



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 8.4
IJAR 2023; 9(5): 234-239
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 12-02-2023
Accepted: 04-04-2023

Heena Kauser
M.A. (Philosophy), Miranda
House, University of Delhi,
India

The traces and development of feminism from a philosophical perspective

Heena Kauser

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/allresearch.2023.v9.i5d.10825>

Abstract

The oldest trend in the world is feminism. Throughout the Vedic age, there were signs of a female-centered society. The oldest woman in the community used to be the village chief, according to the Rig Veda. Female members of society used to rule it in the past. In the evolution of human civilisation and culture, the Vedic period is regarded as crucial. Women were held in great regard in society; they enjoyed equal rights and ideals, and women were allowed to participate in religious activities both at home and in temples. Women were empowered at this time, and education for women was authorised. Princesses were obviously permitted to participate in "Swawambar: The Golden Age" between the 15th and the 19th centuries. This research reveals the different aspects of philosophical feminism.

Keywords: feminism, Philosophical feminism, Women's movement, female-centric society

Introduction

Feminism is the oldest trend in the world. The trace of a female-centric society was noticed in the Vedic era. According to the Rig Veda, the oldest female member of society used to be the leader of the village. In the past, female members used to dominate society. The Vedic period is considered an important era in the development of human civilization and culture. Women were highly respected in society; they had equal values and rights, and in society, they were permitted to take part in religious occasions in both the home and the temple. It was an era of women's empowerment, and women's education was permitted. During the 15th to 19th centuries, it was evident that princesses were allowed to take part in "Swawambar: to select their husbands. Child marriages and Sati pratha were unheard of in this period. Adult marriage and remarriage of the widow were very normal during the period. Later in the Nineteenth century, Men's movement was noticed, and the society's status changed male –dominating society. Parda Pratha, Andermahal (House arrest of wife, and not facing other men than family members), and barring women from open religious gesture, Devdasi tradition in the temples were some of the moves by male to close women in the home. Their education rights were also taken off from them by showing religious traditions. In a single statement, women were being used as commodities in the male-dominated society. This research paper reveals the history, philosophical feminism trends in a chronological manner.

Beginning of feminism Movement

The 20th century saw the beginning of the feminist movement, which began with the affirmation of women's equality and the right to vote. There have been several feminist movements and ideologies developed over time, each with a distinct strategy and objective. The civil rights movement and the anti-apartheid campaign, which are alleged to have merely heightened the worries of the white, middle-class, and educated populace, have both been attacked in the meantime. Later, as a result of this criticism, black feminism and intersectional feminism, among others, emerged. Feminism in the early stages has been particularly influenced by the 'first wave feminism' liberal philosophy and values. There is no dearth of liberal elements in the second phase of feminism. In the nineties of the 19th century, the prevalence of the word 'feminist' in English was observed.

Corresponding Author:
Heena Kauser
M.A. (Philosophy), Miranda
House, University of Delhi,
India

But modern feminism emerged towards the end of the 17th century. During this time the development of early capitalism is reflected. In the initial phase of the development of Buddhism, the status of women deteriorated due to the change in the legal and economic environment. At this time, expressions of liberal thought-ideology emerged as a reaction against the promiscuous power of men. Liberal thinking should be expressed regarding the establishment of women's political authority. In 1792, towards the beginning of the French Revolution, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* was published. For the first time, through this book, the full expression of the early liberal policy of feminism took place. At this time women did not have the right to vote, even the right to education. Women were deprived of many vocations. There was not much difference between women and children in terms of legal status. Married women did not have any property rights of their own. Full rights of the husband over the earnings of the wife were recognized. The wife had the right to divorce even if she was a prostitute.

History of Feminism

In 1837, the French philosopher and European socialist Charles Fourier first used the term feminism formally. In 1880, France, in 1900 the United Kingdom and in 1910 the United States became active in implementing the term feminism. Where the idea of feminism was to establish fair rights for women. Feminism was never equal to malaise and it will never be. A woman is a unique personality created by the creator, so it is natural that her rights will also be unique. Why would they imitate the man or why would they join hands with the man as a candidate for authority. Women and men are complementary to each other, two inseparable branches of the human race. Since both women and men are humans, they will have some common rights called human rights. After that, women will have some unique rights as women and men will have some unique rights. But one's rights can never be the reason for the loss of other's rights. Social, political, economic and cultural spheres are covered by human rights. Human rights apply equally to men and women.

Literature Review

The meaning of words like "feminism" and "feminist" appears to be obvious and unquestionable. It has turned into a barrier to comprehending feminism because of its diversity, distinctions, and distinctiveness Delmar, R. (2018) ^[1]. Critiques of reason and purity have frequently been developed in feminist philosophical study Groenhout & Bower, (2003) ^[2]. Philosophical feminism thought was not only developed in the 20th century, it was also had a great critics too Gatens, M. (1991) ^[4]. Many distinct concept is provide a thorough grounding for a feminist environmental philosophy Plumwood, V. (2002) ^[2]. It is also noticed that the conscious of women developed along with the development of the society Fraser, & Nicholson, (1989) ^[5]. The society buried women in home as a tool of reproduction, and they are necessary for nurturing children Richardson, S. S. (2010) ^[6]. In due course, the women of western countries tried developing movement to get freedom Wollstonecraft, M. (2008) ^[7]. Later the same was commenced in India too Roy, S. (2015) ^[8]. It resulted the feminist movement in India for women education, women rights and self help Subramaniam, M. (2004) ^[9]. Another

serious reason of feminism is the participation in jobs by women as 20th Century witnessed the economic recession, and it was difficult for only male members to manage the family Liu, D. (2006) ^[10].

Different Concept

Liberal policy mainly reformative nature. Feminists of this class are in favor of opening up opportunities for equal competition between men and women in the fields of public life. On the other hand, many feminists talk about attacking the patriarchal structure of the society. Liberal feminists are generally not in favor of eradicating the distinction between public and private spheres of life. He talked about the need for reforms. Its main goal is to establish equal rights in the common fields. In this case, for example, right to education, right to vote, right to take scholarship freely is worth mentioning. In this regard, in particular, examples of remarkable success in Western countries are undeniable. Despite this, not much attention was paid to the areas of personal life, the system of power and authority in the family, gender division of labor.

Early liberal feminism was fully expressed in *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft. This book is considered as the main text of the first and main feminist book. This female sociologist has argued that, as human beings, women are entitled to equal rights and privileges like men. Women need to be given the right to education and it is necessary to accept women as rational beings in their own right. Only then the gender differences in the political and social sphere will become unimportant. He firmly rejected the prevailing notion about the inferior status of women. According to his opinion, women are rational people like men. So women should have equal rights. He has been vocal about equal rights of women in the field of education, job, property, voting. The philosophical basis of liberal feminism is rooted in individualist libertarian thought. Accordingly, all people are of equal importance. All people have equal moral value. Irrespective of caste, creed, caste, male or female, everyone deserves equal respect. According to liberals, everyone has the right to participate in political life. In this case, it is necessary to counter any kind of discrimination or discriminatory behavior against women. It is necessary to rationally judge and discuss among the individuals. It is desirable to have the nature, intelligence, quality ability of the person as a matter of judgment.

Theories of Feminism

John Stuart Mill's - The Subjection of Women

John Stuart Mill was a political economist, philosopher, and politician from England. He was a staunch supporter of Classical Liberalism, and his most famous essay, *On Liberty*, was published in 1859. Unlike many other Victorian liberal thinkers, Mill's view of liberalism included women's rights, and he advocated for gender equality. He wrote his article *The Subjection of Women* in 1869. The term relates to "female subordination" in this sense, when women are governed by an individual or the state. Throughout the essay, Mill makes the case for women's equal participation in society, politics, education, and the workforce. Mill offers the idea that "the principle that regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong... (and are) obstacles to human improvement, and it ought to

be replaced by a principle of perfect equality..." He makes reasons in favour of this idea throughout the chapter. These include the beginnings of female subjugation and current society's evolving perspectives. He draws a connection between the treatment of women and slavery to emphasise the ethical concerns of a male-dominated society. Furthermore, Mill criticises the conventional perspective of women by claiming that history does not justify their subjugation. Mill discusses the home concerns that Victorian women faced. He investigates marital laws and reveals the power discrepancy between men and women. Exemplifications are used to demonstrate how marriage rules largely favour males. Children of a married couple, for example, are considered the property of males. He utilises the slavery comparison once more to show the disparities inside a marital contract. He illustrates his proposals for equal marriage by comparing it to business partners and urging a "division of power." He promotes for the female workforce and societal engagement but recognises that some women may want to focus on household matters. He contends that this privilege should be decided by a woman rather than the state. Mill's arguments pit him against what historians call the Cult of Domesticity. This word alludes to a romanticised vision of women that emerged in the nineteenth century. These femininity standards were most commonly put upon middle and upper-class women. Piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity were virtues associated with a "good woman." In other words, a woman was supposed to serve her husband, raise children, prioritise others, and take care of the home. This was to be done with grace and without complaint or disagreement. Mill elaborates on his beliefs regarding the role of women outside of marriage in this section. He contends that they should be permitted to vote, work, and run for political office. Mill addresses how legal and social reforms would help society in the concluding section of the essay. This covers women's advantages such as ensuring marital equality and encouraging women to pursue intellectual pursuits and professions. He claims that this will help males by encouraging competitiveness and intellectual stimulation. He also feels that young males will gain from treating girls as equals, developing humility and a feeling of service. He also demonstrates how this will limit masculine entitlement and bigotry. He finishes by asserting that mankind will not reach its full potential if half of the people is denied the opportunity for self-development and engagement.

Freud's theory of femininity

Sigmund Freud's opinions on women sparked debate during his lifetime and continue to do so now. "Women oppose change, receive passively, and add nothing of their own," he said in a 1925 study titled "The Psychological Consequences of the Anatomic Distinction between the Sexes." "Freud was a product of his time." He was hostile to the women's emancipation movement and thought that sexual reproductive processes controlled women's life."

Michel Foucault view on Feminism

Thus, any straightforward causal connection between a social gender and a biological sex is contested by Foucault's ideas. Gendered conduct is not neutrally or naturally determined by the body. A biological sex does not definitely and automatically lead to gender identity. In order to promote awareness and change, feminist theory recognises

and challenges oppression and power structures. According to feminist philosophy, understanding, advocacy, and change may take place when oppression and power are recognised and challenged. According to Foucault, power is distributed and ubiquitous rather than exercised by individuals or organisations through 'episodic' or 'sovereign' acts of dominance or coercion. In this perspective, neither an organisation nor a structure exist since "power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere."

Modern liberal feminism

The central theme of modern liberal feminism is that rational women as individuals. In this matter, women are entitled to full human rights. Women should have the opportunity and freedom to determine their role in public life. There should be opportunities and facilities for women to compete equally with men in politics and in paid jobs. In the 1970s, the freedom of women in all these areas was officially recognized to a large extent, but in reality it was not fully available. Second wave feminism began in America as a form of liberal protest against the failure of American society to fulfill its promises regarding women's intended independence, self-expression and cultural rights and freedoms. At this time, it is claimed that women should be freed from the captive life of household responsibilities. The existing usage rules and regulations in this regard will apply equally to men and women. In modern liberal feminism, it was not said to reverse the existing social, economic and political system at once. This section of feminism did not attack the morals and family values of the past.

A contemporary expression of modern liberal feminism occurred in Betty Friedan's book titled *The Feminine Mystique*. The book was first published in 1963. According to this female sociologist, certain beliefs are instilled in women through socialization. Accordingly, women feel that their fulfillment is present within the home or family. The aim of a woman's life is to have a husband and children and take care of them. American feminist Friedan once said that woman is feminine mystique. This understanding was ubiquitous and very successful. This female sociologist showed that many American housewives experience anger and despair. This state of despair cannot be explained to them. All these unhappy American women think that the fault for this is not their own, but their circumstances. Freud called this problem: '* problem that has name'. Through this quote, Freud wanted to explain that many women suffer from deep depression and emotional experiences. Because they have to remain confined within the confines of their household chores. Independence women do not get the opportunity to achieve success in political life or public life through lucrative career. Valerie Bryson commented on this in an essay titled *Feminism*. Friedan was sounding a clarion call to women, for she believed that the gains won by earlier feminists meant that the door to freedom had been opened, and that women could now walk through it and join men in pursuing careers in the public sphere."

Friedan observes that some discriminatory practices against women continue. There is a need for active struggle against these. For this purpose, in 1966, with the help of others, Shrimati Friedan formed the National Organization for Women (NOW – National Organization for Women). The organization has to be developed as a national pressure group. Its purpose was to organize a struggle against gender

bias and inequality through the existing political system and political process. Later Mrs. Friedan emphasized on several other programs for the benefit of women. These are greater government support for child rearing; Greater participation of men in household work and child rearing, restructuring of the recruitment process in the best jobs, so that women and men can take responsibility in performing household chores on the basis of mutual cooperation. It has also been said that the female race has been a victim of inequality for a long time. That's why compensation needs to be done. For compensation, discriminatory process will have to be started in favor of women, against men, in the matter of employment. However, the National Organization for Women (NOW) has over time become a strong pressure group and the largest women's organization in the world.

Feminist thought developed in the late 20th century through the liberal political ideology of Radcliffe Richards and Susan Moller Okin. Shrimati Richards - of *The Skeptical Feminist*. The title book was published in 1982. This sociologist accepted and supported the modern liberal philosophy of John Rawls. And in this way he has established a principle of justice. Accordingly, regardless of male or female, everyone will be able to develop their inherent qualities. He has also said that according to this principle of justice, reverse discrimination may be necessary for a temporary period. The book titled *Gender, Justice and the Family* was published in 1990. In this book, Richards and Okin talk about the need for government support in child rearing, more flexible procedures for employment, and the participation of both men and women in domestic work. According to the opinion of these two sociologists, gender equality is not necessary only because of justice and reason; It is necessary in the interest of the male race and the whole society. Valerie Bryson commented on this in her *Feminism* Topic: "...from this perspective, there is no reason why their proposals should be opposed, and neither explores the possibility that women's progress might be blocked by powerful conflicting interests."

In 1993, a book titled *Fire with Fire* by Naomi Wolf, a female social scientist, was published. Mrs. Wolf re-raised the liberal feminist statement for the new generation. According to her opinion, women would not see themselves as weak and helpless. They will be adherents of power feminism. Women will exercise autonomy in determining their lifestyle. Women have to overcome the fear of success.

Critique of Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism has come under fierce criticism. Anti-feminist thinkers are in favor of preserving the old system or status quo in the matter of gender discrimination. Naturally they attack the feminist ideology. Some feminist thinkers have also opposed liberal feminism. Other feminists have alleged that liberal feminists may properly pursue women's legitimate interests. Ni. Naturally, they could not point out an effective way to ensure women's freedom. Critics invent various arguments against liberal feminism. Some of them are particularly notable. One: There exists a fundamental incompatibility between the concepts of liberalism in principle and the demands of feminist politics. Feminist politics based on gender interests cannot be reconciled with individualist ideas of liberalism. In liberalism, it is believed that, regardless of gender, the one whose personality is capable of achieving full development. On the other hand, in feminism, the difficulties of the female race are specially

highlighted and collective activism against discriminatory behavior on women is called for. Naturally the conflict of feminism with liberalism is inevitable.

Radical feminists have drawn attention to the limitations of individualism as the basis of gender politics.

- 1) The libertarian ideological background moves away from the structural nature of patriarchy. However, in this patriarchal structure, women are kept oppressed, not as individuals. They are deprived of their rights and privileges and are subjected to gender discrimination. Because of gender, women are systematically oppressed.
- 2) In individualism, special importance is imposed on personality. The predominance of personality can create hindrance in the way of collective consciousness and activism among women on the basis of gender unity and sense of sisterhood.
- 3) Liberal libertarian approach can be taken beyond gender and other social identity identities. Can evaluate people by looking at personal discretion and success. This can result in the depoliticization of gender relations. Because gender difference is not visible in this process. Even masculine characteristics and tendencies can be tactfully imposed on women. If a person is judged genderless, the male nature is subtly imposed. In this way, treating all people equally means considering women as men.
- 4) According to the critics, the failure of liberal feminism from the perspective of individual terms. A wide publicity has been done regarding the greed of certain women. This is correct. But still the true equality is missing in the field of work and politics. In the field of power and authority, the supremacy of the male has continued. Women still have less earning power than men. Even in the legal field, complete equality was not established.
- 5) According to the critics, the concept of power and politics is acceptable to men in a liberal background. As a result, the root cause of women's oppression remains unpublished. Moreover, in such a theoretical discussion, a kind of artificial division is accepted between the universal sphere of politics and the private sphere of personal relations. Due to this, in the emergency judgment of life, some personal areas will not be able to be properly understood. In this case, family can be mentioned as an example. Gender politics can take place in the family. Again, the incident of violent behavior or rape on a woman in the home cannot be counted as an unfortunate personal experience. Because all this is related to the power-system of the society. Apart from this, the failure of this principle in properly assessing the importance and value of women's role in household activities is undeniable. Valerie Bryson commented on this in an essay titled *Feminism*: "...domestic and caring work does not disappear when women enter paid employment, nor is it shared equally with men; until this problem is confronted, the liberal promise of emancipation may represent an increase in women's burdens, and women will be unable to compete equally with men in paid work or politics."
- 6) According to the opinion of many critics, the objectives of feminism actually proved ineffective. For middle-class women interested in career advancement, the goal of feminism can be a meaningful reflection. Critics are

skeptical about the existence of a truly competitive hierarchical social system. In such a society, most of the people will suffer, regardless of gender, all will be exploited and oppressed by caste and class. The core claim of liberal feminism is equal rights for women. This is helpful अमोजीक attracts women in favorable positions in terms of background and educational qualifications. Because this class of women can take advantage of the facilities of career and opportunities for higher education. Andrew Haywood commented in the title of his Political Ideologies—"Liberal feminism may therefore reflect the interests of white middle-class women in developed societies, but fail to address the problems of working-class women, black women and women in the developing world."

- 7) According to the critics, feminine values should be strengthened instead of abandoned. Statements of liberal feminism have been prepared from the perspective of the rituals of the male race. The traditional characteristics of femininity and the value and importance of women's actions have been ignored in liberal feminism. If the objective is to be like a man, then the ability to give birth to children would indicate a limitation of women. Women's household work and service work will be of lower nature and less important. In this context Valerie Bryson commented: "...we must recognize the interdependence that is the essential basis of human society so that male ideas of autonomy, competition and rationality must be supplemented or replaced by nurturing, co-operation and empathy."
- 8) Liberal feminists believe very simply that the state is a neutral institution; In the matter of establishing equality between men and women, the state will be found in a friendly and helpful role. According to critics, this view of liberal feminists is erroneous. Liberal feminists themselves are confused about the nature of state power and the interests of men and women. Feminists of this class believe that a just social order is the protector of everyone's interest. In a just-based society, men can also be feminists like women. But according to the critics, the male race has a kind of selfish interest in continuing its power and authority. This trend or tendency is reflected in all the institutions of the state and society. The state is under the influence of men everywhere.
- 9) Many critics are of the opinion that the state represents the necessity of a capitalist economic system. If the interests of the male race conflict with the hopes and aspirations of the female race, the interests of the female race will be hindered. Bryson states: "...confusion over the nature of the state is increased by liberal feminist demands for state action... for this is contrary to liberal principles of limited government and non-intervention."

Misunderstood Concept of feminism

Evidently, misunderstanding this idea has led to many people—men and women—hating it and veering away from it. The following are some ways that the idea of feminism is misconstrued today: The term "feminism" is often used to refer to masculine hatred, male superiority, and men-bashing. The idea that all men are the same or that they are all sexist is supported by this. A person cannot be a feminist if they value the institution of marriage and choose to stay at

home and raise their children. Feminists cannot be men. Many people might think that feminism as solely a "woman's issue" that men should not participate in. The idea that being a feminist is un-"manly" is held by many males. Worst of all, some men believe that granting women equality implies that they must forfeit their own rights. Many women think that granting them particular rights goes against the principles of feminism. For instance, they don't want to sit in the seats on buses and trains designated for ladies. The word "feminism" has come to have such a bad reputation because of this generally accepted erroneous meaning. The subjective definition of the term "feminism" has been up for controversy for many years—possibly for centuries—and as a result of the different arguments around its meaning, the term's actual significance for promoting gender equality has been obscured.

Truth and Reality about Feminism

The misunderstanding of feminism is completely different from the reality. It will really consist of the following element. It promotes equal opportunity for men and women in all aspects of life. Along with achieving social and political equality, women should also be given a fair portion of the rights they are due. Women need to be able to use their discretion and make decisions that affect their own lives. She should be allowed to make her own choices, such as her work and profession as well as her clothing and life partner. It is neither intended to diminish men's rights or to elevate women over males. Feminism does not require a woman to support it; anyone of any gender can speak out in favour of women's rights. Women who are clever, powerful, and motivated to succeed should no longer be held back by cultural and religious restrictions. Feminism does not seek to grant women additional rights; rather, it seeks to level the playing field. Being a feminist does not require you to abandon your spouse or son(s) and live alone. It does not imply that you oppose the institution of marriage or that childbirth is not important. The assumption that women are nothing more than reproductive machines is contrary to feminism, which is not against women who wish to become mothers.

Conclusion

In order to make further progress towards equality for all, it is essential to overcome widespread misconceptions and engage men, women, and all genders in our effort to realise true equality. The word "feminism" has been dragged through the mud and has been misinterpreted by so many people throughout the world. There is no room for difference of opinion on this matter. Nevertheless, there are several limitations of this doctrine. That too cannot be denied. The importance and significance of the liberal philosophy of justice, freedom and equality is undeniable. The application of all these concepts is more significant in the interest of women. In the context of this implementation process, it is possible to re-evaluate and improve all these liberal ideals.

References

1. Delmar R. What is feminism?. In Theorizing feminism. Routledge; c2018, 5-28.
2. Plumwood V. Feminism and the Mastery of Nature. Routledge; c2002.

3. Groenhout RE, Bower M. (Eds.). *Philosophy, feminism, and faith*. Indiana University Press; c2003.
4. Gatens M. *Feminism and philosophy: Perspectives on difference and equality*; c1991.
5. Fraser N, Nicholson L. *Social criticism without philosophy: An encounter between feminism and postmodernism*. *Social Text*, 1989, 83-104.
6. Richardson SS. *Feminist philosophy of science: History, contributions, and challenges*. *Synthese*, 2010, 337-362.
7. Wollstonecraft M. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women & A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. Cosimo, Inc; c2008.
8. Roy S. *The Indian women's movement: Within and beyond NGOization*. *Journal of South Asian Development*. 2015;10(1):96-117.
9. Subramaniam M. *The Indian women's movement*; c2004.
10. Liu D. *When do national movements adopt or reject international agendas? A comparative analysis of the Chinese and Indian women's movements*. *American Sociological Review*. 2006;71(6):921-942.