

Feminist Movement in the Third World Countries

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Abstract

Feminism is a significant ideology, fast developing in the modern times. It emerged as a concept in the west with the objective of providing a space for women in the society, later on embracing the superb ideas of an egalitarian society, where the dialectics of male dominance and female subordination are erased. Having started as a social movement, it became a discourse, wielding a formidable influence on world literature and branching out as French, Italian, American, Canadian, Black feminism and Third World feminism in literature. Feminism does not consider reading as an inactive or passive act because depending upon the readers' time, place, culture and intensity, the meaning of the text changes. Feminism refuses the imposition of the rule that one has to read the text in Black feminism some particular method. It calls this forcing of a single meaning on the readers 'language politics' that has been done all along patriarchal criticism. It has made us realize that no reading is done without any previous knowledge or experience.

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The women's liberation movement of the Commonwealth countries, in fact, started along with the Independence Movement. Uma Narayan, in her book *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Tradition and the Third World Feminism* wrote that the goals of Indian feminism were different from that of western feminism .

Black feminism and Eco-feminism are the two new concepts which stood against white feminism. The National Black Feminist Organization established in May 1973 showed a negative approach to the western feminism. Meriam Schneir, in her *Vintage Book of Feminism* says that the white feminists considered job as a route to freedom, whereas for the black women working for earning is an unpleasant part of life. The white women wanted restrictions on abortions to be lifted, whereas the black women feared the overuse of abortions. The black women suffered double oppression-racial and sexual. (Schneir 171)

For the Eco-feminists the natural force represented the generative power of fertility and birth. Our ancestors gave a lot of importance to nature. But in this age of science, the scientific knowledge has drained the power of nature to make it passive. Exploitation of nature is not different from exploitation of women. an eco-feminist called Andree Collard in her *The Rape of the Wild* says:

“Women are subjugated and downgraded. Our interest and those of the natural world are denied or ignored... women and our kind-the earth, the sea and sky are the real but unacknowledged objects of attack, victimized as the enemy of patriarchy.” (Collard, 12)

There is another new approach to the issues that confront the women of today. Naomi Wolf refers to this in her book *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and how it will change the 21st*

century and calls it Power feminism. She says: This awareness has released the text from the tyranny of a single meaning. This may be called ‘emancipation of the text’.

Feminism looks at the text as containing various interpretations of culture, and as a structure which should be analysed carefully. Here, feminist criticism is indebted to the theory of deconstruction in linguistics. Feminist criticism goes beyond the artistic value of the text to the criticism of society and culture. Therefore, it becomes the study of culture also. This is called decentralisation of the text. It throws light on certain important issues unnoticed so far.

Feminist criticism reads a text from the feminist perspective. That means, it is a search for the female sensibility – its presence or absence – in the text. When the text is read like this, the power structures working within patriarchy could be identified. This kind of reading, since it has woman at its centre, may be alleged as political reading. But feminism assures this allegation by saying that the mainstream reading also is not free from politics. In fact, it is so political that, its politics goes perfectly unnoticed. The new method of reading taught to us by feminism has helped us read the texts in our own method.

The traditional or mainstream thought says that art speaks for all and it represents all. Feminism gives still more complex interpretation of art. It does not consider art as something different from our daily routine because art exists within the social and political zone itself. Moreover, it speaks from the perspective of the one who creates it. If one says that art represents reality, then, just like life, that is also created by man. Therefore, art also will not give ultimate relief to woman.

Thus, feminism protested the universal value of art. Since the traditional thought had found it difficult to assimilate this, feminism had not come to the central point of argument. Associating art with sexual politics was a revolutionary step taken by feminism. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* is an epoch-making work in this regard. Speaking about the male power working behind art is a unique thing done by feminism.

This a very significant dimension of the feminist theory. We see in the history of the world how patriarchy has tried all along to keep female sexuality under control. For the father's mastery over the family, for the children's identity and for the continuity of the inheritance of the family property the women's sexuality was controlled. For the male-dominated system the woman's body also was a part of the property. Religion, aesthetics and monarchy also took their share in controlling women's sexuality. In India even today we can see values like chastity and wife's loyalty to husband controlling woman's sexuality. The woman's sexuality is always a trump card used by the male-centred system to blackmail her.

Patriarchy gives licence to woman's sexuality whenever it needs it and dismisses when it does not. Manu Chakravarthy, a Kannada writer, in one of his articles on the dimensions of feminism has explained how patriarchy neutralises the sex of a woman by dismissing her sexuality. He raises two points here:

When man looks at a woman as a means of getting his pleasure, there is no place for sexual activity. If the man is active there, the woman is inactive. Only the man's sexuality shines there. The woman is just converted into a mere thing meekly serving his needs. Her own sexuality is ignored. This is nothing but neutralising her sexuality.

The French feminists like Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva etc. have done an intensive study of female sexuality. Female sexuality can never be understood by a male-centred mind. Luce Irigaray says that the fatherly tyranny on woman is based on the dark and negative structures of Freud on sexuality. Modern science also has supported the feminist thoughts by giving new information on female sexuality.

The question of motherhood is another aspect of female sexuality. Motherhood also is not free from male hegemony. The feminists said that patriarchy glorifies motherhood, but burdens women with the duty of child rearing, apart from the biological duties of bearing and labour.

Thus the feminists have achieved success in questioning the traditional beliefs regarding sexuality. Another interesting thing is the question raised by the feminists about the naturalness of sexual relationship between man and woman. There is lesbian feminism which says that homosexual relationship is possible among women also.

Feminism came into existence mainly with the purpose of opposing the control of patriarchy over sexuality. The feminist theory has power resistance at its centre. The definitions of power given by Foucault have benefited feminism to a great extent. According to Foucault power pervades the social institutions like state, law etc (Meera 119). Gramsci has given important insights into the power class and the exploited class (Meera 120). In the arguments about power, there is the change of interpreting the rights of the exploited class from the perspective of power class (like measuring the needs of the women from the needs of man as though man is the ideal state). That means, if there is a belief that the exploited class becomes like the powered class, all the problems will be solved, but the original structure of power

exploitation remains there. Another exploited class comes into existence, more power will be exercised.

The solution for this is, understanding the problem from the exploited person's perspective. Then only the exploited class can retain its identity. It is possible only when the resistance of the exploited class is not interpreted as its strength but its capacity to speak about its own strength – its strength away from the world of the exploiting class. In other words, if showing resistance to the male world becomes the only aim of feminism it will not be an achievement on its part. It has to identify its own strength which has come directly from its experience of life. It does not stop there. It continues in building a private, powerful world of its own. The delicate ways of women's protest and its artistic dimensions build this world in a beautiful manner. This is identified as delicate protest or aesthetic resistance. That is why the feminist fight – political, economic and social modes – do not become sufficient; because they are limited to resist only male domination. Hence, cultural theoretical and artistic modes are also important.

The power-resisting theory of feminism looks at the present administrative system like the state government also with suspicion, because the concept of nationality resists diversity in its attempt to bring about unity. Feminists look at this unifying factor with suspicion, because in this process there is more possibility of the women's identity getting ignored and the problems of women getting increased. Feminism always entertains diversity. Another factor here is the national authority. The state government will develop corruption and cruelty with the power in their hand and strengthen the male dominated system which is already exploitative.

Feminism believes in the reconstruction of the past because history which holds the past is imperfect and incomplete. It contains the story of only the people who are strong and those who belong to the mainstream. It does not contain the history of the downtrodden. Thus, it has become necessary now to excavate what has been lost in the passage of time. The feminist historians like Susi Tharu are currently engaged in the same work.

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Feminism does not accept the way of speaking about man and woman together as man. It does not accept the concept of universal woman also because as the time, space, race and perspective change, the concept of woman also may change. It is impossible to explain the concept of woman which is applicable to all times, all places and all races. That is why differences of opinion arise among the theories of feminism.

There is a difference between the ways in which the male-centred thinking describes the relations among women and feminist thinking. In the male-centred thinking, since male is at the centre, woman moves around him with an attitude of rivalry. Moreover, the woman who lives in man's world, assimilates the values.

Feminism has shown that the relations among women can be cordial and pleasant. It has identified the mother-daughter relationships. Mother-in-law, Daughter-in-law relationships, grandmother-daughter-grand daughter relationships getting across the Freudian way of thinking that the son if he has to grow up to maturity he has to reject his father, and daughter has to reject her mother. And feminism has proved that daughter can internalise her mother.

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