

Feminism : An Understanding Through Waves

Defining means determining, limiting and essentializing. Since feminism defies all the three defining feminism becomes a formidable exercise. As Charles Beasley aptly remarks, ' there can be no final answer to the question what is feminism? However an introduction to what it is not may well suffice to make us understand this simple yet contested ism termed feminism.

To begin with feminism is not array of negative assumptions- anti marriage, anti family, anti society and not the least anti man in its stance. It is not uprooting traditions, gossip mongering, bra burning, male bashing or even a laundry list of women's issue. It is an irony that today while women are accepted as equals, but as a feminist they are often seen as threatening or simply unnecessary by both men and women. This anxiety against feminism is best reflected in the statement given long back by Rebecca West, a British author, journalist and a literary critic. It follows.

" people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that distinguishes me from a doormat or a prostitute.

" To further substantiate is the assertion given by Shoba De the veteran modern Indian novelist and columnist which follows.

" I write with a great deal of empathy towards women. Without raising a feminist flagI feel very strongly about women situation.

" These statements are markers that indicate the pessimism that feminism entails. Perhaps this is practically because many men and women casually believe that feminism is a perpetual quest of placing women at the peak and pushing men at the background; which is ofcourse, grossly misleading

While objectively a feminist theory attempts at giving rational explanation of universality of women of women's oppression in its endless variety and monotonous similarity, cross culturally and throughout history. Subjectively it is also a way of viewing the world from a women's perspective. It is understanding

women's psyche, showing concern for women's issue, sharing her inner stories , lending her a helping hand and many things more. As Charlotte Bunch cites, feminism is not about adding on women's rights but about transforming society so much that feminism maybe called transformational politics. Because everything impacts women every issue is necessarily a women's issue and there is a feminist perspective on every subject. In other words, simply stated it means that feminism can be best comprehended not by definition but through its passage in time n history which is best manifested through the waves.

The First wave:

The First wave beginning most probably from the mid nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century was mainly fought for political and civil, educational and economic rights. The political bible of this wave was reckoned to be The Vindication of the Rights of Women authored by Mary Wollstonecraft(1792). Gradually with feminist aspirations and activism picking momentum in France, Britain, the US and other european countries the feminist finally triumphed and achieved their share of rights. Right to vote was granted to women first in Newzealand followed by Britain,US and other countries as well. However despite gaining access to political rights it was felt that women were still victims of inequality. Though equal opportunity was given to women visa vis men in terms of political and civil rights they were not in a position to avail those opportunities due to socio cultural constrains. So this gave rise to dissatisfaction and a sense of disgust to women who now shifted their attention to the hidden and unforeseen issue that actually underlay behind women's subjugation. This fuelled the rise of a new revolutionary interception popularly termed as the second wave.

The Second Wave:

The second wave beginning generally from the nineteenth century and lasting for more than two decades was basically a protest against the failure of the first wave to deliver the promises of independence, self expression, equality and fulfilment. It was felt that with personal experiences in the Civil rights movements, Students and Neo left movements women realised that they were simply treated as sex

objects, secretaries or undervalued or incompetent workers rather than equal partners by those men in association. And any attempt to challenge this was met with silence, ridicule or contempt. This is best amplified by the satire of a British writer, GK Chesterton in 1943. It follows,

"Twenty million young women rose to their feet with the cry. We will not be dictated to, and proceeded to become stenographers".

So naturally resistance of women to such a treatment led to a new revolutionary and at times a radical ideological position posited by the second wave. Taking an irreconcilably antagonistic stance the radical feminist offered a direct and scathing attack against all existing institutions and practices. The radicals advocated separation with men blaming them to be the cause of women's agony. Formulating a strong critic and narrative of gender the radicals advertised rejection of societal institutions like marriage, family, femininity and heterosexuality. The second wave brought to the centre stage issues like legal equality, reproductive rights like right to abortion, promoting easier and safe contraception, bodily rights. It also drew attention to issues in the private sphere raising the slogan that "personal is political". And every realm of life is the realm of sexual politics. As such domestic violence, marital rape came under the radar of governmental discourse in law. The second wave garnered tremendous pressure on governments with the subsequent passage of several pro women legislations that led to the establishment of rape crisis centres, women shelters, reformed divorce and custody laws to suit women's stance.

The Third Wave:

The third wave commencing since 1990's with Anita Hill's case of sexual harassment against US Supreme court nominee Clarence Thomas derouted the entire feminist axiom from legal equality to that of discrimination and harassment to women in places of work. It was also acknowledged that discrimination is harder to quantify and even more harder to fight. So the feminist at this phase were focussing on a creation of an ambience favorable for women where women could have a choice of making a decision without constraints. whatever women

chooses to do it is feminist as long as she made that choice. The third wave unlike the second one is not rigid, anti feminine, sexually judgmental or anti sexual. They claim that using make up, dressing up is not a sign that women are adhering to male gaze. Instead they argue that dressing or styling lends confidence, feel good emotions and expression to women's voice. The third wave even questions the gender binary and brings in transgender and others into its fold. This wave is inherently pro sex, sex work and does not believe in the stigma surrounding sexual pleasure.

The Fourth Wave:

The fourth wave emerged more significantly with the Me too movement in the UK initiated by Laura bates Everyday Sexism Project 2012 that enabled and encouraged women to share their experiences of daily normalised sexism from street harassment to workplace discrimination to sexual assault and rape. This wave co- incides with online activism and lays premium on using technology, print media, digital and social media platforms for creating awareness and voicing women's concern. Further the speed of communication and the concept of 'going viral' has been major determinant in the success of this wave promoting digital trend known as 'Call Out Culture'. Hashtag feminist campaigns are often the result of this culture. The fourth wave focuses on empowering women and argue for greater representation in politics and business. They stress on justice against assault and harassment, against body shaming, equal pay, bodily autonomy etc. According to Canadian Art historian Ruth phillips the fourth wave falls within the broad agenda financial, political, environmental concern and is recognised as a key factor in alleviating poverty, improving women's health and achieving economic growth. It also represents heterogeneity of society by adding racial, colonial, economic and LGBT issues. Accordingly this wave is also called intersectional feminism .we are in the place of multiple feminism. This wave have made governments in various countries to expand the legal definition of rape, harassment and inflict stringent punishments and a more humane compensation for the survivor. Unlike the previous waves the fourth wave represents a tornado of views, experiences and grievances.

Computing Women's Work: Its methods

Women's empowerment is of paramount importance for multiple development goals. However, it is much easier to discuss the importance of empowerment than it is to define the methods and tools needed to measure it. This requires research focused on the conceptual understanding of how we should measure women's empowerment, in a variety of facets, and the creation of tools and methods for doing so.

It is a known fact that unproductive work (including care) that women do are often unaccounted for. In fact, care sustains our societies but standard measures of economic activity only include care if it is provided for pay. Because these household services are largely performed by women, standard measures that leave them out underestimate women's economic contribution. Hence, in this regard it becomes important to compute and measure women's work. In this regard, 'Counting Women's Work' is an international research project dedicated to measuring the gendered economy, including unpaid care work. It is through measurement that we begin to value the role of care in society, to count the contributions of the women and men who provide it, and to reckon with its cost. Similarly, the teams under the Cross-Cutting Gender Research and Coordination flagship of the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets (PIM) have been working to address this need and to develop a range of methods for improving gender analysis in agricultural research.

Standardized tools for measuring women's empowerment generate comparable research across contexts. The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), launched in 2012, and its variants are a significant contribution to

the current methodologies for understanding women's empowerment. The WEAI is an aggregate index that summarizes women's empowerment in five domains for a given population, based on data collected from both women and men decision-makers in the same household. It allows for high-level comparisons across a portfolio, and at the same time, can be used for household, individual, and intra-household analysis.

Household decision-making Husbands and wives often respond differently to questions about who makes decisions, and the lack of concordance provides important information. Different responses can be result of asymmetric information within the household. Extended households in which couples live with one set of their parents may have different patterns of decision-making, which will influence outcomes. It is useful to understand not only 'who' makes decisions, but also 'why'. In Senegal, researchers used a series of vignettes that described the reasons why a particular household member might be the one to make the decision. They found that outcomes that are often attributed to the gender of the decision-maker may be more accurately attributed to the structure of the decision-making process within the household and the norms associated with the process within the community. It was also found out that 'who' within the household receives information may also affect the outcomes of household decisions. For instance, the ongoing research in Uganda is using videos of male and female commercial farmers to explore the links between the gender of the model farmer and the gender of the household member receiving the information on agricultural decisions. Preliminary results show that targeting women with the intervention has a positive effect on various empowerment domains and agricultural production.

Measuring asset use, control, and ownership Asset ownership is an important dimension of women's empowerment, and increasing evidence suggests that who owns the assets within households affects a range of household decision outcomes. Assets are not owned by households, but by people. Qualitative analyses provide insights into the complex dynamics between empowerment and asset ownership. Using qualitative data in combination with

household survey data on assets has shown that different answers from husbands and wives about ownership and control over assets often mean that they have a different understanding of the concepts.

Other methods for data collection Cognitive interviewing is particularly helpful when collecting data on women's empowerment, given the complexity of the concept and the diverse ways in which empowerment is understood and interpreted in different contexts. Cognitive interviews before a survey is rolled out to the field can help clarify translations, identify ambiguous phrasing, and help improve data quality overall. Traditional gender norms typically assign greater responsibility for domestic chores and care work to women. These tasks tend to be invisible because they are often unpaid and undervalued, and yet they may result in heavy work burdens for women and limit whether and how women can engage in other productive activities. Time use surveys are useful for understanding gender disparities in time burdens, and for designing effective policies and programs to address such disparities. Furthermore, time use data can help investigate the linkages between time use and nutrition outcomes.

Conclusion:

The unpaid work needs to be measured as it is only through measurement that unpaid care work can be integrated into social science and policy analysis in ways not previously possible, leading to better policy-making around issues of labour and economic growth, social welfare, gender equity, and human capital investment. An internationally validated standardized tool such as the WEAI allows researchers to more accurately compare results across many different contexts — contributing to the understanding of women's empowerment in a broader sense — and can also be used alongside qualitative methods to understand the meanings of empowerment in local contexts. Experimental methods that unpack the household decision-making process enable researchers to go beyond the question of who is making the decision in the household, providing information on how and why certain individuals are making the decisions. Knowing which rights are held by which people is essential for effective programming. However, there

are still limitations to the understanding of the optimal methods to measure women's empowerment and which tools are best suited for which contexts. Going forward, CGIAR must maintain a concerted effort toward producing high quality tools and innovative methods in the pursuit of improving our definitions and understanding of women's empowerment.

LIBERAL FEMINISM:

Liberal feminism is one of the early branches of feminism beginning with the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft having stressed on the value of equality between men and women. This is one reason why liberal feminism is also termed as "equal rights" feminism. In Britain the area of 1850's saw a major resurgence of feminist activity where activists women expressed concerns about the legal position, economic dependence of married women via different forumd and Publications. In America Elizabeth Cady Stanton campaigned publicly to change conditions of family life and marriage. She argued that marriage is a form of unpaid prostitution and domestic labor, for a wife had no rights to deny her husband sexual access to her body. Thud Stanton working closely with Susan. B. Anthony became the most important American feminist campaigning for modification of divorce law, married women's property rights and voting rights. Also feminist writings were reflected in the works of J.S. Mill's (Subjection of Women) Harriet Taylor's (Enfranchisement of Women), Sarah Grimke's (letters on the Equality of the Sexes) Margaret Fuller's (Women in the 19th century)

Thus in 19th century the liberal feminist as mentioned above questioned law that allowed Men but not women the right to vote and demanded equal political, civil, legal and educational rights with those of men.

The central premise of liberal feminism is that women are like men rational beings and as such, they are entitled to full human rights. It demands that women should be liberated from domesticity and that the existing "rules of game" be applied women in the same way as to men.

Socialist Marxist feminism:

The socialist Marxist feminist accept many arguments of liberal feminist but propose abolition of nuclear families along with capitalism as it is wasteful, inefficient, oppressive and exploitative. For the early socialist, the goal was not equal rights within the existing society but within a radically transformed one; in which private property was to be abolished and socialism thereby established. The Marxist feminist (modern) however, argues, that patriarchy (that is male dominance) and capitalism support each other. Within the household men take the benefit of women's unpaid domestic labour and thereby relieve their employer- the capitalist of the liability to pay for that labour. Outside home women are segregated to perform some specific jobs for which very low wages are paid. Feminist like Lisa Vogel, argues, that in a capitalist society women have to work throughout pregnancy and have to return to work less than a week after delivery. They also have to face problems of sexual harassment and exploitation by the male factory owners; also within bourgeois family women are even more exploited because the total financial strength remains with the husband. Both Marx and Engels said production and reproduction as the base of the society but none of them gave equal role of production and reproduction to women in the productive process.

Now that Marxism itself is in the state of disarray the status of Marxist feminism is questionable however many more than Marxist feminists have developed a more flexible form of it which is often described as 'socialist feminist position'; left wing talk of incipient revolution is advanced which prefers piecemeal reforms to class struggle. For many socialist feminists the immediate political tasks are to challenge sexism within trade unions and left wing political parties and to organise around particular class, gender, race, community, environmental demands in the belief that these are interconnected and that they can have accumulative effect on society.

RADICAL FEMINISM:

Radical feminism one of the second wave feminism began with the transitional writings of Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique* 1963). This wave basically began as a protest against the failure of the society to deliver to women the promises of Independence, self expression and fulfillment despite formal political gains. The radicals basically identifies men to be the cause of women's oppression. It was felt from women's experience in the Civil rights and Anti-war, new left and students movements that young women were treated as sex objects, secretaries or housewives rather than equal political partners and that any attempt to challenge this was met with silence, ridicule or contempt. Resistance to such a treatment lead to a new and Revolutionary ideological position that offered direct and fundamental challenge to all existing perspectives; as women discovered that problems which they had assumed to be there alone, in fact, was widely shared, this lead to the "conscious raising" exclusive women's groups, associations where women expressed and share personal experience and developed strategy for change.

Radical feminist question the public- private divide; for them, personal is political because they deny the existence of a separate political realm and insists that the concept of political itself is male. Radical feminism differs from both liberal and Marxist feminism with the hope of modifying it to include exclusively women's interest and perceptions. It dismisses liberal initiative of changing existing laws as cosmetic that conceal and sometimes perpetuate the injustices that exist within the structure of the family itself.

Similarly, the marxist stress on the economic basis of women's oppression, ignoring the non economic aspects specially the sexual forms. Also the radical feminist unlike the liberals are suspicious of governmental intervention, perceiving the state itself to be intrinsically patriarchal. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* is an important work in this direction.

In Elizabeth Grosz's terms this is "feminism of difference" the radical feminist accept gender differences and criticizes the earlier generation of egalitarian feminist for demanding equality with men. In fact they have been concerned to defend a concept equality that goes much beyond the formal equality of gender neutral laws. They

stress on the idea of difference meaning

that ,women as groups must be given a special say / vote in matters of public policy; for instance, women should have veto over changes pertaining to a law on abortion.

However radical feminism since it's Inception have developed and fragmented and the label has been applied to confusingly diverse range of ideas. For instance, many radicals see the family as the key to men's patriarchal power where women are exploited and oppressive gender identities are learned and where sexual power is violently expressed. While others focusing on reproduction considered pregnancy and childbirth as barbarious relics from which women will be liberated by reproductive technology. While still others argue that, on the contrary, the creative exclusive experience of motherhood would foster cooperation, care and peace so needs to be nurtured. yet still ,for others, sexuality is the prime mover of male power that is a means of controlling women and as such, must be rejected by women. For some the central issue is not Hetero sexuality as such but its association with violence as maintain and manifested by vast pornographic industry which devalues women's dignity by seeking them at sex objects rather than full human beings .Thus radical feminism is based on the premise that women has more in common with any other women regardless of class, race, nationality, ethnic group then any women has with any women.

Such an agenda, however encourages some degree of seperatism from men . Radical feminism recommends putting women first making them the primary concern. As such this approach is inclined to according lesbianism an honoured place as a form of mutual recognition between women . In this sense radical feminism as the name suggest ,generally advocates a Revolutionary model of social change . But though they may pursue a revolutionary agenda they also stress on practical political strategies like the liberals.

Post feminism / post modern feminism

Post feminism is a term that is very much in vogue these days and often said to represent the third wave whose validity as a movement is questioned because of its skepticism. In this context post feminism becomes a pluralistic epistemology dedicated to disrupting universalising patterns of thought and the capable of being a line with

post modernism postcolonialism post structuralism etc.

One example of this approach is provided by Anne Brook's *Post Feminism: Cultural theory and Cultural forms* (1997). She argues that second wave feminism bases its claim on an appeal to liberal humanism of enlightened modernity, for example, it assumes that a simple reversal of the hierarchical dualism of man- women will affect the Liberation of women. A feminist approach indebted to post modernist thought, however, will tend to question the ideological process by which men and women are placed in separate oppositional categories, and may, indeed, seek to destabilize the notion of autonomous subject. Thus rendering the development of any kind of overarching meta -theory impossible.

They reject western philosophy's quest for truth and certainly, arguing that this is now, meaningless in society that are increasingly characterised by fragmentation, diversity and transience. From this perspective, it is individual subjectivity (personal) that is important and such label as 'women' or 'working class' can only conceal the multiplicity of a particular experience. Likewise in the post feminist Era the host of overlapping schools that have come up our many for example

Black feminism/ third world feminism:

Many countries are now both rediscovering the own history and developing their own ideological positions. It raised objections to the over generalizations due to the dominance of well -of white women in women's movement. The assumption of black feminism is that racism made the experience of black women unique and that only they could articulate them, made them see white feminism as a form of racism. As a consequence, black feminism insisted that racism must be treated as a separate system of oppression from that of gender and that black women must organise separately from the white women.

Thus the consequence for feminism is a movement of diverse and overlapping oppressed groups for whom feminism is the only common factor but not the primary one. Throughout its plurality feminism has one obvious simple overarching goal- to end men's systematic

domination and to understand ,explain and challenge that domination in order to help it.