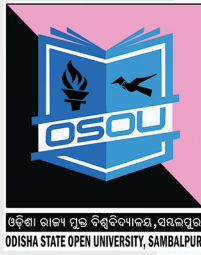


GEPS-1
Block-2



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Odisha State Open University
Sambalpur

BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONOURS) IN
POLITICAL SCIENCE

GENERIC ELECTIVE - I

FEMINISM : THEORY AND PRACTICE

Theories of Feminism

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Odisha State Open University, Sambalpur, Odisha
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Bachelor of Arts
POLITICAL SCIENCES (BAPS)
GENERIC ELECTIVE COURSE-I

GEPS-1
FEMINISM: THEORY
AND PRACTICE

Block-2

Theories of Feminism

UNIT-05 LIBERAL AND SOCIALIST FEMINISM

UNIT-06 RADICAL FEMINISM

UNIT-07 ECOFEMINISM

UNIT-5 LIBERAL AND SOCIALIST FEMINISM

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5.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Recognize and describe the general characteristics of a feminist theory;
- Describe the different political philosophies that inform formative feminisms (i.e. Liberal and Socialist,) in defining human nature and analyzing women's oppression;
- Examine the theoretical debates and thoughts of leading feminist thinkers and the liberating strategies suggested by each formative feminism; and
- Critique each formative feminist theory so as to understand the historical rise of successive feminisms.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

In the first block you have understand the concept of feminism. In this block we will try understand the different 'Feminist Theories' and its discourse. we will begin by trying to achieve conceptual clarity regarding the theoretical perspectives on feminism. Through your study, you will realize that the term 'Feminism' is directed

at changing the existing inequalities in the power relations between men and women. Feminist theories combine description, explanation, and prescription. Each theory attempts to describe women's oppression, explains the causes and consequences, and prescribes strategies for women's liberation. You will also see that feminist theories contradict the erroneous, unclear and irrational way of thinking and writing on the subject of women.

By formative feminisms we mean those early theories and political influences which came to shape the feminist movements from their inception in the early part of the 19th and through the 20th centuries. Here, we will look at the theoretical frameworks of the formative feminism. The formative feminisms are Liberal, socialist, Radical, and eco-feminism. Each theory presented in this unit has three broad sections - the informing political philosophy, its theoretical debates, and critiques of the theory.

The information presented here will strengthen your understanding of the historical shifts that have taken place in Western political thought and their long reaching impact on feminists from the 17th to the 20th century. You will also notice how the feminist thinkers of each period have employed similar or related concepts but contextualized them to their time, deftly challenging the patriarchal views about women. Moreover, you can also observe how each feminist theory pushes the frontiers of feminism further and provides space, scope and energy for new ideas to emerge. Finally, you will find that 'Feminism' is not a single, unidirectional theory. Rather, it branches out to encompass various focal aspects and areas of life as perceived and lived by both men and women at a particular point of time in history.

5.3 LIBERAL FEMINISM

In Block 1 of this course, you read about the evolution of feminism in the west as well as in India, and their linkages with a feminist consciousness or awareness about women's rights. These movements were energized by various theoretical perspectives of the time, and the theories in turn, evolved along with the movements. Therefore, feminist theories gain meaning when, we locate them within broader philosophical and political perspectives of their times. Let us begin by looking at one such formative branch of feminism: Liberal Feminism.

Liberal feminism is a logical extension of traditional liberalism that emerged in the west, out of the rapid social, political and economic transformations of the late 1600s to 1700s. The period is called 'The Age of Reason' or 'The Age of Enlightenment'. For liberalists, the uniqueness of human nature is in the capacity of rationality. Human progress is in the onward march of human reason and knowledge. Individual dignity, equality, autonomy and self-fulfilment are esteemed as liberal values. Rationality is the property of individuals rather than of groups, and this mental capacity is possessed at least by all men in equal measures.

5.3.1 Conservative Liberals

The consensus among the conservative liberals was that the principles of rational individualism are not applicable to women. They inherited Aristotle's reductionism that "We should look on the female as being as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature" (Aristotle, 1953). Thinkers like Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu and above all Rousseau wrote that women are biologically suited to play the roles of wives and mothers. They are by nature, emotional and passionate, and hence unsuited for work in the public sphere. The 'Normative Dualism' of Des Cartes divided mind from body. Rationality and associated mental capacities were ascribed to men while women, passionate and emotional, were identified with the body. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was committed to sexual dimorphism, in constructing a systematic difference between 'rational man' and 'emotional woman' and setting up complementary roles for men and women.

5.3.2 Liberal Feminist Voices

The 18th century liberal feminists argued that women as well as men had natural rights. The 19th century feminists extended the arguments in favour of equal rights for women under the law to own property and to vote. The contemporary liberal feminists adopt the theory of welfare state and demand that the State should actively pursue social reforms and ensure equal opportunities for women. They oppose laws that establish different rights for women and for men.

It was left to the early liberal feminists to argue that women were indeed capable of reasoning. Attempts were made to demonstrate that the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment could be applied to women as well as to men. Women's voices were heard from both sides of the Atlantic demanding equal treatment with men. Let us discuss the views of some important liberal feminists as follows.

i) Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)

Liberal tradition emerged with the growth of capitalism. Mary Wollstonecraft was writing at a time when the economic and social position of European women was very low. The bourgeois women of the capitalist society were confined within the unproductive, idle condition of domestic life. Rose Marie Tong describes the situation in her *Feminist Thought*: "These women were the first to find themselves left at home with little productive, or income-generating, work to do. Married to wealthy professional and entrepreneurial men, these women had no incentive to work ..." (Tong, 1989, p. 13-14).

Wollstonecraft compared these women to the "feathered race"- the birds in cages who do nothing but plume themselves and "stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch" (Wollstonecraft, 1792). She surmised that if men were also caged in as women are, they too would be pleasure seeking and pleasure loving and be overtly emotional and passionate.

ii) Harriet Taylor (1807-1850) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

Fifty years later, Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858) and her close friend John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) whom she married later, defended women's rights in a series of essays they published jointly and separately. Both Taylor and Mill differed from Wollstonecraft in demanding for women not only the same education as men to achieve sexual liberty, but also the civil liberties and economic activities that men enjoy. Harriet Taylor was the primary author of *Enfranchisement of Women* (1851) and Mill was the author of *Subjection of Women* (1869). These works provided the first systematic defense of women's rights.

Mill and Harriet provided an Agenda for the next 200 years of liberal feminism by synthesizing both utilitarianism and libertarianism (Nye, 1988, p. 12-13). Utilitarians envisaged a society in which there is the greatest good for the greatest number of people while Libertarians claimed that freedom is the natural right of every human being. Mill and Harriet argued that women should be granted all political privileges, including the vote and the right to run for public office.

iii) Betty Friedan (1929-2006)

The leading figure in the 20th century liberal feminism is Betty Friedan (1929-2006), an American activist and writer. Her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1974), is credited with sparking of the 'second wave' of feminism. The second wave of feminists believed that women's liberation meant sexual equality and gender justice, and that social change can be achieved by constructing legislation and regulating employment practices. The 'feminine mystique' is the idea that women can find satisfaction exclusively in the traditional role of wife and Friedan attempts to explode this myth. Friedan analyzes the emptiness that middle class, suburban, white, heterosexual housewives experience in their domestic life. Frustrated, beleaguered, and bored, these women turn to adorning themselves. They hope in vain that sex will free them. Friedan calls this frustration 'a problem that has no name'. Friedan emphasizes that women should be freed from oppressive gender roles everywhere, in the academy, the forum, and the market place.

The National Organization for Women, co-founded by Friedan in 1966, aimed to bring women into the mainstream of American society in full partnership with men. Friedan joined other leading feminists (including Gloria Steinem, Shirley Chisholm, Fannie Lou Hamer, Bella Abzug, and Myrlie Evers-Williams) in founding the 'National Women's Political Caucus' in 1971.

Liberal feminists are of two categories:

i) Classical feminists who fought for the removal of discriminatory laws and

ii) Welfare feminists who argued that government should take appropriate action to eliminate socio-economic, as well as legal impediments to women's progress. In general, both are known to depend heavily on legal remedies.

5.3.3 Liberating Strategies: Education and Employment

Liberal feminists believed that given equal education, women will be equally rational as men. This premise is explained by traditional and modern liberal feminists. Wollstonecraft forcefully argued against Rousseau's view that women are defective in reasoning. In his book, *Emile, ou de l'éducation* (*Emile, or On Education*) published in 1762, Rousseau emphasized the egalitarian view that "the entire education of women must be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to be loved and honored by them, to rear them when they are young, to care for them when they are grown up, to counsel and console, to make their lives pleasant and charming, these are the duties of women at all times" (Cited in Okin, 1983, p. 71). Rousseau also assumed that little girls always liked to sew rather than to read and write. Wollstonecraft repeatedly argued that women ought to be given the same education as men so that they would be capable of making free choices and assume responsibility for their own development.

Valerie Bryson points out that Wollstonecraft's quarrel with Rousseau is fourfold (Bryson, 1992, p.22-23):

First, Wollstonecraft was convinced that the women of upper classes in her time were frivolous and vain not by nature but because of their socialization.

Second, she affirms that women are equally capable of and entitled to a rational education.

Third, the virtue of being a good wife or mother cannot be imposed on women; it must be freely chosen by women themselves and women should be given knowledge and education so as to make rational choices to be good wives and mothers.

Fourth, if men and women are of equal worth, they must also have equal rights. Wollstonecraft advocates political liberalism that campaigns for women's suffrage and legal rights and equal participation in politics and paid employment with men.

According to Betty Friedan, many educated middle-class women of her time suffered from depression because of the ambiguous life imposed on them. As education developed their potentialities, domestic life demanded their fulfillment in childbearing and childrearing. Friedan advised the suburban housewives to get college education and then enter into full time, public work-force. As education is intimately connected to employment and financial independence, liberal feminists like Betty Friedan emphasized its importance for women.

Employment and career will enable women to earn and become economically independent of their husbands. J.S. Mill opined that by keeping women in an

unnatural state, the nature of women has become an artificial thing. He wrote in *The Subjection of Women* that the power of earning is essential for the dignity of a woman. Friedan argued that equality and human dignity are not possible for women if they are not able to earn and 'only economic independence can free a woman to marry for love'. According to Taylor, women could be fully liberated if they were to work outside the home. So the right to vote is not enough but participation in the free market of capitalist society is necessary. A woman who is employed contributes to the family and also wins respect. But Mill was of the view that a fully liberated woman enters and leaves the labour market at will.

5.3.4 Marriage, Motherhood and Career

J.S. Mill believed that even if a woman receives the same education, economic opportunities and civil liberties, she will prefer marriage and motherhood over other competing occupations. But Taylor claimed that given a free choice, a woman will choose a career in arts, business or politics instead of marriage and motherhood.

Friedan insisted on women entering a career. She argued that if a woman spends her whole time in the role of a wife or mother and has no time for a career, she will not develop into a full person. But Friedan failed to explain how to combine marriage and motherhood with a career without bringing in major structural changes within, as well as, outside the family. Later, Friedan admitted that it is not easy to combine marriage and career. Instead of calling women back into the private sphere, she exhorted women to propel the women's movement and work with men for the desired changes in the 'mainstream'. Liberal feminists also demanded equal rights for voting, reproduction, abortion and child healthcare, and reacted against sexual harassment.

5.3.5 Eighteenth century Liberal feminism

The most prominent advocate of Liberal feminist ideals in the 18th century was Mary Wollstonecraft. Her important work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) which was a response against Rousseau's *Emile*, called for equality of the sexes. Wollstonecraft asserted that biology is not a determinant of one's rationality and virtue. Citing Rousseau's educational philosophy in *Emile* which proposed the development of rationality as an important component in the education of boys but not girls, Wollstonecraft claimed that social norms did not permit women to make their own decisions and discouraged them from developing their powers of reason. Therefore this ensured that women were lacking in the virtues that was necessary for full participation in citizenship. She forcefully argued that society should provide the same education to girls and boys because everyone deserves equal access to opportunities that would help them develop their rational and moral capacities by virtue of which one can attain full personhood. What Wollstonecraft forcefully advocated for was full moral personhood of women. She also argued that the duties of a wife and mother were among the commands of reason and therefore should be faithfully discharged. Wollstonecraft exalted reason at the expense of emotions, for

which she has been criticized by later feminists. Wollstonecraft has also been charged with adopting a model of education that privileges traditional male traits. This implicitly suggests that women were somehow rationally and morally deficient. Wollstonecraft did not critique the notion of universal humanity based on rationality, but emphasized the inclusion of women into the male political model of Liberalism.

5.4 Nineteenth century Liberal feminism

John Stuart Mill and Harriet Mill were the major representatives of Liberal feminist voices in the 19th century. Mill and Taylor were partners and intellectual collaborators for twenty years until the death of Taylor's husband John Taylor, after which she married Mill. Although they differed in their opinions on many counts, both John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill defined rationality not only in moralistic terms focusing on autonomy, but also in prudential terms, emphasizing on self-fulfillment. Taylor, as well as Mill who was also a utilitarian philosopher, believed that the best route to maximize the benefit of everyone is to permit individuals to pursue their desires, as long as they do not hamper each other in their pursuit. They also claimed that the only path to achieving equality for women was to provide them with not only equal education with men, but also the same political and economic rights that have traditionally been the exclusive privileges of men. Taylor's most famous work was "Enfranchisement of Women" (1851) and Mill's most famous feminist work was his treatise "The Subjection of Women" (1869). Scholars also believe that Taylor and Mill together wrote an essay called "Early Essays on Marriage and Divorce" (1832).

Taylor's works focused on the condition of women and advocated measures to bring about the social and political equality of women and men. She believed that social customs and norms brought created inequality between men and women. Taylor differed from Mill in that, she advocated that women should pursue a career outside their home and contribute economically towards the financial management of the household in order to be truly equal to their husband. However, as many scholars have pointed out, Taylor betrays her privileged class bias when she claims that working wives and mothers would hire a slew of domestic servants to help ease their household burdens, something only the rich upper class women could afford. Since she does not talk about the families and household burdens of the women who were to be hired as domestic help, she has been accused of addressing only on the needs of privileged and rich women.

The British utilitarian philosopher J.S. Mill was also a proponent of women's right to citizenship. In his famous treatise "On the Subjection of Women" (1869) where he claimed that women have had an inferior education and fewer opportunities than men, Mill advocated that intellectual, economic, and civic roles be thrown open to women. He claimed that women have not achieves the success and intellectual acumen of men not because they were rationally and intellectually inferior, but because of their

inferior education. He also believed that women should be given equal access to the public sphere and should have a say in the formation of legal and civil policies. Women should also be allowed to pursue a career as well as economic opportunities. Mill claimed that social, economic and political equality would ensure better relations in marriages, ensure greater gender equality, thereby increasing the happiness quotient of women as well as men. According to Mill, the liberation of women would bring about greater good for everyone since it would increase the contentment of the entire society. For Mill, the liberation of women was consistent with the altruistic goal of utilitarianism. However, though Mill was an eloquent advocate of equal rights and opportunities for women, he believed that in ideal circumstances, women would choose family over their career, since he believed that ultimately, women were more responsible than men in the maintenance of family life. He believed that the option of having an opportunity to work would be enough for women, since he believed that a truly liberated woman would choose to stay at home to rear their children until they reach adulthood.

5.4.1 The rise of suffrage movement

Liberal feminists of the latter half of the 19th century build upon Mill and Taylor's claims that women's suffrage would ensure their social and political equality with men. The right to vote was perceived as a symbolic recognition of women's rights to full citizenship and an opportunity for women to have an active role in changing those structures, systems and attitudes in society that oppress women. Liberal feminist agenda in the 19th century took shape in the form of mass movements for women's rights and women's suffrage across Europe and America. The 19th century women's rights and suffrage movements rose into prominence first in America and spread to other parts of Europe. The women's rights movement and suffrage movements grew out of the 19th century abolitionist movement against slavery and movements for civil rights of Blacks in America. Nineteenth century women abolitionists and leaders of women's rights movement in America such as Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony soon realized in the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London the recalcitrance of the male abolitionists to link women's rights movement to the movement for the rights for slaves, since they refused to consider women as an oppressed group.

The Suffrage movement rose into prominence with the historic Seneca Falls convention in 1848 in New York that served as the first forum on such a large scale to advocate women's right to vote. Led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, more than three hundred men and women met in Seneca Falls, New York to discuss the possibilities for amendment in the constitution that would grant the right to vote to women as well as Blacks in America. The convention produced the "Declaration of Rights and Sentiments" that was modeled after Thomas Jefferson's "Declaration of Independence". The Declaration reiterated the Liberal ideas of Mill and Taylor regarding reforms in women's education, marriage, divorce and property rights.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton went on to form the National Woman Suffrage Association with Susan B. Anthony that advocated a revolutionary feminist agenda for women; while Lucy Stone founded the more moderate American Woman Suffrage Association that pursued a reformist feminist agenda. These two associations merged in 1890 to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association, which by then had lost the revolutionary fervor of the early 19th century women's liberation movements and confined itself only to efforts to gain suffrage rights for women.

5.5 Twentieth century Liberal feminism

A prominent 20th century feminist whose works reiterate Liberal feminist ideals was Virginia Woolf. One of the most acclaimed modernist novelists of the 20th century, Virginia Woolf's feminist works such as 'A Room of One's Own' (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) highlights the hindrances that come in the way of women's intellectual and economic pursuits and aspirations. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf presents a powerful liberal materialist analysis of women's oppression. Originally conceived as a lecture that Woolf had to deliver on the topic of women and fiction, *A Room of One's Own* is written in an easy and conversational style, where Woolf invites her readers to consider with her 'the woman question'. She points out that there has been a disparity between men and women's access to education and material wealth. She drives home her point by inviting her readers to imagine the options that would have been available to a female Shakespeare whom she names Judith an imaginative sister of the famous bard who was as gifted as he. A female no matter how talented she was had no scope to showcase her talents. She would have been barred from theatres and publishers would have refused to consider her work. She would have been driven to penury and untimely death before her talents got recognized. Woolf goes on to claim that women are not intellectually inferior to men. She points out that genius is not a miraculous gift that one is born with, rather, it is a talent that develops among the educated and leisured class when two important criteria are met – firstly, a room of one's own which is symbolic of independent space for woman as an individual, and secondly, financial independence. According to Woolf, for women these two amenities were not available. Woolf claims that the oppression of women in society is not a consequence of women's inferiority, but a consequence of stifling social structures and relationships as well as limited access to wealth, opportunities and education.

1.5.1 Twentieth century second wave Liberal feminism

The second half of the twentieth century saw a resurgence of Liberal feminism within the second wave feminist movement. Second wave Liberal feminism expands and develops the 'welfarist' stance of mainstream Liberalism to include issues pertaining to social justice. By the 1960s, most Liberal feminists had joined women's mainstream rightwing groups such as National Organization for Women (NOW), the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC). These groups were conceived as

pressure groups that applied legal, social and other pressures upon social and political institutions in order to improve the lot of women in society. These Liberal women's rights groups focused their attention mostly in the area of legislation. Twentieth century second wave Liberal feminism's most prominent proponent was Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and one of the founders and first president of the national Organization for Women (NOW). NOW was the first explicitly feminist group in America to challenge the social, political and economic inequality of women in all spheres of life. Though NOW's initial members included Marxist, Radical as well as Liberal feminists, under Friedan's leadership, its identity and agenda came to be increasingly defined as liberal. The radical feminists soon left NOW to form smaller women's liberation groups that were more personally focused in their endeavor to raise women's consciousness about the nature of their oppression. Under Friedan, NOW staunchly opposed radical feminists, particularly those who advocated lesbianism. Friedan called the lesbian feminists as "lavender menace" since she perceived them as alienating society from the ideals of feminism. Today, NOW exists as a 'grassroot' arm of women's movement that claims to follow a multi-issue, multi-strategy approach to women's rights, and maintains till date, the organization's history and agenda in their official webpage.

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) was regarded as one of the most influential feminist publications of the 20th century that had a tremendous impact on Liberal as well as Radical feminism. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan postulated that women suffered from a malady that 'had no name' (Friedan, 1974:15). Friedan claimed that American white middle class women may have achieved a certain degree of equal legal status with men; nevertheless, they led unfulfilled and anxious lives. They were trapped in the monotonous cycle of domesticity that ensured that they spent all their time cleaning, polishing and organizing homes that were already tidy. Though Friedan did not advocate the elimination of nuclear families and the institutions of marriage and motherhood, she claimed that the error of the feminine mystique was that it overvalued these institutions (Tong, 2009: 28). According to Friedan, the root of discontentment and frustration of the white heterosexual middle class women in America was the lack of their social and political power. She urged women to step outside the domestic sphere and participate in the public life by pursuing careers and exploring employment opportunities. However, Friedan has been criticized of limiting her feminist concerns only on the upper-middleclass heterosexual white women. She has also been criticized of assuming that all women face the same form of sexual oppression. Critics have also pointed out that Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* misjudged the challenges that combining a career and marriage as well as motherhood posed even to privileged women (ibid).

Twenty years after the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan published *The Second Stage* (1981) where she acknowledged the loopholes in her earlier work and made an attempt to redress it. Realizing that the role of a full time career woman and a full time wife and mother was taxing and no less oppressive for women, Friedan

claimed that the 1980s 'superwomen' were as oppressed as their full time mothers had been in the 1960s. Friedan concluded that the best way to deal with this predicament was for the 1980s women to move from what she termed as the 'first stage feminism' to 'second stage feminism'. Quoting Friedan Tong points out that Friedan propounds that 'second stage feminism' is characterized by the collaborative efforts of women and men to escape the excesses of the 'feminist mystique' "which denied the core of women's personhood that is fulfilled through love, nurture, home" as well as the excesses of the 'feminine mystique', "which defined women solely in terms of their relation to men as wives, mothers and homemakers" (Friedan quoted in Tong, 2009, 43).

According to Tong (2009), while *The Feminine Mystique* called for women to be more like men, *The Second Stage* encouraged women to be like women and to collaborate with men to build a future where all human beings displayed androgynous traits. By the time Friedan wrote her third book called *The Fountain of Age* (1993), she was advocating androgyny, urging men to develop their passive, nurturing feminine traits, while women were encouraged to develop their assertive, adventurous masculine traits (Tong, 2009: 32). The publication of *The Fountain of Age* marked Friedan's shift towards humanism from feminism. She claimed that a humanistic wholeness is the true promise of feminism and advocated that feminism should move beyond focusing exclusively on women's issues. Friedan's stance has been called into question by many Liberal as well as radical feminist who point out the contradictions inherent in Friedan's notion that feminism should move beyond focusing on women's issues yet still remain true to its commitment towards women's empowerment. Apart from Friedan, other noted contemporary Liberal feminists identified by Zillah Eisenstein in her book *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (1981) are Elizabeth Holtzman, Bella Abzug, Eleanor Smeal, Pat Schroeder and Patsy Mink. Contemporary feminist intellectuals such as Samantha Brennan, Susan Okin, Patricia Smith, and Jean Hamton are also proponents of Liberal feminism.

5.6 Current trends in Liberal feminism

Contemporary trends in Liberal feminism continue to be guided by the feminist goal of women's liberation from all forms of gender discrimination. Though they may differ in their approach and methodology, they continue with their focus on resolving all structural and attitudinal hindrances to the progress and equal participation of women in all spheres of society. As Tongs (2009) points out, there are two types of liberal feminists - namely, classical and welfare liberal feminists. Classical Liberal feminists follow the classical liberals in their belief of limited state intervention and control in the public sphere and free market. They place greater emphasis on individual autonomy and political and legal rights of the individual. Welfare liberalists on the other hand favour government intervention and regulation in the public sphere. They advocate that the government should regulate economic and social disparities and unequal distribution of privileges by providing underprivileged

citizens with amenities such as housing, education and healthcare among others. They also advocate regulation of the market via taxes and other economic reforms.

Though many contemporary liberal feminists acknowledge that the traditional family is unjust, their solution was recourse to androgyny. They believed that to realize the ideal of justice and equal partnership for both men and women in the family, family structures and sex roles within the family should turn towards androgyny. Men must break out of the stereotypical view of patriarchal masculinity and women must step out of their roles as primary care givers in the family to collaborate with each other to assume equal responsibilities for rearing children and doing housework.

A significant departure of contemporary liberal feminism from other strands of feminism can be seen in their stance towards the issue of prostitution and pornography. Unlike Marxist and Radical feminists, who vehemently opposed prostitution and pornography as one of the most violent forms of women's subordination to male sexism, liberal feminists generally do not condemn them when the women who are involved in such practices do so of their own choice. In accordance with the Liberal belief that individual rights have priority over the 'good' or 'ideal', Liberal feminists believe that informed and mentally competent adult women are the best arbitrators of their own interests. Therefore, Liberal feminism perceives any form of state or legal intervention as negation of independent choices of women and therefore opposes such intervention. They reject laws prohibiting prostitution and pornography and defend the privacy and right of women who choose such professions by invoking the value that Liberalism places on autonomous choice. Liberal feminists therefore object to prostitution and pornography only when involves coercion. They maintained that the radical feminist stance that no woman could choose to be involved in the production of pornography without violent or nonviolent coercion would amount to a total disregard for the autonomy and dignity of women. Furthermore, they argued that governmental censorship and criminalization of pornography and prostitution would not only diminish civil liberties, it would be detrimental to the interest of the perceived coerced agents or the sex workers who would be worse off in such a situation.

Another point of departure of liberal feminists from other strands of feminism is their stance towards sexuality. Liberal feminism rejects the stance of Radical lesbian feminism towards sexuality and sexual orientation. Radical lesbian feminism advocates lesbianism as a means to subvert heterosexuality since it is perceived to be a political institution of patriarchy to subjugate women. Liberal feminism postulated that despite the patriarchal nature of sex roles and norms, the liberal principle of autonomy is also applicable to sexuality and sexual orientation.

Liberal feminist also usually advocate women's right to abortion. The most famous and compelling liberal feminist defense of abortion was Judith Jarvis Thompson's essay "A Defense of Abortion" (1972) where she asserted that women's rights over their life, liberty and privacy outweighs the rights of a fetus, even when the status

of personhood is accorded to it. Since anti-abortion perspectives do not consider the perspective of women who were sustaining the fetus, it violated the rights and devalued the personhood of women.

5.3.5 Critiques of Liberal Feminism

The central aim of liberal feminists was to achieve for women those traits associated with males. It did not occur to them to question the value of traditional male attributes. This erroneously assumes that women can become like men if they set their minds to it; that most women want to become like men and that all women should aspire to masculine values. Liberal feminists worked for women's equality without aiming at changing the structures of existing institutions. Their emphasis on individualism prevents people from coming together as a community. It separates an autonomous individual from others, thus creating a 'political solipsism'. Though liberal feminists argued that women should be economically independent of men, they failed to provide women with adequate strategies to achieve an independent status. Even after gaining all sorts of legal rights, women will be still left in a condition of economic dependency damaging to liberation.

Elevating the activities of the mind over those of the body and identifying women with the body, as well as with 'woman-specific' work like child care, child rearing, care of the sick and the aged, lead to the devaluation of such activities since they are perceived as forms of unskilled, unpaid labour, associated with servicing the despised body and requiring less mental work.

On the whole, we could say that Wollstonecraft, Taylor, Mill and Friedan sent women out into public realm, though without summoning men into the private domain. Despite these limitations, liberal feminists have contributed immensely in improving the quality of life for women.

5.6 SOCIALIST FEMINISM

In order to examine the situation of women, both of these formative feminisms use sex and society as their lenses, although with the help of different feminist perspectives. Socialist Feminism is an offshoot of women's movement in the 1970s. It is a synthesis of the best insights of both Marxist and radical feminists. It blends capitalism and patriarchy; production and reproduction. Productive activity for socialist feminists is not only provision for basic material needs of food, clothing, and shelter, but also the reproductive and sexual work that is done by women at home.

Socialist feminism adopts two kinds of approach: dual-systems theory and unified-systems theory. The dual systems theorists like Juliet Mitchell treat patriarchy and capitalism as separate forms of social relations but dialectically related to each other while the unified systems theorists like Hartman and Sheila Rowbotham insist that patriarchy and capitalism are not separate but together form one unified concept.

5.6.1 Historical Conception of Biology

Social Feminists believe that biology is gendered as well as sexed. This implies that while we may be born with specific sexual anatomies (female/ male/ trans-gendered), our bodies are also submitted to a social gendering process from the time of our birth. So we could say that we are born into an already gender codified society. In terms of the notion of gender, we can thus infer that infants are bisexual (androgynous) at birth. But they are transformed into boys and girls with rigid masculine and feminine character structures, through a systematic gender-structuring which continues throughout life. The physical differences between men and women are partially determined by the work they do. Iris Young remarks that women in sexist society are physically handicapped because they have less mobility and strictures on physical development. Marian Lowe has investigated that social conditions bring variations in menstruation and menopause. Juliet Mitchell, Jane Flex, Gayle Rubin, Nancy Chodorow, and Dorothy Dinnerstein have all worked to prove that the masculine and feminine character types are structured and established by specific social forms of work practices. On the whole, socialist feminists believe that our 'inner lives', our bodies and behavior are structured by socially imposed gender-structuring. You will read much more about the relationships between 'sex' and 'gender' in the second unit of the block-1.

The activities in women's private life such as sexuality, childbearing and childrearing cannot be understood apart from society. Zillah Eisenstein argues that giving birth to a child is termed 'motherhood' only if it conforms to the social norm defining the relations of marriage and the family. Otherwise, the child is 'illegitimate' and the act 'adultery'.

5.6.2 Historical Analysis of the Gender Division of Labour

Socialist feminism claims that human beings are constantly recreating themselves through sexual division of labour. Iris Young (1981) provides a historical analysis of the gender division of labour. In pre-capitalist times, there existed an economic partnership between wives and husbands. With the rise of capitalism came the public-private split. Capitalism identified men as the 'primary work force' and women as the 'secondary work force'. As women were needed at home, they were confined to domestic work. Women became a large reserve army of labour, unemployed, low paid and less skilled secondary workforce, needed to keep wages low and meet unexpected demands in the workforce. In the third world economies, women gradually move from the primary work force to secondary work force.

Even today, the categories of work where women congregate are the lowest paid. Women work mostly as clerical workers, saleswomen, social workers, nurses and teachers. This confirms the ideological perception of women as subservient, nurturing, and sexy. It forces women to depend on men. Women wage earners face problems common to all workers and in addition suffer sexual harassment.

In the 1970s, socialist feminists began to demand due wages for household work that women do. Margaret Benston's "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation" exposed domestic labour as a crucial form of women's work and many more domestic labour studies followed to gain public recognition and legitimacy for women's work at home (Benston, 1969).

5.6.3 Women as Sexual Objects

A woman is confronted by words, gestures, comments and threats of violence which express male dominance. Alison Jaggar (1983) sums up the socialist feminists' views on how women are treated as sexual objects:

Women are viewed relentlessly as sexual objects, whether or not they welcome sexual interest, and they are subject continually to sexual assaults and harassment. In addition, economic survival requires most women to present themselves in a way that is sexually pleasing to men: male superiors penalize women who seem to be "punishing" or defying men through their appearance: much of women's work is sexualized: and, in the end, the best chance of economic security for most women remains the sale of their sexuality in marriage. ... (p. 108).

It is an ideological mystification to consider women primarily as sex objects . Women have always worked outside procreation. They have provided food and services to the family and the larger society outside. It is men who control the expression of women's sexuality.

5.6.4 Alienation

Women, like wage workers, are alienated in sexual situations. Alison Jaggar proposes alienation as the theoretical framework which accommodates the insights of Marxist, radical, psychoanalytical and liberal feminisms (Jaggar, 1983, p.353).

A wage worker is alienated from the product upon which he works. In the same way, a woman is alienated from her body, the product upon which she works. A woman has little say on her body. She adorns herself, diets and dresses but all these activities are done for men. A woman is alienated from the product of her reproductive labour, that is, her child. A woman does not have the power to decide how many children she should have and when. Motherhood can also be an alienating experience for a woman as women may be alienated from the process of their reproductive labour. It is obstetricians who take total control of the birthing process. Childbearing like childrearing is an alienating experience. "The social relations of contemporary motherhood make it impossible for her to see the child as a whole person, part of a larger community to which both mother and child belong" (Jaggar, 1983, p.315). Finally, women are alienated from their intellectual capacities. To the extent men take control of producing and distributing knowledge and the process, women are not at ease in the academy. Ann Foreman (1977) declares that femininity itself is alienation.

5.6.5 Liberation of Women

Mitchell argues that defeat of capitalism alone cannot liberate women unless it goes with the defeat of patriarchy. Biological or economic revolution will not liberate women. It is only an outer expression. Mitchell considers the psychoanalytical view that sex oppression is deeper at the unconscious level. Hence she advocates primarily a psychological revolution, and states that attitudes toward women will never really change so long as the female and male psychology are dominated by dominant phallic symbols which extol male culture, male authority and male control over women.

5.6.6 Critiques of Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminism is criticized for being neither revolutionary nor radical enough. It underplays the significance of capitalist forms of exploitation. It has failed to create lasting solutions to the problem of female economic and social exploitation. One distinguishing feature of socialist feminism is its emphasis on democratic control of procreation. But it fails to explain what democratization of procreation would mean in practice. However, in its favour, one could say that socialist feminism has an inspiring vision of an androgynous society in which the distinction between ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ no longer exists.

Your reading of various formative feminisms, Liberal, Marxist, Radical and Socialist, would have given you an understanding of the wonderful chemistry that exists between the progressive theories on which each of these was based. In the light of this, we could say that Socialist feminism is the most evident indicator in terms of showing how paradigms shift when feminist equations (specifically, Radical and Marxist) work on each other in understanding women’s tangible and intangible oppressions.

5.7 SUMMARY

In this unit, we discussed and analysed four formative feminist theories. You would have realized that feminist theories address fundamental issues in feminist thought the origins of women’s universal oppression, gendered and problematized social and institutional relations, and the political actions to be taken to ameliorate these injustices. The four types of formative feminisms that you have read about included - Liberal and Socialist. You have also seen that each feminist theory remains partial, imperfect, and incomplete. However, all of these different feminisms have contributed in valuable ways in enhancing our understanding of women’s oppression and each offers us a rich perspective on how to struggle against this oppression. We need to draw on the strengths of all these theories in our ongoing efforts to deepen our critical understanding of these important issues.

Finally, the formative feminisms are predominantly of white, middle-class origins. From the viewpoint and historical perception of Indian women, we can find both commonalities and differences when we compare the situations discussed here with

those in India. In other units of this course, you have already read specifically about women's movements in India. Hence, to an Indian student, it will be an interesting exercise to read through this unit with a critical enquiry and apply the tools to your own life and those around you.

5.8 GLOSSARY

Alienation: It refers to the estrangement of individuals from other and a particular process. Humanbeings, according to Marx, are alienated from their work, their product, humanity and other people in the capitalist mode of living. Labour as well as our existence becomes an object in this process.

Feminism: A social, economic, and political commitment directed at changing the existing power relations between women and men in society in order to fight against gender injustice and to promote equal rights and opportunities for all.

Liberal feminism: Assumes that the inequality of women stems from the denial to them of equal rights and from their learned reluctance to exercise such rights.

Liberalism: Constitutes a philosophy based on the principle that every person is to be given equal opportunities and civil rights.

Mother-Right: A term associated with matrilineal descent. It was popularized by Bachofen, who said that matrilineal kinship combined with matriarchy was the universal first stage of human development. Lewis Henry Morgan, Engels and Marx used mother-right for the stage of human history which preceded patrilineal descent and patriarchies.

Patriarchy : A sexual system of power in which men as a category appropriate all superior social roles and keep women as a category in subordinate and exploited positions.

Reproduction: Childbearing and childrearing responsibilities and associated domestic tasks done by women.

Sexual division of labour: A universal practice in which necessary work and tasks are divided up according to gender. Men get some of the jobs and women get some of the jobs, based on traditional roles and expectations.

Socialist feminism: Sets as its goal transforming basic structural arrangements of society so that categories of class, gender, sexuality, and race no longer act as barriers to equal sharing of resource. Class and gender intersect in shaping women's lives.

5.9 EXERCISE

1. Discuss the relevance of any one formative feminist theory in the context of your own life experiences. Do you think your analysis from your chosen perspective can make your life more meaningful?

2. Based on your reading of this unit, comment on the following using a feminist perspective:
3. What values could you add to the household work of women revolving around consumption and reproduction?
4. Explain 'household labour' in the context of the gender division of labour?

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UNIT-6 RADICAL FEMINISM

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6.6.1 Publications

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6.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, we will be able to understand the clear picture of Radical feminism

- Recognise the genesis of radical feminism in the world.
- Critically examine of the different radical feminist groups.
- Discuss the important of key concern of radical feminist in the society.
- To examine the radical feminist movement and its impact on society.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

After discuss the liberal and socialist feminism, you have understand the theories clearly. So today we will try to focus on radical feminism. It is usually documented within second wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, an era that witnessed widespread radical protests and women's liberation movement. Though these movements were widespread throughout Europe and America, it was America that emerged as the centre stage where the historic radical feminist movement unfolded. Radical feminist movement exploded into the American public consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s as a discourse of resistance that was rooted in revolutionary and collaborative effort for political change. It grew rapidly into a mass movement where the agitating feminists took to public demonstrations and conscious political interruptions, speak outs, pamphlets, manifestoes, magazine articles, newspaper, radio and T.V. interviews to raise public consciousness about their feminist agenda.

Defining the term 'radical' as the effort to go to the root of a problem so as to solve it, radical feminists claimed that the root of women's oppression stems from patriarchy and patriarchal gender relations in society. Female oppression is the result of casting women into biologically determined roles of childbearing and childrearing, and the identification of women with their sexualized bodies (Scholz, 2010). Accordingly, radical feminists focused on reconfiguring the politics of gender, sexuality and the family. They launched a scathing and unrelenting critique of those social institutions they perceived to be agents of patriarchy such as the family, religion, and state. They campaigned for equal opportunity for all women that should be supported by government funded child care and called for abortion rights for all women. They also highlighted other factors of women's oppression, such as limited birth control; the role of media in generating inferior stereotypes of women; and domestic violence which had hitherto been overlooked by earlier feminists.

However, as Alice Echols (1989) points out, it is important to note that radical feminism was not monolithic. Various radical feminist organizations differed from each other in their approach and ideology. Differences between radical feminists have led to the formation of varied groups which emerged out of the political factions

of larger groups. By the 1969 there existed a variety of divergent strains of radical feminism that would discard the rhetoric of universal sisterhood in favour of discussing women's differences in their sexual orientation, race and class.

6.3 Early Roots

Though the heydays of radical feminism are the mid 1960s and 1970s, the roots of this movement can be traced to three distinct progressive traditions in 19th century America that served as models for radical feminism (Buchanan, 2011). The 19th century abolitionist movement against slavery and movements for civil rights of Blacks in America was the oldest tradition of progressive socio-political movement that shaped radical feminism. The women's suffrage movements of the 19th century provided another model for the radical feminists. In America this movement included pioneering feminists such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, whose *The Woman's Bible* (1895) made the radical claim that the Bible is a text written by male clergy to subordinate women. Stanton and Anthony founded the leftist leaning National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) and can be considered to be the precursors of radical feminism.

The third tradition can be traced to the 'feminist arm' of the New Left of the 1960s which fought for greater civil rights of citizens and critiqued wars and capitalist systems. There would be radical feminists were women within socialist organizations such as 'Student Nonviolent Coordinating Council' (SNCC), 'Students for a Democratic Society' (SDS), 'Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam' among others, who rebelled against subsidiary roles accorded to them by their male counterparts in the movements. These women realized that their devaluation in these socialist movements was a reflection of the devaluation of all women in society at large.

Attributing their suppression to patriarchy and sexism, these women split from the male dominated socialist organizations to form radical women's organizations that firmly believed that their campaign to end sexism can never be furthered by men since men were the original perpetrators of sexism.

6.4 Radical feminist groups and organizations

6.4.1 New York Radical Women (NYRW)

The New York Radical Women that was founded in 1967 by Shulamith Firestone and Pam Allen was one of the first organizations of the radical feminist movement. The group split from the New Left movement as a result of the rampant sexism and devaluation of women that was prevalent in the male dominated organizations of the New Left. NYRW became the launching pad for other radical feminist groups in the future such as, The Feminists, New York Radical Feminists, Redstockings, Cell 16, and the radical feminist street theatre group called WITCH. Some of the prominent

members of the NYRW included Sheila Cronan, the author of *Marriage* (1970); Irene Peslikis whose article “Resistances to Consciousness-raising” (1970) made the term ‘consciousness raising’ one of the keynote concerns with which radical feminism would be identified; and Patricia Mainardi who wrote the well-known radical feminist work *The Politics of Household* (1970).

The NYRW members played a key role in organizing the historic 1968 Miss America Pageant protest outside Atlantic City Convention Centre. Carol Hanisch of NYRW who popularized the slogan “The personal is political” in her 1969 essay of the same name, is credited to be the mastermind of this iconic protest. Women from different states of America who gathered in Atlantic City to protest the pageant dumped items such as high heeled shoes, curlers, wigs, false eyelashes, as well as copies of magazines like *Playboy* and *Good Housekeeping* and other such items that they perceived as the beauty culture’s chauvinist tool of oppression into ‘Freedom Thrash Cans’. They also crowned a live sheep as Miss America. The protest was symbolic of their rejection of unrealistic standards of physical appearance subjected on women’s bodies. The women protested against the standards of appearance, claiming that these practices reduce women to sexual objects. Some of the NYRW members who were able to secure seats inside the Convention centre unfurled the banner reading ‘Women’s Liberation’ and tried to disrupt the pageant. The event received wide media coverage and launched radical feminism and its agenda into public consciousness. Unfortunately, this event had led to the stereotyping of all feminists as a brigade of ‘bra-burners’. However, contrary to prevalent belief, what they burnt was only an effigy of the Pageant’s Master of Ceremonies, Bert Parks.

6.4.2 Redstockings

The Redstockings was founded by Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis in 1969. The name of the organization is a creative adaptation of the pejorative term ‘bluestockings’ used for educated and intelligent women in the 18th and 19th centuries, by substituting red, the colour of socialist revolutionaries for blue. Unlike the New York Radical Women (NYRW) whose membership was made up of radical as well as socialist feminists, Redstockings was conceived as an exclusively radical feminist and militant public group that would be committed to political action as well as consciousness-raising, a group exercise where women shared and analyzed their experiences in order to gain political insights into the nature of their oppression and to create awareness that ‘the personal is political’. The Redstockings, who laid down the basic precepts of most strands of radical feminism, were strongly influenced by the left. Although they disagreed with Marx’s analysis of women’s oppression emerging as a result of exploitative capitalist system, they appropriated certain Marxist notions such as, the notion of class conflict, and materialism, and applied them to male-female relationship in order to create a theory of women’s oppression (Echols, 1989). Firmly believing that male dominated left would resist opposition of male power, the Redstockings pushed for the formulation of an autonomous feminist

theory. According to Ellen Willis, the Redstockings transformative theoretical framework took a form of 'neo-Maoist materialism'. It fused the groups' belief that personal experience should be the basis of feminist theory with a theoretical framework guided by two premises. The first premise was that sexual class struggle emerged as a consequence of men's economic, social and sexual exploitation and dominance over women. The second premise was women's behaviour was determined by their immediate material conditions, and those conditions are their oppression by men (Willis, 1984). In Willis's words, the Redstockings sought to radicalize the left 'by expanding the definition of radical to include feminism' (Willis, 1984: 93).

The earliest members of Redstockings consisted of Kathie Sarachild, Irene Peslikis, Pat Mainardi, Barbara Mehrhof, Linda Foldman, Sheila Cronan, and Pam Kearon. The Redstockings became well known for their campaigns to legalize abortion laws. The group carried out consciousness-raising exercises on topics such as abortion and rape. They organized 'Speak-out on Abortion' in 1969 in Manhattan where women spoke out and shared their experiences of abortions in a society where had little access to birth control, and where abortion was not legalized.

However the group experienced deep fractions over the importance of consciousness-raising and the 'pro-woman' line which would eventually dissipate it. The pro-woman faction that was the dominant faction believed that women's behavior was a result of their external and material conditions rather than conditioning. Eventually Sarachild, Kearon, Cronan and Linda Feldman left to join the Feminists and Shulamith Firestone would go on to establish the New York Radical Feminists. The group disintegrated in 1970, but was resurrected a few years later by some of its former members such as Kathie Sarachild and Carol Hanisch. Today, the group exists as a 'women's liberation think tank', and maintains till date, the group's history in their official webpage archives.

6.4.3 The New York Radical Feminists (NYRF)

The New York Radical Feminist was a group of feminists who parted ways with the NYRW and Redstockings in 1969. Founded by Shulamith Firestone who left Redstockings and Ann Koedt who parted ways with the Feminists, the NYRF defined itself as a radical feminist movement that was mass based. A key belief of the NYRF was that men consciously wield power over women and subjugate them, while women consciously choose to internalize their subordination by diminishing their ego. The organization focused on the methodology of consciousness building, published newsletters, organized a number of public conferences and speak outs such as rape, abortion, violence against women, marriage, prostitution, lesbianism and motherhood. One of the most memorable events organized by the NYRF was the 1971 Conference on rape at Washington Irving High School following a Speak Out on rape that was arranged in the beginning of the same year at St. Clement's Episcopal Church in New York. A significant body of information regarding rape

from the political, social and psychological perspectives was generated from these events and was eventually published in Susan Brownmiller's landmark publication on rape known as *Against Our Will* (1975).

However the NYRF would also experienced deep fractions within their organizations created by the ideological differences between the 'politicos' who still adhered to the tenets of the New Left, and other pro-woman feminists which would eventually dissipate the group.

6.4.4 The Feminists

The Feminists was founded in 1969 under the leadership of Ti-Grace Atkinson, author of *Amazon Odyssey* (1974), and former president of the New York chapter of National Organization for Women (NOW). Atkinson attributed the split between the Feminists and NOW to its hierarchal structure that replicated the oppressive system of patriarchy. Further disagreements were also created over NOW's refusal to address controversial issues such as lesbianism, birth control and the legalization of abortion. The Feminists were the extreme radical wing of the radical feminist movement. They veered towards an extreme form of idealism and moralist stance. Identifying the family, marriage and heterosexuality as patriarchal institutions that perpetuated sex role systems, the Feminists advocated that these institutions be totally annihilated. Believing any contact with men is equivalent to collaboration with the enemy; the Feminists advocated separatism, celibacy and set stringent standards of behaviour for their members.

6.4.5 Cell 16

Cell 16 was founded by Roxanne Dunbar in 1968 and she remained the major theoretician of the group until she left it in 1970. Dunbar, who had been an active member of the New left in West Coast, drew from Marx, Mao, de Beauvoir, and Solanas to articulate her feminist beliefs. She conceived of Cell 16 as a 'vanguard cadre group' (Echols,1989:158-9) that would show women the possibility of a new society (Echols,1989:159). Other members of Cell 16 were Dana Densmore, Jeanne Lafferty, Lisa Leghorn, Abby Rockefeller, Betsy Warrior and Jayne West.

Cell 16 deviated from most radical feminists of their times in their stance towards Marxism. Unlike the radical feminists who considered that Marxist analysis on women's oppression was did not shed enough light on the nature of male dominance, Cell 16 believed that Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao have postulated an accurate analysis of women's condition and history (Echols, 1989). Dunbar claimed that the main failure of the New Left was its failure to follow Marx and Engels closely enough. They believed that sexism is the result of women's difference from, and their dependence upon men. Believing that women's behavior was conditioned by patriarchal sex roles, they suggested that women should 'unconditional' themselves by erasing those womanly behaviours that they were conditioned into in patriarchal

society. They perceived the process of ‘unconditioning’ as the disavowal of traditional markers of femininity in their attire, behavior and sexuality. They advocated that women should not have any relationship with men, encouraged women to learn martial arts such as karate, and to live in separatist all female communes. The group released their journal *No More Fun and Games* in 1968. The journal which featured articles from Dana Densmore, Lisa Leghorn and Betsy Warrior on issues such as sexism, sexuality, self-defense and celibacy, was the first articulation of the group’s theoretical stance.

6.4.6 WITCH

Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH) was formed in 1969 following the split between the politicos and feminists of NYRW. Created by Robin Morgan, Peggy Dobson, Florika Romatien, and Naomi Jaffe, the radical feminist street theatre group that emerged in New York took the city by storm through its guerilla street theatre. The group created awareness of issues pertaining to radical feminism through skits, plays and humour. Their method of catching the attention of the public to and highlight political and economic issues frequently involved dressing as witches and chanting hexes. Their first appearance was on the Halloween night of 1968 in front of Chase Manhattan Bank. Dressed as witches, the members of the group chanted hexes over Wall Street and the entire financial district (Buchanan, 2011). In 1969 they hexed the Bridal Fair in New York and held mock wedding ceremonies to protest against the institution of marriage.

6.4.7 Radicalesbians

Radicalesbians was an important radical lesbian group that was formed in response to Betty Freidan’s disparaging comment that radical lesbians formed a ‘lavender menace’ to the feminist movement. The group initially called themselves ‘Lavender Menace’ and made their first appearance in 1970 during the ‘Lavender Menace’ protest at the Second Congress to Unite Women in New York in 1970. The group hijacked the conference proceeding and took over the stage to distribute its manifesto known as “The Woman-Identified Woman”. The manifesto is today considered to be a landmark publication of lesbian feminism. Some of the prominent members of the Radicalesbian included Rita Mae Brown, Karla Jay, Artemis March, and Lois Hart.

6.4.8 The Furies Collective

The Furies Collective was a short lived feminist lesbian commune that was founded in 1971 in Washington DC. Furies members included Charlotte Bunch, Sharon Deevey, Rita Mae Brown, Nancy Myron, Jennifer Woodul, Joan Biren, Helaine Harris, Susan Hathaway, and Ginny Berson. In their first newsletter *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly* that was published in 1972, the Furies described the collective as ‘lesbians in revolt’ and recounted the origin of their name to the female spirits of justice and vengeance from the ancient Greek mythology. The Furies

believed that lesbianism was not just a sexual orientation but a political choice, a political means to threaten male heterosexual ideology. Charlotte Bunch's essay "Lesbians in Revolt" (1972) articulates some of the foundational precepts of the collective. The newsletter *The Furies* continued to be published till 1973 though the Collective was dissolved in 1972.

6.5 KEY COMMON CONCERNS

Though radical feminist groups and organizations differ from each other in their social, political and philosophical stances, they nevertheless shared some key common concerns. As Paul Buchanan says (2011) the common concerns of the radical feminists can be cast into two broad categories, firstly women's campaign to regain control over their own bodies and secondly emphasis on equal opportunity.

6.5.1 Regaining control of their own bodies

6.5.1.1 Abortion and contraception

The controversial issues of abortion and contraception were central to the radical feminists' efforts to reclaim their bodies in social thought and medical practice. The radical feminists strongly believed that true freedom for women includes the freedom to make their own decisions regarding their reproductive capability. Abortion was considered to be one of the vehicles of self-determination of women. It gave women the right to privacy and right to control their fertility by giving them the opportunity to choose to continue their pregnancy or terminate it. Radical feminist organizations such as the Redstockings organized many speak outs which pushed for the reformation of abortion laws. Radical feminists such as Lucinda Cisler who published the article "Abortion Law Repeal: A Warning to Women" (1969) where she stressed the need to simplify the process of abortion and make it accessible, led the effort to abolish abortion laws.

Since most women did not have safe and ready access to abortion, many communities performing abortions in a clandestine manner mushroomed in the American society. One such well known community was JANE that was established in 1967 in Chicago. JANE started as an informal programme which referred women to physicians who were willing to perform abortion. Eventually it went on to perform abortions on a wide scale without the aid of physicians.

The development and provision of safe means of contraceptives and birth control is another key in the feminist project to reclaim their body. The radical feminists regarded contraceptives as means to ensure their reproductive freedom, the freedom to decide when to have children. They claimed that reproductive freedom can ensure women's good health, support their empowerment in the domestic as well as the public sphere. The radical feminists therefore sought to create public awareness about contraceptives through organizations such as Planned Parenthood and

publications such as the Boston's Women's Health Collective are *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.

6.5.1.2 Rape and violence against women

The radical feminists were the first to address the issue of rape and violence against women. Radical feminists such as Kate Millett in her *Sexual Politics* (1968) identified rape as a weapon of patriarchy against women. Other radical feminists groups organized speakouts and conferences to highlight rape and violence against women, compelling the law and public consciousness to view domestic violence and rape as criminal offences and not just private domestic affairs. A path breaking radical feminist publication on the subject of rape is Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975), a comprehensive study of rape as a vehicle of control over women. In this work Brownmiller explores how rape was used as an instrument of military conquest by victorious armies to vanquish their enemies. Brownmiller, along with other radical feminists would later go on to claim that marriage was a social institution for the license of rape and a patriarchal tool to subjugate women.

As has been pointed out by many critics, the efforts of the radical feminists to highlight rape and violence against women has by far been one of its biggest contribution to the emancipation of women. Their contribution to raise awareness of such issues paved a way for legal, social and political reforms on a wide scale to protect women from such forms of violence.

6.5.1.3 Pornography and prostitution

The radical feminists claimed that one of the fundamental tools of women's oppression is their identification as sexualized bodies which have led to practices such as pornography and prostitution. They believed that pornography exemplifies male power over women in its most graphic form. Radical feminists such as Robin Morgan claimed that pornography is the theory for which rape is the practice. Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon are two most representative radical feminists who launched mass anti-pornography campaigns. They claimed that pornography sexually objectified women as conquered and dominated; as enjoying humiliation, rape and physical abuse. They emphasized that pornography naturalizes violence against women by making them appear as commonplace and acceptable.

In 1979, several radical feminists such as Andrea Dworkin, Susan Brownmiller, Lynn Campbell and Robin Morgan formed an organization known as 'Woman against Pornography' (WAP) in New York. The organization rose into prominence because of its anti-porn activism, public marches, conferences, speak outs and tours in the heart of New York's sex industry to educate the masses about the violent nature of pornography.

Prostitution was another issue that was identified by radical feminist as pertinent to their feminist agenda. They emphasized that prostitution was an evil that resulted due to lack of economic opportunities available to women as well as their objectification as sexual objects in the patriarchal society. In her treatise “Speaking out on prostitution” (1971), Susan Brownmiller claims that women who took to prostitution were victims of a patriarchal society that does not confer equal status to women and therefore presented little employment opportunities for them. Other radical feminists also identified factors such as lack of education, poverty and human trafficking of women as instrumental in the rise of the oppressive practice of prostitution.

6.5.1.4 Celibacy

Many fractions of radical feminist organizations believed that heterosexual sex as an institutionalized practice that was considered to be synonymous with ‘normal sex’ is a political means of controlling the sexuality and body of women. Ann Koedt was the first radical feminist to talk about heterosexual sex as an institution that was oppressive since it focused on the needs and wants of the male over the female in her essay “The Myth of Vaginal Orgasm” (1970). Other radical feminist such as Ti-Grace Atkinson went to the extent of saying that the notion of heterosexual desire was a delusion, a patriarchal ideology that aimed at controlling women’s bodies and their fertility. They also advocated lesbianism as a means of sexual independence as well as a way of ensuring personal and political separation from men. Radical feminists like Kate Millett and Valerie Solanas also advocated celibacy. Millett equated celibacy with sanity while Solanas claimed in her famous work “The SCUM Manifesto”(1967) that sex was the ‘refuge of the mindless’ (Solanas 1967:10).

6.5.2 Equal opportunity

6.5.2.1 Vocation

The radical feminists’ concern for equal opportunity for women coalesced around their efforts to ensure women’s freedom to pursue any vocation they deemed fit for themselves. Radical feminists pushed for equal opportunities for women in every field of life such as economy, politics, culture, science and technology, religion as well as the ‘personal’ sphere of domestic life. They claimed that equal opportunities for women entailed that they be allowed to pursue a vocation of their choice. They also claimed equal pay for women and men in the workplace. In keeping with this belief, the radical feminists launched mass campaigns and mobilization at the grass root level to exhort women not to subjugate their aspirations for the sake of their husbands or children, but to strive for self-expression.

6.5.2.2 Child care

The radical feminists considered women’s domestic role of child rearing and household duties as greatest impediment in their pursuit of equal opportunities in the domestic as well as the public sphere. Jo Freeman was one of the first radical

feminists who critiqued the patriarchal myth of traditional family values as attempts to control women by limiting their opportunities in society in her essay “The Building of the Gilded Cage” (1971). The biologically determined role of women as mothers and nurturers often dictated that they sacrifice their personal dreams and ambitions for the sake of their family. Defining every mother as a ‘working mother’, radical feminists pointed out the double standards of the patriarchal society in eulogizing motherhood while simultaneously ‘devaluing the works that mothers do’ (Echols 1989: xiv). They therefore advocated that men should have an equal share in household duties as well as in child rearing. They also claimed for government sponsored child care services so as to enable women to practice their profession.

Certain radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone went on to campaign for the dissolution of the nuclear family in favour of community units, where childrearing would be the collective responsibility of the community. In keeping with this vision, organizations such as the New York Radical Women worked to make community child care accessible and affordable to women so that that would have a greater opportunity to pursue their vocation.

6.6 RADICAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT: PUBLICATIONS, ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS

The split of radical women from the radical New Left in the 1960s can be considered as beginning of radical feminist movement. The radical feminist movement is one of innovative protest and activism. Riding on the wave of tremendous energy, enthusiasm and popularity of the agitating radical feminists, the movement, as Ellen Willis says in her essay “Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism”, displayed in the first few years of its existence the potential to turn into a ‘true mass movement’(Willis, 1984). As mentioned earlier, America was the epicenter of organized radical feminist activism. Radical feminism is plural and divergent. Radical feminist activism found expression in varied organizations that were defined by their unique agendas, beliefs and stances. Various radical feminist organizations and movements sprang up rapidly across America who were committed to end the unjust domination of men over women. These organizations and communities used various innovative strategies such as manifestos, statements of purpose, articles and pamphlets that were sometimes written collaboratively and distributed collectively; demonstrations, conferences and speak outs; mobilization among other women, friends and co-workers in the workplace, streets, supermarkets and homes; and newspaper, radio and TV interviews to spread awareness about their agendas and political actions.

6.6.1 Publications

6.6.1.1 Manifestoes

According to Jacqueline Rhodes (2005), the rhetoric of radical feminism was the rhetoric of manifestoes, pamphlets and conscious political interruptions that aimed at

political transformation of patriarchal society. One of the first documents that articulated radical feminist concerns regarding sexism was a document written on the subordinate position of women in the New Left student organization known as Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The document was written by Mary King and Casey Hayden and was published in the April 1966 edition of Liberation magazine in a form of a manifesto entitled “Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo”.

Two years later, a women’s liberation group at the University of Florida in Gainesville released a document in 1968 that came to be regarded widely as the first theoretical framework of the radical feminist movement. Entitled “Toward a Female Liberation Movement” and commonly known as “The Florida Paper”, the treatise was written by Judith Brown and Beverly Jones. The paper critiqued the sexism and oppression of women by male members in the New Left movement and advocated the creation of an all-female commune as a sanctuary for women seeking to escape the sexist oppression rampant in male dominated society and nuclear family. The paper also postulated lesbianism and celibacy as possible alternatives to patriarchal institutions and values in society.

Jo Freeman’s article “The BITCH Manifesto” that was published in 1970 in New York Radical Women’s Notes from the Second Year is one of the most original and provocative essays that has today become synonymous with the creed of radical feminism. Freeman reclaims the derogatory term that is used for women and invests it with new connotations. She claims that the term ‘Bitch’ refers to women who are courageous enough to transgress the prevalent sexist notions of propriety in sex roles and behaviours which have subjugated women for centuries.

The ‘SCUM Manifesto’ that was published by Olympia Press in 1968 was another radical document that advocated separatism to an extreme degree. The manifesto which was written by Valerie Solanas claimed to speak for a fictitious radical feminist organization called the ‘Society for Cutting Up Men’ (SCUM) that advocated the annihilation of all males. The manifesto that was essentially a diatribe on all men and all forms of sexism articulated the anger expressed by some women when radical feminist movement was at its pinnacle.

Another significant publication of the radical feminist movement is the Manifesto called “The Woman-Identified Woman” (1970) published by a feminist group called ‘Radica lesbian’. The manifesto that was written by Rita Mae Brown and Artemis March begins by stating that the term ‘lesbian’ is used as a derogatory term by males for any woman who dares to step outside the norms of traditional female subservience. They then go on to rescue the term from its negative connotations by redefine and expand the term ‘lesbian’ as a metaphor that is symbolic of every woman’s rage against patriarchy and path that leads to liberty. They also claim that categorization of sexuality into homosexual and heterosexual predilection is a means of patriarchal control. The manifesto also advocates the practice of separatism, which

is women's willful and conscious separation from men and from institutions, relations, roles and activities that maintain male privilege.

6.6.1.2 Newsletters and essays

In 1968, the New York Radical Women released its landmark newsletter known as Notes from the First Year. The two successive editions of the newsletter were entitled as News from the Second Year and Notes from the Third Year respectively. These newsletters featured articles that would come to be recognized as classics of the radical feminist movement by authors such as Shulamith Firestone, Jo Freeman, Carol Hanish, Anne Koedt, Katie Sarachild, Cindy Cisler and Rosalyn Baxandall. These articles articulated some of the key issues of radical feminism such as equal opportunity and right for women, the sexist oppression of women, women's reproductive rights and healthcare and the role of women in the radical movement.

“The Building of the Gilded Cage” is another landmark essay written by Jo Freeman. The essay which was published in 1971 in Notes from the Third Year is a compelling study of the mechanism of patriarchy. Freeman embarks upon a historical examination of the evolution of Patria potestus or the power of the father as institution of social control. She claimed that power of the father is an institution that ensured women relinquish their identity and autonomy firstly to their fathers, and then to their husbands. Freeman also examines how patriarchy created social divisions on the lines of gender and limited the economic and political opportunities for women under the pretext of providing women protection and privilege.

Another important essay that helped define the radical feminist movement was Naomi Weisstein's essay “Kinder, Küche, Kirche as Scientific Law: Psychology Constructs the Female” (1968), which is taken from the German slogan ‘Kinder, Küche, Kirche’ that means children, kitchen and church. These were the domains that were traditionally considered to be the appropriate domains for women. In this essay, Weisstein debunks the gender stereotypes that psychology creates for women. Challenging the widely held belief that human behaviour is the manifestation of the individual's inner essence, Weisstein posits instead that social context plays a great role in determining human behaviour.

The 1970s witnessed the propagation of feminist agendas and movements via the new forms of mass media such as TV, music, and print journalism. An increasing number of women expressed their feminist ideals through mainstream press and this brought about a resurgence of feminist periodicals and magazines. Some of the important radical feminist periodicals of the era were Voice of Women's Liberation in Chicago; No More Fun and Games in Boston; Off Our Backs from Washington D.C., Women's Liberation Newsletter in Cambridge, Massachusetts; It Ain't Me, Babe from Berkeley, California; and Ain't I a Woman? from Iowa. As Martha Allen (1988) says, these early feminist journals featured the voices of key feminist intellectuals and

leaders and provided an open forum where women could speak for themselves, share and create consciousness about key feminist concerns.

6.6.1. 3 Major Books

The publication of Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) marks another high point of radical feminism. Firestone's book uses Marx and Engels' theory of class oppression as a framework for the analysis of sexual oppression of women. However, unlike Marxism she does not consider economic relationships as the basis of human society. Defining women as a sex class that has been oppressed by men, Firestone claims that sexual division of men and women and the power relations that emerge from this division are the basis of human society. She also claimed that women's oppression is the most primary form of oppression and identifies the nuclear family as the primary source of women's oppression. Drawing from Beauvoir's notions of how women are relegated to the position of an insignificant 'other' by men, Firestone maintains that women are otherized because of what she calls as the 'tyranny of reproduction'. Women have been subjugated by men because of their biological determined roles of childbearing and childrearing and because their fertility was controlled by men. Firestone therefore advocated the elimination of patriarchy and of the nuclear family and emphasized that women should have access to contraception and government aided child care. She also advocated the abandonment of traditional marriage in favour of an all women's separatist community which would be responsible for raising children.

Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), a path breaking analysis of patriarchy in the representation of women in literature was another influential radical feminist publication. Millett claims that sex is a political category, and that sexual politics is not determined by biology, but by social conditioning. Millett turned to literature to provide instances of how male writers defined sexual roles for women in society. She analyzed the works of 20th century male writers like D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and Norman Mailer to show how these writers define what it is to be male and female. She points out the pattern of 'feudal servitude' (Millett,1990:25) that is the defining factor of male-female relationships portrayed in the works of these writers. She goes on to point out that while men were defined in terms of their aggression, violence and dominance over their women, the degradation of the female characters generates the erotic in their works.

She goes on to claim that all forms of social, political and economic institutions are entrenched in patriarchal logic that posits male supremacy and female subservience. She identifies the family as the primary institution of patriarchy, claiming that it plays a major role in naturalizing the inequality of power between the sexes. She famously claimed that it is the family that 'effects control and conformity where political and other authorities are insufficient' (Millett, 1990:33). Millett's analysis inspired the

social and political theory of the radical feminist movement, as well as feminist literary theory in the field of literature in the 1970s.

Mary Daly was an influential voice that articulated radical feminist concerns within the framework of theology. A professor of Theology from Boston University, Mary Daly developed a feminist theological standpoint known as “Post-Christian Radical Feminism”. Her controversial works such as *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), *Beyond God the Father* (1974) and *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1975) earned her the reputation of being one of the most provocative and influential feminist intellectual of her times. Daly firmly believed that the primary root of women’s oppression was religion. She postulated that all religious systems in the world were instruments of oppression since they endorse and eulogize women’s passivity and submission to male supremacy. She critiqued the exclusion of women from holding clerical positions in the church and the church’s perception of God as male.

Daly’s most innovative work *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* charts out a unique and radical feminist ethics that rejects patriarchal myths that organize the social world. In this work, she sets out to unearth the lost voice of female ethics that she names as the ‘Crone’ or ‘Hag’. Daly makes deliberate use of these pejorative terms that men use for women and reinvents them by rejecting their sexist connotations. This method underscores her approach which was to reinvent and reclaim terms which have been invested with sexist pejorative connotations and then go on to use them to subvert patriarchal logic. Her methodology includes research into the etymology and original connotations and usage of derogatory terms for women such as ‘haggard’, ‘crone’ and ‘hag’ and to retrieve within their etymology a compelling feminist perspective which has the potential to subvert patriarchy. In this manner, Daly initiates not only a new vocabulary, but a new feminist epistemology or a new feminist perspective on women’s experiences. Calling her new feminist ethics ‘hagography’, a neologism that puns on the term ‘hagiography’ which is the biographical writings of Christian saints, Daly set out to reclaim and celebrate women who have been persecuted and excluded by orthodox religion. Daly’s hagography also attempts to expose patriarchy’s practice of constructing cultural myths that naturalize the inferiority of women.

6.7 SUMMARY

In the unit, we have discussed or found that the genesis of radical feminism. The radical feminism started in the year 1960 and 1970 on the form of second wave feminism. The movement was found in America and European countries but the America was the centre point of this movement. It has also highlight the different radical feminist groups and their role to develop the feminist movement, the role of the groups has to fight for identities of woman and counter the male dominating role in the society. There have been also discussed some important concerns for the

woman and their existence in the society. So far the relevance concerns are concerned such as abortion and contraception, rape and violence against women, pornography and prostitution, celibacy. These concern are the vanguards of the woman to lead their life independently in the society. It has also examined the opportunities of woman in terms of professional fields and other works. It is also argued that during their professional works with the public or private organisations, the organisation should have allowed them for maternity leave of provide the other basic facilities to take care of their child's.

Many scholars believe that the rise of lesbian feminism steered the radical feminist movement towards cultural feminism. Though cultural feminism is an offshoot of radical feminism the beliefs of these two strands of feminism are antithetical. Cultural feminism is a moral and cultural movement that advocated separatism and sought to build a female counter culture to patriarchal society. It conceived of a separate women's culture that could provide sanctuary to women to enable them to withdraw from patriarchal society and the struggle against male supremacy. Radical feminism on the other hand was a political movement that sought to transform society by bringing about the end of male supremacy in all spheres of life. Weakened by its numerous internal factions, the radical feminist movement began to wane and dissipate. Many women began to turn to the liberal feminism of NOW which, by then, began to recognize and embrace differences of class, race and sexual orientation among women.

The Radical feminist movement has also been criticized by women of colour and from the 'Third World' as privileging a version of feminism that focused only on white, middle class women. They point out that the radical feminists' notion of 'universal sisterhood' based on the shared oppression of all women neglects differences among women along the lines of race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation. Many detractors of radical feminism have been women themselves. These women were alienated by the ideology and dramatic antics of certain radical feminist groups who have often treated them with open hostility for not being a part of the feminist movement. Nevertheless, the extensive influence of radical feminism to the feminist cause cannot be undermined. As Echols says, even though the radical feminist movement was short lived, its effects are anything but short lived. The world today is different than what it used to be in the 1960s and 1970s, not only because of technological advances in birth control, expansion of economy, and modernization, but also because radical feminism was central to this transformation. We owe changes in the family, such as the increase in dual-income families; the gradual erosion of sexual division of labour at home; greater access to contraceptives, birth control and women's health; awareness of rape and domestic violence; and our less rigid understanding of gender to the efforts of radical feminism (Echols,1989: 285). It was radical feminism that generated anti-rape and anti-domestic violence movements and contributed concretely to women's cause by setting up shelters, community support and women's helpline (Siegel, 2007: 169). In the words of Ellen

Willis, 'It was radical feminism that put women's liberation on the map, that got sexual politics recognized as a public issue, that created the vocabulary ("consciousness-raising," "the personal is political," "sisterhood is powerful," etc.) with which the second wave of feminism entered popular culture.' (Willis, 1984:92).

However, one of the greatest impacts of radical feminism was in higher education. Many radical feminists found positions in colleges and universities, usually in the nascent area of women's studies. Radical feminism had a major contribution in the 'intellectual formation of faculty' (Seigel 2007: 169) who would develop the discipline of women's studies in various universities. This had a tremendous impact in the development of feminist intellectual traditions within the academia which continues till date to inform and shape contemporary feminist thoughts and practices. Radical feminists such as Ti-Grace Atkinson joined Tufts University, Massachusetts; Charlotte Bunch at Rutgers University, New Jersey; Mary Daly at Boston College; Roxanne Dunbar at California State University, Hayward; Jo Freeman taught at SUNY and Naomi Weisstein at SUNY Buffalo. Others like Shulamith Firestone, Susan Brownmiller, Kate Millett, Rita Mae Brown and Robin Morgan are known as intellectuals and writers who exercised tremendous influence over the development of feminist thought.

6.8 EXERCISES

1. What are the different radical feminist organization and its role in society?
2. What are the key concerned of radical feminism?
3. Briefly discuss about the New York Radical Feminists?
4. Analyses the radical feminist movement?

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UNIT-7 ECOFEMINISM

Structure

7.1 Objectives

7.1 Introduction

7.3 Defining Ecofeminism

7.4 Theoretical Debates

7.4.1 Nature-Culture: The Seeds of Ecofeminism in the West

7.4.2 Prakriti and Shakti: Towards a More Indigenous Approach in Ecofeminism

7.5 Alternative Ideas

7.6 Environmental Activism: Chipko and Beyond

7.7 Summary

7.8 Exercise

7.9 References

7.1 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit you will be able to:

- Critically analyses the notion of ecofeminism as theory and as a practical solution while approaching problems regarding gender and the environment;
- Describe the subjugation and oppression of environment and women by a larger system or culture; and
- Explain how different cultures come to see the environment and the conflicts in these multiple perceptions.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

You may have heard of the term ‘ecofeminism’ already. In this unit, we will try to achieve a greater understanding of the term within different contexts. We will examine the definition of ecofeminism, and then look at some related theoretical debates. We will look at both western and indigenous approaches to ecofeminism. With the help of this theoretical framework, we will try to gain a critical perspective on some of the ways in which the subjugation of the environment is linked to that of women. You will also learn about the role of different women’s movements and their struggle to preserve the dignity of our environment.

7.3 DEFINING ECOFEMINISM

Before we begin to examine various aspects related to ecofeminism, let us first attempt to define it. It is important to understand that ecofeminism as a theory is a combination of ideas that support the fight for women's empowerment and that of a viable, sustainable environment. Braidotti (1994) defines ecofeminism as 'the feminist position most explicitly concerned with environmental degradation'. Thus in the most simple terms, ecofeminism comes to regard an association between women and nature as essential to the way both are treated. For both women and nature are mistreated and subjugated and as Françoise d'Eaubonne, the French feminist credited with the emergence of the idea of ecofeminism, comes to note this is because of the 'Male System'. She suggests that the only way to save the environment is through the destruction of male power by women. Yet, ecofeminism is much more than a mere disapproval and destruction of the male power. It is very much embedded in the way women are closely associated with the environment in the multiple ways in which they are perceived. And within feminism too there is no one way of looking at this relation, for as a theory ecofeminism is linked to diverse thoughts and practices.

7.4 THEORETICAL DEBATES

As a movement, ecofeminism has come to be influenced in different ways by different strands of the feminist movement. Thus, Jaggar notes that liberal feminism is least able to associate itself with ecology for its orientation remains centered on white, middle class concerns. And even though radical feminism uses the association between women and nature as a rallying point in its emancipator politics, their argument is seen as far too simplistic to carry forward a movement. However, Social Ecofeminism comes across as an interesting new movement that is influenced by Marxism and is based on the recognition that gender is socially constructed and recognizes the urgent need to develop conceptual tools that will look at ecological and social change vis-à-vis gender.

Bina Agarwal (2007) lays out certain key ideas within ecofeminism. First, there is an important connection between the domination and exploitation of nature. Second, in patriarchal thought women are seen to be closer to nature and men as closer to culture. Nature in turn is seen to be inferior to culture, and therefore women are inferior to men. Third, the domination and oppression of nature and of women have occurred together. Women have an important stake in ending the domination of nature, thereby bringing together both human and non-human nature. Fourth, the feminist movement and the environment movement must stand together to create a more equitable and just society. Both the movements have a lot in common and are can create a common perspective, praxis and theory. In this sense, Agarwal notes that the eco-feminist movement has an ideological base that attributes the source of the subordination and domination of women in existing systems of beliefs and practices, and representations. And the supporters of this movement are calling out to all men

and women to rethink and recreate their relationship to nature. Ecofeminism emerged as a response to the large-scale destruction of the environment and the subsequent impact on women. Interestingly, the correlation between a tortured and exploited environment and a subjugated and oppressed sex was evolved in the West. But in order to create a workable theory of action the need to look at cross-cultural debates and issues led to the emergence of other strands of thought within ecofeminism. This was also in answer to large-scale ecological movements in developing countries where the ties between nature and women were seen to be of more relevance.

In the next section, we trace the links theoretical influences of the ecofeminist movement, with reference to the West and later look at the other cultural understanding of the movement. In the latter case, the focus is especially on India as over the past two decades it has spawned many ecological movements lead primarily by women.

7.4.1 Nature-Culture: The Seeds of Ecofeminism in the West

Sherry Ortner's (1972) formulation linking nature to women and culture to men remains the definitive ideological influence of the ecofeminist movement. The nature-culture approach looks at the close relation that women share with nature and the resultant insubordination of both nature and women.

In trying to understand the reasons behind the insubordination of women in society, Ortner identifies three levels of the problem. The first level refers to the universal fact of the inferior position of women in society, which is however socially and culturally endorsed. Ortner wishes to examine the reasons behind it. Second, are the cultural symbolisms, ideologies and social structural arrangements that are related to women but differ from one culture to another. Third, what are the means by which women revolt or try to suppress these structures of oppression and insubordination. Ortner is categorical that in examining the inferior position of women she is looking at universals, or facts applicable across cultures that place women in a disadvantageous position.

Yet, before one begins to associate women with nature and men with culture it is important to understand that the categories of nature and culture themselves and are cultural categories social constructions. According to Ortner, culture therefore implicitly recognizes and asserts the difference between nature and natural phenomena, and itself. Here the focus is on the difference in the operation of nature and the operation of culture and a situation wherein culture sees itself as capable of controlling the operation of nature and nature itself. Thus, Ortner says, "This culture (i.e. every culture) at some level of awareness asserts itself to be not only distinct from, but superior in power to, nature, and that sense of distinctiveness and superiority rests precisely on the ability to transform to 'socialize' and 'culturalize' nature" (1972, p.11).

Having established the universal domination of nature by culture, Ortner creates the foundation of her examination of how women come to be identified with or symbolically seen to be closer to nature, as opposed to men, who are associated with culture. Women are placed within the format of nature primarily because of their physiological, bodily make-up. Her body and its functions are thought to condition her social roles and psychic (emotional, mental) structure in such a way that removes her from cultural functions, by putting constraints on her.

Ortner draws from her understanding of Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* to look at how women are perceived to be physiologically closer to nature and therefore inferior. For Beauvoir the role that women play in society is an extension of the physiological state. The physical make-up, development and functions of the human female are "to a great extent than the male, a prey of the species" (1972, p.14). That is many major organs and processes within the female body are actually geared towards the reproduction of the human species rather than the personal needs of the woman herself. Take the example of the female breasts, which according to Beauvoir serve absolutely no purpose to a woman's personal health and can be done away with. Similarly menstruation and the ovarian cycles are geared towards creating conducive conditions for bearing children. For Beauvoir, it is almost as though the woman has to adapt to the needs of the egg, rather to her own requirements. Most of the above processes are a source of discomfort and may often in many cultures be the reason for segregation and isolation, as is the case with menstruation.

The above reasoning for women's inferior role leads to a larger point that Ortner wishes to make. Though descriptive, the above analysis points to how in reproducing the human species, women are handicapped, while men in being excluded directly from the task of reproduction are at an advantageous position. Men create more than life they create 'meaning'. By meaning Ortner and Beauvoir are referring to things that exist beyond the level of mere existence and the survival of the species. For men are able to create inventions of novelty and value meant for the future while women by virtue of their physiognomy are 'doomed' to repeat and recreate the human race. In creating technology and symbols, man is involved in the production of things and values that are eternal and everlasting, whereas women are creating only perishables or human beings.

Interestingly, in such a formulation men are seen to be associated with culture through the invention and participation in hunting and warfare. Acts that do not create but destroy. Women are nature in that sense that they create what man destroys. Yet on the other hand women are very much part of the cultural enterprise. They are part of the socialization process that trains the young to join society. Though socialization as part of childrearing is an extension of childbearing (which in turn restricts her to the household and the domestic domain), yet it is a role that mediates between nature and culture. In this sense women come to be seen as intermediaries.

This intermediate status of women is read as the middle position in a hierarchy where culture is at the top and nature down below. Ortner sees that the role of being intermediates may stem from mediating between nature and culture. Women remain close to nature, but also important participants in the social and cultural process through their role in socialization. Though relegated to the domestic milieu of childbearing and childrearing their importance as primary agents in the transmission of cultural values to the younger generation (boys' socialization is taken over by men once they reach puberty, while that of girls' continue with their mother) cannot be wished away. However this mediation with culture can be relegated to a lesser domain. So, Ortner notes that the participation of women in the domestic domain is seen as a form of lesser culture, in opposition to the higher culture that men belong to and cultivate, such as religion, law, arts, etc.

Take for instance cooking - Ortner notes that cooking as an act within the domestic domain is a job for women, primarily because of their natural association with the household. However, cuisine or cooking as an art remains the domain of men and therefore superior to and separate from everyday cooking. For Ortner, the universal devaluation of women comes from the separation of nature and culture—and within culture the difference between low and high culture. Either way, whether in their association with nature or with low culture, women remain inferior and subordinated. In all this, tellingly, women accept their subordinate role as intermediaries and reproducers of the natural order, just as nature accepts the domination of man and culture.

The above theoretical background forms the foundation of the Western ecofeminist movement. Bina Agarwal notes that the biological essentialism inherent within this formulation (for which Ortner too has been extensively criticized) does not take into account the way women are viewed in different cultures. It places woman as a unitary category (2007, p.319) ignoring cultural, class and ethnic differences. Second, with such an ideological framework the ecofeminist movement depends on a logic of subordination that ignores the ways in which domination is exercised beyond the realms of ideology and at the level of economics, politics, etc. Third, the above approach does not look at the ways in which ideological constructs come about both historically and culturally, and how they become predominant within society. That is, what institutions, social and economic relations make such ideas of subordination dominant. Finally, the association of women with nature does not take into account women's everyday association with nature. It pushes forth a kind of 'essentialism' that looks at female essence as static and unchanging. Agarwal finds such a stance deeply problematic as notions regarding nature, culture and gender have already been seen to be socially and historically constructed.

However proponents of this theory find support in ecofeminists such as Ariel Salleh who places women's reproductive functions within the domain of nature. She

attempts to move forward by placing ecofeminism within a mode of praxis or movement.

Salleh (1993) is very clear about the importance of a discourse that places women and nature as similarly represented, if not treated, especially symbolically. She endorses the linking together of the feminist and environmental movements to put forth an alternative world view. This is tellingly evident in her critique of another strand of environmental theory, called Deep Ecology, that Salleh sees as representing the requirements of white, middle class men who see nature as a means of reconnecting with the human 'ego' and is removed from any activist concerns regarding the environment. Salleh wishes to stress on a theory that can also form the basis of an active movement wherein excluded and oppressed groups within society such as women are members and frontrunners.

In her attempts to create a theory that is tied to a praxis rooted in life needs and the survival of the habitat, Salleh recommends looking at the hands-on experiences of those women who are closest to their habitats, such as Third-World women. Ecofeminism according to her should be a strategy for social action that includes both men and women. In fact in answer to critics, such as the deep ecologists, who maintain that women are as much responsible for the destruction of the environment in their dependence upon labour-saving devices and technology Salleh notes that women continue to be relegated to their 'natural' role as housekeepers even with the advent of such technology. She is categorical in noting that this view emerges from a biased, Western standpoint that does not take into account the lack of any such labour-saving technology at the disposal of poor Third-World women, who live and work with their own labour, close to nature. She also insists that the acknowledgement of the feminine role as 'careers' and backbones of families is an important aspect of the ecofeminist movement.

Vandana Shiva finds the Western ecofeminist movement as lacking in the way it presents the association between women and nature. Her formulation of a more inclusive and dynamic theory, draws on Indian cosmological and philosophical thinking to project a new relationship between gender and nature. Having examined the movement within the western context, let us now turn to India to examine indigenous approaches to ecofeminism.

7.4.2 Prakriti and Shakti: Towards A More Indigenous Approach in Ecofeminism

In ancient Indian philosophy the association of women with nature is even more deeply embedded than in Western thought. However, unlike in the West, the opposition between the male and the female, and in turn between nature and culture, does not exist in Indian philosophical thought. Vandana Shiva (1988) finds this to be the hallmark of a culture that looks at both the male and female as the expression of the same person and not separate from each other.

In Indian cosmology the world is produced through the opposing play of destruction and creation, and cohesion and disintegration (Shiva, 1988). The dynamic force that comes out of this process is called Shakti which is literally the source of everything and in turn pervades everything. And the manifestation of Shakti, or the feminine principle in the form of an energy or power is called Prakriti, or nature. "Nature, both animate and inanimate, is thus an expression of Shakti, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos, in conjunction with the masculine principle (Purusha), Prakriti creates the world" (Shiva, 1988, p.38). Thus here person and nature or Purusha-Prakriti are a duality in unity. They are not opposing to each other, but rather they are "inseparable complements of one another in nature, in woman, in man" (Shiva, 1988, p.40).

Shiva notes that the association of women exclusively with nature is not a revolutionary thought but is actually the source of the subjugation and exploitation of women and nature. She finds Beauvoir's formulation to be characteristic of Western feminist thought that accepts the duality and opposition of the male and female further placing the woman as weak and therefore oppressed. In fact the answer to the woman problem, for Beauvoir, lies in masculinizing women. Liberation will come through in a world where women are free to assume masculine values. For Shiva such a formulation is problematic especially when the categories of masculine and feminine are themselves socially constructed. Western gender theory has placed them within biological essentialism. However Shiva supports another line of thinking that looks at a transgender ideology wherein the feminine principle is seen in both men and women. This feminine principle is the principle of activity and creativity in nature, "One cannot really distinguish the masculine from the feminine, person from nature, Purusha from Prakriti" (Shiva, 1988, p.52). Nowhere else is this more evident than in ancient philosophies, especially those found in the Third World where, "Women and nature are associated not in passivity but in creativity and in the maintenance of life" (author's emphasis, 1988, p.47).

Despite there being a unified approach towards nature in terms of men and women, Shiva reiterates that women do share a special relationship with nature. This is seen in the following ways. First, in the ways in which women's interaction with nature was reciprocal for they found themselves to be close to nature in the way both produced and replenished the earth and society. Second, women are in partnership with nature by not only using its resources, but also giving it back. They do not own nature like property, but insist on participating in the process of 'to let grow and to make grow'. Last, with nature women are producers who help sustain society and relations. There are proponents of a subsistence economy and the inventors of the first productive economy (Shiva, 1988, p. 43).

In such a situation any kind of division and oppression of nature and of women is a result of colonialism. Shiva finds colonialism to be a source of the destruction of nature and of women's work. The coming in of science and technology has broken

the synthesis between natures, masculine and feminine principles—and this has been replaced by an unequal and hierarchical relationship. Development is seen as mal-development for women and nature by perpetuating domination and centralization through patriarchal control.

Take for instance the colonial destruction of forests in India. Shiva notes that the forest in India is a symbol of life and fertility. Known as Aranyani or the Goddess of the Forest, she is worshipped in different regions by different names. The forest has always been the highest expression of harmony and communal habitat honoured and protected as sacred groves. This is symbolic of the community's sense of deep ecological understanding. Colonial rule was established with the destruction of the natural resources of India, such as forests. The colonial practice of commercial forestry and the scientific management of forests, involving the marking out of forest area as 'reserved' and protected, was the beginning of the displacement of traditional indigenous knowledge and women's subsistence economy. The above practice involved the erosion of forests and the rights of the local people on its produce.

Shiva insists that the role of marginalized women and communities becomes especially important for they are living proof of the harmful effects of progress, as also they have the holistic and ecological knowledge of what the protection and production of life involves. Women of the Third World are the best representatives of such a category.

Bina Agarwal finds Shiva's theory different from the Western feminist perspective in the sense that it explores aspects that the latter have left out in their formulation, especially the links between development and developmental change and their impact on the environment, as well as the aspect of people's dependence on the environment for their livelihood.

Yet, the theory is not without some drawbacks. One, Shiva's theory places all Third-World women under one category. This kind of generalization that collapses cultural, economic and social differences is also a kind of essentialism, according to Agarwal. It sees all Third-World women as close to nature, especially in terms of their knowledge base and dependence.

Two, within India itself the theory does not take into account other historical, cultural and social processes and ideas that may have impacted the relationship with nature. The dependence on Hindu philosophical thought does not apply to other systems of thought and practices in India. Besides within Hinduism itself there are very many different strands of understanding that may not support what Shiva lays out in her theory.

Three, Agarwal contends that Shiva does not include the impact of precolonial structures and practices upon the environment and on women. Inequality in the form of caste, and class have long existed within the Indian social framework, which Shiva

ignores, giving precedence to colonial oppression and the coming in of modern scientific thought as the primary reasons for the destruction of the environment and the suppression of women. The above criticisms point to the fact that within ecofeminism there is still space for change and reformulation. As Salleh notes, the movement's dynamism lies in its theoretical stance that adapts to changes occurring across the world as well as giving due importance to alternative theories that combine a more holistic approach to environment and gender issues.

In the following section, you will learn about some alternative approaches to ecofeminism which will help you to think critically about ways in which these debates may be resolved.

7.5 ALTERNATIVE IDEAS

The need of the hour remains the formulation of a theory that is an inspiration for a movement uniting the fight for the protection of the environment, and women's rights. Such a theory should also unite rather than alienate women and men across the world. Eco-feminism has tried to do so in many ways, but of late the need to encapsulate aspects that point to the diversity in women and their ties to the environment has led to the formulation of alternative theories that aim to be more inclusive.

Bina Agarwal formulates the idea of feminist environmentalism wherein the link between women and environment is seen through the dynamics of gender, class, caste and race, and through the organization of production, reproduction and distribution. In terms of being a theory for action, "such a perspective would call for struggles over both resources and meanings" (Agarwal, 2007, p.324).

This approach involves the inclusion of ideas such as the appropriation of resources by dominant groups in society through control over property, and power. The ways in which this control is exercised, both ideological and institutional, is a sign of privilege and therefore needs to be examined further.

In terms of feminist ideology, Agarwal talks of notions regarding gender and the actual division of work especially in relation to the environment. On the environmental front there is a need to look at the relationship between people and nature in terms of exploitation and appropriation by a few.

Agarwal goes on to discuss the importance of feminist environmentalism in relation to the Indian experience. Here she analyses the different reasons behind the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the environment. Needless to say the dynamics behind this oppression goes beyond the simplistic understanding of nature as similar to women and therefore subject to similar treatment by those in power. It includes issues such as class and caste control and other social, economic and political problems.

Forms of environmental degradation such as water and wind erosion, falling surface or ground water, indiscriminate sinking of tube-wells, amongst many others are connected to exploitation at various levels of power and governance. The process of statization or the state's increasing control over forest commons has been noted since colonial rule. This has led to large scale degradation and deforestation. Post-independence the government has actively pursued the policy of alienating the people from their rights in common forest land. Locals do not have access to forests from which they drew their sustenance and livelihood. The process of privatization of common resources has meant that forests are now being increasingly commercially exploited. The erosion of community resource management systems; exclusion of local people, especially women from control over these resources; excessive population growth, and its pressures on natural resources; and the negative impact of technology such as that used in the Green Revolution have only made the environmental issue more serious.

These processes are happening at the macro level wherein the state is becoming oblivious of how its policies are impacting the micro-local populace especially women and children. Agarwal lays out certain aspects of how this process of statization, increasing technology and privatization is affecting the marginalized population of women and children. First, the preexisting division of labour based on gender places women in poor peasant and tribal households as the chief source of sustenance. They are hugely dependent upon the environment, taking fuel from firewood found in the forest environmental degradation and the state control of forest land is pushing women and young girls to travel further for fuel or firewood. The stress on getting food and basic necessities that were earlier available close to hand, is creating an unequal division of labour where women have to labour harder. Second, the systematic differences in allocation of resources in terms of gender is evident in the huge mortality and morbidity rates amongst women and children, especially girls. Third, inequalities in men's and women's resources also include a disadvantaged position in the labour market. Fluctuations in weather patterns mean more uncertainty in agricultural work—leading to availability of primarily seasonal work. It is these reasons amongst others that create the need for a movement that looks at the processes by which the degradation of the environment is often connected to the marginalization of communities and groups such as women.

7.6 ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM: CHIPKO AND BEYOND

Interestingly, the cause that ecofeminism wishes to fight for around the world has been women-led environmental activism. In India as way back as the 1970s a wave of environmental movements spread thanks to the dedicated involvement of women fighting to safeguard their environment and resources. The most famous of these was the Chipko movement that gathered steam in the hills of India affecting village after village.

Radha Kumar (1993) lays out a dateline of the movement to show how much the involvement of women affected the way the government framed its policies around environmental policy. The movement began in 1973 in Gopeshwar in Chamoli District in northern India. It began with the women of the village hugging (chipko in Hindi) the ash trees of the nearby forest that a sports goods contractor from Allahabad had come to cut. This was followed by one of the movement founders, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, influencing the villagers of Reni, to take action against the auctioning off of the forest neighbouring the village. The men of the village decided to approach the government, even after which the indiscriminate cutting of trees began. Seeing this the women led by a 60 year old widow Gaura Devi went ahead and hugged the trees, foiling the attempts of the contractors to cut them. Again in June 1975 women stopped the felling of trees in a forest near Gopeshwar village by clinging to them. The Chipko movement spread in many areas of Uttaranchal—especially in the districts of Chamoli and TerhiGarhwal.

The movement began to organize itself and called itself the Dasauli Gram Swarajya Mandal that helped form women's organizations such as the MahilaMangal Dals. This helped women in becoming a part of the way in which they could claim their rights to decide what was done to the forests and fields. The characteristic of the environmental movement is seen especially in terms of how it has been led by women at the local level, with the men often not supporting their activism. In most cases the movement has involved a face-off between the male-dominated village panchayats and the Mahila Mangal Dals (women's groups). The struggle for the protection of the environment has often taken on an anti-men stance. Conflict over grazing and rights over resources has been reflected in the way men have tried to coerce women into toeing their line through threats and beatings. Often in support of the contractors the men and the panchayats have tried to dissuade environmental activists from fighting for their cause. Interestingly, as Kumar notes, the Chipko movement takes on different issues for the purposes of activism. Anti-mining, timber contracting and anti-alcohol movements trace their original source to the movement for environmental rights. The anti-alcohol movement for instance is in response to the ill effects of alcohol addiction in rural areas. Not only does the addiction lead to violence against women, it also impacts the men's health and most importantly leads to a squandering of household income. This affects women directly—especially in rural and tribal areas. In the latter, many tribes have willed forest land to contractors under the influence of local, country-made liquor. The movement for prohibition therefore is seen to be necessary to protect both the environment and women.

Uttarakhand SangharshVahini was formed in 1977 in support of prohibition. In 1983, in a mass meeting held by the organization alcoholism was seen to be a major problem. From 1965-71, anti-alcohol activism gained momentum leading to prohibition in many areas. In February 1984, villagers in a district in Almora successfully managed to bring to book an agent in illicit liquor, as well as the government official who was involved in smuggling the liquor. The movement then

spread to different villages where the Vahini activists went about destroying liquor, liquor shops and made liquor vendors apologize in public.

In order to analyse the impact of the environmental movement in India, three examples are presented here. Each of the three movements are over the span of at least three decades and show the struggle that women have to undertake to fight for their rights and those of the environment. Interestingly, the rights of women and the environment seem to complement each other in each of the instances discussed here. The examples are all from India.

Madhu Sarin (2001) looks at the politics of the forest and the role of women in environmental activism in the Kumaon-Garhwal region. In Uttarakhand, even though women have been closest to the environment in terms of livelihood and cultivation, yet the forests have been under the control of the men. Under colonial rule, the British rulers took over most of the forest land and made it inaccessible to the local population under this elaborate system of scientific management of forests that placed them under the category of reserved areas. Denotified or preserved forest land was an attempt by the government to have access to areas rich in natural resources. Post-independence, the government introduced the notion of Van Panchayats which would be involved in joint forest management (JFM). The idea of JFM came about through the Chipko struggle that fought for involvement of the local population with their natural resources. However, the panchayats in this area had been traditionally male-dominated while the movement had been overwhelmingly led by women. Therefore, the unofficial, informal community forest management (CFM) was formed by women in favour of their role in safeguarding natural resources and the forests in the area. The CFMs in the area were opposed to the male-dominated Van Panchayats and the government-controlled JFMs. The first point of conflict began with the formation of village forest joint management (VFJMs) which were funded by the World Bank in association with the Uttaranchal Government. The till now autonomous Van Panchayats came under the control of the VFJMs. This was because women had begun to take over the reins of the Van Panchayats, and with the help of government programs such as Mahila Samakhya, which aims to empower women, they were doing an outstanding job of protecting the forests and safeguard the community's resources. The VFJMs represented opposition from the village men and the forest department.

In Khirakot, a village in the Someshwar valley in Uttaranchal, the women found their access to the forest blocked by a miner who was building a soapstone mine in the area. When the mine dust began to settle on their land making it difficult for them to plant their crops and plough the field, the women launched a protest against the miner. In retaliation the miner filed criminal cases against the village men, each of those who had protested against the setting up of the mine. The women in turn were not intimidated (even though the men were) and collected money from each village household to fight the case. The contractor further tried intimidation in the form of

destruction of property, and stoning of the villagers' houses. The activists in return blocked the route to the quarry and did not let labourers to work in the mine. Finally, on a visit to the area the district magistrate was moved by the struggle of the village women and immediately recommended cancelling the case. This was further followed by the closing of the mine in 1982—a true victory for the women's movement (Kumar, 1993).

Another very significant instance of women's involvement in the fight against human and environmental injustice is the infamous Bhopal gas tragedy, with which you would be already familiar, as it has been under media glare for several years since it occurred in 1984.

Box 7.1: Case Analysis of the Bhopal Gas

The Bhopal gas tragedy of 1984 saw a mass movement of women gas victims in response to the indiscriminate and avoidable death of around 4000 people to gas poisoning from the Union Carbide factory. The tragedy that recorded 500,000 as potential victims—in terms of long-term signs of gas pollution—was a result of gross negligence. After the Government of India decided to take sole control of the disaster in terms of relief, and pursuing the case against the American firm for compensation to the victims—a lot of information was closeted under the Officials Secrets Act. To unearth the information and fight for adequate medical care, the women of Bhopal came out in large numbers.

Women's' continuous protest against the Bhopal gas disaster is exemplifying the aspect of existence of ecofeminism in the contemporary context of nature/culture debate. Over the years the ratio of women to men in protests and demonstrations increased to 90:10. The women went on fighting for relief and employment even after the government settled for much less with Union Carbide in 1989. Finally with the election of a new government, the activists were able to win Rs. 360 lakh as a three-year relief grant, as well as government access to medical information. Most importantly they secured the government's support to reopen the case against Carbide that had been infamously settled in 1989 by the Supreme Court (Kumar, 1993). It is these stories of courage and activism that have inspired feminists and environmental activists around the world. And it is these very movements that inspire ecofeminists to fight for the rights of women and the environment.

7.7 SUMMARY

This unit looks at the importance of an ideology that aims to bring together the shared causes of women and the environment. In particular, the unit focuses on the following aspects of the eco-feminist movement:

- Showing how women are intrinsically linked to the environment and nature, through their physical make-up and the social roles that they fulfil due to their physiological structure;
- Linking women in the Third-World to the environment through their dependence upon it for their survival and livelihood; and
- Tracing how institutional mechanisms and social structures such as caste, class and gender suppress both the environment and women, as part of the larger structures of dominance and insubordination.

The unit also discusses the environmental movement, spearheaded primarily by women to show how they have located themselves as the best supporters of protection of the environment and sustainable development till date. When the world is facing a global crisis vis-à-vis the environment, it is essential for us to understand the ways in which the environment has come to figure in our everyday lives. It is in this sense that we must also strive to protect it. It is no wonder then that an important part of this course tries to look at how this linkage can be established at the level of human relationships, especially that with gender, and more specifically, women.

7.8 EXERCISE

1. How are women related to nature and men related to culture? Explain it in relation to ecofeminism.
2. Do you agree with the idea that women are closer to nature and therefore inferior? How does Vandana Shiva formulate this idea? Substantiate.
3. What is feminists' environmentalism? Explain it from different theoretical perspectives.
4. Discuss the salient features of environmental movements in India.

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