

A THEORETICAL APPRAISAL ON LIBERAL FEMINISM



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Abstract:-Liberal feminism, being one of the integral school of Feminism has been playing a significant role in the women emancipation movement since the second half of the eighteenth century. Liberal feminism is basically based on individualism. This article is a humble attempt to focus on the central idea of liberal feminism. Both descriptive and analytical method is applied in the discussion of the aforesaid matter. Logic used in the analysis is both deductive and inductive. With the help of certain primary and secondary sources, the article is prepared to focus on the central idea of the liberal feminism.

Keywords:Theoretical, Liberal Feminism, analytical method ..

INTRODUCTION :-

There is a good or number of definitions of feminism. According to the Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics, *Feminism is a way of looking at the world which women occupy from the perspective of women. It has its central focus the concept of the patriarchy which can be described as a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions. Feminism is, therefore a critique of patriarchy on the one hand and an ideology committed to women's emancipation on the other*¹. So, feminism is a broad ideology which is mainly concerned with the emancipation of women from all bondages. Basically feminism has been classified into liberal, socialist, radical schools. However here our main focus on liberal feminism.

CENTRAL IDEA OF LIBERAL FEMINISM –

Liberal Feminism is one of the significant trends or schools of feminism. According to liberal feminist school, both men and women are entitled to same or equal rights, and freedoms, there should not be any artificial distinction so far as rights and freedoms are concerned between men and women. Distribution of rights and freedom should be concerned in the context of human beings. Mary Wollstonecraft was the pioneer of liberal feminism. Her famous book 'A Vindication of the Rights of women is one of the landmasses in the history of liberal feminism. J.S. Mill, Betty Friedan, Harriet Taylor, Gloria Steinem, Rebeca Walker have played outstanding role in the growth and development of the liberal feminism. These prominent figures claim that both men and women are same, so both are entitled to equal rights, freedom and privileges. *They emphasize that both men and women are human beings and so can claim equal rights with them. The Liberal feminists stand on the basic tenets of Political liberalism. The liberal feminist movement was particularly strong in the countries like USA, England*². The pioneers of the liberal feminist's movement like Mary Wollstonecraft, J.S. Mill, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Rebeca Walker etc. strongly opposed the tactic to stop the feminist movement by demanding socio-political rights for women. Liberal feminists accelerated their movement for voting and other political and social rights of the women in the 20th century.

The basic idea of liberal feminism is integrally related with individualism. According to liberal feminism every person irrespective of sex, caste, creed and religion has the right to develop his personality and the state must make way for the realization and fulfillment of the right of every individual. *Liberal feminists opposed any artificial distribution of the rights and privileges on the ground of sex or gender. Both men and women should have equal rights and privileges. Liberal feminism however does not ignore the natural distinction between men and women. But it denies the artificial distinction between men and women regarding rights and privileges. It admits that the door to all sorts of rights and privileges shall be equally opened to all*³.

CRITICISM

The Socialist critique of liberal feminism argues that the liberal feminist marginalize the working women. Liberal feminists according to socialist school fails to the understanding the socio- economic condition or problems faced by the working women in the capitalist system. So socialist school challenge the stand of liberal feminists in favour of women. It wants to link the freedom of women to free the working class women in general. Socialist critique blames the liberal feminist school for neglecting the socio-economic condition of working class women. Until and unless the questions of the working class come under the purview it is not possible for women in general to become free from the slavery and discrimination deeply rooted in the patriarchal system. Socialist feminist believes that feminism is not only a legal and political movement it is also a movement to root out the capitalist system. On other hand radical feminist argues that women are oppressed and exploited since the very beginning of human civilization and it is the patriarchal system which takes women as inferior class is mainly responsible for all sorts of discrimination and exploitation upon women through ages. So the radical feminist wants the abolition of the patriarchal system. Radical feminists argue that the liberal feminist wants to preserve the patriarchal system by reforming the certain values and norms through socio political mechanisms. But it is not possible to free women from slavery and domination of males until and unless the patriarchal system is abolished. *Moreover, the radicals argue that women's oppression is the oldest and most basic form of oppression, and whether it arises from socialists who expect women to make tea while men develop political strategy, or it is expressed through black men such as Stokely Carmichael, who see women as having only bodies and not minds the same point holds ; all men oppress women ,and all receive psychological, sexual and material*

*benefits from doing so*⁴.

At the same time the third world feminists also sharply criticize the liberal feminist school. It argues that the liberal feminists are mainly concerned with the problems of western women, they fails to understand the status and position of women of third world countries. According to the third world feminist school the diverse socio economic and cultural condition of third world countries significantly determine the position of women of the third world countries. So it will be a major blunder to understand the position of women of these countries without focusing their caste, religion poverty etc. Another feminist school black feminist is aware of the question of black women. it is also the critique of the liberal feminists . It argues that black women are marginalized within Western country due to their racial identity and liberal feminists fail to understand how they are exploited both whites and black males.

CONCLUSION–

Liberal feminism, being the major landmarks in the history of feminism had a far reaching impact upon the growth and development of women liberation movement. But certain complaints are seen to be lodged against the liberal feminism and in the cause of time, therefore, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, blank feminism, third world feminism and many other feminism schools emerged as the critical of liberal feminism. Radical feminism asserts that liberal feminism has failed to build up a systematic theory about women's development. Liberal feminism according to radical feminist school fails to understand how women are oppressed and discriminated in the patriarchal system. On the other hand, socialist feminists also agree that the liberal feminist school tends to preserve and protect the patriarchal system through enriching the capitalist system. Though liberal feminism is not free from certain criticism, its pivotal and outstanding role in the growth and development of the feminist movement cannot be ignored. It is the liberal feminist movement that heralds the new path and horizon of women emancipation movement. It opens the door of thought of the liberation of the women from all sorts of slavery and bondages.

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