

## FEMINISM: THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*Feminism tends to be thought as a movement of women and many feminists absolutely reject the idea of allowing men into it. However, men can be as opposed to the injustices from which women suffer as women can. Thus, feminism is not concerned with a group of people it wants to benefit, but with a type of injustice it wants to eliminate.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Feminism. Development, Movement of Women*

### INTRODUCTION

*One is not born a woman, one becomes one woman voice. (Beauvoir 5)*

According to Donna Hurst and Sue Morrow: “Feminism is difficult to pin down because it is a dynamic, constantly changing ideology with many aspects, including the personal, the political and the philosophical.” (qtd. In Caine 50) For Charlotte Bunch: “Because feminism is concerned with transforming society, it may well be called transformational politics.” (Bunch 34). The feminist movement, according to Teresa Billington George, seeks: “The recognition of the world upon a basis of sex-equality in all human relations, a movement which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the ground of sex, would abolish all sex privileges and sex burdens and would strive to set up the recognition of the common humanity of woman and man as the foundation of law and custom.” (George 694)

Whatever the description may be feminism is a call to action; it can never be simply a belief system. Without action, feminism is merely empty rhetoric. Therefore, feminist theory is concerned with matters like the history is concerned with matters like the history of women’s oppression, differential treatment of girls and boys, Male sexual fantasies, anthropological studies of women, political methods and so on.

Feminism is generally thought as a phenomenon of the centuries, but ever since antiquity against male oppression. In a study, *Women, History and Theory* (1984), John Kelly brilliantly demonstrates a solid thinking about women. French feminism goes back even further and identifies Christine de Pisan (1364–1430) as the first to have held modern feminist views. She was the first feminist thinker to spark off the four-century long debate on woman which came to be known as *quenelles des femmers*. Her immediate aim was to oppose the mistreatment of women by exposing the already existing ideology about women and opposing the prejudice and narrowness of patriarchy. Flora Tristan (1803–1844), Jeanne Deroin (1805–1852), Pauline Roland (1805–1892), Madeliene Pelletier (1874–1939) and Helene Briton (1874–1962) published an anthology which criticized the existing society and claimed equality for women. They were inspired by the French

revolution. This helped them to hope for a new civilization and the transformation of the educational system, which would also bring about the establishment of civic rights for women.

In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, in 1815 Fanny Burney's *The Wanderer*, in 1825 the establishment of a ladies society for the relief of Negro slaves, in 1848 John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, further added fuel to the fire. The *Enfranchisement of Women*, published in 18847 aroused more consciousness amongst women. In 1868, Mill published *The Subjection of Women*, where he wrote: "The object of this paper is to explain that the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself", and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side nor disability on the other." (Barrett 5)

In 1870 the Married Women's Property Act gave married women in Britain, the right to their own earnings, and in 1898 term feminist was used in the Westminster Review. After this there was a remarkable awakening and in 1850's and 1860's there was the emergence of the first women's movement in Britain. This movement made a petition to reform the laws which oppressed married women depriving them of any property. The early feminist activists concentrated their attention on the range of secondary education, making higher education accessible and then on suffrage.

Mid-Nineteenth Century, feminists developed a powerful image of sexual difference based on praising womanhood on general and exalting the activities and character of particular woman like Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Fry, Mary Carpenter, Lousia Twining, Mary Somerville, and Queen Victoria, as all these could become examples for women.

Dale Spender's book *There's Always been a Women's Movement in this Century* debates about feminist activity. With great efforts French Women obtained the right to vote in April 1944. Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex* in 1949. Later on in 1967, feminist groups *Feminism-Masculin-Futur* and *Feminisme-Marxisme* were formed. Further in 1969, the publication of Montique Witting's *The Guerrillas* further enhanced the movement. In 1970, *Feministes Revolutionaries*, a group of radical feminists were formed committed to remove the patriarchal order. In 1975, Helene Cixous published the *Laugh of the Medusa*. Betty Fredian's *The Feminine Mystique* flourished in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the feminine deal.

In Unite States, Declaration of the Rights of Women written by Olympede Gouges in 1790, then there was declaration of the Rights and Sentiments of the Seneca Falls and after a heated debate the convention agreed to acknowledge the right of American women to elective franchise. During the next seventy-two years, one strong bond uniting three generations of women, believing along with Elizabeth Candy Stanton, that only through the exercise of the franchise they would eradicate the existing legal, economic and social inequalities affecting women. Only after the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, the document acquired historic value and became an inspiring symbol of the feminist movement. In America's Margaret Fuller had agitated for women's movement in the middle of the nineteenth century and was the first to use the term "Patriarchal Value". In 1968, Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* came which was an epoch making work dealing with women's issue.

There are many texts in literature which are now interpreted as feminist. Roman De La Rose is the first overtly feminist cult, Fanny Burney's, Evelina George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is considered to be feminist. Richardson's and Fielding's texts are also interpreted feminist. Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Hedda Gabler, Mederedit's *The Egoist*, James The Bostonians, Hard's *Tess* and *Jude* all are now interpreted to be feminist. Emily Dickinson is considered as a feminist poet as most of her poetries deal with feminine thoughts.

### **THE DIVERSITIES IN IDEOLOGY OF FEMINISM**

Feminist criticism is a part of discourse of the feminism emerged in Europe and America in the later 1960's to receive political and social issues associated with women's actual participation in western culture. The feminist criticism is nationally diverse. In America and England, it is homogenous, mostly devoted to close reading of the text. The Anglo American feminist criticism is much practical; its emphasis is on a reversionary reader or of a female reading of text. The distinction between the British and the American feminism is that the former is associated with patriarchy tradition and the latter is concerned with canon formation of literature.

French Revolution, like most of the feminism began with a radical political activity and in the 60's is become devoted to theory. The impulse of the theory was provided particularly by three forces: Marxist Criticism, Psycho Analytic Theory particularly by Jacques Lacan, a French Psychologist, The Deconstruction Theory by Derrida, a French Philosopher, the Semiotic Forces of Poland Barthers, a French Theorist found its impulse later on. Feminist criticism is concerned with one major issue of female writer or e'criture feminine. The feminist critics assume that the woman is a biological person, a subject. It is the distinctiveness of woman which characterizes the feminist writing. The post structuralists say that woman is a textual product, a linguist construct; a particular emphasizes femininity, not the biological difference of man and woman but the cultural difference. With this concept of female subjectivity which came into being with the interference of structuralism, comes another aspect, the difference dilemma Julia Kristena, a French Theorist speaks about the difference, studies three stages of feminism: The woman demands equality of excess into the male symbolic order, Kristena calls this liberal feminism where equality with ale is demanded. The stage where woman rejects the male symbolic order, this is the position of radical feminism. The stage where woman and man are in a right for the symbolic order, this is metaphysical feminism.

The conservative view is that the differential treatment of woman as a group is not unjust. They admit that some individual women do suffer hardships. But this suffering is not a part of the systematic social oppression. They rationalize the differences between women's and men's social roles in two ways that the female role is not inferior to that of the male. That the women are inherently better adapted than the men to the traditional female sex role. Writers who advance such a view range from Rousseau, Schopenhauer, Fichte, Nietzsche and Freud convinced on the inherently unequal abilities of men and women, all conservatives emphasize that one of the main tasks of the state is to ensure that the individual performs his or her social function. They argue that social differentiation between sexes is not unjust, since justice not only allows but requires treating unequal unequally.

Liberal feminism refers to the tradition expression in John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*. This tradition has continued in various moderate groups like the National Organization for Women, which agitate for legal reform to improve the status of women. Liberal feminism views liberation for women as the freedom to determine

their own social role and to compete with men on terms that are as equal as possible. The liberal does not believe that it is necessary to change the whole social structure in order to affect women's liberation.

According to classical Marxist Feminist, views the oppression of women as historically and currently is a direct result of the institution of private property. Consequently, feminism must be seen as a part of a broader struggle to achieve a communist society. Marxists, is more over recognized that women suffer special forms of oppression to which men are not subject and hence, in so far as the oppression is rooted in capitalism, women have additional reasons to work to remove that economic system.

Radical feminism understands many different forms of social oppression in terms of the basic concept of sexual oppression. It is formulated by such writers as Ti Grace Atkinson and Shulamith Firestone. Radical feminists deny the liberal claim that the basis of women's oppression consists in their lack of political or civil rights. Similarly, they reject the classical Marxist belief that basically women are oppressed because they live in class society. Instead, in what appears to be a regression to conservatism, the radical feminists hold that the roots of the women's oppression are biological. The origin of women's subjection lies in the fact that as a result of the weakness caused by child bearing women become dependent on men for physical survival. The origin of the family, thus, is a primal biological factor. The radical feminist believe that the physical subjection of women by men was historically the basis form of oppression, before the thought about private property and class relationships that develop within the biological family provide a model for understanding. They believe that the role system must be abolished, even its biological aspects. The radical feminist conception of human nature is Neo-Freudian.

The multiplicity of approaches and assumptions inside the movement can lead to conflict and competition; it can also be the source of vitality and genuine learning. Such diversity if fostered as it has been in some feminist thought can be a model for cultural heterogeneity. The purpose of this paper is not to model a single feminist critical perspective but to put together, a collection that can be tailored to fit a number of difficult educational purposes for courses in literary and cultural studies.

### **CONTINENTAL DIVERSITIES IN WOMEN ISSUE**

Europe and America gave birth to feminism cradled and brought it up, the European and American variety of feminism is not only the movement. Within America there is what is called "Black Feminism". Toni Morrison is the prominent black feminist writer. Black Feminism is not only white feminism with black face. On the contrary, it implies legitimate issues which affect the lives of black women, not only in America, Africa but wherever blacks and whites co-exist. Black feminism is the context for the development of black defined sexual political struggles, sexual tensions and conflicts in terms of black culture as against the white dominant culture. Alice Walker objected to the phrase 'Black Feminism' or 'Black Feminist' and substituted 'Womanism' and 'Womanish' without the epithet 'Black'.

'Womanism' and 'Womanish' have strong roots is black woman's culture. These words can perhaps be associated with the word 'Womanish'- a word which clack mothers used to describe and to inhibit the strong, outrageous and out spoken behaviours of their children. Whatever be the origin of these words, they are reserved for describing the black woman's situation. While the words 'Feminism' and 'Feminist' are accepted as coming out of the white woman's culture.

Black feminism is the most dynamic movement to black and other third world people because it makes it absolutely essential to examine the way in which they live, the way in which they believe in. It calls into question the most basic assumptions about their existence.

In East, there is Asian Feminism. It is not the same as its American or European counterpart, not it is the same in all parts of Asia. For example, the problem of woman in the Muslim World with its tradition of 'Burkha' and 'Shariyat Laws' are not the same as those of the woman in Communist China, Buddhist Japan or Secular India.

In an interview by an Asian woman and an Asian-American woman asked whether she believed herself as a 'feminist'. In reply she said:

*"There is feminism where all problems of women in society are seen as caused by men. I don't believe men are the creators of the problems in society. I do believe that men and women have to work together to solve the problems of the society."* (Fawcett 357)

From the trends the Feminist Movement assumed, it is evident that Feminism has its goal gives to every woman, the opportunity of becoming the best that her natural faculties make her capable of. (Fawcett 357)

Till the present day the goals of feminism has not drastically changed. They have only been modified to suit the needs of modern times. One of the major present day goals is the liberation of women from the oppression shackles of male domination, even in twenty first century, Jill Johnston declares: "We don't have anything to do with men at all. They have taken excellent care of themselves." (Johnston 166)

Amid the chorus of supporters and admirers of feminism, there are occasionally a few discordant notes. For example Kornegger describes feminism:

*"As a many sited monster which cannot be destroyed by Singular decapitation, we spread and grow in ways that are incomprehensible to the hierarchical mentality."* (Kornegger 243)

Elaine Showalter differentiates feminism into three different phases: 'Feminine Phase of Internalization', the 'Feminist Phase of Revolt' and the 'Female Phase of Self-Discovery and Self-Recovery. (Showalter 36)

To conclude 'Feminism' or 'Feminist' is an attitude which places the female in the centre of life and society based on gender or sexual differences. In a male dominated works towards the political, economic, spiritual and social equality of women.

### **FEMINISM AND INDIAN SPIRIT**

Feminism is not only a western world experience, but it was prevalent in India from the time existence came into being. It is mentioned in the Vedic literature that:

*Shakti is Mahadevi  
Mahadeva is holding Shakti  
Their union has resulted in  
The Manifestation of the animate and the inanimate world.  
Shiva and Devi are identical  
And as inseparable as moonlight is from moon.*

(Katakarn 5)

Men and women have been created together they form the basis of human existence. An analysis of woman's status during the Vedic period reveals that they enjoyed a position of equality with man in all spheres. They were given equal opportunities for education. The goddess of learning is Saraswati. Women were eligible for Upnayana, a ritual after which boys are considered for getting married and Bramhacharya means to remain unmarried forever. According to Sarvanankramanika there were more than twenty women seers or Bramhacharinis who composed the hymns of Rig Veda. Some historians believe that some of the hymns of Atharva Veda were also composed by women seers. Gargi, Ghosa, Gotha, Vishwavara, Apala, Maitreyi, Arundhati and Lilavati were illustrations Vedic women:

*The Kaushitaki Brahmana mention a learned lady Pathya swasti, who travelled all the way to the North of India to study the goddess of learning of Vac or the goddess of learning of Vac or the Goddess of learning for her scholarship.*

(Mujumdar 52)

There is an interesting passage in the Saptashati where Durga, who is virgin tells the Asuras, who aspired to marry her.

“He who conquers me in battle, he who humbles my pride, he who is my equal in the world, he shall be my husband.” (Chakravarti 70) Though, in patriarchy it is interpreted that Goddess Durga wanted to be in a humble position to man.

Marriage was not compulsory for girls in the Vedic Age but an unmarried person was not eligible to participate in Vedic sacrifices. Remarriage of widows was allowed and there also prevailed the custom of ‘Nityoga’, according to which a wife could seek extra marital sex for concerning a child, in case the husband was incapable of giving her one or had died without giving her one. (the conceptions of Dhrishtrashtra and Pandu, as described in the Mahabharata). Women were free to choose their husband and ‘Gandharva Vivah’, a custom in which marriage could take place in front of God without the intervention of others, only with the consent of both the partners, was common. The freedom of women in the Vedic age is evident festival from the account of the popular festival called Samanas where men and women met and mixed freely.

The Vedas think of the wife not only as a joint ruler but also as a queen exercising her sovereignty over all the members of the household, including her husband's parents. “The wife, verily in the home.” says the Veda. (Majumdar 52). Her intellectual personality is recognized and she is invited soon after her marriage to address the Vidhata, the religious assembly.” (Chakravarti 71). The Mahanirvana Tantra says, “A girl should be brought up and educated with great effort and care.” (French 26). This shows that even a long after the Vedic age, the society in India insisted for the freedom of the women.

There are certain matrilineal societies in Kerala in the South and among Garos and Khasis in the North-Eastern part of India even today. These provide a qualitatively different social setting for the women in those areas, but they have hardly affected the country's ethos and can be termed only as insignificant exceptions.

In an article published at Manushi ‘Lady Sing the Blues where Women Retell the Ramayana’, Nabneeta Dev Sen has depicted the story of ‘Sita’ from women's point of view. After reading the text of Chandrabati in 1989, she discovered that a woman's Ramayana tells a different story. Chandrabati and Molla are the very first recognized women to retell the Ramayana in their regional language.

The major themes in the songs are: Sita's birth, her wedding, her abduction, pregnancy, abandonment and childbearing. These themes obviously have no religious significance. They do not complain about hard work or poverty. All the songs complain about neglect and denial of their rights. Now to consider one song, here is the theme of Sita as the essential orphan describing her in forest exile, talking to the birds and trees as she has no one else to talk to:

*Sitabai says,  
 What kind of a woman am I?  
 I was given away to Rama  
 When I was five years old.  
 What sort of mother's love have I got?  
 Dear Plum tree, dear Babul tree,  
 Sita is telling you, you the story of her life.  
 Please listen I was found at the tip of a plough.  
 How can I have parents?  
 I was found in a box, in the open field.*

*(Sen 108)*

Feminism has been the subject of writers since antiquity. Henry Derozio's *The Fakir of Jungheera* has strident feminine stance at the British period. Toru Dutt is one of the distinguished authors in Indian English literature. Her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hinduism* (1882) attracted the attention of Hinduism. The first poem 'Savitri' of the ancient Ballads has a feministic appeal. It narrates the fortune of the princess Savitri and her courageous encounter with the God of Death. Then followed the philosophical conversation between Savitri and death. Savitri states speaking in terms of Vedantic philosophy, Yama was greatly pleased with Savitri and decided her to ask for a boon but the life Satyavan. One after the other three boons to Savitri but at the last boon he laid down no condition. Savitri immediately caught the due and demanded

*Let my Satyavan live again  
 And children unto us be born  
 Wise, brave and Valiant.*

*(Dwivedi 73)*

The modern women's 'lib' movement affects an impetus when the following lines are read with a proper understanding:

*In there far off primeval days  
 Fair India's daughter were not pent  
 In close zenanas*

*(Dwivedi 73)*

That women enjoyed full freedom of movement in ancient India is marvelously mentioned here.



## WOMEN ISSUE IN INDIAN WRITING

The impact of tradition and culture through long surviving institutions and the ideologies woven into them might not have relevance in a Euro-American environment but cannot be ignored in the Indian context.

There is the issue of female subaltern identity in Mulk Raj Anand's novel *The Old Woman and the Cow*, the female protagonist Rosie in *Guide* by R.K. Narayan, R.W. Desai's *Damyanti's Dilemma*. The portrayal of women by male artist must be deficient for, even the most imaginative of male writers is by no mean equipped to give an authentic rendering of the female sensibility of late, there has been a tendency among the women Indian novelists writing in English to share their view. There has emerged a group of women novelists who try to give their own side of the story from their own point of view.

Women writers of all ages have a natural preference for writing about women characters. Such preference may be a limitation of their creativity. But this limitation does not in any way reduce the importance of women activities. Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock*, *Fire on the Mountain*, *Clear Light of Day* Baumgar thesis Bombay, Nayantara Saghal's *This Time of Morning*, *Storm in Chandigarh*, *The Day in Shadow*, *Rich Like Us* are feminist in subject. Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in an Eve*, *Some Inner Fury*, *Possession* and *Two Virgins* are feminist in subject. Bharti Mukherjee, Shobha De, Mahashmeta Devi, Mammon Raison Goswami, Ismat Chugfai, Lakshmi Lanan, Vasireddi Sita Devi and so on are other women writers who deal with women's subject.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the few writers who deal with a woman's problems' psychological, emotional without giving them a grandiose name 'Feminist Writing'. She tries to catch the subtle psychological complexities of the individual's mind. As she self states:

"Innermost feelings come out in my writings. The kind of emotions we know women have, but never comes out." (Eve's Weekly 26).

She writes about tears in things, the little upsets in life, the price one has to pay for one's acute self-awareness, the loneliness that becomes more pronounced as one gets older and older.

Deshpande's inclination to writing is due to her family background. Born in Dharhad, Karnataka, she is the daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Shri Adya Rangacharya. He is known as The Bernard Shaw of Karnataka Theatre. His innumerable plays have been widely published in kannada, English and Sanskrit. Deshpande represents a fact of being detached from him. In response to a question of Vanamala Vishwanatha, she says:-

*If I should criticize him, I should say he was detached from us. never guided us, May be if he had directed us at an early age. I could have done better. Hr never did that. (Literature Alive 8)*

At the age of fifteen she went to Bombay and graduated from their in Economics from Elphistone College. She then gained her law degree from Mysore (University Bangalore). There she topped the list of candidate at the final law.



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