

# Relevance of Feminism in 21st Century

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## Abstract

This paper tries to analyse the importance of feminism as a movement for women in 21st century. Women for time immemorial are cast in gender roles and in name of family culture and traditions are continuously subjected to several physical and psychological violence. But most of the women themselves need to understand that they are not inferior because they are born as women but they are inferior because they lack equal opportunities and feminism gives them an opportunity to ask themselves the question of 'who is am' or 'femin is (a)m'.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Patriarchy, Indian Society, Violence Against Women.

## Introduction

In 21st century many women declare about the death of feminism. As per our research fewer than one in ten women aged 25 to 29 identified with feminism because they say that women have arrived and they don't find any kind of inequality. But this may be the truth for what we may say 'tip of iceberg' i.e a very small number of women. Majority of women mainly in Asian region still even need to know why they need feminism.

## Aim of the Study

As a college teacher whenever I discussed issues of gender bias and female emancipation mainly feminism most of my colleagues talked about the hardships they are facing in their married life but they refused to take any action to improve their conditions. Even the younger girl students of M.A. Eng classes refused to believe that there is any need of feminism. On the contrary boys claimed that they are exploited because all the laws are in favor of women and even their father's give more priority to their daughters rather than sons.

## Review of Literature

In the last 150 years, condition of women rights has so much improved that due to feminist movement a lot of girls in the age group of 21-30 years have started feeling that there is no need of any such movement and also that there is no difference in the sexes. But they fail to realize the ground reality. Most of the men say that women are more protected and fail to realize that because they are in the threat. During last year's I came through these fabulous books:

1. "The Guilty Feminist" (2018) by Deborah Frances White- This book very jovily and without any bitterness, talks about the facts relating to women like make up, rape, fantasies, catcalling, manspreading, pornography and gender pay gap.
2. "The Cost Of Living" (2018) by Deborah Levy- It is a satire on a world that always expects a woman to conform to patriarchal line of living. It is a beautiful work which levy calls a new way of living in post familial world.
3. "Why I Am Not A Feminist" (2017)- A feminist manifesto by Jessa Crispin. This piece of work calls for a fearless revolution and accuses feminist movement of obliviousness, irrelevance and cowardice.

In fact, feminism is not about women. It is about half the population that as Showalter rightly says lives with their dominator and most of the times subjugate themselves willingly. Feminism is not about gender war but simply about human rights of existence. It is as important as it is to breathe.

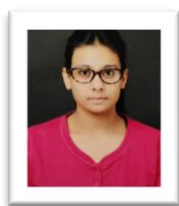
"I, myself, have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is. I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat."

The novelist Rebecca West wrote this nearly 100 years ago, but even today any woman who differentiates herself from a doormat faces some of the same problems. Feminism or the Rise of Feminine Consciousness is not just about equal rights for women, although that is



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definitely a part of it, instead it goes much deeper than this. In fact, consciousness is the state of being conscious, awareness of one's own existence, sensations, thoughts, surrounding etc. Feminist consciousness not only attacks the injustice of history, but also advocates the rights and equality of Women beyond the idea of gender.

Michel Foucault defines gender as "a set of effects produced in bodies, behavior and social relations by the development of complex political technology."<sup>1</sup> The patriarchal system of society teaches women to internalize the concept of male domination in the process of socialization. Simone-De-Beauvoir's Second Sex shows how a woman is forced to behave in feminine way by constant cultural conditioning;

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in the society. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature ...which is described as feminine."<sup>2</sup>

A talk of feminism instigates an Indian mind to talk about Vediceera and the mythological depiction of the female form as Goddess, because it is easier to put them on an altar and fake worship than to understand the language of symbols and gestures and treat them equally. Many male reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwer Chand Vidya Sagar, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekanand felt the sad plight of Indian women and started feminist-movement in India. This movement was later joined by women. From Savitri Bai Phule, First Women teacher and Indian Feminist to Rita Banerji, feminist author and founder of the 50 million missing campaign, an online, global lobby working to raise awareness about female gendercide (femicide) in India, thousands of women have worked for the emancipation of women, have worked to raise their consciousness, feminine consciousness.

Women's rights and issues have always been a subject of serious concern of academicians, intelligentsia and policy makers. From pastoral society to contemporary information and global society, the role of women has changed drastically. The Indian constitution granted equality, freedom from discrimination based on gender or religion and guaranteed religious freedom. Seven five year plans were developed to provide health, education, employment and welfare. The result is that Indian women are at highest possible posts that include the post of president, prime minister, speaker of Lok Sabha and leader of opposition party respectively. Women are doing exceptionally well in different spheres of life, be it academics, teaching, defense, media or entrepreneurs etc. very beautiful feather was added to the cap of achievements when Avani Chaturvedi flew in her MiG 21 Fighter Plane.

Women have progressed so much so that some people are even tempted to say that feminism does not seem very relevant to the 21st century. It was necessary a 100 years ago when women could not vote, lacked many legal powers and were discouraged from working outside their houses. Today women are a significant voting block, have gained

power in judicial system and have high paid jobs including being CEO of Big Banks and MNCs. Our Constitution has made adequate provisions from article 15 to 21 entitled as fundamental rights where a woman is competent to claim it equal footage in society. What more equality we are looking for?

It would be wonderful to agree but 21st Century is not post patriarchal. Women still face significant obstacles that men do not. In the Indian family culture which idolises' sons and dreads the birth of a daughter, to be born female comes previously close to being born less than human. For a woman this decriminalization begins even before her birth. Regardless of the economic background, the status of female child has never been the same as that of the male at any level. Girl child grows up with the notion of temporary membership in her natal home to be disposed of with assets and dowry. Her productive role is to continue the household drudgery added to which is her productive role. Indian Patriarchal Culture has made the process of gaining landownership rights and access to education challenging, Trend of sex selective abortions is constantly on rise.

Gender based violence is another bitter reality of the society with which many women are faced. Generally considered the Private affair, it is not a private affair. It has an economic, social and political cost to society. Women are worst hit in cost c wars and communal clashes. 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 from sexual abuse. The rise of religious fundamentalism is also extremely disturbing as regards women's rights to their economic autonomy and their freedom of choice. The public-private divide which operates very strongly in Indian middle class women's lives do not allow them to speak about the humiliation and violence they undergo. Trivializing as well as silencing are political acts which supports the structure of oppression of women." Girls, who observe domestic violence are more likely to tolerate abusive partners as adults, thus subjecting another to generation same sad dynamics,

All is not well with women and so. Feminism is still relevant even in 21st century. But women are equally responsible for their fate as men. Mary Wollstone craft contents in her 'A vindication of the Rights of Women' that the great majority of women are intellectually and ethically inferior to men not because of lack of potential or ability, but owing to their inferior education and insidious social conditioning. Very often we see that women who are whole heartedly fighting Patriarchy "Value What in same may they reject"<sup>5</sup>. Their consciousness of their being and dilemma of "Who I am" metamorphoses into "Do I really desire to do anything about who I am". She is perpetually caught in the struggle between freedom and domesticity, the need for independence and need to belong. She keeps hanging between order and Chaos, Convention and identity. Freedom keeps betraying her because she chooses to remain silent and if she does not stand

and speak for herself now, no one else will and the history of oppression will continue. In this age of voices her silence shall be proclaimed acceptance not protest. And as Shakespeare says in Othello-

let men know  
that we have same senses like them  
we can see and smell  
and our palates are both for sweet and sour

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