

## Feminist Analysis of Organizations: A Theoretical Perspective

Shakila Yasmin\*

### Abstract

Organizational studies and feminist theories have long been detached due to their distinctive interest areas. Feminist scholars, only in the late 1960s and early 1970s, have condemned traditional organizational research to ignore issues of gender in working life. However, researches till date reveal that the gendered norms of 'ideal workers', the gendered division of labor are still prevalent and gender inequality has been institutionalized in organizations. Therefore, it's legitimate to evaluate theories of organization from feminist perspective, such that an alternative gender neutral model of organization can be conceived. The objective of this paper is to identify existing theories about gender inequality in organizations. Based on secondary literature, seven major feminist approaches to organizations have been evaluated in terms of their argument and prescriptions for achieving gender equality. Liberal and psychoanalytic feminist approaches are transformative and mild, compared to others. Marxists frame gender difference as synonym to class struggle. Socialists on the contrary argue that a dual interlinked system of women's oppression (capitalism and patriarchy) exist. Radicalists theorize sex to be the core of all sorts of oppression. They challenge all sex-based structures and take a separatist move. By examining multiple marginality and subordination of the third world women, post-modern and post-colonial feminists argue that previous feminists were focused only on the privileged women of developed economies. In terms of organizational practices, post-moderns and post-colonials prescribe a contingency approach, as such to take into account hybridity of identities.

**Key Words:** Feminism, Gender, Organizations

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\* Institute of Business Administration, University of Dhaka

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the study

Although the roots of studies on women's subordination and inequality go back to late 1700's, theories and researches on sex - segregation or other gender inequalities in organizations have a very recent history. Organizational studies and feminist theories were detached due to their distinctive interest areas. Organizational literature has been dominated by male academics to solve the problems of male managers while feminist studies mostly dealt with women and nature of patriarchal relations in entire social realm (Mills, 2004). Feminist scholars only in the late 1960s and early 1970s have condemned traditional organizational research to ignore issues of gender in working life (Acker & Van Houten, 1974). As Dorothy Smith has argued in "Sociology for Women"- The available discourses on organizations, the way that organizational sociology is defined is grounded in the working worlds and relations of men, whose experience and interests arise in the course of and in relation to participation in ruling apparatus of this society (Smith, 1977). Rapid development of women's liberation movement since the late 1960's increased the awareness of women to their subordination both in public and private sphere. Since then scholars have created knowledge about how gender inequalities are produced and reproduced in organizations.

Yet, the influence of feminism in mainstream organizational analysis and the extent to which feminist research informs business texts are cursory. Albert J. Mills (2004) in his paper 'Gendering organizational analysis-a retrospective' has presented a review of 107 widely used business text books in North America published between 1959 and 1996. Prior to 1990 gender discussion in business texts were limited as a new reality to be dealt by male managers due to equity legislation, increased participation of women in work force. Post 1990 business text books though include a broader discussion of gender compared to those published between 1959-1990, failed to discuss the effect of gender in organizational behavior ( e.g. culture, motivation, stress, communication) and subsumed gender with diversity (race, age, ethnicity, sexual preference). Mills (2004:22) summarizes his research findings with the following remark- "The relative absence of feminist scholarship of organizations is only a part of the problem. Today's discussion of gender has been incorporated in a male-stream discourse that tends to speak in a clearly male voice and to subordinate humanist concerns (e.g. issues of self-esteem, discrimination etc.) to organizational outcomes of profitability, effectiveness and growth." Indeed the field of business studies is dominated by functionalist and managerialist perspective (Mills & Simmons, 1995) which is a 'malestream' framed by masculinist view of reality and dominated by male researchers and male oriented researches.

(Mills & Tancred, 1993). Few feminist works incorporated into the discourse are usually made to fit, rather than question that paradigm. For example: The most cited feminist literature in the business texts according to Mills (2004) analysis are R. M. Kanter's (1977, 1979) 'Men and Women of Corporations' and 'Power Failure in Management Circuits'. The first work shows how the careers and self-images of the managers, professionals, and executives, and also those of the secretaries, wives of managers, and women looking for a way up, are determined by the distribution of power and powerlessness within the corporation. She has produced description of the complex and often contradictory behavior of people in organizations, and the irrationalities of bureaucracies as well as an analysis of the "why" of behavior in organizations and developed recommendations for changing the dysfunctional aspects of bureaucratic structures. But her analyses and change recommendations do not challenge the traditional organizational logic and structure rather presents a laundry list of recent human resources management techniques, such as flatter organization, flexible work hour, and other policies promoting better work life balance. Similarly, Kanter's 1979 work presents a view of powerlessness of women in organization only as a by-product of her analysis of power. Drawing a distinction between productive and oppressive power she maintains that the former is a function of having open channels to supplies, support, and information; the latter is a function of these channels being closed. She then describes three positions that are classically powerless: first-line supervisors, staff professionals, and, surprisingly, chief executive officers. These positions can be powerless because of difficulties in maintaining open lines of information and support. Seeing powerlessness in these positions as dangerous for organizations, she urges managers to restructure and redesign their organizations in order to eliminate pockets of powerlessness. Kanter(1979)also notes how powerlessness of women (when they exhibit the same issues of powerlessness as men) is perceived as the result of their incapacity, and inefficiency. The second most cited feminist author in Mills (2004) study was Virginia E. Schein (1973, 1975). Schein examined the relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics among middle managers. The publication in 1975 is a replication of the previous study with female middle managers. Both empirical studies confirmed the hypothesis that successful middle managers are perceived to possess characteristics, attitudes, and temperaments more commonly ascribed to men in general than to women in general. The limited number of women in management positions can be accounted in part to this association between sex role stereotypes and perceptions of requisite management characteristics. Moreover, the perception that women are less qualified than men for management positions can be a result of such sex role stereotyping of the managerial job. Definitely this perception

would have a negative influence on selection, promotion, and placement decisions concerning women in organizations. Therefore, Mills (2004:21) questions – “Are feminist discourses developing enough of the right kind of work to illuminate the problem of organizational development? How do we combine the problem of questioning the gendered frameworks in which “men” and “women” are constructed with the need to challenge the impact of those frameworks on women?”

It is true that women’s participation in the public sphere has increased; organizations today are implementing numerous gender sensitive policies such as flexible work hour, working from home, paternity/maternity leave, etc. However, the opposing relation between sex role stereotype and requisite management characteristic (Schein, 1973, 1975; Brener, Tomkiewicz & Schein, 1989; Kanter, 1998, 2003; Marshal, 2013 and others) still prevails. A recent analysis by Gascoigne, Parry & Buchanan (2015) reveal that the gendered norms of ‘ideal workers’, the gendered division of labor are still prevalent in organizations. Extreme jobs i.e. long work hour and intensified work rationalize the separation of work and non-work spheres and institutionalize gender inequality in organizations. Therefore, the legitimate question is, whether there is any alternative organizational model which is gender neutral?

## 1.2 Objective of the study

This paper has evaluated major feminist approaches to organizations. The objective is to identify the major feminist arguments, their projects and prescriptions against oppression of women in organizations. How different feminist approaches have critiqued organizations as gendered entities has also been explored. This analysis will help building a platform for further research about ‘how can we make traditional male-dominated organizations pro-woman?’ or about the prospects of an alternative organizational model which is gender neutral. In other words, this paper will create the foundation to build insights for researching Mills’ (2004:23) concluding question, “How do we combine the problem of questioning the gendered frameworks in which “men” and “women” are constructed with the need to challenge the impact of those frameworks on women?”

## 2.0 Methodology

The research has been conducted relying on secondary literature. For the purpose of analysis, organization is defined as an entity where a group of people engage in concerted efforts to achieve a common goal. Although families, friendship groups and other informal entities are organizations

(social), they are left out of the scope of analysis because they mostly operate in the private sphere of economies. Therefore, here organizations mean business organizations, NGOs, nonprofit entities working for communal, societal and national interest, and different offices and departments of government.

Feminism is defined as the collection of ideologies and movements against all sorts of oppression of women that aims at defining, establishing, and defending women's political, economic, and social rights (Webster Dictionary, 2013; Cambridge Dictionary, 2013)

Literature from different schools of feminism such as Liberal, Marxist, Socialist, Radical, Post-modernist, and Post-colonialist has been reviewed to present their unique perspectives about organizations and gender thereby. Although, all feminist schools agree on the male dominance and existing inequality in the work-place, they differ in their claims about the structure of organizations and the ways through which this situation may be changed (Usar, 1996). Women writers in pre-modern period or in the early stages of modernity envisioned women's education (for upper class women) that will enhance their abilities as wives and mothers. They advocated for preserving the social, political and religious hierarchies of the time to maintain and guarantee social and political order. Their defense about women's intellectual ability and educational vision of the women was not ambitious to explore women's role beyond the private sphere (Newman & White, 2006). So, pre-modern, and early modern feminism are not feminism in real sense, they can at best be phrased as proto-feminism. Such proto-feminism is limited in private sphere and is not relevant for analysis of organizations. Therefore, the paper leaves out proto-feminism and start with modern feminist theories.

### **3.0 Findings**

#### **3.1 Liberal Feminist Approach**

Liberal feminism relies on liberal political theory. It defines feminism as a belief that we should all have the same rights, or that women are equal to man and deserve the same respect, opportunities, rights and pay and that men and women should share roles (Turk, 2010). This outlook is very much associated with 'modernity' which places high value on individual autonomy, and self-fulfillment. Liberal feminists believe that women's oppression was the result of society's mistaken ideas about women's nature. They rejected the idea that women's oppression is based on nature

(Newman & White, 2006). According to them sex is a biological issue; and gender is constituted by socialization of sexes for appropriate behavior. They perceive the organizations composed of rational individuals seeking for autonomy and efficiency in line with liberal political theory (Usar, 1996). Hence, positivist gender neutral objectivity referred in conducting research.

Liberals are critical about existing sex segregation in both vertical and horizontal dimensions leading to wage inequalities, barriers to higher status jobs for upward mobility at the expense of women (Usar, 1996; Turk, 2010). Liberal feminists' researches on organizations are primarily quantitative. Such research has identified the notion of glass ceiling that represents phenomenal exclusion of women from top executive positions in organizations, and glass walls meaning alienation of women in certain functional area/ sectors of organizations (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Arulampalam, Booth & Bryan, 2007). However, liberals are optimistic about the modification of this condition. They prescribe a transformative approach to change. If powerless has some power over the decision making process, they argue, inequalities between the sexes would disappear. They focus on unequal access to education and other opportunities males enjoyed as the reasons for women's inability to advance in career. According to them, interventions such as increased training and education for women along with some minor changes or regulations within the existing system, like equal pay for equal work, sex - blind performance appraisals, equal opportunity for training and gaining higher status jobs, increase in the number of working women, are enough to eliminate inequality in work - places (Arulampalam, Booth & Bryan, 2007). Such interventions leave existing organizational policies and structures intact and are meant to assimilate (some) women with minimal disruption of the status quo.

Liberals' analyses of organizations are mostly criticized by other feminists because they do not question the power relations. They are not critical of hierarchical division of labor and the separation of private and public spheres. They hoped that filling in pipeline will solve the problem of disparity. Their theorization of the problem of disparity between men and women in organization is too simplistic. They consider 'women' as another variable which has been historically overlooked in the analysis of organizations. Their approach to solve the problem are - 'add women and stir (Martin & Meyerson, 1997) and/ or 'fix the women' (Eley & Meyerson, 2000) through training, education etc. For example: their change strategies include encouraging 'women' to act more like 'men'; androgyny training, whereby 'women' and 'men' adopt gender-neutral styles of behavior ; and/or recruitment patterns that develop female role modeling. But these

suggestions have all been criticized from a gender perspective for focusing on individual change, or placing an over-reliance on making 'female' ready to take 'male' roles, while ignoring the possibility of challenging the 'masculinist discourse' within which organizational action is constructed, and maintained (Calas & Smircich, 1996; Ferguson, 1985).

In addition, impediments to women's advancement in organizations are more complex and illusive than deliberate forms of sex discriminations. Unless change efforts challenge existing power arrangements in organizations, people from traditionally under-represented groups will remain marginalized in tenuous and often untenable positions. (Cox, 1994). As liberals do not question women's responsibility inside home as mother and wife, whatever approach taken, liberal feminist efforts thriving women's equality in organizations not only fail to recognize the tension between women's role in work and home but also intensify it. Moreover, liberal feminist analyses do not take in to account difference of race and economic class. However, liberals' approaches to organization is important because they begin to distinguish among types of organization/institutions as pro-women and anti-women and ask questions about organizational mission and culture for equality of women which begin to cross over into *socialist feminist perspectives* (Usar, 1996).

### 3.2 Radical Feminist Approach: 'It's All About Sex'

The second wave of feminism explored the way liberalism required transformation of public and private sphere, but divided into two political and theoretical streams- Radical Feminism and Socialist Feminism. Socialist Feminists defined sexual oppression being cofounded by issues of race and class while radicals view sexual oppression as the most fundamental and the most universal form of oppression: it is all about patriarchy and sex (Shulman, 1980; Whittier, 2010). But both are fundamentally concerned about the issue of sexual oppression.

Radical feminists though identify sex as the fundamental division, a division to which all other divisions such as class, race, age and ability are secondary; they don't accept the notion that domination of female sex by male sex is natural. They theorize 'patriarchy' as the system for socialization and institutionalization of women's subordination. They denounce bureaucracy and hierarchy as male created and male dominated structures of control that oppress women (Acker, 1990). Bureaucracy is an organization of oppressive male power, it is both mystified and constructed through an abstract discourse of rationality, rules and procedures; whereas

feminist discourse, rooted in women's experiences of caring and nurturing outside bureaucracy's control provides a ground for opposition to bureaucracy (Ferguson K. E., 1985). Radicals argue that exclusion of women from public realm for long years caused differences in the socialization of women. When women had entered into historically male dominated organizations, they found themselves marginalized. One form of radicals labeled as liberalist radicals call for women to separate themselves from the source of oppression through 'political lesbianism'. The other form, cultural radicals advocate an essentially pro-women position that celebrate and revalidate female attributes traditionally undervalued by patriarchy (Whittier, 2010). Cultural Feminism attests, that, women give birth and nurture gives them a different perspective of the world. The goal of creating women culture is to select the best aspects of women while rejecting the values and concepts that tend to favor the dominant patriarchal culture. There is value in maternal thinking, in its transformative capacity e.g. to train children for strength and moral sensitivity. Distinctive ways of conceptualizing, ordering and valuing emerge from maternal practices. Some empirical works suggest that women's perspective is more egalitarian, peaceful as opposed to rivalry (Newman & White, 2006). Therefore, women's natural and/or socially constructed feminine characteristics make them better equipped than men to create democratic, participatory, non-hierarchical organizations (Savage & Witz, 1992). Thus, cultural feminist projects include formation of women-centered, leaderless, structure-less, organizations that may eliminate masculine values advocating competition, leadership, hierarchy, and so on. Feminist organizations designed by and for women, in other words, women-only institutions are essential to create space for women and allow them to maintain their commitment to feminism. (Calas & Smircich, 1996).

But many feminist organizations though have survived; few retained the radical-democratic form (Martin, 1990). They often struggle to exist in a capitalist environment as they demonstrate possibilities of non-patriarchal and non-bureaucratic way of working. Radical feminism thereby in a sense cannot cohabit with bureaucracy and (Gould, 1979; Martin, 1990). The separatist strategy of radical feminism is criticized of over-valuing women over men. In this respect, androgyny - being neither female nor male but human - is an optimal situation to deal with the inequalities of the modern era. In addition, the radical feminist approach to organizations is blinded with sex-based oppression and undervalues other differences like culture, history, geographical location, race and class which contribute to inequality (Newman & White, 2006; Whittier, 2010). Like the liberal feminist arguments, new feminist organizations might only represent white, middle class women's interest.



### 3.3 Psychoanalytic Feminist Approach

Psychoanalytic feminism, examines the psycho-sexual development of both sexes in patriarchal structure. Traditionally psychoanalytic theories justify women's oppression. But feminists use psychoanalysis to find out the effects of separatist social arrangements on different psycho-sexual developments of women (Chodorow, 1989). Unlike the radical feminism, psychoanalytic feminism perceives the women's socialization process less favorably than men's, and instead of changing the structure of organizations according to feminine values, puts emphasis on changing the process of women's psycho-sexual development in order to adapt them to a male dominated organizations. Unlike liberals psychoanalytic feminists try to achieve such a change not only at the personal level but also at the societal level "with cultural and historical roots" (Benjamin, 1988; Chodorow, 1989). Although, they think this perspective is a good way to challenge the status quo, they never have an attempt to change existing hierarchical structure. In addition, overemphasis on psycho-sexual development reduces the importance of power dynamics which are the basic causes of gender inequality.

### 3.4 Marxist Feminist Perspective

Marxist feminists take a materialist position as opposed to idealistic notion of liberal feminists. Marxist feminism points figure to the material nature of women's oppression, i.e., the social and economic circumstances of women that shape their life and their oppression. According to Marxist feminists, the gender similar to class or part of class relations constitutes and maintain system of oppression i.e., production and reproduction of identities and values through power relations (Colley, 2002; Gatens, 2003). Double burden of women due to their sex and class are central themes of Marxist feminists. They criticize liberals for accepting given hierarchical and capitalist relations and mainstream Marxists for their undervaluation of patriarchy and for ignoring women's unpaid labor as an important factor in social reproduction (Marshall, 2013). They argue equality of rights will have minimal impact if the material inequalities and everyday experiences of women's lives remain unchanged. According to them, it is impossible to attain equality in a class-based capitalist society where wealth produced by many is taken by the few. They also have focused on work-related concerns such as relegation of women to certain types of works, trivialization of women's domestic work, and relationship between the institution family

and capitalism (Gatens, 2003; Messerschmidt, 2009). Yet, Marxist framing of sexual division of labor as class division of labor ignores other explanations of women's oppression and thereby is critiqued to be sex-blind. They presume the rise of working class against the capitalist society will naturally solve the struggle between the sexes. Marxists view economy (i.e., money and wealth) as the most significant source of power. They theorize that attainment of economic power through women's participation in public sphere will automatically tackle the social and cultural aspects of oppression. Their projects strive for major structural changes in political realm and capitalism from a macro level not from meso (organizational, group or team) level (Messerschmidt, 2009).

### **3.5 Socialist Feminist Approach**

But class based capitalism is not the only machine responsible for women's oppression; rather patriarchy is another closely intertwined social and historical structure contributing to predicament of women within them (Newman & White, 2006). So, socialist feminists argue that gender creates another material axis in the division of labor, one that is governed by patriarchal relations, which cross the bourgeois/proletariat class boundary creating an alliance of men subordinating women. (Hartmann, 1981). Socialist feminism, or "feminist - materialism", relies on the idea that male dominance is a consequence of social practices rather than biological differences. Unequal relationship between sexes is systematically reproduced to meet material needs, which is not universal but rather had occurred in a specific space and time in history. Socialists critique liberals for lack of understanding of the material nature of women's oppression; Marxists as being gender blind and too focused on economic power and radicals as separatist. However, like radicals and Marxists they argue for changing structures and power relations of our institutions. Unlike Marxists they focus both in public and private spheres (Hearn, 2000; Haraway & Manifesto, 2000).

Socialist feminists have done a considerable amount of research about organizations, especially after 1980's. Unlike other feminist analysis of organizations socialists argue that public realm in which organizations are located is not separated from private where domestic relations take place. Relations within organizations and within families are assumed to be mutually dependent. There is a dialectical relationship between organizational life and "broader societal system ". These simultaneously

reshape each other (Haraway & Manifesto, 2000). That means, if husband dominates wife in the private as a result of "patriarchy", capitalist man dominates working - class women as a result of "capitalism". In addition to the above, socialists take the following three as major propositions to explain existing structure of organizations: a) owners of the means of production have crucial role for the perception of organizational and social reality b) although sexual division of labor is determined by class structures, it has a degree of autonomy and determines the class as well and c) material conditions are reflected by perceptions of reality (Newman & White, 2006). But since material conditions change and contradict each other, alternative perceptions can always exist. Based on the above, socialist feminists try to answer questions like "how social perception of gender affect the structure of the organization and how this structure affects gender identities?", or "since organizational leaders are males, to what extent their masculine values affect the understanding of organization's structures?" (Hearn, 2000) Challenging the latest theory of organization structure (structural contingency theory) socialists feminists argue that the degree of complexity in organization depends on actions and decisions taken by power groups in it not by its size and use of technology. According to them organizations are political units and their structure reflects the conflict between the power groups and maintains subordination relations (Usar, 1996).

They also criticize other organizational theories mostly for focusing on males as top level managers and thereby being masculine (gendered) (Acker, 1990). Even when women included into the research, their behavioral differences are explained by gendered stereotypes or distinctive socialization processes. Other processes like, "patterns of selective recruitment" that require passivity and conformity from women and "social control mechanisms" to repress women in the organization, are usually overlooked in mainstream organizational theories. Thus, important studies that are called "classics" of the organization theory are re-analyzed to show their ignorance on gender differences (Usar, 1996). For instance, Hawthorne studies claim that positive treatment of employees increase motivation and productivity (Daft, 2010) is re-examined. It is found out that research conclusions are different for males and females. Control mechanisms effective for women are likely to be similar those used for children. Females perform better under close and personalized control mechanisms, while males prefer impersonal rules and some degree of autonomy. By framing leadership as identity work (Ely, Ebarra, & Kolb, 2011) revealed gender dynamics involved in becoming a leader and offers a theoretical rationale for teaching leadership for women. They have identified that women face a tradeoff between competence and likability as they aspire leadership positions. Due to limited number of women in leadership roles,

women leaders are subject to greater scrutiny. As a result they become risk averse, overly focused on details, prone to micro-manage and sometimes become overly focused on managing self-image, which can be self-defeating. Socialist feminists thus have shifted organizational research focus from actors' intention to exclude women to 'second generation' gender bias- culturally embedded, ingrained in work place structure, practice, and pattern of interactions.

Socialist feminism therefore suggests reevaluation of feminine values and skills to construct class less and genderless organization structures. In other words, this is the 'value the feminine' frame of organizational change as phrased by Eley Meyerson, (2000). Interventions suggested by this approach include consciousness-raising in the form of developing organizational culture and training to make people aware of the differences between women's and men's styles, skills and perspectives; to point out the ways in which feminine activities, such as listening, collaborating, nurturing and 'behind the scenes' peacemaking have been devalued in the public sphere of work; and to demonstrate the benefits of these activities. In addition, this approach call for changes in organizational policies such as adjustments of wages for male and female labor to ensure equity based on comparable but-not identical-skills, child care places for every work-place, flexible time jobs, equal and extended time for maternity and paternity leaves etc. Rather than elimination of gendered division of labor, socialist feminists propose female dominated jobs would receive comparable worth as male dominated professional works (Hearn, 2000). For instance: caring work would be just as important and well rewarded as any other; having a baby or taking care of a sick mother would be as valued as making an automobile or exploring planet outside the earth. According to them, elimination of gender dualism does not necessarily mean the elimination of gender differences. It means elimination of institutional constraints that attribute certain stereotypes to each sex. In their proposed model of organizations, it would be impossible for one individual to exclude other gender, or perceive himself/herself as a primary gender. It calls for a redefinition of work and work relations, the rhythm and timing of work to be adapted to the rhythms outside of work. It will accommodate the emotional roles by individuals, in sexual, love, parenting or household relationships (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Hearn, 2000; Haraway & Manifesto, 2000).

The transformation proposed by socialist feminist model seems radical in the sense that it would probably require the end of organizations as they exist today. There will be no hierarchy; workers will run things themselves in the new forms of organizations. Perhaps there would be

some communal or collective form of organization where work and intimate relations are closely related. But how given the present organization of economy and pervasive power relations so overwhelming a change would come about is still a question.

### **3.6 Postmodern Feminist View of Organizations**

All the feminist perspectives of organizations discussed so far can be blamed of focusing on only one privileged group of women to a varying extent. Postmodern feminists engage in intersections of complex social relations. Deconstruction is the mostly used methodology in their organizational analysis. By questioning the concepts of "positive knowledge" and "essentialist identity", they re-analyze sexuality, self-actualization, globalization, and inequality by treating gender as one of the categories among class, ethnicity, race, and age. They criticize ontological and epistemological claims of modernist theories; their foundationalism, essentialism, and universalism including the claims of many feminist theories (Calas & Smircich, 1996; Hekman, 2013). They argue that knowledge forms the power relations in organizations, and this naturalize the exclusion of certain groups from organizations, such as women, minorities, and elderly.

Despite their growing prevalence in explaining social reality, there are limited numbers of organizational study done by postmodern feminists. Although they emphasize more complex and distinctive issues that are ignored by other perspectives, many feminists criticize their approach. Critics argue that it is too early to question some concepts that women had never a chance to define their own (Usar, 1996).

### **3.7 Post-Colonial Feminism and Organizations**

Post-colonial or Third World theory is the most recent approach to feminist theory. It looks at marginalization, subordination and the 'subaltern' in the relationship between colonial power (north) and the colonized (south). Post-colonial feminism similar to post-modernist feminism examines the multiple marginality and subordination of women but with specific focus on third world women, oppressed not only by colonial imperialism but also by patriarchal structure of both 'west' and

their own culture, and the Western feminism. The concept of 'hybridity', suggesting the shifting and multiple character of identity is introduced by post-colonial feminists (Newman & White, 2006). Their agenda include issues related to transnational corporations such as off-shore production, exploitation, marginalization and oppression of the third world women working in 'sweat shop', transnational motherhood etc. Drawing on some of their critiques from socialist feminism such as, capitalism, colonialism, stratification of gender; and post-colonials try to explain these complex relations between the first and the third world. They illustrate new ways of organizing in the global world by applying concepts of new social movements (Kapur, 2002). In terms of organizational policy, they argue against generalization of rules and advocates organizations need to follow contingency approach as such to take into account hybridity of identities. However, they are criticized by other feminists as being too difficult for many to understand.

#### **4.0 Discussion**

Based on above analysis of different feminist approaches to organizations it is evident that all feminist theories were concerned about gender inequality in organizations and proposed ways to eliminate women's oppression. Their approaches varied with their theorization of the reasons of marginalization of the 'other' gender by the dominant gender. Liberals theorize society's mistaken ideas about women are responsible for women's oppression. They take mandate in the form of rights movement such as equal access to education, employment, equal pay and more through training, awareness building and regulations. They have an idealistic notion about our social, economic and statutory institutions as being gender neutral. Marxists claim 'no, no, no .....' – the prevailing capitalist system is made by men, for men. In this system, women are alienated in the private sphere to do unpaid domestic work. They argue economic power is the source of all sorts of oppression. So, Marxist feminists portray gender/sex based oppressions as class based power struggle. They presume the rise of working class against the capitalist society will naturally solve the struggle between the sexes. Their projects strive for major structural changes in political realm and capitalism from a macro level not from meso (organizational, team or group) level. But Marxist feminism is critiqued to be sex-blind by other feminist theorists. Socialist feminists argue that capitalism and patriarchy together have historically produced and reproduced gender difference thereby systemized women's oppression. They look for ways to transform both capitalism and patriarchy. They suggest revaluation of feminine values

and skills to construct class less and genderless organization structures. But the transformation they are looking for seems utopic in the sense that it would probably require the end of organizations as they exist today. Radical feminists on the contrary take a separatist move. They argue sexual oppression is the most basic and universal form of oppression. Rather than trying to transform organizations they call women to come out of all hetero sexual and patriarchal relations. Like socialist feminists (cultural) radicals value the feminine attributes, but they promote formation of women-centered, leaderless, structure less, organizations that may eliminate masculine values advocating competition, leadership, hierarchy, and so on. Many feminist organizations though have survived; few retained the radical-democratic form (Martin, 1990). Practically, such organizations struggle to exist in a capitalist environment. Critiques argue the separatist strategy of radical feminism over-values women over men and creates a new form of gender inequality. All the modern feminist approaches (from liberal to radical) have been criticized by post-modern and post-colonial feminism of being focused on specific group of women (white women of the global North). By questioning the concepts of "positive knowledge" and "essentialist identity", post-modern feminists re-analyze sexuality, self-actualization, and inequality by treating gender as one of the categories among class, ethnicity, race, and age. Post-colonial feminism similar to post-modernist feminism examines the multiple marginality and subordination of women but with specific focus on third world women, oppressed not only by colonial imperialism but also by patriarchal structure of both 'west' and their own culture, and the Western feminism. In terms of organizational analysis their agenda include issues related to transnational corporations such as off-shore production, exploitation, marginalization and oppression of the third world women working in 'sweat shop', transnational motherhood etc. Psychoanalytic feminism, examines the psycho-sexual development of both sexes in patriarchal structure. Instead of changing the structure of organizations according to feminine values, psychoanalytic feminism emphasize on changing the process of women's psycho-sexual development in order to adapt them to a male dominated organizations both at personal and social level.

To summarize we can consider mapping feminist theories along a continuum presenting the degree of challenge they pose to our existing organizational theories. In this continuum, liberal and psychoanalytic feminism will be positioned to the least challenging end with Marxist feminism in the middle followed by socialist feminism and radical feminism at the most challenging end. Post-modernist and post-colonial feminism adds new dimension to the analysis so cannot be positioned in the continuum.

Not only due to increased participation of women in almost all industry sectors across the world but also to face the challenges of globalization, and series of global financial and economic crises business studies researchers has been compelled to revisit many theories of organization. To face the challenges of new economy organizational leaders are looking for new ways of structuring, leading, decision making, recruiting, controlling, motivating, rewarding and so on. Many organizations now-a-days are altering to flatter structure, participatory decision making, practicing three sixty degree feedback, work-life balance programs, providing paternity/maternity leave, on-site child-care facilities. Most of these changes have been called upon by one or other feminist analysis of organizations (Calas & Smircich, 1996). Based on this scenario it can be claimed that organizations have to progress toward femininity or androgyny. In that respect, this research will have immense significance for organizational leaders and researchers who vision for a gender neutral and/or sensitive organization structure. Future research should focus on operational details of alternative forms of organizations to ensure gender equity in every aspect of organization both in numerical and behavioral terms. Also existing gender and diversity policies needs to be evaluated in terms of effectiveness and feminist theories and politics.

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