

**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

**IJELLH**

**International Journal of English Language,  
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

**UGC Approved Journal**



**Volume 6, Issue 11, November 2018**

[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

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### Introduction to Feminist Movement: A Historical Context

#### Abstract

Feminism is both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms. Feminism brings many things to philosophy including not only a variety of particular moral and political claims, but ways of asking and answering questions, critiques of mainstream philosophical views and methods which were covered as 'Feminist interventions'.

Keywords: Feminism, revolution, equality, social and political

“Woman is the earth, air, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind, the articulation of space, the knowing in knowledge; the knowledge in fire, movement clear and rapid as the mountain stream; the woman is that which seeks against that which is sought. To Mitra she is Varuna, to Indra she is Agni, to Rama she is Sita, to Krishna she is Radha. Woman is the meaning of the word, the breathe, touch, act; woman, that which reminds man of which he is, reminds herself through him of that which she be. Woman is kingdom, solitude, time; woman is growth, the Gods, inherence; woman is the death, for it is through woman that one is born; woman rules, for it is she, the universe....”<sup>1</sup>

The concern of feminism and feminist movement straight from 1960's, has such a vast history that it can be discussed for many years to come. The Feminist movement is all about availing equal rights that of men whether religious or political, social or economic, personal or professional, if women are denied of those rights that clearly indicates that the world is inconsiderate towards the half of the population of the world. In the archaic society women often enjoyed vantage to their society of so-called civilized society. They existed as more independent entities in their own established customs and attitudes because the economic structure of their society was simpler. But with the advancement of the civilization simplicity got destroyed and a complicated form took birth and the frame work of society underwent a rapid transformation and the position of women kept changing along with it. Woman got thus reduced to the status of a reproductive machine and while man's sphere kept amplifying, her space kept abbreviating. In a nutshell she became a property of man and he applied all the methods such as social, religious, ethical commands to establish his dominance over woman. The industrialization dealt a fatal blow to feudalism\* and in the upheaval which followed many new social factors and democratic revolutions such as the French Revolution, which broached a new ideology and new philosophy of life. Equality was the new slogan of that time. The long suppressed women found this new champion to encourage and there arose the Feminist Movement.

“The feminist argument showed that more than half of humanity was included in this new dimension, demonstrating that earlier version of civil, private and legal rights were based on the premise that women were not considered subjects of rights.”<sup>2</sup>

The historic period preceding the Middle Ages in Europe, there has been a constant voice women struggle fighting to liberate their folk from the male's act of subjugating by cruelty. The partiality that is not fair or equitable against which the feminist protest has been existing

since the inception of civilization. What this movement stands for and from what women are demanding “liberation”?

“Woman’s liberation refers to liberation from the traditional female role, which effectively serves to limit the things women can do and the ways she can behave.”<sup>3</sup>

Feminism has three components. First it is a movement, something produced or fait accompli by the efficient efforts or activities; and the other those efforts are of social and political change, and the last in component but the beginning of feminism is to enable women to carry this responsibility.

“One of the primal and seminal concerns of feminism is to declare that a woman is a being. She is an appendage of man. A woman is not the other; she is not an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of, through trial and error, finding her way to salvation.”<sup>4</sup>

FRENCH FEMINISM the feminist Movement in France is as much about political and social activism as it is in other countries. Like the Women’s Movement in United States, England, Australia and elsewhere, activism is the center of the French Feminist Movement.

“French feminist theory that have had a significant influence on, and are in dialogue with, Anglo- American feminist theory and psychoanalytical theory. While some feminists in France are more concerned with patriarchal social institutions and material and economic conditions, other are more concerned with psychic structure and patriarchal colonization of the imagery and culture. Both of these trends move away from traditional discussions of Nature towards discussions of socially constructed notions of sex, sexuality and gender roles.”<sup>5</sup>

In 20<sup>th</sup> century France, Feminism was explained by the history of contentious act of strong disagreement and antagonizes between supporters of psychoanalytic feminism and believers

of materialistic feminism. In the beginning of 1970's the Women's Movement in France amalgamated, if briefly, into Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes, is called MLF too.

“The name Mouvement de liberation des Femmes was first used by media reporting on a group of women who were arrested for putting a wreath on ....”<sup>6</sup>

Islam Feminism The term Islamic feminism started showing its traces very lately in 1990s through multiple examples:

“Iranian scholars Afsaneh Najmabadeh and Ziba Mir-Hosseini explained the rise and use of the term Islamic feminism in Iran by women writing in the Teheran women's journal *Zanan* that Shahla Sherkat founded in 1992. Saudi Arabian scholar Mai Yamani used the term in her 1996 book *Feminism and Islam*. Turkish scholars Yesim Arat and Feride Acar in their articles, and Nilufer Gole in her book *The Forbidden Modern* (published in Turkish in 1991 and in English in 1996) used the term Islamic feminism in their writings in the 1990s to describe a new feminist paradigm they detected emerging in Turkey. South African activist Shamima Shaikh employed the term Islamic feminism in her speeches and articles in the 1990s as did her sister and brother co-activists.”<sup>7</sup>

The history of Muslim feminism is of course a long and complex one; it is also closely linked to the history Western colonialism in the Muslim world. At the very outset, Islam was the most radical supporter of political and social revolution of the rights of women the civilized world has ever witnessed and then Muslims became destitute of the term feminism and now the worldwide scenario is Muslim countries are considered to be the worst abuses of women's rights.

GERMAN FEMINISM In order to marshaling and organizing and making ready for use Feminist movement in the 1970s in West Germany faced more constructive and legal hurdles

than in the United States. The gender inequality is to be regarded as the covert perpetuation of facism and its victim- perpetrator dialect is, to be sure, an assumption that underlies much of first wave German feminism and women's literature as it emerged after the Second World War.

“German Feminism's theoretical justification had been provided by Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, when they established a correlation between the violence of instrumental reason, the bio- politics of facism, anti- Semitism, and the historical objectification of women as ‘phusis’\*\*. The legacy of this tradition can be discerned in the New German Feminism of the 1970's, no less than in the powerful critical paradigm that Elizabeth Lenk set when alluding to Arendt, she defined women as ‘pariahs’.<sup>8</sup>

#### ITALIAN FEMINISM

Despite the strong influence of French feminism the two strands of feminism that have developed in Italy since 1968 emerged from two major movements: Catholicism and Communism. The strength of this clear, comprehensive account is in its ability to explain the relationship of custom, religion, and party to the rising tide of feminism since 1968. What, then, are the configurations of feminism, just into a few decades after Carla Lonzi first introduced consciousness- raising, Italian style, to a whole generation of women? Women's cultural politics in Italy finds itself in a period of transition. Italian feminists continue to mobilize over issues such as the nuclear disaster, the Gulf war, and more recently, the resurgence of the political Right. Italian women have come a longer way since the early post- Unification struggle for civil and legal rights and for some degree of autonomy.

**BRITISH FEMINISM** This covers the period from the origins of modern feminism in Britain in the 1790s through to the end of the 'first wave' of the women's movement . The society

accepted without verification or proof that women were slavish to men, and their ultimate agency that predetermines the course of events (often personified as a woman) was marriage so they needed least qualification.

“If woman’s soul was as good as man’s, her mind was equally good and made of same reason, to love God.”<sup>9</sup>

This Feminist Movement seems to extend and advances feminist thoughts, the social and political movement for feminist equity and a possibility due to a favorable combination of circumstances of self-ascertain immunity from arbitrary exercise of authority: political independence for woman.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was the era of women, the World became conscious of their rights, the essential qualities or characteristics by which something is recognized, ability to perform and the inherent capacity for coming into being were the subject matter of a conversation

“Feminism in 20<sup>th</sup> century France is defined by a history of controversies and antagonism, especially those between materialist feminists and psychoanalytic feminists”<sup>10</sup>

By the mid of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the woman’s question had become a central issue for Russian Reformers and syndicalist. It would not be my purpose to summaries or review the literature of mainstream Western feminism in detail or to examine its validity in terms of post or pre feminism in the Western context. My primary concern here is with Indian scenario, such references as are made to women’s movement abroad would be ones which seems necessary to place the Indian situation in a larger, global context. This would highlight both our own differences with in the theoretical premises of Western feminism and the similarities which can cross cultural and societal boundaries.

In India the rights of women and that which is contrary to the principles of justice or law to woman began to express strong disapproval by the social reformers firstly and mainly in Bengal and Maharashtra. After independence the Government made certain earnest and

conscientious activity to ratify their promises by giving equal rights to women and by identifying many different kinds of purposefully administrative bodies for a possibility due to a favorable combination of circumstances that has been brought into existence for women. Although these attempts were at best partial and after 57 years of independence seem to have a severe set back for feminism. The post independence India, feminist were more fragmented then ever before.

Manu is a firm and dependable believer in the coordinated and proportionate development of human personality. He assigns a very fairish place to woman in the framework of society.

उत्पादनमपत्यस्य जातस्य परिपालनम् ।  
प्रत्यहं लोकयात्रयाः प्रत्यक्षं स्त्रीनिबन्धनम् ॥ [Manu IX 27]

“utpadanamasya jatasya paripalanam ।

pratayham lokyatrayah pratayksham strinibandha ॥”[ Manu IX 27]

Man cannot make any progress if there be no woman standing by his side ready to cooperate with him in all his activities. He fully realizes the great importance of woman and man and woman are complimentary to each other. They together make a complete whole.

एतावानेव पुरुषो यज्जायात्मा प्रजेति ह ।  
विप्राः प्राहुस्तथा चैतद्यो भर्ता सा स्मृताङ्गना ॥  
[Manu IX 45]

“etavanev purusho yajjyatma prajeti ha ।

harpiv angnatarams as atrahb ohdatiahc ahtsuharp11 " Manu IX 45]

Manu believes that there is a vital structural difference between man and woman. Manu regards a woman as more emotional and rational by nature than man. An analysis of the woman's question must begin with the family because it is here that woman's oppression begins. We must examine how love, sexuality, biological reproduction, domestic labour and individuality are to be understood in a patriarchal society. Since woman does not describe a

class or a caste but sex, the project of understanding her radically distinctive and without equal and specific oppression, which is going on the exploitation and socialization of society to consider man- woman relations.

‘Where women were adored, Gods frequented that place.’”<sup>11</sup>

This was the true saying because during the historical period women were supposed to be on the equal position to men. She was leading a miserable life and had to live behind the ‘purda’. Early marriage frequently encountered. Widows could not remarry and they have to practices self denial as spiritual discipline. Some terrifying specific practices of ‘Sati’, child marriage were prevalent in larger in number, quantity, or importance.

“Hindu culture has erred on the side of excessive subordination of the wife to the husband. This has resulted in the husband sometimes upsurging and exercising authority that reduced him to the level of brute.”<sup>12</sup>

The social position of Hindu and Muslim women were almost same. They had to be financially , emotionally and socially dependent on men folk as the education wasn’t meant for them. Indian women are conditioned to take on the forced submission and allow others to control their lives. Various reform organizations worked in the direction to educate women to enable them to respond strongly towards their rights, they are striving to eradicate all other social ills like; widow’s position, child marriage *pardha* custom, etc.

“The movement for liberation of women received a great stimulus from the rise of the militant national movement in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Article 14 and 15 of the Indian Constitution guaranteed the complete equality of men and women. Although the social reform movement and the constitution of free India, have made a big contribution for the upliftment of Indian women, a number of visible and invisible obstacles and evils still remain in putting principle of equality of sexes into practices. In this direction, a series of progressive legislation have removed many disabilities under which Indian women had to suffer terribly.”<sup>13</sup>

Social and economic conditions of women are changing now but their condition is not yet satisfactory. Women's place has been held prisoner to the house hold and hearth, her pre-defined role was the reproduction and catering for the need of men folk by way of creature comfort. Women must develop the ability to sustain a vision of what we want the world to be.

## NOTES

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Where women's alleged closeness to nature is discussed in relation to colonialism and anti-Semitism.