Block 3
Perspectives in Sociology-III

UNIT 7   FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES*

Structure

7.0   OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

* Outline the emergence of organised feminism;

* Describe the feminist perspectives such as Liberal, Marxist, Radical,

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Socialist, Post Modern and Third Wave Feminism.;

- Outline the issues of women's lives that different feminist perspectives focused upon; and

- Explain the central ideas of different feminists through their writings.

7.1   INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will study about the concept of feminism and also the different feminist perspectives as Liberal, Marxist, Radical, Socialist and Post Modern and Third Wave feminism. In this unit we will discuss about the different feminist perspectives and their beliefs corresponding to the different aspects of women's lives that they focus upon. Different feminist perspectives focus on different issues and feminists have not always had a unified voice and have focused on issues corresponding to changes in society.

7.2   SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Feminism in its present form originated in Europe and America but women have always protested as well as found their avenues to express dissent from the dominant patriarchy, in whatever form it has existed historically. Feminist perspective refers to perspectives which in one way or another seek to critique, question and find alternatives to the dominant male perspectives that are correlated with what feminists call as universal patriarchy. Feminism is not a monolithic perspective and there are multiple ways of understanding women's subordination and the ways to liberate women and grant them justice and equality. Organised feminism emerged from 17th century onwards in England, United States and France. With the coming in of industrial capitalism and economic and political changes within the family there was also a change in the status of women. "Feminism" was originally a French word which was introduced in the United States in the early twentieth century (Jaggar 1983: 5). It was first used to refer to a group of women who advanced women's rights and were referred to as the romantic feminists as they largely concerned with the uniqueness of the female sex and on their motherhood status. The sexual rationalists on the other hand claimed a better status for women as they visualized women as equal to men and wished to end the domination of women by men.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century writers such as J.S. Mill and Cicely Hamilton incorporated gender concerns in their writings but they did not find a place in mainstream sociology. In the following section we will try and explore whether the founding fathers of sociology incorporated gender concerns in their writings in the nineteenth century.

7.2.1   Founding Fathers of Sociology and the 'Woman Question'

In this section we will explore early sociological writers as Karl Marx and Engels, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Georg Simmel and analyse if their work influenced the writings of modern feminists. Most feminists consider that the 'founding fathers' of sociology were men who paid little attention to the issue of gender or incorporated gender concerns in their writings that attempted to explain

the social transformation in the nineteenth century industrial capitalist society (Seidman 1997 in Jackson and Scott 2002: 2).

Karl Marx visualised workers and capitalists as men and not women in capitalist society. Women do not figure in Marx's writing even as reproducers of labour power. On the other hand Engels (1884) explained the cause of women's subordination in the 'The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State'. Engels believed that women and men were equal in prehistoric times. Engels held that prehistoric societies claimed descent through the female line (mother-right) and the universal historic defeat of the female sex came about with the development of private property and emergence of monogamous family. Men could now pass the privately held commodities to their own offspring through the male line. Critics have questioned Engel's view by pointing out that it is debatable whether women held authority at any time in history. However, Marx and Engels influenced later Marxist feminists who explored the economic roots of women's subordination as also to give importance to women as reproducers of labour. Weber defined 'patriarchy' as the oldest form of socially legitimised power, referring to the patriarchal structure of ancient families. Weber's work also influenced feminist writers as Roberta Hamilton. Emile Durkheim viewed men's and women's roles as increasingly differentiated with the division of labour and increase in specialisation in society. His functionalist orientation to the study of society implied that women's place was in the domestic sphere and women in a married relationship had an affectual function which was complementary to the role of men who had an intellectual function. (Jackson and Scott 2002: 2-5).

Georg Simmel like Weber and Durkheim viewed the differences between men and women as natural. He held that men were oriented to the public sphere and women to the private or domestic sphere and this led to corresponding visualization of masculinity and femininity. However he was critical of the fact that masculinity could be represented as ungendered and as the norm while femininity was the deviation from it (Jackson and Sue Scott 2002).Therefore the classical sociologists did not incorporate gender concerns in their writings although some of their writings influenced the ideas of later feminists. In the following sections we will cover the different feminist perspectives.

7.3 LIBERAL FEMINISM

With the coming in of industrial capitalism in mid-seventeenth century in England women wondered as to why the new egalitarianism did not apply to them (Jaggar 1983: 27). Liberal feminists believe that all human beings are rational agents and subordination of women is due to certain traditional beliefs and legal impediments based on the belief of women's incapability to perform certain tasks. Whereas men are judged on the basis of their abilities, sometimes women's abilities are seen as limited because of their sex (Jaggar 1983: 176). Liberal feminists argue that men and women should have equal rights and state should bring about reforms so that women have equal opportunities as men. In the nineteenth century liberal feminists clamoured for women's rights to hold property and women suffragists in US such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton fought

for the women's right to vote which was finally granted to women in 1920. In the twentieth century they fought against laws which gave men more rights in contrast to women.

7.3.1 Liberal Feminists Analysis of Women's Oppression

7.3.1.1 Mary Wollstonecraft

The Liberal feminist Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1799) wrote 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman' in John Stuart Mill's 'Subjection of Women'. She addressed the concerns of women who experienced a deterioration of status because of the onslaught of industrial capitalism. She held that girls should be provided the same education as boys so that they can develop their rational capacities. Some modern philosophers (Jaggar 1983: 35) such as Hume, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel had doubted whether women were fully rational. Mary Wollstonecraft argued that women were as competent and rational as men. She held that women could not fully realize their competence because they were denied education and confined to the domestic sphere. For her economic and political independence of women is important but not ultimate to end women's subordination. She claimed that a woman should be strong in mind and body, a fully rational agent who is capable of self-determination (Tong 1983: 15).

7.3.1.2 Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill

Liberal feminists in the nineteenth century as Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill co-authored, 'Early Essays on Marriage and Divorce' in 1832. Harriet Taylor authored the 'Enfranchisement of Women' in 1851 and Mill wrote the 'Subjection of Women' in 1869. These essays largely focused on issues such as marriage and divorce. Harriet Taylor for instance cautioned women to have few children as she felt that women would have to bear the onus of rearing them singly in the event of divorce. John Stuart Mill on the other hand, believed that both divorced men and women have a role to play in children's lives. Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill held that for gender justice to come about political and economic opportunities should be available to women apart from education in par with men. Harriet Taylor held that a wife can be a husband's equal only when she contributes economically in the family by working outside the home but for that women would need an army of servants for domestic work and child rearing. Liberal feminists as Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Taylor are critiqued for addressing the concerns of a privileged class of women.

Both Taylor and Mill worked towards women's suffrage and held that it is vote that gives power to individuals to change the societal system. J.S. Mill took up the cause of women's suffrage as he held that women would then work towards the well-being of larger society rather than the individual families. He however believed that truly liberated women will be more inclined towards family and child rearing.

7.3.2 National Organisation for Women (NOW)

In the twentieth century other rebellious liberal feminists held that apart from the right to vote women also needed economic opportunities, sexual freedom and civil liberties. With the rise of women's liberation movement in the 1960's there has been many feminist perspectives which explain women's subordination

and this also strengthened feminism. In the 1960s thus National Organisation for Women (NOW) was formed that argues that gender justice can be attained only when there is equitable distribution of resources between men and women (Tong 2009: 2). Betty Friedan who wrote the 'The Feminine Mystique' was elected NOW's first president in 1966. Betty Friedan wrote about how girls and boys are treated differently and existence of 'sex role conditioning' from the moment of birth. Friedan largely addressed the concerns of white middle class educated women of US suburbs who found the traditional routinized roles of mother and wife unsatisfying. Friedan held that integration of women in public sphere would lead to some involvement of men and children in housework. She held that a woman can be a "full human person" if apart from being a mother and wife, she is also integrated into the workforce (Tong 2009: 31). However Friedan is criticized for not looking at the complexity that women face in trying to juggle between family and work life without bringing about structural changes in society.

Liberal feminists are for less of state intervention in the private sphere but believe that there should be state intervention in the public sphere in matters such as guarantee of property rights, voting rights and freedom of speech. On the other hand contemporary liberal feminists, particularly the welfare liberals, call for government intervention in the economy particularly in providing legal aid to families with dependents or providing low cost housing. Liberal feminists believe that androgyny is an ideal which allows human beings to develop their full human potential. An androgynous society would be one in which men and women would be physiologically male and female but they would not show the extreme masculine and feminine qualities that are traditionally associated with men and women. As men and women will be given equal opportunities to develop their potential they will not be defined in terms of traditional psychological traits associated with men as logical, independent, aggressive, courageous, insensitive and emotionally inexpressive and women as intuitive, dependent, compassionate and emotional woman.

Check Your Progress I

i)   Explain the basis of women's subordination according to liberal feminism.

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ii) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences:

a)   Mary Wollstonecraft held that women could not realize their potential because they were confined to the domestic sphere and denied ....

b)   Both Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill worked for women's .... movement.

c)   Betty Friedan wrote the book ....

7.4 RADICAL FEMINISM

In the late 1960s women's problems were seen not as an indication of individual failure but as an offshoot of a system in which men as a class oppress women as a class. Unlike the liberal feminists, some of the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s did not want to reform the system but to revolutionize it and to find a place for women in the system. These feminists formed groups such as Red stockings, the Feminists and New York Radical Feminists. These revolutionary feminists believed in consciousness rising. Radical feminists believe that physiology and hetero-sexuality is at the core of women's oppression and is rooted in the family composed of a husband and wife. They describe the heterosexual act as an act of domination and patriarchy being a very personal matter, clear in their slogan 'personal is political'. Radical feminists proclaim that all women are sisters (Tong 2009: 49) as heterosexuality is the major form of human oppression. According to radical feminism gender constructs reflect an elaborate system of male domination and should be eliminated (Jaggar 1983: 85).

Among the first to promote androgynous women was Joreen Freeman. These radical feminists held that a woman may be born biologically female but it does not imply that she has to display only feminine qualities. She can possess both masculine and feminine qualities. Other radical feminists opposed this view and held that women should be strictly feminine and demonstrate the superiority of being a womanly woman.

Radical feminists such as Mary Daly critique the notion of an androgynous society. She holds that both masculinity and femininity have their merits and depravities. To encourage men and women to develop one side of their personality is to presuppose the existence of gender stereotypes in society. Radical Feminists are divided on the nature and function of sexism and the way to eliminate it into two groups. There are various expressions of radical feminism even though all radical feminists focus on sex, gender and reproduction.

7.4.1 Radical Feminists' Analysis of Women's Oppression

7.4.1.1 Gayle Rubin

According to radical feminist Gayle Rubin, the sex/gender system in a patriarchal society is a system in which society uses facts of biology of persons as a basis of assigning gender identity and certain attributes to men and women. Socially prescribed gender identity is seen as natural and normal (Tong: 51).

7.4.1.2 Kate Millet

In Sexual Politics (1970) Millet held that if women have to be liberated male control should be eliminated as male control maintains patriarchy. Kate Millet held that the sex/ gender system is the basic source of oppression of women and feminism should work towards the elimination of this system. She held that patriarchy propagates certain roles for men and women so that men are seen as active and dominant and women are seen as passive and subordinate, as derived from the sexual act. This patriarchal ideology spreads through the church, family and the state which reinforces women's subordination to men. She was for an androgynous future in which the desirable male and female traits coexisted (Tong2009: 54).

7.4.1.3 Shulamith Firestone

An enduring influence of radical feminists is through the work, 'The Dialectic of Sex' by Shulamith Firestone. The opening words of her book are, 'Sex class is so deep as to be invisible' (Jaggar 1983: 85). Distinctions of gender based on sex pervade all aspects of our lives but we do not recognise them. She has shown how the patriarchal institution of motherhood reproduces fathers and mothers of the future. Shulamith Firestone has revised Freudian views of the emergence of femininity in girls and masculinity in boys as rooted in biology. She holds that femininity in girls and masculinity in boys can be explained due to greater power accorded to fathers than mothers in male dominant society. Critiquing Freud's theory of Oedipal complex she argues that both boys and girls are attracted to their mothers who are the initial caretakers. Later in life boys and girls are attracted to their fathers who are seen as confronting greater challenges in the public world. Boys try and to be close to the fathers by imitating them while girls try and please him by asserting their femininity (Jaggar 1983: 258).

7.4.1.4 Adrienne Rich

In "Of Woman Born", Adrienne Rich held that men are aware that patriarchy cannot survive unless men are able to control women's power to bring or not bring life into the world (Tong: 200: 79). Rich held that male doctors took control of the birthing process by replacing female midwives. Men have dictated the rules regarding diet, rest, babies during pregnancies and this has confused women as it was in conflict with their own intuitions. She held that women should be able to direct the childbirth process and experience the pleasures and pains instead of being guided by the male physicians. Patriarchy has led to an alienating experience of motherhood for women. Rich agreed with Firestone that women should be liberated and biological motherhood should cease to be institutionalised under patriarchy.

Check Your Progress II

i)   Distinguish between liberal feminism and radical feminism.

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ii)   Explain the central argument for women's subordination by Shulamith Firestone.

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7.5   MARXIST FEMINISM

Unlike radical feminists who believe that heterosexuality is the source of women's oppression Marxist feminists believe that capitalism is the cause of women's oppression. Marxist feminists are influenced by the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and other nineteenth century thinkers. They regard class based society as the source of women's oppression and believe that it is the origin of private property that shattered the egalitarian relationship between men and women in preindustrial societies. Production was in the hands of few individuals who were men (Tong 2009:4). Marxists and Socialist Feminists are concerned with the issue of whether women per se constitute a class. While Proletariat and Bourgeoisie women belong to different classes but they can be involved in a unifying struggle such as the 1970s Wages for Housework.

7.5.1   Marxist Feminists' Analysis of Women's Oppression

7.5.1.1   Ann Foreman

Marxist feminist such as Ann Foreman held that a woman's sense of self is dependent on her families' and friends' appreciation of her. So a woman is alienated from herself. Also she is engaged in housework which is mundane, routinized and alienating as it is not viewed as productive. She holds that women as a class of workers can gain liberation only when housework is regarded as productive work. Marxists feminists seek to create a World in which women see themselves as integrated rather than fragmented beings who are alienated dependent on others appreciation (Tong 2009: 102).

7.5.1.2   Evelyn Reed

In the work, 'Women: Caste, Class, or Oppressed Sex?' Evelyn Reed argued that the social relations of capitalist and economic forces brought the oppression of one sex by another. Reed held that it cannot be denied that women are subordinated to men in a capitalist patriarchal order but the fact is that bourgeoisie women also dominate over Proletariat men and women in a capitalist order. Money is power in a capitalist system. She encourages the oppressed men and women to wage a class war against their common oppressors. She holds that primary enemy of proletarian women is not patriarchy but capitalism. With the abolition of capitalism the relationship of men and women would be more egalitarian (Tong 2009: 107).

7.5.2   Marxist Feminist Perspectives on Housework

After Communist Revolution in Russia in 1917, things did not go well for Soviet women who were confined to exhausting, low valued, low waged work. Some Marxist Feminists as Margaret Benston turned their attention to house work and saw women as a class who produced simple 'use values'(Tong 2009: 108). She held that domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, childcare should be socialized so that women can be brought to the productive work force and are engaged in the same 'female work' outside their homes over which they have control and is valued. Maria Della Costa and Selma James on the other hand argued that the alternative for women would be to stay at home and demand wages for the productive work they did in the home. They held that women should get wages from their husbands' employers for the housework that they do. However, many

Marxist feminists in 1970s were not sure if wages for housework could liberate women. They critiqued that women would be confined to the homes, not integrated in any work outside home but engaged in routinized repetitive work.

Check Your Progress III

i) Outline the views on housework given by Marxist feminists.

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ii) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences:

a) According to Ann Foreman women can be liberated only when housework is recognized as .... work.

b) Marxist and Socialist feminists hold that the origin of .... shattered the egalitarian relationship between men and women in preindustrial society.

c) .... women dominate over Proletariat men and women in capitalist society.

7.6 SOCIALIST FEMINISM

Another theoretical perspective which challenged the sex gender distinction was socialist feminism which questioned the biological basis of distinction between men and women. Socialist feminists unlike Marxist feminists hold that class antagonism by itself is not the cause of women's oppression but class antagonism is to be replaced by 'an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' (Tong 2009: 96). They believe that to understand women's oppression not only class but sex, race and ethnicity are important categories. For them women's sex class and economic class is the basis of women's oppression. Socialist feminists agree with the Radical feminists that patriarchy is the source of women's oppression and also with the Marxist feminists that capitalism is the source of women's oppression. To end women's oppression socialist feminists believe that the two- headed beast of capitalist patriarchy or patriarchal capitalism is to be killed. Therefore socialist feminists develop theories that seek to explain the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism (Tong 2009:111).

In order to view how patriarchy and capitalism worked together to bring about women's oppression there are two sets of theories as (1) two-system explanations of women's oppression and (2) interactive-system explanations of women's oppression.

7.6.1   Two- System Explanation of Women's Oppression

7.6.1.1   Juliet Mitchell

Instead of a Marxist mono-causal explanation which views women's status in society as determined by her role in production in a capitalist society, Juliet Mitchell in the book, 'The Woman's Estate' held that women's status in society is determined by her role in production, reproduction, sexuality and socialisation of children. While Marxists may propagate women's entry into production and abolition of the family but there is also a need for policies in the areas of reproduction, socialisation of children and sexuality which are as primary as the economic demands. Women's liberation can be achieved only when there is a change in the psyche and mindset of individuals which views women as less valuable than men (Tong 2009: 112).

7.6.1.2   Alison Jaggar

Alison Jaggar held that an overthrow of capitalism would not lead to women's liberation but only an overthrow of patriarchy would. Women are alienated from their own bodies as they tend to physically define themselves to please the society and even their bodies are appropriated due to acts such as male gaze and sexual harassment. Women are alienated from their own selves. Women are also alienated from their children. The children very often blame mothers for things gone amiss in their lives. So just as the workers are alienated from the products of their labour and are simply seen as an appendage to the machine similarly women are alienated as 'women 'within the patriarchal system as the edicts regarding child rearing practices and rules regarding women's reproductive choices are decided by men who are at the helm of affairs.

7.6.2   Interactive System Explanation of Women's Oppression

Unlike the two- system explanation of women's oppression the interactive system explanation for women's oppression views how patriarchy and capitalism align with each other to oppress women. Iris Marion Young argued that class analysis by itself (as classical Marxists would have it) cannot explain the women's subordination because that amounts to being 'gender- blind' and only 'sexual division of labour' can replace class analysis to explain women's subordination. Sylvia Walby similarly holds that patriarchy and capitalism interact with each other to oppress women (Tong 2009: 116).

7.6.2.1   Heidi Hartmann

Heidi Hartmann holds that patriarchy and capitalism are the two heads of the same beast: capitalist patriarchy. In the nineteenth century capitalism proletariat women were encouraged to be stay at home housewives working to produce a productive labour force or later were exploited in the workforce as they received low wages. Because of class and gender division of labour women do not have direct access to the means of survival. Women were dependent on wage earners particularly adult men. The working women were also not helped by their husbands in domestic work. The sexual division of labour therefore disadvantaged women.

i)   Match the following:

a)   Liberal Feminism   1)   Capitalism is the basis of women's
                                   subordination

b)   Radical Feminism   2)   Traditional beliefs and legal
                                   impediments is the basis of women's
                                   subordination

c)   Marxist Feminism   3)   Patriarchy and capitalism is the basis
                                   of women's subordination.

d)   Socialist Feminism   4)   Patriarchy is the basis of women's
                                   subordination.

ii)   Write a short note on interactive system of women's oppression of Radical
      feminism.

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7.7   POSTMODERN AND THIRD WAVE FEMINISM

Earlier waves of feminism have been critiqued for representing the interests of
only white upper class women. This feminism at the beginning of the twenty-
first century is in some ways different from earlier feminism yet is informed by
earlier feminism in other ways. Postmodern feminism critiqued the enlightenment
beliefs and claim that rationality can attain universal truth. Postmodern and post-
structural feminists are influenced by psychoanalysts like Jacques Lacan,
existentialists like Simone de Beauvoir, deconstructionists like Jacques Derrida,
and poststructuralists like Michel Foucault. Hélène Cixous was influenced by
Jacques Derrida. Judith Butler was influenced by Michel Foucault in their
thought.

7.7.1 Hélène Cixous

Poststructuralists as Hélène Cixous was influenced by the concept of Jacques
Derrida's difference (the French word spelt as *differance*). According to Cixous,
meaning of the term masculine is seen in relation to and opposed to the term
feminine. Helene Cixous critiqued that writing and thought has been segmented
into polar categories by men in which masculine thinking and writing is privileged
over the feminine (Tong 2009:275). Cixous encouraged the feminist writers to
come up with writings that focus on the multiplicities and possibilities which
will be a deviation from the writings which focused on the logic which saw the
World in terms of oppositional categories in which one category (male) dominates
over the other (female).Third wave feminists provided an extensive critique of
second wave feminism from within the feminist movement.

7.7.2 Judith Butler

Judith Butler in 'Gender Trouble' engaged in a 'deconstruction' of sex and gender categories. She held that just as gender, sex of an individual is also constructed so bodies do not have a pre assigned gender. The institutionalisation of heterosexuality in society implies that sex and gender are accordingly performative in nature. Men and women have to act like men and women to be accepted as such (Tong 2009: 281). She agrees with Simone de Beauvoir that one is not born a woman but one becomes a woman as gender is assigned by society. Persons are controlled by the scripts that is created by society about sex or gender and have no choice. According to Butler sex is not different from gender but is culturally constructed. Bodies are signified through their gender. Bodies perform their gender. "Saying it's a girl at a baby's birth brings a girl into being, brings the process as Butler puts it of girling the girl" (Jackson and Scott 2002:19). Performativity is therefore citational as it is based on traditional practices, norms and conventions. She makes a point that in our lifetime it is difficult to think of ourselves beyond the sex, gender and sexuality by which society defines us.

Therefore, Third wave feminists focus on diversity and change. For third wave feminists difference is the way things are (Tong 2009:271). They are open to conflict, contradiction and self-contradiction. Third wave feminism critiqued feminist thought which downplayed differences among women.

Check Your Progress V

i)   Write short note on Post Modern and Third Wave Feminism.

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7.8   MULTICULTURAL AND POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM

Multicultural feminists focus on the differences between women. Postcolonial or global feminists focus on how women's lives in Southern developing nations are different from women's lives in the Northern developed World. It is because women are not equal and have different viewpoints. Indian feminism for instance, has to constantly define, distinguish itself in its relationship to the West. Women may not call themselves as feminists, but may be involved in pursuing policies for women. In India any discussion of feminism had to confront Western feminism because during the era of colonialism the social reformers, nationalists were informed by socialist, liberal and feminist ideas as expounded by the West. However there is a need for a self-conscious historical writing on feminism in India with a search for its indigenous roots (Chaudhuri 2004: xiii).The attempt is to look for a past for feminist movements not defined by Indian nationalism and Indian women should not be conflated with Indian nation. Western feminists held that structures of patriarchy oppress women and can be explained through the sex gender system. Patriarchy is at work along with various other structures of domination in India as caste, class, tribe and community. Also the concept of patriarchy has its own path in the Indian context.

7.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we learnt that feminism has always existed but organised feminism emerged around 17th century in England. We discussed about the central ideas of different feminist perspectives such as Liberal, Radical, Marxist, Socialist, Post Modern and Third Wave Feminism, Multicultural and Postcolonial feminism. We understood about the diversity of feminist viewpoints and how the demands of feminists changed with changes in society. Liberal feminists have clamoured for equal rights and benefits for men and women. Radical feminists believe that patriarchy is the basis of women's oppression and gender that is sex roles should be eliminated. Marxist feminists believe that capitalism and patriarchy is the basis of women's oppression and demand that housework should be valued in society. Socialist feminists believe that both patriarchy and capitalism should be eliminated. Post Modern and Third Wave feminists believe that there can be multiplicities and possibilities in society and heterosexual society with male dominance is a source of women's oppression. Multicultural and postcolonial feminism believes in the differences in viewpoints among women according to their situations.

MODEL ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

i)   According to liberal feminism the basis of women's subordination is due to certain social beliefs, attitudes and customs. Legal impediments faced by women is another reason for women's subordination. There are certain notions held in society that women are incapable. Men and women also do not have equal rights and opportunities while men and women are equally rational.

ii)   a)   Education

      b)   Suffrage

      c)   The Feminine Mystique

Check Your Progress II

i)   Radical feminism did not want to reform the system like liberal feminism but revolutionize it. Radical feminists believed that it is not social attitude which is the source of women's oppression but patriarchy is the source of women's oppression. According to radical feminists men as a group dominate over women and they called for consciousness raising. Unlike liberal feminists they did not demand just reform of legal and political structures but they hold that patriarchy should be eliminated.

ii)   Shulamith Firestone wrote the book, 'The Dialectic of Sex.' She held that distinctions of gender based on sex pervade all aspects of our lives but we do not recognise them. She was of the view that women a class are discriminated because of their sex. She holds that femininity in girls and masculinity in boys can be explained due to greater power accorded to fathers than mothers in male dominant society.

Check Your Progress III

i)   According to Marxist feminists the contribution of women through housework is unrecognised in society and they are relegated to a secondary status in society. Margaret Benston women are seen as producing simple use values in society. She holds that housework should be made productive andvalued in society. On the other hand, Maria Della Costa and Selma James on the other hand argued that the alternative for women would be to stay at home and demand wages for the productive work they did in the home.

ii)   a)   Productive

       b)   Private property

       c)   Bourgeoisie

Check Your Progress IV

i)   a (2)

       b (4)

       c (1)

       d (3)

ii)   According to the interactive system explanation of women's oppression both capitalism and patriarchy work together to oppress women. Heidi Hartmann holds that patriarchy and capitalism are the two heads of the same beast: capitalist patriarchy. They hold that sexual division of labour oppresses women and classical Marxism by itself is gender- blind.

Check Your Progress V

i)   Third wave feminists such as Cixous and Judith Butler focused on 'difference' rather than providing a unitary definition of women's subordination. They are open to conflict, contradiction and self-contradiction. Third wave feminism critiqued feminist thought which downplayed differences among women. They critiqued enlightenment beliefs of the ability to attain universal truth.

7.10   REFERENCES

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UNIT 8   DALIT PERSPECTIVE*

Structure

8.0   OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to understand:

- Sociological perspective on Dalits;

- Theoretical Rationale of 'Dalit Perspective'; and

- Various meaning of Dalit perspective.

8.1   INTRODUCTION

Hindu social order is divided into Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras and there is fifth group, although not part of Varna hierarchy yet, included in the Hindu social order called the Ashprashya (untouchable). Apart from their specific caste names like *Chamars*, *Dushads*, *Mahars*, *Matangs, Vankar, Malas, Madigas, Holyars, Pulayas, Chakkliyars, Namshudra*, etc. to name just a few, they were also known by different names-like *Chandals, Avarnas, Achhuts, Pariahas, Namashudra, Adi-Dravid, Adi-Hindu*, Depressed classes, Oppressed Hindus etc. at different point in time, in various regions of the country. These aforesaid markers were accorded to them either by the sacred texts of Hindu society or the so-called upper castes in the Varna hierarchy. However, after the passage of Government of India Act -1935 Scheduled Castes became their legal identity as these castes were put in a schedule. After independence Scheduled Caste became their constitutional identity as constitution identified them for certain constitutional rights specific to them. The Indian constitution gives a definition of the Schedule of Castes under Article-341. Accordingly, at present, there are 1038 castes declared as Scheduled Castes and together they constitute approximately 16 per cent of Indian population today. But after the emergence of Dalit Panthers, a political party organised in 1970s in Maharashtra, they came to be popularly known as Dalits. But, there is still a lot of confusion in the usage of this term 'Dalit' because different sections of society use it according to their needs and understanding. Some sections of our society use the term Dalit for

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economically poor people; some use it for Tribals and still some others use it simultaneously or interchangeably for poor people, Tribalsand ex-untouchables. Hence at the outset we need to define the term 'Dalit' sociologically.

8.2 DEFINING DALITS: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

There is no sociological definition of the term 'Dalit'. At best sociologists have evolved literary or cultural meaning of the term Dalit. Further they have used political definition of the term Dalit as propounded by the 'Dalit Panthers'-a political party in their manifesto in 1973 (Murugkar 1991). Why is it important to evolve a definition of the term Dalit? It is so because without a clear cut definition of the term Dalit it becomes difficult to specify the nature and composition of the population which it connotes. It is really difficult to ascertain the boundaries of the population which is addressed by the nomenclature of Dalit because the 'Dalit Panthers' propounded a class definition, according to them, Dalits included members of Scheduled Castes (SC's), Scheduled Tribes (ST's), the landless laborers, poor peasants, women and all those who were exploited politically, economically, and in the name of religion (Murugkar 1991:237). Kumar (2005, 2010 b) has tried to define the term Dalit, sociologically, according to the following characteristics

1) Unique structural location in the Hindu social order:

2) Cumulative social exclusion suffered by them because of their structural location (see Table)

3) Long history of social exclusion.

4) Un-alterable social status based on Caste.

5) Construction of consciousness anchored in the historicity of social exclusion because of structural location.

6) Evolution of their own icons like Buddha, Ravidas, Ambedkar etc., their greeting symbol-*Jai Bhim* and their own celebrations which cuts across caste, linguistic and regional boundaries(Kumar 2009).

To elaborate the second characteristic given above, the following table gives us a rough idea of type and intensity of cumulative social exclusion suffered by Dalits-

Table 8.1: Representation of Social exclusion of Dalits

	Types of exclusion		Nature of Exclusion
1	Social Exclusion	a	Denial of existence in the Rigveda
		b	No reference in the *varna* scheme
		c	No right to sacred thread
		d	Exclusion from Ashramas
		e	No prescription of Dharma
		f	Exclusion from Purushartha
		g	Exclusion predestination

Practice of Untouchability	a	Residential exclusion (in the south of the village)	
	b	Denial of acceptance and access to water	
	c	Denial of accepting of food	
	d	Restriction on sitting together	
	e	Restriction on celebrating together	
	f	Denial of entry into house	
	g	Denial of entry into kitchen	
	h	Denial of entry into temples	
Atrocities	a	Rape of Dalit women (a caste act)	
	b	Murder of a Dalit	
	c	Grievous Hurt	
	d	Arson/loot	
	e	Ridicules in society and sacred texts	
	f	Denial of wearing of clothes/shoes/turbans etc. similar to upper castes	
Hazardous/Stigmatized Occupation	a	Cleaning human excreta	
	b	Scavenging /cleaning mainholes	
	c	Midwifery role by Dalit woman	
	d	Removing carcasses	
	e	Grave digging/burning dead/drum beating at the time of death	
	f	Piggery/Butchery/toddy tapping	
	g	Cleaning of soiled clothes	
	h	Denial of taking out marriage and funeral processions	
2 Political Exclusion	a	Denial of participation in electioneering process	
	b	Denial of participation in the decision making processes	
3 Religious Exclusion	a	Exclusion from the different structures of religion	
	b	and the legitimacy of religion for exclusion	
4 Economic Exclusion	a	Denial of freedom of occupation	
	b	Denial of access to resources	
5 Educational Exclusion	a	Exclusion from the ownership of educational centers	
	b	Exclusion from becoming knowledge seekers	

		c	Exclusion from becoming Knowledge givers
		d	Exclusion from curriculum
6	**Enemy within**	a	Oppressors of the same color
		b	Oppressors of the same religion

Source: Kumar 2009 b, Indian Media and Its Role in the Empowerment of Dalits, Communicator: A Journal of the Institute of Mass Communication, Vol. XLI, No. 1, January- December 2006

To substantiate Dalit identity further it is to emphasize that Dalits suffer cumulative social exclusion that spills over various spheres of an individual's life viz. economic, political, social, religious, educational etc. The exclusion has a very long history spanning thousands of years and is un-alterable even though the members of such groups achieve economic or educational mobility, or migrate abroad (Kumar 2004, Kumar 2009 c). This structural location, cumulative exclusion, long historicity of exclusion, un-alterable social status unites members of these groups cutting across the caste, linguistic, and regional boundaries. Further because of the aforesaid characteristics they have developed unique type of conscious which has forced them to evolve their own icons like Buddha, Ambedkar etc. their own greeting symbols and their own festivals like Buddha Jayanti or *Babasaheb*'s birth and death anniversary.

8.3 DEMAND FOR A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

In general parlance Scheduled Castes/Dalits are understood as people suffering from disabilities who need state patronage and measures like reservation policy and scholarships. This perspective projects them only as passive recipient of state patronage. However, an in-depth observation and sociological analysis of the Dalit community reveals that they have their own agency, their own culture, icons, organisations, movements, style of protest and world view. More significantly, they are also internally differentiated on the basis of gender, age, language, religion and region like any other social group. But there is general blackout of their existential and experiential realities in the sociological literature. For instance, Parvathamma (1978:91-96) argued that, "In all the writings of Srinivas, the Brahmin and non-Brahmin values are juxtaposed… The third group, which is rather sizeable, the Harijans, however, do not figure in these discussions". Similarly Oommen, (2007:101) argues that, "… all the available evidence suggests that Indian sociologist and social anthropologists … have largely neglected the social realities of the lowly placed and oppressed … particularly the SC's". Oommen, further argues that, "This is not simply a matter of praxiological aberration but also that of theoretical neglect: a product of cognitive blackout" (ibid). In the same vein, Rege (2006) highlights erasure of Dalit intellectualism in the social science curricula and secondly lack of serious engagement with Dalit feminist critiques in the social sciences. Kumar (2010:374) has further problematized the notion of cognitive black out of Dalits from sociological curriculum, by depicting lack of reflexivity, chequered availability and pseudo-inclusivity of Dalits in the discipline of sociology.

8.4 THEORETICAL RATIONALE OF 'DALIT PERSPECTIVE'

To begin with 'Dalit perspective' draws its strength from various sociologists like Mills (1957), Freire (1970), Burger and Luckman (1967), and P. Bourdieu (1986). At the onset Mills (1959:12) argues that, "...the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history, biography, and the relationship between the two within society... No social study that doesn't come back to the problems of biography, of history and their interrelation within a society has completed its intellectual journey". Further he also adds that, "social science deals with problems of biography, of history, and their interaction within social system-are the coordinate points of the proper study of man" (1957:159)...[and making] "... distinction... between 'the personal problems of the milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure"(Mills 1957:14) is integral part of sociological imagination also. Further, Dalit Perspective also draws legitimacy from 'Sociology of knowledge' also. According to Burger and Luckmann (1967:4), "... Sociology is concerned with the relationship between human thought and the social context within which it arises. It may thus be said that the sociology of knowledge constitutes the sociological focus of a much more general problem, that of the existential determination... of thought as such".

If we apply the aforesaid prepositions given by the various sociologists then we can argue that there are groups of individuals whose biographies and histories and their interaction in the Indian social structure produce very different existential and experiential realties. We can further substantiate our point via Bourdieu's notion of cultural and social capital (1986). According to Bourdieu, (1986) " The social world is accumulated history...It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms...Depending on the field in which it functions ...capital can present itself in three fundamental guises; as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights; as cultural capital ...exists in three forms: in the embodied state i.e. in the form of long-lasting dispositions
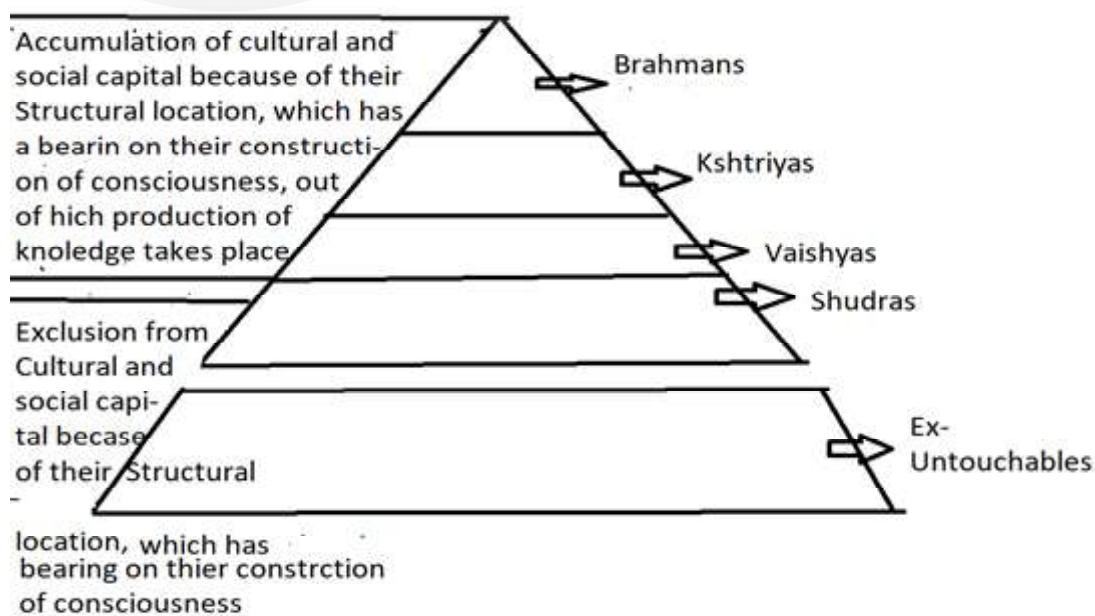

Fig. 8.1: Figure depicting accumulation and exclusion from cultural and Social Capital

of the mind and body, and in the institutionalised state, a form of objectification which must be set apart...; and as Social capital ...which is the aggregate of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition-or in other words, to membership in a group-which provides each of its members with the backing of collectively owned capital".

Bourdieu's concepts can be applied to Hindu social order as shown in the following figure 8.1 that represents the exact position of various groups in terms of their social and cultural capital.

If we operationalise the aforesaid structure in the Indian society in the sphere of knowledge production and research then what do we get? We can observe that there is an intrinsic relationship between the individual's structural location and the production of knowledge. It is so because the individual is socialised in the socio- historical and cultural milieu which shapes his consciousness. Out of this consciousness production of knowledge takes place. Therefore, it can be easily said that structural location of the Dalits is intrinsically linked to their production of knowledge which can be called as 'Dalit Perspective'. Last but not the least, such type of perspective is required because Freire emphatically argues that, "the pedagogy of the oppressed... makes oppression and it causes objects of reflection by the oppressed and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation". However Freire (1970:36) also argues that, "...the pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be developed or practiced by the oppressor" (1970:30-36) it has to be developed by the oppressed and that is why there is need of Dalit perspective.

Apart from general theoretical framework few Indian sociologists have highlighted the rational of perspective which can be equated with Dalit perspective. According to Oommen (2007:104-105), "If experience and knowledge are inextricably interlinked in social sciences, then the location of the knowledge producer, the researcher, in social structure is crucial from the perspective of production of knowledge. That is, the perspective from below is necessitated due to the politics of location. The process of production of knowledge and the advantages emanating out of one's location in social structure are invariably linked". Singh (1986), had noted need of different perspective to understand the issues of Scheduled Castes. He argued that, "An important ideological perspective that has now emerged in the interpretation of… deprivation among the Scheduled Castes is that the traditional Brahmanical model for the interpretation… [it] itself [is]an attempt to justify caste exploitation and oppression… The traditional cultural ideology, therefore, needs to be inverted in order to evolve an objective ideological or even methodological perspective which to study… Scheduled Castes in India (Singh 1994:94). Moreover, Dalhiwale (2005 (ed.)) has pleaded that Sociologists understand Indian society through a perspective, which includes the perspectives of Buddha, Jotiba Phuley, Chatrpati Shauji Maharaj, B. R. Ambedkar, E. V. Ramasamy Nicker (Periyar) and host of other social reformers and leaders belonging to the excluded categories. Clubbing their ideas about the Indian society Dahiwale call it 'Non-Brahmanical Perspective'. In the same vein Mani (2005) also argues that for better understanding of socio-religious world view and caste ideology we have to 'De-Brahmanize Indian History by clearing cobwebs of fiction and misunderstanding that have been woven around the Veda and Vedic religion. Hence, there are enough evidences to show that Dalits and Other Backward Classes are demanding new perspective to understand Dalits.

8.5 DEFINING DALIT PERSPECTIVE

Perspective means, 'a specific point of view in understanding and judging things or events' (Webster's New World Dictionary 1991:1008). Accordingly Dalit perspective is a specific point of view to understand and analyze the social reality empirically. This point of view emanates from unique trajectory of experiences and consciousness of millions of Dalits shaped by their structurallocation and consciousness as discussed above.

There are at least four functions of Dalit perspective. These are:

i)   It tries to understand and analyze the existing socio-political reality about the Dalits with the help of book view and field view.

ii)   It tries to understand and analyze the reality about the Dalits established by the other social scientists.

iii) It tries to understand and analyze the existing socio-political reality about the society as whole.

iv)   It provides us a broad framework to study the Dalit society.

Dalit perspective started evolving when they began to analyze the nature and content of their own community. It tried to highlight the plight of their own community and demanded relief from the existing regimes. Later, it went on to critically examine the existing literature, about the Indian society and Dalits, produced by the social scientists belonging to other castes and communities than Dalits. Thirdly Dalit perspective also tries to analyze the existing socio-political reality of the whole society. Last but not the least it also provides us a general framework to understand the nature and scope of the Dalit society as a hole. These four aspects of Dalit perspective are interdependent and inter-connected.They do not exist independently on their own. Although, such type of understanding and analyses is not readily available under the exact heading of 'Dalit Perspective', however several social scientists have discussed these aforesaid aspects under various headings. For instance, a preposition 'Perspective form below' has been used by a number of sociologists (Mencher 1974, Oommen 2007, Ram 2010, Kumar 2014). Few others have spoken about ''Non-Brahmanical Perspective' (Dahivale 2005) and still others have argued for 'De-Brahmanising History' (Mani 2005). One can treatall these views relatively similar to 'Dalit Perspective'. In this context it will be interesting to note Ram (2010) who reiterates that, "… perspective from below is an approach which adheres to the views of those who are considered to be placed at the bottom of social hierarchy be they Shudra or untouchables… these views are related specially to what they have experienced through all these years… and… undoubtedly derived its strength from thoughts and philosophy of Ambedkar on Indian Society" (Ram 2010:38).

8.5.1 Dalit Perspective: Existing Reality and Book View about of Dalits

The Dalit perspective argues that the book view of caste system says that there are only four *Varnas* and *Manu Smriti* argues that there cannot be fifth. Further question is raised as to why the Dalits have been categorized as fifth *Varna* by sociologists and anthropologists like Ghurye (1979:307) and Dumont (1999:68). They point out that a problem arises within the schema of Hindu Social Order

which is constituted by *Varna-ashram-dharma.* That means normatively there are four classes of people, that is, *Brahmin, Kshatriya,Vaishya* and *Shudra.* Out of these fourVarnas male members of only three *Varnas* namely – *Brahmin, Kshatriya,* and *Vaishya* have been prescribed to follow four stages in their full life span viz. – *Bramhcharya, Grihastha, Vanprastha* and *Sanyasa*; together which are called as *Ashramas.* Further, they have also been assigned various duties (Dharma) as well (Mathur 1991:68, Ghurye 1979: 48-51).The Dalit perspective enquires if Dalits are fifth Varna then which ashrams members of the Dalit community can follow and which of the Dharma (duties) they can performand why no mainstream sociologist has given any objective answer to the aforesaid question. This perspective emphatically underlines that although there have been long struggles by the Dalits to prove the point that they are not part of Hindu Social Order and have separate and independent status (Omvedt 1994:122, Gooptu 1993, Lynch 1974, Singh 2000) yet sociologists have included Dalits in the Hindu Social Order. It is here Dalit Perspective questions that the social scientists whether Hindu Social Order is a social construct or a reality (Kumar 2010: 360-380) and "Is the inclusion of Dalits in the Hindu Social Order an academic or political exercise"? (Kumar 2005:520).

8.5.2   Dalit Perspective: A'Field View'

Apart from highlighting the existing position of Dalits in the Hindu social order in the book view Dalit perspective also tries to analyze how and why is that their values, world views, icons, movements etc. have been blacked out in the 'field view' of the Indian society. It emphasizes that even in the studies of Indian Village their day-to-day sufferings, ridicule, dirt, filth and poverty was never discussed. Indian villages were celebrated as 'Little Republics' to invoke Metcalf's phrase. Studies of Srinivas (1978) and Beteille (1971) on Indian villages were based on unity and interdependence axis. Dalit perspective declares this perspective of the mainstream sociologists as erroneous. For instance according to Ambedkar. who had seen his relatives live in the villages argues that, "… In this republic there is no place for democracy. There is no room for equality,…liberty and… fraternity. The Indian village is the very negation of a republic"(Ambedkar 1989:19:26). On the other hand Parvathamma highlights that , "Srinivas seems to be firmly committed to the equilibrium model of Radcliffe Brown and Durkheim… the principle of village solidarity… in day-to-day life is often governed by conflicting interests so that both inter-caste as well as intra-caste relationships are marked by changes… solidarity is at best temporary and situational" (Parvathamma 1978:95). Further, Arun (2007) portrays that there is still spatial difference between Cheri (Dalit Colony) and Ur (so called upper caste residential area) and even the burial grounds of Dalits and the so-called upper castes are different. Writing the existing hegemony of the so-called upper caste in the village even today Arun laments that, "They (Dalits) still do not wear shirts and when they meet the higher caste of the village they remove their towel from their shoulder in respect… In the same way the older Paraiyar women do not wear blouse and sandals in front of the higher castes" (Arun 2007:38). Ramaiah (2010) also presents a very different picture of the Indian village in comparison to the mainstream sociologists.

Accordingly Dalit autobiographies portray spatial, cultural, and occupational etc. differences among the resident of the same village. For instance, Valmiki's (2003:1) description of his village is a case in point. According to him, "On the

edge of the pond were the homes of Chuhras. All the women of the village, …would sit …behind these homes at the edge of the pond to take a shit…There was muck strewn every here…The pigs wandering in narrow lanes, naked children, dogs, daily fights, this was the environment…If the people who call the caste system an ideal social arrangement had to live in this …for a day or two they would change their mind". In the same vein Madhopuri (2010) in his autobiography argues that sources of water for each caste in rural Punjab were different. Similarly, a string of autobiographies of Dalits have also tried to highlight the existing exploitation, exclusion and contempt which Dalits suffer in the village setting even today (Valmiki 2003, Jadhav 2003, Bechain 2009, Tulsi Ram 2010). Hence Dalit perspective raises the question that why did such difference exist between the point of the so-called mainstream sociologists and that of Dalits. The answer is not far to seek. It happened so because, while doing their studies they did not live in the Dalit localities like- *cahmarutees*, *maharwada*, *madigawada*, or *cheri*, to name just a few, rather they stayed in the upper caste localities and hence they could not see Indian village from the Dalit perspective (Parvathamma (1978), Ram (1995), Dahiwale (ed.) (2005), Rege (2006), Oommen (2007)).

8.5.3   Dalit Perspective Gives us a Framework to Understand Dalit Society

Dalit perspective gives us three broad aspects make sense of the Dalit community as a whole:

i)   Understanding Dalits through their internal social categories like Dalit women, Dalit youths, Dalit icons, Dalit Diaspora etc.

ii)   Understanding Dalits via institutions like caste religion, Political parties, NGOs, and Literature.

iii) Understanding Dalits through the processes like different shades of their movements, the processes like Modernisation, and process of globalisation.

Dalit perspective tries to establish that Dalit women are triply exploited on the basis of gender, class and caste. This differentiates them from general caste women who are exploited only on the bases of gender and class (Rege, Kumar). Dalit women are different from the so-called upper caste women on the bases of the stereotyping,about them, they are termed as *Dai* (midwives), *Devdasis* (temple servers), and *Dayans* (witches).They differ from other women because of the sexual violence they suffer at the hands of the upper caste males. Dalit perspective reiterates that Dalit women's sexual assault by the so-called upper caste is an act prompted by Dalit women's location in the caste structure. There are four reasons for the same: first, though Dalits are treated as untouchables but Dalit women become touchable. Second, Dalit women's rape on a number of occasions is a group activity. Third, it is a caste act because violence is perpetrated by the so called upper castes while they attack Dalit localities. During such violence, Dalit women's age doesn't deter the assaulter to commit such heinous crime. Fifth, these sexual acts are committed at the time when Dalits assert for their legitimate constitutional rights. Sixth, they are also committed to shatter the morale of the community members as a whole. It declares that neither Indian women nor Dalit society can be understood as a monolithic whole.

Similarly a very important difference between Dalit and general caste youth is the type of 'injured psyche' with which Dalit youths live and grow. Their

consciousness is constituted by the treatment they have to suffer at the hands of their peer group in the neighbourhood, or in the informal or formal institutions of which they become members. They are ridiculed by their so-called upper caste mates using the epithets like *Sarkari Damads*, *Cata Students, Sonar Chand* and girls being asked 'whether they have come via *kotha* (brothel) or via quota (Kumar 2016 a)'.

Further, Dalit perspective emphatically highlights the process of blackout and reductionism of the icons belonging to Dalits and other backward casteslike Jyotiba Phuley, Narayana Guru, E.V. Ramasamy Periyar, Sahuji Maharaj and Dalit icons like Ravidas, Ambedkar or even Kanshi Ram. It also attempts to deconstruct the process of reductionism of Dalit icons like Babasaheb Ambedkar and instead of referring him only as Dalit Messiah, it calls him as nation builder and architect of modern India.

Further, Dalit perspective (Kumar 2004, Ghuman 2011) successfully demonstrates that Dalit Diaspora has established itself as a separate community with the help of their celebrations and organisations. Theyhave established their icons like Buddha, Ravidas, and Ambedkar through the establishment of Buddha Viharas, and Ravidasi Temples. They have got installed busts of Babasaheb Ambedkar in the universities like — London School of Economics, Columbia University, Massachusetts, Brandies University, Simon-Fraser University, York University in Canada, Melbourne University in Australia andKoyasan University in Japan. Dalits have started celebrating and commemorating birth and death anniversaries of their icons by establishing an alliance with the local groups of their adopted countries and the Indian consulate. Dalit Diaspora has also highlighted the issue of human rights violations back home with their respective governments of their host nations.

Dalit perspective helps us to arrive at an in-depth understating of nature and characteristics of castes which is not available in the analysis of the mainstream social scientists. For instance, Ambedkar (1979) has refuted most of the theories of origin of caste and its characteristics as well. He has refuted racial theory of caste as well as occupational theory of caste. Ambedkar (1979) also refutes the simple understanding of hierarchy within the caste system. Instead, Ambedkar (1979) accepted that only endogamy is the real characteristics of caste.

Further, according to him caste is not a simple division of labor rather it is division of laborers as well. Caste system is based on birth of an individual in a group without any freedom to choose an occupation. Moreover, it is accompanied by untouchability and hereditary. Further Ambedkar uses the term inequality in place of hierarchy. Accordingly, he has argued that the system of hierarchy is a weak system in which it seems that one caste is placed over the other with its privileges. Instead, he refers to principle of 'graded inequality'. The graded inequality has at least five classes — the highest, higher, high, lower and the lowest. In this system, except the lowest, there is no class which is absolutely underprivileged. Hence, each class being privileged has interests to maintain the caste system rather dismantling it. Last but not the least, Dalit perspective also refutes the point that caste is a colonial construct (Kumar 2014.) with the help of oral testimonies of saints of formless God- Ravidas and Kabir. Dalit perspective emphasize that caste existed much earlier than colonial period.

Dalitsclaim statuses like Adi-Hindu, Adi-Dravida, Adi-Andhra, and Adi-Karnataka to assert that they have been original inhabitants of this land and the Aryans came from outside and subjugated them. They give three reasons to illustrate their exclusion from the Hindu religion. One, they had launched Bhakti movement with the allegiance to formless god — like Ravidasi or Kabirpanthi movement. Two, they transferred their allegiance to non-Hindu religions.They converted to Sikhism (Juergensmeyer : 1982 & Webster, C.B. John, 2002) which had indigenous origin and to Islam and Christianity which had foreign origin. A third trend emerged after Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956 when five lakh of Dalits converted to Buddhism in Nagpur. Since then Dalits have been asserting Buddhism as their religion. (Kantowsky 2003). However, it is a fact that millions of Dalits also worship their local deities which are not part of Hindu pavilions of God.

It was in 1960s that Dalit youth started writing poems, short stories, plays and other types of creative writings to air their experiences and Dalit literature grew as part of the Dalit movement. . They started bringing out magazines and pamphlets and organising conferences of Dalit writers. It was accepted by the Dalit actors that they are guided by vision and understanding of Babasaheb Ambedkar. Dalit autobiographies were seen as the most effective genre of the Dalit literature and viewed as meta-narratives to make sense of Dalit lives.These have deconstructed the existing socio-cultural and political realities as depicted by the mainstream sociologists (Raj Kumar 2010 a, & 2010 b).

Dalits observe their political parties from the perspective of leadership, ideology and membership (Gokhale 1993). Kumar (2002) divides Dalit political leadership into dependent and independent leadership. Most of the parties are led by Dalits themselves like Independent Labour Party (ILP), Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF), Republican Party of India (RPI), Dalit Panthers (DP), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) to name just a few. They have their own agenda that sets them apart from the mainstream political parties. BSP has been the most successful of the Dalit political parties capturing power in the most populous state of the country (Uttar Pradesh) and today is a national party of the Dalits. The BSP has strengthened Indian democracy by giving representation to erstwhile excluded communities (Kumar 2006, Kumar 2007). As far as Dalit NGOs are concerned it is interesting to note that after the advent of globalisation they have become more visible and have started raising the Human rights issues of Dalits at the national and International forums like United Nations or European or Asian Social forums (Sachchidananda 2001).

Dalit perspective reiterates the need to identify different shades of collective actions within the rubric of Dalit Movements. It argues that there are at least eight types of movements organised by Dalits. These movements are: (i) Socio-religious reform movement, (ii) Political movement, (iii) Dalit Literary and intellectual movement, (iv) Dalit employee's movement, (v) Dalit NGO's movement, (vi) Dalit women's movement, (vii) Dalit media movement, (viii) Dalit Diaspora movement (Ram 1999, Kumar 2010 a).

Dalits have also responded to the process of modernisation and globalisation (Kumar 2007 b). As far as process of modernisation is concerned it started with acquiring modern English education during colonial period. For Ambedkar process of modernisation meant establishment of values of equality, liberty,

fraternity and social justice. It also included the process of nation building with the establishment of constitutional rights for the erstwhile excluded communities. As the time went by, Dalits tried to enter in the modern institutions like bureaucracy, education and politics with the process of reservation. They also demanded their self-representation in the institution of education, production and governance referring to their Constitutional Rights. After 1990s, the Dalits have also tried to negotiate with the process of globalisation. On the one hand the Dalits perspective emphasizes that the process with its liberalisation and privatisation and informal revolution have been detrimental to the DalitsThe private sector industries and even universities and professional colleges do not provide reservation for Dalits neither do the MNCs(Jogdand 1991). As far as information revolution as part of globalisation is concerned, Dalits have used it to connect themselves globally with the help of e-mail, internet, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. They have also benefitted because of the new role acquired by human rights institutions like NHRC etc.

Check Your Progress

1) Define the term Dalit and locate the different types of exclusion related to dalits.

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2) Discuss the theoretical rationale of Dalit perspective.

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3) What do understand by Dalit perspective?

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4) Explain the existing reality and book view about of dalits.

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8.6   LET US SUM UP

To conclude, we can argue that Dalit perspective is a specific point of view to understand the society empirically. This perspective emerges out of thoughts and experiences of millions of Dalits who have unique structural location in the society and their consciousness is shaped by long history of cumulative exclusion. Dalit perspective draws its strength from a number of social scientists especially C.W. Mills preposition of three coordinates of sociological imagination i.e. biography, history and their interaction in society. It also draws its strength form P. Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and social capita. This perspective has four specific functions, one it tries to understand and analyze the book-view and field-view of Indian society in general and about Dalits in particular. Secondly, it critically tries to understand the views of the mainstream sociologists about Indian society as hole. Thirdly, it has also reflected about the society and social institutions in general. Last but not the least Dalit perspective provides us a broad framework to understand socio-cultural and political aspects of Dalit community. For instance it gives us insights about internal social categories of Dalits like — Dalit women, Dalit youths, Dalit icons, or Dalit Diaspora. It tries to reflect upon institutions like Caste, village, religion, or literature. Dalit perspective also helps to understand the processes like different shades of Dalit movements and their engagements with the processes like modernisation and globalisations. Overall this perspective has brought more rigor in the discipline of Indian Sociology which has not been very representative (Kumar 2016 b). By providing us different vantage point to understand social reality it has questioned the established concepts and deconstructed a number of established notion about Indian society in general and Dalit community In particular.

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