

**Feminism: Concepts and Theories**  
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**Feminist Theory: The First Wave**

Welcome back to Feminism Concepts and Theories. This is Week Five! We ended Week Four in a hopeful note that things will get easier henceforth and this is what I am hoping we'll be able to do. Today, and in this week, we are taking up the three, perhaps the four Waves of Feminism. And this is mostly historical information in relation to feminist movements in broadly the global north: the US and the UK. But, it will also become clearer to you as I venture into this week, there we also thinking about a mode of working, in relation to feminist history and the history of the feminist movement; but, also in relation to the formation of theory itself. What I mean to say is that, in many ways theory is not formed in a vacuum. One has to pay attention to socio-political movements in the time that has been formed to understand its thrust and the ways in which it focuses attention on a particular set of demands.

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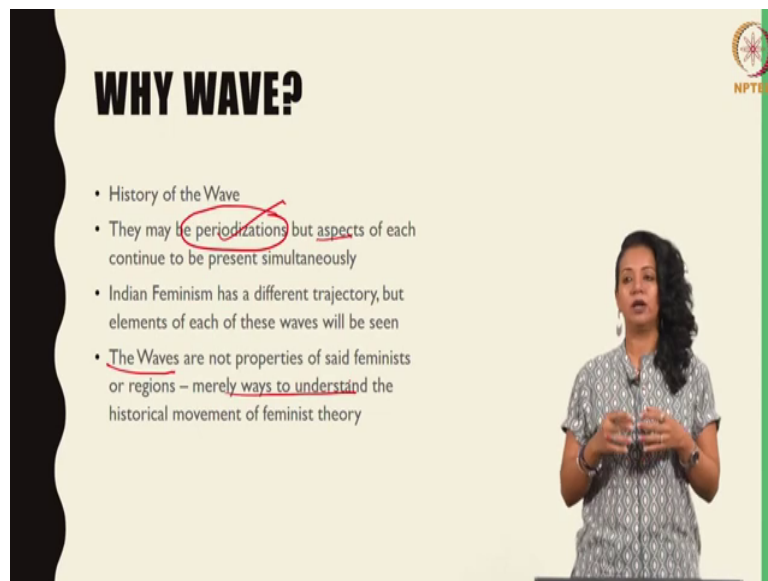
So today, without further ado, we are looking at three waves of feminism, yes, primarily First Wave. We are interested in a set of key concepts, but also a set of key thinkers. So, one of the things that we are going to do starting this week is, together, read primary text.

If certain texts typify the spirit of the age or are great exemplars of First Wave Feminism. I am going to go through excerpts with you, line-by-line, in order to try and see why is that people were writing the way they were and how is it that one can understand principles of feminist theory from those writings.

In these primary readings, please remember you can also go back and find the original text, the entire text, and this is only a basis for your kind of larger education in feminism itself; and is not particular to feminist theory as being located only in the global north or only in the US or only in the UK.

Consider this week's readings as a kind of method to be able to see why is it that feminist movements in different parts of the world seem to be so different, but also similar in many ways.

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**WHY WAVE?**

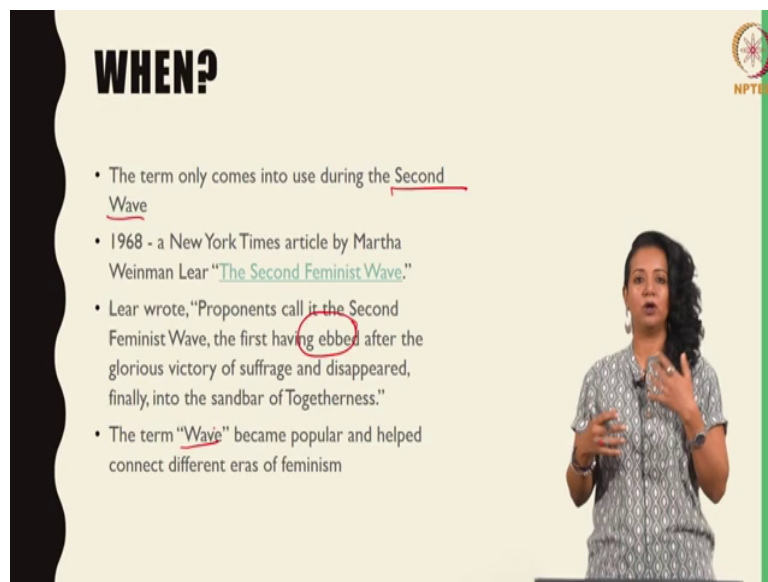
- History of the Wave
- They may be periodizations but aspects of each continue to be present simultaneously
- Indian Feminism has a different trajectory, but elements of each of these waves will be seen
- The Waves are not properties of said feminists or regions – merely ways to understand the historical movement of feminist theory

But, before we do, let us ask our self a particular question: Why Wave what do we mean by saying First, Second, Third Waves of Feminism? And why is it that we are interested in periodization? Does it mean that each follows the other? Does it mean that each feeds into the other? What do we understand in terms of this metaphor? So, one of the things to remember in all the Waves of Feminism, but, generally in understanding historical movement, is that often it is not the end of one that heralds the beginning of another; there is no clear end point and starting point; there is no clear rationality necessarily, in time, between one and the other. We are looking at periodizations, but aspects of each continue to be present simultaneously.

For example, Indian feminism has a very different trajectory as you will see three or four weeks from now.

But, elements of what we are going to discuss as First, Second and Third wave continue to be seen even in current day contemporary feminist practice in India. And lastly waves are not properties of any kind of feminist movements; you cannot say that you can only refer to particular things in particular geographies as First or Second Wave. There are ways to understand the historical movement of feminist theory, which is not necessarily unidirectional, or, clearly demarcated one from the other.

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The slide is titled "WHEN?" in large, bold, black letters. It features a list of four bullet points on the left side. The first bullet point states: "The term only comes into use during the Second Wave". The second bullet point mentions: "1968 - a New York Times article by Martha Weinman Lear 'The Second Feminist Wave.'" The third bullet point quotes Lear: "Proponents call it the Second Feminist Wave, the first having ebbed after the glorious victory of suffrage and disappeared, finally, into the sandbar of Togetherness." The fourth bullet point says: "The term 'Wave' became popular and helped connect different eras of feminism". On the right side of the slide, there is a photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned top, who appears to be presenting. In the top right corner of the slide, there is a logo for NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning).

The term Wave itself does not come into use until the Second Wave. So, the First Wave only comes into the being in hindsight in 1968- a New York Times article by Martha Lear, calls the current properties of the ongoing movement that she sees around her, The Second Feminist Wave. She writes, "Proponents call it the Second Feminist Wave, the first having ebbed after the glorious victory of suffrage, and disappeared finally into the sandbar of Togetherness." So, you can see she is having a little fun over here.

What she is saying is that suddenly something seems to have resurged; some kind of a ferment is in the atmosphere, that one begins to recall something similar happening during the time when women were fighting for the vote. When they were fighting for suffrage, they were suffrages... suffragettes, who we'll begin to continue to talk about a few slides down, but, what Martha Lear is saying is that the Second Wave comes after the ebb of the first. So in many ways, she is imagining continuity in feminist movements, and feminist theory in

relation to a particular time in the past, which seemed like it would not have a legacy after that.

The term Wave then became popular and helped connect different eras of feminism. It allowed women to think about their struggles as not being alone; as not being fixed in time; and as being universal in a particular mode, in ways that woman have thought about themselves and their place in the world for a very long time. So, wave then produces, a seeming notion of togetherness and a seeming notion of universality.

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**WHY NOT WAVE?**

- In 2010, the feminist historian Linda Nicholson argued:
  - "The wave metaphor tends to have built into it an important metaphorical implication that is historically misleading and not helpful politically."
  - It "suggests the idea that gender activism in the history of the United States has been for the most part unified around one set of ideas, and that set of ideas can be called feminism."

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These are also the reasons why the term wave has been critiqued.

It has been accused of producing the seeming togetherness when there is none. It has been accused of collapsing multiple categories of feminist struggle into one, as if everywhere the category of woman is one and the same. And you will recall bell hooks in this scenario where she also argues that, even as sisterhood is a remarkably important emotion, one should also remember that different kinds of women have different kinds of locations in the world vis-a-vis identity, politics, needs and desires, and therefore not to risk the danger of behaving as if one woman speaks for all.

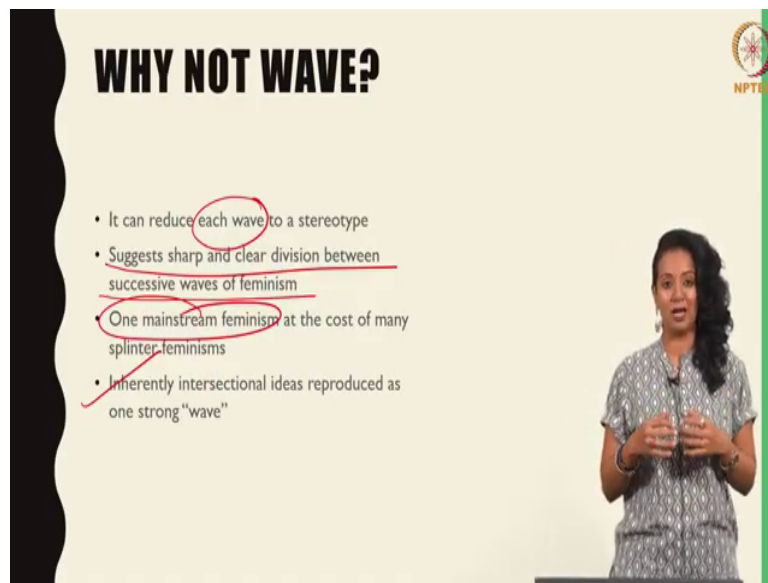
And many say, including the feminist historian, Linda Nicholson that the wave metaphor tends to have dealt into it and important metaphorical implication that is historically misleading and not helpful politically. Pause here, historically misleading, not helpful politically. So, one even on its own terms, historians like Nicholson claim that, they are

choosing particular aspects of history and seeking to connect it in a seamless narrative, when this is not the case; things appear differently at different points of time thanks to different kinds of provocations and hence they cannot be seen as arising one after the other. They are not even politically helpful, arguing that the demands of one set of women at a particular time are continuities of say suffrage takes away from the details the specificities of those kinds of demand, at that time and does not allow for political furthering of their goals. She goes on to say, it suggests the idea that gender activism in the history of the United States has been for the most part unified around one set of ideas, and that set of ideas can be called feminism.

This will be a familiar debate for you from one of our lectures in earlier weeks. Where we said there is no clear agreed upon idea of the word Feminism. It nevertheless continues to operate in a particularly unified fashion in narratives and discourses as if all feminists are the same. To Nicholson this is a problem the history of gender activism is different depending upon who the activists are and where they are located at what point in their lives. And therefore, it is not unified around one set of idea and in fact such unification is dangerous.

Now, you can already imagine why such unification is dangerous, we have been over this with Equality and Difference, which is that in order to present one set of ideas as the one that is universal, you negate a whole different set of ideas from different parts of the world, from different identity politics, from different needs, from different contingencies, and therefore there is no possibility of there ever being homogenous feminism either in theory or in practice.

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Critiques also suggest that Wave reduces each wave to a stereotype. First Wavers are like this, Second Wavers are like this, Third Wavers are like this. It becomes an easy cultural narrative that does not allow one to deal with the complexity of issues in hand, I have already mentioned this. So, just sharp and clear division between successive waves of feminism, where is the truth is they're often overlapping and emerge from different urgencies.

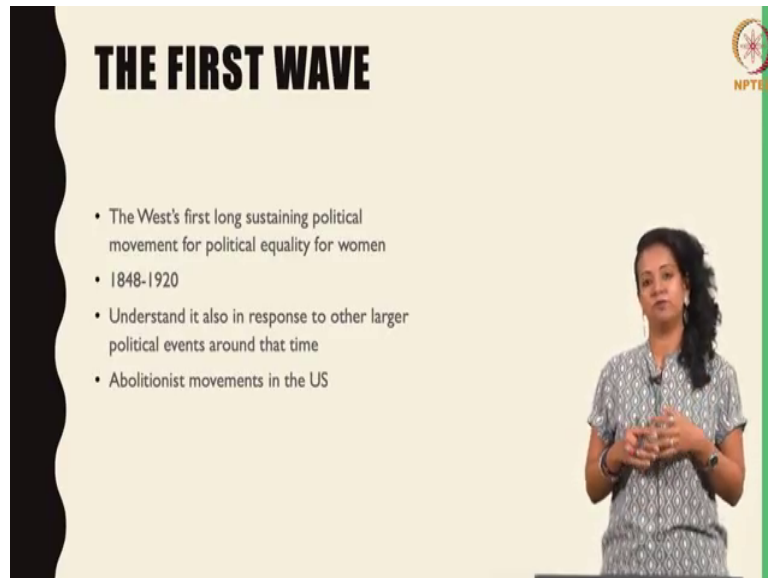
One mainstream feminism is hero-ed, is valorised, at the cost of many splinter feminisms that maybe at odds with what mainstream feminism is suggesting; that may critique mainstream feminism for the things that it leaves out and may accuse it of political expediency at the cost of knowledge production.

And many say that inherently intersectional ideas are reproduced as one strong wave as it is marching forward in one direction. Nevertheless, I still think that the idea of the Wave is important to engage with, in all of its problems, in all of its exclusions, mainly because, historically it allows us to locate feminist theory in relation to a different basket of theories that emerged in relation to world history.

Therefore it secures for feminist theory a solid place in relation to historical movement. If you remember when we discussed New Historicism and the idea of experience in feminist theory, we spoke about women's roles and where is it that women actually exist in history; and Waves become an important way to recover these voices and to recover ways in which woman have been thinking about themselves in relation to the movement of nations, worlds, politics, law, sexism, cultural movement and a whole gamut of things that testify to the fact

that woman have, and will always be active participants in public debate, and the shaping of public narrative and discourse. There is also a reason why I am saying “public” very specifically because this was the thrust of First Wave Feminist theory.

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The First Wave of feminist theory can be broadly located in the time period 1848 to 1920 in the United States of America. There is slightly different timeline for the UK but, we are primarily going to examine and explore ways in which First Wave theory took root in the US. The First Wave signifies broadly the West’s first, long-sustaining political movement for political equalities for women.

The key word here, remember, is “political equality” of women as fully realised, sentient, actualised, political beings capable of contributing to the ways in which a country decides to govern itself. It will be obvious to you from here that, the first wave develops in tandem with liberal theory, with liberalism, and democracy. This is why I mentioned that one must understand it in response to other larger political events around that time.

The other important movements, set of movements happening around that time in the US have to do with slavery with anti-slavery movements that ask for the abolition of race as a matter of differentiation in public space and accord political equality to Africans-Americans in US. And the First Wave of feminist theory also borrows energy from those sets of developments.

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Here, is a picture of a march for woman's suffrage that says New York City women have no vote at all. This is nineteen hundred which if you think of it is not that far back in our past. So, as recently as nineteen hundred women were asking for the right to govern themselves through political representation at the most, and voting at the least.

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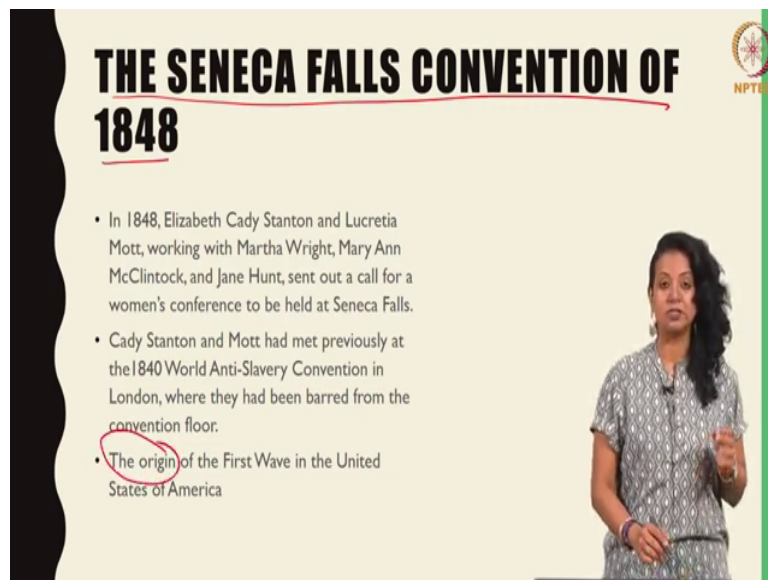
In the UK, there was a slightly different timeline for suffrage as I indicated. The suffrages and then the suffragettes and I will come a little bit to why, suffrages and suffragettes had a longer history with the founding of the National Society for Women's Suffrage (NSWS) in 1868 which was only the culmination of a series of smaller events.



So, as maybe obvious to you the debates are clearly very much around women's voting rights. Suffragette which derives from suffrages refers in particular to members of the British Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a "women-only" movement founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst, which engaged in direct action and civil disobedience.

In the history of social and political movements this kinds of binary is something that comes up again and again. Those that think that change comes about through slow, measured, moderate means, and those who indulged in civil disobedience and public action in order to impress upon the powers that be that this is an urgent necessity that people are willing to put themselves in danger for.

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**THE SENECA FALLS CONVENTION OF 1848**

- In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, working with Martha Wright, Mary Ann McClintock, and Jane Hunt, sent out a call for a women's conference to be held at Seneca Falls.
- Cady Stanton and Mott had met previously at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, where they had been barred from the convention floor.
- The origin of the First Wave in the United States of America

The slide features a video inset of a woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned top, speaking. A red circle highlights the word 'origin' in the third bullet point. The slide also includes a logo in the top right corner and a decorative black wavy border on the left side.

In the US, one of the most important events of First Wave Feminism is the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848.

In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, working with Martha Wright, Mary Ann McClintock, and Jane Hunt, sent out a call for a women's conference to be held at Seneca Falls. Cady Stanton and Mott met previously at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, where they had been barred from the convention floor because women were not allowed. So, you see already how women who are politically motivated to be able to fight, and join the voices for Anti-Slavery, or join the voices against the slavery who were barred from politically fully realised beings.

And that is when they say that, well, clearly we're trying to do something good, but, there are ways in which we are being reminded that women are only good for certain sets of things in the world. So, this kind of common experience brings them together into the First Wave of feminist theory. And this is often located as the origin of the First Wave in the US.

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**SENECA FALLS CONVENTION**

- "A Convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel, at Seneca Falls, on Wednesday and Thursday, the 19th and 20th of July current; commencing at 10 o'clock A.M. During the first day the meeting will be exclusively for women, who are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day, when Lucretia Mott, of Philadelphia, and other ladies and gentlemen, will address the Convention."

This is what the declaration or invitation for the convention sets. A convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel, at Seneca Falls, on Wednesday and Thursday, the nineteenth and twentieth of July current; commencing at ten o'clock A.M. During the first day the meeting will be exclusively for women, who are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day, when Lucretia Mott, of Philadelphia, and other ladies and gentlemen, will address the Convention. So, this is very-very serious, there is something going on here, there is a keen to large scale political mobilisation, where Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott want to gather people to raise the awareness of this kind of absence in political citizenship for women.

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**DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS AND GRIEVANCES**

- Modeled on the "Declaration of Independence"
- "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights..."
- Abolitionist Frederick Douglass attended the second day of the convention
- The 19th Amendment was adopted in 1920, granting American women the constitutionally protected right to vote.

The slide features a video inset of a woman in a patterned dress speaking. The NPTEL logo is visible in the top right corner.

Here, they formulate what is called the Declaration of Sentiments and Grievances So-so interesting and clearly modelled on the Declaration of Independence. This works as an interesting foil to a declaration that calls for independence instead they say Declaration of Sentiments and Grievances. Now, one has to wonder whether this is literal or that is kind of play where independence only the lot of men writ large. Whereas, women are only allowed sentiments, since women are accused to be sentimental beings.

And grievances since women are accused of complaining all that time, and as if these are the only ways in which women's voices will be heard. As part of it, the declaration says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights..." Ring a bell? Recognise something from the Declaration of Independence itself?

Anti-Abolitionist Frederick Douglass attended the second day of the convention. The nineteenth amendment was adopted in 1920 has culmination of this set of First Wave movements granting American women, the constitutionally protected right to vote. So, you can see from 1848 to 1920 is where we locate the movements and the various kinds of sentiments of the First Wave. And in our imagination 1920 is still relatively recent, 1947 is when India gives everybody the right to vote, together, and that is when the country becomes the independent.

Post-colonial countries like India, democratic post-colonial countries like India have a very-very trajectory of the women's movements, but, as you can see with first wave you establish

a basis for this. Other countries of the world early in the eighteenth century were producing the ferment for us to understand how is it that women can be full political beings. Just sort of for fun for your information, let us go through a list of countries and see when is it that they gave women the right to vote.

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**WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE**

- New Zealand: 1893
- Finland: 1906
- Denmark and Iceland (Women over 40): 1915
- Russia: 1917
- Germany: 1918
- UK: 1918
- Brazil: 1932
- Turkey: 1934
- France: 1944

We start with New Zealand in 1893, Finland 1906, Denmark 1915. In Iceland in 1915 only women over 40 were given the right to vote. Think about that for just a second with the understanding is that, women can be rational beings allowed to choose how they are governed, but, only after the cross the age of 40, not age of 20, 19 into adulthood same way as men. And contrast this with the ways in which in current day narrative, women are considered to be... women are considered to have a capacity to mature much faster than men. Russia 1917, Germany: 1918, UK 1918, Brazil 1932, Turkey 1934. Lo and behold France only 1944.

Clearly, it is only in the early in the twentieth century, that one begins to see first wave efforts bearing fruit across the world. This is not to suggest a direct connection between first wave movements and first wave activism in the US and the rest of the world, but, there are ways in which feminist theory begins to have the visibility and legibility across the world in different political context.

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**WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE**

- Japan: 1945
- India: 1947
- Greece: 1952
- China: 1953
- Mexico: 1953
- Egypt: 1956
- Canada: First Nation women won the right to vote in 1960
- Australia: Indigenous Australians won the right to vote in 1962
- Switzerland: 1971

The slide features a woman in a patterned dress standing on the right side. The text is on the left, with several items circled in red. The NPTEL logo is in the top right corner.

Japan 1945, India comes into in being in 1947 and gives women the right to vote along with the men at the same time. Greece 1952, China 1953, Mexico 1953, Egypt 1956. Canada and Australia first nation women and indigenous Australians won the right to vote in 1960 and 1962 respectively. Recall then, the ways in which age works in Iceland, these are the same ways in which ethnicity, ethnic identity, average null identities seem to work for women. That until 1960, 1962 they were not considered to have enough political acumen to be able to vote. Hence surprise Switzerland 1971, just think about these countries and draw for yourself a map of the world in which the feminist movement as we understand it has made large strides in a relatively short period of time.

At the same time, we continue to hear narratives about women not having the capacity to wield power, to wield political citizenship to understand what is going on, being infantilized continually even in the contemporary world and then think about the ways in which we discussed the First Wave as encompassing a set of ideas and narratives and not necessarily relating to a particular set of political goals, starting in 1848 ending in 1920 and then we are done.

I would suggest that we continue to think about the goals of the First Wave as important even in the present moment.

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The slide features a title 'GOALS AND ISSUES OF THE FIRST WAVE' in bold black text at the top left. In the top right corner, there is a logo for NPTEL. A list of four points is presented on the left side, each enclosed in a red hand-drawn box:

- Equal political rights for women
- Equal opportunities for education and employment
- Right to own property
- Borrowed energy but also competed with the anti-abolitionist movement

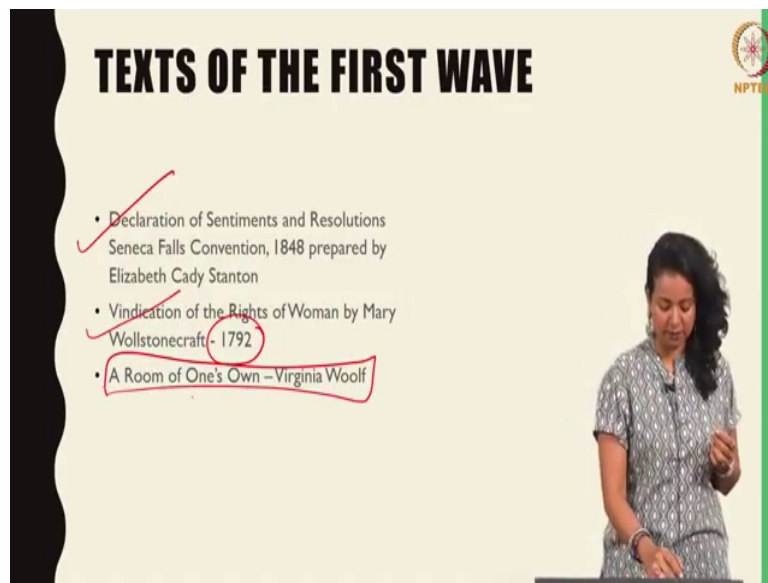
On the right side of the slide, a woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned short-sleeved top, is shown from the waist up, gesturing as if presenting.

What were these goals and issues? Equal political rights for women, equal opportunities for education and employment, right to own property, right to be financially independent and right to own property even as first wave borrowed energy from, and also competed with the anti-abolitionist movement. Often women, and these were white women in the US made the argument that what kind of a political milieu is this in which even African and American men get the right to vote but white women do not.

There was opposing of gender against race as opposed to making a coalition with the movement that was anti-slavery. And this is problematic for a number of reasons because it is an exclusionary set of possibilities being suggested were feminist theory that goes against the core of how we are understand the role of exclusion in the world. And therefore, first wave of feminism has been also being critiqued for this idea of political freedom, only for white women.

The first wave therefore in its thrust is fairly easy to understand, but, the thing to remember is that the things people were suggesting during the time were very revolutionary. Women had been writing about the rights of women, their capacity to be realised beings, their capacity to be publicly responsible people for a very long time. However, if is only during this period there was sustained political movement to give them the rights, the way that women had been imagining themselves.

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Let us look then at examples of a few key text during this time. Let us start with the “Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions” prepared by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. We will then go on to another important text from 1792 that poses the rights of the women in a slightly different vein but still an important precursor to First Wave feminist theory and lastly, let us read some very important and interesting passages from Virginia Woolf’s, *A Room of One’s Own*.

If you recall, there was a throw away reference to Virginia Woolf in relation to New Historicism or recovering women’s history, where we had spoken a very briefly about the Woolf saying, what about Shakespeare sister? Why is it that we never hear about any kind of women from the era of Shakespeare? Did women not have imagination? Did they not have the capacity for genius? Could they not write? How is it that in the Elizabeth in era, we only hear about men? So, we will talk a little bit about this wonderful text called *A Room of One’s Own*. Let us start by reading the “Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions.”

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**DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS AND RESOLUTIONS**

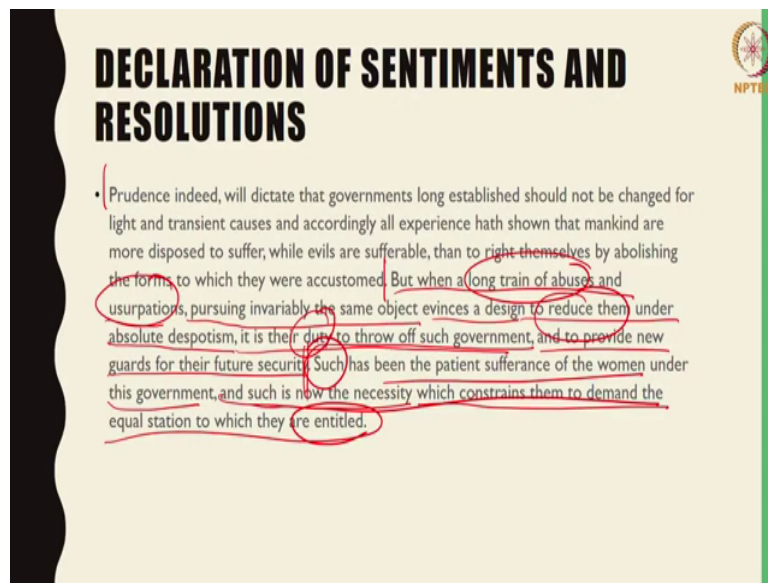
• When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course. (We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.)

“When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.” I know this sounds like a terribly clunky sentence, but bear with me. One portion of the family of man: women, to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied. What is this different position that is being argued for? One in which women have rights, but, one to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them... meaning, there is a rationale to this, it is natural for women to have equality; a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course. One should declare how is it that women think they deserve this kind of equality especially since the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them to such. This is followed by, “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal. That they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure theses rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Look at this wonderful move made between these two sentences. One: becomes necessary for one portion to assume among the people, a position to different from what they have hitherto occupied. These truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal and they are endowed with rights, among which are life, liberty, pursuit of happiness,;governments are instituted to secure these rights and these governments



need the consent of the governed, namely women! “Whenever, any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness.” In other words, women will pledge their allegiance to governments that secure to them as they do to all other populations, the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness.

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It continues, “Prudence indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes and accordingly all experience has shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, then to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.” Really important! Here the declaration is asking you to pay attention and says that, governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes. They cannot be changed just for petty things, for trivial things. All experience has shown that mankind is more disposed to suffer, when the evils are sufferable. That the limit of tolerance of humankind are high and it is better to keep a government going than to change it every time this kind of understanding of suffering changes. However, “But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.” Here, think also about the ways in which the statement borrows from the larger feelings of the anti-slavery movement. A long train of abuses and usurpations reduce them, it is their duty therefore to throw off such

government and to provide new guards for their future security. “Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal stations to which they are entitled.” We start with, women must assume a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied. These truths are self-evident yet government does not secure this to women. And women have suffered for so long now that their time for suffering is up. They are tired of this kind of abjection, and despotism and such is now the necessity, which constrains them to demand the equal stations to which they are entitled.

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**DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS AND RESOLUTIONS**

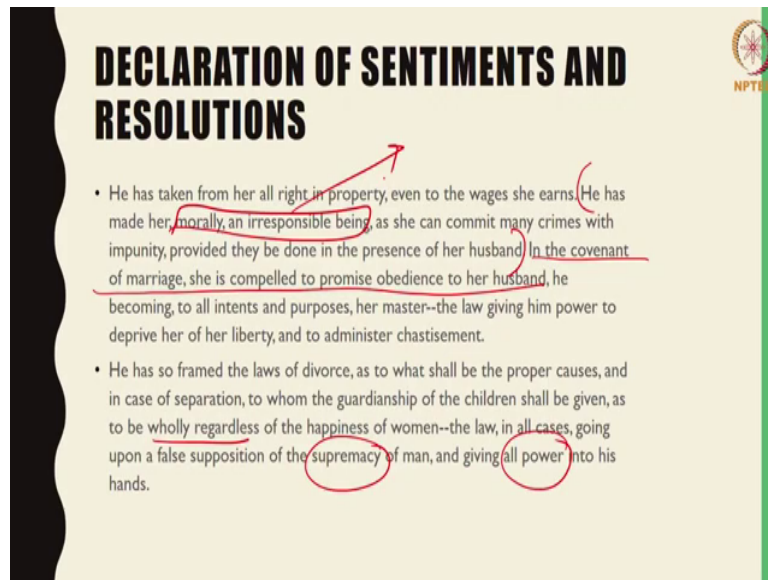
- The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world. He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise. He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice. He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners. Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides. He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

And now we come to the heart of the matter. “The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.” Now, this declaration does not balk from calling out the heart of the matter. It is making clear in no uncertain terms, that this is about man’s tyranny over woman.

“To prove this let facts be submitted to a candid world. He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise. He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice. He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men-both natives and foreigners.” Now, here you might begin to see a problem because the argument is, that rights have been given to both natives and foreigners, and here is a little cunning insertion -- ignorant and degraded men. Here, there is a hint of the kind of racialization that First Wave women's feminism in the US

suffered from. “Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides. He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.” Very strong words and accusations. It continues:

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## DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS AND RESOLUTIONS

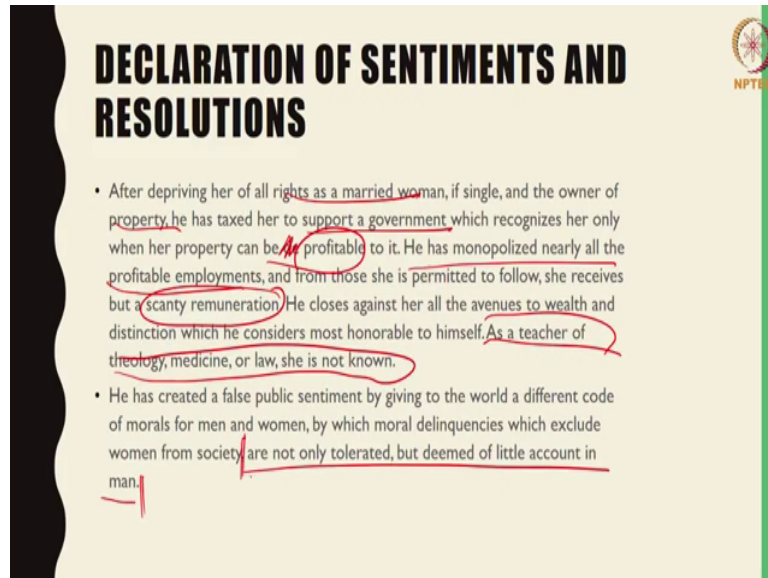
- He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns. He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master--the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.
- He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given, as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women--the law, in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

“He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns. He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband.” Now, this is a very interesting addition because instead of celebrating the fact that ostensibly women who are criminals can get away with things, the declaration says that, he has made her that an irresponsible being by taking away from her the demand for morality, the demand for responsibility; you have effectively left her an immoral slash amoral child almost. She can commit crimes with impunity; you have left her no capacity to develop in the world as a responsible adult. “In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming to all intents and purposes, her master- the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty and to administer chastisement.”

“He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes and in case of separation to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women. The law in all cases going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.” Here, there is a call for egalitarian

distribution of power, in order also that women can become responsible in public space and be seen as responsible in the eyes of the law and the world at large.

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## DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS AND RESOLUTIONS

- After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single, and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be profitable to it. He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.
- He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man.

“After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single and the owner of the property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be profitable to it. He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honourable to himself. As, a teacher of theology, medicine or law she is not known.” The declaration for the goals on to excavate the ways in which current law, current public sentiment disallows women any kind of possibility. So, she has no rights as a married woman, if she has property it’s taxed to support a government, so that it is not profitable to her. Men have monopolized profitable employments; women receive only scanty remuneration thereby requiring that they be dependent on men all the time. And as a teacher theology, medicine, or law women are not known. They have no capacity for any kind of form of employment that secures to them any kind of distinction.

“He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man.” In other words, even in terms of delinquencies because of a different code of morals, women are not even considered. There are no possible ways according to this Declaration for women to be realised beings in society.

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**DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS AND RESOLUTIONS**

• In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions embracing every part of the country.

The slide features a woman on the right side, and the text on the left has several words underlined in red: 'we', 'misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule', 'employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press', and 'Conventions'. Red arrows point from these underlined sections to the right.

And the Declaration also clearly points to the fact that it knows that this is an uphill task. “In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule, but, we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures and endeavour to enlist the pulpit and the Press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions embracing every part of the country.” Now, this clearly a very ambitious project.

They are suggesting that they understand fully well what is it they seeking to change, and you can see that it takes them some time 1848 to 1920 is not small. However, clearly there is also a plan: employ agents, circulate tracts, petition State and National Legislatures, and enlist religion and public opinion on their behalf. “We hope this convention will be followed by a series of convention embracing every part of the country.” This is also a clear mobilisation.

I know this has been a bit of long read, but bear with me because I think it is really important to pay attention to the language employed in each of these Waves too try and understand what is it that women were fighting against in that particular age. What are the ways in which they had to persuade, to push, to break open the boundaries of understanding in order to further the feminist movements and its goals.

I want to move on now slightly different text which argues very differently than the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions for why is it that women need full rights in society.

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**VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN - 1792**

- Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to co-operate unless she know why she ought to be virtuous? Unless freedom strengthen her reason till she comprehend her duty, and see in what manner it is connected with her real good? If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind; but the education and situation of woman, at present, shuts her out from such investigations.

The slide features a woman in a patterned dress speaking on the right side. The text on the left is partially circled in red. An NPTEL logo is visible in the top right corner of the slide.

This is the “Vindication of the Rights of Woman” from 1792, where Mary Wollstonecraft goes on to say the following. “Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to co-operate unless she know why ought to be virtuous? Unless freedom strengthen her reason till she comprehend her duty, and see in what manner it is connected with her real good? If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind; but the education and situation of woman, at present shuts her out from such investigations.”

Look at how interesting this is: main argument is meant to support women’s rights in order that women can become effective companions. Women will only co-operate with a larger endeavour for truth, if, they know why they ought to be virtuous. Freedom strengthens reasons and if the goal is for a reasonable companion to man then women deserve freedom. Children must be educated by women, by mothers who are patriots in order to produce patriotism, and such can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind. But, the education and situation of woman, at present shuts her out from such investigations.

So, Wollstonecraft is suggesting here that women are valuable entities, but not in their own right as individuals but, as companions, wives, and mothers. In other words, in their capacity to further the education of the child and the existence of man.

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**VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN - 1792**

- Let there be then no coercion established in society, and the common law of gravity prevailing, the sexes will fall into their proper places. And, now that more equitable laws are forming your citizens, marriage may become more sacred: your young men may choose wives from motives of affection, and your maidens allow love to root out vanity.

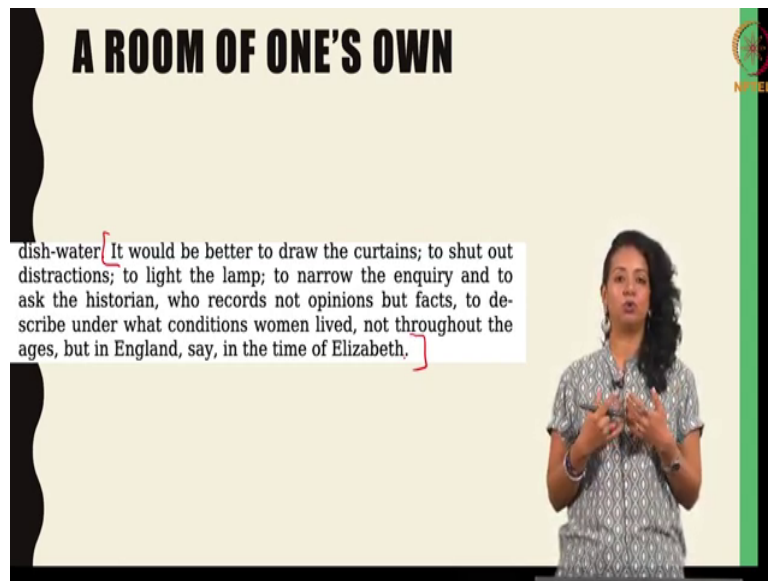
She goes on to say, “Let there be then no coercion established in society, and the common law of gravity prevailing, the sexes will fall into their proper places. And now that more equitable laws are forming your citizens, marriage may become more sacred. Your young men may choose wives from motives of affection and your maidens allow love to root out vanity.”

In other words, there is a broad moral project to Wollstonecraft’s text. Vindication of the rights of woman, but woman, as necessary companion to man where of course the sexes will fall into their proper places. To recall one of the strengths of difference and equality which spoke about kind of feminist theory, that agrees that women and men are different, but, that these differences are important for their incorporation into public place, each in their own right.

Think of vindication of right of woman as a modification of that, where Wollstonecraft argues that such capacities of women are important in public space as a counter and as a foil to men’s capacities; they will only feed into the larger project of patriotic, moral, mankind. Here, the question is worth asking, whether this is something that can be loaded as a feminist text because it does not seem to accord to women any kind of independent existence. However, step back little bit since we are not examining this just from the point of view of

the present moment but, also from the point of view of 1792 from our discussion of few minutes ago, that from 1848 to 1920 is when women are even able to make the argument the women can be politically responsible. 1792 is further back from that. Perhaps one of the things to consider is that women had to find different route to make the argument for equality and this may have been the only possible route available during that time. For a last text for today, I want to read from the delightful *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf.

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In chapter three if I remember correctly, Woolf suggest this: “It would be better to draw the curtains; to shut out distractions; to light the lamp; to narrow the enquiry and to ask the historian, who records not opinions but facts, to describe under what conditions women lived not throughout the ages, but in England, say, in the time of Elizabeth.” Now, largely across the text Woolf is investigating the question of what it takes for women to write fiction. What does it require in a woman’s life for her to be able to produce fiction as a larger genre, and as a writer of worth in the world?

And the answer of course in the title is, A Room of One's Own, but, in the process even as she suggests this, gathering together all other kinds of ruminations and thoughts, she asks the question of where is it that women were in Elizabethan England. Why is it that we have no records of their lives?

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## A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN



For it is a perennial puzzle why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet. What were the conditions in which women lived? I asked myself; for fiction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground, as science may be; fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible; Shakespeare's plays, for instance, seem to hang there complete by themselves. But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in.

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How brilliant is this paragraph! Woolf is arguing for an important, solid materiality from which fiction emerges: that the work of imagination is carried out by living, breathing, sustaining bodies whose historical conditions and material conditions are constitutive of the capacity to write fiction; and therefore, why is it that no woman seems to have been capable of the kind of extraordinary literature in a time when every man, every other man, was capable of song or sonnet. And fiction, even if it is imaginative, has the need for material life in very particular ways. So, what is it that we know of women’s material lives during this time?

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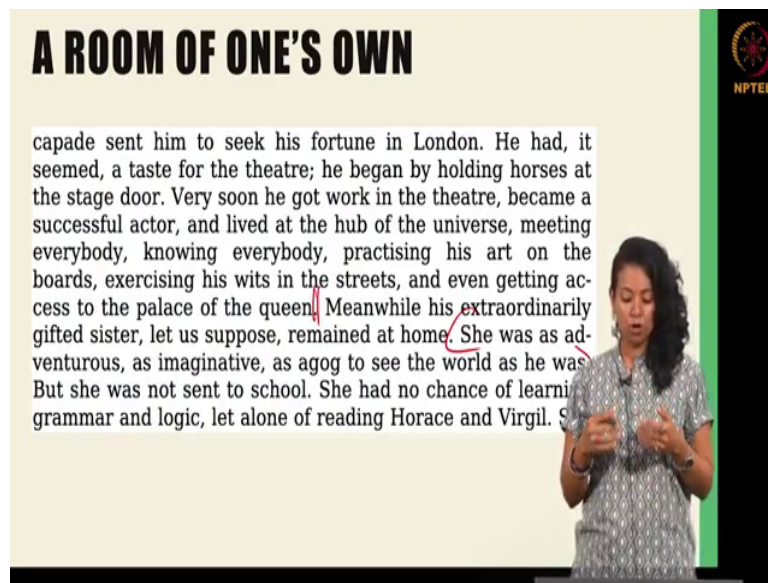
## A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN



Be that as it may, I could not help thinking, as I looked at the works of Shakespeare on the shelf, that the bishop was right at least in this; it would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare. Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say. Shakespeare himself went, very probably,—his mother was an heiress—to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin—Ovid, Virgil and Horace—and the elements of grammar and logic. He was, it is well known, a wild boy who poached rabbits, perhaps shot a deer, and had, rather sooner than he should have done, to marry a woman in the neighbourhood, who bore him a child rather quicker than was right. That es-

“Be that as it may, I could not help thinking,” she continues “as I looked at the works of Shakespeare on the shelf, that the bishop was right at least in this; it would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare.” And remember she is making a very important argument here, where she is not agreeing with this so-called bishop. She is merely saying that he was right that it would not have been possible, but for different reasons. So she goes on to argue. “Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say. Shakespeare himself went, very probably, – his mother was an heiress – to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin – Ovid, Virgil and Horace – and the elements of grammar and logic. He was, it is well known, a wild boy who poached rabbits, perhaps shot a deer, and had rather sooner than he should have done, to marry a woman in the neighbourhood who bore him a child rather quicker than was right.” Here, Woolf is gathering from the historical elements of the time and of Shakespeare’s life to be able to build the material conditions from which Shakespeare’s work emerges.

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The slide features a title "A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN" in bold black letters at the top left. Below the title is a block of text from Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own". The text is: "capade sent him to seek his fortune in London. He had, it seemed, a taste for the theatre; he began by holding horses at the stage door. Very soon he got work in the theatre, became a successful actor, and lived at the hub of the universe, meeting everybody, knowing everybody, practising his art on the boards, exercising his wits in the streets, and even getting access to the palace of the queen. Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. S". To the right of the text is a vertical green bar with the NPTEL logo at the top. In the bottom right corner of the slide, a woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned top, is shown from the chest up, looking down at her hands as if speaking or gesturing.

“That escapade sent him to seek his fortune in London. He had, it seemed, a taste for the theatre; he began by holding horses at the stage door. Very soon he got work in the theatre, became a successful actor, and lived at the hub of the universe, meeting everybody, knowing everybody, practising his art on the boards, exercising his wits in the streets and even getting access to the palace of the queen.” Here, you can imagine Shakespeare as a bold, enterprising man who leaves where he is from to go to London, to the big bad world of London, and makes his fortune there.

“Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But, she was not sent to school. She had no chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil.” Here, Woolf is making evident to us that it does not matter even if women were to have similar capacities, for they would never have had the chances that someone like Shakespeare did. And therefore, in reverse, we seem to suggest that women had no capacities at all. Thereby reifying these understandings of difference between men and women.

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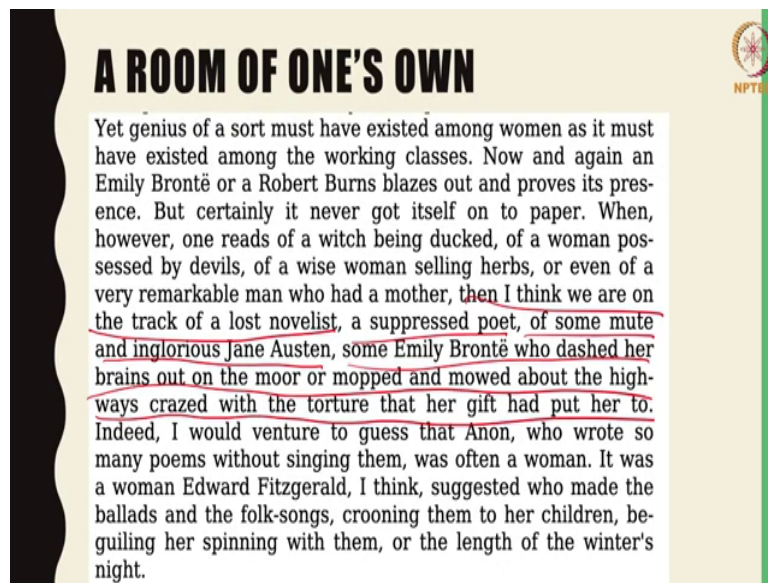
**A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN**

That, more or less, is how the story would run, I think, if a woman in Shakespeare's day had had Shakespeare's genius. But for my part, I agree with the deceased bishop, if such he was—it is unthinkable that any woman in Shakespeare's day should have had Shakespeare's genius. For genius like Shakespeare's is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people. It was not born in England among the Saxons and the Britons. It is not born to-day among the working classes. How, then, could it have been born among women

“That, more or less, is how the story would run, I think, if a woman in Shakespeare’s day had had Shakespeare’s genius. But, for my part, I agree with the deceased bishop, if such he was – it is unthinkable that any woman in Shakespeare's day should have had Shakespeare's genius.” And here she delivers the closing salvo.

For genius like Shakespeare's is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people. It was not born in England among the Saxons and the Britons. It is not born today among the working classes. How, then could it have been born among women? Here, Woolf is also making an interesting differentiation between privileged men of certain class, and the others among which women are also included; so the access of the working classes equal to the access to women. This is quite an interesting in brilliant sort of exposition of the ways in which that which we understand to be genius, is also located in very-very particular conditions of privilege, access and identity. And therefore, Woolf suggest that the rights of women in this regard are constitutive of the capacity to be included and counted among the world’s geniuses or for that matter as writers of fiction.

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**A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN**

Yet genius of a sort must have existed among women as it must have existed among the working classes. Now and again an Emily Brontë or a Robert Burns blazes out and proves its presence. But certainly it never got itself on to paper. When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Brontë who dashed her brains out on the moor or mopped and mowed about the highways crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to. Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman. It was a woman Edward Fitzgerald, I think, suggested who made the ballads and the folk-songs, crooning them to her children, beguiling her spinning with them, or the length of the winter's night.

“Yet” she continues, “genius of a sort must have existed among women as it must have existed among women as it must have existed the working classes. Now and again an Emily Bronte or a Robert Burns blazes out and proves its presence. But certainly it never got itself on to paper. When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Bronte who dashed her brains out on the moor or mopped and mowed about the highways crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to.” Look at this beautiful picture she creates of all the genius women who never had the chance to explore such. And how it must have driven them crazy. “Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon,” remember all of us have read poems in our childhood at the end of which is a little hyphen that says Anon or anonymous or we do not know who is it that wrote this? “I would venture to guess that Anon who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often woman. It was a woman Edward Fitzgerald, I think suggested who made the ballads and the folk-songs, crooning them to her children, beguiling her spinning with them, or the length of the winter’s night.” Look at this beautiful picture she creates of all the lost and forgotten women who alas thanks to the society’s understanding a women’s rights, or lack thereof, were confined the backyards of history where they rise only as anonymous voices.

That brings us to the end of text from the First Wave, and I want to make a quick reference to one another figure before we move on to a summary of the First Wave.

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**MARGARET SANGER (1879-1966)**

- Margaret Sanger was a nurse by training.
- Large working-class family
- Her mother's had 18 pregnancies and 11 births.
- Sanger opened the country's first family planning clinic in New York in 1916, even as provision of contraception was a criminal offence.
- Five years later she founded the American Birth Control League, culminating in her co-founding the International Planned Parenthood Federation in 1952.
- Maria Stopes in the UK

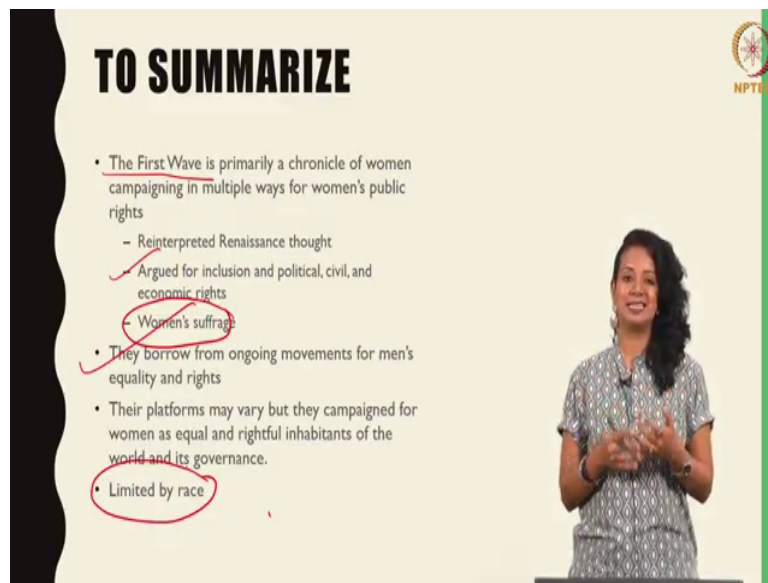
The slide features a photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned short-sleeved top, standing and looking down. The NPTEL logo is visible in the top right corner of the slide.

Margaret Sanger is another important figure to emerge at the edges of the First Wave. Nurse by training, who herself came from a large working class family, and she witnessed her mother's 18 pregnancies and 11 births. Having seen this for herself, she was convinced that women's rights were also inextricably tied up with women's control over their own reproductive capacities.

She opened the country's first Family Planning Clinic in New York in 1916, even as provision of contraception was a criminal offence. Five years later she founded The American Birth Control League, culminating in her co-founding the International Planned Parenthood Federation in 1952. Her work, along with the work of Maria Stopes in the UK, is always quoted and often spoken about, as one of the first kind of important movements in reproductive rights for women, which we will also go on to discuss in relation to Second Wave.

However, the thing to also remember is that both Margaret Sanger and Maria Stopes are controversial figures because of their associations with eugenics. If you are curious please go and look that up too.

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## TO SUMMARIZE

- The First Wave is primarily a chronicle of women campaigning in multiple ways for women's public rights
  - Reinterpreted Renaissance thought
  - Argued for inclusion and political, civil, and economic rights
  - Women's suffrage
- They borrow from ongoing movements for men's equality and rights
- Their platforms may vary but they campaigned for women as equal and rightful inhabitants of the world and its governance.
- Limited by race

To summarize as we bring to end this lecture on First Wave Feminism: The First Wave is a chronicle of a women campaigning in multiple ways for women's public rights. It reinterprets Renaissance thought: the idea of liberty and the right to happiness; argues for inclusion and political, civil, and economic rights.

It is often associated with primarily women's suffrage. First Wave was borrowed from ongoing movements for man's equality and rights, therefore, liberalism and liberal feminism as well. Their platforms may vary but they campaigned for women as equal and rightful inhabitants of the world, and therefore its governance.

Limitations of First Wave Feminism are often suggested to be around its race politics. I hope that was clear, please do continue to look at the texts that I have suggested and perhaps look up some more to see what are the ways in which First Wave Feminists furthered this kind of focus on women and their identities. We will return in the next lecture with Second Wave Feminism. Until then...

