Working Paper

Evolution of Feminism and Feminism Movements in India

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Abstract

Feminism as an ideology is associated with women's rights and women's movements across the world. The purpose of this paper is to clear the misconceptions about feminism in the third world countries by highlighting the major feminist movements in India. Firstly, it talks about the evolution of feminism in India and across the globe. It showcases the works of feminists like Mahatma Phule, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and talks about Brahminical feminism in India. It then draws attention to feminism after independence when 'The Committee for the Status of Women in India' was set up to review the status of women in the country. It also discusses different prominent movements which took place in India like the Shetkari movement, Chipko movement, Hindu Militant feminism, etc. and how some of those movements led to the enactment of new laws favoring women while how some proved negative for the cause of feminism. The paper concludes with an analysis on Indian feminism, for which different opportunities to overcome threats and weaknesses are discussed.

Keywords: feminism in India, evolution of feminism, movements in India, feminist ideology

Introduction

Feminism emanated in the Netherlands, Great Britain and United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was visible in India as well since the late nineteenth century. Before that, Indian women didn't have much independent role in the society, neither were their contributions recognized or given importance (M. E. John, 1996) (Krishna, 2007). Their activities were considered very private (Jayawardena, 1998) to the family with no interference of society or state. In the same manner, their problems were also considered private. But gradually, there was increased awareness amongst women which gave rise to feminist movements in India (Ravindran & Sundari, 1993).If any deeper analysis has to be done about the trends of feminism and the feminist movements prevailing in India, it is important to reflect for a moment and prepare a brief summary about the distinctness of feminist movement in general and Indian feminism in particular (Kishwar, 2001). The context of Third World feminism should be kept in mind while doing any such study.

There have been three significant misconceptions about feminism in the third world countries. The first misconception has been explained by Kumari Jayawardena (Jayawardena, 1998). It says that the orthodox leftists and political conservatives look upon feminism as a product of western capitalism and it has hardly any relevance for women in the third world countries. It also says that it is an ideology exclusively for the local materialistic women and it alienates traditional women from family responsibilities, culture and religion. Second misconception states that feminism alienates women from the revolutionary struggles of national liberation and socialism. There is a third misconception carried forward by western feminist scholars who view Indian women as a homogeneous category. They believe that Indian women are poor, uneducated, family oriented, sexually constrained, ignorant, tradition bound, victimized, etc. who live a truncated life (Vasavi & Kingfisher, 2003). This clearly imply a complete contrast portrayal to the western women who are seen as modern, educated and having a complete control over their decisions and sexualities. But in reality, this is not the full truth and different generalizations about women, whether belonging to a developed or a developing country, would be a gross mistake. To contradict this misconception, feminists like Gail Omvedt traced the feminist movements of 1970s where working and rural women were first trained for leadership roles. Hence, the specifics of time and space should be taken into consideration before

making any generalizations about feminism, women and feminist movements (Sinha, 2000). This paper tries to clarify the western misconceptions about feminism in the third world countries.

Methodology

The search for the articles included in the review was carried out first by employing keyword search with listed series of keywords and their combinations "feminism in India", "evolution of feminism", "waves of feminism" in Google Scholar. Secondly, another set of articles were chosen using the reverse search method in which relevant additional articles were included from the references of the articles selected in the first round. Articles were selected based on the number of citations received. The final sample included thirty articles from reputed journals and books.

Conceptualization

The term "feminisme" was first coined in 1837 by a French philosopher Charles Fourier (A. Rao, 2003). The ideology of modern feminism was developed in Europe and in the United states during 1960s and spread all over the world. Feminism in the United States developed along with ethnic and black movement studies. Modern feminism (Ghosal, 2005) as an ideology can be understood "as an effort to make women a self-conscious category, a force to generate a rational sensible attitude towards women, an approach to view the women in their own positions and an approach to view the women through their own perspectives". The first wave of feminism took place during the eighteenth and nineteenth century in Europe. It demanded equality, liberty and universal suffrage (Agnes, 1985). This ideology was on similar lines with the ideas of liberalism in Europe. The turning point of this feminist movement was publication of The vindication of the rights of women by Mary Wollstonecraft (Chatterjee, 1994).

Feminism is an ideology which seeks to end sexism of different forms. It calls for different social and political movements to establish justice for women and equality of the sexes. It focusses on removing gender stereotypes (Ghosal, 2005) and tries to establish equal educational and professional opportunities for both men and women. The objective of feminism is to bring societal changes with regards to women's rights. The feminist movements all over the world gave rise to a feminist theory which studies women's and men's social roles in different fields like philosophy, sociology, literature, education, anthropology etc. (M. Rao, 2001).

Evolution of Feminism in India

During the nineteenth century, the ideas of feminist reform movement began to spread in India since it was under the British influence. No education to girls, child marriage, Sati system, restrictions on widow remarriage etc. were some of the issues (Forbes, 1996) faced by Indian women during the pre-independence period. However, the feminist reforms in colonial India were limited in scope and approach since it focused on the Hindu upper caste of the society only. Only the colonial elite got the opportunity to experience colonial feminism. Hence, the social reform movements in colonial India brought positive changes in the gender relations in some upper caste families (Buch, 1999), while the lower caste women were deprived of their rights as the issues plaguing them were treated as group or community problems. This type of feminism in the colonial period was termed as "Brahiminical feminism" by scholars like Anupama Rao (A. Rao, 2003) (Ghosal, 2005). She questioned and debated about the practice of sati, widow remarriage and the right age for marriage which took care of the concerns of only the upper castes and their lives. This led to a slower and a quieter transformation of the domestic sphere, through women's education and the percolation of a new sensibility about women's duties and responsibilities. Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar (O'Hanlon, 1994) were the missionaries who worked towards the liberation of women in India but unfortunately their efforts remained confined to selected strata of society and couldn't reach the grassroots level.

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (Hensman, 2001) (O'Hanlon, 1994) was one of the first social reformer who understood women's caste issues and problems of upper caste widows. In 1848, he opened a school for untouchable girls and a home for upper caste widows, who were accused and punished for having illicit relations. Jyotirao Phule was pressured by the society for a second marriage since he didn't have children from his first wife. Instead of succumbing to societal pressure, he and his wife Savitribai Phule (Kishwar, 2001) took a revolutionary decision of adopting a baby born to a Brahmin widow. He believed that upper caste women had more burden to maintain caste purity. Therefore, the softer forms of oppression and gender discrimination faced by upper caste women were no less than manual and sexual labor faced by lower caste women (Ravindran & Sundari, 1993).

Tarabai Shinde, a social reformer and an activist at Mahatma Phule's Satyashodhak Samaj, wrote a revolutionary article "Stri Purush Tulana" in 1882 (O'Hanlon, 1994). The focus of the article was an upper caste widow convicted of infanticide. It was considered as the first feminist critiques of caste. She did not consider home and family as sacrosanct concepts. She demanded state intervention to enable women to live easily and marry independently, and to punish men who abused women's rights. Another feminist author Rosalind O'Hanlon stated that, "the wide range of ways in which she (Tarabai) herself describes and represents women, contrasting strongly with the impoverished stereotypes of contemporary masculine discourse, is the most striking aspect of her text. Her voice itself moves from urbane social commentary to the scathing female abuse of the market place, from mocking descriptions of men's sexual pretentions to the pleas of a pious wife for domestic harmony and companionship. It is clear then that she was not arguing from abstract or modern principles of rights or equality, except at the most common sense level. Nor, indeed does she draw at all on themes from devotional religion, through which as we saw, some women in precolonial society expressed their dissent from Brahminical religious culture. For her what seems to have mattered was not merely a religious milieu in which women can find acceptance as equals, but from much more concrete changes in the domestic and social circumstances of women" (O'Hanlon, 1994).

During the nineteenth century, a different concept of womanhood appeared which was responsible for the key political movements in the country. India's national identity was developing in this period. On this Uma Chakravarti wrote about how India's identity was shaped out of its culture and more importantly from its womanhood. Hence, the image of womanhood became more important than ever in the changed face of reality that came out of the changed political and social environment (Banerjee, 1998). She used the concept of 'the invention of tradition' coined by social scientist Eric Hobsbawm to describe the events of the nineteenth century. The context for this concept of womanhood at this time stemmed out of a past, constructed in a way to inculcate the compulsions of the present which determined the presence or absence of certain elements from historical and semi historical writings. The theme of this womanhood was based on the "Sahadharmini model". It incorporated spirituality along with "Gargi Maitreyi Sita Savitri model" as well as "Lakshmibai model" (Ghosal, 2005). Uma Chakravarti stated that nationalism had come to the same stature as was religion earlier. She believed it was important for women to be present in this sphere (M. Rao, 2001). This model

provided a common outlook towards womanhood by streamlining the differences of perceptions of the progressives and that of the conservatives. According to her, the concept of womanhood in all respects were similar in the twentieth as well as the nineteenth century. This womanhood showcased a different concept of morality and purity with regards to the upper caste society. It had a fragile feminism and moral vulnerability in it. In the words of Hanlon, these models "reinforced with Hinduized forms of veiling and outward modesty, were particularly important for emerging dominant peasant castes like Marathas, Jats and Rajputs in the later nineteenth century" (O'Hanlon, 1994). These upper class castes and middle class peasants were responsible for the generation of restrictions on women which can be seen even in the present day women's roles. It can be said that militant feminism started growing since this period. Therefore, a Rashtrasevika Samity (Ghosal, 2005) was formed in 1936 which was the mother wing of Hindu militant feminism to keep women tied to their family with a little spice and of excitement of getting a public identity.

During the late nineteenth century, women's issues on liberation and independence started to fade from the public agenda (Sheth & D.L., 1999). This happened because women were objectified for nationalist purposes i.e. feminist issues took a back seat in the nationalist agenda. A renowned scholar Partha Chatterjee spoke about the reasons for this secondary status given to feminist issues in his work "The Nation and his Women" (Chatterjee, 1994). He said that, "the reason lies in the inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state. This inner domain of national culture was constituted in the light of the discovery of tradition. By assuming a position of sympathy with the unfree and oppressed womanhood in India, the colonial mind (Krishna, 2007) was able to transform this figure of the Indian woman into a sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire cultural tradition of a country. The reason why the issue of female emancipation seems to disappear from the public agenda of nationalist agitation in the late nineteenth century is not because it was overtaken by the more emotive issues concerning political power. Rather, the reason lies in the refusal of nationalism to make the women's question an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state" (Chatterjee, 1994) . Uma Chakravarti explained it in simpler language that, "as women's issues were no longer compatible with more defied forms of Hindu tradition and Hindu womanhood since the 1890s we noted a disappearance of women's issues from the agenda of nationalist politics" (Chatterjee, 1994).

It can be understood that there was no clear nationalist solution to women's issues during the colonial period. There was just an attempt to create patriarchy with a compassionate appearance. Its span was very limited since it couldn't reach majority of the women and couldn't solve their everyday problems (M. E. John, 2002). It was neither meant to challenge the patriarchal addicts nor did it help in removing the discrimination against women. But at the same time, the period cannot be considered as a completely waste of time for the growth of feminist movements in the country. Many historical possibilities emerged during this time and strong women scholars like Kailashbasini, Rasasundari and Kundamala (Ghosal, 2005) expressed their views on feminism against the strong patriarchal control in the country.

Post-independence Feminism

After independence, though the Indian constitution prohibited inequality and discrimination towards women on grounds of gender, caste, religion, no genuine effort was seen highlighting feminist issues (A. Rao, 2003). For nearly three decades' post-independence, there was insensitivity and stillness towards women's causes. During the Nehruvian period, there was an expectation that secularism, democracy and egalitarianism will wipe out most of the social evils like discrimination against women, destructive patriarchy (Vasavi & Kingfisher, 2003) and religious fundamentalism. But, the feminist ideas started taking a new turn since the decade of the seventies with a focus of solving women's problems from the core. Various factors played a role in the development of feminism during that period. On this Neera Desai and Maithreyi Khrishnaraj stated that, women were looked upon as victims rather than participants in the process of development in the post-independence period. On the other hand, women's position deteriorated and they suffered in almost all spheres except some relief in education and employment for middle class women and this decline was visible in almost every aspect of life (Desai, 2001).

This situation drew special attention and along with recommendations from the United Nations, a Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) was set up in 1971 to review the status of women in India. The committee placed its report named "Towards Equality" in the parliament in 1973 which was published in 1974 (Ghosal, 2005). It affirmed that women of every class faced discrimination in their respective positions. This alarming report on sex

inequality was the turning point of feminist movements and thoughts in the country (Shah, Gothoskar, Gandhi, & Chhachhi, 1994). After 1975, a genuine change based on feminist ideas became visible in administration and in academics. Since this time, women's study provides a theoretical basis about the feminist movements and gender politics. Kumud Sharma, a feminist activist expressed her views as, "women are attempting to remove themselves from the footnotes and appendices of academic discourse to the main text. The emergence and growth of women's studies in India reflects women's conscious engagement in the politics of knowledge" (Sharma, 1989). She even stated that, "gender is useful to social scientists as an analytical category in the same way as caste, class and ethnicity. Attention to gender leads not only to an understanding of the multiple roles that women fill in society but also to an awareness of the social processes which constraint or enhance their potentialities; and it leads us to provide reasons for women's oppression and subordination in various systems and subsystems and to take note of women's responses to these systems" (Sharma, 1989).

Feminism and feminist movements were treated as a part of the democratic issue and human rights agenda (Buch, 1999). Progression of feminism in this period gave rise to a confusion about the problem of autonomy pertaining to both structural and ideological autonomy. Structural autonomy means feminist organizations and political parties both come together to solve feminist issues. While ideological autonomy has adopted a dual approach where it stresses on women's rights along with a focus on issues like security, health, nutrition, equality, mortality and empowerment (Banerjee, 1998). To support this cause, many NGOs and feminist organizations came forward and started to critique government and political parties. These feminist groups learnt the language of radical feminism. At the same time, these feminist organizations were also affected by different ecological and socio economic factors. Hence, feminist groups started participating in tribal women's movements, backward class and peasants' movements, ethnic and ecological movements etc. It can therefore be inferred that, from this period onwards feminist movements were combined with other social movements and were looked upon from a broader view (Hills & Silverman, 1993). During the 1970s and 1980s, great enthusiasm was seen in the feminist movements. To support this, almost all political parties created a special women's wing in their organizations. But in reality, these parties attach least importance to women's issues.

During the 1980s, different forms of violence against women gained attention and became a part of the feminist movement (Sheth & D.L., 1999). Other than state and NGOs, many voluntary organizations also came forward for the issue of violence. Sharad Joshi started the Shetkari sangathan movement for this purpose since he believed that violence is the major factor for women's issues. This sangathan organized one of the largest gatherings of peasant women in the country. Along with its main aim of balanced village centric growth and decentralization (M. Rao, 2001), its focus was also on women's issues. They created Shetkari Mohila Agadhi, women's wing of the Shetkari sangathan (M. John, 1993). In 1989, this Shetkari Mohila Agadhi took steps for the closure of village liquor shops, they spread awareness for property rights of women. They even had campaigns for safe motherhood, pure drinking water, uniform civil code, justice for rape victims, women's entry into panchayat raj etc. Gail Omvedt stated that, "in orienting women's struggles on the issue of political power and in arguing not merely for participation but even the leadership of women in general revolutionary movement, Sharad Joshi has articulated the needs and force of the awakening rural women" (Krishna, 2007). Similar to other feminists, Sharad Joshi also stated that there should be complete autonomy to a women's organization and it should count all Indian women.

At this time the feminist movements achieved great political importance while the state also passed new laws and framed rules for the protection of women's rights. But Flavia Agnes stated that, if injustice and abuse against women could be solved by passing laws, then the period of 1980s would be known as the golden era for women in India (Agnes, 1985). During this time, multiple protective laws were passed to end oppression against women, its frequency was such that any new campaign would lead to a new legislation. But in reality, the law does not understand women's issues and most of the times the loopholes in law overpowers the objective. Best example would be "The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act" (Ghosal, 2005) which was passed in 1986. It denied maintenance to Muslim women after divorce. This was a big compromise of the state on women's issues during that time. Another example would be the murder of eighteen - year - old Roop Kanwar in 1987. It was a public sati performed in Deorala, Rajasthan. The government passed "The Sati Prevention Act, 1988" after the incident. Back in 1829, a regulation to abolish sati was already passed but sati crimes were reported and no serious steps were taken by the government. Hence, the government had to again pass the Act in 1988. Scholars like Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanta stated that it was not the lack of laws but

the lack of will that failed to intervene into women's issues. At the same time Flavia Agnes believed that, "the issue of a secular non-sexist civil code has been consistently pushed under the carpet and even when it does come up, in the present political context, it may well be more anti-minority than pro-women"(Agnes, 1985)

Different forms of Feminism

Ecofeminism

The chipko movement which took place during the 1970s and 1980s gathered wide attention world over as the most successful grassroots activism. It happened in North India and was a major environmental and social movement (Mies & Shiva, 1993). It marked a trend of ecofeminism in India. On this, activists Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva said, "it is a women identified movement and we believe we have a special work to do in these imperiled times. We believe that the devastation of earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors are feminist concerns. It is the masculinist mentality depending upon the multiple systems of dominance and state power which denies women's right to their own bodies and own sexuality" (Mies & Shiva, 1993). Hence, it can be said that ecofeminism focuses on women-nature connection. This ecofeminist school of thought treats rural women as embedded in nature and therefore considers them as active participants of development. It considers women as the keepers of divine feminine energy of the cosmos. Prakriti (women) are regarded as nurturers of harmony and diversity of natural forests as a life source. It also states that it is the responsibility of women to restore nature from the destruction done by men and industries. To this Shiva stated that the beginning of commercialization leads to the death of nature, which for the women is also a start of their disintegration, devastation, devaluation and disruption. She stressed that this death is triggered by the arrival of industrialist and masculinist forces of western culture. Hence, the dual aim of ecofeminism is protection of nature from constant exploitation and liberation of women from unending marginalization. Ecofeminism is gaining importance in India due to the growth of globalization and liberalization at a quick pace. A lot of women and feminist groups are subscribing to this ideology since women are the greatest sufferers of globalization, industrialization and liberalization. The forces of industrial modernization are affecting the economic, physical, social and psychological

conditions of women in a negative way. Hence, the resistance to this discrimination and suppression should also originate from feminism itself. It can be said that ecofeminism merges nature and feminist movement with democracy, social justice and reforms in agriculture (Mies & Shiva, 1993).

Militant Feminism

During the 1990s, a different kind of feminism based on religious sentiments caused stress to the women in the country as well as raised feminist concerns (Ghosal, 2005). These feminist groups known as the Hindutvavadi militant feminists get inspired by the concepts of Bharatmata (mother nation), veerangna, Lakshmi and apply their modern forms (Hills & Silverman, 1993). The Mohila Aghadi of Shiv Sena, the Durga Vahini of Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Rashtrasevika Samiti of RSS were the leading groups which gave rise to Hindutvavadi militant feminists. They played a major role in the destruction of feminist ideals and dilution of women's liberation efforts. This trend has shown major growth since the 1992 – 1993 Surat and Bombay riots to Gujarat bloodshed of 2002. These group of women stood in defense of their husbands (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994) who were found guilty of riots, illegal possession of arms, murder and rape of women belonging to other community. They have also attacked people of minority community on various occasions. On this Teesta Setalvad stated that, "the rumor and whisper campaigns undertaken by these women's groups take on a positively Machiavellian role. In the first stages they succeed in spreading fear and insecurity among a given community, giving credence to fantastic tales of impeding dangers and attack. The resulting paranoia, fueled by gory tales of blood and revenge caused by the enemy are precondition enough to justify violent blood-letting from their side" (Desai, 2001).

The approach towards emancipation challenges women's status in the family and in the society. This feminist ideology towards liberation and independence of women pushes them to ask questions on uncomfortable issues and to take risks (Vasavi & Kingfisher, 2003). However, the Hindutva ideology stresses on women's short term issues. Also, the fundamentalist organizations are creating a feminist space by borrowing some concepts of western radical feminism in an inappropriate way to achieve their goals of fundamentalism (Bhatt, 1998). A suitable example would be that radical feminists consider all men as potential rapists whereas

fundamentalist feminists consider all men belonging to other religious communities as potential rapists. Indian tradition restricts public discussion on sexuality while the fundamentalist ideology tries to create fundamentalist feminism by highlighting sexuality as a threatened idea and putting it opposite to male sexuality of other community (Rustagi, 2000). After providing a strong defense for Hindu tradition, this fundamentalist ideology sometimes deals with common issues like rape and dowry deaths and tries to attract more attention of Hindu women towards it. Tanika Sarkar stated that the main aim of rightist women's organizations is "to obliterate the notion of selfhood, to ease concern with social and gender justice and to situate the public, political, extra domestic identity on authoritarian community commands and a totalitarian model of individual existence, every particle of which is derived from an all-male organization which not only teaches her about politics but also about religion, human relationships and child rearing" (A. Rao, 2003). It can therefore be inferred that this new type of feminism inspires women to be a self-constituted political subject which is dangerous and which has an adverse effect on the feminist ideology as well as on the feminist movement. However, if analyzed deeper, it can be understood that this is nothing but an attempt by the patriarchy in the direction of finding new ways and means of domination (Shah et al., 1994).

Other Feminist Movements

There are a variety of other forms of feminism and feminist movements which took place in different parts of the country along with some major movements highlighted in this review. Most of the times, specific feminist issues are taken into consideration as they are while other times they are clubbed with general social issues (Buch, 1999). Sometimes feminism has created true liberation for women from the strong clutches of patriarchy while on the other hand it occasionally turns its attention to economic, social, political or cultural issues. And sometimes an orthodox rightist philosophy (M. E. John, 2002) in feminism is developed and western influence is discarded in the name of preserving the culture and heritage of the country. Despite of all these struggles, there have been some pure feminist movements that took place across the country like the Sathin movement in Rajasthan by women for prohibition of child marriage, or the movement by women of Andhra Pradesh highlighting the growing alcoholism and drug use by their husbands, or the movement by Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtrian women against eviction during the Narmada Bachao andolan (Hensman, 2001). Some other movements were campaign

for drinking water highlighting and opposing privatization of water, or compensation restoration campaign for Bhopal gas tragedy victims, or various anti-price rise movements across the country. For economic upliftment of women, there has been an establishment of Kudumbashree in Kerala while another best example that proved the strength of entrepreneurial drive and competence of rural women is the 100% women-owned microfinance institution (Gramin Bank) created by following the ideas of Nobel Laureate Prof. Mohammad Yunus. There were also movements by Indian North Eastern women against militarization and drug use. Another campaign for the prohibition of sex determination tests has led to significant changes in the Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994 without compromising on women's right to abortion (Mukherjee, 2002). Apart from these, there are different autonomous feminist groups across the country fighting for women's rights against domestic violence, or against violence at work place, or for women's rights over land and property, etc. (M. E. John, 1996).

SWOT analysis on Indian Feminism

Looking at the trends of feminist movements, a SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities, threats) analysis can be made on Indian feminism (Ghosal, 2005). Wide and multi-dimensional platform is the strength of the feminist movements. Along with it, increasing involvement of Indian feminist groups with different socio economic issues and causes is enriching the movement. But, wide diversities make it difficult to establish a strong institutional basis. Also, there are other weaknesses like poor level of literacy and strong economic dependence of the females on age old patriarchal systems and traditions (Qadeer, 1998). It therefore becomes very difficult to generate awareness among women with is a necessary prerequisite for the development of feminism and for the spread of feminist ideology. The threats to Indian feminism are the divertive elements which oppose the spread of awareness about women's rights in the name of preserving religious and caste identities. On this, Gabriele Dietrich says, "the two major challenges in front of us seem to be the organizational question and the question of inventing a comprehensively non-violent lifestyle, in the face of globalization as an external onslaught and communalization of politics as the internal onslaught. The problem is that destruction is so much faster than constructive work" (Krishna, 2007). Despite of all these, there are enormous opportunities for Indian feminism to overcome its threats and weaknesses. It should also be remembered that women are not a homogenous category, but are different and

distributed across different sectors in India. Some of the opportunities are separation of religion from state and politics, check forces promoting militarization, preservation of Indian pluralist culture, redefine security in more humane terms, opposition of laws and practices that strengthen patriarchy, etc. (Sinha, 2000).

Conclusion

From different literature on trends of feminism in India, it is seen that contemporary feminist movements happened during the 1970s and 1980s. At that time numerous autonomous feminist groups emerged and raised their voice against sex discrimination (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994). They fought in a dispersed manner without any government support. Since India is a class based multi-cultural society, women here cannot be treated as a homogeneous category. Hence, the political ideology and movements seen here were more leftist than liberal. This led to an atmosphere of cultural radicalism. The first step towards this movement was to break silence and to expose the types of humiliations and atrocities (Sinha, 2000) which women face in their daily lives. Slowly, this movement started criticizing the government, society and family for not taking adequate steps for protection of women's rights. The feminist agenda includes dowry, murder, gendered violence, rape and other forms of public and domestic violence. However, since 1990s, the increased participation of women in right wing movement has been confusing and manipulating the issues of contemporary feminism. On this, Geraldine Forbes said that this had dulled the feminist movements which were extremely encouraging and positive in the 1980s (Forbes, 1996). On the other hand, women have started participating in other parallel movements and causes as well like environmental movement, human rights movement, etc. which has also played a role in diluting the pure feminist causes to some extent. While looking at the second decade of the twenty first century, it can still be said that feminism in India has a long way to go for attaining gender sensitization and gender equality. Agreeing with the lines said by Forbes, who thinks that there is "now a complicated mix of women playing public roles – leftist women, moderates, conservatives, right wing women – all appropriating the trappings of feminism but without commitment to a vision of gender justice and human rights voiced by the authors of Towards Equality" (Forbes, 1996).

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