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Feminism

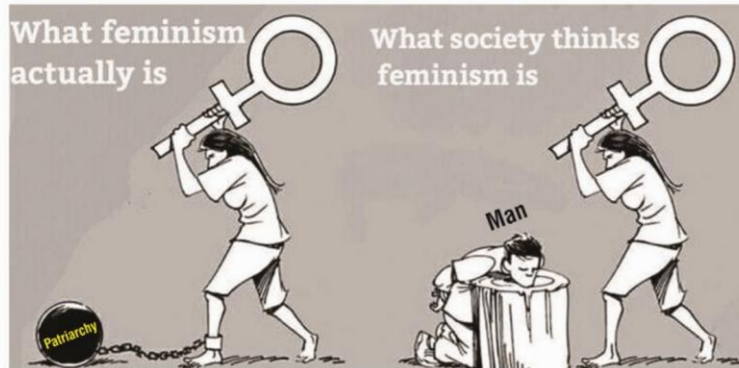
-Feminism refers to the movements and ideologies that strive to promote empowerment of women so that they achieve equality with men.

- Feminist schools of thought emerged on the horizon of Modern Political Theory from the last decades of the 19th century. It was propelled by scientific realisation about the innate capability and equality of women with men

-There are different feminist schools of thought that can be broadly categorised as

1. Liberal Feminism
2. Marxist Feminism
3. Radical Feminism
4. Eco Feminism
5. Post-Colonial Feminism

Real Meaning of Feminism



1. Liberal Feminism

- The feminist movement, in its infant stage in the late 19th century, advocated equal political rights for women.
- It believed that the subordination of women in society could be rectified with electoral enfranchisement of women and endowment of other political and economic rights.
- The State was considered to be a gender neutral institution. Therefore granting of voting rights to women will culminate in the fruition of women development.
- The greatest feat of liberal feminism lies in winning voting rights to women in the democratic western countries.

2. Marxist Feminism

- It placed gender inequality and exploitation in the origin of private property from the second stage of human history called Ancient Slave Society.
- Friedrich Engels, a close associate of Karl Marx, wrote the book "The Origins of The Family, Private Property and the State". He argued that subordination of women emerged with the rise of private property as men controlled the property and used it to establish their domination over women.
- The struggle for women liberation should take place simultaneously with the struggle for liberation of the working class. Marxist revolution will lead to the destruction of capitalism and the establishment of communism where there will be no private property.

-There will be equality among not only men but also between men and women

3. Radical Feminism

-There are no innate differences between men and women and women came to be subjugated deliberately for the purpose of exploitation, that is the crux of Radical Feminism.

-**Simone de Beauvoir**, the famous radical feminist and author of the work “**The Second Sex**”, asserted that “**A woman is not born but made**”.

-Both woman and man are endowed with same capacities when they are born. Male-dominated society and culture known as patriarchy creates through indoctrination the inequality between them.

-The differences in gender are created artificially and unjustly. We can understand this assertion when we note the enormous differences in the status and position accorded to women among the cultures of the world.

-**Carole Hanisch**, a famous Radical Feminist, brought out the most important slogan of Radical Feminism - **Personal is Political** - to reveal patriarchal domination over women.

-The liberal politics divides the activities of humankind into personal and public domains. The personal domain is considered to be a sphere of personal life where family operates. It is believed that there is no scope for conflict and domination in this sphere and only love, affection and empathy are relevant.

-Women live in the personal sphere and therefore there is no need for political rights, power and authority for women.

-But the public domain is a sphere of struggle, competition and therefore politics. This domain is dominated exclusively by men. Therefore, men alone participate in politics and possess political power.

-Radical Feminism repudiates the above liberal exposition and asserts that private and personal domain is also subject to politics.

-The relationship between man and women in personal domain is not always characterised by the considerations of love and affection. Even here struggle, competition and domination operate. For example the relations between husband and wife and a brother and sister are not always friendly and affectionate.

-Struggle and competition can also be found in them. Therefore, we should speak about politics, women rights, gender equality in personal domain too. Radical Feminism argues for a revolutionary re-ordering of society and politics to implant gender equality in personal and public domains.

4. Eco Feminism

-Eco Feminism provides a feminist interpretation of nature. The two ideologies of Feminism and Environmentalism are fused in Eco Feminism.

- It argues that patriarchy is the root cause of environmental degradation and women exploitation. The important architects of Eco Feminism are [Francoise D'Eaubonne](#), [Rosemary Ruether](#), [Ynestra King](#) and [Vandana Shiva](#).

-There are two schools of thought in Eco Feminism.

-They are Radical Feminism and Cultural Feminism. [Radical Feminism](#) asserts that patriarchy or male-dominated system subjugates and degrades both environment and women. Male domination of society must be eliminated to realise the twin objectives of environmental preservation and women empowerment.

-The other school, [Cultural Feminism](#) argues that women are closer to nature as both are food providers and play indispensable role in biological reproduction. The environmental degeneration affects women more than men. The division of work between the two genders leaves women more disadvantaged in the age of environmental crisis. They suffer more as in male dominant societies they are given the responsibilities directly linked with nature.

5. Post-Colonial Feminism

-Post-Colonial Feminism arose as an ideology and movement in the 1980s in the countries of Asia and Africa that were formerly enslaved in colonialism.

-Audre Lorde contributed to the emergence of Post-Colonial Feminism in one masterpiece essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House". [Gyatri Spivak](#), [Chandra Talpade Mohanty](#) and [Ethel Crowley](#) are important Post-Colonial Feminists.

-Audre Lorde said, "To imply, however, that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy. It is to ignore how those tools are used by women without awareness against each other... As an African-American woman in White patriarchy, I am used to having my archetypal experience distorted and

trivialised.”

-It revolts against the western feminist movements' attempts at universalising their experience. Women do not constitute a single and homogenous category as they are differentiated by a host of factors like class, race, religion and country.

-The mainstream feminism suffers from several deficiencies when applied to non-western societies. The Post-Colonial Feminism criticises the negative impact of western colonialism on the social economic and political universe of women in Asia and Africa, a reality that was ignored and never experienced by the mainstream feminist thought.

- They had experienced racism, slavery, forced migration and numerous other evils that make them different from the Western women.

It also condemns the projection of the western women who are educated, politically-conscious, modern and empowered and non-western women as passive, powerless victims.

-Post-Colonial Feminism argues that women in these societies are victims of double colonisation represented by the exploitative forces of colonialism and patriarchy. Post-Colonial Feminism castigates the visible indifference of the mainstream post colonial political thought to the peculiar sufferings of the women in their societies and countries.



Communitarianism

-Communitarianism emerged as a political doctrine during the 1980s when Michael Sandel authored the book '*Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*'.

-He criticised the libertarianism and its thinker John Rawls in that work. The other political scientists supporting communitarianism include Alisdair MacIntyre, Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, Amitai Etzioni and Will Kymlicka.

-Though the British Socialist Goodwyn Barrow coined the word "communitarian" in the 1840s, the doctrine of communitarianism emerged only towards the end of the 20th century

-Communitarianism rose as a revolt against the prevailing two ideologies of libertarianism and Marxism.

- It criticised the thinkers of libertarianism for their over emphasis on individuals. It rejected Marxism for being committed to class- based action and analysis. However, the opposition was directed against Libertarianism that had become the ruling philosophy of mankind especially in the western world.

-Communitarianism argues that man is not born in a vacuum. He is a social and cultural animal. Individuals are born in a community or culture and therefore inherit it. Their beliefs, behaviour, skills, capacities, attitudes etc are predominantly influenced by the community.

- Every individual builds on these commonly available and acquired capacities to make a mark in his or her life time. Man is not an atomistic entity existing alone but is embedded in the community. The individual is not 'unencumbered self' (completely free) from society but 'situated self' (rooted and planted) in society

-For example a child born in Tamil Nadu speaks Tamil language fluently and not Japanese whereas a child born in Japan speaks Japanese fluently and not Tamil.

-A man living in a community where computer technology is already available in developed form may become a skilled person in software domain. On the contrary, a man living in a remote community that has not witnessed the growth of information technology will not have adequate software skills.

Concept of State

-Communitarianism considers the State as a positive instrument that promotes the idea of the common good. The concept of common good is present in every community. The community develops a set of goals, practices and measures that collectively promote the fundamental welfare of all.

-The State should promote the realisation of the common good and act against the activities that promote individual good in contradiction with **common good**.

- It should protect and promote those cultural traditions of the community that symbolise and sustain the common good. Communitarianism supports a State that is democratically elected and constituted.

-They strongly aspire for a State that is responsible and responsive to demands of the community.

Concept of Rights

-Communitarianism believes that rights and responsibilities are intimately related. It rejects the excessive reliance of libertarianism on the concept of individual autonomy and rights. Instead, it focuses on a new concept of rights where common good is given importance.

-They strongly contend that the common good of the community has supremacy and priority over the rights of the individuals as it is prior to them. Every person may have his own conception of good but such individual good must be subordinated to the idea of common good.

-A new concept of **positive rights** is propagated where in a wide variety of rights like **State-subsidised education, State-subsidized housing, safe environment, universal healthcare** are demanded for the community members.

-A synthesis between rights and responsibilities is advocated by certain thinkers who belong to Responsive Communitarianism.

Concept of Justice

-Communitarians attack John Rawls and other libertarian thinkers on the concept of justice. They reject universalism of libertarianism, their argument that the concept of justice is universally applicable as it is based on reason.

- On the contrary, communitarians articulate the particularistic view of justice. Every community develops its own notions of justice and therefore it differs from society to society.

-Therefore, we can conclude that Communitarianism as a political doctrine believes in the indispensability of community for the development of the 'situated and embedded man'.

-The positive State should concentrate on the provision of positive rights to community and its people so that common good can be preserved and promoted. But Libertarianism still criticises Communitarianism as preparing the path for the emergence of collectivism and authoritarianism.

Post-modernism

=Post-modernism refers to a variety of ideas that criticise modernity and emerge as its successor and rival.

=The major proponents of post-modernism include **Fredrick Nietzsche, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida**. Modernity has dominated the political theory in the last 200 years. Rationality, universalism, reductionism are among the dominant principles of modernity.

=Post-modernism challenges these principles and advocates alternatives. It emerged in the last three decades in western political theory.

Fredrick Nietzsche is called Father of Post Modernism. He famously said "God is dead". He argued that man should stop the search for the ultimate truth to explain human life. It is beyond our capacity.

=Modernity believes in universalism and reductionism. It explains all the phenomena through a single factor or one ultimate truth.

-For example, Karl Marx said human life depends on economy and all problems can be solved by eliminating the right to private property.

-Similarly Fredrick Hegel, the German philosopher argued that the world is nothing but the embodiment of World Spirit.

-Post-modernism, in contrast, advocates that the world and our life is complex and cannot be explained by a single factor. A host of factors like culture, language, religion, politics, and economy decide human life and this world.

-Post-modernism believes that truth is not singular but plural. There are multiple versions of truth. For example, take any one leader or historical event. Different people will talk about the leader or the event differently.

-One person may call that leader a visionary. Another may call him a demagogue. Yet another may have a different perspective.

- All may be right in their own perspective and interpretation. The world is not constituted only by the two colours of black

-**Jacque Derrida** was a French philosopher who advocated an innovative Post- modern concept called **deconstruction**.

-He provides deconstruction as an approach to understand meanings and texts. There are multiple meanings in a text and as human language is not so developed it may not be possible for the author of a text to communicate all his thoughts and the receiver or reader of the text may understand the meanings differently.

-Multiple interpretations of a text exist and therefore Derrida suggests deconstructing the meanings of the text.

-Post-modernism opposes the universalism of modernity. In contrast it supports Particularism.

- It argues that the parts are more important than the whole. For example, modernity pays attention to universal theory of rights or welfare. Post- modernism focuses on the **rights of particular social groups** like women, tribals and the like, who are less privileged.

-Modernity devotes attention to systemic change but post-modernism focuses on emancipating or changing the condition of specific social groups.

- Identity politics is interlinked with post- modernism. **Identity Politics** refers to the activities of specific social groups, usually the weak, vulnerable and under-privileged communities who organise themselves under the banner of their own caste, race, and

gender to resist domination of other groups over them. The members of these groups call themselves 'we' and oppose the activities of others, 'they'. Post-modernism and Identity Politics promote the empowerment of local, specific communities.

-Post-modernism has been criticised by many thinkers and scholars. In fact, Alan Kirby, a British cultural critic, said post-Modernism is dead as its cultural period is over and the world has entered **digi-modernism** or the Era of Digital Modernism.

Environmentalism

-The advent of modern science and technology driven development had devastated the planet's environment precipitating several ecological crises like ozone depletion, climate change and acid rain.

-Environmentalism arose as a protest movement and ideology against the perilous destruction of the earth.

Political Theory and Ecology

The words environment and ecology are synonymous. Andrew Heywood, the noted political scientist classifies ecology in political theory into three kinds

1. Modernist Ecology
2. Social Ecology
3. Deep Ecology

A) Social Ecology

The term 'Social Ecology' was coined by American philosopher Murray Bookchin. It advocates radical changes in the existing social and political structures to make them ecologically correct. There are three distinct trends in Modernist Ecology

1. Eco-socialism
2. Eco-anarchism
3. Eco-feminism

Eco-socialism

-Rudolph Bahro in his book 'From Red to Green' supported eco-socialism. It considers capitalism as the enemy of ecology. By breeding materialism and consumerism capitalism has inflicted horrific destruction on the environment.

-The unlimited right to private property, the cardinal principle of capitalism endangers the precious health and wealth of the planet's ecology.

-The nature is seen only as a commodity to be traded in the market and consumed by the man. Ecosocialism propounds a new approach in politics that combines socialism and ecologism. Socialism alone can nurture environment.

-The state must be imparted with a socialist content and direction to end the evil of capitalism and to protect environment

Eco-anarchism

-Murray Bookchin advocated eco-anarchism. It considers authority as the enemy of ecology. The emergence of authority in human history in the form of State, religion and even family had led to the domination of man over man.

-The same forces have produced the subjugation and domination of nature by man. Man is a voluntary animal and his original instinct is the cooperative instinct. In the ideal society, man establishes various associations based on voluntary cooperation to achieve development.

- But artificial forces of State, religion, private property have subverted the system and created structures of domination and subjugation.

-They have also wrought havoc on ecology. Therefore, we should create a new society based on voluntary instincts to protect man and ecology

Eco-feminism

-Carolyn Merchant in the book 'The Death of Nature' propounded eco-feminism.

-This perspective considers patriarchy as the enemy of ecology and feminism as its beloved friend. Patriarchy means domination of man over women.

-Eco-feminism argues that patriarchy created the domination of man over not only women but over nature also.

-Patriarchy follows instrumental reason whereby both women and ecology are seen merely in terms of use value, as objects to be exploited and not as subjects endowed with life and intrinsic worth.

- Ecofeminism demands gender and ecology sensitive politics so that a new world of justice and sustainability can be established.

B) Modernist Ecology

-Modernist ecology is synonymous with shallow ecology. It attempts to promote a new harmony between liberalism and ecology.

-The liberal tenets and approach should be reformed so that the menace of ecological destruction can be avoided. It advocates a new 'enlightened anthropocentrism' where man, being the centre of the planet must consider the long-term interests of humanity

and ecology in his developmental activities and should not be driven solely by short-term interests.

-Modernist ecology believes in the concept of **inter-generational justice** and argues that we did not inherit the earth from our previous generations but borrowed it from the future generations of humanity and therefore, there is a moral responsibility to protect and preserve the earth for their life in the future.

- The concept of **'sustainable development'** is a basic characteristic of modernist ecology. It argues that **'getting richer faster'** should not be the goal of human world rather **'getting richer slower'** should be its guiding approach.

-The modernist ecology is not a homogenous ideology. On the contrary, it is heterogeneous. There are different perspectives and prescriptions.

- Certain followers have called for the establishment of a totalitarian **'Green State'** to protect ecology. Another group of supporters demanded **'Green Capitalism'**.

-The majority of advocates and supporters of modernist ecology suggested the green tilted State intervention in market to protect ecology and satisfy human interests.

Deep Ecology

-It advocates a new style of politics, policy and political attitude towards nature. It argues a fundamental shift in the relationship between politics and nature.

-Politics must understand, respect and protect the element of inter connectedness found in ecology linking the human beings, other biological forms and the inanimate world.

Multi Culturalism

- Multi Culturalism is an ideology that believes in the peaceful coexistence of different and distinct human communities

- Modern societies have become plural and multi cultural

- Communication Technology, Globalization, Liberalization, Human Migration, Science and Technology all have promoted the settlement of different human communities in one single place

- In any place there is bewildering variety of people living together

- Many cities have people of different ethnic, religious, tribal. Caste background living together
- Multi Culturalism as an ideology promotes fraternity, cooperation, mutual respect and tolerance among people
- It is against exclusivity and discrimination
- Multi Culturalism supports the journey of human kind towards a world society, Government and State

Further Readings

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