

## Lens of Feminism: Changing Perspectives and the Contestations within

**Dr. Aparna Varma**

Assistant Professor

School of Internal Security, Defense, and Strategic Studies

Rashtriya Raksha University

&

**Dr. Arghya Chakraborty**

Assistant Professor (English)

School of International Cooperation, Security, and Strategic Languages

Rashtriya Raksha University

### Abstract

Defining, establishing, and achieving political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes is the shared goal of a broad spectrum of political groups, philosophies, and social movements collectively referred to as "feminism." Feminism's core tenet is to promote women's equality and fairness in all areas of life and to provide them the same access to resources that men would otherwise have unrestricted access to. Because feminism encompasses a wide range of topics, including the history of women's oppression and potential strategies for overcoming the "anxiety of authorship" by creating their own literary canon. Since there are many different psychosocial and cultural definitions of femininity, feminism is in fact a genuine attempt to analyse, understand, and define. However, by examining a few seminal works in the field of feminist literary theory, this study aims to trace the theoretical roots of the movement and describe some fundamental feminism-related assumptions and ideas.

**Keywords:** Second Wave Feminism, Feminism, Gyno-criticism.

### Introduction

Originally derived from the Latin word "femina", meaning "woman," the term "feminism" was first applied to the movement for women's rights and equality. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "feminism" is the attribute of being feminine or womanly. "Feminism" is defined by Webster's Dictionary as the idea that women should have the same political rights as men. "The terms 'feminist' or 'feminism' are political labels that indicate support for the goals of the new Woman's Movement which emerged in the late 1960s," said Toril Moi. The symmetrical use of masculine and feminine terms in legal papers, according to Simone de Beauvoir, is also only a formality.

Everybody has a different definition of what "feminism" is. Chaman Nahal defines feminism as "a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome" in his article "Feminism in English Fiction." Dependency syndrome exists, regardless of the

source—the spouse, the father, the community, a religious or ethnic group. My concept of feminism comes to life when women overcome the reliance syndrome and lead normal lives.

The core tenet of feminist theory is that western philosophical heritage and masculine-dominated social discourse have devalued women since the dawn of human civilization. Every civilization's history demonstrates that women have consistently been relegated to a position of subordination, leaving them without the ability to reclaim their distinct identities unless they revisit, investigate, and ultimately reestablish them via their own experiences and discoveries. Women must define themselves in relation to the male-informed values and beliefs that are transmitted from one generation to the next in order to investigate their own distinct identities. By producing female subjects who are socialized to embrace the system's values, these beliefs have established the dominant system. In the same way that women are exploited, men similarly degrade and take advantage of the physical cosmos, reducing both to submissive objects and selfless artifacts. Men have thus acquired enormous power to manipulate the domination over women and nature in all three of these domains: historical traces, philosophical or epistemic heritage, and ecological inhaling. In other words, women are forced to rely on men and derive their existence from their historical insignificance. Women have generally been viewed by the philosophical and epistemic systems as non-entities, second-guesses, non-existent creatures, or sexual objects that vacillate between libido and envy. Because women have always been associated with nature and its peaceful, cool, and irresistible objects—such as clay, earth, moon, and reproduction and nurturing—the third form of exploitation is equivalent to that of nature. By protesting and resisting standards of conduct that are labelled as male, feminist philosophers challenge these ideas. In order to restore the emerging feminist literary canon, they revise history and base their counterarguments on the theoretical and philosophical framework. Feminist literary theory, then, is the development of feminism into a theoretical or philosophical framework for examining women's literary traditions and analysing the reasons behind women's subordinate status. They went through several phases to create their own and independent identities while de-centering phallogocentric ideas. They were progressively able to assert what they had been denied for decades thanks to these developmental stages.

### **Feminism: Then and Now**

Thus, three waves may be distinguished in the history of the contemporary feminist movement in the West. Maggie Humm was the one who separated the rise and development of contemporary feminist groups in the West into three "waves." Different facets of the same feminist themes are addressed by each of the three feminist waves. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the beginning of the first wave feminist movement. Women advocated for suffrage campaigns at this time, and they spoke out for equal access to the

parliament and the opportunity to vote. One could argue that Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* served as a model for these suffrage campaigns. She is actually recognized as the founder of British feminist criticism, inspiring suffragettes to fight for women's rights. She promoted equal social and moral rights for women in her work. The varied intellectuals who fought for women's equal legal and social rights were linked to the second wave feminist movement, which got its start in the 1960s. Numerous seminal works emerged in the literary world at this time, powerfully advocating for women's freedom from the philosophical and linguistic codes of men. Elaine Showalter's *The Literature of Their Own* (1977), Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976), Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968), and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) are among the key works of second wave feminism. In response to the perceived shortcomings of second wave feminism, the third wave feminist movement was born. This movement started in the 1990s and spread to gender studies, ecofeminism, and postcolonial feminism. This movement's feminist intellectuals promoted social justice for women. Similar to this, literary experts think that the fourth wave of feminism, which began in 2012, is connected to social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others. It is linked to efforts like the "Me Too Movement" and the "Every Sexism Project." The Me-Too Movement opposed sexual harassment and attacks that women experience in the workplace and other settings. Social activist Tarana Burke used "Me too" on the My-Space social network in 2006 as part of a campaign to support "empowerment through empathy." The discussion that follows will touch briefly on some of the early fundamental ideas that pushed feminist literary theory to broaden its scope.

Simone de Beauvoir is widely considered to have created the theoretical groundwork for feminist criticism. According to de Beauvoir's 1949 book *The Second Sex*, femininity is a social construct that is formed over a protracted period of socialization rather than an innate trait. According to her, the three reasons were mostly responsible for women's inferiority. In the beginning, women were always taught to assist males, which is how they came to be. Second, in order to be accepted by society, women were urged to externalize feministic traits like obedience, altruism, and attractiveness. Thirdly, compared to men, women have had fewer rights. For this reason, she contends that women's historical insignificance, not their inferiority, is what condemned them to a lower status. She contends that women are not born but are instead created through a largely male-centric socialization process that has relegated women to the status of second-class, inferior, and subservient. According to Simone de Beauvoir:

*One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male*

*and eunuch, which is described as feminine*

Since women's writing has been marginalized in popular culture and literature since the dawn of human civilization, feminist theory has mostly focused on the idea that male writers have dominated the literary world. In reality, women were discredited for fulfilling social responsibilities in the public or private spheres that might have improved their financial circumstances. The notion in men's inherent superiority and patriarchal social systems also deterred them from pursuing literary goals. The repressive ideology and practice of patriarchy needed to be challenged by female authors and theorists with alternative narratives that would provide women a safe space to experiment and develop a unique artistic genre. The foundation for feminist critique was established by Virginia Woolf's work *A Room of One's Own* (1929), which was initially written as a lecture she was asked to give at Girton College Cambridge in 1928 on the subject of "Woman and Fiction." Her treatise challenges the notion that women are inferior and offers a compelling materialistic explanation of women's subjugation. She contends that women's books are not written in the same style as men's. She also holds that artistic brilliance is not a miracle gift that is bestowed at birth, but rather emerges among the leisurely and educated class when two requirements are met. The first is having a room of one's own, which represents a space where women may be themselves. Financial independence comes in second. Women would flourish in both literary and social endeavours when these two requirements were met. She also introduced the idea of androgyny. As she explains it, she contends that even though the physical body is separated into two sexes, the mind can have traits from both. The idea of androgyny put forth by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who claimed that "the mind of a true artist is androgynous," served as her inspiration.

Elaine Showalter, an American feminist critic, questioned Woolf's notion of androgyny. She introduced the idea of Gynocriticism as an alternate framework for analysing women's writing in her essay *Toward Feminist Poetics* (1979). Gynocriticism is the study of women's literary works by female authors from a historical perspective. The ideological or phallogocentric perspective, which holds that women were readers and consumers of literary materials, is one of its two branches. The stereotyped portrayal and misreading of women in male-authored literature are criticized in this critique. The second is Gynocriticism, which is a literary movement in which women write and produce literary works. Feminist criticism flourished in all directions thanks to the groundbreaking literary works of various other feminist theorists in the 1970s. All of these works had one thing in common: they expressed women's inner and physical experiences in order to give them a voice and provide a way to move up from their current status to one where they can explore not only their own distinct and independent identities but also create their own literary canon.

## **Liberal Feminism**

Liberal Feminism promotes political and legal reforms to uphold gender equality. It is a type of individualistic feminism that emphasizes how women may uphold and demonstrate their equality by taking accountability for their own deeds. In order to enhance the relationships between men and women, liberal feminism promotes social reform. Liberal feminists contend that since no woman is denied her equal rights, change can be achieved without changing the way society is organized.

Many issues are deemed essential by liberal feminists, such as access to reasonably priced childcare and health care, rights pertaining to reproduction, abortion, sexual harassment, and the right to vote, education, "equal pay for equal work," and increasing awareness of sexual and domestic violence against women.

## **Radical Feminism**

The male-controlled economic system, which radical feminism critiques as sexist, is the main cause of women's servitude. Radical feminists contend that the patriarchal system, which they perceive to be fundamentally oppressive and controlling, must be overthrown in order for women to be free. Radical feminists think that oppression and injustice are the fault of male-dominated institutions of authority and power, and that society will not change significantly as long as these institutions and their principles persist. Some radical feminists believe that the only way to achieve their objectives is to completely destroy society and rebuild it.

## **Cultural Feminism**

Culture-based feminism is the belief in a "female nature" or "female essence" that aims to honour the attributes of women that are frequently disregarded. Although it highlights the disparities between men and women, it views these differences as cultural and psychological constructs rather than as a property of the human species. Cultural feminism's detractors contend that it can be essentialist, discriminatory, and has a propensity to reproduce antiquated conventions and stereotypes. Additionally, they point out that cultural feminism sometimes ignores or minimizes the importance of women's political and economic equality and that it may be challenging to reconcile with other feminisms that highlight gender equality as a universal aim (Central Asia GWAnet, n.d.).

## **Conclusion**

"Feminism" was a social movement that was started by a number of resistance movements that opposed the ideas of social inequity, patriarchy, and capitalism's role in oppressing women. Feminist theory was first a fragmented and illogical system of resistance to phallographic thought and behaviour, but it is now a recognized area of critical research and

study. Feminist literary theory's scope extends beyond merely reclaiming and constructing women's independent identities in literary and social contexts; it also advances in tandem with literary discourse that is centred on men. In order to define, develop, and attain women's social justice in all areas of life, we now include a wide and varied range of feminist theorists who use post-structuralist, psychoanalytic, Marxist, and postcolonial techniques to de-centre masculine ideology.

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