

Name: SOHELA

Batch: 332

Q: What is Feminism? What are the different theories of feminism? ←

Ans. Introduction:

→ Origin: In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, French philosopher "Charles Fourier" first used the word "Feminism" which is derived from the Latin word "Femina" means "Woman."

→ Definition: ←

"A social, political, and ideological movement which promotes gender equality in terms of rights, opportunities, and status, known as Feminism."

→ Key Points:

→ Feminism involves the belief that individuals of all genders ought to be free to make decisions about their lives, bodies, and futures without experiencing discrimination, harassment, or physical violence because of

their gender.

- Feminism also oppose and rejects the patriarchal, sexist, and misogynistic structures that support gender inequality.
- In general, Feminism aims to establish a society that is just, fair and equitable for all.

### → Feminists:

- Feminists can be of any gender, ethnicity, age, or origin, and they can come from all different types of occupations.
- They support gender equality and the rights of both sexes.
- To promote gender equality and spread awareness of gender based injustices, feminists may take part in action, campaigning, or education.
- There were many influential feminists throughout the history like Mary Wollstonecraft,

Simone de Beauvoir, Bell Hooks, Betty Friedan and so on.

### → Theories of Feminism

There have been many theories of feminism throughout the history some of them are as follows:

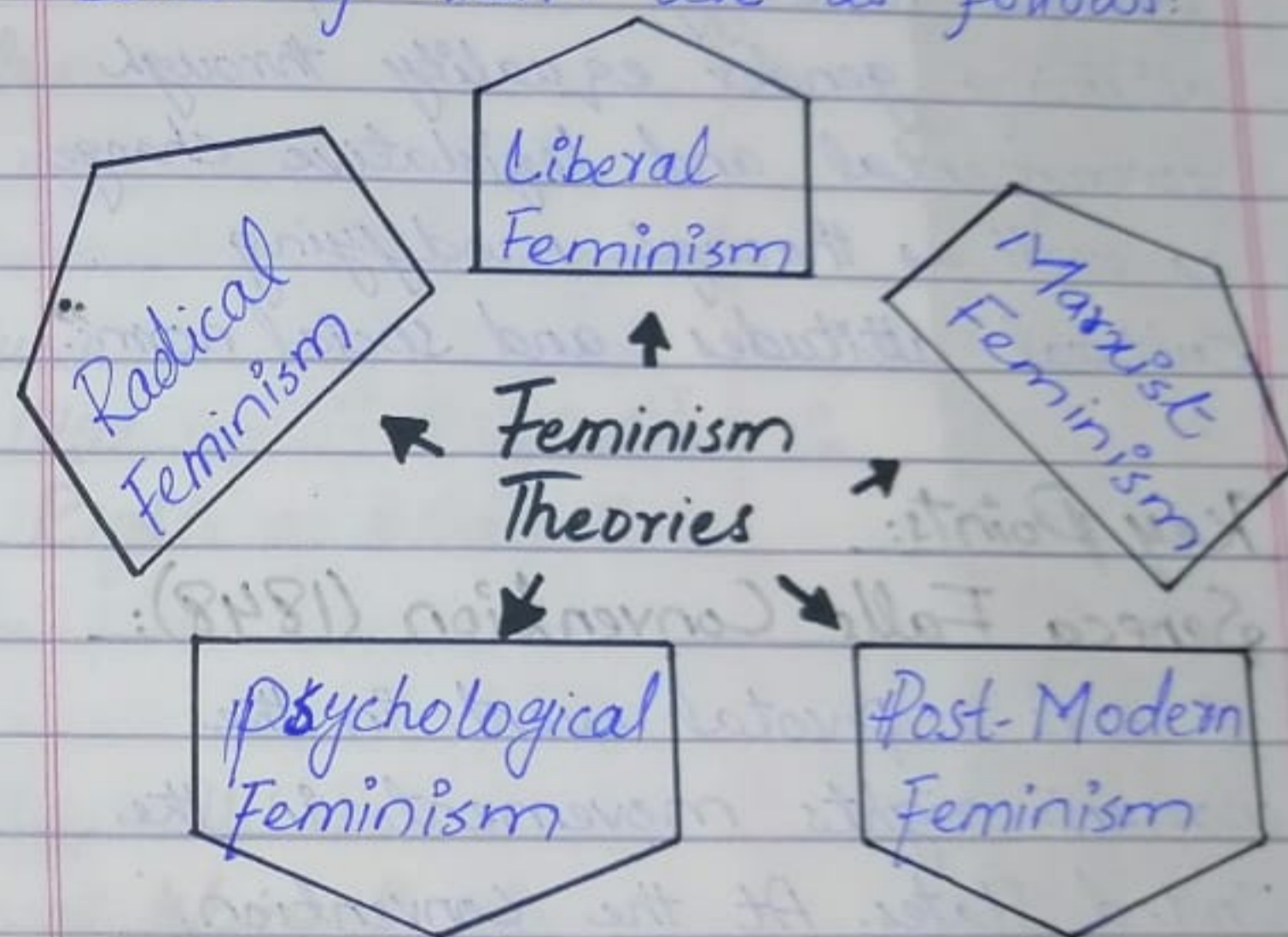


Figure: Theories of Feminism

### 1. Liberal Feminism:

#### → Origin (1972, -1960s):

Liberal Feminism is also known as First wave of feminism when women in Europe and North-America started organizing for

their rights and freedoms in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, liberal feminism was born.

## → Definition:

“Liberal feminism theory is a feminist ideology that emphasizes attaining gender equality through governmental and legislative change as well as through modifying cultural attitudes and social norms.”

## → Key Points:

### 1. Seneca Falls Convention (1848):

It was a pivotal event in the women's rights movement in the United States. At the convention, attendees discussed and advocated for a range of women's rights.

It includes;

- The Right to vote
- The Right to Education
- The Right to Own Property
- The Right to Divorce

## 2. 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment of USA (1920):

The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US constitution, ratified in 1920, granted women "The Right to Vote". The amendment marked a significant milestone in the ongoing fight for gender equality in the US.

### → Major Advocates:

- 1) Mary Wollstonecraft: An English writer and philosopher who argued for women's education and equal rights in her 1792 book, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" was one of the first liberal feminism proponents.
- 2) John Stuart Mills: Mills' 1869 book, "The Subjection of Women" also argued about the legal and political rights as men, and that society's subordination of women was unjust.
- 3) Bell Hooks: Hook's 1984 book, "From Margin to Center" also describes the struggle to end sexist oppressions.

## → Criticism on Liberal Feminism:

- Its main focus was on individuals' rights and legal reforms and somehow failed to address the systematic oppressions.
- Limited Scope because it only focused on the needs of privileged women such as white, middle-class women while neglecting the experiences of women from marginalized communities.

## 2. Radical Feminism:

- Origin: The Radical Feminism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, and emphasizes the need for fundamental and systemic change in order to "achieve gender equality."

### → Definition:

"Radical feminism is a feminist perspective that advocates for the complete restructuring of society to eliminate gender-based oppression and patriarchy. Radical

feminists aim to create a society where gender roles and hierarchies are dismantled, and women have full autonomy and equal rights."

### → Key Points:

1. Critique of Patriarchy: Radical Feminism identifies patriarchy as the root cause of women's oppression and advocates for a complete dismantling of power imbalance.
2. Sexuality and Reproductive Rights: It often addresses issues related to sexual autonomy and reproductive rights, advocating for women's control over their bodies.
3. Intersectionality: Recognizing that gender intersects with factors like race and class, it addresses multiple forms of oppression that compound inequalities.

## → Major Advocates:

- (1) Simone de Beauvoir: In her 1949 book, "The Second Sex", she argued that women have been historically defined and marginalized by men. She critically examines the historical, societal, and philosophical oppression of women.
- (2) Betty Friedan's In her ~~book~~ 1963 book, "The Feminine Mystique", helped to spark the second wave of feminism and argued for women's rights and freedoms.
- (3) Shulamith Firestone: Her 1970 book, "The Dialectic of Sex", was about gender-based oppression as a result of biological differences between men and women and advocated for the complete dismantling of traditional gender roles and norms.

## → Criticism on Radical Feminism:

→ The main objective of Radical

Feminism focuses on complete dismantling of patriarchal system which is totally against the nature because male and female are always in pairs.

- It also fails to address other issues of gender equalities and problems faced in society like race, class and sexuality oppressions.
- Hence, due to the narrow concept, the radical feminism soon lost its visibility.

### 3. Marxist Feminism:

#### → Origin (1960s - 1970s):

The Marxist Theory was developed by "Karl Marx" and "Friedrich Engels" in the mid-19th century. Marx work focused on the analysis of capitalist society and the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class. This theory has been influential in many areas of social and political thought, including

Feminism.

## → Definition:

"Marxist Feminism Theory is about gender-based oppression rooted in the capitalist system and the socialist Revolution is necessary to achieve gender equality."

## → Key Points:

- It analyzes the ways in which capitalism and patriarchy intersect and reinforce each other, and advocates for a collective approach to social change.
- It seeks to challenge traditional gender roles and the socialization of domestic labor, and ~~the~~ to value domestic work as an essential contribution to society.

## → Major Advocates:

- (1) Selma James: An Activist and Writer known for her work on the concept of "Wages for Housework"

Her Contribution to Marxist feminism includes highlighting the economic and social value of unpaid domestic work.

- (2) Silvia Federici: Her book, "Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation" explores the historical connection between the witch trials, the rise of capitalism and the subjugation of women.

## → Criticism on Marxist Feminism:

- Critics argued that it only focuses on economic factors and reduce all social phenomena to economic relations.
- They argued that other factors, such as, culture, psychology, and individual agency, play significant roles in shaping society and cannot be solely explained by economic forces.



## 4. Psychological Feminism:

→ Origin: Psychological feminism, also known as feminist psychology, originated in the 1960s and 1970s, as a response to the feminist movement's recognition of gender bias and sexism within psychology. It emerged to challenge male-centric perspectives in the field and explore how societal gender roles influenced mental health and behavior.

→ Definition:  
"Psychological feminism theory examines how societal gender roles, power structures, and stereotypes influence human psychology, behavior, and mental health, emphasizing the need to challenge gender biases within the field and promote gender equity."

→ Key Points:

→ Critiques Gender Bias: It challenges

gender bias within Psychology.

- Promotes Inclusivity: It seeks to make psychology more inclusive by addressing the experiences of women and marginalized gender groups.
- Advocates for Gender Equity: It advocates for greater gender equity in both research and therapeutic practices.
- Explores Gender Roles: It examines how societal gender roles shape individual psychology and behavior.
- Major Advocates:

(1) Carol Gilligan: In her book, "In a Different Voice" (1982) challenged the male centric theories, and highlighting the importance of care and relationships in ethical decision-making.

(2) Nancy Chodorow's Her book "The Reproduction of Mother" (1978) examined the role of mother-child relationships in shaping gender identity, shedding light on early

formation and socialization of gender roles.

- (3) Karen Horney: Her work challenged Freudian views on women and sexuality. Her book "Feminine Psychology" (1967) is a notable work in this regard.

### → Criticism:

- Critics argued that psychological Theory of feminism overly focused on individual experiences and emotions, and may not be effective at addressing larger social and political issues.
- The Feminist scholars and psychologists criticized Sigmund Freud's concept on role of biological determinants and ~~visibility~~ Phallus in the development of femininity.

### § Post-Modern Feminism:

Origin: It is a theoretical framework that emerged in the

late 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1990s), building upon and critiquing earlier Feminist Movements.

### → Definition:

"Postmodern Feminism rejects fixed, universal notions of gender and power, emphasizing the role of language, culture, and intersectionality in shaping individual experiences and identities. It deconstructs established narratives and hierarchies to promote diversity and complexity in understanding social issues."

### → Key points:

- (1) Challenges fixed gender and power structures.
- (2) Emphasizes the influence of culture and language.
- (3) Prioritizes diversity and intersectionality.

## → Major Advocates:

- (1) Judith Butler: Her concept of "Performativity," challenges fixed gender roles and identities.
- (2) Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Her work on postcolonial feminism and the critique of Eurocentrism within feminism, highlighting the importance of including voices from the global south and marginalized groups in feminist discourse.

## → Criticism:

Critics argue that postmodernism's rejection of objective truth and its emphasis on relativism can lead to a breakdown of shared meaning and moral values in society.

## ⇒ Conclusion:

Hence, the feminist theories underscore the ongoing relevance and necessity of feminism in addressing contemporary gender disparities.