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Feminist Studies and Gender Relation

Abstract:

In discourse of Feminism, over numerous years, much emphasis has been laid on inequality, injustice, bias, suppression, domination and exploitation a woman faces in this patriarchal system and how to change this prevailing social conditions? But in recent years, the focus have been slightly been deviated from – liberating women from social malice to – targeting men for all the wrongs a woman faces.

Strange, though interesting it is, some feminists in general seem to emphasise their arguments in recent times by establishing the opinion – ‘if a man can do this or that, a woman too’. From this arises an obvious question: is the existence of a woman centred on a man? Does she have no independent identity other than – *not being a man*?

It seem, those feminists while trying to distinguish themselves from men, unconsciously have surrendered to their dominance. To prove that a woman is ‘capable’ of doing anything they compare her to a man. Isn’t it a silent admittance that they perceive men to be more capable when they set them as parameters? While on the other hand, some feminists somehow blame *only* men for being the reason of all their problems. Whereas Black feminism proves that women also suppress women. On the contrary, there are many men responsible for myriad social movement for betterment of social conditions of women, for instance Raja Ram Mohan Roy. These concepts have imbalanced the relation of man-woman, where one sees the other not as their counterpart but as enemies struggling for dominance over the other.

This paper aims at looking at Feminism from newer perspectives and exploring newer possibilities to find the centre of harmony among the two sexes, by bringing newer ideas into lime light. Accounting special references from some of the eminent feminists’ works over the centuries like Simon de Beauvoir, famous psychologists like Sigmund Freud and Indian mythology.

Keywords: Feminism, gender equality, feminist critics, ‘penis-envy’.

The Full Paper:

Feminist discourse, over numerous years, has echoed concerns about the problems posed by masculine sex on feminine sex. The oppression, inequality, subjugation and bias, she faces in this prevailing system. It began with just cause: demanding recognisable and respected state in the society for women, but in the recent years it has slightly deviated from its true motives, when the attention shifted from— serious concerns for women – to – targeting men for every problem a woman faces.

The essence of feminism found recognition in the earnest voice that came from Marry Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication for the Rights of Woman* (1792): where she advocated for women’s education and other fundamental rights, which were denied to women because of her sex by patriarchy. After 200 years, similar concerns were projected in *A Room of Her Own* (1957) by Virginia Woolf: how women are denied opportunities to grow into eminent personalities, or even, to have an individuality of her own because she is not a man, but a inferior subject – a ‘woman’.

This social protest became psychological struggle when Sigmund Freud propounded the “penis envy” theory (1933), which attracted the reaction from another psychologist, Karen Horney defending women with assertion — that men are “womb envy” as they lack the capacity of child bearing. This psychological battle became more pronounced with publication of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949): where she agrees with Freud on the opinion that women are not born, but are created (Freud 1968 [1933], 116); but differs on the question of— ‘how’ a child becomes a woman. For her, it is the patriarchal system that ‘constructs’ a woman, which was entirely contrast to the belief of Freud that it’s a ‘castration anxiety’ that makes a child to grow into a woman.

In later years, this psychological battle becomes more severe with the publication of Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1969): where she presents the politics of patriarchal system to regulate the sexual life of women to successfully keep them under control of patriarchy and govern their mind as well as body. Similarly, there were number of books published, that propagated the ideas established in *The Second Sex* and *Sexual Politics* in past years like *Gender Trouble*, *Female Eunuch*, etc., which gave momentum to the ideas against patriarchal system and male dominance.

The ideas encompassed by these books are not the mere reflection of author's mind, rather they are both: the glimpse of developing feminine conscience; and the force that was developing feminine conscience. They succeeded in making women aware of their existence, and also, about the kind of existence they must demand from the patriarchy. But in doing so they have pictured *all* men as a source of all the troubles and problems a woman faces. That has, somewhere, instigated a silent hatred towards men in the conscience of women, which do not find clear and bold expression, but is apparent in many feminist branches and books, for instance in Radical feminists ideologies. This silent hatred, somewhere, has decentralised the feminist struggle from – the valued acceptance of her existence – to – establish dominance of feminist values over patriarchy.

If we accept this notion of feminism that only patriarchy dominates, then how come we have voices of Black feminists, who accuse white women too, for their exploitation? This instance of woman dominating woman do not confine itself in matter of race only but found expression in many works of literature. Here taking account of the novel by Jane Austen's – *Emma* (1815): where a white woman Emma starts controlling life of another white woman Harriet Smith because she is economically, and by class and status is superior to her.

If we maintain that all men subjugate women, then we are ignoring the contributions of various men who not only supported women in their protest against patriarchal regime but have also worked all their life for upliftment of women's condition. The famous movement led by women for 'the right to vote' at Seneca Falls, New York (1848) was also supported by social activist Frederick Douglas. Similarly in India, we had league of extraordinary men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy who contributed majorly in the abolition of inhumane practice of Sati-Pratha. Likewise, Dhayanand Saraswati and Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, devoted their life—in promoting girl child education, abolishing child-marriages and encouraging remarriage of widows. Mahatma Gandhi, supported all-round development of women, when he advocated for their liberty in social gatherings and encouraged them to participate in politics. Along with them, there are innumerable unnamed fathers, brothers, uncles and husbands, who had, and are supporting and encouraging females to discover their potentials in various fields and walks of life.

Yes, it is true that patriarchy had long back disrupted that fine balance of feminine and masculine forces, that are depicted in perfect balance and harmony, by the symbolic image of "Ardhnareswar": uniting bodies of Shiva and Gauri, (also known as Purush and Prakriti) as

one body. When masculine half began imposing its authority on the feminine half of the society and kept on doing so until it received a reaction in the form of feminism. It had forgotten that men and women are meant to not only coexist, but to exist in harmonious state. But does the feminist regime or “woman culture” is the alternative of the patriarchal system? If yes, then where will it lead to? To another system with set rules and obligations, but this time it would have feminist bends. But will it, actually, restore the harmonious state of existence between man and woman? Purush in his ‘tandav’ always destroys Prakriti; and Prakriti in her wrath always brings destruction on Purush.

It’s time to realize, that men and feminine forces if directed against each other, will only lead to destruction of the both. As this vivacious cycle of dominance and subversion has no end. This state of binary do not exists only at the external level, but also, in the body of each and every individual as proved by both mythology and science. When we fight with the other half of ourselves externally (whatever regime— patriarchy or feminism— we may be advocating), we unconsciously negate the other half of our inner self. That renders us with half of the potential, half of the mind, half of the existence and half of the life.

The eminent novelist Neelum Saran Gour (Professor of English Literature, in Department of English & MEL, University of Allahabad, Allahabad.) also consensus with the thought when she says:

“I write as man....By restricting myself as a woman, I would negate the part of me, that is not essentially a woman. ‘Being-ness’ is more than being a woman or a man. It is that self, that exceeds the identity of being only a woman or only a man.”

Feminism began with the protest that was to remind men that women are their counterpart, not the inferior subject. After much effort, they have succeeded in obtaining their lost space and reviving their diminished identity. The only poignant concern is, while rebelling against patriarchy, they themselves do not end up in establishing a system where the women in position began to dictate what’s better for the other women and men in general. That is what men have done for several ages. They must head towards restoring the balance between men and women. A balance that patriarchy couldn’t practice because, to put in words of eminent poet Sonjoy Dutta Roy (Professor of English Literature, in Department of English & MEL, University of Allahabad, Allahabad):

“One fears, when one faces, something as complex as female sexuality. Only to keep that under control patriarchy established. But understanding of that female sexuality would be far more releasing for men, to create further balance and harmony.”

To attain that harmony, is not a one-handed task. It needs mutual cooperation from the other sex, with treatment of female sex as their equals. To say equal, do not necessarily means: if a man is standing on a stool, a woman *has* to stand on the same stool just to prove that she is equal; nor she should continue to fight to obtain a man's position just to prove that she is equal. Rather there should be equality in ‘opportunities to choose’ and her choices must be respected by both patriarchy and feminists.

Feminist regime need to direct their efforts in creating that *space* where ‘women as women’ can blossom in their wholesomeness, not as a reactionary force against men. Where a woman can decide: what it is to have an individuality of a woman? But that *space* cannot be achieved by hating men. Rather the best way it could be achieved is, by *sensitising* men towards women. To sensitize them for women's issues, for their frustrations, problems, anxiety and inner turmoil. It is significant to inculcate in them a sense of respect and care for women. Respect, not only for her individuality, but also for being their equal human other half, which when combines makes them whole. Though it is a herculean task but only this will lead towards a society where one needs not be fearful of the other, nor s/he has to be suppressed or to dominate the other to assert his/ her existence. To the original setup of Purush-Prakriti in their balanced harmony, where man and woman realise— the one is the other, and the other is the former.

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