CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Simone de Beauvoir rightly observes: One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch which is described as feminine.¹

What Simone de Beauvoir says seems to be an absolute truth despite the fact that we have reached the 21st century and are more technologically and scientifically advanced as never before. No matter what developments have taken place in the last century women still are fighting for acknowledgement that they are to be treated as equal. They comprise half of the population and deserve to be treated as equal.

Paradoxically they are not treated on par with men though they are an integral part of the human civilization. No society can progress without the active participation of women and yet although the place of women in society has differed from culture to culture, from age to age she has never been considered equal to man.

The reason for this inequality stems from the fact that woman is biologically different and is entrusted with household responsibilities and childbearing and rearing. The work that the woman does usually goes unrecognized as she does not earn wages for her work. They are confined to their home, oppressed and marginalized in all aspects of life. Sociologically seen is that even the poorest of the poor Indian male is fortunate in having opportunity for realizing his frustrated ego, has a wife whom he can treat as inferior. Even in the modern changed ambience her position is an unenviable secondary only to the man. She may be an educated middle class woman or an illiterate one; she is still subservient to the patriarchal society that believes that they have given enough freedom to their women folk by educating them and allowing them to work; earnings which are taken by the male counterpart who is the head of the house.

There are various studies that bring to light the fact that woman from the time she is born is told both verbally and nonverbally that she is not worthy of the same respect, that same importance that a man can get. That she has to be compliant to the demands of the male members in the family and in turn of that of the society. She is never to get angry or upset about the demands
made on her and should have immense patience and tolerance towards others. We have reached
the moon and back and yet women have not found their voices.

There have been other voices which have proclaimed that much has been said on feminism and
women’s liberation, that there is now an overdose of the feminist works and writings but if we
make our society a careful glance we notice and realize that things haven’t changed for the
women and if they have, it is only the façade that has undergone a cosmetic change.

Yes she is now sent to school and is allowed to work but the number of these women is still less.
Always looked down upon as the weaker sex, she is not allowed to strengthen her wings to find
whether she can take that flight for the fear that the patriarchal society may lose their control
over them. The clipped wings of the woman make her entirely dependent on the male
counterparts emotionally, intellectually and especially, financially.

The patriarchal society is much to blame for the condition of woman. The tendency to exploit
and to endure exploitation is so deep rooted in their bones that the thought of rebellion does not
arise in their mind. Most of the subjugation and oppression is passed under the label of ‘tradition
and culture’, which one follows under the name of ‘sanskar’. These traditional values make the
woman individuals with no clear identity, individuality or self will. Our print media today are
overflowing with reports of assaults, rapes, female infanticide, wife battering, family violence
and dowry deaths all relating to women who are traumatized and have not found any support
system in the society.

Feminist writers have tried to bring about change in the society by showing the atrocities and the
condition of women by portraying them in various scenarios in their writings. Feminism is a
social movement that seeks equal rights for women. Feminism as we know today is a product of
modern entity. It refers to economic, political and cultural movements aimed at establishing
greater rights and legal protection for women. Feminist theorists question issues as relationships
between sexes, sexuality and power in social, political and economic relationship. Feminist
political activists advocate issues such as women’s suffrage, salary equivalency and control over
reproduction.

In the western world, the feminist movement is divided into three ‘waves’. The first wave refers
to women’s suffrage movements of the late 19th century and the early 20th century concerning
them with mainly the right to vote. The second wave refers to the ideas and actions associated
with the women's liberation movement beginning in the 1960s that campaigned for legal and social rights. The third wave that started in the beginning of the 1990s was a continuation of and a reaction to the perceived failures of the second wave.

These feminist movements and theories were predominantly led by middle class white women from Western Europe and North America. The trend accelerated in the 1960s with the civil rights movement in the United States and the collapse of European Colonialism in Africa, the Caribbean, parts of Latin America and Southeast Asia.

Feminist theory aims at understanding gender equality. Feminist theory also focuses on addressing various issues relating to women’s rights, interest and various issues.

Feminist theories first emerged as early as 1792 in the publications such as ‘The Changing Woman’.\(^2\) ‘A’int I a Woman?’\(^3\), ‘Speech after arrest for Illegal Voting’.\(^4\)

These writings made the woman visible to the world for the first time. Women issues were addressed by Sojourner Truth. Susan Anthony addressed the issue of language within the Constitution. Raising the question why woman were accountable to be punished under law that could not use for voting, owning property or marriage. Nancy Cott made the distinction between modern feminism and its antecedents. She transformed the movement from one of universal entity to one concerned with primary individuality dealing with women condition as social construct, gender identity, and relationships within and between genders.\(^5\) In the immediate post war period, Simone de Beauvoir provided the existentialist dimension of women with the publication of Le Deuxième Sexe (The Second Sex). The Question she asks is “What is a Woman?”\(^6\)

A Woman is always defined in reference to the man and not vice versa. The woman accordingly is not nature created but society or ‘man’ created. Elaine Showalter describes the development of feminist theory as having a number of phases. A Feminist reader must examine the ideologies behind the literary phenomena. There have been several feminist ideologies over the years. They vary in goals, strategies & affiliations though they often overlap.

BLACK FEMINISM argues that sexism, class oppression, and racism are all bound together. The argument continues that the liberation of black women will entail freedom for all people as it will require ending racism, sexism as well as class oppression.\(^7\) Alice Walker’s womanize
pointed out that black woman experienced a different and intense oppression than the white women. There is a long standing and important alliance between post colonial feminism and the transnational feminism and third world feminism. The recent black feminist political and social movement grew out of discontent with civil rights movement and feminist movement of the 1960s & 1970s. Black women began creating theory and developing new movements which spoke of problems that they battled like racism, classism and sexism. This gave rise to black feminist literature. Michelle Cliff believes that there is continuity “in the written work of many African-American…you can draw a line from the slave narrative of Linda Brent to Elizabeth Keckley’s life.

LIBERAL FEMINISM asserts the equality of men and women through legal and political reforms. An individualistic form of feminism it focuses on woman’s ability to show and maintain their equality through their own actions and choices. Liberal feminist feel that change is possible without altering the structure of the society as all women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality.

ANARCHIST or Anarcha feminism is a combination of anarchy and feminism and views patriarchy as a manifestation of involuntary hierarchy which is essential part of class struggle. As L. Susan Brown puts it, “as anarchism is a political philosophy that opposes all relationships of power, it is inherently feminist” Important historic anarchy- feminist include Emma Goldman, Freerica Montseny, Voltaire de Cleyve Maria Lacerda Moura and Lucy Parsons.

SOCIALIST AND MARXIST FEMINISM connects the oppression of the women to the Marxist ideas about exploitation, oppression and labour. Socialist feminist think that unequal pay holds women down. Socialist Feminist finds that women are exploited by the patriarchal system through prostitution, domestic work (unpaid), child care and marriage. Marx felt that when class oppression would be overcome then the gender oppression would vanish too.

RADICAL FEMINISM considers male controlled capitalist hierarchy as defining feature of women’s oppression and describes it as sexist. It is believed by them that women can free themselves only when they have done away with the oppressive and dominating patriarchal system. They consider male based authority and power structure responsible for oppression and inequality. They feel that the society will not change till the values and patriarchal undergoes a change. Radical feminism sees no alternatives other than total uprooting and reconstruction of
society in order to achieve their goals. Sub types of Radical Feminism are cultural feminism, separatist feminism and anti- pornography feminism.

CULTURAL FEMINISM is the ideology of a ‘female nature’ or ‘female essence’ that attempts to revalidate what they consider undervalued female attributes. It emphasizes the difference between women and men but considers the difference to be psychological and to be culturally constructed rather than biologically innate. Cultural Feminism is based on an essentialist view of the differences between women and men and advocates independence and institution building. It has led feminism to retreat from the politics of ‘life style’.

SEPARATIST & LESBIAN FEMINISM is a form of radical feminism that does not support heterosexual relationships. Its proponents argue that the sexual disparities between men and women are irresolvable. They also believe that men cannot make positive contributions to the feminist movement and that even well-intentioned men replicate patriarchal dynamics.

MULTIRACIAL FEMINISM is also known as ‘women of colour’ feminism and offers a standpoint theory and analyses the life experience of women of colour.

POST COLONIAL FEMINISM also at times known as ‘Third World Feminism’ discusses the experiences endured during colonialism, including migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to influential discourses of imperial Europe.

Post colonial feminism centers on racial, ethnic issues, and long lasting economic, political, and cultural effects of colonialism, inextricably bound up with the unique gendered realities of non white, non western women. Colonial powers often imposed western norms on colonized regions. Post colonial feminist today struggle to fight gender oppression within their own cultural models of society rather than through those imposed by Western colonizers.

THIRD WORLD FEMINISM has been developed by feminist who acquired their views and by feminist who are acquired their views and took part in feminist politics in so called third world countries. Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Sarojini Sahoo criticize Western Feminism on the grounds that it is ethnocentric and does not take into account the unique experience of women in the third world countries.
STAND POINT feminist since 1980s have argued that feminism should examine how women’s experience of inequality relates to that of racism, homophobia, classism and colonialisation.\textsuperscript{21} 

POST –STRUCTURAL FEMINISM also referred to as French Feminism uses the insight of various epistemological movements including psychoanalysis, linguistics, political theory (Marxist and post Marxist theory), race theory, literary and other intellectual currents for feminist concerns.\textsuperscript{22} Post-Structural Feminist maintain that difference is one of the most powerful tools that women possess in their struggle with patriarchal domination.

POST MODERN FEMINISM incorporates post modern and post structural theory. It criticizes the distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender. It believes that that there is no single cause for women’s subordination and no single approach to deal with the issue. Post modern works highlights stereotypical gender roles and portray them as parodies of original beliefs.

ENVIRONMENT FEMINISM links ecology with feminism. Ecofeminist see the domination of women as stemming from the ideology that makes man dominate the environment. They feel that both women and the environment are exploited as passive pawns in a race to dominate.

INDIAN FEMINISM: Unlike the Western feminist movement, India’s movement was initiated by men, and later joined by women. The efforts of these men included abolishing \textit{sati}, which was a widow’s death by burning on her husband’s funeral pyre, the custom of child marriage, abolishing the disfiguring of widows, banning the marriage of upper caste Hindu widows, promoting women’s education, obtaining legal rights for women to own property, and requiring the law to acknowledge women’s status by granting them basic rights in matters such as adoption.\textsuperscript{23} The history of feminism in India can be divided into three phases: the first phase, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, initiated when male European colonists began to speak out against the social evils of \textit{Sati}; the second phase, from 1915 to Indian independence, when Gandhi incorporated women's movements into the Quit India Movement and independent women's organizations began to emerge; and finally, the third phase, post-independence, which has focused on fair treatment of women in the work force and right to political parity.

Post independence feminists began to redefine the extent to which women were allowed to engage in the workforce. Prior to independence, most feminists accepted the sexual divide within the labor force. However, feminists in the 1970s challenged the inequalities that had been
established and fought to reverse them. These inequalities included unequal wages for women, relegation of women to ‘unskilled’ spheres of work, and restricting women as a reserve army for labor. In other words, the feminists’ aim was to abolish the free service of women who were essentially being used as cheap labour or capital. Feminist class-consciousness also came into focus in the 1970s, with feminists recognizing the inequalities not just between men and women but also within power structures such as caste, tribe, language, religion, region, class etc. This also posed as a challenge for feminists while shaping their overreaching campaigns as there had to be a focus within efforts to ensure that fulfilling the demands of one group would not create further inequalities for another. Now, in the early twenty-first century, the focus of the Indian feminist movement has gone beyond treating women as useful members of society and a right to parity, but also having the power to decide the course of their personal lives and the right of self-determination.

REFERENCES

6. Moi Toril, ‘What is a Woman?” And Other Essays, Oxford 2000


