

CONCEPTUALIZING VARIETIES OF FEMINISM

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ABSTRACT:

The paper aims to bring out the conceptual varieties of feminism to avoid the vagueness surrounded with the concept and understanding of feminism. The paper thereby aims at looking for the most important of these varieties and the relations between them. The paper also highlights issues addressed by feminism. The paper ends with discussion on importance of feminism. The paper is conceptual in nature, based on secondary data.

KEY WORDS: *Conceptualizing, Varieties, Feminism*

INTRODUCTION:

This paper looks at the concept of Feminism with proper response to conceptual opacity informing that it is neither 'essentialism' nor 'disseminationism', neither the determination of one 'true' meaning nor the refusal to identify and define different meanings. Feminism is not the articulation of broad geographical categories. It brings out in detail the conceptual varieties of feminism, clarifying and organising our diverse understandings of feminism in such a way as to increase our comprehension of the issues across a broad range of writers, activists, and ordinary people. The term 'feminist' appears to be used most consistently with respect to a particular set of political aims. While it is not possible to plot out a minimal programme shared by all people, however, feminism advocates actions to reduce gender inequalities, eliminate rape, wife abuse, the sexual molestation of young girls, female infanticide, underfeeding of girls, restrictions on reproductive freedom, etc. Moreover, feminists quite generally share the belief that women have been deprived of these rights in a manner and degree to which men have not. Only the most narrow-visioned feminists fail to recognise that in the course of human history men have been deprived of such rights as well- most often due to race, caste and class, but also due to age, nationality, intellect, sexual preference, physical handicap, or less systematic factors, such as personality. This, however, does not change the fact that women as women have been systematically deprived, while men as men have not- and some conception of this seems crucial to feminism of all sorts (Hogan, 1993: 45-46).

As a social movement, Feminism seeks to end women's subordination. Most importantly it holds that women's subordination is real, but neither natural nor necessary. And emphasizes that it can and should be ended (Alway, 1995 :211).

Feminism is a modern political ideology which developed in Europe and in United States in 1960's. It is closely associated with women's studies and women's movement all over the world. The main objectives of feminism can be identified as:

- i) to focus on women as a self-conscious category;
 - ii) a force to generate a rational sensible attitude towards women;
 - iii) an approach to view women in their own positions and through their own perspectives
- (Ghosal 2005: 793-794).

CONCEPTUALIZING FEMINISM

Walby

Feminism may be defined as a move to reduce and eliminate gender inequality or alternatively limited to the global of improving the position of women with the aim of transforming gender relations and existing gender standards (Walby 2011:1). According to Walby, contemporary feminism is being reshaped by global discourses of human rights with increased focus on state interventions (Walby, 2002 :p 533). The conception of feminism In terms of rights with it's current deployment globally appear to have some new features. The increasing use of human rights discourse and with its increasing engagement with the state is multilayered. It involves changes in social structure, political structure in economic and political resources in the framing of the issue and the development of feminist epistemic communities. (Walby, 202: 542). Walby's analysis, further shows how Globalization is being used creatively as a new framing for feminist politics. As it is no more possible to limit the horizon of feminist politics to that of local or which is no longer limited to local or national situations but has become global . This has been possible mainly due to enhanced capacities for communication across national boundaries and a emergent global institutions and forums, which provides spaces for the development of feminist ideas and practice (Walby 2002:549).For example, globalization of gender mainstreaming or the attempt to stop violence against women involves the development of political networks at the local, national and global levels. There has been a globalization of demands to restrict men's violence against women by use of legal regulation, and to provide resources to women who have suffered such violence(Walby,2002: p 540).

Nancy Fraser

To Nancy Fraser, feminism is not simply a matter of getting a smattering of individual women into positions of power and privilege within existing social hierarchies, rather it is about overcoming those hierarchies. It involves challenging the structural sources of gender domination in capitalist society, which has in institutionalize dseparation of two distinct kinds of activity, the one that is productive labour which is historically associated with men and remunerated by wages, the other i. e. "caring" activities, which is historically unpaid and continued to be performed by women. This

Gendered, hierarchical division between “Production” and “reproduction” is a defining structure of capitalist society, involved with deep source of gender asymmetries within it. (Gutting and Fraser, 2015: 2). Her major concerns were both to accommodate difference and preserve the analytic and positive force of feminist theory.

Nancy Hartsock

Nancy Hartsock (1981), describes feminism is about truth claim and how we justify them. She notes that, the reality perceived by different segments of society is varied, and therefore mode of analysis leads us to respect experience and differences to respect people enough to believe that they are in best possible position to make their own revolution. For Hartsock, activity is epistemology women and men create their own relation through their different activities and experience (p 343). Hartsock (1987), further asserts that we need to develop an understanding of difference by creating a politics in which previously marginalized groups can name themselves and participate in defining the terms that structure their world. Central to Hartsock’s argument is the claim that unless we provide a systematic understanding of the world, we will not be able to change it. She wants to valorise difference, to claim that difference among women are significant both theoretically and practically. She further, asserts that although women are not a unitary group, white, ruling-class, now referred to as the “centre”, while those on the periphery, the “Others”, are defined as heterogeneous. Hartsock’s argument is that we must create a politics that lets the “Others” into the centre, a centre, that she claims, will “Obviously” look different when occupied by women of colour (Heckman, 1997:p.350).

Benhabib (1992), claims that feminism holds on to the idea of collective feminist subject in order to secure the viability of feminism as politics. The feminist subject should be inclusive based on respect for differences among women, due to the various determinants of their situatedness. The aim is not consensus, but rather accordance, established through taking the position of the other (cf. Stormboj , p 11).

According to Talpade (2003), The third world women’s writings on feminism have consistently focused on the idea of the simultaneity of oppressions as fundamental to the experience of social and political marginality and the grounding of feminist politics in the histories of racists and imperialism; the crucial role of a hegemonic state in circumscribing their / our daily lives and survival struggles(p 52). To Talpade, Feminism cannot be defined exclusively in terms of gender as ideologies of woman, as womanhood have as much to do with race, class, caste, nation as much as they have to do with sex. It is the intersections of the various systemic networks of class, race, caste, (hetero) sexuality and notion, they that position us as “Women”. Thus, the fundamental challenge for feminist analysis lies in taking seriously the location and struggles of Third world women (p 55).

FEMINISM ADDRESSES THE FOLLOWING ISSUES:

a) **It is concerned with redressing social wrongs.** It is centrally concerned with judgements of what ought and what ought not to be the case, with what constitutes right action and the good life and with what operates to prevent that, with the nature of the human conditions within which we want to live and those which must be resisted because they are morally wrong. Morality is not just a private matter. Although it is concerned with what each of us decides about what constitutes the good life and how to live it, that does not mean that morality is an individualistic phenomenon in any sense which implies that ‘individuals’ are discrete entities, existing in isolation, prior to or somehow ‘outside’ social relations. Individuals can be nothing but social beings, and the moral beliefs which structure human life are collective. But it does mean that morality must be shared and communicable, even when it involves an ‘unpopular’ stance taken in opposition to dominant beliefs (Thompson and Denise ,2001:7).

b) **It involves struggling to make the ‘private’ woes of women ‘public’.** It involves, identifying the numerous ways in which the ‘public sphere’ men value is dependent for its continued existence on the unpaid, unacknowledged and unreciprocated work of women. And it involves elucidating the ways in which the public penetrates the ‘private home, family, bedroom, and the individual psyches of women and men .

c) Feminist politics requires that the nature of **politics in the conventional sense be radically changed** if it is to include the interests of women. This requirement cannot be met by a tokenistic fitting of some women into positions which remain unchanged. Women cannot be equal with men as long as there is no equality among men. In feminist terms, **what women want is a human status where rights, benefits and dignities are gained at no ones expense**, and where duties and obligations do not fall disproportionately on the shoulders of women. Such a project promises to transform politics altogether.

d) **Feminism aims to expose the reality of male domination**, while struggling for a world where women are recognized as human beings in their own right. Feminism both exposes as well as challenges the existence of male domination. Indeed, it is through exposing male domination as domination that feminism poses its major challenge, since social domination operates most efficiently to the extent that it ensures compliance by being disguised as something else, and not domination at all. It has been the task of feminism to tear away the masks behind which male domination hides its true nature, and expose it **for the dehumanizing system it really is.**

The manifestations of male domination, although they are sometimes horrifically violent and degrading, are also subtle, mundane, ordinary, unremarkable, and, moreover, very deeply embedded in the psyches of individuals, and not just male individuals either. It constitutes the social environment of women as well as men, the ‘mutual knowledge’ of social actor and part of the taken-for-granted ambience of everyone. At the same time, the extent to which people are kept in ignorance of where their real interests

lie, are manipulated for purposes not their own, are prevented from controlling the conditions of their own existence by powerful vested interests, is the extent to which they are subjected to conditions of domination. It is this reality of domination which feminism resists with its commitment to the belief that human beings have the right to exist in freedom and dignity simply because we exist (Thompson, 2001 :8-10)

DISCUSSION: WHY FEMINISM IS IMPORTANT?

Feminism is important for it seeks to bring into question the taken for granted issues of dependence, subordination and superiority .Feminism is important for it is fighting for a world in which women have, and are seen to have, a fully human status. It is this aspect of the feminist struggle which has received the most attention, to the point where feminism has tended to be implicitly defined solely of ‘women’. This focus of attention is of utmost important. Feminism is important, for it is necessary to rescue women from historical oblivion, to insist on women’s human rights and dignities, to expose injustices and harm done to women, to assert in a multitude of ways that women are human beings deserving of respect. Although defining feminism in terms of women is necessary it is not sufficient as the unifying factor of feminist politics. It is the opposition to male domination which makes feminism relevant to women wherever they are situated, however differently they are excluded from recognition as human (Thompson ,2001:10-13)

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