

# The History of Feminism

## Abstract

The radical French Philosopher Charles Fourier invented the word Feminism. He only brought this word into existence but did nothing in this field specifically. He related the women status with social progress. The full-fledged movement of Feminism did not come into being till a conference on women took place in 1848. That conference they had conducted to amalgamate feminism into other movement like Abolition of slavery and racism whereas the leitmotif of feminism was carried forward for bringing revolution as well as evolution in society. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century this movement was confined to women's liberation, equality, women's suffrage, sexual harassment and domestic violence, but it gave affirmation to any female for acquisition of equality between the sexes. It is more dealt with transformation of society. If society begins to acknowledge the role of female, the transformation of society happens on its own. Indian feminism has its own perspective. This concerned with mind set up of Indian people as the socialization of both the sexes takes place in different ideologies.

**Keywords:** Western Feminism, Emancipation, Women's Suffrage, Equality, Gender Crisis.

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## Introduction

As existentialism philosophy reflected absurdity, chaos and bloodshed, so the feminism reflects woman's predicament in society. A woman never an independent being, She is always made to work by male, the male can be her husband, brother, father and son. When Feminism entered into women's lives it persuades women to think about themselves, literally it influenced more people but on ground reality its impacts are less discernible. The western feminists are radicals in their approach but Indian feminists are moderate in their outlook, western feminists believe only feminism is a remedial to all the illness in women's lives. Indian feminists believe male and female are two sides of a coin, both are complementary to each other. Even some Indian women repulsive to women reservation bill, that has triggered off controversy in Indian politics, subsequently they emphasis that they want only prerogatives not reservation on the ground of sexes.

## Aim of the Study

The present paper acquaints the reader about the genesis of feminism in Europe as well as in India. Feminism does not deal with analysis of women's literature but it studies common crisis in women lives and how these women are struggling to get themselves adjust in new era with traditional values.

Feminism was never acknowledged as a movement but it got title a little later when fair sex came to the realization that woman needed to have a place of her own. One of the feminist Saskia Wieringa pointed out in her book "Subversive Women" "that feminism carries multiple meanings, limited neither to recent movements nor to western contexts". It is only feminism that helps women to reach their prerequisite places. In western world Feminism emerged out of the pens of writers like Mary Wollencraft 's work "The Vindication of Rights of Women" that advocated for the right of women. It was the time when people in general and woman in particularly were not aware of their rights, education and liberty and she was delineated as puppet and chattel. Although few European female writers endeavoured to crack the shell of inflexibility in patriarchal system but those who registered their presence were associated to the upper class. Apart from the small changes a major development took place when J.S.Mill favoured women's participation in election. In his work- "The Subjection of women", He advocated "The legal subordination of one sex to another- is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a system of perfect equality; admitting no power and privilege on the one side nor disability on the other"[7]<sup>1</sup>. That new development created a history and women section

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celebrated the victory and made prediction that the day is not far when any woman could be elected as leader. The woman like Elizabethen Brown and many others like her started writing for woman on that very day and unlike male counterparts they emphasised on the writing from woman's angle. Moreover they focused on women's experiences. These so called feminists objected to be branded as feminist as they believe feminism exists nowhere in world but they carried on fighting for attaining equity. Some writers believed the profounder of this movement brought a new wave in shape of feminism in world, whereas their claimed restricted up to cry for equality, voting system and education, they also wanted to sensitize the females about their rights.

It is also not wrong to say that feminism really first of all enjoyed by woman like Millament in the play "The Way of the World" wherein she challenged the submissive nature of female when she was proposed by Mirabell. Before giving consent to the proposal she placed her conditions in front of Mirabell, a hero of the play in the proviso scene in play. The English drama writer William Congreve through the mouthpiece of Millament spread a positive vibe among women. He supported one thing here that woman are in transitory stage and failed to take any decision for themselves. The words of Millament were the reflection of certain certitude prevailing in society. The upper class women arranged their parties and declared their independence in these parties. By the turn of the century the writer like Jane Austin took the world over in her strides. "Like the lake poets, she met with scanty encouragement in her own generation".(437)<sup>2</sup> Her presentation reflected the stereotypical thematic scenario of other's works but she shared women's experiences with her readers in her novels. With her entry into literature domain it seemed that another feather had added into women's oriented writings. Jane Austin figured out one more thing that a woman claimed a place for herself, society denies her any place, a place that a society has reserved for her is within the four walls of house. Jane Austen revealed the predicament of aristocratic society only, she did not contribute immensely in woman's writing but she is a torch bearer who made road for others. The 19<sup>th</sup> century is a century of woman's emancipation because from western world to Asian, Asian to Africa world, African world to Arabic woman all clamoured for liberation. That liberation was similar to feminism. Feminists altered the dimension for woman within the framework of feminism. In the past They struggled to get equity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but the demand of feminism became a bit different in the 20<sup>st</sup> century where it is clearly asserted that women want to end up patriarchy which perpetual women's subordination. This new revolution was called after the name of New feminism. Virginia Woolf, a conventional novelist in her work "Room of one's own" clarified her standpoint by favouring new wave that woman writing should explore female experience in its own right and not form a comparative assessment of women's experience in relation to men's. One feminist Toni Moi exegesis the philosophy of Virginia Woolf by adding that Woolf wants to give

respective identities to masculine and feminine, she is stood against in balancing powers between two. Actually Virginia Woolf believed that male and female are performing task as per their creed they can be complement to each other but never identical. Simon De Beauvoir an American feminist took the first wave of feminism into second wave when she produced a historical work "The Second Sex". In this book she discoursed on the femininity and stressed that women should not be isolated on the ground of biological psychological economic variation. The one feminist proves this argument of Simon De by saying these words ; The women don't have special limbs to look after children nor do we have special glands which produce love, If a woman can cook so a man because she does not cook with her womb. Elian showatter, the champion of feminist criticism deconstructed the language of male towards female in her text. Her work "A literature of their own' British women novelist from Bonte to Lessing" exposed the language that a male use for female. Basically Elain drew a conclusion in her critical study that males not only dominates female in social life but they have supremacy in literature too. She asserted that female view point was always ignored. One of the critics urges that "masculine thought allowed no space for woman writers and their ideology. Literary world like other spheres of life was a victim of pernicious male, dominance from which many female wished to escape" [7]<sup>3</sup>

In view of all the existing theories of feminism Elaine Showalter an American feminist critics and developed gynocriticism. She goes a bit ahead in depicting the experiences of women. She concentrated on self-discovery of a woman. These feminists focused on women's gradual deterioration in society. They criticised the language of male towards females. The male allow a female to use only that language which is being sanctioned by them. The work "Pamela", a virtue reward gives a glimpse of male dominated language. Richardson presented a picture of that woman who kept intact her virginity, inspite of having been in custody of her abductor. Philosophy of Richardson described a woman like Pamela who is a paragon of virtues but ventriloquist in the hand of writer. Finally her virtue rewarded when her abductor proposed her for marriage. She stood for her virginity and came out victorious. Dale Spender's Man made languages " [1980] is on this subject only that male opposes the languages of woman and suspending them by saying that language of women is inferior to males. Whatever work was going on in the field of feminism, progressed very well but this widely recognised ideology gets more exposure when the second wave of feminism arises. Friedian's "The Feminism Mystique" takes the credit of second wave. This wave argues the domesticity and socialization are the basic components that pushing backward any women in society. Before giving a waking call to a woman first make them realize they are important part of society as well as country.

Western Feminism gave perseverance to Indian feminism. Indian Feminists are not as stringent as westerns but Indian feminism is basically

indigenous feminism focus on general areas like women need education, liberation, right to make decision, develops a sense that she is not lesser but at par with man. In past centuries Indian feminists had a narrow vision. The intellectual like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, and Gopal charaya described the woman role in family. They made her indispensable part of family but she was not treated on equal terms with male. In Narayan's Guide Rosie is an antagonist not heroine of the novel presented the ideology of new wave of feminism. She flouted all the conventional of society when she left her husband Marc and started her new life with Raju Guide. Gradually she came to the realization Raju staying with her only for money. She again repeated her former action and left him too. The new wave of feminism that shattered the tailor made image of woman in Europe thoroughly and stirred the suppressed soul of Indian women and the role of Rosie instigated them to introspect their individual beings. She left both Raju and Marc because she believes they wanted only a dumpy woman not a woman with the living spirit. Simon de Beauvoir shared the view point of Rosie in her book "She will never be more than an element in her life" [352]<sup>3</sup>. Moreover "Second Sex" is also one of those works which is acclaimed widely and put a woman at pedestal. Due to estranged relationships Rosie preferred to stay out and everyone bent on labelling her a loose character woman. The ideology of these writers contributed a lot in spreading feminism in India. Tagore writing also presented a bold aspect of womanhood. He produced Choker Bali and Ghare Bhairi. In them he made woman bold and iconoclastic, whenever the blow of feminism sounded, the name of Kamini Roy could be reverberated, her most memorable work "Nirmalaye" is one of those works which kicked off feminism as social awareness in society. Although Women paved a way for women yet it is seen that the actual feminism was started in India by males only. Some thinker believes the profounder were males who initiated feminism in India. The feminists generally make an effort to seek the gender equality in society. Its first phase came in being with the abolishment of Sati Pratha in India which was one of the worst practise. The second stage commenced in 1915 when Gandhi had incorporated the tenets of feministic theories into independence movement in India. The third phase which is unique in nature influenced over Indian minds in 1970's. This phase was concentrated on to do away with discrimination and gender inequality in society. As everyone is preoccupied with biased philosophy the feminists like Kamala Markandya, Anita Desai, Gita Mehta plunged into literary field. Whatever they portrayed it was the reflection of socio-cultural values. Kamala Markandya brought forward the themes of clashes between western world and oriental thoughts. In novel "Nectar in a Sieve", Rukmani represents a mediocre Indian rural woman who life confines only in family. She is not sort of writer who highlights only female characters. In her works she presented the predicament of man and woman in rural India.

Indian Feminists work on self-quest of woman. Indian women have a lower status because of oppression, one of the writer pointed out the oppression a women in two ways: Oppression outside the family and within the family.(282)<sup>4</sup> They believed woman does not require anything she only wishes to identify herself. The crisis of identification has been well portrayed by Shashi Deshpande in her works. One critic writes about Shashi Deshpande "For Deshpande, every novel starts with people". Character thus occupies a pivotal position in her fiction"[16]<sup>5</sup>. The novels "That Long Silence" Jaya, Roots and Shadows's Indu, Sarita in "Darks hold no terrors" depict the themes of woman's instability in India. Deshpande's women are struggling to get their places, each time they raise voice to say something in their favour they forced to accept their secondary places and silence. Jaya, a writer tries to explore herself in writing, Indu's self-cognizance of Akka's role in family, gave her strong reason to search her identity. Sarita returns to her father home, here at that place she introspects herself and finds it is only terror that scares her if she faces terror bravely it dies its own death. So in the end when she was not prepared to go at her husband's place still asked her father to let him in when she is away to check a patient nearby and she will be back soon.

Nayantara sahgai is a feminist thinker, she writes in English about India. Her works focused on upper class society. She portrayed female as shakti in her works, her approaches towards any trouble in women life, was holistic and suggested solution to the problems especially she worked on identity crisis for women in India. The women character like Maya and Rashmi are immobile. The other women like Saroj, Simrite, Devi are self-determined and prepared themselves for the world and never felt remorse. Her works were concentrated on emancipation, self-identity and stasis somewhere. Her contribution in fictions annexed into the parameters of feminism that further incorporated by Anita Desai in her works. She talks about women's alienation. The fiction "cry the peacock" told the story of a lady Maya who is a pamper child and married to a lawyer. She is of sensitive nature that she visualizes the image of her father into her husband. This never be possible in her life and she development estranged relationship with her husband. In frustration she killed herself. Desai wants to say woman is a prey of her wishes. The despondency that has been depicted by Anita Desai carried forward by Shobhe de in her works. She belonged to Feminism but she has own perception on feminism. First she described it is sex that subjugates a woman. A woman never be developed a complete being in society as she is in shackles, these shackles are made up of ancient outdated values. She presents the world of socialites and sex. Her works "Socialite Evening, Sultry Days, Starry Nights" are fabrication of a male domination. Shobha De through her works succinctly criticised the sham values and ethnicity.

#### **Conclusion**

Feminism engenders the spirit of enthusiasm in woman. It endeavours to provide equality between sexes but feminism argues without alteration in

thoughts women can never achieve any liberation. Feminism does not persuade anyone to raise voice against patriarchy but it gives a support to women for speaking out of their rights. This stream has reached impasse it goes further only when masculine thoughts come in favour of equality between two sexes.

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