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Women with dreams are women of vision

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Abstract

"Feminism isn't about making women strong. Women are already strong. It's about changing the way the world perceives that strength." G.D. Anderson. Feminists seek to allow everyone the choice of taking on the roles without the opprobrium of society. They basically want people to be treated equally based on merit rather than gender. Feminism has been described in terms of waves. The first wave began in the mid-19th century and concluded with the Women's Suffrage Movement. Then, in the late 1950s, second wave feminism gained traction. The second wave movement arose out of women's resistance to being forced out of the workplace after World War II. This failure to acknowledge women's need for economic independence and personal autonomy led feminists to take action. In the context of 1970s feminism, Consciousness-Raising came into being, emphasizing the practice of discussing the varied and everyday effects of sexism, racism, and classism in groups of similarly identified individuals. The goal was to uncover the ways of patriarchy which distorted all levels of reality, including the psyche, to better resist subordination and to ultimately create a new social world. Uncovering the experience of inequality within personal relationships was of central importance for second wave feminists since much of women's subordination occurred in the intimate spheres of their lives. Women cared so much about these issues that they wanted to strengthen their voices by fighting for gender equality to ensure they would be heard.

Keywords: Feminism, sexism, racism, and classism, women

Introduction

Virginia Woolf's affiliation with feminism is extremely apparent due to feminist themes within her novels and ties to groups such as the Suffrage Movement. She argued that women's experience, particularly in the women's movement, could be the basis for transformative social change. In her essay "A Room of One's Own", she demands that:

"A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write"¹.

She thereby claims women's right for basic conditions, like leisure time, privacy and financial independence, which would allow them to unfold their intellectual potential. She influenced a feminist mindset, and through her works, inspired a number of women to ponder and seek emancipation.

Margaret Fuller, a famous woman of letters in the nineteenth century, started public "conversations" for women, which borrowed from the model of study groups and reading parties. During these gatherings, Fuller encouraged women to express themselves freely and to act on their ideas. Fuller, of course, was an outspoken women's rights activist. In discussing the "woman question" in her piece "Woman in the Nineteenth Century" (1845), Fuller argues the importance of women's roles in the future if "every path [were] laid open to woman as freely as man":

We believe the divine energy would pervade nature to a degree unknown in the history of former ages, and that no discordant collisions, but a ravishing harmony of the spheres would ensue^[2].

Adrienne Rich, an American poet, essayist and radical feminist of outstanding reputation, was distinguished by strong vision brought the oppression of women to the forefront of discourse and kept it there for nearly a half-century. Throughout her career as a poet, Rich had spoken for those people who have been forgotten, or denied a voice. For Rich, society as a whole is found on patriarchy and as such it limits the rights for women. For equality to be achieved between the sexes, the prevailing notions will have to be readjusted to fit the female perspective. She argued persuasively that women's disenfranchisement at the hands of men must end.

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"Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" is a poem about an oppressed woman trapped within the cultural constraints and responsibilities of married life who escapes into an alternative world of embroidery and sewing, after long suffering she looks for a positive way to express her artistic talents, before it's too late. The tigers she creates will outlast her and become a symbol of freedom and independence forever.

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,
Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
They do not fear the men beneath the tree;
They pace in sleek chivalric certainty ^[3].

The reader is immediately taken into this highly visual and symbolic scene. The tigers which Aunt Jennifer creates are topaz in color, that is wine-red, yellowy orange, and live in a green world where their majestic movements express fearlessness with Green the season of spring and rebirth. They prance and are sleek as well as chivalric. Chivalry an ancient knightly term defines courteous treatment, especially of women by men. So the tigers know exactly what they're doing, being confident and vital. Poet, teacher, critic, political activist and women's rights advocate, Adrienne Rich, once said that 'poems are like dreams: in them you put what you don't know you know'. Her poem "Diving into the Wreck" is about a woman's quest for discovery as she journeys alone to seek the truth. The speaker of the poem makes the readers to understand the risks and rewards of the speaker's pursuit. It is not only the journey of self-discovery but also as a mission to understand the truth of humanity. The speaker who was diving into the wreck as a recoverer and an activist, not hunting for new discoveries, but hunting down the ones that had been abandoned, deemed inconsequential and without value.

We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
back to this scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear ^[4].

The most notable fact our culture imprints on women is the sense of her limits. The most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities. Alice Walker champions the independence and tenacity of an African American woman named Celie in the novel "The Color Purple". Her work as a feminist and in particular a womanist has vaulted her into the public eye. The adoption of "womanist" signified an inclusion of race and class issues in feminism. Well into the novel "The Color Purple", Celie's husband, the emotionally and physically abusive Mr. confronts her. She records the conversation in one of her letters to God, letters which comprise the novel's entire narrative:

"Who you think you is? he say. You can't curse nobody. Look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman ... you nothing at all." Later, Celie acknowledges his claims, yet finds power in her identity

and existence: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook.... But I'm here ^[5]."

Canadian author Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" is a dystopian novel telling the suffering of handmaids. In an interview with The New York Times. She was asked: "What does feminism mean to you?"

Atwood replied, "It's not up for me to decide. For me, it means something that is working for women's equality, and we are a long way from that. And by equality, I mean legal equality, political equality, and social equality."

Answering the question "Is The Handmaid's Tale a "feminist" novel?" Atwood wrote in The New York Times:

"If you mean an ideological tract in which all women are angels and/or so victimized they are incapable of moral choice, no. If you mean a novel in which women are human beings - with all the variety of character and behavior that implies - and are also interesting and important, and what happens to them is crucial to the theme, structure and plot of the book, then yes. In that sense, many books are "feminist" ^[6].

Various issues related to women subjugation are relooked. Women may have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses; enjoying equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions. Various attempts are made to bring awareness towards the need for a Non Sexist Education and to create Gender Sensitive Environment by sensitizing women world towards their hidden potentials. Universal education is a universal law. Furthermore, the education of women is more important for women as they are the trainer of the child from its infancy. And if a woman was imperfect then it will imply a condition of imperfection for all mankind. If the educators were incompetent, the educated will be correspondingly lacking. This is evident and incontrovertible. Half of the total number of crimes against women are related to molestation and harassment at the workplace. The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act was passed, to prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner. The Supreme Court of India took a strong stand against sexual harassment of women in the workplace. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. The goal is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women by enabling them to realize their full potential socially and economically, by making them aware of their rights and fundamental freedom, by equal access to participation in all spheres of life and decision making, equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security at public office etc, strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women, mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process, elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and building and strengthening partnerships with civil society. Apart from all this, the reality is that men have owned women, both psychologically

and legally, throughout many phases of history. And many women – some consciously, many unconsciously – want to feel “owned.” But things are shifting towards positive. Women have begun to demand the right to make their own choices, control their own bodies, and determine their own destinies. When they understand that this is a cultural process, they no longer have to experience their struggles, fears, and pain as a personal inadequacy. The women can appropriate their bad feelings as a healthy response to the unhealthy culture. McGrath asserts that denying that they are victims is “counterproductive, because it prevents full recovery...The first step in resolving Victimization Depression is to confront their denial. By doing so, they’ll begin to build the skills and confidence so that they can handle reality no matter how bad it gets ^[7].

However the last decades have witnessed some basic changes in the status and role of women in our society. There has been shift in policy approaches from the concept of 'welfare' in the seventies to 'development' in the eighties and now to 'empowerment' in the nineties and twenties. This process has been further accelerated with some sections of women becoming increasingly self-conscious of their discrimination in several areas of family and public life. Women today are highly active in Politics, Sports, Art, Literature, corporate world and social saints and have mastered anything and everything which a woman can dream of. But she still has to go a long way to achieve equal status in the minds of men. True empowerment will only be reached when women take part actively in the decision making process of the country. Empowerment of women could only be achieved if their economic, political and social status as well as basic health and education are improved. Gender equality is needed which is that stage of human social development at which the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female, a stage when both men and women realize their full potential. This could be possible only by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings. But despite all these measures there should be a strong determination among every man that every woman in this country should be honoured. All this requires a concept of vision along with indomitable spirit to live with dignity. To be a woman is the best gift of God to humanity and we should see our existence in this light. Challenges and barriers are the part of everyone’s life and for women they become harder. When women have the agency to do what they want, a higher equality between men and women is established. Through online activism, women are able to empower themselves by organizing campaigns and voicing their opinions for equality rights without feeling oppressed by members of society. Empowerment of women is a necessity for the very development of a society, since it enhances both the quality and the quantity of human resources available for development. Women have dreams that they yearn to fulfill, too: Dreams to make a change in the world, dreams for a successful life, and dreams to inspire others. "I raise up my voice-not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard we cannot succeed when half of us are held back." -Malala Yousafzai.

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