

## **The essence of Feminism: An Overview**

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**Abstract:** The present research paper, while exploring the definition of feminism, highlights the bitter realities of a patriarchal society. It discusses how the woman is excluded socially and economically. It reveals how she is not treated equally to her male counterpart. In this paper, an attempt has been made to explain that this movement aims to maintain a harmonious relationship between men and women.

**Keywords:** Subordinate, Feminism, Patriarchal society, Submissive.

Over the past centuries, gender inequality has been witnessed worldwide. Women are excluded socially and economically on the pretext that she is subordinate to their male counterpart. This harmful practice created a sense of anxiety and anger among the crusaders, intellectuals, and writers across the world. The existential angst of fair sex stimulated them to fight against gender bias, so they started a movement to advocate for women's rights, which is called feminism. It is a concept that emerges from a struggle to bring gender equity into society. It is a social and political movement that champions women's political and social rights. Feminism aims only at improving women's condition in the patriarchal society by securing their rights. It is not against the male member of society at all. Its purpose is to bring both members of the community on an equal pedestal so that harmony may be created in the relationships, which is essential for the growth and development of the nation.

Feminists raised their voices against the male-dominated culture characterized by gender discrimination. In such system, women are not treated equally as their male counterparts; in childhood, mothers bring up their children with different nurturing patterns. They prepare female children for the patriarchal role to be performed in the future, and in this attempt to make them perfect house makers, they don't allow them to bloom up to the mark. They don't permit their talent and potential to shine, consequently making them submissive, sacrificial, and irrational creatures, which is the patriarchal society's utmost demand. The radical feminists are of the view that it is the cultural conditioning that makes a person a 'woman' that keeps her in a subsidiary position. Simone de Beauvoir, a leading feminist, describes in her book, *The Second Sex*, "One is not born, but rather becomes a

woman.... It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine” (295).

In India, women have had constitutional rights since the constitution was written. But the corny traditions and the customs of the society prevent them from enjoying those rights. India's patriarchal system has its culturally specific issues as hierarchies dominate it. "Relational hierarchies between women within the same family are more adverse. Here women are pitted against one another. Not all women are powerless at all times" (Feminism 3). Some unhealthy practices like child marriage, Purdah Pratha, a ban on remarriage, etc., came into existence, putting women at an inferior status.

Moreover, women's education was discouraged too. In such biased circumstances, women were victimized and marginalized, and her situation became paradoxical. It has been observed:

‘Matri Devo Bhavo’ is an old sentiment shared by the Indians. From time immemorial, women have been considered goddesses like Durga, Parvati, Kali Shakti, Vaishnomata, Bhairavi so on. Indians put them on a pedestal and offered prayers and sacrifices. In contrast, more 'goddesses' are being killed in the womb, burnt alive for dowry, harassed at workplaces and streets, raped, abducted, exploited, and discriminated. Indian citizens venerate and salute this country as ‘Janani’ or mother; on the other hand, they disregard their sisters, mothers, and wives (qtd. in “Socio-Economic 2).

Girls are discouraged from higher education because the patriarchal society prioritizes making them the perfect house maker to serve their husbands and family. As a result, her intellectual faculty still needs to be developed. Without proper education and knowledge, she becomes irrational, one characteristic of being recognized as a 'woman' in the patriarchal society. Some feminist writers like Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, etc., have raised their voices against these unhealthy traditions of the patriarchal society. Kaushik justly remarks:

Her education and professional attainments are underdeveloped, her ambitions and aspirations are curbed or trimmed, and she is taught the role of her in-laws in general and the husband in particular with self-sacrifice. Her physical and intellectual potentialities are thus subordinated and subjected to her assigned domestic roles and duties (167).

Feminists from all over the world protest against this malpractice of patriarchal society because they believe that a woman is also a human being and should be treated at par with her male counterpart. Holistic development of her personality should get encouragement, for which education is a must. Education is a liberating phenomenon that brings rationality to behavior and personality. When a woman becomes rational, she sheds the dependence syndrome and can establish self-identity. This is what feminist's desire. In his book, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), John Stuart Mill, a male feminist, strongly pleads for woman's education and economic independence.

Feminists argue that even wedlock doesn't provide women social justice. It doesn't proffer her the right of ‘arranging, ‘which emphasizes her oneness and equality with her husband. The patriarchal attitude of the husband doesn't allow her to enjoy the togetherness

and warmth of the relationship. She is considered only a perfect house manager and procreative device. Whenever she fails to perform these roles, the patriarchal society kicks her, leaving her without moorings. Feminist writers raise these issues through their writings. In this context, Simone de Beauvoir asserts:

A man can think of herself without a woman. She cannot think of herself without a man. And she is simply what man decrees.... She appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him, she is sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated concerning man and not he concerning her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential (qt. in Sheeba, Azhar 8).

Thus it is pretty evident that feminism is a movement that tries to make society aware of the existence of women so that the patriarchal society may recognize the equality between males and females. It aims to bring gender equity into the community, which is essential for the holistic development of women's personalities. And for the growth and development of a nation, every citizen should be rational and independent. Feminism, nowhere else, talks against a male member of society.

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