
UNIT 4 FEMINISMS: VARIATIONS AND CONTEXTS

Yuthika Mishra

Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives
- 4.3 Defining Feminism
- 4.4 Evolution of Feminism
- 4.5 Feminist Theory, Feminism and Women's Movement
- 4.6 Western Feminisms
- 4.7 Indian Feminism
- 4.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.9 Glossary
- 4.10 Unit End Questions
- 4.11 References
- 4.12 Suggested Readings

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The very fact that a notion to highlight the condition of women evolved in the 19th century, and came to be known as **feminism**, shows that there was something amiss in the scheme of things. Firstly, it appeared that women were gradually asserting themselves to get the right to be treated like human beings; secondly, they were also by now convinced that this change in their position was possible thanks to the liberalizing and equalizing forces unleashed in the world by the capitalist-socialist combine. This combine had become a major force to reckon with by the end of the 19th and start of the 20th century.

As an idea and as a concept, 'feminism' has been identified as the main generator of women's and gender studies and also as the chief force behind the various women's movements all over the world. Feminist scholarship has been at the forefront of critical thinking in the last four decades, challenging and rethinking major theoretical and political formulations such as Marxism, and playing a leading role in the development of post-colonial, post-modern theories, among others. While women's movements may not always be about women (that is, women in movements may have different agendas from women's movements), the fact that feminism and women's

movements have been so intricately connected necessitates the need to study the linkages, similarities and overlaps between the two. In the various sections of this unit, we will try to describe and explain these linkages, and trace the evolution of various feminisms in the world.

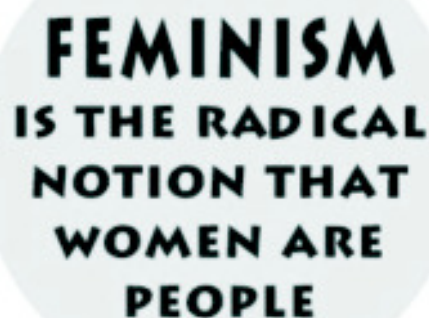
4.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Describe feminism with reference to the women's movement;
- Analyze and identify different types of feminisms along with their backgrounds;
- Trace the evolution of feminism in the world with special reference to India; and
- Explain the need of feminism in the present social set up.

4.3 DEFINING FEMINISM

Etymologically speaking, the word feminism is derived from the French word '*féminisme*' and seems to have been popularized in the 1890's. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Online Dictionary) it is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes and it also denotes organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines feminism as "a belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way". It also lays emphasis on the set of activities intended to achieve this state of equilibrium. Feminism is defined as the advocacy of social equality for men and women, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism. In brief, it can be said that feminism is a belief in the equality of sexes.



**FEMINISM
IS THE RADICAL
NOTION THAT
WOMEN ARE
PEOPLE**

Fig. 4.1

Source: Retrieved from: <http://www.amazon.com/FEMINISM-Radical-Notion-PINBACK-Feminist/dp/B003R0BPWW>

While it is very difficult to find out the precise meaning of the word one cannot help but agree with Rebecca West, the famous writer who wrote in 1913, “I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute” (West, 1982, p.5). In the early years, the word carried negative connotations as it sometimes does even now. Another question may be raised here in order to clarify the definition of the word feminism, that is, what would we call women who continued to work for the cause but did not call themselves feminists? There are several examples like the first-wave women trade unionists in Britain who fought for equal pay. Closer home, Sarojini Naidu totally disapproved being called a feminist. But in both the cases, the contribution to the cause of women’s movement has been of immense value politically. It may be emphasized here that the contexts of feminism keep changing and all those working for the cause come within its ambit. Writing about South Asia, Kumari Jayawardena defines feminism as, “embracing movements for equality within the current system and the struggles that have attempted to change the system”. (Jayawardena, 1986, p. 2) You would have realized by now that feminism might have different meanings and connotations in different regions, countries and spaces and it might differ according to the requirements of class, caste, background, educational level, consciousness etc. However, broadly speaking it creates an awareness of women’s oppression and exploitation in society and inspires conscious action by women and men to change this situation.



Fig.4.2

Source: Retrieved from: <http://bookmaniac.org/dealing-with-internet-drama-in-feminist-discourse-sxswi-panel-report/>

4.4 EVOLUTION OF FEMINISM

Evolution of the Three Waves of Feminism

Scholars have divided the history of Western feminism into three ‘waves’. The first wave in the 19th and early 20th century primarily focused on women’s voting rights. The second wave refers to the women’s liberation movement which began in the 1960’s and was concerned with the legal and social equality of women. The third wave, beginning in the 1990’s, builds on the apparent failures of second wave and tries to address them. You will read more about these “waves” in the context of western feminisms in section 4.6.1 below.

The concept of waves is not used to describe/analyse feminism in the Indian context. Given the significance of the colonial situation when the women’s movement first emerged and its close association with anti-colonial struggles, the term ‘feminism’ did not gain much currency in the women’s movement’s self-description in that period. In a later period, after Independence, women were engaged on multiple political fronts. Thus, the term ‘women’s movement’ is more commonly used in the Indian context.

It will be correct to say that even though the word feminism came to be used in the 19th century, the concept came into existence much earlier. As you have already learned in Unit 1 of Block 1, feminist writings first appeared in the 15th century with Christine de Pizan, Margaret Cavendish, Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft. Feminism got a boost and emerged by the 19th century in ‘waves,’ as noted above, especially in the US and UK.

New Feminisms

The term ‘New Feminism’ has been understood to include the varieties of feminist concepts that have evolved over time. At different times, various kinds of feminisms, and various phases of women’s movements, have been dubbed as “new” in order to indicate major turns and shifts. Post- feminism, power feminism, third wave feminism, libertarian feminism, babe feminism- all these terms have been used periodically to describe *new feminism*. The ongoing debate over the meaning of the term feminism has led to the coinage of the term *new feminism*. Contrary to the belief that these recent contributions on feminism are different or “do not easily fit into the more familiar models of feminist politics” these new feminisms have influenced feminist works academically and “have had a far ranging influence in the political, economic and cultural spheres” (Showden, 2009, p.1). Most of the new feminisms have been grouped under the rubrics of ‘post feminism’ or ‘third-wave feminism’ or both. Both these terms are often, unwittingly, used interchangeably. Although both are responses to dissatisfactions with liberal, socialist, and radical forms of second-wave feminist theory, they have different connotations.

Originally, the term was used in Britain in the 1920s to distinguish the new feminists from the old school of mainstream feminists, thus known because of the issue of suffrage which they championed and which marks the beginning of feminism in the modern period. The new feminists were also known as *welfare feminists* because they were more specifically concerned with the well being of mothers and the requirements of motherhood like family allowances being paid directly to mothers. They also vouched in favour of protective legislation in industry. They were led by Eleanor Rathbone of the *Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship*, an organization that took up the cause of the post- suffrage era of feminism. Those who opposed the *New Feminists* were mostly young women who did not believe in the idea of separate spheres for women. They were particularly opposed to protective legislation, which they saw as being in practice restrictive legislation, which kept women out of better-paid jobs on the pretext of health and welfare considerations.

In recent years, the term 'new feminism' has been revived by Catholic feminists responding to the call of the Pope for a "‘new feminism’ which rejects the temptation of imitating models of ‘male domination’ in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society and overcome all discrimination, violence and exploitation" (www.vatican.va/evangelium-vitae, para 99). New Feminism also claims to be a Catholic philosophy, which emphasized the notion that men and women are complementary to each other, thus disputing the notion of superiority of men over women as embodied in patriarchy. Belonging to the genre of 'difference feminism', this notion not only believes in the equal worth and dignity of both the sexes, but also supports the notion of the strengths, perspectives and roles of women.

With the influence of New Feminism various world issues have been taken within the fold of feminism and have been studied with a feministic approach. Thus, varieties of feminisms have evolved, for example, the concept dealing with environment and women and their linkages is known as environmental feminism or ecofeminism. Ecofeminists see men as controllers of land and hence responsible for the oppression of women. The same dynamics operate for the destruction of the natural environment. One point of criticism could be that there is too much stress on the mystical aspect of women and nature. (You will read more about these issues in Unit 3 of Block 2). There are other types of feminisms that have developed around issues, regions or communities for example, Dalit feminism, Black feminism and Third-world feminism (which is closely related to Asian and African feminism).

These varieties of feminisms have come under the influence of ideologies like postcolonial feminism, which emphasizes not only colonial domination and marginalization of colonized women by Western feminists, but also the

ability of the colonized to remain active and articulate within this framework. Postmodern feminists argue that sex and gender are socially constructed, that there is no homogeneity in women's experiences because their cultures and histories are varied and that terms like gender, feminism and politics are too limiting. In a different vein the poststructuralist feminists believe that it is this difference which is one of the most powerful tools that women have, especially if it is combined with the various intellectual currents. Even opinion on the role of men is divided- according to some, men are also oppressed by gender roles while others consider men as agents of oppression, or complicit in fashioning sexist ideologies and practices. Contrary to common beliefs, most feminists are not rabid 'man-haters', indeed many of them have cordial social and personal relationships with men. The characterization of feminists as aggressively anti-men is, some feminists argue, a means of discrediting feminists and the feminist movement.

In our day to day interactions at home we may notice examples of 'feminism' being discredited on one pretext or the other. For instance when a young girl wants to leave home or go out for some vocation or for a job or for higher studies and gets adamant about fulfilling her dreams she is often accused as being under the influence of feminism or the new trends that have plagued the modern society. But when the very same girl earns a livelihood for the whole family and goes out to do so she is encouraged. Why? There is a lot of contradiction involved in the society and its regulations which are dominated by men and are modelled on patriarchy.

Similarly, there are attempts to control women's reproductive rights and choices. Women are, at times, forced to abort female fetus and go for a male child in keeping with the wishes of the husband's family whereas for a mother it makes no difference if the child is a boy or a girl. Many such instances may be recalled from our surroundings that we encounter daily.

There are also instances of oppression of men in the name of gender roles. In dowry cases or in cases of violence against women at times men are falsely implicated. More recently there are several cases where the law against dowry is misused by the wife to extract monetary gains or to extricate herself from the bond of marriage. All this happens at times at the instigation of her parental family. Here the role of law becomes very important and proper discrimination is required so that injustice is not perpetrated.

Check Your Progress: Describe what you have read so far by explaining when and how New Feminism evolved, and what it means.

4.5 FEMINIST THEORY, FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Most feminist theories have been generated based on the experiences of women, and have evolved through women's movements. Feminist theories form the main plank of women's studies which is spread over a variety of disciplines. These included history, geography, anthropology, sociology, art history, psychoanalysis, economics, science, literature, philosophy and theology apart from media, film and music.

The demands made by women's movements included the right to vote, to own property, reproductive or health rights and the right over their own bodies. They laid emphasis on the fundamental right to equality in every field of life and from this emerged the issue of equal pay for equal work, equal opportunity for careers, and opposition of oppression, patriarchy, domestic violence and sexual harassment. Initially beginning in the Western countries, the movement for female rights spread far and wide and this has led to the development of a variety of feminisms all over the world.

Both the concept of feminism and the idea of a women's movement are closely intertwined, so much so that they nourish each other and also depend on each other for their growth. Feminist ideology has been, and continues to be, in the forefront of the women's movements. Women's struggles have all been issue-based and changed from time to time, depending on the position of women at a given time and place. For example, the issue of suffrage was one of the first issues to be taken up by the women's movement at a global level. Of course there were other equally inflammable matters like sati, widow remarriage, age of marriage, purdah, and the social and economic inequality between men and women, but the question of suffrage became a political issue since its very inception and hence it became all the more important (see the previous unit on Suffrage in this block).

Feminist thinking has been associated with various dominant political theories at different stages. For many decades, the categorization of feminism usually followed the differences in the ideological positions of its major proponents and the issues prioritized by them- thus, radicals, liberals, Marxists, socialists etc. However, over time, these lines became increasingly blurred and historians of feminism followed different principles of classification, causing a great deal of confusion regarding nomenclature. On the whole, Radical feminism believed that patriarchy was the main cause of women's oppression and so a total restructuring of the society was necessary. They also do not absolve capitalism, (since it is based on patriarchal structures), but see patriarchy as more 'fundamental' and pre-dating capitalism. Liberal feminists aimed at the equality of men and women through reform without altering

the structure of society. While socialist feminists found a link between the oppression of women and their exploitation and labour, Marxist feminists felt that the end of class oppression would lead to the end of gender oppression too. There are several other approaches to the 'woman question', which suggest various alternatives, for example, cultural feminism, anarchist feminism and separatist feminism, to name a few. In the next section, you will get a closer look at varieties of feminism in the west and in India.

4.6 WESTERN FEMINISMS

It is generally believed that feminism first appeared in the 19th century. In the second half of the 19th century state sponsored social reforms were being carried out in Europe. In the backdrop of industrialization, liberalism and growing national consciousness, the domestic policies of most of the European states were influenced by these forces. In the years after the 1880's various progressive steps were engendered by state governments like universal manhood suffrage, expansion of the popular press, acts and laws to regulate factory hours and working conditions. But they fell short of fulfilling the needs and demands of most workers. The long economic depression that began in 1873 and lasted well into the 1890s added to social and political tensions in almost every country. Many feminists contended that social reforms would be inadequate as long as women were without the right to enter universities or vote. Thus, the suffrage movement took shape and forged ahead with the demand for voting rights for all adult women. Gradually the movement grew strong and drew within its fold various other issues of concern for women. This process of gradual undulation of women's demands is known as 'waves' of the women's movement, as you have already seen in Section 4.4.1 above. Let us now take a closer look at the notion of the three waves of Western women's movements, as they have been identified by scholars.

Feminism in the Three Waves of Women's Movements

The **first wave** of the feminist movement in the United States began in the 1840's as women opposed to slavery, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, drew parallels between the oppression of African Americans and the oppression of women. They also sought equality in property rights and changes in the marriage relationship. They are mostly known for their efforts for suffrage or voting rights for women. The Seneca Falls convention began the social movement by which women finally won the right to vote in 1920. But other disadvantages persisted, and a second wave of feminism arose in the 1960s and continues today.

Sometimes also referred to as the women's liberation movement, the **second wave** focused on the discrimination of women, and on cultural, social and political issues. Some of the most influential works of the second wave are

The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir (which was actually published in 1949 but gained its popularity during this time), *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan and *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett. The second wave has often been accused of catering to the needs of the upper middle-class white women and, sometimes, of biological essentialism.

Much of the scholarship on second-wave feminism has focused on divisions within the women's movement and its narrow conception of race and class. Feminists in the 1960s and 1970s also formed many strong partnerships, often allying themselves with a diverse range of social justice efforts on a local grassroots level. There were coalitions and alliances in which feminists and other activists joined forces to address crucial social justice issues such as reproductive rights, the peace movement, women's health, Christianity and other religions, and neighborhood activism, as well as alliances crossing boundaries of race, class, political views, and sexual identity.

Beginning in the late 1960s, women's health became a primary concern of feminist activists throughout Canada. Women's liberationists located in Vancouver were particularly active. In 1970, members of the Vancouver Women's Caucus organized an Abortion Caravan that traveled across the country in the name of women's rights to accessible abortion on demand. The following year, the women of the Vancouver Women's Health Collective came together to imagine and create new feminist options for women's health care, including the operation of a women-run clinic (Hewitt, 2009).

In the 20th century, two names stand out in terms of their originality. Simone de Beauvoir of *The Second Sex* fame (1949) and Germaine Greer who wrote *The Female Eunuch* (1970). The latter, like the former, is a monumental work. Both are works of piercing subjectivity, literary feats of self-description whose status becomes over time, ever more artistic and less political. Germaine Greer is the daughter, not the originator, of feminist culture, and she and her work are part of the 'second wave' of feminism. Greer believes that women can change their saga if they so wish to or they may change their lives for the better.

Third-wave feminism, begun in the 1980s or early 1990s, addressed feminism across class and race lines and has been grounded in culture rather than biology. Postmodernist feminists, with their interrogation of fixed categories like 'women' and 'gender', belong to the third wave. In the west, some people also refer to a contemporary 'post-feminist' era, which is based on the belief that the main agendas of feminist movements have already been met through an egalitarian society which offers equal rights and opportunities to men and women. However, there has been a groundswell of strong opposition to such assumptions as most third wave feminists continue to struggle in an unequal world. This is especially true in India, to which we will turn in the next section.

4.7 INDIAN FEMINISM

Women, increasingly aware of their rights and duties, helped in the formation of the first women's movement in India. The use of the word 'feminism' in the Indian context was still peripheral although its impact was being felt all over the country thus leading to the birth of the women's movement. More specifically, in the political context, women were increasingly making their presence felt by way of participation in the movement for national freedom. Women's struggle, the world over, has been marked by the efforts of the 'second sex' in dealing with the various material and non-material inequalities and hierarchies that have affected women's lives across time and space, such as those related to class, gender, 'race', caste, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, education, age or health. Women have, since ages, challenged or fought these inequalities through different types of politics and activism in the public sphere and through individual actions and forms of resistance in the so called 'private sphere'. Like the women's movement elsewhere, the movement in India may also be divided into three phases, if not waves.

The first phase began in the second half of the 19th century when socio-religious reforms prompted women's upliftment and gender equality. The second phase begins in the 1920s, when organized efforts were made to take up women's issues. This phase also coincided with the nationalist movement and at times both appeared to merge. Women were also being gradually initiated into feminism. The role played by women leaders and women's organizations also constituted a new feature of this period. The third phase started after independence, more specifically in the 1960's, when in the years after independence, the task of nation-building began. Another phase, the fourth one, has been identified by scholars of women's studies, beginning with the 21st century, when women's issues became more diverse and connected with movements against other forms of inequality and subordination.

Activity: Based on what you have read so far, create a table of the three waves of feminism, which shows the evolution of the waves in specific time periods, and also mentions important features and names associated with each wave. Make a separate column to represent the phases of the women's movements in India. Now, try to look for cross-cultural comparisons.

Post- independence Scenario: Indian Context

Like Western Europe and the United States, India too saw a feminist movement in the early twentieth century and like them it gradually waned after gaining certain demands. Later, a new feminist movement developed which brought together the contemporary radical movements. The sixties and early seventies saw the development of a whole spate of radical movements in India, from student uprisings, workers' agitations and peasant insurgencies to tribal, anti caste and consumer action movements. These spanned a political spectrum from Gandhian-socialist (that is, nonviolent protest based on explicitly moral values, over specific working or living conditions); to the far left, in particular, the Maoists. The Gandhian-socialists initiated several of the first women's movements in post-Independence India. These included an anti-alcohol agitation in north India, a consumer action and anti-corruption agitation in western India, and a women's trade union, also in western India.

Interestingly, however, neither they, nor others, looked upon these movements as feminist, nor did they advance any theories of women's oppression. These were advanced first by two women's groups which were formed in 1975, both of which grew out of the Maoist far left. The Progressive Organization of Women (POW) in Hyderabad offered an Engelsian analysis of women's subordination, and the League of Women Soldiers for Equality, in Aurangabad, linked feminism and anti-casteism, saying that religious texts were used to subordinate both women and the lower castes. Although the imposition of a State of Emergency on India in 1975 led to a break in most agitational activities, there was, in many ways, an intensification of theoretical discussion. In 1977, when the Emergency was lifted, several women's groups had developed out of these discussions which were able to come 'overground', and several new groups were also formed. Most of these groups were based in the major cities, such as Bombay (Mumbai), Delhi, Madras (Chennai), Poona (Pune), Patna and Ahmedabad. Though there was no particular uniformity between them, their members were largely drawn from the urban educated middle class, and this was an important reason for their feeling that their own needs were minor, and different from the needs of the large, and poor, majority of Indian women.

These women's groups comprised women from different sections of the far left, and there was, at this time, considerable debate on the class basis of women's oppression, the road to women's liberation, and the role that they themselves could play in this. Historically, the experience of the Maoist insurgency of the late sixties and its repression and disintegration in the early seventies, had led many to believe that a revolutionary transformation of society could only come into being if different oppressed groups, such as tribals, subordinate castes and women, first organized and represented

themselves, and then coalesced to fight their common enemies. The question facing the women's groups, therefore, was how women could organize and represent themselves. The general feeling was that the primary role of middle-class groups, such as their own, was to generate a consciousness of women's oppression not only among women but among workers, tribals and others. Broadly speaking, two different views were expressed right from the beginning and continue to be representative even now. The first view holds that socialist feminists should join trade unions and revolutionary mass organizations while continuing to be members of autonomous women's groups. The former were seen as activist forums and the latter as forums for the development of socialist-feminist theory. The second view professed the spread of these activities more spontaneously. It implied that once a feminist movement began, it would naturally spread and grow in multiple ways. The two positions were neither as abstract nor as crude as they sound. By and large, those holding the first had been, or were, active in radical and far left, organizations. They felt that these organizations contained space for the raising of feminist demands. The others had not been, or were not then, involved in such organizations. They felt that negotiating within them would yield small gains compared to those won by an independent women's movement which, through its very existence, would force political organizations to take note of it. In the event, most of the women's groups were sufficiently open to allow both views to coexist within them. They developed links with far left, working-class, tribal and anti-caste organizations, campaigned around specific issues, and debated and disseminated theories of women's oppression. In the early years, however, campaigns were relatively sporadic and minor compared to the pace of theoretical activity. Most of the groups remained fairly loose until the beginning of the eighties - so few even named themselves that at the first socialist-feminist conference in Bombay in 1978, their main identification was regional - as the 'Bombay group', the 'Delhi group', and so on.

By 1979-80, women's groups and campaigns had started all over India, and ranged from protesting dowry murders and police rape to unionizing women workers, domestics and slum-dwellers. The campaigns against dowry murders and police rape were in fact what 'launched' the women's movement, for it was these that caught the attention of the press and became public issues. The campaign against dowry murders started in Delhi in 1979. This was the first time that dowry deaths, hitherto regarded as suicide, were called murders and they also involved bride burning. It was also the first time that the private sphere of the family was invaded, and held to be a major site for the oppression of women. The public/private dichotomy was broken by groups of women demonstrating outside the houses and offices of those who were responsible for dowry deaths within their families, and demanding the intervention of both state and civil society. Interestingly,

feminists were joined by local residents and within some months of the campaign, groups of residents and professionals also began, independently, to make similar protests.

Indian feminists discovered the ironic process whereby an agitation gained numerical strength by being joined by political blocs, but at the same time found itself constrained, intellectually, morally and strategically, by them. By the early eighties, therefore, the women's movement had grown in such a way that autonomous feminist groups were only one of its several currents. Parties of all colours joined the movement, the socialist and communist parties were becoming increasingly active, as were the older, hitherto quiet, women's organizations. At the same time an interest in women began to be shown by diverse groups and radical movements. The socialists had actually formed a women's organization in 1977, which was affiliated to the newly formed and elected Janata Party, but between 1978 and 1980 their activities were fairly low-key and they were for that period marginalized by the feminists. The Communist Party of India had had a women's front from the late fifties, which had dwindled into inactivity. It was galvanized only in 1980-81, when the Party saw that women could again become an important constituency. The Marxists also noted the potential of the women's movement at this juncture, and formed two women's organizations in 1981, one of which was affiliated to their trade union. The first attempt to organize women's trade unions had been made in 1972, when the Self-Employed Women's Association, a kind of Gandhian socialist union of women vendors, was formed in Ahmedabad. By the late seventies SEWA had expanded, and to the union were added several craft co-operatives in and around Ahmedabad. In the eighties they had branches all over the country.

Working-class women's organizations which were set up in the late seventies or early eighties were formed of women belonging to different streams, tended to be different from SEWA. They, too, maintained a distance from the feminists as the issues they handled differed. They did not wish to expose their constituencies to the struggle for power which was being waged in the feminist movement. Perhaps it was for these reasons that the efforts to reach out made by feminist groups in the eighties took the form of neighbourhood rather than workplace politics, with groups of women working in urban slum areas and mobilizing women in campaigns for better water facilities, drainage, and so on. Interest in feminist ideas was meanwhile growing in the radical socialist student movement, which had spearheaded a consumer cum antistate agitation in Gujarat in the mid seventies, and had waged a campaign for land redistribution in one district of Bihar in the late seventies.

By this stage the Indian feminist movement was a multiplicity of organizations and activities. In spreading it had undergone a process of fragmentation

which is common enough to all movements but which affected the feminists in a particular way. As a credo, it is believed that feminism was based on the need for personal solidarity. This led many feminists to question the very basis of feminism. Whereas earlier a certain commonality of women's experience was stressed, as a point at which political differences could be transcended, it was now felt that differences could not be subsumed in this way, and that the quest for unity was not only futile but also counterproductive, for it allowed all sorts of evils to be glossed over. This affected the movement in various ways. A new element could be seen in the links between feminism and environmental, ecological, health, radical science, anti-communal and anti-caste movements which appeared to be multiplying and strengthening all over the country, and which led to new theoretical developments within the movement, as well as new forms of action.

4.8 LET US SUM UP

This unit has given you a broad overview of the emergence of feminism in the western and the Indian contexts. Though feminism has its origin in the women's movement of the west, the concept of equality and consciousness of rights could well be internalized in the changing context of Indian's political, economic, and social spheres. Does feminism have a future or has it served its purpose? The answer lies in the very emergence of various types of 'new' feminisms over a period of time, and in different historical, cultural and political contexts. This phenomenon shows that so long as the problems of women persist, feminism will remain relevant.

4.9 GLOSSARY

Suffrage	: The legal right to vote
POW	: Progressive Organization of Women
SEWA	: Self Employed Women's Organisation

4.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Define feminism and discuss the origin of the concept of new feminism.
- 2) Is feminism a movement? Explain it with suitable examples.
- 3) How does feminism deal with the women's question? Discuss.
- 4) Compare and contrast the evolution of feminism in the west and in India.

4.11 REFERENCES

Basu, Amrita (1999). (Ed.). *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective*. Kali for Women: New Delhi.

Chaudhuri, Maitrayee (2004). (Ed.). *Feminism in India, Issues in Contemporary Indian Feminism*. New Delhi: Kali for Women and Women Unlimited.

Forbes, Geraldine (1999). *Women in Modern India*. Cambridge: University Press.

Hewitt, Steve (2009, September). 'Clandestine Operations: The Vancouver Women's Caucus, the Abortion Caravan, and the RCMP'. *The Canadian Historical Review*, 90(3), 463-495.

Jayawardena, Kumari (1986). *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. London: Zed Books & New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Matthews, Jean. V. (2004). *The Rise of the New Woman- The Women's Movement in America (1875-1930)*. The American Ways Series. Ivan R. Dee Publishers.

Mitchell, Juliet. & Oakley, Ann (1986). (Eds.). *What is Feminism?* Pantheon Books.

Walter, Natasha (1998). *The New Feminism*. London: Little Brown & Company.

West, Rebecca and Marcus, Jane (1982). 'Mr Chesterton in Hysterics: A Study in Prejudice', *The Clarion* (14 Nov 1913). Transcribed by Ted Crawford, reprinted in *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West 1911-17*. New York: Viking Press.

Moi, Toril (1999). *What is a Woman and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Showden, Carisa R. (2009). 'What is Political about the New Feminisms?'. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 30 (2), 166-198.

'The Gospel of Life'. Retrieved March 25, 1995 from www.vatican.va/evangelium-vitae.

4.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

Beteille, Andre (1995). 'Feminism in Academia: Changes in Theory and Practice'. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 2(1), 111-13.

Butler, Judith (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Gupta, Dipankar (1995). 'Feminification of Theory'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30(12), 617-20.

Offen, Karen. M. (2000). *European Feminisms (1700-1950): A Political History*. Stanford. Stanford University Press.

Sangari, Kumkum. & Vaid, Sudesh (1989). (Eds.). *Recasting Women: Essays on Colonial India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.