

SEMESTER-II
Core Course 03 (SOCACOR03T)
Topic-5: Feminist Perspective.

The term *feminism* was derived from the Latin word '*femina*' meaning 'woman' and was first used in connection with the issues of equality and Woman's Rights Movement. Feminism perceives that women suffer from social injustice because of their gender. It attempts to eliminate their sufferings and enable them to achieve the freedom to order their own lives and to be recognized as individuals *per se*. The idea of an egalitarian society must prevail. The dialectics of male dominance and female passivity must be erased. Feminism is a specific kind of discourse: "a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism" (Belsey and Moore 122).

In the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Catherine McKeen describes feminism in its broadest sense, "it refers to any theory which sees the relationship between the sexes as one of inequality, subordination, or oppression, and which aims to identify and remedy the sources of that oppression". Feminism focuses on the values of "equality, self- development, individual achievement, and freedom from restraint on the one hand, and the actual norms of male preference, discriminatory treatment, and restriction of women's development, self-expression, and activity on the other"(Ferree and Hess 172). According to Germaine Greer feminism "straggles not about assimilation but about asserting difference, endowing that difference with dignity and prestige, and insisting on it as a condition of self - definition and self- determination". Therefore, the aim of feminism is to wrench power from the male oppressors and establish an egalitarian society in which sexual difference and sexual hierarchy will no longer exist. *The Columbia Encyclopaedia* defines "feminism" as a: "movement for the political, social, and educational equality of women with men".

The feminist movement occurred in two phases: the first phase appeared with the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Woolstonecraft. She describes how women were incarcerated and how they were incapacitated by the androcentric culture. She had been in revolt all her life against tyranny, against law, against convention. During French Revolution, Rousseau had written a book about the rights of Man and he did not talk about woman's rights. So, Mary Woolstonecraft wrote the book for the excluded members in the society. This phase included *The Declaration of Sentiments of the Seneca Falls Conventions*, which appeared in Europe and the U.S.

The next phase of the movement appeared with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* (1963). This phase shifted the concept of feminism from equality to freedom. Beauvoir argued

against femininity as traditionally constructed and she postulated that women must assert their rights. When this happens, a woman becomes an autonomous; independent being and she is free, active and capable of making her own decisions.

This phase of the feminist movement brought forth thousands and thousands of women to participate in at least one of its groups. There have been mass demonstrations for women's rights. A flood of books has dealt with woman's position in society, and several new feminist magazines have been launched. Various women's groups have arisen, not for political or charitable purpose, but solely to advance the cause of women; to attack special problems of social dependence, discrimination and limited life alternatives that women face because they are women. Therefore, women gathered in groups and raised each other's level of consciousness about sex discrimination by giving personal examples of abuses perpetrated upon them by the opposite sex.

The patriarchal society considered women as imitative, decorative, procreative and destructive. They looked women as an object. The long history of patriarchal theory proved the inferiority of women. The feminists started to argue about the theory, which is impersonal and public, and which is related to male's perspective. Because of the abuse of material support like education and money, women were considered to be dependent. Through emotional and moral values, women were placed in the secondary position. They had no legal and public existences. Men considered themselves to be superior to women because men looked upon themselves as rational beings and women as non - rational. So, the rational must control the non - rational and the order must control the disorder. Through marriage, a woman gets protection from her husband. Men are considered as the abler and stronger persons, so the husbands inherited the property and had authority over wives and children. The person who got the property rights can alone get the public rights. So, the property should be handed over to the husband. The woman, who does not have property rights, has no control over inheritance, and no rights to bring civil suit. So, those men who had rights to participate in the public affairs became citizens and women were excluded from the role of citizens.

(A) Liberal Feminism:

Women who fight for their equality were known as the Liberal feminists. They fought to get economic rights, legal rights, public rights and social rights. "Liberal feminism was organized on the concept of the social contract, individualism, independence, democracy, and equality of opportunity". When the Declaration of Independence was trans-scripted, a new meaning was applied to women. Even though women got the natural rights, their voice in public affair was not recognized. After

marriage women lost all their property rights to their husbands, and women also gave their wages to them. Their husbands became their masters, so their husbands had all the power to deprive women's liberty. Women fought for their rights because they did not receive equal pay. They were also excluded from the professions of theology, medicine and law. They were never allowed the leadership positions in the church.

Women remained enslaved and they were taught by men to strengthen their body and mind to be beautiful and to serve men. Without knowing that they were in the cage they beautified themselves. They were "created to be the toy of man" and whenever men had chance, they ill - treated women. Liberal feminists believed that it was women's responsibility to preach that whatever was morally right for a man to do, was morally right for a woman. Liberal feminists felt that proper education and proper training in critical thinking would make women realize their rights. It would enable women to think clearly and sensibly about their own situation. Liberal feminists believed that keeping half the human race in a state of ignorance retarded the progress of the entire race. When women thought differently or incorrectly, it was due to lack of training. Critical thinking generated faith in individualism and helped their self - determination. It would enable them to think for themselves and they could control their lives. Liberal feminists believed that critical thinking could liberate the individual from the mindless repetition of mere physical existence and proper education could liberate women from subjugation to their conditioned role of serving men. Only when a woman became independent, such self-empowerment could happen.

Liberal feminists also felt that marriage was the field which was created to manipulate the emotions of women. So, the Liberal feminists projected the idea, "a woman must learn to take responsibility for her, she is in a world of her own, the arbiter of her own destiny to function freely, to enjoy her natural rights". They urged women to educate their daughter's in 'courage' and 'self - dependence' to function freely and to enjoy her natural rights. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Sarah Grimke's *Letters on Equality* present the idea against women's subordination developed in the liberal tradition.

Liberal Feminism affirms "merit based on individual achievement, equality of rights as citizens, a social order based on contract and a minimum of social restraint on individual action". Liberal Feminism typically demanded social and political change that would eliminate the unjust advantages of men and guarantee equal rights. It stressed the importance and the autonomy of the individual. Liberal Feminism claims that women and men are equally entitled to be treated as individual people. Liberal feminists see social policy as an important force in establishing access to economic opportunity and civil rights. They also stress the need for changing division of labour in the household, eliminating stereotypes in education, and increase personal choice in

childbearing and childrearing. Liberal Feminism advocates that the sexes are alike, and therefore deserve equal rights. Liberal Feminism emphasizes the absolute equality of men and women. It aims at securing women's rights through lobbying and legislation. It believes in affirmative action and promotes equal opportunity for women as individuals by providing ameliorative measures for women.

(B) Radical Feminism:

Radical Feminism strives towards freedom of women. Both Cultural and Radical feminists accept the difference between men and women biologically, but Cultural feminists assert the fundamental personality of women. Radical feminists were of the view that men and women were biologically different and this factor must be taken into account by women while fighting for equality and freedom.

Radical feminism views the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change, change of rather revolutionary proportions, in fact. Radical Feminism is called 'radical' because it is struggling to bring about really 'fundamental changes in society'. Women who were interested in getting to the roots of the problems in society became Radical feminists. Radical Feminism is concerned with the analysis of the oppression of women as women. Its basic aim stated that there shall be no characteristics, behavior or roles ascribed to any human being on the basis of sex.

The male-dominated society always viewed women as basically weak, emotional, sensitive, and always longing for love and nurturance and, therefore, they need security. Women continue to depend on men for emotional security in a way that is not reciprocated. The Radical Feminists believe that women are different from men; they are humane, caring for others, flexible, non-competitive and co-operative. So, they want spiritual freedom and intellectual freedom from invasions of privacy and the insults of degrading stereotypes.

Radical feminists accept their difference from men, but they seek equality. They also seek freedom which is their principal motto, but some Radical feminists emphasize uncharted freedom for all women. Oppression is common for all women -- race, colour and class. So are the privileges. "Feminism is the political theory of all women — working - class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbian, old women, as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less is not feminism, but merely female self — aggrandizement".

All civilizations are patriarchal and their ideology is male supremacy, which requires women to exhibit male - serving behaviour and to accept male - serving roles.

Family is the main source of patriarchal ideology, which reclaims women's oppression both in economics and in biology. Thus women were put between the material biological base and the ideology of female subjugation. The social structure also contributed its role to women's oppression. When women were restricted to talk about sex openly, women could not project their sexual and emotional responses. Female sexuality was one of the earliest radical feminist issues and the different psychosexual makeup of men and women contributed to women's oppression. The normal male and female heterosexual relationship was the product of patriarchal culture.

Because of this, the Radical Feminists fought against the oppression of women — especially the institution of marriage. In a nuclear family, if there was a child, and the father was working, the mother automatically should be a full-time house maker. If the mother divorced the father, and the father was unwilling to support his children, the mother had to look after them and the low earnings of mother resulted in the 'feminization of poverty'. So, the feminist movement furthered a new sense of woman's possibilities outside marriage and motherhood. Most feminists agreed that women's unpaid work within the home or reproductive function hindered her in obtaining education and paid work.

The Radical Feminists criticized love because it affected both women's mind and body. The love between the heterosexual man and woman should be really reciprocal. But, women surrender their autonomy to men because of social and economic reasons, which have little to do with love. Since, men are more powerful in economic and social conditions; they are in better position in relationship. Women, therefore, continue to depend on men for emotional sustenance in a way that is not reciprocated. Radical feminists found that "women's oppression is rooted primarily in psychological", more than "economic factors".

Therefore, the women's movements have provided shelters and supported the victims and analyzed the causes for their problem. Most battered women had children and it was very difficult for unemployed or underemployed mothers to find affordable housing and child care. Sex, whether willing or forced, affects woman and leads to child bearing; child rearing; nurturance and affection. Activists in the women's movement have formed 'Active kinship' networks to overcome these oppressions. They believe that the mother-daughter relationship and network of women might transform patriarchy.

Radical feminism emphasizes the power that women already have in themselves and the need for mental transformation that would free women to act powerfully. Women who define and care for themselves create a community that does not need men to function. Radical Feminism provides an image of female freedom and possibility

that is healing and transforming for women. Radical Feminism also accepts the difference between men.

Radical feminism also accepts the difference between men and women biologically, and believes that the origin of women's oppression is the patent sexual or procreative function of women. It attempts to raise women's consciousness of their oppression with an intention of putting an end to the domination of men.

(C) *Socialist Feminism:*

Socialist Feminism postulates that men determine their being and it exists on class consciousness, where the ruling class (man) saw the world from the perspective of their own class and not from the oppressed class (woman). In general men came under the ruling class and they never considered women, the oppressed class. In the family circumstances, the Socialist Feminism indicated that the "natural division of labour in the family created the first form of ownership, of one person by another; who saw the enslavement of the wife and children by the husband as the first form of private property" (McLellan 476). They believed that through revolutionary activity and by realizing their oppressed condition, they could change the political and familial circumstances.

Socialist Feminism seeks an end to the exploitation of the weak by the strong and it sees patriarchy as another force that distorts and limits human possibilities. It argues that all social structures permitting men to control and benefit from women must be eliminated. Socialist feminism emphasizes on changing the system, which exploited and oppressed women both in workplace and at home. The Socialist Feminism does not focus on the idea of women as a sex class. It is concerned with the fight against patriarchy and views that task as being inseparable from the struggle against capitalism and racism.

(D) *Eco Feminism :*

Ecofeminism looks at nature, politics, and spirituality in a new way. Eco feminists believe that the domination of women is directly connected to the environmental misuse and pillage of our earth. From this core tenet, a philosophy flourished based on the interconnected web of life. Ecofeminism is "a theory that rests on the basic principle that the patriarchal philosophies are harmful to women, children, and other living things"

The issues of power, domination and subordination are important to Eco-feminism. High on the list is toppling patriarchy. The Eco-feminists also struggle against

oppression like racism, heterosexism, classism, and imperialism. This broad-based support for social justice is one of the Ecofeminism's greatest strengths.

Ecofeminism is infused with a deep affinity for the non - rational, and emotional realm. All spirituality was originally earth - based and centered on an oneness with nature. Women as the givers of food, health, wealth, wisdom, and courage have been upheld as female goddesses. Eco-feminists expanded the analysis of traditional, political issues like, race, class, and gender. Ecofeminism is contrary to male values such as aggression, and it is compassionate to feminine values like, kindness, affection, and sympathy that would ultimately save the future of mankind. Ecofeminism offers a singularly powerful and comprehensive vision for attaining earthly peace and harmony.

Conclusion:

Feminist movements are concentrated in women's problems and privileges. They are against sexism Male and female sexuality should be based on harmony. On the whole, women are considered as sex object, or as means or agent of reproduction or as imitators of men. Therefore, feminists have to find out whether there is coherence in the various streams of feminist thought or not.

Women are not feminists by virtue of the facts alone of being women. Feminism is a social - political reality, a struggle, and a commitment. Women are eternal victims of male ploys. Many women have been victimized intellectually, emotionally and physically by men; it is also true that some have managed efficiently to counter male power. The experience of women directs them to prevent male oppression.

But one of the things men learn from feminism is that women have had enough of being marginal, marginalized: patriarchal society is about marginalization, keeping women out or on the edges of its economy, its institutions and its decisions. Some feminists dream of a world without men, of the perfect friendship of women unalloyed by baser and coarser nature. The concept of feminism placed women's freedom in opposition to women's duties and rights, and polarized woman's need for dependence and independence. Finally, women achieved legal emancipation with respect to equal rights in the matter of property, education, and employment. The feminist movement has made a woman visible and offered her the freedom to choose, in the path of self-direction and determination that is in argument with; others, rather than the competition against them. So, the patriarchy should be changed, and the change should be treated as individual. The writing of woman in the present world has been recording their experiences and invariably each experience is based on a particular culture, political religion and social milieu.