ABSTRACT

Progress is being made in overcoming deep seated biases that have bedeviled the life of women over centuries. The reasons may be the economic pay offs but the accompanying improvements in the quality of women is undeniable. Feminism seeks to define, establish and defend equal rights for women. Similar to their feminist counterparts all over the world, Feminism in India is the pursuit of women’s rights within the society of India. Modern day feminism has focused on fair treatment of women through the stages of girl child, married women and mother. Despite the progress made by Indian feminist movements, women living in modern India still face many issues of discrimination. A slow but inexorable change is taking place as work life balance in dual career families propels and spreads the ideas driven by feminist concepts.

Keywords: Women; Feminism; Work Life Balance; Dual Career Family

INTRODUCTION

Feminism seeks to define, establish and defend equal rights for women. This equality is sought to be obtained in political, economic, cultural and social context. It attempts to obtain equal rights for women in education and employment.

Human rights in contract law, property and voting are sought to be obtained for women on an equal footing. They hope to obtain personal freedom and control over their reproductive rights. They protest domestic violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault. They demand rights in the place of work, including maternity leave and advocate against forms of discrimination against women. These are revolutionary demands and have changed the society in so far as they have been able to obtain them.

Oppression of any individual or group is not recognized as a social problem until society collectively defines it as such. Sociologist Herbert Blumer postulates that regardless of its objective situation, a malignant condition in society remains ignored until it is defined by and conceived in society as problematic. An injustice generates an automatic action but in such cases as the injustice is not recognized there is no remedy. The injustices against women have now been recognized, as a consequence of feminist activity. For example, domestic violence occurred for centuries; yet, it was not seen as a social problem worth addressing until the early 1970's. The question then becomes how we make society aware of oppression and other crises.

India is ranked 132 out of 148 countries on Gender Inequality Index as per the 2013 Global Human Development Report.

Like their feminist counterparts all over the world, Feminism in India is the pursuit of women’s rights within the society of India. Feminists in India seek gender equality. Indian feminists also have fought against culture-specific issues within India’s patriarchal society, such as laws regarding inheritance and in earlier times, sati. The abolition of sati should be regarded as the earliest victory for feminism. Gandhiji’s incorporation of women in the freedom struggle brought them out into the world.
Modern day feminism has focused on fair treatment of women through the stages of girl child, married women and mother.

Despite the progress made by Indian feminist movements, women living in modern India still face many issues of discrimination. India has a patriarchal culture. This has made the process of gaining land-ownership rights and access to education a difficult challenge. An indication of the reaction of society to the progress of feminism is the pernicious practice of sex selective abortions.

Feminist movements in India has been criticized for taking up the cause of women who have obtained many rights whilst neglecting women’s rights if they are poor or belong to the disadvantaged sections of society. Consequently, the access of women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/ Other backward Classes and minorities, majority of whom are in the rural areas and in the informal, unorganized sector – to education, health and productive resources, among others, is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded. Feminism in our country has a long way to go.

**OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

Feminism as revealed in literature does not consider the effects that the normal economic process has in forwarding its cause. The objective of this article is to define the various strands of feminism and show how economic issues which led to the double income family is forwarding the cause of feminism.

**Patriarchy**

Indian women find it necessary to challenge the age old system of patriarchy which is embedded in India. Patriarchy is a social system in which society is organized around male authority figures. Patriarchy demands that fathers have authority over women, children, and property. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege. The corollary is that females are regarded as subordinate.

This idea has led to opposition on the grounds that it is contrary to traditional values or religious beliefs. Some people believe that social acceptance of divorce and non-married women are wrong and harmful. They argue that men and women are fundamentally different and thus their different traditional roles in society should be maintained. Others oppose women's entry into the workforce, political office, and the voting process, as well as the lessening of male authority in families. These are the entrenched values that Indian feminists have to move against.

**Advances Made By the Indian Women**

The government has accorded high priority to the advancement of women. Our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have been geared towards fulfilling the cause of welfare of women. The Five year plans have been worked keeping in mind advancement of women. The National Commission for Women was set up in 1990 with the purpose of safeguarding the rights and entitlements of women. To facilitate the participation of women in politics, the Constitution was amended in 1993 for reservations of seats in local bodies and municipalities. This will aid in the decision making at the local level. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women.

**Women in Agriculture**

Agriculture is the mainstay of the vast majority of the world’s poorest. Women do the majority of the agricultural work across India. However women do not enjoy equal access to information and farm supplies. The land worked by women yield lower returns than those done by men- as much as 40% lower.

The current trends in agricultural market liberalization are redefining the links between gender and development. The proportion of women in agricultural production and postharvest activities ranges from 20% to 70%. The increase in productivity, which these developments have brought about is
associated with a growing demand for female labor. The seasonal increase for the demand in labor has led to the migration of families in search of work.

These developments have brought benefits, in general. However, the largest proportion of rural women worldwide continues to face deteriorating health and work conditions. They have limited access to education and control over natural resources. Their employment is seasonal and insecure. The wages are low. This situation is due to a variety of factors. There is a growing competition for agricultural markets due to globalization. This increases the demand for cheap and flexible labor. Sustainability issues are leading to a growing pressure on and conflicts over natural resources. The claims on government expenditure are not growing. Other factors include increasing exposure to risks related to natural disasters and environmental changes, increasing occupational and health risks.

The critical role of women in agriculture is now being recognized. It is necessary to reach them the benefits of training in soil conservation, social forestry and dairy development. They could benefit from understanding occupations like horticulture, live stock and small animal husbandry, poultry and related activities. Such training has started but needs to be expanded.

The Way Forward

Where their role in industry is concerned they should be given comprehensive support in terms of labor legislation, social security and other support services to participate in various industrial sectors. Women at present cannot work in night shifts even if they wish to. Suitable measures, including security should be taken to enable the women to work on the night shift in factories. There has to be a provision for support services for women, like child care facilities, including crèches at work places and educational institutions and home for the aged and the disabled.

Education

Equal access to education for women and girls should be ensured. There is a need to sensitise people about the need for education for women. Proper training gives women an edge in agriculture, this converts to a better life for family. Special measures will have to be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, increase enrollment and retention rates of girls. This will improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation /vocation/technical skills for women.

Health

A holistic approach has to be taken towards women’s health which includes both nutrition and health services. It is necessary to adopt and give special attention to the needs of women and the girl at all stages of the life cycle. The reduction of infant mortality and maternal mortality is a matter of national pride.

The women have special nutritional needs. They suffer the highest risk of malnutrition and disease during infancy, adolescence and child bearing. This becomes important when we realize that the health of the women will affect the health of the child.

The vast majority of rural women still depends on the locally available non-commercial sources of energy such as animal dung, crop waste and fuel wood. In order to ensure the efficient use of these energy resources in an environmental friendly manner it is important to help in training and participation of women in environmental programmes.

Active involvement in SHGs has enabled women to have a voice in the community affairs and they have been able to tackle problems such as a lack of drinking water and electricity, access to health services and children’s education. Nonetheless various constraints like discriminatory practices in labour, low level of skills etc. operate to contract a woman’s potential for empowerment. It may be comparatively easier to ensure material change than to cause a change in power structures and the ideologies and attitudes which accompany them. The recommendations for a way forward include ensuring a proactive involvement of women in the various programs, changing social norms and
perceptions and engaging with wider movements of social change.

**Women and Microcredit**

The access to micro credit of women has to be enhanced. This will lead to greater consumption and production. There is need for strengthening the existing mechanisms and encouraging newer ones. Such credit will have the greater impact if it is directed towards those women who are below the poverty line.

A NGO which deserves special mention is the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA). Its micro finance arm, the SEWA Bank, provides loans, arranges safety nets in case of unemployment and support for the poor and needy working women. SEWA has touched the lives of more than half a million women by ensuring financial security. This has increased the self esteem and confidence of women and made them better problem solvers at home and society.

The organization started work in the seventies when economic growth opportunities were limited. It took the help of the government and other institutions to further its objectives. The success of this institution served as a model for other institutions and inspired the growth of such N.G.O.s.

In developing the organization, the founder Ela Bhat realized that a poor women’s economic possibilities have the following characteristics. They will make a substantial contribution when activities have the following characteristics: the participant is not obliged to be far from home. The work is relatively monotonous and do not require rapt concentration. The work should not be dangerous. The work can be performed in spite of interruptions, and is easily resumed once interrupted. An innate understanding of these principles allowed SEWA members to accept a lot of work which was available.

The reality of what employee’s experience, specifically in regards to work-life balance, is a direct result of power operating covertly through ideological controls. Work–life balance is a concept which includes proper ordering between "work" (career and ambition) and "lifestyle" (health, pleasure, leisure, family). These ideological controls are expressed through the patriarchal attitudes of society. These attitudes affect her education, health and her opportunities in the workplace.

Every individual will have concerns regarding jobs, family relationships, community activities, health care etc. All these concerns require time and energy if they are to be met adequately. A balance life is necessary for the mental, psychological and emotional well being of the person. One aspect of the woman’s working world is the work life balance of the working women. Her work life is affected by her personal life. To carry out her domestic work and balance it with her obligations as an employee is demanding. She needs the support of her immediate family and her co-workers at her work place. The issues involved can be captured by analyzing the work life balance of working woman.

A large number of employees state that their jobs are "very" or "extremely" stressful. Those in high-stress jobs are three times more likely than others to suffer from stress-related medical conditions and are twice as likely to quit. The study states that women, in particular, report stress related to the conflict between work and family. In a study in the U.S., researchers found that with an increased amount of negative spillover from work to family, the likelihood of reporting stress within the family increased by 74%, and with an increased amount of negative spillover from family to work the likelihood to report stress felt at work increased by 47%.

There is the ideological norm of the "ideal worker." Many organizations view the ideal worker as one who is "committed to their work above all else". "Ideal workers" are those that demonstrate a desire for extra responsibility behaviors, which are seen as positive attributes.

Alternatively, those who are perceived as having to divide their time (and their commitments) are seen not as dedicated to the organization. As research has shown, a manager’s perception of a subordinate’s commitment to the organization is positively associated with the individual’s career assessment.

Often, these perceptions are placed on the female worker. Managers who perceived their female
employees of maintaining high work-family conflict were presumed as not as committed to the organization, therefore not worthy of advancement. This negatively impacts working mothers as they may be "inaccurately perceived to have less commitment to their organizations than their counterparts.

Working mothers often have to challenge perceptions and stereotypes that evolve as a working woman becomes a working mother. Working mothers are perceived as less competent and less worthy of training than childless women. The moment when she becomes a mother, a working woman is held at a completely different norm than her childless colleagues. In the same Cuddy et al. (2004) study, men who became fathers were not perceived as any less competent, and in fact, their perceived warmth increased.

Today there are many young women who do not want to just stay at home and do house work, but want to have careers. The number of women joining the workforce increases as the youngest child increases in age, indicating that the majority of women with dependent care responsibilities cannot or do not wish to give up careers. While women are increasingly represented in the work force, they still face challenges balancing work and home life. Both domestic and market labor compete for time and energy.

In India there is a great change in the attitudes towards working women. Economic stress/requirements have led to dual career families becoming increasingly acceptable. There are studies which indicate that change is occurring in society which is going past traditional beliefs. A study in India has found that a majority of working women (80%) agree that their husbands are keen to see her rise in her career. The reaction to this development is indicated by 8% of the women who complain that their husbands are not willing and enthusiastic for their rise in career.

Majority of the women accept that their husbands appreciate that the respondents are holding dual responsibilities - home and office. Almost half (48%) of the respondents agree that their husbands share household responsibility with them.

However, the percentage of women who complain of tiredness is 49%. They reduce stress by music, yoga, TV etc. The study reveals that men are overcoming biases with regard to the role to be performed by women and are being supportive of their spouses.

CONCLUSION

Feminism remains a controversial issue. Even the ideas which constitute feminism is debated. When it comes to the directions which a society should take, the consensus breaks down.

Progress is being made in overcoming deep seated biases that have bedeviled the life of women over centuries. The reasons may be the economic pay offs but the accompanying improvements in the quality of women is undeniable. Thus education is sought to be given to women to prepare them for life in the workplace. A greater concern for her health and nutrition accompanies the realization that she has a great untapped potential to contribute to society as an economic agent. This change has reinforced her traditional role as the person who runs the house and increased her effectiveness. A slow but inexorable change is taking place as work life balance in dual career families propels and spreads the ideas driven by feminist concepts. Thus unnoticed by many commentators, a huge shift is taking place, in albeit a small section of society where feminist issues are being aced and resolved.

REFERENCES


