

FEMINISM : A POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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INTRODUCTION:

Women across the world have been historically oppressed, discriminated, subordinated under the garb of Patriarchy. It has resulted into Exploitation of women, Gendered Division of Labour, Crimes against women, limited participation in Public sphere that further strengthened the System of patriarchy. History -or 'His-Story' as some Feminists describe it -is that of men and their doings. Very few women appear on of 'great people' . Globally only about 30% of women are leaders. At the current rate, it will take 134 years to reach full gender parity globally far beyond the 2030 SDG target. (Global Gender Gap Index 2024)

The voice of protest against this patriarchal set up raised by Feminism – a Meta ideology. Although concerns about the condition of women have been traced to medieval times, or even classical antiquity, it makes more sense to begin with the end of eighteenth century and the French revolution. The enlightenment and revolution influenced women in France and elsewhere in Europe with prospect of liberty and equality. It's marked the 'First wave of Feminism'. A radically new the 'Second wave' occurred, inspired by the writings of Simone de Beauvoir etc. 1990s marked the 'third wave of Feminism'.

In 21st century there's no straightforward definition of Feminism. Feminism is a women basis socio politic movement and ideology, and supports the idea "*Women should share equally in society's opportunities and scarce resources*" (Delaney 2005) .The Feminism is an ideology with a difference. There are sharp, even bitter, divisions within feminism on its aims, goals, methods, theories and inspirations. Four major strands of Feminist thinking can be identified: Liberal, socialist, radical and post Feminism explains and suggests directions for the change in social and environmental factors; tries to highlight the interventions for evaluating social and environmental experience of groups and individuals, regardless of sex or gender . It has changed the lives of millions of women.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To understand basic tenets of Feminism and investigate the categories.
2. To Eliminate women oppression and strive towards Women empowerment.
3. To establish a society based on Gender Equality and equity.
4. To analyze Feminist Theory of International Relations.

FEMINISM:

The Feminism is a diverse, rival and often opposing collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies. From ancient times, human took attempts for establishing gender equality in the ancient society. A Greek Philosopher Plato, revealed that women possess, "Natural capacities" equal to men. He Relieved women of their House hold , child rearing responsibilities (Theory of Communism) and talking about 'philosopher Queen'.

Feminism believes that women and men are not different in Natural Rank. Women are strong Intellectually and emotionally. They are rational as like men. Hence women are not complementary to men. It supports a broader struggle for women to make their own decisions related to their bodies financial independence, freedom to choice their lives and sexual choices and

liberation from all types of oppression. As we know there are various categories of feminism, each category tries to describe Women's oppression, explain cause – consequences and suggest strategies for women's liberation.

1. LIBERAL FEMINISM (17th-19th AD)

It is a Feminist Theory that believes gender inequality is created by lowering access for women and girls to civil rights and allocation of social resources such as education and employment. Its origin is traced to Liberal political Theory, inspired by French Revolution. The pioneers of Liberal Feminism are Marry Wollstonecraft, J. S. Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill. Wollstonecraft, A Mother of Feminism, in her Essay: 'Vindication of Rights Of Women' argued that if different education system is imposed on men and women ;then it would be counterproductive and nation would be of Artificial and weak character. She Vindicated equal Education and opportunity to participate in public life to women. J. S. Mill in his 'The Subjection of Women' emphasized that, if women are given opportunity they will excel. He actively campaigned for Legal and political rights for women and reforms in Property laws.

This resulted into Right o vote for women in 1920 in th USA. However, it was criticised as masculine and lack originality as it studied women as an individual and just applied liberal principles. It caught into a dichotomy of personal and political .

2. MARXIST FEMINISM

Marxist Feminism is the philosophical variant of Feminism that incorporate and extend Marxist Theory. It analyses the way women are exploited by capitalism and individual ownership of private property. According to Karl Marx, Capitalist and men are equal beneficiaries of cheap labour of women and Women act as Reserve Army of Labour. For him Domestic work is marginal to capitalism and Revolution against capitalism can vanish gender oppression.

Sheila Rowbatham , a Marxist Feminist, was critical of Marx for neglecting role of house wives in contribution to economy, sexuality and maternity. She highlighted secondary oppression of women with economic, social and political structures related to capitalism. She called for Revolution within Revolution . Further, Peter Custer In her Work 'Capitalism and Women's labour in Asian Economies' explained the Capitalist system's ways to exploit women globally.

3. SOCIALIST FEMINISM

Inspired by Marxism and developed as reaction to Liberal Feminism, the "Socialist Feminism: A Strategy for Women's Movement" was the first publication to use the term. Charles Fourier Was the first Socialist Feminist, who called for Group Marriages and Common parenting. It argued that Economic dependence on male because of uneven distribution of wealth within capitalism is the cause behind subjection of women to male domination. Socialist Feminists criticised Marxist view that class oppression could overcome gender subjugation too.

Socialist Feminists believe that women are exploited by dual system: Capitalist and patriarchal. It analyzes both economic and and gender based oppressions and any one form of oppression is not the key form of oppression, instead it is a combination of a systems related to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, social class and nation that are interlinked. They want social and economic equality and financial independence of women.

Susan Evan maintained that Socialist Feminism lost traction in west due to linking socialism to totalitarianism. Yet, It is two pronged theory that broadened Marxist and Radical Feminism.

4. RADICAL FEMINISM:

IN 1960s its roots were founded by the women who had participated in the civil rights and anti war campaigns. It analyzes all pervasive nature of patriarchy, criticised gender and rejected Essentialism. It believed that patriarchy and sexism are the most fundamental factors in discrimination and oppression of women. Shulamith Firestone in her book ‘The Dialectic of Sex’ stated that Patriarchy is the basic structure of the society and family, marriage perpetuate the patriarchy in the society. Thus need to end sex distinction by ending biological families. Simone de Beauvoir (‘The second Sex’) famously said that “A woman is not born but Made”. Sex is natural and there’s no question of inequality. But Gender is artificial and societal creation of The patriarchy.

Carol Hanisch gave the famous Slogan of Radical Feminism – “Personal is political and political is personal”. It means relations between the sexes are power based and ideologically sustained. Gender based division of labour in personal sphere has created structural barrier to equal participation of women in public sphere.

Radical Feminists also highlights the violence made by men through rape, domestic violence, pornography, prostitution. They believe that women are morally superior to men and patriarchy should be replaced by matriarchy. They want to transform the women life and society through radical actions.

Despite this, Radical Feminism was criticised for Binary understanding of Gender. It is condemned as pessimistic, monolithic that it overlooked the intersection of racism, capitalism, neo liberalism, sexism. It was refused by Post Feminists as too white.

5. POST FEMINISM

The post Feminism emerged in 1980s and also called as The Difference Feminism. It is new Idea of Women Empowerment, autonomy, sexuality factoring in consumerism, multiculturalism, post Colonialism and neo Liberalism. It is essentially Intersectional. It challenged the Radical Feminist’s Binary Gender Rigidity. Gender is rather more fluid (Judith Butler) . It criticised the tendency of seeing women as the victims. It Emphasis to be feminist and femine at the same time. It calls for celebrating feminine traits and Differentiated Citizenship. It sees Sexuality as a Liberating Force and calls for Homosexual Families.

It has evolved through different strands as follow

- Black Feminism –

It is a political struggle to combat oppression faced by any women of color. Black women face different forms of oppression that is racist classist and sexist. Bell Hooks Argued that problems of black women are different than white that must be illuminated by intersectionality. Almost All African Black women have experienced living in a society that devalues them and most of them are victims of much oppressions like child rape, child marriage etc.

- Eco Feminism –

It believes that oppression of women and domination of nature are connected and mutually strengthening. It is the feminist position most explicitly concerned with environmental degradation. Ecofeminist Vandana Shiva opined that women have special connection with environment and they are the worst sufferers of environmental crisis. Chipko Movement in India, Green belt Movement in Kenya are some movements related to eco feminism .

● Post Colonial Feminism-

It incorporates ideas of Indigenous and other third world feminist movements into the mainstream Western Movements. Women are colonized in two fold way by Imperialism and male domination. According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty (‘Under Western Eyes’), Western Feminism should incorporate historical context and cultural Differences within the third world.

FEMINIST THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:

Feminist Theory of International Relations is attempt to provide critique of Mainstream theories of International Relations like Realism, for gender omission. It believes that absence of women in decision making structure is one of the factors for not only violence against women but also recurrent wars in international politics. “Men make war , because war make men”.

J Ann Tickner in her book ‘Gender in International Relations’, gave Six principles as counter to the Six Principles of Classical Realism putforth by Morgenthau.

Masculine view of human nature by Realism but it should be seen through dynamic objectivity .

1. National interest is not solely power maximization but is is multidimensional .
2. Power should be taken as collective empowerment.
3. All political actions have moral significance.
4. Moral elements of human aspirations deescalate tension.
5. Denies validity of autonomy of a political.

Cynthia Enloe (‘Banana , Beachesand Bases’) argued that Personal is International and International is personal. She highlighted the missing women at International level. Feminists challenge the top down view of security and Demand Focus on Human Security.

However, it is at the margins of International Relations. Mainstream scholars rarely debate answering the questions raised by Feminist Scholars. Yet there’s been certain progress. For example UNSC resolution 1325 to maintain gender perspective in all fields and increase women’s role in peace process, Security decision making.

CONCLUSION:

Feminism is aimed at creation of a just Gender neutral society , the protection of freedom and Liberty. At present Women are making progress and excelling in almost all fields . For example, Political leaders like Kamla Harris, Nirmala Sitaraman. Entrepreneurs like Oprah Winfrey, Indra Nooyi.

Yet, the issues like cross-border trafficking, Cyber bullying, sexual Harassment at workplace , feminization of poverty, climate change, Glass ceiling, renewed violence and so on are hindering their development. For example #meetoo Movement, Brutal murder of a trainee doctor at Kolkata etc. Thus, Welfare state should Incorporate Feminist discourse into its policies For Inclusive and sustainable development.

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