Chapter 8

WOMAN AS VICTIM OF MALE ALCOHOLISM: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

It is evident from the study that women are the worst affected in the coastal fishing hamlets of Kanyakumari District due to male alcoholism. As alcoholism of man affects the well being of women, including their freedom, honour and dignity and serves as the cause for oppressing them physically and mentally, the issue has to be viewed from a feminist perspective. Due to alcoholism of the male member of the family, woman feels stifled and suffocated both inside and outside her home. What Simone de Beauvoir says about women in general can be applied to the women affected by male alcoholism in the study area. “The sphere where she belongs is everywhere enclosed, limited, dominated by the male universe; high as she may raise herself, far as she may venture, there will always be a ceiling over her head, walls that will block her way,”

The present project may be viewed from the point of Women’s Studies as it helps to expose the gender discrimination prevalent in the target group that is further reinforced by male alcoholism. This study also helps to understand the sufferings of women in their state of poverty that is further aggravated by the problem of male alcoholism. It also attempts to create awareness among women with the aim of activating them to fight addiction which will enhance their socio-economic position. The findings of the study, it is hoped will help
safeguard the interests of women, which will ultimately lead to the realization that will motivate women to battle out of oppressions.

Being a study made from a feminist perspective this must instigate women in the study area, to get empowered to fight oppressive forces in the society, by realizing that they are victimized by male alcoholism. Defining feminism as “a movement for the full humanity of women” Deborah Cameron says, “Women must as a precondition to any wholesale change in values be liberated from their present subordinate position with its multiple restrictions, exclusions and oppressions. But the transformation that will result from this liberation is envisaged as a profound one, affecting the whole of humanity.”

FEMINISM

Before looking at how women in the study area are affected by male alcoholism from a feminist perspective, it is essential to know what feminism is and a short history of it. Feminism can be defined as a theory that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially. Feminism is a set of social theories and political practices that are critical of past and current social relations in which women are not treated on par with men. It involves the promotion of women's rights and interests which feminists feel have not been highly valued in the past. Feminists question such issues as the relationship between sex, sexuality, and power in social, political, and economic relationships.
M. K. Bhatnagar says, “Feminism is a rapidly developing critical ideology of great promise. It has evolved into a philosophy encompassing diverse fields of human activity in society.” Feminism brings about changes in structures and puts an end to domination by resisting oppression. Feminism is not just a school of thought, but an action oriented movement that would bring about a change in the status of women. As Andrea Dworkin puts it: “The feminist project is to end male domination. In order to do this, we will have to destroy the structure of culture as we know it, its art, its church, its laws; its nuclear families based on father right and nation states, all of the images, institutions, customs and habits which define women as worthless and invisible victims.” (qtd K.K.Ruthven ). A feminist is one who endeavours to establish the dignity and equality of women. As Evans puts it, “any feminist is, at the very minimum committed to some form of reappraisal of the position of women in society” (Evans, in Evans et al. 1986, 2. qtd. Imelda Whelehan).

Feminism created consciousness among women of the oppression they have been bearing because they are women, and this enabled them to have a vision of a liberated society in which they strive on an equal dignity with men. Until feminism made humanity realize that society must be made accountable for violence against women, women silently and ungrudgingly were bearing the pain, responsibility and humiliation of abuse engendered by attitudes that stereotyped women as sex objects, that advanced women’s subservience and that maintained the sanctity of men as all powerful kings in their homes and society, justifying their atrocities committed on women. Maggie Humm says “The emergence of feminist ideas and feminist politics depends on the
understanding that, in all societies which divide the sexes into different cultural, economic or political spheres, women are less valued than men” (qtd. Stuart Sim).

The birth of feminism can be traced back to the 1960’s in the United States of America. The first indications of a feminist reawakening appeared after World War II when the United Nations affirmed the “equal right of men and women” in its 1945 charter. The Second Sex appeared and was read and discussed by women everywhere. Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique was published in 1963. Finally in the late 60s, a vigorous feminist movement arose in the US and rapidly spread to other countries. The feminists of the 60s, set out on two different paths. One campaigned for equality with men in employment, law, education and politics. Other adopted the larger goals of liberating women from sex stereotypes and reshaping sexist institutions. It was their vitality, daring and creativity that gave feminism in our time its distinctive style and character – and incidentally, its media image.

Betty Friedan pointed out that the feminine mystique is that women could achieve happiness only through marriage and motherhood, and this served important social needs such as sending women to kitchen and instilling in women a desire for new consumer goods.

**TYPES OF FEMINISM**

Feminism, that was a new thought, caught up with the West and gave rise to many schools of thought. Each had its own priority and philosophy but
all tried at the betterment of women’s lot by fighting forces at work against the status and dignity of women.

**Amazon feminism** is dedicated to the image of the female hero in Greek mythology and in fact, as it is expressed in art and literature, in the physiques and feats of female athletes, and in sexual values and practices. Amazon feminism focuses on physical equality and is opposed to gender role stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumptions that women are weak and physically helpless. Amazon feminism rejects the idea that certain characteristics are inherently masculine or feminine. Amazon feminists believe that all women are as physically capable as all men.

**Cultural Feminism** favours that there are fundamental personality differences between men and women, and think that women’s differences are special and should be celebrated. Cultural feminism is the theory that wants to overcome sexism by celebrating women's special qualities, women's ways, and women's experiences, often believing that woman's way is the better way. Cultural Feminists, focus on the differences between men and women and celebrate those differences. This group of thinkers asserts that women emphasize the importance of relationships, contexts, and reconciliation of conflicting interpersonal positions, whereas men emphasize abstract principles of rights and logic.

**Ecofeminism** is a theory that rests on the basic principle that patriarchal philosophies are harmful to women, children, and other living things. Parallels are often drawn between society’s treatment of the environment, animals, or resources and its treatment of women. Eco-feminists
believe that patriarchal philosophy emphasizes the need to dominate and control unruly females and the unruly nature and the earth.

Another school is called **Feminazi**. A Feminazi is defined by anti-feminists as a feminist who is trying to produce as many abortions as possible.

**Individualist Feminism** is based upon individualist or libertarian philosophies. The primary focus is individual autonomy, rights, liberty, independence and diversity.

**Material Feminism** is a movement in the late 19th century that aimed at liberating women by improving their material condition. This movement revolved around taking the burden off women from housework, cooking, and other traditionally female domestic jobs.

**Moderate Feminism** tends to be patronised by younger women or women who have not directly experienced discrimination. They tend to question the need for further effort, and do not think that radical feminism is any longer viable.

**N.O.W. Feminism** or **Gender Feminism** is the type of feminism the National Organization for Women represents. This theory is based on the notion that in order for men and women to be equal women must be granted some special privileges, and men should not be an issue in feminism.

**Pop-feminism** is a negative stereotypical man hating ideology, and it is often mistaken by people to be feminism in general. There is no proof that such feminists exist. But, if such a category of feminists exists, they should be referred to as “pop-feminists”. Pop-feminism degrades men in all manners and glorifies women.
Radical feminism is the breeding ground for many of the ideas arising from feminism. Radical feminism was the cutting edge of feminist theory from approximately 1967-1975. It is no longer as universally accepted as it was then and no longer serves to solely define the term, "feminism". This group views oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change, change of rather revolutionary proportions, in fact. It focuses on inequality and asserts that men, as a class, have dominated women as a class, creating gender inequality. Radical Feminists urge us to abandon traditional approaches that take maleness as their reference point.

Separatists are often wrongly depicted as lesbians. These are the feminists who advocate separation from men; sometimes total, sometimes partial. Women who organize women-only events are often unfairly dubbed separatists. The core idea is that separating from men enables women to see themselves in a different context.

The New Scholars in Feminism is an idea that is gaining much attention. There are some feminist scholars emerging with loud voices and strong evidence, who feel strongly that there are no personality differences between men and women. These new scholars are emerging from gender studies and women's studies programmes in colleges all over the U.S. Majority of them believe that gender differences are a result of social and environmental influence.
Traditional or Liberal Feminism asserts that women are just as rational as men and challenges the assumption of male authority and seeks to erase gender based distinctions recognized by law, thus enabling women to compete in the job market. Liberal Feminism sees individual as a rational, independent being and hence asserts the natural rights extended to women and considers education as a very important component. Liberal feminists believe that boys and girls share a common humanity, and if children are not taught to behave in sex-stereotyped ways, the adult world will be a more equitable place for both sexes. Equality of opportunity is the goal associated with Liberal Feminism. Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor and Betty Frieden are some of the names associated with this school. Wollstonecraft is of the opinion that middle class women sacrifice their health, liberty and virtues for the sake of their husband’s prestige, pleasure and power. She insists that education is needed for women to sharpen and focus their mind and would help them develop into rational and independent beings. She wants women to be treated as autonomous decision makers, and professed legal and economic independence. She presents a new vision of a woman who is not a slave to her passions, husband and children. Women must obey the commands of reason and perform well as wife or mother. “Personhood” as she terms it is needed for women which would empower them to take up the responsibility for development and growth. Women should be educated to exercise the same civil liberties and economic opportunities as men.
John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor stress civil liberties and economic opportunities to achieve sexual equality and gender justice. Insisting on women’s participation in work outside home as a liberating factor, they said that society has the responsibility of providing women with education, same civil liberties and same economic opportunities. Taylor advocates education, partnership and equal share in decision-making. She insists on income for woman so that she will not be the servant of her husband. Betty Frieden also advocates work outside home for women, besides her role as mother. All those who belong to this school of thought agree upon gender justice and sexual equality as the prime goal of woman’s liberation. They raise their voice against the forces that oppress women and argue for liberty, equality and fairness for all and assert that biological sex should not determine their psychological and social gender. Liberal feminists like Bern and Bern advocate sharing the responsibilities of household responsibilities and childcare equally between man and woman.

FEMINISM AND WOMEN’S MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Women's movement in India has a long and rich history and it has struggled for various concerns of Indian women like fighting for safe contraception, literacy, water, and electricity or resisting sexual harassment. Gail Omvedt provides numerous instances of how class, caste, and gender issues were perceived as interconnected by the different sections of the women's movement. Omvedt's book Reinventing Revolution: New-Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India is a richly textured account of
the simultaneous growth of all these social movements, such as the women's, the farmer's, the environmental, and the anti-caste Dalit movement. Omvedt's analysis reveals how these movements were mutually reinforcing.

The causes for which the women’s organizations have fought down the ages are matters to be looked into. In pre-independent era the concerns were abolition of sati, encouragement of widow remarriage, and prohibition of child marriage and the movements did make strides. In independent India, women’s organizations focused on the vulnerability, helplessness, and the shame of being born a woman in a patriarchal society. Women’s outfits took up the cause of women and took the lead in numerous struggles against dowry murders, rape, female illiteracy, female mortality, female infanticide, and female foeticide, highlighting the gender-based structures of oppression and linked them with other social and economic structures. Deforestation, shortage of potable water, and decrease in rainfall made the Indians think of ecology and environment and issues like deforestation. When the environmental movement picked up momentum, ideas of ecofeminism and women's positive roles in preserving the environment gained a new image for rural women as agents of change.

Though women’s organizations raised their voice against liquor tragedies, for example the Vypeen liquor tragedy in Kerala, not much of concerted effort was taken anywhere except in Andhra Pradesh where women joined together in their fight against arrack. Never in the history of Indian women’s activities it was realized that male alcoholism was a concern of feminist movements.
Alka Kurian, while tracing the origin of feminism in India states that feminism started in India during the country’s struggle for freedom. She says that onset of the “second wave” was in the seventies, when there was a mass participation of women from the lower strata of society. Educated women with critical thinking emphasized the need for empowerment in society and advocated involvement of women in politics. There was the third wave of the Indian Women’s Movement, and according to Alka Kurian, it is “…an indication of the onset of independent issue-based responses by feminist groups, who began to tackle urban and rural women’s dilemmas and conflicts as a part of the larger struggle to assert the personal, social and cultural implications of a feminist consciousness.”

WOMAN AS VICTIM OF ADDICTION - A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

It is against the background of different schools of thought of feminism that we have to look at the problem of women in the coastal fishing hamlets of Kanyakumari District as victims of male alcoholism and suggest ways and means to come out of being victimized by male alcoholism. We should also bear in mind that it should be done only in the light of the ground reality of feminist movement in India and the socio-cultural-economic realities governing the communities of fisherfolk in Coastal Kanyakumari District.

In India feminism or women’s studies should be concerned with marginalization of socially disadvantaged women. The doubly discriminated and oppressed Dalit women, like the Blacks in the US or the Samaritan woman in the Bible, need special attention. Any liberation that is not addressed to the
needs of the marginalized women living below the poverty line is meaningless and insignificant. Feminism in India should bear in mind the welfare of women in communities like the people in the fishing hamlets of coastal Kanyakumari District. Feminist activities should be addressed to the needs of such women and strive to eradicate the oppressive forces at work against them.

It is evident from the present study that male alcoholism is the main force victimizing the women of the study area and hence it is the task of feminists to plan strategies to fight male addiction.

It is clear that women in the study area submit unquestioningly to male dictates and they believe that they are bound to do so. This has made them put up with all sorts of atrocities meted out to them including wife battering. Looking at the problems of women of this educationally and financially underprivileged society from the Liberal Feminist’s perspective, one is reminded of what Wollstonecraft said about man’s tyranny that is ingrained deep in social practices. Wollstonecraft forcefully relocates much of the blame for women’s enslaved state; it is not the result of her nature but man’s tyranny. “From the tyranny of man, I firmly believe, the greater number of female follies proceed; and the cunning, which I allow at present a part of their character, I likewise have repeatedly endeavoured to prove, is produced by oppression.”8 Relationship between men and women is clearly stated as a power relationship, where men hold sway, not by virtue of their greater ability to rule, but by maintaining tyrannous subjection over women in their homes and in society. This is very much true of the fishing community in the coastal Kanyakumari District.
Liberal feminists attach a lot of importance to education as a first step towards empowerment of women. 25.8% of the target group is illiterate and the target group’s knowledge of legal rights is deplorably poor. Literacy and the definition given to it in India cannot be equated with people’s ability to acquire knowledge. So any attempt at educating the women of the study area should be synonymous with raising their awareness level. For any effective and potent feminist awakening, awareness creation should be the first step. This awakening is essential for the women to come out of the male chauvinist mould to which they are conditioned. Literacy drive for women in this area should not be confined to schooling, but should be extended to awareness building on women’s rights and making available information on the legal provisions that safeguard the interest of women.

Women in the target area are financially dependent on men and this has made them tolerate abuse and subjugation of any sort. By and large man alone goes for work and he has monopoly over the family income. He wastes money on alcohol, relegating to the background many urgent needs like health care and education, especially of the girl child or woman. Very often the responsibility of clearing debts falls on the woman. Betty Frieden’s suggestion that the woman should find a job outside her home is applicable to women of the study area. What women in the area lack is financial independence and this has enabled men to have tyrannous subjection of women. She is subjected to physical, mental and sexual harassment and in spite of being suffocated, stifled and tortured, she feels that she is financially insecure if she comes out of wedlock. She is not able to walk out of her wedlock as she is afraid of the
poverty and sufferings to which she and her children will be thrown open. Looking at the problems of women through the concepts of Liberal Feminism, one would say like Harriet Taylor that women in the coastal fishing hamlets of Kanyakumari District should have income generating programmes for them, so that they will not be servants to their husbands. Lack of awareness coupled with lack of financial independence has perpetuated suppression of women in this area and have exposed to them to all kinds of exploitation by their alcoholic husbands.

Liberal Feminism also implores women to equip themselves to compete in job market. So far, fishing has been the monopoly of men and both men and women in the study area believe that women are not mentally and physically fit to go for fishing. This attitude of the society should change and women also should get trained in fishing. Of course, of late a few women have started getting trained in deep-sea fishing. Such activities should be encouraged if flowering of feminist ideologies are to be witnessed in the coastal fishing hamlets. John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor lay emphasis on economic opportunities to achieve sexual equality and gender justice and women in the area will succeed in fighting male oppression only if they come out of the stereotyped household works and prove to be equal in making money. This alone will lead to equality in partnership and decision-making.

Both men and women in the study area are steeped in bigotry. Many interviewees said that men need alcohol and their activities like wife battering cannot be questioned. Mary Wollstonecraft realized the gravity of the situation arising out of such a belief in male supremacy and hence stoutly opposed
Rousseau's concept that courage, temperance, justice and fortitude are the prerogatives of men, and women must possess virtues like patience, docility and good humour. Women in the study area are like this, and hence the remedies suggested by Wollstonecraft are applicable to them.

While fighting oppression of women in the coastal fishing hamlets of Kanyakumari District due to male alcoholism, one has to think of applying the suggestions of Radical Feminists also. As Radical feminists believe oppression of women is widely spread in the target group and is deep rooted to the extent that it is very difficult to eradicate it. Women in the study area are not exposed to feminist ideologies and are not aware of the legal provisions that safeguard their interests and believe that even wife battering is a sign of love and recognition from their husband although alcoholism of men has caused quantitative and qualitative sufferings to women. Many take these sufferings for granted and they usually go unrecognized due to the sexist prejudices existing in society.

Interpretation of women's oppression in terms of patriarchal society as given by radical feminists stand good when we look at the plight of women in the coastal fishing hamlets of Kanyakumari District. Looking close at the life of the community under study, one would say that oppression of women is the most fundamental form of oppression here also. Man has been oppressing woman in this community down the ages and nothing short of a revolutionary change will bring relief to women. Unless there is a total and drastic reorientation given to the society with regard to the status, dignity, position
rights of women, oppression of women due to male alcoholism will go unchecked and unabated.

Looking at how the society has understood the worth of women, cultural feminism also holds good as far as the study area is concerned. Cultural feminism implores all to understand the uniqueness of women and appreciate their real worth. In the coastal fishing hamlets, that is steeped in patriarchy, the worth of woman is not understood, accepted and appreciated. That is why whatever she contributes goes unrecognized. She is easily thrown open to different kinds of oppression including victimization due to male alcoholism and this becomes a culturally approved practice.

Social Feminists, while analyzing the plight of women, especially women in flesh trade, find that it is the inclination of Capitalism to exploit women in such a way that they are prompted to indulge in activities that are considered immoral. Viewed from this perspective, one tends to believe that, in the coastal fishing hamlets women are exploited and are lured to take part in the distilling or brewing of illicit liquor and also sale of it which satisfy the needs primarily of men. The experiences of women as victims of male alcoholism in the fishing hamlets of coastal fishing hamlets reveal a few women's realities. It appears that no specific feminism is applicable and this means that dimensions of different feminism hold good.
FOOTNOTES


