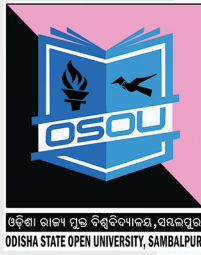


BPS-1
Block-2



ଓଡ଼ିଶା ରାଜ୍ୟ ମୁକ୍ତ ବିଶ୍ୱବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟ, ସମ୍ବଲପୁର
Odisha State Open University
Sambalpur

BAPS

BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONOURS) IN
POLITICAL SCIENCE

UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL THEORY

***Critical And Contemporary
Perspective In Political Theory***

This course material is designed and developed by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi and Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), Guwahati.



ଓଡ଼ିଶା ରାଜ୍ୟ ମୁକ୍ତ ବିଶ୍ୱବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟ, ସମ୍ବଲପୁର, ଓଡ଼ିଶା
Odisha State Open University, Sambalpur, Odisha
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Bachelor of Arts POLITICAL SCIENCES (BAPS)

BAPS-1 Understanding Political Theory

Block-2

CRITICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PRESPECTIVES IN POLITICAL THEORY

UNIT-7 THEORIES OF FEMINISM

UNIT-8 FEMINIST AND POSTMODERN

UNIT-9 MODERNISM AND POST-MODERNISM

UNIT-07 THEORIES OF FEMINISM

Structure

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- 7.3 Defining Feminism
- 7.4 Evolution of Feminism
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7.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Describe feminism and theories with reference to the women's movement;
- Analyze and identify different types of feminisms along with their backgrounds;
- Trace the evolution of feminism in the world with special reference to India; and different waves of feminism.
- Explain the need of feminism in the present social set up.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

The very fact that a notion to highlight the condition of women evolved in the 19th century, and came to be known as feminism, shows that there was something amiss in the scheme of things. Firstly, it appeared that women were gradually asserting themselves to get the right to be treated like human beings; secondly, they were also by now convinced that this change in their position was possible thanks to the liberalizing and equalizing forces unleashed in the world by the capitalist-socialist combine. This combine had become a major force to reckon with by the end of the 19th and start of the 20th century.

As an idea and as a concept, ‘feminism’ has been identified as the main generator of women’s and gender studies and also as the chief force behind the various women’s movements all over the world. Feminist scholarship has been at the forefront of critical thinking in the last four decades, challenging and rethinking major theoretical and political formulations such as Marxism, and playing a leading role in the development of post-colonial, post-modern theories, among others. While women’s movements may not always be about women (that is, women in movements may have different agendas from women’s movements), the fact that feminism and women’s movements have been so intricately connected necessitates the need to study the linkages, similarities and overlaps between the two. In the various sections of this unit, we will try to describe and explain these linkages, and trace the evolution of various feminisms in the world.

7.3 DEFINING FEMINISM

Etymologically speaking, the word feminism is derived from the French word ‘*feminism*’ and seems to have been popularized in the 1890’s. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Online Dictionary) it is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes and it also denotes organized activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests. The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines feminism as “a belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way”. It also lays emphasis on the set of activities intended to achieve this state of equilibrium. Feminism is defined as the advocacy of social equality for men and women, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism. In brief, it can be said that feminism is a belief in the equality of sexes.

7.4 EVOLUTION OF FEMINISM:

Development of Feminism is divided in to 3 waves of Feminism. The 1st wave of Feminism dates back to the 19th Century and early part of Twentieth century. That does not mean Feminism or feminist movement did not exist prior to this period.

7.4.1 Ancient Feminism:

In fact in 6th century B.C. there were women writers in Greece who even ran girl schools. We also had women writers in the 15th century in France and Christine de Pisan from this period and are considered as one of the early feminist thinkers. Women writers played a major role in the Seventeenth century West Indian Slave Rebellion. Women also had a major role in the 18th century in French Revolution. This was the time when women tried to assert themselves in France by propagating that every woman is born free and her rights are same as that of any man. But by the late 18th century strict laws and codes were enforced to subjugate any kind of women's movement. The Napoleonic code even snatched away the right over funds and finance from women and restored it completely to man. Women were deliberately restricted to their home and household activities.

7.4.2 Feminism in America and Africa:

If we look at the history of feminist movement and Feminism in North America then we can see some kind of organized activity from the times of "American war of Independence" in the mid eighteenth century. Women participated in this struggle along with men and were strongly involved in boycotting the British made goods. Feminists movement got a new turn in America in late eighteenth century when black women understood that in order to live a dignified life it was not only a fight they had to carry out against racism but it was also a struggle against their own men who believed in traditional gender stereotyping and practical social and cultural norms which encouraged bias and discrimination against women. During these times black women organized themselves and carried out their struggle in public platforms like church congregations. The real turning point in black women getting fully involved in the feminist movement came after the incidence when black feminist, Sojourner Truth, stood before the Second Annual Convention of Women's Rights in Akron Ohio in 1852 and quite outspokenly demanded the right for vote for black American women amongst other things.

7.4.3 The Industrial Revolution:

The Industrial Revolution also saw a change in the structure of society whereby more women were involved in the industry as work force. This was a trend that was seen not only in Europe but also in North America. Many of the early trade union movements were in fact initiated by women workers. Meanwhile in other parts of the world there were number of instances where women came together to fight against discrimination and bias. In Asia and Africa, women were actively involved with men in their struggle against colonial powers.

7.4.4 Organized Feminist Movement:

It was only by the late 19th century and early 20th Century that organized feminist movements became really visible. This can be considered as the period when the First

wave of Feminism hit the world. It is really unbelievable today that in those times women were considered as private properties; to be purchased in marriage and they had no right to vote in a democratic set up or any right to property.

7.4.5 Feminist movements in China, India and Africa:

The late 19th century saw the taiping rebellion against foot binding in China. Chinese women also demanded rights to property and equality with men in other spheres of life. In British India, during the same time, women along with men were actively involved in the Swadeshi movement and they boycotted the British goods. Question was also being raised on the dowry system prevalent in India which was traditionally handed over by the British in India. On the other hand in Africa, women were active in the struggle against the colonial powers and were also fighting for better reproductive rights. The age for marriage was raised in some of the African countries like Egypt in this period. The women's right to vote became a major issue all over the world during this time. The voting rights were first given in New Zealand followed by Britain, America and Latin American countries etc. Colonial India also got the voting rights for women. All these developments took place in the early 20th Century.

7.4.6 Socialist Movement:

The Socialist Movement also saw the rise of Feminism within its framework. In Russia women got equal rights as that of men but during the times of Stalin things became bad with many of the civil and reproductive rights "being snatched away". In China also the socialist movement provided "equal rights to work" for women though women took the burden of both home as well as the work from it.

7.5 HISTORY OF MOVEMENTS

While it is very difficult to find out the precise meaning of the word one cannot help but agree with Rebecca West, the famous writer who wrote in 1913, "I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute" (West, 1982, p.5). In the early years, the word carried negative connotations as it sometimes does even now. Another question may be raised here in order to clarify the definition of the word feminism, that is, what would we call women who continued to work for the cause but did not call themselves feminists? There are several examples like the first-wave women trade unionists in Britain who fought for equal pay. Closer home, Sarojini Naidu totally disapproved being called a feminist. But in both the cases, the contribution to the cause of women's movement has been of immense value politically. It may be emphasized here that the contexts of feminism keep changing and all those working for the cause come within its ambit. Writing about South Asia, Kumari Jayawardena defines feminism as, "embracing movements for equality within the current system and the struggles that have attempted to change the system". (Jayawardena, 1986, p. 2) You would have realized by now that feminism might have different meanings and

connotations in different regions, countries and spaces and it might differ according to the requirements of class, caste, background, educational level, consciousness etc. However, broadly speaking it creates an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in society and inspires conscious action by women and men to change this situation.

7.6 NEW FEMINISMS

The term 'New Feminism' has been understood to include the varieties of feminist concepts that have evolved over time. At different times, various kinds of feminisms, and various phases of women's movements, have been dubbed as "new" in order to indicate major turns and shifts. Post- feminism, power feminism, third wave feminism, libertarian feminism, babe feminismall these terms have been used periodically to describe *new feminism*. The ongoing debate over the meaning of the term feminism has led to the coinage of the term *new feminism*. Contrary to the belief that these recent contributions on feminism are different or "do not easily fit into the more familiar models of feminist politics" these new feminisms have influenced feminist works academically and "have had a far ranging influence in the political, economic and cultural spheres" (Showden, 2009, p.1). Most of the new feminisms have been grouped under the rubrics of 'post feminism' or 'third-wave feminism' or both. Both these terms are often, unwittingly, used interchangeably. Although both are responses to dissatisfactions with liberal, socialist, and radical forms of second-wave feminist theory, they have different connotations.

Originally, the term was used in Britain in the 1920s to distinguish the new feminists from the old school of mainstream feminists, thus known because of the issue of suffrage which they championed and which marks the beginning of feminism in the modern period. The new feminists were also known as *welfare feminists* because they were more specifically concerned with the well being of mothers and the requirements of motherhood like family allowances being paid directly to mothers. They also vouched in favour of protective legislation in industry. They were led by Eleanor Rathbone of the *Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship*, an organization that took up the cause of the post- suffrage era of feminism. Those who opposed the *New Feminists* were mostly young women who did not believe in the idea of separate spheres for women. They were particularly opposed to protective legislation, which they saw as being in practice restrictive legislation, which kept women out of better-paid jobs on the pretext of health and welfare considerations.

In recent years, the term 'new feminism' has been revived by Catholic feminists responding to the call of the Pope for a "new feminism' which rejects the temptation of imitating models of 'male domination' in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation" (www.vatican.va/evangelium-vitae, para

99). New Feminism also claims to be a Catholic philosophy, which emphasized the notion that men and women are complementary to each other, thus disputing the notion of superiority of men over women as embodied in patriarchy. Belonging to the genre of 'difference feminism', this notion not only believes in the equal worth and dignity of both the sexes, but also supports the notion of the strengths, perspectives and roles of women.

With the influence of New Feminism various world issues have been taken within the fold of feminism and have been studied with a feministic approach. Thus, varieties of feminisms have evolved, for example, the concept dealing with environment and women and their linkages is known as environmental feminism or ecofeminism. Ecofeminists see men as controllers of land and hence responsible for the oppression of women. The same dynamics operate for the destruction of the natural environment. One point of criticism could be that there is too much stress on the mystical aspect of women and nature. (You will read more about these issues in Unit 3 of Block 2). There are other types of feminisms that have developed around issues, regions or communities for example, Dalit feminism, Black feminism and Third-world feminism (which are closely related to Asian and African feminism). These varieties of feminisms have come under the influence of ideologies like postcolonial feminism, which emphasizes not only colonial domination and marginalization of colonized women by Western feminists, but also the ability of the colonized to remain active and articulate within this framework.

Postmodern feminists argue that sex and gender are socially constructed, that there is no homogeneity in women's experiences because their cultures and histories are varied and that terms like gender, feminism and politics are too limiting. In a different vein the poststructuralist feminists believe that it is this difference which is one of the most powerful tools that women have, especially if it is combined with the various intellectual currents. Even opinion on the role of men is divided- according to some, men are also oppressed by gender roles while others consider men as agents of oppression, or complicit in fashioning sexist ideologies and practices. Contrary to common beliefs, most feminists are not rabid 'man-haters', indeed many of them have cordial social and personal relationships with men. The characterization of feminists as aggressively anti-men is, some feminists argue, a means of discrediting feminists and the feminist movement. In our day to day interactions at home we may notice examples of 'feminism' being discredited on one pretext or the other. For instance when a young girl wants to leave home or go out for some vocation or for a job or for higher studies and gets adamant about fulfilling her dreams she is often accused as being under the influence of feminism or the new trends that have plagued the modern society. But when the very same girl earns a livelihood for the whole family and goes out to do so she is encouraged.

Why? There is a lot of contradiction involved in the society and its regulations which are dominated by men and are modeled on patriarchy. Similarly, there are attempts to control women's reproductive rights and choices. Women are, at times, forced to abort female fetus and go for a male child in keeping with the wishes of the husband's family whereas for a mother it makes no difference if the child is a boy or a girl. Many such instances may be recalled from our surroundings that we encounter daily. There are also instances of oppression of men in the name of gender roles. In dowry cases or in cases of violence against women at times men are falsely implicated. More recently there are several cases where the law against dowry is misused by the wife to extract monetary gains or to extricate her from the bond of marriage. All this happens at times at the instigation of her parental family. Here the role of law becomes very important and proper discrimination is required so that injustice is not perpetrated.

7.7 FEMINIST THEORY, FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Most feminist theories have been generated based on the experiences of women, and have evolved through women's movements. Feminist theories form the main plank of women's studies which is spread over a variety of disciplines. These included history, geography, anthropology, sociology, art history, psychoanalysis, economics, science, literature, philosophy and theology apart from media, film and music.

The demands made by women's movements included the right to vote, to own property, reproductive or health rights and the right over their own bodies. They laid emphasis on the fundamental right to equality in every field of life and from this emerged the issue of equal pay for equal work, equal opportunity for careers, and opposition of oppression, patriarchy, domestic violence and sexual harassment. Initially beginning in the Western countries, the movement for female rights spread far and wide and this has led to the development of a variety of feminisms all over the world.

Both the concept of feminism and the idea of a women's movement are closely intertwined, so much so that they nourish each other and also depend on each other for their growth. Feminist ideology has been, and continues to be, in the forefront of the women's movements. Women's struggles have all been issue-based and changed from time to time, depending on the position of women at a given time and place. For example, the issue of suffrage was one of the first issues to be taken up by the women's movement at a global level. Of course there were other equally inflammable matters like sati, widow remarriage, age of marriage, purdah, and the social and economic inequality between men and women, but the question of suffrage became a political issue since its very inception and hence it became all the more important (see the previous unit on Suffrage in this block).

Feminist thinking has been associated with various dominant political theories at different stages. For many decades, the categorization of feminism usually followed the differences in the ideological positions of its major proponents and the issues prioritized by them- thus, radicals, liberals, Marxists, socialists etc. However, over time, these lines became increasingly blurred and historians of feminism followed different principles of classification, causing a great deal of confusion regarding nomenclature. On the whole, Radical feminism believed that patriarchy was the main cause of women's oppression and so a total restructuring of the society was necessary. They also do not absolve capitalism, (since it is based on patriarchal structures), but see patriarchy as more 'fundamental' and pre-dating capitalism. Liberal feminists aimed at the equality of men and women through reform without altering the structure of society. While socialist feminists found a link between the oppression of women and their exploitation and labour, Marxist feminists felt that the end of class oppression would lead to the end of gender oppression too. There are several other approaches to the 'woman question', which suggest various alternatives, for example, cultural feminism, anarchist feminism and separatist feminism, to name a few. In the next section, you will get a closer look at varieties of feminism in the west and in India.

7.8 WESTERN FEMINISMS

It is generally believed that feminism first appeared in the 19th century. In the second half of the 19th century state sponsored social reforms were being carried out in Europe. In the backdrop of industrialization, liberalism and growing national consciousness, the domestic policies of most of the European states were influenced by these forces. In the years after the 1880's various progressive steps were engendered by state governments like universal manhood suffrage, expansion of the popular press, acts and laws to regulate factory hours and working conditions. But they fell short of fulfilling the needs and demands of most workers. The long economic depression that began in 1873 and lasted well into the 1890s added to social and political tensions in almost every country. Many feminists contended that social reforms would be inadequate as long as women were without the right to enter universities or vote. Thus, the suffrage movement took shape and forged ahead with the demand for voting rights for all adult women. Gradually the movement grew strong and drew within its fold various other issues of concern for women. This process of gradual undulation of women's demands is known as 'waves' of the women's movement. Let us now take a closer look at the notion of the three waves of Western women's movements, as they have been identified by scholars.

7.9 EVOLUTION OF THE THREE WAVES OF FEMINISM

Scholars have divided the history of Western feminism into three 'waves'. The first wave in the 19th and early 20th century primarily focused on women's voting rights.

The second wave refers to the women's liberation movement which began in the 1960's and was concerned with the legal and social equality of women. The third wave, beginning in the 1990's, builds on the apparent failures of second wave and tries to address them.

The concept of waves is not used to describe/analyse feminism in the Indian context. Given the significance of the colonial situation when the women's movement first emerged and its close association with anti-colonial struggles, the term 'feminism' did not gain much currency in the women's movement's self-description in that period. In a later period, after Independence, women were engaged on multiple political fronts. Thus, the term 'women's movement' is more commonly used in the Indian context.

It will be correct to say that even though the word feminism came to be used in the 19th century, the concept came into existence much earlier. As you have already learned in Unit 1 of Block 1, feminist writings first appeared in the 15th century with Christine de Pizan, Margaret Cavendish, Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft. Feminism got a boost and emerged by the 19th century in 'waves,' as noted above, especially in the US and UK.

The **first wave** of the feminist movement in the United States began in the 1840's as women opposed to slavery, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, drew parallels between the oppression of African Americans and the oppression of women. They also sought equality in property rights and changes in the marriage relationship. They are mostly known for their efforts for suffrage or voting rights for women. The Seneca Falls convention began the social movement by which women finally won the right to vote in 1920. But other disadvantages persisted, and a second wave of feminism arose in the 1960s and continues today. Sometimes also referred to as the women's liberation movement,

The **second wave** focused on the discrimination of women, and on cultural, social and political issues. Some of the most influential works of the second wave are. *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (which was actually published in 1949 but gained its popularity during this time), *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan and *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett. The second wave has often been accused of catering to the needs of the upper middle-class white women and, sometimes, of biological essentialism.

Much of the scholarship on second-wave feminism has focused on divisions within the women's movement and its narrow conception of race and class. Feminists in the 1960s and 1970s also formed many strong partnerships, often allying themselves with a diverse range of social justice efforts on a local grassroots level. There were coalitions and alliances in which feminists and other activists joined forces to address

crucial social justice issues such as reproductive rights, the peace movement, women's health, Christianity and other religions, and neighborhood activism, as well as alliances crossing boundaries of race, class, political views, and sexual identity.

Beginning in the late 1960s, women's health became a primary concern of feminist activists throughout Canada. Women's liberationists located in Vancouver were particularly active. In 1970, members of the Vancouver Women's Caucus organized an Abortion Caravan that traveled across the country in the name of women's rights to accessible abortion on demand. The following year, the women of the Vancouver Women's Health Collective came together to imagine and create new feminist options for women's health care, including the operation of a women-run clinic (Hewitt, 2009). In the 20th century, two names stand out in terms of their originality. Simone de Beauvoir of *The Second Sex* fame (1949) and Germaine Greer who wrote *The Female Eunuch* (1970). The latter, like the former, is a monumental work. Both are works of piercing subjectivity, literary feats of self-description whose status becomes over time, ever more artistic and less political. Germaine Greer is the daughter, not the originator, of feminist culture, and she and her work are part of the 'second wave' of feminism. Greer believes that women can change their saga if they so wish to *or* they may change their lives for the better.

Third-wave feminism, begun in the 1980s or early 1990s, addressed feminism across class and race lines and has been grounded in culture rather than biology. Postmodernist feminists, with their interrogation of fixed categories like 'women' and 'gender', belong to the third wave. In the west, some people also refer to a contemporary 'post-feminist' era, which is based on the belief that the main agendas of feminist movements have already been met through an egalitarian society which offers equal rights and opportunities to men and women. However, there has been a groundswell of strong opposition to such assumptions as most third wave feminists continue to struggle in an unequal world. This is especially true in India, to which we will turn in the next section.

7.10 INDIAN FEMINISM

Women, increasingly aware of their rights and duties, helped in the formation of the first women's movement in India. The use of the word 'feminism' in the Indian context was still peripheral although its impact was being felt all over the country thus leading to the birth of the women's movement. More specifically, in the political context, women were increasingly making their presence felt by way of participation in the movement for national freedom. Women's struggle, the world over, has been marked by the efforts of the 'second sex' in dealing with the various material and non-material inequalities and hierarchies that have affected women's lives across time and space, such as those related to class, gender, 'race', caste, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, education, age or health. Women have, since ages, challenged or fought

these inequalities through different types of politics and activism in the public sphere and through individual actions and forms of resistance in the so called 'private sphere'. Like the women's movement elsewhere, the movement in India may also be divided into three phases, if not waves.

The first phase began in the second half of the 19th century when socio religious reforms prompted women's upliftment and gender equality. The second phase begins in the 1920s, when organized efforts were made to take up women's issues. This phase also coincided with the nationalist movement and at times both appeared to merge. Women were also being gradually initiated into feminism. The role played by women leaders and women's organizations also constituted a new feature of this period. The third phase started after independence, more specifically in the 1960's, when in the years after independence, the task of nation-building began. Another phase, the fourth one, has been identified by scholars of women's studies, beginning with the 21st century, when women's issues became more diverse and connected with movements against other forms of inequality and subordination.

7.11 POST- INDEPENDENCE SCENARIO: INDIAN CONTEXT

Like Western Europe and the United States, India too saw a feminist movement in the early twentieth century and like them it gradually waned after gaining certain demands. Later, a new feminist movement developed which brought together the contemporary radical movements. The sixties and early seventies saw the development of a whole spate of radical movements in India, from student uprisings, workers' agitations and peasant insurgencies to tribal, anti caste and consumer action movements. These spanned a political spectrum from Gandhian-socialist (that is, nonviolent protest based on explicitly moral values, over specific working or living conditions); to the far left, in particular, the Maoists. The Gandhian-socialists initiated several of the first women's movements in post-Independence India. These included an anti-alcohol agitation in north India, a consumer action and anti-corruption agitation in western India, and a women's trade union, also in western India.

Interestingly, however, neither they, nor others, looked upon these movements as feminist, nor did they advance any theories of women's oppression. These were advanced first by two woman's groups which were formed in 1975, both of which grew out of the Maoist far left. The Progressive Organization of Women (POW) in Hyderabad offered an Engelsian analysis of women's subordination, and the League of Women Soldiers for Equality, in Aurangabad, linked feminism and anti-casteism, saying that religious texts were used to subordinate both women and the lower castes. Although the imposition of a State of Emergency on India in 1975 led to a break in most agitational activities, there was, in many ways, an intensification of theoretical discussion. In 1977, when the Emergency was lifted, several women's groups had developed out of these discussions which were able to come 'overground', and

several new groups were also formed. Most of these groups were based in the major cities, such as Bombay (Mumbai), Delhi, Madras (Chennai), Poona (Pune), Patna and Ahmedabad. Though there was no particular uniformity between them, their members were largely drawn from the urban educated middle class, and this was an important reason for their feeling that their own needs were minor, and different from the needs of the large, and poor, majority of Indian women.

These women's groups comprised women from different sections of the far left, and there was, at this time, considerable debate on the class basis of women's oppression, the road to women's liberation, and the role that they themselves could play in this. Historically, the experience of the Maoist insurgency of the late sixties and its repression and disintegration in the early seventies, had led many to believe that a revolutionary transformation of society could only come into being if different oppressed groups, such as tribal's, subordinate castes and women, first organized and represented themselves, and then coalesced to fight their common enemies. The question facing the women's groups, therefore, was how women could organize and represent themselves. The general feeling was that the primary role of middle-class groups, such as their own, was to generate a consciousness of women's oppression not only among women but among workers, tribal's and others. Broadly speaking, two different views were expressed right from the beginning and continue to be representative even now. The first view holds that socialist feminists should join trade unions and revolutionary mass organizations while continuing to be members of autonomous women's groups. The former were seen as activist forums and the latter as forums for the development of socialist-feminist theory. The second view professed the spread of these activities more spontaneously. It implied that once a feminist movement began, it would naturally spread and grow in multiple ways. The two positions were neither as abstract nor as crude as they sound. By and large, those holding the first had been, or were, active in radical and far left, organizations. They felt that these organizations contained space for the raising of feminist demands. The others had not been, or were not then, involved in such organizations. They felt that negotiating within them would yield small gains compared to those won by an independent women's movement which, through its very existence, would force political organizations to take note of it. In the event, most of the women's groups were sufficiently open to allow both views to coexist within them. They developed links with far left, working-class, tribal and anticaste organizations, campaigned around specific issues, and debated and disseminated theories of women's oppression. In the early years, however, campaigns were relatively sporadic and minor compared to the pace of theoretical activity. Most of the groups remained fairly loose until the beginning of the eighties - so few even named themselves that at the first socialist-feminist conference in Bombay in 1978, their main identification was regional - as the 'Bombay group', the 'Delhi group', and so on.

By 1979-80, women's groups and campaigns had started all over India, and ranged from protesting dowry murders and police rape to unionizing women workers, domestics and slum-dwellers. The campaigns against dowry murders and police rape were in fact what 'launched' the women's movement, for it was these that caught the attention of the press and became public issues. The campaign against dowry murders started in Delhi in 1979. This was the first time that dowry deaths, hitherto regarded as suicide, were called murders and they also involved bride burning. It was also the first time that the private sphere of the family was invaded, and held to be a major site for the oppression of women. The public/private dichotomy was broken by groups of women demonstrating outside the houses and offices of those who were responsible for dowry deaths within their families, and demanding the intervention of both state and civil society. Interestingly, feminists were joined by local residents and within some months of the campaign, groups of residents and professionals also began, independently, to make similar protests.

Indian feminists discovered the ironic process whereby an agitation gained numerical strength by being joined by political blocs, but at the same time found itself constrained, intellectually, morally and strategically, by them. By the early eighties, therefore, the women's movement had grown in such a way that autonomous feminist groups were only one of its several currents.

Parties of all colours joined the movement, the socialist and communist parties were becoming increasingly active, as were the older, hitherto quiet, women's organizations. At the same time an interest in women began to be shown by diverse groups and radical movements. The socialists had actually formed a women's organization in 1977, which was affiliated to the newly formed and elected Janata Party, but between 1978 and 1980 their activities were fairly low-key and they were for that period marginalized by the feminists. The Communist Party of India had had a women's front from the late fifties, which had dwindled into inactivity. It was galvanized only in 1980-81, when the Party saw that women could again become an important constituency. The Marxists also noted the potential of the women's movement at this juncture, and formed two women's organizations in 1981, one of which was affiliated to their trade union. The first attempt to organize women's trade unions had been made in 1972, when the Self-Employed Women's Association, a kind of Gandhian socialist union of women vendors, was formed in Ahmedabad. By the late seventies SEWA had expanded, and to the union were added several craft co-operatives in and around Ahmedabad. In the eighties they had branches all over the country.

Working-class women's organizations which were set up in the late seventies or early eighties were formed of women belonging to different streams, tended to be different from SEWA. They, too, maintained a distance from the feminists as the issues they handled differed. They did not wish to expose their constituencies to the struggle for

power which was being waged in the feminist movement. Perhaps it was for these reasons that the efforts to reach out made by feminist groups in the eighties took the form of neighbourhood rather than workplace politics, with groups of women working in urban slum areas and mobilizing women in campaigns for better water facilities, drainage, and so on. Interest in feminist ideas was meanwhile growing in the radical socialist student movement, which had spearheaded a consumer cum antistate agitation in Gujarat in the mid seventies, and had waged a campaign for land redistribution in one district of Bihar in the late seventies.

By this stage the Indian feminist movement was a multiplicity of organizations and activities. In spreading it had undergone a process of fragmentation which is common enough to all movements but which affected the feminists in a particular way. As a credo, it is believed that feminism was based on the need for personal solidarity. This led many feminists to question the very basis of feminism. Whereas earlier a certain commonality of women's experience was stressed, as a point at which political differences could be transcended, it was now felt that differences could not be subsumed in this way, and that the quest for unity was not only futile but also counterproductive, for it allowed all sorts of evils to be glossed over. This affected the movement in various ways. A new element could be seen in the links between feminism and environmental, ecological, health, radical science, anti-communal and anti-caste movements which appeared to be multiplying and strengthening all over the country, and which led to new theoretical developments within the movement, as well as new forms of action.

7.12 SUMMARY

This unit has given you a broad overview of the emergence of feminism in the western and the Indian contexts. Though feminism has its origin in the women's movement of the west, the concept of equality and consciousness of rights could well be internalized in the changing context of Indian's political, economic, and social spheres. Does feminism have a future or has it served its purpose? The answer lies in the very emergence of various types of 'new' feminisms over a period of time, and in different historical, cultural and political contexts. This phenomenon shows that so long as the problems of women persist, feminism will remain relevant.

7.13 EXERCISES

1. Define feminism and discuss the origin of the concept of new feminism.
2. Is feminism a movement? Explain it with suitable examples.
3. How does feminism deal with the women's question? Discuss.
4. Compare and contrast the evolution of feminism in the west and in India.

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UNIT-8 FEMINIST & POSTMODERN

Structure

- 8.1 Objective
- 8.2 Introduction
- 8.3 Post-Modern Feminism
- 8.4 Postmodern Positions Adopted By Different French Feminist Class Theorists.
- 8.5 Origins of Postmodern Feminism's and Theory
- 8.6 Critiques of Postmodern Feminism
- 8.7 Summary
- 8.9 Exercises
- 8.10 References

8.1 OBJECTIVE

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Describe the postmodern views on feminism.
- Explain French feminist Class theories
- Different critique of postmodern feminism
- Define postmodern theory

8.2 INTRODUCTION

We are living in the so called modern or by some standards post-modern world, which is based upon the ideology of egalitarianism and universality but try and look around and you will find lots of examples that are contrary to the general conception about this 21st century. We are still carrying the burden of traditional divided society which was based primarily on ascribed statuses that ensured the place of a person in a particular community, caste or group by virtue of her birth in that particular group. Prejudice and discriminatory attitude is something that has not changed much over a period of time. This is true even in the case of & Approaches to the Study of Gender, gender discrimination which is a manifestation of patriarchal mindset and ideology that stops short of calling this century a truly modern one. While penning down this unit, there is a debate going on in electronic and print media about the issue of male dominance and patriarchy. Cases in point are the recent molestation of a girl by a mob

in Gwahati, Assam and pronouncement of patriarchal diktats by khap or caste panchayats in Uttar Pradesh. In Baghpat district of Uttar Pradesh, a caste panchayat announced that the women of the village will not carry mobile phones with them and their movement in and around the village will be monitored and restricted. Similarly in Assam a girl was molested by a mob publically and in full view of the media. These incidents also highlighted the insensitivity and callous attitude of some agencies that were supposed to be the custodians of women rights. This brings us to the point where we should understand and rethink about how our society is structured in a manner that is biased towards the male members and overlook the rights and privileges of women.

Sometimes the state apparatus also behaves and is structured in such a way as to promote male dominance. One can look at the example of Hindu Succession Act, 1956 which was amended in 2005 but still contains provisions that are in favour of women's husband's family. This act relates with the succession of property. It is stated in the act that the self-acquired property of a women who dies without writing her will and in the absence of her husband and children will belong to her husband's family and not to her parents. This is a clear reflection of the societal and traditional norm where a woman after marriage is considered to be a member of her in-laws family and not to her natal family. Similarly in a marriage alliance a woman is not considered as an equal partner in marital property or husband's property acquired after marriage. This inequality devalues her contribution towards the marital property in terms of her labour that she provides under the rubrics of house-keeping and as a primary care giver to her children and husband (Singh, 2012; Rao 2008; Pal 2004). Beside these examples there are other more visible instances like sex-selective abortions that indicate towards a generalised discriminatory attitude towards women. These examples also reflect a patriarchal mind-set and male dominance.

8.3 POST-MODERN FEMINISM

The post- modern concern with multiple voices, the lack of a master narrative and an exploration of social practices and their impact on the subject are just some of the areas of shared interest with feminist theories.

Post-modern feminism leans heavily on social constructivist theories arguing that gender is a construct of language, or discourse. Judith Butler argues for this position in *Gender Trouble* (1990), while Luce Irigaray argues that the 'feminine' is constructed largely as the 'other' of masculine. Both draw heavily from the earlier work of Simone de Beauvoir, who was the first to spell out the processes by which women were constructed as *The Second Sex*, which was also the title of her path-breaking text on gender in society.

Criticising the Essentialist position, Butler argues that bodies as well as dispositions may be socially constructed. This contests the basis of the Essentialist position that sex is biologically determined but gender is socially constructed. Further, post-

modern arguments highlight the centrality of language to human experience. Feminists argue that the balance of power in the real world is mirrored in the way experience is structured by language in the discursive world. Thus, the inequality of genders begins at the moment we enter language in order to express our experience. Feminists further argue that the evolution of language over time suggests that it may be reshaped to overcome these dis-balances. Thus, this brand of feminism sees language as a location for political struggle.

The shared principle among post-modern feminists is the assertion that the use of language involves an acceptance of a certain structure. This structure is predicated on a gendered binary value system where the female is the other. It is this calling into question of the structure of language that also makes them Post-structuralist feminists.

8.4 POSTMODERN POSITIONS ADOPTED BY DIFFERENT FRENCH FEMINIST CLASS THEORISTS.

Helene Cixous argues for a difference in the very structure of male and female writing. Male writing has more binary oppositions and linear structure, while female writing has non-linear, lateral structure. She links these patterns to female sexuality and to an experience of the world through the particularities of women's bodies. Inviting women to "write the body". She calls for experimentation with feminine writing or "écriture féminine". Encouraging women's voices will allow more such expressions of language and these will eventually expand the discourse in new directions.

Luce Irigaray uses tools from psychoanalysis to argue that the female subject enters the world through a language in which it sees itself as the other. To make this language gender neutral in structure, the experiences of the female body, both sexual and otherwise must be articulated, by women. This language will return the sense of 'self' to the woman who only experiences her own 'otherness' in gendered language.

Julia Kristeva accepts that language is structured as a binary, but rejects the idea of man and woman being aligned with the 'masculine' and the 'feminine'. She argues that the idea of making language gender neutral by articulating women's experiences links 'feminine' to the biological woman; the biological woman however, is more than the discourse and is also constantly in flux. Thus, to identify the differences in terms of gender is to merely reproduce the structure of existing language. She argues that the existing structure 'represses' some experiences of the subject in being unable to articulate them. To express these repressed experiences would be to break out of the binary structure of language.

Monique Wittig rejects all notions of an inherently feminine writing. She argues that "one is a writer, or one is not" (Wittig, 1978, p.103-111). Thus she suggests that in language, one may articulate oneself free of one's sex. For Wittig however, the category 'woman' exists only in its relation to 'man'. She asserts a Universalist

position suggesting that gender categories may be abolished altogether. In her work *The Straight Mind* (1980), she argues that lesbians may not be called women in the way she defines it, as they step outside the heterosexual domain, which is the key arena for their identification as women- i.e. in relation to a man. Rather than target patriarchy in general, Wittig argues that heterosexual norms guiding society create the oppression of individuals.

Post-modern Feminists argue that the dominant representations of women are not reflections of an unchangeable- biologically given 'nature'. In fact women learn this mode of behaviour through their use of language. They further argue that the language itself determines the limits of the representations of women.

Postmodern feminism is a mix of post structuralism, postmodernism, and French feminism. The goal of postmodern feminism is to destabilize the patriarchal norms entrenched in society that has led to gender inequality. Postmodern feminists seek to accomplish this goal through rejecting essentialism, philosophy, and universal truths in favor of embracing the differences that exist amongst women to demonstrate that not all women are the same. These ideologies are rejected by postmodern feminists because they believe if a universal truth is applied to all woman of society, it minimizes individual experience, hence they warn women to be aware of ideas displayed as the norm in society since it may stem from masculine notions of how women should be portrayed.

Postmodern feminists seek to analyze any notions that have led to gender inequality in society. Postmodern feminists analyze these notions and attempt to promote equality of gender through critiquing logocentrism, supporting multiple discourses, deconstructing texts, and seeking to promote subjectivity. Postmodern feminists are accredited with drawing attention to dichotomies in society and demonstrating how language influences the difference in treatment of genders.

The inclusion of postmodern theory into feminist theory is not readily accepted by all feminists, some believe postmodern thought undermines the attacks that feminist theory attempts to create, while other feminists are in favor of the union. For this reason, postmodernism and feminism have always had an uneasy relationship.

8.5 ORIGINS OF POSTMODERN FEMINISM'S AND THEORY

Butler

Postmodern feminism's major departure from other branches of feminism is perhaps the argument that sex, or at least gender, is itself constructed through language, a view notably propounded in Judith Butler's 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*. She draws on and critiques the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan, as well as on Luce Irigaray's argument that what we conventionally regard as 'feminine' is only a reflection of what is constructed as masculine.

Butler criticises the distinction drawn by previous feminisms between (biological) sex and (socially constructed) gender. She asks why we assume that material things (such as the body) are not subject to processes of social construction themselves. Butler argues that this does not allow for a sufficient criticism of essentialism: though recognizing that gender is a social construct, feminists assume it is always constructed in the same way. Her argument implies that women's subordination has no single cause or single solution; postmodern feminism is thus criticized for offering no clear path to action. Butler herself rejects the term "postmodernism" as too vague to be meaningful.

Paula Moya argues that Butler derives this rejection to postmodernism from misreadings of Cherríe Moraga's work. "She reads Moraga's statement that 'the danger lies in ranking the oppressions' to mean that we have no way of adjudicating among different kinds of oppressions that any attempt to casually relate or hierarchize the varieties of oppressions people suffer constitutes an imperializing, colonizing, or totalizing gesture that renders the effort invalid...thus, although Butler at first appears to have understood the critiques of women who have been historically precluded from occupying the position of the 'subject' of feminism, it becomes clear that their voices have been merely instrumental to her" (Moya, 790) Moya contends that because Butler feels that the varieties of oppressions cannot be summarily ranked, that they cannot be ranked at all; and takes a short-cut by throwing out the idea of not only postmodernism, but women in general.

Mary Joe Frug Frug

Mary Joe Frug suggested that one "principle" of postmodernism is that human experience is located "inescapably within language". Power is exercised not only through direct coercion, but also through the way in which language shapes and restricts our reality. She also stated that because language is always open to re-interpretation, it can also be used to resist this shaping and restriction, and so is a potentially fruitful site of political struggle.

Frug's second postmodern principle is that sex is not something natural, nor is it something completely determinate and definable. Rather, sex is part of a system of meaning, produced by language. Frug argues that "cultural mechanisms ... encode the female body with meanings" and that these cultural mechanisms then go on explain these meanings "by an appeal to the 'natural' differences between the sexes, differences that the rules themselves help to produce".

French feminism

French feminism as it is known today is an Anglo-American invention coined by Alice Jardine to be a section in a larger movement of postmodernism in France during

the 1980s. This included the theorizing of the failure of the modernist project, along with its departure. More specifically for feminism, it meant returning to the debate of sameness and difference. The term was further defined by Toril Moi, an academic with a focus on feminist theory, in her book *Sexual/Textual Politics*. In this book she further defined French feminism to only include a few authors such as H  l  ne Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, while also creating a distinction between French feminism and Anglo-American Feminism. She states that the difference between the two is that Anglo-American feminists want to find a "woman-centered perspective" and a woman identity since they were not given the chance to have one in the past. French Feminists believe there is no identity for a woman but that "the feminine can be identified where difference and otherness are found." Elaine Marks, an academic in the field of Women's Studies, noted another difference between French and American feminists. French feminists, specifically radical feminists, criticized and attacked the systems that benefit men, along with widespread misogyny as a whole, more intensely than their American counterparts. Through American academics contriving their own concept of French feminism, it separated and ignored the already marginalized self-identifying feminists, while focusing on the women theorists associated with *Psych et po* (*Psychanalyse et politique*) and other academics who did not always identify as feminists themselves. This division ultimately ended up placing more importance on the theories of the French feminists than the political agenda and goals that groups such as radical feminists and the Movement for a New Society (women's liberation movement) had at the time.

8.6 CRITIQUES OF POSTMODERN FEMINISM

There have been many critiques of postmodern feminism since it originated in the 1990s. Most of the criticism has been from modernists and feminists supporting modernist thought. They have put a focus on the themes of relativism and nihilism as defined by postmodernism. Though modernist critics believe more importantly, that through abandoning the values of Enlightenment thought, postmodern feminism "precludes the possibility of liberating political action." This concern can be seen in critics like Meaghan Morris, who have argued that postmodern feminism runs the risk of undercutting the basis of a politics of action based upon gender difference, through its very anti-essentialism. Alison Assiter published the book *Enlightened Women* to critique postmodernists and postmodern feminists alike, saying that there should be a return to Enlightenment values and modernist feminism. Gloria Steinem has also criticized feminist theory, and especially postmodernist feminist theory, as being overly academic, where discourse that is full of jargon and inaccessible is helpful to no one.

8.7 SUMMARY

This unit has given you a broad overview of the emergence of post modern feminism in the western and the Indian contexts. Though feminism has its origin in the women's movement of the west, the concept of equality and consciousness of rights could well be internalized in the changing context of Indian's political, economic, and social spheres. Does feminism have a future or has it served its purpose? The answer lies in the very emergence of various types of 'new' feminisms over a period of time, and in different historical, cultural and political contexts. This phenomenon shows that so long as the problems of women persist, feminism will remain relevant.

8.9 EXERCISES

1. What is postmodern feminism?
2. Explain the Origins of Postmodern Feminism's
3. What is French feminism
4. What Are The Different Critiques Of Postmodern Feminism?

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UNIT-09 MODERNISM & POST MODERNISM

Structure

- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 Introduction
- 9.3 Characteristics of Modern Period
- 9.4 Postmodernism
- 9.5 Postmodernism Perspective
- 9.6 Contributions of Postmodernism
- 9.7 Limitations of Postmodernism
- 9.8 Summary
- 9.9 Exercises
- 9.10 References

9.1 OBJECTIVE

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Describe the modernism and postmodernism views on feminism.
- Explain characteristics of modernism
- Different perspective on postmodernism
- Define postmodernism contribution and its limitation

9.2 INTRODUCTION

Modernism is both a philosophical movement and an art movement that, along with cultural trends and changes, arose from wide-scale and far-reaching transformations in Western society during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Among the factors that shaped modernism were the development of modern industrial societies and the rapid growth of cities, followed then by reactions of horror to World War I. Modernism also rejected the certainty of Enlightenment thinking, and many modernists rejected religious belief.

Modernism, in general, includes the activities and creations of those who felt the traditional forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, philosophy, social organization, activities of daily life, and sciences, were becoming ill-fitted to their tasks and outdated in the new economic, social, and political environment of an emerging fully industrialized world. The poet Ezra Pound's 1934 injunction to "Make

it new!" was the touchstone of the movement's approach towards what it saw as the now obsolete culture of the past. In this spirit, its innovations, like the stream-of-consciousness novel, atonal (or pantonal) and twelve-tone music, divisionist painting and abstract art, all had precursors in the 19th century.

A notable characteristic of modernism is self-consciousness and irony concerning literary and social traditions, which often led to experiments with form, along with the use of techniques that drew attention to the processes and materials used in creating a painting, poem, building, etc. Modernism explicitly rejected the ideology of realism and made use of the works of the past by the employment of reprise, incorporation, rewriting, recapitulation, revision and parody

9.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN PERIOD

The modern period is roughly the period lasting from the sixteenth century A.D. up to the middle of the twentieth century the last four hundred years or so. This period is marked by a strong confidence in reason, particularly scientific reason. Knowledge obtained through "scientific" methods was considered more reliable and higher than other forms of knowledge.

According to postmodern thinkers, the modern period is marked by these characteristics: rationality, dualism, the search for absolute knowledge, belief in progress, pride of place given to science, a centre-periphery division of cultures and nations. Here is a short explanation of each of these traits:

Rationality: A good model of the centrality of reason would be the philosophy of Descartes. For him and other rationalists, the surest and the most evident certainties came through reason. Reason is the highest arbiter of truths. There is nothing we cannot explore through reason. Reason was seen as more reliable and less biased than ordinary experience or religious dogma. Descartes, Kant, Leibnitz, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel would be typical representatives of this modern way of thinking.

Dualism: Reality was seen as divided into the world of reason or spirit, and the world of matter. Of the two, the rational was seen as superior to the realm of matter. Human beings, too, were seen as made of up the dual elements of matter and spirit, which were very different from one another. One of the philosophical problems that would grip many thinkers discuss is the mind-body problem. How can my thinking or decision, for instance, move my hand?

The possibility of, and the search for, absolute knowledge: Descartes and Kant in particular tried to establish unshakable foundations for their philosophy. Their belief or claim was that absolute knowledge was possible. What was needed was to develop a right methodology to discover it. When discovered, such truth would be absolutely

valid and unassailable; it would be true for everyone, everywhere, irrespective of the conditions or times.

Belief in Progress: Belief in reason led moderns to believe in unlimited progress. Sigmund Freud, for instance, would speak of reason as “our real God.” He held that all problems could be solved by reason. If we do not have a solution today, human reason will discover the solution tomorrow. Moderns saw history as progression. The diseases which we cannot heal today will be treated by medicines which we will invent tomorrow.

In social and political areas, too, moderns were optimists. A hundred years ago, that is, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of intellectuals and political leaders believed that there would be no more wars, since countries could now communicate with each other easily, and settle disputes rationally. Moderns, in this sense, were optimists about the future. Things were expected to get better and better. *Science as supreme:* Modern thinkers generally accepted scientific knowledge and technology as the paradigm of knowledge or as the most perfect type of knowledge.

The main tool for unlimited progress was science. Science, many moderns believed, will solve most of our problems and make our individual and social lives safer, more comfortable and better in every way. Compared to pre-modern times, the modern world seemed to have been so much better off, in every way. To be modern meant to believe in science and recognize its superiority. All other ways of knowing were considered somehow inferior to scientific learning. This belief in science and technology was at times taken to absurd lengths. In one well-known tragic instance, when the Titanic was built, it was considered unsinkable; the ship did not, therefore, carry enough life boats.

Centre and periphery: Most of this progress and scientific advancement took place in one particular part of the world, namely, the area we refer to as the “West,” that is, Western Europe and North America, together with other nations where Europeans settled in large numbers, like, Australia and New Zealand. The average Westerner was proud of being white and richer than the rest of the world. Western culture considered itself as not only richer than other parts of the world, but as racially and culturally superior. They saw themselves as the “centre” and the rest of the world as “periphery.” In the colonized countries, such as India, they managed to influence a good number of the local people, too, to see Western culture as inherently superior and their own cultures as inferior. This cultural arrogance was used to justify colonization. Instead of seeing it as the economic and cultural exploitation of the rest of the world in extremely unjust ways, it was presented as a civilizing process. Many non-European nations were conquered and exploited by European nations, which became extremely wealthy in the process, while reducing old civilizations like India to extreme penury.

Thus, the centre-periphery contrast was not just a philosophical notion; it had deep economic and political repercussions.

Some call this the *Enlightenment Project*, linking these traits to the European Enlightenment Period, when reason was accepted as the supreme norm in society. People believed that the best way to discover the truth and to organize society was reason (and not, for instance, religious doctrine). Thus, the modern European nations are not organized around a religious dogma or sacred texts, but around reason. The French Revolution and the French Constitution (which, in its turn, influenced the American Constitution, as well as the Indian Constitution) are examples of this way of thinking. People believed that human reason is the best tool for solving human problems. They took a clear stand that was different from, and often in opposition to, pre-modern ways of thinking, which they considered outdated and obscurantist.

9.4 POSTMODERNISM

Introduction

Postmodernism is commonly understood to have emerged from a politics of the left. But when the concept was first used, postmodernism had a traditionalist meaning. It was a reaction to political, cultural and artistic movements whose perceived extremes were understood to be symptomatic of the cultural decline of the West. The first reference to postmodernism can be found in the year 1926 in the work of Bernard Iddings Bell entitled *Postmodernism and Other Essays*. Bell's postmodernism embodied ideas he believed to be superior to those associated with the modern era, such as the modern faith in the power of reason to free the human spirit from bondage arising out of ignorance and prejudice. Postmodern ideas would supersede modern ones. And they characterized the era that would follow on from the modern age; they defined the post-modern age. When Bell spoke of postmodernism, he referred to something that was both ideological and historical. It was a body of ideas and a new epoch. Bell considered postmodernism to be an intelligent alternative to the two rival ideologies that dominated Western Societies in the 1920's; ideologies that, regardless of their fundamental differences, shared values that he believed made them quintessentially modern.

9.5 POSTMODERNISM PERSPECTIVE

Political theory has been enriched with multiple approaches and traditions that tend to analyse and understand politics in different and often contradictory ways. Each of these approaches has certain core premises and postulates that define its identity. However, each of them is also extremely variegated and sometimes informed by the other traditions. This paper is a broad overview of postmodernist approaches/traditions in political theory.

Social 'science' was subject to criticism in the 60s and 70s. While some critics challenged positivism in social sciences, others critiqued the unifying and objectivist paradigm of science itself (see Siedman 1992). Since the 1980s, postmodernism has been a significant influence in social sciences including political theory. Steven Seidman and David Wagner (1992: 2) explain postmodernism in social sciences as thus:

In the social sciences, postmodernism describes the critique of the modernist project to ground and unify the social sciences. In its critique of modernist social science, postmodernists reconsider the relationship between scientific knowledge, power and society as well as the relation between science, critique, and narrative.

The postmodern critique therefore underlines destabilizing the unity of humanity, the individual as the centre of history and society, idea of universal Truth and the belief in social progress intrinsic to Enlightenment (see Seidman 1994:1). "This "postmodern" knowledge contests disciplinary boundaries, the separation of science, literature, and ideology, and the division between knowledge and power" (ibid: 2).

Jane Bennett (2004: 46) refers to three usages of postmodernism in contemporary times: (1) as a sociological designation for an epochal shift in the way collective life is organized (from centralized and hierarchical control towards a network structure); (2) as an aesthetic genre (literature that experiments with non-linear narration, a playful architecture of mixed styles, an appreciation of popular culture that complicates the distinction between high and low); (3) as a set of philosophical critiques of teleological and/or rationalist conceptions of nature, history, power, freedom, and subjectivity.

Bennett argues that postmodernism refers to all the above in political theory but more intensively the third meaning. At its most basic level, postmodernism is opposed to metanarratives, totalities and grand theories. In that sense, many postmodern thinkers refute the idea of theory itself, for theories are grand narratives (Butler, in Bennett 2004: 46). Bennett outlines the following as the main features of postmodern approach to political theory despite the claims of the genre towards infinite diversity and subjectivism:

- Postmodern approach often takes the form of genealogical studies "which reveal how discursive practices and conceptual schemata are embedded with power relations, and how these cultural forms constitute what is experienced as natural or real" (Bennett 2004: 47). As Seidman (1994: 6) writes, "These are historical critical analyses tracing the making of identities, selves, social norms, and institutions which focus on the role of the medical and human sciences in the shaping of a "disciplinary" society". Foucault, Judith Butler,

Ann Ferguson- all follow this approach. A genealogical approach is not involved in tracking down the origin of a particular phenomenon; but they try to unravel the discursive practices that have led to the acceptance of certain things as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’. Foucault’s study of madness (see Foucault 1961) and Butler’s deconstruction of gender- ‘gender trouble’ are examples of this approach (Butler 1990; 2004). Identities and norms are therefore constructions that have ‘sedimented’ into ways of behaviour, language and institutions that are resistant to modify, revise or oppose them (Bennett 2004: 47). Genealogy also dismantles the epistemic privilege of the western canon, for it challenged notions of rationality, human agency, etc. (see Vincent 2009: 178).

- Postmodernism therefore is interested in exploring the ‘indeterminate’ or the ‘chaotic’ that is always attached to the dominant reality. The ‘invisible’ in Merleau-Ponty, the ‘semiotic’ in Kristeva, ‘sexual difference’ in Irigaray- are examples. These indeterminacies upset the widely held normative consensus in politics, and offers ways of resistance. Judith Butler’s mimesis is a case worth mention. Butler contends that even as we repeat norms, a point may come there will be a rupture of norms (see Butler 2004).
- Difference(s) therefore is central to postmodern approach to political theory. Postmodernism is not merely about acknowledgement of difference, but difference is identified as the key to politics by virtue of an ongoing process that generates more positivities (Vincent 2009:178).
- Postmodernism is characterized by an ‘incredulity towards meta-narratives’ (Loytard, in Bennett 2004: 49; Brown 2002: 58; Butler 2004: 13). This entails dismissal of a linear history of progress as well as the rejection of a definitive interpretation of history (Brown 2002: 58). Or, as Christopher Butler (2002: 13) points out, “These narratives are contained in or implied by major philosophies, such as Kantianism, Hegelianism, and Marxism, which argue that history is progressive, that knowledge can liberate us, and that all knowledge has a secret unity. For example, Lyotard accuses Habermas’ ‘universal consensus’ as a terroristic conformity (Bennett 2004: 49). Thus even if they have a descriptive account of the society, they are opposed to a final end or *telos*; also, nothing is outside complexities and indeterminacies.
- Contingency, as opposed to necessity becomes the key to postmodern approach. For example, post-Marxists like Laclau and Mouffe do not believe in the necessity of a revolution-central to Marxism. On the contrary, their idea of ‘radical democracy’ is based on contingent selves as well as contingent alliances that also do not uphold the ontological superiority of any group. Butler (2002:29) captures this aspect of postmodernism when she writes,

“Postmodernism thus involved a highly critical epistemology, hostile to any overarching philosophical or political doctrine, and strongly opposed to those ‘dominant ideologies’ that help to maintain the status quo”. It opposes all closures and fixed categories. Contradictions and differences become the hallmark of postmodernism.

- Postmodernism also dismantles the binary between ‘transcendental’ and ‘immanent’. While metaphysical theory of Kant and others made transcendental claims, postmodern studies deal with the immanent without reintroducing the transcendental (Bennett 2004: 49). A common example could be the preoccupation of postmodern political theory with the politics of the body when liberals mainly dealt with the mind.
- Postmodernism rests itself on the process of ‘becoming’ an open-ended creative process in which the subject is continually in the process of becoming a subject. The non-fixity of subjectivity also implies that one is not defined by a fixed, essential identity. The absence of a fixed self and an essence to the self also directs a different form of politics in postmodern approach. Postmodernism is generally identified with fragmentation and renegotiations of meanings. As Lyotard suggests, postmodernism entails a decentering of the subject and the social world. The ahistorical standpoint of an abstract mind and universal knowledge is challenged by localized and knowledges as well as by the decentering of the subject marked by multiple and contingent subject positions.
- The metaphysics of immanence also challenges the distinction between the human and the non-human; it displaces human beings from the centre of the universe (Bennett 2004: 49). If liberals made human species as the foundational identity, postmodern approach denies the fixity of such identity as well. Donna Haraway’s ‘cyborg feminism’ points to the instability of the category ‘human’ (Haraway 1989). Haraway describes human beings as ‘cyborgs’- a mixture- a hybrid- of animal and machine, language and affect, culture and biology (see Bennett 2004: 49). “We are viewed instead as a particularly complex and reflexive formation, differing from other forms in significant degree but not in kind” (ibid).
- Postmodern theory is generally deemed to be anti-science by virtue of its resistance to an Objective Truth. This is best represented by Derrida’s idea of ‘deconstruction’- “that truth itself is always relative to the differing standpoints and predisposing intellectual frameworks of the judging subject” (Brown 2002: 16). ‘The death of the author’ in postmodernism entails that meanings of the text are properties of the interpreters and not the author herself. Derrida repudiated ‘logocentrism’ implying the fixing of meanings in

texts. This in turn also implies the alterability or contingency of meanings. However, others believe that postmodernism is not antiscience; it believes only in one kind of science- that which is indeterminate and complex and non-linear. Postmodern theory is also therefore non-linear. Society is perceived as “an incompletely structured system, an open system susceptible to unpredictable encounters and the periodic emergence of new formations” (Bennett 2004: 50).

- On the whole, postmodernism is also marked for its opposition to the empirical claims of science and the objectivity and universality of knowledge. Science is also a social construct, a body of knowledge that embodies the views of the dominant, in postmodern perspective. Science is yet another discourse, a discursively constructed set of statements, implying that like any other discourse, the ‘neutral’ science is also imbued with power.
- The opposition to grand narratives and the logic of necessity is also reflected in the debunking of macro politics and a celebration of micro politics. In other words, politics is mainly articulated in micro political activities and hence is different from liberal and Marxist approaches. Postmodernism’s main focus is not on institutions and structures. The major foci are media, military training, inter subjective relationships, etc. the key targets of micro politics include “bodily affect, social tempers, political moods, and cultural sensibilities” (Bennett 2004: 51). This also explains how politics gets redefined in terms of somatic and affective dimensions (ibid). The postmodern approach therefore engages with changing the micro political settings so as to alter macro political possibilities (ibid).
- Postmodern approaches to political theory also deal with power differently. While liberals perceive power as located in the state, and Marxists see power as primarily flowing from class politics, postmodern writers convey that power is not located in an identifiable centre; it is diffused and pervasive; power is capillary in nature. Foucault’s distinction between juridical power (power embodied in state and its institutions) and bio-power is worth discussion here. In his work *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault points to bio-power as disciplining and normalizing unlike juridical power that is regulatory. Postmodern approach therefore locates power not only in the institutions and the sovereign, but in everyday practices that constitute and normalize subjectivity. Interestingly, *the subject is constituted by power relations; the very same power relations also offer room for resistance to those norms that constitute us.*
- The open-ended nature of categories has been perceived as a challenge to collective politics also due to the commitment to anti-foundationalism and

anti-essentialism. Anti-foundationalism is explained by Seidman as the rejection of an ahistorical, Archimedean standpoint to claim or critique knowledge (see Seidman 1994). In other words, postmodernism rejects the idea of an *a priori* or pre-existing category or self that is at the centre of knowledge and politics. Postmodern writers are divided on the architecture of collective politics in the light of anti-foundationalism and antiessentialism. Derrida's deconstruction of binaries and Rorty's dismantling of subject object dualism in knowledge are examples. Postmodernism also is against the fixed 'essence' of many categories. Thus they do not believe in pre-existing categories like class, women or even humans. While Butler is opposed to any kind of essentialism (Butler 1994) but views foundations as permanently contestable, Spivak makes a case for 'strategic essentialism'- essentialism only for strategic reasons and purposes. Yet another postmodernist William Connolly speaks of politics in the nature of 'rhizomatic' structures¹, wherein social life is constituted by multiple minorities with divergent moral traditions and ontologies and come together for pragmatic purposes (Connolly 1999). Jane Bennett (2004:53) explains 'rhizomatic politics' as thus: A rhizomatic politics does not have as its regulative ideal a general consensus. It is inspired, rather, by the vision of mobile constellations whose members support common policies but not necessarily all for the same reasons, and who attempt to render themselves 'more open to responsive engagement with alternative faiths, sensualities, gender practices, ethnicities, and so on'" A rhizome is a web like root unlike a single tap-root.

9.6 CONTRIBUTIONS OF POSTMODERNISM

As we have repeatedly stated, postmodernism is not a system or coherent set of doctrines. Hence, it cannot be presented, or defended or rejected as such. We need to see it as a new set of movements that arose independently in different fields, and influenced each other. These new ways of thinking can be credited with the following merits or contributions to the world of thought and culture.

Listening to the forgotten little narratives: The postmodernist suspicion of meta-narratives (accepting an unexamined grand theory that supports many particular doctrines and practices) can help us to listen to the many forgotten stories of ordinary people, smaller nations, less powerful cultures. For instance, colonization supported itself with the metanarrative of European cultural superiority and the claim of bringing civilization to the colonized peoples. In the process, the voices of the conquered peoples were not listened to. The so-called discovery of America in 1492 would mean different things to the conquering European settlers and to the Native Americans who lost all their land. The same can be said about the "progress" made by India by building huge dams; we do not normally hear the voices of the millions of people who lost their homes and land in the process.

The uniqueness and independence of different fields: Postmodernism frees each discipline to be itself, rather than compare itself to experimental science and be treated as inferior. Thus Kalidasa's writings or the Ajanta-Ellora paintings or the Bhagavad Gita or the Bible cannot be judged by the canons of science. Each field is unique and independent. (And has the right to exist, provided it does not violate the rights of other human beings.)

From a centre-periphery world to a pluri-centric world: No culture (e.g., European) or race (e.g., white) or caste (e.g., Brahmin) has the right to propose itself as superior or as the norm to judge others. Who is to decide who is superior, and on whose criteria? Why should we have this superior-inferior hierarchy at all? Can't human beings live and treat each other as human beings, different in some ways (in race or gender, in looks or language or customs), but equal in dignity and worth?

Critique of doctrines with culturally insensitive claims: Postmodernism invites us to look the background of doctrines that claim to be universally valid.

Influence of the non-rational: Reason, the queen in modernity, is seen as just one of the paths for reaching the truth. Postmodernism gives an important place to the role of the non-rational. This is partly because of the frightening truth that very brilliant people did some horrible things to others during the wars or during inter-racial or inter-religious fights. Reason alone does not seem to be a reliable guide and teacher in human affairs. We need to listen to other areas, such as, our emotions, our aesthetic sense, our traditions, our dreams. Analysis of language: Language is used and abused. We need to examine it critically. Words express ideas; words also betray the ideas they claim to represent. A language is not merely a tool of communication; it is also the bearer of a culture, and defender of particular values. Words can never express human experiences exactly or exhaustively.

Creativity in the arts, architecture and other fields: Refusing to follow the canons of modernity blindly, postmodern thinkers, artists, architects and writers have walked on untrodden paths, exploring new themes and new styles in new ways.

9.7 LIMITATIONS OF POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism has both strong admirers and adamant critics. Here are some of postmodernism's weaknesses theoretical critique of theory: This is an age-old issue in philosophy. To criticize a theoretical position, you are using other theoretical assumptions. Thus, for instance, to state that we should reject all meta-narratives is itself a meta-narrative. Human beings cannot speak or survive without some grand theories, whether religious or social or 15 economical. Even to state that there are other avenues to the truth besides reason, is itself a rational, theoretical statement. We cannot escape the use of reason.

Claiming more than it can prove: Postmodernism's claim that we live in a very different kind of age cannot be proved. Some would see postmodernism itself as a

continuation of modernity (as another type of rational critique) rather than as something different from modernity. There are differences among periods of history and among cultures. This does not prove that what human beings have in common from one century to another or from one setting to another is less than the differences. A person living in the third or tenth or eighteenth century has more in common with us than there are differences between that world and ours.

Neglect of the essential and permanent: Why people read old religious books, or respond to a novel or movie from another culture, is because there is something essential and permanent we all share. Each of us is not so unique as to be completely different from others. This essential and permanent element is largely ignored or denied by postmodern thinkers.

Overlooking the contributions of modernity: While there were many flaws in modernity, it had its undeniable achievements. Psychiatric treatment of mental patients, for instance, is certainly an improvement over seeing the mentally sick as possessed by demons and subjecting them to cruel punishments. So, too, our modern means of travel, our mobile phones and computers, the spread of books, the many medical treatments available, are some of the advances the human race made using the gift of reason. Even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a great achievement. Whatever one's religious faith (or lack of it), people have certain inalienable rights as human beings. The common basis is our human nature, as seen by our reason. Modernity was a greatly beneficial and freeing change for most people living in pre-modern settings. Would any of us like to go back to the pre-modern era?

Neglecting Social reforms: Whether it is the abolition of sati in India or of slavery in the West, while one's religious faith was often the motivating force, the real arguments against injustice were based on an appeal to reason. Think of the fight against untouchability or the political action against the enslavement of Africans or for the better treatment of women, or the respect afforded to persons of different religions in a multireligious society. A modern, rational outlook was a key element in bringing about such changes. Without a common rational forum for exchange, what would a society's decisions be based on? We cannot leave everything to the preferences of individuals or small groups.

Moral relativism: A number of people who study postmodernism accuse it of having no strong ethical principles, of making everything a matter of private opinion. We should not forget that the position, "Everything is relative," is itself a self-contradictory statement. No one can logically hold it without contradicting oneself. To say that we need to respect cultures and that all our learning is conditioned by history and setting, is one thing. To jump from that to the conclusion that everything is relative, and that there are no universally valid truths, is an illogical step. Postmodernism seems to make this mistake.

Unnecessarily complex and obscure language: While studying the use of language and pointing out its limitations, several postmodern writers are notorious for excessive use of complex jargon, and writing in a way that is hard for even an educated person to follow, or for a reader to pin down.

9.8 SUMMARY

Human beings can be said to be the same all over, and at all times, or very different, depending on what you want to stress. The same can be said of the similarities and dissimilarities among people. Postmodernism stresses the differences more than the sameness or continuity with modernity.

As a call not to let the big voices (meta-narratives) drown the little voices, or to allow the self-styled centre (Europe, or the US, or Western culture or a so-called higher caste) ignore the dignity and voices of the less powerful, it is a bold and challenging critical voice.

How far these ways of thinking, living and looking at the world are widespread, and who are the votaries, are moot questions. In our own country, we have people living in the premodern age (think of people looking for religious explanations of diseases like small pox, or the killing of women as witches to ward off evil in a village), in modernity (e.g., our study of mathematics and science, our use of phones and computers and trains and planes, our access to vaccination, blood tests and heart surgery) and in post-modern settings (generally smaller groups found on college campuses and in research circles). No person or country or culture is totally pre-modern or modern or post-modern.

To understand some of the changes taking place in our world, it is good to listen to voices that consider themselves postmodern, so that we may never deify science and reason and progress and a particular culture, not deny its achievements, but have a realistic idea of the power of reason to do good and to do evil, the ambiguous nature of scientific progress, the unclear direction of history, the good and bad found in every culture (no culture being intrinsically superior or inferior), the need to listen to the little voices and not just to the dominant ones, to examine texts and language critically, to be willing to learn from those who are different from us...In all this, postmodernist thinkers have been pioneers inviting us to listen, question, adapt, learn, and not be dazzled by the achievements of reason, science, technology, capitalism and colonial expansion. In taking such bold steps, this trend itself has neglected or denied important and essential aspects of what it means to be human. Postmodernism tends to deny ultimate principles or philosophical or religious truths that are perennially valid.

But then, following the same logic, postmodernism's own ways of thinking cannot be defended or validated. This is why philosopher Richard Tarnas says of postmodernism, "It cannot on its own principles ultimately justify itself any more

than can the various metaphysical overviews meta-narratives against which the postmodern mind has defined itself." To conclude, just as postmodernism invites us to look at modernity critically, common sense and human wisdom remind us to look at postmodernism itself with critical appreciation, seeing its strengths and not denying its weaknesses.

9.9 EXERCISES

1. What is modernism?
2. What are the different characteristics of modernism?
3. What is postmodernism?
4. Explain the Contributions of Postmodernism.
5. Describe the Limitations of Postmodernism.

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