
UNIT 10: FEMINISM

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10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Know what feminism is
- Explain the origin and development of feminism
- Know the characteristics of feminism
- Explain the concept of liberal and radical feminism
- Know the criticisms of feminism

10.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces to you the concept of feminism. After going through this unit one will be able to know that feminism is the radical notion of claiming that women are also human. You will also be know that how feminist movement has playing an important role so far right to education, right to work and right to vote are concerned.

10.3 THE CONCEPT OF FEMINISM

Feminism is a movement against the Patriarchal and male dominated social set-up of the society. Feminism says about the important concept like rights, liberation and independence of woman in the world.

It is not very easy to define feminism in a sentence. But still it can be said that it is a radical notion to think that women are also human being. With the changing of time, the outlooks and views of feminism has also been changed. John Charvet in his book 'Feminism' (1982) has said that feminism is the idea or view, according to which male and female are equal. According to Oxford Reference Dictionary, 'Feminism is a movement or theory supporting woman's right on the grounds of equality and sexes'. Kamala Bhasin and Night Said Khan in their book 'Feminism' has mentioned that feminism is the process of making consciousness among both male and female people of the world regarding the exploitation against the women in society, family, work-place etc. It says about the equal right of the women to the society. The term 'feminist' actually does not mean the female thinkers. Irrespective of both male and female, who thinks about the women's right, women liberation and independence are regarded to be feminist thinkers. Many male thinkers also think about women's freedom and liberation.

10.4 ORIGIN OF FEMINISM

In the modern time, whenever the social and national philosophical important studies are concerned, feminism has taken an important role here. According to many social thinkers, feminism is a movement against the male-dominated society, where right of the women (social, political, economic etc.) are dominated and exploited by the man and the so called social system of the society.

Actually regarding the origin and development of feminism, it is difficult to found any definite definition. But still in the ancient Greece and the Chinese culture and civilisation, some viewpoints regarding feminism have been found. But no proper social documents can be pointed out here.

In the middle era, in 1405, one book entitled "Book of the City of Ladies"

has been published by Christine de Pisan. In this book, many works and contribution of women from the ancient era has been mentioned and described. In this book, some important issues like women education or women's right to vote also has been discussed. In her book, she has mentioned many issues of modern feminism.

In 18th century, about feminist revolution and feminism, a proper publication has been found in the book entitled, "A Vindication of the Right of Women", written by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792. In this book, a strict emphasis has been given by the writer on women education and right to vote of the women.

In 1845, Margaret Fuller has written on book named, "Women in the Nineteenth Century". In this book she has described about the conditions of the women. After that in 1849, J.S. Mill and H. Tylor have jointly written a book entitled "The subjection of Women". In this book, the right of the women in the social, economic and political activities have been discussed very elaborately and generally. Here the writers said that a woman should get both legal and political rights for the sake of the state.

In the 19th century, regarding the right to vote of the woman a revolution has been taken place. It is regarded as the First Wave Feminism. In this period woman's right over the legal and political matter of a right to vote the women. Because by granting this found against women, various social discourses found against women can be dissolved. For the first time in 1893, the woman's right to vote has been recognised in New Zealand. In 1903, in Australia, in 1906 in Finland, in Norway, in 1915 in Island, in 1917 in Canada, Germany and Poland, woman's right to vote has been recognised. Though lately, but still in Great Britain and in U.S.A. too woman's basic right to vote has been accepted in 1918 and in 1920 respectively.

But the important fact, that is to be mentioned here is that after, the recognition of woman's voting, instead of having the woman movement strong, it becomes weak. Because most of the feminist philosophers thinks that when a woman will get right to vote, women liberation will movement. That is why a new phase of feminist movement is to be taken place after 20th century. This is called second wave feminism.

Second wave feminism is of revolutionist in nature. That is way it is called radical feminism. In this phase, the gender-discrimination is regarded to be the creation of the society. In this era, it is discussed that only by giving political and legal rights; the problems of woman cannot be solved. The radical feminists wanted to change, the whole social systems. By the changing structure of the society only, the development and liberation of the woman is possible. In this context, we can take the name of Virginia Woolf. Virginia Woolf has written a book entitled 'A Room One's Own' (1923), where she has made a revolution against the patriarchal set-up of the society and the capitalism. According to Woolf a society should be like that, where there is not any patriarchal set-up. The aim of society is to make the life of each and every individual to be beautiful and complete.

The feminist thinkers, whose name can be specially mentioned in the connection of the development of second wave feminism is Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir has written the famous book entitled, "The Second sex". In this book, by keeping the important feminist qualities to the front, she had criticised the male-centric social set- up. Simone de Beauvoir has given importance on the equal right of the woman in the political and economic matter.

Another name which can be mentioned in the second wave feminism is the feminist philosopher Betty Friedman. In 1963, Friedan has written the book, "The Feminist Mystique". In this book, she has accepted that there is discrimination about the woman in society. Betty Friedman has opened an organisation for women, named 'NOW'. Its full name is 'National Organisation for Women'. The aim of this organisation is to make a revolution against the gender discrimination of the society.

10.5 DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINISM

So far as the development of feminism is concerned, the names of Germaine Greer, Frigate and Kate Millett can also be mentioned. In 1970, three books have been published by these there philosophers. Greer had written the book, 'The Female Eunuch'. Frigate has written the book entitled

‘Patriarchal Attitudes’. Millet has written the book entitled ‘Sexual Politics’. In all these three books, some important documents and arguments have been found in favour of feminism.

In the later part of 20th century too, some important books have been published, which have played important role in the development of ‘feminism’. Those books are viz., ‘The Sceptical Feminism’ (1982), of R. Richards, ‘Gender, Justice and Family’ (1993), jointly written by R. Richards and S.M. Okin; and ‘Fire with Fire’ (1993) by Naomi Wolf.

In this way various writers and thinkers have played a significant role, so far as the development of Feminism is concerned. Today ‘Feminism’ is an independent thought or philosophy.

10.6 CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMINISM

1. Feminism is a movement against patriarchal set-up of the society. Feminism is not a movement against any individual, state or a group. It is a revolution, which gives importance on the bend of those rules which says against of women’s right.
2. Feminism does not reject the feminity of a woman. The main aim of feminism is to make a woman a whole woman.
3. Feminism is a movement against the gender discrimination of the society. Biological differences between male and female are there. It cannot be ignored or rejected. But the social discrimination between male and female is something, which is created by the society and feminism is against of it.
4. Feminism is revolution, which tries to change the outlook and mentality of the society. Again in various advertisement women are presented in a very bad way. It is also discrimination against the woman. It is believed that with the help of proper education the discrimination between male and female can be ruled out.
5. According to feminism both man and woman are complimentary to each other. One cannot be thought except another. An ideal society cannot be established without the joint contribution of both male and female.

6. In her book 'The Second Sex', Simone de Beauvoir has written that care and nurturing quality of a woman is too necessary for a society. But it does not mean that the status of a woman is lower than the man. The aim of woman is to establish herself as perfect woman and not as a man.
7. Feminism is actually a humanistic view. Because it speaks about the rights of all human being. Feminism is a supporter of socialism or communism, as feminism has totally ignored and rejected gender-discrimination
8. Feminism is existentialist philosophical view. Every human being is a self-conscious entity. So all women are independent and have existence.

Feminism can be broadly divided into two groups. They are liberal feminism and radical feminism. They can be explained as follows:

10.7 LIBERAL FEMINISM

Liberal feminism is mainly the first wave feminism. This view tries to define woman from the angle of human freedom and rationalism. According to this view, women are free entity and she is fully a rational entity. According to this view all the human beings of the world have equal right to live. Woman is also a human being and individual. So a woman also has the equal right to live in this world. Every human being has a social, cultural and moral value. Irrespective of caste, creed, religion and sex, all the human being should get equal right to the society and as human is also a human being so she should get the equal right to the society. This view tries to establish right to education, right to vote, right to property, right to job etc. to the woman. To give political and economic right to the woman is the main aim of liberal view of feminism. Feminist social philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft, J.S. Mill, Harriet Taylor, Betty Friedman, R. Richards, S.M. Okin, and Naomi Wolf were the supporter of liberal feminism.

In this context the book entitled, 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' (1792) written by Wollstonecraft can be mentioned. According to

Wollstonecraft like a man, a woman should also get equal right to the society. This feminist thinker has give tremendous importance on education right of the woman and said that only by right to education only gender discrimination can be removed. It is said by her that like man and a woman is also a rational individual. So discrimination on the basis of sex or gender is not acceptable. Wollstonecraft did not believe in psychological difference of man and woman.

J. S. Mill and Taylor in their book, "The Subjection of Woman" have written mentioned about the economic, political and social right to work. Modern feminism has given importance rational and intellectual side of the woman. That is why many thinkers have given importance on over-all human-right of the woman. Modern liberal feminism is actually the second wave feminism. The modern liberal feminist thinker Betty Friedman in her book 'The Feminine Mystique' has accepted the discrimination behaviour against of the woman. Friedman has also mentioned in this book about the depression and sufferings of the upper middle class woman of the society. Betty Friedman and her organisation 'NOW' have tried to create a revolution against the traditional gender-discrimination of the society. The main demands are to make the abortion legal, equal participation of a man into domestic affairs and child-care, to remove the discrimination of fair of the labours etc. She also demands the compensation for the long torture and suffering of the woman. Some other books like 'The Scripture Feminist' by Richard as another book in this regard. Naomi Wolf in her book 'Fire with Fire' has asked the woman to become brave and bold.

So finally it can be said that the first ideology or motto of liberal feminism is 'Equate'

10.8 RADICAL FEMINISM

Radical feminism is radical in nature. It is not so liberal like liberal feminism. Radical Feminism has been inspired by so-called patriarchal social set up and influenced mainly by ideas of socialism or Marxism. According to Radical Feminism, the so-called patriarchal social set up is totally responsible for the gender discrimination is man-made and society

made. Family set-up, national set-up etc. are all male created. They have created all the systems to dominate the woman. According to radical feminism actually there are not any differences between male and female. It is seen that various works have been distributed among the males and females. This is not because of the biological differences. But is something, which is totally created by the environment and surroundings. So it is totally meaningless to have social discrimination between the man and the woman. Radical feminism believes in an ideological society, which is sexually blind. In any occupation of a state preference should be on the basis of male and female. In a society human being should not be treated a man or woman, but as human.

According to radical feminism, family is a social institution. But in a family, a woman is always found to be dominated and neglected. Radical feminism is against of the family system. According to them family is a process, by which woman are dominated and made deprived of all the rights of them. Actually family is only a medium by which man use to exploit the woman. Domestic violence, sexual abuse etc. according to radical feminism actually man uses woman to get pregnant, to give birth the child and to take care of them. That is why radical feminism believe that for the wellbeing of the woman and for the establishment of equal society band of family system is too essential. Another name that can be mentioned in the context of radical feminism is Simone de Beauvoir. In 1949, she had published a famous book, i.e., 'The Second Sex'. She had mentioned in the book that 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman'. Beauvoir had lived a free and liberal life like man. The qualities of man are considered by the society that boldness, liberal, efficient, independent and strong.

10.9 CRITICISM OF FEMINISM

In the present society, feminism has great idealistic and practical value. From the historical and ideological point of view, it becomes clear that feminism is not anti-man view. But feminism believes in the change of the mentality of the male people. Actually feminism is a humanistic

philosophy. This philosophy tries to make the society ideologically good and tries to provide equal right for all.

The importance and significance of feminism cannot be ignored. But this philosophy had to suffer from a lot of criticisms too.

First, it is said that though feminisms tries to make women liberated and independent from the male dominated society, but it is noticed that many women willingly prefer to live within the domination of man.

Secondly, though various views have been presented regarding the definitions and concepts of feminism, but there is not a unity among the views. So clarity is not there about the ideas

Thirdly, Feminism tries to change the existing system and social set-up of the society. To make the woman free, they have chosen an ideological path.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q No 1: Who is the author of the 'Feminism', written in 1982?

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Q No 2: What does the term 'feminist' mean?

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Q No 3: In which ear the book 'Book of the City of Ladies' has written?

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Q No 4: Who is the author of the book entitled, 'A Vindication of the Right of Women'?

.....

Q No 5: What are the two types of feminism?

.....

Q No 6: What is the full meaning of the term 'NOW'?

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Q No 7: Who is the author of the book, 'The Subjection of Women'?

.....

Q No 8: 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman'—— who has given this statement?

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10.10: LET US SUM UP

- Feminism is a movement against the Patriarchal and male dominated social set-up of the society.
- Feminism is a radical notion to think that women are also human being.
- Irrespective of both male and female, who thinks about the women's right, women liberation and independence are regarded to be feminist thinkers. Many male thinkers also think about women's freedom and liberation.
- In the modern time, whenever the social and national philosophical important studies are concerned, feminism has taken an important role here.
- According to many social thinkers, feminism is a movement against the male-dominated society, where right of the women (social, political, economic etc.) are dominated and exploited by the man and the so called social system of the society.
- Betty Friedman has opened an organisation for women, named 'NOW'. Its full name is 'National Organisation for Women'. The aim of this organisation is to make a revolution against the gender discrimination of the society.
- In the middle era, in 1405, one book entitled "Book of the City of Ladies" has been published by Christine de Pisan. In this book, many works and contribution of women form the ancient era has been mentioned and described. In this book, some important issues like women education or women's right to vote also has been discussed.
- Betty Friedman has opened an organisation for women, named 'NOW'. Its full name is 'National Organisation for Women'. The aim of this organisation is to make a revolution against the gender discrimination of the society.
- Liberal feminism is mainly the first wave feminism. This view tries to define woman from the angle of human freedom and rationalism.

According to this view, women are free entity and she is fully a rational entity.

- Radical feminism is radical in nature. It is not so liberal like liberal feminism.
- Radical Feminism has been inspired by so-called patriarchal social set up and influenced mainly by ideas of socialism or Marxism.
- According to Radical Feminism, the so-called patriarchal social set up is totally responsible for the gender discrimination is man-made and society made. Family set-up, national set-up etc. are all male created.
- They have created all the systems to dominate the woman. According to radical feminism actually there are not any differences between male and female.
- In the book 'The second sex', Simone de Beauvoir had mentioned that 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman'. Beauvoir had lived a free and liberal life like man. The qualities of man are boldness, liberal, efficient, independent and strong.



10.11: FURTHER READING

Beauvoir, S. d. (2011). *The Second Sex*. Vintage Books.

Friedman, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. W.W. Norton and Co.

Hooks, B. (2000). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Pluto Press.

Schneir, M. (1994). *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*. Vintage Books.



10.12: ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Q No 1: John Charvet

Answer to Q No 2: feminist thinker

Answer to Q No 3: 1405

Answer to Q No 4: Mary Wollstonecraft

Answer to Q No 5: Liberal feminism and Radical feminism

Answer to Q No 6: National organization for Women

Answer to Q No 7: J.S Mill and Taylor

Answer to Q No 8: Simone de Beauvoir



10.13 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions:

1. What is feminism?
2. How Kamala Bhasin and Night Said define feminism?
3. Who is the author of the book, 'Women in 19th Century'?
4. Who has written book, 'The Second Sex'?

B. Short Questions: (Answer in within 100-150 words)

1. Write a short note on the Development of feminism.
2. Briefly describe the liberal feminism.
3. What is radical feminism? Describe briefly.

C. Long Questions: (answer in within 300-500 words)

1. Describe the origin of feminism.
2. What are the characteristics of feminism? Describe
3. Critically explain the concept of feminism.
