



An Overview of Indian Feminism's Complexities

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ABSTRACT: The paper aims to highlight the complexities that are dominant in Indian society. The variety of issues that makes Indian feminism different from western feminism is also explored. The present paper presents a brief overview of western feminism, however, a large portion discuss the Indian feministic concerns and issue. The paper is not limited to any particular writer or writing of an author but it is an eclectic approach to present the subtle difficulties of Indian feminism in the best possible way. The focus is largely on the third and fourth wave of feminism. Giving the increasing insecurities of women even in this digital era, the paper therefore is a humble effort in that direction to bring some of the merging issues and concerns of women in general and Indian women in particular to the forefront. An eclectic approach has been used for the evaluation of the issues and concerns therefore the paper highlights various feministic issues like cultural social, economic individual, Islamic etc. associated with different branches of feminism.

Keywords- Feminism, Equality, Effeminate, Patriarchy

INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a term derived from a Latin word - i.e. "Femina" which means having effeminate qualities. Etymologically the word Feminism is a French word, Feminisme. The dictionary meaning of the word "feminism" is 'the state of being female.' The Oxford Dictionary 7th edition offers the meaning of "Feminism" as the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of the equality of the sexes'. It is hard to tell when it came into existence. However, feminists believe that the word 'Feminism' was first used in a French Medical Text in the year 1871. It was attributed to those men having effeminate traits or qualities. For a comprehensive understanding of feminism let's record some of the definitions of it. "Feminism" in Encyclopedia of Sociology (2010) is defined as, "A movement that attempts to institute social, economic and political equality between men and women in society and end distortion in relationship between men and women" (Ryan 12).

Freedman in his book Feminism (2002) states, "The term feminist seems to have been used in 1871 in a French Medical Text to describe a cessation in the development of sexual organs and characters in the male patient, who was perceived as thus suffering from the feminization of their bodies." (2) However, in the year 1872 French producer, Alexander Dumas File wrote a book titled as Homme -Femme (1872) wrote on the theme of 'Adultery'. In this book, he used the term feminism for such "women whose behaviour resembled a lot with men, whose behaviour was masculine" (316). Since Alexander was himself anti-feminist he used it for those women who behave as men do. It is even thought that the word "Feminism" was first used in England in the year 1891 in their fight against equal rights. However, initially, it did not represent the rights of women. Feminism is the product of Western society.

There is no unequivocal definition of feminism because it has been more described than defined. Feminism is neither a science nor a philosophy. It is without the contours of dogma and doctrine. In common parlance, Feminism is known as a movement "of women, by women, for women" to achieve women's rights. It is also known as women's Liberation Movement. There is no defined and specific definition of the term Feminism because it is indigenous. KamlaBhasin says, "Feminism is the name of the feelings that women are subjected to multiple atrocities in society and are exploited. The attempt to change this situation is generally referred to as Feminism" (Interview, KamlaBhasin). She goes to the extent of saying that feminism is basically the feeling that ours is a patriarchal based society. Irritant in her views, she says women are exploited in every aspect of life and those people whether the men or women who desire to bring the change in such situation are referred to as feminists. Bellington believes that "Feminism is a women's movement which aims at re-ordering of human relationship." While Anderine Rich says, "The aim of feminism is to recognize the wrong perceptions

created by men about women”. John Desrochers opines that “Feminism is the act of creating awareness about the dependence and exploitation of women which continues at both places inside the family and outside the family.” Barbara Smith says, “Feminism is a political perception and the act of liberating women.” It even talks about all types of women, women of a different colour, creed, working women, physically challenged women, economically unsound women and even elderly women. Feminism talks about all their relevant issues. Hence it is obvious that there is no proper or definite definition of feminism. It is a concept or idea which focuses on various issues like patriarchy, inequality, protection, the defeat of marital relations and empowerment of women and many more which are at the centre of feminism. Generally, people associate feminism with a directionless movement which teaches women to hate men, extremism and destroy the traditional values of the family system. The reason for this is that people look at it only from a radical feminist perspective or wear the radical lens of feminism. While the truth is that ever since the birth of feminism many philosophers along with theories came into being. Their way of thinking was different from each other but all acknowledged that a woman should be given the due rights that she deserves in society as a human being. They were common on this point that a woman should not be treated like other sex. Such treatment to women by society is condemned by the feminists. Therefore, all feminists endeavour to comprehend and address the issues and problems of women. Further, they raise their voice against the atrocities and exploitation done to women since ages. The idea is to fight against domination, discrimination and subordination. It is through this movement they question the conventional and traditional attitude of society. According to feminists, “In all societies which divide sex into different cultural, economic or political spheres women are less valued in comparison to men.” The word feminism tantamounts to sexual equality combined with a commitment to exterminate sexual ascendancy and to transform the society. They are against the sexual discrimination and sexual segregation of women at workplaces and in domestic life. They question the superiority of man and his polygamous nature at the expense of the subordination of women. Now that we have some idea about western feminism, one wonders how far

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