

**GOVERNMENT ARTS COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS),  
COIMBATORE – 18  
POSTGRADUATE AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**WOMEN'S WRITING – UNIT I – THEORY  
SEMESTER – II**

**UNIT – I : THEORY**

**NON-DETAILED**

**1.1 FEMINISM AND FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM**

**What Is Feminism?**

Feminism is the idea that women should have rights equal to men's in political, social, sexual, intellectual and economic spheres. It comprises a diverse collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies, largely motivated by or concerning the experience of women. Feminism concerns itself with issues of gender difference (a distinction of biological and/or physiological characteristics typically associated with either the males or the females of a species) that advocate equality for women's rights and interests (Lerner, 1993).

It broadly covers a series of campaigns for reforms on issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, women's suffrage, sexual harassment, and sexual violence, all of which fall under the label of feminism. The movement's priorities, meaning and connotation vary among nations and communities and it might differ according to the requirements of class caste, background, educational level, consciousness etc. The feminist movement's agenda includes acting as a counter to the putatively patriarchal strands in the dominant culture.

**Waves of Feminism**

Some feminist scholars have divided the movement's history into three 'waves'. However, the concept of waves is studied in the context of western feminism. It is not used to describe feminism in Indian context.

**First Wave Feminism (Late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century)**

The first wave refers to women's suffrage movements in the 19th and the early 20th centuries (mainly concerned with women's right to vote), although it originally focused on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and opposition to chattel marriage and the ownership of married women by their husbands.

The Seneca Falls Convention began a social movement by which women finally won the Right to Vote in 1920.

**Second-Wave Feminism: 1960s/1970s**

The second wave refers to a period of feminist activity that began in the early 1960s and lasted through to the late 1980s. Some scholars suggest it was a continuation of the earlier phase of feminism that involved the suffragettes of the UK and the USA, but whereas the first wave



focused on rights such as suffrage, the second wave was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as ending discrimination.

The slogan '**personal is political**' became identified with second-wave feminists, who saw women's cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked. They encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and a reflection of sexist power structures, sexism being the belief that one gender or sex is inferior or less valuable than the other.

### **Third- wave Feminism: (1980'-2000)**

Feminism's third wave began in the early 1990s, arising as a response to the backlash against the second wave. The Third Wave grew out of an enormous cultural shift. By the late 1980s, a cohort of women and men who'd been raised with the gains, theories, flaws, and backlash of the feminist movement were beginning to come of age. Whether or not these individual men and women were raised by self-described feminists—or called themselves feminists—they were living feminist lives: Females were playing sports and running marathons, taking charge of their sex lives, being educated in greater numbers than men, running for office, and working outside the home.

Third wave feminism seeks to challenge what it deems is the second wave's essentialist definition of femininity (for every specific kind of entity there is a set of characteristics, all of which any entity of that kind must possess), which, in its view, emphasises the experiences of upper-middle class white women.

The third wave often critiqued second-wave feminism for its lack of attention to the differences among women that arise from race, ethnicity, class, nationality and religion, and emphasised 'identity' as a site of gender struggle. The third wave, with its origins in the mid-1980s, sought to negotiate a space within feminist thought for the consideration of race-related subjectivities.

### **The Fourth Wave (Approximately 2008–Onward)**

By the time Obama and Hillary were facing off in the Democratic primaries, a critical mass of younger feminists began expressing themselves. They were tech-savvy and gender-sophisticated. Perhaps most significant, though, their experience of the online universe was that it was just a part of life, not something that landed in their world like an alien spaceship when they were twenty or fifty.

Much like the Third Wave lived out the theories of the Second Wave (with sometimes surprising results), the Fourth Wave enacted the concepts that Third Wave feminists had put forth.

Many commentators argue that the internet itself has enabled a shift from 'third-wave' to 'fourth-wave' feminism. What is certain is that the internet has created a 'call-out' culture, in which sexism or misogyny can be 'called out' and challenged. This culture is indicative of the continuing influence of the third wave, with its focus on micro-politics and challenging sexism and misogyny insofar as they appear in everyday rhetoric, advertising, film, television and literature, the media, and so on. The existence of a feminist 'fourth wave' has been challenged

by those who maintain that increased usage of the internet is not enough to delineate a new era. But it is increasingly clear that the internet has facilitated the creation of a global community of feminists who use the internet both for discussion and activism.

### Theories of Feminism

Category of Feminism	Causes of Oppression	Remarks
Marist	Capitalism	Gives a graphic picture of the interface between multiple forms of oppressions.  Justifies the feminist consciousness of other marginalised populations.
Radical	Patriarchy. Women's oppression is viewed as the first and deepest form of human oppression, and also the most prevalent.	Evolved from the movements of the 1950s and 1960s.  Often critiqued for its essentialism, a singular definition and westernization of concept of women.  Questions positivist methodology.
Socialist	Capitalism and patriarchy. Men's control over women's labour.	The origin of standpoint feminism: a belief that the oppressed understand oppression better than their oppressors.  Focus on inequality.  Dynamic view of politics
Liberal	Lack of laws against oppression.	Positivist feminism argues that women with equal opportunities would counter sexism
Psychoanalytic	Early childhood experiences	

**Feminist theories used in development****WID- Women In Development**

Boserup, laid the basis for WID, contradicting the theories of development, which assumed the “trickle down effect” to disadvantaged men in Third World Countries, would have a further “trickle down effect” to women.

**Connelly, MacDonald, Parpart, & Barriteau, (2000)** in explaining the historical context of engendering development have posited that “Boserup discovered that most of these projects ignored women and that many technologically sophisticated projects undermined women’s economic opportunities and autonomy... Training in new technologies was usually offered to men, which meant that most “modern projects improved male opportunities and technological knowledge but reduced women’s access to both technology and employment” (pp. 3).

Though WID argued, that development could not be achieved unless women are included or “added on” in processes of development, it did not question the “Why” - the root causes of such inequalities. This missing dimension led to the next theory.

**WAD- Women And Development**

This theory rejected the view of women being ‘added on’ and argued that the very presence of women implied that they were a part of the development process (as well as all other processes too). They claimed that it was the inaccurate interpretations of women’s roles and contributions to the economy, that had led to a neglect of their needs and their inclusion in the conceptualization and planning of development activities. Proponents of WAD, mostly drawn from the South, further stipulated that unless the issues of inequality arising from patriarchal attitudes and reflected in institutions and systems of private and public spheres are not addressed, the benefits of development can never be equitably distributed amongst men and women. This theory did not stand for too long, when yet another dimension of thinking was added, giving rise to the third theory.

**GAD- Theory Gender and Development**

This theory advocated that women’s needs could not be seen in isolation of the needs of men, the other half of society. If a holistic approach is not taken to view issues of gender as opposed to only women’s issues then such development was not sustainable.

Farrell (2008) says, “the objective behind such a strategy is that the priorities of men and women get adequate consideration and existing inequalities between them are not perpetuated” (p.7).

In more recent years two more theories emerged, namely *PAD – Post Modernism and Development* and *WED – Women, Environment and Development* but the GAD remains by and large, the most popular theory.