

# Protest Literature

## A Critical Anthology



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## Feminism : An Introduction

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Dr. Rajesh Anandrao Ade

The origin of the term feminism has not been determined. It is ambiguous and unpredictable as the French Philosopher and novelist wrote in her well-known book, *The Second Sex*, *One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*. The word feminism was considered as the medical term. It was first used in 1871. As per the medical view, it characterizes feminism symptoms in the bodies of male. It becomes clear that it was applied to the male who showed the feminism quality in his behaviour. On the contrary, Alexander Dumas applied the same term to describe women behaviour like the male.

What may be the reason behind this term? It gives the platform to the women to raise their voice against women's oppressions which were done under the name of social, political and economic. There are certain assumptions regarding to the term. It assumes that feminism approach is based on ideologies and philosophies. It considers that this approach appose women's operations. From the primitive times women are considered weak,



feeble-mindedness, seductress, obstacle, the sexual object of men's desire. But feminism approach alters the picture of the suffering patriarchal conditions of the women. It changes the sexual biases, religious, cultural and biological origin.

Every term has its back roots; so feminism has its back roots. The first wave began with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. In France, Olympe de Gouges fought for women's political and economic rights. It is a literary as well as a political movement.

There are three waves of feminism. The first wave began from 1830 to 1920. The first wave fights for the legal and political rights of women. The second wave began from 1960 to 1980. It begets the powerful slogan *Equal pay for equal work*. Betty Friedan was the pioneer of the slogan who wrote the book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. She exposes the frustration of the 1950s housewives in America. She founded the National Organization of Women (NOW) for legal rights. Juliet Mitchell's *Woman's Estate* is one of the great creations. According to her production, reproduction, sexuality and socialism are the root causes for the women's oppressions. She coined very suggestive phrase, *cultural utilisation as exchange object*. The third wave began from mid-1990 to until.

The theories of feminism can be divided into three, categories *liberal women*, *Marxist* and *radical feminism*. The first theory based on the philosophy of women's rights. The second theory believed in economical views. The third theory believed that patriarchy to be the origins of all the sufferings of women. *De Beauvoir argues that there was nothing natural about the hierarchical division of men and women into first and second sex*. She applies the concept, *Other*. She defines, *He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she the other*. It is true if we try to focus on men and women's conditions in the society. As per cultural view women's position in the society is weak while men is strong. The same view is strongly put by Virginia Woolf in her well-known essay, *A Room of One's Own*, that the women are facing restrictions in social and economic situation. But this debate is the seed of two contrast



terms, androtests and gynotests.

Shulamith Firestone is considered the most notable author of the radical feminist movement. Her book, *The Dialectic of Sex* is the manifesto for the second wave. It was published when Firestone was just twenty-five years old. It is dedicated to de Beauvoir. Firestone argues about communal child bearing means that women should free from the tyranny of motherhood. She thought it is the root cause of the women's sufferings. Another radical feminist author Mary Daly argues in her book *Gyn Ecology: Ecofeminism argues that women, nature and the Third World are all victims at the hands of an exploitative male capitalist technology and ecofeminists frequently used the image of 'the web of life' to express the themes of cooperation, interdependent life to harmony. It was coined by the French feminist Francoise Dieudonne. According to Karen Warren, there is a historical, conceptual, empirical and experimental, epistemological, symbolic, ethical, theoretical and political connection in women and the environment.*

During the period of 1970's, several books were published which show relationship between women and environment. Rosemary Radford's *New Woman, New Earth* is the begging book of ecofeminism. The author critically analyses the monopoly of men over cultural and women's relation with the nature. Ariel Salleh's *Ecofeminism as Politics* is one of the leading book which attempt to define the term *ecofeminism* which is a combination of four words, feminism, Marxism, social ecology and post colonialism. Another important work is *The Sexual Politics of Meat* by Carol J. Adams. It deals with the operation of postcolonial women. The reason behind this is patriarchy.

After ecofeminism, *Phallogocentric* literature was one of the new approaches. It means the practice of approaching male authors from a feminist perspective. It tries to analyse the masculine bias of their attitudes towards women through the use of language and imagery by masculine authors. It is a psychoanalytic approach. Kate Millet is one of the notable feminists of this approach. Her work, *Sexual Politics*. She analyses the man-woman relationships from the novels of Lawrence, Norman and Henry Miller.



Phallogocentric brings a new glint in the form of *gynocriticism*. It was first used by the American academic Elaine Showalter in her essay *Towards a Feminist Poetics*. The important works of this approach are Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, and Patricia Meyer Spacks' *The Female Imagination*. It gives birth to *gynocriticism*. It means an alternative female-centred criticism was developed to this need and because of its preoccupation with the female voice, it became known as 'gynocriticism'. The major difference between phallogocentric and *gynocriticism* is that the first considered women as a reader while next considered women as a writer. In the words of Showalter *gynocriticism* means, *the history, style, themes, genres, and structure of writing by women; the psychoanalytical, of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and evaluation or laws of a female literary tradition*. Germaine Greer is an Australian writer who wrote the book, *The Female Eunuch*. It is one of the polemical books in the world. Another is Moers who is considered as the *female Gothic* and she coined the term, *heroinism*.

Eli Zaretsky's famous work is, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* examines the domestic labour that is much more crucial than the male. He says that the women play *double duty*. In the public place, she earns the wages for her duty but in private; she remains unpaid for her domestic work. Carole Pateman makes a distinction between private and public spheres. She exposes the same thought as Zaretsky exposes in the domestic sphere women play the role of family caretakers, but in a public place, they have not to afford political rights.

The French term, *écriture féminine*, believes that language is masculine. It is a term coined by Cixous. Literary meaning is *feminine writing*. She applied it in her work, *The Laugh of the Medusa*. The French feminists believe that women are mute in literature. This term was developed in the second wave. Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray are the major figures. Irigaray introduced two opposite terms, *mirror* and *flat mirror*. They reflect female reflection and male identity. She states *female sexuality has always been conceptualised based on masculine parameters*. She



expresses her arguments against Freud's theory of sexuality.

Helene Cixous contribution to feminism is the postcolonial binary oppositions. It is influenced by the deconstruction theory of Derrida. She argues that patriarchal possession is passing from father to husband.

Michele Barret well-known book is, *Women's Oppression Today*. She was influenced by Marxism.

### **Conclusion**

Feminism is a broad term in literature. Though, it emerges in recent times it grows in big trees with various leaves of philosophy, psychoanalytic, linguistics, postcolonial and Marxist. It moves from androcentric and heterosexual biases into *Third World* lesbian theory. The feminism movement is nothing but something that celebrates women's liberty, women should be women. It liberates women from a system of male-centred traditions, and beliefs. Today, it is proved by women that they are superior to males. It empowers the women to find out their own identity.

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