UNIT 2- FEMINISM: LIBERAL AND RADICAL

UNIT STRUCTURE

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2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this chapter you will be able to:

- understand the meaning of Feminism
- understand the meaning of Liberal Feminism
- understand the views of Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Martineau
- understand the meaning of Radical Feminism
- know the difference between Liberal Feminism and Radical Feminism

2.2 INTRODUCTION:

Feminism comprises a number of social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women. Feminism is a movement that confronts the abuse of power and seeks equality and justice.

The word 'feminism' cannot be explained by a single phrase or definition. It has very subjective interpretations according to its appropriateness and relevance. It has been said that today there are as many definitions of feminism as there are feminists. Each definition of feminism is governed by many factors including one's own beliefs, history and culture.

Different feminist theories with different ideologies play different roles at different times and place in the world. Their ideological viewpoints cross connect or simply oppose the basic tenets.

Feminism is a theorizing wherein literary theories and practices are importantly in focus. Mainly, one theory of feminism seems opposing another set of feminist thoughts. And as a result, it is ironic to say that a particular feminist theory versus another whereas all the strands propagate equality and gender justice under different domains like economy, class, caste, race, culture, religion etc. A feminist perspective is to become aware of the situation of women, of the relation of women to the world, of the oppression and discrimination to which women have been subjected. Anyone male or female who supports this idea can be a feminist. Feminism means the full social, political and economic equality of men and women. The first idea that is likely to occur in the course of any historical thinking about feminism is that feminism is a social force.

The development of feminism has led to gaining focus on the subordinate position of women in many societies. Feminist sociologists have been mainly responsible for developing theories of gender inequalities, yet there is little agreement about the causes of inequality, and about the actions that should be taken to reduce or end it.

Several feminist approaches can be broadly divided into four categories:

- Liberal feminism
- Radical feminism
- Marxist and socialist feminism
- Post Modern feminism

In this unit we will discuss about liberal and radical feminism.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Difference between sex and gender

Q2: Define feminism

Q3: Feminist approaches divided into how many categories

2.3 LIBERAL FEMINISM

Introduction :

Liberal feminism was started in seventeen and eighteenth century, in the age of Enlightenment in Western Europe. The development of Western capitalism created new systems of inequality marked by the displacement of the poor from rural areas and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the new capitalist class. The ideology of the enlightenment era provided the backdrop for major changes in Western social organization. Liberal feminism enjoys greater popular support than the other perspectives because its aims are more moderate and its views pose less challenge to existing traditions. Liberal feminists aim for gradual change in the political, economic and social systems of societies.

To the liberal feminist, nobody benefits from existing gender inequalities; both men and women are harmed because the potential of female and males alike is suppressed. For example, many women with the potential to be successful and skilled members of the workforce do not get the opportunity to develop their talents, while men are denied some of the pleasures of having a close relationship with their children. The creation of equal opportunities, particularly in education and work, is the main aim of liberal feminists. They pursue this aim through the introduction of legislation and by attempting to change attitudes. Since they believe that existing gender inequalities benefit nobody, they are willing to work with any member of society who supports their beliefs and aims.

Meaning of liberal feminism

Liberal feminism rejects the conservative view that persons assumes their status in life because of ascribed characteristics and attributes and the denial of opportunity. Liberal feminism rejects the existing practise where women are bound to particular roles and statues because of their biological capacity to bear children.

The liberal feminism assumes that the person can create humanitarian change through the use of human rationality. Injustice is viewed as due to irrationality and ignorance. Reason and the pursuit of knowledge are believed to be the source of social change. Liberal policies for change rely on a faith in the process of social reform. Liberal feminists' practical solutions to inequality include programs that prohibit discrimination. For liberal feminist the ideal gender arrangement is one in which each individual to is given the choice to be housewife or househusband, unmarried careerist or part of a dual income family, childless or with children, heterosexual. The Liberal feminist see this ideal as one that enhances the practice of freedom and equality, central cultural ideals in America.

Principles of Liberal Feminism:

There are two central principles of liberal feminism, which are as follows:

- The concept of individual liberty
- Emphasis on human reason as the basis for humanitarian social change In liberal feminism, these are the basis for equal opportunity and social reform. For Liberal feminist social change lies in the construction of legislation and in the regulation of employment practices. According to the liberal perceptive, the obstacles to equal rights for women lie in traditional laws and practices that deny the same rights to women that men already have.

Assumptions of liberal feminism:

- Main advocator of Liberal feminism were Marry Wollstonecraft and Harriet Martineau
- Liberal feminism is certainly the 'moderate' or 'mainstream' face of feminism.
- Liberal philosophy was based on reason, equality and individual freedom.
- Liberal perspective assumes that persons can create humanitarian change through the use of human rationality.

- In Liberal feminism women's position in society is seen in terms of unequal rights or artificial barrier to women's participation in the public world, beyond the family and household.
- The focus of liberal feminist was on the public sphere, on legal, political and institutional struggles for the rights of individuals to compete in the public market.
- The basic idea of liberal feminism was that women are foremost human beings and not sexual beings. Women should have freedom to act according to their wishes, as they are rational creatures and they should not be denied natural rights.
- Liberals accepted the sex role differences and expected women to take care of the home and thus contribute to the well-being of society, but they contended that both sexes are equal and so women should have the same role like men.
- Liberal feminism seeks the reform of individuals through the resocialization of children and the relearning of appropriate social roles for adults.



LET US KNOW

Mary Wollstonecraft :

Born on: 27 April 1759

Died on: 10 September 1797

Major Works:

- Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: With Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life, 1787.
- Mary: A Fiction, 1788.
- A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Moral and Political Subjects, 1792.

Mary Wollstonecraft is one of the famous liberal feminists. Let us discuss the main features of her theory.

- Women remain enslaved of men because of a wrong socialization, which teaches women that their purpose in life is to serve men.
- Wollstonecraft believes that proper education, proper training in critical thinking, is the most important single item on the feminist agenda.
- Women must think clearly and rationally about their own situation which will make them less trustful and less likely to forget their own self-interest.
- According to Wollstonecraft men and women have the same moral and intellectual core; they should receive the same mental and spiritual training.
- Women should get access to the great enterprises of public life and not be confined to the domestic sphere. They should be allowed into various professions such fields as medicine, scholarship and business.
- Wollstonecraft's views initially met resistance and extreme criticism, she is now held in high regard for seeking to empower a previously oppressed sex.
- Her work is important to literary criticism because she found in literature, the same sexual inequality and incoherence she was arguing against in society at large.



LET US KNOW

Harriet Martineau :

Born on: 12 June 1802

Died on: 27 June 1876

Major Works:

- Illustrations of taxation, 1834

- Illustrations of Political Economy, 1834
- Society in America; 3 volumes,1837
- The Hour and the Man: An Historical Romance, 1839
- Household Education, 1848

Let us discuss the main featuress of the theory proposed by Harriet Martineau

- Harriet Martineau known as the first female sociologist.
- She translated various works by Auguste Comte.
- She worked for women's emancipation with her support for the American abolition movement.
- It is the drive towards human happiness which shapes morals and manners whereas for Feminist Studies it is the drive towards human equality.
- Martineau's work stands as an example of early white feminist thought, complete with its class and race contradictions.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q4:In which year Martineau was born?

Q5: When was the book, 'Mary: A Fiction,' published?

Q6: Name any two liberal feminists.

Criticism of liberal feminism

- Liberal feminism fails to explain the institutionalized basis of race and class oppression.
- Liberal feminism did not give any positive alternative to the patriarchal control of female sexuality.
- Liberal feminism leaves much unanswered, it does not explain the emergence of gender inequality.
- Liberal feminism judging women and their success by male standards.
- Liberal feminism overlooks race and class inequities.
- Liberal feminism emphasizes change within existing system

2.4 RADICAL FEMINISM

Introduction

Radical feminism started in 1970s, primarily in New York and Boston. It was developed by a group of "Movement Women" who were those who had participated in the political activities of the civil rights and anti-war campaigns of the 1960s.

The New York radical feminist groups, formed in 1967 and 1968 developed the main body of radical feminist theory. The first major radical feminist publications, Notes from the first year appeared in June 1968, followed by Notes from the Second year 1970, and Notes from the third year 1971. These included the most important early articulations of radical feminist theory.

Radical feminism blames the exploitation of women on men. To a radical feminist, it is primarily men who have benefited from the subordination of women. Women are seen to be exploited because they undertake unpaid labor for men by carrying children and housework, and because they denied access to position of power.

Meaning of Racial Feminism

Radical feminists believe that women have always been exploited and that only revolutionary change can offer the possibility of their liberation. Radical feminists see society as patriarchal - it is dominated and ruled by men. Men are ruling class, and women the subject class. The family is often seen by radical feminists as the key institution oppressing women in modern societies. Radical feminists argue that women are not just equal but are actually morally superior to men. They wish to see patriarchy replaced by matriarchy. From such perspectives, men are responsible not only for the exploitation of women, but also for many other problems. This may include conflict, war, destruction of the environment and so on.

Rosemarie Tong (1998) distinguishes between two groups of radical feminist:

- Radical-libertarian feminists who believe that it is both possible and desirable for gender differences to be eradicated, or at least greatly reduced, and aim for a state of androgyny in which men and women are not significantly different. They believe that differences between the masculine and feminine are socially constructed. If they are removed then equality between men and women can follow.
- Radical-cultural feminists believe in the superiority of the feminine. According to Tong radical cultural feminists celebrate characteristics associated with femininity such as emotion, and are hostile to those characteristics associated with masculinity such as hierarchy.

  Tong accepts that a distinction between radical liberation feminists and radical cultural feminists can be overstated, but believes that it does reflect real and significant differences.

Principles of Radical Feminism

Radical feminism is based on two principles:

- Women are of absolute positive value
- Women are everywhere oppressed- violently oppressed-by the system of patriarchy



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q7: Rosemarie Tong give…… groups of radical feminist

Q8: Women are everywhere …… by the system of patriarchy, according to radical feminism.

Difference between Liberal Feminism and Radical Feminism

Radical feminism, unlike liberal and Marxist feminism, is not drawn directly from previous bodies of 'male stream' thought. It has some links with liberal feminism,for example some feminists spoke of sexual politics but it offers a real challenge and rejection of the liberal orientation towards the public world of men. Liberal feminism did not consider the connection

between sexual oppression, sexual division of labour and the economic class structure. So, it claimed for reforms. Indeed, it gives a positive value to womanhood rather than supporting a notion of assimilating women into arenas of activity associated with men on the other hand, Radical feminists demand the destruction of patriarchy. It pays attention to women's oppression in a social order dominated by men.

Radical Feminism and the role of patriarchy

Radical feminists see in every institution and in society's most basic stratificational arrangements-heterosexuality, class, caste, race, ethnicity, age, and gender- systems of domination and subordination, the most fundamental structure of which is the system of patriarchy. Not only is patriarchy historically the first structure of domination and submission, it continues as the most pervasive and enduring system of inequality, the basic societal model of domination. Through participation in patriarchy, men learn how to hold other human beings in contempt, to see them as nonhuman, and to control them. Men create and maintain patriarchy not only because they have the resources to do so but because they have real interests in making women serve as compliant tools. Women are uniquely effective means of satisfying male sexual desire. Their bodies are essential to the production of children, who satisfy both practical and psychological needs for men. Women are a useful labor force. They can be ornamental signs of male status and power. As carefully controlled companions to both the child and the adult male, they are pleasant partners, sources of emotional support, and useful foils who reinforce the male's sense of central social significance. These useful functions mean that men everywhere seek to keep women compliant. But different social circumstances give different rank orders to these functions and therefore lead to cross-cultural variations in the patterning of patriarchy. Within patriarchy men see and women learn what subordination looks like. Patriarchy creates guilt and repression, sadism and masochism, manipulation and deception, all of which drive men and women to other forms of tyranny. Patriarchy, to radical feminists, is the least noticed yet the most significant structure of social inequality. Radicals

hold that defeat of patriarchy must begin with a basic reworking of women's consciousness so that each woman recognizes her own value and strength; rejects patriarchal pressures to see herself as weak, dependent, and second-class; and works in unity with other women, regardless of differences among them, to establish a broad-based sisterhood of trust, support, appreciation, and mutual defense.

Assumptions of Radical feminism:

- Main advocators of Radical feminism were Kate Millet and Germane Greer.
- Radical feminism looked at women as one homogeneous group and recognized them to be oppressed by men; this gave the movement a universal vision.
- The Radical do not favor marriage and family because these institutions help to establish patriarchy in society.
- Radical feminism describes sexual oppression as the very least a fundamental form of oppression and the primary oppression for women.
- Men, as a group, are considered to be the beneficiaries of this systematic and systemic form of power.
- Women are oppressed because of their sex.
- Sexual oppression is seen as the oldest and even the most profound form of inequality.
- The notion of shared oppression is intimately connected with a strong emphasis on the sisterhood of women.
- Radicals present a social and political change required to overthrow the system of male domination as far-reaching. They generally advocate a revolutionary model of social change and want women to unite and become self-reliant and overthrow male dominance by a complete sexual revolution.



LET US KNOW

Kate Millett

Born on: 14 September 1934

Died on: 6 September 2017

Major Works

- Sexual Politics, 1970
- The Prostitution papers: A Candid Dialogue, 1971
- Sita, 1976
- The Basement: Meditations on a Human Sacrifice, 1979
- Going to Iran, 1981
- The Politics of Cruelty: An Essay on the Literature of Political Imprisonment, 1993

Kate Millet is one of significnt radical feminists Let us describe the main features her theory.

- Femininity is the primary vehicle of women's oppression and calls upon male dominated institutions to allow women the opportunity to participate fully in the public world.
- Early socialization is most significant, as it encourages males to be aggressive and female to be passive. Male and females are taught to behave and think in ways which reinforce the biological difference.
- Men are socialized to have a dominant temperament. This provides men with a higher social status, which in turn leads to them filling all social roles and they show mastery over women.
- Family is the main institution of patriarchy, within the family it is the need for children to be legitimate, to have a socially recognized father that gives men a particularly dominate position.
- Women have a caste like status that operates independently of social class.
- Women from higher class backgrounds are subordinate to men. Millett believes that the economic dependency of women on men places outside the class system.

- In traditional patriarchies, women lacked legal standing and were not able to own property or to earn their own living, even in today's society, women can work but their work is usually menial, badly paid and lacking in status.
- Societies, in which women retain their roles as mothers and housewives, much of that work is unpaid. Millett saw women as being a reserve labor force that are made use of when they are needed but are discarded when not required.
- Millett argues that men also retain patriarchal power through myth and religion. Religion is used as a way of legitimating masculine dominance.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q9:In which year Kate Millett was died?

Q10: When was the book, 'Sexual Politics' published?

Criticism of Radical Feminism

- Radical feminists seek to promote division between peoples on superficial differences.
- Radical feminism often resorts to violence.
- Its propositions are said to be unrealistic
- Radical feminism is said to class blind, and color blind



2.5 LET US SUM UP

- Radical feminism blames the exploitation of women on men.
- It is primarily men who have benefited from the subordinated of women.
- Radical feminists focus on the patriarchal nature of law and its oppressive impact on all women.