

Feminism and Politics: Emerging Issues and Challenges in the 21st Century

Dr. Tapan Das,

Assistant Professor, Department of political science, Assam University-788011, Assam University, Silchar,
Assam (INDIA)

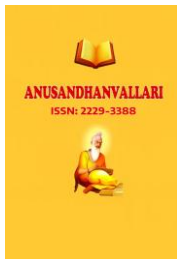
Abstract: Feminism is a theory developed over the several hundred years beginning from the 16TH Century onwards and till the present times, working in the direction of improving the overall situations of women in the socio-cultural and politico-economic system. Feminism places women at the center of debate and development and for improving the existing society, by way of raising issues related to women. They endeavor to see and solve problems from the point of view of women. Feminism is intimately inter-related with subjects like anthropology, biology, economics, history, law, literature, philosophy, political science, psychology, history, and theology. It works, develop theories, social network, in order to bring a positive change in the world, it has broadened and deepen over time. They try to locate themselves in which political and social experiences, they find themselves most often. Women all over the world plays a significant role, however, they think, their situations have not improved much over the years. Their role as a passive wives and mother, as a social and political actors are well-known. Despite their significance in every walk of life, they are ignored and yet to find adequate space in public life. Men are making private and public life successfully. Why women cannot with same level of dedication. It has been found that their role requirement in most situation always have been essential, however, their visibility and presence is conspicuously absent. Women in order to shoulder equal responsibility with their counterparts, along with family life, their social role and performance capability needs to be enhanced. Man as a master concept and patriarchal system is vehemently challenged and exposing masculinist bias. Feminism consistently working towards the process, relativizing master-man concept.

Keywords: Feminism, Politics, Patriarchy, Contemporary Issues and Woman, Woman leadership.

1. Introduction

Feminism is a theory developed over the several hundred years beginning from the 16TH Century onwards and till the present times, working in the direction of improving the overall situations of women in the socio-cultural and politico-economic system. Feminism places women at the center of debate and development and for improving the existing society, by way of raising issues related to women. They endeavor to see and solve problems from the point of view of women. Feminism is intimately inter-related with subjects like anthropology, biology, economics, history, law, literature, philosophy, political science, psychology, history, and theology. It works, develop theories, social network, in order to bring a positive change in the world, it has broadened and deepen over time. They try to locate themselves in which political and social experiences, they find themselves most often. Women all over the world plays a significant role, however, they think, their situations have not improved much over the years. Their role as a passive wives and mother, as a social and political actors are well-known. Despite their significance in every walk of life, they are ignored and yet to find adequate space in public life. Men are making private and public life successfully. Why women cannot with same level of dedication. It has been found that their role requirement in most situation always have been essential, however, their visibility and presence is conspicuously absent. Women in order to shoulder equal responsibility with their counterparts, along with family life, their social role and performance capability needs to be enhanced. Man as a master concept and patriarchal system is vehemently challenged and exposing masculinist bias. Feminism consistently working towards the process, relativizing master-man concept.

To Welby, the concept of Patriarchy remains central to a feminist understanding of society. She says that,”



Patriarchy is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality. (Welby, 1990). However, her definition of patriarchy is different from that of other feminists. It is argued that there are six patriarchal structures that restrict women and help to maintain male domination. They are: -

1. Paid Work
2. Patriarchal relations within the household
3. Patriarchal Culture
4. Sexuality
5. Male violence towards women
6. The State

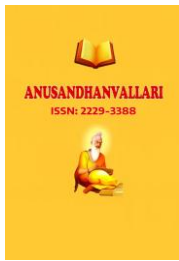
Patriarchy is commonly described as a system of social structure and practices, in which man govern, oppress and exploit woman. Patriarchal violence is then any kind of violence that creates or maintain men's power and dominance or avenges the loss of their power. Patriarchy is most commonly understood as a form of social organization in which cultural and institutional beliefs and pattern accept, support and reproduce the domination of women by the more powerful man. The present paper is an attempt to understand the basic objectives and goals of feminism and newer emerging issues in the contemporary politics, adopting purely secondary sources of data and observation methods

2. Women and politics

What is Politics and how does woman relate to politics in order to bettering the present situation of women and human life as a whole? Politics is simply the legitimate power entrusted upon the selected representatives to make policies and implement schemes. Both men and women are an integral part of a political system contributing equally in their own ways for a well governed state, nation and the world as a whole. Politics is the most important and core area for the feminists where woman can play a significant role. What is the present scenario of woman's participation in politics? It is the art of the government; it is the management of men, material and methods. It is a systematic activity of running day to day to affairs of the people and for undertaking activity for their welfare. However, since the ancient days, to present modern days, men have had a dominant role in the governing process. Man perceived as a master class and governing class decides, plan, executes programmes of the government, be it in the legislative, executives, and judiciary, man's domination has invariably been prominent throughout the ages. The moot question arises is as to how to get woman's involved in politics and political affairs.

So far as women's participation in politics is concerned, it is not very encouraging and rosy in the majority of the nations of the world. Even developed countries like UK, America, Japan and other European countries shows a lesser degree of involvement and interest of women in politics and governing process. Political sphere and its involvement by the woman can be a distinctive indicator of the progress and health of the society. Political actions can be broadly classified in the following ways, such as contesting for the post of public office and election, political canvassing/campaigning, contributing funds, distributing pamphlets, discussion on political affairs and of course, socialization process such as membership of a club, NGOs/civil societies, pressure groups, and political parties etc. But the reality is that in the majority of categories and indicators of political of political involvement, women are invariably less. A vast majority of women are not interested in politics. The usual trend is that they do not show much interest and enthusiasm to participate in the political activities.

In respect of political representation, woman has less degree of share compared to men in the local level of institution, or at the state and parliamentary level. Women's representation has assumed greater significance in a modern parliamentary democracy for fostering equal opportunities in matter of women-centered legislation and policy formulation. Research conducted worldwide suggest that policies are skewed in favors of those who participate in the political and legislative process. This necessitates that there is a need of more and more woman to come forward, participate and get represented in the competitive democratic process.



3. Woman in the contemporary society

Feminism in its different variants advocate for a woman-centric social policy and political rights and other related rights for bringing a change in their life as well as for the world as a whole. They are more natural, possessing strong sense of system and systematization which can help in their emancipation which are otherwise degrading in nature in the current context. It is beyond doubt that over the past centuries, woman has been participating in various social and political movements in different parts of the globe. They have been champions for advocating and advancing women's rights in diverse forms and shape such as educational rights, socio-political and cultural rights, economic wellbeing, human rights issues and health and reproductive issues etc. They are now hugely aware of their self-development issues and areas and getting involved in the social causes. Illiteracy and ignorance, which were widely prevalent centuries back are now fast waning for women. They often challenge the dominant patriarchal structure of the society, which they often consider as a barrier to their advancement. Women all over the world are much aware now-a-days and desires to contribute through their economic participation along with the shouldering their responsibility of family life. Now, there is hardly any occupation left which is not held by the women, be it industrial works, computer engineering, space exploration, transport and communication, medical, administrative office, teaching and in the informal sectors. Of course, on the average, there is still long way to go for the woman. This contributes to the nation's GDP and economic prosperity.

4. Major issues in Feminism

None can know and solve woman's problem better than woman themselves. They should come forward and participate actively in the socio-cultural and political system for their own liberation. Feminism is a reflection of the day-to-day life of the woman as a whole and where they find themselves within an environment and in comparison, to man. There are issues and problems specific to woman and society has a role to addressing these issues and explore practical and imaginative solutions.

i) Street and Workplace harassment:

Woman often has to move out of the domestic compound for various reasons such as educational purposes, working places, medical facilities, marketing daily needs, entertainment and health etc. However, often, there are reported cases of sexual harassment either on the streets or in the work place, jeopardizing the modesty and safety of the woman and girls. Vishaka Guidelines of the Honorable Supreme Court (1997) can an important milestone in the prevention of sexual harassment cases in the country coupled with POSCO etc. Similarly, most countries in the globe have their own safety mechanisms and legal provisions for dealing with such cases.

ii) Equal pay for equal work:

Man and woman must be paid equally for performing similar nature of work, considering similar amount of labor is expended for the type of works. Woman often feel cheated for their labor and as a result, has come out successfully with several pieces of legislations. In India, Article 39 (d) DPSP of the Indian Constitution directs the state to ensure equal pay for equal work for man and woman. The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 in India mandates equal pay for equal work man and woman for the work or work of similar nature and prohibits discrimination in employment based on sex. It also ensures equal treatment in recruitment, promotion, and training opportunities. The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 was repealed and its provisions were subsumed under the Code on Wages, 2019, aim at simplifying and modernizing wage-related regulations. The Code aims to address contemporary employment realities more accurately and effectively than the earlier lopsided legislation.

iii) Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence against woman is the most prevalent form of human right violation in the globe. Gender-based violence is defined as violence perpetrated against woman because she is a woman. It inflicts harms in the form of physical, mental, and sexual with having short-term and long-term consequences. It is often argued that power and resources are the root causes of violence against women. Types of violence primarily visible are:

i) Physical Violence ii) Sexual Violence iii) Psychological Violence iv) Economic Violence. The protection of woman from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 in India is a laudable piece of legislation for the woman and their safety.

iv) Reproductive Choice and Right

Reproductive rights and choice is very often a matter of great debate and discussion requiring legal and constitutional intervention. Cairo Agenda defined the contour of woman's control over their own child-bearing and reproductive related issues and rights. Abortion, medical abortion and legality are factors that needs to be carefully considered and analyzed. Most women must be made aware of their self-rights to reproductive choices and health issues. Family planning should be encouraged and popularized. Use of contraceptive and birth control pills should be popularized through government policies and organizing sensitizing programmes. Reproductive choice and Rights encompass the ability of individual to make free and informed decisions about their reproductive health including whether or not to have children, the choice of spacing birth of babies and number of children and most importantly access to health care and information.

v) Leadership and representation issue for the woman

In general, woman leaders are countable and very few compared to man. However, it is a good debatable matter whether woman can be a leader and they can prove to be good leader equally for leading society. Anthropologists all over the world has been researching on the on the subject for a long time and they have failed to find an appropriate and accurate answer to this quite baffling question. However, in the contemporary democratic system, both man and woman are entitled to enjoy equal socio-cultural, A political rights and benefits. Although, woman leadership, role and responsibility is very less and negligible. Future is hopefully; optimistic and woman's leadership role will increase in the future.

vi) Ownership and Property Rights

Another significant aspect in woman empowerment is the legal right to ownership and property rights. There are few societies in the world which practice matrilineal inheritance backed by legality and most others follow a patriarchal system of land and other immovable property. Feminist, now-a-days demands for their ancestral property inheritance rights. Most feminist are demanding for legal property right for equal the division of Property. has always been the primary and foundational source of material comfort, power and prestige, facilitator of a happy and peaceful life, for a long and fulfilled life.

5. Conclusion:

Feminism is a vast and rich subject area which is growing steadily but slowly with its increased literature, publications and books and with contribution from scholars across the countries and continents. It has definitely succeeded to rebuild, recreate and reimagine a social structure based on moral values, fairness, truthfulness and scientific temper and of course justice and equality of opportunities. They consider male-dominated society and man's leaderships have been primarily responsible for the degradation of the life of woman in general and society. Man as a master domineering concept is being challenged by the contemporary feminist all throughout the world. Patriarchy is often seen as a oppressor and exploiter of womanhood and to the path of their enjoyment. Reforms and changes are initiated in various parts of the world like woman voting rights in Arab, abortion right, legal property right in most of the developing nations. Newer issues are emerging in the feminist literature like marital rape and body autonomy etc. Both male and female needs equal measure of attention and nourishment for a balanced social and economic development. Illiteracy, ignorance, the concept of domestic confinement to social consciousness and social service are rising. Number of working women is increasing day by day with increased share of familial responsibility and work accomplishment.

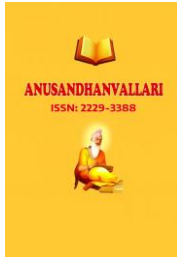
Family planning should be accorded highest priority at the present juncture considering the social and political unrest and environmental crisis. The rapidity of the growth of population and drastic demographic changes taking

places on the different places of the earth has an adverse long-term consequence for the balance of the earth. Climate change is real and will affect all if urgent measures are not taken. Resources are limited but population multiplication is a problematic issue. Most women do not have large family out of either wish or any deliberate planning. They remain fully ignorant of the potential impact upon the society. It is most essential that ministry of family welfare and planning should be vigorously activated and policies are implemented. Scientific methods in family planning is the need of the hour with popularization of the use contraceptive, birth control pills and other latest product innovation. These should be freely and regularly distributed after sensitization programmes in both India and at the Global level. It is heartening and inspiring developments to find that old age blind customary belief and practices have declined or some other on the verge of declining like Sati System, Child Marriage, prohibition of widow remarriage, female feticide, female domestic confinement etc. Female illiteracy rate has declined to a significant level or obliterated completely in certain regions.

Women are now toiling shoulder to shoulder with men in order to improve the upon the living standard of their own family as well as of their own community. Woman are, generally, considered more naturally inclined than man which could be good for the promotion of sustainable development and facilitate in the right navigation of the humanity towards sustainable earth. A sustainable earth and environment can be only possible under the leadership of woman since over male dominated leadership has led to a moral decay of the society and in all other aspects. Mother earth and nature has a limit in its carrying capacity, the capacity to regenerate and rebuild for a sustainable world wherein woman has a more significant role to play so as to avoid any future mishaps in the form of natural calamities. Man's masculinist bias might unknowingly harm the nature more than the action forthcoming from woman. Feminist, hence, can work and contribute towards the direction of the century's most important and relevant theme of Sustainable Development alongside addressing their own socio-cultural and other issues.

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