CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION
Feminism as a movement represents a variety of views about what constitutes a just society, what is unfair and unjust in the relationship between men and women in the society. The different feminists' views work out different agenda for bringing changes in the subjugated and oppressed status of women in the society. Broadly defined feminism is an active desire to change women's position or status, starting from obtaining equal work with men in respect of their nature as a free person in the human society to treatment and understanding as a moral agent.

The term 'feminism' may be new but it can be traced back to ancient cultures and civilizations. In ancient Crete women were given importance and they dominated the family. In Mesopotamia women enjoyed high status in civil and political field. Similarly in ancient Egyptian civilization women held high places in the field of law. In the fifteenth century Christine De Pisan published her book "The City of Ladies" expressing various feminist ideas, with an emphasis on women's right to education and political participation. Christine De Pisan's was a writer of the medieval era who strongly challenged
misogyny and stereotypes expressed in the male-dominated realm of arts. Her success stems from a wide range of innovative writing and rhetorical techniques that critically challenged renowned male writers such as Jean De Meun, who to Pisan’s dismay, incorporated misogynist belief within their works. A number of scholars have insisted that Pisan should be seen as an early feminist who effectively articulated the importance of the role women can play in society. This characterization has been challenged by other critics who claim either that it is anachronistic use of the term or that her beliefs do not merit such a classification as they are not progressive enough like those of Mary Wollstonecraft.

French revolution, the mother of all revolutions, aroused hopes and fresh vision among women that gradually found expression through a bold challenge to patriarchy. The English feminist Mary Wollstonecraft in her book “Vindication of the Right of Women” proclaims the centrality of the value of individual independence without sexual discrimination. She lays emphasis on extending the Enlightenment principles to women. Her understanding of how to overcome some of the debilitating cultural differences, afflicting women, reflected in her vehemently advocating the role of education. She felt that this will help women to claim significance within their functions. The era of Wollstonecraft required that justification of
women's right to self-development be provided or articulated in a consistent manner. The ground she adduced to claim the right to self-development by women as that it would make them better mothers. Her arguments anticipated the concerns of later generation of feminist campaigners for gender and sexual equality.

In the middle of the Nineteenth Century started the women's movement, which later on acquired the title of 'first wave' feminism and dates between 1819 and 1928. The 'first wave' campaign for equal legal and political rights for women. The campaign had as its central focus and is principally recognized for female suffrage, the women's right to vote. However, other issues were also simultaneously struggled for, such as women not being allowed to sign contracts and had no title to own by inheritance or dower to their children in case of legal separation.

The 'first wave' with its main concern for the women's right to political participation also came to be known as the suffragette movement. The suffragette movement led to the 'second-wave' feminism in the Nineteen Sixties. The second wave feminism had two different camps representing the two dominant competing theories of governance and duties and rights of the individuals. The two camps were the liberal and the socialist.
The liberal component of the ‘second-wave’ rested on the argument that acquiring political rights does not solve the ‘women question’. The goal of ‘second-wave’ feminism therefore was not merely political emancipation but liberation of women in all spheres of life and it reflected itself in the growing number of women’s liberation movements.

The first women’s liberation movement started in the United State. Liberal feminist Betty Freidan in her book, ‘The Feminine Mystique’, described women’s problem as ‘the problem that has no name’. She further stressed the undesirable focusing on middle-class white women. Freidan detailed the debilitating and restrictive aspect of the role of housewives and mothers. She pointed out the full women’s potential that only had a limited expression in public life due to the limited freedom to participate in the world outside the home. The main argument of liberal feminists was that women should be provided the opportunity to determine their social role with as much freedom as men and be treated as being of equal moral worth. The philosophical basis of liberal feminism, as that of liberal philosophy in general, is that individual women should receive equal treatment, regardless of their sex and gender, race, color, creed or religion. However, they along the lines of liberal discourse insisted that individuals are to be judged only on rational grounds, on the
content of character, on possession of talents and on their personal worth, in short, they preferred meritocracy. The criterion for liberal feminist keeping in with their male counterparts was merit. Liberal feminists persistently raised a demand for equal rights. Liberal feminism is essentially reformist, since it only wants to bring about changes to the extent of establishing equality and is less concerned with deeper analysis of gender and sexual biases that may lead to paradigmatic shifts. Their prime concern was with opening up of public life to equal competition between men and women. Their arguments are primarily centered around issues to ensure establishing of equal rights in the public sphere, such as the right to education, the right to vote, the right to pursue a career and so on.

The other component of the second-wave feminists, that is, the socialist feminist thought originated in the nineteenth century. This component was inspired by feminists who envisioned a world in which economic competition and exploitation would be replaced including between men and women, who would also share domestic tasks, household chores, and childcare. The socialist feminism understood and therefore thematized the contention that patriarchy can be only be seen as the result of social and economic factors. Friedrich Engel, in his book “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and State” brought out the insight that the assumed inferior
position of women in society has essentially changed with the development of capitalism and the institution of private property. Engel’s was categorical and affirmed that the oppression of women primarily operates through the institution of the family. Rekaha Pandey explains,

“...[in] Marxist ideology family life has developed into a patriarchal system in which woman is enslaved, suppressed and isolated as a form of ‘domestic slavery’ and in effect legalized prostitution”.¹

Gender discrimination clearly cuts across class divides, creating tension within socialist feminists, with the orthodox Marxist insistence on the primacy of class politics. Engels believed that the ‘bourgeois family’ which accorded inferior status of women is a consequence of private property and was therefore a by-product of capitalism. This suggests that class exploitation is a deeper and more significant process than sexual oppression. Women are oppressed not by men but the institution of private property in capitalism. It also suggests that gender equality will be a by-product of a social revolution when capitalism will be overthrown.

Liberal and socialist ideas threw light on the position of women in society but neither of the views recognized that gender is
the most fundamental of all social division. During the 1960’s and 1970’s the feminist movement sought to uncover the influences of patriarchy not only in politics, public life and the economy, but in all aspects of social, personal and sexual existence. This trend was evident in the work of Simone de Beauvoir and was developed by early radical feminists such as Eva Figes and Germaine Greer.

Greer in her book ‘The Female Eunuch’ suggested that women are conditioned to a passive sexual role. Women have been sterilized and turned into sexless object by the cultural stereotype of the ‘eternal feminine’. The central feature of radical feminism is the belief that sexual oppression is the most fundamental feature of society, while other forms of injustice, such as class exploitation, racial hatred, etc, are merely secondary. Radical feminists have therefore insisted that society be understood and expressed as ‘patriarchal’ to highlight the central role of sex oppression. Radical feminists argue that social constructs such as masculinity and feminity should be removed and new non-gendered categories for organizing personal and social life must be evolved, formulated and adopted. Radical feminists believe that women hold special strength for understanding and potential of reconstructing a world in which oppression may not exist. Patriarchal models of thinking have contributed dichotomous thinking to the world. Masculine is opposite
to feminine, objectivity to subjectivity, rationality to irrationality. Radical feminists argue that environment can contribute to transcend 'masculine' and 'feminine' dichotomies by refusing to categorize emotion and subjectivity in its processes and to heal the fragmentation that occurs when the world of men and women are understood in polarized ways. 'Second-wave' feminism succeeded in many countries with legalization of abortion, equal pay, wider access to education and political and professional, public and private life.

The radical feminism led to new forms of feminism emerged under the general umbrella of postmodern feminism. Postmodern feminism realizing the limits of feminism is an attempt to transcend the dichotomous presentation of earlier feminism. Postmodern feminist reject the existence of any universal or essential female standpoint. Postmodernist theorist seek to understand how meaning is negotiated, how people in power maintain control over meaning, and how truth is invented, shaped and modified by history, social content, views and life experiences.

A primary tool of postmodern feminist's interpretation is deconstruction, which involves the breaking down of polarities and dichotomies. It deconstructs to analyze and explain the system of power in any textual discourse. It maintains that constructs such as masculine and feminine, heterosexuality and homosexuality and
black and white were created and therefore all truth claims and
dehumanizes. Postmodern feminist view suggests that all
methods have strengths and limitations, and no one ‘snapshot’ no
matter how well can provide complete knowledge about women’s
experience. The postmodern feminists argue that there is no single
unified category formed around a common aspect to be found in
being a female and which naturally binds women together. They
argue that being a female is itself a highly complex and category
constructed in contested sexual scientific discourse and other social
practices.

It shows that postmodern thought entails an abiding crisis in
the modernist understanding of self-hood deemed as a unitary
coherent subjectivity; this was anticipated by the Marxist critiques of
individualism as well. This crisis leads to the question as to how far
it is possible to preserve the emancipator ideals of modernity which
seems necessary to vary endeavor of feminism while dispensing with
those absolute foundation which have been so thoroughly challenged.
As a political practice feminism must continue to posit some belief in
the notion of effective human agency, the necessity for historical
continuity in formulating identity and belief and some kind of
historical progress.
In response to this crisis, feminism has offered different strategies. Some of the feminists reject post-modernism and cling to classical feminist assumptions. Others have espoused post-modernists' analysis of subjectivity and argued for radical revision of feminist thought. Some feminists have dismissed post-modernism as purely mystifying academic standpoint. Some have seen in it the potential of a sound political philosophy.

Women through the ages have realized themselves in care for their families and nurturance of their relationships. This role played an important part in the structuring of the society and this role started to break up with the changing socio-economic conditions. Gerda Lerner wrote,

"It is no accident that the slogan women’s place is in the home took on a certain aggressiveness and shrillness precisely at the time when increasing numbers of poorer women left their homes to become factory workers".  

It is their role that determined the traditional ethics and in turn the traditional ethics confined them to a particular role. Ethical principles, practical wisdom, affective responsiveness, and character and virtue help us live good lives, lives in which we are able to explore our possibilities, seek happiness, joy, and contentment. Feminism is a
response to the universally dominating parochial societies. It is thus that it is expected that there will be a basis for feminism to be found in an identity that exists cross-culturally. This identity is established since it accompanies the oppression of women, found across cultures, resulting from the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy. Butler in her book ‘Gender Trouble’ says,

"The notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exist". 3

Although universal patriarchy no longer has the kind of respect it once held, but the shared notion of ‘woman’, has proved to be much more recalcitrant. It is this that led feminists to argue that gender is relational, or is the result of a set of relations, but is definitely not an attribute of a person. Beauvoir led radical feminists to argue that,

"...only the feminine gender is marked, that the universal person and the masculine gender are conflated, thereby defining women in terms of their sex and extolling men as the bearers of a body-transcendent universal personhood". 4
However, in Beauvoir the subject in the existentialist description of misogyny is the ever present masculine. The masculine is always differentiated or is the outside constitutive of the feminine ‘other’, who is not placed within the norms characterizing personhood and is always the ‘particular’. Judith Butler critically assesses Beauvoir’s position,

“Although Beauvoir is often understood to be calling for the right of women, in effect, to become existential subjects and, hence, for inclusion within the terms of an abstract universality, her position also implies a fundamental critique of the very disembodiment of the abstract masculine epistemological subject”.

Judith Butler goes on to say,

“That subject is abstract to the extent that it disavows its socially marked embodiment on to the feminine sphere, effectively renaming the body as female”.

As far as Beauvoir is concerned the female body should be source of women’s freedom and instead has become a defining and limiting essence. Cartesian framework’s necessity to distinguish between the mind and the body to incorporate the notion of freedom
and moral agency impacts Beauvoir’s analysis of body. Judith Butler argues that this,

"...is clearly limited by the uncritical reproduction of the Cartesian distinction between freedom and the body. In the philosophical tradition that begins with Plato and continues through Descartes, Husserl, and Sartre, the ontological distinction between soul (consciousness, mind) and body invariably supports relations of political and psychic subordination and hierarchy. The mind not only subjugates the body, but occasionally entertains the fantasy of feeling its embodiment altogether. The cultural association of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism".⁶

As a result of this uncritical reproduction of the mind and body distinction, according to Judith Butler, should be rethought for the implicit but prevailing gender hierarchy that the distinction has produced, maintained and rationalized.⁷

Wittig argues that,
"Gender is used here in the singular because indeed there are not two genders. There is only one: the feminine, the "masculine" not being a gender. For the masculine is not the masculine, but the general."\(^8\)

Wittig in view of this gives a call for the destruction of 'sex' to ensure that both the sexes are decorated with the status of universal subject. On the way toward that destruction, 'women' must assume both a particular and universal point of view. Wittig requires that, "One must assume both a particular and a universal point of view, at least to be of literature."\(^9\)

The feminist woes are equally founded when it comes to their recognition as moral agents and the incorporation of their point of view in theories of ethics. The traditional theory of justice ethics can be reasonably divided into three perspectives. The first lays emphasis on principles, which reflects itself most clearly in the deontological theory. Kant is most identified philosopher who enunciates the deontological ethics. The deontological theory of ethic is rule-oriented or principle oriented. The theory holds that moral action is to be carried out without any reference to pleasure or pain, profit or loss or any other considerations of utility. In deontological theory of ethics actions are morally obligatory and no regard is to be borne of their consequences.
The second is teleological ethics which is grounded in the notion of their being a goal that reflects the morality adopted. The Greek telos means final purpose, a teleological ethical theory explains and justifies ethical values by reference to some final purpose or good. Ancient Greek theories are ‘teleological’ because they identify virtue with the perfection of human nature. The goal it is claimed is the ‘good’. As such the good itself requires that each of us to strictly adhere to his duties. The philosophers identified with this appear to be the answer of Bentham, Mill, and most of the classical utilitarians. Virginia Held says,

“Utilitarian theories can also be interpreted as ethic of justice. They recommend maximizing the utility of all persons, assumed to be individuals pursuing their own interests though these interests need not be egoistic. Utilitarianism is less able to protect individual rights against majority interests but it justifies the legal protection of rights as conductive to general utility. It aims to treat individuals fairly in its rational calculations of them interests utilitarian theories, like their Kantian counterparts, rely on impartial, universal principles”.

10
The perspective of care as espoused by contemporary feminist thinkers poses a challenge to dominant ethical theories the following lines from Virginia held are worth quoting,

"The ethic of care, as we have seen, offers a distinctive challenge to the dominant moral theories—Kantian moral theory, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics. The expression of Kantian moral theory as a morality of justice can easily be seen in much contemporary work in political theory, starting with John Rawl’s A Theory of Justice. Theory of this kind relies on the view that all persons, assumed to be free, equal, autonomous individuals, could agree to certain impartial, abstract, universal principles of justice. Justice is taken to be the primary value in political and social arrangements. The goals of such theory are fair distributions of the products of economic activity and of positions of power. The theory demands that persons be respected through recognition of their rights and delineates the moral constraints within which individuals are permitted to pursue the interests they are presumed to seek."”

11
Modern ethical theory began with Thomas Hobbes, who uses the term 'Law of Nature' in referring to ethical principles to be distinguished sharply from the medieval concept of natural law that he rejected. There is, for Hobbes, no moral order in the cosmos, nor any natural prompting towards justice and sympathy for others in human nature. The nature is in incessant chaos for lack of moral principles to govern and to bring about order. In short, for Hobbes moral principles were responsible for building up a society and bringing in justice to regulate it. This position laid emphasis on an understanding of ethics as delivering justice.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is the present 'Introduction'. The second chapter, titled 'Moral Capacity', will discuss the notion of justice and ethic in terms of moral capacities and thereby differentiate between the traditional and feminist approach. Moral capacity is an account of ethical philosophy in its historical perspective. The historical paradigms of ethics have been summarized in this chapter and they have been evaluated against the backdrop of contemporary feminist ethical thought.

The third Chapter, 'Moral Reasoning', will discuss the problematic of moral reasoning as a universally desirable capacity and its hegemonizing relation with a gender bias. Kant is the most explicit proponent of moral reasoning start with the definition of
reason in his 'Critique of Practical Reason'. He points out that the interest of reason, the speculative employment, consists in the cognition of the object to the highest *a priori* principle and its practical employment consists in the determination of the will in respect of the purposes or ends of life.

The fourth chapter, 'Moral Concept', is divided into three sections, viz. University, Respect and Responsibility. In discussing universality we, firstly, distinguish between ethical universalism, the masculine basis of ethical principles, and ethical particularism, the feminine requirement of ethical principles. In the section 'Respect', various ethical theories are discussed holding respect for other persons to be founding element of all moral obligations and duties. Lastly the discussion on 'Responsibility' brings out the place of notion of responsibility in ethical formulations. In this chapter we also refer to the feminist critique of the traditional ethic for not taken into account what women think in the framework of responsibility.

The conclusion is an attempt to refresh our findings and to attempt a possible solution to the antagonistic elements coming out of the conflict between the feminist and traditional ethical requirements and priorities.
REFERENCES

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5 Ibid: p. 16.

6 Ibid: p. 17

7 Ibid.

8 Wittig, Monique: The Point of View: Universal or Particular”. Feminist issue Vol. 3 No. 2, Fall, 1983, p. 64.
9 Wittig, Monique: The Trojan Horse", Feminist Issues, vol.4, No 2, Fall 1984, p. 68.

10 Held, Virginia: The Ethic of Care, Personal, Political and Global, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 156.

11 Ibid.