Research on Feminism and Revolts against Feminist Theories

Introduction

Women have been regarded inferior to men traditionally. They are considered as the property of men. In common sense, they have been regarded as the creature who should be under controlled by a man. Law and theology both dictate the subjection of women to men both physically and intellectually. Women could not use their names on their property, their children and their lands by natural law. They could not be recognized by their own name but by their father or their husband. These theories have been practiced throughout the history and women has been regarded as the inferior creature and regarded as the servant of men.

Feminism movements came to being in response to women’s experiences under a patriarchal society. Before the feminism movements, being a woman was equivalent to being non-existent. All social, cultural and economic benefits were enjoyed by men at the expense of women. Safe to say, women experienced oppression in different levels. Individual abuse was witnessed through attitudes and actions that were prejudicial to women. Institutional oppression, on the other hand, was seen through policies and norms put in place by institutions such as the education sector that disadvantaged the women. For example, female education prior to the movement was not a priority. Finally, social-cultural oppression was witnessed through expressions of the language, art and social norms that reinforced the common belief that one group is inferior to another (Griselda). In this case, women being inferior to men.

Women`s Republican club was the first club in history that demanded full elimination of gender discrimination, social affairs, and consistency. These demands were asked in the midst of French Revolution. In 1848, first deceleration of independence of women was presented in the United States. They asked for full instructive, true blue consistency, business openings and equal compensation with comparable rights to assemble pay and the benefit to vote for women. By the time these demands were improved and the advancement spread and drove its way into Europe. After these advancements, Feminist activists entered in trade and asked benefit to vote and claimed property rights for married women. In the United States, there has been distinctive sanctioning go to confine these activities for example by obliging the hours of work each week for wedded ladies banishing women from higher master threats et cetera.

Waves of Feminism

A Commission was established by United Nation in 1940 to provide women equal rights and equal opportunities in politics, economics, and in education throughout the world. In the 1960s, Feminist movement experienced a rebirth with the establishment of a National organization for Women. This organization argued about the legislation of abortion rights, child care support by federal government, equal pay for women, occupational upgrading or increments for women and also economic power for women. The time passes and in 1972, under the leadership of Bella Abzug, Betty Friedan, and Gloria Steinem, an Amendment for Equal Rights was pushed through the Congress but it fell short in 1982. Although these movements have has their own essence and a large number of women moved into the workplace after the 1960s Feminist movement and changed the society.

The feminist movement has undergone three major historical periods commonly known as waves. The first wave of feminism was witnessed in the period between the late 19th century and early 20th century (Gray). During this time, the feminists advocated primarily for recognition of women as independent beings with their own rights and not as men’s property. They fought against exclusionary social norms and practices as well as exploitation and subordination of women. It was as a result of this wave that women in America got the right to vote.

The second wave of feminism occurred between the 1960s and 1990s, after the world wars. During the war period, women had to take up different social and political roles to support their families (Gray). Afterward, the women joined hands in fighting for equality of women in the labor market. They campaigned for equal pay, educational opportunities as well as employment opportunities. The second wave saw to the coming together of women of different races and classes fighting for a common goal. They asserted that superiority or inferiority of an individual in the society should not be determined by one’s gender. All genders were, therefore, t be viewed as equal.

The third wave of feminism started in the mid-1990s to present day. The third wave is seen as disputable as not at all like the past waves; they don't have an unmistakably set subject or territory of core interest. Women's activists in this period grasp singular contrasts and concentrate more on individual character and acknowledgment. They claim to bear on from the latest relevant point of interest. In this manner, in the wake of having ladies engaged and perceived as equivalent in the general public, they ought to be permitted to abuse their maximum capacity. The wave is set apart with a few discussions. For instance, some claim that bareness is a type of ladies strengthening and sexual expression though others see it as corrupting. Every one of these perspectives are however obliged by the third flood of woman's rights. What is seen as imperative is the way a lady sees herself and how she is permitted to conduct herself.

Main types of feminism

Within the feminist waves, there were different types of feminist theories. The theories mainly provided insight on the priorities and views of different women (Lober). In this paper, I shall firstly highlight the characteristics of radical, socialist, liberal and cultural feminists.

Radical Feminists

The most prominent theory is the Radical Feminist theory which dictates that there should not be any male dominance in society and Radical feminist theory eliminates the male supremacy from the society and call it as the radical reordering of society. Radical theory abolish the male superiority by eliminating social norms in all social economic context.

The theorists believe that inequality between both genders is so deeply rooted in the society that only radical measure can eliminate the disparities. The proponents call for total elimination of gender when it comes to how one views an individual. Therefore, the society is not made up of men or women, but of individuals with the same capabilities. They argued against set gender roles such the belief that women were meant to be at home rearing children. To empower women, they created inroads such as counseling services that saw to women telling their personal stories and get encouraged. The radical feminists viewed all men with suspicion, whether the men were directly involved in the discrimination of women or not.

Socialist Feminists

 Social Feminist theory which focuses on both private and public sector of women`s life. The theory argues that liberation can only be achieved by the working on the both ends, on economic and cultural sources of women. They believe that social gender roles are not fixed. Hence the society should not judge a woman based on her socially assigned role but based on her ability to perform. They focused on the political economy, highlighting how reproduction and little pay was a form of taking advantage or exploitation of women for the benefit of men. Women who stand for this theory view recognition of women as the primary way of ending discrimination. Only when a woman’s contribution is recognized and valued in the society can the community fully appreciate her ability and treat her justly.

Liberal Feminists

Liberal feminist theory dictates that the feminism should treat every woman on an individual level and maintain the quality through their own choices and actions. The proponents of this theory sought to fight for women’s liberation through recognition of their freedom of choice, expression, and access to opportunities. They believed that women should be responsible for their own sexuality as well as in control of their bodies. Therefore, no barriers should exist that prevent women from achieving or obtaining the high-ranking positions in government or institutions.

Cultural Feminists

From the Radical theory, there has been another theory that is derived from the radical theory itself is called Cultural Feminism. The theory seeks to show how the society is culturally oriented towards men. Men are known to be aggressive and competitive, traits which are not entirely positive. Culturally, women, on the other hand, are gentle and caring. The society, however, encourages people to be aggressive and competitive. The cultural feminists propose that the society should be culturally oriented towards feminine traits. They view men and masculinity as an enemy to women. Therefore, a woman friendly environment or society should be free from masculinist values.

Although this theory has many opposing section and parts but it leads to the same way as the Radical Feminist theory. These feminist theories are actually an extension of feminism in theoretical, fictional or philosophical discourse. The main reason of these theories is to understand the gender inequality in the workplace and at home. Feminist theory dictates a change in the course of action although society encourages people to be aggressive and competitive.

Arguments against Feminist Theories

The main goal of feminist theories is to eliminate gender inequality in public sphere. Women should be given a chance to better educate themselves, work, equal pay and better working condition. Gaining access to better education, starting out a career and seek promotion equally in a male dominant society. Occupation is the main target to make a plan for one`s own progress. All women want what all men want, Better education and decent living.

The feminist movement has been weakened due to the diversity of opinions surrounding feminism and the many forms it takes (Pateman and Grosz ). The diversity of opinions shows a lack of uniformity providing a platform to exploit any loopholes present in the theories. Today, the word feminism is associated with men-hating, a view that has also watered down the feminist movement. The main question then becomes, if feminists are fighting for equality between men and women, why should men be hated and treated differently?

On the other hand, there are some outright differences between men and women that cannot be overlooked. The issue of discussion, therefore, becomes equality versus difference. There is a need to present both genders with equal opportunities in all possible spheres. However, it is also crucial to note their differences (Monica). For example, both women and men participate in marathons. However, they do not compete against each other. The reason being, a man’s stamina, and strength cannot be compared to that of a woman. Therefore, when feminists argue for equality, they should be mindful of the existing differences and realize that total and complete equality is impossible to achieve.

Essentialism and Constructionism theories also play a significant role in propelling the criticism of the feminist theories. Essentialists can be termed as anti-feminists as they openly acknowledge that women are innately and inherently different from men. They claim that femininity or masculinity is not learned but is inbuilt. On the other hand, constructionist disagree with this view arguing that masculinity and femininity is a product of exposure (Rivkin and Ryan).

Looking at essentialism deeper, what makes a man different from a woman is not just the physical look, but also the genetic composition of either. As noted, some feminists claim that what distinguishes a man from a woman is the societal upbringing and their environments. Therefore, if both were to be brought up in totally similar situations, they would most likely behave the same. However, this is not the case as some critics argue. A woman’s genetic composition predisposes her to be fragile and gentle whereas men are geared towards aggression and dominance. The hormonal functions of either gender are very different making them behave and carry themselves differently. There is, therefore, no way can a woman be equal to a man. This assertion does not point to either gender being inferior to the other just that both are uniquely different and should be treated differently.

Women are the ones and will dependably be the ones who bear kids. Accordingly, uncommon arrangements ought to be made in both social, political and financial circles to permit ladies to experience this stage easily. Women's activist scholars have a tendency to disregard this reality by requesting correspondence in laws.

In her book, Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory, Linda Alcoff criticizes feminist theories because the concept of a woman is seen as problematic to them (Linda). For most feminist theorists, they either shy away from actually defining a woman or define women based on what men or society say women are. As a result, there is a back and forth argument as to who or what actually defines a woman. The confusion brought about by the lack of a uniform concept of identifying a woman neutralizes the impact that feminist theories are supposed to have. The question, therefore, becomes, if one cannot define a woman, then what exactly are feminists fighting for? Feminist theories, therefore, fail as they are seen only to oppose what a woman is not instead of giving a woman a definition. Consequently, women like Linda are seen to criticize the feminist theories.

Some demands made by feminists’ theorists, instead of empowering women seem to be portraying them as a weaker sex and in need of handouts. Fighting for the right of women to vote or to education is a form of women empowerment. In attaining these rights, women can stand their ground and fight for positions they are qualified to hold. However, there is a group of feminists that believe that due to the patriarchal nature of society, a woman, for example, needs to be put in a leadership position whether or not she is qualified. Such a view is highly criticized by anti-feminists’ theorists as it is seen to belittle women. If women are indeed as capable as men, they should not be subject to sympathy or handouts. They should be allowed to fight for what they deserve and have earned. Feminists, however, tend to have double standards as they appear to want women to be treated differently but only to the extent that it benefits them (Monica).

Post-feminists today encourage women and girls to abandon feminist affiliations as it is possible to achieve independence and freedom without becoming part of a feminist group. They argue that if the objective was actually equality between men and women, it should be termed as people-ism other than feminism which is biased towards one gender (Monica). Finally, feminist theories are seen as anti-family and anti-marriage. Most homes today are broken due to feminist beliefs. Feminists argue that women should not be viewed from their roles such as being a mother or a wife as this may be demeaning. Such a view makes women embarrassed to own up to their roles in the family and as a result, families, and marriages do not last long. Being a mother and a wife is something women should be proud of. However, feminists tend to disagree on this.

Conclusion

The importance of feminist theories cannot be understated. They are what led to the recognition of women as members of the society and as independent beings. However, in my opinion, in today’s world, the theories have been overtaken by events. Most societies if not all have evolved. Insisting on these theories is what will prevent men from accepting women and vice versa. The goal should not be to remove the difference between men and women but to embrace the differences. Embracing of differences does not mean discrimination, it means equality of opportunities and acceptance of each gender’s strength and weakness.

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