



FEMINISM

The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities

WHAT IS FEMINISM ?

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 professional opportunities for women that are equal to those of men.

- ▶ *Feminism (of late called 'womanism') is a serious attempt to formulate the issues and find solutions to gender problems. It was started by Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex (1949) and gained momentum in the 1960s.*
- ▶ *The problem of inequality between the sexes was highlighted by Mary Wollstonecraft in her A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792)*

❖ **Wollstonecraft** was an English writer, philosopher and advocate of women's rights and is **regarded as one of the founding feminist philosophers, and feminists.**

❖ In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, proto-feminist Wollstonecraft took inspiration from the revolutionaries of her time who demanded greater rights for mankind, to advocate for an even more socially-maligned group : women. Independent, educated and intellectually esteemed,

Wollstonecraft has been called one of the mothers of femin

theory, posing the idea of women as the natural and intellectual equals of men and deserving of equal treatment and opportunities nearly a hundred years before the term "feminist" even existed.



The Paradigm of 'Waves'

- ❖ In order to classify the shifting movements in the history of feminism, the paradigm of 'waves' came into use. Thus, **'first wave feminism'** is used to signify the feminist movements of the late nineteenth-century **were aimed at acquiring equal rights for women.**
- ❖ **'Second wave feminism'** refers to the feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s that addressed **issues such as women's employment, role in the family and sexuality, along with their political rights.**

❖ **John Stuart Mill, Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Martineau** (1802-76) provided the intellectual **impetus** for this **first wave of feminism**.

❖ These first-wave feminists struggled against inequalities in the access to education, employment and political rights, and unjust marriage laws.

❖ Wollstonecraft challenged the assumptions of Rousseau in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, **advocating equal participation of women in public life and greater empowerment in economic and private spheres**.

❖ During the Second World War, women were compelled to join the workforce but by the end of the war, women were expected to return to the 'homes' – domesticity was emphasised, as was women's role as nurturers and care givers.

❖ The **second wave** was, however, far-reaching with women not only demanding **political and legal** but also control over their **reproductive and sexual roles**. Another paradigm shift was discerned after the 1960s.

Three Categories of Feminism

- ❖ Feminist activities are put under three categories : **Liberal feminism, Marxist or Socialist feminism and Radical feminism.**
- ❖ Liberal feminism argues for **equal rights for women.**
- ❖ The Marxist or Socialist feminist system believes that **gender equality** is related to the capitalist mode of production.
- ❖ Radical feminists identify **patriarchy** to be the root of all evils against women.
- ❖ Liberal feminism starts with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women* (1869), and the Women's Suffrage Movement in both the United Kingdom and the United States.
- ❖ Liberal feminists found discrimination against women in the public sphere - in society's denying them access to education, politics, financial independence and general intellectual life.

- ❖ **Radical feminists, however, do not agree with Liberal feminists.** They say, the structures of oppression are so deeply entrenched in patriarchy that only a complete **overhaul of social, political and personal ideology** can bring about meaningful change in women's condition.
- ❖ **Marxists** and Socialist feminists **insisted** that women's oppression is a **result of capitalism**. To instil gender equality, both patriarchy and capitalism should be dismantled.
- ❖ The **third wave** of feminism and postmodern feminism attack the binaries of the **'masculine' and the 'feminine'**, 'sex' and 'gender', inherent in patriarchal structures. The third-wave feminists assert the importance of difference in speaking, thinking and writing for and about women.
- ❖ **This coincided with the ascendant use of the term 'Gender', instead of 'Sex'**

Feminism is now understood as broad-based.

- ❖ The definition of feminism put forward by Estelle B. Freedman, in *No Turning Back : The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, contains the key elements of feminism as a social, cultural, political and personal movement for freedom and equality :

Feminism is a belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth. Because most societies privilege men as a group, **social movements are necessary to achieve equality between women and men**, with the understanding that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies.

- ❖ The various kinds of feminism – Liberal, Radical, Marxist, Postcolonial – signal the variety of approaches and attitudes towards women's oppression.