Others would argue that it is a modern concept.

Some would argue that there is a difference between feminism and the role of women in Hinduism.

Key questions

How have the roles of men and women changed in Hinduism?

To what extent is feminism an issue in Hinduism today?

To what extent was Indira Gandhi a successful role model for Hindu women?