UNIT 3: FEMINIST THOUGHT (II) : MARXIST-SOCIALISTS, POST-MODERN

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3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this chapter you will be able to

- understand the meaning of Feminism
- understand the meaning of Marxist and socialist feminism
- know the difference between Marxist and liberal feminism
- know the features of Marxist and Socialist feminism
- understand the Marxist theory of family relations

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Different feminist theories with different ideologies played significant role at different times and place in the world. We will outline the Marxist and Post-Modern perspectives in detail in this Unit.

3.3 MARXIST AND SOCIALIST FEMINISM

3.3.1 Introduction

Marxist and socialist feminism do not confer women's exploitation a result of patriarchy entirely but they see capitalism as being the principal source of women's oppression. Karl Marx and Engles endorsed the notion that economic struggle should be given priority over the social and sexual struggles. Marxist and socialist feminism relate women's oppression to the production of wealth. They place much greater stress on the exploitation of women in paid employment. The disadvantaged position of women is held to be a consequence of the emergence of private property and subsequently their lack of ownership of the means of production, which in turn deprives them of power.

Marxist feminists tried to use a class analysis rather than a gender analysis to explain women's oppression. Marxist feminist Evelyn Reed in her book *"Women: Caste, Class, or Oppressed Sex?"* stress on the fact that the same capitalist economic forces and social relations that brought about the oppression of one class by another, one race by another and one nation by another also brought about the oppression of one sex by another, Reed resisted the view that women's oppression is the worst kind of oppression. Although Reed agreed that relative to men, women occupy a subordinate position in a patriarchal or male-dominated society, she did not think that all women were equally oppressed by men or that no women were guilty of oppressing other women. On the contrary, she thought bourgeoisie women were capable of oppressing both proletarian men and women. In a capitalist system, money is most often power. Reed believed

that the primary enemy of at least proletarian women is not patriarchy, but first and foremost, capitalism.

3.3.2 Difference Between Marxist And Liberal Feminism

- Liberal feminism traces its roots in American Revolution while Marxist feminism finds its inspiration in the writings of Karl Marx.
- Marxists reject the liberal idea of human nature, claiming instead that what makes us different from other animals is our ability to produce our means of subsistence. Human is 'what they are' because of what they do-specifically, what they do to meet their basic needs through productive activities such as fishing, farming, and building.
- For the liberal, the ideas, thoughts, and values of individuals account for change over time. For the Marxist, material forces-the production and reproduction of social life-are the prime movers in history.

3.3.3 Features Of Marxist And Socialist Feminism

- Marxist and socialist feminists claim that social existence determines consciousness.
- Marxist and socialist feminists see that class and gender relations intersect in capitalist societies and that class relations alone do not account for the location of women and men in social life.
- This feminist perspective begins with the point that, although economic class relations are important in determining women's status, gender relations may be equally important.
- Marxist and Socialist feminists see that class and gender relations intersect in capitalist societies and that class relations alone do not account for the location of women and men in social life.
- Marxist and socialist feminists believe we need to analyze the links between women's work status and women's self-image in order to understand the unique character of women's oppression.
- Eradicating social class inequality alone will not necessarily eliminate sexism as well.

- Women's unpaid work as housewives and mothers is one of the main ways in which women are exploited.
- Men in general benefit, it is primarily capitalists who gain from women's unpaid work since new generations of workers are reproduced at no cost to the capitalist.
- Marxist and socialist feminists relate women's oppression to the production of wealth.
- The disadvantaged position of women is held to be a consequence of the emergence of private property and subsequently their lack of ownership of the means of production, which in turn deprives them of power.
- Women as a group exploited, particularly since the advent of capitalism.They are more sensitive to the difference between women who belong to the ruling class and proletarian families.
- Marxist feminists desire for revolutionary change, however, they seek the establishment of a communist society.
- In communist society where the means of production will be communally owned, gender inequalities will disappear.
- They regard classism rather than sexism as the fundamental cause of women's oppression.

3.3.4 The Marxist Theory Of Family Relations

Marx and Engels wrote *"The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State"* (1845), in which he showed how changes in the material conditions of people affect the organization of their family relations. According to this book in the early stage of human history every woman had fair access to for every man, and vice versa. All were essentially married to all. As fewer and fewer women in the tribal group became available to any given man, individual men began to put forcible claims on individual women as their possessions.

Engels interpreted this state of affairs as a sign of women's economic power. Because women's work was vital for a tribe's survival and because women produced most of the material goods (e.g., bedding, clothing,

cookware, tools) that could be passed on to future generations, Engels concluded that early pairing societies were probably matrilineal, with inheritance and lines of descent traced through the mother.

The "domestication of animals and the breeding of herds" outside the household led to an entirely new source of wealth for the human community. Somehow, men gained control of the tribe's animals, and the male-female power balance shifted in favor of men, as men learned to produce more than enough animals to meet the tribe's needs for milk and meat. Surplus animals constituted an accumulation of wealth men used as a means of exchange between tribes. Possessing more than enough of a valuable socioeconomic good, men found themselves increasingly preoccupied with the issue of property inheritance. As men's work and production grew in importance, not only did the value of women's work and production decreased, but the status of women within society decreased. Because men now possessed things more valuable than the things women possessed, Engels believed that proletarian women experience less oppression than do bourgeois women.The bourgeois family comprise of a relationship between a husband and a wife in which the husband agrees to support his wife provided that she promises to remain sexually faithful to him and to reproduce only his legitimate heirs.

3.3.5 Women's Wage After The 1917 Communist Revolution

In Russia during the 1917 Communist Revolution, women were invited to enter the productive workforce to supposedly find in it the beginnings of their full human liberation. It was felt economic independence would come the possibility of women's developing self-confidence and viewing themselves as makers of meaningful human history. Unfortunately, things did not turn out so well for post-revolution Soviet women.

Problems faced by women in workplace are as follows :

- The relegation of most women to low-status "women's work" i.e., secretarial work; rote factory work; and service work, including jobs related to cooking, cleaning, and caring for the basic needs of the young, the old, and the infirm;

- The creation of "female professions" and "male professions";
- The payment of lower wages to women than the wages paid to men;

3.3.6 The Wages-for-Housework Campaign

Maria Dalla Costa and Selma James argued that in a capitalist society, the best way for women to achieve economic parity with men might not be for women to enter the productive workforce and for domestic labor to be socialized, but instead for women to stay at home and demand wages for the "real work"-that is, productive work- they did there. Men's employers should pay women wages for the housework they do.

3.3.7 Theoretical Perspectives Of Marxist And Socialist Feminism

➢ Iris Maion Young :

According to Iris Marion Young, as long as classical Marxist feminists try to use class as their central category of analysis, they will not be able to explain why women in socialist countries are often just as oppressed as women in capitalist countries.Class discuss just respective roles of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, whereas a sexual division-of-labor analysis requires a detailed discussion of who gives the orders and who takes them, who does the stimulating work, who works more hours and who works less hours, and who gets paid relatively high wages and who gets paid relatively low wages.

Therefore,rather than a class analysis, a sexual division-of-labor analysis can better explain why women usually take the orders, work part-time, and get paid relatively low wages, whereas men usually give the orders, do the stimulating jobs, work full-time, and get paid relatively high wages. She believed that capitalism and patriarchy are necessarily linked.

We do not need one theory (Marxism) to explain gender-neutral capitalism and another theory (feminism) to explain gender biased patriarchy, said Young. Rather, we need a single theory a socialist feminist theory able to explain gender biased practices.

She argued that capitalism is very much aware of its workers' gender Because a large reserve of unemployed workers are necessary to keep wages low and to meet unanticipated demands for increased supplies of goods and services, capitalism has both implicit and explicit criteria for determining who will constitute its primary, employed workforce and who will act as its secondary, unemployed workforce. For a variety of reasons, not the least being a well-entrenched gender division of labor, capitalism's criteria identify men as "primary" workforce material and women as "secondary." Because women are needed at home in a way men are not-or so patriarchy believes-men are freer to work outside the home than women are.



LET US KNOW

IRIS MARION YOUNG

Born On: 2 January 1949

Died On: 1August 2006

Major Works:

- Justice and the politics of difference, 1990.
- Intersecting voices: dilemmas of gender, political philosophy, and policy, 1997



LET US KNOW

HEIDI HARTMANN

Born On: 14 August 1945

Major Works:

- Women, work, and wages equal pay for jobs of equal value, 1981
- The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism: towards a more progressive union, 1981

- Women's work, men's work sex segregation on the job, 1986 Main Points:

➢ **Heidi Hartmann**: Heidi Hartmann's analysis of the interaction of patriarchal structures and the development of capitalism is an important contribution of socialist feminism.

Heidi Hartmann noted that a strict class analysis leaves largely unexplained why women rather than men play the subordinate and submissive roles in both the workplace and the home. To understand not only workers' relation to capital but also women's relation to men, a feminist analysis of patriarchy must be integrated with a Marxist analysis of capitalism. The partnership between patriarchy and capitalism is complex because patriarchy's interests in women are not always the same as capitalism's interests in women.



LET US KNOW

SYLVIA WALBY

Born On: 16 October 1953

Major Works:

- Localities, class, and gender, 1985.
- Patriarchy at work: patriarchal and capitalist relations in employment, 1986.
- Gender segregation at work, 1988.

➢ **Sylvia Walby:** Sylvia Walby conceptualized patriarchy and capitalism as developing in tandem. As she saw it, patriarchy is located in six somewhat independent structures: unpaid domestic work, waged labor, culture, sexuality, male violence, and the state. These structures, and their relative importance, vary from one historical era to another. Walby noted that patriarchy oppressed women mostly in the private sphere of domestic production during the nineteenth century, and mostly in the public sphere of waged labor and the state in the twentieth century. Focusing on workplace gender inequity

in the United Kingdom in particular, Walby observed that in 1992, the British government made full employment for both men and women one of its main goals. Than ever entered the productive workforce, where they gained not only economic clout but also a strong political voice.

CRITICISM

- Marxist and socialist feminists explain capitalism, but they do not explain patriarchy.
- Marxism explains why capitalists exploit women, but not why men exploit women.
- Marxist theory term women as insignificant, they sit on the sidelines of the grand struggle between capitalism and labour.
- Marxist theories see capitalism alone benefitting from the exploitation of women.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Define feminism.

Q2. Give two features of Marxist and socialist feminism.

Q3. Name two Marxist and socialist feminists.

Q4. Write difference between Marxist and Liberal feminism.

Q5 In which year Sylvia Walby was born

Q6 When was the book, 'Justice and the politics of difference' published.

3.4 POST-MODERN FEMINISM

3.4.1 INTRODUCTION

Postmodern feminism refers to the feminist theory system that is inclusive of postmodern ideals and post-structuralism theory. Postmodern feminists reject any mode of feminist thought that aims to provide a single explanation for why women are oppressed or what steps all women must take to achieve liberation. Postmodern feminism has some similarities with

aspects of Black feminism. Postmodern feminism tends to reject the claim that there is a single theory that can explain the position of women in society. It encourages the acceptance of many different points of view as equally valid. In particular, it tends to deny that there is any single, unitary essence to the concept 'women'. Postmodern feminists invite each woman to become the kind of feminist he/she wants to be. There is no single formula for being a feminist.

Many postmodern theories reject the idea of progress altogether. Post modern feminist see the whole idea of progress as a product of a dominant, male rationality. Some see ideas such as justice and equality as concepts associated with male reason, which seeks to manipulate and control the world. They reject these sorts of aims, which they see as the product of masculine styles of thinking. Post modern feminists have suggested ways in which the interests of women in general can be pursued. Unlike more conventional feminisms, though, these have more to do with the use of language than with such things as improving job opportunities, freeing women from biological constraints or getting men to do more household works.

Postmodern feminists question the whole idea of truth by claiming that language cannot represent some external reality. Not only should the binary opposition projected by male thought be rejected but language itself fails to represent a feminine understanding of the world. Language is the ally of male rationality. It is used to impose an artificial order on the world and to express the masculine desire manipulate and control,Languages that have been developed primarily by men are less useful for understanding the ways in which women understand and experience the world.

3.4.2 Assumptions Of Postmodern Feminism

- Main advocators of Postmodern Feminism were Rosemarie Tong and Judith Butler.
- Postmodern feminism rejects a dualistic view of gender.
- Postmodernism tends to celebrate differences and to attack the idea that some features are to be preferred over others.

- Postmodern feminists argue against the assumption that all women share a common oppression.
- Postmodern feminists sometimes reject the idea that women can progress by taking on the features and gaining the social positions traditionally reserved for men.

3.4.3 Third-Wave And Postmodern Feminists

Third-wave feminists push just as hard as postmodern feminists to take feminist thought in new directions. Third-wave feminists are more than willing to accommodate diversity and change. They are particularly eager to understand the ways in which gender oppression and other kinds of human oppression co-create and co-maintain each other. For third-wave feminists, difference is the way things are. Third-wave feminists expect and even welcome conflict and contradiction, including self-contradiction.

3.4.4 Theoretical Perspectives Of Post-Modern Feminism



LET US KNOW

JUDITH BUTLER

Born On: 24 February 1956

Major Works:

- Subjects of desire: Hegelian reflections in twentieth-century France, 1987
- Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity, 1990
- The psychic life of power: theories in subjection, 1997

In this section we will discuss the work and propositions of some of the most important post modern theorist.

Judith Butler :

➢ Judith Butler is influenced by Freud, Derrida, and Foucault.Butler claimed that there is no necessary connection between a person's sex and a person's gender. Butler said, not only is gender constructed, but sex is constructed too.Gender and sex, said Butler, are more like verbs than nouns. But actions are limited. Individuals

are not permitted to construct their gender and sex. They are controlled by the scripts society. It takes considerable imagination to change these scripts.Butler aims to break the supposed links between sex and gender so that gender and desire can be flexible, free floating and not infuenced by other stable factors. Butler said gender is a culmination without one being conscious of it, but says that it does not mean this is mechanical. She argues that we have desires that do not originate from our personhood, but rather, from social norms.



LET US KNOW

HELENE CIXOUS

Born On: 5 June 1937

Major Works:

- To Live the Orange, 1979
- The Newly Born Woman, 1986
- Love Itself: In the Letter Box, 2008
- White Ink: Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics, 2014

➢ **Helene Cixous :**

Helene Cixous is influenced by Derrida.Cixous believes that language is male-dominated and she terms it phallocentric.Cixous believes that male thought and language can be seen as phallic.Male sexuality, the sexuality of the phallus, has a single focus, the penis whereas women can find pleasure in different parts of their bodies and can achieve greater pleasure than that offered by the phallus. Cixous discovers binary oppositions at work everywhere. The binary hierarchy is always a relationship of violence and the feminine term is always killed. Cixous has objected to masculine writing and thinking because they are cast in binary oppositions. Man has unnecessarily segmented reality by coupling concepts and terms

in pairs of polar opposites, one of which is always privileged over the other. Cixous listed some of these dichotomous pairs:

- Activity/Passivity
- Sun/Moon
- Culture/Nature
- Day/Night
- Head/Heart
- Father/Mother
- Speaking/Writing
- Man/Woman
- High/Low

The oppositions are hierarchical, with the masculine ranked higher than feminine. Change in culture and language is possible, men could also benefit from the change as well as women. Femininity and masculinity can be present in both sexes. If women can develop ways of expressing the joy of femininity and can succeed in speaking out, more men as well as women can benefit from the revelation of the feminine.



LET US KNOW

HELEN HASTE

Born On: March 17, 1943

Major Works:

- Making Sense: the Child's Construction of the World,1987
- The Sexual Metaphor, 2004

➢ **Helen Haste:** She attaches great importance to the role of language and to the existence of dualisms.Haste puts particular emphasis on the role of metaphors' in language. Metaphors are not merely comparisons between one thing and another, they also shape the way that people see the world and how they act. Gender differences go deeper than patriarchy or capitalism, they are enshrined in

language. Different metaphors' are used to understand the lives of men and those of women. Haste believes that it is difficult to express and understand female experiences through a language dominated by men, particularly by male metaphors. Haste acknowledges that there have been significant changes in recent times. For example, she points out that the most significant is the growing recognition is that women are sexually autonomous beings who have their own sexual needs and desires.Women should no longer be seen as the other to the male. Masculine view of the world should no longer be accepted as the only view.

CRITICISM

- Postmodern feminism returned to the argument that men and women are fundamentally different.
- Postmodern feminists say little about the physical force of the male or inequalities of wealth and income, which plays an important role in maintaining gender inequalities in general.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q7. Define postmodern feminism.

Q8. Name two postmodern feminists.

Q9 In which year Judith Butler was born.

Q10 When was the book, 'The Sexual Metaphor 'published.



3.5 LET US SUM UP

- Most postmodern feminists are good at theory and focus on the "otherness" of females in a patriarchal society and express its advantages.
- Helene Cixous compares feminine writing masculine writing, claiming women's writing is much more interesting.
- Postmodern feminism emphasis on the importance of language.