



# **FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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In Latin, Femina means woman. Therefore, the word 'Feminism' is derived from Latin.

(<https://geheugen.delpher.nl/en/geheugen/pages/collectie/Vrouwen+in+actie%21/Feminisme+en+vrouwenbeweging>)

Feminism is an ideology that deals with the escalation of women at all the social spheres of life like politics, finance, language, family, society, religion, caste, race, literature, culture, arts, education, profession, wages, opportunities, gender and so on. It is also a movement which aims at bringing equality in the social stature of men and women. It tries to deconstruct all the gender biases set against women by and in the patriarchal society. It also tends to understand and define the natural difference between a man and a woman. The rights regarding child production and upbringing, domestic violence, equal wages for the same work, gender violence and discrimination are some of the seminal points that the feminism stresses most.



Symbol of Feminism ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist\\_movements\\_and\\_ideologies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist_movements_and_ideologies))

## **Definition of Feminism:**

Feminism is a “belief in and advocacy of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes expressed especially through organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests.” In brief, it is “the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities.” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism>)

## **Types of Feminism :**

Feminism tries to find out causes of subordinate status of women, analyses and explains the causes, and suggests remedies over the found problems. It does not take revenge against men, rather it works as an energy-source of the equality and enhancement of women lives.

### **1.Liberal Feminism:**

“Liberal feminism, also called mainstream feminism, is a main branch of feminism defined by its focus on achieving gender equality through political and legal reform within the framework of liberal democracy.” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal\\_feminism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_feminism)) The goal of Liberal feminism, the first phase of feminism, is to accomplish identity of women equal to men. The discrimination between the genders should be stopped and both, men and women, be considered as human beings. It is considered as the first phase in the history of feminism. Early literary texts like *The Vindication of Rights of Women* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft, “On the Equality the Sexes” (1790) by Judith Murray, *Declaration of Sentiments* (1848) by Elizabeth Stanton, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) by Virginia Woolf are its examples. Women with their supporters marched on street to show their protest to get women's domestic, political, social and religious rights. Their most important demand was the right to education. Their next demand was the right to vote. They want right over family property. They also want the right to decide whether to beget a baby. The higher education institutions were very few in those days and girls were not sent for higher studies. Their main objective was to spread awareness regarding the rights of women, and to bring respective necessary changes with the help of available resources.

### **2. Socialist Feminism:**

Socialist Feminism is also known as Marxist Feminism since it encompasses many of the Marxist theories. It is the second phase of Feminism, which aimed at achieving gender equality in financial sectors and society. It comes between the mild phase of 'Liberal Feminism' and

extreme phase called 'Radical Feminism'. It fights against the payment discrimination of the same work for male and female workers. For the equal status in society, women should get 'equal wages for the same work'. All the domestic financial rights, except very few, in a patriarchal society are reserved to the males only. This financial restrictions helps men to keep women under control. Therefore, it is the most important thing to bring the dreams of feminism true.

The earlier supporters of this phase argued that the theories of Karl Marx would help to overcome the social and domestic oppression of women. They are oppressed and sometimes treated as slave at the place of their work. They are either under-paid or not paid at all. Their domestic work is not considered as work at all, hence is not valued or paid for. They are kept engaged in household duties and are not given time to work professionally. *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir, *Wages Against Housework* (1975) by Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero* (2012) by Silvia Federici etc are texts supporting this Marxist Feminist view.



Socialist feminism calls for an end to capitalism (<https://study.com/academy/lesson/feminism-types-and-definitions-liberal-socialist-culture-radical.html>)

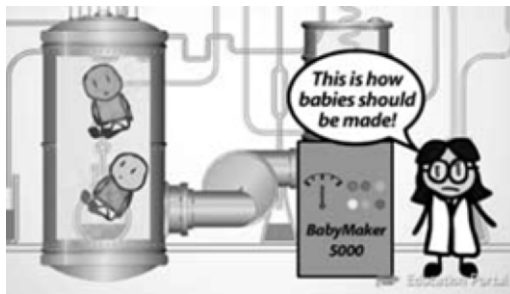
However, feminists recently questioned the male-oriented Marxist theories and constructed new theories.

### 3. Radical Feminism:

Radical Feminism is the extreme phase of feminism. “Radical feminism is a perspective within feminism that calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts



....” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radical\\_feminism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radical_feminism)) This phase is started in 1960s and also called as second wave of feminism. By this time women in most of the countries got the right to vote. They also started working professionally outside of the home. However, they experienced difficulties in outside work such as under-payment, type of work, sexual harassment etc. Therefore, it deconstructs and redefines the roles of gender in the patriarchal society. For the supporters of this type of feminism, all the men are oppressors of women. They started spreading awareness regarding the sexual harassment at domestic and working places. They fought legally to prevent women from becoming object of sex and production. They believe that men have developed a systematic social structures to ensure male supremacy and authority over female. Therefore, they took more direct action against the male supremacy and dominance. The texts such as *Sexual Politics* (1970) by Kate Millett, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975) by Susan Brownmiller, *Ain't I a Woman* (1981) and *All about Love* (2000) by Bell Hook discuss the radical views of feminism.



Radical feminism believes in eliminating the concept of gender entirely (<https://study.com/academy/lesson/feminism-types-and-definitions-liberal-socialist-culture-radical.html>)

#### 4. Cultural Feminism:

Cultural Feminism is the outcome of Radical Feminism. It believes that men and women perceive the world differently. Therefore, they should not be treated like men in all the contexts. They also believe that the perception of world by women is better and more beautiful than the perception of men. It stresses that the women's approach of the world will help construct and protect the world. For instance, a girl tackles any natural or readymade object more delicately and cautiously than a boy. The culture of nurturing and caring is inborn in women. The world needs this culture more in the 21st century. They also celebrate the concepts like

maternity and peacefulness. Therefore, their perception of world should be promoted and practiced. The texts such as *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir, *That Long Silence* (2008) by Shashi Deshpande, *Men Explain Things to Me* (2014) by Rebecca Solnit deal with the cultural aspects of feminist movement.

### **5. Eco-Feminism:**

The name Eco-Feminism was coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974.

(<https://www.britannica.com/topic/ecofeminism>)

It reflects the spiritual side of feminist movement. As its name shows it is more concerned with ecology and environment. It seeks connection between nature / ecology and women. It basically believes that the patriarchal attitude of men will destroy the environment and its resources. This male attitude does not bother about the fast dying natural resources. This reckless attitude of men towards environment is also parallel to women. Eco-feminism finds similarities between the wretched condition of women and the helpless nature. Both women and nature are controlled and badly treated by the patriarchal society. *Women and Nature* (1978) by Susan Griffin, *The Death of Nature* (1980) by Carolyn Merchant and *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) by Mary Daly etc are the texts expressing eco-feminist views.

### **6. I-Feminism:**

I-Feminism, that is, Individualist Feminism is an offshoot of Liberal feminism. It relies more on law to bring gender equality in the world. For the supporters of I-feminism, every human being, irrespective of their gender, race, nationality, or caste, is an individual. They must be treated equally. If you insult a man, it hurts him. The same is true with a woman or a person from any race / nation / caste. Like other branches of feminism, it also works to bring gender equality in all the spheres of life such as religion, education, caste, profession, wages, business and family matters. Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill etc has influenced this movement.

### **7. Transgender Feminism:**

Some feminists do not consider the Transgender / trans-women as women. For them transgender people get all the rights that a male gets in a patriarchal society. On the other hand, some feminists accept transgender as woman for their womanish behaviour and desires. Therefore, they fight for the freedom of overt expression of womanish /

feminine desires of / by the transgender. *If I Was Your Girl* (2016) by Meredith Russo, *Refuse* (2011) by Elliott DeLine, *Double Trouble* (2020) by Yumi Cox are the texts that discuss the experiences and problems of transgender people.

### **8. Other Feminisms:**

Other than these major types, there are types of feminism based on caste, religion, race, nationality, language, literature etc. Black feminism, Post-colonial feminism, etc are few of them.

Feminist women and their supporters existed in society from very long. However, it was only from the 18th century that the women consciously and overtly raised their voices against the gender inequality in the society. They formed movements to achieve their goals. Initially, the movement was 'liberal'. It has gone through various phases by changing its goals and become 'radical'. Although the feminists have nearly achieved their goals in the developed countries and urban areas in developing countries, they are still fighting for their goals in the under-developed countries and the rural areas in developing countries.

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