



FEMINISM: THE GENDER INEQUALITY

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ABSTRACT

The word feminism is used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issue of gender difference as well as movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaign for women's rights and interest. Women are the integral part of human civilization. No society or nation can ever progress without an active participation of women in its overall progress. It is also correct that the place of women in every society has been differed from culture to culture and age to age although one fact is common in almost all the societies of the world that woman has never been considered the equal of men. Her status largely depends on the simple biological fact that she is the bearer of children whose care is her sole responsibility. Thus her sphere is usually restricted to her familial roles. There was an awareness of the need of improvement in women's condition and the idea to impart education to women was revived. For this purpose, several colleges were opened and many people came forward to identify their values and give them their recognition. But the real face of feminism is yet to come before the society. The paper is an attempt to focus upon the feminism in different aspects.

Key words: feminism, civilization, culture, biological fact, recognition, consciousness.

The word feminism means political, social and economic equality of sexes. Women have been oppressed in all civilization of human history, culture and society that oppression is seen in various forms. It is correct that despite their biological differences men grow up in a culture of toxic masculinity that is not good for men and women. Today, feminism has become of political movement, a social identity and recognition. The feminism is the chronological narrative of the movements and ideologies aimed at equal right for women while feminists around the world have differed in causes, goals and intentions depending on time, culture and country. Feminism involves various movement, theories and philosophies which are concerned with the issue of gender inequality and humanitarian rights. The world history of feminism can be divided into three waves. The first wave was in the 19th and early twentieth century, the second was in 1960s and 1970s and the third extends from the 1990s to the present. Feminist theory emerged from these feminist movements.

Women's Movement refers to a series of political campaign on – reproductive rights, domestic violence, sexual harassment, equal pay etc. This movement was germinated in 14th century in France. Christine de Pizan was the first female author in France to make a living through writing. This movement seemed to begin during the French Revolution since it was a period of a radical and political turmoil in which the lower class demanded their inalienable rights as well as their rights for citizenship. This movement changed the women of France to take the action and fight for their right. One such woman was Olympe de Gouge, a French writer who became famous during the French Revolution for the work 'The Declaration of the Rights of Women and Citizen.' Gouge began the declaration with the statement – "Women is born free and remains equal to men in her rights." Many historians recognize Olympe de Gouge as the founder of the French Feminist Movement.

The Feminist Movement started in the early 19th century in the western world and reached every part of the world till the mid century. It is seen in its full swing with the publication of the book 'The Second Sex' by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949. Feminism in India is a set of movements aimed at defining, establishing and defending equal political economic and, economic and social rights and equal opportunities for Indian women. It is the pursuit of women's rights within the society of India. Despite the progress made by Indian feminist movements, women living in modern India still face many issue of discrimination. India's Patriarchal culture has made the process of gaining land ownership rights and access to education challenging. As in the West, there has been some criticism of feminist movements in India. They have especially been criticised for focussing too much on women, already privileged and neglecting the needs and representation of poorer and lower caste women. This has led to the creation of caste specific feminist organisation and movements.

The History of feminism in India can be also divided into three phases like the world feminism. The first phase begins in the mid 18th century when the male European colonists began to speak out against the social evil of sati. The second phase from 1915 to Indian independence when Gandhi ji incorporated women's movements in to the Quit India Movement and the third phase – Post independence which has focussed on fair treatment of women at home after marriage. Despite the progress made by Indian feminist movement, women living in modern India still face many issues of discrimination. Although it is correct that the place the women in vedic time was very pious in India. Manu, the ancient law giver whose philosophy occupies a significant place in the main stream of Indian Ideology and culture does express some noble sentiments about women-

‘Where females are honoured, there the deities are pleased,

But where they are dishonoured, there all religious acts become fruitless’

One of the most important social movements of the past two hundred years which has affected the most enduring and progressive transformation of human society on globe scale is the feminist movement. Today feminism means many different things to different people but at its core, if one goes back to its origin in the late 18th century it is primarily a social movement for the proper emancipation of women in every field. Earlier this movement was popular as women's rights' for the most past lonely voices pleading against obvious and manifest iniquities in the society treatment of women. Women were restricted in terms of the ownership of property and authority. They did not have full rights over their own body, which meant they had no legal protection against sexual violence. They were discriminated against in the workplace and were considered inferior to men.

With the passage of time women realized their dignity and started to fight for their right and importance. Many women felt that all the relevant battles had been fought and won and it affected only political climate. Increasingly, women recognized that campaigning was limited and women could not make their voices heard directly. The rise of the militant suffragettes and the contribution of a mass of women workers during war time pressurised the government to gain limited suffrage. Women are not weak, timid and submissive. They possess the spirit of creative energy to change the world. They try to uncover those elements of ‘self which had been hidden under the cultural and patriarchal myths of selfhood. They portray their experiences and real life situation through characters specifically created for this purpose. Rashmi Bajaj makes the following statement about the recent works of Indian women writers –

“We have here increased social consciousness, a strong awareness of identity as women, championing of women’s cause, problem of alienation and identity crisis, daring portrayal of sex and emphasis on the study of personal relationships.”

Feminism is an awareness of women’s oppression and exploitation in society and conscious action by both men and women to change the situation. Today, feminists are working towards the upliftment of women and are struggling for the achievements of women’s equality, dignity and freedom of choice. It is an endeavour to control lives of women within and outside their homes. It encounters the systematic devaluation of women. It demands and fights for an adjusted and equitable society without any discrimination of sex. Modern women feel that it is time to assert their individuality as free human beings. They are awakened to face the challenges in order to lead a meaningful and dignified living irrespective of the public opinion. They challenge these problems through their writings. Elaine Showalter writes:- “It was through the women’s Liberation movement that they began to draw connection between our own work and our own lives, to note the disparities between the identification and ambitions that had attracted us, along with thousands of other women, to the study and teaching of literature, and the limited and secondary roles granted to fictional heroines, women writers are female scholars. Feminism involves literary experience with the fierce urgency of revelation or a great awakening.”

India has a tradition of fine women writers and some of the earliest established names among them were also pioneers in fields beyond literature. Roekya Sekhawat Hosssein was a leading Bengali feminist of the 20th century. Cornelia Sorabji was the first woman to study Law at Oxford and British University. Sarojini Naidu, Ritu Menon, Kalmal Bhasin, Nayantara Sahgal, Majnula Padmanabhan, Bulbul Sharma, Vandana Shiva, Arundhati Roy, Salma Urmila Pawar, are some names who are both feminist and social thinkers. They have tried their best to give women a place in the Indian society it is the luck that women are being identified everywhere in Indian society. They have their own identification and recognition in 21st century. They have become equal to men and in some fields they are far superior to men. Much of the early reforms of Indian women were conducted by men. However, they joined in this movement as wife, sister, relative and individual directly affected by this campaign. Women’s participation in the struggle for freedom developed their critical awareness, their role and rights in Independent India. Literary feminism is concerned with the politics of women’s authorship and the representation of women’s condition within literature. Broadly speaking, feminism is a phenomenon of social change and that attempt to make the women literate and get rid of the shackles and grip of the male dominated society, enabling them to claim their right as free human beings. The chief objective of this movement is to improve the status of women and to provide equal opportunity and dignity with men.

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