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Feminist Ideology

- The expression feminism stands for and is often used for the empowerment of women, for support of women rights in all domain of life including politics.
- It emerged as a body of ideas and a movement that aimed to enhance women's status and power.
- It believes that women are disadvantaged in comparison to men. This disadvantage is not natural or biological. It is a social and political construct which should be challenged and changed.
- Feminism criticises the established theories of State on the ground that they completely ignore the subjugation of women and gender differences in structures of power. Feminism comprises a number of social, cultural, political movements, theories and moral philosophies concerned with discrimination against women and women rights.

Feminism

Feminism is used to indicate the different trends or subtypes in feminism.

These include:

Liberal Feminism

- Liberal feminism advocates for equality between the sexes through social and political reforms, and legal means.
- Liberal feminists stress on the importance of an individual, and believe that every woman can assert her place in society and gain the rights she deserves. Some very important objectives of liberal feminism are abortion rights, equal pay for male and female employees, educational rights, voting rights, childcare, health care, etc.
- Liberal feminism leans more towards 'sameness' perspective, and seeks to bring about a change only in the present state of society, and not a revolution as such.

Feminism

Radical Feminism

- Radical feminism takes its name from the Latin word, which means root. In context, radical feminism believes in 'going to the root' or source (of the problem).
- Radical feminism believes that it is the male-dominated hierarchy (or patriarchy) which is responsible for the oppressed status of women today.
- According to this branch of feminism, if changes are not brought about in this hierarchy, there can be no equality between men and women, and that a total reconstruction of the society is necessary to bring about the desired reforms.
- Over time, radical feminism has given birth to several sub-categories that each focus on a particular issue with a similar approach.

Feminism

Cultural Feminism

- Some experts feel that cultural feminism is a branch of radical feminism, while others feel that the two differ considerably.
- Cultural feminism believes that the society needs a female 'essence' or a female 'nature'. This kind of feminism believes that the qualities present in women are not only unique, but also superior than those present in men.
- These qualities, say cultural feminists, are more of a psychological and cultural nature than biological. These feminists believe that the female essence should be celebrated, and infused with the male-dominated world to provide the right balance to the working of society.

Feminism

Socialist Feminism

- This type of feminism believes that the oppressed status of women can be attributed to the unequal treatment at both the workplace, and in the house.
- Financial and personal exploitation, the institution of marriage, childbirth and childcare, prostitution, and domestic work, according to socialist feminists, are tools for degrading women, and the work that they do, in a male-dominated society.
- They believe in work that causes reforms in the society as a whole, and not on an individual or community level.

Feminism

Marxist Feminism

- Marx was of the opinion that the capitalist system was to blame for the inequalities faced by the working classes, and the removal of the capitalist system would remove these inequalities, which would ultimately reduce gender inequalities as well.
- This is the attitude adopted by Marxist feminism. Many socialist and Marxist feminists put these philosophies together to achieve gender equality in both the professional as well as personal spheres.
- Socialist and Marxist feminism often considers itself to be a sub-category of radical feminism, only referring to a different 'root of all problems', which is the economic system.

Feminism

Ecofeminism

- Ecofeminism is actually the combination of ecology, and feminism that dwells on the symbolic relationship between the oppression of women, and the destruction of the environment.
- Ecofeminism believes that the destruction of environment and the oppression of women in society are symbolically related to one another.
- According to this theory, just like men control and destroy the environment for their own benefit and pleasure, they control and oppress women too, for the same reason.
- Ecofeminism advocates that women should try to reduce the destruction of the environment as much as possible, and create and maintain a healthy environment to repair social as well environmental injustice.

Feminism

Black Feminism

- Black feminism believes that racism and gender discrimination are two sides of the same coin.
- The liberation and freedom from oppression of black women would ensure equality for everyone, according to Black Feminists, who refer to themselves as 'Womanists'.
- Black feminism believes that if the liberation of black women is successful, it would mean the liberation of all women, racial discrimination, as well as discrimination based on economic classes.

Feminism

Post-structural and Postmodern Feminism

- Post-structural feminism, also referred to as French feminism, uses the insights of various epistemological movements, including psychoanalysis, linguistics, political theory (Marxist and post-Marxist theory), race theory, literary theory, and other intellectual currents for feminist concerns.
- Post-modern feminists begin with the assumption that the modernist conception of feminism places overt emphasis upon gender differences between women and men whilst ignoring the differences within each gender.

Feminism

Post-structural and Postmodern Feminism

- Gender is **constituted** by the way we talk, create images and present ourselves to others.
- The nature and extent of patriarchy is therefore different for a middle-class white woman than a poor black-woman.
- This view is framed within the concept of **intersectionality** which seeks to examine how biological, social and cultural categorisations interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels. It is a framework which enables us to identify how systemic injustice and inequality exists on a multitude of levels.

Feminism

Post-structural and Postmodern Feminism

It may be enough to adopt a 'pro-women' stance rather than labelling oneself as a feminist. This argument is particularly persuasive for those who feel the term itself carries a certain degree of ideological baggage.

At the very least, it must be recognised that the issues facing women are different to previous waves of feminist thought. It also reflects a recognition that *some* objectives of the women's movement have been achieved.

Evolution of Feminist Movement

- The feminist movement is generally said to have begun in 1858 with the **Seneca Falls Convention** (the first women's rights convention).
- However, its roots can be traced back to 18th century. Christine de Pizan, a late medieval writer was possibly the earliest feminist writer in the western world.
- Feminist thought took a concrete shape during the Enlightenment with thinkers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Marquis de Condorcet who championed women's education.

Evolution of Feminist Movement

- During the period of French Revolution two of the first works on feminism appeared. The French revolutionary adopted the famous declaration of rights of man and citizen in 1789, which was based on liberty, equality and fraternity.
- Olympe de Gouges brought to the notice that it did not talk about the female citizens and their rights. She brought an alternative declaration- **Declaration of Rights of Woman and Female Citizens**.
- In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft published one of the seminal works of modern feminism. The "**Vindication of the Rights of Women**" argued for the equal education of women, allowing them to become whole, independent people.

Three Waves of Feminism

- Feminists and scholars have divided the movement's history into three "waves".
- The first wave refers mainly to women's suffrage movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (mainly concerned with women's right to vote).
- The second wave refers to the ideas and actions associated with the women's liberation movement beginning in the 1960s (which campaigned for legal and social rights for women).
- The third wave refers to a continuation of, and a reaction to the perceived failures of, second-wave feminism, beginning in the 1990s.

First Wave of Feminism

- First-wave feminism refers to an extended period of feminist activity during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the United Kingdom and the United States.
- Originally it focused on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to chattel marriage and ownership of married women (and their children) by their husbands.

First Wave of Feminism

- However, by the end of the nineteenth century, activism focused primarily on gaining political power, particularly the right of women's suffrage. Yet, feminists such as Voltairine de Cleyre and Margaret Sanger were still active in campaigning for women's sexual, reproductive, and economic rights at this time. In 1854, Florence Nightingale established female nurses as adjuncts to the military.

First Wave of Feminism

- In Britain J. S. Mill made a considerable contribution to the women' cause with his book 'Subjection of Women' in the mid 19th century. His wife and great feminist Harriet Taylor significantly influenced his thought.
- In 1918 the Representation of the People Act 1918 was passed granting the vote to women over the age of 30 who owned houses. In 1928 this was extended to all women over twenty-one.

First Wave of Feminism

- In 1848 German and French feminists published newspapers. The first women's rights convention was held in July 1848 in Seneca Falls, a small town in the New York state of USA. The convention using the declaration of independence claimed that men and women are equal.
- It also demanded the right to vote for women. In the United States, leaders of this movement included Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony, who each campaigned for the abolition of slavery prior to championing women's right to vote.
- American first-wave feminism is considered to have ended with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1919), granting women the right to vote in all states.

Second Wave of Feminism

- Second-wave feminism refers to the period of activity in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s. the second wave was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as ending discrimination.
- The feminist activist and author Carol Hanisch coined the slogan "The Personal is Political" which became synonymous with the second wave.
- Second-wave feminists saw women's cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked and encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and as reflecting sexist power structures.

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Second Wave of Feminism

- The French author and philosopher **Simone de Beauvoir's** book '**The Second Sex**' is a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a very significant contribution to the contemporary feminism
- As an existentialist, she accepted Jean-Paul Sartre's precept existence precedes essence; hence "one is not born a woman, but becomes one." Her analysis focuses on the social construction of Woman as the *Other*. This de Beauvoir identifies as fundamental to women's oppression.

Second Wave of Feminism

- **Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)** criticized the idea that women could only find fulfillment through childrearing and homemaking.
- The phrase "**Women's Liberation**" was first used in the United States in 1964 and first appeared in print in 1966. One of the most vocal critics of the women's liberation movement has been the African American feminist and intellectual Gloria Jean Watkins who argues that this movement glossed over race and class and thus failed to address "the issues that divided women." She highlighted the lack of minority voices in the women's movement in her book *Feminist theory from margin to center* (1984).

Second Wave of Feminism

- One of the achievements of the feminist movement was that the United Nations declared 1975 as International Women's Year and the period between 1976 to 1985 was declared as United Nations Decade for Women. The United Nations organized four world conferences on women from 1975 to 1995.

Third Wave of Feminism

- Third-wave feminism began in the early 1990s, arising as a response to perceived failures of the second wave and also as a response to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second wave.
- Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity, which (according to them) over-emphasize the experiences of upper middle-class white women. Third wave feminism's central issues are race, social class, and sexuality. They are concerned with the workplace issues like sexual harassment, unfair maternity leave policies and motherhood support for single mother, child care etc. They also draw attention to the media's portrayal of women as sexualized objects catering solely to the men's needs and anti-intellectualism.