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Unit I

Module 3

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Feminist writers

- Virginia Woolf questioned women's contribution to social and political life.
- She was married to the political journalist Leonard Woolf, with whom she founded the Hogarth Press.
- Woolf delivered a series of lectures at Newnham and Girton, the only colleges for women at Cambridge University at that time.

- *A Room of One's Own* (1929) consists of an edited version of her lectures on “Women and Fiction”, published by Hogarth Press.
- In the work she explored the cultural and economic constraints on female creativity and pondered the historical and political obstacles which have hampered the establishing of a female literary tradition.

- In order for a woman to be creative, she need a steady income of 500 euros a year and a room of her own “guineas and locks”
- In her essay “Professions for Women” she specifically identified two issues hindering female creativity:
- “Social pressure on women to conceal the fact that they have a mind of their own”

- “... and the need to disguise their physical desires in order to avoid chastisement and masculine disapproval”
- In *Three Guineas* (1938) – attempted to construct a female identity which would transcend national and political boundaries.
- Her writings displays acute awareness of discrimination and social marginalization.

- “As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world”
- Her writings became relevant to the later feminists who pursued consciousness-raising during the second wave of feminism.
- Her ideas – need for female literary tradition – taken up by gynocritics

- Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) – new era of thinking about woman's position in society.
- A classic of feminist philosophy
- She offered a new understanding of social relations between men and women.
- Her interpretation of the social construction of femininity as Other paved the way for the theoretical discussions of the second wave.

Existence Precedes Essence

- De Beauvoir explained subjectivity (our sense of Self) through existentialist philosophy
- Existentialism proposes that one exists first, and through one's acts, one becomes something
- She reasoned that an individual has absolute control over their fate, and neither society nor organized religion should limit our freedom to live authentically

- Since all cultural representations of the world around us have been produced by men, women read themselves in terms of masculine definitions and “dream through the dreams of men”.
- Thus woman is required to accept her status of Other, “make herself object” and “renounce her autonomy”

- “This status of Other can be changed if women learn to access the subjecthood they have so far been denied”
- “Women must achieve complete economic and social equality, which will enable an inner metamorphosis to take place”

- “When a female becomes woman, she will be a Subject as man is a Subject, and an Other to man in as much as he is Other to her”

Second Wave Feminism: Milestones

1960	First oral contraceptive developed by American scientists is approved for use
1963	John F. Kennedy creates the Commission on the Status of Women which will expose discrimination against women in employment Betty Friedan, <i>The Feminine Mystique</i>
1966	National Organization for Women (NOW)
1968	Student revolutions in France Miss America protests
1970	Germaine Greer, <i>The Female Eunuch</i> Shulamith Firestone, <i>The Dialectic of Sex</i> Kate Millet, <i>Sexual Politics</i>

Second Wave Feminism: Milestones

1971	Ms magazine is founded by Gloria Steinem
1972	Spare Rib magazine founded by Marsha Rowe and Rosie Boycott
1974	Ann Oakley. <i>Women's Work</i>
1975	Sex Discrimination act passed in the UK to “render unlawful certain kinds of sex discrimination, and discrimination on the grounds of marriage” National Abortion Campaign formed in the UK to defend women's rights to make decisions about their bodies
1976	Adrienne Rich, <i>Of Woman Born</i> Dorothy Dinnerstein, <i>The Mermaid and the Minotaur</i>

Second Wave Feminism: Milestones

1978	Mary Daly, <i>Gyn/Ecology</i> Nancy Chodorow, <i>The Reproduction of Mothering</i>
1981	Bell hooks, <i>Ain't I A woman?</i>
1982	Combahee River Collective issue their statement
1983	Alice Walker, <i>In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose</i>
1991	Naomi Wolf, <i>The Beauty Myth</i> Susan Faludi, <i>Backlash</i>
1994	Violence Against Women Act passed in the US

- Second wave feminists adopted and adapted De Beauvoir's reasoning that women's oppression lay in their socially constructed status of Other to men.
- The term "second wave" was coined by Marsha Lear to describe the increase in feminist activity in America, Britain and Europe from the late 1960s onwards.

- Two political movements shaped the second wave: the Women's Rights Movement (WRM) and the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM)
- The WLM emerged out of the New Left of the WRM in the late 1960s. In the US, it came as result of civil rights activism and anti-Vietnam campaigning.

- The WLM provided theoretical solutions to women's oppression, whereas the WRM was the more practical and socially driven movement.
- The slogan "the personal is political" referred to the fact that every aspect of a woman's private life is affected by and can itself affect the political situation. The term was popularized in 1969 by the American radical feminist Carol Hanisch.

- More recent feminists have challenged early interpretations of the slogan and have invited women to separate the personal from the political.
- 1963, Betty Friedan – *The Feminine Mystique*
– It heralded the second wave.
- The title refers to the idealization of traditional roles ascribed to women which is interpreted as a means of keeping women subordinate to men.

- “The mistake, says the mystique, the root of women’s troubles in the past is that women envied men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love.”

- Friedan was instrumental in consciousness-raising and appealed to women – her book was based on her personal experiences and those of real women.
- Friedan believed that since American society was predicated upon the pursuit of the American Dream, all that was needed for women's liberation was a national programme of education which would lead to fulfilling work and would liberate both sexes.

- She maintained that if women learned how to juggle their various domestic duties, they would find the time and energy to engage in professional careers. This would ensure them private and public satisfaction.
- Problematic issues in her argument: she did not identify the source of women's oppression, nor did she take into consideration women's varied access to education.

- Friedan, like de Beauvoir, focused solely on the experience of middle-class, heterosexual, white women. Both critics tended to blame women themselves for their subordinate position and failed to acknowledge the need for society to change in order to accommodate women's changing lives.

- However, she was a formidable activist:
Founded National Organization for Women (NOW); Organized the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971 and the International Feminist Congress in 1973; Started the first Women's Bank in 1973.
- 1981, *The Second Stage*, She detailed the obstacles facing women who attempt to combine marriage and a career.

Consciousness-raising

- Feminist activists of the 1970s understood the need to make their case heard by more people but they also aimed at making the movement for women's liberation more inclusive and representative.
- In the US, consciousness-raising (C-R) efforts took the shape of rap groups organized around the country.

- Rap groups educated their members about the politics of discrimination, altering their perceptions and conceptions of themselves in relation to society.
- The groups were characterized by their unstructured approach.

- In Britain, the Black Unity and Freedom Party took issue with C-R activity that seemed to focus on what they perceived as white women's self-indulgent concerns: love and sex.
- Elsewhere, a fervent critique of C-R activities that focused on issues of relevance to white women from a certain socio-economic background was gaining momentum in African countries.

- In 1995, at the UN's World Conference on Women, these concerns were aired and resulted in a series of declarations and agreed actions that recognized the variety of feminist political and social activity that is required to achieve a representative form of C-R.

Thank You