

A Feminist's Perspective: Understanding Gender Oppression and the Struggle for Equality

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Abstract: *The research paper discusses feminism and the struggle for gender equality from a feminist perspective. It explains that feminism is a complex perspective that aims to bring awareness, power, and knowledge to contemporary thinking. The movement seeks to address the issues responsible for bringing equality to women and demands equal rights and opportunities for both men and women. The paper also highlights the history of gender in feminism and the role of Mary Wollstonecraft, who is considered the first feminist or mother of feminism. Wollstonecraft wrote a book called "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," which presents the classical thought of feminist perspective. She protested for a liberal feminist approach and was essentially concerned with the individual woman and her rights. The paper concludes by emphasizing that feminism aims to provide a society where there is freedom from any type of sexual differences, and every person who talks about equality and freedom can be considered a feminist.*

Key Words: *Gender, Feminism, Man, Society, Politics.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Feminism is a very complex perspective. It is a source of new awareness, power and knowledge to the contemporary thinking. Feminism is basically a western concept. In the second half of the twentieth century, feminism has appeared as the most powerful movement that almost came as a big threat to the men dominated literary world. The term feminism has been used first time by French dramatist Alexander Dumas in 1872 in pamphlet L' Homme femme to designate the women movement for their rights in a society. The suffering, which the women had been enduring at that time, was said to be deduced from the patriarchal structure of society. Even in recent times, the women status has been coming down incessantly not just in domestic places and but also workplaces, that is why feminism movement has been made a perpetual struggle for the protection of women rights. Initially in the western countries women fought for external restraints and gained liberation from all forms of oppression which were held by society, the state and by men. In some way, the feminist movement was the metamorphous of that struggle. According to the world book: "Feminism is a belief that women should have economic, political and social equality with men. In the same book we find that feminism also refers to political movement is sometimes called women movement or women rights movement". (The World Book Encyclopaedia, 1992)

Feminism movement deals with such issues which are responsible for bringing equality to women. It is the movement which is supported by both women and men for any type of oppression. Feminism demands equal rights and opportunities for both. It does not privilege women over men. Feminism movement tends to transform traditionally rules and encourage women for their rights and equal status. Feminism has been supporting women from social institutions which control women rights, power and are responsible for oppression. The feminism word was driven from the "Latin" word 'Femina' means "woman" and was first used in connection with the issues of equality and women rights Movements.

Feminism makes an attempt to realize their suffering, so that they can be prevented from injustice, oppression in the society. Feminism elutriates that how traditional male supremacy and patriarchy system create their own rules and values. People tend to live according to these rules and behave under these disciplined discourses. Feminism focuses on the values of equality, self, development, individual achievement and freedom from any kind of restraint. On the

other hand, it makes explicit the actual norms of male preference, discriminatory treatment, stricture on women development, expression, and the perpetual gaze on “other.”

Feminism movement discriminates oppression according to gender and sex. Feminism inspires and provides knowledge about the suppression of woman so that they can achieve high status and courage to fight against traditional norms. Feminism aims to provide such type of society where there will be freedom from any type of sexual differences.

The word “feminism” is being used to make women more aware about rights so that they can realize their actual identity. Women have always been the central point in feminism movement and it tries to bring forth the main reasons behind women subjugations. Feminism theory encourages women to get their freedom while living in the society and state structure.

2. HISTORY OF GENDER IN FEMINISM:

Feminist thinkers have been talking about women oppression throughout the world. Men and women are categorised by their biological and social position in society. In early period, feminist thinkers didn't use word gender in the sense of sex and gender difference. They sometimes even used these terms interchangeably. They were trying to write for gender equality and the protection of their rights. Feminist movement was started with Marry Wollstonecraft, she argues about equality and right to vote. The first step, in feminism, was to change literature narrative and traditional values. Feminism movement was against of physical, mental and economical oppression on women. Initially, feminism thinkers wanted to change patriarchal roles which define women as a weak, emotional and passive creature. Society gives all rights to men and a superior position also, but in other hand women are always suppressed. One question arises in everyone's mind that who is the feminist? People often have a presupposition that a feminist is one who always keeps talking about women rights and male dominating society where the binary distinctions are prevalent. It is inaccurate interpretation of feminism. Every person who talks about equality and freedom can be considered as feminist. The history of feminism is vast in its nature, but the emerging point was based on preliminary necessities such as to provide education and bring gender equality.

Mary Wollstonecraft:

Mary Wollstonecraft has been called first feminist or mother of feminism. She wrote a book about women rights. This book “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” presents classical thought of feminist perspective. She protested for liberal feminist approach and she was essentially concerned with the individual woman and about their rights. She gives her views about men and woman life standards and she say that woman should not be compared on the basis physical structure. In her times, the position of woman was inferior to men. Women had no rights of education and the equality of opportunists. Women were being understood inferior based on their gender.

Mary Wollstonecraft says about women, “It will also require some time to convince women that they act contrary to their real interest on an enlarged scale, when they cherish or affect weakness under the name of delicacy.” (Mary Wollstonecraft, 1975)

Mary views that men hold the power to influence the thoughts of society hence they keep women ignorant by withdrawing their formal education and their chance to think independently. Mary refers to this situation as a “Slavery which chains the very soul of women, keeping her under the bondage of ignorance.” Mary Wollstonecraft compares women with the slave in the society. She argues that slave works for money, but women work as a domestic slave. The author has made an endeavour to bring equality in gender by means of education and right to vote.

John Stuart Mill:

John Stuart Mill was a British philosopher, political economist, and civil servant. In the history of liberalism, he was a very prominent writer. He was the first man to write about women rights in his period. That time women position was subordinated and had no rights in the hands.

John Stuart Mill has written a historical book “The Subjection of Women” which a landmark of feminism. It became the focal point of discussion in feminist thoughts throughout the mid nineteenth century. Mill illustrates his own ideas on women's equal rights in work, education, property and suffrage. Mill argues that men and women are equal in the sights of fundamental law.

Mill focuses on the patriarchal attitude in the following lines.;

“Generality of the male sex cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal at the fireside, and here is the secret of the opposition to woman's equality in the state and the church, men are not ready to recognize it in the home.” (John Stuart Mill, 1870)

Virginia Woolf:

Virginia Woolf was a feminist writer. She participated in several women's organisations throughout her lifetime and her literary work is not infrequently concerned with clarifying and bettering women's position within patriarchal social structures. Her first novel which named 'Orlando' was published in 1928. She wrote a famous novel "A Room of One's Own". Where she gives message and encouragement to feminist writers for writing their own literature to deconstruct the male dominated literature. woman can speak from their own perspective and create their values through literature. "A Room of One's Own" is a non-fictional piece of literature where she gives critique of male dominated ideology in the context of her own personal experiences. Even she was not allowed to enter in the literary world because of her gender. She also collected other women's personal experience about their subordinated position and suffering in society. She asserts and infers that the writings which have been credited under "anon" must have been written by some women. They were suppressed and afraid to come out openly. She says that Shakespeare was a famous writer and if Shakespeare would have a sister who was as talent as he was. Even then she wouldn't have been as famous as Shakespeare. Woolf wrote another novel in the perspective of gender. She shows in her novel "Orlando" that each culture has its own gender assumptions and customs. They expect from society that everyone should perform correctly according to gender roles. Through Orlando she shows that it is need of hour to raise questions because the whole system structure has been under this gender discrimination. Throughout all her novel, a suggestion or message is being given that they should create their own values and literature then they must made themselves strong economically, self-sufficiency and independency which are first step towards this giant revolution.

Simone de Beauvoir:

After Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir gives an argument that women still do not have any equality of opportunities as compared to men. Women were the primary subjects of suppressing throughout the first half of 20th century which disturbed many thinkers. She was one of them who raised voice against this patriarchal domination. Simone de Beauvoir was the one of most influential thinkers of 20th century. She considered as the milestone in the feminist movement. She revolutionised this movement with her book "The Second Sex" which was published in 1949. In this book, she discussed the reasons behind women oppressions and the discourses which make it easy for power to suppress them. First half of 20th century was the time of great turmoil, this century had faced two world wars up to, its first half. Simone, who was a novelist and literary thinker, initially wrote novels but her personal experiences and her relationship with existential thinkers made her to write about the conditions of woman. The Second Sex became a sensation in market when it come for the first time in 1949. This book is divided into two parts; first about facts and myths and second about lived experience. Facts and myths are about the past feminine cult which has been controlling and dominating the woman mentality. Lived experience is about the present time in which the women are being oppressed through various dimensions.

Simone de Beauvoir described that how the women get treated in the world:

"woman's alienation in her body is not inevitable, her lurid portrayal of female biology nevertheless might appear rather deterministic." (Tidd. U. 2004).

Betty Friedan:

After Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, who was a prominent feminist thinker, talked about the marginalized position of woman in society. Betty Friedan wrote a book The Feminine Mystique about the roles of women which are divided by traditional society. Primarily this book presents contrast views against the prevalent traditional family structure which has been divided by patriarchal system. Friedan asserts that all the problems in society are mainly caused by the radical view which defines woman as a housewife and child nurturing machine this point of view. Patriarchal notion, women have to imprisoned in these stereotypes. She illustrates that how in her times there were lot of assumptions and myth which used to define woman as parasites. Betty Friedan didn't argue against this myth rather she turned in the argument by saying that yes woman are parasites and dependent on men, economically. But she raises the question that why this is so? What is reason behind this? Hence, they have to "beg" for money from husband then obviously they are meant to be considered as parasites, but the fault is not in female rather in constructed "woman". Betty also gives views about education in society. She says that education system is also patriarchal in nature. The education system provides knowledge about gender-based roles in society. She says that our college education prepares women to perform the roles of women wife and mother in society. Education system both schools and colleges do not encourage for jobs rather they teach women to get fit in the society following specific gender role such as housewives.

Kate Millett:

Kate Millett was an American feminist writer and she wrote in her book "Sexual Politics" about the perspective of women's inferior status. Which has been shape by patriarchal society based on their sex and gender. She was the first

feminist writer to use sex and gender words explicitly. She said that sex is related to biological facts and gender as a social constructed thing. Patriarchal society defines everything in binary terms, i.e., sexes as male and female and gender as a men and women. But the norms and rules which have been used to create society are male dominated. She draws an attention towards the political implication which was status category with sex. Millet argues that a socialization stereotype with sex category masculine and feminine refers “temperament”. According to her, society is male dominated that is why masculinity and femininity both are supported with male.

As she writes:

Because both are “based on the needs and values of the dominant group and dictated by what is members cherish in themselves and find convent in subordinates: aggression, intelligence, force and efficacy in the male passivity ignorance, docility, virtues and ineffectively in the female.” (Kate Millett, 2000)

Judith Butler:

Judith Butler is a prominent feminist writer. Her famous book *Gender Trouble* was published in 1990. This book deals with the most core concepts of feminism and redefined them in a new dimension. She analysed the concepts of Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Lucy Irarary, Derrida and Foucault. She points out the objectification in the Freud’s interpretation of dreams and his psychoanalytical method. Freud and other predecessor feminist writers have made the mistake when they make two categories, i.e., man and woman. They have put all woman under one umbrella of woman concept. Hence, every attribute identifies to whole woman category, but this is not the case in reality. She asserts that feminism has been restricted under these mini-objectives, but it has to pursue many other subtle aims. They have denied the existence of isolated body and body is determined through human efforts. Parallely, they avow that gender is constructed by patriarchal structure which itself is grounded upon the body identity theories. Gender is not just social construct rather a performativity. She rejects any kind of essentialism and stresses that the activities we do in mundane life are defining what we are. Hence, gender is not what we are rather what we do. Sex, gender and sexuality have the same source of emergence. That emergence point is heterosexual matrix. When the repeated acts are done habitually within this matric then they decide what we do and what we will do. Precisely, gender is sum total of repeated acts.

Butler wrote regarding women masculinity that:

“The woman who wishes for masculinity is homosexual only in terms of sustaining a masculine identification, but not in terms of a sexual orientation or desire.” (Judith Butler, 2007)

3. CONCLUSION:

In this paper, gender is defined through the perspectives of various feminist thinkers. These feminist thinkers have defined the subversive nature of gender. Feminist movements have explored the oppression tools and the power relations beneath them. These theories have demonstrated the prevailing discrimination between man and woman. Equality in education and opportunities are asked to seek in society. This chapter describes the gender theories from Mary Wollstonecraft to Judith Butler. Initially, sex and gender were taken synonymously. Mary wrote about the freedom of woman rights, Mill made emphasis on equal opportunities, Virginia Woolf exposed the literary deficiency in the history of woman, Beauvoir explicitly talked about sex and gender. she distinguished these two terms. Kate Millett and Betty Freidan have stressed upon the patriarchal structure which is deeply rooted in every gender problem. Finally, Judith Butler redefines gender with her performative theory.

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