



Department of English  
School of English and Foreign Languages  
BHARATHIDASAN UNIVERSITY  
Tiruchirappalli – 620 024, Tamil Nadu, India

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Unit I

Module 1

Dr. M. Angkayarkan Vinayakaselvi  
Associate Professor  
Department of English  
Bharathidasan University  
Email: avs@bdu.ac.in

# Feminism

# Is Feminism Still Relevant?

From 1970-78 the UK based Women's Liberation Movement conference had campaigned for:

- Equal pay
- Equal educational and job opportunities
- Free contraception and abortion on demand
- Free 24-hour nurseries

# Is Feminism Still Relevant?

- Legal and financial independence for all women
- The right to self-defined sexuality and an end to discrimination against lesbians
- Freedom from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion; and an end to the laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and aggression to women

# Earlier views

- As early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, Aristotle (384-322 BC) declared that
- “women were women by virtue of a certain lack of qualities”.

# Earlier views

- The Greek historian and army general Thucydides (c. 460-400 BC) had some advice for women:
- “It is a great glory in a woman to show no more weakness than is natural to her sex, and not be talked of, either for good or evil by men”

# Earlier views

- Virgil (70-19 BC)
- “Woman is fickle and always changing.”
- Thomas Aquinas (1225-74)
- “Woman is an imperfect man.”
- William Shakespeare’s (1564-1616) Hamlet famously exclaimed:
- “Frailty, thy name is woman!”

# Early Modern Feminism (1550-1770)

- Early modern feminist activity aimed at challenging the prevalent social view that women are weak and irrational creatures who should be controlled by men.
- Queen Elizabeth I's accession to the throne in 1558 and her long and successful reign as a single female.



# Reinterpreting the Bible

- Essays in the 16<sup>th</sup> century questioning the ideal of the female as “chaste, silent and obedient”
- 1589, Jane Anger’s *Her Protection for Women* reinterpreted Genesis.

# Reinterpreting the Bible

- Rachel Speght's *A Muzzle for Melastomus* (1617) interrogated the story of Adam's fall from the Garden of Eden.
- "If Adam has not approved of that deed which Eve has done, and been willing to tread the steps which she had gone, he being her head would have reproved her." – taking the issue with the underlying assumption that Adam had been seduced by Eve to eat the Apple

# Reinterpreting the Bible

- The gender of authors such as Jane Anger, Rachel Speght, Esther Sowernam and Sarah Egerton remains debatable.
- Despite that their writings reflect the contemporaneous concerns with traditional perceptions of woman's nature and her role.

# Independent Churchwomen

- Lawrence Stone wrote about the political and socio-economic status of women in 17<sup>th</sup> century England.
- This suggests that women played an important role in religious interpretation by participating in independent churches where they were allowed to engage in debate, to vote and even prophesy.

# Independent Churchwomen

- These women sought to re-invent their roles by claiming a prominent position in society and religion.

# Political Actions

- 1642 – impoverished women working in a variety of trades collectively rebelled and marched into London to petition the Houses of Lords and Commons.
- To acknowledge their status of working individuals and to improve the conditions of the working class.
- These women's collective sentiment of injustice and their determination to fight unjust laws testifies to a feminine consciousness which united them.

# Political Actions

- 1688 – the Glorious Revolution saw the rejection of monarchical patriarchy with the overthrow of James II, initiating a fierce wave of publications by literary women such as Aphra Behn (1640-89) and Lady Chudleigh (1656-1710) whose 1703 poem “To the Ladies” expressed the feelings of the era.

# The Quakers

- The Quakers believed in social equality – it was translated into a series of original attitudes towards race and gender. They do not accept any form of hierarchy between people.
- Between 1755 and 1776, Quakers became active in fighting the institution of slavery by creating abolition societies to promote emancipation.



# The Quakers

- Within the family, Quakers did not differentiate between the social roles of men and women.
- Thus, many female friends were highly educated and played prominent roles in politics and education.
- Quaker women would travel unaccompanied, contribute to Church administration and preach to mixed audiences.

# The Quakers

- 1652 – the Society of Friends was founded in England by Quakers.
- Consequently, it is believed that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century “Quaker women comprised 40 percent of female abolitionists, 19 percent of feminists born before 1830, and 15 percent of suffragists born before 1830” (Mary Maples)

# The Age of Reason

- During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, notable female figures spoke about need to challenge women's subordinate social position.
- Their writings insisted the use of reason opposed to faith to discover any truth about our existence.
- Finding things out individually rather than unquestioningly following tradition was the Enlightenment's practice of free enquiry.

# First Wave Feminism

- It is referred to the organized feminist activity which evolved in Britain and the USA in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- The movement relied primarily on the various independent and sporadic activities of 18<sup>th</sup> century feminists – the term coined in 1895.

# First Wave Feminism

- The major achievements of the first wave feminists were:
- The opening of higher education to women and the reform of secondary education for girls, and the enactment of the Married Women's Property Act, 1870.
- They failed to secure the vote, which was stopped by the First World War in 1914.

# Milestones of First Wave Feminism

1770-84	Abigail Adams corresponds with her husband
1792	Mary Wollstonecraft, <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i>
1821	Frances Wright, <i>Views of Society and Manners in America</i>
1837	Harriet Martineau, <i>Society of America</i>
1837	Angelina Grimke lectures in public about abolition and women's suffrage
1837	Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady attend World Anti-Slavery Convention in London
1848	Seneca Falls Convention
1851	Harriet Taylor Mill, "The Enfranchisement of Women"
1854	Caroline Norton, <i>English Laws for Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century</i>

# Milestones of First Wave Feminism

1866	Barbara Bodichon found Women's Suffrage Committee
1869	John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women"
1869	Married Women's Property Act
1892	New Zealand grants women's suffrage
1902	Women's Suffrage Conference held in Washington DC
1903	Emmelina Pankhurst founds the Woman's Social and Political Union (WSPU)
1905	Vida Goldstein founds <i>Women's Sphere</i>
1909	Vida Goldstein founds <i>Women's Voter</i>
1914-18	First World War

Thank You