

Feminism Demystified-history and Beyond

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The study explores Feminism by focusing broadly on its history and further examining using Marxism and critical discourses by other feminists. Feminism refers to the idea that women and men ought to have equal rights. In 1734, the Swedish Civil Code gave women more rights, most notably prohibiting husbands from selling their wives' possessions without their approval. In her 1790 essay "On the equality of the sexes," American women's rights campaigner Judith Sargent Murray claimed that women are just as bright as men. British author Mary Wollstonecraft responded to philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and other 18th-century Enlightenment intellectuals who did not extend their concepts of freedom to women in her 1792 book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She challenges the idea that women are less logical than males and opposes the injustice. "Who made man the exclusive judge?" she demands. However, Frenchman Charles Fourier coined the term "feminisme" in 1837, marking the beginning of the concept of feminism. The Victorian Social Convention exalted and imposed the domestic roles of wife and mother on most married middle-class women in 19th-century Britain. Career aspirations were restricted because they were not allowed to receive an education on par with that of males. In *The Communist Manifesto*, German philosophers and revolutionary political theorists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels contend that a bourgeois man regards his wife as nothing more than an apparatus of production. According to Engels, the family is at the core of the violence and oppression that women experience. Marxist feminists saw capitalism and patriarchy as the two fundamental systems that supported the subjugation of women. The British writer and social theorist Harriet Taylor Mill underlined that a lady who could support the family financially and had a good education would be respected by her husband and treated as a partner. However, men utilize rape as a means of controlling women, as seen by the social inequities that still affect women today. It's shocking to learn that rape was a taboo topic until 1975 when Susan Brownmiller authored *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. There was a notion that said women's sexuality encourages rape, hence the guilt was frequently placed on the female victims. Nonetheless, postcolonial feminists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty contend that regardless of their status as powerful or marginal, wealthy or not, women residing in non-Western nations are presumed to be impoverished, uninformed, uneducated, sexually restricted, tradition-bound, and victims. FGM (female genital cutting) has been a custom for at least 2,500 years, still practiced in thirty countries, mostly in Africa, Indonesia, and the Middle East. It is not connected to chastity and purity, guaranteeing that women remain virgins until marriage and remain faithful afterward. In this essay, Finally, I have looked at how women have faced discrimination in a variety of settings, including the home and the workplace, for millennia due to their gender.

Keywords: feminism, equal rights, freedom to women, an apparatus of production, subjugation of women, social inequities

Introduction

Feminism, according to Lucy Mangan, is a movement that seeks to eradicate sexism and the oppression of women by males as well as to establish social, legal, and economic equality between the sexes (Mangan, 2019, p. 14). A wide spectrum of social groups and ideologies centered on defending women's rights and organizing for social, political, and economic equality between the sexes replaced feminism (Mangan, 2019, p. 359). It also refers to the idea that women and men ought to have the same rights. In this essay, I've looked at how women have faced discrimination in a variety of settings, including the home and the workplace, for millennia due to their gender.

History of Feminism

At the beginning of the Enlightenment in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, there was a growing intellectual emphasis on liberty. In her book, *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* from the 1700s, Englishwoman Mary Astell makes the case that God gave both men and women equally intelligent souls. In 1734, the Swedish Civil Code granted certain rights to women, notably prohibiting husbands from selling their wife's possessions without their approval.

Nonetheless, The Daughters of Liberty were established in the United States in 1765 to oppose import taxes and advocate for American independence from Great Britain. An African American slave in Boston, Massachusetts, United States, named Phillis Wheatley composed a sonnet in 1768 pleading for her release. She addresses British King George III in the poem. Women who were trailblazers started to bring attention to the injustices they faced. America saw revolutions from 1775 to 1783 and France from 1787 to 1799. Many women advocated for themselves to be granted new freedoms. Such campaigns, meanwhile, were not successful at the time. In her 1790 essay "On the equality of the sexes," American women's rights campaigner Judith Sargent Murray claimed that women are just as bright as men.

French political activist Olympe de Gouges made the case for women's equal citizenship rights with males in *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, published in 1791. British author Mary Wollstonecraft responded to philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and other 18th-century Enlightenment intellectuals who did not extend their concepts of freedom to women in her 1792 book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She challenges the idea that women are less logical than males and opposes the injustice. "Who made man the exclusive judge?" she demands. Despite their physical limitations, women are just as capable of thinking rationally as males, according to the author. On the other hand, Nana Asma'u taught a group of women known as jajis in 1830 in what is now Northern Nigeria so they could travel to the Sokoto Caliphate to educate other women. Suzanne Voilquin took over as editor of the first working-class feminist publication, *Tribune des femmes*, in France in 1832.

The Concept of Feminism

However, Frenchman Charles Fourier coined the term “feminisme” in 1837, marking the beginning of the concept of feminism. Societies needed more regulation as they grew increasingly complicated. Men established institutions that aided in the subjugation of women and strengthened their position of power. Men were forced to control over all spheres of society. It was believed that women were less intellectually, socially, and culturally advanced than men.

Imposed Domestic Roles by Victorian Social Convention

The Victorian Social Convention exalted and imposed the domestic roles of wife and mother on most married middle-class women in 19th-century Britain. Career aspirations were restricted because they were not allowed to receive an education on par with that of males. The majority of working-class females were responsible for managing the household, rearing the kids, and working in trade, industry, and agriculture for pitiful pay. They generally worked until they were ready to give birth when they were pregnant. All women, regardless of social level, lost all of their money and possessions to their husbands upon marriage. In the US and most of Europe, the circumstances were comparable. Domestic servants were women who worked within the home. On the other hand, women who had outside jobs were groomed for partnership roles. According to Mill, this is the reason why a woman who provides material support for her family cannot be regarded with the same disdain and tyranny as a dependent woman (Mill, 1869).

Marx and Engles on Capitalism

German Philosophers and revolutionary political theorists Karl Marx And Friedrich Engle in *The Communist manifesto* claim that capitalism oppresses women, treating them as subordinate, second-class citizens in both the family and society. Men in the ruling class see children as cheap instruments of labor from which they can profit. Women are required to produce children to supply the demand for cheap labor. They are oppressed by their husbands, who benefit from exploiting them and their children. The bourgeois man sees his wife as a mere instrument of production.

Engles asserts that the violence and oppression that women endure are rooted in the family at its very foundation. He describes the emergence of the nuclear family as the “world historical defeat of the female sex” wherein the woman was the slave of her husband and a mere instrument for the production of children. Engles adds, that to ensure her fidelity, “she is delivered unconditionally into the power of the husband; if he kills her, he is only exercising his rights” (Engles, 1884, p. 132).

Marxist Feminists

Marxist feminists believed that in capitalist society women were a “reserve army for labor called on when the need arose, such as during war, and excluded when that need disappeared”. They argued that patriarchy and male domination existed before the emergence of private property and class divisions. Capitalism and Patriarchy were identified by Marxist feminists as dual systems that underpinned the oppression of women. In male-dominated capitalist societies, “unproductive” women’s work was at the bottom of the social pyramid. Private, unpaid, domestic, and supportive labor, mainly done by women was also at the bottom of the social pyramid.

Some Initiatives by Notable Feminists

However, some protesting feminists emerged. Protesting feminists included the Irish-born writer Anna Wheeler, who left her husband and earned a living as a translator and writer. She advocated equal political rights and equal access to education for women, convinced that gender equality could never exist while women were excluded from socially productive work. British Writer and Social theorist Harriet Taylor Mill deplored the fact that wives were treated as inferior, despite the mutual interest both partners had in building a successful marriage.

Harriet Taylor Mill drew attention to the prejudice that excluded women from almost all work required either rationality or training. She emphasized that a well-educated wife who could contribute to the family income would win more respect from her husband and be treated as a partner. She argued that this would benefit not only women but also society as a whole. Additionally, women who fail to engage with society could hinder their families' moral development.

If we look into social injustices imposed on women even today, we see men use rape to exert power over women. Rape is motivated by both power and violence. A culture of silence surrounds it. Surprisingly, until 1975, rape was a hidden issue. When Susan Brownmiller wrote *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* in 1975, rape was a hidden issue. It was widely considered to be rare since it was seldom reported. Rape was discussed in hushed tones. The blame was often put on the female victims, there was a myth that female sexuality invites rape. It was women's responsibility to control or limit male lust. Unexpectedly, women burned or even murdered after rape has become a common phenomenon nowadays whenever we look into the newspaper. The culprits seldom get punished, rather they threaten the victim's family for filing a case.

If we delve deeper into women's condition around us, it has been observed that working-class black women face racism and class prejudice for their ethnicity and skin color. By the 1980s, women could vote but work rights, freedom of sexual choice, and birth control were still driven by middle-class white women. Toni Morrison was the first African-American writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Her writing brings black experiences into mainstream American Literature.

Violence Against Women

A horrific tradition that persists in thirty countries mainly in Africa, Indonesia, and the Middle East, as many as 200 million women have undergone FGC (Female genital cutting). Fear of unmarriageability, rejection, and even exile from the community compel girls to submit to FGC. It is a tradition dating back at least 2,500 years. It is not associated with purity and chastity, ensuring that women are virgins until marriage and faithful thereafter. In at least 15 countries, most girls are cut before they are five years old, while others undergo the procedure at puberty. Many live in poor countries, leaving them with little choice but to comply and die of poverty. Respected women village elders often perform the procedure and earn a living from doing so. At the United Nations' Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, FGC was declared a form of violence against women. By 2013, 24 of the 27 African countries where FGC is prevalent had laws against it.

This is sad that when women's issues, such as rape or even objectification in pornography are discussed, they are most often termed as explicit. Furthermore, women who like to address women's issues are often hesitant to reveal that they are feminists. Surprisingly, men are also appalled by women who are feminists, they are even hesitant to hire a female employee who has attributes of a feminist.

Conclusion

Women should be capable of overcoming their respective crises, should be vocal, demand their place, and emerge as strong individuals actively resisting patriarchal ideologies. Feminism should not be homogenized, and controlled by certain ideas and theories, according to Susan Stanford Friedman. She further emphasizes that feminism needs to be articulated in a global context. She strongly believes in the development of multicultural, international, and transnational feminism. Men can exercise power and authority only if women's equality is denied. The forces of a patriarchal society make women silently endure trauma. Women should demand to be acknowledged for their unpaid labor in their homes and should demand equal pay at their workplace. Additionally, recognizes whether she has been betrayed or subjugated by men. Finally, she should not be at the bottom of society's hierarchy, rather it is quintessential that she demands to be considered a human being intellectually equal to men and plays an instrumental in the domestic domain as well as contributing to society financially by working in factories as labor or intellectually though working in academia or other significant fields in the society.

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