

REVIEW ARTICLE

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

ISSN  
INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

FEMINISM AND ITS TYPES: AN OVERVIEW

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doi: [10.33329/ijelr.64.229](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.64.229)



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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this paper is to present an overview of feminism and its types. Feminism is the most popular women's movement for getting their rights at par to male gender. The first, second and third waves of feminism are its different developmental stages. The social feminism, cultural feminism, ecofeminism, material feminism, moderate feminism, radical feminism and postcolonial feminism are the some of the main types of feminism which are analyzed to some extent in this work.

**Keywords:** Feminism, waves of feminism, types of feminism

Introduction

Feminism is an ideology or belief which seeks equal rights for women in every fields of work. *Feminist criticism is concerned both with the representation of women in literature and with changing women's position in the society by freeing them from oppressive restraints. Central to those restraints are essentialist definition of what it is to be a women: definitions that assume human nature is universal and which refuse to see who culture plays a significant part in constricting and fixing identity. Feminist criticism is, of course, part of the large movement in the contemporary world for women's equality that women itself growth out of previous century of struggle by women to win equal rights, and out of previous writing, in text such as Mary Wollstonecraft's A vindication of the right of the women (1792), which articulate the cause of women (Martin and Feck 171). Other important works that approaches the rights of women is J. S. Mill's The Subjection of women (1869) and Margaret Fuller's Women in the nineteenth century (1845). The suffrage movement at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century carried on the campaign. In the 1920s there were clear signs of new and different approaches in relation to women writer and literature. This was noticeable in the critical work of, for example, Rebecca West, and in Virginia Wolf's essays on women authors who suffrage from economic and culture disadvantages in what she termed a parochial society. She addressed herself to the issue of why there was so few a women to writers and why it is frequently difficult or impossible for a woman to write.*

Concept of Feminism

Feminism is a movement that argues for women's right and full gender across all aspects of culture, politics, economics, and even daily life. It began to gain attraction in the nineteenth century over such issues as diverse, married women's property right, women education, and women's right to vote. In literary circle, it was expressed as a demand for women to be taken seriously as writers and to be paid as man doing. Feminist literary

criticism recognize that since literature both reflects culture and shapes it, literary studies can either perpetuate the oppression of women or help to eliminate it.

### Definition

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines feminism as "the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim" (Hornby 560). Whereas A New Approach Dictionary of Living English defines, *Feminism as a belief or movement advocating the cause of women's rights and opportunities, particularly equal rights with men, by challenging inequalities between the sexes in society (Sohoni 200)*. After taking into consideration some of the definitions of feminism, it is essential to study the nature of feminism and its correlations with various other factors on a broad level.

Feminist Literary Criticism began to counter, resist, and eventually eliminate the traditions and conventions of patriarchy, the ideology or belief system that sees the dominance and superiority of men over women as "natural" in both private and public contexts- as it exist in literary, historical and critical contexts.

According to **Toril Moi**, "Feminist Criticism... is a specific kind of political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism...".

According to **Judith Fetterley**, "Feminist criticism is a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the worlds, but to change it by changing the consciousness of those, who read and their relation to what they read".

**Lisa Tuttle** cites the goals of feminist literary criticism as:

- To develop and uncover a female tradition of writing.
- To interpret symbolism of women's writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by the male point of view.
- To rediscover old texts.
- To analyze women writers and their writing from a female perspective.
- To resist sexism in literature, and
- To increase awareness of the sexual politics of language and style.

### Development of Feminism:

The Feminist criticism is concerned with the ways in which literature furthers the social, political economics and psychological oppression of women. They examine gender politics in literary works and trace the subtle construction of masculinity and femininity and their relative status, positioning and marginalization within works. The concept of Feminism Movement got prominence and importance in the 1960s. Earlier, feminism was limited to some female writer only but the increased number of the female writers and the representation of woman characters in fiction world drew large attention in the literature. The evolution of feminism movement in the literature as follows:

#### First Wave Feminism:

First Wave feminism mainly concerned with the treatment of woman in the male-dominated society. The major works of this phase are Mary Ellman's *Thinking about Women* (1968), Kite Millet's *Sexual politics* (1969) and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970). Many important works of the male writers have been studied in order to analyze the attitude of male towards women and society. Writers like Mary Wollstonecraft "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" 1792, highlighted the inequalities between the sexes. Activities like Susan B. Anthony and Victoria Woodhull contributed to the women's suffrage movement in 1920 with the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

#### Second Wave Feminism:

It is more commonly, also known as 'Gynocriticism'. This stage is believed to have begun with Elaine Showalter's "A literature of Their Own" in 1970. Second Wave Feminism is concerned with the women writings include Ellen Moore's *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter's *Literature of their Own*(1970), Nina Baym's

Women Fictions (1978), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Mad Women in the Attic* (1979), and Margaret Homan's *Women writers and poetic identity* (1980). This phase chiefly explores the relationship between female and male literature and text were analyzed to understand the treatment of female characters by the male in the society.

### **Third Wave of Feminism**

The third wave of feminism emerged in the mid-1900s. It resisted the perceived essentialist ideologies and a white, heterosexual, middle class focus of second wave feminism. Third wave of feminism borrowed from post-structural and contemporary gender and race theories to extend on marginalized populations experiences. The third wave was much more inclusive of women of colour than the first and second waves had been.

Feminist criticism in the 1970 exposed the mechanism of patriarchy, that is, the culture 'mindset' in men and women, which perpetuated sexual inequalities. Critical attention was given to books by male writers in which influential or typical images of women were constructed. In these sense, feminist criticism was combative and polemical. In 1980s, it becomes more eclectic, drawing upon the findings and approaches of other kinds of criticism- Marxism, structuralism, and linguistics. Secondly, it switched its focus from attacking male version of the world to exploring the nature of the female world and outlook, and reconstructing the lost or suppressed records of female experience. Thirdly, attention was directed to the need to construct a new canon of women's writing rewriting the history of the novel and of the poetry in such a way that neglected woman writers were given new prominence. These are the phases of interest that seems characteristic of feminist criticism. Elaine Showalter described the change in the late 1970s as a shift of attention from 'androtexts' (books by men) to 'gynotexts' (books by women). She also introduced the new term 'gynocitics' meaning the study if gynotexts. Hence, feminist literary criticism has become 'an urgent political necessity'.

### **The Feminist Movement:**

Based on the various discussions, one can approximately place the feminist movement in different basic categories. The following heading will clearly explain the different feminist movement:

#### **Bourgeois Feminism of Virginia Woolf:**

Woolf asserts that women have not been able to write because of the prevalent social conditions that acted as a barrier between them and writing. Their financial dependence on opposite gender and the absence of independent financial stability prevent women from writing. She believes that if women are given the financial sources and freedom available to men, they will be as productive.

#### **French Feminism:**

This includes a group of feminists who believe that women's writing should be radical in its nature. They should reinvent language and writing so that they depart drastically from the present masculine mode of expression. They entrenched blind a Lacanian scholarship. They argue that the present masculine discourses stem from the so called "Symbolic order" where men have to mask their real desires for fear of castration. Since the female has no symbolic organ to lose, she could write from the so-called "Imaginary Order". By doing so, feminists can subvert all patriarchal logo.

#### **American Feminism:**

This movement includes another group of mainly women intellectuals who suspect the French feminist movement; and they, instead of reinventing the language, advocate a literary reading of textology against the grain of traditional male narratives, against the canon and the high culture.

Under the theory of feminism there should be no difference between male gender and female gender in getting all sorts of rights. Notice that this theory does not subscribe to differences between men and women or similarities between men and women, nor does it refer to excluding men or only furthering women's causes. Most other branches of feminism do.

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**Cultural Feminism**

The theory that there are fundamental personalities differences between men and women, and those women's differences are special and should be celebrated. This theory affirms the notion that men and women are difference biologically due to which women are kinder and they can rule the world in a nice manner free from fear and tensions of war and weapons.

**Ecofeminism**

Ecofeminism is a theory that rests on the basic principal that patriarchal philosophies are harmful to women, children, and other living things. They feel that the patriarchal philosophy emphasizes the need to dominate and control unruly females and the unruly wilderness. Eco feminist believes to live a life in harmony with natural environment and its organisms.

**Material Feminism**

Materialist feminism is basically a theoretical framework for studying feminist knowledge, class, division of labor, state/government power, economic power, gender identify, racial identify, sexual identity and national identity. A movement that began in the late 19th century focused on liberating by improving their material condition. This movement revolved around taking the "burden" off women in regards to housework, cooking, and other traditional female domestic jobs.

**Moderate Feminism**

They often believe that the ideals of the feminist movement are no longer viable, and therefore question the need for further efforts. Often this group espouses feminist's ideas while not accepting or wanting the label of 'feminist'. Taking moderate positions may be useful strategy in some situations, but higher concerns can never be found halfway between lesser goods. There is no midpoint of truth, for example, between theism and atheism.

The phrase "moderate Feminists" is ambiguous. For some people, the "moderate" label signifies less than total commitment to feminist ideas.

**Postcolonial Feminism**

Postcolonial Feminism is also called as Third World Feminism that includes postcolonial setting, and deals with the topics like racism, colonialism and its cultural, economical and political effects on the society that explore some particular gendered realities of non-white and non-western women. It provides information about the sufferings of people due to colonialism such as resistance, suppression, representation, difference, race, gender, slavery, migration and reactions to influences of imperial Europe. Postcolonial feminism constitutes both recently decolonized nations and the women under patriarchal influences, as both of them reveal the dominant culture suffered by them in the society. Post colonialism is strongly connected to the Black Feminism as it deals with the issues related to racism. The women have to remain under the impact of traditional norms, and hence they were oppressed by the men. Postcolonial feminism provides them with a platform to express their rebellion against the injustices imposed on them due to the traditional norms followed by colonialism. The new customs were an imposition on the former colonies as a means of social progress. Similarly, women were considered as secondary and restrictions were imposed on them by men.

**Conclusion**

Feminist criticism takes the feminism and the feminism theories as a base to criticize the literature of old and modern times. It is focused on addressing the issues regarding places and consideration of women in social, political and psychological and economic aspects of human life. The greatness of feminist literary criticism lies in its ability to take a variety of new routes. In practice, feminist literary criticism is not limited to texts written and read by women, for its interest is not only how 'women' have been treated, but how notions of gender and sexuality have generally determined an inferior place for many different voices of women, of racial and ethnic minorities and gay and lesbian writer and readers of literature. Feminist criticism works with a shifting agenda,

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of endlessly acknowledging both the complexity of the past and the limits of any schemes of interpretation we place on the past. It questions the patriarchal order of society, but is ready to accept and work with the provisionally that is the consequence of questioning or abandoning that old, containing fiction. Feminist literary Criticism may be seen to intervene in the process of culture's self-reproduction to make visible the injustices of present between men and women, and keep them from being reproduced in the future.

In this paper, the concept of feminism, its three developmental stages and various types are thoroughly discussed to give a brief picture of this movement to the readers.

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