**Question; Define Feminism. Discuss the objectives of feminism.**

**Answer**

**Introduction**

Throughout most of Western history, women were confined to the domestic sphere, while public life was reserved for men. In medieval Europe, women were denied the right to own property, to study, or to participate in public life. At the end of the 19th century in France, they were still compelled to cover their heads in public, and, in parts of Germany, a husband still had the right to sell his wife. Even as late as the early 20th century, women could neither vote nor hold elective office in Europe and in most of the United States (where several territories and states granted women’s suffrage long before the federal government did so). Women were prevented from conducting business without a male representative, be it father, brother, husband, legal agent, or even son. Married women could not exercise control over their own children without the permission of their husbands. Moreover, women had little or no access to education and were barred from most professions. In some parts of the world, such restrictions on women continue today.

**Meaning:**

Feminism, the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Although largely originating in the West, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests.

The term feminism can be used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference. It is a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights. The man who coined ‘feminism’ in 1837, was a radical French philosopher Charles Fourier.

Despite its recent origin the feminist views have been expressed in different cultures can be traced back in ancient civilization of Greece and China. Christine De Pisan’s Book, *‘City of Ladies’* published in Italy in 1405, foreshowed many of the ideas of modern feminism advocating women’s right to education and political influence. The first text of modern feminism usually taken to be Mary Wollstonecraft’s ‘*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman’* (1792), in which she advocated the social and moral equality of the sexes. In fact, the book was written against the backdrop of the French Revolution.

**Definitions**

The global idea of feminism refers to the belief that men and women deserve equality in all opportunities, treatment, respect, and social rights. In general, feminists are people who try to acknowledge social inequality based on gender and stop it from continuing. Feminists point out that in most cultures throughout history that men have received more opportunities than women. Following are some of the definitions of feminism:

1. In the words of **Beatrice Forbes-Robertson Hale,** 1914, “Feminism is that part of the progress of democratic freedom which applies to women”.
2. **Adrienne Rich,** 1976, stated that, “Feminism means finally that we renounce our obedience to the fathers and recognize that the world they have described is not the whole world.... Feminism implies that we recognize fully the inadequacy for us, the distortion, of male-created ideologies, and that we proceed to think, and act, out of that recognition."

**Objectives of Feminism:**

Feminist theories and doctrines are diverse, but their unifying feature is a common desire to enhance, through whatever means, the social role of women. The underlying themes of feminism are therefore, first, that society is characterized by sexual or gender inequality and, second, that this structure of male power can, and should be, overturned. Its main objectives are:

1. Feminism has as its goal to give every woman the opportunity to becoming the best as per her natural faculties.
2. It aims to understand the nature of gender inequality. It focuses on analyzing gender inequality.
3. It challenges present social structure and values in society which asserts socio-cultural and political discrimination against women with gender being the primary motive behind it.
4. It aims to find out the causes of subordination of women.
5. To identify the areas of discrimination against women and to examine the social construction of sex and gender.
6. To emphasize on the adoption and implementation of laws relating to women’s rights, property rights, etc.,
7. To protect women folk from the scourge of violence which includes domestic violence, sexual harassment and assault?

**Question: Critically discuss the importance of feminism to the study of political theory**

**Answer**

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**Importance of Feminism:** Despite criticisms, the importance and relevance of feminisms can be summarized under the following points:

1. Feminism made the role of women and gender relations viable in sociology and in political theories in general.
2. Feminism exposed the dark side of family life, helping to free women and children from domestic violence and abuse.
3. It helped substantially in reaching the goal of women emancipation.
4. It opens an opportunity to acquire self-respect and self-love for women in the society.
5. Feminism has helped in increasing people's awareness of the inequalities created by gender. It shows how gender roles are socially constructed.
6. Feminism helped in making a relationship on the basis of mutual respect, instead of being dependent on control and indigence in the family.

**Criticism**

As an ideology, feminism is not spared of criticism. The whole ideology is subject to severe criticism by the anti-feminists writers from different angles. They attacked feminism as an ideology on the following grounds:

1. They argue that feminism is characterized more by disagreement than by agreement. A range of common ground could never be identified within feminism.
2. Another criticism of feminism isthat it is an ideology said to be an extension of western ideology formulated to impose on developing countries of third world
3. The concept of liberal feminism has been criticized of being concerned only with the problem of women belonging to middle class. They alleged that liberal feminism is elitist in nature.
4. A few modern anti-feminist writers are being very critical to the present context. They asserted that contemporary societies are characterized by their plural identities, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic traits. Hence, a single feminist theory cannot address the problem of all women in the society.
5. The feminist theory has been attacked by different religious groups. They asserted that feminism is contrary to traditional values and religious beliefs.
6. Anti-feminists argued that man and women are different from each other naturally and they have distinct role to play in the society. Women should not have the equal capacity with men in the society.
7. A few critics stated that feminism underestimated the domestic responsibilities. The fact that feminism promotes equality among men and women does not mean that their roles are interchangeable. So for mothers, it is their responsibility to bear a child and fulfills the role of a mother for the child.

**Conclusion**

Thus, to conclude we must confess one thing that atrocities, violence, murder, death, discrimination against women have not declined, rather it pervaded all societies. The human rights of women are violated indiscriminately in every aspects of our life. As long as violation of women’s human rights and inequality prevails in our society, the relevance of feminism will continue to exist.