

Understanding Feminism in its Entirety

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 20 February 2019

Keywords

Feminism, upliftment, pains and privations, inequality, injustice.

ABSTRACT

The present paper is a sincere endeavor to have a deeper look in the very nature of feminism and how it seems to have been treated differently at the hands of different thinker, critics and writers. Though not a new term to be encountered as it has been there from the days of Chaucer to the present days, feminism kept peeping out and marking its presence in different forms such as women inequality, cruelty on them, doormat treatment, considering them on entity etc. With the passage of times, the focus of feminism continued to creep through various aspects related to women but it boiled down to one thing – the uplifting of women status.

Feminism:

Derived from Latin word “femina” the term feminism means “women” alluding to the belief that women are equal to men socially, economically and politically – the main focus of the term is to advocate the equality of two sexes. In other words, feminism refers to an extent of political movements, ideology and social movements that share a typical goal: to define, set up and accomplish political, economic, personal and social equality of sexes. This includes looking for to set up professional and educational opportunity. The feminism became prevalent from the earlier 20th century for attaining women franchise in the west, Marxist ideology made feminist challenge sexism as well as capitalism. Despite much objection Feminism become much popular during 1800’s and 1900’s. The term ‘Feminist’ arose due to various campaigns carried out for the emancipation of women which were struggle throughout the nineteenth century.

The movements fought through campaigns for women’s suffrage, for gaining education, professional rights, rights to own property and rights to have guardianship of their children for married women. In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* demanded for equal status for women among men in the society and appeared as a powerful attack on the men in western society. The work of John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* in 1869, Margaret Fuller’s *Women in the Nineteenth Century* 1845; Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* in 1929 and Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* in 1949 express radical perspectives of feminist ideologies. Feminism is the ideology which explores the systematic social injustice caused by gender discrimination. It was noted as an organized movement for women’s rights in USA and a Continuous effort was taken for the rights of women’s suffrage by the feminist’s movement. Historically feminism was characterized into different waves. At the beginning of the 19th century in the UK and US, the agency of women was restricted on two different fronts: legal autonomy and the right to vote. Women were considered property of their husbands or fathers in most of the countries. In their own land or contracts they were generally unable to enter; and were legally seen in much the same way children are today. Also, at the time, voting was largely by household, with only

householders able to cast a vote. Hence, although there were comparatively few direct prohibitions on women voting, the restrictions on women owning property kept most of them disenfranchised. Later in the 19th century, when property qualifications for voting were eliminated, women became explicitly excluded from the franchise. Because there were no other waves at the time, first wave feminism did not describe itself as such. In fact, the term feminism was not coined until decades after first wave feminism ended. Second wave feminists retroactively dubbed the suffragettes first wave feminism to clarify their continuity with but divergence from that earlier movement. Hence, the feminists of the first wave set out to extend to women the assertion of Thomas Rains borough during the Putney Debates: “I think it’s clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government.” [Putney] First-wave feminists often joined other social movements, including abolitionism, the temperance movement (the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, for example, was headed for many years by a feminist, Frances Willard), the labour movement, and the anti-war movement in regards to World War I. Some famous feminists from this era are Mary Wollstonecraft, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Alice Paul, Emmeline Pankhurst, Margaret Sanger, and Emma Goldman. Coming off the heels of World War II, the workplace, sexuality, family and reproductive rights are focused in the second wave of feminism.

During a time when the United States was already attempting to reconstitute itself, it was perceived that with the exception of the failure of the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (which has still yet to be passed) women had met their equality goals. With the middle class white women’s problems this time is often dismissed as offensive, outdated and obsessed. Conversely, during the second wave many women were initially part of the Black Civil Rights Movement, Anti Vietnam Movement, Chicano Rights Movement, Asian-American Civil Rights Movements, Gay and Lesbian Movement, fighting for equality. Many of the women supporters of the aforesaid groups felt their voices were not being listened and felt that they first needed to address gender equality

concerns. In order to gain respect in co-ed organizations about these civil issues women cared so much that they wanted to fortify their voices and would be heard for gender equality. Unlike the former movements, due to varying feminist outlooks the term 'feminist' becomes less critically received by the female population. There are the ego-cultural feminists, the radicals, the liberal/reforms, the electoral, academic, eco-feminists...the list goes on. The work done of previous waves of women were prefaced the main issues. The disparities in male and female pay the reproductive rights of women vanquish by continued fight. In our nation as well as abroad work continues to end violence against women. The true understanding and acceptance of the term 'feminism' was discussed in this wave. It should be noted that since the first wave the tremendous progress has been made, but there is still much to be done. It is much harder to put a label on what a feminist looks like due to the range of feminist issues today. Generally improving their status, feminism refers to any ideology that seeks equality in rights for women.

Feminism is rooted in ending men's historical power over women. The ideology is gaining currency throughout the whole world while modern feminist thought is largely rooted in the Western intellectual tradition. In many cases, the feminist goal of equality for women has helped push movements to change the entire way private society is viewed, and in some cases even helped topple authoritarian governments. One of the greatest vindications of feminism is the power women in Liberia showed when, with some assistance from the international community, they ended the civil war and subsequently replaced the chaotic, unabashedly corrupt, and genocidal dictatorship with a reasonably functional democracy. Women were considered property of their husbands or fathers in most of the countries. They were generally unable to enter into contracts or own land, and were legally seen in much the same way children are today. Also, at the time, voting was largely by household, with only householders able to cast a vote.

The women in the East are influenced by the major western feminist trends with different feminist thoughts like liberal, Marxist, socialist, radical, psychoanalytic, existential and post-modern feminism. The concept of feminism was not the same since it changed according to the changing times, hence feministic ideas followed by groups of people according to their socio-cultural, traditional, geographical locality, regional background or any focused reason for the oppression of women.

Liberal feminism argued that men and women are equal a believed that both are capable of producing moral judgment in relation to social and political spheres. Liberal feminism is also affiliated to the category of women's rights feminism and it was originally organized with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792.

Marxist feminism exposed the struggle of women against capitalism. The fundamental idea behind it was the matter of women's liberation with regard to their ability of productive capacity improving the economy of the country capitalists aim to see women as wage laborers. Hence it was over thrown since it exploits the capability of women. Women

had been dwelling in isolation at home. Marxist feminist provided an opportunity to the working class women to set foot in the social domain of production.

Socialist feminism came into existence with the collaboration of Marxist and Radical feminism. Socialist feminists believe that capitalism and the patriarchy are the root cause for the sufferings of women. Few socialist feminists trust that capitalism and patriarchy are almost similar and the others believe that they run parallel to each other subordinating women in different ways. The failure of Marxist feminism is the central sources for the emergence of Radical Feminism.

Feminist focused not only on the abolition of capitalism but also on patriarchy which snatched the absolute freedom of women as daughters, mothers and wives since they do not have command over their bodies. The cultural feminists give importance to the biological state instead of focusing on sex. According to them the conduct and attributes of women (nurturing, caring, emotional) and that is the reason for women and their oppression.

They accept these characteristics as original and ensure that women should be given equal rights because of these attributes. They feel that society can be improved only through the empathetic nature of women which can work with men's logical character. Post-modern feminism: Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristiva were the three writers prominent in the upliftment of post-modern feminism. Post-modern feminism accepts that women are treated as the other in the society and strongly criticize the prevailing patriarchal aspects they even avoid the grand narratives of language exploring the suppression of women and evaluate the way language is masculine centered. Eco-feminism connects ecology and feminism conveying the fact that the society harms nature.

The Eco-feminists believe that there is a link between women and nature and the central goal of the movement is to abolish all types of social injustices and oppressions of subordinate groups like women, poor and children. They concentrate on the fields like spirituality, class struggle, economics, colonization and racism. The problems of women came to debate when the state authorized a survey on the position of women to a group of socialists and researchers.

Conclusion

In recent times in the socialist societies equality of status has been assigned to women, but it is often legal than existential. Women accounting for nearly one half of the human population live in perpetual subordination to the other half the men. The state- that is centralized power- is always patriarchal in nature, so the weaker, marginal, down-trodden people are always as a rule kept weaker, marginalized and down-trodden. And these people are gradually excluded from the power scene and even their primary rights to live are negated. In this system the indigenous people of the country, the tribal, the lower castes, the women are kept necessarily outside the boundaries of power. Women by their sheer numbers can be called the largest minority to be thrown aside and oppressed. In the years after independence there has been no vital change in the situation.

Any progress of the society can be measured by the way its women are treated there. Some of the sure ways to measure the progress of women are considered in terms of their employment, education, health, income and also the role played by them in families, communities and in the society at large. Women have made tremendous progress in the area of agriculture, science and technology; and medicine. Nevertheless, they remain as the most exploited lot in the

world and in India, in particular. It was not so in the earlier days. From a point of potential exclusion and an indication of the second-class existence that an Indian woman is by birth condemned to assume in her life's journey. The woman's compartment—the so called ladies coupé—is a clear example of a gendered spatiality, where woman are sheltered from the outer male world.

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