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Lecture – 16 Introduction to Feminism I

Dear participants welcome to the fourth week of the module. In this module we would be focusing on discussions related with feminism and gender issue. We will begin with the development of the feminist arguments, move on to the beginnings of gender, to masculinity and queer studies. The last module would be based on media and gender issues. Feminism and gender these are two words which are often discussed and which are often a part of our daily vocabulary.

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Feminism and Gender

- Feminism is an ideology and a movement for socio-political change, challenging male privilege and women's subordination within any given society.
 - Biological Bodies, protest against asymmetrical status of women
- Gender is the socially projected component of human sexuality.
- Perhaps the best way to understand gender is to understand it as a process of social presentation.
- Gender Roles are delineated by behavioral expectations and norms
- od04lec16 Once individuals know those expectations and norms, they can adopt
 - In the first three years of a child's life, gender awareness takes its roots

Feminism is an ideology and movement. These two aspects are so important simultaneously that we cannot disassociate them from each other. Unlike various other theoretical arguments. Were ideologically takes precedence, for example, Marxism they find that feminism is a movement which is interlinked with ideology in a very unique manner. The ideology and movement is for socio political change which wants to challenge male privilege and women's subordination within any given society.

Feminism believes that the biological differences have resulted into a symmetrical status of women and their exploitation in patriarchal societies. Whereas gender is a socially projected component of human sexuality. Wherein understanding of basic feminism has started with this idea that biological differences have resulted into two different types of status for men and women.

We find that gender is an understanding of how society perceives human sexuality. Perhaps the best way to understand gender is to understand it as a process of social presentation. Gender roles are also delineated by behavioural expectations and norms. Once individuals know that these are the expectations and norms in the given society related with a particular gender they can adopt behaviours that project the gender they wish to portray.

So here we find that the societal interpretations become important and therefore the perceptions of gender maybe different in different societies. It is also said that in the first three years of a child's life the gender awareness takes its roots. So the cultural component as far as the gender construction of identity is concerned is very important.

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Feminist Theory: "A point of view of, for and by women!"

- Not a mere intellectual curiosity
- Culturally viable option
- Compared with Marxism and Psycho-analysis
- Exposes the incompleteness of previous systems of knowledge
- No strait-jacketed definitions
 - Only working ones
- Focused on action
- Not pro-active
- Basically pluralistic Liberal, Marxist, Radical, Psycho, Anarchie, Black, Eco...
- To Oppose Systematic Social Injustice Because of Sex by incorporating constantly emerging critical approaches

Feminist theory is sometimes explained as a point of view of, for and by women. Because outside this framework but there is nothing which we can call as being a feminist perspective. It is also not a mere intellectual curiosity. It is not something which has started only as an academic

debate. It was there because the need was felt by women as well as by men also. In todays world we find that it is perhaps the only culturally viable option.

Because if we do not adopt it we find that half of the population would not be able to contribute to the growth of the system. In terms of its overwhelming significance it can be compared with Marxism and psycho-analysis. No discussion of humanities and social sciences as well as other fields would ever be complete now without incorporating the angle of gender. So we have the inclusion of feminism

And gender in every aspect in every discourse related with human philosophy. Therefore, it has also exposed the incompleteness of previous systems of knowledge. Because feminist studies also show us that the previous systems of knowledge were only male centred and they had isolated women from it and therefore they represented only half of the population of the world. It is also true that perhaps there are no straight jacketed definitions for feminism.

And therefore as the title of this slide I have taken up this phrase a point of view of, for and by women. Because we can have only working definitions of feminism because depending on the societal structure the needs and the requirements of feminism become also different. Also remember that this is not an ideology which exists in exclusion. This is an ideology which is linked with the movement as well as societal needs.

Therefore, it is also focused on action. If we take out action from it, we find that it does not remain viable at all. At the same time, it is not a proactive philosophy and this is a very interesting aspect of feminists development of thought. We find that wherever a particular philosophy takes shape the woman becomes a part of it gradually and the feminist interpretation of that particular theoretical approach emerges.

It is through not only about the theoretical grounding and women's participation in it. We find that in every field gradually as woman have started to enter and participate the feminist perspective has emerged. So now we do not talk anymore only about feminism as an academic debate in the context of literature and philosophy. We talk about feminism in terms of law, we talk about feminism in terms of scientists.

We also talk about feminism in terms of environment, space sciences so on and so forth. So it is not a proactive one and therefore it is also basically pluralistic. Because it can be fitted into different approaches. So therefore we have different perspectives and different types of feminism which are available to us. For example, Liberal, Marxist, Radical, Psychoanalytical, Anarchic black feminists, Eco feminist etc.

Because they respond to a particular philosophy or a particular need or a particular development in the society. Despite all these differences we find that the basic approach of feminists is the same. It wants to oppose systematic social injustice because of sexual differences by incorporating constantly emerging critical approaches.

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Origins of the Term:

April 27, 1895, Athenaeum

1901, Dictionaire de Philosophie, state of being womanly

1906, Dictionaire de Philosophie, position favorable to the rights of

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women

1906, Oxford English Dictionary

The origin of the term are quite interesting also. The first print reference which we get for this term is an *Athenaeum* a magazine which was published in 1895. So April 27, 1895 issue of *Athenaeum* has used the term feminism for the first time. Originated from Femina it was considered that it is something which is related with women. The first dictionary entry is found in the French edition of the *Dictionary de Philosophie*.

In which in 1901 edition it was adopted and defined as a state of being womanly. It was only in 1906 edition of the same dictionary that it was redefined as a position favourable to the rights of women. In 1906 only it was a part of the *Oxford English dictionary*. The feminist philosophy as an argument as an academic development maybe rooted in the 20th century. But we find that as a movement. And this awareness it has even in the western world at least four to five centuries old tradition.

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Some Milestones

Four centuries old tradition*

- Christine de Pisan (1364-1430)
- Mary Wolstonecraft (1792)
- J.S. Mill (Suffrage Bill in 1867)
- Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions (1848)
- Suffrage Rights: USA (1920) and UK (1918)

Reasons of Resistance to the Demands of Women

- 1. Feminine Mystique: Recurrent glorification of the wifely and maternal roles
- 2.Misogyny: Legal, religious and literary texts
- 3. Scientific confirmation of a negative feminine stereotype

The first recorded indication is found in the writings and in the works of Christine de Pisan who was associated with the French court and had written several books basically to sensitize the women of the court. But she had also incorporated the feminist argument which were not exactly accepted by the contemporary French court. All of us are also familiar with the famous book by Mary Wollstonecraft published in 1792.

A Vindication of the Rights of Women which contains the genesis of almost all contemporary feminist demands and talks about the significance of education for women. In this tradition we find that not only women were participants, some men also contributed to the awareness towards generating equality for women and most prominent name in the western theoretical development is of J. S. Mill who had introduced in 1867 the suffrage bill in the British parliament.

Though it was not accepted at that time still it created an awareness and also generated a debate about starting political rights for women. Ultimately we find that in 1848 in the US Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolution which was signed by more than 70000 women during those times. There was a tangible demand in terms of demanding political rights. Basically the right to vote in the western countries.

And ultimately it led to the provision of incorporation of suffrage rights for women in USA in 1920 and in the UK in 1918. So sometimes it is questioned and people often wonder as to how it has taken up so many centuries for people to understand that women should have a place of equality in this world. So there are several reasons which may be given for them and they are termed as being Feminine Mystique, Misogyny

And also scientific information of a negative feminine stereotype. The phrase feminine mystique is a very popular word as far as our understanding of the feminist philosophy is concerned. It is a recurrent glorification of the conventional roles of a wife and a mother in the society. The roles of wife and mother are glorified to such an extent that we women were never given an opportunity to think beyond these means.

There was a certain type of misogyny also which was inbuilt in the western tradition. In fact, in all the traditions. But since we are talking about the western context we are limiting our discussions to this. So, in legal religious and literary text we find whether it is Aristotle's works or whether these are the works of St Thomas Aquinas a certain type of message initially is in built in which it is commented that

A woman's brain is never developed as much as it is developed in the case of men. So with this type of a Misogyny it was very difficult for women to challenge these notions. Somehow we also find that the scientific confirmation of a negative feminine stereotype is also important. During the Victorian days it was thought that since the size of a woman's brain is smaller than the size of men's brain the woman's capabilities of the intellect would somehow also be inferior.

And we find that even now these type of feminine stereotypes in a negative manner continue in different types of social research and scientific investigation. So feminism as a movement and ultimately this movement resulted into an ideology. It can be divided into different phases.

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Feminism: Different Phases*

- Medieval Era
 - Satisfaction with existing roles
 - Betterment of situation
- 19th Century
 - Freedom within Pre-defined roles
 - Enhanced focus on legal and political rights
- 20th Century Developments

* Marsha Lear

During the medieval era, the 19th century and the 20th century. During the Medieval era we find that women were satisfied with the existing roles. They never thought that these existing roles, the primacy of the role of a wife or a mother should be challenged or should be added by some other roles also.

All they wanted was a betterment of the situation so that they can live their life in a peaceful manner. During the 19th century we find that women started talking of freedom within predefined roles of their gender. And they focused more on legal and political rights and particularly they started to fight for the right to vote. Because they thought that if they would have better participation in the governance

They would perhaps be able to improve their situation. Still by and large they wanted a political right to vote and gradually the demands for owning property, the demands to enter into different professions were also added. It is in the 20th century that we find that there are major developments in the feminist movement and the feminist academic philosophy also. In the 20th century we can have these three different phases.

This idea of phases I have taken up from Marshalier. You would find that sometimes different types of ears sometimes different types of chronological developments are associated with the development of these different phases of feminism. So by and large we find that there is a consensus as far as the decades are concerned. But the exact year can be different so for my discussion I have based my argument on Marshalier.

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20th Century

First Phase : Early 20th Century

Political and Legal Reforms only

Second Phase: 1960s

Decade of vehement protest

Post Feminism: 1980s

Different configurations in relation to post-modern approaches

Marshalier there has said that the first phase is during the early 20th century where women wanted political and legal reforms only. When these political rights that is the right to vote was given to women, they thought that perhaps the things would be better. They did not and therefore they started to talk about the legal reforms. The second phase is 1960s decade that is the decade of vehement protest.

In the Western world we find that there was an all-round protest and dissatisfaction after the world wars. The economic system, the society itself was crumbling and feminism also entered into a vehement face during the 1960s. This is also the time when the academic contribution of various feminist philosophers came to be noticed and feminist philosophers started talking about the significance of cultural conditioning

As far as the product which is named as woman is prepared. During the 1980s the face of post-feminism begins. The term post feminism has been used by Toril Moi to look at different configurations between postmodernism and feminism. So post-feminist is a term which is used to denote different configurations in relation to postmodern approaches. Later on we find that later this the post-feminist phase ultimately leads to our understanding of gender.

So in order to understand gender theories we also have to understand what exactly is the feminist theory. Feminist started to talk about the differences between men and women which resulted into a secondary position of women and ultimately it led us to we add to an enhanced sensitivity towards gender differences.

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First Phase:

Political Rights and Social Betterment

- During the medieval times, women simply wanted more humane circumstances
- Focus shifted on political and legal rights after the Seneca Falls resolution (1848)
- Still, home-making and child care were treated as the primary occupation
- Should mothers also work?

In the first phase we find that during the medieval times and in the first half of the 20th century women wanted only political rights and social betterment. They simply wanted to focus on political rights after the Seneca Fall Resolution and gradually we find that right to work in different professions was also a major demand. Women were not allowed to enter any other profession except that of teaching and later on that of being a nurse.

Higher education was not open to them so we will also started to fight for that in the first part of the 20th century. They also wanted that women should be given the right to own a property and to initiate their own business houses also. Still in the first half of the 20th century in the first

phase it was considered that homemaking and childcare were the primary occupation for women. Whereas it was considered that women should work they should get educated. But the question was also asked should women also work.

So normally education and work was considered to be the domain of those women who were either not married or did not have children so that the primacy of their duties towards homemaking and childcare do not suffer at all. In the second wave movement of feminism we find that the idea of cultural conditioning was started.

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Second Wave Feminism

- Offshoots of other protest movements civil rights and racial apartheid.
- Several women's liberation groups were formed in America, Britain and Germany in the 1960's
- Second wave started positioning women's issues within sociocultural frameworks
- Suggested that the different experiences/processes of socialization result in different behaviors among men and women.
 - Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millett

During the second wave feminism during this decade of 1960s. We find that there were offshoots of different other protest movements also. The questions regarding civil rights had started fresh. The issues about racial apartheid had also come to the foreground. So, several women's liberation groups were formed in America, in Britain and Germany in and around 1960s. And these groups started positioning women's issues within socio cultural frameworks.

Prior to that these issues were not positioned strongly within the socio cultural frameworks. The work towards the movement for equality of women was also supported by the academic writings of writers like Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, later on Betty Friedan, Kate Millett. They suggested, these writers suggested that the different experiences and processes of socialization

result in different behaviours among men and women. Simone de Beauvoir is particularly known for this quote.

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Construction of the Feminine (vs. feminist and female)

"One is not born, but rather <u>becomes</u> a woman

The true woman is an artificial product that civilization makes, as formerly eunuchs were made.

Her presumed instincts for coquetry, docility are indoctrinated, as is phallic pride in man."



"One is not born but rather becomes a woman". In 1959 he French edition of the *Second Sex* was published in 1961 it was translated into English by Parsley and then it became a war cry for women associated with feminist movements. Simone de Beauvoir was the first thinker who suggested that the role of the cultural conditioning is important to impart femininity to a woman and masculinity as it is considered in our world to a men.

And therefore she says one is not born but rather becomes a woman. The true woman as it is understood in our society is an artificial product that civilization makes as formerly eunuchs were made. Her presumed instincts for coquetry, docility are indoctrinated. It is during this time that we find that even the literary authors had talked about how the social conditioning has a major negative impact over the lives of women.

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Second Phase: Beginnings of Gender (?)

- Lack of purpose imparts an inner vacancy to women
 - A Room of One's Own
 - Three Guineans
- A void, which they try to fill up with activities
 - Mrs. Dalloway
- Repetitive chores enhance their loneliness
 Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (1963), describes a problem "that has no name"— the pervasive despondency of American women in the 04legios and early 1960s, linking it with education system, women's magazines and the media

The first significant name is that a Virginia Woolf who not only in her literary pieces but also in her discursive writings talk about the situation of women. In her two text *A room of One Own* ad *Three Guineans* she has talked about the isolation which women had to suffer, the secondary position which they had to suffer in terms of education and amenity and she has said that the literature of the world is basically a literature of and about men.

It is written only about men it is written predominantly by men and whatever impressions we get of women is decided by the male perspective of the author. So women there is a silence about women in our literature. She also has presented how lack of an extended purpose in a woman's life results in an inner vacancy which sometimes they try to fill up with activities. And a very interesting example is presented in a novel *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Where Mrs. Dalloway and elite housewives throws parties and by the arrangement of these parties she tries to find out some type of semblance of purpose in her life. They also said that the repetitive nature of women's chores, the household chores and hence the loneliness of women because they never since the completion of any work which is given to their lot. Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique* has taken up a problem that has no name.

And she has talked about the situation which was prevalent in the USA after the Second World War. The pervasive despondency of American women in the 1950s and early 1960s was linked

by Betty Friedan by the education system, woman's magazines in the media. She has talked in detail how the education system and courageous a particular type of priorities set as far as women and girls are concerned.

And how particular roles are always eulogized in women's magazines by the media, by the advertisements also. Up till this moment in the development of the feminist thought.

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'Anatomy is Destiny'

- Biological determinism is often used to support generalisations about men and women
 - Such as 'men are naturally more able in maths and technology' or 'women are naturally suited to domestic duties'.
- Biological determinism asserts that certain behaviours are justified and unchangeable because
 - 'Boys will be boys'
 - 'Girls should be girls'

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The phrase *anatomy is destiny* was considered to be a very significant phrase. It was used by biological determinism to support generalizations about men and women. It also suggested that the different cultural conditioning which we have in our societies is justified and these suggestions and generalizations were always used by phrases like "men are naturally more able in maths and technology" or "women are naturally suited to domestic duties".

Biological determinism also asserted that certain behaviours are justified and unchangeable because as they say boys will be boys and girls should be girls. In these phases we can also notice that when we use will in the context of boys there is a sense of determinism. On the other hand when we use the auxiliary verb should in the context of girls it also suggested something which is contrived.

Something which has to be moulded. So biological determinants was prevalent particularly in the 20th century in the first half of the century and then it was gradually came to be challenged by the second wave feminist critics also. The feminist critics in the second phase pointed out that there are certain stereotyped gender characteristics which are eulogized by literature by media by our education system in general.

And these characteristics ultimately are projected as being the ideal behaviour for girls and boys. (Refer Slide Time: 24:25)

Stereotyped Gender Characteristics	
Feminine characteristics	Masculine characteristics
submissive	o dominant
dependent	independent
emotional	rational
receptive	assertive
intuitive	analytical
timid	brave
passive	active
sensitive r	insensitive

If you look at the colour coding of feminine characteristics and masculine characteristics we find that the pink has been used for woman and blue has been used for boys. So you would find that the colours also become significant for our understanding of the gender. So in a traditional perspective we find that a woman is expected to be submissive, dependent, emotional, receptive etc.

Whereas it is expected that a boy or a man would be dominant in dependent would take lead but be analytical and would be socially responsible. So, these different sets of characteristics which were somehow in built in the process of social conditioning in our educational patterns in our behaviour towards young girls and boys ultimately resulted into a particular set of personalities for the men and women. This also made the second wave feminist consider and believe

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Second Wave Feminists

Believed that the patriarchal social organization has always had a bias in favor of men

Wanted to initiate a cultural change to ensure a sense of equality between gendered relationships.

They refused to accept biological differences as determiners of destiny.

Questioned the validity of pre-fixed roles and the authenticity of prevalent notions of gender

Demanded equality with men in terms of social, political and economic rights, so that women can eschew cultural constraints and can define their

That the patriarchal social organization has always had a bias in favour of men. They wanted to initiate a cultural change to ensure a sense of equality between gendered relationships and therefore the second wave feminist refuse to accept biological differences as determiners of destiny. They started to challenge it and they also questioned the validity of prefixed roles and the authenticity of prevalent notions of gender.

Simone de Beauvoir has specifically mentioned how gradually a young child is trained to be a girl or trained to be a boy is encouraged towards a particular set of behaviour and is discouraged or even severely punished when a gender in appropriate behaviour is displayed particularly by a boy. If a young girl behaves in a tomboyish fashion and Simone de Beauvoir was writing towards the middle of the 20th century.

So Simone de Beauvoir has written that if a girl exhibits tomboyish qualities they are still somehow accepted tolerated by the parents in the hope that soon she would be able to overcome that. But the same type of tendencies in a young boy is never tolerated. If a young boy wants to dress up like his elder sister wants to play with dolls then is also severely punished and scolded. So you would find that in the sexual binary the place of a man

And the place of a woman is already fixed. And this is exactly what the second wave feminist have started to challenge. So, they demanded equality with men in terms of social political and

economic rights so that women are able to eschew cultural constraints and can define their own preferences in life. So feminist theory ultimately is rooted in certain ideas.

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Feminist Theory

- Sense of being a woman is merely the product of sex-coding processes of social practices.
- Kate Millett argued that women's oppression is rooted in social conceptions of femininity. Her seminal work Sexual Politics (1969) suggests that gender is culturally constructed. She defines sexual politics as arrangements which allow a group of persons to control the other
- Stereotyping of the female as prostitutes, virgins, unchaste women, or sexual anorexics - results in patriarchal domination

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The sense of being a woman is merely the product of sex coding processes of social practices is one of the fore most arguments which has started with the second wave feminist theories. It is not only the literary theory not only the educational practices and not only the cultural behaviours which are responsible for it but the systematic institutionalisations of religion also has resulted into this.

Now Kate Millet has argued that women's operation is rooted social conceptions of femininity and her major work Sexual Politics which was published in 1969. So just like Simone de Beauvoir the gender is culturally constructed. She defines sexual politics as arrangements which allow a group of persons to control the other. And she also says that stereotyping of the female also results in patriarchal domination.

Because the individual differences are always oversighted. For example, a woman is either a prostitute or a virgin or an unchaste woman or a sexual anorexics or a wife or a mother outside these socially defined roles she does not have any other identity.

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Feminist Theory

These controlled/conditioned sexual relationships extend into the domain

of ideology, biology and socio-cultural institutions

Family, religion, educational institutes and work place.

Millett has pointed out how in the Christian mythology Adam is treated as

the racial type, whereas Eve is a mere sexual type.

Eve eats the forbidden fruit of life and goads Adam to do the same.

However, it is the fall of Adam, the male, that leads to the fall of humanity

These controlled and conditions sexual relationships extent also into the domain of ideology,

biology and socio cultural institutions. We find that they become dominant in organizations like

family, religion, education institutions and workplace also. Millet has pointed out how the

Christian mythology has also always suggested that men is better than a woman. So, in the

Christian mythology Adam is treated as the racial type

Whereas Eve is projected only as a sexual type. It is Eve who eats the forbidden fruit of life and

goads Adam to the to do the same but it is not her fall but it is the fall of Adam the male which

leads to the fall of humanity. Various feminist thinkers have also suggested that while as young

children and adolescent they were going through these biblical passages. They were also facing

certain guilt about being a woman.

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Basic Understanding

 The global idea of feminism refers to the belief that men and women deserve equality in all opportunities, treatment, respect, and social rights.

In general, feminists are people who try to acknowledge social inequality

based on gender and stop it from continuing.

Feminists point out that in most cultures throughout history men have

received more opportunities than women.

While this basic idea of feminism seems simple enough, there are many

people who misunderstand what the goal of feminism is.

So you would find that these cultural processes which ultimately become a part of our

understanding of the world become important to understand the idea of feminism. The global

idea of feminism refers to the belief that men and women deserve equality in all opportunities,

treatment, respect and social rights. So feminists are people who try to acknowledge social

inequality based on gender and stop it from continuing in that manner.

So feminist point out that in most cultures throughout history men have received more

opportunities than women. And while this basic idea of feminists seem simple enough we find

that there are many people who misunderstand the goal of feminism. In fact, often we find that

feminists are projected as angry bitter woman who only want to subjugate men but these are

stereotypes also have offended various people

Who are associated with the feminist movement in theory. So they have started to work in the

direction of understanding the differences which exists between the stereotype and reality when

it comes to anything related with feminist ideas. At this point I would reiterate certain things

which I have mentioned earlier.

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- Feminism is <u>not</u> Pro-Active
- It is always a response
- Similarities with other protest movements

Firstly, feminism is not a proactive philosophy and therefore it has resulted into various types of feminism. It is always a response to a situation to an ideology etc and therefore there are also similarities with other protest movements. The second wave of feminism is known for the anger and bitterness which is in built in it. But we find that in the early days most of the movements are bitter and angry.

Whether these are the movements related with racial apathies, these other movements related against related with Dalit consciousness protesting against the exploitation in a society and feminist movement is also not an exception. But by the time we enter the third wave of feminism we find that this anger and bitterness has gradually moved to a different area. So because of these reasons we find that there are different types of feminism.

Liberal feminists, Marxism feminism and black feminism, eco feminism etc. So in our next discussion we would look up the different types of feminisms, what are the commonalities and what are the differences in these movements and gradually we would also see how collectively these movements moved towards a post-feminist understanding of this scenario. Gradually leading way to our understanding of the issues of gender. Thank you.