

FEMINISM

Feminist thought resist categorization into tidy schools of thought. Interdisciplinary, intersectional, interlocking are terms that best describe feminist thought. It is difficult to categorize every feminist's thoughts as belonging to one school or the other, but feminist thought is old enough to have a history with a set of labels. The labels are incomplete and highly contestable. Nevertheless, various schools have been identified based on their range of approaches, perspectives, and frameworks used by women to shape a) origins of patriarchy b) their explanations for women's oppression and, c) their proposed solution for its elimination. This essay aims to familiarize its readers with some of the prominent schools of feminism.¹

Liberal feminism started in the nineteenth century during the women's suffrage movement. Liberal feminists believe that rationality, individual autonomy and self-fulfillment are characteristics possessed by all, and are common nature. Thus they should be extended to women. Women have the same rational human nature that men do and so, they should be given the same educational, professional opportunities and civil rights as man. A just society is one that allows individuals (including women) to exercise their freedoms, and respects their individuality and autonomy. These feminists believe that female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that block women's entrance to and success in the public world because society holds the false belief that women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men. According to this school of thought, the goal of women's liberation is freeing women from oppressive gendered roles, towards true equality.²

Radical feminism believes that patriarchy cannot be reformed and needs to be ripped out. It celebrates womanhood and believes that womanhood is a power, not a curse. The main insight of this school of thought is on how the distinctions of gender based on sex, structure virtually every aspect of a person's lives, and are so all-pervasive that ordinarily they go unrecognized. The primary concern of these feminists is the subordination of women, in dealing with which they reveal how male power is exercised and reinforced through practices such as rape, pornography, prostitution, child bearing, housework, love, marriage etc. In response to total domination, subordination and devaluation of women by men, one part of radical feminists tried to celebrate womanhood – based on creative power inherent in women's biology. Some radical feminists emphasize on pleasures of sex (heterosexual, lesbian and autoerotic) while some others emphasize the 'dangers' of heterosexual sex. Some believe that new reproduction-assisting technologies are liberating while some believe they are harmful. Within radical feminism, there is a wide range of thinkers with varied approaches and standpoints.³

Marxist feminists look at the society through a lens of class. They are influenced by the philosophies of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxist feminists reject the abstract individualism of liberal feminism. Their emphasis is on social nature and social existence (class, kind of work done) that determines human consciousness. They believe that a

¹ Jagger, A. (1983). *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, pp.27-50.

² ibid

³ id

woman's conception of herself is a product of her social existence which is largely defined by the kind of work she does. They believe that in a capitalist society, women are relegated largely to domestic work in the private sphere, and to the reproduction of species (rather than production). With its emphasis on economic factors, Marxist feminists seen women as a distinct economic class, rather than as individuals, analyzing the connections between women's work status & their self-image. They say that capitalism perpetuates subordination of women by enforcing their economic dependence on men. They say that for women's liberation, capitalism should be replaced with a socialist system in which means of production belong to everyone because then, women will have no economic dependence on men and will be just as free and truly liberated as men.⁴

None of these schools are perfect in isolation from others. For instance, liberal feminists did not include an analysis of race, class or sexuality and focused only on interests of white, middle class, heterosexual women, leaving behind a huge chunk of women unheard and unrepresented. Similarly, radical feminists believe in the goodness of all women and corruption of all men. This is too simplistic and rigid a thought. Every man isn't an exploiter and oppressor, and every woman isn't a victim. Similarly, Marxist feminism doesn't address why many employers prefer not to hire women (due to gender stereotypes and maternity leave avoidance), and how that can be done away with.

Therefore, feminism as a movement and revolution will be at its most powerful when it works with unity within itself, and works on its inherent loopholes. All schools of thought should comprehensively be used to fight the patriarchy.

⁴ id