

**MASTER OF ARTS
SOCIOLOGY
CENTRE FOR OPEN AND
DISTANCE LEARNING
(CODL)**



**MSO 302: GENDER AND SOCIETY
BLOCK I**

**CENTRE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)
TEZPUR, ASSAM - 784028
INDIA**

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MSO 302: GENDER AND SOCIETY



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MSO-302: GENDER AND SOCIETY

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Published by the Director on behalf of the Centre for Open and Distance Learning, Tezpur University, Assam.

BLOCK I

MODULE I: INTRODUCTION TO GENDER AND SOCIETY

UNIT 1: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER: SEX AND GENDER, INTERSECTIONALITY OF GENDER WITH OTHER ASPECTS OF SOCIAL LIFE

UNIT 2: PATRIARCHY AND MASCULINITY: MEANING, IDEOLOGY AND FORMS

UNIT 3: UNDERSTANDING BODY AND SEXUALITY

UNIT 4: CONTEMPORARY SEXUALITY POLITICS: LGBT MOVEMENTS

MODULE II: FEMINIST THOUGHTS

UNIT 5: FEMINIST THOUGHT: RADICALS

UNIT 6: FEMINIST THOUGHT: MARXIST, SOCIALIST AND LIBERAL

UNIT 7: FEMINIST THOUGHT: POST-MODERNIST

UNIT 8: FEMINIST METHODOLOGY AS A CRITIQUE OF SOCIOLOGICAL METHODS

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course will introduce the learners to the major concepts and theoretical perspectives of sex-gender systems and practice. This course also aims at giving a comprehensive study on the origin of feminist ideology and their changing nature. It deals with both European and non-European literature and discusses various issues related to gender. It also discusses specific issues concerning gender relations in the Indian context in their structural forms and representations.

The course is divided into four Modules, each consisting of multiple units. This has been done to discuss the major concepts more elaborately and, in a learner, friendly way.

Module I gives an introduction to the paper. It consists of four units, each dealing with different concepts of gender and society. **Unit 1** deals with how gender is socially constructed. The unit focuses on the basic ideas of sex and gender. It also elaborates the idea called intersectionality of gender to understand how various other identities affect gender. **Unit 2** is about patriarchy and masculinity. This unit explores the basic concepts that are widely used in gender studies to understand women subordination and marginalization. **Unit 3**, on the other hand, deals with body and sexuality, focusing on the development of the post-structuralism and postmodernism in social science, which has a huge impact on analysing sexuality, gender and body. The last unit of the module, **Unit 4**, discusses contemporary sexuality politics. The LGBT history in various countries, especially in the USA and in the UK, as well as the events that accelerated the LGBT movement, are explored in this unit.

Module II is about feminist thoughts. **Unit 5** gives an overview of the radical feminist thought. **Unit 6** deals with the ideas and theoretical arguments of Marxist, liberal and socialist feminist thoughts. **Unit 7** will help the learners to understand post-modernist feminist thought. The learners will get introduced to the different theoretical ideas associated with

post-modern feminism. **Unit 8** will introduce the learners to the feminist methodology. This unit explores how feminist methodology has questioned and challenged other sociological methods.

Module III discusses feminism in the context of the Third World. **Unit 9** explores Third World women and the politics of feminism. **Unit 10** deals with colonialism, nationalism and women's movement in the Third World countries. **Unit 11** explores the concept of gender and development. This unit presents a detailed discussion on eco-feminism.

Module IV is dedicated to gender issues in the context of India. **Unit 12** will familiarise the learners with the intersectionality of gender, religion and politics in the Indian context. The major thrust will be Dalit Feminism. **Unit 13** deals with the contemporary issue of property rights and the debate on domestic violence. Another contemporary issue, i.e. education and health will be covered in **Unit 14**.

The complete course is divided into two Blocks. **Block I** contains Module I and II. **Block II** will have Module III and IV.

MODULE I: INTRODUCTION TO GENDER AND SOCIETY

UNIT 1: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER: SEX AND GENDER, INTERSECTIONALITY OF GENDER WITH OTHER ASPECTS OF LIFE

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives
- 1.3 Understanding Sex and Gender
- 1.4 Gender Role
- 1.5 Social Construction of Gender
- 1.6 Intersectionality of Gender
- 1.7 Summing Up
- 1.8 Questions
- 1.9 Recommended Readings and References

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first Unit of this paper, we will introduce you to the basic ideas of Sex and Gender. You will first learn how gender and sex are conceptualized in gender studies and various other aspects such as how society constructs various gender roles depending upon the biological sex of an individual. We will also discuss the social construction of gender to understand various nuances of gender studies. Further, we will elaborate the idea called intersectionality of gender to understand how various other identities affect gender.

Sociology of Gender or gender studies looks into various aspects of gender-based discrimination in society. In all societies, women are considered as second sex and are discriminated based on their biological sex. The development of the feminist movement during the later period of the 19th century and its subsequent development in the later period

questioned the very foundation of gender-based discrimination in society. As a result, various legal and administrative reforms have been done so far to offer equal status to women in society and more is yet to be achieved.

The feminist movement which started with the demand of getting voting rights later demanded various rights such as equal pay for equal work, abortion right, and maternity leave and so on. However, in the subsequent time many feminists addressed the idea of patriarchy (we will discuss it later) which is the root cause of women subordination and marginalization in society and also broaden its scope by incorporating various sections like the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, transsexual) groups, queer groups and others like black women, Dalit women in its agenda. Before discussing all these nuances of gender studies and the feminist movement in India or abroad we will initially start with various concepts widely used in gender studies.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this Unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the idea of sex and gender and its relationship;
- Analyse how gender is socially constructed and how gender role marginalize and discriminate women;
- Describe the idea of intersectionality and how women of various categories and strata are discriminated in society;
- Explain various other related terms and concepts such as gender roles, performativity, etc.

1.3 UNDERSTANDING SEX AND GENDER

In common parlance, sex is the physical and genital differences between men and women. Sex is thus the biological division between the two

sexes. The various biological attributes of being male or female can be said as sex. In a simpler way, when an infant is born depending upon the genital or the sex organ the infant is identified as male or female. It is the physiological and biological characteristics, which identify an individual as male or female. Thus, sex is a biological category.

On the other hand, gender is a kind of social and cultural construction. Once an infant is born either it would be male or female. Depending on its sexual category various social and cultural attributes are imposed on the infant starting from its name to dress pattern, food habit, social behaviour etc. These further lead to how a person of a particular sex should behave, what should do or not do etc. are defined by society. This is broadly known as gender roles. When society imposes such attributes to biological sex it becomes gender. If sex is the biological definition of male and female then gender is the cultural and social definition between men and women. Gender is thus the social and psychological characteristics of men and women.

Gender is a cultural and social construction through which society identifies between a man and a woman. As gender is a cultural and social construction hence, the gender roles, patriarchy is different from society to society or culture to culture. Gender is hence, the cultural meanings those are attached to men and women,

Thus, sex is the genital differences between individuals where gender is the sense of performing a masculine or feminine role in society as determined by society. Gender, hence a more fluid category which may or may not depend upon the biological traits.

Oakley (1972) in her book *Sex, Gender and Society* first explored the term gender. She defines sex and gender in the following way,

“Sex” refers to the biological division into male and female; “gender” to the parallel and socially unequal division into femininity and masculinity” (41).

From the above definition or distinction of Oakley, gender refers to the unequal divisions between men and women as all binaries are not just about categorization into two categories but also the hierarchy and unequal division of power between the two categories. Thus when we talk about socially constructed sex i.e. gender it refers to the social relationship between men and women and the consequent discrimination as well as marginalization. She again says, “Gender’ is a matter of culture; it refers to the social classification of men and women into masculine and feminine.”

Bhasin (2014) distinguishes between sex and gender in the following way:

Sex	Gender
Sex is natural	Gender is socio-cultural and it is man-made
Sex is biological. It refers to visible differences in genitalia and related differences in procreative function	Gender is socio-cultural and it refers to masculine and feminine qualities, behaviour patterns, roles and responsibilities etc.
Sex is constant, it remains the same everywhere	Gender is variable, it changes from time to time, culture to culture, even family to family

Sex cannot be changed

Gender can be changed

(Bhasin, 2014:3)

Hence, the basic distinction between sex and gender is sex is biological and gender is social and cultural. Gender is thus the socially and culturally constructed divisions between male and female.

Stop and Read

In a simpler understanding, sex is the biological and physiological differences between male and female, where gender is the social and psychological differences between male and female. Though many a time, sex and gender are used synonymously or interchangeably by many, but both cannot be used as same in academic discourses. As mentioned sex is just the genital difference between male and female. When we talk or use the term gender it not only differentiates between male and female but also talks about different roles, attributes, marginalization etc.

Though it is widely accepted that sex is natural and gender is a cultural and social construct, but in recent studies especially some postmodern feminists' looks sex, gender in a more complex manner. A scholar like Judith Butler (2008) considers gender as performance. She develops the theory of gender performativity by which she implies that there is no sex which is not gender, and every gender performs as per expectation. She explains how gender is performed in everyday life.

“Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of

substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender” (Butler, 2008: 45).

Butler here elaborates gender as a kind of performance – gender is one what does, not who one is. However, the repeated acts or gendered performance makes it appear as if natural characteristics possessed by a particular gender. The language constructs the gender with the repeated stylization of the body with a set of repeated acts. The identity of male or female is a performative statement rather than an identity. She further says,

“within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative— that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (ibid: 34).

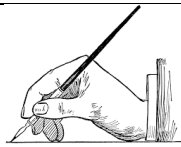
Butler also argues that like gender, biological sex is also a construction. She holds,

“If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (ibid: 9-10).

Here, she says that sex is a social construction and all sexes are gendered. Sex is also constructed by society like gender as the distinction between man/male and woman/female are also constructed by society only. Similarly, biological science is also a social construction which is expressed through language. For her, sex is not only an analytical category

rather it is also a normative one, which defines what man and woman are. It, thus, describes and reinforces sex differences that are already gendered.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Why does Judith Butler consider gender as performance?

1.4 GENDER ROLE

Gender role consists of those kinds of behaviours, which a society expects from different genders. Such behaviours may start from division of labour to how and what to or not to wear, what kind of food should one eat or not eat, how to conduct, speak, or interact with the society by each gender. It also determines what male and female should think and do. Generally, gender roles define the masculinity or femininity of a gender. Such expectations or gender roles imposed upon various sexes are taught to each sex through the process of socialization from early childhood. Further, gender roles are reinforced through various societal institutions such as family, schools, church, and also through popular media. Hence, gender role also becomes normalised and is thought to be natural.

In every society or culture male and female are viewed differently. Depending upon their sexual differences various roles and responsibilities are assigned by the society to each sex i.e. gender roles, which are considered or thought as biological by the society. Society expects different behaviour or in a sense imposes various tasks starting from food habit, dress pattern, behaviour to roles and responsibilities from these two sexes. Males and females are socialized differently in every society. Such socialization and impositions convert a biological male to a masculine gender and females to a feminine gender. As a result, it sub-ordinates or marginalizes the women as a whole.

1.5 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

The feminist scholarship from its early days considers gender as a social construction. Gender differentiates itself from sex which is natural either male or female whereas, gender is the cultural definition of masculinity and femininity. This idea of the social construction of gender widely challenges the ideas of sex/gender. The essentialists believe that sex is natural, and the difference between them is also natural. Similarly, it normalises the idea of gender also as a natural division. The society thinks of sex as natural hence depending upon the sexual differences the various attributes, roles imposed upon various sexes are also considered as natural. As such, such normalisation makes various attributes, roles imposed upon different sexes become natural – i.e. gender is also natural. The belief in gender ideology speaks how different sexes should behave in a particular societal setup; and they perform as per the expectations of the society. Gender ideology can be defined as the beliefs on gender roles, attributes, rights and responsibilities of man and woman.

However, the social constructionists argue that sexual differences, roles, behaviours etc. are socially and culturally constructed which vary from society to society and culture to culture. Gender is socially constructed through issues such as what is expected from various genders, what is

allowed or not allowed and kinds of values are imposed upon. The idea of the social construction of gender, however, argues unlike sex, gender is an achieved status. Everyone in the society is brought up in a gender system, which tells us how to act within its prescribed norms.

The gender ideology thus becomes a process and a structure that leads to the subordination of some groups. The daily behaviour, performing gender roles and responsibilities create the binary between men and women. It further leads to gender discrimination such as the status of women and power become limited. French feminist and writer Simon de Beauvoir writes in her book *The Second Sex*, “one is not born but rather becomes a woman.” Beauvoir describes that woman is considered as second sex, not a primary one. Men are the primary and after come the women. Man is standard and woman is understood only in relation to man. All human being born as equal but once the infant is a girl she is converted to a woman – second sex through her upbringing, gender roles etc. Moreover, women are compared to men through binaries such as – emotional versus rational, active versus passive, and so on. Such attributes of women (as well as men) are not determined by their biological sex.

Gayle Rubin in her famous essay “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex” initiated an idea called “sex/gender system”. She defines “sex/gender system” as

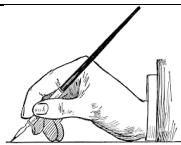
“...a set of arrangements by which a society transform biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied” (Rubin, 1975).

Here, Rubin argues that biological sex, gender and sexuality are the product of society and culture. Like gender, sexuality is also cultural. Heteronormativity is the norm in every society. Rubin made an extensive analysis of gender, sex and sexuality by critiquing Marx, Engels, Levi-Strauss as well as analysing institutions like kinship to elaborate on the social construction of gender and sexuality.

Stop and read

As gender is a social construct, it is constructed through various gender roles. Such social construction normalized gender behaviour as well as the division between genders. These gender roles, responsibilities make stratification in society and women are subordinated in various facets. As a result, women are discriminated in every society in the name of gender ideology. At the same time, such prescribed roles and responsibilities make a distinction between two sexes, which is considered as natural.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Who is the author of *The Second Sex* ?

2. What is meant by gender role?

1.6 INTERSECTIONALITY OF GENDER WITH OTHER ASPECTS OF SOCIAL LIFE

The Oxford dictionary defines Intersectionality “as the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded

as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise". This implies that people face various kinds of discrimination in a number of ways in society based on their identity in terms of social category or categorization. Such kinds of identities through which discriminations are made are interconnected and interrelated.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black legal expert of USA, coined the term intersectionality in 1989 to make the feminist movement more inclusive in terms of including black and other women in the feminist agenda. In her thought-provoking article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" she argued that the feminist theory and anti-racist theory is unable to address the black women as a whole.

An individual does not carry a single layer identity rather having multiple identities at the same time. These identities come from the social relations of the individual as well as depending upon the power structure of the society. As a result, the individual experiences both privileges and oppressions simultaneously in society. Intersectionality of gender allows understanding gender in a broader way instead of understanding in a linear way. Intersectionality is a concept where it sees how various oppressive institutions of the society are interconnected and that they cannot be understood separately. Such practices may be racism, homophobia, sexism, etc. those are not independent entities rather interconnected and interrelated. These practices performed within social institutions influence each other and as a result marginalization and discrimination continues. To elaborate the multiple types of discrimination, Crenshaw offers an example of traffic to understand it. She holds,

“Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination” (Crenshaw, 1989: 149)

What Crenshaw, argue that only through the feminist agenda, problems of various sections those who are marginalized for various other factors such as race, sexual choice, caste, religion, ethnicity cannot be addressed. These oppressive institutions are interconnected and marginalization occurs in various times or at the same time from various corners.

Intersectionality perspective allows us to understand such institutions in relations to each other and also to look into how these different institutions intersect and affect women in multiple ways. It is a tool of analysis for addressing various intersecting oppressive institutions as well as to see how gender intersects with other institutions.

For example, an educated black woman may get some preferences or privileges as she is educated but at the same time, she may face racial discrimination. A white gay man may be in a privileged position due to his racial category, but discriminated for his sexual choice. In the Indian context a Dalit woman faces double discrimination. As a Dalit, she faces caste-based discrimination and also as a woman she is discriminated by the patriarchal structure of the society.

The idea of intersectionality is a concept that attempts to understand woman's identity in an in-depth manner. If we consider women as a separate identity or a category we need to understand that women are not a homogeneous category rather they are divided in terms of caste, class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual preferences, nationality and so on and so forth. An individual as a woman is discriminated in the patriarchal structure of a society. At the same time, she may also face various other kinds of discrimination depending upon the various above-mentioned categories.

The different institutions of the society that discriminate individual or group are interrelated in nature. Race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity etc. intersect each other and influence each other. If we see the feminist movement in India or outside, it is generally led by the upper caste/class and/or is about women who are privileged in some senses than some groups. The intersectional feminism looks at intersecting social identities and oppressions that emerge from such identities. In the Indian context oppressive institutions like caste, religion, ethnicity intersects each other with gender. Many studies show that sexual violence against Dalit women is higher than of the other groups. As such it is pertinent to look through intersectional perspective to understand women's oppression and violence against women in India and how it cannot be studied using women as a homogenous category due to their different lived realities.

1.7 SUMMING UP

This Unit has explained some basic ideas on sex, gender, sexuality, and some other related ideas such as gender role, heteronormativity, gender performativity, intersectionality etc. which are widely used in gender and sexuality studies. We have also discussed some of the theoretical arguments put forth by various scholars like Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin,

Simon de Beauvoir, Kimberlé Crenshaw which are important to understanding gender studies both historically as well as in the present context. Though the feminist movement initially talked about women as a whole, subsequent development in the discourse further questioned the very idea of women, as all the women cannot be clubbed into a single identity and also many groups were excluded from the feminist agenda. However, later those groups were included in the discourse of gender studies. The idea of intersectionality further made an attempt to see the feminist agenda from a more inclusive point of view. In the subsequent Units, we will discuss these which will help to broaden your understanding of gender studies.

Glossary

- **Sex:** Sex is the biological and physiological category of male and female. It is natural.
- **Gender:** Gender is the cultural and social definition of male and female. How a woman should behave or man should behave in a society etc. are imposed on various sexes and they perform according to it.
- **Gender Role:** A society expects different behaviour, roles and responsibilities from different genders and imposed different attributes depending on their sex. Such expectations, attributes and behaviours are known as gender role.
- **Performativity:** Judith Butler conceptualized this term in gender studies by which she means that gender is a repeated act of performance.

- **Sexuality:** Sexuality or sexual orientation is the emotional or sexual desire to a particular sex. Sexual orientation is broadly divided into four categories homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual and asexual.
- **Intersectional:** Intersectional is the idea where various oppressive institutions of society such as sexism, racism, caste, religion ethnicity etc. intersect. Different identities of an individual for which the individual sometimes may get some privilege but at the same time discriminated for his/her other identity/identities.

1.8 QUESTIONS

1. Define Sex and Gender? What are the differences between sex and gender?
2. What is gender role? Elaborate with examples.
3. What is gender performativity?
4. “Gender is socially constructed”- Discuss
5. What is intersectionality? How does intersectional approach help in understanding gender discriminations? Elaborate with examples.

1.9 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2: PATRIARCHY AND MASCULINITY: MEANING, IDEOLOGY AND FORMS

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives
- 2.3 What is Patriarchy?
- 2.4 Engels: Origin of Family, Private Property and the State
- 2.5 Kate Millet: Sexual Politics
- 2.6 Sylvia Walby: Patriarchal Mode of Production and Other Structures
- 2.7 Gerda Lerner: *Creation of Patriarchy*
- 2.8 Masculinity and Femininity
- 2.9 Summing Up
- 2.10 Questions
- 2.11 Recommended Readings and References

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The gender differences in society, already discussed in the previous unit, are the creation of society. The gender differentiation, women oppression, keeping women and the marginalized away from decision-making, etc. are legitimized in society through some institutions. Patriarchy is one of such institutions through which systematically women are marginalized in society. Through patriarchy, women are oppressed in every kind of society in various ways – economically, politically and also socially. In gender studies when we look into gender relations in a society, it generally examines the position of women and other marginalized gender in society and this stems from the framework of patriarchy; it also examines how patriarchy works in that particular society. Patriarchy, in general, refers to the rule of the father as the head of the household in a family. It thus talks about the supremacy of the males in the basic unit of society as well as the first institution that one

is socialized into i.e. family. The family is also the ideological unit of society and becomes a site for the working and reproduction of patriarchy and patriarchal ideology. But from the 1960s onwards especially with the rise of the second wave feminism, the meaning of patriarchy does not talk only about the rule of the father in a family. Its scope and meaning became wider which also looks into various political, social, economic aspects where the system called patriarchy oppress and discriminate women. We will discuss the concept of patriarchy in this Unit bringing in various debates and arguments put forth by various scholars of gender studies.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will learn some of the basic concepts widely used in gender studies such as patriarchy, femininity, masculinity etc. These concepts are widely used in gender studies to understand women subordination and marginalization. By the end of this Unit, you will be able to learn -

- Explain the concept of patriarchy;
- Explain how patriarchy works in society thereby marginalizing the women;
- Analyze the different theoretical debates on patriarchy;
- Explain the concepts like masculinity and femininity.

2.3 WHAT IS PATRIARCHY?

As mentioned above, patriarchy, in general, refers to the rule of the father in a male-dominated society. But in gender studies, the meaning and scope of the term are quite wider. Patriarchy implies, men are the privileged gender in society and they hold the power and therefore, they dominate over women and other genders that do not belong to the binary of men/women. In such societies, men are considered as the primary

gender starting from the basic unit of society i.e. from family to the social, economic and community life. In a patriarchal society men are considered superior to women and thereby women are oppressed and discriminated. In all kinds of the decision-making process in a patriarchal society irrespective of personal and public sphere women are kept away. Men take decisions in the family, in societal affairs as well as in other aspects too.

Until 1960, patriarchy was seen in familial affairs. However, the idea or conceptualization of the term patriarchy took a new turn in the second wave feminist movement. Before 1960 patriarchy was considered more related to the institution of the family. The radical feminists considered patriarchy as a social system through which men subordinate women. It is a social system where men dominate over women.

Patriarchy is not simply the rule of the males over females. It is also not only a matter of decision making rather it is a hierarchical power structure between male and female where men control the women in all aspects such as sexuality, production, reproduction, etc. Patriarchy is thus a system, an ideology which is the dominance of the males and subordination of the women. Moreover, apart from the subordination of women, all men are not powerful in a patriarchal system. For example, younger males are less powerful than the older males in the family structure and so forth. The power of males is also dependent by various other race, class and caste identities.

Bhasin (2006) refers to patriarchy as

“to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways” (Bhasin 2006:3).

Patriarchy is thus a system of power relation between male and female through which women subordination is made.

Walby (1990) defines patriarchy “as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (ibid: 20). She considers patriarchy as a system because it rejects the biological determinism and individual man gets a dominant position subordinating the woman.

Gerda Lerner (1986) argues that patriarchy is the manifestation and institutionalization of male domination over women. She holds,

“Patriarchy in its wider definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources. One of the most challenging tasks of Women's History is to trace with precision the various forms and modes in which patriarchy appears historically, the shifts and changes in its structure and function, and the adaptations it makes to female pressure and demands” (ibid: 239)

Patriarchy is hence an institutionalization way of subordinating women through which women are deprived of decision making, keeps women away from the important positions of power and men enjoy all power and privileges.

Bell Hook defines patriarchy as,

“a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence” (Hooks, 2003).

Patriarchy is not a recent day phenomenon or an ideology of the present times. Rather it started with human civilization in different forms.

Engels holds that the origin of patriarchy lies in the origin of the family and private property. Patriarchy is the present context understood as a system that describes how women are subordinated in society.

We can cite several examples in our society where patriarchy works. For examples till the 19th-century widow were burnt with their dead husbands. The widows in India have to wear certain kinds of clothes etc. Reproduction and control of sexuality of women are the key features to describe a woman as a wife. The patriarchy controls women's sexuality, social political and economic mobility, and confined them into the household as wife, mother, daughter, daughter in law etc. Let us now discuss some theoretical arguments put forth by various scholars to understand the idea of patriarchy in a more lucid manner.

Stop and Read

Patriarchy is a system through which men dominate the women. In both public and private spheres, women are dominated through the system of patriarchy. Literally, patriarchy means the rule of the father in a household, where he takes all kinds of decision in the family. But in gender studies, the scope of the term is much wider. It is a system through which women are oppressed, discriminated socially, politically and economically and also keeps the women away from taking any decision.

2.4 ENGELS: ORIGIN OF FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE

Friedrich Engels in his book *Origin of Family, Private Property and the State* gave a detailed description of how patriarchy started in society. His work was mainly based on Morgan's book called *Ancient Society*,

which was an attempt to see the materialistic evolution of the human society. He describes the various phases of human society through a Marxist analysis of the economic origin of human society and how patriarchy became a norm in human civilization in a class society. He holds that the women subordination in society was due to the rise of private property and capitalism. He divided human history into three stages i) savagery ii) barbarism and iii) civilization with sub-stages.

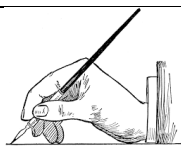
Engels asserts that the earlier organized human societies were classless and communal where matriarchy was the norm. Such societies did not have any kind of private property such as land or animal. Though sexual division of labour was prevalent but such societies were egalitarian in nature. Men were the hunters and women took care the other social spaces. Engels wrote,

“The man fights in the wars, goes hunting and fishing, procures the raw materials of food and the tools necessary for doing so. The woman looks after the house and the preparation of food and clothing, cooks, weaves, sews. They are each master in their own sphere: the man in the forest, the woman in the house. Each is owner of the instruments which he or she makes and uses: the man of the weapons, the hunting and fishing implements, the woman of the household gear” (ibid: 218)

As women gave birth to children the identity of the family was passed on through the mother's line. Women controlled the social, political and economic level of the society. Engels further argues that with the advent of agriculture, domestication of animal, accumulation of private property emerged with the surplus in the spheres controlled by men. As such, men wanted to keep the property in their name and to be inherited by their sons. Hence from a so-called promiscuous society, the society shifted to a monogamous one which started controlling women

sexuality. It imposed monogamy to control women's sexuality whereas men's sexuality was unregulated. As men started to control the sexuality of women it withheld the rights of the women; Engels calls it the "world historical defeat of female sex" (50). He further says, "the man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children" (ibid)

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Define patriarchy.

2. How, according to Engels, did patriarchy start in society?

2.5 KATE MILLET: SEXUAL POLITICS

Kate Millet was one of the leading feminist figures of the Second Wave feminism. In her book *Sexual Politics*, she popularized the idea of patriarchy with new understandings. Millet argues that the relations between sexes are political. For her sex is a "status category with political implications." She was a radical feminist and developed the idea "personal is political" (we will discuss various types of feminism in later Units). She states that patriarchy is omnipotent everywhere.

... our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance – in short, every avenue of power ... including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands (Millet 1977:25).

Unlike the Marxists, Millet argues how patriarchal structure dominates the private and social life of women.

Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including powers of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale (ibid:33).

She says,

“Patriarchy's chief institution is the family. It is both a mirror of and a connection with the larger society; a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole. Mediating between the individual and the social structure, the family effects control and conformity where political and other authorities are insufficient. As the fundamental instrument and the foundation unit of patriarchal society the family and its roles are prototypical. Serving as an agent of the larger society, the family not only encourages its own members to adjust and conform, but acts as a unit in the government of the patriarchal state which rules its citizens through its family heads. Even in patriarchal societies where they are granted legal citizenship, women tend to be ruled through the family alone and have little or no formal relation to the state.” (ibid).

She further argues,

“one takes patriarchal government to be the institution whereby that half of the populace which is female is

controlled by that half which is male, the principles of patriarchy appear to be twofold: male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger”.

2.6 SYLVIA WALBY: PATRIARCHAL MODE OF PRODUCTION AND OTHER STRUCTURES

Sylvia Walby in her book *Theorizing Patriarchy* argues that patriarchy is a social structure. She identifies six structures of patriarchy viz. i) the patriarchal mode of production ii) patriarchal relation in paid work iii) patriarchal relation in the state iv) male violence v) patriarchal relations in sexuality and vi) patriarchal relation in the cultural institutions (Walby, 1990, 20).

i) the patriarchal mode of production

Walby argues that through patriarchy men benefit materially. For her, in such societies in families husbands are the expropriating class where women are the producing class. It talks about the production relation in the household where women's labour is not taken into consideration such as household work, childcare etc. which are unpaid labour. In the patriarchal mode of production, there are two classes the wives and the husbands. The wives consist of the exploited class who is also the producing class and on the contrary, the husbands consist of the exploiting class or the non-producing class. The exploited class not only perform the household works and child care at the same time it also supplies the labour in the form of children to fill up the vacuum.

ii) patriarchal relation in paid work

Again women in the labour market women are restricted to do certain kinds of works. The work of women are denigrated as less productive and therefore they earn less for more tedious work. The gendered division of labour within the household is reflected in paid work as well. For example, paid work which are related to caregiving such as that of

nursing is associated with women. Careers of many women are interrupted with marriage and childbirth. However while motherhood is celebrated in informal paid work women seldom gets maternity leave. In formal paid work it is assumed that women are the primary caregivers hence men receive less number of days as paternity leave. Paternity leave itself is a very new development.

iii) patriarchal relation in the state :

Walby further argues that the state is itself a patriarchal institution. Moreover, the state is also bias, racist and capitalist. It has a systematic bias in term of its policies which serves patriarchal interest.

iv) Male violence: Male violence over women though is seen as an individualistic act but Walby argues that it is systematic and patterned. Wife beating, sexual harassment, rape etc. are routine activities of men over women. The state condones or overlooks it as interpersonal acts, its refusal to intervene also reveals the patriarchal nature of the state. The state has intervene in very few cases mainly in situation when the violence becomes acutely life threatening.

v) patriarchal relations in sexuality

In case of patriarchal relations in sexuality which is maintained through forced heterosexuality and the sexual double standard between male and female, the latter means that standards of sexual morality placed on women are not equally placed on men. The sexuality of women is policed physically through threats of violence and ideologically through myths such as that of Sati-Savitri etc.

vi) patriarchal relation in the cultural institutions

The patriarchal cultural institutions such as media, religion, education etc. create the representation of women in a particular way, which can be said as patriarchal gaze. Such gaze imposes identity to women, which

further helps in behaving in prescribed ways. One example of the media imposing patriarchal relation could be seen in advertisement wherein household utility items such as washing machines and detergents are sold as products that would ease the women's work. Similarly advertisement of beauty and beauty products are instrumental in imposing and espousing a kind of femininity. Similarly in the field of education the gendered notion of men and boys as more adept to the sciences is one such construction.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Who wrote *Sexual Politics* ?

2. What are the six structures of patriarchy identified by Sylvia Walby?

2.7 GERDA LERNER: *CREATION OF PATRIARCHY*

Lerner in *Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) examined the relation between patriarchy and other structures of society in a historical context. She says,

“patriarchy is a historic creation formed by men and women
in a process which took nearly 2500 years to its completion”
(Lerner, 1986: 212).

Discussing the historical process of creation of patriarchy in Mesopotamian region, she argues that though in such societies some

women held a higher position as well as economic independence was there but the crucial point was that women sexuality was controlled by men. Thus she shifted the attention that there is a need to focus into the question of control of women sexuality than the economic questions. For her, control over women's sexuality is central to the women subordination. Bringing references from historical sources as well as critiquing Engels, Levi Strauss she holds that before the private property and the class society commodification of women's sexual reproductive capacity was occurred. Lerner holds that women subordination in a society passed through the rise of private property, the institutionalization of slavery, women's sexual subordination and economic dependency on male

Stop and Read

From the above discussion on various works written by various authors, we have basically learnt that patriarchy is a social system which subordinates women in various ways. Walby, Lerner, Millet etc. have critically examined how in the different aspects of the society women are kept away and through those men control the women. Some of the important areas where men control women are women's labour, sexuality, reproduction, mobility etc.

2.8 MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

Masculinity and femininity are some cultural and social attributes to men and women to define or to characterize masculine and feminine genders. These are gendered characteristics, which include values, ideas, cultural expectation etc. Masculinity and femininity as gendered identities hence it is a socio-cultural process and defines the male and female respectively. Certain activities, behaviours are gendered in a society either as masculine or feminine. The biological differences

between men and women are given gendered identity, which is known as masculinity and femininity. The values, characteristics etc. are associated with the gender identity called masculinity and femininity. Children of different sexes are socialized and encouraged to perform as per the gender norms.

Faulkner (2009) says,

“Cultural notions of “feminine” and “masculine” behaviour are shaped in part by observations about what women and men do. This kind of “gender marking” tends to discourage women or men from entering “gender-inauthentic” occupations.”

Hofstede holds,

“Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.” “Femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.”

Many a time, masculinity and femininity can be seen in binary opposite terms, such as:

Masculinity

Rational

Active

Subject

Dominance

Femininity

Emotional

Passive

Object

Submission

Strong

Weak

Public Sphere

Private Sphere

Interestingly, masculinity and femininity are not only oppositional but at the same time, they are also hierarchical. One side of the table is considered as superior and another side of the table is inferior. Thus gender norms, gender role create the masculinity and femininity, superiority and inferiority. It is hence a process of othering, a process where women are constructed with inferior terms.

The idea of masculinity and femininity has differed from culture to culture and society to society. Hence, these are a socially constructed idea, which is again normalized as natural in society. Thus masculinity or femininity is gendered behaviour or being masculine or feminine is the gender of the individual. It also becomes the primary differences in sex role identity in society.

Stop and Read

Masculinity and femininity are gendered identities of different sexes. These are constructed through gender norms, social behaviour etc. Society expects different kinds of behaviour from males and females. Masculinity and femininity are not only oppositional but also hierarchal.

2.9 SUMMING UP

In this Unit, we have discussed the idea of patriarchy and some other ideas associated with gender such as masculinity and femininity. As mentioned, the meaning of patriarchy is much wider in gender studies. It is a social structure through which women are oppressed in various ways in society. Patriarchy is an ideology, which restricts women mobility,

controls women's sexuality, women's productive labour, reproductive rights, property rights etc. It is a system through which men dominate over women. In the present discourse of feminism or gender studies, patriarchy is one of the central concepts. We have discussed Engels thesis of patriarchy that how patriarchy emerged in society. We have also discussed Kate Millet's idea on patriarchy as well as Sylvia Walby's idea of different structures of patriarchy.

Further, we have discussed the concept of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity, femininity etc. are social construction through which certain social behaviours are fixed by society for different sexes.

Glossary

- **Patriarchy:** When we try to locate women position in a society one of the central concepts comes to our mind is patriarchy.
- **Radical Feminism:** Radical Feminism is an ideology within feminist movement which advocated drastic change or radical reordering of the society by overthrowing patriarchy and male authority.
- **Patriarchal Mode of Production:** Patriarchal Mode of Production is an understanding of the household as primarily built with women's unpaid labour. Here wives constitute the exploited and producing class and husbands constitute the exploiting and non-producing class.
- **Masculinity & Femininity:** Masculinity and femininity are gender identities or what it means to be a man or woman in society.

2.10 QUESTIONS

1. What is patriarchy? Illustrate with examples.
2. Elaborate how emergence of private property became “world historical defeat of female sex”.
3. How does patriarchy oppress women in various public and private spheres of society?
4. How are sexuality and patriarchy interconnected?
5. Define masculinity and femininity.
6. Masculinity and femininity are not only oppositional but also hierarchical- Elaborate the statement.

2.11 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 3: UNDERSTANDING BODY AND SEXUALITY

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Objectives
- 3.3 Idea of Body in Gender Studies
- 3.4 Sexuality
- 3.5 Heteronormativity
- 3.6 Queer
- 3.7 Summing Up
- 3.8 Questions
- 3.9 Recommended Readings and References

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The common understanding of sex and gender in the early feminist theory which we have already discussed in the previous Units is that sex is biological and gender is cultural. It also claims that the sexes are fixed, immobile, stable as it emanates from a biologically given identity. However, with the development of the post-structuralism, postmodernism, as well as French feminist thoughts scholars like Judith Butler and others, have argued that like gender, sex is also a social construction which can be deconstructed. Sex or the body is also a social phenomenon and centred on this they have essentially put the theories of subjectivity, body, sexuality to understand and to elaborate the discursive nature associated with the body. We will discuss those ideas in details to understand how the poststructuralists and postmodernists look at body and sexuality as opposed to the previous feminists.

The idea of the body takes an important position in gender studies and feminism. The idea of the body or the image of the body implies how we see our own body and how others see it; co-constituted with the physical, mental, social and cultural constructions. We have already discussed the controlling of women's body by men that leads to the subordination of women, marginalization as well as oppression. Hence, the body is not simply a physical entity rather it has other connotations – who control one's body, how we see our own body and bodies of others. As such, there is a complex relationship of power between the physical body and its image. Similarly, sexuality is also an interesting site of investigation in gender studies. In simpler term, sexuality implies sexual orientation (of falling into a cis-gender or beyond that binary) or that of being asexual. Our sexuality is shaped or influenced by culture, morality, society etc. The power relation that governs the body and sexuality is one of the significant aspects of gender and sexuality studies. Hence, the body and sexuality are important issues of social relations.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will elaborate on the idea of body and sexuality in gender studies. Though there are various debates on the idea of the body, the third wave feminists argue that the body is a political entity. Similarly, sexuality, sexual identity, sexual orientation or sexual choice, etc. have their own nuances. The development of the post-structuralism and postmodernism in social science also has a huge impact on analysing sexuality, gender and body. After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- Analyse the idea of body and politics of the body;
- Discuss the idea of sexuality and sexual politics.

3.3 IDEA OF BODY IN GENDER STUDIES

Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan (2004), write that there has been a shift in the very idea of the body over time especially in relation to nature and culture. They have given three categories on the idea of the body within gender studies: the body as nature, the body as socially constructed and finally body as embodiment (6). Further elaborating these three categories, Pilcher and Whelehan say that in the perspective of the body as nature implies body is a natural, biological entity that determines the biological differences between men and women. Body as a social construction considers body primarily “as an object of interpretation and the attribution of meaning.” It emphasizes various social and cultural practices arising from the meaning given to female and male bodies are important rather than the natural body itself (7-8). In fact the emphasis is that the ‘natural’ body does not exist outside of these constructs as practices. What they want to mean by this is that the socialization of the body of any male or female gives the meaning to the naturalness of the fe/male body. It does not have any relation to the natural body in that the ‘natural’ is also a category socially and culturally given. The embodiment perspective considers the body both as a natural and physical entity as well as also produced through social and cultural construction.

The feminists have widely written on the body and its relationship with sex, gender and sexuality. Simon de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* widely discusses the interrelationship of body and existence. Her famous quote “One is not born, but, rather becomes a woman” exemplifies the social construction of the body. She further says that “No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an

individual as an Other” (1989:267). Beauvoir acknowledges the biological differences between men and women where she writes, “there will always be certain differences between man and woman”. But the problem is the biological differences between men and women are regarded as the determining factor for subordinating the women.

The above mentioned three aspects or categories to describe the body we see various arguments and writings. In the history of feminism, it is seen that some of the second wave feminists accepted the body as a natural and biological entity. The natural division between men’s body and women’s body leads to women’s subordination. Many scholars and activists tried to find out a way for women’s emancipation out of this naturalness of body.

Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectics of Sex: The Case of Feminist Revolution* (1970) has widely discussed the natural body and the subordination of women. She argues that the capacity of women to conceive, giving birth etc. makes women dependent on men for their survival. The natural difference of reproductive function is the major cause of women dependency and subordination. Hence, she proposed for elimination of the natural bodily differences with advanced scientific techniques so that the inequalities between men and women can be eliminated. She holds, “The reproduction of the species by one sex for the benefit of both would be replaced by (at least the option of) artificial reproduction” (19). For her, the reproductive capacities of women as well the consequent emotional bondage make women weaker. The biological body of women that only is capable of giving birth and also some extent makes women better caring for children. The women liberation will come through an alternative method of childbirth. Looking into women’s body in a negative way Firestone urged women to be more men like to achieve the equality.

On the other hand, some other feminists look women body with a more positive view. Scholars like Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray see “sexual bodily differences between women and men are stressed, with women’s bodies praised and valorised as an especial source of women’s empowerment” (Pilcher Whelehan 7: 2004). Thus, the women body in naturalistic perspective is a site through which men exploit women.

Ortner (1974) in “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture” discussed the universal subordination of women. She holds that women’s body and various functions of it keep closer to nature and allows men to work in culture. In the nature-culture binary, culture is thought to be superior to nature. As such women are socially in below position than the cultural men. Thus, the female body is associated with nature because she, like nature, produces her own kind as opposed to men who produces culture, work of art etc. thus, creates a hierarchy of gender relations due to this assumption of women=nature; men=culture.

Body as a socially constructed idea believes that women’s body and men’s body are constructed by society. Various social and cultural practices make the body. Hence the body is a matter of interpretation and attribution of meaning. The process of socialization to a male and female child, gender roles etc. are marked by the body. Poststructuralist Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) has discussed in details about the body and body politics. She argues that the “ body is not a “being,” but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality” (1999: 177). Body is a political entity where the gender roles hierarchy regulates the body and bodily activities. For Butler, the body is not just natural or a neutral thing rather it is performatively constructed. Body is not natural, like gender, it is also discursively constructed. It is not a matter of “mute facticity” (48) (a

natural fact). As she has argued there is no sex which is not already gendered, similarly, all bodies are gendered from its existence. Hence, there is no natural body which pre-exist such constructions. She negated the very idea of essential sex where she says, “sedimentation of gender norms produces the peculiar phenomenon of a “natural sex” or a “real woman” or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions” (178). This sedimentation has over time produced “ a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relation to one another” (ibid). Thus, gender is, for her a fabrication or a fantasy that is instituted and inscribed on the surfaces of the body (174). In her argument of gender performativity, she considers gender as a performance. She argues, “gender proves to be performance – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (33). On the other hand, she defines gender as “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame” (43). In this line, the repetition of gender performing or performance of gender naturalized the body. Gender is in a sense considered as real rather than a being.

The embodiment perspective, as mentioned above considers body both as natural and cultural. The embodiment in simpler terms can be defined as a representation of something in a tangible form. In such line, when we say body as an embodiment that means the incorporation of nature and culture to define the body. This thus creates various expectations and influences the body along with the imposed gender norms. Connell (1987) argues that “The social practices that construct gender relations do not express natural patterns, nor do they ignore natural patterns, rather they negate them in a practical transformation” (79). He further says that the cultural practices negate the similarities of men and women through over exaggerating their differences. Such cultural practices may be clothing and accessories etc. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) says,

“Clothing and accessories are an important means of achieving the negation of the body: skirts, high-heeled shoes and handbags (all with ‘feminine’ styling) for ‘female’ bodies, and trousers (with pockets), ties, and flat shoes (all with ‘masculine’ styling) for ‘male’ bodies” (9). Various cultural practices also transform the body to a masculine or feminine body as Connell says, “The physical sense of maleness grows through a personal history of social practice, a life-history in society” (Connell, 1987: 84). The body is not just a physical entity rather it is an embodiment where cultural practices, gender, societal norms give a shape to it. Connell in *Gender in World Perspective* (2009) further says that,

“Bodies cannot be understood as just the objects of social process whether symbolic or disciplinary. They are active participants in social process. They participate through their capacities, development and needs through the friction of their recalcitrance and through the direction set by their pleasures and skills. Bodies must be seen as sharing in social agency in generating and shaping courses of social conduct”(57).

Feminism, however, looks at body in terms of its role in social, cultural, sexual, political life. It has looked into the body not only as a biological or cultural existence rather, how it is produced continuously and differentiated through complex relation of power – may be social, historical or cultural. Elizabeth Grosz for example in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), argues that the bodies are the product of certain historical, social and cultural circumstances that exist at any given point of time. She says,

“the body, or rather, bodies, cannot be adequately understood as ahistorical, precultural, or natural objects in any simple way; they are not only inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressures external to them but are the products, the direct effects, of the very social constitution of nature itself. It is not simply that the body is represented in a variety of ways according to historical, social, and cultural exigencies while it remains basically the same; these factors actively produce the body as a body of a determinate type” (x).

Grosz rejects the dualist notions of body/mind, male/female dualism where mind (male) gets more privilege. Body is just a social construct and also a site of cultural representation. She reconstructs the idea of the body where she argues that the body should not be considered in a biologicistic or essentialist sense rather it should be analysed in terms of men's and women's subjectivity. The embodied subjectivity implies the definition of the subject – male, female, black, white, brown, etc. Such identity arises from the 'corporeal' (the body), as this is itself inscribed by the cultural, within changing time and shifting space (1994: 23). Body is thus a locus where nature and culture meet. It also gives the scope to see the nature and culture distinction in terms of body with a more radical way.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Who wrote *The Second Sex*?

.....

2. What are the three categories on the idea of body within gender studies as given by Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan?

.....
.....
.....

3. How does Judith Butler look at the body?

.....
.....
.....

Stop and Read:

The body can be defined or can be understood in various ways. Some scholars believe that body is a natural entity, where some others think that body is cultural. On the other hand, some scholars consider the body as embodiment - it is both cultural and natural. In feminism and gender studies body is not just simply seen as a social, cultural or natural entity. It sees how the body is defined or constructed and thereby controlled or regulated by the society. At the same time through such regulation women subordination occurs.

3.4 SEXUALITY

Sexuality in common understanding can be said as an understanding of sexual desires. But in the discourse of feminism and gender studies, the idea of sexuality is much wider. It is not only the sexual desires rather it is associated with the idea of the body also. How one thinks about his/her own body and body of others. At the same time, sexuality means the sexual desire i.e. to whom someone is attracted emotionally and physically. Sexuality also includes sexual activities and behaviour. In sociology of gender when we talk about sexuality, we generally study the sexual attitudes and practices. Every society has its own norms and rules about sexual practices hence it is universal in nature. Various societies have various attitudes toward sexual practices, homosexuality, masturbation, pre-marital sex etc. Some societies consider some sexual practices or behaviour as normal/natural and some as abnormal or unnatural. In gender studies when we discuss sexuality it also means the sexual identity – how one identifies herself or himself as homosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual.

Sexuality is recognized differently in different times. It varies from society to society. At some point in time, it was thought that heterosexuality is the norm and sexual practices other than heterosexual intercourse was regarded as not normal. As a result, in many societies including in India, homosexuality till 20th century considered as a criminal activity. Some scholars attribute this to colonial laws and argue that such practices were more acceptable before the imposition of the colonial laws on the natives. However, with the development of the feminist scholarship and psychoanalysis, different authors like Foucault, Freud etc. have interpreted the same-sex relationship. Foucault looks into the power relations associated with the sexual practices. We will discuss Foucault's idea of sexuality in this Unit. Let us first examine how different scholars have defined the idea of sexuality.

Weeks defines sexuality as

“a historical construction which brings together a host of different biological and mental possibilities, and cultural forms — gender and sexual identities, bodily differences, reproductive capacities, needs, desires, fantasies, erotic practices, institutions and values — which need not be linked together, and in other cultures have not been” (2017:12).

Gayle Rubin on the other hand says that sexuality is political. Society rewards some people and suppresses some other depending upon their sexual choices. She holds,

“Like gender, sexuality is political. It is organized into systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others. Like the capitalist organization of labour and its distribution of rewards and powers, the modern sexual system has been the object of political struggle since it emerged and as it has evolved. But if the disputes between labour and capital are mystified, sexual conflicts are completely camouflaged.”

(Rubin, cited in Parker and Aggleton, 2007: 180)

Thus, sexuality is basically sexual expression, sexual desire, sexual identity, sexual orientation, sexual oppression and so and so forth. These form the sexuality of an individual. But the expression of

sexuality is regulated by society through various social norms, rules and regulation. Marriage, kinship, family, various other social institutions, customs, polygamy, power relations etc. regulate sexual desires, sexual practices, and sexual identity.

The feminists engaged with sexuality in a more complex way looking into power relationship, female body etc. associated with it. Foucault, for example, sees sexuality as a cultural construct widely associated with power relations. For him, the body and sexuality are sites of power relations. Foucault's analysis of the body and sexuality and its relationship with power is widely discussed in his books like *Discipline and Punish*, *History of Sexuality*. In *Discipline and Punish* he discusses the disciplinary power controlling of the body. For him, during the 17th and 18th-century various disciplinary methods and techniques were adopted to regulate the body of the individual. It gave the scope to dominate and control the body. He talked about the docile body where he argues,

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born, it defined how one may have a hold over other's bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. (136)

He holds that body is always under constant surveillance and under regulation. As a result, the body is always subtle and seems to be invisible. It further leads to normalization and acceptance of such system. Foucault says that "a docile body may be subjected, used, transformed and improved".

Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge and understanding of body and sexuality gives the scope to understand them in a more discursive way. For Foucault, power is everywhere, and it comes from everywhere. At the same time knowledge is never neutral. Power and knowledge are discursively formed. In his analysis of sexuality, Foucault argues that sexuality is constituted through discourse. Discourse is again related to power that reveals the power structure of the society. He defines power as "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation" (1978:92). He asserts that the body is a locus where rules, hierarchies and metaphysical beliefs are imposed and reinforced. Thus, the body is a site of discursive formation. Sexuality, on the other hand, is the core of the personal identity. Foucault argues that there are numbers of institutional practices or tools that normalize the heterosexuality. Those are

1. Hysterization of women's body: The female body is saturated with sexuality with procreation. It is organically connected with the social body and life of children. The mother is presented with a negative image of a nervous woman.
2. Pedagogization of children's sex: here he argues that historically it is seen that dangerous sexual potentials must be controlled. The parents, doctors, educators must be alert in terms of sexuality of children. The sexuality of children, therefore, considered a danger to the society, hence it needs to be controlled through pedagogical means.
3. Socialization of procreative behaviour: It implies the responsabilization of the couples. The reproductive couples are socialized economically. Foucault in this regard offers the example of birth control pills.
4. Psychiatrization of perverse pleasure: The abnormal sexual behaviours are clinically analysed and can be correct through medicines.

The above mentioned points as Foucault argues are important in modern sexuality. For him, sexuality is a useful tool to exercise power as well to analyse the power relation in society. His analysis on sexuality as a social construct and the so called deviant sexual behaviours such as homosexuality existed over time.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is sexuality?

2. Who wrote *Discipline and Punish*?

3.5 HETERONORMATIVITY

Heteronormativity is an idea, which believes that being heterosexual is natural or normal. All other sexualities, other than heterosexuality are abnormal or not natural. Heteronormativity rejects the other sexual orientations and choices and identities by constructing homosexuality in binary terms. This idea does not only say heterosexuality as a normative sexual practice, but it also says heterosexuality as a normal way of life. Heteronormativity, Kitzinger defines as “the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted phenomenon” (2005: 478). As such heteronormativity is an assumption where heterosexuality is considered as a norm and all other sexual practices as abnormal. Heterosexuality hence is operated unconsciously where individuals internalize the heteronormativity ideals

through socialization or through the societal norms. Berlant and Warner, hence argue that heteronormativity is privileged in society. They hold, “By heteronormativity, we mean the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent-that are, organized as a sexuality-but also privileged”.

3.6 QUEER

Queer is an umbrella term for the sexual minorities those are outside the space of gender binaries. Those minorities may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual (LGBT). The queer theory suggests that there is a space outside the gender binaries as they consider sexual identity as much more fluid in nature. The queer study seeks to study the unconventional gender characteristics and by rejecting gender binary i.e. gay and heterosexual idea placing multiple sexual identities and practices. As Butler says in *Gender Trouble* identity is very much fluid phenomenon. Nothing is fixed within the identity. Identity is a construction, which is expressed by an individual or society defines it. Along with the LGBT the queer comprised of all other people such as pansexual, asexual, gender queer and all others who are out of the ambit of heterosexuality. As such queer or queerness is the oppositional practice of the heteronormativity. It rejects the binary identity constructed through the heteronormativity.

Stop and Read:

Sexuality is sexual expression, sexual desire, sexual identity, sexual orientation, sexual oppression and so and so forth. Sexuality is political. There are certain power relations where sexual practices are regulated. At the same time apart from the various alternative sexualities such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual etc. are mostly considered as abnormal sexual practices. However, various

scholars, such as Foucault, Butler, etc. have shown that sexuality is formed through discourses where power and knowledge play an important role. Moreover, forced heterosexuality creates gender binaries and identities. Butler argues that identity is always fluid and nothing is fixed in identity. Queerness is hence a rejection of the gender binaries and identities.

3.7 SUMMING UP

In this Unit, we have learned how the body and sexuality are seen in gender studies. The common understanding of the body as natural and heterosexual practice as natural and given are ideas rejected in gender and sexuality studies as such understandings are considered as social construction, constructed through discourses. We have also learned both body and sexuality are political and society tries to regulate and control it through constant surveillance.

Glossary

- **Discourse:** Discourse in common parlance refers to how one thinks or communicates about things, events, society and so on. It is a particular way of talking about and understanding of the world.
- **Docility:** Docility implies which can be easily managed or controlled. Foucault talks about the docile bodies - how society through constant surveillance and norms regulates the individual's body.
- **Embodiment:** Embodiment meaning the tangible form of an idea. The term is used here to discuss how the body is seen as an embodiment of nature and culture. The physical body

is the outcome of the natural existence and the expression of cultural norms as dictated by society.

- **Performativity:** Judith Butler conceptualized the term called gender performativity. By gender performativity, she means that gender is a repeated act of performance.

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. Write a brief note on the idea of body.
2. What is embodiment of body? Discuss briefly.
3. Discuss Judith Butler's idea of body.
4. What is sexuality? How is sexuality political?
5. Discuss Foucault's idea in understanding sexuality.
6. What is heteronormativity?
7. How does queer theory challenge heteronormativity?

3.9 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 4: CONTEMPORARY SEXUALITY POLITICS: LGBT MOVEMENTS

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives
- 4.3 Sexual Politics, Sexual Orientation, Sexual Identity
- 4.4 LGBT Movement
- 4.5 Stonewall Riot
- 4.6 Pre-Stonewall and Gay Movement
- 4.7 Post-Stonewall and LGBT Movement
 - 4.7.1 Pride Parade
- 4.8 Section 377 and India
- 4.9 Summing Up
- 4.10 Questions
- 4.11 Recommended Readings and References

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, we have discussed various concepts related to the body and sexuality. We have also read how the postmodern feminists have taken sexual identity not only in terms of binaries – homosexual and heterosexual. It has further opened up the discussion to understand sexuality more in terms of sexual choice and various other identities as well as patriarchy associated with it. As we have already discussed the term queer is used nowadays to denote all the sexual minorities. In this Unit, we will discuss LGBT history in various countries especially in the USA and in the UK. We will see how and what events accelerated the LGBT

movement which meant for their recognition in the mainstream society as well as equal treatment in the society.

The LGBT movement in various parts of the world sought recognition of their sexual choices and orientation as well as demands equal rights, which were denied or in a sense discriminated by the society. Apart from heterosexual behaviour all other sexual practices were/are seen as abnormal. Foucault in this regard holds that the Victorian morality of the 19th century which propagated monogamy, heterosexuality and procreation were dominant for which in almost all countries homosexual practices, sodomy etc. were criminalized. However, in the 20th century, especially from the 1950's decade, people started coming out openly expressing their sexual orientation as well started demanding decriminalization of the sodomy law as well as equal rights for the sexual minorities. We will discuss the history of the LGBT movement in the USA and in the UK to understand the LGBT movement and various activisms related to the movement.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit you will be able to:

- Discuss the history of the gay rights movement;
- Discuss the Pride Parade, Stonewall riot;
- Analyse Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code.

4.3 SEXUAL POLITICS, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, SEXUAL IDENTITY

Sexual identity and sexual orientation, etc. have become important in the discourse of sexuality politics in the contemporary world. The academic development in the field and rising activism for the rights of the sexual minorities (LGBT people) started getting support from the other corners

also. It has essentially started questioning what Butler says as the heterosexual matrix. She defines it as ‘that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalized’. The common notion in various societies about the same-sex relationship was that as the same-sex relationship cannot procreate hence with the exception of heterosexual relationship all other sexual relations are not natural or normal, as they do not lead to procreation. As a result in almost all the countries, the same-sex relationship was criminalised. Such notions consider sexuality as innate – a biological instinct to reproduce. As such, deviation from such norms is considered as unnatural, immoral etc. However, rejecting such notions the gay people started coming out openly demanding equal rights in various countries of the world. The Victorian notion on sexuality based on an understanding of sexual relationship as meant only for procreation was negated. Foucault in *History of Sexuality* argues that the notion of sexuality drastically changed during the 19th century. He says,

“As defined by ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, a life , a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into the total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away” (Foucault, 1978:43) .

Foucault further narrates that the construction of sexuality mostly lies in the institutional discourse that comes to constitute the “regime of truth”. During the Victorian period, with the development of modernity, sexuality becomes more isolated. In this period heterosexual love, monogamy, procreative etc. were functions considered as the norm. Sexual deviations other than heterosexual behaviour became anomie.

As a result, the modern, as well as others, started criminalizing the same-sex relationship. Apart from medical treatment, the law was in force to punish sexual minorities or so-called deviant people. However, in the 20th century, new discourses came into existence where various prejudices, stereotyping, etc. were questioned. At the same time formation of various gay and lesbian groups sought for equal rights as well as claiming of a new identity in terms of sexual choice or orientation gave a fillip to the gay rights movement. With the development of the queer studies, the idea of heteronormativity as well as sexual identity described in binary terms i.e.- homosexuality and heterosexuality, were questioned, breaking such notion that queer included all other sexual minorities i.e. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender etc.). Let us discuss briefly the LGBT movement and how it has impacted the very notion of sexuality in one hand and gaining equal rights, identity as well as decriminalizing the same-sex relationship on the other hand. The LGBT people through their movement celebrate the pride, diversity, sexuality as well as individuality. As such the LGBT movement is a challenge to the common notion of homophobia or to other sexual practices not recognized by society.

4.4 LGBT MOVEMENT

We have already mentioned above that other than heterosexuality other sexual relationships were criminalized by most of the nations of the world. With the rise of the feminist movement and subsequent protests and demands by the civil rights organizations as well as by the queer people, various nations have started giving recognition to the LGBT people and their rights.

Though the LGBT movement is not very old in India, in Western countries, the LGBT movement is not very new. However, it is to be kept in mind that homosexuality is not new in any society, it is prevalent in every society but due to the heteronormative idea or patriarchal notion of the society

homosexuality is/was considered as an unnatural sexual practice. Foucault argues that the construction of homosexuality is a 19th medical discourse. In many societies it was thought that homosexuality is a disease that needs medical attention. For example, till 1973 the American Psychiatric Association considered it as disease. In 1992 World Health Organization accepted homosexuality as normal behaviour.

The history of the LGBT movement can broadly be divided into pre-Stonewall, Stonewall and Post Stonewall. A riot took place in the Stonewall Inn in New York against the police torture and discrimination carried out by the gay community. The Stonewall riot is discussed briefly below.

4.5 STONEWALL RIOT

The Stonewall Riot was one of the important events in the LGBT movement across the world. Till 1960's homosexuality was considered as disease and were people who practised it were often hospitalized as well as they had to face public humiliation for their sexual identity in the West as well as in the USA. Though gay rights activism was going on before the Stonewall riot which occurred on June 27-29, 1969, the riot was a turning point for the LGBT people fighting for equal rights. The riot took place in the Stonewall Inn, in New York between the Police and the demonstrators. However, the gay rights movement was not new in the USA. The Mattachine Society of New York (1951) formed by some gay men which lobbied for law reform as well as opposed the discriminatory attitudes of the society towards the gay men for their sexual identity. Daughters of Bilitis (1955) was another organization founded by lesbian women. The problem of both the organizations was that it didn't seek social change rather sought accommodation in the existing structure.

Before the riot of Stonewall, in the USA the police used to harass the homosexuals as well as arrested them. In the gay bars police regularly

raided those and sometimes arrested the gay peoples. Sometimes bar licenses were cancelled if knowingly drinks were served to the homosexuals.

The Stonewall Inn was located in downtown New York was predominantly a gay bar where patrons were mainly gay men and drag queens. On 28th June 1969, Police in Uniform and plainclothes raided the bar arrested the employees and turned out the customers one by one to the street. The street erupted with violent protest. The crowd had grown in its numbers and they started throwing beer bottles, stones etc. to the police. In this particular day outside the Stonewall Inn, the gay people fought back instead of accepting everyday humiliation. By early morning it seemed that the protest was over. But the next night, the crowd returned larger in numbers in the name of gay pride. For almost the next six days gay rights demonstrations took place. The riot by gay people is considered as the starting of the modern gay rights movement. In a sense, the Stonewall Inn riot is considered as synonymous to the gay resistance.

Prominent lesbian rights activist Jill Johnston writes about the Stonewall riot in the following words,

“was the event that catalysed the modern gay and lesbian political movement. It changed the ways thousands, ultimately millions, of men and women thought of themselves ... It represented the birth of an identity unprecedented in society.”

On the first anniversary of the Stonewall Riot, gay pride march took place in various cities of America. Civil rights groups started fighting against the American Psychiatric Society that considered gay sex as unnatural and associated it with mental disorder. Along with various civil rights activists and gay men protests and demands for equal treatment to the homosexuals were seen in various parts of the country. People started taking a militant approach starting from the Stonewall riot

against the humiliation. Harvey Milk a gay activist became popular and was considered as an icon of the gay rights movement and was subsequently elected to the public office. He was assassinated in 1978. However, in the later years, the rise of HIV and AIDS created a stigma about the gay people

4.6 PRE-STONEWALL AND GAY MOVEMENT

In the pre-Stonewall period, some organized protests and activists were seen for gay rights in the USA and other parts of Europe. In 1919 Magnus Hirschfeld founded an institute in Berlin named as Institute of Sexology. He was a prominent advocate of gay rights. In 1933, with the rise of fascism Hitler banned gay sex and in 1934 Magnus institute was raided and lots of books were burned down.

In 1947 a magazine called *Vice Versa* was published which was the first gay and lesbian periodical. “It contained no by-lines, no photographs, no advertisements, no masthead and neither the name nor the address of its editors. In fact, *Vice Versa* looked more like a term paper than a magazine, and it made no pretence of answering who? what? when ? or where? Regarding the news of the day” (Streitmatter, 1998:78). The editor’s intent was explained in the front page of the first issue of *Vice Versa* that says, “There is one kind of publication which would, I am sure, have a great appeal to a definite group. Such a publication has never appeared on the stands. New stands carrying the crudest kind of magazine or pictorial pamphlets appealing to the vulgar would find themselves severely censured were they to display this other type of publication. Why? Because society decrees it thus.

Hence the appearance of *Vice Versa*, a magazine dedicated in all seriousness, to those of us who will never quite be able to adopt ourselves to the iron bound rules of Convention” (ibid, 78).

During World War II, the life of individuals drastically changed as well as the rise of gay rights activism too. The US military punished gay soldiers

and excluded them during the World War I. In WWII, men and women from all over the country came out from the rural environment to the war industry – away from the supervision of family and community. Such an environment gave the exposure for expressing the sexual identities to these rural and semi-urban folks. Gay and lesbian identity became crystallized. Unlike the WWI experience, during WWII, gays and lesbians were policed less. As both men and women participated in the war industry, women working outside the familial life gave more opportunity to explore their sexuality. The crystallization of sexual identity especially of gay and lesbian during the war period and subsequently many social movement, civil rights movements etc. were experienced in the post-war America.

Alfred Kinsey published *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* in 1948 which encountered a strong condemnation and acclaim. Interviewing thousands of people in America on sexuality, Kinsey, found that the number of homosexuals is far more than what was believed. He also found significant numbers of bisexuals. His report also revealed that almost 10% population is homosexual.

The increasing numbers in terms of asserting the sexual identity, The Mattachine Society was formed in 1951. Society can be said as the beginning of the gay rights movement in the contemporary period. In 1955 the Daughters of Bilitis was formed. The Daughters of Bilitis organized the National Lesbian Convention in San Francisco in 1960 (We have already discussed the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis above). In 1961 Illinois became the first state to decriminalize homosexuality.

4.7 POST-STONEWALL AND LGBT MOVEMENT

4.7.1. Pride Parade

Pride Parade or pride march is generally celebrated in the month of June across counties to commemorate the Stonewall riot of 1969 in New York.

The Stonewall riot marks the emblematic starting of the contemporary gay rights movement across the world against the prejudice, discrimination towards the LGBT people. Many scholars divide the world into “before Stonewall” and “after Stonewall” considering stonewall as a watershed event in the history of the gay rights movement.

The pride rally generally symbolizes the empowering of the LGBT community in one hand, and social mobilization on the other. It sends the message against discrimination, as well as negating of it in the ways in which their sexual practices were seen as a pathology; it sends their message of their right to existence alongside the so-called mainstream heteronormative people. Pride parades/rally is celebrated in countries across the globe where LGBTQ people come openly with rainbow flags, clothes of certain colours.

The pride parade is generally celebrated in the month of June every year. The month of June is also considered as LGBT Pride Month by the LGBT people. The pride march nowadays comprises of parade, marches, parties, symposia and so and so forth.

The rainbow flag is an important symbol of the LGBT pride parade. It is considered as the challenge towards the heteronormative gender norms and exhibits the other sexual possibilities and sexual choice. The flag was designed by Gilbert Baker, a San Francisco Artist in 1978 as a symbol of the gay and lesbian political movement. The various coloured strips have various meanings.

Red for life

Orange for healing

Yellow for Sunlight

Green for nature

Blue for harmony

Violet for spirit.

In the post-Stonewall riot, gay rights activism became stronger. The first gay parade was held to commemorate the Stonewall riot on 28th June 1970. One the important move was the American Psychiatric Association declared that homosexuality is not a psychiatric disorder. Harvey Milk a gay man was elected to public office for the first time. He was subsequently murdered in 1978. In America, with the rising protests and gay rights activism, the rights of the homosexuals became legislated. Many old laws were outlawed which discriminate people in terms of sexual orientation. The World Health Organisation in 1992 removed homosexuality as a disease from its list. “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy was adopted in the USA in which applicants in the US army need not disclose their sexual orientation.

Similarly in other countries also the LGBT movement got momentum. In 1954 in the UK, the Wolfenden Committee was formed by Home Office, to review homosexual offences after well-known people were convicted of indecency. The report was published in 1957, which recommended that homosexual behaviour between consensual adults in private should not be considered a criminal offence. The publication of the report had a tremendous impact in the UK. In 1958 the Homosexual Law Reform Society was formed which advocated for change in laws in terms of homosexuality. It persuaded the parliament to implement the Wolfenden Committee report. Arena Three, a monthly lesbian magazine was published in 1963. The North Western Homosexual Law Reform Committee formed in 1964, campaigned for homosexual equality (CHE). In 1967, the Sexual Offences Act partially decriminalized homosexuality in private above the age of 21. The North Western Homosexual Law Reform became one of the UK wide organization which was later renamed Committee for Homosexual Equality. It started getting support from various corners of the country. Eventually, in 1972 a fortnightly newspaper called Gay News was published. The Liberal Democrats (erstwhile Liberal Party) gave its support for equal rights to the homosexuals. In the later period, the gay

Trade Union was formed as well as other organizations such as the Gay Christian Union, Black Gay and Lesbian group were formed. In the following period various campaign was launched such as publication, TV program etc. Denmark in 1988 gave legal recognition to same-sex marriage.

4.8 SECTION 377 AND INDIA

In India homosexuality was banned and punishable by law under the section of 377 of Indian Penal Code, 1860. This colonial law had been continuing since then in the post-colonial India too with the misconception that same-sex relationship, gay marriage etc. are against nature. However, the rising demands, pride march as well as rights of the individual in terms of sexual choice got momentum in India too. In 2009, the Delhi High Court struck down the law in the verdict given for the case Naz Foundation vs. Govt. of NCT, Delhi. It considers that the law violates the rights of the individual given by the Constitution of India. The court decriminalized sex between two consenting adults of the same sex holding that it violates Article 14, 15 and 21 of the Indian Constitution. In these Articles, Article 14 talks about equality, Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc. and Article 21 talks about protection of life and personal liberty. The Delhi High Court decision was quashed by the Supreme Court. However, in 2016 another five petitions were filed by various activists. It says, “right to sexuality, —right to sexual autonomy and —right to choice of a sexual partner to be part of the right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India and further to declare Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (for short, —IPC) to be unconstitutional”.

(https://www.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2016/14961/14961_2016_Judgement_06-Sep-2018.pdf). The various petitions also claim that “homosexuality, bisexuality and other sexual orientations are equally natural and reflective of choice and inclination founded on consent of two persons who are eligible in law to express such consent and it is neither a physical nor a

mental illness, rather they are natural variations of expression and free thinking process and to make it a criminal offence is offensive of the well-established principles pertaining to individual dignity and decisional autonomy inherent in the personality of a person, a great discomfort to gender identity, destruction of the right to privacy” (ibid). The petitioners also said that 7-8% population of the country who constitute the LGBT community need to be recognized, protected. It also claims that sexual orientation is an integral and innate facet of every individual’s identity. The LGBT community faces discrimination due to the Victoria era morality Act called IPC 377. In the Victorian era, sexual activities were considered only for procreation. The Supreme Court in its verdict said that consensual sex between same sex is no more a criminal conduct. However, Section 377 governs the non-consensual sexual acts against adults and all acts of carnal intercourse against minors and acts of bestiality.

4.9 SUMMING UP

In this Unit, we have learned about the gay rights movement and various activism by homosexual people especially in the USA and in the UK. The post-WWII gave a new social order in a western society where men and women could explore their alternative sexuality. As a result, the gay organization started forming. However, against the police harassment in 1969 in New York Stonewall riot took place where the gay people fought back, adopted a militant approach to confronting the police. In the history of the gay rights movement, the Stonewall riot is said to be watershed moment across the globe. Every year in the month of June pride parade is held across the globe. In subsequent times, accepting the sexual identity and choice of an individual some countries have decriminalized homosexuality .

Thus, ‘Queer’, transgendered, bisexual, transsexual, and intersexed are now familiar (non- slang) terms that, with lesbian and gay, have more or less

replaced “homosexual,” a wooden, if overdetermined, term coined in the nineteenth century that does not capture the plasticity and malleability of human sexual practices and identities. In the meantime, “heterosexual” is becoming a less self-evident orientation or ideology through its interrogation by scholars and laypersons alike, although it remains the dominant default mode of sexuality in most societies’ (Robertson, 2005:1).

Glossary

- **Homosexuality:** A person who is emotionally, romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of the same sex.
- **Sexual Orientation:** Sexual orientation is one's sexual preference. It is referred to the one's sexual attraction to another male or female or any other gender including asexuality.
- **Gay:** A term used for and by someone who self-identifies as a homosexual, especially a male.
- **Lesbian:** : A term for a female homosexual that has developed further to define a woman whose emotional, social, political as well as sexual interests lie in someone of her own sex.
- **Bisexual:** A person sexually interested or desirous of both men and women.
- **Transgender:** Refer to people who permanently changed their gender i.e. characteristics conventionally associated with biological sex through their use of clothing, hair styles, makeup, and mannerisms that are socially normative for the “other” or “opposite” sex.
- **Drag Queen:** Drag queens are people generally males who dress in women clothing and act like feminine gender. Drag, cross-

dressings, or wearing the clothes typical of the other gender, especially for theatrical effect.

- **Homophobia:** A reference to a conscious or unconscious aversion to and fear of homosexual—also bisexual or transgendered people, homosexuality, and homosexual communities and culture. Often today it is discussed as the fear of being homosexual.

4.10 QUESTIONS

1. Write briefly on the LGBT movement in USA.
2. What is Stonewall riot? Why Stonewall riot is considered as the watershed moment in the history of LGBT movement?
3. Write Short Notes:
 - a. Pride parade
 - b. Section 377 of Indian Penal Code
 - c. Vice Versa
 - d. Stonewall Riot

4.11 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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MODULE II: FEMINIST THOUGHTS

UNIT 5: FEMINIST THOUGHT: RADICALS

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Objectives

5.3 Radical Feminism: The Key Issues

5.4 History of Radical Feminism

5.4.1 Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement

5.4.2 Personal is Political

5.5 Key Features of Radical Feminism

5.6 Sexuality, Sexual Exploitation and Reproduction

5.7 Lesbianism

5.8 Pornography

5.9 Summing Up

5.10 Questions

5.11 Recommended Readings and References

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we will discuss in details about radical feminism. As we know, with the development of feminism in the Western world various type feminist thoughts emerged – such as liberal, radical, Marxist and so on and so forth. In this Unit, we will discuss the idea of radical feminism, various authors who propagated the idea as well as various key issues of radical feminism.

The radical feminist thought is one of the dominant thoughts in gender studies or feminism. Feminism as a whole basically talks about women's equal rights, power in society. The idea of radical feminism came out of the

discussions on various issues related to women such as household works, menstruation, childbirth, sex, abortion etc. during the second wave feminist movement started in the West in the 1960s. The radical feminism started looking into the basic reasons of women oppression and discrimination in society. Although liberal feminism was dominated during that time radical feminism went beyond the adjustments as demanded by the liberal feminists and enquired about the basic reason of women oppression which it calls as patriarchy. The other feminist thoughts such as liberal feminism etc. believe in reforming of the socio-political as well as a legal system through which gender equality can be achieved. Unlike these, the radical feminists believe in a radical restructuring of the society by challenging the patriarchy and male supremacy. Radical feminists basically examined the root cause of women oppression. This stream of thought is widely associated with the second wave feminism lasting from 1968-73. Shulamith Firestone, Anne Koedt, Carol Hanisch, etc. were some of the popular names who were associated with the radical feminist thought. We have discussed these in details below.

5.2 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this Unit, you will able:

- Discuss radical feminism;
- Explain how it is different from other feminist thoughts;
- Explain the key issues of radical feminism;
- Analyse the major goals of radical feminism.

5.3 RADICAL FEMINISM: THE KEY ISSUES

Radical feminism tries to locate women oppression in society. It holds that the main cause of women oppression in society originates from various social roles and institutional structures. These are constructed by patriarchy through which it suppresses women and men become powerful. The radical feminism does not merely see the women discrimination rather

emphasized more on women oppression. It further delves into gender politics of resistance. The radical feminism emerged in 1960-70 during the second wave feminism. Radical feminism started in the United States and later spread to other countries. From 1967 radical women started meeting in the United States and started discussing the male supremacy. The issues discussed were pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation, male violence etc. those were pertinent in the day to day life of women. Such discussion led them to understand the women oppression in society and developed the radical feminist approach.

Radical feminists consider women oppression as the oldest form of oppression prevalent in society. Earlier, the radical feminists referred to themselves as radical women. However, on 17 October 1968, a group of feminists called themselves as radical feminists. T. Grace Atkinson and Shulamith Firestone, etc. were famous leaders of the radical feminist movement. The major difference of the liberal feminism with the radical is that the radical feminists talk about women liberation unlike the “women’s civil or political rights”. The major goal of this form of feminist thought was to overthrow patriarchy. We have already discussed in earlier Units about the institution of patriarchy. Patriarchy defines the gender role in society; it is the framework within which all institutions including that of the family exist. The radical feminists argue that through the institution of patriarchy men become more powerful and women are oppressed. The social roles, gender roles, the institutional structure that create the hierarchies of male supremacy and women oppression also originated from such structures. As such, by overthrowing the patriarchy or through a radical restructuring the society, traditional gender roles can be changed and oppression over women by men can be ended. Moreover, radical feminists also see women oppression in terms of men controlling women’s body. They consider the hierarchy from which emerges males’ sexist control over women as instrumental in women oppression. The male hierarchy and power relation must be demolished for women liberation and it can only happen once the patriarchal structure is overthrown. In a

nutshell, the radical feminists argue that patriarchy divides the rights, privileges etc. in a society between men and women which further gives privilege to men and women are oppressed.

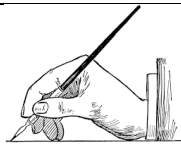
The major differences between radical feminism and liberal feminism are:

- a) Liberal feminism advocated for civil and legal rights for women where the aim of radical feminism was to overthrow the patriarchal structure of the society. They want a radical change in society through which traditional gender roles were questioned.
- b) In liberal feminism, women were seen as an individual where the radical feminism looked women as a group or more emphatically a class.

Stop and Read:

The radical feminism considers patriarchy as the sole cause of the women oppression in society. Patriarchy defines the gender role and other institutions such as family, marriage, kinship, religion etc through which women oppression comes from men. The oppressions to women come in the form of sexual violence, domestic violence, rape, childbirth, child caring etc. The radical feminists believe that without overthrowing the institution of patriarchy women liberation is not possible. Hence, it talks of radical restructuring of the society - dismantling of patriarchy through which traditional gender roles can be changed and women oppression would be over.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. How is radical feminism different from liberal feminism?

5.4 HISTORY OF RADICAL FEMINISM

As we have mentioned above, the radical feminist movement started in America with the second wave feminism. The feminist discourse during that time was dominated by the liberal and socialist feminist thought. In the liberal feminist, mainstream feminists groups such as National Organisation for Women (NOW) believed that the women question can be addressed or gender equality could be achieved through reforming the existing system as well as changing or gaining some changes in the legal and civil issues. However, the radical feminists distanced themselves from both these schools and even some radical feminists adopted the militant approach in doing radical feminism. From 1967, a group of radical feminist started discussing the male supremacy in America and within a short span of time, they could establish themselves as a dominant school of thought in feminism. Alice (2003) mentions that “Radical feminism rejected both the politico position that socialist revolution would bring about women’s liberation and the liberal feminist solution of integrating women into the public sphere” (3). She further says that “Radical feminists argued that women constituted a sex-class, that relation between women and men needed to be recast in political terms, and that gender rather than class was the primary contradiction” (ibid). It was seen that the radical women

feminists were part of the New Left political movement who campaigned for Anti-war and left movement during the 1970's decade. However, within the movement, the women were excluded and not given equal power at par with. Carrying their radical ideology the women distanced themselves from the New Left movement and started radical feminism where it started looking into the root cause of women discrimination in society. The radical group became critical to patriarchy which is considered as the primary cause of women oppression as well as various other institutions such as family, love, marriage, normative heterosexuality etc. It started fighting against sexual violence, rape, abortion law etc. It also started raising consciousness among women by small group meetings where women shared their day-to-day experience that covered childhood, work, domestic life, sexual violence etc. Thus, radical feminism focuses its activity in two aspects: a) consciousness raising and b) to create alternative institutions,

The consciousness-raising was one of the major tactics of the radical feminism stream for developing a shared consciousness of women oppression in society. Consciousness raising was a space for discussing issues pertaining to various women related problems where an individual woman shared their day-to-day experiences such as domestic violence, sexual violence, abortion and others. This CR (Consciousness raising) began first in New York and in Chicago and later spread to other parts of America. The CR became the strength of character of the radical feminism. The CR had the aim of giving practical action rather than theory to dismantle gender discrimination and patriarchy. Echols mentions that the idea of consciousness-raising was brought from "speaking pains to recall pains" used during the Chinese revolution by the peasants. The process of CR and sharing of the individual issues by the women created a consciousness among the women that the individual problem is not unique rather common with other women.

5.4.1 Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement

Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement was one of the radical feminist groups established in 1969 in New York. Shulamith Firestone, Ellen Willis, etc. were the dominating names in the Redstockings movement. The group fought and campaigned for consciousness raising, personal is political, pro-women line, sisterhood is powerful, politics of housework, the Miss America Protest, and especially abortion law reform. The manifesto adopted on 7th July 1969 which reads,

“Women are an oppressed class. Our oppression is total, affecting every facet of our lives. We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants, and cheap labour. We are considered inferior beings, whose only purpose is to enhance men's lives. Our humanity is denied. Our prescribed behaviour is enforced by the threat of physical violence”

(<https://www.redstockings.org/index.php/rs-manifesto>)

The Redstockings manifesto further identifies men as agents of oppression. Men have been dominating all the social and cultural institutions as well as oppress women through physical control. It held that male supremacy is one of the oldest forms of domination and other dominations are extensions of male domination. It also says that women need not change rather men should change. The personal experiences of women are regarded by the Redstockings and those feelings are the basis of the analysis of common problems of women. The major goal of the Redstockings was to create a female class consciousness by sharing personal experiences and condemning the sexist institutions (ibid).

5.4.2 Personal is Political

Carol Hanisch published her famous essay “Personal is Political” which appeared in *Notes From the Second Year: Women's Liberation* in 1970. The personal is political was one of the famous slogans in the radical feminist discourse. The slogan itself narrates that personal experiences or problems faced by individual women are not unique to herself rather they are part of the larger patriarchal system. The men dominate women in every sphere of

society, hence there is no distinction between the personal and political life. Jaggar says “It reveals how male power is exercised and reinforced through such ‘personal’ institutions as childrearing, housework, love, marriage and all kinds of sexual practices” (1984:101). Hanisch wrote in 2006 about the motivations of writing the essay “Personal is Political” describing her experience working with the male-dominated movements and groups like Anti-war (Anti-Vietnam war), civil rights, old and New Left groups. These groups, however, gave the least importance to the women oppression in their agenda. The situation in marriage, childbirth, abortion, sexual violence etc. feelings of exclusion of every woman were not merely individual rather shared. The consciousness-raising meeting discussed those individual problems and came to the conclusion that the root cause of women discrimination, oppression lie in the roots of sexism and patriarchy which is systematic in nature. The personal is a political slogan in a way to challenge the idea of women’s problem, not simply personal complaints. It connects the personal problems with the larger social and political structure of the society. Women are exploited and oppressed because they are women and sexual and reproductive life are the most fundamental form of women oppression. It further propagated the idea of universal sisterhood for women through which it calls on all women across the globe to unite against male power.

Stop and Read

The radical feminists were mostly part of the New Left Group who were active in the Anti War Movement (Vietnam War), civil right movement etc. But within the New Left Group, the women found that their questions were hardly given importance by the male counterparts. As a result, bringing the radical idea from Marxism those women started radical feminists movement to address women questions. Consciousness raising was one of the important aspects of the radical feminist groups, wherein small meetings women described

their personal experiences pertaining to their domestic life, sexual life, violence, childcare, etc. The radical feminists believed that personal problems of women are not necessarily individual issues rather having deep political meanings. As such, they developed the idea called personal is political

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement?

2. Who wrote the essay "Personal is Political"?

5.5 KEY FEATURES OF RADICAL FEMINISM

- Radical feminists hold that women oppression is the most fundamental form of oppression historically.
- Radical feminists believe that women oppression comes from the social roles and social institutions which are constructed by patriarchy. It further creates male supremacy and women oppression.
- Radical feminists consider patriarchy as the root cause of women oppression hence its main goal was to eliminate patriarchy from the society. It speaks of the radical restructuring of the society by

uprooting the patriarchy. It tries to free women from patriarchal control.

- Radical feminists argue that patriarchy and through its various institutions control women sexuality and reproductive lives.
- Radical feminists had a militant approach in doing feminism. Unlike the liberal feminists, they dismiss the approach of adjusting in society through civil rights and legal rights.
- Sexual oppression is considered as the most fundamental form of women oppression.
- Radical feminists hold that women are oppressed through sexuality and reproduction. As such it holds that compulsory heterosexuality is oppressive. Many radical feminists advocated for lesbianism.
- Radical feminists also advocated for the right to abortion.
- Radical feminists wanted a revolutionary change in the societal structure through which patriarchy can be uprooted and women oppression can be overcome.

5.6 SEXUALITY, SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND REPRODUCTION

The radical feminism directly confronts with the sexual exploitation of women by men. Radical feminists believe that as men control the female body especially the reproductive capabilities and the sexuality of women. As such, it suggests to overthrow those and give extreme solutions unlike the liberal feminists accommodating themselves in the system. Shulamith Firestone in her book *The Dialectics of Sex: The Case of Feminist Revolution* (1970) questioned the very idea that why women should bear the burden of reproduction pain for the entire human species. She criticizes some institutions like the family where she says the biological family is “an inherently unequal power distribution” (8).

Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case of Feminist Revolution* (1970) is one of the influential texts in the radical feminist

thought. Firestone argues that the gender inequality imposed upon women through their biology. These are physical, psychological and also disadvantages imposed by childbirth, pregnancy and childbearing. She hence talked about the seizure of the reproduction system. She advocated for cybernetics for human reproduction – artificial reproduction. She says, “Pregnancy is barbaric. Pregnancy is the temporary deformation of the body of the individual for the sake of the species” (Firestone, 1970: 198). She further says that “Moreover, childbirth hurts. And it isn’t good for you” (ibid). Firestone agreed with Marx and Engels on the theory of class and class struggle but she holds that the class divisions are not economic rather two biological classes “for procreative reproduction and the struggle of these classes with one another; in the changes in the modes of marriage, reproduction and childcare created by these struggles” (12). In this struggle, women are disadvantaged and exploited by men. Women dependency over males creates the gender inequality in society specifically in biological terms. She holds, “That Women throughout history before the advent of birth control were at the continual mercy of their biology - menstruation, menopause, and 'female ills', constant painful childbirth, wet-nursing and care of infants, all of which made them dependent on males (whether brother, father, husband, lover, or clan, government, community-at-large) for physical survival” (ibid 8). Firestone to overcome such situation proposes the control or seizure of the means of production i.e. controlling of the childbirth. Women must control the childbirth in order to uproot the oppression. As women oppressions are biological women liberation needs a biological revolution.

Rosemarie Tong analysing Firestone describes that the systematic subordination of women lies in the biological inequality of sexes. Firestone hence, developed the sex class rather than economic class to address the women oppression. Tong says, “because Firestone believed that the roots of women’s oppression are biological, she concluded that women’s liberation requires a biological revolution, in much the same way that Marx concluded that the essentially economic oppression of workers required and

economic revolution. Whereas the proletariat must seize the means of productions in order to eliminate the economic class system, women must seize control of the means of reproduction in order to eliminate the sexual class system; and just as the ultimate goal of the communist revolution is, in a classless society, to obliterate class distinctions, the ultimate goal of the feminist revolution is, in an androgynous society, to obliterate sexual ones” (Tong 1997: 73). Firestone thus to eradicate the patriarchy and oppression over women, proposes of freeing women from the familial setup of heteronormativity. It can be replaced by artificial reproductive techniques with biological reproduction. This would give women full seizure of control of the body in one hand and full restoration of women to ownership of their own bodies on the other as well as temporary control of human fertility.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Write two key features of radical feminism.

2. How, according to Shulamith Firestone, is gender inequality imposed upon women through their biology?

5.7 LESBIANISM

Many radical feminists believe that lesbianism is necessary for the commitment towards feminism. It holds that lesbianism is important to

overthrow the patriarchal structure and patriarchal sexuality of the society as well as it also fulfils the desires and needs of women. Charlotte Bunch says that heterosexual feminists are not true feminists. Bunch argued that “the very essence, definition and nature of heterosexuality is men first” which implies that the heterosexual women betray the lesbians. As such, “only women who cut their ties to male privilege can be trusted to remain serious in the struggle against the male dominance”. She further says that “For the Lesbian Feminists, it (sex) is not private, it is a political matter of oppression, domination and power. ” Hence, Bunch believes that lesbianism is the revolutionary rejection of all male-defined institutions (Tong 1997: 123). To some extent, lesbianism was seen as the central to the feminist project as it challenges the male supremacy, heterosexual desire, and also liberates women from male hegemony.

Anne Koedt’s essay "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" (1973), on the other hand, discusses various myths related to sexual intercourse, especially of heterosexual intercourse. Koedt argues that women mistake that orgasm comes from the vagina where in reality it comes from the clitoris. The essay counters the dominant ideas of female sexual pleasures.

However, the connections between feminism and lesbianism are very loose as many lesbians are not feminists. Among the radical feminists, many dismiss the idea of the lesbianism to fight against the patriarchy. Lesbianism is an alternative sexual preference of individual rather than a feminist stance always.

5.8 PORNOGRAPHY

There are contesting views on pornography in the circle of radical feminists. Some consider it as an industry where some have no problem with pornography. In the 1980s some radical feminists such as Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon started working on to ban porn. They hold that pornography leads harm to women as well as these are misogynist and

violent. In the anti-pornography movement Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon proposed anti-pornography legislation to the city of Minneapolis in 1980 where it defined pornography as “the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women whether in pictures or in words that also includes one or more of the following: women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects,...or women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation; or women who experience pleasure in being raped...or women's body parts are exhibited, such that women are reduced to those parts, or women are presented in scenarios of degradation...shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual.” They consider pornography as the sexualizing of the female body as well as dehumanizing. Dworkin says, “Feminists are often asked whether pornography causes rape. The fact is that rape and prostitution caused and continue to cause pornography. Politically, culturally, socially, sexually, and economically, rape and prostitution generated pornography; and pornography depends for its continued existence on the rape and prostitution of women”.

The radical-cultural feminists argue that there is no difference between gender discrimination in the bedroom and the sexual objectification of women in the bedroom. Tong mentions “In both instances, the harm done to women is about men’s power over women. Pornography is nothing more than patriarchal propaganda about women’s “proper” role as man’s servant, helpmate, caretaker, and plaything, according to radical-cultural feminists. Whereas men exist for themselves, women exist for men. Men are subjects; women are objects, they said” (Tong, 1997:68).

But there are some other radical feminists known as radical libertarian feminists who support pornography. They urge women to “use pornography to overcome their fears about sex, to arouse sexual desires, and to generate sexual fantasies” (Tong, 1997:68). They argue that women should feel free to enjoy all kinds of pornography including violent pornography also. It views pornography as a means of women’s freedom of

pursuing sexual pleasures. As such, pornography is not the sexual objectification of women rather the freedom to enjoy and experience sexual pleasure.

5.9 SUMMING UP

In this Unit, we have discussed various aspects of radical feminism, history, key features as well as their critique on sexuality, reproduction, lesbianism, pornography etc. The radical feminists argue that women oppression is the most fundamental form of oppression throughout history across society where men oppress women. Oppression comes through gender roles and patriarchy. The radical feminists hence propose a radical restructuring of society by overthrowing patriarchy through which women oppression can be ended. The radical feminist movement started in the USA where most of the radical feminists were part of the New Left group actively participated in the Anti War movement and the civil right movement. They later formed the radical feminist groups and through consciousness raising it started discussing individual women issues and developed the popular slogan like “personal is political”. They campaigned for the right to abortion, ban on pornography and some extreme radicals advocated lesbianism.

Glossary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Left: The New Left was a radical leftist group active during 1960-70 in America consisted of mostly college students and other young people who took a stance against Vietnam War, carried out protests for civil rights, women's right, racial equality etc.• Heteronormativity: Heteronormativity is a concept in gender studies which means certain preconceived ideas or attitudes which defines what kind of gender expression or sexualities are

normal. In common parlance, heterosexuality is considered normal and expected behaviour of the society.

- **Sexism:** Sexism is kinds of prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviours those are based on traditional stereotyping of gender and gender roles that means it is most practised against women. It is discrimination against women on the basis of their sex. Such attitudes and behaviour exist at an individual or institutional level. Sexism contributes to inequality between the sexes.
- **Radical feminist:** Radical feminists see patriarchy as structuring relations between the sexes and thereby the basis for gender inequalities and all other social inequalities
- **Radical libertarian feminists:** Tong (1997) defines radical libertarian feminists as those who hold the view of 1960-70's radical feminists view especially on reproduction and motherhood. The radical libertarians advocated for androgyny (new reproductive technology for childbirth) to eradicate women's oppression.
- **Radical cultural feminists:** Radical cultural feminists consider motherhood gives power to women. It considers the femaleness as empowering.

5.10 QUESTIONS

1. What are the key features of radical feminism?
2. How is radical feminism different from other feminists thought?
3. 'Personal is Political' - describe.
4. Why is Patriarchy considered the central issue in radical feminist thought?

5. Discuss radical feminist views on sexuality and reproduction.

5.11 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Web Links: <https://www.redstockings.org/index.php/rs-manifesto>

UNIT 6: FEMINIST THOUGHT: MARXIST, SOCIALIST AND LIBERAL

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Objectives
- 6.3 Liberal Feminist Thought
- 6.4 Marxist Feminist Thought
- 6.5 Socialist Feminist Thought
- 6.6 Summing Up
- 6.7 Questions
- 6.8 Recommended Readings and References

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit, we will introduce you to some feminist thoughts such as liberal feminism, Marxist feminism and Socialist Feminism. As we know feminism is an ongoing movement since the early years of the last century that fights for the equal rights of women in society. In the feminist discourse, there are various approaches or theoretical understandings to analyse the women oppression as well as possible solutions to empower the women. Basing on such approaches they can be widely divided into various categories such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, Socialist feminism etc. We have already discussed the radical feminism in the previous Unit, in this Unit we will discuss the liberal, Marxist and Socialist feminist thought.

Alison Jaggar's *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* was published in 1983 where she defined four types of feminist thoughts viz. Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, Socialist feminism and Radical feminism. Though these

taxonomies were not new during the publication of the book, she conceptually cleared the ideas of various types of feminism which are widely used nowadays. The Liberal, Marxist and Socialist feminism which are discussed below will give you the scope to understand the feminist movement and various approaches. The various theoretical arguments of the mentioned three types of feminist thoughts are discussed in details. Though the liberal feminism dominated the first wave feminist movement, in the second wave feminist movement, we have seen rise of the Marxist, Radical and Socialist feminism along with the liberal feminist thought. The liberal feminists sought legal reform in the existing structure, where Marxist and socialist feminist look into the relationship of capitalism and women subordination.

6.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit you will be able to:

- Discuss ideas of liberal, Marxist and Socialist feminism;
- Analyse the theoretical arguments of these feminist thoughts;
- Discuss the major authors and their works.

6.3 LIBERAL FEMINIST THOUGHT

Liberal feminism is an approach in feminist thought which tries to achieve equality between men and women in various spheres of society. It seeks civil and political rights for women and it fights against the discriminatory practices against women. The liberal feminists emphasize the equality of men and women for which it seeks to change and reform in the legal structures. The root of liberal feminism lies in liberal political thought. The liberal political tradition considers the human being as rational and autonomous. Moreover, it also values individual liberty. Liberalism is a political philosophy which talks about equality. Liberal feminism in the similar line focuses on the equality of women in society. The liberal feminism is thus an approach which advocates individual rights and

freedom of women. Jaggar writes, “Consistently over the centuries, feminists have demanded that the prevailing liberal ideas should also be applied to women. In the 18th century, they argued that women, as well as, men had natural rights; in the 19th century they employed utilitarian arguments in favour of equal rights for women under the law; and in the 20th century, with the development of the liberal theory of the welfare state, liberal feminists demand that the state should actively pursue a variety of social reforms in order to ensure equal opportunities for women” (Jaggar, 1983: 27-28).

Some of the early books on women rights within the liberal philosophy tradition were Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Wollstonecraft’s work focuses on the condition of women in her time where women were confined in the household and all sorts of opportunities were denied. She called the privileged women (the married and bourgeoisies women) as “Confined then in cages, like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock-majesty from perch to perch. It is true, they are provided with food and raiment, for which they neither toil nor spin; but health, liberty, and virtue are given in exchange” (125). The women offered health, liberty and virtue to the men for the prestige whatever the husband can give. Women are domesticated as wife or mother for the prestige of the husband and thus dignity of women was taken away. Though Wollstonecraft did not provide a concrete solution for women liberation, her work initiated the women discourse questioning the male supremacy.

Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) took a clear stand on women’s right. Challenging the common notion that women are not equal to men he wrote, “The principle that regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong itself, and is now one of the chief obstacles to human improvement; and it

ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality that doesn't allow any power or privilege on one side or disability on the other" (1). Mill was one of the early feminists who advocated for women rights and equality. He was in favour of the personal, legal, political right of women as well as equal rights for women in government, occupation as well as in marriage. Mill also rejected the idea that there are natural differences between male and female. He writes, "There is anatomical evidence that men's mental capacity is superior to women's: they have a larger brain.' In fact, it is by no means established that a woman's brain is smaller than a man's. . . . The size of the brain in human beings, anatomists say, varies much less than the size of the body or even of the head, and the one can't be at all inferred from the other" (40). Thus, Mills negating the traditional understandings on women, advocated for women's right, equality, property right, women education, suffrage etc. His work provides an elaborate account of the subordination of women where he talks about justice, equality, liberty and right to choose the conditions of women.

From the mid-19th century and in the early 20th century the liberal feminist movement was dominated with the suffrage movement (right to vote) in the Western world. The Seneca Falls Convention was held in 1848. The struggle for suffrage for women became the first dominant project of the liberal feminists during the period in the USA. In 1920, women got the right to vote in the USA. This period is also known as the first wave feminist movement which was mostly dominated in the USA and the United Kingdom. Apart from the suffrage movement, the major agenda of this wave of the feminist movement was based on the liberal-right perspective dominated by enfranchisement and civil rights. It sought legal, political and civil reform for equal rights of the women.

The second wave feminism began from the 1960s onwards. The second wave liberal feminists started demanding equal opportunities, sexual freedom and civil liberties. The liberal feminist agenda was to integrate the

women into the structure with legal and political reform. It, however, did not question the structure or the very institution called patriarchy. Various women's rights groups such as National Organization for Women (NOW), National Women Political Caucus (NWPC), Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) were formed and liberal feminists joined those groups. The purpose of those groups was "by applying legal, social, and other pressures upon institutions ranging from the Bell Telephone Company to television networks to the major political parties" (Tong, 1997:24). The white and the middle-class women who were part of the liberal feminism in the West seek reform in the existing structure rather than a revolutionary change in the structure for women liberation.

Betty Friedan one of the founder members of the NOW, wrote *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) where she questioned some of the women issues those were unseen in terms of women discrimination and in the liberal discourse of feminism. Friedan interviewed her classmates after their reunion in college. After interviewing, Friedan could know how unhappy the women were despite living in a happy family in the USA. This prompted her to write the book *Feminist Mystique*, where she wrote that the white middle class, heterosexual and educated women were unhappy in their traditional family life where most of the time they pass in taking care of children, cooking and doing household works. The popular assumption in the USA that woman should be at home and be busy with domestic works and motherhood. These were challenged by Friedan's work as her study showed women were not happy and were not given the opportunity to work outside. She wrote in the preface of the book "There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform to, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique" (9). She said that women had a problem that "had no name". The narrow role imposed by the society to women although they had the right to vote or right to property but still not happy, led Friedan to interrogate feminist movement and women question with a deeper

understanding. The feminine mystique of women – an idealized image of a woman with imposing domesticity are re-imposed through education, media etc. She says, “For a woman, as for a man the need for self-fulfilment-autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization - is as important as the sexual deed, with as serious consequences when it is thwarted. Women's sexual problems are, in this sense, by-products of the suppression of her basic need to grow and fulfil her potentialities as a human being, potentialities which the mystique of feminism fulfilment ignores.”

After the formation of NOW and Betty Friedan's work, many discriminatory laws in America were removed, sex-based discrimination in employment was abolished which is known as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964). Equality in the workplace, education, equality in the public sphere, equal pay, better working condition etc. were won by legal reforms for women. The Equal Right Amendment (ERA) was one of the key goals in the liberal feminist agenda. The ERA was a proposed amendment to the USA constitution of equal rights for women. The texts of the ERA was as follows:

Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

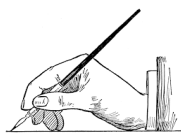
Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification

The first version of the ERA was first introduced in 1923 as “Lucretia Mott Amendment,” which read: “Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction”. In 1943 it was re-written and as “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex” and was placed in every session of the Congress until it was passed in 1972.

(source: <http://www.equalrightsamendment.org/index.htm>).

Stop and read

The liberal feminist approach considers men and women as equal and demands equal rights for women. It started with suffrage movement and demand for property right in the West later started addressing other issues such as employment, better working condition, education, equal pay etc. They strongly oppose the sex-based discrimination and seek legal reform for women's right

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is liberal feminism?

2. Who is the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*?

6.4 MARXIST FEMINISM

The Marxist feminism draws theoretical arguments from Marxism and looks the women oppression in society. Marxist feminists like the Marxist understanding of society believe that the capitalist system in society is the root cause of women oppression. Capitalism in Marxian sense is inhumane as it alienates its own labour force from the production process and the product and making a profit by paying fewer wages runs the system. Marx talks about class struggle through which the system can be overthrown. The

Marxist feminists' analysis of the women oppression is that due to the emergence of private property and lack of ownership of the means of production in the capitalist mode of production.

Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1940) was a systematic study on the oppression of women from a Marxist point of view. He viewed that the oppression of women came through the rise of the family and private property. The rise of the private property systematically removed the woman's position in the family and men started controlling the means of production. As such, Engels says, "The overthrow of mother right was the *world historic defeat of the female sex*. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children". Thus for the Marxist feminists similar to the Marxists with the overthrow of the capitalist system women subordination in the society would be ended.

Jaggar describes the Marxist understanding of the women subordination. The Marxists deny that the women oppression is neither universal nor biologically determined. This is the product of the class society and by abolishing the class society the women oppression can be abolished. In the capitalist system women, oppression is there because such oppression benefits the capital (Jaggar 1983:70). In the capitalist system, the women oppression comes through the sexual division of labour where they are doubly depressed. Initially, women are oppressed in the workplace by paying a low wage to compare to men and also in the domestic sphere, where they have to do domestic work without any wage. The unpaid domestic work for those who are not working outside the home, make the women economically dependent on the men. At the same time, women are what Marx calls as "reserve army force" that can be used at any moment wherever necessary.

Margaret Benston (1972) in her essay “The Political Economy of Women’s liberation” writes, “In sheer quantity, household labour, including child care, constitute a huge amount of socially necessary production. Nevertheless, a society based on commodity production, it is not usually considered “real work” since it is outside of trade and the market place.” Benston argues that the women labour which is unpaid is very large and profitable to the capitalist class i.e. who own the means of production. If women are paid even at minimum wage a massive redistribution of wealth would occur. But in the present system, the family is a kind of hidden tax for the wage earner which buys labour power of two people (ibid). As such a continuation of the family is necessary for running the capitalist system and the unpaid women work is helpful for the capitalist system. The Marxist feminists can also be said as materialistic feminists for their emphasis in the capitalism and family to elaborate women subordination. Marxist feminists argue that women’s role in the family benefits capitalism in three ways:

- 1) Women perform *domestic labour on an unpaid basis* and *provide care* for the current (and increasingly the previous) generation of workers.
- 2) Women also *reproduce and socialize* the next generation of workers
- 3) Women *consume* the goods and services produced by capitalism.

(Abbott et. all 2005: 35)

Benston further argues that “As an economic unit the nuclear family is a valuable stabilising force in capitalist society. Since the husband/father’s earnings pay for the production which is done in the home, his ability to withhold labour is much reduced.” It implies that the husband has less space for bargaining or flexibility of changing his job is very limited as he has to take care of the expenses of his family.

Fran Ansley, another Marxist feminist, looks into the emotional support provides by the wife to the husband in a capitalist system that works as a

safety valve in the system. She says, "When wives play their traditional role as takers of shit, they often absorb their husbands' legitimate anger and frustration at their own powerlessness and oppression. With every worker provided with a sponge to soak up his possibly revolutionary ire, the bosses rest more secure."

The Marxist Feminist position on women oppression largely lies in the classical Marxist idioms of class and class struggle in the capitalist system. Through the destruction of the current capitalist system as well as private property women liberation can happen.

Stop and read:

- Marxist feminists believe that gender relation is dependent on production relation and reproduction.
- Class relation and capitalist exploitation are the roots of women oppression in society
- The idea "women as homemaker" - their roles in household activities are the cause of women exploitation.
- Women are the reserve labour force.
- Women emancipation is possible by class struggle and overthrowing of the capitalist system.
- Women oppression in the capitalist system benefit the capital.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What, according to the Marxist feminists, are the three ways in which women's role in the family benefits capitalism?

6.5 SOCIALIST FEMINISM

The Socialist feminists like the Marxists, look into women oppression in terms of the capitalist structure. But what makes them different is that they also recognize patriarchy as the cause of the women oppression in society. For them, class and gender have a symbiotic relation. The socialist feminists thus connect capitalism and patriarchy as the cause of women oppression. Hence, socialist feminism is the synthesis of the Marxist feminism and the radical feminism. It is an attempt to deal with the “unhappy marriage between Marxism and feminism” as many authors claim the Marxist Feminist idea of women emancipation is too mechanical. Moreover, Marxist feminists cannot explain the existence of patriarchy in non-capitalist societies. The Socialist feminists argue that the sexual differences, gender roles or the sexism etc. are not biological rather they are within the structure of the society. The class and oppression based on sexual divisions are not independent entities, on the contrary, they are interdependent, hence along with the class struggle the patriarchy also needs to be addressed to eradicate women oppression in the society.

Heidi I. Hartmann in her article “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more Progressive Union” says that the “attempts to integrate Marxism and feminism are unsatisfactory”, she added “they subsume the feminist struggle into the ‘larger’ struggle against capital. She further says “either we need a healthier marriage or we need to divorce” (Hartmann, 2010: 169). Hence she proposed for an integration of the

Marxism and feminism to analyses feminist understanding of patriarchy and Marxist analysis of capitalism. She says, “while Marxist analysis offers essential insight into the laws of historical development, and those of capital, in particular, the categories of Marxism are sex -blind. Only a specifically feminist analysis reveals the systemic character of relations between men and women. Yet a feminist analysis by itself is inadequate because it has been blind to history and insufficiently materialist”(ibid). Hartmann argues that the materialistic analysis of patriarchy is not only psychic but having a social and economic structure. Hence, it is necessary to recognize that society is organized in patriarchal and capitalistic ways. Capitalism benefits from the women’s unpaid labour at home but at the same time men are also beneficiary of such unpaid work as “husbands and fathers receive personalized services at home”. She defines patriarchy as “a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women” (ibid, 174). As such women have to fight both against patriarchy and against capitalism simultaneously.

In making integration of capitalism and patriarchy the concept called patriarchal mode of production was proposed. Henn says, patriarchal mode of production “is a theoretical model of class relations between a class of patriarchs who, as heads of households, control the access of other household members to the means of production and a class of patriarchal dependents, wives and working children, who gain access to the means of production and consumption by providing surplus labour to the class of patriarchs” (1988). Domestic labour of women is kind of labour which the socialist feminists call as the patriarchal mode of production.

Sylvia Walby conceptualized patriarchy and capitalism. She refers to six structures of patriarchy in society viz. i) the patriarchal mode of production ii) patriarchal relation in paid work iii) patriarchal relation in

the state iv) male violence v) patriarchal relations in sexuality and vi) patriarchal relation in the cultural institutions (Walby, 1990, 20).

The integration of patriarchy and class relation in socialist feminist understanding is also known as the dual system theory. Though in both the cases either in a capitalist system or patriarchy women are oppressed, when both intersect, women oppression increases.

Stop and Read

For the socialist feminists, class and gender have a symbiotic relation. For them, capitalism and patriarchy are the causes of women oppression. Hence, it is a synthesis of the Marxist feminism and the radical feminism. It is an attempt to deal with the "unhappy marriage between Marxism and feminism"

6.6 SUMMING UP

In this Unit, we have discussed the liberal feminism, Marxist feminism and socialist feminism. The liberal feminism is based on the idea of liberal political thought which consider the human being as autonomous and rational. Mary Wollstonecraft and J.S. Mill were the early liberal feminists who advocated for women rights and opposed discrimination basing on sexes. The tradition was further carried out and demands were raised for women suffrage, property rights especially in Western countries. However, from the 1960s onwards the liberal feminism feminists started demanding various other rights such as equal pay, civil rights, sexual freedom etc. The liberal feminists do not want a revolutionary change in the social structure rather seek an adjustment in the existing structure and also seek legal reform against discrimination of women. The Marxist feminists, on the other hand, look at women oppression as a result of the capitalist system. On the other hand, the socialist feminists accepting the role of capitalism in women oppression also see patriarchy as one of the major cause of

discrimination considering both capitalism and patriarchy have a symbiotic relation.

Glossary

- **Seneca Falls Convention:** Seneca Falls Convention was the first women rights convention held first in July 1948 in Seneca Falls in the USA. Almost 300 women joined in this convention and it launched the women suffrage movement.
- **NOW:** National Organisation for Women is a women organization of the USA founded in 1966. The webpage of NOW reads, "NOW's purpose is to take action through intersectional grassroots activism to promote feminist ideals, lead societal change, eliminate discrimination, and achieve and protect the equal rights of all women and girls in all aspects of social, political and economic life" (<https://now.org/about/>)
- **ERA:** The ERA or Equal Right Amendment was first proposed in 1923 in the USA Congress as the [Lucretia Mott Amendment](#) for equal rights for men and women. In 1943 it was re-written as Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex" and was placed in every session of the Congress until it was passed in 1972.
- **Patriarchal mode of production:** The Socialist feminists coined this term, which implies that the man is paid for his work outside the household. On the other hand, the woman who works at home, taking care of the children and do other household works are not paid any wage. Such labour

eventually helps in sustaining the capitalist system marginalizing women.

6.7 QUESTIONS

1. What is liberal feminism? What are the main features of liberal feminism?
2. Write a detail note on the history of liberal feminism.
3. What are the major arguments of Betty Friedan's mentioned in *Feminine Mystique*?
4. What is Marxist feminism? How are women oppression and capitalism interlinked?
5. "Unhappy marriage between Marxism and Feminism"-Elucidate the statement.
6. How are women oppressed in the capitalist mode of production? Discuss.

6.8 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Web links: <http://www.equalrightsamendment.org/index.htm>

UNIT 7: FEMINIST THOUGHT: POST-MODERNIST

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Objectives
- 7.3 Postmodern Feminism: Basic Ideas
- 7.4 Helen Cixous
- 7.5 Judith Butler
- 7.5 Summing up
- 7.6 Questions
- 7.7 Recommended Readings and References.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The Postmodern feminism is based on theoretical foundations of postmodernism. Although, postmodernism is itself a quite controversial term and concept in the discourse of social sciences. Postmodernism criticizes all other theories and philosophical foundations of it. Hence, many a time postmodernism is called anti-theory and anti-foundation is the base of it. Postmodernism rejects all kinds of grand narratives, macro politics as well as rejects the idea of ultimate truth, reality etc. It holds that there is nothing called absolute truth or reality – everything is a construction. In such rhetoric, the postmodern feminism negates the dominant narratives on sex, gender and sexuality and gives the scope to understand feminism and its associated concepts and ideas in a discursive way. Neither postmodernism believes in a single theory (grand narrative) nor postmodernism a single theory. Hence, postmodern feminism and the postmodern feminists use post-structuralist ideas of Derrida on language and deconstruction to analyse feminist standpoints. At the same time, it also widely uses Foucauldian concepts like power, knowledge in postmodern feminist discourse. Like postmodernism, postmodern feminists also believe in multiplicity, plurality, multiple reality and difference.

7.2 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this Unit is to introduce you with the idea of postmodern feminism which is a very new idea in the feminist discourse. We will discuss in this Unit how the postmodernism has influenced the gender studies and various theoretical arguments associated with the concept called postmodern feminism.

After going through this Unit you will be able to:

- Explain the idea of postmodernism and postmodern feminism;
- Analyse how the postmodern feminism has criticized some of the basic ideas such as gender, sex etc.;
- Discuss different theoretical ideas associated with postmodern feminism;
- Discuss major authors and their works.

7.3 POSTMODERN FEMINISM: BASIC IDEAS

The postmodern feminism is an approach to the feminist theory that incorporates postmodernism and post-structural theory. This is different from other approaches of feminism basically in the sense that postmodern feminists argue that sex or gender is constructed through language. Moreover, as we know postmodernism rejects the idea of grand narrative, the idea of absolute truth, reality etc. and celebrates plurality and multiplicity, similarly postmodern feminism also rejects the dominant ideas on women, sex and gender. As such, postmodern feminism does not consider women as a homogenous category like other liberal, radical or Marxist feminists arguing that a singular theory or concept cannot explain all the women and their oppression or questions.

Similarly, there must not have a single path for all women to achieve the women liberation. They hold that there is not a singular essence of women rather having multiple existences. So postmodern feminists recognize the differences among women, those are based on various categories like class, caste, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion and so and so forth. As postmodern feminists were highly influenced by the works of Derrida, Foucault, Lacan etc. the idea of sameness

among women and unified women are highly objected. Anthony Giddens writes, “postmodern feminists reject the claims that there is a grand theory that can explain the position of women in society, or there is any single universal essence or category of ‘woman’. Consequently, these feminists reject the accounts given by others to explain gender inequality – such as patriarchy, race or class –as essentialist” (Giddens, 2006:475).

The postmodern feminists, thus, accept various standpoints of various groups and individual cutting across sex, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ethnicity religion etc. as well as the difference is one of the core ideas in postmodern feminist discourse. Butler says that the notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticised in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists. Where those various contexts have been consulted within such theories, it has been to find .examples. or .illustrations. of a universal principle that is assumed from the start. That form of feminist theorizing has come under criticism for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression, [and] because they tend as well to construct a ‘Third World’ or even an ‘Orient’ in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essentialised, non-Western barbarism. The urgency of feminism to establish a universal status for patriarchy in order to strengthen the appearance of feminism’s own claims to be representative has occasionally motivated the shortcut to a categorical or fictive universality of the structure of domination, held to produce women’s common subjugated experience” (Butler, 199: 6-7). Here Butler criticizes the false universalism as well as considers patriarchy as a western notion. She does agree about women subjugation across culture but posits false universalism as the problem of many prior schools of feminism.

One of the major techniques adopted by the postmodern feminism is deconstruction. The idea of deconstruction was developed by Jacques Derrida, through which he criticized the structural ideas of binary oppositions and

objective knowledge. The postmodernists and the poststructuralists argue against the objective knowledge and binary oppositions saying that the objective knowledge or reality is a construction of language. Derrida used the term called *différance* to counter the idea of binary opposition. The binary opposition was widely used by the structuralists in understanding some phenomena or language; such as we understand masculine in relation and opposition of feminine and vice versa. However, Derrida criticized the Western metaphysical tradition claiming that in the scheme of binary opposition's one paradigm is always given more importance than the other. Similarly, the structuralist idea that signifier leads to signified, Derrida, says that signifier does not lead to signified rather every signifier produces more than one signifier, and signified itself is a signifier only. Hence, the meaning of anything is always differed and delayed.

The postmodern feminists in a similar line of Derrida deconstruct the male language and worldview. Giddens writes, "postmodern feminists have attempted to create fluid, open terms and language which more closely reflect women's experience. For many postmodern feminists men see the world in terms of pairs or binary distinctions ('good versus bad', 'right versus wrong', 'beautiful versus ugly' for example). Men they argue have cast the male as normal, and female as a deviation from it" (ibid: 475). In such rhetoric, the postmodern feminists believe that men have constructed the role of women as 'other' always.

The postmodern feminists criticize the construction of gender in a fixed binary structure. They argue that what we perceive gender, sexuality etc. are actually not reality rather a social construction. Postmodernism dismisses the project of modernism and questions the Enlightenment discourse. They claim that the "enlightenment discourse universalized white, Western, middle-class male experience". The current of postmodern feminism started in the late 1980s which can be termed as the third wave feminist movement essentially critiqued the second wave feminist stance. The initial question that postmodern feminists argue that sex itself is a construction of language. In the rest of the feminist waves, we see the domination of white, middle-class women who spoke on behalf of all the

women. It thus, claim the very idea of ‘women’ as a controversial category which is why it calls gender is performative based on heterosexuality instead of socially or culturally constructed. Let us discuss some of the dominant authors of the postmodern feminism. We will discuss the ideas of Hélène Cixous and Judith Butler.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. How is postmodern feminism different from other approaches of feminism?

2. Who has developed the idea of deconstruction?

Stop and Read

The postmodern feminists do not consider women as a single and homogeneous category. It also rejects any kind of universal idea(s) on women oppression and thereby any fixed path for women liberation is suspect. The postmodern feminists argue that the women cannot be clubbed into a single category, as they are different due to various reasons of their primary identity such as that based on ethnicity, race, religion, class or sexual orientation. Thus, the postmodern feminists celebrate plurality and multiplicity in terms of gender sex, sexuality or sexual orientation. It has

deconstructed the ideas of sex and gender to understand the women subversion by applying Derrida and Foucault.

7.4 HÉLÈNE CIXOUS

Hélène Cixous is one of the leading authors of the postmodern feminist discourse. She applied the Derrida's notion of the rejection of the binary opposites to address the gender issues. She argues that the binary oppositions work everywhere in society. The structuralists like Ferdinand de Saussure contends that binary opposition is essential to produce meanings like good/bad, day/night, masculine/feminine etc. Cixous criticizes such binary oppositions in terms of gender and explains that such binary oppositions create gender divisions. She looks into the feminine writing (*l'écriture féminine*) and masculine writings (*literature*) and analysed that man defines himself and define women as other. Her approach is to destruct the logocentric ideology which would ground in female pleasure. Influenced by Derrida's analysis of language which is described in binary terms and women are portrayed as negative and Lacan's notion of the phallus, she became sceptical towards the definition of women in the phallogocentric language system. Lacan holds that sexual difference is structured by phallus – the presence or absence of it. Kuhn says "Sexual difference is seen as structured by the subject's relation to the phallus, the signifier which stands in for the play of absence and presence that constitutes language. Because the Oedipal moment inaugurates sexual difference in relation to the phallus as a signifier, men and women enter language differently, and Lacan's argument is that the female entry into language is organized by lack, or negativity (1981:37)." Thus, in Lacanian sense, language signifies that phallus is more powerful and controls. As such, in the language itself, woman has no role as she does not have a phallus.

In her essay "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks / Ways Out/ Forays" she says poignantly that the place of women within the philosophical and literary history is not at all satisfactory. She asks, "Where is she? Either a woman is passive or she

does not exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought.” She also says that “Philosophy is constructed on the premise of woman’s abasement”. Cixous in her essay “Sorties” points out the violence of hierarchies created through binary oppositions where men get the privilege. Some of such binary opposites she mentions

Activity/passivity

Sun/Moon

Culture/Nature

Day/Night

Father/Mother

Intelligible/Sensitive

Logos/Pathos

Thought has always worked by oppositions

Speech/Writing

High/Low

By dual hierarchical oppositions (Cixous, 1988:287).

In the above binaries, according to Cixous, man is associated with the positive sides – with the phallus (active, cultural, day, intelligible etc.) where women are identified with passive, natural, night, sensitive which implies women are ‘other’. Each binary opposite appropriates the other. She says that when an element of a pair intends to make sense “A universal battlefield”. Each time a war is let loose” – meaning men get the privilege and women is the recipient of the death sentence. She holds that in the phallogentric (hierarchical and patriarchal) language system woman is always the ‘other’. Deconstructionists like Derrida or Cixous attempt to dismantle those hierarchies. Hence, she argues that women should come out from the masculine language. Criticizing both Lacan and Freud, Cixous deconstructs the woman body by looking into logocentrism and phallogentrism. As the female is looked in terms of lack of a penis, the men’s language misrepresented and repressed and the body is no longer the body of a woman. As such, examining the woman body and sexuality she says, "woman's libidinal economy is neither identifiable by a man nor preferable to the masculine economy." The western

metaphysical tradition or the philosophical tradition constructed women in binary opposite mode.

She also talks about bisexuality which she defines as “the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes”. Her idea on bisexuality is not about the combination of sexualities (androgyny) rather for her to it is to the displacement of the unitary sexual identity. She locates the repressed feminine component in both men and women. She developed the idea of bisexuality to dissolve the distinctions of binary oppositions against the phallogocentric notion that divides man and woman. She sees the potential of bisexuality for both men and women but “men having been trained for glorious phallic monosexuality”. She argues that bisexuality would help a woman from repression as binaries repress the feminine. She says “it is women who are opening up to and benefiting, from this vatic bisexuality which doesn’t annul difference but stirs them up, increases their number”

7.5 JUDITH BUTLER

Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) gives us a new understanding of sex and gender. The commonsensical notion of sex and gender is that sex is natural and gender is a social and cultural construction. But for Butler both sex and gender are constructions. For her, sex and gender cannot be distinguished and there is no relation between one’s gender with sex. She says that “sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along” (Butler, 1990:12). Gender is not only the binary social construction but sex is also constructed by scientific discourses what she says as “whereby gender mirrors sex” (10). Sex is also culturally constructed like gender. Butler accepts the biological differences of the body but when she says sex is also a cultural construction she implies that understanding of sex, being male or female is the product of society, produces through discourses. Both sex and gender are normative and political. Hence Butler holds, “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gendered, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender

turns out to be no distinction at all” (10-11). There is no sex which is not already a gender. So there is no body which is a natural body that pre-existed, as all bodies are gendered with the beginning of its social existence. The body cannot be sexed prior to constructed gender. Because it is gender, which gives the concept of reading the biological determinations of the body.

She defines gender as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (43-44). For her, gender implies what one does, not what one is. As postmodernist and influenced by Foucault, Butler rejects the gender binary in terms of male or female. She argues that the identity of women does not depend on gender. Similarly, sexuality is not the underlying definitive of gender. In her book *Bodies that Matter* she argues that gender is not fixed across culture. Change in social context changes gender roles as well as power relation too. Gender is not something that someone born with rather it is performed continuously. Butler hence described the concept of gender performativity. Performativity is not simply performance but it is a performance that is performed unconsciously and repeatedly. She says, “gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (33). A woman is something that she does rather than what she is. Butler argues that all genders are performative. Gender is performed repeatedly in a “highly rigid regulatory frame” where the subject does not have the autonomy to choose his/her gender rather needs to perform accordingly as per the existing regulatory frame.

Butler further claims that “the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (ibid, 173). What she means by this is that the performance of gender makes it what it is. It does not exist outside of those performances

that existed before. Further analysing gender performativity, Butler elaborates, “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (33). As Foucault says ‘subject is subjected’ similarly Butler also says that the subject is not stable. It constructs its identity through various actions. Her critique on sex, gender and sexuality, however, helps in understanding the queer politics also. To give a radical turn in feminist politics it is necessary to rethink on the ontological questions or constructions of identity.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Why does Judith Butler consider both sex and gender as constructions?

7.6 SUMMING UP

In the above sections, we have discussed some of the basic ideas of postmodern feminism as well as some concepts of Helen Cixous and Judith Butler. The most important idea of postmodern feminism is that it negates the idea of universal women or universal patriarchy. Moreover, postmodern feminists also negate the idea of binary oppositions claiming that such oppositions subvert women. Helen Cixous discusses those binary oppositions and bringing in theoretical arguments from Derrida elaborated about women subordination based on the western philosophical foundations. Judith Butler, on the other hand, argues that like gender, sex is also a construction because the sexed body is always gendered and

there is no body outside the normative or ontological understanding of sex and gender. She further claims that gender is performative, which implies normative gender roles and actions are performed unconsciously.

Glossary

- **Post-structuralism:** Post-structuralism is a literary and cultural theory widely associated with Derrida and some other authors. The post-structuralists criticize the structural idea of objectivity and meaning of language and any other phenomenon. In structuralism, Saussure argues that the language is a sign system and every sign has a signifier and signified. The signifier is the acoustic image of the sign which leads to signified i.e. the meaning of the sign. The signs are understood in relation and binary oppositions. Derrida argues that signifier does not lead to the signified rather the Saussurian signified itself is a sign which produces more signifier. Hence, the meaning of a word cannot be found as it always differed and delayed. Similarly, Derrida also criticizes the notion of binary opposites as one paradigm of the binary opposites are given more importance than the other.
- **Grand Narrative:** Grand narrative or meta-narrative is a narrative from where all other narratives can be explained. The term is used in postmodern discourse introduced by Jean-François Lyotard. A meta-narrative or grand narrative gives a totalizing and comprehensive account of any event, history, social and cultural phenomena. Enlightenment, modernism, Marxism etc. are examples of such meta-narratives. Postmodernists reject the idea of the meta-narrative.
- **Logocentrism:** Logocentrism refers to Western philosophy, which regards language and words as the fundamental expression of

external reality. In logocentric ideas, presence is considered as superior. As such speaking is better than writing because of the presence of the speaker.

- **Queer:** Queer is a term which denotes people belonging to various other sexual orientations other than heterosexuals; such as lesbian, gay, bisexual etc. The term is symbolic of all identities that do not fall under traditionally sanctioned lines of sexuality.

7.7 QUESTIONS

1. What is postmodernism? How is postmodern feminism different from other feminist thought?
2. What are the key features of postmodern feminism?
3. Discuss Helen Cixous' idea on gender binary.
4. Why does Butler say "sex is a construction"?
5. What is performativity?
6. Discuss Butler's idea on sex and gender construction.

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UNIT 8: FEMINIST METHODOLOGY AS A CRITIQUE OF SOCIOLOGICAL METHODS

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Objectives

8.3 Method, Methodology and Epistemology in Research: The Feminist Critique

8.4 Feminist Critique of Sociological Method

8.4.1 Positivism and Feminist Critique

8.5 Feminist Methodology

8.6 Summing Up

8.7 Questions

8.8 Recommended Readings and References

8.1 INTRODUCTION

We have discussed in the earlier Units some basic understandings on feminism as well as various theoretical arguments related to feminism. In this Unit, we will discuss the feminist methodology. We know that the discipline of sociology has its own research method and methodology to understand or to analyse various social phenomena. However, the feminist methodology gives us a new scope to understand social phenomena with a more gender-sensitive way. Here we will see how the feminist methodology has challenged various approaches and proposes a new methodology to understand the social reality of the marginalized sections.

Any kind of research consists of three components – the method (the tools that are used in research) and the methodology and epistemology. These three components guide the researcher theoretically as well as methods of collecting pieces of evidence and analysis of the phenomena objectively by the researcher. Research is to create new knowledge or adding new

knowledge in the respective field. In social science, we use various theories such as structural, Marxist, postmodern, etc. approaches to analyse various social phenomena. The method implies as mentioned, various tools such as interview, observation, survey etc. The methodology is the appropriate way to discover knowledge. Methodology leads the researcher to adopt the correct tools or method to be adopted in research. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. However, with the rise of the feminist movement and research, the feminists alleged that the dominant methodologies in sociology or in social sciences broadly have inherently male biases or popularly known as androcentric in nature.

The feminists started criticizing the way the social sciences research has analysed women, men, social situation/institution, etc. As a result, feminist methodology emerged. The major aim of the feminist methodology is to correct those faults. The feminist methodology started questioning the dominant research approaches where the idea of ‘value-free’ in research also questioned by the feminists. Some questions like Who decides what to investigate? Who is the investigator? What is the social context? Who writes about whom? etc. become important. Pertaining to such issues including others, the feminist methodology developed where it essentially questions the androcentric biases in research. The feminist methodology criticizes the method, methodology and epistemology of social sciences. It argues that the traditional social science methodology, through which men, women or the social situation is not presented properly. Most of the time women are left out or presented from a male point of view. However, it is to be kept in mind that feminists use various methods in their research and feminism is a perspective, not a research method. The feminist methodology uses similar methods of social science research but use to give importance in some aspects those were ignored by the traditional social science methodology. Harding writes,

“how they carry out these methods of evidence gathering is often strikingly different. For example, they listen carefully to how women informants think about their lives and men’s lives. They

observe behaviours of women and men that traditional social scientists have not thought significant. They seek examples of newly recognized patterns in historical data” (Harding, 1987: 2).

The feminists argue that the traditional theories are gendered in nature and it hardly gives any scope to understand how women participate in social life. The feminist methodology is an alternative version of such theories. This will be discussed in details in the following sub-units.

8.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit you will be able to:

- Explain how feminist methodology has questioned and challenged the social science methodology;
- Analyse the major ideas of the feminist methodology.

8.3 METHOD, METHODOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY IN RESEARCH: THE FEMINIST CRITIQUE

Harding (1988) defines methodology as “a theory and analysis of how research does and should proceed...” (Harding 1987: 3). Thus, methodology guides the researcher to take appropriate theoretical perspective and also to adopt a proper method to create or discover new knowledge through research. Social science in general and sociology in particular, we use to adopt a proper methodology and methods that guide us to do the necessary research. The feminists, however, reject the traditional methodology and consider it as biased where women are not given proper importance. The feminist research methodology is grounded on the theoretical perspectives of feminism. Hence, the feminist methodology is a perspective, not the research method. Harding (1988) further argues that “a research method is a technique for (or a way of proceeding in) gathering evidence”. She says that all evidence gathering techniques fall into three

categories: a) listening to (or interrogating) informants, b) observing behaviour c) examining historical traces and records (1988: 2). She narrates that feminist researchers use these three methods only in their research but what is important is that they how they gather the pieces of evidence are different from the traditional researchers. As traditional researches are having male biases or more seemingly androcentric in nature the feminist researchers give importance in their methods. She says,

“They listen carefully to women informants think about their lives and men’s lives. They observe behaviour of women and men that traditional social scientists have not thought significant. They seek examples of newly recognized patterns in historical data.” (*ibid*)

Epistemology, on the other hand, is the theory of knowledge, justifying belief. In research, epistemology answers questions such as who can be known, what kinds of thing can be known who can be a knower, what are the test beliefs must pass to legitimize the knowledge etc. The feminists attack the epistemological questions such as can women be a knower, tests only against men’s experiences and observation, does subjective truth can be said as knowledge etc. (*ibid*, 3). The traditional epistemology as feminists claim knowingly or unknowingly have excluded women. Harding writes, “systematically exclude the possibility that women could be “knowers ” or agents of knowledge, they claim that the voice of science is a masculine one, that history is written from only the point of view of men (of the dominant class and race, that the subject of traditional sociological sentence is always assumed to be a man” (*ibid*). Thus, the feminists have rejected the methodology and epistemology of sociological or social science research.

There are five epistemological principles or guiding principles in feminist methodology. These are

- i) significance of gender and gender asymmetry as a basic feature of all social life.

- ii) the centrality of consciousness-raising or debunking as a specific methodological tool
- iii) challenging the norm of objectivity that assumes that the subject and object of research can be separated from each other and that personal and/or grounded experiences are unscientific;
- iv) emphasis on the empowerment of women and the transformation of patriarchal social institutions through research and research results.

(Cook and Fonow, 1990:72-73).

Stop and read:

There are three concepts in research - method, methodology and epistemology. Method is the tools used in collecting facts or data where the methodology is the theory and process through which research is done. Epistemology is the body or theory of knowledge that justifies those beliefs.

In feminist research methodology, the feminists have questioned the approaches of the traditional social sciences. It alleges that the traditional methodology is not gender neutral. It produces male-centric knowledge which excludes the experiences of women. The feminist research methodology has also questioned the quantitative analysis and the idea of objectivity. The major aim of the feminist research methodology is to add women domain of knowledge which eventually ignored by the traditional methodology.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is epistemology?

2. What are the five epistemological principles in feminist methodology?

8.4 FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF SOCIOLOGICAL METHOD

8.4.1 Positivism and Feminist Critique

Positivism was one of the dominant approaches in the discipline of Sociology during the 18th century to understand various social realities. The positivists claim the approach as neutral and value-free as well as scientific. It also held that by applying the methodology of natural science, truth can be attained in social science too. Moreover, it also claims such researches as objective. The positivists believe that there is universal and objective truth and the task of the researcher is to find out the truth and it can be attained through applying the scientific method. As such, the focal point in positivist research is objectivity where it believes that subjectivity is an obstacle in producing knowledge. The underlying epistemological belief of the positivists was that what is knowable can be achieved through observation and reason like the natural science phenomena. It can be

analysed through the mathematical or statistical tools and truth can be achieved.

The feminists take an anti-positivist stance by critiquing the positivist approach in research. This is also known as standpoint theory. The idea of objectivity, quantitative methods etc. ignore the real-life situation of women. It holds that the production of knowledge comes through the experiences of the dominant sections. It ignores the subjective experiences or situations. Thus such knowledge – the knowledge or experience of the dominant sections is established as the standard knowledge. In a society that is stratified in various strata, various kinds of experiences are produced and similarly the knowledge in those ladders. Without engaging with the marginalized and oppressed sections in society how objective knowledge can be produced

“The experiences and lives of marginalised people, as they understand them, provide distinctive problems to be explained or research agendas that are not visible or not compelling to dominant groups. Marginalised experiences and lives have been devalued or ignored as a source of important questions about nature and social relations”
(Harding, 1998:151)

The feminists are an ardent critic of quantitative research. They hold that methodology is gendered. Various terms like objectivity, scientific, positivism, statistics masculinity etc. words are mostly related to quantitative research. On the other hand interpretation, subjectivity, non-scientific, femininity etc terms are associated with qualitative research. The feminists allege that the positivistic quantitative methods have excluded and ignored the women (Oakley 1974). It argues that such methods have added women in male knowledge. It has questioned various other tools such as questionnaire, survey, psychological test, experiment and even interview to those strips the context for which the real experience is lost – more emphatically, the women experience is lost. It thus gives importance to the context where the subject is not isolated, unlike the quantitative

method to get a real life experience or to gather the data. Fine and Gordon (1989: 159) has argued,

“do not put us in a laboratory, or hand us a survey, or even interview us separately alone in our homes. Watch me (MF) with women friends, my son, his father, my niece, or my mother and you will see what feels most authentic to me”

As a result, the feminist methodology agrees that the qualitative method is more fruitful for feminist research. The qualitative method gives space to women to speak. It seeks in-depth interviews and subjective knowledge of the individual (woman) to understand the social realities. Men and women are different due to their social positions, so the experiences of the life of men and women are also different. The feminist research provides the space for women so that their voice can be represented or concerns can be expressed. This further can lead to the social change or reconstruction of society. The incorporation of feminist methodology in research or women perspective is thus an approach that is incorporated with the theories, researches and the subject.

Stop and Read:

The feminist research methodology has rejected the positivist approach in research. Positivism is widely associated with 18th-century sociological thought which believes that objective truth can be achieved through proper methodology - the methodology of natural science. It also advocates the quantitative method and mathematical analysis for obtaining the objective truth. However, the feminist take an anti-positivist stance claiming the methodology as androcentric. It does not represent women voice and propagates male knowledge as standard knowledge. They advocate for the qualitative method which gives the scope women to speak. Moreover, it also seeks to present voices of the marginalized in its research. It holds that subjective experience is also important to understand the real-life situation.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is positivism?

2. What is standpoint theory?

8.5 FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

The feminists hold that the traditional methodology excludes women from inquiry, the existing knowledge is patriarchal in nature and it reinforces patriarchy rather emancipating women. Hence, the feminists seek its own methodology to understand social reality as well as gender-sensitive research that does not lead to patriarchy. However, there are contradictions on the very idea of feminist methodology. As Marjorie L. DeVault in her book *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research* (1999) remarks,

“Often, queries of feminist methodology carry contradictory demands: sceptics ask feminist to define their methodology so as to fit with the terms of conventional research paradigms, and also to make sharp, non-overlapping distinctions between feminist and mainstream methodologies.”

The feminist research methodology is grounded on feminist theories or theoretical perspectives. The feminist methodology cannot be defined in fixed terms. It advocates a methodology that values women. Distancing from the objectivity in research the feminists tend to

Reinharz (1992) gives the following characteristics of feminist methodology:

1. Feminism is a perspective, not a research method
2. Feminists use a multiplicity of research methods
3. Feminist research involves an ongoing criticism of non-feminist scholarship
4. Feminist research is guided by feminist theory.
5. Feminist research may be transdisciplinary
6. Feminist research tends to create social change
7. Feminist research thrives to represent human diversity.
8. Feminist research frequently includes the researcher as a person.
9. Feminist research frequently attempts to develop special relations with the people studies (in interactive research)
10. Feminist research frequently defines a special relation with the reader.

(240)

The major aim of the feminist research methodology is to make women visible as well as representing of women perspective in the domain of knowledge. Criticizing the existing theories and with the development of the feminist movement and feminist theories from 1960s onwards it has contributed a lot in the domain. However, many scholars contend that there is no distinctive feminist research methodology. The feminists use the existing research methods for their own purposes. But there are some common features of feminist research methodology. These are:

- a) Rejection of positivism: We have already discussed above the reservations of the feminists over research. It rejects the objectivity, value-neutral and quantitative ideas of positivist approach.
- b) Concern about gender: The feminist enquiry gives more concentration in gender relations. It seeks to describe women voice,

experiences of the females in a certain social context i.e. explains the women experience to reject the androcentric biases of research.

- c) Value neutrality: The feminist research methodology rejects the positivists claim of value neutrality.
- d) Women emancipation: As feminism deals with the women question, emancipation of women from oppression, it seeks research-based knowledge should be used in liberating women
- e) Non-hierarchy between the researcher and the researched: The feminist methodology endorses a non-hierarchical relation between the researcher and the researched.

(Haig, 1999).

The feminist methodology as we have mentioned earlier uses varieties of methods in their enquiry. They use to apply a non-experimental method in a natural context oppose to the experimental method of positivism. Moreover, it prefers qualitative methods rather than the quantitative method. This gives the scope of reducing the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched, women voice is given due importance.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Write two characteristics of feminist methodology as given by Reinharz.

2. Who is the author of *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research*?

8.6 SUMMING UP

In this Unit, we have discussed the various aspects of the feminist research methodology. We have learned that the traditional sociological methodology is androcentric in nature. Positivism, quantitative method, value neutrality and objectivity etc. have been questioned by the feminists arguing that these do not represent the women voice. Though the positivism and other traditional methodology claim it as objective and create or contribute knowledge, the feminist methodology argues that such knowledge is male-centric knowledge which ignores the women experiences. Thus, the aim of the feminist methodology is to add the women voice and knowledge in the domain. As societies are stratified in nature hence, the feminist methodology seeks to add the voice of the marginalized sections to represent the real-life situation. The feminist research methodology attacks the very grounding of traditional research the method, methodology and the epistemology. As the aim of the feminism is to achieve or fight for women emancipation hence feminist methodology seeks social change through its research. It represents human diversity in its research. Moreover, the feminist methodology as a critique of the traditional sociological methods seeks to eliminate the hierarchy of the researcher and the researched. Finally, feminist methodology adopts the similar methods of social science research but it is more keen to adopt a qualitative method, non-experimental, ethnography and so on. As such, there is not a unified method of feminist research methodology. The feminist methodology based on the theoretical foundations of the feminist theories; hence it is a perspective, not a research method.

Glossary

- **Androcentric:** It is a practice of putting men's point of view in the centre and analysing the world from a male/masculine point of view.

- **Epistemology:** Epistemology is the philosophy of the theory of knowledge. It is the study of the origin and limits of knowledge.
- **Positivism:** Positivism is an 18th-century theory which believed that the research in social science and natural science is mutually exclusive. The same methodology of natural science can be used in social science to find out the truth of any social phenomena.

8.7 QUESTIONS

1. What are method, methodology and epistemology? What is the feminist critique of these traditional social science research?
2. Write a note on the feminist critique of positivism.
3. Why does feminist research methodology prefer qualitative research than quantitative research?
4. What is the standpoint theory of feminist research methodology?
5. Discuss briefly why feminists criticize the traditional social science research methodology.
6. Write a note on some of the features of feminist research methodology.
7. Write briefly on the epistemological position of the feminist research methodology.

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