

SUMMING UP

We have presented in brief, the main theoretical trends in the feminist movements as they have developed in the West in the contemporary period. While the debate with Marxism and within Marxism dominated the 1970s, in the 1980s cultural feminism with its separatist agenda and focus on the cultural aspects of women's oppression came to the fore. Issues of sexual choice and reproductive role of women came to dominate the debate and discussions in feminist circles. Many socialist feminists too have given significance to these questions though not in the extreme form that cultural feminists have. Transformation of the heterosexual family became the main call of the bourgeois feminist movement and the more active sections among them tried to bring it into practice as well. Though many of them may have envisaged a change in the entire social system in this way in fact it became a reformist approach which they have tried to theorize.

Postmodernism made its influence felt in the 1990s. Yet in the late 1990s Marxism is again becoming an important theory within feminist analysis. This critical overview of the way the feminist movement (particularly the radical feminist and socialist feminist trends) theoretically analysed women's oppression, the

solutions they have offered and strategies they evolved to take the movement forward we can say that flaws in their theory have led to advocating solutions which have taken the movement into a dead end. In spite of the tremendous interest generated by the movement and wide support from women who were seeking to understand their own dissatisfactions and problems the movement could not develop into a consistent broad based movement including not only the middle classes but also women from the working class and ethnically oppressed sections.

The main weaknesses in their theory and strategies were:

Seeking roots of women's oppression in her reproductive role. Since women's role in reproduction is determined by biology, it is something that cannot be changed. Instead of determining the material, social causes for origin of women's oppression they focused on a biologically given factor thereby falling into the trap of biological determinism.

In relation with her biological role focusing on the patriarchal nuclear family as the basic structure in society in which her oppression is rooted. Thus their emphasis was on opposing the heterosexual family as the main basis of women's oppression. As a result the

wider socio-economic structure in which the family exists and which shapes the family was ignored.

Making the contradiction between men and women as the main contradiction. Concentrating their attention on changing the sex/gender system – the gender roles that men and women are trained to play. This meant concentrating on the cultural, psychological aspects of social life ignoring the wider political and economic forces that give rise to and defend patriarchal culture.

Emphasising the psychological/personality differences between men and women as biological and advocating separatism for women. Overemphasis on sexual liberation for women Separate groups, separate live-in arrangements and lesbianism. Essentially this meant that this section of the women's movement confined itself to small groups and could not appeal to or mobilize the mass of women.

Falling into the trap of imperialism and its promotion of pornography, sex-tourism etc by emphasizing the need for liberating women from sexual repression. Or in the name of equal opportunities supporting women's recruitment into the US Army before the Iraq War (2003).

Organizational emphasis on opposition to hierarchy

and domination and focus on small consciousness raising groups and alternative activity, which is self-determined. Opposing the mobilization and organizing of large mass of oppressed women.

Ignoring or being biased against the contributions made by the socialist movements and socialist revolutions in Russia, China etc in bringing about a change in the condition of large sections of women.

How incorrect theoretical analysis and wrong strategies can affect a movement can be clearly seen in the case of the feminist movement. Not understanding women's oppression as linked to the wider exploitative socio-economic and political structure, to imperialism, they have sought solutions within the imperialist system itself. These solutions have at best benefited a section of middle class women but left the vast mass of oppressed and exploited women far from liberation. The struggle for women's liberation cannot be successful in isolation from the struggle to overthrow the imperialist system itself.

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