



## FEMINIST MOVEMENT AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

## Political Science

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## ABSTRACT

Feminism is too important a subject to be ignored in any serious discussion on women's development. Certain issues, which are commonly considered 'Feminism', are among the more salient topics of public discourse. Feminist thought addresses itself to these issues passionately, persuasively and often angrily, and has emerged as the single-most creative and challenging social thought. It is preoccupied exclusively with a whole range of feminist interests at the global level. Contemporary feminist scholars have challenged all dominant social and political thoughts - the celebrated traditional theories based on male dominated knowledge. They have successfully contested all sexist assumptions embodied in the literary texts and social science writings. They have unveiled the fallacies of existing notions about women, showing vividly how are they gender biased, limited and narrow. Simone de Beauvoir's classic work. The second sex (1948) convincingly argues that notions, values and beliefs that characterise women's life all over the world are sexist in character. She argues that the notion of 'feminity is manufactured in society and women are defined and differentiated with reference to man, and not with reference to themselves, and, in consequence. They are considered incidental and inessential. Betty Friedan's work- The Feminine Mysitique (1930) argue that women have always been persuaded to believe that their fulfillment lies in domesticity only. Home becomes women's fortress and their prison, but real power remains in the hands of men. They are the provider, the protector and the master.

## KEYWORDS

Feminism, Women Empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

Feminist exposes the felicity of culturally constructed notions of masculinity and femininity and contest beliefs such as women are passive and submissive by nature. While the feminists concede the naturalness of biological differences, they also say that social and psychological differences between men and women are culturally created/ constructed and acted upon. Feminist doubt the proposition that women despite differences could be equal. They contend that these natural /biological differences are used to reinforce rigid role-status hierarchy. Their argument is that different but equal' is a slogan which does not hold promise unless the power and the authority is equally reallocated. Protagonist of feminism assert that those who propagate the notion of different but equal, would have to sooner or later concede that while women are different in some ways, they are the same in most other ways. Feminists pose the question: who sets standards of behaviour? Men or Women? Obviously men.

A variant of equal but different thesis the complimentary thesis, namely, men and women are different but complimentary to each other. Feminists are not impressed with this thesis. They say that this is more of an ideal than reality. Their view is that complimentary thesis suggests a balance of power, which does not obtain in actuality. Furthermore, the feminists say that religion and myths have made lifetime subordination of women under the veil of culture. Sati is an example of this kind of ethic.

Feminists' research on gender focuses on the cultural processes of gender differentiation and the process by which social power and authority gets expressed through discriminatory allocation of material and social resources. This process concretely disadvantages women and leads to their oppression. Critical feminist research has shown that studies examining the sex differences have resulted in only minor and marginal differences, while they have ignored large areas of sameness across gender.

## Patriarchy in Feminist Thought

Another core theme of feminist thought is patriarchy' Male domination in feminist literature is identified with patriarchy. In sexual politics, Kate Millet named patriarchy as the sole cause of women's powerlessness, in Women in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Power Lessness (1971) Vivian Gornick and Barbara Moran (eds) observed that patriarchy is the cause of women's oppression and is vital to any understanding of women's liberation movement. Feminist treat family as a historically specific institution of patriarchy. Gender relation, Feminists assertions are based on dominance that derives support and sustenance from patriarchy. Patriarchy, they argue, resides at home, the work place and in the public lives of women. Most suffer the burden of patriarchy relations and gender domination, especially in rural areas. Every share of women's lives-their sexuality, fertility,

movement, self-expression and participation in decision-making and politics is controlled by patriarchal society. Most women willy- nilly internalise this patriarchal ideology and silently suffer the oppressive realities of male domination. Patriarchy, the feminist's sum up, is the system of male domination.

## Feminist Perspective on Women's Development

In order to understand the feminist perspective on women's development let us be very clear about one point, namely-there is no such thing as one feminist perspective. There are, in fact, many feminist perspectives. The differences among these perspectives are not mere benign divergencies; the divergencies in fact mark the political differences, which are often conflicting. Traditional Marxist feminist locate women's oppression in their exclusion from public production; the radical feminists locate women's oppression primarily in their sexual procreative capabilities' and socialist feminists hold that gender oppression cannot be accounted for without reference to class oppression. These divergencies are also acknowledged by anthropologists who observe that different societies have different constructs for womanhood. In India, for example, the tribal constructs of womanhood are very different from the urban constructs for womanhood.

While this discussion has hastily explained the different feminist perspectives in reference to the First World, Second World and the Third World Women's perspective has however emerged with equally strong views on the subordination and oppression of women in the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The Third World Feminist Perspective is articulated by postcolonial feminist thinkers who reject the monolithic nature of western feminism on the grounds that

1. It distorts women's multiple realities by projecting Third World women as powerless, backward and vulnerable.
2. It ignores difference, indigenous knowledge and local expertise; and
3. It limits theoretical analysis and reinforces western cultural imperialism.

Chandra Mohanty, Gaytri Spivak, Trinli; Minh-ha, anzaldua and others have argued that three distinctive strategies are present in the western feminist discourses:

1. Essentialist construction of the category of women.
2. Universalistic assumptions of sexist oppression across cultures, and
3. The colonial intentions of western feminist discourse.

The feminist scholars in India have critically looked at the western feminist discourse and have been able to formulate indigenous perspectives on more important issues of women's development. In

their ever-growing number of writings they are focusing on the following:

1. Reconstructing knowledge from the feminist perspective;
2. Representing the reality of women's experiences and establishing the truth of that reality;
3. Contributing to increased awareness of feminist concerns and issues;
4. Providing an ideological framework to the emerging feminist movement.
5. Breaking down the boundaries of social disciplines on women's question;
6. Contributing to the growth of women's studies;
7. Encouraging analytic response to feminist issues and opening up of new areas of feminist research and critique;
8. Recasting social science disciplines from a gender sensitive perspective;
9. Questioning the objectivity and value-neutrality of social sciences on gender issues;
10. Confronting patriarchal myths both at the academic and institutional level;
11. Producing gender-sensitive cadre of social scientists;
12. Inventing arguments to criticize the claims of dominant knowledge on gender issues, femininity and sexuality;
13. Providing alternative vision on gender justice and women's empowerment;
14. Furnishing indigenously generated data and empirical literature on women;
15. Challenging the commonsensical (inherited) understanding of women's questions and trivialization of women's issues;
16. Contributing to mainstreaming of gender perspective in development planning;
17. Removing misconceptions about feminism and women's movement; and
18. Contributing to increased visibility of gender concerns on the agenda of state action. (S.P. Srivastav, 2000)

Feminist thought has made a major impact upon social theory and the social science more generally over the past quarter of a century, so feminist theory is an important subject matter in its own right in social theoretical thinking and with theorising gender".

## CONCLUSION

Feminism has emerged as one of the key contemporary socio political ideology; feminism has not remained as monolithic concept. It has its own fragmentations any how these fragmentations does not symbolise that feminist discourse as different theoretical dimensions which are antithetical to each other, feminism is like an umbrella which has engrossed all the issues pertaining to women. It has steamrolled women's movements but its nature and direction has varied from time to time and place to place changing social dynamics and the dynamics of international order has affected decisively on the nature of feminist thought. Hence, it is essential to examine different theories of feminism.

An appellant of movements in feminism means that calling one's self, a feminist can mean many things. In general members of the following categories of feminism believe in the listed policies; however as with any diverse movement, there are disagreement within each group and overlap between others. This list is meant to illustrate the diversity of feminist thought and belief.

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