

BA (H) GEOGRAPHY

SEMESTER VI

EVOLUTION OF GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT

Unit: 5 – FEMINISM

Introduction

Feminist geography is an approach to study in human geography which applies the theories, methods and critiques of feminism to study the human environment and society. Its prime focus is on the study the geographic difference in gender relations and gender equality. However, it reflects on the geographical nature of the female experience. Feminist geography emerged in the 1970s, when members of the women's movement called on academia to include women as both producers and subjects of academic work. Feminist geographers aim to incorporate positions of race, class, ability, and sexuality into the study of geography.

Definition

Feminism is a diverse collection of social theories, political movement and moral philosophies, largely motivated by the experiences of women.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines feminism as "the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim" (Hornby 560). Whereas A New Approach Dictionary of Living English defines, "Feminism as a belief or movement advocating the cause of women's rights and opportunities, particularly equal rights with men, by challenging inequalities between the sexes in society" (Sohoni 200). After taking into consideration some of the definitions of feminism, it is essential to study the nature of feminism and its correlations with various other factors on a broad level. Feminism is mainly a western concept. In human history, women's existence is observed through male point of

view as a result of which women are always considered as secondary. Feminism comes into existence through the struggle for women's right against the injustice carried out in the society.

Aspects of Feminism

Feminism involves two important aspects of **intellectual commitment and political movement** that lead to justice for women and ends in sexism in all forms. According to Deborah Madsen, “feminism deals with women and their status in society and asks questions about oppression, consciousness and gender”. Madsen further states that the concerns of feminist theory are “the unique experience of women in history; the notion of female consciousness; the definition of gender that limit and oppress; and the cause of women’s liberation from those restrictions”.

Feminism involves different aspects related to **women’s rights** in the society such as political, social and economical. These rights allotment provides them a means of participation in politics, business and legal matters that help them to get recognition and build up power in the society. It also covers all aspects of women's rights.

Feminism covers two major concepts that of **gender and patriarchy**. Gender is identified through the difference of male and female. It is regarded as sex role in sociology. In the society of the past, all the decisions in the family were dependant on the men and, therefore, women were given secondary status. This position in the family came to be known as patriarchy. This system had a lot of influence on the society. Hence, male enjoyed all the privileges allotted to them by the society whereas women were always given secondary status. From these general observations, feminist theory came into existence that raised the concept of inequality between male and female. Feminists have worked out lots of campaigns in order to gain equal share in the family property and voting right for women. They also promoted women’s reproductive rights. Feminist activities have opposed various injustices such as domestic violence and sexual

harassment. Considering the economical factor, they have struggled for women's rights at the work place including equal wages and opportunities for them. Various definitions of feminism are provided, as according to Chris Weldon feminism is a politics: It is politics directed at changing of existing power relation between women and men in society. These power relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. They determine who does what and for whom, what we are and what we might become. In the society, women are given secondary status like discrimination between the rights of male and female, sexual assault, restrictions imposed on behaviour, separation, etc. Men always keep restrictions on women's political, social and cultural rights. It becomes essential to understand the origin of feminism. In the 19th century, women from England and America started a movement for their voting right. Till 1960, the movement was not up to the mark, but later it started taking its speed. Various movements took place after which the writings of Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer and Kate Millet became popular. The basic aim of the feminist theory is to understand certain aspects of gender difference and gender inequality. Considering the aspects of social and political power relations, it concentrates on the promotion of women's rights in the society. There are various themes that explode in feminist theory that includes discrimination, sexual objectification, oppression and patriarchy. In April 1981, All Indian Women Students Association was established. It included various subjects correlating to Women Studies such as History, Sociology, Economics, Psychology, Geography and other subjects.

As put by Elioise A. Buker, feminist shares five general commitments:

1. Valuing women and their specific contributions to society.
2. Critically analysing the past to understand how patriarchal practices have devalued women.

3. Analysing sex gender differences and examining differences among women, especially in terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, age, body shape and religion as well as other categories of identity.

4. Formulating new understandings that can transform social, political and personal practices on the basis of women contributions, values and experiences.

5. Working towards social and personal transformations through political activities designed to enable women to participate as full citizens in public life.