CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF FEMINISM

(WITH FOCUS ON AFRO-AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS)
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FEMINISM is taken from the Latin word Femina meaning woman, originally meant “having the qualities of a female”. It began to be used in reference to the theory of sexual equality and the movement of women’s rights replacing WOMANISM, in the 1890. Alice Rossi has traced the first usage in print to a book review published in ‘The Athenaeum, 27th April 1895. The term was widely used and recognized by the turn of the century.

At present, there are many individual definitions of feminism, and its fundamental meaning is in dispute. Dictionaries often, define it as the advocacy of women’s rights based on a belief in the equality of the sex. In its broadest use the word refers to everyone who is aware of and seeking to end women’s subordinate on any way and for any reason. Bell Hooks (1984) objects to this,

“anything goes approach saying it has made the term practically meaningless because any women who wants social equality with men regardless of her political perspective (she can be a conservative right winger or a nationalist communist) can label her self feminist.”

Yet Alison Jaggar (1983) has argued that to deny the label to some on ideological, grounds while granting it to others is not only sectarian but misleads us about history. Just as an inadequate theory of justice is still a conception of justice, so an inadequate feminist theory is still a conception of feminism. According to Denna Hawxhurst and Sue Morron,
"Feminism has only working definitions since it is a
dynamic constantly changing ideology with many as-
pects including the personal, the political and its
philosophical. Feminism is a call to action. It can
never be simply a belief system. Without action, femi-
nism is merely empty rhetoric which cancels itself out."²

Feminism originates in the perception that there is something wrong
with societies treatment to women. It attempts to analyse the reasons for
the dimensions of women’s oppressions and to achieve woman’s libera-
tion. To some liberation it is defined as social equality with men, while
others feel that this narrow definition reflects the class bias of what is
described as Bourgeois Feminism, Career Feminism, Main Stream Femi-
nism or Liberal Feminism. Yet Hester Eisenstein (1984), writing about
the distinctive, original and revolutionary character of modern feminism
asks,

"Ought one to castigate feminism because it is insuffi-
ciently revolutionary and geared to the concerns
of the working class? Or ought one to take a
longer view and ask what would become of present
social arrangements in the capitalists West and indeed,
in most societies, capitalists and communist, if all the
demands of the women’s movement were met with
respect to all women?"³

Charlotte Buch (1981) has pointed out that feminism is not about
‘adding in women’s rights but about transforming society, so that femi-
nism may be called “transformational politics” because everything affects
women, every issue is a women’s issue, and there is a feminist perspec-
tive on every subject. Teresa Billington wrote in 1911, that feminism is
a movement that seeks,

"the reorganization of the world."⁴
HISTORY OF FEMINISM:

Till recently, people have ignored the question concerning the position of woman excluding the woman suffrage movement. With the recent flood of writings by a galaxy of feminists, literary assessments of modern feminism ignored the full extent of women's active participation in the feminist movement, giving the woman the right to vote in the 1920's apparently opening the gates to equality, but it was not so in effect. The feminists have exposed many areas where women have not achieved full equality with men. They do not ask for a single change but a host of changes ranging from discrimination in employment and salaries, support of day care centres, reformation of the education system and the stereotyp sex role.

The first wave of feminism was in the eighteenth century between 1780-1880, the second wave between 1880 to the first and the second decades of the twentieth century wherein women were given the right to vote. The first American to advocate the rights of women was Al Cuin who wrote A Dialogue to the Rights of women (1976-97). The first feminist book by an American women writer was Ann Mather Crocker's Observations on The Real Rights of Women, with Their propriate Duties Agreeable to Scripture, Reason and Common Sense, published in 1918. This foreboding title jolted the Americans to awake, rise and face the new feminist movement.

Before World War 1st feminist views were expressed in a context of socialism or anarchism. Due to the new wave of feminism a new interest was reawakened in the first wave of feminism and the role of women had suffragist activities. Which encouraged women to organise and to operate politically and to achieve their goals. Some feminist
attacked marriage, family and women’s lack of access to birth control information as the main agents of oppression of women. There were many women writers writing for the rights of women.

The first phase of feminist writing began around 1780 and the writer of this phase were impressed by the achievements of the male writers of that period. The norms and traditions cultivated by the male writers have been imitated by various women writers namely George Eliot, Elizabeth Browning, Elizabeth Gaswell, Chaorlotte Bronte and a host of other writers belonging to the Victorian era.

The feminist theory is not one, but consists of many theories and perspectives and each feminist theory attempts to describe women’s oppression and explain its causes and consequences and prescribes strategies for women’s liberation. The first wave feminists are characterized by its grounding the classical liberal rights perspective and its focusing on campaigns for women’s enfranchisement and the extension of civil right to women. Mary Wollstonecraft was a popular feminist writer of this wave. She states,

"women are more pleasure seeking and pleasure giving than men. If given the right education in utilitarian terms she will likely forge the disparity between man and women. Rational and independent women are more "observant daughters, affectionate sisters, faithful wives and reasonable Mothers She wastes no time and energy on useless and idle arguments or entertainment."

The second phase of feminism can be considered to be in the early decade of the twentieth century between 1880 to 1920, when the feminist writing expresses a strong protest against the patriarchal standards of society and asserts the principle of autonomy of the female
life. The rights of women are claimed confidently both by women
eaktivists and women writers of this period. Writers of this phase are
Olave Schriener, Sarah Grand, Mrs. Craigie, Mary Coleridge George
Egerton, Amelia Johnson, Frances Ellen Walkins Harper, Pauline Hopkins,
and many others.

The major phase of feminism and feminist writing is believed to
have begun around the 1920’s to the present. By this time there was
the widespread growth in educational opportunities for women, coupled
with their entry into professions which were dominated by the estab-
lishment of legislation on abortion and equal pay, idea of birth control,
created conditions in which feminist activism could reseurface. Some
believe that with the creation of Bettly Friedan’s (1963) Feminine Mys-
tique careers had become unfashionable and the concept of the “femi-
nine mystique” had become popular theme, of motherhood and being a
good wife and mother. The third phase was a period of self discovery
and self-assertion for women and they tried to locate the causes of
oppression of women in a socially constructed form of gender differ-
ences. The feminist theory was traditionally characterized by its inter
discipline its transgression of the usual subject (e.g. literary, historical,
philosophical, psychological anthropological and sociological). The growth
of feminist texts can be seen in the works of early 1970 writings of
German Greer, Juliet Mitchell, Mary Daly and Kate Millett. In the 1960’s,
1970’s, early 1980’s feminist theory was also predominantly western and
motivated by white and/or heterosexual interests.

Not only the white but the black woman were also considered as
moral beings or so weak that they were entirely subjected to the so
called superior faculties of men. Women had been robbed of their
economic independence and experience. Substance clung unhappily to
their past for they had not been allowed to prepare for a different style. She had always been dependent on man and her whole life revolved around the man, her whole being centered on the man. Instead of forming an united front, man had dominated the woman, treated her as an inferior being. In the late eighteenth century woman threw away her chains and started fighting for the femininist movement. Such revolutions had taken place but were not very successful owing to lack of support hence they dwindled away.

The woman’s movement directed much of its energy into sexual politics. Previously woman had lived within the walls of a house and had rarely experienced the joys of free sex nor had ever lived their lives to the full because men always viewed these steps towards sexual freedom as steps that would take away their authority over women.

The women’s movement, to a greater or lesser extent, began to compete with and supplement the institutions of marriage, love and psychotherapy. Upto a point women’s liberation was more “therapeutic” than either marriage or psychotherapy. It made the women happy, angry, more confident, more adventurous, more moral and produced different range of behavioural changes in women.

Mariaw Stewart, orphaned at the age of five, was the first Afro-American woman to lecture in public on political issues and to leave copies of her texts. This early black woman intellectual foreshadowed a variety of themes taken up by her and other Black feminist successors Maria Stewart challenged African - American women to reject the negative images of Black womanhood pointed out that racial and sexual oppressions were the fundamental causes of Black women’s poverty. In an 1833 speech she proclaimed.
"Like king Solomon, who put neither nail nor hammer to the temple, yet received the prises, so also have the white Americans gained themselves a name while in reality we have been their principal foundation and support." ⁵

Stewart objected to the injustice of this situation:
"We have pursued the shadow they have obtained the substance; we have performed the labour, they have received the profits; we have planted the vines, they have eaten the fruits of them." ⁶

Maria Stewart not only, pointed out the source of Black women’s oppression but also urged the Black women to forge self-deﬁnitions self reliance and independence. She pointed out that it was useless for them to sit with folded hands and to reproach the whites; as they would never alienate them. She urged the Black American women to raise their spirit of independence, boldness and enterprising, fearless and undaunted. She felt the necessity of self-deﬁnition as Black women survival was at stake. She exorted,

"Sue for your rights and privileges, know the reason you cannot attain them. Weary them with you importunities; You can but die if you make the attempt, and we shall certainly die if you do not." ⁷

Stewart also challenged Black women to use their special roles as mother to forge powerful mechanisms of political actions.

"O, ye mothers, what a responsibility rests on you! You have souls committed to your charge...It is you that must create in the mind of your little girls a thirst for knowledge, the love of virtue and the cultivation of a pure heart." ⁸

Maria Stewart was one of the first Black feminist to champion the
utility of Black women’s relationships with one another in preventing a community for Black women activism and self determination. She argued society owes girls the education equivalent to the boys because all persons deserve an equal chance to develop their rational and moral capacities. She argued that women have the same rational nature as men do and therefore they should also be given equal rights. She states that woman is not a “toy of man” who should dismiss her reason and amuse man but have a mind of her own unless society provides educated women with similar liberties and economic opportunities as man has; she will be confined with her hard won autonomy with in the four walls of her domestic realm. She also states.

“Shall it any longer be said of the daughters of Africa, they have no ambition, they have no force”?

“By no means. Let every females heart become united, and let us raise a fund ourselves; ...that the higher branches of knowledge might be enjoyed by us.”

“Turn you attention to knowledge and improvement for knowledge is power (9).

Jessie Fauset is a feminist writer who says that the ignorance of women ensures their being utilized by the others. She advises the African American women that she is fully aware of the sexual abuses visited upon Black women tradition. She states,

Tis the same argument employed by the ruling few , by the rich while against the people in all countries. And let us observe that if good in one case, it should be good in all, and that, unless you are prepared to admit that you are yourselves less industrious in proportion to your intelligence, you must abandon.
the position with respect to others. Let us understand what knowledge is, perceive that accurate knowledge regards all equally, that truth, or fact, is the same for all human kind that they are not truths for the rich and truth for the poor truths for men and truths for women, they are simply truths, that is facts, which all who open their eyes and then ears and their understanding can perceive and this is what woman has to aim at. Once she realizes that man is trying to control her, she will be unable to widen her knowledge. If she breaks these bounding chains, then and only then will she become a free woman a human that God has intended her to be and not a slave to man as the world has made of her."

She continues to ‘plead’ the cause of virtue and the pure principles of morality for Black women. And to those who thought that Black women were inherently superior, Fausset responses,

“Our souls are fired with the same love of liberty and independence with which you souls are fired. To much of your blood flows in our veins too much of your color in our skins for us not to possess your spirits.”

The works of Maria Stewart, Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Fausset, Dorolhy West, Paule Marshall, Margret Walker and many others suggest the fate of countless Black women intellectuals and many Maria Stewarts African-American women whose minds and talents have been suppressed by “the pots and kettle” symbolic of Black women’s subordination. Far too many African American woman intellectuals have laboured in isolation and obscurity and like Zora Neale Hurston, lie buried in unmarked graves. But through the efforts of contemporary Black women scholars many writers are known to us. They have laid vital analytical foundation for
a distinctive standpoint on self, community, and society and, in doing so created a Black women’s intellectual tradition. In 1905 Fannie Barrier Williams lamented,

“The colored girl is not known and not believed in. She belongs to a race that is best designated by the term problem, and she lives beneath the shadow of that problem which envelops and observes her.”

The Black women intellectual tradition has been suppressed and oppressed by the white and the male group. This is because the Black women do not possess an independent consciousness and thus become their victims. Inspite of this suppression, Afro-American women like Anna Julia Cooper, Sojourner Truth, Mary McLeod Bhune, Toni Morrison and many others have struggled and raised their voice against oppression and suppression and tried to comprise the politics of Black feminist thought.

Black women’s oppression can be structured along three independent dimensions. First the exploitation of Black women’s labour the “iron pots and kettles” symbol in Black women long-standing ghettoization in service occupations, represent the economic dimensions of oppression. The drudgery of enslaved Afro-American women’s work, the free wage labour in the rural South, till the high cost labour Black women have paid for survival and suffered from economic exploitation.

Second, the political dimension of oppression denied Afro-American women the rights and privileges which were extended to white male. The Black women were for bidden to vote, to go to public offices, and with hold equitable treatment in the criminal justice system.

Thirdly the images of the Black women were controlled during the slave era, atleast to the ideological dimensions of Black women’s
oppression. From the mammy, Jezebels and breeder women of slavery to the smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake mix boxes ubiquitous Black prostitutes and ever present welfare mothers of contemporary popular culture, the nexus of negative stereotypical images applied to Afro-American women have been fundamental to Black women's oppression.

Thus the seamless web of economy, politics and ideology formed the foundation for the Afro-American woman to raise their cry against women's oppression and to suppress the ideas of Black women intellectuals and to protect elite white male interest and world views. The Afro-American were denied positions as scholars, authors, teachers, poets critics and position of power etc. It led to the elevation of elite white male ideas, interests and the corresponding suppression of Black women ideas and interests in traditional scholarship and popular culture. This gave rise to feminism and its theories, but they too suppressed Black women's ideas. Though the Black women intellectuals expressed a unique feminist consciousness about intersection of race and class in gender but could not be a full participants in white feminist organizations. Till today, the feminist movement is found to be racist and overly concerned with the middle class women's issue.

This historical suppression of Black women's ideas influenced the feminist theory. And the theories advanced to be universally applicable to women as a group but on a closer examination were found to be limited by the white. For example Nancy Chowders's (1974,1978) work on sex role socialization and Carol Gilligaus study of the moral development of women both are based on white middle class sample. Though they make classics contribution to feminist theory but the abuse of Black feminist idea makes them to challenge the hegemony of mainstream scholarship on behalf of all women. Much of contemporary
Black feminist thought, comes from Black women’s increasing willingness to strive for gender equality. Since 1970 the Afro-American women has talked on masculinist bias in Black social and political thought and the racist bias in feminist theory. But recently it has been seen that their voice is being heard and chapters of white feminist theories like Manning Marable (1983), Spelman (1982), Harding (1986), Anderson (1987) reflect efforts to in corporate Black women’s ideas. But the Black men such as Robert Staple’s (1979) analysis of Ntozake Shange’s (1975)Choreopoem, for colour girls who have considered suicide and Michele Wallace’s (1978) *Black Macho and the Myth of the Super Woman*, express the difficulty of challenging the masculinist bias in Black social and political thought. Black men also had a masculinist bias against the Black women writers of 1970’s and 1980’s, Calvin Herton says,

“The telling thing about the hostile attitude of black men towards black women writers is that they interpret the new thirst of the women as being counter productive to the historical goal of the Black struggle. Revealingly, white black men have achieved outstanding recognition throughout the history of black writing, black women have not accused the men of collaborating with the enemy and setting back the progress of the race” 13

The Black womens ideas were resisted by the white feminists also. They omitted the women of colour and reflected a basic unwillingness to alter the paradigms that guided their work.

Though being oppressed the Afro-American women fashioned an independent meaning of Black womanhood. By this she resisted negative evaluation of Black womanhood advanced by dominant groups, thus
developed a distinctive women’s culture. Her position in the political economy, ghettoization in domestic work made her see the white elite and realise that they were economically exploited workers hence remained outsiders. This developed an outsider within, perspective in the Black women’s which contradicted between the dominant groups action and ideologies, between ideologies of womanhood and Black woman’s devalued status. Patricia Hill Collins asks:

“If women are allegedly passive and fragile, then why are Blacks women treated as “males” and assigned as heavy cleaning chores” ?

Thus we find the intellectual Black woman constitutes Black feminist thought. At the core of Black feminist thought many theories were created by Afro-American women, to clarify, the Black women’s experience and ideas. The basic components of Black feminist thought are Academic thematic content and its epistemological approach.

The Academies section is the institutionalization of feminist criticism and theory. The pieces of this section consider the implications of the acceptance of feminist theory by the academy, and the ways in which educational and cultural institutions affect, the work of feminist scholars. ‘Epistemologies’ and ‘Subjectivities’ focus on the epistemological and ontological issues which have proved to be central to feminist debate in the 1980’s and 1990’s. The epistemological section replaces the radical, liberal and Marxists divisions which were though political division shifted as per their rights. The subjectivists section focuses on invocation of the category of ‘woman’. The various theories on subject about sex gender, visual and technology are discussed.

Academies:

In 1984 Bell Hooks the critic of a decade later writes academic feminism as ‘femocracy’. The Academie section includes those theories
of eighties and nineties feminism which include the fragmentation and institutionalization of feminism. Thus the academic location of feminist reflects on fragmentation, sensitivity and authenticity. It examines the feminist / theorist and grapples between the theoretical and the autobiographical, the institutional and the political, the general and the particular.

Bell Hooks defines, “Feminism, as the struggle to end sexist oppression reflecting the roots of feminism in the political aspirations of the women’s movement.”

Anne Phillips reflects the political practices of the woman movement in 1970’s which emphasize participation and friendship at the cost of accountability and diversity. By 1980’s the academic discipline of women’s studies was formally established. Mary Evans, one of the foremost founders reflected upon both the charges made from and within feminism of abstraction, elitism and co-option, and the marginal status of the discipline within the academy. By 1994 Anna Yeatman reflected more positively on incorporation of feminism. She said,

“Feminism theory, has natured to the point where it is able to subject its own premises to an ironical, skeptical and critical mode of analysis”.

By 1980’s, feminist theory proliferated and feminist criticism became difficult. Feminist writing became more direct Chandra Mohanty puts it thus:

“Feminist scholarship...is not the mere production of knowledge about a certain subject. It is a directly political and discursive practice in that it is purposeful and ideological. There can, of course, be no apolitical scholarship”.

Chandra Mohanty says that western feminist self-presentations and their representation of women in the Third World are mutually constitutive
along power laden axes. If the deconstructive/postmodern theories are adopted we find the French feminist is popularized. Feminism's turn to theory and its institutionalization occurred during the early 1980, but the tensions between self-presentation and representation of others, between political and the academic, the personal and the theoretical persists when one speaks as a feminist.

Mary Evans calls theories of feminism as Women's Studies. It represents either the exploitations or the deradicalization of feminism and the women's movement. It argued that those who teach women's studies only serve their own professional interest and those of patriarchy and the male ruling class. The energy that should have been directed towards the transformation of social and sexual relationship is, dissipated in narrow scholastic battles which is served only to perpetuate those hierarchies of control and authority to which the women's movement is opposed. Mary Evans finds no difference between Women's studies and feminist studies as both challenge male intellectual hegemony. She says,

"Both Women's Studies and feminist studies propose a radical change in the theoretical organization of the universe. Women's Studies is [...] a self-conscious determination to show that both the content and form of existing knowledge is related to the unequal distribution of social power between men and women." 18

She further adds there is no distinction between feminist and women's studies. The latter is seen as the reactionary, in corporative, prostates actively whilst feminism is always radical, antithetical to the present society.

The theory says that a women expressing horror or dislike at her situation does not have the same right to express that dislike as the same
claim to be taken seriously as the theorist. But a distinction has to be made between the analysis of subordination of all women and the subjective and personal reaction to that subordination by one woman. On analyzing the reason and nature of the oppression of women it was found that feminist theory becomes the preserve of small alight which occasionally issues statements on what to think and how to think, to the rest of the women's movement and how the feminist energy should be directed. Critics like Sheila Rowbotham, Lyvn Segal and Hilary Wainwright argued that their feminist theory should be more democratic and less authoritarian. It enhances the status, and the wealth, of those women producing it. It increases the discrepancy between highly educated woman and those woman with little or no higher education.

According to Bell Hooks it is very difficult to define feminism, Carmen Vasquez comments,

"We can't even agree on what a 'Feminist is. Feminism in America has come to mean anything you like, honey. There are as many definitions of Feminism as there are feminists".\(^{19}\)

Many use the term 'women's lib or feminism as a movement that aims to make women the social equal to of men. But men are not equals in white supremacist, capitalist, patrirkhcal class structure. So the questions arises as which men do women want to equal to? Women in lower class, poor groups and nonwhite donot define women's lib as women gaining social equality with men as they are continuously reminded in their every day lives that all women do not share a common social status. Moreover many men in their social groups are exploited and oppressed. So they think it to be a movement affecting the social standing of what women in middle and upper class groups and the social status of working class and poor women.
Unaware of the meaning of the term ‘feminism’ many are reluctant to advocate about feminism. Women from exploited and oppressed ethnic groups dismiss the term as they find it to be white women’s rights. Many see it as synonymous with lesbianism, and most are familiar with its negative perspective. Currently feminism is practically meaningless. As anyone who wants social equality with men labels herself with feminism. Barbara Beig defines, feminism as,

“a broad movement embracing numerous phases of women’s emancipation”.  

Though feminism evoked a personal freedom it neither focusses on woman as an autonomous human being worthy of personal freedom nor on the attainment of equality of opportunity with men which can rid society of sexism and male domination. Feminism is a struggle to end sexist oppression and eradicate the ideology of domination.

Bell Hook’s theory defined feminism in such a way that it diverted women’s social and political reality and centralized the experience of all women. Lack of sufficient definition made the bourgeois women dominate, exploit and made the oppressed group feel that they are hopeless and can do nothing to break the domination. Bell Hook defined feminism as, “a struggle to end sexist to oppression so as to give it a direction for exploration and analysis.”

Teresa De Lauretis gives the aesthetic and feminist theory. She talks about aesthetic awareness and modes of sensory perception. It is about past fifteen years that the thought of feminism has developed. It is a women’s movement, a two fold pressure, a simultaneous pull in opposite direction having a positive outlook and affirmative action on behalf of women as a social subject. She said that there was a negative inherent in the radical critic of patriarchal and bourgeois culture.
debate on women’s cinema, its politics and language came up in 1970 in relation to feminist politics and women’s movement. The feminist film culture produced in the mid to late seventies emphasized a dichotomy between women’s movement and two types of film work: one was immediate documentation of positive usages of women; the other analyzed the ideological codes. Women was presented in different theme there was gender specific division of women in language, urge to imagine new forms of community new images consciousness of a subject feature at the core of all kinds of work - domestic, industrial, artistic, cultural or political work, they engendered the social subject as female. These themes formally explored women in cinema and found that it required deconstruction or destructing of the thing to be represented. Hence the deaestheticization of female body, the desexualization of violence, the deocidualization of the narrative make it less feminine aesthetic than to a feminist de-aesthetic.

Like English and American feminism there is French Feminism theory. There lies superficial difference between ‘French’ and Anglo-American feminism. French feminism included Marx’s theories of ideology and reproduction. It does not escape the in built colonialism of First World War feminism towards the third. Mary Jane Sherfy in her work Fifty Three of Our Bodies, Quarselves calls sex as free activity where there is no shame but a need for the radical feminist who keeps herself away from reproduction discloses the beauty of the lesbian body; and the female wage-slave has the body for maximum exploitation. This theory can liberate the sufferers from Sudan from their social cultural patterns.

Helena Michie feels that the other woman should be repressed in her feminist theory. Feminism reclaims family and reproduces it in an altered form ‘Sisterhood’ is the challenge to the patriarchy. By choos-
ing sisterhood over daughterhood, feminists view not between father and daughter but between sisters. The relation between the mother and the daughter becomes the locus of the reproduction of feminist psycho-analytic discourse. She says,

"Feminist have turned their gage from the Oedipal triangle to pre-Oedipal period in which the girl struggle with her likes and dislikes to her mother". 22

The 'other woman' is the mistress, the rival or the sexual threat. She is the third world woman, the lesbian, the antifeminist who is excluded from the embrace of Oedipal sisterhood. This 'other woman' has been introduced in the feminist writing. Other Women is a novel by Lisa Alther, about the relationship between a female psychologist and a lesbian patient. The Other Woman: Stories of Two Woman and a Man, The New Other Woman by Laurel Richardson hint at a problem central to feminist perception of otherness. The theory tells the feminist to recognize the face of the other woman the face outside the mirror.

Elaine Showalter talks about autonomy and assimilation in Afro-American's in her theory. She presents the parallel histories of Afro-American and feminist literary criticism and theory over the past twenty-five years. In both feminist and Afro-American criticism, the other woman, has been the black woman, so the black and white feminists have objected to the sexism of black literary history and the, black women have also challenged the racism of feminist literary history. Before the Women's Liberation Movement women's writing was an androgynist poetics without female literary consciousness but in late 1960 it was female aesthetic and by 1970 it was gynocritics or the study of women's writings. In late seventies gynestie or post-structuralist feminist
criticism, dealing with 'the feminine' in philosophy, language and psychoanalysis became an important influence on the field as a whole. And in late eighties it is the rise of gender theory, the comparative study of sexual differences. It identifies women's writing as a central subject of feminist criticism, but rejects the concepts of female identity and style. Thus women's writing and feminist criticism were,

"a double voiced discourse embodying both the muted
and the dominant, speaking inside of both feminism
and criticism." 23

Thus gender theory corresponded to the Third-World critics and focus on 'race' which means social, cultural and psychological construct imposed upon biological sexual differences. It explores ideological inscription and the literary effect of the sex/gender system.

Barbara Christian and many critics believes that feminist literary theory is prescriptive and it should have some relationship to practice. Instead of inventing a theory they feel the works of writers should be read and kept open for the intricacies of the intersection of language, class, race and gender in the literature. Afro-American literature is pure expression and denies being political. They believe the new philosophical-literary-critical theory of relativity is prominent and the literature of the blacks, (women of South America and Africa) is political and it is being presumed by a new western concept which proclaims reality does not exist and everything is relative. A hierarchy has been developed between theoretical criticism and practical criticism. The Black Arts Movement tried to create Black Literary Theory and in doing so became prescriptive. If the theory is not rooted in practice, it becomes perspective exclusive and elitist. The theory about feminism should not be a race but an understanding so that it gets a response or it will die.
Nancy Miller takes the 'feminist' from a political movement to the critical label. She feels that 'feminism' becomes a position of representativity and makes the status of women. And with age the individual criticism becomes institutionalization of feminist criticism. So that later it is not in feminism but with feminism this new wave of the movement will move to the new generation and then the change will come.

'Feminism Theory' speaks about equal rights and its arrival in the academy has coincided with the demise of many organizations of seventies and eighties which constituted the heart of the women's movement. This was expressed by Susannah Radstone at the International Debate Conference held at Glasgow University on 12th-15th July 1991.

Around 1981 came up the Academic Literary Theory, it differentiated between French and American feminism. The French feminism or post structuralist theory argued whether feminist criticism should be defined as the study of women writers or it should be taken as the fact of institutionalization. It contributed to the acceptance of feminist criticism by the literary academy. 'Theory' included a 'feminist' component, it also dismissed feminist criticism which was not properly 'theoretical'. By mid-eighties work on woman writers based on post structuralist theory was very widespread and constituted the center of academic feminist criticism. After a decade, there was conflict over race in academic feminism and about the institutional status of feminist criticism.

Anna Yeatman expressed that it was by the end of the 1970's that the feminist movement was challenged by women of colour. They brought out the neglects of class, racist and ethnic oppression by the feminist movement. For black woman the racist oppression was primary than gender oppression, and in opposing racism their allies were black men.
not white women. Nancy Cett a feminist historiographer of U.S. feminist, in *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* says,

"The women's rights tradition was historically initially and remains prejudiced toward, those who perceive themselves first and foremost as "woman" who can gloss over then class, racial, and other status identification because those are culturally dominant and therefore relatively invisible." 22

This theory had deconstructive response but there came a theory of the intersection between different bases of oppression and the idea of multiple bases of oppressions like class, gender ethnicity, race and sexuality. It was able to subject its own premises to an ironical, skeptical and critical mode of analysis. Teresa-de Lametis says,

"A feminist theory begins when the feminist critique of ideologies becomes conscious of itself, and terms to question its won body of writing and critical interpretations, its basic assumptions and terms and the practices which they enable and from which they emerge." 23

**Epistemology:**

After the Academies comes the Epistemologies. It is a theory of knowledge, many epistemological exploration draw on the psychological theories of Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligas as the basics for an explanation of the deficiencies of dominant conceptions of rationality. They debated about the existence and nature of ‘female’ knowledge. They adopted and developed a perspective that experience of mothering shapes male and female psyche differently. They had a symmetrical organization of parenting, and mother was their primary parent.
They adopted the ‘object-relations’ theory analysing why rationality is so deeply associated with masculinity.

Nancy Hart Sock takes up the Feminist Marxist theory, she feels that the position of women is structurally different from that of men and the lived realities of women’s lives are profoundly different from those of men. On the basis of an account of the sexual division of labour she explored the oppositions and differences between women’s and men’s activity and their consequences for epistemology. She puts forward the schemata and simplified account of the sexual diversion of labour and its results for epistemology.

She analysis the position of women with the contribution of her nature. They as a sex are institutionally responsible and capitalistically contribute in both production of wages and goods in the home. So this dual contribution involves unification of mind and body Another theorist has put it,

"Reproductive labour might be said to combine the functions of the architect and the bee; like the architect parturitive woman knows what she is doing; like the bee she cannot help what she is doing." 24

Thus motherhood involves a unity of mind and body. This theory advocates the gender theory of feminism.

Sandra Harding’s theory insists on the prespectives of woman’s experience. She insists that woman should be given the right to reveal their experiences, they should have an equal say in the design and administration of the institutions where knowledge is produced. So, it is the ‘women’s experiences’ in the plural which provides the new resources for research. There is no ‘woman’ and no woman’s experience because women come only in different classes, races, and cultures.
Masculine and Feminine are categories within every class, race and culture as the men and women's experiences, desire and interest differs. Similarly, in genders also there is class, race and culture. Hence we talk about 'feminisms' only in plural. Not only our gender but experience also categories Feminism - black feminist, socialist feminist, Asian-American feminist, lesbian feminist. They are a rich source of feminist insight.

Sandra Harding studies the women from the perspective of their own experiences in order to understand them well. According to her, the inquirer must be placed in the same critical plane as the subject matter, thus the result appears to be real, concrete with specific desires and interest. As feminism is a political movement for social change so she views it with understanding and finds that Feminist Empiricism and the Feminist Standpoint are two ways to study feminism. And comes to the conclusion that the two feminist epistemologies and the tension between each suggest their transitional nature. Hence they are transitional epistemologies i.e. between liberal and Marxist theory of human nature and politics.

Jane Flax disagrees that feminist theory is a unified or homogeneous discourse but it is important to analyse gender relations. It is not necessary that how gender relations are constituted and experienced we think or do not think about them. Feminist theory includes prescriptive elements so without feminist political action theories remain inadequate and intellectual. So the theory can be further developed by thinking about gender relations. She analysis the feminist theory into two categories, the analysis of social relations and post-modern philosophy. Gender relations are constituent elements in every aspect of human experiences. They have no fixed essence, they vary both within and over time. In post-modern philosophy, feminist theory reveals and contributes to the growing
uncertainty within western circles for explaining and or interpreting human experiences. Contemporary feminists join other postmodern philosophers to question within feminist theory and found that feminist theory more properly belongs in the terrain of postmodern philosophy.

Feminist theorists have entered into echo postmodernist discourse and suspect that such transcendental claims reflect and reify the experience of only a few persons - mostly white, western males. They reflect important aspects of the experience of those who dominate our social world. So she says that the fundamental purpose of feminist theory is to analyze gender and to consider it as the central subject. Gender should not be treated as a simple natural fact, it is a complex and unstable process defined and controlled by man. Feminist theorists should deconstruct further the meanings attached to it as biology/sex/gender/nature. This process of deconstruction can separate 'sex and gender'. Feminist theories, like other forms of post modernism, encourages to tolerate and interpret ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplacitvity and exposes the roots of our needs for imposing order. Thus postmodernist theory provided feminism with additional framework of gender.

In the early period of contemporary feminist movement, feminists searched for a grand theory. They had a psychoanalytic feminist approach to gender and sex, which was central and basic to both theory and practice. They tried to reshape the gender neutrality or irrelevance by traditionalists. Nancy Chodorow, finds a psychological commonality among all women and men and says that psychoanalytic feminism does not capture gender and sexuality in different times and places, nor has it made the dynamics of change central. The psychoanalytical theory includes gender but not class, race or ethnicity. It is not attuned to differences among women - to class, racial, and ethnic variations in
experience, identity or location in social practices and relations  Psychoanalytic feminism is enriched by clinical theoretical or psychoanalytically informed phenomenological and experiential accounts of gender identity, self and relation among women and men of colour and non-dominant classes. She focuses on the mother and pre-Oedipal period with Freudian focus on the father and the Oedipus complex. And finds that women rather than men have primary parenting responsibilities and men resent and fear women because they experience them as powerful mothers. To emphasis the emotional power of the mother following psychoanalytic object-relations theory she does not preclude a recognition of the fathers social, cultural and political power. In doing so father as actual or symbolic presence controls the mother-child relation, mother-daughter relations or even the motherhood. And, at times mother is found to be submissive self-effacing and powerless.

Patricia Hill Collins presents the Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology. It reflects the thematic content of African American women’s experiences. The Black women’s thought is viewed as subjugated knowledge because they had to struggle against white male interpretations of the world, gender oppression, primarily through sex/gender hierarchies. These experiences transcended divisions among women created by race, social class, religion, sexual orientation and ethnicity formed the basis of women’s standpoint with a corresponding feminist consciousness and epistemology. This gave a modern, and postmodern view to gender.

Patricia Waugh brought out the feminist theory which has a self conscious awareness of its own hermeneutic perspectivism and is based on the recognition of a central contradiction in its attempts to define an epistemology; that women seek equality and recognition of a gendered identity. These are a few theories of feminism mentioned in the Academisection
Subjectivities Theories:

In the subjective case the feminist perspective is regarded as essential and constructive. Monique Witting gave a materialist feminist theory; that approached to women’s oppression and destroyed the idea that women are a ‘natural group’. The lesbian society destroys the natural group and the basis of women’s oppression is biological as well as historical. The materialistic feminist approach shows that the cause is only a mark imposed by the oppressor. They are seen as black therefore they are black; they are seen as women therefore they are women. But before being seen that way they are made that way. Thus lesbians are unnatural compelling, totally oppressive and destructive for women. This theory has a Marxist approach. The volatility of woman has been debated from the perspective of psychoanalytic theory of feminism. Derida calls it,

“undecidability of woman as the sexual identities are secured by psychoanalysis Women is not only an inert and sensible collective, the dominion of fiction but women is histrically, constructed and always relatively to other categories which themselves change.” 25

American and European cultural and radical feminism retains faith in the integrity of women. In the 19th century, ‘women’ is voiced in a new way but today it has become a modern, social, category. Feminism emphasis that ‘women’ are not racially or culturally homogeneous. They are simultaneous foundation of an irritant to feminism.

Toril Moli gives a theory on Feminist, Female, and Femme. She distinguishes between ‘feminism’ as a political position, ‘femaleness’, as a matter of biology and ‘femminity’ as a set of culturally defined
characteristics Morag Shiach gives a psychoanalytical approach to the feminist theory. He calls feminism as a political term, an interrogation of power, a possibility of change but not just a matter of technique. Judith Butler is the last in the series to study feminism with a subjective approach finds subjects of sex, gender and desire. According to her there must be a universal basis for feminism, either hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. Kate Soper gives a postmodern and humanistic approach to feminism. She recalls that in the past critics of liberal humanism was for women to be recognized as equal subjects, entitled to the rights which were claimed for all men. Today there is a whole body of feminist writing which would shy away from an equality which welcomes women as human subjects on a par with men. For this human subject, bears the traces of the patriarchal ordering which is coextensive with human condition. Feminism should be ‘humanist’ and ‘feminist’ in order to have a post structuralist look.

Kadiatu Kanneh gives the theory a linguistic approach. She says that there is a body language and one cannot liberate the female body from language. For black feminist blackness and womanhood cannot be separated. Because the black approach to the body gives sensual pleasure and political language, and sensual pleasure is associated with cultural identity.

Sexualities:

In the section of sexual approach to feminism radical feminist perspective are represented by writings of Adrenne Rich, Andrea Dworkin, Lizkelly, Catherine Mackinnon etc. They view heterosexual and romantic passion and pleasure in feminism. Adrienne Rich uses the term lesbian existence and *lesbian continuum* Lesbian existence gives historical presence of lesbians and the continuing creation of the meaning of that
existence. **Lesbian continuum includes** a range-through each woman’s life and throughout history of woman identified experience. She perceives the lesbian experience as a female experience, with particular oppressions meanings and potentialities. Heterosexuality she says has been forcibly and subliminally imposed on women, though women have resisted it everywhere, often at the cost of physical torture imprisonment, psychosurgery, social ostracism and extreme poverty. Therefore women identification is the source of energy, a female power which is ruthlessly curtailed and wasted under the institution of heterosexuality.

Andrea Dworkin in her theory includes Pornography. It is a Greek word from *prone* and *graphos* meaning writing about whores. *Prone* means the lower class of whore, least regarded and least protected of all slaves. *Graphos* means writing or drawing. It is thus the graphic depiction of women as whores. Liz Kelly brings the sexual violence in her feminist theory. She finds male control over women’s sexuality as the key factor in women’s oppression and that sexuality is based on men’s experiences and definitions which permits the use of force and disagrees with the women’s oppression. Catherine Mackinnon remarks,

“Feminism fundamentally identifies sexuality as the primary social sphere of male power. The centrality of sexuality emerges not from Freudian conceptions but from feminist practice on diverse issues including abortion, birth control, sterilization, abuse, rape lesbianism, sexual harassment, prostitution, female sexual slavery and pornography. Producing a feminist political theory centering on sexuality, its social determination, daily construction, birth to death expression, and ultimately male control.”

Many black feminist agree that sexuality does not have the same significant for women in all cultures, or all women in a particular culture.
Women are defined as sexual objects available to men. Catharine Mackinnon brings the feminist theory of the state. She says,

"male domination is sexual i.e. men in particular, if not above sexualize hierarchy, gender is one."

So the theory has sexual theory of gender as a gendered theory of sex and this is supported by the modern feminist work, both interpretive and empirical on rape, sexual harassments, sexual abuse, prostitution pornography etc. The theory is based on the data that locate sexuality within the theory of gender, meaning the social hierarchy of men over women. The theory becomes feminist because it treats sexuality as a social construct of male power, defined by men, forced on women and having the meaning of gender. The theory conceptualizes the social and sexual reality.

The general theory of sexuality emerges when the feminist critics do not consider sexuality to be and born force in the Freudian sense, instead it appears to be culturally specific because male supremacy is largely universal. Thus sexuality becomes social and relational constructing and constructed of power. It may be a feminist unconscious but not the Freudian.

Mary Mcintosh believes feminism to be a form of politics deeply rooted in humanism with woman as its subject and liberal project. She brings the Queer Theory. This is a social constructionism, the idea of sexuality is not given in nature nor in biological but to emediated by history and culture. It has an odd relationship to pre-existing lesbian and gay male theory. As Queer theory is deconstructive and has much in common with the radical forms of social constructionism represented in the male gay tradition. It is different from the film theory that sees subjectivity but relies on psychoanalytic theory.
Bisexual conscious feminist theory and feminist conscious bisexual theory is brought forward by Susan Sturgis. They have the potential to challenge western ways of thinking. These western models form the basis not only of oppression of bisexual, lesbians and gay men, not only of women but of those who are suppressed. The bisexual feminism resists the conception of gender radical feminist trap of biological determination, where it believe that women are oppressed and men oppress because of their biology. The bisexual feminism rejects the conservative anti feminist and radical feminists. It has a movement along with it.

Visualities and Technologies:

The fifth section has theories of visualities and technologies. The visual theories of feminism include those of Jacqueline Rose who gives sexuality to the vision. Kija Silverman views feminism with the apparatus in cinema. But Annette Kuhu brings some of the problems for feminism through cinema. The question if feminists take pleasure in visual representation, and if so, how is remained unanswered. Therefore there is a lot of controversy regarding visual theories on feminism.

In the second wave feminism was occupied with technology. From eighties to nineties there has been a shift from spiritual ecofeminism to postmodern cyber feminism. To bridge the gap between technophobia and technomania feminist theorists produced an important body of work analyzing how technoscience has inscribed itself on the bodies of female, or feminized subjects. Carol Stabile in her theory on Feminism and the Technological Fix presents feminist technomania through feminist postmodernist theories. Theorists like Carolyn Mirchat Rosi Brandolli, Sherry Turkla, Sarah Franklin gave a technological approach to their theory on feminism. Thus this chapter gives the various sectors on which theories of feminism are based. The works of Gloria Naylor are very
much influenced by these theories of feminism. In her novels we find the
gender theory Bell Hooks theory to end sex oppression, Elaine Showalters
concept on Afro-American Feminist Literary Theory, Barbara Smith’s
theory on Black lesbians, Nancy Chodorous Psychoanalytic theory on
feminism and many others.

Besides this there are many other beliefs, some have sectioned off
and created labels that represent them best and their beliefs surrounding
feminism. So there are different branches of feminism theory that are
recognized by feminist and feminist scholars. Below are some theoretical
definitions, sections and beliefs.

Amazon Feminism:

It is dedicated to the image of the female hero in Greek mythology
and in fact, it is expressed in art and literature in the physiques and
feet of female athletes and in sexual values and practices. Amazon
feminism focuses on physical equality and is opposed to gender role
stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumptions that
women are supposed to be, look or behave as if they are passive weak
and physically helpless. Amazon feminism rejects the idea that certain
characteristics or interests are only masculine or feminine and upholds or
explores a vision of heroic womanhood. The Amazon feminists view
that all women physically capable as men.

Cultural Feminism:

This theory believes that there are fundamental personality differ-
ences between men and women, and that woman differences are special
and should be celebrated. This theory of feminism supports the idea
that there are biological differences between men and women. Women
are kinder and more gentle than men, leading to the mentality that if
women rules the world there would be no war. Cultural feminism is the
theory that wants to overcome sexism by celebrating woman special quality believing that woman way is the better way.

**Ecofeminism:**

Ecofeminism is a theory that rests on the basic principal that patriarchial philosophies are harmful to women, children and other living things. In resisting patriarchial culture ecofeminists believe they are also resisting plundering and destroying the Earth. They feel that the patriarchial philosophy emphasizes the need to dominate and control unruly females and the unruly wilderness. Ecofeminism states the patriarchial society is relatively new and the matriarchial society was the first society. Women were centre of society and people worshipped Goddesses. This was the *Feminist Edeu.*

**Feminazi:**

Rush Limbaugh made this term popular on TV/radio. A feminazi is defined by antifeminists as a feminist who is trying to produce as many abortions as possible. Hence the term ‘Nazi’ came up.

**Individualist or Libertarian Feminism:**

It is based on individualist or libertarian (minimum government or anarchocapitalist) philosophies. The primary focus is individual autonomy, rights, liberty independence and diversity.

**Material Feminism:**

A movement in the late 19th century to liberate women by improving their material condition. This movement revolved around taking the burden of women in regards to house-work, cooking and other
traditionally female jobs

**Moderate Feminism:**

This branch of feminism lends to be populated mostly by younger women or women who have not directly experienced discrimination. They tend to question the need for further effort, and do not radical feminism is any longer viable and or embarrassing.

**Gender Feminism:**

The NOW (The National Organization for Women) is based on the care theory that if men and women are to be equal the women must be granted some special privilege and men should not be an issue in feminism.

**Pop Feminism:**

This is a type of feminism which degrades men in all manners and glorifies women.

**Radical Feminism:**

It is the breeding ground for many of the ideas arising from feminism. It is the cutting edge of feminist theory from 1967-75. This group views the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, in race, culture and economic class and intents on social change. Radical feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically determined behaviour and culturally determined behaviour in order to free both men and women from their narrow gender roles.
Separatists:

They are wrongly depicted as Lesbians. These are the feminists who advocate separation from men, sometimes total or partial. This enables men to see themselves in a different context. They do not interact with men for sexual fulfillment nor do they shun all interactions with men.

Thus these are a few acknowledged theories on feminism. Below is the presentation of the paradigms of Major Critical Theories in U.S. by Warren Hedges, of English Department, Southern Oregon University.

Timeline of Major Critical Theories in U.S.

Highly Influential Paradigms:

These Influence all the Schools and Approaches that follow. Below.

Each Successive Paradigm Complicates and Incorporates Elements of Previous Paradigm.

Structuralism proper actually only comes to U.S. in the late 70s. But it epitomizes the importance of most theories of the time placed on a single deep structure to explain literature and culture. Jungian or myth-based criticism identified the structure as ‘arche types’. Second wave feminism looked to gender differences. Psychoanalysis to the Oedipus complex. Marxism to material conditions, etc.
Feminism & Gender Studies

2nd Wave Feminist Criticism
- Maintains that "the personal is political" & views women's personal experience as a valuable source of political insight
- Highlights ways that traditional criticism ignored women readers & the way women were portrayed in literature from a male centered viewpoint
- Seeks to recover neglected women authors of the past and value female experience
- Sometimes posited "universal sisterhood" or uniquely female experience.
- Works in concert with cultural feminism's effort to create, recover, and foster a distinctively women's culture.

“3rd Wave” Feminism
- Complicates assumptions of 2nd wave feminism by examining differences between women, including issues of race, age, and sexuality
- Many recent approaches modify other interpretive traditions (materialist criticism, psychoanalysis, French theories about language)

Gender Studies
- Draws on feminist scholarship but also discusses men and masculinity in historically specific ways

Queer Theory
- Takes practices like drag and butch/femme as an occasion to theorize about how representation "consolidates" or "disrupts" identity and how political dilemmas are simultaneously representational dilemmas.

African-American Criticism & Ethnic Studies

African-American Criticism
- Closely connected with Civil Rights & Black Art movements. Tried to define what was unique about Afro-American experience and art.
- Initially some critics look black male experience and identity to be the most authentic form of resistance to oppression. Many other culturally marginalized groups model their criticism and activism on Afro-American efforts.
- Sought to theorize about African-American art in a global context interested in identifying & recovering African roots of much Afro-American art & culture

Recent African American Criticism
- Shifts from discussing race as an identity to examining race as a cultural construct
- Maintains its political commitments, but moves toward coalition models (from "black is beautiful" to "people of color")
- Incorporates feminist critiques of earlier work that stressed male experience

Ethnic Studies
- Examines Literature from groups traditionally seen as "marginal" to US culture (Native Asian & Latino/a Americans)
- Also examines literature of groups that become provisionally accepted (Jewish Italian) and/or moved from being perceived as "ethenic" to "white" (Irish, Scottish)

Post Colonial Theory
- Examines literature from areas that were formally colonized and that is created in the language or are forms of the colonizers

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Thus, feminism though had its origin for the struggle for women's rights in late 18th century is still proceeding. It started with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Later came John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Woman* (1869) and the American Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1846). The Suffragette Movement at the beginning of the 20th century carried on the campaign. In 1920 there were new approaches in relation to women writers and literature. This was noticeable in the critical works of Rebecca West and in Virginia Woolf's essays on women writers who suffered from economical and cultural disadvantages. Her book *A Room of One's Own* (1929) became a classic document of the feminist critical movement. Dorothy Richardson's gave the stream of consciousness in her novel *Pilgrimage* which centres on female consciousness of the heroine Miriam Henderson. In 1949 an important landmark in the evolution of feminist criticism came in the work of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* which questioned the role of women in society. In America the spate began with Marrynn Ellman’s *Thinking About Women* (1968) and is followed by Anglo-American and French feminist theory.

Amartya Sen in 1985 brought forward that many women do not object to their restricted gender role. They often do not feel dissatisfied, because they feel that is what it is expected from them and the male members of the household are more valuable than them. According to him limited experience may limit imaginations and the desires for anything better so we should not simply take their content at face value but should cast a critical eye and bring her out from her restricted gender role.

Thus we find from the eighteenth century till date that inequalities of wealth and power lead to sexual inequality which is the major reason
for the struggle of feminism. Evolutionary psychology can be friendly to many feminist concerns as it can remove obstacles to feminist arguments. Though it is difficult to change the cultural feature but if men can conflict with equality among women and the critical social role of the sexual contract, then there can be a change in the society.
CHAPTER-II

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