

## FEMINISM: REBELLIOUS THOUGHT OF MODERN WOMEN

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### ABSTRACT

For equal human rights and freedom for women, feminism, at its core, is an intellectual, philosophical, economic, and political discourse. Since the beginning of order in civilization, female oppression existed where women are treated as lesser beings and confined to their reproductive roles, passed from tribe to tribe as 'breeding vessels' in a patriarchal structured society, with their lives at the mercy of men. In today's world of supposed equality many people, especially women themselves, tend to have a negative attitude towards feminism and take their liberation for granted. The present paper is an endeavor to explore the modern feminists' perceptions of and movement against women's vulnerable status in the family, male dominated society, and in the economic and political participation. Findings of the study reveal that feminism has surely brought women a long way since their days of slaving in the household but there is still a long way to go on the crucial issues of women's oppression.

**KEYWORDS:** Feminism, Modern Women, Revelation

Many people consider feminism a relatively modern western idea. Though the origin of the term 'feminism' is recent; the demand for women's rights is very old. In the west, Christin de Pizan, a female member of French Royal court, first questioned about the worth of women. In 1405, she wrote a book titled 'The Book of the City of Ladies' (Pizan, 1982). On a sudden, she began to feel the meaninglessness of what she heard or read before about women. In her opinion, women are also, no doubt, the creation of God as men and a part of human race and they are not other species or race that they are to be deprived of moral education (Rahman 1996:17).

In the west, the struggle of women's freedom takes a well organized form through suffragette movement. At present, the women can vote to elect the representatives in almost all countries of the world. But they are not given the rights easily like others. They were to demand this right through much struggle, sufferings, and through the establishment of this suffrage, the struggle of gaining women's rights has been introduced. Symbolically the women leaders have been able to put forward this suffrage successfully in different countries of the world. So, in spite of all adverse and unfavorable situations the women all together put forward their demand of other reasonable rights including suffrage. At this, a storm of protest blows in the male society. It is said that women don't understand politics and if they get suffrage, they will fail to utilize it. But in spite of protest and resistance, political awareness among the women continues to grow in different countries of the world. As a result, a movement is formal everywhere to give suffrage to women as men (Begum, 1985:44). The women society of Great Britain also struggled for a long time to obtain their suffrage. Even when New Zealand was a colony of Great Britain, the movement for suffrage began. In 1869, a British lady named 'Mary Ann Muller (1820-1901)' published a leaflet calling the women society to come forward for the demand of women's suffrage. At this, many women came forward themselves to work for political rise. By their effort and by the endeavor of Mary Leavitt (1830-1912), a leader of American Christian women organization, established in New Zealand, a memorandum signed by thirty thousand women was produced before parliament. For this strong movement, a limited suffrage was given to women in New Zealand in 1894. Practically this came to effect in 1928. Before that, right to property was given to the married women in

1882. Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928), a leader of British Suffragette Movement, formed a revolutionary women's organization to obtain the suffrage in 1903. At that time, women's suffrage became an emotional slogan. Emily Davison (1872-1913), a martyr for the suffragette movement, threw herself in front of the King's horse Anmer during the Derby in June 1913 to draw attention to the suffragette campaign (Begum, 1985:46). Though the movement of women's suffrage was political, the demand for equal rights of both men and women was at its centre. At the same time, the movements for legal reformation of education, work, marital laws, guardianship of children, right to property, etc. were also intense to the initiators of the movement for women's suffrage (Begum, 1985:48).

The progressive feminists found no difference between peace movement and women movement. Bertha Von Suttner (1843-1914) wrote a book named 'Lay Down Your Arms' in 1889. Inspired by the success of this, according to many, industrialist Alfred Nobel introduced Nobel Prize and Bertha Von Suttner won that Prize. It was she who was the first Nobel Prize winning women.

In British Suffragette Movement, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) became famous through her writing. In 1792, she wrote a book named 'A Vindication of the Rights of women' (Wollstonecraft, 1967). The new edition of the book with a preface by Suffragists Millicent Garrett Fawcett was published in 1890. The book of this feminist writer is regarded as a manifesto of women's movement. Mary expresses her public opinion courageously and was vocal for equal rights of men and women. In her book she opposed the notion 'women exist for men's entertainment'. This book highlighted women's equal opportunity in education, work, and politics. A woman is also to be evaluated under the same moral standard as used for a man (Rahman 1996:20). Mary Wollstonecraft spoke about the free and universal education for both men and women of all classes. In her book, though she paid concentration on women's education, she did not think that only education could change their lot. For this, she demanded for the amendment of political rules of law so that subordinate position of women could be changed. Mary Wollstonecraft was one of them who called the government to give the opportunity of education to women by introducing a new educational system. She argued saying that a woman is not inferior. Rather the training she gets is inferior. She criticized the existing educational system as it makes a woman artificial and weak. In her incomplete novel 'Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman', she stated about the quest of women's freedom. France introduced divorce law in 1792. Mary Wollstonecraft dreamt that English women could take shelter of divorce law to get rid of the cruelty of their husbands. With the demand of women's political and legal rights, she introduced a new era in the modernism of European woman. In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the feminists kept themselves busy with the struggle of demanding these rights.

Another contemporary feminist was Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906). This American feminist of nineteenth century was the daughter of a cotton mill owner. She refused to purchase the cotton prepared by the slaves. As a result, her business almost ceased. Susan was compelled to leave school and to work at mill. Later on, she took teaching as her profession in New York and in 1848, she made an organization named "The Daughters of Temperance" which started working to remove the social curse of taking alcohol. She was resisted to address a public meeting on shunning alcohol and was dishonored. Eventually she could realize that women must demand their rights. That is why she started a movement for women's rights.

From 1856 until 1861, before the civil war, she worked as a member of American Anti Slavery League. After the end of civil war, she again joined the women's movement. In 1868, she started working for her own weekly news paper titled 'The Revolution' whose motto read, "Men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less" (Rodger, 2001:51). It is Susan who in 1869 founded 'National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA)' with the help of a woman named Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In 1888, at the age of 72, Elizabeth Cadistan (1815-1902), while addressing an

international women's conference, lamented saying that till now, a woman was nothing but an echo of a man. The law, constitution, beliefs and principles and the rules and regulations of the social life are enacted for men only. Till today, a woman in the true sense is a dream of the future (Schneir, 1972:28).

Olympe De Gouges (1748-1793), the French dramatist and revolutionist, was one of them who played an important role for the movement of French women. Nowadays she is so far well known as an early feminist who demanded that French women be given the same rights as French men. In her 'Declaration of the Rights of Woman (1791)', she challenged the practice of male authority and the notion of male-female inequality. For women, she also demanded for modern educational system and equal rights at marriage (De Gouges, 1980:87-96).

In her essay 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness (1981)', the renowned American literary feminist critic Elaine Showalter (1941-) says, "A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers: class, race nationality, and history are literary determinants as significant as gender. Nonetheless, women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space" (Hicks, 1983:272). Feminist criticisms can be divided into two separate varieties. In the first variety, women are regarded as consumers of man made literature and the imagination of a feminist changes the realization of the importance of sexual rules. Elaine Showalter calls this type of analysis 'feminist critique' (Showalter, 1979).

Feminist critique is essentially political and contradictory. Carolyn Heilbrun (1926-2003), the writer of American journal-'Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society' and Catharine Stimpson, the founding editor-in-chief compare feminist critique with the Old Testament searching for the past sin and error, and gynocritics with the New Testament seeking the favor of imagination (Rice & Patriacia, 1989:93). Carolyn Heilbrun comments on her own text, "When I speak about feminist criticism, I become surprised, what a lofty moral-level I hold!" (Donovan, 1976:72). Feminists' criticism attacks the ideas of giving favor to the women established in literature, and opposes male representatives in literature. Thus, this criticism raises questions about numerous superstitions and early ideas written by male writers about women (Cuddon, 1998:338). Toril Moi (1953- ), a renowned feminist critic, has divided feminist literary theory into two clear streams in her book *Sexual / Textual Politics*. One is Anglo-American and another is French. Moi has examined the power and limitations of these two streams very skillfully (Moi, 1985).

In an essay Tillie Olsen (1912-2007), the American Writer, in association with the political turmoil of the 1930s and first generation of American feminists, says that feminist movement as a part of other movements of our time is encouraging women forum to write and make existent among other writers. This movement has collected many evidences of new realization about women's affairs. Discrimination, limitation, fine, denial, etc. have been carefully and pathetically proved (Eagleton, 1996). Though she published little, Olsen was influential for her treatment of the lives of women and the poor. She drew attention to why women have been less likely to be published authors (and why they receive less attention than male authors when they do publish). Her work received recognition in the years of much feminist political and social activity. It contributed to new possibilities for women writers. Olsen's influence on American feminist fiction has caused some critics to be frustrated at simplistic feminist interpretations of her work (Schultz, 1997:113-131).

In the book 'Introducing Post-feminism' by Sophia Phoca and Rebecca Wright, some ideas of post feminism are found. In case of shifting from feminism to post feminism, women have started to celebrate individuality more than equality (Phoca & Wright, 1999). Mary Eagleton says, "It is a great project to be united with feminist criticism stream, but it is, at the same time, unlimitedly challenging too (Eagleton, 1996:1).

Feminist literature and critical theory is basically originated from feminism. But it would not be right to think it as any following practice under feminism. Similarly it would not be wise to think feminism under feminist criticism. In fact, a dialectical mediation can be searched between these two issues (Hicks, 1983:272).

In 1963, American modern feminist Betty Friedan (1921-2006) wrote the book 'The Feminine Mystique' and came to the spot light. Friedan in her book says that, for years, the women spoke for how to please their husbands, how to bring up their children more carefully, how to cook fowl and so on while their husbands discuss politics in other corners of the same room. Nobody has argued about whether women are superior or inferior, but everybody knows that women are different from men. 'Freedom' or 'livelihood'- these terms were strange and embarrassing to women (Rahman, 1996:29).

Betty Friedan opines that the social system should be reorganized in such way that women society can participate equally and play their part. She thinks about the domination of women or their empowerment that it is absolutely personal right to vote for a woman or not, to elect her or not. She says that the idea is not so simple that the women are superior to men and after being elected, they will reform the politics. There is no guarantee that women society will be less corrupted than men in case of exercising their power. This evidence has been found many times in the east as well as in the west.

In the book 'The Second Stage' published in 1981, Betty Friedan says that we can't think only about a single woman about the later stage, even not the women against men or men against women. If a woman is to take part in earning livelihood, men also must take part in rearing the children. They also may enjoy some facilities to play their new role at home and family. More attention is needed to the system of caring the children, sharing the job, the leave of father or mother and relaxed time of work. It will no more be a movement of women, rather it will be a movement of reorganizing the society and men also will be side by side with women in the front line. She has sought the answer of the conflict of American women and their mental crisis (Friedan, 1963).

Before the writing of Betty Friedan's 'Feminine Mystique', Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) stirs up by writing the book 'The Second Sex' (Beauvoir, 1984). The latent question of women's condition and freedom also arised at that time. She was born in a Catholic Hierarchy family. Throughout her life, she had a good relation with the famous philosopher Jean- Paul Sartre (1905-1980). At the time of writing her famous book, she observed the women with her objective look. Later, a change came in her out look. In the seventies, she realized that socialism was not enough. Women were also exploited in the socialistic society as in the capitalistic society. She has famously written: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Although she regarded gender as a socially constructed category, she opposed the feminine on the grounds that femininity equals natural passivity and dependency compared to an active and independent masculinity. In her book 'The Second Sex' she analyzed women in different ways- physically, psychologically, and historically.

She discussed the position of the women at different times- nomadic condition, pre-historical time, middle age, the dawn of modern age, and French Revolution. She explained the role of women in literature. She showed women at different stages of life. In her huge book, she talked about the married women, prostitutes, homosexual women, independent women, mothers, beloveds, old women- all. She mentions the end of patriarch requires two changes. Firstly, women must come out of their veils to establish themselves as the subject of history. Secondly, the society should be changed in to democratic socialism.

She speaks about the world where men and women will be equal and boys and girls will be equally paid for the equal works and the same environment must be provided for both men and women. Marriage will be on the basis of agreement between man and woman, maternity will be voluntary i.e. both abortion and prevention from conception will be legal (Azad, 2001: 302-303).

The foundation of women's movement was introduced in search of social, legal, and family reforms and political rights for the interest of women. Later on a number of women's organizations for social welfare were developed demanding the reform of the laws about the right to work, protection of maternity, marriage and divorce. At the same time, the question raised on the future of the children of the separated families, the rights of parents, family life, and successor. Thus, the rise of women started and from the era of the first movement onward, demand of the wages of the working women, the condition of work, creating the opportunity of more work, etc. continued to rise (Begum, 1985:51).

At Stuttgart, in a conference of working socialist women held in 1907, an anti-socialism international front of the progressive women is formed, making Clara Zetkin (1857-1933), witty German socialist leader, its secretary. Its second conference was held in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, in 1910. In this conference, 8<sup>th</sup> March is declared the International women's Day for the women of the world. This day has a historical background. On 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1908, in Chicago, America, women workers made a movement demanding eight hour work day and equal wage for the equal work. During this bloody struggle, some women were killed. To pay homage to those women workers, 8<sup>th</sup> March is still observed throughout the whole world as a special day of the women. In the socialist world, 8<sup>th</sup> March is a public holiday (Begum, 1985:50).

In "The Communist Manifesto" written by Karl Marx and Engels in 1848, the abolishment of private ownership is mentioned as the main and only precondition of women's freedom (Marx & Engels, 1983). To analyze the oppression, persecution, discrimination against women during social evolution, they have showed that, with the abolishment of private ownership, such a society develops where family custom goes totally under ownership convention. According to Marx, private ownership relation interferes the man-women relationship and makes the relation of the both a target of business (Marx, 1967:246).

According to Engels, virtually women's freedom lies in the abolishment of capitalistic production process. In the book 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State', he shows through the analysis of the order of social evolution clearly that economic foundation of unbalanced rights of the women under the environment of private ownership predominance is established (Engels, 2004). Engels shows the theoretical combination of the idea of the society with women's affair. In his opinion, the authority of men over property, heredity, and determining the relation of heir, the recognition of paternal right in lieu of maternal right subordinates the women in society ((Engels, 2004:64-65). From the same view point, Marx and Engels feel the importance of realization of persecution of men and women. The abolishment of the socio-economic process (capitalism) which creates the discrimination between society and women, proprietorship and the unique conflict among the working class is the only way of getting rid of the all persecution.

Only then, the women will be free from being the tools of production and all the persecution will be abolished (Marx & Engels, 1969:98-137). At the beginning of pre-capitalistic society, Marx and Engels in 'The German Ideology' said for the first time about the sex wise division of work in family. The sexual role of producing issues, first, created the division of work between men and women which was totally 'natural' (Engels, 2004:74). Through this division, family created property occurred first. Since then, wives and children became the slaves of the husbands. The division of work derived from sexual difference and the appearance of individual property, at the same time and in the same way, lays the material foundation of women's sub-ordination (Marx & Engels, 1947:21-22). Thus, the sexual difference and the matter of inequality are covered with the productive process of material wealth. Though the division of labor originates from reproduction, they did not critically examine the issue. Rather, the main theme of the materialistic explanation of confined women's status in "The German Ideology" was exhibited in 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State'.

For sexual role and discrimination, in the third world, in the west and in the socialistic countries, the life and work of most women are confined to less valuable and non-institutional sector of production. The invisibility and futility of their work has enhanced the universality of man's role as the patron of women. In the capitalistic society, as a result of privatization from the public sectors of social production to the separation of household work, through the same experience of the inclusion of all women in work, the abolishment of gender discrimination is not possible (Engels, 1958:162-166). Rather, as a result of the separation of household work and privatization brought about by capitalism, the separation of men and women and the polarization of male predominance have intensified.

Eli Zaretsky, a professor of history at Eugene Lang College, explains the issue in such a way that capitalism separates family from the social production and creates a new sphere of personal life. This personal connection separates woman from men and gives a new characteristic to male predominance. Capitalism imposes the responsibility of sustaining the emotional and psychological affair of personal relation in family on women and keeps women away from working as laborers. By reproducing labor power and providing the laborers with psychological nutrition, the women work for the capital and not for men (Zaretsky, 1977:59).

In the theoretical discussion of feminism, Kate Millett (1934- ), first, established the concept of patriarchy. She and Shulamith Firestone (1945- ) established patriarchy as a basic system of predominance in the analysis of subordination of the women. Millett showed that the rule of men over women in patriarchal system had been more constant than class stratification (Millett, 1971:24). Firestone originally gave her analysis based on biological reproduction. She showed that the origin of patriarchy lies in women's reproductive power and individuality of role. This individuality of role is at the root of persecution to women too (Firestone, 1970:9). In this context, the name of Christine Delphy (1941-) is mentionable. She tried to give relatively materialistic explanation of patriarchy. Delphy showed that the standard of women's enjoyment and living was determined with the class position and earnings of the husbands. In capitalistic system, the women depend on men dually for their own labor power and patronage (Delphy, 1977:15). So, she thinks that the materialistic base of the persecution on women lies not in capitalism, but in the relation of patriarchal production.

To organize all women of all classes, Zillah R. Eisenstein, a Professor and Chair of Politics at Ithaca College, puts forward the role of patriarchy and emphasized the awareness of women about patriarchy highlighting its role (Eisenstein, 1976:35). In this regard, the comment of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), an important Marxist thinker, is noteworthy. The struggle of the women against patriarchal persecution will essentially develop a new thought and manners which will help the women to weaken the patriarchy (Boggs, 1976:44-45). John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), contemporary of Marx and Engels, wrote the book 'On the Subjection of Women' which is still a remarkable book about women (Mill, 1969:548). In 1851, Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858), wife of John Mill, questioned about women's domestic slavery through her writing (Taylor & Mill, 1970). So to say, Taylor, in her essays especially criticized the degrading effect of women's economic dependence upon men.

At the same time, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a feministic philosopher of nineteenth century, put forward this issue tremendously. Though, in her speech, women's suffrage got importance, she added the subject of caste and class to women's subjection. In her opinion, the term 'revolution' is the best for women's freedom. For centuries, the pioneer of the movement of women's freedom of different countries of the Western Europe have tried to establish the legal equity of men and women but failed. As capitalism exists and the power of private ownership and the capital invested in land, mills, and factories are preserved, the superiority of men must prevail. In this respect, the women are not only downtrodden with poverty and persecution of labor slavery but also bound to be sub-ordinate to men.

After the revolution in Soviet Russia, as a result of economical system free from capitalistic rule, the life of women also got rid of exploitation. It is in this respect that, as the real precondition of women's freedom, the liquidation of proprietorship or the economic system free from capitalistic rule is confirmed. The women of this country got not only suffrage but also all types of equality within two years of revolution. From the beginning of women's movement, one thing is being discussed with emphasis that the problems of women are a composite of economic, social, and political questions. Many things are involved in women's freedom women's dignity, i.e. the position of women in family and society, children's care, making the ways of liberating women from the clutches of all types of suppression, oppression and discrimination, and identifying what should be the efforts of women to change the present social condition. In this complex knot, one thing is basically involved and that is without national liberty and getting rid of clutches of colonialism and imperialism, the women of a country can't get rid of exploitation and persecution separately (Begum, 1985:58).

## CONCLUSIONS

So long we have seen the picture of the rights of men and women in different countries, societies and doctrines of the west. In this picture, we have seen that women have never enjoyed the same rights as men or they have not been let to enjoy. Though the women have tried to launch an organized movement to establish their rights of self dignity in the west, i.e. in Europe, it has been nipped in the bud and the women leaders of that movement have been tried to throttle through oppression and suppression. In the modern world, allied social system has been accepted. So, even in 20<sup>th</sup> century it is seen that different countries are being allied with each other with their doctrines.

Being feministic is not about adopting a hostile, militant attitude against men and motherhood. In the end, before anyone is a man or woman, we are all humans first. Despite the gender differences, everyone is essentially the same. Every woman wants the same thing every man wants: love, respect, fulfillment, and acknowledgment; to be allowed to attain what we want out of life on our own merit. To the end, the modern women of all over the world expressed their views boldly.

Women are not a separate class, rather they belong to every society. So, there is no scope to discuss the women's issues ignoring or classifying the status or class of women. Of course the features of social system of different countries and the oppositeness of class interest should be kept in mind to analyze the women's movement. It is also natural that there will be different opinions and decisions of different political parties. It is also natural that in different levels of social evolution, different problems and solutions of women's freedom have been identified and will be identified. Blind revolutionary movement about class discrimination or blind feministic movement about class discrimination, both of these two have no future. Both of these should be discarded and alertness is required. At present, such a revolutionary movement is required throughout the world that can add feministic that can under take the activities of radical social change. The more the relation of these two will be close the more the struggle of establishing a society based on human equality will be strengthened. The cultural and economical freedom of women is a part and parcel of such a society where the life of human beings cannot be separated from it and where their production and reproduction won't be controlled by sex, caste or class subjection.

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