

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 6. Issue.4. 2019 (Oct-Dec)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

UNDERSTANDING FEMINISM

Dr. RAJIVA RANJAN

doi: [10.33329/ijelr.64.120](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.64.120)



Dr. RAJIVA RANJAN

ABSTRACT

Feminism has deviated from the basic notion of equality of men and women and has come down contemptuously from personal remarks to negate everything said or done by `men`. This understanding of feminism will simply impede the anticipated progress and delay in desired justice for half of the humanity.

**Key Words:** Feminism, discrimination, patriarchy, ideologies, harassment, dowry

Feminism is a noble concept against ignoble thought of discrimination on the grounds of sex. At the outset, the division of gender roles was based on the capacity to bear and nourish the babies and; to keep provisions ready in the entire time span. The division had no arguments for thousands of years; but was later on challenged sometimes lightly and sometimes intensely. This may be due to men taking their roles more seriously and undermining female roles or negating them completely in the whole progression of existence. Men's physical strength, their ability to hunt (in modern times their money making skills) and freedom from child bearing liabilities made them high headed and arrogant towards female. Under this backdrop we can see the creation of patriarchal society in which all social norms were created and controlled by men, making women a passive partner in the whole course.

Feminism is the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of equality of sexes. It initiated in the west, exhibited throughout the world and was exemplified by countless people and institutions committed to action on belief of women's rights and interests. It could be traced way back in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, when `Roman women filled Capitoline Hill and blocked every entrance to the Forum because Consul Cato resisted attempts to repeal laws limiting women's use of expensive goods'. However, its modern avatar came in different waves bringing forward different aspects of feminist issues.

The first wave of feminism was from 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century and issues raised during this period were suffrage, working conditions and educational rights. It started with `Married Women Property Law' in the US in 1809 and remained till `Right to Vote' was granted in 1928. During the first wave of feminist movement there were 69 incidents out of which important ones were celebrations of 1<sup>st</sup> International Women's Day in 1913, and Germany's `Right to Vote to Women' in 1919.

The second wave of the movement was from 1960's to early 1980's and it brought forward issues like inequality of laws, cultural inequalities and role of women in society. To be precise, it started in 1963 with the `Report of American Presidential Commission' on the status of women, which caused `Equal Pay Act' and it continued till 1980's Feminist sex wars also known as lesbian sex wars or sex wars or porn wars. The last incident was `Japanese Equal Employment Opportunity Law' in 1985 which prohibited gender discrimination with respect to recruitment, hiring etc. There were altogether 104 incidents in the second wave of the movement.

The important incidents of this period included foundation of 'National Organization for Women' (NOW) in 1966, establishing American Radical Organization *Redstockings* in 1969 and 'The American National Black Feminist Organization' in 1973.

The third wave of feminist movement started in 1991 when Rebecca Walker an American feminist published an article 'Becoming the third wave', following establishment of '*Riot Grrrl Movement*' in Washington. Major incidents of this phase included 'Gender Equality in Education Act' in 1994 and 'The Violence against Women Act' in the US in 1994.

The fourth-wave feminism is a resurgence of interest in feminism which started in 2012 and is associated with the use of social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr, and blogs. It focused on '*justice for women, opposition to sexual harassment and violence against women*'. Major issues included 'street and workplace harassment, *campus sexual assault and rape culture*'. This wave included 2012 Delhi gang rape.

During different waves of feminist movements different feminist ideologies came into existence. These ideologies included '*Liberal Feminism*' which was based on equality of men and women through political and legal reforms without altering the structure of the society. The second was *Radical Feminism* which considered 'male controlled capitalist hierarchy' as the defining feature of women's oppression; and the total uprooting and reconstruction of society necessary to reach their goal. The third was *Libertarian Feminism* which conceived people as self-owners and entitled them to freedom from coercive interference. The fourth was *Separatist Feminism* which did not support heterosexual relationship. Closely related to this was *Lesbian Feminism*. The sixth was *Eco Feminism* which believed that men's control of land was responsible for the 'oppression of women and destruction of natural environment'. The next was *Materialist Feminism* which believed in critical analysis of capitalism and its ideological relationship to women. After this, *Marxist Feminism* came into being which felt that capitalism is the root cause of women's oppression. The next was *Social Feminism*. It wanted to end both the economic and cultural sources of women's oppression. Then *Anarchic Feminism* which required struggle against patriarchy. The next was *Black and Post-Colonial Feminism* that challenged some of the western feminist thoughts. After that, there was *Post-Colonial Feminism* which believed that colonial oppression and western feminism marginalized postcolonial women. *Third World Feminism* was closely related to Post Colonial Feminism. It also corresponded with ideals in *African Feminism*. Then came *Motherism*, *Stiwanism Feminism* which believed in Femalism, Transnational Feminism and African Womanism. The latest in the movement is the *Lipstick Feminism* which is a cultural feminist movement with an attempt to respond and to backlash second wave Radical feminism of 1960's-70 by reclaiming symbols of 'feminine' identity, such as makeup, suggestive clothing and sexual allure as valid and empowering choices.

All these waves of feminist movements were either entreaties for equality or hatred towards *oppressors*. This hatred against men might have led to *Radical Feminism* and aversion to men and society which culminated in the form of certain ideologies like *Separatist Feminism* or even *Lesbian Feminism*.

The main dialogue in feminism is about sex industry (which is considered an exploitative result of patriarchal social structure): pornography, prostitution and trafficking of women; and patriarchy. Feminists felt patriarchy as primary authority figure and center to social organization which held control over women, children, and property. It implied the institution of male rule. They believed it as unjust social system and oppression to women.

Feminism is used for a dual purpose. One is to get the privileges which women don't have due to gender disparity and the next is to settle scores against '*foot soldiers of patriarchy*'. In the movement towards attaining the dual purposes, sometimes they promote one, holding the other back and vice versa. This is the reason why 'several feminist rhetoric today do cross the line from attacks on sexism into attacks on men, with a strong focus on personal behavior; ranging from the way they talk to the way they sit in public transport'. The gender antagonism was inherent in feminism from the beginning but they were directed more at institutions than at individuals. The rise of radical feminism brought a wave of female anger at men's collection of individual misdemeanors. Andrea Dworkin and Marilyn French depicted ordinary men as *patriarchy's brutal foot soldiers*.

This tendency reached new height as new radical feminist theories have migrated from academic into mainstream conversation by coining words like: `mansplaining`, `manspreading`, `maninterrupting`. The hatred and jealousy could be visible in any form ranging from antagonist behaviors, derogatory remarks to `dismiss anything said by men` (as state correspondent Dahilia Lithwick had admitted using this term in debates about Hillary Clinton).

To be precise, mocking and berating men is not the way to show that the feminist revolution is about equality and they have stake in the new game. The fixation on men behaving badly may distract from more fundamental issues worldwide. To name a few:

1. In Ethiopia, women and girls are taken as property and may be exchanged.
2. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, women are handed over to rival partners to settle conflict.
3. In Australia, Canada, Israel and the US 40-70% women are murdered by their husbands.
4. In Pakistan, 80% women face domestic violence
5. In Israel, women can't divorce if men don't agree but this is not so in men's case.
6. Rampant Honor killing in third world countries.
7. In the US, 74 women are raped every hour and in India 35 women per minute.
8. In Thailand, Korea, Philippines, Brazil, and Hungary, Sex tourism is promoted.

To conclude, there is no time to fix on men by coining new phrases or by settling scores which can't be fruitful but it is the time to fix on issues like better representation of women in jobs and parliaments and to deal with crime against women both from within and without. It should be made clear that women are individuals and not properties, which could be exchanged or used to settle a feud. There is a lot to work to stop honor killing and rape and to stop sex tourism and inequality against women. They should ensure that there should be no discrimination on the grounds of sex for entry in temples or mosques, or performing last rites of parents or succession of wealth. Feminists must also ensure that there should be no female infanticide and dowry deaths. The change must be positive and in *feminist perspective* only. To treat men badly as a feminist ethos will surely divert the attention from the noble cause of equality.

#### References

1. [www.brittanica.com](http://www.brittanica.com)
2. [www.lexico.com](http://www.lexico.com)
3. 'The Washington Post' June 30, 2016, 'Feminists treat men badly. It's bad for feminism' by Cathy Young.
4. *Beasley, Chris : What is Feminism?, 1999*
5. *Walker, Rebecca: "Becoming the Third Wave", 1992*
6. [www.enwikipedia.org](http://www.enwikipedia.org)

---

**Biographical details of the author: Dr. Rajiva Ranjan** was awarded a Ph.D. degree in Humanities from Magadh University, India in 1998. Since post-graduation, he has been teaching English language and literature in different institutions both at home and abroad.

---