

# ACTIVISM, SOLIDARITY AND DIVERSITY: FEMINIST MOVEMENTS TOWARDS GLOBAL SISTERHOOD

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**Abstract**—In its broadest sense, globalization refers to the economic, social, cultural, and political processes of integration that result from the expansion of transnational economic production, migration, communications, and technologies. Feminism, as an ideology and a movement, has for decades improved the lives of women around the globe. However, despite feminism's essentially emancipatory role, its positive effects have not been equally felt or interpreted by all women who have come in contact with it. A global feminism that transcends narrow national, cultural, religious and social boundaries is crucial.

The contemporary era requires us to focus on the concept of whole-istic feminism: feminism that addresses racism, class and other social boundaries, and acknowledges that alliances with other women and other disadvantaged groups are crucial in resisting systematic oppression. While feminists would surely not deny that the oppression of women is a matter of international concern, the west has tended to dominate both the theoretical and practical aspects of the movement. By way of this paper, the authors will try to trace the history of feminism across the globe and how it has impacted and shook various customs and cultures. Furthermore, the authors will also try to explore the necessary impact of feminism over the much hyped concept of global hegemony, and how has feminism led to a steady decline of global hegemony. In the end, the authors will try to focus of the key variables through which feminism is mostly misunderstood in the Indian context. The authors will also provide key suggestions on how we can promote positive feminism without actually propagating it.

**Keywords:** Global Hegemony, Global Sisterhood, Activism, Solidarity, Feminism/

## INTRODUCTION

Recent times have brought a consistent change in growing the strength of women's movements and its public visibility. Sisterhood became a global trend although in the last years its presence was performed mainly in internet. The fourth wave of feminism with its "hashtag activism" is responsible for building bonds among women, creating networks of mutual support and strengthening their awareness of social and legal rights. Online social networks allowed women and girls to surf

across national, cultural, class and religious boundaries and recognize common conditions, problems and feelings. According to Munro (2013), this flow of communication via social media led to a new awareness, a "call out" culture that challenges misogyny and sexism, by providing a forum for discussions and a route for activism.<sup>1</sup>

Feminism, too, has been used to label a rather wide variety of political views and movements that share a focus on the empowerment of women and an opposition to patriarchy, sexism and male domination. While the public face of the feminist movement – 'mainstream' feminism – has remained grounded in a predominantly white, middle-class struggle to gain equality within existing social structures, there exist now myriad streams of feminist thought. Two varieties of feminism that are often touted as inclusive and welcoming of Indigenous women are cross-cultural (including 'global,' 'critical race' and 'Third World') feminisms, as well as 'eco-feminism.' Both are problematic. Cross-cultural feminisms, while they have addressed the nexus of race and gender, lack a space in their theory for the environment and the ways in which ecological issues and Indigenous rights intersect. Eco-feminism, on the other hand, deploys a well-developed framework describing how linked conceptual structures endorse the subjugation of women, the natural world and people of colour; but have yet to offer a theory that can effectively articulate cross-cultural issues.<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> Beckwith, Karen. 2007. "Mapping Strategic Engagements: Women's Movements and the State", International Journal of Feminist Politics 9(3): 312-338.

<sup>2</sup> Carroll, William K. and Ratner, R.S.1994. "Between Leninism and Radical Pluralism: Gramscian Reflection on Counter-hegemony and the New Social Movements".

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.<sup>3</sup>

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. 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. The term first wave was coined retrospectively after the term second-wave feminism began to be used to describe a newer feminist movement that focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as political inequalities.

Second-wave feminism refers to the period of activity in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s. The scholar Imelda Whelehan suggests that the second wave was a continuation of the earlier phase of feminism involving the suffragettes in the UK and USA. Second-wave feminism has continued to exist since that time and coexists with what is termed third-wave feminism. The scholar Estelle Freedman compares first and second-wave feminism saying that the first wave focused on rights such as suffrage, whereas the second wave was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as ending discrimination.

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 or avoid what it deems the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity, which (according to them) over-emphasize the experiences of upper middle-class white women.

## CHAPTER-I: MODERN INDIAN FEMINISM

Modern feminism is called fourth-wave feminism and is aimed to fight contemporary challenges. Nowadays, feminism is dealing with issues like street harassment, workplace harassment, campus sexual assault, etc. Thousands of women face these problems daily. Issues like sexual assault and harassment ruin their lives, careers, and personal relationships

— no need to mention the damage to mental and physical health.

This is exactly why the topic of feminism is not only up-to-date but also worthy of examining and highlighting.

Feminism is something - as a right of every woman to be a woman and not feel lesser for it. Most of the time, women are made to feel you have to be a certain kind of person, then you are a good woman.

Let's first identify who we are. What does our sex demand of us? Biologically, there is a difference. Unfortunately, we do not acknowledge that. It is not just the male gaze, male way of understanding women. Feminism is about a woman being comfortable about a woman.

Even before the term feminism was introduced, we had some great feminist icons mentioned in our culture and history. Draupadi, a woman born out of fire, avenged the humiliation meted out to her in Mahabharata. Durga maa an incarnation of goddess Parvati was created as an amalgamation of all the gods to destroy evil. In Ramayana, Sita fought for her independence and raised her two sons single-handedly. Rani Lakshmi Bai and Chand Bibi are other examples of immense courage and power.<sup>4</sup>

### Why is feminism so crucial for a country like India?

India needs feminism because a woman should not be considered a responsibility of a male throughout her life. May it be her father, brother, husband or son. Practices like kanyadaan, Raksha Bandhan and the purdah system where a woman is veiled with a ghoonghat or a burqa highlight the extent of male dominance. These practices emphasize that strong, capable men<sup>5</sup> have to protect the weak, fragile women and that women aren't designed to protect, but to be protected.

India needs feminism because a woman is not a burden and marriage should not be the only motive behind her birth. Every year over 2 lakh girls are killed even before they can step into this world and thousands of women die due to dowry harassment. In most Indian households males and females are treated differently, where education, as well as nutrition of boys, is prioritized and that of the girl is neglected. Women in a family most commonly eat the last and the least after serving all their family members. This discrimination is reflected in the statistics released by the government which state that almost 50 percent of teenage Indian girls are underweight and 52 percent are anaemic.

India needs feminism because a woman is treated with disdain whether she is employed or not. A certain section of our society believes that it is an offense if a woman is well-educated and working to support herself or her family

<sup>3</sup> Carroll, William K. and Ratner, R.S.1994. "Between Leninism and Radical Pluralism: Gramscian Reflection on Counter-hegemony and the New Social Movements", *Critical Sociology* 20(2): 3-26.

<sup>4</sup> Amos, V. & Parmar, P. (1984). 'Challenging Imperial Feminism'. *Feminist Review*. 17, pp. 3-19

<sup>5</sup> Oyèwùmí, Oyèrónke (2013). *The invention of women*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

financially. Another sophomaniac section of our society believes that becoming a housewife would contribute little to women's empowerment. Some women who choose to raise their children full time over continuing their career are also criticized. But what is important to realize is that just because a woman isn't earning doesn't mean her work is less important. Some research also points out how being a homemaker is equivalent to working 2.5 jobs. So, a profession shouldn't be deemed important based on the amount of money it offers but on the amount of value it holds.

India needs feminism because a woman deserves the same amount of money and respect as a man does for performing the same tasks. Working women in India earn only 66% of what their male counterparts earn for the same amount of work. This gender pay gap and disparity in opportunities discourage women from performing well in the professional background. A report suggests that India would be 27% richer if there was a higher employment of women. There is the presence of the glass ceiling effect in India which means that there is an invisible barrier that prevents women from rising to higher ranks in a corporation. In India, females make up only 11.2% of board members in Indian firms which is less than the global average. Women are considered ill-suited for holding power in a democracy but what we don't realize is that any person who understands the problems of running a home will be nearer to understanding the problems of running a country.

India needs feminism because we have maligned the purity of something as natural as menstruation and turned it into something unmentionable. Indian women on their periods are treated as untouchables. They aren't allowed to enter the kitchen, forced to sleep on the floor, cannot be touched, spoken to or even eaten with. Because of the stigma attached to it, there is a lack of awareness about the methods of menstrual protection. Data suggests that about 46 percent of women do not use hygienic methods of menstrual protection and 36 percent feel uncomfortable in buying them with other customers around. India suffers from something called "period poverty" because we lack enough sanitary products to cater to our population. Another thing that comes to light is the hypocrisy, where on one hand we worship Kamakhya Devi also known as the bleeding goddess and on the other hand restrict menstruating women from entering her temple.

India needs feminism because even professions and family roles have now been stereotyped based on gender. For example, professions like engineering, aviation, and military are considered masculine and professions like teaching, fashion designing, and homemaking are considered feminine. Stereotyping in family roles includes how men are expected to be the sole breadwinners of a family and females are presumed to single-handedly take up the responsibilities of managing home. India prides itself on producing great female warriors such as Rani Padmavati, Razia Sultana, and Rani Ahilyabai Holkar, still the participation of women in the Indian defence forces is disheartening. Equal involvement of

men and women in the army is still a far-fetched dream. This only supports the stereotype that connects masculinity to physical strength and femininity to emotionalism.

India needs feminism because no man should be under the pressure of being emotionally and physically stronger than a woman. It's time that statements like "Mard ko dard nhi hota" and "Ladke rote nhi" are sidelined and men are not sneered at for volunteering to take up responsibilities at home.

#### **Obstacles faced by feminism in the contemporary world.**

Feminism is one of the oldest and most powerful social movements in history; it is a revolutionary movement, and that means change. There is so much wrong with the present system that we can't just tinker round the edges, we need to start again; our end point cannot be equality in an unequal world. This is also the reason why feminism is not struggling to simply reverse the present power relationship and put women in charge instead of men (though this is a common myth about feminist politics). Feminism is about change, not a changing of the guard.

#### **The Wrath of Patriarchy**

If we are to correct our unbalanced world, then we need to get rid of patriarchy as a system of social governance. By patriarchy, I mean male supremacy; I mean a society where every avenue of power – especially mainstream institutions of power – is overwhelmingly dominated by men. You don't have to go far to find this, and it isn't a preserve of foreign countries or dictatorial regimes; India is patriarchal, just like the rest of the globe. It may look different and take different forms, but it's the same old male supremacy.

Business leaders, the judiciary, senior police, management in education and the media: wherever you look you will find that power is in male hands. This is sexism, base, raw and simple. It means that our society is shaped by one half of the population alone; that it reflects, aggrandises and normalises its group perspectives and its image of power.

But this power structure is cracked, it always has been; that's why it has to be constantly propped up through force, violence and the threat of violence. This ancient imbalance has brought us to the brink of planetary crisis, it has ripped out chasms between countries and people. The situation is not natural; we cannot possibly look at things as they are and say so it was meant to be. We should try to change it however we can, and that's where feminism comes in.

The obvious threats to feminism today are the same as they have always been, the main ones being the existence of patriarchy and the backlash from that system when it hits out against any challenges to its continuation. However, there are more insidious and less obvious threats. These dangers hide in plain sight, and come partly in the form of a version of feminism known as "**choice feminism**".

This term is used to refer to a common phenomenon, whereby the language of liberation, taken from feminist political theory, is turned on its head and used against women. Choice feminism can be found particularly in media representations of what feminism is and what women's empowerment might look like. There is an attempt, unfortunately fairly successful, to reduce feminism to simply being the right for women to make choices. Not choices about whether to stand for parliament, or instigate pay transparency in the office or lead an unemployed workers union, or form a women-only consciousness-raising group in their town; far from it.

People make decisions every day, they make them within a set of limited options and within a context that shapes not only what choices are on offer, but also which ones are seen as most attractive or less risky. People tend to make safe decisions, ones that will not set them apart from others, and ones that are socially sanctioned and rewarded. Also, let's get real for a minute: we actually make all sorts of boring decisions every second, from whether or not to get a drink of water to whether or not to take an umbrella. There is nothing inherently feminist in making decisions.

### **Gender Violence**

First and foremost there is violence within the home. It typically occurs when a man beats his wife/ female partner. Then there is violence against women in public spaces and within the community at large. Physical, sexual and psychological violence include rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment and intimidation in school or work, the exploitation and commercialization of women's bodies and trafficking of women for sexual abuse, which is related to increased poverty that is mainly a result of unbridled economic liberalism is on the rise. Besides these we also see violence against women perpetrated by the State: Physical, sexual and psychological violence are too often perpetrated or tolerated by states that priorities custom or tradition over the respect of fundamental freedom. In some countries, in this region, the rise of religious fundamentalism is extremely disturbing as regards women's right to their economic autonomy and their freedom of choice. Gender violence is rooted in the theory that the cause of domestic violence is one person's arbitrary belief in the right to exert power over another person, interpersonal interactions or interpersonal relations and is situated in the socio-economic and political content of power relations. The understanding of violence has to incorporate the imperceptible psychological unseen day to day violence perpetrated within the families through cultural, religious practices, inter personal, interrelationships, language, gesture and socialization.

## **CHAPTER-2-FEMINISM VIS A VIS GLOBAL HEGEMONY**

### **Feminism, Globalism and Globalization**

Globalization of feminism is simply an extension of feminism to a global level. Globalization of feminism refers to the variety of interrelated frameworks used to observe, analyze, and interpret the complex ways in which the social reality of gender inequality is constructed, enforced, and manifested from the largest institutional settings to the details of people's daily lives within the global capitalist. In this sense, globalisation can be conceived as a driving force behind global feminism whose main goal is to accelerate the liberation of women globally. This multi-perspective approach conclude that woman's roles are closely linked to the political, economic, social, and cultural conditions that constrain them from advancement. It insists that the factors determining the economic exploitation and marginalization of women stem from chronic inequalities. Therefore, a feminist analysis of globalization has to be framed by the ideas that: (i) the market is a gendered social construction;

(ii) production and reproduction are intrinsically linked, constituted and reconstituted through relations of power;

(iii) women and men often enter and participate in markets on differential terms; and

(iv) nation-states have differential levels of development in addition to being unevenly developed within their national boundaries. Globalization is both gendered and sexualised.

### **Feminist International Relations**

Feminism is indeed a multi-perspective approach to the study of IR. It was Thorburn (2000) who stated that there is a diversity of views within feminism itself. Similarly, Buskie (2017) noted that the feminist approach to IR is not a single unitary theory, but a distinct discourse made up of many competing theories. Some of these theories or perspectives of feminist international relations include difference feminism, liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, post-modern feminism, critical feminism, feminist constructivism, post-colonial feminism, standpoint feminism, and feminist empiricism.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Impacts of Globalization on Women**

Globalization has both positive and negative impacts on women. The commonest positive effects of globalization in the literature is that it has increased employment opportunities for women. For example, globalization has created work opportunities for women, especially professionals, in the newly emerging forms of employment in the IT and service sectors. It is to a large extent true that through globalization, women have gained certain

<sup>6</sup> Langridge, C., 2013. Liberalism: Another Tool of Western Hegemony. [Online] [Accessed 2 November 2019].

opportunities in terms of widening field of job options and also in terms of recognizing women's rights as a part of the human rights. Therefore, one of the positive impacts of globalization has been the increased participation of women in the paid labour market. By creating more job opportunities for women in the paid employment, globalization has resulted in women gaining more autonomy over their own wages and a feeling of independence from traditional gender roles in society, especially in marriage and childrearing. In other words, it has opened up new employment opportunities for educated and professional women thereby creating an environment that allows many women to achieve higher income, greater personal autonomy, and gender parity. In addition to this, the ideas of autonomy, individualisation, liberation and equality that are inherent in globalisation has modified women's self-perception and their identity as legal subjects.<sup>7</sup>

However, women face major challenges as a result of changes in the world economy arising from rapid globalisation and fast-paced technological progress. It has been argued that globalisation is not necessarily integrating men and women into a homogenous entities in the sphere of economy, culture, technology and governance. This is evidenced in the fact that the impact of globalisation on gender is geared towards gender discrimination and inequalities in terms of access to and control over capital and resources. The semi-skilled or the unskilled women have lost the control over their land resulting in the loss of traditional livelihood and sustainability. It has become clear that the impoverishment that women have experienced in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific, and the former socialist countries is not a transitory phenomenon, nor a consequence of poorly implemented policy recommendations, as is often claimed by the World Bank but a direct consequence of further integration of these regions into the global economy. Thus, women's material well-being has generally deteriorated and gender inequality has increased as a consequence of globalisation thereby intensifying the marginalisation of women and the "feminisation of poverty". Hence, globalisation has gender discriminating effects because of gender-differentiated initial conditions which discriminate against women. Even the class differences among women have been exacerbated by globalisation. It has been generally argued that although globalisation has improved women's labour market access, it has done little to reduce the sexual division of paid labour. Women have access to a very limited number of occupations and are concentrated in the low quality range of the service sector and in labour-intensive manufacturing. It has been therefore noted that globalisation increases the existing economic disadvantage experienced by many women relative to men in most countries of the world. This structural poverty is exacerbated in many countries by globalisation which is often gendered in terms of the differential entitlements, capabilities and rights conferred to

women and men. Thus, globalisation intensifies some of existing inequalities and insecurities for women. It has reduced the ability of women in developing countries to find paid work that offers security and dignity. Inequality and poverty contribute to the apparent increase in the international trafficking in women for prostitution and trafficking in both women and men for other kinds of labour. This has led to globalisation of the sex industry sometimes through coerced labour. For the violence against women is not only domestic violence but also the institutional violence inscribed in economic programmes that sustain globalization.<sup>8</sup>

The wave of deregulation under globalisation has introduced labour market "flexibility," which, in the fragmented, low-wage labour markets of developing countries, has initiated new forms of expropriation of female labour. Therefore, it remains an elusive concept of economic 'freedom' as described by the advocates of globalisation who assert that women are expected to benefit from many new job opportunities in new economic era whereas the reality depicts that emerging new work opportunities laid out to them generate further exploitations and vulnerability.

Furthermore, globalisation has changed the intra-household responsibilities for males and females where females are given more responsibility over the survival of the family. Female responsibilities have thus increase in era of globalization. Even young daughters are financially supporting their parents and fellow siblings while mothers are seeking informal work to provide for their children.

## CONCLUSION AND KEY SUGGESTIONS

Feminism is the notion that all humans are equal regardless of their gender. Feminism is uplifting women so that men and women are treated equally. It's not downsizing men or declaring them inferior. It's not based on women having power over men; instead, on women having power over themselves. Most often, feminism is misconstrued as a "women's movement" because of its origin from the word "feminine". But, it's imperative we realise that feminism is not just a women's movement, it's a "human's movement" that is concerned with the liberation of both men and women. However, it's important that we also accept that women have been the prime victims of years of patriarchy and toxic masculinity. Feminism is an attempt to remove this notion of dominance and subordination, to bring both genders on the same level.<sup>9</sup>

What if we chose to be feminist? What if we chose to organize together to change the world to something better? What if we decided to finish the job our sisters started more than 40 years ago and end the power imbalance between women and men?

<sup>8</sup> Riley, M. 2007. Why do Gender Issues Remain Problematic to Development Agencies? [Online][Accessed 6 November 2019]

<sup>9</sup> Engels, Friedrich. 1972. "The Origins of Family, Private Property and the State" in K.Marx & F. Engels, Selected Works, New York: International Publishers.

<sup>7</sup> Zakaria, R., 2017. The Myth of Women's 'Empowerment'[Online][Accessed 5 November 2019]

That of course is the collective strength we represent, the revolutionary potential that has to be tamed and distracted.

The authors want to provide certain suggestions so that feminism is taken in the right spirit, and full fills its prime purpose, that is to bring at par both the sexes. Some suggestions are as under:

1. There is no essential need for a completely unified feminist movement, rather the goal should be a kind of feminism that acknowledges different dimensions and layers of oppression
2. Feminism could gain strength if we teach the same at school, by highlighting the key difference positive and negative feminism right from the school level itself.
3. At the same time, there needs to be debate and discussion on the key aspects of feminism regularly at various platforms, so that core essence of feminism could be plucked and the same could then be inculcated in our laws.
4. Spreading awareness where feminism is most weak, i.e. at the rural level should be the key agenda of the state government by making sure rural men treat rural women at par with each other.
5. Gender neutral laws should be enforced to make sure one sex is not pitted against the other.
6. Historical background of feminism should be taught at school level, so as to inculcate in children, the core values of feminism.