B.A. 3rd. year (Major)

 **Contemporary Political Issues**

**Liberal Feminism**

First wave of Feminism was very much influenced by the principle and ideology of liberalism. And in the Second Wave of Feminism also the influence of Liberalism was very prominent.

The word “ Feminist” was used on the last part of 19th century. But the modern concept of Feminism had developed even earlier ,that is during the last part of 17th century. At that period Capitalism started to flourish .And as a reaction against the autocratic power of men the concept of Liberalism had developed.

The Liberal thinkers became vocal for the rights of women. In1792 Mary Woll-Stonecraft published her book “ Vindication of the rights of Women”. In this book the primary idea of Liberal feminism had developed for the first time. In that period women were not entitled to enjoy right to vote and even right to education. The married women did not enjoy the right to property and they did not even enjoy the right to divorce in-spite of being tortured by their husband.

The philosophical basis of liberal theory of feminism lies on

 Individualism. Accordingly, all human beings are equally important. All would have to enjoy equal status in the society irrespective of caste,religion,class,sex etc.and have to get opportunity to participate in the political life. Any kind of discrimination against women in this regard should be prohibited.

Liberal feminism is mainly reformative in nature. They were in favour of giving equal opportunities to women so that they would compete with their male counterpart.However,they did not advocate the abolition of public-private dichotomy.Their main aim was to establish equal rights for women in public domain.In this regard, Right to Education,Right to Vote, Right to choose one’s own Profession etc. to be materialized for all.

The Western countries were wide ahead in giving those rights to Women.But in various areas of private life,like division of power on the domain of family life, Gender based division of labour etc. were not addressed properly.

According to Marry Woll- Stonecraft, if women enjoy the right to education they would establish themselves as reasonable being. And this reasoning power in the long run would help to abolish all kinds of discrimination from the society.She was very much vocal about equal opportunities for women in regard to education, employment, property, suffrage.

Andrew Heud mentioned in his book “Political Ideologies’’ about Mary’s Feminism;”Wollstone craft,s feminism drew upon an Enlightenment l liberal belief in reason and a radical . humanist commitment to equality.She stressed the equal rights of Women, specially I in education, on the basis of the notion of “Personhood”.

Famous English liberal thinker J.S Mill in his famous book “On the Subjection of Women” had depicted condition of women in England.[1869]. He also gave importance on giving total legal rights and political equality to women for the betterment of the society.

The core concern of Liberal Feminism is that as a human being women are reasonable enough to decide their own fate and thus in the field of politics and employment equal opportunities should be created for women. During the 60s, of the 20th century these opportunities for women were formally accepted, but practically these were not available. And because of the failure of American Govt. and society to provide justice to women the Second wave of feminism was visible. In this stage a clarion call was given to free women from the bondage of household activities. And both men and women should share equally the household responsibility The modern liberal concept was not in favour total change of present, social, economic and cultural system. They did not even attack the traditional values and family values. One of the famous exponent of this period is Betty Friedan who expressed her views in her famous book ”The Feminine Mystique” (1963).According to her views some belief and faith had nurtured among women through the process of socialization. They believed that the true development and success of womenhood is possible only within the four wall of their family by rearing their children and fullfiling the needs of their husband.However,many American women were not satisfied and depressed with their position in the society.So with a view to remove the obstacles on the way of the emancipation of women she had formed an organization known as N.O.W. (National organization for women)This orgasition was playing a role of a pressure group. The aim was to use the contemporarypolitical system and political process to end the traditional concept of gender discrimination and to provide more facilities for child rearing and to introduce maternity leave with pay and to engage manfolk to discharge and share domestic activities with their betterhalf.

During the 20th century the concept of Liberal feminism further developed though the writings of Redcliff Richard and Susan Moller okin. They were influenced by the theory of Justice developed by John Rawls. Both men and women should have to get the opportunities to develop their inner qualities and temporarily reverse discrimination system may also be applied.

In 1993 NaomiWold a Social scientist in her book “Fire with Fire” again focoussed on the idea of liberal feminism.She gave stress on “Power feminism” and urged the women to apply their independence and decision making power while shaping their own life.