

Philosophy of Feminism inculcated among working women

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Abstract

Feminism philosophy speaks about gender equality. This qualitative study explored how feminism as a philosophy is inculcated among workingwomen. In the first stage working women of University of Education Jauharabad Campus, University of Sargodha and District Head Quarter Hospital Khushab were selected purposively and in the second stage ten, ten female faculty members each from University of Education Jauharabad Campus and University of Sargodha and ten nurses of District Headquarter Hospital were selected conveniently. A total sample of thirty working women from universities and nurses was taken. Focus group discussion was conducted for data collection. For data analysis, thematic analysis was done. Major research findings were that women liked their identification as feminist. Feminism philosophy has developed gender equality among men and women and it also has empowered women to some extent. Based upon findings of this study, it is suggested that women should be given due freedom for making choices and decisions in a developing country like Pakistan.

Key words: Feminism, Gender equality, Empowerment, Freedom of choice.

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Introduction

Women had to face lot of problems, issues and obstacles to become a useful member of the society. If we review the history we come to know that female was denied of all types of rights, she was left alone, ignored and mistreated by men. With the introduction of feminism the scenario has totally changed. Instead of a puppet in the hands of men, now she is becoming a president, artist and teacher etc. A feminist point of view recognizes a social hierarchy between women and men. This inequality is attributed to the social system known as patriarchy, in which women are exploited and oppressed (Walby, 1989). In Pakistan, the society is patriarchal in nature which states the lack of social power that directs to the subordination and oppression of women. There are various types of feminism (radical, socialist, liberal) which are varying from each other in their specific goals. The major objective of feminist movement is achieving the social dominance of females and to encourage gender equality in economic, social and political arenas. This study was conducted to assess philosophy of feminism inculcated among working women and how much awareness is developed among them about different aspects of feminism philosophy. Rest of the study is organized as section 2 gives objectives of the study. Section 3 is about literature review. Research design is in section 4. Data analysis and findings are given in section 5 and 6 respectively.

Objectives of the study

Following are objectives of this study

1. To investigate working women's perception about feminism.
2. To evaluate to what extent feminism philosophy has given empowerment, equality and freedom of choice to working women.

Literature Review

Feminism is a global phenomenon which is now becoming popular all over the world, resulting in gender equality in terms of economics social and political areas. In USA the word "feminist" got popularity in 1910 but there existed no precise definition of the term feminist even among those who label themselves as supporter of feminism. (Hooks, 1984) describes its reason and says that this is due to lack of consensus on agreed upon definition of feminism. (Richards and Baumgardner, 2000) included all those men and women in category of feminist who are politically and socially conscious and who work towards equality. Some researchers add another element in the their definition of feminist and named it as "action component" which means a person who works for gender equality and the term feminism is used for those men and women who work for a committed action on behalf of women. Feminists work for eliminating obstructions to equal economic, social and political opportunities for female and object to the idea that a women's value is mainly determined by her gender and that women are inherently inferior, subservient or less intelligent than men.

First time the terminology of feminism was used in France in 1880s by Hunburtine Auclert in her Journal *La Citoyenne* as *La Féminité* in which she criticized the male supremacy and made claims for women's rights (Ghorfati & Medini, 2014). Different researchers defined the term feminism in different ways. In English history feminism is interconnected with women's activism from late 19th century to present. In United States of America and Europe this term was used in the context of political historical movements while some others used it as a belief that women are facing inequality in their lives with no rights and disparities. (Ghorfati & Medini, 2014) clarified this concept and said "Women need feminism because there are women who suffer injustice". (Freedman, 2002) described that "feminism is a belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth". (Hooks, 1984) defined it as "a movement to end sexist oppression". So feminism is a philosophy which demands gender equality in cultural, social and economic fields. The objective of feminism is to make changes to happen in society so that equal opportunities can be provided and gender disparities can be eliminated.

History of feminism can be divided into three waves. (Knapp & Ogunbanjo, 2014) discussed in their article about these waves and stated that the first feminist wave between 1870 and 1920s is termed as women political reform movement which focused on obtaining the right for woman to vote and getting the status of complete citizens. In World War I, women were asked to perform traditional male

role due to the insufficiency of male workers. During 1918 in Britain an act was passed to grant the women with right of voting. In 1893 New Zealand was the first self-governing country which gave the right to women over the age of 21 years to vote in parliamentary elections.

The second wave ranges from mid 1960s to late 1970s. It is termed as women liberation movement and is linked with radical feminism. Radical feminists believe in woman's total freedom and they think that male-based power and authority leads to oppression and inequality in society (Ghorfati & Medini, 2014). A French philosopher (Sex, 1949) & Simone de Beauvoir gave argumentations about woman as "wombs" and said that a female's life is defined in terms of her "biological fate". Beauvoir insisted that women's needs are no more linked with their body than men are. In the dialectic of sex, a famous leader Shulamith Firestone favored her view. She gave logical arguments that artificial reproduction would permit female to prevail over the suppressed social position which is a direct consequence of their biology. This second wave was mainly about equality in workforce and giving freedom to women about their bodies. During this second wave awareness about sexual harassment and domestic violence was also raised by women (Dicker, 2008).

Third feminist wave started in early 1990s. The symbol of this wave is Rebecca Walker who used this third wave feminism in 1992 in response to second

wave ideas and activities such as in sex work, prostitutions and pornography. The leaders of this wave disseminated their views about feminism by using technology like radio, television, magazines and internet. The members of this group worked on internet and removed stereotypical and typical pictures of women by deleting ideas like sexist language unfair terms used for girls and woman. They worked on making the feminist theories successful and effective. Third wave of feminism focused on the threats to women's equality including violent attacks on clinics providing abortion services and other issues related to domestic and sexual violence. Furthermore this wave is more comprehensive, identifying people's multiple identities (Dicker, 2008).

Liberal feminism provides freedom to women regarding her social role. This type of feminism has helped to remove patriarchal laws that denied women's civil rights. It puts emphasis on equality of women before law, in professional and educational opportunities, property rights, modification in marriage laws, equal pay for equal work, and freedom from all dehumanizing forces. Radical feminism rejects liberal point of view that lack of political and civil rights leads to women's suppression. It claims that women's oppression is biological so there is a need for biological revolution. Social feminism which is termed as Materialist feminism demands for an end to capitalist system through a socialist reform of economy. Muslim feminism offers significant rights to women that are broader than those

rights given by secular legal system. Many Muslims mistrust the concept of feminism as they observe the feminist emphasis on equality of rights as it odds with the Islamic ideology of complementarily of the sexes and the specific roles developed for women and men, which they think reflect their specific strengths and weaknesses (Afshar, 1997). In contrast to secular feminists, Muslim feminists provide women's place and rights within Islamic framework. They support this argument by saying that Islam has delivered women from being perceived and treated as commodities. Within this account, western women are utilized as cheap labor, suppressed as sex objects and deprived of their femininity. Muslim women has not double burden of equality: work and home which has been counterproductive (Treacher, 2003). Patriarchic laws that are oppressing women are now being challenged by Muslim feminists. Islamic scholars are speaking about rights of women based on Islamic laws and developing awareness among Muslim women to work for their rights (Chaudhary, 2014).

Feminist theory has been developed over time and now in it contains many theories pertaining to women studies (Smith, 2013). (Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2010) defined feminist theory and said "feminist theory is a writing which tries to elaborate , analyze and state the conditions of women's lives...the main issue that has concerned feminist theory is, depending on conditions one prefers, women's inequality, subordination and dominance of men". The reason for all these is the

issue gender irregularity, the designation of women and things associated with women as different from, inferior to men and things associated with men.

It is a well-known fact that people are treated differently on the basis of their gender. Gender also plays significant role in selecting careers. A study consisting of 65 participants explored personal goals and career interests and found that women's goals were more consistent with care giving and men's goal with status which made prediction about career interests associated with gender stereotypes. In spite of feminist revolution, women in all over the world are suffering violence and injustice as compared to men. Women make two-thirds of the world's working class, but they get only one-tenth of the world's income and own one hundredth of the world's property (William, Elanie, 1991). Women doing jobs in factories, shops, domestic services, sex industries, not out of desire but out of need and lack of meaningful choices, in patriarchal societies that not only bound of their options but depriving them of educational chances to qualify for better paying jobs (Sharp & Gregory, 2009). Feminist movement has made many strides for gender equality, yet many women are reluctant to identify themselves as feminist. Mostly all the studies conducted on self-identification found that majority of participant did not identify themselves as feminist (Diekmann, 2015).

Basic aspect of human development is women's empowerment and gender equality. Statistical data of a report published by United Nation Development

program (2016) shows that half population of the world is not enjoying human development, so such development is not worldwide. A study conducted by (Corbett & Hill, 2012) shows that women are not well represented in higher paying professions especially in the field of technology, mathematics, science and engineering. In America a recent census confirmed that at each educational level men are highly paid than women (Ewert, 2012). Mostly people think that gender equality at all levels is significant. In 1996 a poll was conducted in which 59% male and 66% female responded that they have belief in gender equality (Huddy, Neely & LaFay, 2000). In some countries like USA women face employment discrimination and earn unequal pay and encounter harassment in work place (Diekmann, 2015). Research conducted on women and gender studies courses have shown rise in various types of self-efficacy variables (like empowerment, self-esteem, an intension to engage in feminist activism) during the whole semester. Self-identification can also be developed via personal contact with feminist ideals through friends or family members who identify as feminist. Women whose self-identification is as a feminist may have experienced sexism or they have been exposed to gender biases in others (Nelson et.al, 2008). Personal identity of every person is influenced by many factors of their environment (Wilson & Akert, 2007) and these factors are important to consider when examining women's decisions of feminist self-identity. Qualitative researches permit researchers to assess the

contextual and dynamic aspects of every woman's unique life experiences, giving a valuable tool to assess the feminist identity (Angelone, Wirsky, 2015). Women are facing sexual harassment which is affecting their work satisfaction and hindering their opportunities for progress. A recent study was conducted by (Watkins et al., 2006) to observe that how modern sexism might impact progression in one's career. This study revealed that genders matters in career development and promotion and found that men enjoyed greater outcomes in career promotion. Another study also confirmed that women earn less as compared to men across global the world (Bradshaw, Castellino & Diop, 2013). In short from gender wage gap to outright gender-based harassment, sexism exists in and outside the workplace. In Pakistan the unemployment rate for every age group of women is high (2008). Sexism may be in different forms and it can include disparities at the institutional level in the form of unfair policies to discriminatory stereotypes regarding behavior that is deemed on gender to other unconscious actions that are sexist (Cudd & Jones, 2005). To summarize, from the gender wage gap to outright gender-based harassment, sexism is still present in and outside the workplace. A study conducted in Pakistan concluded that there exist gender biases and human rights violation against Pakistani women. Women have to face many restrictions and limitation of independency. Yet higher education level both for men and women is a change

agent for this inequality. Another factor that plays important role in women empowerment in Pakistan is media (Tazeen et al., 2011)

In Pakistan gender roles are promoted by traditional roots and social values, mainly based on the concepts of reproduction and production, taken to mirror masculine and feminine traits of an individual. In Pakistan more than 50% female have lack of basic education, 30% lower level of earning but most of the women in Pakistan are restricted to homes and domestic affairs and are excluded from decision making (NIPS, 2008). Since in Pakistan a small number of women are in working filed yet they are now being developed and performing in different professions and awareness is also being promoted among them about their feminist role, empowerment and liberation and in choice of freedom.

Research Design

Qualitative methodology was used in this study. All working women of district Khushab were the population for this research study. For sampling purpose, at first stage working women of university of Education Jauharabad campus, University of Sargodha and nurses working in District Headquarter Hospital Jauharabad were selected purposively. At the second stage 10, 10 female teachers each from University of Education, University of Sargodha and 10 nurses of DHQ hospital were selected conveniently. A total sample of thirty women was taken. The

tool used for data collection was Focus Group Discussion (FGD). This focus group discussion was conducted on following five themes:

1. Identification as feminist
2. Gender equality
3. Equality in context of gender differences
4. Empowerment and liberation
5. Freedom of choice

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was done. In response to first question that “would you consider yourself as a feminist? (Identification as feminist).

Fifteen out of twenty working women liked to describe themselves as a feminist. Some responses were “definitely I am a feminist”, “I consider myself as a feminist and I want to strive for gender equality” etc. The women who disagreed with this statement were considered as “non-feminist”, one participant said, “No, I don’t like to be identified as a feminist but as a human”. One participant of nursing profession said that’ no I don’t like feminism philosophy as it is against Muslim feminism”. Another participant from nursing field said that “what is feminism? I don’t know about it. It is meaningless in our society. Researcher considers that the reason for lack of variation in responses may be due to the information provided by researcher to the participants that this study is about feminism philosophy

developed among working women, the researcher thinks that there would have had great variation in responses if the researcher had said that this was a study about “gender”, “equality”, “women”.

Second question was about the theme of “gender equality”, the question was “you are paid equally for your services to men” in other words “do you think feminism philosophy have developed in you the general desire for gender equality?” Twenty five respondents said that of course it has developed awareness among working women for gender equality. One participant said that both women and men should have same opportunities and on one should be treated differently on the basis of gender yet they had complaint about presence of gender disparity in domestic affairs. Another participant said that equality should be in social context, legal issues, economic benefits and decision making process. Taken together mostly responses were general consisting the belief that feminism philosophy has developed awareness among working women about gender equality.

Third question was about “equality in context of gender differences”. Working women were asked that you think that in your profession you observe gender equality keeping in view that man and women are biologically different? The responses of ten participants indicated that women are identified as feminist and embrace gender equality; they said that they have also developed awareness about the natural and biological differences between men and women. Yet twenty

respondents said in professions like teaching and nursing they are not treated equally in view of these biological differences. One participant said that she believes in equal pay, equal rights and equally freedom. But she also believes in recognizing differences: feminism is not the perception to consider women like men but it is about femininity.

Fourth theme was about “empowerment and liberation”. Participants were asked that “feminist approach is a source of empowerment and liberation? Out of thirty, twenty participants disagreed with the opinion that feminist approach had led to empowerment and liberation. Respondents from nursing filed negated it and said they don’t think that feminism has given them empowerment. One nurse told that they are still oppressed by colleagues and some time by patients especially in the form of sexual harassment. One teacher said that” I believe women have the power to do whatever is in their hearts; yet , I still believe that gender discrimination exists there and well in our society and most of us are unaware about it. Another teacher said that feminism gives empowerment yet she said that liberation is not linked with feminism she said that liberation is restrained with culture.

Last of theme was about “freedom of choice” What did you think that feminism philosophy has led to freedom of choice? Out of thirty, fifteen respondents agreed with the opinion and rest of the participants disagreed with it.

The participants who were in the favor of statement said that “if a women want to be a successful businessman, doctor, teacher or a lawyer, she should have the right in selection of profession”. They said that decisions regarding study and selection of profession or filed are not imposed on them. Yet the women who disagreed with the statement said: No they don’t have any freedom and independency. One participant said that feminism is the matter of concern for urban people. It has no work to do in rural areas. Moreover she said in rural areas if parents give freedom in decision making process, resistance from society forces the parents to restrict their children to follow their decisions.

Findings and Conclusion

The current literature shows that feminism philosophy is being developed among women especially working women. Female like to describe themselves as feminist and interestingly, the overall rate of feminist self-identity in the current study is quite high. It was concluded that feminism philosophy has developed awareness among working women about gender equality, yet this equality is to be enforced in wages, social status, legal issues and decision making process. It was also observed that female in their profession like teaching and nursing are not treated equally considering the biological differences between men and women. Similarly about the theme “empowerment and liberation, majority of respondents especially from nursing field negated the idea that “feminist approach is a source of

empowerment and liberation”. The responses to the ‘freedom of choice’ theme bring to light the social pressure on women to adhere to traditional gender roles and the use of feminism as a tool to break free of these bonds. It was concluded that mostly society is a resistance in freedom of choice.

The current data suggest that there are several potential avenues that the feminist philosophy needs to be embedded more rigorously among women for equality, justice and empowerment. This study represents an attempt to qualitatively examine the feminism philosophy inculcated among working women. Many factors are identified that are hindrances in inculcating feminism perspectives among working women like sexual harassment, no equality on the basis of biological differences, lack of freedom in decision making process and fair empowerment and liberation. So in order to achieve the goals of feminism there is a need to work on emergency basis to develop awareness among working women of all profession about feminism philosophy.

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