CHAPTER-I

FEMINISM: NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT
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Feminism is defined by Webster’s Dictionary as ‘the Policy, practice or advocacy of political, economic, and social equality for women’ (1987 ed., p.346). The Oxford English Dictionary, in its seventh edition, defines Feminism, as ‘the issue of equality for women’. In the 1960s feminism was supposed as the belief that women and men have equal rights and opportunities. It became the subject of intense debate when women’s liberty movement encouraged women to reject their traditional supporting role and to demand equal status and equal rights with men. The second wave of feminism began in the 1960s. Women like Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem became associated with fight to get equal rights and opportunities for women under the law. An important issue was the Equal Right Amendment which was interested to change the constitution. Although the E.R.A. was not passed, there was progress in other areas. (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, Seventh Ed.)
Practically feminism may be defined as support of equal opportunity for jobs and education for women. The feminist movement had its beginning in the eighteenth century when, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, women lost their traditional place in Western Society and became economically dependent on men. Since then it has tried to redress the balance between activities open to men and those open to women whereas possibilities for education were limited in the nineteenth century, now, in the twenty-first century, women in the West are in a position to be as well educated as men. They can vote and they have achieved equal rights in terms of job opportunities.

Feminist ideas and social movements emerged in Europe, Great Britain and the United States in an international context that promoted the migration of people and ideas across national boundaries. Between the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft’s, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” (1792) and John Stuart Mill’s “The Subjection of Women” (1869) ideas, social movements and individual feminists migrated across land and sea, generating a powerful new context for the advancement of women’s rights. In this era the terms women’s rights and women’s emancipation were
widely used to refer to what we today would call feminism. Although the term feminist did not appear until the late nineteenth century in France and somewhat later in Great Britain, the U.S. and other countries, it can be used here to describe earlier women's rights activists. These early feminists included both women and men who advocated greater equality for women in public institutions, such as the Church and government, and in the family and household, and the equality of the sexes more generally. Some of the more radical feminists also insisted on a woman's right to exercise control over her body, including the right to remain single, to develop sexual relations and to bear children outside of marriage. Almost all feminists in this period viewed woman's rights to higher education as one of their most important demands. Feminist ideas were fueled by major social, intellectual, political, economic and cultural transformations in Europe and North America. Socially, the expansion of literacy created greater and more equal access to knowledge among middle-class and working class people. Intellectual changes known as the Enlightenment often challenged the authority of religion and worked independently of state-established churches,
creating opportunities for feminists to do the same. Politically, the 1688 Glorious Revolution in England set the stage for more far-reaching reforms in the following centuries. Revolutionary movements in the United States (1770s) and France (1790s), dominated by middle-class, overthrow monarchical orders that claimed to rule by divine right. In Europe and Great Britain socialists movement vigorously critiqued the new industrial order of the 1830s and 40s, and joined with middle-class and working class movements in the revolutions of 1848 to extend popular rule. Advocates of women’s emancipation joined these movements and defended women’s rights to participate in public life. In Germany the Revolution of 1848 -1849 produced similar uprising on behalf of expanded civil, political and economic rights, and there too women’s voices emerged to urge women to claim a place in public life.

The term Feminism was not coined until the 1890s and was not used widely until after the First World War. This does not mean that feminism did not exist before 1890s. Indeed feminist ideas can be traced back to the seventeenth century though most historians have argued that the publication of 'A Vindication of
the Rights of Woman' by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792 marked the birth of feminism in Britain. She argued that women should have the same rights as men. Although her writings never gained a popular following; they continued to be central to all the criticism of male domination made in the nineteenth century.

"Feminism is concerned with understanding gendered identity. Similarly, feminism is also concerned with analyzing women's lives and the patriarchal system which shapes those lives. For example in the 1960s and 1970s 'consciousness raising' was an important part of feminism. This was a process through which women met in groups to articulate their own experiences. Feminism, at a very general level, then, is concerned with similar set of problems to psychoanalysis." (Tidd, p. 60)

Feminism (of late called "Womanism") is a serious attempt to formulate the issues and find solutions to gender problems. It was started by Simon de Beauvoir in "The Second Sex" (1949) and gained momentum in the 1960s. She says, Legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and Scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. She points out that women
are not a minority like the blacks and they are not a product of history like the proletariat. Even earlier the problem of inequality between the sexes was highlighted by Mary Wollstonecraft in her "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792) and by Olive Scheiner in 'Women and Labour' (1911) Virginia Woolf is another important writer who in her ‘A Room of One’s Own’ (1929) examined the problems women face. She advocated a balance between a ‘male’ self-realization and female self-annihilation. She rejected the notion of a separate feminist consciousness and hoped to achieve a femininity of the unconsciousness so that there is no conflict between male and female sexuality, ‘an escape from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness’. In an influential essay ‘Professions for Women’ she considered the problems of women writers, particularly the writers of her period. Women writers according to her were imprisoned in the ‘Ideology of womanhood’, the ideal of the ‘Angel in the house’. In addition the taboo about women talking about their passions prevented them from telling the truth about their experiences as a body. These obstacles, she felt, could be removed only when women achieve social and economic equality with men. Virginia Woolf, though not a feminist
in the modern sense is a noted thinker of her period in the area what is now called 'gynocriticism'. (Krishnaswami, Varghese eds., p. 74-75)

There were also some men writers like John Stuart Mill (The Subjection of Women 1869) and Fredrich Engel’s (The Origin of the Family 1884) who wrote about the problem of women’s inequality in society. But there was no sustained or systematic effort towards a women’s movement. Kate Millet’s “Sexual Politics” (1970) makes a distinction between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, sex is determined biologically whereas gender is culturally/socially/psychologically constructed through sex-role stereotyping and historical conditioning. Millet argues that women as much as men are responsible in perpetuating the sex-role images, she analyses the repressive role of the male and the submissive role of the female. (Ibid, p. 76)

More recently, feminism has become increasingly concerned with the issue of psychological and social conditioning and the ways in which these vary for men and for women. From early childhood says Kate Millet, (Qtd. from, Feminism and Buddhism, online) “a contemporary feminist, men and women
are trained to accept a system which divides society into male and female spheres with appropriate roles for each, and which allocates public power exclusively to the male sphere. Feminists try to redress this balance and encourage women to develop qualities which in our society are labeled masculine such as initiative, aggressiveness, and responsibility and so on. Feminists also explore the areas in which women are different from men and try to help women to gain confidence in these areas and in their ways of expression." (Feminism and Buddhism, online)

Feminism, then could be described as a movement that demands or insists that women should have access to all the facilities they require for their development as human beings, it asserts that they should not be confirmed or limited to any particular range of facilities or activities, and it encourages them to take more initiative, be more independent, and to function as individuals in their own right, rather than being mere extensions or supporters to the men in their lives. This kind of social awareness boosted women to demand their equality with men in all fields of life particularly in social and political matters. In short it can be called the new movement raised for the emancipation of
women. Women activists started great movement to get the right to vote and finally they succeeded. In 1869 the Municipal Franchise was achieved, in 1870 women were allowed to vote and since then they could get different positions in different fields. In the same year a Suffrage Bill was introduced.

This movement for the emancipation of women exposed new 'channels' of education and profession to women. New colleges for women were started at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Women joined the professions like nursing and teaching, in a large number. Their physical charm and beauty as well as their attractiveness helped them to grab jobs in different fields. They could also join the government jobs. Soon these women became able to join the jobs like teachers, doctors, engineers, and lawyers and they also entered into the parliament. Owing to their hard work and continuous struggle with their life and society women could gain respect in the society and in all orbits of life. Even in the matter of love and sex women generated free thinking and strove for equality with men in marriage. Women in the Victorian age resisted the conventional roles imposed on them by the patriarchal society i.e. they disliked to be
within the four walls of house all their life. In short they unveiled the blushing modesty and pride of the Victorian maidenhood from their faces. These women stopped pursuance of the orthodox ways of life. This led to a frank depiction of love and sex in the novels of that time. Naturally among the Victorians it created a great bustle and some of them started to raise their voice against it while others thought that it was against the orthodox ways of life. Matthew Arnold, for instance was the writer who was much impressed by this theory as it depicted a realistic picture of life. Similarly, Oscar Wilde was a strong admirer of this new movement of frankness.

"The Feminist movement is not a unique product of the modern age. Its historical precedents reach back into antiquity. In the 'Republic', Plato advocated the abolition of the family and social roles determined by sex. In literature, the ancient Greek Classical Comedy, 'Lysistrata' by Aristophanes preached feminist ideas. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote "A Vindication of Rights of Woman" (1792) which is one of the earliest and famous feminist works. The Victorian economists and philosopher John Stuart Mill wrote "The Subjection of Women " in 1869 and the German socialist, Friedrich Engel in his essay 'The Origin of the Family',
'Property and State (1884)', proclaimed marriage as a 'dreary mutation of slavery', urged its abolition and suggested public responsibility for the rearing of children. In America Feminism was the outgrowth of the movement for the abolition of slavery and the Temperance movement for the legal banning of liquor. Women who joined this organization soon discovered that to make their cause effective, they required political power. The historical milestone of the Feminist movement was the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 which in its manifesto, demanded women's rights to her complete control over her property and the right to divorce her husband, guardianship of the children and an end to sexual discrimination in employment along with the right to receive equal pay with men for the same work and the most important female franchise. As the campaign for the women's suffrage grew, the more conservative Feminists limited their cause to the single issue of suffrage. In 1920 with the passage of the 19th amendment to the American constitution giving women the right to vote, the majority of women activists as well as the public assumed that with female franchise women's rights had been fully obtained. On December 14, 1961, President John F.Kennedy signed
an Executive order establishing the President’s Commission on the status of women. Its mandate was to examine and recommend remedies to combat the prejudices and obsolete customs and morals which act as obstacles to the complete realization of women’s rights. College and University girls began to participate in these political activities. In contrast to the women who assembled at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 and merely protested against the ill-treatment and abuse of women by drunken husbands and achievement of their legitimate rights in marriage, control of property and earnings and equal pay with men for the same work, the demands of the modern successors are far more radical.” (History of Feminism, online)

Feminism ushered in enormous changes for women in the workforce. In the past there was not equal pay for women and men. Men would be paid more than women for doing the same job. In the fields where women have predominant shares, immediately men would be offered senior positions in which they supervised and managed female workers. What was more shocking, women had to leave the public service if they got married. More than this, education for girls and women was not
highly regarded and so the pathways to employment were severely limited. This has all changed during these years. These profound changes are due to feminist action.

Feminism brought the issue of violence against women into the light, created safe places for women to turn and demanded changes in the law. Not only has feminism brought changes to the lives of women and families but it has also contributed to the transformation of the work of therapists. It seems that everyone has his own perception about the definition of Feminism. "The 1970s and early 1980s witnessed an upsurge of feminist activism against male domination and oppression. This was accompanied by theorizing on patriarchy in which the broad outlines of the most widely recognized theoretical perspectives -liberal, radical and Marxist/socialist feminisms---could be discerned. Politically feminists in the West (white) saw the value of organizing separately from men in consciousness raising groups with so-called leaderless structures. Liberal Feminism had an advantage: its ideological position gave it the greatest level of coherence with liberal modernization and development theory and practice albeit with a tension around male bias. For functionalist scholars the
emergence of the nuclear family model under Western industrialization and modernization, with its accompanying sexual division of labour at home, was deemed rational and advantageous to the reproduction of the family unit. Hence, the normative conventions within communities of people of European descent, whereby women were expected to specialize in domestic labour and men in wage labour were upheld. However, Arthur Lewis (1955) asserted that modernization would deliver even greater benefits to women than men, permitting freedom from household drudgery and seclusion in the household. Women would be free to exercise her talents and join the human race.” (Saunders, p.2)

It seems to us that, when someone is asked the question what feminism is, it is most likely that the reply will consist of mixture of ‘liberal feminist’ ‘socialist Feminist’ and radical feminist ideas. Liberal Feminism is based on the desire for equal rights with men, particularly in public spheres of life. Many people when asked what Feminism is, give an answer along the lines of it being a political ideology directed towards ensuring equality for women. It is about challenging the power relations between men and
women that result in the systematic disadvantaging of women. Liberal feminist thinking is grounded on the notions of individual rights, freedom and autonomy and an assumption of the basic sameness of men and women.

**Radical feminism** on the other hand rejects the idea that women and men are primarily the same, rejects the idea of assimilation into a man’s world, and instead opts for the celebrating of women’s difference. Radical feminism is seen as a movement of women taking action to create new possibilities and places for women in society to celebrate women’s ways of being and what women have to contribute. Within radical feminism there is a particular valuing of women’s difference that is not possible within Liberal Feminism, and a focus is on a sense of shared ‘sisterhood’. The emphasis is on the ways in which women are oppressed *as women*, and, this takes precedence over their oppression as members of any other group. Though this has certainly been challenged by more recent radical feminist and feminist of colour, the belief was common among white radical feminist of the 1960s and 70s that all women regardless of their
race, culture ethnicity, age or class, held more in common with each other than they did with any man.

**Socialist Feminism / Marxist Feminism** was the third key grouping of feminism that could be identified in the 1960s and 1970s (although like liberal feminism it has a long history). Within socialist and Marxist feminism, the struggle against sexual oppression was seen as part of a broader struggle to transform society and communities. Issues of class, worker’s rights and need to dramatically alter the ways of living within Western Societies were placed on the agenda alongside the need to address gender-based oppression.

“Today feminists are implacably opposed to any social roles being determined by sex. Feminists assert the absolute and unqualified equality of men and women, notwithstanding anatomical differences. They deny that there is any inherent biological distinction between men and women on the basis of sex which determines that the wife should be the housewife and mother and the husband the breadwinner and authoritarian head of the family. They believe that women should take just as active role in sexual intercourse as men and not to be passive. They
demand the abolition of institutional marriage, home and family, assert complete sexual freedom and that the upbringing should be a public responsibility. They insist that all women should be given the right to complete control over their reproductive lives. They are demanding that all restrictions must be lifted from laws governing contraception so that devices can be publicly advertised and available over the druggist counter to any women regardless of her age and marital status and purchasable without a doctor’s prescription. All laws restricting abortion should be removed and that women have a legal right to abortion at any stage of pregnancy. Abortions should not only be available at demand but should be supplied free by the state to any woman who wants one so that the poor can take full advantage of facility.” (His. of feminism, online, p. 7)

* Simon de Beauvoir, French feminist, life long partner of Jean-Paul Sartre, in her *The Second Sex* carefully distinguishes between sex and gender, and sees an interaction between social and natural functions. We may get the vivid and clear picture of feminism in the following lines from Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) ——
"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society, it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine". (Beauvoir Simon De, p.267). The above famous phrase that opens the second volume of *The Second Sex* means that there is no pre-established female nature or essence. It also means that by and large the patriarchal societies traditionally value women's reproductive capacity more than her intellectual development or autonomy.

De Beauvoir believed that women's identities were defined by the male, and were named and judged in comparison to men. Men had defined the world. She believed that a male-defined society was inhabiting the ability of women to transcend their identities. De Beauvoir blames the women themselves for this situation. The philosophy of existentialism assigned responsibility for one's own destiny to oneself. Therefore, in formulating her theory, De Beauvoir blamed women for allowing the Second Sex status to be forced upon them. De Beauvoir believed that a lack of formal organization contributed to the predicament of women found themselves in. Women needed to rise up against their male oppressors through independence. De Beauvoir viewed departure
from the role of wife and mother and the establishment of economic and professional independence as the key to women's equality with men.

"A common misreading of *The Second Sex* is that she does not recognize sexual difference and thinks that women should become like men in their quest for freedom. In fact Beauvoir recognizes sexual differences, but does not accept that the valuing of these differences between women and men should justify the oppression of women and their traditional status as second-class citizen in patriarchal society. According to Beauvoir society is organized in such a way as to favour male projects and aspirations. Beauvoir argues that women have been assimilated to their body and sexed identity and traditionally confined to the roles of wife and mother. Marriage and motherhood have consequently been artificially promoted as the most important roles for women in society and this has been inscribed in laws custom, beliefs and culture of society. Beauvoir argues that the way forward for women is to pursue economic independence through independent work and through a socialist organization of
society, which would favour women's emancipation and autonomy'. (Tidd, p.52)

The Second Sex focuses on how femininity has been conceptualized and how women 'become' relative beings in a patriarchal society. Its main argument is that, throughout history woman has been constructed as man's 'other' and denied access to an autonomous existence. Men have positioned themselves as uniquely responsible for all aspects of public life and correspondingly women have been confined to a marginalized position in society according to which they are made to support male interest. Beauvoir argues that man has assumed the position of universal subject and woman is positioned as relative 'other' or object of male consciousness. Society is consequently structured to perpetuate patriarchal ideology and women are maintained in an inferior position. This persistence of patriarchal ideology throughout history has enabled men to assume that they have a right to maintain women in a subordinate state and women have internalized and adapted to this oppressed state. (Ibid, p. 51)

Most feminists believe that women are quicker than men in the field of judgment and mathematics. The only difference
between men and women is one of physical function that is, one begets, and 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 from both.

Feminism is the belief that a person’s character cannot be judged on their gender, that we all deserve a right to consideration regardless of physical appearance, that heresy from orthodox is only genius, that kindness and reverence are given and deserved by all, that the most sincere form of affection is not limited to one gender, as intellectual thoughts and meaning and purpose and emotion are not superfluous based on one’s sex organ. Feminism is the belief that the love between two people is less real because one tries to dominate the other because of gender. It is the call of the angels of truth for fairness and equality, compassion and knowledge – that none should be exempted from love, beyond the border of empathy held under the bondage of cruelty bound to in a ‘tight fist’, the belief that nobody should be subjected mercilessly to the brutality offered by human tyrants because of their sex – this belief is Feminism. And like all other creeds that are founded on
humaneness and passion for life it will continue to exist, and it will manifest itself wherever there is an open mind, wherever there is an open heart, wherever there exists a Freethinker willing to destroy the cycle of ill thought tradition. Feminism is the belief that woman deserves to be treated equally as men, their gender not influencing how we regard them. This is Feminism, and it is what every kind and gentle hearted soul believes.

But it is more than just that. It is the soft reflection of one lover of another, the kind, unkempt spirituality of reverence for one another. And still, more than that, it is the rising sun of vitality and rebirth. It is more than just Feminism, but Equalism. Just as a woman deserves the rights enjoyed by a man, a man ought to enjoy the same rights as any woman. It is not about destroying the differences between a man and a woman, but appreciating the quality of the diversity of the genders. Creating equality between the sexes is not about destroying the attributes of one sex or another that make them unique, but it is about upholding their abilities to do what they do as individuals, and understanding the genders sexually, because that is really the only difference. It is a radically absurd statement to claim that no
woman can do what a man can do, and the same applies to the claim that no man can do what a woman can do.

'A sexiest will find himself confused if he asks for the best, the kindest and the most intelligent, those full of the most ambition and duty ....a sexiest will find himself confused when asking humanity this, and finding that men and women both step forward. A Racist will also be confused when he finds that one race is not wholly (or even marginally) responsible for good people, kind fathers, affectionate mothers, and undying friends.

The question really is: Is there anything about a woman that makes her particularly inferior, less noble, than a man? As sure as the answer can be that good and bad women are not good or bad because they are women. Similarly there are many great men, as well as men of poor character but their gender is not the root of their greatness or notoriety. It is in their adherence to humanness and intellectual pursuits, their sneaking romantic fascination with life and the ideal of a better world, it is the measure of virtue over vice that we find any one person worthy of our adoration, and their gender is only as relevant as their eye, colour, their hair colour, their height, their weight, their race, their species. Just as
one's eye colour is irrespective of their abilities as a person, one's gender is not an innate factor in determining it they are productive, compassionate individuals.' (Punkerslut, online p.2-3)

'The Subjection of Women' by J.S.Mill that appeared in 1869 proved a landmark in the history of feminism as it became the focal point of discussion of the feminist thoughts in the mid nineteenth century. Mill supported women's equal rights in work, education, property and suffrage. By emphasizing the fundamental equality between men and women, he argued that their seemingly different abilities are the result of the enormous differences in their upbringings and education. The book was received with tremendous enthusiasm as the part of the feminist. John Stuart Mill's book quickly became a standard reference point for late-nineteenth century feminists in the United States and Europe. In 1870, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton spoke "On Marriage and Divorce" at a convention that commemorated the twentieth anniversary of first National Woman's Rights convention of Worcester, Massachusetts, she praised Mill's emphasis on the importance of equality in marriage. Mill has focused on the patriarchal attitude in the following lines,
“Will man yield what he conceives to be his legitimate authority over their subjects, or slave-holders over their slaves?” No, no, John Stuart Mill says the generality of the male sex cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal at the fireside, and here is the secret of the opposition to woman’s equality in the state and the church, men are not ready to recognize it in the home.” (Mill, p. 46) The Feminist belonged to no one party but rather, to the causes of women, called then “the woman’s question”. Oddly, most historians argue that the most influential of the feminist was a man.....John Stuart Mill who wrote *The Subjection of Women* in 1869. He strongly argued for women’s rights to vote and participate publicly. The Act of 1832 had attempted to make the voting right an exclusively male right. John Stuart Mill pointed out; women were inculcated to believe “that their ideal of character is the very opposite of that of men, not self-will, and government by self control, but submission and yielding to the control of others.” Mill developed arguments partly derived from the pioneering eighteenth century feminist; Mary Wollstonecraft, who held that equality for women, must be regarded as an integral part of modern liberal society.

Though the women were oppressed, it still witnessed the first serious, concerted effort for women’s rights. And while
women became more assertive men had two reactions, they became either more repressive or more permissive. Many women worked in volunteer jobs, a kind of borderline between home and workplace. They also played a crucial role in antislavery movement. Many were also writers: in fact, during the century, more novels were published by women than by men in England in the nineteenth century. But it was economic necessity rather than equality that drove women to demand the right to work. Chivalry and tradition had convinced people that the man should work for the woman, but all that old dogma was dying. Women rebelled, not because they wanted the work, but because they wanted the power, that it represented. By the end of the nineteenth century because of economic and technological factors there was a rapid rise in opportunities. Women worked as accountants, secretaries, postal workers, photographers, typists, clerks, waitresses and maids. By 1901, twelve universities granted degrees to the women. The 1857 Divorce Act removed divorce from the regulation of the church and made it a civil action, and half the divorce actions of the working classes came from women. This Act also made it possible for women to own property. In short
early feminist believed, in fact, that "liberation" should never be purchased at the cost of womanly virtues.

First and foremost among the British and European advocates of greater equality for women was Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) who, in a time when most people believed women were intellectually inferior to men argued that the inequalities that marked women’s lives could be erased by equal access to education. Her 1792 book, ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Woman’ became the cornerstone upon which many subsequent feminist writers constructed arguments that advocated the equality of sexes. Arguing by analogy of the "Rights of Man" expressed in the American and French Revolution, Wollstonecraft insisted that women were born equal to men. Their inequality was a social construction she insisted, which could be reversed by providing girls with education and training equal to men. Wollstonecraft’s views drew on her own experience as a daughter and a teacher. Her father wasted his inheritance in drink and ill-fated schemes, growing more abusive as he aged. Mary left home at nineteen to become the paid compassion of a wealthy widow in Bath, where she learned to disdain the emptiness of upper class women’s lives.
Her life changed in 1784 when she founded a school for girls in
Newington Green, North London. There she lived among and was
strongly influenced by Dissenting intellectuals especially Richard
Price, who supported the principles of the then-in-progress
French Revolution.

"When an early feminist writer like Mary Wollstonecraft
examined the society in which she lived, or society in which liberal
individualism was becoming the dominant ideological formation
of (male) personhood and social organization what she uncovered
was the systematic inequality of women in all areas of life, the
family, work, culture, economics, the law, education as well as the
inconsistency of the ideological positions that held this inequality
in place. Wollstonecraft's feminism is historically determined,
depending on the ideological positions she deplores. It is also class
determined addressed not to ladies, but to middle class women,
with some education but who did not suffer the debilitating effects
of the excessive femininity of dependence invalidism, frailty and
false modesty that she suggests is cultivated by the aristocracy of
the late eighteenth century." (Robbins, p. 28)
Women’s inequality, says Wollstonecraft, is socially constructed to shore up the position of the privileged liberal-individualist male. Either, she says, ‘Nature has made a great difference between man and man, the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial, furthermore she argues that ‘women in particular’ are rendered weak and wretched, by a variety of concurring causes amongst which are inadequate parenting, bad education, the lack of property rights, and exclusion from the political sphere, as well as the negative effects of literary-cultural life: the ideology of romantic love which makes women mere creatures of sentiment. (Wollstonecraft p.79)

Wollstonecraft suggests that while women are denied other forms of power (political, educational, and legal), they will make use of whatever power is left to them, in particular their sexual power to attract men because they are taught and have learned their lessons well, that they can only draw power from sexual relationship rather than having any autonomous potency of their own. Neither ‘The Vindication nor Wollstonecraft’s fiction demand a dismantling of contemporary social structures. Instead ‘The
Vindication’ is basically a plea for bourgeois woman’s equality with bourgeois man in the area of educational, legal and political system. It is also an attack on an ideal of femininity that constructs female inequality as ‘natural’. (Robbins, p. 27)

In her book ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Woman’, Mary Wollstonecraft attacked the educational restrictions that kept women in a “state of ignorance and dependent on men.” Feminist in the 1880s agreed with Wollstonecraft that girls should have the same educational opportunities as boys. However this was very difficult as there were few schools in the country that provided a good academic education for girls. Mary Wollstonecraft’s book, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” published in 1792 came in direct parallel to Tomas Paine’s ‘The Rights of Man’ which advocated the rights of men while almost excluding the question of the rights of women. Her book was a sharp reaction against J.J.Rousseau’s Emile that justified the different standards, education and behaviour for boys and girls in accordance with their different sets of role as ascribed by the society. “Wollstonecraft refutes Rousseau’s view that women are made to please men and argues that woman is an independent being both
capable of and entitled to rational education like men. Her strong advice to her fellow beings is reflected in the following speech:

(Quoted from Manjit Kaur)

“Let us endeavour to strengthen our minds by reflection till our heads become a balance for our hearts, let us not continue all the thoughts to the better occurrences of the day, or our knowledge to an acquaintance with our lovers’ or husbands’ hearts, but let the practice of every duty be subordinate to the grand one of improving our minds, and preparing our affections for a more exalted state.” (Kaur, p.1)

Mary Wollstonecraft has been called the ‘first feminist’ or ‘mother of feminism’. Her book ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Woman’ is a classic of feminist thought. She is usually considered a liberal feminist because her approach is primarily concerned with the individual woman and about rights. She could be considered as a different feminist in her honouring of women’s natural talents and her insistence that women not be measured by men’s standards. Her work has a few glimmers of some modern sexuality and gender analysis in her consideration of the role of sexual feelings in the relationships between men and women. The Feminist Sensibility can be studied from the following passages of Mary Wollstonecraft’s writing:
'A wild wish has just flown from my heart to my head, and I will not stifle it though it may excite a horse laugh. I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society, unless where love animates the behaviour. For this distinction is, I am firmly persuaded, the foundation of the weakness of character ascribed to woman, is the cause why the understanding is neglected, whilst accomplishments are acquired with sedulous care: and the same cause accounts for their preferring the graceful before the heroic virtues.' (Wollstonecraft, p. 57)

Wollstonecraft has beautifully refuted the issue of gender discrimination in the following quotation-

"After surveying the history of woman I cannot help, agreeing with the severest satirist, considering the sex as the weakest as well as the most oppressed half of the species. What does history disclose but marks of inferiority, and how few women have emancipated themselves from the galling yoke of sovereign man? -So few, that the exceptions remind me of an ingenious conjecture respecting Newton: that he was probably a being of a superior order, accidentally caged in a human body. Following the train of thinking it can be imagined that the few extraordinary women who have rushed in eccentric directions out of the orbit prescribed to their sex, were male spirits confined by mistake in female frames. But if it be not philosophical to think of sex when the soul is mentioned, the inferiority must depend on the organs, or the heavenly fire, which is to ferment the clay, is not given in equal portions." (Ibid p.34)
In the conservative political climate that followed the French Revolution in England, Europe and North America after 1800, Wollstonecraft's reputation suffered from her unorthodox personal life. Still her 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman' remained one of the most influential feminist texts in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The Bronte sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne Bronte, not only contributed much to the growth of the novel, but also to the position of women at this time. They did much to alter the way in which women were viewed demonstrating new social, psychological and emotional possibilities for women. Emily Bronte's novel 'Wuthering Heights' was published in 1847. The Bronte sisters opened up new possibilities for the form of the English novel; at the same time they provided a basis for which psychological exploration became a key component in the development of the genre of the novel. They also offered new possibilities for the portrayal of women in fiction. In a speech that is often quoted, Catherine describes to Nelly the great difference between the two kinds of love which she cherishes in
her heart. Her love for Edgar, she says, is like the foliage in the woods, she says:

"If all else perished and he remained I should still continue to be and if all else remained and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods."

"Time will change it,................ Nelly, I am Heathcliffe he's always, always in my mind-not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself but as my own being -so don't talk of our separation again" (Bronte Ch. IX, p.170)

Betty Freidan, in "The Feminine Mystique" (1963)' set women on paths to careers and equality, avoiding motherhood - only to be reproached later by disillusioned followers who pointed out that, unlike them, she already had a husband and children when she urged this life pattern. But her retractions in 'The Second Stage' (1981) were ignored, as equality feminists continued to implement her earlier prescriptions. She was obviously influenced by De' Beauvoir, but she definitely had her own take on matters. Friedan originally set out to prove that a college education did indeed prepare women for the role of wife and mother. Through her research however, she concluded that women were dissatisfied
and unfulfilled with their roles as wives and mothers. She believed that women faced "trapped housewife" syndrome. Women felt trapped because society expected them to be happy and fulfilled in their roles, but they did not feel so. Women were trying to conform to an ideal which merely left them frustrated and unfulfilled. This was the feminine mystique.

Betty Friedan together with Simon de Beauvoir blamed women's frustration and purposelessness on society's stereotyped expectation of the role of the women. According to these early feminists, society had wrongly named and defined women. Women's role, not women was responsible for their unhappiness. Friedan believed that this situation could be overcome through participation in spheres of influence equal with men. Friedan maintained that educators at every college, university, junior college and community college should see to it that women make a lifetime commitment to a field of thought and to a work of serious importance to society. According to Friedan; each woman would need to name herself by developing vision for her own future. What is found to be interesting is that while De Beauvoir found that the women themselves were a big part of the problem i.e. they
needed to take responsibility for their situation, Freidan believed that it was the "role" that was to blame. She appears to have believed that women were victims of circumstance living in a male defined world. In either case, both saw, at the very heart of the matter, a patriarchal society was to blame.

'The symbolic importance of the vote to generations of feminists and subsequent historians has meant that women's broader political culture and history has been obscured. The possession of the vote qualified women finally to enter the purely masculine and public world of national politics from which they had so long been excluded. Women's interest in securing access to political rights was not limited to the campaign for parliamentary suffrage. Feminist agitated on a range of issue that affected public policy from education through official attitudes to prostitution. There were advanced liberal thinkers of whom the greatest was John Stuart Mill. "Mill argued that self government was more important than efficient government, that the franchise should be extended, that all special privilege should be abolished, that women should enjoy equal rights with men, and that the state should intervene in economic life to protest and to control even to
the point of interference with the rights of property. Conditions gradually improved at the front during the spring of 1855. Florence Nightingale, a woman of great strength of character organized a good base hospital staffed with well-trained nurses.” (Holt, p. 674-680)

Perhaps the most influential American critic of the second wave of feminism is Elaine Showalter, and especially her 'A Literature of Their Own' (1977). Showalter at once outlines a literary history of women writers, produces a history which shows the configuration of their material, psychological and ideological determinants, and promotes both a feminist critique and a 'gynocritics'. What the book does is to examine British women novelists since the Brontes from the point of view of women's experience. Showalter takes the view that, while there is no fixed or innate female sexuality or female imagination, there is nevertheless a profound difference between women's writing and men's, and that a whole tradition of writing has been neglected by male critics.

By the 1890s, the New Woman began to emerge with a distinct identity. Reforms in law and in educational and
professional institutions had opened up a wider range of opportunities than had ever previously been available and frank discussion of sexual questions, together with rational investigations of woman's place in contemporary society, had done much. As Gail Marshall writes, 'Studies of sexual inversion, such as the first volume of Havelock Ellis's "Studies in the Psychology of Sex (1897), gave scientific credibility to fears of the merging of sexual characteristics, the specter of androgyny was one of the factors which enabled a link in the public's mind between the twin fears of the decadent and the 'new women'. This phrase is a highly flexible one, used by women's supporters and detractors alike, but necessarily carrying implicit within it a questioning of traditional female roles. To think opponents, the new women were of doubtful gender, described by Eliza Lynn Linton, keen as ever to assert her own distance from such anarchic figures, as rebellious 'Maenads' 'contemptuous of men, unloving to children', or as lesbians. She also characterizes women's 'clamour for political rights' as 'their confession of sexual enmity', seeing in such actions 'a curious inversion of sex'. But, to some of the new women themselves, their actions exemplified the assertion
of a form of feminine morality and purity at odds with, and otherwise unavailable within, contemporary society. The novelist and essayist Sarah Grand wrote that women were concerned to 'raise the race a step higher in the scale of being' with Mona Caird asserting that this would be achieved through a purity which 'is becoming one of the regenerative and moving forces of the century.' (Marshall, p.118)

The 'new woman' term is primarily of use in signaling an amalgam of the variety of movements for the reform of women's situation. This age could provide ample opportunities of jobs to middleclass women. The first woman sat on the London country council in 1888. However despite the increase in women's social and political responsibilities their accession to the vote seemed as usual. That is why the Suffrage societies were setup throughout the country, culminating in the establishment of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1897. Fortunately in the same year a woman's suffrage bill passed a second reading in the House of Commons by a majority of 228 to 157. In 1889, an appeal against women's Suffrage, signed by around 2000 women, appeared in the Nineteenth Century periodical. The signatories
included many well-known women, such as the novelist Mrs. Humphry Ward, but even such a retrograde action was itself of course proof of women's inherent capacity for and interest in politics and fuelled the debate which the signatories had sought to quell. (Ibid, p.118-119)

The challenge to the institution of marriage was a central part of the new woman's activities, and received backing from the courts in 1891, when they upheld a wife's right to resist her husband's use of force in insisting that she share the marital home. Mona Caird's article on 'Marriage' in the Westminster Review of 1888 analyzed the custom as one based in a capitalist ethos and in men's monopolizing jealousy and hence necessarily unpropitious for the survival of love and good feeling. She advocated instead a form of free marriage based solely on the continuance of the desire to be together. (Ibid, p.119)

As new freedoms were achieved by women, it seemed to many that to marry would be to deny oneself that newly won autonomy. "In fact, the New Woman represented everything that was daring and revolutionary, everything that was challenging to the norms of female behaviour dictated by the conventions. But
two essential points have to be kept in mind if an accurate picture of the New Woman is to understand. Firstly, a woman was only genuinely ‘New’ if her conflict with social convention was on a matter of principle. Mere eccentricity or flamboyance along the girl of the period lives were not sufficient. The New Woman had high ideals, she examined the world from an intelligent and informed base, and if what she saw led her to the conclusion that accepted standards were unjust or inadequate then she would try to go her own way according to her own principles. Secondly the New Woman’s radical stance was taken on matters of personal choice. It was not based on any recognizable movement or organization, and was necessarily limited to the areas where personal choice could operate. A woman at the end of the nineteenth century could not choose to vote in a general election, but she could opt for bachelor motherhood or a career. *(Cunningham, p. 10)*

The point is, of course, that the New Woman’s ideals were far too advanced for her environment. The novelists were trying to do two things at once: firstly to argue the moral and social case for a ‘high’ degree of emancipation and secondly to show how firmly entrenched were the creeds and conventions which oppressed
women. (*Ibid, p. 49*) Thus the common pattern of the New Woman novel is to show the heroine arriving at her ideals of freedom and equality from observation of her society, but then being brought through the miserable experience of trying to put them into practice to a position of weary disillusion. Violently abused by many, ridiculed by the less hysterical and championed by a select few, the New Woman became a focal point for a variety of the controversies which rocked the nineties.

It was suddenly discovered that women, who had for so long been assiduously protected from reading about sex in novels and periodicals, or from hearing about it in polite conversation, had a great to say on the subject themselves. Marriage, traditionally regarded as woman's ultimate goal and highest reward came in for a tremendous battery of criticism. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the emphasis fell on questions of social organizations and particularly of sexual morality and here again the New Woman was building on earlier foundations.

After a thorough study of feminism and its nature and development it would not be wrong to say that Thomas Hardy had feminine sensibilities. He put forth the problem of a woman
who is raped, as the society has always an adverse opinion about the woman who is raped. He tried to bring into the notice of the society the necessity of the rights like property and divorce for women. He talked about the reformations in the marriage institution. He had awareness about the women's suffering and their oppression imposed by the society particularly in Victorian England. The great writers like Beauvoir, Millet, Freidan and Wollstonecraft and Mill have expressed their views about the vindication of the rights of women and Hardy has presented those women who suffered, because of the lack of proper protection and good treatment either by society or by their family. So far as his presentation of women characters in his novels is concerned it would not be wrong to say that Hardy has anticipated the issue of Feminism which is supposed to be the modern development. He has depicted the great flaw of the patriarchal power by showing the (wife) sale of Susan. At the same time he has tried to present a New Woman in the form of Jude, by her explicit awareness of herself as a, member of an oppressed Sex rightly seeking autonomy. Hardy has shown Bathsheba as a protester as well as Eustacia as a rebel. In short Hardy's achievement as a feminist lies
in uniting the fallen woman and her reformed husband and bridging the gap between them.

**References**


4) Feminism and Buddhism, www.fwbo.org/articles/feminism


