

## Phylogeny of Feminism

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### Abstract

*Feminism is a concept that has been present in the world since time immemorial. It has been present in all generations and in all walks of life. Feminism has prevailed in almost every nation, irrespective of class, colour or creed. Women, through the years, have fought against male dominance, with little progress. However the fight against a male dominated society has been continuing for over hundreds of years and is sure to continue until men and women are treated as equals. It is the duty of every woman to continue the fight so that they would be treated equally, without any prejudice. There is no doubt that women will become victorious, come what may. It goes without saying that humans cannot be differentiated according to gender, caste or colour. The aim of this article is to specify the progress of women over the years in their justice for equality.*

**Keywords:** *Feminism, Dominance, Discrimination, Exploitation, Marginalization.*

### INTRODUCTION

The most important social event of the past two centuries and certainly the only social movement that has brought the enduring and progressive transformation of human society on a global scale is Feminism. Feminism is the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of equality of the sexes. It is a range of social and political movements that aims to establish and achieve equality between the sexes. It is the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men and the struggles to achieve the same. "The word feminism can stand for a belief in sexual equality combined with a commitment to transform society." (Humm, 1) Feminism has existed beyond the limits of recorded history. There was a time when women were considered as second hand citizens. Their primary duty was to give birth to children and spend time within the confines of their home, looking after their husband and children. They were denied education. They were not permitted to secure jobs like their male counterparts. Occupation in government and private establishments were considered the monopoly of man. Things have changed but I believe that there is still a lot of room for improvement. 'The unfinished business of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is Women's Equality.' (Clinton, 2013). Women, across the globe, are still abused physically, mentally, and psychologically. Crimes against women have become a part of the daily routine. Countless women are raped and murdered every day. "In the developed world women have been marginalized because their role in industry has decreased due to lack of skills and they have been forced to do only housework, which has no value in a capitalist economy, as it does not fetch money." (Nussbaum, 10) Shakespeare once said, "Frailty, thy name is women". Those words spoken more than five hundred years ago seems so true even today. Women are abused on the streets, at their places of work and wherever opportunity beckons for men.

What's the worst possible thing you can call a woman? Don't hold back, now.

You're probably thinking of words like slut, whore, bitch, cunt (I told you not to hold back!), skank.

Okay, now, what are the worst things you can call a guy? Fag, girl, bitch, pussy. I've even heard the term "mangina."

Notice anything? The worst thing you can call a girl is a girl. The worst thing you can call a guy is a girl. Being a woman is the ultimate insult. Now tell me that's not royally fucked up. (Valenti, 2007)

I firmly believe that things have got to change and change fast. Feminism is not something that can be left to the annals of history. If the current generations do not continue to fight, even the current progress could

be lost. "It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent." (Albright, 1998). Feminism is both an intellectual as well as a political movement, fighting to seek justice for women in all walks of life.

Feminism tries to achieve equality between man and woman. It emphasizes that an individual has the power to alter discrimination against women. It aims for individuals to use their own ability with the help of democratic process in order to help man and woman to become equal in the eyes of law. "I hate to hear you talk to all women as if they were fine ladies instead of rational creatures. None of us want to be in calm waters all our lives." (Austen,60). By organizing women, they will be able to appeal to a larger audience and push for legislation and raise awareness of the issue among the people. By the beginning of the 1960 resurgence in energy took place in the US, leading to the famous march to Washington. The main thrust of feminism states that women should be able to determine her social role, just as a man. It also reiterates that women should have equality with men in educational and professional opportunities. It also suggests that they should have equal rights in property and equal pay for equal work. In order to classify the shifting movements in the history of feminism, the paradigm of 'waves' came into use.

### **THE MOVEMENT BEGINS**

The metaphor "waves" is often used to describe and explain the history of feminism in the United States (Evans, 2003). The first feminist wave goes as far back as World War 1, when members of the National women's party organized a strike outside the White House. They accused the American government of undemocratic practices against the women in the US. Meanwhile Germany and a few other countries granted suffrage, freedom and social rights to women. "I hate to hear you talk about all women as if they were fine ladies instead of rational creatures. None of us want to be in calm waters all our lives." (Austen, 60)

The feministic wave influenced and inspired feminist movements across the globe. Women started to vote for the first time in history and involved themselves in all fields that were ones considered the monopoly of man. Prior to World War 1, women were not permitted to do anything without her man's consent. Men's domination existed in all fields and women were given a stereotypical image. She was merely a housekeeper, a mother and a wife. They were required to remain modest and humble, in spite of the circumstances.

After long periods of struggles and strikes, women in domain started demanding for their rights. Beginning with the right to vote and right to marry, women desired total and absolute freedom in everything. They started criticizing the working conditions for women and clamored for equal pay and salary equal to men. The leaders of the feminist movement worked overtime to influence society and make people aware of the significance in equality between man and woman. In the 1960s, new ways of thinking appeared on the horizon. They wanted to change the accepted ideas about the reality of feminism as not merely a movement for women's rights but an organization for the rights for all humans.

"To throw obstacles in the way of a complete education is like putting out the eyes; to deny the right of property is like cutting off the hands. To refuse political equality is to rob the ostracized of all self-respect, of credit in the market place, of recompense in the world of work, of a voice I choosing those who make and administer the law, a choice in the jury before whom they are tried and in the judge who decides their punishment."(Stanton, 76)

### **THE PERPETUAL CLASH**

The second feminist wave is generally considered as a sequel to the first wave. The advocates of second wave feminism exposed the exploitation and marginalization of women under male hegemony. The prevailing patriarchal order, which took the inhuman subordination of the female sex for granted, was ardently challenged and vehemently opposed. There was a competition known as Miss American pageant in 1968 and 1969 in which women were presented as cattle to emphasize the way she looked,

wore and spoke. They emphasized that it was more important in the way she thought, believed and acted. Several countries across the globe were furious. They tried as best as they could to stop the event. They wanted to prove to the world that women are equal to men and aren't just puppet in the hands of men. Quite a few countries organized strikes and walks against the competition. They made it clear to the whole world that women were merely victims of a patriarchal, commercialized, oppressive and unfair beauty culture. All of a sudden, the very idea of women's rights and equality became a global talking. They made it to the headlines in visual and print media across the world.

The nature of women's oppression is unique: women are oppressed as women, regardless of class or race; some women have access to significant wealth, but that wealth does not signify power; women are to be found everywhere, but own or control no appreciable territory; women live with those who oppress them, sleep with them, have their children we are tangled, hopelessly it seems, in the gut of the machinery and way of life which is ruinous to us. (Dworkin, 123)

The Anti Vietnam War movement, the lesbian and gay movements and the civil rights and black power movements argued on the same idea like the criticism of capitalism and imperialism. The period also witnessed the production of several books related to the Second wave feminism. The subjection of women and the case for feminist revolution stood out, among others. In a way, liberal feminism in USA and Europe brought their ideas from Betty Friedan and her book, "The feminine Mystique" (1963). Writers and feminists believed that women do not have any political or social rights or the power to decide about their own lives. Moreover, they started to ask about the rights of women to be paid even when working in her own house as a kind of citizen income.

The act of building up woman's identity paved the way to show women across the world that they possessed the right to be better and do what she liked with her life. In fact, the very idea of equality and women's identity were welcomed by some but also rejected by a few. The best example of women who wanted to remove the obstacles of racism and inequality were Black Women themselves. They formed organizations like, "Back Women Organized for Action (BWOA) and the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). They wanted to bring gender and racism into national consciousness and stop considering colored women as inappropriate. One such woman, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, said in 1990

The moment we begin to fear the opinions of others and hesitate to tell the truth that is in us, and from motives of policy are silent when we should speak, the divine floods of light and life no longer flow into our souls. Every truth we see is ours to give the world, not to keep for ourselves alone, for in doing so, we cheat humanity out of their rights and check our own development (National American Women Suffrage Association, Speech)

### **ALMOST THERE**

"The third wave feminism recognizes the interlocking nature of identity- that gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and class never function in isolation but always work as interconnected categories of oppression and privileged" (Henry, 32). They considered themselves as the most powerful, the most effective and very clearly, the strongest group, when compared to the previous waves. The new generation feminists believed that the ideal way to make the third wave more effective than the previous ones was to develop and change the ways and methods of looking at the rights for women. They used words like girls instead of women to attract the new generation. They started preparing parties for girls and encouraged young women into fashion and clothes. They believed that women had the capacity to change the world in a positive way. The status of women saw an obvious improvement but it was clear that there was still room for improvement. Riot girl groups became notorious in USA and Europe. The refreshing ideas of feminism were spread using technologies like the Radio, Print Visual media and the Internet.

This wave of feminism was totally convinced by the importance of the development of feminist theories. The new generation feminists criticized the previous waves and feminists. However they showed

their respect and acknowledged for their great efforts. The new wave of feminists wanted to build a modern image of women's rights, not only in the US but in Europe and in the rest of the world. They wanted to accomplish what the previous waves began, by redefining feminism in a totally different way. Estelle. B. Freedman, in *No Turning Back* stated The History of Feminism and the Future of Women contain the key elements of feminism as a social, cultural and personal movement of freedom and equality

Feminism is a belief that although women and men are inherently of equal worth, most societies privilege men as a group. As a result, social movements are necessary to achieve political equality between women and men, with the understanding that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies. (Freedman, 7)

They were determined to prove that the third wave was powerful and effective not only in words but in actions and decisions. It asserts the importance of difference in speaking, thinking, and writing for and about women. The third wave of feminists was not only looking for political and social rights for women but they wanted her to perform in all domains. Another important perception that contributed to the third wave was ideas and suggestions about cyber feminism. It helped women to be an important part in the development of technologies. They wanted women to be an important Cog in the wheel of progress.

Globalization was a related topic in feminism during that period. They tried to bring together the biggest number of participants from different places, races, religions. They wanted to convince people, women in particular, about the importance of helping each other to overcome the segregation against women.

Each of the feminist waves had played their part in feminist theories and politics. Starting way back in 1960s, they paved the way for other waves to help women to get her social, political, cultural and religious rights in different ways.

### **FEMINISM IN MODERN TIMES**

The three waves have very clearly paved the way for entirely transforming women in modern times. Women constitute more than half of the world population. Their role has become as important as that of man. They are an integral part in the balance of power across the world. Today, many important decisions are made by women the world over.

The role of women is extremely important in our society in which man is still playing the dominating role. In the past few years the position of women has improved by leaps and bounds. It is entirely different from the time when their role was confined to the four walls of their home. It is a welcome change from the time when they were denied the right to vote and was denied access to education. Governments across the world have started to realize the importance and the necessity of educating women, not only for her beneficial advantages but for the development of the society, the state and the nation. Parents are encouraged to let their daughters to study in order to increase the level of literacy that ought to prevail in a society that was developing. Women were told that education was as important as voting and working. The governments across the world realized that when a woman was educated the entire family and the society were educated too. The education of women became a priority for nations across the world.

Ideally, what should be said to every child, repeatedly, throughout his or her school life is something like this: 'You are in the process of being indoctrinated. We have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination. We are sorry, but it is the best we can do. What you are being taught here is an amalgam of current prejudice and the choices of this particular culture. The slightest look at history will show how impermanent these must be. You are being taught by people who have been able to accommodate themselves to a regime of thought laid down by their predecessors. It is a

self-perpetuating system. Those of you who are more robust and individual than others will be encouraged to leave and find ways of educating yourself — educating your own judgements. Those that stay must remember, always, and all the time, that they are being moulded and patterned to fit into the narrow and particular needs of this particular society (Lessing,1962).

There is no doubt that change is present in today's world. The first movement for women's equality started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and lasted well into the 20<sup>th</sup>. The second began in the sixties and lasted until the 80s. Modern day feminism began in the 90s and is an ongoing process. There are some who believe that the fight for equality has ended since women have earned the right to vote. 'No country can truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens.'(Michelle Obama). Although we have come a very long way since the 1800s, the need for complete and absolute equality will never be over unless and until man and woman receive the same rights in all spheres. It goes without saying that there is still a very long way to go before man and woman are seen as equals. "Modern development has not has not been that much beneficial to women as shown by many studies and day to day crimes against women are increasing as they are coming out in the public arena. People's attitude towards women should be changed and some peculiar crimes like female feticide, infanticide and child marriages can be dealt with better by creating the right type of consciousness among people."(Andal, 54)

Because I am female, I am expected to aspire to marriage. I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. Now marriage can be a source of joy and love and mutual support but why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don't teach boys the same. We raise girls to see each other as competitors not for jobs or accomplishments, which I think can be a good thing, but for the attention of men. We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way boys are (Adichie, 2013)

#### 1. The wage gap

It is obvious that women still earn 77 cents for every dollar that a man makes. Talents of women are not recognized on the same level as those of men in the same field. There are certain skeptics who argue that women work much lesser than men; they also argue that women work in less dangerous environments when compared to man. Quite sadly, black women earn much lower than their fairer counterparts. There are times when women work in less hazardous conditions when compared to men. It is only because they are not hired to work in such conditions; not because they are not qualified or capable. They have been avoided only because of their gender.

If women work less it is only because they are expected to be homemakers and well as mothers. They spend time with their children because husbands rarely take time off from their work. In fact, women do not pursue education as much as they would like, as their chief priorities remain their children and their home.

#### 2. Violence against women

In 1993, the United Nations declared elimination of violence against women. However one in three women today are victims of physical and sexual violence. This statistics is even higher in countries where women are treated as property of their husbands. Our sexuality is not our own anymore; we are not protected from violence, we are not believed when we report it. There is absolutely no sign in the horizon to even imagine that violence against women will stop.

#### 3. Dress culture

In 2015, young women used the social media to expose the sexist nature of their schools. Several posts went viral, indicating what young girls were wearing and why they were asked to change to something better. Skirts that were deemed too short and tops that were believed to be too distracting were discriminated and shamed. No one realized or had the patience to think that women wore shorts

in the hot summer months so that they would be more comfortable. They had no intentions whatsoever to distract their male counterparts. It is obvious that girls ought to have the freedom to wear what they deem comfortable in the same way that their male peers do. The girls are neither the problem nor the issue. The problem is simply the sexualizing the body of a young woman.

#### 4. Advertisements

Main stream visual media perpetually bombards us with images of products. More often than not, we see thin, fair women advertizing the products. The viewers are made to believe that the ideal women are thin, fair and curvy. Women are used in advertisements chiefly to sell the products through their sensuous looks. Women have been used in advertisements from time immemorial and it goes without saying that such products sell much more than those advertized by their male peers.

### CONCLUSION

In spite of the untiring efforts of several generations of women, equality of the sexes is still a mirage. It is obvious that women are still under-represented in positions of power, undervalued and discriminated in all walks of life. It is clear that women are still considered as a weaker sex, humiliated, raped and murdered every day. It is an open fact that women are even today under-paid when compared to their male counterparts. It is now commonplace that in spite of continues efforts by several organizations through the years, women are still looked upon as incapable, inefficient when compared to man. There is no doubt that the fight for equality will have to continue until life endures. To the casual onlooker, things have changed and changed dramatically. However, the difference remains when one peers deeper into the prevailing situation. We can only hope that circumstances will change with the passage of time. The fight for equality will have to continue, unabated. "Feminism is about justice, which cannot be achieved just by ending sexism or racism, but rather must be about ending all forms of domination."(Hooks, 2000)

The only difference between men and women is one of the physical functions one begets, the other bears children. Apart from that, they both can and should perform the same functions and should receive the same education to enable them to do so; for in this way society will get the best value for both. (Selden, 534)

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