

SEMESTER V- LITERARY THEORY

Module IV - Gender, Ethnicity and the Subaltern

GENDER STUDIES AND FEMINISM

Introduction

- Feminism developed as a movement in literature for the liberation of women.
- Basic Concept of Feminism- affirmation of the equality of sexes, to protest against sexual discrimination and subjugation of women by male dominated society.
- Western society is largely patriarchal/ male dominated, hence controlled & organized to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains.
- Sexual differences are anatomical, but gender differences are creations of the male-dominated society.
- Accordingly males expected to be active, adventurous, heroic, rational and creative, but female ought to be obedient, timid, docile emotional & passive .
- Feminism started as a movement to register protest against sexual discrimination and unjust attitude.

History and Development of Feminism

In A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft demanded equality of the sexes, educational rights for women and an understanding of femininity as a social construct rather than a biological one.

The history of feminism categorized into 3 waves.

1. First Wave
2. Second Wave
3. Third Wave

The First Wave (1830- 1930)

- Emerged out of an environment of urban industrialisation and liberal, socialist politics
- Began formally in the US at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 when 300 men & women rallied to the cause of equality for women.
- The publication of Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century brought to the limelight education, employment and political rights for woman.
- The British counterpart of the Seneca Falls Convention was the Langham Place Circle (1850) which campaigned for many women's causes, including female rights in employment and education. It also pursued women's property rights through its Married Women 's Property Committee.
- The phase aimed at ensuring the passage of women from domestic sphere to public sphere by defying existing gender stereotypes.
- Virginia Woolf- the most important theorists in her work, A Room of One's Own (1929) re-examined gender relations by questioning the patriarchal education systems and literary practices. A woman must have money and a room of her own to be able to write said Virginia Woolf.
- Being ' the angels of the house's, women are expected to behave in accordance with patriarchal fantasies, by being obedient, beautiful and domesticated.

- She stated that Language is patriarchal in nature and therefore women are asked to express themselves in an idiom that could capture their experience.
- The first wave was a first world women's movement considering the rights of the upper class/ middle class women of these nations.
- The achievements of this phase were the securing of educational, political and property rights for women.

The Second Wave (1960 -1980)

- Began in America
- This wave unfolded as a delayed reaction against the renewed domesticity of women after World War II.
- In the context of the anti- Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movements, feminism was supported by the New Left.
- Anglo- American version was more radical in outlook. French version was more theoretical and based on the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.
- In *The Second Sex*, the French feminist, Simone de Beauvoir argued that men fundamentally oppress women by characterising them as the other, defined exclusively in opposition to men.
- Men occupies the role of the self, or subject; women is the object, the other.
- She argues a recommendation of the basis of stereotypes.
- Her arguments were taken forward by the liberal feminists of America who raised the slogan of " equal pay for equal work "
- Betty Friedan argues in her pioneering work, *The Feminist Mystique* (1963) for what is described as 'equality feminism'.
- Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) discusses the problem of women stripped of her sexual desires and libido by the prescriptive roles of patriarchy.
- Kate Millet discusses the frequently neglected political aspect of sex in *Sexual Politics* (1970).
- Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979) deals with the two models of representing women as 'angels' or 'monsters' and claims that the mad women characters of the Victorian novelists are symptomatic of the psychic tension that the authors experienced.
- Elaine Showalter asked for the rejection of the phases of imitation and protest to bring in a Gynocritical model that she proposed in place of the "Feminist" practice of revisionary reading of the male authored texts.
- The programme of the gynocritics was "to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories".
- The French women critics- Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous followed the post structural and psychoanalytic tradition in constructing their branch of feminism.
- French feminist thought is often characterized by a language which is elusive, poetic and full of linguistic puns, as these writers questioned the masculine/ patriarchal notion of language itself.
- Helene Cixous in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, proposed the concept of *écriture féminine* (feminine writing) which has its source in the mother, in the stage of the mother- child relation before the child acquires the male- centred verbal language.
- She proposes a pre- Oedipal language, using Lacan's ideas that the structure of language is centred by the Phallus, which undermines the notion of fixed signification in language and

reveals the joyous free play of meanings.

- In short, the French feminists see the body as the site of 'jouissance' (French word meaning enjoyment in terms both of rights and property and of sexual orgasm) and the maternal as a possible connection to writing and creativity. In them one can see the reclamation of the body discounted by patriarchy as inferior to the mind.
- Marxist Feminism and Radical Feminism are two of the influential categories of Feminism. While the former is trans-historical, the latter was a product of the second wave.

Ecriture Feminine

Coined and introduced by Helene Cixous in her essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 'écriture feminine' literally means women's writing. It is a philosophy that promotes women's experiences and feelings to the point that it strengthens the work. It refers to a uniquely feminine style of writing characterised by disruptions in the text, such as gaps, silences, puns, new images and so on. It is eccentric, incomprehensible and inconsistent, and the difficulty to understand it is attributed to centuries of suppression of the female voice, which now speaks in a borrowed language. According to Cixous, *Ecriture Feminine* places experience before language, and privileges the anti-linear, cyclical writing so often frowned upon by patriarchal society. Believed to originate from the mother in the stage of the mother-child relation before the child acquires the male-centred verbal language, this pre-linguistic and unconscious potentiality manifests itself in those literary texts which, abolishing all repressions, undermine and subvert all significations, the logic and the closure of the phallogocentric language, and opens into a joyous freeplay of meanings.

The Third Wave

- Post feminist concerns engenders the third wave of Feminism.
- The term Postfeminism refers to a backlash against the second wave of feminism. The second wave is a monolithic entity, a case of generalization, privileging certain sections and groups.
- This approach primarily considers feminism in its present form as inadequate to address the concerns and experiences of women.
- The perception that women are of many colours, ethnicities, nationalities, religions and cultural background and hence any theory of homogenization should be resisted was the central thesis of the third wave.
- Rebecca Walker, an American writer, feminist and activist who coined the term actually referred to the different new happenings like queer theory and lesbian feminism by the term, but by extension black feminism and dalit feminism were also included in the third wave.
- This wave tried to formulate feminist practices inclusive of race, class, gender and sexuality.
- The third wave rejected many of the positions of the second wave.
- Unlike the previous waves, this phase did not have a single objective.

Categories of Feminism

Marxist Feminism

- Influential category of feminism which is trans-historical.
- Inspired by the writings of Karl Marx and Engels.
- Marxist feminism investigates the myriad ways in which women are oppressed through systems of capitalism and private property.
- Engels argued that the bourgeois family rests on material foundation of inequality between

husband and wife, the latter a kind of unpaid prostitute producing heirs for the transmission of property in exchange of boarding and lodging.

- Argued for a radical restructuring of economics which is based on capitalism is a requisite for the actual liberation of women, because their labour remains uncompensated.
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Selma James, Silvia Federici - spokespersons of the movement.

Radical Feminism

- A product of the second wave
- Radical Feminism saw patriarchal oppression that exists in all societies as the original reason for the gender injustice in the world.
- For radical feminists women's subjugation is the oldest kind of oppression in history.
- They called for a reevaluation of sex roles and a reconsideration of the reproductive process.
- A group of Radicals advocated artificial pregnancy outside the body of women so that they do not remain biologically enchained to reproducing the human species.
- Robin Morgan holds the view that pornography contributes to rape with the statement that "Pornography is the theory, and rape is the practice."
- Leading Radical feminists- Shulamith Firestone, Kathie Sarachild, Mary Daly, Carol Hanisch and Judith Brown.

Psychoanalytic Feminism

- Juliet Mitchell's Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974) paved the way for psychoanalytic feminist literary theory, another variant of the second wave.
- The Psychoanalytic Feminist theorists like Shoshana Felman, Naomi Scheman and Jane Gallop explored the similarities between psychoanalytic and literary approaches to textuality focusing on the slippage, ruptures, excesses and silences of the text.
- They either apply psychoanalytic models to Literary texts, or use literary strategies to read psychoanalytic texts as a means of exploring questions of femininity, woman, sexuality, desire and fantasy.
- The British psychoanalytic feminist theorists focused on Lacanian theories and the Americans focused on motherhood as the model.

Black Feminism

- African American women's historical encounter with enslavement, emancipation, segregation and patriarchy since the beginning of the last century pioneered the black feminism of the 1980s.
- Argues that sexism, class oppression and racism are inextricably bound together.
- Black women's oppression is the result of double discrimination- being a woman and being black.
- Black Feminism opposed patriarchy and white feminism.
- Two main purposes of Black Feminism were
 1. To question the masculinist/patriarchal ideologies of the black movement
 2. to question racism in the feminist movement.

- Black Feminist theory argued that black women were positioned within structures of power in fundamentally different ways than white women.
- Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice from the South* (1892), critiqued the white women's movement for elitism, racism and provincialism is considered one of the original texts of black feminism.
- Contemporary Black Feminist theorists such as Angela Davis, Bell Hooks and Patricia Hill Collins continued the argument that the black women unlike many white women are marginalised along lines of race, class, gender and sexuality.
- In *Ain't I a Woman* (1981), Bell Hooks accuses the feminist movement for being a largely middle and upper class affair and from its failure to articulate the needs of the poor and in white women, reinforcing sexism, racism and classicism.
- Bell Hooks argues that black feminists found the sisterhood for most white women did not mean surrendering allegiance to race, class and sexual preference.
- Bell Hooks observes that the problem of black women were not addressed even within Black Arts Movement and Civil Rights Movement.
- The writings of Patricia Hill Collins, Hortense Spillers and Hazel Carby mark the beginning of black Feminist thought.
- Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* (1991) argues that black women possess a unique stand point on, or perspective of, their experiences and that, there are certain commonalities of perception shared by black women as a group.
- Patricia Hill Collins defined Black Feminism as including "women who theorize the experiences and ideas shared by ordinary black women that provide a unique angle of vision on self, community and society." (*Black Feminist Thought*)
- For Black women, alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing are built upon lived experience and not upon the woman as an object because the woman cannot be studied outside of her environment or experiences.
- Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* proposed a new facet of black feminism known as 'womanism' which stressed the collective bonding of all women, irrespective of race, creed and class.
- While Feminism places priority on women, womanism incorporates racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic and political considerations.
- Aim of the black feminist works are to create forms of knowledge built in the experiences of black women.

Dalit Feminism

- A typical Indian phenomenon in feminist criticism.
- Dalit women writers focused on the double oppression experienced by the backward women of India.
- Double oppression from the upper class men and women and from the Dalit male.
- Dalit Feminism is an articulation based on the consciousness of the dalit women, their experiences of humiliation, deprivation, isolation based on caste, class and gender.
- Dalit Feminism also called as 'discourse of discontent' and 'a politics of difference' it argues for a greater space for dalit women in life.
- In Literature, the dalit feminist reveal the misrepresentation of the dalit women as victims in mainstream literature. Eg: Mulk Raj Anand, Prem Chand
- Also encourages the dalit women to script their body and mind mainly in autobiographical narratives.
- Bama Faustina's *Karukku* and *Sangati* are considered two dalit masterpieces. She exposes

the caste oppression meted out to the Dalit Christian's not only by the upper caste society but more so within the Catholic church itself

- Other leading dalit feminist voices - Meena Kandasamy, Sivakami and Jeyarani.

Lesbian Feminism

- Lesbian Feminism arose as a resistance to the second Wave of feminism which categorized all women as heterosexual.
- It refutes heterosexuality as normal and straight.
- Also refutes the claim that society should be structured to serve heterosexual needs.
- This critical school of 1970s & 1980s attempted to mark lesbians as a distinctive category within Women's Liberation Movements.
- According to lesbian feminists, the true feminists are lesbians because they choose women as sexual partners.
- Heterosexuality, to them, is a form of sexual and political subordination to patriarchy.
- Some of the slogans of lesbian feminism popularised through the working class movements were "Feminism is the complaint, lesbianism is the solution"; "Feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice" and so on
- Lesbian criticism looked for close friendships between single women and this led to revealing appreciation of the plays, novels and poems involved.
- Leading lesbian critics were Charlotte Bunch, Rita Mae Brown, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Marilyn Frye, Mary Daly and Sheila Jeffreys.

Post Colonial Feminism

- Black Feminism did not address the question of race and ethnicity.
- Post Colonial Feminism developed as an attempt to address the experience of Oppression of the women in Chicago, Asian American and women of other cultural, national and geopolitical locations.
- They argue that the lived experiences within the context of Africa, South America and Asia are different from that of African Americans.

Different Phases of Feminist Criticism

- Three stages in the evolution of women's Literature

1. The Feminine Phase

- From 1840 to 1880, a span of 40 years.
- Women wrote in deliberate imitation of their male counterparts, trying to equal their intellectual achievement.
- Major sign of this period- use of male pseudonym.

2. The Feminist Phase

- From 1880 to 1920, a span of 40 years.
- Marked a strong protest against sexism and discrimination.

3. The Female Phase

- From 1920 onwards
- Writers rejected the conventions of earlier phases namely, imitation and protest.

- Both imitation and protest were considered as forms of dependency
- They insisted on the female experience as the creative source of art.
- Aimed at emancipation of women's writing from the conventional and stereotypical male models
- Tried to be guided by their own impulses and experiences.

Feminist Criticism and Gynocriticism

- Elaine Showalter divides Feminist Literature into two
 1. Feminist Criticism
 2. Gynocriticism

Feminist Criticism

- Concerned with women as reader/ as the consumer of the male produced text or Literature.
- Examines the truth of the male conception of women in literature.
- Images and stereotypes of women in male created literature subjected to serious analysis.
- Concerned with the exploitation and manipulation of women in popular culture and films.

Gynocriticism

- Women as Writer/ the producer of textual meanings.
- Aims at correction of misrepresentation about women, recurrent in male created Literature.
- An endeavor to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature.
- Tried to develop new models based on the study of genuine female experience.
- Subjects include Psychodynamics of female creativity and the portrayal of distinctive feminine experiences like domesticity, child birth, mother- daughter and woman- woman relationships.

QUEER THEORY AND LGBT LITERATURES

- A cultural theory of the 1990s
- The emphasis emerges because of the Gay Liberation Movement of America.
- Two main objectives:
 1. to resist persecution and discrimination against a sexual minority.
 2. to encourage gay people to develop a pride in their sexual identity.
- The term Queer was coined by an Italian feminist and film critic- Teresa de Lauretis in 1990.
- She refers to the sexual minorities of gay, lesbian and bisexuals.
- The central concern of gay theorists- revaluation of the prevailing sexual attitudes which were mainly homophobic and repressive of the alternative forms.
- They claimed the term heterosexism was used by the society to refer to the prevailing social organisation of sexuality, which privileges and mandates heterosexuality as normal or straight and homosexuality was considered 'deviated'.
- Hence gay communities were repressed and invalidated due to their social invisibility.
- The gay and lesbian communities attacked the root of homophobia (irrational fear and hatred of same sex love).

- As Feminist Theorists considered patriarchy as site of oppressive power relation the sexual minorities placed heterosexism on equal terms.
- Two major sources of influence on Gay / Lesbian Theorists were Freud and Foucault.
- In the work, Outline of Psychoanalysis , Freud argues that the primary aim of sexual life was concerned with obtaining pleasure from the body. It often goes beyond the needs of reproduction.
- In Three Essays on Sexuality , he also noted that man need not always find sexual interest in woman. He seeks company of gay men other than women.
- Foucault's The History of Sexuality is a visionary re- reading of major theories of psychology and sexuality.
- To him, heterosexuality is an aspect of hermaphroditism and an inversion of the masculine and the feminine in the biological body of one.
- The multiple configurations of power shown as central to the production and control of sex, a Foucauldian position, became a main concern in the cultural materialist readings of Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. Their readings attempted to discuss the inscription of homosexuality in texts and to reclaim aspects of gay life.
- In short, Queering is the process of reversing heterosexuality as the accepted norm.
- Leading Theorists and works- Judith Butler's Gender Trouble (1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's In Between Men (1995) and The Epistemology of the Closet (1990).
- The following are the engagements of Gay/ Lesbian literary critics:
 1. Identify and establish a canon of classic lesbian/ gay writers whose work constitutes a distinct tradition.
 2. Identify gay/ lesbian episodes in mainstream work and discuss them as such rather than reading same-day pairings.
 3. Set up an extended metaphorical sense of 'lesbian/ gay' so that it connotes a moment of crossing a boundary or blurring a set of categories.
 4. Expose the homophobia of mainstream literature and criticism as seen in ignoring or denigrating the homosexual aspects of the work of major canonical figures.
 5. Foreground homosexual aspects of mainstream literature which have previously been glossed over.
 6. Foreground literary genres, previously neglected, which significantly influenced ideals of masculinity and femininity.

Transgender

- A category of gender identity rather than sexual orientation.
- Transgender indicates a category of people who believe that they are trapped in a wrong body, due to a medical problem and converts to the opposite sex by an operation.
- This group includes
 1. People who feel that the assigned sex at the time of birth based on their genitals, is a false description.
 2. People to whom assigning one sexual identity does not conform to conventional notions of male or female gender roles.
 3. People whose sexual identification is difficult to determine due to physically identifiable sex organs.
- Initially transgenderism was a sub category of feminism, and later lesbian feminism. Now its associated with the wide LGBT subcultures.
- Till recently transgender were perceived as homosexuals.

- Transcommunities started to articulate their problems mainly through autobiographical narratives.
- They demand their rights like other sexual minorities.
- The concept of gender identity and transgender identity differ from that of sexual orientation. Being gay and lesbian is a matter of sexual orientation, while gender identity is one's personal sense of being a man or woman.
- The sexual orientation of the transgender people is more or less fixed. Sexual identities of these people are marked as attracted to men (androphilic), attracted to women (gynephilic), attracted to both (bisexual) or attracted to neither (asexual).
- Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire* is one of the earliest books exploring a critique of the patriarchal medical and psychiatric establishment.
- The literature of the transgender aims at the correction of the historical devaluation they experienced.
- Susan Stryker focuses on the history of segregation and discrimination to which they were subjected. Susan Stryker and Stephan Whittle's *The Transgender Studies Reader* (2006) is a significant anthology that analyses the nexus between feminism, queer theory and medical sciences.
- Some of the transgender writings are about asserting consciousness for the transpeople and claiming an identity for them.
- Popular writings-

I Am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey is a first person narrative that explores the different aspects of the sufferings of a woman born in the body of a man.

Courtney Ingram's *The Girl's Life: My Erotic Journey from Male to Female* is another example of this transition.

ETHNICITY

- Ethnic Literatures began to come up as a major area of postcolonial studies in the 20th century.
- The term ethnic or ethnicity derive from the Greek word *ethnikos* which refers to a people or nation.
- It describes a group possessing some degree of coherence and solidarity, who are aware of having common origins and interests.
- In contemporary cultural discourses, it denotes a self-conscious collection of people united or closely related by shared experience.
- Ethnic Marginalisation is a historical reality with varying signification at different stages.
- The original people (aboriginals) left their homelands or withdrew to the interior landscapes with the arrival of the colonial *sahibs*.
- Australia, Canada and United States are nations with such a first nation people who experienced marginality starting with a loss of language, religion and culture.
- The great humanitarian project undertaken by the colonial superpowers destroyed their collective myths, oratures, literatures and all other indigenous practices with the introduction of a scientific European education system.
- Another area of enquiry in Ethnic Studies is the forcible trafficking of people from one country to another during the colonial period. Eg. the African slaves were forcibly taken to America and Europe, which led to the loss of a history, language and collective identity of the people.
- The domination of these intruders gives the natives an experience of deprivation, they are materially deprived,, culturally denuded and politically neutered.

- Ethnic Literatures or oratures of the past are often characterized by the ritual of storytelling, trickster humour, sacredness of the place and mythic time.
- Orality which forms an important aspect of storytelling could be noted in the writings of Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich and N Scott Momaday
- Works- Silko's Ceremony, N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn, Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine .
- Autobiographies politically explain the tribal identity to the mainstream.

THE SUBALTERN

- The term subaltern conventionally denotes a junior ranking officer in the British army.
- Subaltern means from the below.
- Italian Marxist theorist, Antonio Gramsci used it in the contemporary sense for the first time in The Prison Notebooks to refer to socially subordinated groups that lacked the unity and organisation of those in power.
- Borrowing the term in the early 1980s, Indian Marxist revisionist historiographers like Ranajit Guha, Shahid Amin, Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey used it to refer to all those of inferior rank- a group with even less formal institutional access to political power than Gramsci's European working classes of the 1930s.
- In the Indian context, the subaltern is defined as " the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way".
- In a multi volume series of collected essays entitled Subaltern Studies, these historians have consistently attempted to recover a history of subaltern agency and resistance from the perspective of the people rather than that of the state.
- Highlights the failure of the Indian elite/ bourgeois to speak for the nation.
- The elite was accused of evading the concept of nationhood and subaltern domain of freedom struggle.
- The subaltern groups were pushed aside and made history less by the elite.
- The Subaltern Studies historians argued that India had achieved political independence from the British Empire without the corresponding social revolution in the class system it had originally hoped for.
- As a result, theorists like Ranajit Guha note a crisis in the historiographic tradition India-European colonisers and the Indian nationalists.
- The aim of Subaltern Studies is to bring to light the history of the poor, tribals and the vagabond.
- From the perspective of Subaltern Studies, despite the differences between them, the colonial and Indian nationalist approaches share a middle class orientation, and a consequent inability to assign Indian subaltern groups any but the most secondary roles in history, to see them as anything but a passive, naive, potentially anarchic and unstable entity.
- In the counter narratives of Indian history, the Subaltern Studies project has taken a dual task- an enquiry into the gaps and fissures, to understand why nationalism failed to include subalternity and to form an archive of historical subaltern literature, including forms of popular and oral culture of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

DALIT LITERATURE

- Post colonial Literatures in India operates on different avenues like protest Literature of women, diaspora rewriting of colonial history, Subaltern Studies and Dalit writing.
- Dalit writing, a post independent and post modernist exercise is closely related to the writings of Afro- American in America.

- Term Dalit originated from the Sanskrit word 'dalita' which means 'the oppressed '
- Traditional Indian caste system known as 'ChaturVarna' (four castes) represents the hierarchy of four castes- the Brahmin, the Kshtriya, the Vaisya and the Sudra in the social structure.
- Term dalit denotes a member of the caste that is considered the lowest or inferior.
- Dalit scholars believe that the dalit belong to the 'panchamas', the fifth caste.
- Rigveda, the oldest veda of the Aryan supremacy gives an account of the creation of people in the 'Purusha Sukta' myth.
- According to the myth, all human beings descended from the monstrous body of Purusha who was " the man ...with thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet...the ruler of immortality ".
- Brahmins originated from Purusha's head, Kshatriyas from his shoulder, the Vaisyas originated from his stomach and the Sudras from his feet.
- This formed the four Varnas: Brahmins(the learned men/ priests), the Kshatriyas(the strong men/ warriors), the Vaisyas (trade and commerce/ businessmen) and the Sudras(the toilers/ servants). These barns are again divided in