

CHELA SANDOVAL'S DIFFERENTIAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND INDIAN FEMINISM

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Abstract--The feminist movement, a socio-political reality, has grown and developed over a period of time. It has emerged and developed due to various reasons, like protest against oppression, legal reform, social reform, nationalistic concern, education, demand for economic resources etc. Somehow, its growth and development have been attributed mainly to Western influence. Contemporary feminists believe that the process of globalization has further reinforced the differences between the women of western countries and the women of Third world. However, towards the end of 1980s', feminist movement and feminist consciousness started to grow more diverse. Feminists started to confront and debate issues of difference—most notably those of race, class, culture. The western hegemony and dominance misread and minimize the reality of the evolving patterns rooted in history and culture of a particular society. Third World Feminism is different from white and American feminism. The Third World Feminism necessitates the willingness to work with different types of people like the colour, the queer, the poor, physically challenged and obviously, women. The Third World countries differ in terms of genesis and development, which demand recognition of the 'subjectivity' on behalf of the Third World Feminists. In this context, Chela Sandoval in her book "Methodology of the Oppressed" outlined a new form of oppositional consciousness known as differential consciousness. She developed this theory and method in order to redefine feminist movement and to recognize the identities of the women of third world. In the present paper an attempt has been made to understand Indian Feminism with the help of Sandoval's theory of differential consciousness.

Key words—*Feminism, Western Hegemony, Third World Feminism, Differential Consciousness, Indian Feminism*

I. Statement of the Problem

The feminist movement, a socio-political reality, has grown and developed over a period of time. It has emerged and developed due to various reasons, like protest against oppression, legal reform, social reform, nationalistic concern, education, demand for economic resources etc. Somehow, its growth and development have been attributed mainly to Western influence. From the beginning of second wave of feminist movement, one can find the dominance of Western Feminism. In 1970, black feminist, Frances Beale published "*Sisterhood is Powerful*" where she considered second wave of feminism as a "white women's movement", because she held that second wave feminism emphasized only on binary gender division male/female alone. Alice Chai opined that what "feminism" means to women of color is different from what it means to white women.

Contemporary feminists believe that the process of globalization has further reinforced the differences between the women of western countries and the women of Third world. They have been largely skeptical about the ideas of globalization, universality of human rights and their advantages for women. They argue that on the contrary, these trends deprive women of their rights and threaten to roll back all that feminism has gained so far. Feminists do not see globalization as a uniform and unilinear process. They opine that the influence of globalization and neo-liberalism have rolled back the frontiers of state which has negatively affected the rights of women, especially for those belonging to marginalized sections. Due to global capitalism, there is shrinking of resources for women empowerment in the developing countries. Though there are various agreements and disagreements among the scholars regarding the effects of globalization, but the supporters of globalization and neoliberal thinkers unquestionably agree with the ideals of growth, prosperity and affluence for the "Global North" who have abundant economic resources as well as political

stability, both of which are necessary for the development. On the Other hand, the process of globalization has negatively affected the “Global South” who is economically dependent on the “Global North” and faces the heat of war and poverty. These countries have entered in the international world politics after a long struggle against the imperialist rule, which have drained them economically completely. Due to the ‘core-periphery syndrome’, where the core countries, i.e the Global North, are always in an advantageous position than the peripheral countries, i.e., the Global South. The core countries through various neo-colonial strategies exploit the peripheral countries. As the gap between the rich and poor countries are widening, it is hard to generalize the benefits and disadvantages of globalization to all women, encompassing the North and South. It is important to recognize the diversity of human experiences, when it comes to globalization and its impact on different people including women with all the diversities and heterogeneities.

There was the western hegemony in feminist movements, writings in 1970s. The hegemonic feminist scholars and their narratives legitimized certain modes of culture, consciousness, and practice, only to systematically curtail the forms of experimental and theoretical articulations expressed by an eccentric cohort of oppositional activists. This approach and belief misinterprets and minimizes the reality of evolving patterns rooted in the history and culture of different countries Women of the developing countries were typically depicted by Eurocentric Feminists as a single, oppressed group, symbolizing oppression and victimization. Thus, women were not seen in mundane settings, but generally embodying stereotypical images of sexual violence and poverty. The women of developing countries were perceived as primitive, docile and submissive.

Towards the end of 1980s’, feminist movement and feminist consciousness started to grow more diverse. Feminists started to confront and debate issues of difference—most notably those of race, class, culture. Culture is one category that goes on to influence all facets and aspects of life—behavior, relationships, responses, identities and epistemologies. According to Ania Loomba, one should be careful not to homogenize either the First world or Third world women. She says that in each case consideration of class, colour, religion, location, sexuality and politics have divided women’s movement and their subordination concerns. She emphasizes the need to recognize the Third World women and women in color as the most exploited of the world. The western hegemony and dominance misread and minimize the reality of the evolving patterns rooted in history and culture of a particular society. They emphasis the need for a greater recognition of the differences of class, caste, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, race, and their interconnectedness. It is well known that the process of socialization affects the gender equation in every society, both overtly and covertly. Therefore, the hegemonic feminism does not explain the reality of “all” women. Although hegemonic feminism has produced enlightening and liberating spaces, these spaces coalesce into what Gayatri Spivak characterized as a “ high feminist norm” which reinforces “basically isolationist” and narcissistic “admiration” of hegemonic critical thinkers “for the literature of the female subject in Europe and Anglo America”, as if such fascination can lead to liberation. All these led women’s movement buckled from within.

II. Objective of the Study

In the present study has been made to understand Indian feminism from the theoretical perspectives of Chela Sandoval. The study is an attempt to analyze Third World Feminism, especially Indian feminism from a different viewpoint, i.e. from the perspective of differential consciousness.

III. Methodology

The study is a theoretical one. In order to conduct the study and to develop arguments various books and journals have been consulted.

IV. Hypothesis

Hypothesis is a supposition, an assumption which has not been endorsed. The propositions developed for further study or investigations are—

- 1) Third world feminism and in that sense, Indian feminism is different from Western Feminism.
- 2) Chela Sandoval's theory is helpful to understand Third World Feminism.
- 3) Indian Feminism can be interpreted from Sandoval's Theory.

V. Discussion and Analysis

Third World Feminism is different from white and American feminism. The Third World Feminism necessitates the willingness to work with different types of people like the colored, the queer, the poor, physically challenged and obviously, women. In order to have a comfortable and easy access to any legitimized gender category, one has to take into consideration the interactions between different unnamed gender forms within the social hierarchy. It is necessary to acknowledge the different ethnicities, cultures prevalent in the third world countries, which have profound impact on the feminist movement of these countries. These countries differ in terms of genesis and development, which demand recognition of the 'subjectivity' on behalf of the Third World Feminists. In this context, Chela Sandoval in her book "*Methodology of the Oppressed*" outlined a new form of oppositional consciousness known as differential consciousness. She developed this theory and method in order to redefine feminist movement and to recognize the identities of the women of third world. To Sandoval, oppositional consciousness is a state of consciousness which opposes the values and beliefs of socially established dominant order. Her theory of oppositional consciousness can be best understood as topography rather than typology, because it is capable of mapping and identifying the ideological territory where all oppositional activities had occurred. While to explain the transformation the subordination into resistance and opposition, a new typology is required to map the ideological spaces. This Feminism makes clear the vital connections that exist between feminist theories in general and other theoretical and practical modes concerned with issues of social hierarchy, marginality, and dissident globalization. The Third world Feminism is not only influenced by struggles against gender domination, but by the struggles against race, sex, national, economic, cultural and social hierarchies of 20th Century. Therefore, Third World Feminism comprises a history of oppositional consciousness.

The cultural topography delineates a set of critical points within which individuals and groups seeking to transform dominant and oppressive powers can constitute themselves as resistant and oppositional citizen-subjects. These types of orientation can be used by those subjugated, subordinated people or group of people who seek subjective forms of resistance and decolonize their various existing social relations, determined by the hierarchal social order. The hegemonic feminist scholarship tried to interpret the exploitation of women, considering women as homogenous group. It failed to establish a correlation between its own understandings and translations of resistance, and the expressions of consciousness in opposition enacted among other racial, ethnic, sex, cultural or national liberation movements.

In order to explain her theory and methods, Sandoval had identified five 'locations'—"equal rights", "revolutionary", "supremacist", "separatist", and "differential" forms of consciousness in opposition. In the "equal-rights form", the members of the subordinated group argue that they are assigned to an inferior status due to their exterior physical differences which is not reality. They ask for the legitimization of their humanity and recognition sameness under the law of the land. They demand for assimilation and integration with the human-in-power. On the other hand, the practitioners of revolutionary form believe that the assimilation as demanded by the supporters of equal-rights form would not solve such myriad and acute differences. They demand for fundamental reconstruction of the dominant relationship in the society. They argue that such radical transformation would lead society toward the goal of functioning beyond all domination/subordination power axes. The supporters of "supremacism" opine that the oppressed people have been able to achieve a higher evolutionary level than the dominant group people due to their differences. They claim that the subordinated group understands itself to function at a higher state of psychic and social evolution than does its counterpart. Their aim is to provide the social order a higher ethical and moral vision, and consequently more effective leadership. Finally, the "Separatist" group recognizes that their differences are branded as inferior with respect to the category of the most human. This

group demands for a form of political consciousness to protect and nurture the differences that would lead to their complete separation from the dominant social order.

Sandoval expected that through the differential consciousness, the subordinated classes would be able to weave “between and among” the remaining oppositional praxis within the topographic space. Although this differential consciousness depends on a form of agency, Third World Feminists themselves would be a source of influence and motivation, subordinated classes seeking a new subjectivity are uninhabited by any limitations that may have been in place. When differential consciousness is used, the differences once separated every race, sex, age, culture, and gender no longer remain opposed to each other, but recognized within the ‘interdependency’ of each ideological position with equal significance and importance. Sandoval’s theory helped the scholars to enlarge their horizon of analysis and to look beyond the Western Feminism, which harbors to take into account the complex issues of those who are marginalized in the society. It challenged the parochial Euro-centrism. It dismantles the social hierarchies and transcends race, class, culture.

Indian Feminism, a Third World Feminism cannot be treated as a singular feminism, but several feminisms which have their origin in social conditions, religious traditions and caste backgrounds. The feminist movement in India was influenced by its western counterpart, who called for education and equal political rights, economic rights, equal access to health. But it has also addressed local issues and concerns, such as sati, dowry-related violence, sex selective abortions, custodial rape, inheritance laws etc. Uma Narayan rightly puts it “third world feminism is not mindless mimicking of western agenda in one clear and simple sense”. Due to historical and cultural specifications of the region in India has to think in terms of its agenda and strategies. While Indian feminists have the same ultimate goal as their Western counterparts, their version of feminism can differ in many ways in order to tackle the kind of issues and circumstances they face in the modern-day patriarchal society of India. Indian feminists attempt to challenge the patriarchal structure of their society in a variety of ways. The heterogeneity of the Indian experience reveals that there are multiple patriarchies, contributing to the existence of multiple feminisms. Hence, feminism in India is not a singular theoretical orientation; it has changed over time in relation to historical and cultural realities, levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions of individual women, and women as a group. The widely used definition is "An awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in society, at work and within the family, and conscious action by women and men to change this situation". Patriarchy is just one of the hierarchies. Relational hierarchies between women within the same family are more adverse.

So, Indian Feminism can be understood with the reference of Sandoval’s theory of oppositional consciousness, where topography is considered as more important than typology. Codified traditions have, in the main, belonged to elitist societies. There are parallel traditions in rural and tribal societies, which work differently and, at times, frame morality differently. The process of socialization plays a very significant role in the gender orientation. The varied history of Indian women makes it clear that feminism is not necessarily an ideology of resistance to patriarchal control, but a movement that seeks integration of public and the private space and the collapsing of the divisions between two different kinds of sexuality and moral values. Hence, feminism in India is not a singular theoretical orientation; it has changed over time in relation to culture, level of consciousness, perceptions and actions of individual women, and women as a group.

The concept of self is rooted in culture traditions and both epistemological and phenomenological constructs impacted by it. Therefore, depending on historical moment, culture and country, feminists around the world have had different causes and goals. India is besieged by multiplicity of feminism. Indian women have to survive through a ladder of oppressive patriarchal family structures and the state. When the hierarchical systems of society emerge within the family based on social convention and economic needs, girls in poorer families suffer twice the impact of vulnerability and stability. Therefore, historical reasons, circumstances, caste and religious values system in India have caused feminists to develop a different type of Third World Feminism. The attempt is not to trace the development in isolation from the rest of the world, but to trace the differences in tradition, value structures, political history, social concerns and the nature of resistance.

Women's movement and feminist struggle in India need to be viewed not in linearly alone placed in a chronological history, but within simultaneity of resistance movements and demands for equality on grounds of race, gender, class or generation and colonial experience in the Indian context. Feminist movement is nothing, if it is not intersectional.

Indian feminist movement integrates various issues—nature, objectives, policies, attitudes towards women's development; from anti-patriarchy to reform movements, from anti-dowry movements to sustainable development. Therefore, according to Indian feminist movement, 'all issues are women's issues'. Indian feminist movement has three different streams of orientations:

a) The Liberal stream, which focuses on demanding reforms in those aspects of polity which specifically affect women. This stream can be identified with Sandoval's location of "equal- rights form", where the inferior group, i.e., women opposes the gender division in the society and demand for change in order to achieve the status of equality, in the true sense of the term, with the human-in-power, i.e., men. Indian liberal feminists during 1970s' challenged the established inequalities and fought to reverse them, like unequal wages for women, relegation of women to unskilled spheres of work, including the inequalities in the power structure such as caste, tribe, language, religion etc. The increasing economic liberty would help Indian women to fight against stereotypes. Indian women are not negotiating for economic rights, but also for social and cultural rights. "While changes are taking place in economic parameters, social parameters are not keeping pace with these transformations," said Indu Agnihotri, Director for the Center for Women's Development Studies They are not vacating their spaces, but working hard to expand the arena of equality. Instead, they increasingly expressed their individualism and demanded more equal partner-ships-in marriage, public life, law, and politics-with men. Women of the present are more assertive, more liberated in their view and more articulate in their expression than the women of the past.

b) The Leftist Stream analyses the oppression of women within the holistic analysis of the general structure of oppression and calls for a coming together for social change in order to effect the revolutionary transformation of society. A number of Indian feminists believe in Leftist ideology, who declares them autonomous. During the post-independence period, the women socialists initiated several movements, e.g. anti-alcohol movement, anti-corruption movements etc. In 1975, the Progressive Organization of Women in Hyderabad offered an Engelian analysis of women's subordination. This stream can be understood with Sandoval's location of "revolutionary" who do not agree with the "equal- rights form". These feminists argue that in order to establish true equality, the fundamental reconstruction of dominant relationship in the society is needed. The Leftist stream of Indian feminism also asks for revolutionary change to change the subordination power axes.

c) The radical feminists concentrate on defining the development of femininity and masculinity in society as fundamental polarities, and demand to reclaim traditional sources of women's strength, creativity etc. These feminists can be identified with Sandoval's "supremacism" who claim that their aim is to provide a social order of higher ethical and moral vision with traditional sources of women's strength and consequently to provide more effective leadership. Some Indian feminist organizations like League of Women's Soldiers for Equality of Aurangabad linked feminism with castism. They argued that most of the women groups were based on major cities and were dominated by upper, urban educated middle class. Therefore, their interests were not reflected and they were exploited. They emphasized to generate the consciousness regarding the strengths of women as a whole.

VI. Conclusion

From the above study, it can be concluded that Third world feminism is different from Western Feminism. Different cultures, ethnicities which are prevalent in the Third World countries play a significant role in the genesis and growth of feminist movements in the Third World countries. Along with gender, Third world feminism recognize the importance of different obstacles, e.g., colour, lack of economic resources, caste etc. in the exploitation of women.

Sandoval's theory can be understood from the perspectives of Indian Feminism. Due to the existence and influence of various historical and cultural realities, due to different levels of consciousness and perceptions, Indian Feminism has not been able to develop a single theoretical orientation. Sandoval's theory of differential consciousness though differentiates Indian Feminism on caste, culture, age lines, but at the same time interdependency has developed among different streams. It has enhanced the horizon of Indian feminists. Along with the heterogeneous features of Indian feminism, Indian feminists have developed a homogenous outlook to address the issues of women. Indian feminist movement integrates various issues—nature, objectives, policies, attitudes towards women's development; from anti-patriarchy to reform movements, from anti-dowry movements to sustainable development.

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