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A Brief History of Feminism in General and Feminism in India



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In 1610, a French noblewoman started the first salon, an event that attracted likeminded intellectuals to socialise and exchange ideas. While salon participation was reserved for the upper class, the cultural institution provided the first secular outlet for educated women to converse with men. At that time, women's value and role in society was framed as the querelle des femmes, or "question of women." The querelle addressed education, marriage and social mobility as it related to women, and scholars have referenced it as an example of the earliest feminist thought. Despite the Enlightenment and Age of Reason, social progress started only a few centuries ago. Following those paradigm shifts, came the realisation that social and cultural institutions are the whole system of human labour. This meant that changes in those institutions wouldn't be contrary to God because they eliminated class and gender limitations.

Also, during the Revolutionary War in 1774 and the French Revolution in 1789, women were able to exercise greater levels of freedom. Both revolutionary themes discussed human equality including equal representation for men and women. Nevertheless, by addressing women's political rights and freedom as a human right, these events laid the groundwork for early feminism. Amid the tumult of the period, in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft published her seminal work, "Vindication of Woman. "The Vindication of the Rights of Women" brought forth the idea that women should receive equal education and opportunities. She believed that the educational system was biased against women, and restricted women's potential by limiting their education and freedom. She has written extensively about the need to change, and early feminists look to her book as an enduring guide.



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In the 1800's, women had little ability to affect their own destiny. The average married woman counted 7 children among her residence. Higher education was avoided. Wealthier women could exercise limited authority in their household, but lacked economic autonomy and were subject to patriarchal dictates. Lower-class women were as directly involved in the work force as were men, but the same social and legal restrictions applied to both strata.

Very ironically, religion motivated some women in the 19th century to seek out social betterment. The Second Great Awakening helped to give women more power and economic independence outside the home. Prohibition and temperance movements built on a Protestant undercurrent activated women as well. Angelina and Sarah Grimke became well known for their abolitionist activities that included public speeches and pamphlets. When pressed for a public response to sexist comments, Sarah Grimke penned "Letters on the Equality of the Sexes" in 1838. The college was the first of its kind in the nation to admit women.

When the exclusion of women from many abolitionist organisations became unsustainable, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott came together to rally for women's right to vote. In 1848, women from Seneca Falls, New York, gathered together to discuss their grievances and their demand for the right to vote. The convention was met with disdain by the press, but it nevertheless laid the groundwork for later suffrage demands. Many other prominent individuals, including Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, and Lucy Stone, all became active in the women's suffrage movement.

After 1860 suffragists achieved significant gains when New York passed the Married



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Woman's Property Act. The bill granted property rights, joint custody, and equal pay for women.

Feminism was used to describe the incitement for women's rights from the early 1900's to 1910.

Many suffragists did not view themselves as feminists; some only desired voting rights and not suffrage. Forty years later, in 1920, suffrage (or the right to vote) was granted to women.

1.4.1 Four Waves of Feminism

There are four waves of feminism as discussed below:

1. First Wave Feminism (18th century to 1920)

First Wave Feminism was what roiled the American political scene throughout the late 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. The events that are included in the first movements of the history of feminism begin from 1809 in the U.S. married women property law until 1928. All UK women were granted the right to vote equally with men in 1928. Within the first wave movement of feminism, there are exactly 69 incidents. This was a form of feminism that championed certain particular causes that addressed the right of a woman to have a voice in society.

2. Second Wave Feminism (1920 to 1970)

Second Wave Feminism is a movement that concerns itself with wage equality, sexualization, civil rights, and also how women are treated in the workplace. This is the point on every feminist's timeline where the movement began to become popular. The different feminism movements start from 1963 the report of the American Presidential Commission on the Status of Women which caused the enacting of equal pay act till 1980s feminist sex wars last incident the Japanese Equal Employment Opportunity Law of 1985, prohibits gender discrimination with



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respect to recruitment, hiring, promotion, training, and job assignment. There are approximately 104 cases of second wave feminism. In the 1920s, women grew tired of being told to be chaste and dainty while men did whatever they pleased. By the 1960s, famous feminists like Gloria Steinem denounced those inequities and fought against them.

3. Third Wave Feminism (1980 to 2000)

Third Wave Feminism started by writing importance of women's equality. This is an alternative to feminism, where people stop worrying about gender, sexuality and identity politics. The incidents that consist in the third wave of feminism starts from 1991 published of an article by Rebecca walker American feminist "Becoming the third wave" following establishment of riot girl movement in Washington and continuing till now, the latest famous incident was the slutwalk incident Toronto, on 3 April 2011 and globally the slutwalk issue is spreading. Slut walk was an incident that occurred in Toronto where police stated that women are victims because they are walking and such that had created too many challenges and were being reported on media over the world. There are exactly 30 incidents in the third wave of feminism this was a time of radical riot girls, punk rock as a form of feminism, and a time when the LGBTQ was up for questioning.

4. Fourth Wave Feminism (2000 to today)

Fourth Wave Feminism is still in its "infant" stage, but it has certain general characteristics that are easy to notice. This movement is largely accepting of the LGBTQ community and does not view gender as a binary. This is a sex-positive movement that encourages body-acceptance. Cross-dressers are permitted, but misandrists are not. More importantly, Fourth Wave Feminism is



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mostly an online discussion. As of right now, there is a dispute over several important issues in the Fourth Wave Feminism movement. Many Fourth Wave feminists do not feel comfortable identifying as a "feminist". It is difficult to know what we can gain from Fourth Wave Feminism. However, it is believed that we will likely learn more about inclusiveness and egalitarianism in the future.

1.5 Feminism in India

Feminism developed in India as a part of the colonisation of India. This is not to say India did not have a history of subjugating females prior to the arrival of British. The research shows that Indian women experienced "feminist" urges, and also articulated both their sense of exclusion and denial as well as their desire for freedom and fulfilment. Nevertheless, the specific city of Feminism, as a concept that depends upon the principle of universal and equal citizen rights (without regards to gender and creed), is certainly located in a modern context. Similarly, the British nineteenth century idea of the need to educate women for national progress also presents a historically specific, modern formulation that continues to influence contemporary Indian feminism.

On the one hand, modernity was ushered in by colonialism and was premised on and operated within structures that were deeply unequal and unjust, while discourses of modernity spoke of freedom and equality, of progress and the inalienable right to self-rule. The inherent contradiction and ambiguity of modernity allowed women to take shape as Feminists in modern India (Chaudhuri 2011). Despite wanting to be modern, Indians, at the same time, wanted to be



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distinct, different from, and/or superior to the West.

Indian women desired to rid themselves of the oppressive structures of tradition but, at the same time, wished to reaffirm the ancientness and wisdom of that same tradition. Some have, thus, argued that the woman question, such as exemplified by sati in nineteenth century India, was simply an incidental site to debate questions of tradition and culture, nation and modernity (Mani 1989). Moreover, attaining India's freedom from colonialism was seen as a necessary prelude to the freedom of women. Hence, given the close interface between Feminism and western colonialism, many Indian women in both the women's and national movements disavowed being feminist (Chaudhuri 2011).



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This disavowal serves as an impassioned denial of feminist visions, and a deferential reception of patriarchal and orthodox critiques. It is perhaps more productive to read the work in a different way, as a search for a different language by which the culturally specific communities of Indian feminists could articulate their desires at a time when the discourse of difference was absent and illegitimate in the dominant public sphere. This reflects the quest for indigenous cultural grounds for feminism, and how it persists in a twenty-first century marked by global inequalities and western aggression. Contending power struggles for the control of women and cultural rights have often been fought over gender issues and cultural rights. The Western perspective provides a counterpoint to Indian women as emblems of culture in a different light.

The narrative is an important part of the storey of feminism in India, but only a partial



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storey. Western colonialism did not create the only unequal structure in Indian society. In this society, humans were divided by caste and class. The rise of Dalit Feminism in the last decades of the twentieth century has drawn attention to the fact that Dalit women speak differently and that they have been excluded from the feminist movement.

It is claimed that the nationalist framework and the cultural making of the nation by the upper castes shaped by the dominant Hindu middle classes has subsumed the woman question (Geetha 2004). In other words, questions of community and women's rights, of nationalism, secularism, and the state, did not crop up as a posterior add-on to the woman question; they were a bone of contention from the nineteenth century. During the debate it was debated whether purdah (lit. 'curtain', veil worn by women, also 'female segregation', for further discussion, cf. Chaudhuri 2011) was a Hindu or Muslim practise. Members of both communities blamed the other community for the origins of purdah, thereby claiming the right to their women's freedom from the traditional restraints of purdah. A discussion took place in the Constituent Assembly concerning whether religious rights would interfere with women's rights.

This past history of Indian Feminism illustrates the perspective of a twenty-first century West caught between the competing claims of multiculturalism, the concept of the state bound to secular visions, and notions of the individual rights of citizens. The past continues into the present. A bill proposing to reserve 33 per cent of the seats in the Indian parliament for women failed to be ratified in 2010 because leaders of a new and assertive middle class constituted by middle-caste communities saw this as a ploy of upper castes to retain hegemony over the state and



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Indian public life Although women's organisations firmly backed the proposed measure, its realisation seems to be a retreating possibility. Feminism, therefore, is entangled in hegemonic struggles because they exist in a context of social justice.

Feminism in twenty-first century India is therefore challenged by two forces: first, from a patriarchy that defends honour killing on grounds of cultural rights; second, from a neoliberal vision, which deifies the economy and demonizes collective and emancipative politics. Often both sets of views emerge from the same factions. In cases such as honour killings, the state is asked to follow the writ of patriarchally controlled communities (Chowdhry 2007).

At other times, the recommendations have encouraged the government to shun social welfare measures for poor women, and instead to facilitate financial institutions to deal directly with women as creditors. (John 2004). Language of rights of women as citizens and as workers is replaced with language of the market, which is accountable to none other than the imperatives of profit maximisation. Since the focus of this paper is on the ongoing battle of indigenous women over mining appropriations, this can be seen as an obstacle to development. If earlier, politics sought to tame markets, proponents of this new form of global capitalism use markets to tame politics. Images of individuated women, for whom an unbridled market provides endless opportunities, give rise to popular discourses at home and abroad that celebrate the idea of an unfettered self. Females killing their women in rural areas can be explained as an individual choice. On the other hand, real politics witness patriarchal assertions, such as justifying honour



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killings, opposing the Women's Reservation Bill and supporting lenient handling for those accused of rape. Despite strong opposition from feminists, challenges persist in a variety of areas.

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