Theories on gender: Theories of feminism: Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, Radical feminism and socialist feminism. How feminist theory intersects with gender theory and the common points and differences of the two

I. (A) Personal Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>Prof. Sumita Parmar</td>
<td>Allahabad University, Allahabad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Coordinator</td>
<td>Prof. Deepa Punetha; Dr. Ragini Sahai</td>
<td>Allahabad University, Galgotia College of Engineering and Technology, NOIDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Writer/Author (CW)</td>
<td>Dr. Sumit Saurabh Srivastava</td>
<td>Allahabad University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Reviewer (CR)</td>
<td>Dr. Ragini Sahai</td>
<td>Galgotia College of Engineering and Technology, NOIDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Editor (LE)</td>
<td>Prof. Sumita Parmar</td>
<td>Allahabad University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(B) Description of Module

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Description of Module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject Name</td>
<td>Women’s Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Name</td>
<td>Gender: Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module Name/Title</td>
<td>Theories on gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module ID</td>
<td>Paper-5, Module-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-requisites</td>
<td>The reader is expected to have some understanding of gender, patriarchy, &amp; the sexual division of labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>This Module aims to familiarize the reader with inter-linkages between awareness of gender as a stream of thought and feminism as a politics to achieve gender equality. In the process, the Module attempts to elaborate upon the classification of different variants of feminism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keywords</td>
<td>Gender, Feminism, Feminist Perspectives, Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, Radical feminism and Socialist feminism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theories on Gender

Introduction

The present Module engages the reader with the nuanced meaning of feminism and feminist perspectives. It dwells upon the problematic issue of what feminism means and what is meant by feminist perspectives. Subsequently, the broad categories of feminist perspectives manifested in Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, Radical feminism and Socialist feminism are elaborated. The concluding part of the Module briefly addresses how feminist theory intersects with gender theory and the common points and differences of the two. To begin with, feminism broadly means both thought & action towards ending the hierarchy of sexes thereby to achieve gender equality. It begins with the assumption that the inequality between men and women wherein the former is always in domination and the latter in subjugation has been the situation for long. In present times, the roots of such hierarchy need to be uprooted.

Feminism: Concept & Definition

The history of feminism is inextricable from the time-honored concerns of historiography: politics and power (Offen, 1988: 142).

To begin with, some of the Dictionary meanings of feminism are mentioned here. According to Cambridge Dictionaries Online, feminism can be seen as the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Feminism is the belief in the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. The Collins Dictionary of Sociology provides a comprehensive understanding of feminism. According to it,
feminism can be understood in number of ways like: Ñ. a holistic theory concerned with the nature of women’s global oppression and subordination to men; 2. a socio-political theory and practice which aims to free all women from male supremacy and exploitation; 3. a social movement encompassing strategic confrontations with the sex-class system; 4. an ideology which stands in dialectical opposition to all misogynous ideologies and practices (2006: 214).

Regarding feminist writings, Susan James asserts at the outset that ÑFeminism is grounded in the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified (James, 1998: 576). Jaggar (1983: 5) entails that feminism Ñhelps women to achieve the fullest possible liberation.Ñ. She further argues that there has been a shift from feminism to women’s liberation movement in the contemporary period as ÑEarlier feminists used the language of ‘rights’ and ‘equality’ but in the late 1960s ‘oppression’ and ‘liberation’ became the key words for the political activists of the new left. The change in language reflects a significant development in the political perspective of contemporary feminism (1983: 5). For Hooks, feminism is Ñthe struggle to end sexist oppressionÑ (2000: 28). She further argues that ÑTo understand feminism ... one has to necessarily understand sexismÑ (Hooks, 2015: 1). Regarding sexism, it can be stated that it is a Ñsocial situation in which men exert a dominant role over women and express in a variety of ways, both private and institutional, the notion that women are inferior to men (Langer, 2001: 5). Beasley includes Ña critique of misogyny/ sexual hierarchyÑ in the field of feminism (1999: 36). For Thompson, ÑFeminism aims to expose the reality of male domination, while struggling for a world where women are recognized as human beings in their own rightÑ (2001: 8). At the other spectrum of homogenized understandings of what is feminism and what it constitutes lies the ÑfracturedÑ
notion of feminism in terms of race relations & colonial power. While the former in terms of Black Feminism is very much visible in the writings of bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins among others; the latter in the form of Third World Feminism negating/suffering from imperialism is present in the writings of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Kumari Jayawardena, Uma Narayan among others.

**Towards a Feminist Perspective**

A Feminist perspective means to understand and deconstruct the normal appearing social order to unravel the hidden transcripts of patriarchy and female/women subordination and subjugation. It discovers the hidden reality of male domination which is made to be appear normal. Highlighting the nuanced nature of feminist perspective, Menon (2012: viii) states that A feminist perspective recognizes that the hierarchical organizing of the world around gender is key to maintaining social order; that to live lives marked male and female is to live different realities. Thus the feminist perspective brings out the complex nature of reality; it goes beyond the natural and attempts to debunk the reality from the vantage position of the oppressed and marginal, in this case, women. Though in the recent past, there have emerged a variety of feminist perspectives like cultural feminism, Marxist & Socialist, Radical, eco-feminism among others, yet what has united it since the beginning, across its disparate strands, is its focus on power, on the asymmetry of the gender dichotomy and of gendered relationships (Dirks et. al. 1994: 32). It provides a fresh & new look into the social order which appears to be functioning smoothly everyday devoid of any contestations and power hierarchy. The present Module spells out the following key feminist theoretical perspectives which though different from each other in some respects all begin
with analysing women subordination and conclude by providing both a theory & practice of women freedom and liberation:

a. Liberal feminism  
b. Marxist feminism  
c. Socialist feminism and  
d. Radical feminism  

A. Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism originates from the liberal political theory and thus focuses on equality. It can be seen as the application of liberal principles & practices of individual freedom and rights into the lives of women. According to Schwartzman (2006: 1), “The ideals and concepts of liberalism have been used in feminist struggles for liberation throughout recent history. From the time of the women’s suffrage movement to the more recent battles over abortion, women have formulated their demands in terms of equality, autonomy, and individual rights.” Thus we see that the central themes in liberal feminism like independence, equality of opportunity and individualism are derived from the political philosophy of liberalism. In a way, liberal feminists argued that women should have similar rights as men. They challenged their systematic and historical exclusion from the public space. Some of the key writings in liberal feminism are by Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and others. *The Subjection of Women* (1869) is authored by John Stuart Mill. It first appeared as a pamphlet. It is in this writing that empathy towards women’s inequality and commitment towards resolving the same appears very strongly. Mill
argued that women should have the similar rights related to property & citizenship as their male counterpart have.

The late 19th and beginning of the 20th century witnessed the suffrage movement so as to achieve equal voting rights similar to that of men. Thus the notion of rights is central in liberal feminism. The historicity of liberal feminism has been succinctly outlined by Jaggar (1983: 27-28) wherein she states that "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 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."

In the broad rubric of liberal feminism, women demanded equal rights to education and entering into occupational domains earlier considered as masculine or male-centric; equal political and civil rights manifested in citizenship which subsequently will lead to the right to vote. Liberal feminist suffrage campaign is a potent symbol of such demands. It is important to note that the dynamism of the state is paramount for liberal feminism. The latter strongly puts forth its demands and argues for its acceptance and implementation by the former. In contemporary times, liberal feminism has become all the more important due to the changing nature of welfare state due to emergence of capitalism and globalization.

B. Marxist feminism

Quite obviously, Marxist feminism is based on the tenets of Marxist literature. In this regard, Tong (1997: 39) contends that "Just as the liberal concept of human nature is present in liberal feminist thought, the Marxist concept of human nature is
present in Marxist feminist thought. Marx critiqued capitalism as the most exploitative system based on class relations. The creation of private property & surplus value at the cost of workers' needs is the prime goal of the capitalist industrialist. Jaggar (1983: 70) highlights that "The distinguishing feature of the Marxist analysis is the causal link that it seeks to establish between women's oppression and class society. Under capitalism, Marxists claim, women are oppressed primarily because their oppression benefits capital." Needless to say, the notion of class and class consciousness in terms of women being a 'class' i.e. 'sex-class' is at the core of Marxist feminist thought. Marxist feminists like Kate Millett (Sexual politics, 1969), Emma Goldman (The Traffic in Women, 1970), Lillian Robinson (Sex, class and culture, 1978), Michele Barrett (Women's oppression today, 1980) among others argue that it is the exploitative character of the class system that can be seen as equal to patriarchal oppression; thus viewing capitalist patriarchy as a cause of women's oppression.

Industrialization based production process fractured the domestic domain and resulted in the 'public' and 'private' domains of lives wherein the former mostly associated with men is responsible for paid work whereas the latter confined to household non-paid work is confined to women. As and when, women join the labour market they are exploited in terms of less wages paid by the capitalists to generate their own surplus value. In addition, she is not paid for her domestic work (by her male relatives) as patriarchy ordains these as 'normal & natural' domain of women. Such an argument resonates with Paddy Quick's analysis in The Class Nature of Women's Oppression (1977) wherein it is argued that "the oppression of women is based on the role of women in the exploited class as the reproducers of labourers in class society. At the same time, the determining factor in this relationship (between women and men) is the specific economic form in
which unpaid surplus labor is extracted from the direct producers (Quick, 1977: 42). A similar argument is posed by Hartmann (2003: 207) that Ñ.. Marxist feminists have focussed on housework and its relation to capital, some arguing that housework produces surplus value and that house-workers work directly for capitalists....Ñ. In this way, the material basis of patriarchy can be placed in the division of labour thesis which is present in both capitalism and patriarchy.

In this way, we see that Marxist feminists argue that the system of capitalism needs free and uninterrupted flow of labour force (primarily male workers) for its optimum performance. For this to happen there needs to be a division between the public space marked by economic paid activities, the survival of which solely depends on the smooth functioning of private domestic Ñunpaid household activitiesÑdomain by women. Thus, it is the need of capitalism that women stay indoors under the control of patriarchy performing household works so that the men can work outside. To oppose such an exploitative arrangement, one comes across ÑHousework for Wages CampaignÑinitiated by Marxist feminists. So, we see that both class position and patriarchy are linked with each other in womenÑs oppression. Thus, both the uprooting of the class system and patriarchy is the rallying cry of Marxist feminism. However, it is important to note that classical Marxism gives more priority to the former than the latter as capitalism is the fundamental cause of womenÑs oppression; a point aptly highlighted by Hartmann (2003: 206) that ÑMany Marxists typically argue that feminism is at best less important than class conflict and at worst divisive of the working class. This political stance produces an analysis that absorbs feminism into the class struggle.Ñ

C. **Socialist feminism**
Socialist feminism can be seen as an answer to the question posed by Lydia Sargent (1981: xviii) which was ņ... how can women understand their particular oppression in a way that can confront the narrowness of marxist terminology ... which focuses on work and economic relations as the primary (sometimes only) area of importance; and how can they develop a new theory which understands the importance of reproduction, family, and sexuality as central to current analyses and future visions? ņSocialist feminism highlights ņcontemporary male dominance as part of the economic foundation of the society, understanding ņeconomic ņ to include childbearing and sexual activity...... therefore, the abolition of male dominance requires a transformation of the economic foundation of society as a whole ņ (Jaggar, 1983: 147). Hartmann (2003: 218) outlines that ņAs feminist socialists, we must organize a practice which addresses both the struggle against patriarchy and the struggle against capitalism. ņ Vogel (1995: 43) pointed in the same line that ņWomen’s activities in the family household constituted, they suggested, the material basis of female oppression. ņ Thus it established a crucial inter-linkage between capitalism and patriarchy i.e. capitalist patriarchy in some sense wherein economic class aspects of women’s oppression is located. More conclusively, elaborating upon the tenet of socialist feminism, Rowbotham (2013: 97) states that ņin order to act effectively we have to try to work out the precise relationship between the patriarchal dominance of men over women, and the property relations which come from this, to class exploitation and racism. ņ Regarding the distinction between the Marxist and Socialist feminism, Tong (1997: 39) outlines that ņWhereas socialist feminists believe that gender and class play an approximately equal role in any explanation of women’s oppression, Marxist feminists believe that class ultimately better accounts for women’s status
and function(s). Thus the thorny issue among them is whether class or sex is at the core of differentiating men and women.

Clara Zetkin (one of the earliest exponent and activist of socialist feminism) emphasised again and again that the larger historical context of the battle for women's liberation was the working class drive for socialism (Davis, 2012: 14). One of the most seminal works addressing the issues of socialist-feminism is the Zillah Eisenstein (ed.) *Capitalist patriarchy and the case for Socialist Feminism* (1979). This however does not undermine the earlier work by Clara Zetkin and in recent times Gayle Rubin and Nancy Chodorow, and others in a similar theoretical framework. Introducing the work, Zillah Eisenstein in the beginning itself states that "This volume makes public a political and intellectual commitment to understanding the problem of women's oppression in terms of a real synthesis between the two [Marxist analysis and feminist theory]. This does not mean merely adding one theory to the other but rather redefining each through the conflict that derives from and between both traditions..... Male supremacy and capitalism are defined as the core relations determining the oppression of women today. This volume is dedicated to understanding the dynamic of power involved which derives from both the class relations of production and the sexual hierarchical relations of society" (1979: 1). She herself wrote two essays titled *Developing a theory of Capitalist patriarchy and socialist feminism* and *Some notes on the relations of capitalist patriarchy* in this anthology.

Socialist feminist in a way views and addresses the issue of body, sexuality, reproductive rights, etc. intrinsically bound with the economic issues. It is so because the economic system of capitalism is crucial for a patriarchal system. In an important way it outlines the discriminatory aspect of sexual division of labour.
which both creates and reinforces gender differences. These differences are subsequently modelled around the lines of patriarchy and result in the subordination of women. Hartmann (2003: 212) argues that "The material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men’s control over women’s labor power." Gayle Rubin has outlined the notion of sex/gender system which can be seen at the base of women’s oppression. For her, "a sex/gender system is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms, biological sexuality into products, of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (Rubin, 1975: 159). Herein we see that the domestic sphere is closely tied to the needs of the capitalist society.

In a significant way, socialist-feminists pointed out that women’s domestic work is very much crucial for capitalism to survive. In this context, both patriarchy & capitalism become mutually beneficial to each other. Ehrenreich (1991: 47) has put forth certain virtues of such theorisation. These are, first, it gave patriarchy,.... a material base in men’s control over women’s labor power. Second, it revealed a vivid parallel between the private sphere where patriarchy was still ensconced, and the public sphere where capital called the shots. In the public sphere, men labored at production, and in the private sphere women labored at reproduction. Finally, it showed how essential patriarchy was to capitalism; most capitalist institutions produced only things, but the quintessential patriarchal institution, the family, produced the men who produced things thanks to the labor of women.

D. Radical feminism

Radical feminism emerged in the late 1960s as the offshoot of the women’s liberation movement. Though it was more visible in America it later spread to other European countries. According to Buchanan (2011: xix), "The era of the
radical feminist is generally identified as the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s. Outlining its basic contours; Echols (1989: 3) states that radical feminism rejected both the politico position that a socialist revolution would bring about women’s liberation and the liberal feminist solution of integrating women into the public sphere. Radical feminists argued that women constituted a sex-class, that relations between women and men needed to be recast in political terms, and that gender rather than class was the primary contradiction. The 1960s slogan of “The personal is political” fairly resonated with the ideas of radical feminism. Feminist and writer Carol Hanisch’s essay titled “The Personal is Political” appeared in the anthology Notes From the Second Year: Women’s Liberation in 1970. According to Jaggar, “It reveals how male power is exercised and reinforced through such ‘personal’ institutions as childrearing, housework, love, marriage and all kinds of sexual practices” (1983: 101) and thus “bringing sexual, childbearing and child-rearing practices into the domain of politics” (1983: 106).

Rowland and Klein (1996: 11-12) have outlined the general principles of radical feminism shared by its various strands. According to them, “The first and fundamental theme is that women as a social group are oppressed by men as a social group and that this oppression is the primary oppression for women. Patriarchy is the oppressing structure of male domination. A second central element characteristic of radical feminism is that it is created by women for women. That women form a group that can be likened to a social class is an inherent part of radical feminist theory.” Some of the key texts in radical feminism are The dialectic of sex: The case for Feminist Revolution (1970) by Shulamith Firestone and Gyn/Ecology: The metaethics of Radical Feminism (1978) by Mary Daly. Radical feminists argue that such patriarchal oppression is universal in its nature and extent i.e. it as a universal value system. Additionally, it took up the
issues of control over one’s own body and the pursuit of equal opportunity. Regarding the former, women’s bodily autonomy is central to the women’s liberation. It is centred on the issue of right to abortion and its crucial importance to women as such.

Echols (1989: 139-202) outlined different varieties of radical feminism which include Redstockings, Cell 16, The Feminists and New York Radical Feminists. Roxanne Dunbar formed Cell 16 in 1968 in Boston while teaching Boston Draft Resistance group. She was instrumental in publishing one of the earliest journals titled No More Fun and Games dedicated to radical feminism.¹ The members of Cell 16 were staunch advocates of revolutionary internationalism, of understanding how race and class connected to gender, and of revolutionary action.² Echols (1989: 160) states that “Whereas Redstockings argued that women’s behaviour was determined by their material conditions, Cell 16 attributed women’s behaviour to their sex-role conditioning.” Ti-Grace founded The Feminists, a radical feminist group that remained active from 1968 to 1973 in New York. Major radical feminist publications of that time were Notes from the First Year (1968), Notes from the Second Year (1970) and Notes from the Third Year (1971). The radical feminist activist group, Redstockings, was founded in 1969 by Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis. The Redstockings Manifesto was launched by Redstockings of the Women’s Liberation Movement on July 7, 1969. Regarding its role and activities in women’s liberation, “Redstockings women would go on to champion and spread knowledge of vital women's liberation theory, slogans and actions that have become household words such as consciousness-raising, the personal is political, the pro-woman line, sisterhood is powerful, the politics of housework, the

¹ http://accion-positiva.ucoz.es/publ/istorija_zhenshchin/cell_16_quot_no_more_fun_and_games_a_journal_of_female_liberation_quot/9-0-146
² http://moufawad-paul.blogspot.in/2010/10/recently-at-my-doctorate-completion.html
Miss America Protest, and ÔpeakoutsÔ that would break the taboos of silence around subjects like abortion.Ô³ As per its Manifesto, ÔMale supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy.Ô⁴ New York Radical Feminist was founded by Shulamith Firestone, Pam Allen and Robin Morgan among others in 1969. It issued their manifesto titled ÔThe Politics of the EgoÔ which elaborated that Ôthe oppression of women as a fundamental political oppression wherein women are categorized as an inferior class based on their sex.Ô

It used to happen during those times that activists / members of a particular group after getting disillusioned from her parental group used to join the other one. For example, Ti-Grace was a prominent member of the feminist organization NOW and due to certain differences, later on founded her own group. However, irrespective of such shuffling, they all rallied around the basic tenets of radical feminism. With the changing times and irreconcilable differences among its members, it was later Ôtaken overÔ or transformed into another version of feminism known as cultural feminism. The transformation was to a major extent complete by 1975 itself. Thus, within a span of ten years or so radical feminism touched upon so many lives and addressed womenÔs issues in such a passionate way, that its ripples can be still felt across feminist activism and writings. Radical feminism was radical in a sense as it touched upon the issue of body (sexuality, reproduction & abortion) in times when these were considered as taboo and it was the destiny of the women to suffer the negative consequences of these in silence. Radical feminism opened up new spaces from where women spoke out.

³ http://www.redstockings.org/index.php/about-redstockings
⁴ http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/redstockingsmanifesto.html
Conclusion

Feminism as an ideology and practice addresses the issue of women’s oppression & subjugation in its own specific manner and subsequently attempts to provide a possible solution of the same. In doing so, various feminists have outlined varying outlooks either locating patriarchy at the centre of the oppression or some have viewed the industrial-capitalistic society as women’s prime opponent and ‘enemy’. Such a praxis has resulted in various feminist perspectives which (as already highlighted in the Introductory part itself), though appear to be different in their approaches finally merge with each other in their struggle towards women’s liberation, gender equality and the advancement of women.

At this point, the inter-linkages between feminism and gender theory can be spelled out. By now, we have come to a shared understanding that gender is the social construct of the biological identity of any individual i.e. sex. The ‘sex’ either male or female transforms into masculine and feminine through the process of socialization; major agencies of which as C.H. Cooley pointed out, are the family, neighbourhood and peer groups. Sometimes, one can also witness ‘Third Gender’. As the latter is outside of the purview of the present Module, it will elaborate upon how the gender system & gender schema has a profound impact on the feminism and vice versa.

As the male sex has to be socialized in a way that it adheres to the man & masculine framework outlined by the society and the female sex to be realised through becoming ‘woman’ & feminine; any deviance on the part of either man or woman is frowned upon and most of the times meets with negative sanctions. On the other hand, adherence to the gender schema meets with the highest standard of approval and subsequent ‘awards and prizes’ from society. Gender schema can be
understood as a system of existence and practice wherein male is masculine and female is feminine. In this way, the male has to be masculine and female has to be feminine. Being masculine entails being rational, instrumental, objective, powerful (both in terms of physique and mental faculties), domineering, assertive among similar other personality traits. On the other hand, being feminine entails emotional, lack of decision-making sense due to weak mental faculties, vulnerable to sexual assault by men due to fragile biological structure, dependent, subjugated, ‘voiceless’ existence among similar other personality traits.

Feminism and feminist theory challenge the sex-gender system along with gender schema. In due process, it critiques the essentializing of women in terms of her bio-medical features. As argued earlier, gender schema does not allow transgressing personality attributes assigned to men and women. Feminism argues that such a restriction on changing one’s outlook denies women the option to advance and transform her life. Gender schema additionally subjugates women in most of the socio-cultural setup as it clearly demarcates public and private spheres of activities assigned to men and women respectively. Feminism speaks out in favour of women coming out in huge numbers in the public sphere so as to ask for her rights & entitlements. Her coming out in the public sphere can be seen as both the cause and effect of feminist activism and movements. The Gender system ties men and women to different set of roles and thus creates a kind of sexual division of labour wherein though both men and women are joined together in child bearing activity, yet child rearing is solely seen as the women’s domain. Feminism argues that such domesticity is the violation of women’s rights as they are also entitled to get educated, employed and have a sense of freedom and satisfaction. Thus, the centrality of gender schema is to essentialize women (and men) according to their
anatomy, and feminism and feminist activism attempts to fracture such frameworks of existence.