

Feminism is an ideology which believes that women are equal to men in many respects. It aims to give equal rights to women economically, politically and socially.

### **Features of feminist movement**

- feminism began in 20<sup>th</sup> century in the struggle for the political rights of women. Feminism tries to achieve greater freedom for women to work & remain economically, psychologically independent.
- Feminism criticizes patriarchy and helps to make visible the contribution of women to production and reproduction in society. It organizes the struggle against existing biases and prejudices of society in order to raise the status of women.
- **Gerda** Learner defines feminism as a difference between women rights and emancipation. It means a broader struggle of freedom for women to make their own decisions concerning their bodies, financial independence, freedom to choose one's life and sexual choices.
- For **Gail Omvedt**, feminism means the linking up individual freedom to social movements i.e. the women's movement should not only be a movement of women, run by women but also be a part of the large social movement, for liberation from all types of oppression.

Feminism has taken different forms .i.e. Radical, liberal, socialist, Marxist, gandhian, Black feminism and third world feminism. The concept of women as a common category is now replaced with the concept of difference by drawing attention to the diversity of women's social and political reality, race, caste, class and ethnic issues.

# LIBERAL FEMINISM

- Liberal feminism is associated with equal rights and equal opportunities.

## Features

- They place great emphasis on the rights of individuals to compete in the public sphere and also on what they see as corresponding responsibilities of individuals to take part in public life.
- They emphasise that women's unequal position is a result of artificial barriers to women's full participation in the public sphere and hence inability to fulfil their potential as human beings (as men's equal).
- One of the key political goals associated with liberal feminism is equality of opportunity.
- Public citizenship and attainment of equality with men in the public sphere is central to this approach.
- Recognising that mere formal equality is not enough they advocate the passing of laws to outlaw discrimination against women and give them equal rights.
- Liberal or reformist feminists have been concerned to demonstrate that the observable difference between sexes is not biological but a result of socialisation or sex role conditioning.
- Women's subordination is not due to structure and institution of the society but the culture and attitude that is responsible for inequality.
- The creation of equal opportunities particularly in education and work is the main aim of liberal feminist.
- They do not want revolutionary changes but want reforms in society in the existing social structure.

## CRITIQUE:

- They accept male culture as superior to female culture. This is seen when they say that women can become like men and should aspire to obtain masculine traits.
- They did not question gender based division of labour in the family and advocated fulfillment of human potential for women through domestic roles.
- Black feminists have criticized Betty Freidan saying that her views refer to the upper class and highly educated women, who are bored in the home and want to go out.
- They don't question capitalism and did not see the link between women's oppression, traditional gender based division of labour and capitalism. They are reformists as they believe that demanding women's rights will improve their position in society without making any attempt at radically restructuring it.
- They stress on individual freedom. This prevents women from coming together as a group. This trend does not attack the capitalist system but believes that women can achieve liberty, equality, fraternity, freedom etc, through legal reforms. Thus they are reformist.
- They don't deal with the root cause of gender inequalities and the inter-relations between its different forms.