Chapter I

A GENERAL STUDY
OF THE AWARENESS OF FEMINISM
AND INTRODUCTION
This chapter will deal with the origin of Feminism and its various perspectives. Gender inequalities among the women exist in every corners of the globe. Although mass awareness came in this respect only in Nineteenth Century. This awareness got intensified on the last century. Much energy has been spent but the desired goal is yet to reach.

The term Feminism is coined recently. There were debates over it when the word 'Feminism' was first used and secondly what the meaning of the word Feminism is? But no such evidence has been found to described this word Feminism. The term 'Feminist' seems to have first been used in 1871 in a French medical text. It was then used by a French writer and republican Alexander Dumas Fils. He used the term Feminist in his pamphlet and published in 1871.¹

Gender inequality' as it is termed by the modern scholars in not an isolated problem, rather in true sense of the term ‘a global problem’. This problem showed its identity with a long course of development. In 1840 the women’s rights movement has started to emerge in the United States with the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 and the resulting declaration of sentiments which claimed for women the principles of liberty and equality expounded in the American declaration of Independence.\(^2\)

The term ‘Feminism’ is itself a term that was there long before women started questioning their inferior status and demanding on improvement in their social status in its literal value.

The attitude to the development can be well understood in 1870 when Queen Victoria wrote a letter complaining about ‘this mad, wicked folly of women’s rights’. The formidable Empress certainly did not herself need any Protection that the acknowledgment of women’s rights might offer.\(^3\)

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2. *Ibid. P.3*

In 1899, when Empress Victoria was 80, wrote to A.J. Balfour, ‘We are not interested in the possibilities of defeat, they do not exist’. The royal attitude towards women’s rights can be easily understood, with the above exchanges of words in 19th century.

There was a great debate about the social position of women before the term ‘Feminist’ came into existence. The persistent gender inequality gave rise to feminism in the middle nineteenth century and continued till the twentieth century and picked up momentum in 1960’s and 1970’s to attain gender inequality. Feminism concerns themselves with women’s inferior position in society and with discrimination encountered by women because of their sex. The awareness in the name of feminism has passed through a couple of years. Thus, from the middle of nineteenth century. We can perceive the development of women’s rights movement.

The word ‘Feminism’ came into view long after the whole womankind demanded for amelioration of their inferior status in social life. Though it is difficult to define feminism in terms of set of core
concepts. There were debates on the social position of women before the term ‘Feminist’ came into existence. The word ‘feminist’ or ‘feminism’ are like political issues which are indicating the support for the aims of the women’s movement which come into mass in late 1960’s.

The awareness in the name of feminism has passed through couple of years. This development can be classified by its historical appearances as different stages. The historical emergence and existence of feminist movements at different stages in the histories of feminism stated as about the series of waves. In nineteenth and early twentieth century feminism as a distinctive term was referred to the feminist movements that concerned for gaining equal rights for women i.e. rights of suffrage, which was stated as ‘First Wave’. Resurgence of feminist activity in the late 1960’s & 1970’s was stated as ‘Second Wave’ of feminism. At that time protest against women’s inequality, confined not women’s lack of political rights but also struggles in terms of family, sexuality and workstation. Though it is true that feminist movement have been more
active and have recruited more members at certain historical periods, it would be more accurate to know feminism not as issued in waves but as a link of thought and action. In specific meaning, the term feminism had been used restrictedly in relation to some specific thoughts and groups. Moreover, feminism has always been concerned in some way with women's participation or non-participation in paid employment. Mention to be made here a name of a women ‘Sheila Rowbotham (in 1992) describe the activism of women in nineteenth century radical and socialist movements. Women campaigned not principally for suffrage but for women's right to work and paid equally to men. At that time, women's low wages were seen as the result of male domination by Frances and James Morrision, the editors of an ‘Owenite trade union paper,’ the Pioneer, who argued that: The low wages of women are not so much the voluntary price she sets upon her labour as the price which is fixed by the tyrannical influence of male supremacy.\(^4\) In France too, women activists were calling for measures to reorganize both households

5. Ibid. P.45
and industry to liberate women. Thus it is quite clear from these comments that the issues of paid employment, equal payment and the provision of conditions such as child care to enable women to work, have been long-term feminism concerns.

As the twentieth century progressed and more and more women entered the labour force, these types of questions about women’s labour increased and some feminist continued to ask the ways in which women’s inclusion in paid employment affected their household but for some women this system increase in women’s employment outside of the home is seen as a positive element in increased equality between men and women, for others it is not such an important factor in solving the gender inequalities. Feminist who have focused on an analysis of women’s paid employment have sought answers to their questions of why there is a continuing gender segregation in the labour market and why women who do take up paid employment still earn on average less than men? The answers to these questions are linked: Women earn less than men
partly because they are restricted to less valued and less well-paid sectors of the labour market.\(^6\)

More-far-reaching analyses of the sexual division of labour and of women’s place in the labour market have been provided by some feminists, who have attempted to explain women’s place in the labour market through an examination of the capitalist system of production.

So far, some feminist approaches to women’s paid employment and to the segregation of the labour market. Another linked issue, which has concerned feminists, is that of women’s unpaid labour in the home. The problem of unpaid domestic work is however, a problem which again pushes feminists into an equality-difference argument. In this issue some feminist have argued that the unpaid work that women do in the home and as carers is just as valuable as paid employment and it should be recognized and valued as such.

\[\text{6. Ibid. P.47}\]
Many of these changes have obviously benefited women, but they have not abolished the unequal relationships between men and women in the family sphere.

Indeed, Gender inequality is not a homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of interlinked problems. Different kinds of gender inequalities are discussed here with:

**Natality Inequality:** These kind of gender inequalities manifests itself in the form of parents wanting the new born to be a boy rather than a girl. At the time of giving birth, girl babies are definitely not nutritionally deprived than boy babies are, but this situation changes as society’s unequal treatment takes over from nature’s nondiscrimination. There are plenty of aggregative evidence on this. Few years ago, when this could be a desire (a day dream) now, with the modern techniques, to determine the sex of the fetus, sex-selective abortion has become common in every country. Particularly prevalent in East Asia, China, South Korea and Singapore.7

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The neglect of the care of girl babies and of the mother in general and the underlying gender bias that they reflect would tend to yield more maternal undernourishment, and through that more fetal deprivation and distress, underweight babies.

Indeed, it can be said that traditional ways of changing gender inequality, through using public policy to influence female education and female economic participation, may not serve as a path to the removal of natality inequality.

**Mortality Inequality**: Inequality between men and women sometimes involves matters of their livelihood and death, there is usually high rate of mortality of women than men in some regions of the world observed in North Africa and Asia, there are unusually high rate of mortality of women than men. The higher rate of mortality of women, which has found in India, mainly through the neglect of health nutrition and other interests of women that influence survival. Women often die on account of one gender-specific cause of maternal mortality. Maternal
deaths in developing countries account for a high proportion of all deaths of women in their reproductive years. Every woman face a variety of health problems during pregnancy. Some women do not seek medication because they have been taught to believe, suffering is women’s fate. It has been widely observed that given similar health care and nutrition women tend typically to have lower age specific mortality rates than men do. Indeed, even female fetuses tend to have a lower probability of miscarriage than male fetuses have.

However, in many parts of the world, women receive less attention and health care than men do, and particularly girls often receive very much less support than boys. The well known concept of ‘missing women’ was contrived to give some idea of the enormity of the phenomenon of women’s adversity in mortality by focusing on the women who are simply not there, due to unusually high mortality compared with male mortality rates. In rural areas, mortality rates are higher than Urban areas. One study on child mortality in developing countries

reports that 17 out of 38 developing countries showed higher rates of infant mortality for female infant than male. In developed nations, the ratio of female to male infant death is 0.8 or 8 female child's death for every 10 male deaths. Indeed in the scale of mortality inequality India, as well as Pakistan and Bangladesh are close to the bottom of the league in gender disparity.

**Basic Facility Inequality**: This kind of inequality exist where girls have less opportunity of basic facilities like schooling and encouragement to cultivate one’s natural talents etc. than boys. Afghanistan might be a country in the world, the govt of which is keen on actively excluding girls from schooling and education. Families living in rural areas are less likely to have access to school and may also have a more need to keep their girls at home to help and subsistence activities. In case of rich families are more likely to understand the importance of their girl children’s education. Lack of an education affects young girls and women in other destructive way, for example unemployment, teenage

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pregnancies and health problems. Cultural patterns also play a role. In many countries, parents believe that they must educate their sons because they are the ones who will later be required to support their parents in old age. They believe a girl will ultimately get married and join their husband’s family, thus providing nothing to their birth parents. Religious traditions may encourage girls and women to stay at home, raise a family and take care of their husbands, thus discouraging the desire for an education. Still in rural areas the parents are more willing to send their male child to school and female child is engaged in different household works. The parents are found to reluctant to provide even the basic education to their female children. Literacy rates for women were under 50 percent in Africa and Southern Asia, in the year 1990.

**Professional Inequality**: Inequality has been found in profession too. Women were found as facing greater handicap than men in respect of success in work and occupation. There is less women than men in high position in private industries and govt services. In matters


12. *Ibid. P.109*
of basic facilities to a great extent in higher education and civilization, in some developed countries, yet progress to elevated levels of employment and occupation seems to be more problematic for women in compare with men.\textsuperscript{13} It has been found that women are often harass by their male co-workers. Women were found to participate in industry in recent years. Their participation often reinforces sexual stratification in aspect of labour. Unless training and other incentives are provided to women, they will continue to remain in low-paying, dead-end and often dangerous jobs. When women participate in wage labour especially rural women, they are often vulnerable to discrimination, primarily in areas of lower wages. Many employers find that rural women are usually more obedient and less likely to complain about working situations, low rate of wages and other problems with their jobs. The job security of women is still nonexistent in society.

**Special Opportunity Inequality**: It is undeniably true that women are still deprived of some rights. It we compare the

\textsuperscript{13} Amartya Sen. Many Faces of Gender Inequality. www.flonet.com
opportunities of getting educated the womankind, there is relatively little difference in basic facilities like schooling, the opportunities of higher education, far fewer for young girls, than for young boys. In the formal world of work, women face discrimination and multiple challenges. Within some culture, there is less or limited opportunities to access jobs which restrict the position of women. Women’s lack of owe to assets such as land and other forms of collateral affect their ability to do any independent work. The economic conditions of the space in which they live affect women’s standard of living and ability to find work outside the home. The presence of extensive gender inequality has found in many aspects education, training and professional work even in some rich and developed countries in the world. This type of differentiation has been based on the respective provinces of both men and women are different.

Ownership Inequality : The ownership of property sometimes has been found as unequal in many societies. Basic assets
like homes and land is found as unequally shared. The absence of claims to property can not only discriminate the rights and voice of women, but also make it difficult for women to enter and flourish in commercial, economic and some social activities. Women have traditionally had trouble obtaining their property. In developing countries, women have not been allowed to own property, the husband or brothers have had control to property. Though there are some variations for ex. though traditional property rights have favoured men in the bulk of India matrilineal inheritance exists in some of the communities in India, like Nayars in Kerala and Khasis in Meghalaya of Assam. It is worth mentioning that although the Khasi girls are inheriting the property side by side, they are to bear all the responsibilities of the household and the boys are very much passive in the society.

**Household Inequality** : Basic inequalities in gender relations within the family or the household, which can take place in different forms. In some cases, there are no apparent signs of anti female
bias like son preference or even in promotion to higher executive position, the family arrangements can be quite unequal in terms of sharing the burden of housework and child care. Boys are expected to become wage earners to support their own families as well as to provide support to their parents in old age. Families are more likely to provide their sons with all available health care and with an education. Girls are seen as providing service to their families, by staying home and helping their mothers with housework, child care.

The reach of this inequality includes not only unequal relations within the family, but also derivative inequalities in employment and recognition in the outside world. For ex. it is common in the society to take it for granted that while men will naturally work outside the home. Women could do it if they could combine it with various inescapable and unequally shared household duties. So far, we have considered some approaches to women’s paid employment and another linked issue is of women’s unpaid labour in the home. The unpaid labour has seen by
some feminist as the link of patriarchal and capitalist systems of production which give men power over women through a sexual division of labour. This is called ‘Division of labour’. The problem of unpaid domestic work is however a type of an equality difference. Though society has come across the problem of these inequalities, but, they have not abolished the unequal relationship between the two sex in the sphere of the family and society as well. It has been observed that the inequality between women and men can not be confronted and overcome by only one set of all purpose remedy. It is necessary to solve the problem of the variety of forms that gender inequality can take. Some economic models have tended to relate the neglect of women to the lack of economic empowerment of women. But in another side of the coin it has been found that, women’s gainful employment especially in more rewarding occupations, clearly does play a role in improving the status of women. And so does women’s literacy and other factors that can be seen as adding to the status, standing and voice of women in family decisions.

An instance can be followed in this context is the experience of the state of Kerala in India, which provides a sharp contrast with many other parts of the country in having little or no gender bias in mortality. The causal variables related to women’s empowerment can be seen as planning a role here, since Kerala has a very high level of women’s literacy and also much more access for women to well paid and well respected jobs.\textsuperscript{15} All those observations link with each other very well in making a developed country. Although it is undeniably true that women still do most of the unpaid housework and caring in our society and that they receive little or no recognition for this work. It has been found that most countries assign women in domestic and family areas and political and public areas to men.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, some sociologists believe that male dominance is universal, that has found in every culture throughout society. Though women’s roles vary across cultures. Their status within each society is determined by institutional factors such as family, politics, religion and economic systems within the culture as well as by the level of power, prestige and control over property that they have.\textsuperscript{16} It has been

\textsuperscript{15} Amartya Sen. \textit{Many Faces of Gender Inequality}

\textsuperscript{16} Karen L. Kinner. \textit{Women in the Third World}. ABC-CLIO. Santa Barbara, California, U.S.A
observed that there are more men in the world than women, the ratio of elderly women to elderly men is increasing, as is the proportion of elderly women in the general population. The most common form of violence against women is domestic violence, in which either a husband or any intimate partner abuses a woman. Some economic models have tended to relate the neglect of women to the lack of economic empowerment of women. But in other side of the coin, it has been found that, women’s gainful employment, especially in more rewarding occupations, clearly does play a role in improving the issue that women are getting in society. And so does women’s literacy and other factors that can be seen as adding to the status and voice of women in family decisions. Women’s moral voice has gone unheard for so long period because their way of making moral judgements is deemed inferior to that of men, whose voice is taken as the norm. The Vedas are the oldest document of human civilisation. To assertion the space for women in Vedic literature, a study of the gender inequalities in present era became an essential text for study. The study recorded different aspects of imposed inequalities.