

Feminism: Manifestation of Power in Colonial Context

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Abstract. Feminism had emerged in Western ideological context as a bringer of women rights globally; however, different socio-cultural scenarios and the advent of post-colonial theory didn't allow feminism to materialize itself as a homogenous thought for *all the women*. Colonial world does not share the same cultural and ideological development with West; this is why in colonial world, particularly in colonial Asia, we observe Western feminism facing difficulty in implementing itself. Hence, in colonial context introduction of feminism raises two questions. That how feminism was introduced in the colonial world and in what forms it became conspicuous? Therefore, the aim of the article is to analyze the interrelation between colonialism and feminism and the reasons because of which colonialism demanded feminism to flourish onto the surface of history of colonial world. This discussion will further bring the possibility of Western feminism as a universal concept in colonial context into question. To discuss the situation of colonial context Frantz Fanon's concept of colonialism has been focused and to find the relationship between feminism and colonialism as a link between the West/colonizers and the east/colonized Foucault's concept of power is taken up as a conceptual model.

Keywords: Feminism, Colonialism, Power, Post-colonial theory, History, Frantz Fanon, Foucault M.

1. Introduction

This article will deal with the feminism in Asian colonial context through the lens of history. The purpose of the paper is to know how and why feminism has been introduced in the colonial world; for which Frantz Fanon is studied to analyze colonialism and Foucault to elaborate the concept of power. This article though will not directly question whether feminism as a western form is applicable on the colonial society or not, however, it will at the end by implication question the universality of the principles of feminism. The purpose of this article is not to know why women of the colonial world are not emancipated or what problems feminism is facing in the colonial world; rather it is to know the genealogical development of feminism in the colonial world.

2. Feminism in the colonial context:

Feminism has emerged not only as a philosophical ideology but also as a moral theory; as it involves the concept of rights of women on the platform of human ontology. Simultaneously, it is also a political movement because it talks about the question of power. If we analyze the western culture, feminism as a political movement and ideological thought materialized itself as a response to the modern philosophical thought which despite its claim to emancipate human beings ignored women of this emancipation. On the contrary, Asian world; specifically the colonial nations, did not go through the process of modernization because of its different historical lineage from the west; so feminism as a principle of women rights could not be hovered on the platform of women rights. Hence, it is important to know that what movement and which ideology are responsible for the introduction of feminism; in the colonial world of Asia generally? If the link between the colonialism and feminism as its derivative gets established, the second question arises that in what form feminism has surfaced as a discourse in the colonial Asian world?

2.1. Feminism as a manifestation of colonialism:

The fact that every human being demands the freedom and self expression is beyond doubt. However, when we talk about women, the yardstick to measure the freedom and equality for them, in the form of Western feminism, can be questioned and examined in colonial feminine context. As we have seen that feminism as thought is indigenous to the western world; yet we find its inscription on the eastern colonial world. The important reason is colonial states have the ideological imprints of the western mother states even

after the decolonization, if we analyze decolonization through the lens of Frantz Fanon. This is because the era of colonization is itself responsible for the introduction as well as implementation of the colonizer concepts. The whole colonial history and our affiliation with the colonial ideas after the decolonization has not been able to let us think independently and indigenously; we always tend to import the solutions for our local problems (Fanon,) without realizing that our cultural, social and anthropological development is different from that of western world; hence, our problems as well as their solutions are also dissimilar.

Construction of the personality of any human being is dependent upon its sociological, cultural and religious ideas, as together these ideologies form the identity of any human being. This is why; formation of the western women is different from the creation of the eastern women. Therefore, our women rights and concepts of equality should differ from the western concepts. Question arises since when have we started borrowing the feminist ideas from the west. The answer is colonialism introduced it to the educated women of the colonial world which can be proved by various arguments. Firstly, Western women in the imperial world constructed their character different from the disposition they had in their nation-land. As an imperial woman, western women posed themselves more like a man than woman. In colonial world- she was a colonizer, therefore, racial difference was more conspicuous and prized as compared to the *feminine fraternity* in her attitude (Gosh, 2004). Hence, this attitude resulted in suppression of colonial women. She came forward as an emancipated being which native elite women idealized. As Frantz Fanon (1963) justifies in his book *The Wretched of the World* that the colonized local elite and the intellectuals opted for imitating the character of colonizer in order to occupy their position after decolonization. Hence, they will act as bridge between the mother country and the newly born decolonized state. Turning to the issue of women; native women got inspiration from the western women which could be done by following the western feminist thought. In other words, by locating their positions equal to the colonial men the way western women were positioning themselves identical with colonizer men.

Secondly; the western feminine comportment towards the local men was structured on the racial and gender difference resulting in the elevated impression of the western man as a civilized human being as compared to the native man (Hassan 2005, p.35). Consequentially, the abhorred existence of colonial men by western women was also detested by native women because of their imitating behavior.

Thirdly, the concept of feminism was already in the minds of western women to which they revered a lot for their emancipated existence. The colonial world presented itself like a lab to them for the experimentation of their feministic ideas. In colonial world the western women exposed their abilities of performing role equal to the western men and showed their mental/ intellectual capacity of exploiting and racial control exactly the manner it was shown by their counterparts((Gosh, 2004).

Lastly, western women also found native women as a submissive creature and determined to 'rescue' them from the clutches of patriarchal culture and control (Hasan, p. 28); which again provided a path for the introduction of feminism as a thought. However, this was done to produce the 'efficient' west- imitating- native- elite- class by introduction of these concepts through education. This 'elite' later helped the western women particularly and colonizing mother land in general by spreading their ideas to the other native classes. Hence, it created an aura of western superiority which helped colonizers in controlling the natives by manipulating them economically which is the most important and underlying reason behind all the reasons

By analyzing all the above mentioned reasons we come to know that the idea of women freedom and its solutions in colonial context are not derived from its culture rather it is an inspiration from west out of our colonial motivation and subjugation. History of colonial culture has asked colonial women to draw the definition of 'equality' and source of oppression from the western world. Consequently, this external interpretation of women issues by the local feminists has created confusion among the general women in colonial society who consider the solution to their issues alien to their problems. All these feminists situate themselves in different paradigm of understanding the women issues; few idealize the western notions of female emancipation, others revere religious and cultural ideologies. Hence, we are unable to address the issues of women in the real colonial framework. If we grant the above then the question arises that why would colonialism demand feminism to get flourished in the colonial world.

2.2. Feminism: A power-knowledge manifestation bin colonial world:

From the above discussion we come to know that feminism is manifestation of colonizers thought as a form of one of the dominating epistemologies on the colonized states; as, colonization is the form of domination and exploitative government. Hence, its all ideological offshoots would also come under the category of power discourse. In order to consider feminism as power discourse in colonial scaffolding Foucault's power model best reflects the concepts.

Foucault elaborates power into two forms; first one as authoritative in form of juridico-discursive model which involves three basic assumptions: (1) power is possessed (e.g. by individuals in the state of nature, by a class, by the people), (2) power flows from a centralized source from top to bottom (e.g. law, the economy, the State), and (3) power is primarily repressive in its exercise (a prohibition backed by sanctions) (Sawicki 1986, 26). Lemke (2010) summarizes these characteristics as "Foucault's thesis is that in the Western political tradition, power was principally understood in terms of rights and from the perspective of repression: as law, interdiction, censure, constraint etc. This "juridico-discursive" representation of power is dominated by the idea of the freedom of a (sovereign) subject on the one hand and the instance of political sovereignty on the other" (p. 32). In colonial world only the colonizers possessed the power and the legitimacy of power depended on their rules; it was flowing from the authority of colonizer to the colonized natives. Juridico-discursive model appeared as the most frustrating and extreme form of power based on the dividing practices which are observed at different levels in colonial context. Foucault (1982) elaborates this type of power model as a mode of objectification done through the dividing practices. In colonial world, the most conspicuous was a racial division between the colonizers and the colonized; according to Fanon (1963) it was a Manichean world divided into good and evil quarters of the European quarter and the native quarter (p.39), where native tried imitate the settler (p. 153). It is about *us* and *other*, the imperial world entails *otherness* with respect to the colonized and colonized with respect to the colonizers (Bhabha p.101). However, the imperial class is the dominating class this is why their discourse is correct; on the other hand, the native discourse always needs improvement. Hence, it led towards the formation of criterion- the concept of normal or standard and abnormal or substandard coined by the colonial authority. This social division assisted the colonizer to exercise disciplinary practices which was done through the introduction of various dominating institutions and epistemic forms. Therefore, the knowledge forms resulted in normalization and social controlling of the society.

As already been established that feminist theories were also derived from the colonizer mind set as form of power which governed the natives, it entails all the attributes which colonial discourse as a form of juridico-discursive model includes. Dividing practices can be seen prominently in feministic ideas; it divided the western women from the eastern women by limiting the political gains of the native women. (Gosh 2004, p.741-42). Feminist thought also divided the women in to two, the imperial and the native by bringing in the racial concepts; therefore, it also came up as a power discourse. Hence, the native women were suppressed by them. This suppression was not only a racial suppression (Gosh 2004) but also assumed the inferiority of the native women (Hasan, p. 30) both intellectually and physically. These practices made west a standard for the east to follow; western feministic theory was a criterion for the native women of their rights. Also, feminist ideas produced division between the native men and the women; this was done by reforming the image of native men as the most repulsive creature (Hasan 2005, p. 30). Feminism as a form of the colonial knowledge focused towards normalizing and social controlling of the native women. The purpose was to provide controlled ideas of women rights and freedom of the native women.

The other model of power proposed by Foucault does not consider power as such rather it glances at the situation through power relationship. This form entails a productive dimension, which allows and enables the individual and collective experiences to promote new forms of knowledge and practice. Foucault (1982) explains this model as "a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future." He further delineates a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that "the other" (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up.

Understanding the model of power relationship in colonial context it can be seen that the colonial time was power relationship between colonized and the colonizer. Their interaction generated new form of knowledge and feminism is one of them, which as a form of power relationship emerged as a relationship between colonizer-western women and the native-eastern women. Feminism, though did not left its impact directly on the native women but gradually upon the actions of the elite native women, who built the ideas of women rights on the foundation of the western feministic theory. Interaction of imperial women with the native women led towards the creativity of new ideas about women freedom. Hence, feminism as a form of power-relations is not an oppressive form rather it appeared as knowledge form; in other words it bloomed as a knowledge-power model.

Considering both the models of power we can analyze that feminism in colonial societies is a form of manifestation of colonial power. Both these models show inevitable relationship between feminism and colonialism, where imperial class possessed the power for economic reasons and suppressed the colonized people from the free thought and the activity. Feminism was also introduced by the women of imperial class to maintain a dominating posture on colonized men and the women, hence feminism made itself conspicuous as a power form. The most susceptible beings to this idea were native elite women who behaved like the imperial women, therefore, accepted their concepts and tried to apply it on her society. In other words, she acted as a screen between the native and the imperial women and conveyed the imperial feministic ideas to the native women. This way, minds of native women behaved like puppets in the hands of imperial western concepts. One of the tasks of the power according to Foucault is that it constructs the morality of the humans as a subject. Feminism as a power form also constructed the morality for the colonial women and they started demanding their rights according to this theory.

2.3. Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be analyzed that feminism in western paradigm and in the colonial paradigms carry different meanings and definitions because of their specific contextual and historical development. The historical events, social conditions and philosophical ideologies along with the human beings vary in their spatial and temporal existence. This difference is responsible for the generation of philosophical thoughts and its moral and political implication. Feminism is also one of such thought which principles can not be universalized, as spatio-temporal difference along with different subjects might result in unusual result.

The whole discussion leads to the conclusion that to solve issues of colonial women we need to look for the indigenous solutions by keeping not only the respective culture, tradition and religion into consideration but also how personality of women has been constructed in the colonial society. Success in achieving it will inevitably abolish the questions of gender inequality and other issues raised by the women of western world. Similarly, the problems which we address also need consideration; as sociological sameness in the concept of women oppression (Mohanty 1984, p.337) and biological similarity in the construction of women does not entail that women issues are globally identical. Every culture has its own norms and values; determining right and wrong of any one society based on the other society would either be a reductionist approach or it would be like applying rule of one game to another.

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