Research Paper English

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KEYWORDS

Introduction

The term 'feminism' was derived from the Latin word 'Femina'meaning 'woman' and was first used with regard to the issues ofequality and Women's Rights Movement. Ever since antiquity, therehave been women fighting to free their half of the total population ofthe world from male oppression. Feminism is neither a fad nor alogical extension of the civil rights movement, but the protest againstthe legal, economic and social restrictions on the basic rights ofwomen which have existed throughout history and in all civilizations.Naturally, the principles of feminism have been articulated long ago.

Matter

The definition of the term 'feminism' differs from person toperson. According to the French models of feminism, it implies sexualexpression. If we take into account the British models, all feminists slowly become respectable, or acclaimed into the male world order. Ifwe consider American models, they are more outspoken. ChamanNahal in his article, "Feminism in English Fiction", defines feminismas "a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependencesyndrome. There is a dependence syndrome: whether it is the husbandor the father or the community or whether it is a religious group,ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependencesyndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materialises."1

According to Simone de Beauvoir: "One is not born, but ratherbecomes a woman. Nobiological, psychological or economic fatedetermines the figure that the human femalepresents in society; it is civilization as a wholethat produces this creature, intermediate betweenmale and eunuch, which is described asfeminine".2According to her, women are considered secondary in relation to menfrom the ancient time. It is not necessity of feminine feature but it isthe result of education and social tradition under the control of men.Women's dignity failed but they stand on the same ground ofintellectual and professional equality. This has given rise to socialevils also.Feminism is a movement influenced by the ideas postulated,popularized and precipitated by thinkers and authors like AliceWalker, Naomi Littlebear, Judith Felterbey, Michele Wallace, LillianSmith, Elaine Showalter, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett andothers. It is a modern movement expressing protest against the maledomination. It provides strategies for change.

The aim of feminist is tounderstand women's oppression keeping in mind race, gender, classand sexual preference. Today many people feel that feminism has almost endedbecause it has nearly won the war at most of the fronts by achievingfor women equality with men in all walks of life — political, social, economic etc. But the fact is that the feminist movement is still goingquite strong all over the world with the prospects of getting stronger inthe near future. The origin of violence against women is seen in thesubordination of women in the world. In 'Manusmriti', Manu hasgiven secondary place to women. The same thing is reflected in Islamand Christianity. Great thinkers like Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel,Sartre, Freud and Nietzsche consider women inferior.According to Simone de Beauvoir, "The situation of woman isthat she is a free and autonomous being like all human creatures —nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her toassume the status of the other."3Two of the most important works of contemporary feministtheory — Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex and Mary Daly'sBeyond God the Father derive their ideological premise from thetwentieth-century philosophical movement, existentialism.

This bodyof ideas was itself rooted in the theoretical constructs ofSeveralGerman philosophers: Hegel, Hussel and Heidegger, but had its mostpopular formulation in the works of French thinker Jean-Paul Sartre.The early editions of The Oxford English Dictionary definedfeminism as a state of being feminine or womanly as did the 1901edition of The Dictionary of Philosophy. By 1906, however, theDictionaire de Philosophie defined feminism as a position favourableto the rights of women. The Webster's Dictionary defines the term'feminism' as the principle that women should have political rightsequal to those of men. TorilMoi says, "The words 'feminist' or'feminism' are political labels indicating support for the aims of thenew Woman's Movement which emerged in the late 1960s."4 Simonede Beauvoir writes in The Second Sex, "The terms masculine andfeminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legalpapers."5 Feminism is a philosophy that fights against suchdefinitions of masculine and feminine, and aims at placing women in ajust perspective. The word 'feminism' however, must be understood inits broadest sense as referring to an intense awareness of identity as awoman, and interest in feminine problems. Its meaning should not berestricted to the advocacy of women's rights.

Feminism tends to be thought of as a movement of women, andmany feminists absolutely reject the idea of allowing men into it.However, men can be as strongly opposed to the injustices from whichwomen suffer as women can. Feminism is not concerned with a groupof people it wants to benefit, but with a type of injustice it wants toeliminate, even though on the whole the elimination of that injustice isbeneficial to women than men, yet feminism is not just a movement infavor of women, but it is a movement in support against injustice.TorilMoi has used the term 'post-feminism' to cover thedifferent configurations of feminism and post-modernism presenttoday. Present-day feminist theorists believe that, strictly speaking,feminism is an impossible position. The agonistic definition offeminism sees it as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal andsexist oppression. Such an oppositional definition posits feminism asthe necessary resistance to patriarchal power. Logically then the aimof feminism as an emancipatory theory becomes to abolish itself alongwith its opponent. "In a non-sexist, non-patriarchal society, feminismwill no longer exist."6 Feminism is committed to the struggle forequality for women, an effort to make women become like men.

Butthe struggle for equal rights historically and politicallyemphasizes thevalue of women as they are. The very argument rests precisely on thefact that women are already as valuable as men are. But in thesituation of women's lack of equal rights, this value must be located asdifference, not as equality. Women are of equal human value, whenfeminism represents

the value of women as women, it efficientlycounters the systematic devaluation of women under patriarchy. JuliaKristeva suggests,A third space for feminism to operate — thespace which deconstructs all identity, all binaryoppositions. But again, in deconstructingpatriarchal metaphysics, the risk of deconstructingthe very logic that sustains the two forms of-feminism — of sameness and difference —cannot be avoided. And so the three 'spaces' offeminism are logically and often strategicallyincompatible.The post-modern feminists are wary of definitions of any kind.Alice Jardine states:Who and what, then do we mean by "feminist"?That word...poses some serious problems. Notthat we would want to end up demanding adefinition of what feminism is, and therefore, ofwhat one must do, say, and be, if one is to acquirethe epithet; dictionary meanings are suffocating,to say the least.8Jardine states: "Feminism is generally understood as a movement fromthe point of view of, by and for women."9 She suggests feminism as amovement by women which takes on different and very specific formsin different contexts.

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