

# **“Feminism”**

1. Discuss the different streams in feminism in detail.
2. Define Feminism. Discuss its three waves in detail.

About half of the global human population is women. In every step, all over the world; women face inequality, subordination, and secondary class status. Often, they are victim of the oppression, marginalization and exploitation in the patriarchal societies. Before the **First Industrial Revolution (IR)**, the human life was not men dominated, and both men and women contribute equally in the society. The IR began in England in about **1750-1760** that lasted to sometime between **1820 and 1840**. The IR dramatically changed the global social order and consequently, a new gender system started worldwide that disadvantaged women (Mohajan,2019). During this period men started to work in the industries and women were restricted to the domestic sphere. As a result, they remain **vulnerable socially, politically, and economically**. The industrialization also developed a new class system; aristocratic class.

## **Etymology:**

The concept of feminism paves his history from the ancient Greek philosophers. **Plato (427-347 BC)**, a Greek philosopher, revealed that women possess **“natural capacities”** equal to men.

Some scholars believe that the word **“feminism”** comes from the word **“femme”** that means woman (**Collins Dictionary, 2010**).

Actually, it is originated from the French word **“féminisme”** and its derivatives are still obscure.

**Charles Fourier (1772-1837)**, a French philosopher and utopian socialist, is credited for the coining of this word in **1837**. It is a socio-political movement, first occurrences in France centers in 1880s as an activity under forms of demonstrations. Later, the activity is moved to the USA in **1910**.

Feminism began as a political thought when Olympic de Gouges (1748-1793) wrote the **“declaration of the rights of women and the female citizen”**, in 1791, which demanded equal rights for women based on **“The Rights of Man and Citizen”** that is published during the French Revolution.

Similar thinking has risen in the **USA in 1848, in England in 1878, in Russia in 1848, and in China in 1911**.

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### Definitions:

In the 21st century there is no straightforward definition of feminism. At present, there are as many definitions of feminism as there are feminists depending on their own beliefs, history and culture, but gender equality is common to all. It has a variety of meanings and interpretations. Feminists of different fields of life define feminism according to their own social, political, religious, and cultural perspectives.

According to Cambridge Dictionaries, feminism can be seen as

- **"The belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state".**

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica,

- **"Feminism is the belief in the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes".**

It consists of a number of social, cultural and political movements, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women.

It is against the abuse of power, and seeks equality and justice under different domains, such as economy, class, caste, race, culture, religion, etc. (Hundley, 2012).

Feminism is a women basis socio-political movement and ideology, and supports the idea

- **"Women should share equality in society's opportunities and scarce resources" (Delaney, 2005).**

Oxford Dictionary defines feminism as

- **"The belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim".**

The feminism is characterized by

- **"The activism for the purpose of challenging and changing women's subordination to men" (Ferree, 2006).**

Feminism is an ideology that demands an equal right of men and women in terms of politics, decision making, career, and having children. It consists of a number of social, cultural and

political movements that take attempts for equal rights of men and women. It is considered as a struggle to achieve same

rights, opportunities and dignity as men have in the society (Raj & Davidson, 2014). It has raised much in the western upper-

class society and the women have fought for **women's suffrage and reproductive rights**. The rise of feminism in Europe occurred as

**"women of all classes became increasingly aware of the way in**

**which their sex influenced their life chances and experiences"**  
(Fuchs & Thompson, 2005).

### Goals of Feminism:

Therefore, feminism is a diverse, rival and often opposing collection of social theories, political movements, and moral philosophies. It mainly looks social, political, and economic inequalities of women.

Feminism is an umbrella term for a number of cultural phenomena. It tries to acquire freedom for women to work, and make independent economically, and psychologically (Malinowska, 2020).

It indicates institutional and grassroots activities to abolish gender-based inequalities from the society. It hopes to discover the hidden reality of male domination, and women subordination and subjugation in the world, and aims to give equal rights to women economically, politically, and socially (**Brunell & Burkett, 2019**). It supports a broader struggle of freedom for women to make their own decisions related to their bodies, financial independence, freedom to choose their lives and sexual choices, and liberation from all types of oppression.

It tries to describe women oppression; searches strategies, causes, and consequences to remove discrepancies from the society. It takes attempts to achieve the objective of equality, dignity, rights, emancipation and empowerment of women.

Therefore, it is the struggle against sexism, where male supremacy and female oppression are happened. **Actually, sexism is not a modern phenomenon and is a form of social oppression.**

Women all over the world are seen lacking access to opportunities, knowledge, skill and even some basic human rights. In all nation women are victim of **oppression, suppression; and consequently**, they are highly marginalized. From the ancient period human took attempts for establishing gender equality in the ancient society by reducing the discrimination.

It endeavors to see an end to the dominance of men over women, and to provide equal rights between women and men in all fields ranging from household issues to politics, different disciplines, such as **sociology, philosophy, economics, and politics**, served as distinctive intellectual backgrounds of feminism.

Feminism explains and suggests directions for the change in social and environmental factors; tries to highlight the propose interventions for women's intrapersonal and interpersonal concerns, and provides a perspective for evaluating social and environmental experiences of groups and individuals, regardless of sex or gender. It has changed the lives of millions of women.

Feminist Theory is founded on three main principles (**Ropers Huilman, 2002**)

- 1) Women have something valuable to contribute to every aspect of the world.
- 2) As an oppressed group, women have been unable to achieve their potential, receive rewards or gain full participation in society.
- 3) Feminist research should do more than critique, but should work toward social transformation.

**Bina Agarwal** has given some basic ideas within ecofeminism;

- Domination and exploitation of nature has a connection.
- In patriarchal thought women are closer to nature, but men are closer to culture.
- The domination and oppression of nature and of women have occurred simultaneously.
- The feminist movement and the environment movement collaboration can create a more equitable and just society.

**Feminist is a person** who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes. The feminist aims to terminate all forms of male domination. Feminist research focuses on gender and tries to establish gender equality in the world. The conservative feminist Genevan philosopher, writer, and composer; **Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)**, had argued that men and women are by nature not merely different in kind but different in "**natural rank**". She wrote that women are biologically fit to play the roles of wives and mothers, and unable for work in the public sphere. She revealed that women being weaker physically, intellectually, and emotionally. She tried to establish sexual dimorphism on the logic that men are more rational, and women are more emotional and passionate, and set up complementary roles for men and women. She and some other social contractility have not considered women as rational human beings. Although they have conservative beliefs about feminism, and do not think about the gender equality; later English philosopher and physician **John Locke (1632-1704)**, known as the "**Father of Liberalism**", had argued that the sexes should receive the same education, share equal rights, and responsibilities. **Betty Friedan**, the first president of the National Organization for Women had published "**The Feminine Mystique**" in 1963. Although women have the right to vote and hold property, but they spend too much time for polishing and organizing homes that experience boredom and anxiety.

She has realized that they need to go outside of the domestic area by entering into public life as a paid employment. She has argued that equality and human dignity are not possible for women if they are not able to earn. Consequently, employment opportunities for women need to be widened, and many discriminatory laws must be abandoned (**Friedan, 1963**).

### Types of Feminism:

Feminism can be manifested into seven categories as;

- Liberal feminism
- Marxist feminism
- Socialist feminism
- Radical feminism
- Ecofeminism
- Cultural feminism
- Black feminism
- Postmodern feminism

Each ideology tries to describe women's oppression, explains the causes and consequences, and suggested strategies for women liberation.

### 1. Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism first emerged between the **17th and 18th** centuries in the western countries to educate women with liberal ideas, and later expanded in the rest of the world. Finally, in the **19<sup>th</sup> century** feminists extended the arguments in favor of equal rights for women under the law to own property and to vote. Liberal feminism is the most widely accepted social and political philosophy among feminists. It has arisen as a theoretical background to nurture the feminism movements. It is a main branch of contemporary feminism that tries to establish gender equality in the society. It **"tends to be adopted by „mainstream" (i.e., middle-class) women who do not disagree with the current social structure"**.

Liberal feminism supports suffrages, such as;

- Equal rights to education,
- Equal political and civil rights,
- Right to vote for all citizens irrespective of men and women.
- It concentrates more on issues, such as equality in the workplace, in education, and in political rights.

Liberalism is a political and economic principle that stresses individual independence, equality of opportunity, and the

protection of individual rights. It supports rule of law, civil and human rights, secularism, democracy, freedom of speech, press, religion, and property. It encourages the development of freedoms, particularly in the political and economic spheres.

**"It is a, Feminist theory that believes gender inequality is created by lowering access for women and girls to civil rights and allocation of social resources such as education and employment"**

**According to Liberal feminists**, society has a false belief that women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men. They believe that all human are equally rational to perform any job and subordination of women is due to certain outdated beliefs. Men are judged through their merits, whereas women's abilities are deemed due to their sex. They stress that men and women should have equal rights and women have equal opportunities as men.

The pioneers of Liberal feminism are;

- **Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797),**
- **John Stuart Mill (1806-1873),**
- **Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858),**

who act for women rights and liberation, when the economic and social position of European women was very low.

Seminal feminist work **"A Vindication of the Rights of Women"** developed by famous English author **Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792**, which is considered as the beginning of the liberal feminist movement. She shows logics that women become as independent and morally strong as the men. If different education system is imposed on men and women; then it is not only unjust but also counterproductive and the nation will be of **"artificial and weak characters"**. For this reason, she argues for equal access to education for women and men. The women who married to wealthy professional and entrepreneurial men, and had no incentive to work outside home, she compared them to the **"feathered race"**, i.e., the birds in cages that do nothing but plume themselves. Therefore, both sexes, should be educated to enhance their rationality that will be benefitted the society (**Wollstonecraft, 1792**).

By the 19th century, **John Stuart Mill**, an English philosopher, political economist, Member of Parliament (MP) and civil servant, has argued for equal economic opportunities, political rights and civil liberties for men and women in **"The Subjection of Women"**. He thought that same educational and civic opportunities as like men, most women would choose to remain



wives and mothers, by improving domestic life for the family (Mill, 1869). On the other hand, **Harriet Taylor** disagreed on Mill's concepts; women would choose to participate more fully in public life, going beyond simply voting and performing charity work. Instead, they would become the partners of men in productive industry and would have fewer children. His works largely focused on issues of marriage and divorce. He believes that both divorced men and women have a role to play in children's lives (**Mill & Taylor, 1832; Mill & Mill, 1970**).

Liberal feminists are of two forms:

- i) **classical feminists**, who fought for the removal of discriminatory laws.
- ii) **welfare feminists**, who think to eliminate socio-economic obstructions to women progress.

Liberal feminists show mixed opinions on prostitution and pornography. The three main elements in prostitution practice are: **payment, promiscuity, and emotional indifference**. Many liberal feminists reject to condemn or criminalize the prostitution and pornography, because much of it involves coercions and choices that are not autonomous.

Liberal feminists have observed that women who pose for pornography and engage in prostitution are violently forced or coerced into it.

On the other hand, many liberal feminists oppose prostitution and pornography. In the society these are inconsistent with dignity, solidarity, and equality. They realize that prostitution Liberal feminists show mixed opinions on prostitution and pornography.

In the society these are inconsistent with dignity, solidarity, and equality. They realize that prostitution was not the selling of sex but the selling of mastery; they do not provide a service but sell their own subordination. Childhood sexual abuse, drug dependency, and poverty are endemic among prostitutes and other sex workers.

## **2. Marxist feminism**

Marxism is a political philosophy, led by left-wing people; inspired and founded by the two great German philosophers, **Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895)**, and is generally referred to as the economic theory of history.

**Marxist feminism is discovered in the 1970s**, which focused on the dismantling of capitalism and way to liberate women that explains the roots of **women's oppression** from a class viewpoint (Vogel, 1983). Actually, Marx has never developed a theory of

gender, and his contribution in feminism is an indirect procedure; due to the rise of capitalism. Marxism has provided the tools and the categories to enable the society for thinking together gender and class, feminism and anti-capitalism (Federici, 2018).

Marxist feminism is "**critical of traditional Marxism for its gender blindness**". It is concerned with women's double oppression of both class and sex. It directly blames that the root cause of women oppression is capitalism.

Marxist feminists have observed that oppression on women is visible in-home environment, workplace, and social life due to economic, social, and business reasons. They believe that women are oppressed by capitalism and gender inequality will vanish when capitalism is replaced by socialism.

It is a political doctrine that deals in releasing the chains of oppression is applied by the elite class using frames like law, religion, race, and sources of production. Capitalism has created two major social classes:

- i) bourgeoisie, which is the owner of the means of social production (i.e., owners of capitalist companies).
- ii) proletariat, which is the employer of wage-labor (sell labor force in exchange for a wage) having no means of production of their own, subjugated in all affairs of socioeconomic life.

After the IR, the poor from rural areas are displaced to the urban areas and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the new capitalist class. Both philosophers, **Marx and Engels**, observe that the difference between men and women is not biological but social. Their philosophy confirms that economy is the controlling factor of all the realities in the shape of culture, class, creed, education, race, religion, etc. Their works strongly support the powerful insights to interpret the structures denoting women's oppression. They have insisted that patriarchy is a product of capitalism. Capitalism has made a sexual division of labor; men to economic production and women to social reproduction (Marx, 1844; Engels, 1884).

**According to Marxism, the state is an instrument of class struggle in which the bourgeoisie class exploits the proletariat class.** Women should not struggle against men but against the bourgeois system under capitalism, which is a collective work of both men and women of the working class. Marxism considers that gender inequality within the society has produced from capitalism and **"men's domination over women is a byproduct of capital's domination over labor"**.

Engels mentions **"Within the family he (man) is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat"** (Engels, 1884). It is made



to appear natural at the behest of patriarchal forces, which Engels calls "**final defeat of female sex**". He has an intention to emancipate women from the burden of unpaid and devalued domestic duties, patriarchy and economic deprivation. He has highlighted the struggle of women throughout the history. He has observed that economically weak women suffer greatly on patriarchy, but financially solvent women enjoy more social security. He and other Marxist feminists demand women's liberation from economic deprivation. He assures that to liberate women a revolution against the capitalistic order of society is necessary (Engels, 1884).

Nancy Holmstrom says,

**"Marxist feminism is an emancipatory, critical framework that aims at understanding and explaining gender oppression in a systematic way".**

Marxist feminists indicate the secondary oppression of women with economic, social and political structures related to capitalism. It has stressed to adjust domestic labor, as well as wage work to support their position. It believes that the contribution in economic household may give women a better position in the family. It has realized that oppression on women is not only from men but also from women.

**For Marxist feminists**, if the class distinctions can be overcome in the society through unity of the working (oppressed) class, then women can be free, and their housework should be valued by the state and society. Moreover, Marxist feminists add that, women must take an active part in the unity of oppressed class against the bourgeoisie. The way to this unity is all about raising awareness according to Marxist feminism **(Engels, 1884)**. In Marxist feminism ethnicity, race, wage labor, etc. are ignored. Although Marxist feminism is very well-known framework, it does not have adequate theoretical involvement for uprooting gender dominance from the society. Marxist feminists see the patriarchy as a product of capitalism.

### **3. Socialist feminism**

Socialist feminism is a vibrant intellectual and political current that has come and gone. It has arisen to produce a creative synthesis of debates in the **late 1960s** about the roots of the oppression of women. It is inspired by Marxism, and is developed for the reaction to liberal feminism, but it does not lead to the abolition of patriarchy in social relations.

**Socialist feminism is gained popularity in the 1960s and 1970s.** It has gradually faded from the 1980s and has abolished after the collapse of communism in the early 1990s.

Socialist feminists believe that women are exploited by a dual system: **capitalist and patriarchal.**

- They reject radical feminism idea that patriarchy is the only system at the root of gender inequality.
- They also reject the Marxist notion, where class and class struggle are the only defining aspects of history and economic development.
- They believe that the home is not just a place of consumption, but of production as well.
- They agree with the fundamental premises of both Marxist feminisms, where capitalism is the source of women oppression, and radical feminism, where patriarchy is the source of women oppression.

Socialist feminism wants to analyze the effects of fair distribution of rewards to realize the correlation between gender and classes. The main aim of it is to overcome the historical account of the exploitation of women. It analyzes both economic and gender-based oppressions and any one form of oppression is not the key form of oppression, instead it is a combination of systems related to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, social class, and nation that are all interlinked. Gender and class intertwine to create new forms of oppression and privileges.

Socialist feminists have realized that liberal feminism does not stress on the depth of the oppression of women, rather it targets the women of the upper and upper middle classes.

Actually, women have been oppressed in all known societies, and the nature of oppression is differed for the different economic realities. Oppression of women is not only on the economic system, but also on the combination of patriarchy and capitalism.

**Socialist feminism has evolved through the three goals:**

- i) it analyzes the exploitation of women as a result of the two interconnected aspects of patriarchy and capitalism.
- ii) it provides extensive social analysis methods to realize historical materialism.
- iii) it shows the need for significant ideas in material analysis to determine human affairs.

Social feminists have seen that class differences among women influence their gender experience. For example, women from the

upper classes may employ poorer women to do the domestic work for them. It stresses heavily on the economic dimension of gender inequality, the detriment of other areas of women's lives, such as sexuality, violence or abortion.

**Socialist feminists** find economic dependence of women on men as main cause of their subordination. Therefore, they want social and economic equality and financial independence of women.

#### **4. Radical Feminism**

Radical (means root) feminism is a movement founded in the **1960s** by the women who had participated in the civil rights and anti-war campaigns, **primarily in New York and Boston, then spread to the rest of the USA and Europe**; on the basis of the idea that patriarchy is the main cause of discrimination and oppression of women.

It views that patriarchy and sexism are the most fundamental factors in the discrimination and oppression of women and ignore all others forms, such as **race, color, age, religion, ethnicity, culture, geographical location, disability, caste, and economic and social classes**; patriarchy is based in psychological and biological factors, which is rooted in the society.

Radical feminism also highlights violence and coercion made by men through rape, sexual harassment, child sexual assault, domestic violence; abuse for women, children, and vulnerable men in patriarchy. It blames the exploitation of women on men, who have benefited from the subordination of women. It sees women as one homogeneous group and recognizes them to be oppressed by men.

Main advocates of radical feminism are **Kate Millet (1934-2017)**, an American feminist writer, educator, artist, and activist, and **Germaine Greer**, an Australian writer and public intellectual. They complained exploitation of women as housewives, mothers, and sex partners; and also see the marriage as a formalization of women persecution.

Radical feminism is the radical evolution and extreme development of liberal feminists inside the 20th century. It opposes patriarchal oppression and female maltreatment, and tries to prevent male-dominated society. It focuses on power of men and patriarchy, and privilege within the social system that seeks to promote women organizations as separate social organizations (Jensen, 2017).

**It is based on two principles:**

- i) women are of absolute positive value.

ii) ii) they are oppressed violently everywhere due to the system of patriarchy.

It views patriarchy and sexism as the most fundamental factors in women's oppression. It respects women as a political class, because of their biological functions. It does not favor marriage and family, as both of them help to establish patriarchy in the society. It stresses that women who give birth, are different from men, and therefore they should have their own rights rather than only equal rights to those of men have. It seeks to promote division between peoples on superficial differences; its propositions seem to be unrealistic, and often considers as the route to violence.

Radical feminists see the society as patriarchal, and it is dominated and ruled by men, i.e., men are ruling class, and women are the subject class. Moreover, they believe that women are not just equal but are actually morally superior to men and patriarchy can be replaced by matriarchy.

- They want to transform the women life and the society through radical actions.
- They think that men to be enemies of women and consider marriage as a hegemonic contract to exploit women.
- They prefer the use of technologies to men for the fulfillment of sexual desires and reproductive need.

The early radical feminists Betty Friedan has realized that women are oppressed by the cultural construction of society because of their sex. The radical feminist group shows logic that a woman's decision to marry should be a rational strategy rather than surrendering to a false sentiment.

They viewed „gender“ as a socially contrived absolute category than masculinity or femininity. **Mary Daly** and other activists have argued that women are closer to ecology, but men are to their sexuality.

According to radical feminism,

**women exploitation has resulted from socio-cultural practices in patriarchal societies and the Marxism believes that the main source of oppression and causes is inferior position of women in the communities.**

Radical feminists believe that **prostitution, pornography, stripping, massage parlors,** escort services are sexual exploitation industries, and men routinely buy and sell objectified female bodies for their sexual pleasure. Feminists like **Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mackinnon** are very strongly against pornography, because it is dehumanizing and degrading for women. In the **1980s**, some radical feminists argued that

participation of women in the manufacture of pornography and in prostitution were not link to patriarchy.

## 5. Ecofeminism

**Françoise d'Eaubonne (1920-2005)**, a French author, labor rights activist, environmentalist and feminist, introduced the idea of **ecofeminism in 1974** through the publication of her book "**Le Féminisme ou la Mort**". She has realized that the only way to save the environment is through the destruction of male power by women. The movement was further developed by **Ynestra King** in about **1976 and became a movement in 1980**.

Oppression of women and domination of nature are connected and mutually strengthening. In the **late 20th century**, ecofeminism is emerged with the supports of the fight for women empowerment and sustainable environment.

Ecofeminism defines as

**"The feminist position most explicitly concerned with environmental degradation".**

It is much more spiritual than political or theoretical in nature. It contains two major components; ecology and feminine. It believes that women realize and love nature instinctually, and oppose oppression of women and aggression against nature under patriarchy.

Ecofeminists **Alice Walker, Vandana Shiva, Ivone Gebara**, and others deal with the moral basis of human connection to nature. There are many movements in the world that are related to ecofeminism, **for example**, Chipko movement in **India**, Anti-Militarist movement in **Europe and the USA**, Green Belt movement in **Kenya**.

In our society, there are some order dualities, such as **male/female, white/black, culture/nature, West/East, human/nature, white/black, conscious/unconscious, logic/emotion, strong/weak, and spirit/body** occur, and former dominates the latter. For example, conscious is superior to unconscious, the West is superior and civilized but East is inferior, white people have in superior positions than black people, and logic is superior to emotion. In some societies, culture is superior to nature, and man is superior to woman.

- Therefore, if man symbolizes **culture, consciousness, logic and spirit**; woman must represent **nature, unconsciousness, emotion and body**. If we consider case of women and nature, both are similarly conceptualized, and both are exploited in the masculine-dominated society.



In the 21st century, the nature is in the dangerous position due to rapid urbanization, industrialization, commercialization and unlimited needs of human beings.

Women and nature are same in various ways due to their biological status, reproductive role, and discrimination; both defined as passive subjects that subjected to violence and social inequalities.

**Ecofeminists** believe that male-dominated culture thrives on sexism, racism, class-exploitation, and environmental destruction. Of course, they agree that there is a close link between the liberation of women and of nature. They have called the women and men to re-conceptualize world in nonhierarchical ways.

### 6. Cultural Feminism

In 1972, socialist feminist **Elizabeth Diggs**, used the label "**cultural feminism**" for applying it to radical feminism for minimizing gender differences. In 1975, the radical feminist critic, **Brooke Williams**, for the first time, introduced the term "**cultural feminism**" to describe the depoliticization of radical feminism.

Cultural feminism mainly describes about "**female nature or female essence**" that attempts to revalue and redefine attributes ascribed to the feminine character. This female essence includes a greater emphasis on cooperation, relationships, and peace; also referred to as an ethic of care.

The cultural feminism tries to find differences between men and women, based on biological differences in reproductive capacity. It seeks to validate feminine attributes that have been.

Cultural feminists combat woman oppression through means of the creation and sustainability of separate woman-centered spaces that "**promote female biology as the basis of women's power**".

Cultural feminists identified women as **superior/preferable** to qualities identified with men, whether the qualities are products of nature or culture. Male characteristics are harmful to society, and female characteristics bring benefit for the society. **For example**, less aggression among nations would lead to less war and conflict.

### 7. Black Feminism

Black feminism has emerged in the **1970s** to produce social thought for opposing oppression. It is an intellectual, artistic, philosophical, and activist practice grounded in black

women's lived experiences. It is a political struggle to combat oppression faced by any women of color. It has many terminologies, such as Black Canadian feminism, African-American feminism, African feminism, etc. Black feminism is formed to empower Black women towards fighting for their unique cause for social justice.

In 1989, scholar Kimberli Crenshaw (1959-) coined the term **"Black Feminism"** in her doctoral thesis, where she argues that a Black woman have to deal with the concept of the **"double bind"** which refers to being Black and being a woman.

Black feminism plays an important role in the formation and stability of black families in the USA. It emphasizes on the issue of racism that is a main cause of oppression to women of color, and black women face different forms of oppression that is racist and sexist. Majority of African black women were brought to the USA to work as slaves, in a form of oppression. In the American society, black women and white women have different status. The lives of African-American women have been critically affected by racism, sexism, classism, and ethnicism. All African Black women have experienced living in a society that devalues them, and most of them are victim of much oppressions, such as child rape, child marriage, female genital mutilation, etc.

Backgrounds for Black women is challenging because, they are considered to be less than human, and **"there is no more isolated subgroup in academe than Black women"**. Black feminists have expanded the notion "Black Feminism" to include issues of class and sexuality, in addition to race and gender.

**Maria Stewart (1803-1879), Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), and Frances E. W. Harper (1825-1911)**, agitated for the rights of women of color. In 1851, Sojourner Truth, a former slave who became a public speaker later, told that when white women were struggling for voting and labor rights; black women struggled to be seen themselves as human, i.e., in the same society, black women face a radically different situation than white women. Feminist African-American writer Alice Walker coined the term **"Womanism"** in 1979 to describe an intersectional alternative to white feminism. In 1982, her novel **"The Color Purple"** is published where she used **"Womanist"** to describe the black feminist movement.

### **8. Postmodern Feminism:**

In the 21st century we are living in the postmodern world, but prejudice and discriminatory attitudes about women have not changed much over a period of time.

Postmodern feminism, also **called the third-generation feminism, is a combination of poststructuralism, postmodernism, and French feminism.**

These three terms have emerged spontaneously at the sometimes, and also their themes overlap and philosophies seem contradictory. On the other hand, postmodern feminism has an uneasy relationship between feminism and postmodernism; because some feminists believe postmodern thought weakens the attacks that feminist theory attempts to create, while others are in favor of the union.

Postmodern feminists believe that there is a **multiplicity of women and women's movements**, which represent diverse and divergent interests. They recommend a wide range of social forms and behaviors, and argue against a relatively uncomplicated account of oppression based on patriarchy. Postmodern feminism is the destabilization of what is considered normal or natural in relation to gender.

Postmodern feminism rests heavily on social constructivist theories arguing that gender is a construct of language, or discourse. It seeks to develop a new paradigm of social criticism that does not rely on traditional philosophical reinforcements and emphasizes the relations of the feminism issues to the languages, sex, and power.

**Postmodern feminists reject** a common feminist position and support a plurality of perspectives on knowing, such as essentialism, philosophy, and universal truths. They believe that knowledge is always provisional, open-ended, and relational, and each woman can capture the truth differently. They also want to remove gender inequality from the society. They focus on how discourse in society creates social assumptions about how women should be treated. They have followed the ways in which sexual difference is shaped by language and culture. They believe that truth is not absolute and merely constructed by individuals' groups, culture, and language.

All the feminism's basic slogan is creation of a just society, the protection of freedom and liberty, the creation of a classless society, and the creation of a gender-neutral society respectively. At present, educational equality is accepted in many nations and females have gained many societal responsibilities worldwide. But they have not gained same advantages globally as like males to play a vital role in the courts and public administration. We hope that in near future the justice, freedom, liberty and gender equality will be established in all societies.

# A STUDY ON WAVES OF FEMINISM

## INTRODUCTION

Feminism refers to any principles that seek equality in rights for women, usually through improving their status. Feminism is rooted in ending men's historical supremacy over women. Feminism is thus a term that emerged long after women started questioning their inferior status and demanding an amelioration in their social position. Even after the word feminism was coined, it was still not adopted as a term of identification by many of those who campaigned for women's rights. Even many of the women's rights organizations in the late 1960s and early 1970s did not call themselves feminist: the term feminism had a restricted use in relation to specific concerns and specific groups. It is only more recently that the label feminist has been applied to all women's rights groups indiscriminately, and this non-coincidence between these groups' self-identification and subsequent labeling as feminist clearly relates to the problem of what criteria are to be used in deciding whether a person, group or action is '**feminist**'. Feminist writing and criticism highlight the position of women in literature, society and world culture, emphasizing that the roles and experiences of women tend to be marginalized by patriarchal societies. Feminist writers and critics attempt to redress the balance by writing literature and criticism from the point of view of women. A key feminist work from the modern period is A Room of One's Own (1929) by **Virginia Woolf**. The term '**womanist**' is sometimes used to refer to black feminism, to distinguish their approach from that of mainstream white middle-class feminism.

Although the terms "**feminism**" and "**feminist**" did not gain widespread use until the 1970s, they were already being used in the public jargon much earlier; for instance, Katherine Hepburn speaks of the "**feminist movement**" in the 1942 film *Woman of the Year*. According to **Maggie Humm and Rebecca Walker**, the history of feminism can be divided into four waves. The feminist theory emerged from these feminist movements.

## THE FOUR WAVES OF FEMINISM

### The first wave (1830's - the early 1900's): Women's fight for equal contract and property rights

First-wave feminism involved a period of feminist activity during the **19th and early 20th centuries**, especially in Europe and in the Anglosphere;

**it focused primarily on gaining the right of women's suffrage, the right to be educated, better working conditions and double sexual standards.**

The term "**The First Wave of Feminism**" was coined in March 1968, in an article in New York Times Magazine, by journalist Martha Weinman Lear entitled "**The Second Feminist Wave: What Do These Women Want?**"

The term, "**first-wave**", was coined retrospectively after the term second-wave feminism began to be used to describe a newer feminist movement that focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as further political inequalities.

In the late 19th to early 20th centuries, women realized that firstly, they must gain political power (including the right to vote) to bring about change was how to fuel the fire. Their political agenda expanded to issues concerning sexual, reproductive and economic matters. The seed was planted that women have the potential to contribute just as much if not more than men.

First wave feminism refers to an extended period of feminist activity during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the United Kingdom and the United States. Originally it focused on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to chattel marriage and ownership of married women (and their children) by their husbands. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, activism focused primarily on gaining political power, particularly the right of women's suffrage. Yet, feminists such as **Voltaire de Cleyre** and Margaret Sanger were still active in campaigning for **women's sexual, reproductive,** and economic rights at this time. In 1854, Florence Nightingale established female nurses as adjuncts to the military.

#### Points To Remember:

- It is categorized as focusing on the fight for women's political power.
- It takes place mainly in the USA and the UK from the 1820s to 1940s when women being treated as second rate citizens



in male-dominated societies and is represented by the liberal feminism.

- Its primary goal is to gain equal rights for women and for the securing voting rights.
- It aims at social reformation from the patriarchy and liberation from oppression of racial bias.
- Three main types of feminism, such as **liberal, radical, and cultural** feminism have emerged during this movement.
- It focuses the achievement of political and legal rights, such as basic rights of voting, education, work, and access to public space for women.
- It also stresses on economic, sexual and reproductive rights of women in the society.
- It primarily focuses on the plight of White women, mostly belonging to the Western middle-class, and ignores the plight of Black women.
- Feminists in this wave give priority of protest through public gatherings, speeches, and writing.

**American Equal Rights Association**" is formed in 1866, and after collapse of it, the **"National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA)"** is formed in early 1869, and the **"American Women Suffrage Association (AWSA)"** is formed later in that year. NWSA wants to work for uplifting women in national level, whereas the AWSA demands right to vote of women. Finally, in the same year the two bodies merge into the **"National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)"**. In 1916, NAWSA has broken and the **"National Woman's Party (NWP)"** is formed by young feminist Alice Paul (1885-1977).

The 19th amendment to the US constitution passes in the Senate **on June 4, 1919** and Congress gives the right of vote to women in 1920. Within the 1950s women of the most European countries and colonies get partial/full voting rights. Women of the most of the European countries, such as Russia, Germany, Austria and the UK receive the right to vote in **1918, Belgium in 1919, US and Canada in 1920, Ireland in 1928, and Spain in 1931, etc.**

### **The second wave (1960's-1980's): Broadening the debate**

The movement emerges in the wake of World War II when many women enter the labor force, and challenge current notions of the women's role in the family, workplace, and society.

Coming off the heels of **World War II**, the second wave of feminism focused on the workplace, sexuality, family and

reproductive rights. During a time when the United States was already trying to restructure itself, it was perceived that women had met their equality goals with the exception of the failure of the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (which has still yet to be passed). This time is often dismissed as offensive, outdated and obsessed with middle-class white women's problems. Conversely, many women during the second wave were initially part of the **Black Civil Rights Movement, Anti-Vietnam Movement, Chicano Rights Movement, Asian-American Civil Rights Movement, Gay, and Lesbian Movement** and many other groups fighting for equality. Many of the women supporters of the aforementioned groups felt their voices were not being heard and felt that in order to gain respect in co-ed organizations they first needed to address gender equality concerns. Women cared so much about these civil issues that they wanted to strengthen their voices by first fighting for gender equality to ensure they would be heard.

**Second-wave feminism refers to the period of activity in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s.**

The scholar **Imelda Whelehan** suggests that the second wave was a continuation of the earlier phase of feminism involving the suffragettes in the UK and USA. Second-wave feminism has continued to exist since that time and coexists with what is termed third-wave feminism.

The scholar **Estelle Freedman** compares first and second-wave feminism saying that the first **wave focused on rights such as suffrage**, whereas the second wave was **largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as ending discrimination**. The feminist activist and author **Carol Hanisch** coined the slogan **"The Personal is Political"** which became synonymous with the second wave.

Second-wave feminists saw women's cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked and encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and as reflecting sexist power structures.

#### Points to Remember:

- The duration of second wave feminism starts in the 1960s and ends after a period of three decades, **in the 1990s**.
- Sexuality and reproductive rights are dominant issues in this movement.
- **Martha Lear** coins the term "second wave feminism" in 1968.

- During this wave several types of political feminism, such as **Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, and ecological feminism** rise in the society.
- The movement is supported to empower the women on reproductive rights and Sexuality.

It extends many other matters, such as

- Equal education opportunities
- Equal employment opportunities
- Equal pay in workplaces
- Paid maternity leave
- Birth control and abortion rights
- The establishment of adequate childcare facilities
- Rights of equal access to political and economic positions, and women and children's safety.

It also focuses against;

- Domestic violence issues
- Marital rape issues
- Sexual harassment and rape
- Misogyny
- Official legal inequalities
- Pornography and prostitution, and the sexual objectification of women's bodies.

It also wants to create rape-crisis centers and women's shelters, and to bring changes in custody laws and divorce law. It takes various attempts to eliminate gender inequality from society.

### **The third wave (1990's - early 2000's):** **The "micro-politics" of gender equality**

The Third-wave of feminism began in the **early 1990s**. The movement arose as responses to what young women thought of as perceived failures of the second wave. It was also a response to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second wave.

**The term "third wave feminism" is coined by American writer, feminist, and activist Rebecca Walker, daughter of feminist Alice Walker, in her famous article "Becoming the Third Wave" in 1992.**

Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave's **"essentialist"** definitions of femininity, which (according to them) over-emphasized the experiences of upper-middle-class white women. A post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is central to much of the

third wave's ideology. Third wave feminists often focus on **"micropolitics"**, and challenged the second wave's paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for females. Unlike the former movements, the term **'feminist'** becomes less critically received by the female population due to the varying feminist outlooks. There are the ego-cultural feminists, the radicals, the liberal/reforms, the electoral, academic, ecofeminists... the list goes on. The main issues were prefaced by the work done by the previous waves of women. The fight continued to vanquish the disparities in male and female pay and the reproductive rights of women. Work continues to end violence against women in our nation as well as abroad. This wave was about acceptance and a true understanding of the term **'feminism'**. Since the first wave, the remarkable progress has been made, but there is still much to be done. Due to the range of feminist issues today, it is much harder to put a label on what a feminist looks like—leading to a brand-new generation rallying for equality and women's rights.

Points to Remember:

- The third wave feminism is represented by diverse modes of thoughts and extents from the **1990s to 2000s**.
- Third wave feminists see themselves as capable, strong, and assertive social agents, and also believe that they have **"more opportunities and less sexism"** than that of first and second waves.
- The third wave feminism is often also called **"power feminism"** because; during this movement women are strong and rebellious, and working women in various occupations are subjected to a sexist patriarchy.
- It presents a dynamic analysis that gains a global appreciation with comprehensive ideologies, such as **cultural feminism, black feminism, and postmodern feminism**.
- It stresses on the idea of **"universal womanhood"**, which focuses on moving from communal objectives to individual rights.
- It supports reproductive rights, and fights against sexual violence and sexual harassment in workplace, rape and gang rape.

It is global because **"women are of many colors, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and cultural backgrounds"** and celebrates sexuality in a positive way.

**Fourth-wave feminism:**

**A developing and lively wave, revitalization of interest in feminism with the use of social media**

Fourth-wave feminism is the resurgence of interest in feminism that began around **2012** and is associated with the use of social media. According to feminist scholar **Prudence Chamberlain**, the focus of the fourth wave is justice for women and also opposition to sexual harassment and violence against women. Its essence, she writes, is "**incredulity that certain attitudes can still exist**". To those who question about the existence of Fourth-wave feminism, **Baumgardner (2011)** responds, "**I believe that the fourth wave exists because it says that it exists**".

Through examining the era of "terror" produced by the 9/11 attacks, Kaplan (2003) was among the first to imagine the possibilities of fourth wave feminist action and research. To Kaplan, fourth wave feminist projects need to be able to articulate the violence and extremism experienced by women, both at home and abroad, brought on by imperialism in the form of global capitalism. Hence, Kaplan suggests, The fourth wave will be distinguished by bringing second and third wave feminists together to confront a new and devastating reality that involves us all, if not equally, then at least at once. This new reality ideally cuts across racial, ethnic, and national divides.

Fourth-wave feminism is "**defined by technology**", according to **Kira Cochrane**, and is characterized particularly by the use of **Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr, and blogs** such as Feminizing to challenge misogyny and further gender equality.

Issues that fourth-wave feminists focus on include street and workplace harassment, campus sexual assault and rape culture. Scandals involving the harassment, abuse, and murder of women and girls have galvanized the movement.

**Points to Remember:**

- Feminism that is originated from social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, considers as the fourth wave feminism.
- It is forms of interaction and contacts among women, which mainly take place online.
- During this movement, social justice campaigns have erupted on social media, such as **#MeToo** and **#TimesUp** movements. **Ealasaid Munro** has called it "**Hashtag Feminism**", which is started around 2008 based on the "**culture of callout**" that creates hubs for women as "**consciousness-raising groups**".



- In this movement, the social media becomes a real catalyst to fight against **women's harassment, professional discrimination, media sexism, and gender shaming.**
- It tries to empower men, women and transgender people, promoting the acceptance of all possible bodies
- It is highly related to the use of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr, and blogs.
- Aim of this wave is justice for women and sexual harassment and violence against women by men.

### Conclusion

The movement of feminism and its four waves will become a success and the efforts of feminists will not go in vain when women are valued for themselves as men are. When women can walk down a street without being harassed when their interview for jobs are considered with the exact same criteria as men interviewing are. It's when good husbands and fathers have the same norm, couples split up housework fairly and stay at home, dads can support by staying at home as moms do. It's when transmen and transwomen get the health care, they need that is appropriate for their bodies, and what it says on their driver's license isn't considered relevant. The conclusion of feminism is when girl children are not sold into marriage or any children into the sex trade ever. The wrapping up of feminism is not world peace or love and harmony, but the removal of the systemic, universal undervaluing of women and women's work by society. That will mean more competition, but also much more allocation and collaboration.

**The first wave of feminism** is led by only white middle-class women of the USA and Europe. **In this movement**, the women have achieved voting rights and demand for some other rights, such as right to education, right to access to public space, right to property of father, etc. **In the second wave feminism**, Non-white women of West as well as in developing countries are involved with the White women of West. Sexuality and reproductive rights were main demand in this movement.

Some other demands of them are equal opportunities for education, employment; maternity leave, birth control and abortion rights, etc. They become active against domestic violence issues, marital rape issues, sexual harassment and rape, misogyny, etc. **During the third wave feminism**, women became strong and powerful. They have fought against sexual violence, rape, and sexual harassment in workplace. **The fourth**

**wave feminists** are using online technologies, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to communicate and share their feelings and to create awareness among women.

In the 21st century, society has realized that women must be independent and make choices for themselves in education, social works, jobs, careers, and couple life in public as well as at home. To make the society developed and sustainable, all forms of patriarchal oppressions, such as sexism, racism, class oppressions, imperialism, etc. must be eradicated from the society.

