



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**The Conceptual Journey of Feminism: Redefining Gender-Roles**

**Anjali Gupta**

Department of English, St. John's College, Agra  
Email: [surendrasinghsjc20@gmail.com](mailto:surendrasinghsjc20@gmail.com)

Received: 9<sup>th</sup> July 2019, Revised: 30<sup>th</sup> July 2019, Accepted: 18<sup>th</sup> August 2019

**ABSTRACT**

*There is a long journey of efforts that made up the conceptual and intellectual face of feminism. Feminism underwent the significant changes through the various theories. Feminist theories suggest some special directions to bring changes in social and environmental factors that create and contribute to dilemmas and problems experienced by women. Feminist theories provide a perspective for evaluating social and environmental experiences of groups and individuals, regardless of sex and gender. Feminism can be defined as a movement that seeks to enhance the quality of women's life by impacting the norms against the society based on male dominance and subsequent female subordination. The means of change can be noticed in the work-place politically and domestically. Women have come journeying a long way since 19<sup>th</sup> century. They have been trying to prove before the male dominated society that they have equal dignity with their male partner. Liberal feminism is a gradual approach to improving the position of women in society through legislation. Cultural feminism seeks matriarchal vision the idea that belongs to the cultural changes by powerful women while radical feminism promotes women's organizations as separate social institution with the view of 'The Personal is Political.' Marxist or socialist feminism favors economical power in the hands of women. They think oppression of women is based on the private property system that exists within capitalists, social and economical structure. Existential feminism advocates the self-identity of women with the view that woman is not born but made by society. Ecofeminism argues that the control over environmental resources is in the hands of male therefore women are exploited by men in power for their own profit. Postfeminism focuses on how discourse in society creates social assumptions about how women should be created. All these theories including concepts of identity, destruction of discourse and reassessing the cultural characteristics of the female body generate the wide range of ideology regarding feminism.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Feminist theory is an approach to understanding the gender roles and it advocates the women's interest in social organization. Feminism refers to range of political movement, ideologies and social movements that share a common goal to define, establish and achieve political, economical, personal and social rights for women. Feminism attempts to analyze the reasons for and dimensions of woman's oppression and to achieve women's liberation. It is not against man, it just seeks to redefine socially constructed idea of woman's point of view. The target of feminist work is to revise the traditional way of considering history by evaluating that both gender- Male and Female are seen equally. There are many theories of feminism as below.

**LIBERAL FEMINISM**

Liberal Feminism is a theory that imbued with revolutionary passion of liberty of women remained enslaved because of a corrupt process socialization which stunts their intellect and teaches them that their main purpose of life is to serve men. Mary Wollstonecrafts "A Vindication of the rights of the woman" is the first major of Liberal feminist theory. Wollstonecrafts believes that proper education, proper training in critical thinking is the most important single item on the feminist agenda. Liberal feminist are most likely to examine interpersonal interactions and encourage women to behave like those men who are successful in their careers. Liberal feminists work within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into that structure, often using a model of individual rather than structural deficit thus, it can be summarized that liberal feminism is a gradualist approach to improve the position of women in society by promoting equal opportunities

through legislation while, at the same time challenging the socialization process that accepts gender inequality.

### **CULTURAL FEMINISM**

Margaret Fuller's "Woman in the nineteenth century initiated the cultural feminist tradition. Fuller's idea is that each individual is born as a seed with unique design imprinted within, it must be allowed to unfold through one's life course. Fuller declares woman must develop self-reliance. Underlying this cultural feminist theory was a matriarchal vision, the idea of society of strong woman guided by essentially female concerns and values. These included most importantly, pacifism, cooperation, non-violent settlement of differences and a harmonious regulation of public life. It found fictional expression in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's matriarchal utopia, "Herland". Twentieth century cultural feminists believe that the traditional realm of women provides the basis for articulation of humane world view one which can operate to change the destructive masculine ideologies that govern the public world. Cultural feminists assume that women's political value system may be derived from traditional women's culture and applied to the public realm. Thus, Cultural feminism remains one of the most important traditions of feminist theories.

### **RADICAL FEMINISM**

This type of Feminism consists an approach to focus the male-power and prerogative coming under social machinery. It seems to seek promotional facts concerned to female forums. The theory of radical feminism is obviously noticed in its apt form in Kate Millett's "Sexual politics" and Shulamith Firestone's "The Dialectic of Sex: The case for feminist revolution". In his theory of sexual politics Kate Millett depicts it as follows: "When one group rules another, the relationship between the two is political. When such an arrangement is carried out over a long period of time it develops an ideology." The system that empowers male dominating structure mounts men on the top of the sophisticated political ground of individual identity, social institutions and all other sects of power. The view that radical feminists present is an overview of women's personal problems related to injustice and miseries but overall it has become mere an imbalance of power on the ground of radical ideology. The slogan of political feminists, "The personal is political" points out the picture of female form of weakness and forth coming redefining figure of situational legal reforms by which reinforcement of female identity in the reign of sexual hierarchy. Radical Feminists' work promotes apostasy which erects a wall between man and woman relations.

### **MARXIST OR SOCIALIST FEMINISM**

Marxist or Social Feminism defines women's oppression as a result of class-based social system. This Feminism focuses on structural inequality within a class-based social system, especially in reproduction of the workforce adherents promote understanding oppression to best determine which response to use. Money possesses power. The financial position of gender determines its value. It was miserable that women's domestic labor began to count less as compared to wealth, man was accumulating in proportion. As wealth increased, it made man's position more important than women's position. More pragmatically, Social feminists focus attention on women's role in the wage labor force. Often using the labor movement is as the base from which to promote the equitable redistribution of resources. Oppression of women is said to be based in the private property system that exists within capitalist, social and economical structures. The Marxist Feminism focuses on gaining the economical power in the hands of women so that they may be enabled to get equality and advancement in the society.

### **EXISTENTIAL FEMINISM**

In this world every living being has its own existence. The theory of existential feminism has been developed from the concept in which female beings are considered as the human being of equal existential value in the universe. The most important works of existential feminist theory Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" and Mary Daly's "Beyond God the father" represent their ideological overview from twentieth century philosophical movement existentialism. Simone De Beauvoir's gift for feminist theory is her depiction of the existentialist vision to examine the

cultural and political status of women. Beauvoir's statement about her vision, "The situation of woman is that she- A free and autonomous being like all other human creatures, nevertheless finds herself living in a world, where men compel her to assume the status of the other". The basic aspects of existential theory of feminism are as follows- the internalization of otherness in concerned to colonized group experience and the aspect of phenomenological reconstruction of reality which valued as essential to the liberation process. Internalization of otherness refers one has born with the identity of oneself in the view of the dominant group which always leads women. In the modern society, one becomes like the powerful source of suppressing other while second exists for use and throw. Mary Daly condemns the idea of god as a hypothetical transcendence or a fixed image of male as a supreme being. She states, "The women's revolution is an ontological and spiritual revolution, pointing beyond the idolatries of sexist society and sparking creative action in and towards transcendence". She explains that the new consciousness is fundamentally a refusal of objectify. The main point of the theory of existentialism considers as that every object in this world that exists has its own value and identity and no one has right to interfere it. Nature has gifted everyone individual powers and capacity to survive therefore nobody can overlap other's dignity and existence.

### **ECOFEMINISM**

Ecology is the term that refers the relationship between living beings and their environment. It therefore Ecofeminism means the relationship between natural environment and woman world or female factors. The main role of nature is to provide power to all female factors so that the real duty of male machinery can do better for maintaining most appropriate form of this beautiful world of all living and non-living organisms. Ecofeminist scholars like Alice Walker, Vandana Shiva, Ivone Gebara, Rosemary Ruether, Sallie McFague, Paula Gunn Allen, Andy Smith and Karen Warren picturize only the moral grounds of human in connection to the natural environments. The most highlighted form of ecofeminism existed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century when the need of balancing behavior between environment and female forces is felt by the theorists of feminism. The theory of ecofeminism refers that all men exploit natural resources for the benefits of their own, either they are in the form of land or lady. They understand well that there is no importance of man without woman yet they devalue women to suppress them and use them as per their own choice and need of pleasure and profit. The domination of male power upon female generates the ideology of ecofeminism that creates a profound link between ecology and feminism. These feminists assume that the sprouts of female powers resemble to the germination of seeds in the open environment of natural situation. They advocate that wherever patriarchal system leads, the oppression of female powers and destruction of natural environment go decay. As we think that where the value of one rises and the importance of other degrades, the imbalance takes place there and the birth of new ideology takes form. Ecofeminism has born with the features of unwanted and unwilling exploitation of female by the male which is totally against the ecological system. The theory of ecofeminism brings up the values maintaining balance between ecology and feminism.

### **BLACK FEMINISM**

Black feminism is such type of feminism that begins with the racial analysis and points to diversity of women and the several sorts of oppression. As we know that racism and understanding women's diversity and various forms of oppression are adhered to the diversity of responses, family experience in slavery, historic family and social patterns. The theory that was evolved out of this 'Black Feminism Movement' was Alice Walker's Womanism. Here in real sense the Black Feminism makes a clear cut opinion about the racial analysis and discrimination of women. If we do such sorts of division of an impartial part of humanity, it'll be black injustice against her.

### **POSTMODERN FEMINISM**

After the argument of Standpoint feminists about the global issues like rape, incest and prostitution, the cultural specific issues like female genital mutilation as well as glass ceiling practices that impede women's advancement in order to know how the gender inequality interacts with racism, homophobia, classism and colonization, Postmodern Feminism is an right approach

that highlights on how discourse in society prepares social assumptions about women. In this scenario Postmodern Feminism plays a significant role in the socialization of women. It has suggested a wide range of social reforms and behaviors and argues against patriarchy.

### CONCLUSION

Overviewing the theories of feminism, it's obviously notable that feminism had gone through a tough journey of conceptual and ideological phases. Through these theories the arousal of feminine consciousness can't be overlooked. Liberty of the individual is absolutely necessary for the development of society. One of the chief hindrances to human improvement is the subordination of women and it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side and disability on the other. All theories advocate the one major phase of female's position in society. It involves imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition and internalization of its standards. It protests against these standards, values and advocacy of minority rights. Finally feminism has made a permanent platform of self-discovery, a turning inwards freedom from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for self-identity.

### REFERENCES

1. Beauvoir, Simone De (1949): *The Second Sex*, Translated by H.M. Parshley, New York Bantam (1961).
2. Daly Mary (1973): *Beyond God, the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Beacon, Boston.
3. Josephine Donovan (1992): *Feminist Theory* The Continuum Pub. New York.
4. Juliet Mitchell (1971): *Woman's Estate* Baltimore; Penguin (1971).
5. Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
6. Margaret Fuller (1845): *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* Norton New York (1971).
7. Marry Wollstonecraft (1792): *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Baltimore; Penguin.

#### How to cite this article:

Gupta A. (2019): *The Conceptual Journey of Feminism: Redefining Gender-Roles*. *Annals of Education*, Vol. 5[3]: September, 2019: 20-23.