

Chapter One

Feminism in Various Perspectives

The term 'feminism' was first used in 1872 by French dramatist Alexander Dumas, the younger, in a pamphlet to designate the emerging women's movement of that time which, gradually, gained momentum and fought for equality of women in all spheres like social, political, moral, religious, educational, legal, and economic. Feminism has questioned the stereotypical ideas related to the term 'feminine' which is associated with passive, submissive, emotional, irrational, sentimental, timid, weak, docile, subdued, subjugated, sex-object, breeding machines, seductive, silenced, the negative, and always an 'other' which has rendered women powerless and to secondary position.

Feminism, basically, deals with the writings which have shattered the dichotomies between public/private and emotional/rational and examines the works which have established an independent women's identity. For critics, Feminism is "one of the most important social, economic, and aesthetic revolutions of modern times" which protests the exclusion of women writers from so called literary canon, and makes an attempt to redefine literary theory (Guerin et al. 197). Adrienne Rich, in an introduction to an anthology of international women's poetry, describes the condition of female diaspora as:

The idea of a common female culture-splintered and diasporized among the male cultures under and within which women have survived-has been a haunting though tentative theme of feminist thought over the past few years. Divided from each other through our dependencies on men-domestically, tribally, and in the world of patronage and institutions-our

first need has been to recognize and reject these divisions, the second to begin exploring all that we share in common as women on this planet. (qtd. in Showalter 187)

The confusion regarding the proper definition of feminism prevails as Rebecca West is also confused about the term feminism and says that she knows that she is called a feminist when she expresses her sentiments that differentiate her from others. Guerin and other critics point out that feminism has always been defined in terms of what is absent rather than what is present. Audre Lorde also feels that it is difficult to settle for one easy or narrow definition of self and it is wrong to preserve and isolate oneself from all the differences in the world because these differences make it difficult to presume a universal model of feminine experience. There have been many questions, debates, and challenges to construct a strong female literary tradition that does not discriminate among women and that, still, recognises differences and oppositions between them which may lead to formation of a well defined feminist theory. The real meaning of feminism can be achieved only when this diversity is expressed, embraced, and celebrated.

Teresa de Lauretis looks at difference in terms of race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, language, educational background, disciplinary methodology, generational, and geographical. She, further, writes that there is no permanent or stable boundary which can separate feminist discourse and practices from those which are not feminist. The difference in each woman's subjectivity is the major cause for the failure of feminism as feminism engages itself with "various institutions, discourses, and practices" (Lauretis 26). She feels that several attempts have been made to define or redefine the notions of feminist theory, but all these have been unsatisfactory.

Elaine Showalter, in her essay “Feminism and Literature”, writes that the shift from concentration on women’s literary subordination, mistreatment, and exclusion to the study of women’s writing, and analysis of the construction and representation of gender within literary discourse is now observed. Elizabeth Janeway, in her essay “Women’s Literature”, tries to define what can be included and excluded from women’s literature where she includes those writings which tell about local experiences of female sex because common female experience can obliterate common lines and rejects those writers who conform to masculine standards in representation of their protagonists. She also emphasises that discovering of new values to judge any field should not be seen as “the extension of those values” rather than “rejection of existing values.” (Janeway 345)

In England women’s movement has confined itself within the academy and there were no social movements for the upliftment of women and as a result Cora Kalpan fears that feminism can become “smug, institutionalized, reflexive and stale” (qtd. in Showalter 199). Janet Todd also feels that feminist criticism faces hostility in Britain which is greater than in the USA. Beauvoir feels that feminism does not have any autonomy because it has become a tool in the hands of politicians. Some people see feminism as a resistance to patriarchal structure while some see it as a movement to raise awareness and consciousness in women about their oppression. Women are granted identity, but they are not allowed to develop one for themselves. In her book, *A Literature of their Own* (1977), Elaine Showalter shows that women writers in eighteenth century were confined and then attacked by male critics for writing about certain themes like domestic problems, children, clothing, fashion, and food only. Showalter traces three historical phases of women’s literary development.

The first is the 'feminine phase' (1840-80) during which women writers imitated the dominant tradition and adopted the patriarchal aesthetics, social values, and even masculine names like Bronte sisters and Mary Ann Evan. But they represented women in their well defined and traditional roles within the family and community without showing any rebellious woman character out of the fear of displeasing the authorities. Some women extol the bourgeois ideal of happiness disguising the real picture of the society while few others believe in writing protest literature.

The second is the 'feminist phase' (1880-1920) or 'protest phase' during which women protested against the dominant tradition and the unjust treatment of women; they advocated and asserted for minority rights and for political and social equality. The authors explored the lives of women in terms of work, class, and family and demanded complete economic freedom for them. Still, this women's literature remained dependent upon the predominant masculine aesthetics.

The final phase is the 'female phase' (1920-Present) where the focus completely shifted from uncovering misogyny in male texts to 'rediscovering' women, their voices, and identities in women's texts as they perceived sexuality as the source of creativity. This phase has transformed the feminine code of self-sacrifice into an annihilation of the narrative self, but it failed to explore the actual physical experiences of women which are well described in the works of post-war novelists such as Irish Murdoch, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble, and Beryl Bainbridge. Men rejected personal and subjective literature by women, but, now, it is widely read in the form of diaries, journals, and letters writing about women's sexual desires and bodies openly. Toril Moi also differentiates between writing as 'female' which she feels is writing by women; writing

as 'feminist' which takes anti-patriarchal and anti-sexist position; and writing as 'feminine' which is marginalised and silenced by the ruling social and linguistic order.

There have been many schools of feminism like American, French, British, Indian, Third World feminisms, but there is not even a single school that has existed in a fixed manner rather these schools have always faced challenges by other schools or movements. There have been various trends and issues within the feminist movement, though most of them are concerned with political, social, aesthetic, and legal equality of women. Elaine Showalter observes that English feminist criticism is Marxist and focuses on economic oppression of women while French feminist criticism is psychoanalytic which focuses on repression of feeling of women.

The representation of women in American literature has always been secondary to men, though some of the writers try to show their anger against men, yet they ended up showing their women characters conforming and accepting their conditions quietly. Due to industrialisation and capitalism, divorce laws were introduced in America and some rights were given to women in marriage, but this could not bring equality between the spouses. In America, around 1830, women had dominant position at homes, but they demanded for political rights.

The first wave of American feminism came in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Around 1840s, black women were also included forming a feminist association by the Quaker Lucretia Mott which set the mood for American feminism and carried forward by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Emerson, and Abraham Lincoln. Susan B. Anthony rose to fame when she voted, an action against the authority as women were not

allowed to vote. In 1869, she formed National American Woman Suffrage Association. American women were economically stronger than other European women because it has its origin in the civil rights movement whereas feminism, in Britain, has its origin in socialism due to which it could not gain prominence. But it was around 1933, nineteen American republics signed the convention giving equality to women in all the rights. Still, Ayers believes that the major gap in feminist history comes between 1920 and 1960 when, in US, women rights disappeared in public interest and began to surface again only in the 1960s with the creation of President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of women (1961), the Equal Pay Act (1963), and the Equal Rights Act (1964).

The struggle for economic justice and social rights gained prominence alongwith the struggle for political and legal rights. Labour Feminism, in America, advocated the needs of working-class women and preserved their collective and individual rights. They claimed justice for women based on their humanity. These feminists fought for laws regulating hours, wages, working hours and conditions for women; securing union contracts, grievance procedures in factories; equal pay for equal work; a family wage for women and men; suffrage rights for women; to end unfair sex discrimination; social supports for child-bearing and child-rearing; improved pregnancy and maternity leave with job and income guarantee, and health coverage for women during childbirth. Their influence was at peak in 1930s with the emergence of a new Democratic Party and the election of F. D. Roosevelt to the US Presidency. (Cobble)

Rebellion has always been relegated to private sphere until the late 1960s when the American women's liberation movement began immediately after Civil Rights and antiwar movements. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970) and works of Tillie Olsen, Toni

Morrison, and Adrienne Rich were widely read during this time. In the early 1970s, separatist phase called as “Cultural Feminism” was formed which focused more on self-definition and political solidarity. The focus was on personal emotions through autobiographical experiences, sometimes in fictional form, by women writers during 1960s and early 1970s. American feminist criticism is concerned with academic and professional issues like challenging the canon and well formed curriculum and the representation of women in professional journals, organisations, and institutions.

In England, publishing houses provided a strong platform for feminist literary criticism and had supported English feminist journals like *International Journal of Women's Studies*, the *Feminist Review* and others which increased the awareness among the masses. Many women synthesised Marxism and psychoanalysis in their writings focusing on the relation between class and gender where feminists like Laura Mulvey and Annette Kuhn produced their works in film criticism with psychoanalysis as their base.

Christine de Pizan, in the fifteenth century, made her living out of writing. She was an unabashed writer who wrote against clerics who oppressed women and demanded for the rights of education for women. Her movement failed because she did not try to bring a social revolution which could have really changed the face of the society. Women actresses started performing roles on the stage in 1545 which were, earlier, performed by men. Women, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in France, were poorly educated by private tutors. The strongest feminist of that century was Poulain de la Barre and his work *On the Equality of the Two Sexes*, inspired from Cartesian theory, in which he wrote that women accept their subjugation out of custom due to which they are unable to

grab any chance to prove their worth in any sphere. Therefore, he demanded for a strong female education system and rejected the discrimination based on anatomical difference.

Bourgeois writings like fabliaux, farces, and plays written by Jean de Meung, Eustache Deschamps critiqued women bitterly. The bourgeois revolution during 1790s failed due to a huge discrimination and lack of solidarity between bourgeois women, who enjoyed their share in production leading to their material independence, and the peasant women, who faced economic oppression and timidly submitted themselves to their masters. In 1791, Olympe de Gouges proposed a 'Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen', an equivalent to 'Declaration of the Rights of Man', where she demanded for the abolition of all masculine privileges for which she was hanged. Chaumette, the prosecutor says, "[Nature] has told woman: Be a woman. Childcare, household tasks, sundry motherhood cares, those are your tasks." (qtd. in Beauvoir 129)

A ray of hope was offered to women when the rights of the first born and masculine privilege were eliminated, and divorce laws were established. But the coming of Napoleon to the throne deteriorated the condition of women as stringent laws were imposed, like divorce laws were abolished. Writers like Joseph de Maistre, Bonald, and August Comte confined women to the family to fulfill their roles of wives and mothers, but no economic or political rights were given to them. Balzac saw women in terms of possessing a property by contract. Writers like Saint Simon, Fourier, and Cabet talked about free women, but they equated women with flesh. Condorcet and Leon Richer began the feminist movement and demanded the inclusion of women entering the political world and granting them civil rights of women, but did not focus on voting rights.

Feminism was not strong in France as more restrictions were imposed on French women. The demand for women's freedom and independence continued to grow in the eighteenth century where customs and laws still bound them. Women were not allowed to get formal education and strict morality was imposed on them. But women like Mme du Chatelet opened their own Physics workshops or Chemistry laboratory. This century also saw the sprouting of many women writers like Lady Winchilsea, Mrs. Aphra Behn, and others. Beauvoir feels that culture has always been the privilege of the "feminine elite" and not of the masses, but these privileged women are also denied access to higher posts (Beauvoir 123). Beauvoir recollects the accounts of oppression of unmarried women, wives, mothers, and prostitutes who did not have any economic independence or a social status. She points out that women of nobility and bourgeois class led a parasitic life whereas the working women faced sexual inequality at their workplaces.

Beauvoir traces the history where voting rights were given to women in 1898, but only for the Commercial court. Women of France fought for their rights and won voting rights in 1944 and acquired political power in 1945 whereas New Zealand gave full rights to women in 1893 and Australia in 1908. The Revolution arrived very late in England and America. It was around 1903 when Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed which organised many protests, marches, and parades regarding voting rights. These protests turned violent in the later years and it was only in 1928 that women won their right to vote without any restrictions imposed on them.

Later, French feminism, influenced by Saussure's *Linguistics*, assumed that all human performances manifest a system of differential relations of system. By 1968, many radical women's group were formed which argued that capitalism was based on the

sexual division of work and the women's struggle must deal with the dialectical relationship between historical materialism and psychoanalysis. When Woman's Liberation movement appeared in France in 1970, Simone de Beauvoir defended the right to abortion. She was suspicious of the emergence of different strands in feminism which exalted women's essential differences from men and felt that this trap will promote differences in women. Later, these feminists became more interested in psychoanalysis and were influenced by Jacques Lacan.

Lacan believes that no one is "born with a sexuality or as a sex" rather sexuality is an effect of the process of psychic formation which are not natural or anatomically predetermined (Pollock 181). These feminists, now, focused on the problems of textual, linguistic, semiotics, or psychoanalytic theory, but got very little support from French universities or even commercial publishing houses. Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva urged women to offer a resistance to phallogocentric power and to experiment with the language in their novels.

In Germany, in 1790, Hippel, a student, launched first German feminist manifesto. But it is only later in 1848 that Louise Otto organised the movement on national level and founded the General German Women's Association in 1865. After the defeat of Germany in the First World War, women obtained the right to vote and also participated in political field. The women's movement in the German Federal Republic (West Germany) began in the autumn of 1968. They were interested in the economics of housework and motherhood and in ecology and peace. Immediately after women's movement there was a huge increase in autobiographical and confessional feminist literature which focused on women's subjectivity versus men's rationality leading to the

development of feminist counter-culture. It was influenced by post-structuralism, German hermeneutics, the Frankfurt School, and reader-response theory which focused on feminist aesthetic in all the arts like architecture, writings, and others. In East Germany, novelists like Christa Wolf and Irmtraud Morgner talked about women's language and identity which spread widely during 1980s.

In Italy, feminists fought for equality and freedom for expressing themselves in literature. Fascism was the greatest hindrance which bound women to their husbands and did not allow them to come out in public. Beauvoir mentions that though some Italian courtesans were economically independent, yet they were treated as slaves because they were debarred from achieving high education. A gradual change came in the seventeenth century where few women managed to encroach on the masculine world and moved from "amorous casuistry" to politics (Beauvoir 122). Later, women demanded for the separate language for women and attacked grammatical gender reflected in fictional works of Elsa Morante and Dacia Maraini. Now, a new term has been coined for women's movement in Italy, that is, *dopofeminismo*, or postfeminism.

In Soviet Russia, feminist movement took to revolutionary methods to achieve freedom. Women took part in many political strikes, demonstrations, and wars to fight for their rights for social and economic equality. Maternity was recognised as a social function; maternity leave was provided to them; childcare centre and kindergarten were also built. They obtained equal wages to men and ventured in male profession like metallurgy, mining, timber rafting, and railways. But a misbalance was observed between political life and family life of women.

There are also various approaches to do a feminist study of written texts. The first one is to re-examine the depiction, portrayal, and treatment of women characters in the works of male writers from a woman's perspective and to expose the male ideology implicit in the characterisation where women are portrayed as weak, mute, submissive, passive, and dependent on men, fulfilling their familial responsibilities without any resentment.

The second approach is well defined by Elaine Showalter as 'gynocriticism' or 'a literature of their own' where women writings are examined to see how they have portrayed women characters to uncover inter-textual relations. This is an attempt to rediscover, to build, and to preserve lost or neglected writers and to introduce them into literary canon. She, herself, has talked about the fecundity of this approach as it generated a vast literature of individual writers of different eras from different countries like Israel, Netherlands, and Scandinavia and feels that, now, people can have "a coherent narrative" (Showalter 190). This approach assumes that all writings are marked by gender and women are not free to renounce or transcend their gender entirely. She also argues that gynocritics do not deviate from the patriarchal norms rather they constitute a strong subculture within patriarchy.

The third approach focuses on language which is, usually, considered to be a male domain and an attempt is made to expose the dominant relationship of culture and language over the lives of women. They see masculine discourse to be logocentric, hierarchic, and binary whereas feminine discourse is always located in omissions, gaps, and repetitions, and try to create a female language. Many linguists like Robin Lakoff and

Dale Spender argue that woman's language is deferential, passive, apologetic, indirect, tentative, and diffident while men's language is aggressive, imperative, and declarative.

Feminism has also been divided into three waves. The first wave covers the period from 1830-1920 which saw suffragette movement and civil rights movement at its peak. The second wave feminism covers the period from 1920-1960s where many women's groups emerged and engaged themselves with political debates. The third wave feminism, termed as 'post-feminism', is prevalent from 1980s where various branches of feminism like socialist feminism, black feminism, ecofeminism, cyberfeminism, and postcolonial feminism and others emerge. Feminism has not worked in isolation rather it has engaged itself with other branches of criticism like Marxist criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, deconstruction, and others.

Types of Feminism

Liberal Feminism

Some feminists question whether subjectivity is individual or social. The idea of subject first came from liberal humanist tradition which treated subject as the rational and coherent individual who could act according to his own free will. These feminists argued that subjectivity was not always located in the individual alone rather it was socially validated, determined, and constructed. They argued against the confinement of women in their conventional roles and argued for equal civil and educational rights. Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), rejects the established view of women as weaker and inferior being and proposes that lack of education is the main reason behind the secondary position of women and urges that women should strive

to be companion to their husbands rather than their weak and submissive wives. She critiques Rousseau's *Emile* which argues against the education given to women; propagates that women education should be relative to men; and degrades women to the position of slaves.

Wollstonecraft opposes the notion that women are irrational and sentimental and examines that women are subordinated through socialising process like making them obsessed with the idea of beauty, jewellery, and clothes. She shows that femininity is not natural rather it is a social construct. She demands for social, political rights and voting rights for women. John Stuart Mill, in his book *The Subjection of Women* (1869), also demands for civil liberties and equal economic opportunities to women. These feminists are critiqued for their focus only on the notions of femininity and education, and for their idea to reform society by demanding equal rights and not to overturn hierarchies.

Radical Feminism

They traced the root cause behind the oppression of women and found it in the patriarchal structures. Unlike liberal feminists, radical feminists did not want to reform the society rather they wanted to destroy this patriarchal structure, working as an ideology to oppress women. Showalter, in her essay "Feminism and Literature", writes that radical feminism in England first came from within the New Left, and it was, later, influenced by the American women's movement and by European intellectual currents. Margaret Fuller, in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), believes that education, employment, and political rights of women will lead to their emancipation. She emphasises that women should not conform to stereotypical and feminine roles and

should question the categories of gender as, she feels, that there is no completely 'masculine' male or 'feminine' female rather each contains a bit of other. Fuller also considers the inequality among the classes and supports the Black feminist movement. These feminists treat women as a class or a collective subject and emphasise on the notion of 'sisterhood' against patriarchal oppression. They focus on the suffering of woman's body in terms of sexuality, labour, and procreation. They argue that there is a strong need to gain control over mind and bodies to develop true subjectivities.

The works like Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1971) or Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), deal with the cause behind the subordination of women. Firestone finds that there is a dire need to bring biological revolution instead of economic revolution for women to achieve complete liberation and to remove biological inequality, the major cause of subordination. Adrienne Rich proposes various ways to escape from sexual domination of men by celebrating celibacy and lesbianism or by completely eradicating the 'gender', a social and cultural construct. These feminists are critiqued for their exclusion of the issues of race, class, black women, and women of colour which is why it is seen as essentialist and separatist.

Psychoanalytic Feminism

This developed in America, in 1970s by Mary Jacob, Jane Gallop, and Juliet Richardson who explored the origins of oppression of women in their psyche and proposed that woman should first bring change from within by probing into her psyche to achieve liberation. It found its origins in Freud who gave phallogocentric ideas and critiqued his idea of 'penis envy' due to which women are considered as the 'second sex'.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) argue that all women's texts are palimpsests because they harbour secret desire, politics, anxiety, anger, and meanings implicitly whereas the surface meanings are in accordance to their male stereotypes. They examine the female images in the works of Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, and George Eliot and find that female writers often identify themselves with the literary characters, they detest the most, characters like Bertha Mason of *Jane Eyre* or Maggie Tulliver of *The Mill on The Floss* are clear examples of the same. They argue that women writers encountered two stereotypes, that is, the submissive female-as-angel or the dangerous female-as-monster. Beauvoir writes that these women writers spent their energy negatively to free themselves from external constraints due to which they are unable to compete with male writers.

French feminists strongly believe in the psychological category of the feminine and dismiss the actual sex of an author. They use Lacan's idea of unconscious and relate femininity with the language of the unconscious that helps in destabilising sexual categories. Helene Cixous, following Lacan, proposes a utopian place for women, free from symbolic order, sex roles, otherness, and the Law of the Father and the self linked to the Voice of the Mother. Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva oppose phallogentrism by deriving images from women's corporeal experiences and they believe in celebration of an intuitive female critical consciousness while interpreting women's texts, which is usually seen as lesbian.

Female sexuality has been marginalised as insignificant, mysterious, and monstrous, but many Euro-American feminists have developed new models of female sexuality which, they believe, will empower women. Critics like Juliet Mitchell, argue

that the laws of society and life are built into the unconscious which can only be uncovered through psychology and femininity cannot face resistance because it is deeply rooted in the psyche of woman. Gender differences are constructed in contexts of the family and society as difference in genitals: one possessing, one lacking. Mitchell calls it “a social and cultural fantasy” where the woman, right from her childhood, believes that man is complete and she, on the other hand, is incomplete (qtd. in Nayar 104). Jacqueline Rose also believes that the unconscious is the site of a resistance to identity and feminine subjectivity and identity are not coherent or whole, but fractured and internally divided.

The study of visuals and films is done from the psychological perspective based on voyeurism and fetishism. Griselda Pollock, in her essay “The Visual”, writes that feminist theory has changed art, art history, and film studies as it has offered a counter ‘visual culture’ by focusing on ‘image’, ‘representation’, ‘the gaze’, ‘identification’, ‘spectatorship’, ‘voyeurism’, ‘fetishism’, and ‘scopophilia’. (qtd. in M. Eagleton 173)

The other branch is myth criticism where the attack is on Carl Jung’s lack of discussion of the female psyche. Annis Pratt offers intriguing connections between feminism and Jungian archetypal criticism in *Archetypal Patterns in Women’s Fiction* and “The New Feminist Criticism”. They look at the Great Mother, and many other strong images of goddesses like Medusa, Cassandra, Arachne, and Iris which can bring respite to women who are repressed by men. But this turns against women as these goddesses are seen as witches, seductresses, or fools in patriarchal societies. Adrienne Rich looks at motherhood as the feminine status and says that the terrible and mythic power of the mother has been romanticised leading to women’s oppression. These

feminist are critiqued for not providing any proper solution of the oppression and for their belief that the change can be brought only from within an individual.

Marxist-Socialist Feminism

Marxist-Socialist feminism views class as the major cause behind gender oppression and inequality prevailing in the society. These feminists look at material conditions of work and wage and its effects on social structure and political economy in a capitalist, patriarchal world which define gender roles and alter gender power and relations. These feminists locate the link between gender roles and issues of household like economy, labour, and wages; and how women's labour at home goes unnoticed or is unpaid. They feel that it is not right to speak of gender based oppression in universal terms when class, financial power, and social prestige overlay gender roles in certain contexts. These feminists find this to be the major factor behind the unequal power relations between men and women.

During industrial revolution working-class women became the source of cheap labour and they were part of production. Bourgeois women, on the other hand, stayed at homes and were separated from production. In both these cases women were excluded from ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange of goods. According to Terry Eagleton, the Marxist-feminist approach "looks at gender as a crucial determinant of literary production which can provide a better understanding of literature as a gender-differentiated signifying practice." (T. Eagleton 329)

It challenges the tradition in which women's writing has been sidelined from the mainstream of male literature and also their exclusion from the politics. The critics also

examine the double standard of sexual morality, whereby, women are seen as madonnas or angels in the house, on the one hand, and whores or madwomen on the other. They also find that women are not given proper education so that they can be excluded from the discourses of institutions like universities, law, politics, and finance which have always worked to suppress them.

Karl Marx writes that economic production determines historical and social developments and Marxist feminists take this idea to critique capitalist society which exploits women economically as well as sexually. They believe that capitalism is the root cause of economic oppression of women which must be replaced by socialism where the means of production belongs to all, unlike capitalism where it is confined to only few hands. Friedrich Engels believes that private property is the root cause of women's oppression as man has the control over property and his wife and it also gives rise to economic inequality, dependence, political, and domestic struggle between the husband and the wife. So he suggests for the complete removal of private property. He argues that woman's subordination is not due to her biological difference, but it is due to social relations which they share with men.

Industrial revolution brought a promise of emancipation of women if they took part in the production at a large social level, unaware of the trap of economic exploitation in terms of working hours, low wages, and sexual exploitation. The promise of Marx and Engels seems to fade away once the real motive of this revolution came forth. On 2nd November 1892, the first feminine work charter came out which banned night work and limited number of working hours and days in factories, yet the condition of women was implacable. Women with low wages were used as weapons by the oppressors against

other men which increased the hostility between men and women leading to uninterrupted series of pregnancies which tied them to homes.

The Women's Liberation Conference held in 1970, dominated by Socialist feminists, demanded equality of pay and educational opportunities, 24-hour childcare, free contraception, and abortion on demand. Later, they also demanded financial and legal independence, the end to discrimination against lesbians, and freedom from sexual coercion. Marxist feminists argue that material/economic conditions of a society are reflected through the cultural practices and structures like art, music, cinema, sports, religion, serials, education, and much more. They combine class with gender and see that personal identity is not separate from cultural identity. They also explore the cultural dimensions of the woman's material life. The unequal economic and political relations between groups, individuals, and gender are reflected in films and literature.

Cultural texts like cinema, soap operas, music, and paintings are studied to see how these reflect and naturalise the oppression of women by limiting their representation as weak, meek, vulnerable, seductress, obstacle, sexual object, or procreating machine which is adopted, accepted, and followed by women silently. The focus is on how patriarchal structures operate within male-authored texts, and function as an ideology in suppressing women. They are "suspicious of the 'disinterestedness' of established aesthetic judgment, which rationalises its elitism and masks its ideological investment and its self-serving avoidance of question about cultural production and access to cultural capital and have questioned the politics of aesthetic value." (M. Eagleton 161)

They are critiqued for seeing the relation between men and women based only on class-division and not in terms of sexuality. Juliet Mitchell, in *Woman's Estate* (1971), writes that 'socialists' asks feminists to subscribe to a working class ideology which moves them from their own experiences. David Ayers believes that socialist feminists are selective in history as they have neglected earlier feminist history of suffragist movement, which they consider to be liberal or bourgeois.

Existentialist Feminism

Existentialism is a philosophical and cultural movement which focuses on the individual and the experiences of the individual's freedom, choice, and responsibility. Existentialists like Socrates, Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sartre, and Heidegger, believe that moral and scientific thinking are not enough to understand human existence and rather one should be true to one's own personality, spirit, and character which are necessary to understand human existence. This philosophy analyses relationships between the individual and things, or other human beings, and how they limit or condition their choice. They believe that existence precedes essence and deny pre-defined values and systems of thought.

Existentialist feminists emphasise concepts such as freedom, interpersonal relationships, and the experience of living as a human body. They believe in radical change, but fear that self-deception and anxiety caused by the idea of change can hamper it. Many feminists expose and undermine socially imposed gender roles and cultural constructs, limiting women's self-determination, and criticise poststructuralist third-wave feminists who deny the intrinsic freedom of individual women. A female, who chooses

her life on her own terms, inspite of suffering from anxiety associated with that freedom, isolation, or nonconformity of tradition, and yet remains free, demonstrates the tenets of existentialism. The novels of Kate Chopin, Joan Didion, Margaret Atwood, and Margaret Drabble include such existential heroines.

Simone de Beauvoir, a renowned existentialist and principal founder of second-wave feminism, examines women's subordinate role as the 'Other' in her book *The Second Sex*. The book includes the famous line, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" introducing what has come to be called the sex-gender distinction (Beauvoir 293). She tries to find out the basic reason behind the oppression that hinders the existence of a woman by analysing the social structures which construct the notion of femininity and use it as dominating tool to promote sexual difference and to deprive women from freedom of their bodies. She shows that women can be liberated by challenging their feminine destiny; by becoming an autonomous being; by becoming intellectuals, and by gaining financial independence. Existentialist feminism helps in understanding the status of woman as 'other' clearly.

Post-modern Feminism

In the late 1980s and 1990s feminist philosophers and theorists began to rethink about the idea that gender is a social construct, the idea which was propounded by Simone de Beauvoir. These feminists think that 'gender' does not offer the individual a choice to select their gender because society assigns it to him/her. This determinist idea and fixed definition of gender is strongly criticised by the third wave feminists who are influenced by deconstructive thought and argue that 'men' and 'women' are social

categories that can only be defined in relation to each other. These feminists deny stable meaning to gender and also refuse fixity of categories. They see gender as shifting, provisional, contingent, and performance. They believe that gender and its meaning depends on location and, hence, it cannot be universal.

They emphasise difference among women in terms of class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and even age. They try to defy the 'natural' foundations of social customs and codes and try to situate the body at the intersection of nature and culture. Virginia Woolf, in her essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929), grapples with problems specific to women writers and rebels against naturalism which was popular in male novelists. She seeks a form and style which does justice to women's thoughts, feelings, and desires and introduces stream-of-consciousness technique as against realism. But this feminine style of writing is always debated.

In her essays like *Three Guineas* (1938), Woolf develops a woman-centric notion of reading and education. She argues that patriarchal education system and reading practices have prevented women from reading as women because they are trained in a manner that they read the texts from male point of view. This is the reason why women's texts have been rejected by male critics and are seen as "poor cousins" of texts written by males (qtd. in Nayar 87). She emphasises that women use patriarchal and sexist language which fails to capture women's experience. Diction, realism, linearity, and order are seen as true aesthetics of male writers. Fixed gender roles have been challenged and are turned fluid by many writers like Shakespeare's heroines who donned the male attire or Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* which is the best example of androgyny.

Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble* (1990), argues that gender is not a fixed category rather it is a continuous and repeated performance or role enacted by individuals and is accepted by the society. Due to this, subjectivity and identity is seen as fragmented, contingent, shifting, and relational. She also writes that these roles are open to negotiation, alteration, conflict, and contest. Clothes, manners, speech, and language define the gender of a person. She, like Beauvoir, says that a woman becomes a woman and acquires woman's identity because she plays this role repeatedly which she calls 'iteration' of the roles. These feminists see gender like a text or like the meanings of signs which must be repeated in different contexts. This is the reason why cross-dressing or transvestitism becomes a mode of confusion as these roles are not defined by the society.

Later, under the influence of post-structuralism, critics like Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray develop the notion of 'women's writing' or *écriture féminine* which aims to create a distinct fluid, non-linear, elliptical, experimental, and surreal woman's language, reflected in the works of Jeanette Winterson, A. L. Kennedy, Fay Weldon, Kathy Acker, and Angela Carter. They believe that the categories of 'man' and 'woman' are asymmetrical and hierarchical and language plays a major role in maintaining this imbalance. They all challenge the notions of language, form, narrative 'order', and organisation. Their works are part autobiographical and part fictional and talk about sexuality and the fluidity of women's bodies, accompanied by visuals and graphic alterations to fonts, blanks, parentheses, breaks, hyphenated words, and altered punctuation, termed as "gynographic" by Maggie Humm. (qtd. in Nayar 98)

Gynographic writing uses the body as a source of language and metaphor. This helps in breaking the borders between genres, disciplines, private and public, and between the body and the text. Helene Cixous creates a slippery prose of excesses, flows, and shifts to dismantle the binary opposition between academic/autobiography, theory/poetry, and argument/sentiment. She also uses blood and menstruation as sources of a woman's language and pleads for a return to pre-oedipal stage as a means of undoing the male/female binary, that is, return to bisexuality and the collapse of the unitary sexual identity. For her, *écriture féminine* means a practice which cannot be theorised. She also feels that writing has the capability to bring change in the society. There are some critics like Alice Jardine who avoid being called feminist as they find this word as suffocating and reject the dichotomy between males and females.

Jacqueline Rose links the sexual with the visuals. She locates feminine sexuality and representations in postmodernism which is obsessed with the image and simulation. She believes that feminists should pay attention to representation of cultural stereotypes in visuals and unravel how feminine sexuality is represented according to cultural ideologies like women are asked to be 'good looking' to be accepted by men. She argues that the position of woman as fantasy or as a sex-object or the object of desire depends on a particular vision which is a sexualised vision of a body to read patriarchal ideologies.

But some feminists do not take this idea of flexible gender and fluid subjectivity well as they feel threatened about the loss of their identity. This would also hinder the development of subjectivities of coloured, tribal, Dalit, and disabled women. There is a need to examine not the differences between cultures rather to examine differences within the same culture. They are also critiqued for their neglect of the material conditions while

talking of gender. It also fails to achieve the idea of common women's culture as women of colour are left out.

Minority Feminism

Gradually, race, ethnicity, class, and geography were included as analytical categories within feminism and new forms of feminist cultural theory developed. It studies marginalised groups like the Black women and lesbians who face rejections from all fronts. These feminists promote the idea that personal is political, and do not align themselves with other feminists as they feel excluded from their struggle. Alice Walker wants to use the word 'Womanism' instead of feminism, remarking that a womanist does not turn her back on the men of her community. These critics focus on folktales, autobiographies of black women, especially slave narratives to create a black womanist literature. Most black female writers represent relationships between mothers, daughters, sisters, and aunts with no competition among them.

In India, one such example is of Asur tribe. Asur people are tribal/Adivasi people living in the Gumla, Lohardaga, Palamu, and Latchar, Jharkhand. They face several problems like lack of basic amenities of health, education, transport, drinking water and other problems like human trafficking of minor girls, migration of people, displacement by multinational companies, and they are not even listed in minority category. These people are traditionally iron-smelters, hunters, and are involved in shifting agriculture. They claim that they have descended from the ancient asuras, associated with crafting of metals. Asur women sing songs and relate the furnace to an expectant mother

encouraging the furnace to give a healthy baby in the form of good quality and quantity of iron. (Asur_(India))

Many activists, especially females like Sushma Asur, Vandana Tete, and Ashwini Pankaj, try to revive and promote the art, culture, and literature of this tribe, and defy patriarchal system and brahminical system by fighting for their rights. They also try to make people aware about the stereotypical ideas related to god where the female is deified for killing a powerful man by deceit. Sushma, a member of Primitive Tribe Group (PTG), feels that the so-called upper caste always has the control over the documentation of Indian mythology due to which their perspective is never highlighted. Vandana Tete also believes that all perspectives should be given equal importance in a civilised society which will surely help these women to spread their ideas worldwide. (Asur Tribes)

Black Feminism

Black women did not find any place till the late 1970s and early 1980s in theory or practice of feminism because it is not until 1980s that the issue of race became prominent within feminist debates. Third world feminists think that feminism seems to address only the problems of the First world white women, which Cherrie Moraga, feels is exclusive and reactionary.

The neglect of black, aboriginal, minority, and other non-white women from Asia, Africa, South America, and those, who have multiple cultural roots, gives rise to black feminism. They question the masculine ideologies of the black movement and those African American women who conform to white ideals of femininity. Many feminists like bell hooks, think that black liberation can only be achieved through the formation of

a strong black patriarchy. Writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Patricia Hill Collins, write about the true experiences of black women. Black feminism looks at the issues of black woman's labour and the structure of family oppression and argues that the stereotypical images of women as mummies and matriarchs have relegated them to secondary position. These feminists also pay attention to issues of class, sex, and labour, and the material or economic lives of black women. The focus, in these writings, is not on any individual rather the emphasis is on the community as a whole.

Lesbian feminism

Lesbian feminism talks about the marginalisation of lesbians by considering lesbianism as a privileged stance to women. Black lesbian activism within black feminism emerges in the 1990s and has tried to break the notion of heterosexual norms by emphasising on the sexuality of the black woman, her sexual preferences, and the aesthetics of the black body. Terms such as 'alterity', 'woman-centeredness', and 'difference' acquire new meanings when used by lesbian critics. They see heterosexuality as abnormal for women. Bonnie Zimmerman describes 'lesbianism' as a kind of relationship in which two women's strongest feelings and affections are directed towards each other. They also reject the notion of a unified text like French feminists. Woolf's idea of androgyny attacks male/female binary system by focusing on 'manly-woman' and 'womanly-man'.

Earlier, writers were apprehensive about writing fiction with lesbianism as their themes. But novels like Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and Virginia Woolf's

Orlando are examples of women writers exploring these themes boldly. With gradual lifting of censorship, soft core lesbian 'pulp fiction', cheap paperback editions with suggestive covers and enticing titles came out in mid-50s to mid-60s and presented lesbianism in negative picture. Isabel Miller's (pseudonym for Alma Routsong) *Patience and Sarah*, later published as *A Place for Us* in 1969, offers a groundbreaking theme of lesbianism by attempting it to present it through historical fiction based on the life of the painter Mary Ann Wilson and her companion, Miss Brundage in early nineteenth century.

Critical Race Feminism

This movement focuses on the legal issues faced by women of colour within USA, and includes African Americans, Chicano/a, Asian, and Native Americans. It works for the welfare of women by demanding employment and education.

Indian Feminism

It worked for equal political, economic and social rights for Indian women and demanded for gender equality, education, and equal rights; right equal pay for equal work and the right access health facilities too, under the influence of liberal feminism. They fought against culture-specific issues like inheritance laws, the practice of Sati, dowry related violence against women, and sex selective abortion. Women, in India, feel that family, society, and other factors, like their caste, class, creed, and ethnicity, bound and subjugate them and build gendered identities. They are forced to hide their real sentiments and behavior by wearing an artificial expression on their face. Women and children belong to family whereas for men, family is a place, a refuge to which they

return in the evening. But a slight disruption in the family leads to its breakup and women free themselves from this servitude.

The three phases of Indian feminism are: The first phase spread from 1850–1915 and started when some European colonists men fought against social evils like Sati, child marriage, illiteracy; fought for widow remarriage, for the share of women in the property, and women' right to own it; and fought for the preparation of the several laws for the welfare of women. Unlike the Western feminist movement, movement in India was initiated by men in the nineteenth century and was later joined by women, who felt that the sexual difference is not the major cause for the subjection of women. In the late twentieth century, women formed several autonomous and independent women's organisations claiming for right to speech, education, and complete emancipation.

In the second phase, from 1915 to Indian Independence, Gandhi included women in non-violent civil disobedience movement against the British Raj. Many Women-only organisations like All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) emerged dealing with several political issues like women's franchise, and inclusion of women in political parties. They worked for upliftment of women by providing proper maternal health, child care provision (crèches) and other rights.

Many writers like Sajjad Zaheer, Ahmad, and Mahmud-uz-zafar, and Rashid Jahan's work *Angaare*, during this period, boldly challenged the oppression of elite Muslim women and suggested certain reformations at domestic and social front. *Angaare*, an Urdu anthology, published in 1932 offers a critique of society's traditional

norms and customs and highlights the condition of silenced women (Bano). Rashid Jahan, influenced by Marxism, fought for political freedom and socio-economic justice for women. By the 1920s and 1930s, Muslim society began to open up for women who came out of their purdahs, attended mixed gatherings for lectures and music and wore western dresses especially in Aligarh. Writers like Sajjad Zaheer, attack the hypocrisy of religious men and their preaching which emphasises on the notion of masculinity. But these writers face life threatening calls and their works were banned. Liberal reforms among Muslims in India can create a balance between tradition and modernity, but the conservatism of the community brings a setback to any feminist movement.

The third phase, post-independence, focused on fair treatment of women in the field of work and their right to political equality. But high illiteracy rate confined them to lower paid, unskilled jobs with less job security. Many feminists recognised inequalities which exist not only between men and women, but also among women belonging to different caste, tribe, religion, region, and class. Women's issues spread worldwide and the decade of 1975–1985 was declared the United Nations Decade for Women.

Indian feminists, influenced by the Western, also rejected few Western ideas due to the difference in their historical and social culture. For example, in the West the notion of 'self' is linked with competitive individualism whereas in India the individual is usually considered to be part of the whole mass who is dependent upon cooperation of others. These feminists fought for their survival against oppressive patriarchal structures like age, status, and relationship to men. Writers like Mahadevi Verma, Amrita Pritam, Tarabai Shinde, Radha Kumar, Anamika, and many others, have always written for the upliftment of women. Marathi writers like Malatibai Bedekar and Geeta Sane, critiqued

the institutions of marriage and the control exercised by patriarchy and in Bengal, writers like Shanta Devi and Shailabala Ghosh, attack patriarchy and claim women's right to divorce. These writers also challenge the notion that womanhood should be celebrated only in terms of motherhood.

Sampat Pal, living in a village in Northern India, is related with 'Pink Sari Revolution'. She, herself, was the victim of child marriage as she was married off at the age of twelve, but she taught herself to read and write and worked as government health worker. Once she saw a man mercilessly beating his wife and when Sampat tried to intervene, she was warned not to do so. When all the efforts of stopping him went in vain, she returned back with a bamboo stick with other women and gave that man a sound thrashing. In 2006, she formed a team with pink sari as their uniform signifying the womanhood and she named it the 'Gulabi Gang'. This group of Indian women activists protects the powerless from abuse; fights corruption to ensure basic rights of the poor in rural areas; fight injustices, malpractices, and violence against women like domestic violence, child-marriage, female illiteracy, and dowry death. This movement started from Banda district which is steeped deeply in patriarchy and follows strict caste divisions. These people are trying to bring changes in the system by adopting the simplest method of direct action and confrontation.

Amana Fontanella-Khan, in an interview on her book *Pink Sari Revolution: A Tale of Women and Power in India* calls it a "triumphant portrait of a fiery sisterhood" which has changed the course of the lives of women (Fontanella-Khan). Sampat efforts have created a hope for female activism at grass root level, fighting for women

empowerment. These kinds of revolutions are wake up call to women to rise and resist and to show that even a small group can make a difference.

The major limitation of these movements is that despite the efforts made by Indian feminist movements, women, in modern India, are, still, discriminated. Land-ownership rights and access to education is denied to certain sections of the society and the rise in female foeticide hampers its growth. These movements are critiqued for being biased towards privileged women and for neglecting poor or low caste women, including the Dalits. This leads to the creation of caste-specific feminist organisations and movements such as the All India Dalit Women's Forum. The hierarchy between women within the same family, where the grandmother or the mother-in-law holds the power over daughters, is also neglected. Though some women have highly respectable careers and can be seen across Bollywood billboards and advertisements, yet these women face serious resistance from conservatives and anti-liberalist who do not welcome movements that are against sex and gender traditions in India.

Dalit Feminism

Women's Studies critique the idea of knowledge created by men in order to recover and discover women's texts. But in postcolonial nations as in Asia and Africa, the feminists focus on issues regarding women's health, legal rights, domestic abuse, wage legislation, the rights of tribal, and Dalit women. Some Indian feminist critics like Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana, focus on the caste and class which work as oppressive modes to relegate them to subaltern position. The conditions of these women

are worse than the condition of the women belonging to upper-caste, upper-class, or who are professionally well established.

Postcolonial Feminism

Women of colour, lesbians, South African, or working class women find differences among themselves, but Showalter feels that it is wrong to deny that these women do not get affected by being women. She writes that, earlier, black women's writings were ignored, but attention is, now, given to their literary experiences. Later, gynocritics like Mary Jacobus, Bonnie Zimmerman, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, influenced by deconstruction, critiqued early gynocritics like Showalter, Gilbert, and Gubar for supplanting one tradition (male dominated) with another tradition (female dominated) which homogenised all women into one category and their experiences as same and interchangeable denying them the diversity.

Many feminists levy charge against black feminism that it neglects the experiences of 'people of colour' whose lives and experiences are different from that of 'blacks'. These feminists include the experiences of black women as well as that of Chicanos, Asian immigrants in the First world nations, Asian and African women which comes to be known as Third world feminism or postcolonial feminism. It rejects the notion of white feminism homogenisation of a universal woman's question and rather emphasises on specific location and cultural differences among women and the differences in their lived experiences. These Third world feminists argue for the return to spirituality as a source of feminist power which, they believe, constitutes an important component of women's lives and can be a means for their self-empowerment.

Ecofeminism

This is branch of Ecocriticism. The term ‘ecocriticism’ was coined in the late 1970 with the combination of two words ‘ecology’ and ‘criticism’. Ecocriticism deals with the critical writings which explore the relation between literature and the biological and physical environment. It focuses on the devastation brought on the environment by harmful activities of humans. Ecofeminism analyses “the role attributed to women in fantasies of the natural environment by male authors, as well as the study of specifically feminine conceptions of the environment in the neglected nature writings by female authors” (Abrams 81). Even Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex* (1949), relates the condition of woman with nature. She writes that woman is always relegated to the subordinated position and is exploited like Nature. The woman, like nature, is always seen to play the role of nourisher and not of creator, she is always condemned to immanence, static, and closed life as against the life of transcendence for man. This critique by Beauvoir comes at a point when these terms like ecocriticism or ecofeminism were not used. Beauvoir can also be seen as the first ecofeminist from France.

Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) is the best example of ecofeminist text in which she attacks the suicidal use of technological methods and uncontrolled experiments on natural environment by paying no attention towards its effect. Now, women writers have become conscious towards environment which is facing a threat from men and this inspires other women writers also to bring awareness among women towards environmental issues. *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975) by Annette Kolondy stresses that in male-authored texts land is considered as female and men resort to nature for repose, recuperation, and

gratification. She also finds a link between the domination and subjugation of women and the exploitation of the land.

Mary Daly, in her book *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), links the oppression of women to that of nature, treating them both as victims of the patriarchal and capitalist society. She feels that woman's compassion, emotion, and care are linked with qualities of nature. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* or Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, project male characters escaping and finding repose in an unspoiled natural environment which is free of women and the protagonist tests his character and virility. Women writers present a counterview to these types of corrupting images created by male authors.

Cyberfeminism

Many critics believe that technological developments have been used to limit the woman's sphere. Evelyn Fox Keller argues that science is based on a division of emotion and intellect in which objectivity, reason, and mind are given upper hand and are related to male while subjectivity, feeling, and nature are related to female. It explores the material (real), the symbolic (representations), and virtual (cyberspace) worlds and finds whether cyberspace offers different opportunities and greater freedom to women or does it lead to the increase in the cybercrimes against women.

Cyberfeminism interrogates and critiques the patriarchal nature of the new ICTs like Donna Haraway who critiques cyberculture and technoscience. She proposes that the machine-human interface which she names as the 'cyborg' helps in transcending the gender binary, as this cannot be categorised. She defines it as "a creature in a post-gender

world, it has no truck with bisexuality, preoedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all powers of the parts into a higher unity” (Haraway 2). She describes the cyborg as a hybrid mix of fiction, mythology, and lived experiences of women which connects and deliberately blurs the distinctions between human/machine, nature/culture, mind/body, self/other, and male/female. Haraway also advocates the active participation of women in technological fields to shatter the stereotypical differences between technology and nature. But some feminists, again, reject this idea of shifting, fragmented identity as is the focus of postmodernism also because they want to seek a fixed identity. Sadie Plant connects the idea of weaving with the construction of World Wide Web through which women consciously connect and assert their identity.

Cyberfeminism attempts at appropriating cyberspace for the empowerment of women by creating online communities, by providing cybersolace, and by creating information networks for women entrepreneurs. The focus is not only on how virtual environment can provide freedom to women rather the aim is to locate these environments in material and social practices within which women live and work. Many women use technologies to widen and popularise their agenda.

Women writers like Marge Piercy, and Pat Cadigan, have introduced cyberpunk fiction where they represent cyberculture as the product of an unequal system of finance, technology, labour, and cultural stereotyping in which the contribution by women is completely ignored and goes unrecognised because of their emotional side. These writers critique the idea of the transcendence of the body propagated by males as they see their bodies as an important source to achieve freedom and identity.

Even Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex*, has talked about the importance of body which is also the focus of cyberfeminists. She considers body as an instrument to gain a hold on the world, which might appear different, depending on how it is grasped. Even cyberfeminist art work like VNS Matrix is also a new form of the virtual world created by women. Cyberfeminists have retained some pejorative terms like 'slut' and have turned them into positive identity categories to describe cyborg/weird woman. This offers a critique both to humanism and anthropocentrism where reason plays prominent role. The problem, in this field, is that women of colour are neglected as they do not get fair treatment in terms of technology. They are underpaid and their capabilities are underrated when compared to women of First world nations.

Islamic Feminism

In 1990s there has been the rise of Islamic feminism where the nation-state, patriarchy, and religion have been under attack by feminists, who seek legal reforms to empower Muslim women by achieving equality for all Muslims, regardless of gender, in public and private life. Critics like Hashemi and Hoodfar, argue that Islamic laws can be made more gender sensitive and they try to establish the concept of equality through Quran by encouraging women to question the patriarchal interpretation of fundamental Islamic teaching. This awareness has brought a slight change in the society though the cases like shooting of Malala weaken the movement. But, at the same time, such cases set an example before other women to step forward and to fight for their rights.

Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani school pupil and education activist, fights for rights to education for women, especially in the Swat Valley, where the Taliban banned

girls from attending school many times. She also inspired United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education Gordon Brown which launched a UN petition in her name, using the slogan “I am Malala” in which they demanded that all children in the world should be sent to school by the end of 2015. This helped in ratification of Pakistan's first Right to Education Bill. She was shot in her head by Taliban for her ‘outrageous behaviour’, but she survived the attack setting an example for other Islamic women to come out of their purdah and to fight for their rights. (Malala)

Some countries promoted anticonception procedures which were banned in France. Abortion is still not officially authorised by law and women like Savita Halappanavar had to lose her life in 2012. The Pope in 1910s declared that if case arises where a choice has to be made between mother’s life and the child’s life, the former should be sacrificed. The Pope takes the refuge in religion and justifies this act by saying that mother is baptised and can enter heaven, but the foetus will be condemned to perpetual limbo.

Today also in many traditional societies women find themselves caught and locked between the ambivalence of traditional upbringing and the moral values imparted to her and to break through the conventional, stereotypical, and patriarchal obstructions, on the other hand, to embrace and follow modern ideas achieved through education, employment, and economic independence. Many writers show this struggle and reflect the inability of their characters to come out of this ambivalence because those women who are educated and job oriented are, still, asked to perform their domestic duties as well without any help from men. They are chained to their places in society.

Literature is the mirror of the society which reflects reality though, sometimes, in a distorted manner and woman has always been presented in it through different lenses. Now, instead of an objective portrayal of the characters, the writers have delved deep into the psyche of the characters and have reflected human experiences in their works. The concern of feminist writers have always been the emancipation of women from male domination and they aim at providing education to them and to make them an individual enabling them to achieve independence and autonomy and not to merely become passive, submissive object to be looked.

Many feminists try to prove that gender roles are social constructs and are pre-determined and women are trained to fit into the roles of daughters, wives, and mothers. There are only few writers who have portrayed women in strong light and have shown them shattering this stereotypical image as the world has undergone a sea change where more and more women are undertaking higher education, working at high positions, and are economically independent when compared to their predecessors who remained silent and also confined to four walls of their houses without a single sign of protest. It has been an uphill task for many women writers to venture into public realm and to portray strong women characters as they face many criticisms and disapproval from male writers who reject these works as sentimental and subjective. Still, writers like Virginia Woolf follow the stream of consciousness technique while Doris Lessing, in her novel, *The Golden Notebook* depicts the confusion and fragmentation of the life through the narrative structure.

Feminism has changed the face of literary studies and also of Western culture as it has always challenged patriarchal beliefs, notions, prejudices, and practices. Diverse

approaches within feminism have somehow covered all the points neglected by one approach or the other. It has continued to flourish in its many forms and it will always continue to offer society and literary studies new challenges. Many feminists are not considered to be feminist enough by more radical ones. Some think that it has become too radical and too theoretical and has politicised texts too much. The differences also crop up when some feminists stress gender differences while other believe it to be the root cause of female oppression and try to move beyond this binary polarisation completely.

Despite their diversity, the goals of feminism are to expose patriarchal institutions, to challenge prejudices built against women, to discover and rediscover the literature by women writers, and to examine social, political, cultural, economic, and psychosexual context of literature and literary criticism. Some feminists want abstract rights and concrete possibilities to be granted to them without which freedom is baseless. Some critics believe that the task of feminism is not only to work for reforms and rather it should “adapt itself to the changing needs of women and men.” (Guerin et al. 214-15)

Naomi Schor says that feminist criticism should try to interpret “different national traditions” and focus on “the multiplication” of national, racial, sexual, and class differences instead of perpetuating “myths of segregation and national superiority” (qtd. in Showalter 181). Simone de Beauvoir has tried to find out solutions to improve the status of women which is also reflected in the works of Doris Lessing who has been her contemporary in England. Lois West emphasises that the women’s movements must be relativised to their time and place because struggles are local and specific to cultures. She also writes that national identity and the state must be examined through a feminist lens for the ways in which the nation treats its women.

The violence against women continues to be unabated. Sushmita Banerjee, an Indian author was murdered by Taliban in Afghanistan on 5th September 2013 as they claimed that she was an Indian spy. Sushmita rose to international fame for her novel 'A Kabuliwala's Bengali Wife'. She married an Afghan moneylender in Kolkata in the mid 1980s and later, moved to Afghanistan with him where she worked for the upliftment of women which could not be tolerated by some people and they gunned her down. These tragic events, which take place daily, compel us to think that there is a strong need to make people aware about the integrity of women, how to respect them, and how these victims can recover from such heinous crimes.

There is a strong need to raise certain questions once again, “To what extent are we defined by biological difference? How is women’s singularity to be at once affirmed and transcended? What makes women resist and what makes women comply with subordination?” (Rowbotham xviii). Beauvoir writes that the root cause for not having a strong feminist movement, lacking even today, which could have transformed the world and also the condition of women, is because women have never used ‘we’ rather have always tried to work for their own selfish interests. Women do not have solidarity among themselves and do not form a unit to fight against their oppression due to which their past, history, or religion are obliterated. She believes that women have created these differences among themselves on their own because each class is worried about their own welfare and if ever they talk about other classes it is just on superficial terms. Beauvoir believes that acquiescence confirms servitude and this is the reason why women are tied to homes, work, social conditions, and men like father, husband, and son.

Feminism is an attempt to find out the reasons behind the marginalisation of all women and to suggest ways so that women, no longer, are seen as the 'other' and do not remain the worst sufferers of social injustice. Though there are several branches of feminism, yet the main focus of feminists is to depict woman from the state of victimisation to the state of self-determination. The oppression of women can be eradicated completely only when these approaches work together and try to liberate equally all women of different race, class, caste, ethnicity, colour, and creed and work collectively in making them independent individuals. Even Beauvoir could predict that the major cause of failure of women's movement will be the lack of 'collective' or 'holistic movement', which includes women of all caste, class, colour, creed, and orientation as it leaves them incapable to confront new possibilities.

With the advancement of society and introduction of democracy, urbanisation, privatisation, industrialisation, increase in women literacy rate and employment rate, women have also achieved success in every field whether it is sports, technical fields, or education, yet the crime index against women is also increasing day by day. Women fall prey to the heinous and barbaric activities of the brutes who give shock and shivers to the society. The shocking and shameful events of 2012, the rape of Nirbhaya on 16th December, 2012 and the gang-rape of Mumbai journalist, a 22-year-old woman at Shakti Mills compound, shook the whole world. There were protests and rallies against criminals, but several such other cases go unnoticed by the public.

The present work makes an attempt to trace a common thread between two great writers of their times, Simone de Beauvoir and Doris Lessing, who were also contemporaries. This chapter tries to weave together different phases of feminism,

different schools of feminism, different types of feminism, different approaches of feminist study, and what feminism really is and the shortcomings and the solution which some critics try to suggest. This chapter also explains why we still need to talk about feminism, even in the twentieth-first century, where developing countries have progressed so much. The Second chapter will deal with certain ideas of Simone de Beauvoir as discussed by her in her book *The Second Sex*.

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