



## DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINIST SOCIAL MOVEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*The three terms 'feminism', 'new feminism' and 'women's liberation' are commonly used within the ambit of the feminist movement. Feminism connotes an ideology advocating women's rights. It led women to discover themselves as a distinct social group and having a separate entity and identity as 'women'. The research article is based on the content analysis and brings forth the development of the women's movement and feminist thoughts.*

### KEYWORDS

*Feminism, Women's Movement, Women Liberation, Women Empowerment.*

### Introduction

The contemporary feminist movement has its origin in the early 1960s and by the end of 1960s the new women's movement began to receive. The three terms '*feminism*', '*new feminism*' and '*women's liberation*' are commonly used within the ambit of the feminist movement. Feminism connotes an ideology advocating women's rights. It led women to discover themselves as a distinct social group and having a separate entity and identity as 'women'.

### Development of Women's Movement

The development of feminist thoughts and the women's movement can be understood in five phases which are as follows:

1. Women's movement from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
2. From French Revolution (1789) to the end of World War II (1945).
3. Decline of Feminism between 1920 and 1960.
4. The Women's Movement from 1960 to 1975.
5. Third Wave of Feminism

#### 1. Women's movement from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The early feminist attitude is traced back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when there two transitions took place i.e. transition from feudalism to capitalism and a transition from Catholicism to Protestantism. Though there was a beginning of women's agitation against male-dominated culture but it was not the advent of

feminism. According to *Hamilton* (1978), “the transition period from feudalism must be the point of departure for the study of the position of women in capitalist society: not industrialization, not urbanization, not modernization, but the emergence of capitalism.”

So, the effects of this transition to a new economic setup were the emergence of new ideas of reason, logic and science that stirred the doubts about the nature of male and female relationships. The basic changes in the commodity production separated the family from the work domain and that affected the position of women in the family as well as work because the roles of husband and wife became specifically differentiated. The sphere of work remained under the control of men and household and childrearing became the proper business of women.

In industrial organizations their status also declined. In guilds, their position progressively weakened and in the labor market women were allocated either powerless positions or a place where they were severely harassed and exploited. The privileges of widows declined, women had limited access to education and their trade entry was closed. Apprenticeship became more formal. Thus, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Industrial Revolution brought irreversible changes in the status of women and destroyed the family as a production unit. The small cultivators shifted to factories and mines to work and lived in slums in big cities. Proletariat women worked for long hours under poor working conditions and there was a rise in sexual immorality among them while there was realization of meaninglessness and uselessness and loss of sense respect among upper-middle-class women. Middle-class women as freed from the drudgery of household work became the icon of lady of leisure and the new ideal housewife. *Myrdal and Klein* (1956) have asserted, "This sense of vacuity and futility of feminine among upper-middle-class women along with the rise in women's education motivated a social unrest usually called the emancipation of women."

Hence, the early capitalism differentially affected different groups of women. According to *Rowbotham* (1972), “The feminism of this stage is still an aspiration, an idea amongst a small group of women; it had no possibility as a movement.” She further says that the resistance by working-class women was against the new industrial setup, without any feminist consciousness which was growing in a few privileged-class women.

In 18<sup>th</sup> century food riots women prominently protested in which poor re-asserted pre-capitalist economy. In 1913, *Snowden* quoted that the loss of work by women was the root cause of modern feminism which was led by women of the educated middle class. The three categories of women demanded different kinds of provisions. The *upper-middle-class women* wanted political freedom, improved educational facilities and the right to work as they became powerless and dependent ; the *middle-class women* were fighting for equality; whereas *working-class women* were fighting for differential treatment, improved working conditions and wanted protection as they were considered evil, sexual, dirty and their wages were inadequate.

### **Perceived Changes in Contemporary Society**

There were rising nuclear families and a decline in stem families in Western Europe which was made possible by increased knowledge of birth control measures. Besides this compulsory school education, growing interest in psychological factors and premarital employment of women led to the development of feminine individuality. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was a gradual rise in female education in secondary schools and universities, with alteration of marriage, divorce laws and property laws in their favor.

All over North-West Europe, the process of raising nuclear families and conversion of houses into homes had started in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and got well established by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to *Hamilton*, with the emergence of capitalism the difference between women was polarized like the

bourgeoisie, working class, etc. Women were isolated from the production process, and became economically dependent on their husbands. Their interests became diverged. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new romantic image of a woman emerged i.e. child-like, pure and asexual that can be retained only by isolating her from the rest of the world.

Thus, from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century, two transformations i.e. Catholicism to Protestantism and feudalism to capitalism led to two major social changes i.e.

1. Separation of work and family.
2. Lowering the status of women by confining their morality to home and keeping few restrictions on men's behavior.

Hence, as per *Hamilton* (1972), "The genesis of contemporary family and hence, the rise of the women's movement can be traced to the interlocking and overlapping histories of the capitalist mode of production and the Protestant forms of patriarchal ideology."

## 2. From French Revolution (1789) to the end of World War II (1945)

In this span, there was a development of the feminist movement in various countries of the world. *In France*, the evidence of the first women's movement was seen as peasantry and working class riots over rice in Normandy and a march towards Versailles to face the bakers. The upper-class women resented the growing 'romantic woman cult'. *Rowbotham* (1972) quotes their petition to the Assembly in 1789, "You have destroyed all prejudices of the past, but you allow the oldest and the most pervasive to remain, which excludes from office, position and honor and above all from the right of sitting amongst you, half the inhabitants of the kingdom." Whereas, a few middle-class women stirred the issue of liberty and proposed a 'Declaration of the Rights of Women' to abolish all male privilege. These feminists were *Mme Roland* and *Lucile Desmoulins*. Other prominent French feminists were *Simone de Beauvoir*, *Mme De Stael*, *George Sand*, *Charles Fourier* and *Flora Tristan*. *Beauvoir* (1981) asserted, "During revolution women enjoyed an anarchic liberty. But when society underwent reorganization they were firmly enslaved anew.....The Code of Napoleon fixed her lot a century, greatly retarding her emancipation." *Sand* demanded justice for women. *Fourier's* book in 1808 was the first contribution by a socialist feminist in which his argument that 'the degree of emancipation is the natural measure of general emancipation' had a lasting imprint on revolutionary feminism. This impacted radicals and cooperators in other countries too. In 1843, *Tristan* stressed the importance of the relations between men and women in the working-class families.

In *Great Britain*, the herald of the feminism is considered from 1792 with the publication of '**Vindication of the Rights of Women**' by *Mary Wollstonecraft*. Her work reflects early women's consciousness. She stressed that women's lot could be improved through education. Further *William Thomson* in 1825 was the first to link the liberation of movement with a socialist movement against capitalism. He raised various issues pertaining to women like the right to work, economic independence and their security, social support during pregnancy and communal accountability in child-rearing. *Edward Carpenter* was the first to narrate his views on the psychological aspects of female sexuality. By 1840, the women's movement had seemed to have two different paths i.e. upper-class women's movement for suffrage right and the working class movement. The suffrage movement, which is generally known to be started in 1867, when *Lydia Baker* sought to register women's names in the parliamentary voter list. But in reality it started with the demand for adult suffrage right in Manchester in 1819. Besides this, the passing of the Divorce Act, of 1857 had a deep socio-cultural impact in England from 1880 to 1940. As per *Rowbotham*, this movement represented dominant groups. Therefore, there was no prospect for a real social emancipation that could include all women (*Wandor*, 1978). So, in 1860s socialist movement properly developed in England addressing the issue of women's emancipation and the first attempt was made by *Sylvia Pankhurst*.

Socialism in England was influenced by *Morris, Carlyle* and *Ruskin*. They stressed on creation of ideas about 'new women' and 'Ibsenism' and a new ways of living together by men and women. *John Stuart Mill* presented a liberal-radical-socialist stand on historical account of women's position in '**The Subjection of Women**'. On the subjection of women by men he asserted, "It ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on one side, nor disability on the other."

In *the United States of America*, the women's movement is seemed to be started with the Puritan revolution which stirred the ideas about women's rights. Between 1620-1820 many feminists like *Mary Dyer, Ann Hutchinson, Bradstreet* and many others gave voice to women's aspirations. For the first time, women talked about their rights during the anti-slavery movement in 1830s. The linkage between slaves' bondage and women's denial of rights became a dominant theme of the women's movement in 1960s. During the revolution, two women's groups emerged one led by *Lucy Stone* demanded the right to vote and another by *Susan B. Anthony* who toiled for broader areas of women's rights. Further in 1848, a 'Declaration of Sentiments' was adopted, which was considered to be the beginning of the women's suffrage movement in the United States. The other issues that were included in the convention were women's right to property, divorce, work, guardianship of children and better work conditions and wages. In 1845, a book by *Margaret Fuller* entitled '**Women in the Nineteenth Century**' presented a psycho-cultural account of women's oppression. In the early 2nd century, *Carry Chapman Catt* and *Alice Paul* led the second suffrage movement. As a result, the right to vote was granted to women by the US Constitution on 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1920. 'But the American women's movement died because the feminists defined the women's problem too narrowly, as from 1848 to 1920 feminists focused only on women suffrage'(William L.O'Neill, 1969). Later, *Betty Friedan* represented the most significant American organization of middle-class women called NOW (*National Organisation for Women*).

### 3. Decline of Feminism between 1920 and 1960

The dawn of World War, marked the end of the women's movement in Europe. Besides this other causes were the Bolshevik revolution and also the granting of suffrage rights to women. In 1918, the partial right to vote and then in 1928, full-fledged right to vote to women was granted and with this women's movement collapsed. *Friedan* remarks, "To women born after 1920, feminism was dead history. It ended as a vital movement in America with women winning that final right- the vote." Further the economic crisis in America in 1930s and the occurrence of World War II created a situation of personal isolation and a state of acute self-doubt between 1920-1960. Marriageable also continued to decline in America to 20 to teenage. This impacted the literacy rate among women, it dropped from 47% in 1920 to 35% in 1958. Their drop rate out of college increased to 60% in mid of 1950s. The early marriage resulted in a surprising increase in the birth rate of the US. The world of women-centered around their home and kitchen.

But in 1950s a sudden change was noticed i.e. one-third of middle-aged women engaged in part-time work, they worked to pay debts, the mortgage or get through college and some were widows supporting their families. "The mystique of feminine fulfillment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of American culture during the fifteen years after the Second World War (*Friedan, 1979*). *Kate Millet* a radical feminist asserted that the first phase of feminism ended in reform rather than revolution and the period between 1930 to 1960 was the period of counter-revolution. Marxists failed to provide ideological base for the sexual revolution.

Other factors responsible for the collapse of feminism are the end of radicalism in 1930s, the rise of totalitarianism after 1945, and general conservatism in the 1950s. The Soviet government also failed to achieve women's emancipation after 1920s. Thus, depression and political turmoil between the two World Wars put a setback to the women's movement. But this period of the downfall of the feminist movement was accompanied by the tremendous influence of psychoanalytic thoughts of Freud and functionalism (*Between*

1945-1960). The period of nuclear and cold war restricted men and women to their families in America. 'The political conservatism of the 1950s was echoed in a social conservatism which stressed the Victorian ideal of the women's life: a full womb and selfless devotion to husband and children' (*Roszak and Roszak, 1969*). The image of American women as 'mom' was reinforced, what *Friedan* called as 'Occupation: Housewife', 'the feminine mystique'.

#### 4. The Rebirth of Women's Movement from 1960 to 1975

Since the 1960s many changes took place such as the number of working women increased abruptly but they were denied equal access to occupational opportunities. Approximately 9% of midlife women were engaged in work at that time. This change in American society was due to inflation after the Vietnam War, the price hike of Arab Oil, black civil rights struggles and the spread of oral contraceptives, which led to the beginning of questioning of traditional stereotypes regarding myths, sexual mores and sex roles 'favoring idyllic images of housewife', in the form of rebellion and protest. There were marches, sit-ins and pickets by college students. Thus, students, middle-class married women and working women became the part of new women's movement.

The new feminist movement was at its zenith in the latter half of the 1960s till mid-1975. With the end of the Vietnam War, this movement too declined. During this period, many steps for the emancipation of women took place like, in 1961 President Kennedy appointed a commission on the status of women which recommended regarding legal treatment, practices and employment of women. In 1963, *Betty Friedan* published her book '*The Feminine Mystique*', which has been considered as the beginning of the second wave of feminism by *Germaine Greer*. In 1964, US Congress added the term 'sex' in the civil rights bill prohibiting discrimination in employment based on 'race, color, natural origin or sex.' There was rise in radical feminism after the controversial article 'The Position of Women in SNCC' which stressed only on women's position in SNCC (*Student Non-Violent Coordination Committee*). In 1966, a newly recognized organization NOW (*National Organization for Women*) was set up by Betty Friedan which demanded seven things such as the prohibition of sex-based discrimination in employment, constitutional amendment for equal rights, maternity leave, and childcare centers. At the end of 1966, both the socialist and radical feminists began to demand their own separate organizations. Therefore, in 1967 SDS (*Students for Democratic Society*) emerged to protect the rights of black civil rights. Sheila Firestone and Pamela Allen organized a women's liberation group called as 'The New York Radical Women' but the group split into two parts and one of which, the first independent radical feminist group was called as '*Redstockings*'. This group stressed on women's liberation from the oldest supremacy i.e. of males. Another group 'The Seattle Radical Women' demanded radical change in the economic, political and legal system.

In 1968, the slogan '*Sisterhood is Powerful*' was for the first time used in the US Congress by a women's coalition peace group against the Vietnam War. Lesbian groups also got inspiration and emerged with the writing of a short essay by *Anne Koedt* as '*The Myth of Vaginal Orgasm*'. There were protests against the Miss America pageant by radical feminists. A group of FEW (*Federally Employed Women*) specifically focused on legal equality and equal opportunity in employment for working women. The group NOW got split and the new wing defined '*Radical Feminism*' as rejecting sexual intercourse as oppressive rather sex roles are the basic cause of women's oppression. Radical feminism reached to its peak in 1968. In this regard, a group WITCH (*Women's International Conspiracy from Hell*) emerged and its extremist activities were: attacking the annual bride fair in New York, public bra-burning, and bally-hoo operations. At this juncture, *Kate Millet* wrote her eminent radical feminist book '*Sexual Politics*'. At the end of 1968, HRW (*Human Rights for Women*) advocated for legal aid services, women's education and research.

In 1969 and 1970, there was rise in women's liberation movements and the cities of New York and Los Angeles were the main centers. The feminist groups published many newsletters and journals such as

'*Journal of Liberation*' from Baltimore and a manifesto by Red Stockings. In 1970, a Special House sub-committee meeting was held on women's education. In the same year, there was rise in lesbianism and gay liberation movements of men and women with such orientation. Feminists like *Millet* and others declared themselves as bisexual. On the other hand, the orthodox Marxist group led by *Evelyn Reed* was revived. An organization called WEAL (*Women's Equity Action League*) pervaded all over the US to question sex discrimination in areas of employment, education and taxation. A manifesto by *Red Stockings*, advocated that the main cause of women's operation lay in the economic system signified male supremacy. In 1971, NWPC (*National Women's Political Caucus*) was established in Washington through which eminent feminists like *Betty Friedan* and *Gloria Steinem* influenced the policies. As a result, the number of women fighting for office election increased in 1972 and 1974 and the US Party system took notice of that. Further *The Fourth World Manifesto*, on one side criticized the male-dominated left movement and on another side, it condemned some women feminists for their reaction against anything that seems 'male'. Thus, the manifesto declared, 'that neither the male culture nor the female culture was a model for human society' (*Koedt et al., 1973*). In March 1972, the US Senate amended its Constitution for Equal Rights and also due to the efforts of the women's movement the issue of Abortion was undertaken by the Supreme Court in 1973. The *socialist feminist movement* was on the rise and in July 1975, a conference by them was considered as the first organized attempt of socialist feminists.

### 5. Third Wave of Feminism

A new third wave of feminism includes *Redfern and Aune (2010)*. Aune is an academic while Redfern is the founder of a website (F. Word, [www.thefword.org.uk](http://www.thefword.org.uk)). They see this website as an e.g. of third wave of feminism which has developed rapidly since the beginning of the new millennium. They stress that we are living in a post-patriarchal era and feminism is still badly needed. As culture has become individualistic and collective principles of feminism are difficult to retain. They believe that a lot of ground needs to be covered before gender equality can become a surreal reality. In 1971, there was a demand for women's liberation movement to deal with various issues of women. To them, the demands of the 1970s still needed to be achieved. They suggest seven areas need to be dealt with by feminists to improve women's condition, which are: liberated bodied; sexual freedom and choice; an end to violence against women; equality at work and home; altered politics and religion; popular culture bare from sexism; and feminism reclaimed.

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