



FEMINIST MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Rajesh N. Sonkusare

Arts and Commerce College Bhisli, Tah. Chimur Dist. Chandrapur

*Corresponding Author: rajeshns87@gmail.com

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Abstract :-

Universe comprises two genders - masculine and feminine (unless we consider non- binary to be a bonafide gender) and the creator has made both of them equal. The two genders are not only equal but they are interdependent for producing new progeny to keep the human race proliferating.

The article goes on to explain the feminist preponderance in our day to day routine quoting words like Sandhya (evening), Nisha (night) and nidra (sleep) all of which are feminine. In such a society, where the woman is placed on such a high pedestal, at least in theory and theology, why such social evils are prevalent against women is a question that all of us need to ask ourselves!

Feminism should aim for a step ahead to produce women who set the trend and lay down norms for society, women who are writers, talkers and opinion makers! And while we shall continue to face hurdles in the progress of this movement, ultimately, the onus is on the males - fathers, husbands, brothers, sons, colleagues - to contribute to the success of this movement as the change in mindset has to be holistic and not gender specific.

Key words: -Gender, Man, Woman, Feminism, Movement, Marriages.

INTRODUCTION :

Before we dwell deeper into the subject of feminist movements in India, it's very important to understand what we actually mean by feminism or feminist movements.

Text:

Universe comprises two genders - masculine and feminine (unless we consider non- binary to be a bonafide gender) and the creator has made both of them equal. The two genders are not only equal but they are interdependent for producing new progeny to keep the human race proliferating. But how and when, the society started discriminating between a man and a woman, more so in the Indian milieu in which we have always placed women on a very high pedestal, worshipping her as Devi or goddess, is not very clear or is not clearly documented in the annals of the history. Social evils such as child marriage, dowry, sati system, sex determination test etc are very real and in very much existence even in today's modern society, when science and education are widely believed to be eradication ignorance.

Women are the wealth of India and they have contributed in almost every field and made the country feel proud at every occasion. They are in front, leading the country, making mile stones and source of inspiration for many. However, another reality of Indian society is that there is systematic discrimination and neglect of women's in India, which could be in terms of inadequate nutrition, denial or limited access to education, health and property rights, child labour and domestic violence etc.¹

While respecting and worshipping a woman in the form (swaroop) of Devi is an extreme, having religious connotations, a few years ago, I came across a beautiful piece of writing in vernacular language (Hindi) that once again very aptly demonstrated feminism to be an integral part of our day to day existence. We wake early in the morning (Usha) and then finish our daily routine (Kriya). After that it's time to offer daily prayers (Pooja). The article goes on to explain the feminist preponderance in our day to day routine quoting words like Sandhya (evening), Nisha (night) and nidra (sleep) all of which are feminine. In such a society, where the woman is

placed on such a high pedestal, at least in theory and theology, why such social evils are prevalent against women is a question that all of us need to ask ourselves!

But feminist movement is not new; in fact it's as old as social evils. If we look at the history, it is replete with instances of social reformers who worked for upliftment and liberation of women from social evils and malpractices. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati Veeraslingam Pantulu, Pandita Ramabai, Mumtaz Ali, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar are all famous social reformers who supported equality for women and eradication of evils like sati, child marriage and dowry.

In modern times, the first feminist movement that rocked the entire world was "Bra Burning" in New Jersey in US in 1969 when a group of women hurled mops, lipsticks, high heels and brassiere (at least one woman took the bra from under her shirt) into a "Freedom Trash Can"². This symbolised getting rid of stereotypes that oppressed women. As one feminist put it succinctly " We were tired of making coffee but not policy". Some historians mark this event as the real beginning of the 'current wave of feminism."

Of course, feminist movements in India have to tackle social issues that are quite different from those faced by the West. Here it's more about survival of female species. Last heard, the ratio of females to 1000 males stood at 832 in Haryana and 875 in urban Punjab, two of the economically most affluent states in the country. In spite of social awareness. more particularly due to hyperactive social and electronic media, we continue to witness cases of torture or deaths for non-fulfilment of dowry obligations and child marriages. And even in slightly poor or lower middle class families, a girl is made a scapegoat to facilitate expenses on higher education for a boy. Apart from these social

evils, there are other issues, mainly law and order, that relate to safety of a female commuter in public transport and during late night rendezvous. Sharp rise in cases of rape and physical aggression against women bear testimony to the need for the next level of feminist movement. And can we completely overlook another very social menace of female child molestation (some perverts don't spare even young boys) and incest, where elderly relatives, who are fatherly figures to a girl child in the family, fondle with the private parts of the kid! Many celebrities have placed on record having been sexually compromised or exploited by elderly male relatives in their childhood!

However, sometimes we mistake some of the acts linked to female liberation as being part of feminist movement. One should dress as per choice - overtly hot western dresses are not necessarily symbols of liberation. And this logic can be extended to several other social problems that could be, in a way, offshoots of so-called feminism. Premarital sex, excessive use of nicotine, alcohol and in some cases drugs, live-in relationship, use of intemperate language etc are alright if pursued as a matter of choice and with utmost prudence and discretion, but cannot be norms for representing feminism.

CONCLUSION:

Feminism or feminist movements should aim at complete liberation of a woman, giving her the choice and status that's at par with a man. A woman has the right to be born in this world (and as a normal child bereft of sobriquets like Laxmi, Saraswati, Devi), study as much as she likes and in the field she prefers to be (females are now entering into the hitherto exclusive male domains - army, fighter pilots, top of the corporate ladder), marry at an age and with a person of her own choice, bear children not as per the fantasy of her husband or in-laws but as per her own physical and mental make up, wear clothes of her choice, eat and drink stuff that

she loves, work in office or as business, with the male partner sharing familial responsibilities equally, if not more and roam freely without a male escort. Feminism should aim for a step ahead to produce women who set the trend and lay down norms for society, women who are writers, talkers and opinion makers! And while we shall continue to face hurdles in the progress of this movement, ultimately, the onus is on the males - fathers, husbands, brothers, sons, colleagues - to contribute to the success of this movement as the change in mindset has to be holistic and not gender specific.

To end this treatise in my signature poetic manner:

Centuries of exploitation and discrimination of women must end;

God had made both the genders equal without any difference;

Social evils and criminal mindsets of a few rotten elements in the society;

Does not bear almighty's approval and is against his deference!

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