

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
SEMESTER II
TOPIC: WOMEN'S MOVEMENT
(WAVES OF FEMINISM)

The **feminist movement** (also known as the women's liberation movement, the women's movement, or simply feminism) refers to a series of political campaigns for reforms on issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, women's suffrage, sexual harassment, and sexual violence, all of which fall under the label of feminism and the feminist movement. The movement's priorities vary among nations and communities, and range from opposition to female genital mutilation in one country, to opposition to the glass ceiling in another.

Feminism in parts of the western world has gone through three waves. First-wave feminism was oriented around the station of middle- or upper-class white women and involved suffrage and political equality. Second-wave feminism attempted to further combat social and cultural inequalities. Third-wave feminism is continuing to address the financial, social and cultural inequalities and includes renewed campaigning for greater influence of women in politics and media. In reaction to political activism, feminists have also had to maintain focus on women's reproductive rights, such as the right to abortion.

First-wave feminism was a period of feminist activity and thought that occurred within the time period of the 19th and early 20th century throughout the world. It focused on legal issues, primarily on gaining women's suffrage (the right to vote).

During the First Wave, there was a notable connection between the slavery abolition movement and the women's rights movement. Frederick Douglass was heavily involved in both movements and believed that it was essential for both to work together in order to attain true equality in regards to race and sex.

The first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York (now known as the Seneca Falls Convention) from July 19-20, 1848, and advertised itself as "a convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman". While there, 68 women and 32 men—100 out of some 300 attendees, signed the Declaration of Sentiments, also known as the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments. The principal author of

the Declaration was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who based it on the form of the United States Declaration of Independence. She was a key organizer of the convention along with Lucretia Coffin Mott, and Martha Coffin Wright. Charlotte Woodward, alone among all 100 signers, was the only one still alive in 1920 when the Nineteenth Amendment passed. Woodward was not well enough to vote herself.

Second-wave feminism is a period of feminist activity and thought that first began in the early 1960s in the United States, and eventually spread throughout the Western world and beyond. In the United States the movement lasted through the early 1980s.

Whereas first-wave feminism focused mainly on suffrage and overturning legal obstacles to gender equality (*e.g.*, voting rights, property rights), second-wave feminism broadened the debate to a wide range of issues: sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, de facto inequalities, and official legal inequalities. Second-wave feminism also drew attention to domestic violence and marital rape issues, establishment of rape crisis and battered women's shelters, and changes in custody and divorce law. Its major effort was the attempted passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the United States Constitution, in which they were defeated by anti-feminists.

In 1960, the Food and Drug Administration approved the combined oral contraceptive pill, which was made available in 1961. This made it easier for women to have careers without having to leave due to unexpectedly becoming pregnant. The administration of President Kennedy made women's rights a key issue of the New Frontier, and named women (such as Esther Peterson) to many high-ranking posts in his administration.

In 1963 Betty Friedan, influenced by Simone De Beauvoir's book "The Second Sex," wrote the bestselling book "The Feminine Mystique" in which she explicitly objected to the mainstream media image of women, stating that placing women at home limited their possibilities, and wasted talent and potential. The perfect nuclear family image depicted and strongly marketed at the time, she wrote, did not reflect happiness and was rather degrading for women. This book is widely credited with having begun second-wave feminism. Watch this video about the success and impact of Friedan's book:

Third-wave feminism refers to several diverse strains of feminist activity and study, whose exact boundaries in the history of feminism are a subject of debate, but are generally marked as beginning in the early 1990s and continuing to the present. The movement arose partially as a response to the perceived failures of and backlash against initiatives and movements

created by second-wave feminism during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, and the perception that women are of "many colors, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and cultural backgrounds". This wave of feminism expands the topic of feminism to include a diverse group of women with a diverse set of identities.

FEMINISM: INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies and social movements that share a common goal to define, establish and achieve political, economic, personal and social equality of sexes. This includes seeking to establish educational and personal opportunity for **women** that are equal to those for men. Feminists accept the goal of ending sexism by empowering women. But there is a great deal of disagreement about how that goal is to be achieved.

Branches of Feminism

1) Liberal Feminism: It is also called Egalitarian or main stream feminism. It's the most moderate branch. It is based on the simple proposition that all people are created equal and should not be denied equality of opportunity because of gender. Liberal feminism is based on enlightenment on belief of rationality, education and the natural rights that should extend to all men and women. Liberal feminism is an individualistic form of feminist theory which focuses on women's ability to maintain their equality through their own actions and choices. Its emphasis is on making the legal and political rights of women equal to men. Liberal Feminists argue that women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than man. Thus it tends to discriminate against women.

Important points:

The popular feminist writers (**first wave feminists**) associated with this theory are-

- a) Mary Wollstonecraft- "A vindication of the rights of a woman" (book)
- b) John Stuart Mill- "The subjection of women" (book)

Second wave Feminists:

- a) Betty Friedan
- b) Gloria Steinem

Third wave Feminists:

- a) Rebecca Walker

Some popular liberal feminists:

18th century

- a) Mary Wollstonecraft
- b) Judith Sargent Murray
- c) Frances Wright

19th century

- a) John Stuart Mill
- b) Harriet Taylor
- c) Susan B Anthony

20th century

- a) Betty Friedman
- b) Rebecca Walker
- c) Naomi Wolf
- d) Martha Nussbaum

Famous Organizations:

National Organization For Women (NOW): It is the largest liberal feminist organization in United States.

National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC): This organization was founded in 1971. It is the only national organization dedicated exclusively to increasing women's participation in all areas of political and public life. The founder of NWPC is **Gloria Steinem**.

Women's Equity National League (WEAL): This organization was founded in 1968. It is dedicated to improving the status and lives of women primarily through education, litigation and legislation.

2) Radical Feminism: It's the perspective within feminism that calls for a radical reordering of the society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic context. Radical Feminists seek to abolish the patriarchy in order to everyone from an unjust society by challenging existing social norms and institution. They focused on the issues like sexual objectification of women and violence against women. Also raising or spreading awareness about the issues related to rape.

Ti Grace Atkinson- Radical Feminism 1969

3) Socialist Feminism: This rose in 1960's and 1970's as an offshoot of the feminist movements that focuses upon the inter-connectivity of the patriarchy and capitalism. Social feminist argue that liberation can only be achieved by working to end both the economic and cultural sources of women's oppression. They rejects the idea of radical feminists which claims that patriarchy is the only and primary source of oppression of women. Rather socialist feminists asserts that women are unable to be free due to their financial dependence on male. Women are subject to the male rulers in capitalism due to unseen balance in the wealth.

* **"Women and Socialism"** a book by August Babel.

* **"Gender Trouble"** by Judith Butler in 1990's.

4) Eco Feminism: The term Eco Feminism is used to describe a feminist approach for understanding the ecology. Eco Feminism thinkers draw the concept of gender to theorize on the relationship between humans and natural world. This term was coined by French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book **"Le féminisme ou la mort"** in 1974.

Famous Eco Feminist is Charlene Spretnak.

Important Note:

- # Please focus on the Waves of feminism. Prepare notes in detail.
- # All the objectives that I have given related to feminism should be learnt.
- # Name of Feminists and their important work and books.
- # Please go through the other PDF which includes women's movement as social reforms and also women's participation in freedom struggle.
- # Also focus on "women's suffrage" i.e. their right to vote and also women's political representation.