
UNIT 1 FORMATIVE FEMINISMS

Regina Papa

Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives
- 1.3 Liberalism
 - 1.3.1 Conservative Liberals
 - 1.3.2 Liberal Feminist Voices
 - 1.3.3 Liberating Strategies: Education and Employment
 - 1.3.4 Marriage, Motherhood and Career
 - 1.3.5 Critiques of Liberal Feminism
- 1.4 Marxist Feminism
 - 1.4.1 Historical Materialism
 - 1.4.2 Marx on Women
 - 1.4.3 Production and Reproduction
 - 1.4.4 Family and Mother's Right
 - 1.4.5 Monogamy
 - 1.4.6 Sexual Division of Labour
 - 1.4.7 Application of Marxian Liberating Strategies
 - 1.4.8 Critique of Marxist Feminism
- 1.5 Radical Feminism
 - 1.5.1 Patriarchy
 - 1.5.2 Sex and Class
 - 1.5.3 Reproduction
 - 1.5.4 Reproductive Technologies for Liberation
 - 1.5.5 Reproductive Technologies for Enslavement
 - 1.5.6 Forced Motherhood
 - 1.5.7 Women as Sexual Slaves
 - 1.5.8 Liberating Strategies
 - 1.5.9 Critiques of Radical Feminism
- 1.6 Socialist Feminism
 - 1.6.1 Historical Conception of Biology
 - 1.6.2 Historical Analysis of Gender Division of Labour
 - 1.6.3 Women as Sexual Objects

- 1.6.4 Alienation
- 1.6.5 Liberation of Women
- 1.6.6 Critiques of Socialist Feminism

- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Glossary
- 1.9 Unit End Questions
- 1.10 References
- 1.11 Suggested Readings

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this first unit of the block on “Feminist Theories” we will begin by trying to achieve conceptual clarity regarding the theoretical perspectives on feminism. Through your study, you will realize that the term ‘Feminism’ is directed at changing the existing inequalities in the power relations between men and women. Feminist theories combine description, explanation, and prescription. Each theory attempts to describe women’s oppression, explains the causes and consequences, and prescribes strategies for women’s liberation. You will also see that feminist theories contradict the erroneous, unclear and irrational way of thinking and writing on the subject of women.

By formative feminisms we mean those early theories and political influences which came to shape the feminist movements from their inception in the early part of the 19th and through the 20th centuries. You have already been introduced to the history of women’s movements in Blocks 1 and 2 of this course, and some of the terms you will come across in this unit would be already familiar to you. Here, we will look at the theoretical frameworks of the formative feminisms so that you can view these in relation to the historical movements that you have read about earlier. The formative feminisms are Liberal, Marxist, Radical, and Socialist feminisms. Each theory presented in this unit has three broad sections - the informing political philosophy, its theoretical debates, and critiques of the theory.

The information presented here will strengthen your understanding of the historical shifts that have taken place in Western political thought and their long reaching impact on feminists from the 17th to the 20th century. You will also notice how the feminist thinkers of each period have employed similar or related concepts but contextualized them to their time, deftly challenging the patriarchal views about women. Moreover, you can also observe how each feminist theory pushes the frontiers of feminism further and provides space, scope and energy for new ideas to emerge. Finally, you will find that ‘Feminism’

is not a single, unidirectional theory. Rather, it branches out to encompass various focal aspects and areas of life as perceived and lived by both men and women at a particular point of time in history.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Recognize and describe the general characteristics of a feminist theory;
- Describe the different political philosophies that inform formative feminisms (i.e. Liberal, Marxist, Radical, and Socialist) in defining human nature and analyzing women's oppression;
- Examine the theoretical debates and thoughts of leading feminist thinkers and the liberating strategies suggested by each formative feminism; and
- Critique each formative feminist theory so as to understand the historical rise of successive feminisms.

1.3 LIBERALISM

In Block 1 of this course, you read about the evolution of various women's movements in the west as well as in India, and their linkages with a feminist consciousness or awareness about women's rights. These movements were energized by various theoretical perspectives of the time, and the theories in turn, evolved along with the movements. Therefore, feminist theories gain meaning when we locate them within broader philosophical and political perspectives of their times. Let us begin by looking at one such formative branch of feminism: Liberal Feminism.

Liberal feminism is a logical extension of traditional liberalism that emerged in the west, out of the rapid social, political and economic transformations of the late 1600s to 1700s. The period is called 'The Age of Reason' or 'The Age of Enlightenment'. For liberalists, the uniqueness of human nature is in the capacity of rationality. Human progress is in the onward march of human reason and knowledge. Individual dignity, equality, autonomy and self-fulfillment are esteemed as liberal values. Rationality is the property of individuals rather than of groups, and this mental capacity is possessed at least by all men in equal measures.

1.3.1 Conservative Liberals

The consensus among the conservative liberals was that the principles of rational individualism are not applicable to women. They inherited Aristotle's reductionism that "We should look on the female as being as it were a deformity,

though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature” (Aristotle, 1953). Thinkers like Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu and above all Rousseau wrote that women are biologically suited to play the roles of wives and mothers. They are by nature, emotional and passionate, and hence unsuited for work in the public sphere. The ‘Normative Dualism’ of Des Cartes divided mind from body. Rationality and associated mental capacities were ascribed to men while women, passionate and emotional, were identified with the body. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was committed to sexual dimorphism, in constructing a systematic difference between ‘rational man’ and ‘emotional woman’ and setting up complementary roles for men and women.

1.3.2 Liberal Feminist Voices

The 18th century liberal feminists argued that women as well as men had natural rights. The 19th century feminists extended the arguments in favour of equal rights for women under the law to own property and to vote. The contemporary liberal feminists adopt the theory of welfare state and demand that the State should actively pursue social reforms and ensure equal opportunities for women. They oppose laws that establish different rights for women and for men.

It was left to the early liberal feminists to argue that women were indeed capable of reasoning. Attempts were made to demonstrate that the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment could be applied to women as well as to men. Women’s voices were heard from both sides of the Atlantic demanding equal treatment with men. Let us discuss the views of some important liberal feminists as follows.

i) Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)

Liberal tradition emerged with the growth of capitalism. Mary Wollstonecraft was writing at a time when the economic and social position of European women was very low. The bourgeois women of the capitalist society were confined within the unproductive, idle condition of domestic life. Rose Marie Tong describes the situation in her *Feminist Thought*: “These women were the first to find themselves left at home with little productive, or income-generating, work to do. Married to wealthy professional and entrepreneurial men, these women had no incentive to work ...” (Tong, 1989, p. 13-14).

Wollstonecraft compared these women to the “feathered race”- the birds in cages who do nothing but plume themselves and “stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch” (Wollstonecraft, 1792). She surmised that if men were also caged in as women are, they too would be pleasure seeking and pleasure loving and be overtly emotional and passionate.

ii) **Harriet Taylor (1807-1850) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)**

Fifty years later, Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858) and her close friend John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) whom she married later, defended women's rights in a series of essays they published jointly and separately. Both Taylor and Mill differed from Wollstonecraft in demanding for women not only the same education as men to achieve sexual liberty, but also the civil liberties and economic activities that men enjoy. Harriet Taylor was the primary author of *Enfranchisement of Women* (1851) and Mill was the author of *Subjection of Women* (1869). These works provided the first systematic defense of women's rights.

Mill and Harriet provided an Agenda for the next 200 years of liberal feminism by synthesizing both utilitarianism and libertarianism (Nye, 1988, p. 12-13). Utilitarians envisaged a society in which there is the greatest good for the greatest number of people while Libertarians claimed that freedom is the natural right of every human being. Mill and Harriet argued that women should be granted all political privileges, including the vote and the right to run for public office.

iii) **Betty Friedan (1929-2006)**

The leading figure in the 20th century liberal feminism is Betty Friedan (1929-2006), an American activist and writer. Her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1974), is credited with sparking of the 'second wave' of feminism. The second wave of feminists believed that women's liberation meant sexual equality and gender justice, and that social change can be achieved by constructing legislation and regulating employment practices. The 'feminine mystique' is the idea that women can find satisfaction exclusively in the traditional role of wife and Friedan attempts to explode this myth. Friedan analyzes the emptiness that middle class, suburban, white, heterosexual housewives experience in their domestic life. Frustrated, beleaguered, and bored, these women turn to adorning themselves. They hope in vain that sex will free them. Friedan calls this frustration 'a problem that has no name'. Friedan emphasizes that women should be freed from oppressive gender roles everywhere, in the academy, the forum, and the market place.

The *National Organization for Women*, co-founded by Friedan in 1966, aimed to bring women into the mainstream of American society in full partnership with men. Friedan joined other leading feminists (including Gloria Steinem, Shirley Chisholm, Fannie Lou Hamer, Bella Abzug, and Myrlie Evers-Williams) in founding the '*National Women's Political Caucus*' in 1971.

Liberal feminists are of two categories: i). *Classical feminists* who fought for the removal of discriminatory laws and ii). *Welfare feminists* who argued that government should take appropriate action to eliminate socio-economic, as well as legal impediments to women's progress. In general, both are known to depend heavily on legal remedies.

1.3.3 Liberating Strategies: Education and Employment

Liberal feminists believed that given equal education, women will be equally rational as men. This premise is explained by traditional and modern liberal feminists. Wollstonecraft forcefully argued against Rousseau's view that women are defective in reasoning. In his book, *Emile, ou de l'éducation (Emile, or On Education)* published in 1762, Rousseau emphasized the inegalitarian view that "... the entire education of women must be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to be loved and honored by them, to rear them when they are young, to care for them when they are grown up, to counsel and console, to make their lives pleasant and charming, these are the duties of women at all times" (Cited in Okin, 1983, p. 71). Rousseau also assumed that little girls always liked to sew rather than to read and write. Wollstonecraft repeatedly argued that women ought to be given the same education as men so that they would be capable of making free choices and assume responsibility for their own development.

Valerie Bryson points out that Wollstonecraft's quarrel with Rousseau is fourfold (Bryson, 1992, p.22-23):

- First, Wollstonecraft was convinced that the women of upper classes in her time were frivolous and vain not by nature but because of their socialization.
- Second, she affirms that women are equally capable of and entitled to a rational education.
- Third, the virtue of being a good wife or mother cannot be imposed on women; it must be freely chosen by women themselves and women should be given knowledge and education so as to make rational choices to be good wives and mothers.
- Fourth, if men and women are of equal worth, they must also have equal rights. Wollstonecraft advocates political liberalism that campaigns for women's suffrage and legal rights and equal participation in politics and paid employment with men.

According to Betty Friedan, many educated middle-class women of her time suffered from depression because of the ambiguous life imposed on them. As education developed their potentialities, domestic life demanded their fulfillment in childbearing and childrearing. Friedan advised the suburban housewives to get college education and then enter into full time, public work-force. **As education is intimately connected to employment and financial independence, liberal feminists like Betty Friedan emphasized its importance for women.**

Employment and career will enable women to earn and become economically independent of their husbands. J.S. Mill opined that by keeping women in an unnatural state, the nature of women has become an artificial thing. He wrote in *The Subjection of Women* that the power of earning is essential for the dignity of a woman. Friedan argued that equality and human dignity are not possible for women if they are not able to earn and 'only economic independence can free a woman to marry for love'. According to Taylor, women could be fully liberated if they were to work outside the home. So the right to vote is not enough but participation in the free market of capitalist society is necessary. A woman who is employed contributes to the family and also wins respect. But Mill was of the view that a fully liberated woman enters and leaves the labour market at will.

1.3.4 Marriage, Motherhood and Career

J.S. Mill believed that even if a woman receives the same education, economic opportunities and civil liberties, she will prefer marriage and motherhood over other competing occupations. But Taylor claimed that given a free choice, a woman will choose a career in arts, business or politics instead of marriage and motherhood.

Friedan insisted on women entering a career. She argued that if a woman spends her whole time in the role of a wife or mother and has no time for a career, she will not develop into a full person. But Friedan failed to explain how to combine marriage and motherhood with a career without bringing in major structural changes within, as well as, outside the family. Later, Friedan admitted that it is not easy to combine marriage and career. Instead of calling women back into the private sphere, she exhorted women *to propel the women's movement and work with men for the desired changes in the 'mainstream'*. Liberal feminists also demanded equal rights for voting, reproduction, abortion and child healthcare, and reacted against sexual harassment.

1.3.5 Critiques of Liberal Feminism

The central aim of liberal feminists was to achieve for women those traits associated with males. It did not occur to them to question the value of traditional male attributes. This erroneously assumes that women can become like men if they set their minds to it; that most women want to become like men and that all women should aspire to masculine values. *Liberal feminists worked for women's equality without aiming at changing the structures of existing institutions.* Their emphasis on individualism prevents people from coming together as a community. It separates an autonomous individual from others, thus creating a 'political solipsism'. Though liberal feminists argued that women should be economically independent of men, they failed to provide women with adequate strategies to achieve an independent status. Even after gaining all sorts of legal rights, women will be still left in a condition of economic dependency damaging to liberation.

Elevating the activities of the mind over those of the body and identifying women with the body, as well as with 'woman-specific' work like child care, child rearing, care of the sick and the aged, lead to the devaluation of such activities since they are perceived as forms of unskilled, unpaid labour, associated with servicing the despised body and requiring less mental work.

On the whole, we could say that Wollstonecraft, Taylor, Mill and Friedan sent women out into public realm, though without summoning men into the private domain. Despite these limitations, liberal feminists have contributed immensely in improving the quality of life for women.

Check Your Progress: *Can you find any striking similarities between our contemporary Indian social activists and the Liberal feminists mentioned above, especially in regards to their emphasis on education, equality, career and strategies? Think about this paradox: Even highly educated women in India are sometimes placed in situations where they must confine themselves to certain expected and traditional roles. Despite wanting to use their education to contribute in meaningful ways to society, they may not be able to do so. Is education, then, a negative capability? Are you satisfied with the current status of social equality (irrespective of caste, creed, region, language and sex) as enshrined in our Constitution? (Think about equality not only between men and women but also among different categories of people at different strata of society.) Can we say that there is only formal equality and no substantial equity? Feminism searches for 'equity' step by step in human history.*

1.4 MARXIST FEMINISM

Marxism provides a perspective completely different from liberalism. Marxism denies rationality as the essence of human nature. Rather, it offers a theory called historical materialism. The unfortunate effect of economic dependence of women was recognized by Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). Following Marx and Engels, Marxist feminists believe that women are oppressed by capitalism, and that gender inequality will disappear when capitalism is replaced by socialism and a classless society.

1.4.1 Historical Materialism

Marx talked about the ‘materialist conception of history’, which was later referred to as ‘historical materialism’ by Engels. Human beings are viewed as a biological species. Thus, human nature itself changes as modes of production and economic relationships change. It is the mode of production that determines the social consciousness of a given society.

Human praxis is a cooperative social activity involving some division of labour. It is historically determined. The worker’s conception of what needs to be done, how it should be done, and when it has to be done successfully are determined by previous social experience and the social context within which the individual is situated. Marx expresses that the sum total of relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, and on this economic structure is built the legal and political superstructure. On the whole, the mode of production conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general (Marx, 1973). Marx criticized capitalism as he felt that in this contemporary social structure, the necessity of survival and class domination deter human freedom and development. Freedom to Marxists is a social achievement. The capitalist organization of production alienates the workers from the product of their work, from the production process, from their self-realization and alienates them from each other.

1.4.2 Marx on Women

Although Marx does pay some attention to women’s subordination under capitalism, *it was the overthrow of capitalism and not sexual oppression which was the main agenda of Marx*. It was left to Engels to undertake a systematic analysis of women’s oppression after Marx’s death. Engels’ work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, published in 1884, has been accepted as a classic statement by generations of Marxists.

Whenever the women's situation is discussed by Marxists, it refers to women's subordination under capitalism. Since capitalist society is composed of different classes, therefore, all women are not identical. Working class women are different from bourgeois women in a capitalist class society as class divisions cut across sex lines.

Marxist feminists believe that when forms of feminisms do not account for social consciousness, they lead to forms of false consciousness of bourgeois women. According to Marxist feminists, women, as a class, should not focus their struggle against men but against the bourgeois system under capitalism. This is a collective work of both men and women of the working class. **While Marxist theory provides Marxist feminists with useful systematically organized tools to carry out an important critique of patriarchal capitalism, it stops short of providing a comprehensive framework from within which many other issues related to women's place in society could be addressed.**

1.4.3 Production and Reproduction

Engels records that a social organization of a given society in a particular period in history is determined by 'the production and reproduction of immediate life'. This implies that along with production of the means for existence, reproduction of human beings is equally considered. In a capitalist society, oppression impacts both the development of labour and that of the family. With the focus on reproduction, women's role in family and work under capitalism also enters into the Marxian debate.

Household work, the traditional work area of women, is defined as reproduction. In a capitalist society, the economic relations are such that the social tasks involved with reproduction, such as childbearing, childrearing, caring the sick and the aged, cooking, cleaning and other forms of household work, are considered economically cheap and unprofitable. Correspondingly, women as the performers of unprofitable tasks are also undermined in their value and contribution. You will read more on the issue of women and work, and women and household labour in related units of other courses.

1.4.4 Family and Mother Right

Engels traces the evolution of family from the earlier savage society to the present day in his major work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. He uses the anthropological work of Lewis Morgan in formulating his theory of family. Morgan distinguishes two historical periods prior to civilizations - savagery and barbarism (hunting state). In these earliest societies, sexual relationships had been totally promiscuous and unregulated. The original

family consisted of a state of group marriage. In all forms of group marriage, only the mother of the child was known and not the father. This made the '*the mother right*' as the dominant principle in the family organization.

The society moved from hunting state to the herding of cattle and cultivation of plants. In these primitive societies, the relations between sexes were based on equality. Women were responsible for domestic work and men for agriculture and husbandry. Women reigned supreme in the home and the descent was calculated through the female line. Then came the domestication of animals and the breeding of herds, metal-working, weaving and agriculture. There was surplus and slaves were engaged for labour power. Some men gained more property and more power. The acquisition of new wealth led to men's position becoming higher than women's. Men wanted to pass their property on to their children. 'Mother right' was overthrown. Engels' strongly comments in *The Origin* (1972, p. 120) that "the overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex". The traditional inheritance from father to his children was ensured through strict monogamy.

1.4.5 Monogamy

Monogamous marriage is an offshoot of the rise of class society. The first class opposition and oppression coincides with the sexual opposition of man and woman in marriage. The oppositions and contradictions are found in this marriage. Engels argues that prostitution, adultery and gender subordination are the outcome of monogamy. *Marriage itself becomes a crass form of prostitution for women.* According to Engels, the only difference between a married woman and a prostitute is that the former does not sell her body piecemeal like a courtesan, but sells it once and for all into slavery. Thus, the woman historically became a mere commodity, a possession of her husband, and an instrument for the production of children. In the middle class capitalist family, the woman was forced to sell herself sexually and brought down to a position of powerlessness. Engels holds that within the family, the man represents the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat.

1.4.6 Sexual Division of Labour

Despite Marxist ideals promoting equality of women as a class, there are contradictions within Marxist theory based on stereotypical assumption about women's bodies and their roles. The sexual division of labour, from the Marxist perspective, is natural because it is biologically determined. Marx and Engels state that the social division of labour originates in 'the division of labour in the sexual act'. It means that differences of age and sex naturally determine the division of labour. Marx suggests that women may be excluded from those

branches of industry which may be unhealthy or objectionable morally to the female body. In brief, it means that women's capacity to enter public industry is limited both by biological and by moral factors. **The final conclusion may be thus: despite Marxian advocacy for women to enter public industry, there is a suggestion that there could never be a complete abolition of the sexual division of labour, either in the family, in the work place, or in bed. Though gender differences would be muted under socialism, a psychological equality between men and women would be impossible.**

1.4.7 Application of Marxian Liberating Strategies

Marxists believe that the abolition of private property will end sexual oppression, and that economic supremacy will disappear of itself. The first condition for the liberation of woman, according to Engels, is "to bring the whole female sex back into public industry" and collectivize housework and childcare. The second condition for liberation is the social revolution which Engels hoped would occur soon.

Marx's analytical tools are used by feminists in debates relating to women's labour force. According to Marxist theory, classes develop based on work relations. In the case of women, it is not surprising that socialist feminists focused on domestic labour since "this work was done almost exclusively by women and was fundamentally different from the work done by either sex in formal economy" (Armstrong, 1990, p.68). Charnie Guettel, in her work *Marxism and Feminism* (1974, p.52), argued that what women do as housework is outside the formal economy. Jobs performed outside the home are valued as productive as they earn profit in a capitalist society, while the unpaid consumption work at home that women do is regarded as unproductive. Guettel maintained that class differences among women seem to reflect their husbands' relations to production, thus sustaining their **double subordination**. Hence, to overcome their subordination as women, women must work for the socialization of domestic work and enter the labour force. Such a labour force, with more equitable distribution of roles between the genders, can subsequently transform the productive system.

Margaret Benston, in her pioneering article "The Political Economy of women's Liberation" (1969), explored women's domestic labour further. Citing the Marxist distinction between use value and exchange value, she maintained that women as a group are responsible for the production of simple use values associated with homes and families. Unlike the paid work of men, which produces exchange value as well as use value, the unpaid work of women is perceived as superfluous from the standpoint of capital because it produces

only use value. It acquires a secondary status as it does not directly produce for the market or command wages. Contrary to the above, Benston argued that women's labour is useful in two ways:

- First, it fulfills the need for closeness, community and warm secure relationships and stabilizes the entire economy; and
- Second, it serves to make women what Marx would call as 'a reserve army' of labour, contributing to the transient economy in capitalism.

Benston was the first to use the reserve army concept in case of women. She explained how women are called upon to fill vacancies in the job market whenever needed and sent home to do their domestic work when their services are no longer required. Women are the last to be hired and the first to be fired and are hired to do low-paid work when the demand for workers arises in the market.

As you have seen above, Marxist/ socialist feminists strive to develop a theoretical account of different types of oppression resulting from the interface of gender, race/ethnicity, and regionality/ nationality with class. While making use of Marxist concepts to understand the position of women, Marxist feminists have also transformed these concepts. Most recent works demonstrate that work done in the home, including bearing and rearing of children, must be included in any notion of class; moreover, any conceptualization of class is inadequate if it does not take into account sex, domestic work, race, and region.

In the above section, you have obtained a broad overview of some of the ways in which feminists have applied Marxist theories and ideas in trying to achieve a more gender-just society. In the next section, let us look at some critiques of these theoretical perspectives so that we can understand the limitations of Marxist feminism.

1.4.8 Critiques of Marxist Feminism

It has been argued by critics of Marxism that Marxist categories are sex-blind. This accusation is based on the view that although traditional Marxists were able to explain how capitalism separated the homestead from the workplace, they failed to explain why capitalism assigned homestead to women and workplace to men.

Engels' assumption that the family pattern has been universal in all societies is questionable. The claim that there was sexual equality in primitive societies is also dubious. Engel's views on early man's desire to leave his property to his

heirs have been challenged for it is likely that women were the first cultivators and provided the surplus value.

They also said that in a socialist society, housework and childcare should be collectivized. But they have not mentioned who should be doing these household tasks - men or women. The implication is that these tasks will be done by women which reinforce the sexual division of labour that the Marxists want to abolish.

The dual work that women do in combining paid work with domestic responsibility and its implications on women has not been analyzed by Engels though collectivization of domestic work is recommended. He also failed to explain the sexual oppression of women workers and male dominance in the work place.

***Check Your Progress:** What, according to you, are the advantages of using Marxist theories for achieving feminist goals? On what basis has Marxist feminism been criticized?*

1.5 RADICAL FEMINISM

Radical feminism is the most intriguing of all formal feminist theories we have studied in this unit. Issues about women's lives that had been taboo for discussion till the second half of the 20th century, i.e., the female body, sex, violence, reproduction, are brought into focus for frank and in depth analysis. Radical feminism covers a wide spectrum of variant views on the sexual oppression of women. The new concepts and terminologies that Radical feminism has helped to generate are now used liberally by global institutions, governments, and policymakers. Words such as 'gender', 'patriarchy', and 'objectification' might have been familiar to you even though you may not have been familiar with their nuances and significance. Radical feminism can easily be misconstrued if one does not understand its basic concepts and the significance of these concepts.

Radical feminism was started in the late 1960s by some college-educated middle class women and some *New Leftists* who became dissatisfied with what they considered to be conservative demands and male dominance, which were contrary to the principles of egalitarianism and altruism in their organizations.

The term ‘radical’ refers to ‘roots’ and therefore implies going to the roots. **Radical feminists claim that the root of all forms of oppressions is in the oppression of women.** It includes the following meanings: “that historically women were the first oppressed group; that women’s oppression is international; that women’s oppression is the hardest form of oppression to eradicate; that enormous suffering result for women; and that women’s oppression provides a conceptual model for understanding all forms of oppression” (Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1984). According to radical feminists, the social structure that most oppresses women is called ‘*patriarchy*’.

1.5.1 Patriarchy

Through patriarchy men appropriate all super social roles and keep women in subordinate and exploited position. Literally, patriarchy means ‘rule by fathers’. Prior to the emergence of Radical feminism, the term was used mostly by anthropologists in a narrower sense of an old man with absolute power over wives, children, herds, and dependents. Radical feminists use the term ‘patriarchy’ to address an autonomous, social, historical, and political force, a “sexual system of power in which the male possesses the superior power and economic privilege” (Eisenstein, 1979, p.17). Patriarchy refers to all systems of male dominance and appears to be everywhere. For a more detailed discussion of patriarchy, it would help you to refer to the unit on “Women & Patriarchy” (Unit 1 of Block 1) in the course on “Gender and Power”.

1.5.2 Sex and Class

Radical feminists argue that women everywhere share a common oppression, and they constitute a class by themselves as opposed to men. “Sex class is so deep as to be invisible” are the opening words of Shulamith Firestone’s work *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970). Unlike liberals and Marxists, radical feminists pay attention to the ways in which men control reproduction, in other words, women’s bodies. The control of men over women may be in varied forms: restrictive contraception, sterilization, abortion laws, pornography and other kinds of violence against women. When a person is deprived of power over her own body, it is deprivation of her humanity. Moreover, men construct women’s sexuality, not for women’s needs, but for their own interests.

1.5.3 Reproduction

Firestone was influenced by Marxism but believed that Marx’s and Engel’s interpretation is too narrow to explain women’s subordination. Unlike the Marxists, she argues that it is the relations of reproduction, and not those of production, that form the basis of society. Hence she redefines historical materialism of Engels, by replacing ‘materialism’ by ‘sex’, ‘economic classes’

by 'biological classes' and 'production' by 'reproduction' (Firestone, 1970, p.4):

Historical materialism, is that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all historic events in the dialectic of sex: the division of society into two distinct biological classes for procreative reproduction, and the struggles of these classes with one another; in the changes in the modes of marriage, reproduction and child care created by these struggles; in the connected development of other physically-differentiated classes [castes]; and in the first division of labor based on sex which developed into the [economic-cultural] class system.

Thus, Firestone sees that the first division of labour is in the differing reproductive roles of men and women. **The radical feminists conclude that the root of women's oppression is biological and therefore women's liberation requires a biological revolution.** A section of radical feminists are convinced that modern reproductive technologies promote such a revolution.

1.5.4 Reproductive Technologies for Liberation

Modern reproductive technologies of contraception, sterilization, and abortion for the first time in history provide the possibility for biological revolution.

... the artificial insemination by donor , in vitro fertilization, and embryo transfer are also quite widely used. Due to these technologies and due to contracted motherhood, a woman who begets a child need not bear it, and a woman who bears a child need not rear it. Furthermore, as soon as it is possible to beget a child in vitro and bring it to term ex utero, women's role in the reproductive process will be no larger than men's. ... (Tong, 1989, p.74).

Radical feminists claim that sex roles will be eliminated when both men and women stop playing substantially different roles and finally, distinctions between the roles of woman-the-reproducer and man-the-producer will disappear.

1.5.5 Reproductive Technologies for Enslavement

Another group of radical feminists including Mary O'Brien and Adrienne Rich contend that modern reproductive technologies are a trap for women though they may promise untapped freedom. Men who are alienated from reproductive process, try to have power over women's reproductive process as compensation.

Male doctors and psychologists write down the rules, tell women how to feel and when to feel and how to act during pregnancy and delivery. Thus

‘pregnancy’ and ‘birthing’ are not lived experiences for women. In this regard, Mary O’Brien comments that modern reproductive technologies are men’s strategies to get ‘a child-for-nothing’ (O’Brien, 1981, p.58-60).

1.5.6 Forced Motherhood

Radical feminists assert that women are forced to be mothers. Patriarchy declares that motherhood is the only way for a woman’s self-fulfillment. A childless woman is pitied and described as ‘unfeminine’. Women are expected to perform the same kinds of nurturing to adults as they do to their children. Patriarchy determines the conditions of their motherhood which imposes the responsibility of nurturance on women without giving them the power of nurturance. Feminist mothers may thus experience a sense of ambivalence in bringing up their sons amidst patriarchal ideology which promotes the ideas of sons as future masters.

1.5.7 Women as Sexual Slaves

For radical feminists, women under patriarchy are not only mothers but also sexual slaves. Women’s sexuality is controlled forcefully by men and her ‘honour’ violated. Even rape laws are often framed to protect the interests of men rather than of women. An obvious example of this would be that nowhere is a man convicted for raping his wife, although this may be a common occurrence. It is because of the assumption that the woman belongs to her husband. Prostitution is another form of sexual coercion. In all of these instances, what comes to the fore is the idea that women lack control over their own bodies. Radical feminists suggest that women should be liberated from forced motherhood, sexual slavery, and regain control over their bodies.

1.5.8 Liberating Strategies

Promoting female culture and revalorization of females will liberate women from their sexual and attendant enslavement. Radical feminism maintains that every society has two cultures: the visible male culture and the invisible female culture. Religion, government, economy, and all social institutions represent the male view and interests. In this male culture, men envy women’s reproductive processes and female creative energy. Radical feminists state that this results in sexual politics and leads to the notion of the ‘personal is political’. The emergence of femininity in girls and masculinity in boys is not due to the psychological differences in their parents but due to the difference in power between their mothers and fathers. As such, this is the de-biologising of the Freudian theory of penis envy.

Radical feminists Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich advocate celebration of ‘woman culture’ which will change the basic structure of society, substituting new values. These values are qualities that characterize femaleness - empathy,

intuitiveness, adaptability, and awareness of growth as process, and a capacity to respond emotionally as well as rationally. The 'revalorisation' of women's qualities is carried out through women's art and language. It includes the creation of a new world view, seen from women's perspectives, and expressed through journalism, radio, music, film, dance, poetry, painting, photography, sculpture and literature. The first task of radical feminists is to reconstruct patriarchal language. This process is called '*naming*'. Mary Daly defines feminist naming as a deliberate confrontation with language structures. Daly believes that the activity of being able to name things (oneself, or anything in the world around us) through language is indicative of power, and that women have had that power of naming stolen from them. Feminist naming thus begins with women invoking and exerting this power, and confronting traditional language structures.

Radical feminists believe that women are oppressed primarily in the realm of so-called intimate relations and suggest shaking off heterosexual marriage and recommend lesbianism as the full commitment of women to their own sex.

1.5.9 Critiques of Radical Feminism

Radical feminists contend that patriarchy is a trans-cultural universal phenomenon. However, we may note that oppression of women and enslaving practices have different meanings in different societies and are contextualized. Female separatism as envisaged by the radical feminists excludes men who form half of the world's population. Exclusion of men cannot bring about a revolution, as any such revolution must take into account that women and men co-exist within the patriarchal structure which needs to be transformed. Radical feminists are not concerned with the material reasons for men's subjugation of women. They demonstrate vividly how men enslave women but do not attempt to explain why men do so. *The important contribution of Radical feminism is the conviction that while the sexuality of women might have been a source of danger in the past, it can become a locus of power for women in the future.* You would find it interesting to note the manner in which radical feminists use intellectual and analytical tools to subvert given misconceptions about sexuality and about biology of women.

1.6 SOCIALIST FEMINISM

One step removed from Radical feminism is Socialist feminism. In order to examine the situation of women, both of these formative feminisms use sex and society as their lenses, although with the help of different feminist perspectives. Socialist Feminism is an offshoot of women's movement in the 1970s. It is a synthesis of the best insights of both Marxist and radical feminists.

It blends capitalism and patriarchy; production and reproduction. Productive activity for socialist feminists is not only provision for basic material needs of food, clothing, and shelter, but also the reproductive and sexual work that is done by women at home.

Socialist feminism adopts two kinds of approach: *dual-systems theory* and *unified-systems theory*. The dual systems theorists like Juliet Mitchell treat patriarchy and capitalism as separate forms of social relations but dialectically related to each other while the unified -systems theorists like Hartman and Sheila Rowbotham insist that patriarchy and capitalism are not separate but together form one unified concept.

1.6.1 Historical Conception of Biology

Social Feminists believe that biology is gendered as well as sexed. This implies that while we may be born with specific sexual anatomies (female/ male/ trans-gendered), our bodies are also submitted to a social gendering process from the time of our birth. So we could say that we are born into an already gender codified society. In terms of the notion of gender, we can thus infer that infants are bisexual (androgynous) at birth. But they are transformed into boys and girls with rigid masculine and feminine character structures, through a systematic gender-structuring which continues throughout life. The physical differences between men and women are partially determined by the work they do. Iris Young remarks that women in sexist society are physically handicapped because they have less mobility and strictures on physical development. Marian Lowe has investigated that social conditions bring variations in menstruation and menopause. Juliet Mitchell, Jane Flex, Gayle Rubin, Nancy Chodorow, and Dorothy Dinnerstein have all worked to prove that the masculine and feminine character types are structured and established by specific social forms of work practices. On the whole, socialist feminists believe that our 'inner lives', our bodies and behavior are structured by socially imposed gender-structuring. You will read much more about the relationships between 'sex' and 'gender' in various other courses of this programme. You would find it especially helpful to read the unit on "Sex and Gender" (Unit 2, Block 1) in the course on "Gender & Power", where these concepts, and the debates around them, are discussed in greater detail.

The activities in women's private life such as sexuality, childbearing and childrearing cannot be understood apart from society. Zillah Eisenstein argues that giving birth to a child is termed 'motherhood' only if it conforms to the social norm defining the relations of marriage and the family. Otherwise, the child is 'illegitimate' and the act 'adultery'.

1.6.2 Historical Analysis of the Gender Division of Labour

Socialist feminism claims that human beings are constantly recreating themselves through sexual division of labour. Iris Young (1981) provides a historical analysis of the gender division of labour. In pre-capitalist times, there existed an economic partnership between wives and husbands. With the rise of capitalism came the public-private split. Capitalism identified men as the 'primary work force' and women as the 'secondary work force'. As women were needed at home, they were confined to domestic work. Women became a large reserve army of labour, unemployed, low paid and less skilled secondary workforce, needed to keep wages low and meet unexpected demands in the workforce. In the third world economies, women gradually move from the primary work force to secondary work force.

Even today, the categories of work where women congregate are the lowest paid. Women work mostly as clerical workers, saleswomen, social workers, nurses and teachers. This confirms the ideological perception of women as subservient, nurturing, and sexy. It forces women to depend on men. Women wage earners face problems common to all workers and in addition suffer sexual harassment.

In the 1970s, socialist feminists began to demand due wages for household work that women do. Margaret Benston's "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation" exposed domestic labour as a crucial form of women's work and many more domestic labour studies followed to gain public recognition and legitimacy for women's work at home (Benston, 1969).

1.6.3 Women as Sexual Objects

A woman is confronted by words, gestures, comments and threats of violence which express male dominance. Alison Jaggar (1983) sums up the socialist feminists' views on how women are treated as sexual objects:

Women are viewed relentlessly as sexual objects, whether or not they welcome sexual interest, and they are subject continually to sexual assaults and harassment. In addition, economic survival requires most women to present themselves in a way that is sexually pleasing to men: male superiors penalize women who seem to be "punishing" or defying men through their appearance: much of women's work is sexualized: and, in the end, the best chance of economic security for most women remains the sale of their sexuality in marriage. ... (p. 108).

It is an ideological mystification to consider women primarily as sex objects. Women have always worked outside procreation. They have provided food and services to the family and the larger society outside. It is men who control the expression of women's sexuality.

1.6.4 Alienation

Women, like wage workers, are alienated in sexual situations. Alison Jaggar proposes alienation as the theoretical framework which accommodates the insights of Marxist, radical, psychoanalytical and liberal feminisms (Jaggar, 1983, p.353).

A wage worker is alienated from the product upon which he works. In the same way, a woman is alienated from her body, the product upon which she works. A woman has little say on her body. She adorns herself, diets and dresses but all these activities are done for men. A woman is alienated from the product of her reproductive labour, that is, her child. A woman does not have the power to decide how many children she should have and when. Motherhood can also be an alienating experience for a woman as women may be alienated from the process of their reproductive labour. It is obstetricians who take total control of the birthing process. Childbearing like childrearing is an alienating experience. "The social relations of contemporary motherhood make it impossible for her to see the child as a whole person, part of a larger community to which both mother and child belong" (Jaggar, 1983, p.315). Finally, women are alienated from their intellectual capacities. To the extent men take control of producing and distributing knowledge and the process, women are not at ease in the academy. Ann Foreman (1977) declares that *femininity itself is alienation*.

1.6.5 Liberation of Women

Mitchell argues that defeat of capitalism alone cannot liberate women unless it goes with the defeat of patriarchy. Biological or economic revolution will not liberate women. It is only an outer expression. Mitchell considers the psychoanalytical view that sex oppression is deeper at the unconscious level. Hence she advocates primarily a psychological revolution, and states that attitudes toward women will never really change so long as the female and male psychology are dominated by dominant phallic symbols which extol male culture, male authority and male control over women.

1.6.6 Critiques of Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminism is criticized for being neither revolutionary nor radical enough. It underplays the significance of capitalist forms of exploitation. It has failed to create lasting solutions to the problem of female economic and social exploitation. One distinguishing feature of socialist feminism is its emphasis on democratic control of procreation. But it fails to explain what democratization of procreation would mean in practice. However, in its favour, one could say that socialist feminism has an inspiring vision of an androgynous society in which the distinction between 'masculinity' and 'femininity' no longer exists.

Your reading of various formative feminisms, Liberal, Marxist, Radical and Socialist, would have given you an understanding of the wonderful chemistry that exists between the progressive theories on which each of these was based. In the light of this, we could say that Socialist feminism is the most evident indicator in terms of showing how paradigms shift when feminist equations (specifically, Radical and Marxist) work on each other in understanding women's tangible and intangible oppressions.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we discussed and analyzed four formative feminist theories. You would have realized that feminist theories address fundamental issues in feminist thought - the origins of women's universal oppression, gendered and problematized social and institutional relations, and the political actions to be taken to ameliorate these injustices. The four types of formative feminisms that you have read about included - Liberal, Marxist, Radical and Socialist. You have also seen that each feminist theory remains partial, imperfect, and incomplete. However, all of these different feminisms have contributed in valuable ways in enhancing our understanding of women's oppression and each offers us a rich perspective on how to struggle against this oppression. We need to draw on the strengths of all these theories in our ongoing efforts to deepen our critical understanding of these important issues.

Finally, the formative feminisms are predominantly of white, middle-class origins. From the viewpoint and historical perception of Indian women, we can find both commonalities and differences when we compare the situations discussed here with those in India. In other units of this course, you have already read specifically about women's movements in India (Blocks 1 & 2). Hence, to an Indian student, it will be an interesting exercise to read through this unit with a critical enquiry and apply the tools to your own life and those around you.

1.8 GLOSSARY

- Alienation** : It refers to the estrangement of individuals from other and a particular process. Humanbeings, according to Marx, are alienated from their work, their product, humanity and other people in the capitalist mode of living. Labour as well as our existence becomes an object in this process.
- Capitalism** : It refers to an economic system in which means of production, distribution, and exchange of wealth are in the hands of private individuals or corporations who invest, own, and maintain it. Capitalists are people who have capital - money, assets, land, investment, and so on.
- Feminism** : A social, economic, and political commitment directed at changing the existing power relations between women and men in society in order to fight against gender injustice and to promote equal rights and opportunities for all.
- Liberal feminism** : Assumes that the inequality of women stems from the denial to them of equal rights and from their learned reluctance to exercise such rights.
- Liberalism** : Constitutes a philosophy based on the principle that every person is to be given equal opportunities and civil rights.
- Marxist feminism** : Sees women's oppression as rooted not in sexism but in capitalism, with the introduction of private property. Class divisions cut across sex lines.
- Mother-Right** : A term associated with matrilineal descent. It was popularized by Bachofen, who said that matrilineal kinship combined with matriarchy was the universal first stage of human development. Lewis Henry Morgan, Engels and Marx used mother-right for the stage of human history which preceded patrilineal descent and patriarchies.

Patriarchy	:	A sexual system of power in which men as a category appropriate all superior social roles and keep women as a category in subordinate and exploited positions.
Radical feminism	:	Believes that women's oppression is the first form of oppression in human history and the most widespread. It is deep rooted and sexual under the form of life called patriarchy.
Reproduction	:	Childbearing and childrearing responsibilities and associated domestic tasks done by women.
Sexual division of labour:		A universal practice in which necessary work and tasks are divided up according to gender. Men get some of the jobs and women get some of the jobs, based on traditional roles and expectations.
Socialist feminism	:	Sets as its goal transforming basic structural arrangements of society so that categories of class, gender, sexuality, and race no longer act as barriers to equal sharing of resources. Class and gender intersect in shaping women's lives.

1.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss the relevance of any one formative feminist theory in the context of your own life experiences. Do you think your analysis from your chosen perspective can make your life more meaningful? Has it made clear to you any issue you have been confused about earlier? Would you like to make any improvement(s) on the theory? Analyse and discuss.
- 2) Based on your reading of this unit, comment on the following using a feminist perspective:

“The University Education Commission of 1948-1949 headed by Dr. Radhakrishnan recommended that education of women should be such as to suit those pretty accomplishments such as drawing, painting or the like skills”.
- 3) How do ‘caste’ and ‘class’ feed into each other in oppressing ‘women’ of lower socio-economic categories in your society? Explain with specific instances using an apt feminist theory for your analysis.

- 4) What is your view about surrogate motherhood which is based on technology? Does it liberate or enslave women? Explain.
- 5) What values could you add to the household work of women revolving around consumption and reproduction ?
- 6) Discuss how the concept of 'Alienation' is used by Marxist and radical feminists. Use examples from Indian society to see the extent of the relevance of this concept in the lives of Indian women.
- 7) Explain 'household labour' in the context of the gender division of labour.

1.10 REFERENCES

Aristotle (1953). *The Generation of Animals*, vol. 1 and 4. Trans. A.L. Peck. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Armstrong, Pat & Hugh Armstrong (1990). *Theorizing Women's Work*. Toronto: Garamond Press.

Benston, Margaret (1969, September 4). 'The Political Economy of Women's Liberation'. *Monthly Review*, xxi, 13-27.

Bryson, Valerie (1992). *Feminist Political Theory*. Hampshire: Macmillan.

Daly, Mary (1978). *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Elliot, Patricia & Nancy Mandell (1995). 'Feminist Theories'. In Nancy Mandell (Ed.), *Feminist Issues: Race, Class, and Sexuality*. (pp.3-31). Scarborough: Prentice Hall Canada Inc.

Engels, Friederich (1884). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. Trans. Alec West. Eleanor Burke Leacock (1972). (Ed.). New York: International Publishers.

Firestone, Shulamith (1970). *The Dialectic of Sex*. New York: Bantam Books.

Friedan, Betty (1974). *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell.

Foreman, Ann (1977). *Femininity as Alienation: Women and the Family in Marxism and Psychoanalysis*. London: Pluto Press.

Guettel, Charnie (1974). *Marxism and Feminism*. Toronto: The Women's Press.

Okin, Susan M.(1983). Hunter College Women's Studies Collective, *Women's Realities, Women's Choices*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Jaggar, Alison M. (1983). *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Sussex: Harvest Press.
- Jaggar, Alison & Rothenberg, Paula (1984). *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men*. (2nd Ed.). New York: MacGraw Hill.
- Mandell, Nancy (1995). (Ed.). *Feminist Issues: Race, Class, and Sexuality*. Scarborough: Prentice Hall Canada Inc.
- Marx, Karl & Engels, Friederich (1970). *The German Ideology*. New York: International Publishers.
- Marx, Karl & Engels, Friederich (1973). Preface to the *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Mill, Harriet Taylor (1970). 'Enfranchisement of Women'. In Alice S. Rossi (Eds), *Essays on Sex Equality*. (pp.89-122). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mill, John Stuart (1970). 'The Subjection of Women'. In Alice S. Rossi (Eds.), *Essays on Sex Equality*. (pp.123-242). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Millett, Kate (1970). *Sexual Politics*. New York: Avon Books.
- Mitchell, Juliet (1975). *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Nye, Andrea (1988). *Feminist Theory and Philosophy of Man*. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- O'Brien (1981). *The Politics of Reproduction*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Rich, Adrienne (1977). *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Bantam.
- Rousseau, Jean Jacques (1762). *Emile*. Barbara Foxley (Trans. 1966). New York: Dutton.
- Rowbotham, Shiela (1973). *Woman's Consciousness, Man's world*. Baltimore, Md: Penguin Books.
- Tong, Rosemary (1989; rpt.1992). *Feminist Thought: Comprehensive Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Wollstonecraft (1975). *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Carol H. Poston (Ed.). New York: W.W. Norton.
- Young, Iris (1981). 'Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of the Dual System Theory'. In Lydia Sergent (Ed.), *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press.

1.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Butler, Judith & Scott, Joan W. (1992). (Eds.). *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York and London: Routledge.

Eisenstein, Zillah (1979). (Ed.). *Socialist Feminism and the Case for Capitalist Patriarchy*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Eisenstein, Zillah (1981). *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*. New York: Longman.

Hartmann, Heidi (1981). 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union'. In Lydia Sargent (Eds.), *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*. (pp.1-41). Boston: South End Press.

Hooks, Bell (1984). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre*. Boston: South End Press.

Mitchell, Juliet (1973). *Woman's Estate*. New York: Vintage.

UNIT 2 FEMINISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Anu Aneja

Structure

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives
- 2.3 Freud, Psychoanalysis and Feminism
 - 2.3.1 Introduction to Sigmund Freud
 - 2.3.2 Basic Concepts in Freudian Theory
 - 2.3.3 Freud's Theory of Infantile Sexuality and the Oedipus Complex
 - 2.3.4 Female Sexuality in Freudian Theory
 - 2.3.5 Feminist Detractors of Freud: Kate Millett and Nancy Chodorow
- 2.4 Lacan and Feminism
 - 2.4.1 Lacan and Psychoanalysis
 - 2.4.2 Lacanian Feminist Theorists: Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Glossary
- 2.7 Unit End Questions
- 2.8 References
- 2.9 Suggested Readings

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous block (i.e. Block 4), you have seen how feminist theorists have made significant interventions in different disciplinary areas. In Unit 3 of Block 4, we looked at feminist critiques of knowledge in the humanities, more specifically in the areas of literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. In this unit, you will read further about some of the contributions made by feminist theorists who have examined psychoanalytical concepts and theories and attempted to understand their relevance for women. You will also read about the ways in which they have contributed to a critique of some of the gaps and misrepresentations prevalent in these theories. The contributions of feminist theorists will be examined in relationship to the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, two major thinkers of the twentieth century whose works have provoked a rich body of diverse feminist responses and counter-theories. You will again come across some related ideas in the last block of this course, as well as in the course on “Gendered Bodies & Sexualities.”

2.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand and describe the main ideas of Freud's theories and their relevance to women;
- Highlight the relevance of psychoanalysis in feminist theory;
- Provide an overview of contributions made by feminist critics of Freudian theory;
- Describe the ways in which Lacan modifies and adds to Freud's theories;
- Provide an overview of the contributions of some Lacanian feminist theorists; and
- Explain the ongoing importance of the intersections between feminism and psychoanalysis.

2.3 FREUD, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND FEMINISM

Firstly, let us ask ourselves this question: What is psychoanalysis? And, why should we study it? Psychoanalysis is a set of concepts and theories, and their related applications, which help us to understand the workings of our conscious and unconscious mind with a view to comprehend why individuals follow certain patterns of behaviour, and exhibit peculiar personality traits. These theories also help throw light on our hidden desires, fears and other emotions, some of which, when unduly repressed or frustrated, may manifest themselves in the form of mental disturbances and illnesses (neuroses and psychoses). In this way, an understanding of psychoanalytical theories can lead us to find ways to improve our mental health so that we can live more satisfying and fuller lives.

Given the above, we must then also ask why an understanding of psychoanalysis is so significant for our study of women's issues and feminist theories? Many feminist theorists who have studied and been influenced by psychoanalytical theories have also discovered significant gaps or lacunae in these theories, especially in regard to the representations of women's psychosexual development. Sexist assumptions about women's lives and minds, and misunderstandings about women's psychological development in the context of patriarchal societal norms and structures have led to various erroneous misrepresentations which can actually be harmful for women, if these are accepted unquestioningly. As you read in the previous block, feminist theorists have attempted, in different ways, to consider both the relevance of psychoanalytical concepts to women's lives, as well as critiqued the apparent

pitfalls and distortions of certain theoretical perspectives, so that their application and dissemination do not adversely impact women. Since Sigmund Freud is credited with the origins of psychoanalysis, and feminist theorists have responded and reacted to his theories in so many rich and diverse ways, it is important to get a sense of who Freud was, and the nature of his theories. You have already been introduced to some of these ideas in Block 4. Now, we will further expand on some of these ideas, as well as break them down into simpler units for a more detailed examination.

2.3.1 Introduction to Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud was born to Jewish parents on 6th May, 1856 in Frieberg, and grew up in Vienna, Austria. From an early age, the young Freud read prolifically and was introduced to German, French, and English literatures, as well as medicine and other sciences. After obtaining a medical degree, his interest in mental health grew and he began to work on using hypnosis as a way of treating patients. His early work was carried out in Salpêtrière, France, along with the neurologist Jean Martin Charcot, whose works on hysteria Freud went on to translate. He also collaborated with another colleague, Josef Breuer, with whom he published *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-95). Freud furthered his interest in the working of the unconscious and the role played by dreams, and published *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900. This was followed by various other works which lay out Freud's theories in the areas of infantile sexuality, adult psychosexual development, hysteria, neuroses, and other related subjects. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), along with other related essays and works, outlines Freud's understanding of infantile sexuality and the role played by the Oedipus complex in the lives of men and women. Because of the depth, extent, and uniqueness of his contributions, Freud is often seen as the genius behind the nascence of psychoanalytical theories in the early part of the twentieth century, and his contributions to the development of these theories cannot be underestimated. However, like all great scholars, Freud too was a product of his times and some of the influences of the culture and society of which he was a part unwittingly appear as limitations in his theories. Before we look at the nature of these limitations, it is important to understand the basic concepts around which Freudian theory is constructed.

2.3.2 Basic Concepts in Freudian Theory

Fuelled by his growing interest in the role played by dreams and what they may reveal about certain hidden parts of our psyche, Freud advanced the idea that the human mind functions both at a conscious, aware level, as well as at a deeper *unconscious* level. The unconscious is made up of our concealed

desires, fears, and other emotions which may surface and reveal themselves from time to time through our dreams, or through symptoms which may take a physical shape. Dreams were therefore seen by Freud as the pathways to the working of our unconscious minds, or in his own words as “the royal road to the unconscious” (Freud, 1911).

Freud came to believe that we all have certain primal or basic instincts which crave satisfaction through gratification, such as hunger, thirst, or the need for love, or sexual urges. However, since humans live in social settings, and societies impose collective rules and regulations on individuals making certain actions taboo (such as the prohibition on incest), we gradually learn to turn such desires inwards and *repress* some of our instincts. Primal sexual desires are also called *libidinal desires*, and *libido* is the variable force which is also a measure of the instincts produced by sexual excitation. These instincts do not, however, disappear; rather, through the process of *repression*, they are kept alive in our unconscious, awaiting an outlet through dreams or symptoms of various kinds. The *id* is that part of the unconscious which becomes the seat of all of our repressed instincts, aggression and desires. Sometimes, we may find indirect ways to satisfy our instincts (for instance, by substituting shopping or painting for repressed sexual desires). This turning away of repressed desires and their transformation into socially acceptable forms is called *sublimation*. In his work *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud describes sublimation as the “diversion of sexual instinctual forces from sexual aims to new ones” (Freud, 1962, p.44). The entire set of internalized rules and prohibitions which we inherit from society and which becomes part of our personal system of checks and balances is termed our *superego*. The superego is akin to a guard, or inspector, keeping a check on unacceptable desires (thus leading to feelings of guilt, morality, conscience, etc), and forcing our conscious minds to keep these at bay, instead of allowing us to act on them. Mediating between the *id* and the superego is our sense of self, or our *ego*. The ego is influenced and swayed by both the *id* and the superego, depending on the relative strength of each at any given time. It also gives us our sense of individual identity, as well as a sense of personality and self-esteem.

Wavering between the demands of reality, and the pull of our basic instincts which crave pleasure through satisfaction, humans are caught between the *reality principal* and the *pleasure principal*, constantly trying to find a balance between the two. Achieving this balance is what allows most of us to live a ‘normal’ life. In some cases, when repression is unsuccessfully carried out, concealed desires may manifest themselves through symptoms. When such

symptoms manifest themselves as compulsive or obsessive behaviours, they are called *neuroses*, and according to Freud, we all exhibit garden variety type of neuroses at one time or another. However, much more serious situations occur when these symptoms take the form of mental diseases, or *psychoses*, which are much more difficult to treat or cure.

2.3.3 Freud's Theory of Infantile Sexuality and the Oedipus Complex

In his famous work *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1962), Freud develops an extensive and detailed account of infantile sexuality in which he shows the development and structuring of all the above concepts in infancy, and the roles played by them in our mental life throughout adulthood. Freud's accounts of the different development of the little boy and the little girl have provided some of the most interesting and fascinating responses from feminist critics in later years. Before we look at some of these responses, it would be helpful to understand the basis of Freud's theory of infantile sexuality and what it tells us about the differences between girls and boys.

i) Phases of infantile sexual development

According to Freud, the development of the infant occurs in phases. The *pre-genital phase* is made up of two stages of development, the first of which is the *oral phase*. In this phase, the infant does not perceive itself as separate from the body of the mother. Sexual activity is not differentiated from ingestion of food, or from the desire to become one with the mother's body through incorporation, or devouring. The only sexual object recognized here is the mother's breast, (or its substitutes, such as the thumb) since it satisfies the child's hunger as well as its perception of being in a **sybiotic relationship** with the body of the mother. During this stage, the child also learns to find pleasure in its own body which provides *erotogenic zones*. These zones may be any part of the skin or mucous membrane which give pleasure to the child (as in thumb-sucking) and which are akin to the pleasure provided by the mother's breast. At this stage, therefore, pleasure is mainly *auto-erotic* (or turned in upon the infant's own body). In the second pre-genital phase, called the *sadistic-anal*, the infant learns to distinguish between active and passive currents, which lead it to find pleasure in withholding or letting go. Gradually, this phase becomes subordinated to the *reproductive function*, as the importance of the genital organs begins to take shape and sexual desires then become focused on the genitals, and on an external love object, which is now understood as separate from the self. This last phase is the *genital phase*, but since Freud says, only

one genital organ (the male one) is recognized at this stage, it is also called the *phallic phase*. The word *phallus* stands for the male genital organ, or rather, the symbolic value of the penis in the unconscious mind. Thus, we could say, the phallus is a metaphor rather than something literal.

ii) Theory of the Oedipus complex

Freud was particularly struck by the Greek myth of Oedipus and its relevance in the lives of young men. This ancient story about patricide in which a son murders his own father and goes on to develop an incestuous relationship with his mother was seen by Freud as a pivotal force in the psychological development of both men and women. He based his theory of the Oedipus complex on his belief in the universality of the story of Oedipus. His theory is also intimately linked with his understanding of the phases of infantile sexual development described in the above section. According to this theory, Freud describes the different development of sexual instincts in the little boy and the little girl.

iii) Sexual development of the little boy

At first, during the pre-genital, oral phase both the boy and the girl have only one love object, namely, the mother's breast. The infant desires union with the mother's body as he or she perceives itself as an extension of the mother, linked to the mother in a *symbiotic relationship* which is further represented and reinforced through sucking at the mother's breast. The mother and child thus bonded together in the unconscious of the infant represent a *dyad*. During the **mirror stage**, when the infant perceives its reflection in a mirror (or a reflecting surface), a sense of separateness or differentiation occurs. For the first time, the child sees its own reflection and realizes that the reflection possesses a unity which does not exactly match the child's earlier perceptions of him/herself. In a way, then, the child 'misrecognizes' itself in its own reflection. From this point on, the pathways of development of the boy and the girl take different routes. Once the little boy becomes aware of the difference between the male and female genital organs (usually on catching sight of a little girl or of a female body), he also recognizes that he has something which the girl lacks, namely the penis. He thus becomes aware of the absence of the penis in the little girl. "With this, the loss of his own penis becomes imaginable, and the threat of castration takes its deferred effect" (Freud, 1924, p. 176). The little boy who had so far fantasized sexual union with the mother now sees the loss of the penis as a real threat. This threat is promoted both by the presence of the *father*, who

appears on the scene of the mother-child dyad as a *rival, third figure*, as well as by the realization that the potential loss of the penis is possible, as in the case of the girl child. The little boy sees the *girl as already castrated*, that is, he imagines that at some point in the past, she would have possessed what he has, but has now suffered its loss as a punishment for desiring the mother. This gives rise to a fear of castration which is called **castration anxiety**.

The boy realizes that he cannot compete with the *superior phallic authority* of the father, and that, were he to continue desiring his mother, he may face castration as a form of punishment at the hands of the father. The *threat of castration* will remain with the male throughout his life, and will serve to act as the deterrent to the incestuous desire for the mother, which becomes repressed. The little boy now learns to reject the mother as sexual object due to the fear of castration. He also begins to perceive the body of the mother as inferior to the male body, since it lacks the male genital organ, which according to Freud, is the only sexual organ to be recognized at this stage. The boy will then give up the mother as his sole sexual object and learn to identify with his father. He learns to accept the superiority of the father and will try to follow in his father's footsteps and idealize him, in order to find his own future place in the *triad*, and in the larger social structure. The *Oedipus Complex*, or the incestuous desire of the little boy for the mother is thus repressed, if not completely abolished by the threat of castration. Any remaining Oedipal desire will find its place in the *id*, where it will persist in the form of an unconscious desire whose manifestation will usually only be made visible through dreams. This is the basis for Freud's explanation of the occurrence of incestuous dreams in the case of many men.

iv) Sexual development of the little girl

The sexual development of the little girl takes a somewhat different route in Freudian theory. At the very outset, Freud admits that female sexuality was for him much more "obscure and full of gaps" (Freud, 1924, p. 177). However, he goes on to present what he conjectures to be the development of sexual tendencies and desires in the case of the little girl. At first, Freud says, both the little boy and the little girl have a common love object since they both desire the mother, or more specifically, the mother's breast. However, after the mirror stage and the sighting of the male genital organ, the girl, like the boy, becomes aware of the difference between her own body and that of the male body. On comparing her clitoris with the male penis, the little girl is

made immediately aware of her *inferiority* as she possesses a much smaller organ. She imagines that at one time, she too must have possessed a penis like the boy's but that she has lost it due to *castration*. She learns to accept castration as an accomplished fact. Unlike the boy, she does not fear castration since she is already without the male organ. Moreover, Freud says that, realizing that she does not possess what she needs to fulfill her ongoing desire to penetrate the body of the mother, namely, the male organ, the little girl turns away from the mother and renounces her as her sole sexual object. The desire to possess the penis will continue in the unconscious of the girl in the form of "**penis envy**" (Freud, 1924).

Notwithstanding this persistent desire, the girl then resigns herself to her inferior, "*passive*" status, and adopts a *feminine attitude* towards her father, whom she recognizes as a superior male authority. During puberty, girls learn to put aside their aggressive, masculine sexuality in a wave of *repression*, and to make way for the development of their *femininity*. She now rejects the mother and adopts the father as her primary sexual object. Her desire then "slips" from the penis to a baby, which becomes a substitute object of desire. Her *ultimate wish*, according to Freud, is to possess a male child, especially one received by the girl from her father: "Her Oedipus complex culminates in a desire, which is long retained, to receive a baby from her father as a gift - to bear him a child" (Freud, 1924, p.179). Thus, while the castration complex brings about the dissolution of the Oedipus complex in boys, it sets the stage for the girl's Oedipal desire (that is, the desire for the parent of the opposite sex). In both cases, it inhibits "masculine" traits and encourages a "feminine" attitude. Freud used the above theory to explain the ongoing attraction felt by girls for their fathers, or for future father figures in their lives.

Check Your Progress: Explain how Freud builds a different trajectory for boys and girls in terms of their early sexual development. Are you persuaded by Freud's explanations in the context of what you have read so far? Why or why not?

2.3.4 Female Sexuality in Freudian Theory

In his essay entitled "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" (Freud, 1924), Freud further elaborates on some essential differences in the development of unconscious desires between males and females. These ideas are an extension of his theory of the development and dissolution of the Oedipus complex, and the distinctions

between men and women. As you have seen in the above account, a passive, feminine attitude is attributed to women based on their different development. In Freud's account of female sexuality, girls, desiring what they know they do not possess, fall victim to "*penis envy*." In his own words, "she has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it" (Freud, 1924, p.252). According to Freud, her inferiority is carried by her like a scar and will affect all her future actions and behaviours. Even when she has learnt to displace penis envy, in other words, learnt to transfer it onto other objects of envy, it will persist throughout her life in the form of jealousy. Thus, Freud explains the greater tendency towards jealousy amongst women based on this original desire for the male sexual organ. Further, Freud believed that another consequence of penis envy is that the girl seems to blame her mother for sending her into the world in this ill-equipped state. Holding her mother responsible for what she perceives to be her own lack, she further turns away from the mother and towards the father. In the case of females, the Oedipus complex may be more slowly abandoned than in the case of males, and may even persist throughout life, due to the absence of the threat of castration. Freud uses this idea to explain why women will continue to seek out father-figures as love objects as they learn to displace the original incestuous desires for the father onto other men through a process of *transference*. Since the fear of castration does not take root in females in the manner that it does in males, Freud also explains the formation of a much *weaker super-ego*, and consequently, a less stringent sense of morality in women, on the same basis.

2.3.5 Feminist Detractors of Freud: Kate Millett and Nancy Chodorow

As you may already have noted in the preceding section, the representation of female sexuality in Freudian theory might easily lead us to believe that there is something natural and inherent in the psychosexual development of girls and women which leads to their feelings and position of inferiority in society. As you may also have guessed by now, these theories were found far from satisfactory from the perspective of feminist detractors of Freud. In the following sections, let us look more closely at two principal critiques of Freudian theory, both of which have influenced a vast amount of later feminist work in this area.

i) Kate Millett

The author of the widely read book *Sexual Politics* (1970), Kate Millett firmly objected to Freud's theories which she saw as being anti-women and anti-feminist. Like many other feminists of her times, Millett felt that many of Freud's theoretical conjectures are steeped in unexamined

social codes which prescribe traditional roles for women. Millett believed that many of Freud's ideas only served to rationalize these traditional expectations, thus further trapping women in essentialized roles through the authoritative academic discourse of psychoanalysis. She was struck by Freud's repeated admissions of confusion and lack of clarity whenever he embarked on a discourse about feminine sexuality. The fact that Freud had admittedly acknowledged his failure to find the answer to his now famous question "What does a woman want?" before one of his students, Marie Bonaparte, was noted by Millett as evidence of Freud's limited understanding of women and female sexuality:

On another occasion he admitted to Marie Bonaparte "the great question that has never been answered and which I have not been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is, 'What does a woman want?'" In the face of such basic uncertainty it is most unfortunate that Freud insisted on proceeding so far in constructing a psychology of women (Millett, 1970, reprnt. 2000, p. 178; Freud, as cited in Millett, 2000 ed.)

Kate Millett believed that Freud based his theories on certain assumptions and observations which he went on to apply in a *universal* manner to all women without examining the particular circumstances (individual or social) which may have given rise to them in the first place. Thus, Freud's notion of "penis envy" is interrogated by Millett who asks why it is that women seem to possess this sort of envy as exhibited by some of Freud's patients. Millett concludes that it is not the male organ per se, that women envy, but rather the *position* it represents in a patriarchal society. Millett objected to Freud's view that women see themselves as being born "castrated" because they lack the penis. She opines that women's inferior positioning in society, and men's relative superior positioning may be responsible for the fact that the male body and the male sexual organ get imbued with superior significance, thus turning the phallus into an object of envy. She criticizes Freud for extending this *symbolic value* in a way where it seems to become invested with biological significance. Freud's famous statement that "anatomy is destiny" can thus be taken apart since Freud erroneously seems to confuse the distinctions between anatomy and the social position and power held by one gender over another. Further, Millett asks, why is it that the little girl, as described by Freud, would equate the larger organ possessed by the male as the "better" one. In other words, "why is the girl instantly struck by the proposition that bigger is better?" (Millett, 1970, p.181).

She concludes that these observations betray a patriarchal male bias which gets projected by Freud onto the little girl about whom he talks. In her own words, “girls envy not the penis, but only what the penis gives one social pretensions to” (Millett, 1970, p. 181). In this way, Millett points out some glaring gaps in Freudian theory which many later feminists have gone on to elaborate.

ii) **Nancy Chodorow**

The previous block briefly mentioned the contributions of Nancy Chodorow to psychoanalysis. Chodorow is most famously known for her book on *The Reproduction of Mothering* published in 1978, and for many of her other essays, in which she sets out to undo many Freudian assumptions about women and femininity, and to theorize about motherhood from a feminist perspective. Chodorow believes that women’s roles as nurturing mothers are socially determined in patriarchal societies. Because women are expected to be the primary caretakers of children, they learn to hone these relational and nurturing skills more than their male counterparts. While the child develops an intimate bond with the mother, the father presents a remote and distant figure. She questions Freud’s assumption about the infant shifting his/her attention away from the mother and towards the father after the Oedipal stage, as the assumption seems to be based on biological terms. Rather, Chodorow draws our attention to the possibility that the son’s identification with the father may be a *positional identification* rather than an emotional one. Because feminine attributes are defined in more negative ways in patriarchal societies, the boy may repress these attributes within him and reject those, like his mother, who represent or embody them. The superior attributes of masculinity associated with the father are then taken up by him for *identification*.

In the case of the little girl, her identification with the mother is not positional, but rather personal, as it is “continuous with her early childhood identifications and attachments” (Chodorow, 1974, p.51). The girl does not give up her attachment for the mother but adds love for the father to this relationship, in an attainment of heterosexuality. Chodorow argues that the Oedipal stage is significant in its development of the different ‘*relational potential*’ that girls and boys acquire at this time. Because of the added relational dimensions of female sexual development, Chodorow says that there is a greater complexity in the latter. Crucial differences between women and men are thus explained by Chodorow on the basis of women’s closer connection to their roles as nurturers and as mothers, roles which are socially determined. Chodorow sees the

possibility of change in these socially determined roles only with the advent of *shared parenting* since this would bring about a shift in cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity.

Both Millett and Chodorow, in their different ways, draw our attention to a major lacuna in Freudian theory - the impact of social norms, codes, and expectations which differentiate between women and men and which may explain many of the attributes of female and male psychosexual development which Freud seems to gloss over in his rush to prove that “anatomy is destiny.” This said, it is also true that Freud himself developed more sophisticated understandings of sexual differences in the context of social circumstances, in some of his later works. It is for this reason that certain feminists, like Juliet Mitchell, took up the defence of certain aspects of Freud’s theories in response to his feminist critics, as you will see in a following section. However, finally, Freud’s theories do reflect and remain limited by his own biases as a male member of western patriarchal society in the early twentieth century.

Check Your Progress: List and analyse some of the main objections made by Kate Millett and Nancy Chodorow in their criticism of Freud’s theories. Do you agree with any or all of these?

2.4 LACAN AND FEMINISM

You have already been introduced to the work of Jacques Lacan in the unit on Humanities, in the previous block on “Feminist Critiques of Knowledge.” In this section, we will further look at some aspects of Lacanian theory and their relationships to feminist theories of psychoanalysis. Before taking up the study of Lacanian feminist theorists, let us first appreciate Lacan’s views on psychoanalysis.

2.4.1 Lacan and Psychoanalysis

Lacan was a trained French psychiatrist who was greatly interested in Freudian theories of psychological development but extended these theories in very novel and unique directions. Born in 1901, in France, Jacques Lacan was a contemporary of Freud, although his junior. Like Freud, his work too focused on unraveling the mysteries of the unconscious. In his well-known collection of essays, *Ecrits* (1977), Lacan draws up a complex, hermetic and highly stylized map of the unconscious. Having been influenced greatly by Ferdinand de Saussure’s work on language and structural linguistics, Lacan was the first one to draw connections between the *unconscious and language*, famously stating

in one of his much quoted essays, that “the unconscious is structured like language” (Lacan, 1957, p.103). Lacan drew parallels between the functioning of the unconscious and the workings of language, and brought these out through his own highly *metaphorical* and *opaque* language which often presents the reader with a resistance that one has to make a concerted effort to overcome. It is almost as if Lacan wishes to compel us to weave our way through the difficulties of his prose so that we begin to see the curious and complex pathways of the unconscious.

Lacan believed that one of the most significant revelations offered to us by Freud is about the *fragmentation* of the self which is caused by the unconscious. In his novel interpretation of Freud’s works, Lacan demonstrates how the unconscious radically divides our subjectivity (or our sense of self) between our unconscious desires and our conscious ego. In this way, Lacan attempts to show us the very *disruptive power* wielded by the unconscious upon each subject.

While Lacan is more or less in agreement with the different stages of infantile sexuality as mapped out by Freud, he extends his interpretation of these stages in a completely new direction. Employing structuralist and post-structuralist ideas about discourse, Lacan re-reads Freud’s theory of the mirror stage and the Oedipus complex to show how psychoanalysis is linked to discourse. Borrowing from Saussure’s theory of language and linguistics, Lacan employs the notion that every idea conceptualized in the mind can be represented by a sign. Words are the best examples of signs as they stand in for what they represent. Saussure refers to these signs as “*signifiers*” and the concepts they represent as “*signifieds*.” Language, in Saussurean linguistics was thus constructed upon this relationship between signifiers and signifieds, where each signified may have more than one signifier, and where the relationship between the two is based on arbitrary conventions (as in the use of the word “apple” or “*pomme*” or “*seb*” all of which are signs that stand in for a certain fruit). Meaning, according to Saussure, is thus the result of *differences* between signifiers since each signifier indicates its unique correspondence with a signified, and the differences between signifiers allow us to mark these unique correspondences.

Lacan extends these linguistic relationships to his understanding of the unconscious. In Freudian theory, prior to the mirror stage the infant lives in a symbiotic relationship with his mother in a world of ‘fullness’ or ‘plenitude’ as there is no sense of separateness yet. This feeling of ‘plenitude’ described by Freud is termed the ‘*imaginary*’ by Lacan, as it is made up of images which reflect the sense of fullness imagined by the child, based on its original feelings

of completeness in the mother-child symbiotic relationship. In the *mirror stage*, the child sees an integrated reflection of itself in the mirror which gives rise to a separate sense of self, or ego. However, Lacan emphasizes that this image in the mirror is an '*alienated*' one since the child 'mis-recognizes' itself - that is, it realizes that the reflection is, and is not, itself. The third figure of the father, which disrupts the mother-child dyad, is seen as representing the *Law*. Here, however, it is not just the literal figure of the father that acts as a deterrent to the child's Oedipal desires but rather the *sign of the father*, or more specifically, the *phallic signifier*. Furthermore, this Law is *phallic law*, since the father represents the authority of the phallus. The *phallus* is a central term in Lacanian theory, as it stands for that sign (in the unconscious) which makes the child aware of difference (difference between ego and other, between male and female, etc). The **phallus** then becomes the "**transcendental signifier**" in Lacanian theory, the signifier which will give meaning to all other signifiers since it is the first bearer of *difference*, and it is difference which produces meaning, as explained in Saussurian linguistics.

Since language is also a movement from one signifier to another, in an endless process where no signifier actually captures meaning, language is seen as "empty" of meaning, just as the transcendental signifier is also an *empty sign*. To enter the world of discourse, or the *symbolic*, is to enter a world of empty signifiers where desire is always deferred from one sign to another. The *symbolic order*, or the realm of discourse, which makes us aware of difference beyond the mirror stage, is always cut off from the realm of the "*real*" - the realm of meanings which is desired but always beyond the ambit of signifiers, and therefore, inaccessible. The *feminine*, in Lacan's work, is the **mark or sign of an absence**, because culture defines the feminine as a *lack*. However, Lacan shows how women are more capable of a certain mysterious pleasure or "*jouissance*" (which can be roughly translated as orgasm, ecstasy or even spiritual pleasure) which marks their resistance to the dominance of the symbolic order.

2.4.2 Lacanian Feminist Theorists: Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose

Just as there have been many feminist detractors of Freudian theories, there are also feminist theorists who defend, support or find some value in both Freudian and Lacanian theories. Such feminist theorists insist on reading Freud's and Lacan's work in different, novel ways to arrive at new understandings of their ideas. Below, we will look at the work of two such prominent feminist theorists: Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose.

i) Juliet Mitchell

As you read in Block 4, Unit 3, Juliet Mitchell, who published *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* in 1974, adopts a materialist Marxist approach in her reading of Freud and Lacan. Disagreeing with Kate Millett's criticisms of Freud, Mitchell takes up a defence of certain Freudian speculations. She claims that some feminist critics, like Kate Millett, who criticize Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex and the consequent construction of feminine sexuality, misread Freud when they fail to take into account that Freud is talking about the workings of the unconscious, and not the realm of conscious reality. Millett argues that feminist critics of Freud have taken a pre-Freudian approach in not realizing the glaring importance of the unconscious in Freud's work, and that this amounts to a *denial of the unconscious*: "Most hostile critics of Freud implicitly deny the very notion of an aspect of mental life . . . that is different from conscious thought-processes. Other psychologies are about consciousness, psychoanalysis is dealing with the unconscious - this was a point on which Freud had to insist . . ." (Mitchell, 1974, p.8). Another aspect of Freud's theory that Mitchell defends is Freud's insistence on the *relativity of normalcy* - this defence is taken up in the face of criticisms of Freudian theory which claim that Freud was in favour of prescribing a normal pattern of behaviour for men and women. Rather, Mitchell argues in favour of Freud's theories that normalcy is acquired, relative, and a compromise with reality, and that these ideas are adequately addressed by Freud in his work.

Mitchell is not here conceding the essential nature of the Oedipus story but showing how the development that Freud discusses is very much part of the patriarchal structure in which it is steeped. Thus, she observes that we cannot deny its existence simply because we disagree with its effects on women. She says that since boys and girls are born into patriarchal cultures, both of them learn to find their place in the superior or inferior positioning that patriarchy ascribes to them. These positioning becomes intimately linked to the unconscious, which cannot be separated out from external reality. Both the boy and the girl, in Mitchell's account, desire to be like the father because of the authority ascribed to the father by culture. Both also recognize *femininity as powerlessness* and therefore reject or accept it in different degrees. However, because of the different demands of culture, the girl learns to resign herself to her subordinate position before *phallic law*.

While Mitchell makes some important observations about the significance of the unconscious in Freudian theory, she has been criticized for being too eager in her justification of *male dominance* and the *importance of*

the *phallus* in Freud's work. Mitchell does show us however, that an important aspect of Freud's work is that it illuminates the damaging effects of male domination on the development of feminine sexuality within patriarchal cultures.

Mitchell interprets the work of Jacques Lacan in a similar vein, showing us that Lacan's description of sexual difference and gender hierarchy is based on the *phallogentric* structure of society, and not on an essential gender hierarchy created or promoted by Lacan. It is the phallogentric nature of external reality that gets reflected in Lacanian psychoanalysis, according to Mitchell. Definitions of masculinity and femininity, as they appear in Lacan's work, get constructed in the *symbolic order*, that is, in the realm of discourse, or language. The difference in power relations between these gendered inscriptions can be seen as a *reflection of social polarizations* constructed by patriarchal structures. The symbolic order, or the realm of discourse entered into as we pass through the mirror stage, is seen as a pervasive, all embracing reality from which there is no escape. The gendered identities and their attributes created in and through discourse become very much part of our lived reality as well as our unconscious. While Mitchell helps us to see the importance of the symbolic order in psychoanalysis, and therefore helps us to understand the gendered power hierarchies as a result of this importance, she has been criticized for taking too stable a view of gender polarities. For instance, one of her critics, Anthony Elliotts, claims that gender distinctions in Juliet Mitchell's work become too universalized and reductionist, and that she ignores the complexity of more fluid gender identities that may actually be made possible by the resistance of the unconscious to the "straitjacket" of gender categories that she constructs (Elliotts, 2002, p. 144).

ii) Jacqueline Rose

Jacqueline Rose worked with Juliet Mitchell in developing a fascinating reading of Lacan's work which attempts to foreground the positive influences of Lacan's theories for women. In her work on *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne* (1982), Rose defends Lacan's theories of language, the unconscious and the role of desire. Briefly, she advances the claim that in Lacanian psychoanalysis, anatomy is not destiny but it does figure as a central trope in psychoanalysis, simply because we are destined to be subjected to the cultural affects that our anatomy brings with it. *Anatomy*, in this sense, "*figures*" in that it is a '*figure*' or '*sham*.' Similarly, male privilege based on the dominance

of the phallus is a kind of posturing, and not 'natural' in any sense. Finally, women are not essentially inferior to men because of their different anatomy, but they are 'subjected' to inferiority.

Rose remarks how Lacan, in taking as his point of departure the idea of *difference* and *division* as the producers of meaning, provides an account of sexuality solely in terms of its divisions - "the division of the subject, division *between* subjects" (Rose, 1982, p.49). "For Lacan, men and women are only ever in language... All speaking beings must line themselves up on one side or the other of this division, but anyone can cross over and inscribe themselves on the opposite side from that to which they are anatomically destined" (Rose, 1982, p.49). Rose shows how, since femininity (like masculinity) is only constructed through language, and since it is constructed as a *signifier of lack*, or *otherness*, (as in being different from the masculine: the feminine is that which is not masculine), it will always be incomplete. If it is the sign of a lack or an absence, (as in the absence of the phallus), it will also always escape language because it is 'absent.' Lacanian psychoanalysis thus explores, according to Rose, not only the construction of femininity, but also its failure. This does not mean that femininity fails in some essential way, but that it fails to appear in language because it lies always outside of language, outside of the symbolic order. This is because language, in patriarchal culture, reflects the feminine as empty, as void: "Defined as such, reduced to being nothing other than this fantasmatic place, the woman does not exist. . . It means, not that women do not exist, but that her status as an absolute category and guarantor of fantasy . . . is false" (Rose, 1982, p.50).

Due to its outsider status, however, the feminine is also associated with a resistance to the symbolic order, and a resistance to patriarchy. Freud and Lacan had both noted this resistance which makes itself visible through the symptoms of **hysteria**. In taking up a Lacanian position, Rose shows how Lacan's discussion of "*jouissance*" is evidence of this kind of resistance. If "*jouissance*" escapes definition in embodying a mysterious pleasure or joy beyond words, and in dissolving the boundaries between self and other, it also marks women's resistance to fall in line with the demands of the symbolic order. Rose thus manages to reconcile Lacan's views on desire and language with a certain kind of feminist politics in showing how the problem of defining the feminine is also the problem of defining desire itself. Rose's work is important in that it presents a reading of Lacan which foregrounds the posturing inherent in gendered categories. However, its limitations have been noted by critics who question whether

the notion of feminine desire, described at the level of “*jouissance*,” would be able to resolve imbalances in gender hierarchies if this desire itself is not definable within the symbolic order of language.

iii) Post-Lacanian Feminists

In more recent times, feminist theorists like Judith Butler and the French feminist theorists like Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous have all attempted in their own ways, to move beyond Lacanian theories in order to create a space where issues related to women’s sexuality, women’s access to their own bodies, and to language, can be addressed from feminist perspectives. You will read more about the work of post-Lacanian feminists, specifically the French feminists, in the course on “Gendered Bodies.” You will also come across the work of Judith Butler, who is an important voice in the area of queer theory, in Block 6 towards the end of this course.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have seen how Freud’s theories of psychoanalysis, especially as they relate to infantile sexual development, the Oedipus complex, and female sexuality, have been contested, defended, and extended by Lacan as well as by various feminist theorists. We looked at some of the ways in which Kate Millett and Nancy Chodorow object to Freud’s descriptions and analyses of infantile sexuality and feminine sexuality, especially in the context of the Oedipus complex. Similarly, Lacan’s theories, which were themselves based on novel readings of Freudian psychoanalysis, have also been examined and used by feminist theorists to re-write psychoanalysis in order to carve out a space which has been traditionally denied to women in conventional theories of psychoanalysis. Whether these feminists choose to defend or to contest earlier theories, they all contribute towards the re-construction of the ‘feminine’ and female sexuality in terms of their disruptive, subversive or creative potentials. In this sense, their project can be called ‘feminist’ since it works to enable women to rise above the repression of their femininity and to take charge, and become agents, of their own subjectivity.

2.6 GLOSSARY

Complex : This concept is introduced by Austrian physician Joseph Breuer (1842-1925). It refers to collective ideas, feelings and memories that share a general emotional tone that have been marginalized either completely or partially from consciousness. At the same time, it

continues to create an impact on thoughts, emotions and behaviour of the persons. The term is widely used in psychoanalysis.

Jouissance : This French term can be roughly translated as spiritual or orgasmic sexual enjoyment, but can also be used to refer to a sense of overwhelming pleasure or joy. It was used by Jacques Lacan to talk about both pleasure as well as a sexual enjoyment akin to spiritual joy. Later, French feminists and theorists like Cixous use it to refer to a special joy or pleasure experienced by women in exploring their own sexualities.

Psychoanalysis : This term refers to the theories of psychology and the method of treatments for psychological disorders. It was first developed by Sigmund Freud. The core of the theory is based on the workings of the unconscious and deals with the functions and structures related to our mental realm. Psychotherapy is the method developed by Freud and others after him, to analyze an individual's unconscious desires and fears, and to treat mental disturbances and illnesses.

Psychosis : This refers to mental disorders created by delusions and hallucinations. It includes symptoms of schizophrenia and disorganized speech or 'cataconia'.

Repression : Repression is the mechanism used by the ego to suppress and bury its instinctual impulses. It represents the way in which unacceptable thoughts or wishes are banished from the conscious mind. According to Sigmund Freud, the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance from consciousness.

Sign : Sign refers to the unification of signifier and signified. Signified stands for the concept whose meaning is being represented by the signifier. Signifier stands for that which is used to represent the signified and can be a sound image, a written word, or an image. The notion of sign plays a vital role in postmodern scholarship. This has been described by the scholar and linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, in his collected lectures *Course in General Linguistics* (1915).

2.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Describe, in your own words, Freud's theory of infantile sexual development and the role of the Oedipus complex in this theory.
- 2) List the main points in Freud's theories that lead feminist critics to object to these and question them.
- 3) Read the suggested readings by Sigmund Freud listed in Section 2.9 and try to come up with your own observations and criticisms of Freud's theories based on your understanding of this chapter and the readings.
- 4) How does Lacan modify and add to Freud's theories of psychoanalysis? Explain briefly in your own words.
- 5) Explain how Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose defend the work of Jacques Lacan from a feminist perspective.
- 6) Read the articles by Millett, Chodorow, Mitchell, and Rose given in the section "Suggested Readings" below, and list some of the issues taken up by these writers that are not covered in the above material.

2.8 REFERENCES

Chodorow, Nancy (1974). 'Family Structure and Feminine Personality'. In *Women, Culture and Society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Chodorow, Nancy (1978). *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

Elliotts, Anthony (2002). *Psychoanalytic Theory*. Durham: Duke Univ. Press.

Freud, Sigmund (1911). *The Interpretation of Dreams*. 3rd Edition. A. A. Brill (Trans). Plain Label Books.

Freud, Sigmund (1924). 'Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex' (pp. 171-179) and 'Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes' (pp. 248-258). In *Standard Edition*. London: Hogarth Press.

Freud, Sigmund (1962). *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. New York: Basic Books.

Lacan, Jacques (1957). 'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious'. J. Miehl (Trans.). In J. Ehrmann (Eds.), *Structuralism*. New York: Anchor.

Lacan, Jacques (1977). *Ecrits: A Selection*. Norton.

Millett, Kate (1970). *Sexual Politics*. New York: Doubleday. (Reprint, Univ. of Illinois Press, 2000).

Mitchell, Juliet (1974, rpt. 2000). *Psychoanalysis & Feminism*. (2000). New York: Basic Books.

Rose, Jacqueline (1982). *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*. London: Macmillan.

Sarup, Madan (1993). *Post-structuralism and Postmodernism*. Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press.

Trask, Haunani-Kay (1986). *Eros and Power: The Promise of Feminist Theory*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press.

2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

Chodorow, Nancy (1978). 'Gender Differences in the PreOedipal Period' (pp. 92-108) and 'Freud: Ideology and Evidence' (pp. 141-158). In *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

Freud, Sigmund (1924). 'Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex' (pp. 171-179) and 'Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes' (pp. 248-258). in *Standard Edition*. London: Hogarth Press.

Millett, Kate (1970). 'Freud and the Influence of Psychoanalytic Thought and Some Post Freudians' (pp. 176-219) in "The Reaction in Ideology." *Sexual Politics*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis. (Reprint, Univ. of Illinois Press, 2000)

Mitchell, Juliet (1974). 'Psychoanalysis and Femininity', Part One. (pp. 5-120). *Psychoanalysis & Feminism*. New York: Basic Books. (1982 Edition).

Rose, Jacqueline (1982). 'The Meaning of the Phallus' (pp. 74-85). In *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*. London: Macmillan.

UNIT 3 POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM

Yashodha Shenmugasundaram

Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Objectives
- 3.3 Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Feminism
 - 3.3.1 Colonialism
 - 3.3.2 Postcolonialism: A Discourse
 - 3.3.3 Postcolonial Feminism: Colonization and Subjugation of Women
- 3.4 Characteristics of Postcolonial Feminism
 - 3.4.1 Indigenous Cultural Criticism
 - 3.4.2 Heterogeneity, Plurality and Inclusion
 - 3.4.3 Double Colonization of Women
 - 3.4.4 From Margin to Centre
 - 3.4.5 Parallelism and Intersection
- 3.5 Postcolonial Feminist Theorists
 - 3.5.1 Edward Said: Orientalism
 - 3.5.2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Can the Subaltern Speak?
 - 3.5.3 Homi K. Bhabha: The Subaltern Can Speak
 - 3.5.4 Chandra Talpade Mohanty: Third World Feminist
 - 3.5.5 Feminism in India: Silent and Steady
- 3.6 Postcolonial Feminism: A Critique
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Glossary
- 3.9 Unit End Questions
- 3.10 References
- 3.11 Suggested Readings

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Feminist theory consists of several strands which include formative feminisms, multicultural feminism, feminism and history, postcolonial feminism, third world feminism, transnational feminism or global feminism, eco-feminism, and black feminism. (You have already come across some of these in Block 2 and in Unit 1 of Block 5). Feminist theories emerged from the experiences of

women under different social, political, and economic situations, and were influenced by the social and moral philosophies of the time. Academic scholarship arising from these theories led to activism in the form of social movements.

Early feminist theories had a tendency to lump all women together and treat them as homogenously marginalised. In order to highlight a common sisterhood, they often ignored the social, cultural and racial differences that divide women. Postcolonial feminism has emerged in an attempt to address the experiences of women born and raised in former colonies of western imperial powers. It argues that these experiences are different from those of women who live in the western world. It draws comparisons between colonization and women's suppression in the light of geographical, historical and cultural factors.

The field of postcolonialism is vast and open to debates and questions from national, cultural, political, and social arenas. In this unit, we will look at postcolonial feminism's concerns with issues of cultural diversity, ethnic, racial and cultural differences. We will also examine the power relations in order to come to a more subtle understanding of the dimensions of neo-colonial domination.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the relationship between colonialism and postcolonialism;
- Examine the characteristics of postcolonial feminism;
- Analyze the contribution of a few important postcolonial feminist theorists; and
- Situate postcolonial feminism in the context of third world feminism in general.

3.3 COLONIALISM, POSTCOLONIALISM AND FEMINISM

3.3.1 Colonialism

You may have come across this term/ concept in your readings of other disciplines. Can you make sense of it here? We shall use the terms 'colonialism' and 'postcolonialism' often in this unit. For further understanding, you may note that 'colonialism' refers to the policy of having colonies to keep them dependent on the colonizers, so that colonized nations may be used and exploited as material, economic resources by the colonial powers. It also refers to the trait of colonial life in all its aspects. The impact of colonialism

is in terms of territories appropriated (geographic), racism institutionalized (historic), and civilizations destroyed (cultural). Therefore, colonialism forms the origin of postcolonial discussion. The colonial history of the nineteenth century was marked by western imperial appropriation whereas the twentieth century witnessed a reversal with the colonies and empires becoming independent. Postcolonial theory emerges out of this dialectical process of oppression and struggle for freedom from oppression. Colonization is a general term denoting various phenomena in political theory, feminist and Marxian writings. Marxian theory uses it as a category of economic exploitation. Feminist scholars use the term to describe “the appropriation of their experience and struggles” (Mohanty, 1988, p.49).

3.3.2 Postcolonialism: A Discourse

In comparison to colonialism, postcolonial discourse is the discourse of the colonized/oppressed. Since there is ongoing interrogation and knowledge addition within this discursive realm, it does not end with the departure of the colonizers. On an ongoing basis, postcolonialism contends with various forms of oppression. Postcolonialism has multiple meanings:

- **First, it is a literal description of conditions in former colonial societies.**
- **Second, it is a description of global conditions after independence of these colonies. In this case, the usage is more abstract since it is primarily discursive and textual.**
- **Third, it describes the above named conditions as a branch of knowledge.**

The differences between the usages have to be understood for our analytical purpose. There is a developing interest in the third aspect, that is, postcolonialism as a branch of knowledge, and this interest has grown in diversity in recent times. Postcolonialism as used by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989) describes all cultures affected by the process of colonialism and imperial power from the beginning of colonization to the present. It is argued that the countries formerly occupied by colonial powers continue to be affected by their former history of colonization, and thus the colonized continue to suffer the consequences of their history.

Thus defined, postcoloniality is released from the fixity of location and history of colonization and is identified with discourse. Discourse refers to written or spoken communications or debates. Postcolonial theory is a critical study of colonial texts, both literary and non-literary. One of the most prominent and well-known scholars associated with postcolonial studies, Edward Said, initiated

the discourse/debate on postcolonialism with the publication of his famous book *Orientalism*. There are other significant contributions to the origin of postcolonialism such as *The Empire Writes Back* and other similar works from African, Caribbean and Indian writers and social theorists. These writers and theorists engaged with postcolonial discourses and hence postcolonial studies found a place in the academy. Their contributions are given in subsequent sections of this unit. One needs to take note of the fact that postcolonial discourse is interdisciplinary and ranges from discourse on history to research of colonial governments to literary analysis, from critique of scientific work to economic theory. Ania Loomba (1998) sums up postcolonialism as a new critical vocabulary emerging from recent developments in social sciences, literature, linguistic studies, and discourses in the varied forms of communications.

The term postcolonialism earlier referred exclusively to the writings (discourses) and practices produced by the history of colonization with its new symbolism. It is now more of an abstraction figuratively applied to any strategic redefinition of marginality. According to Sara Suleri, “This reimagining of the postcolonial has made way for the theoretical articulation and has enabled the coalition between postcolonial and feminist theories” (Suleri in Ashcroft et al, 1995).

Postcoloniality articulates its theories alongside economic, social, cultural and historical factors. In practice, it works differently in different parts of the world. It conveys patriarchy as a relationship of inequality that is highly variable because it is to be considered always along with the other social structures. For all the above reasons, we need caution and qualification when using the term postcolonialism.

3.3.3 Postcolonial Feminism: Colonization and Subjugation of Women

Postcolonial feminists find parallels between colonialism and the subjugation of women. The western feminists had a narrow focus on the general belief that all women should be equal to men and emphasized the sameness and solidarity of women, irrespective of their manifold cultural, social, and economic differences. They did not examine the nuances and ambiguities of different cultures. Imperial colonization was associated with the belief that westerners were superior and the colonized were inferior races and, therefore, had to be civilized. Postcolonial feminists object to the idea of the commonality and universality of women’s lives, since these were generally based on the universalization of western women’s experiences, and wanted their own voices

to be heard. Through the lens of colonialism, they were able to explore a lot of issues relating to subordination, such as migration, slavery, representation, suppression and resistance, rather than treating gender in a simplistic sense. They believe that gender cannot be extricated from other aspects of their identity and also one cannot gloss over the differences between the western and third world countries. Postcolonial feminism has thus opened up areas and topics for academic studies and research that provide a more nuanced picture of women's lives from around the world. Postcolonial feminist theories provide the analytic tools to address issues of structural inequities in groups that historically have been socially and economically disadvantaged through the creation of an intellectual discourse which can adequately reflect the struggle of women outside the western world.

The specific goals of postcolonial theorists and feminists are quite similar.

Let us summarize them as follows:

- i) They both seek not only to salvage past experiences but also to chart how the world can move beyond colonialism towards equality and opportunity for all.
- ii) Postcolonial theory exposes and deconstructs the racist imperialist nature of colonialism and its ongoing global and material consequences. Third world women are the most exploited and therefore, a new form of international feminist agency is warranted to speak on behalf of all women.
- iii) Postcolonial theory claims intellectual authority by claiming space for multiple voices. For instance, Gayatri Spivak's voicing of the subaltern ('Can the subaltern Speak?', 1995) which includes women metaphorically and Edward Said's attack on orientalism (*Orientalism*, 1978) make bold to disregard the established views of western colonial writings.
- iv) Gayatri Spivak suggests the use of a "strategic essentialism" by incorporating the subaltern voice of the marginalized and silenced as a strategic and necessary position from which to speak and to be heard. Thus, the conceptualisation of the subaltern provides a social category of power structures. By speaking on behalf of a group (representation), postcolonial discourse is able to carve out a clear oppositional identity.
- v) As presented by the African American feminist Bell Hooks, marginality is a site of resistance.

We can find parallels between postcolonial theory and postcolonial feminism in all the above mentioned goals/objectives.

Third World Feminism/ Tri-Continental Feminism

Postcolonial feminism is sometimes also called third world feminism. The term 'third world feminism' is preferred by some feminists for reasons of precision and context. Historically, the third world countries have been under colonialism and liberated through struggle against foreign power and are characteristically postcolonial.

In 1970, black feminist Frances Beal's publication *Sisterhood is Powerful* named the second wave feminism as a white women's movement since it insisted on organizing along the binary gender division of male/female alone and tended to ignore differences of race, culture, or class. However, US third world feminists were conscious that one's race or class often determined access to privileges regardless of one's gender. This type of consciousness was especially pertinent during the suffragette movement in the US. For instance, Sojourner Truth (a famous Black female abolitionist and women's rights activist) found it necessary to repeatedly confront a convention of American white women with the question, "Ain't I a woman?" This statement which is often quoted in feminist literature carries with it the imprint of race, culture, class, and gender and has become very significant in US third world feminism. As stated by Chela Sandoval, this form of "historical consciousness" enabled a different way of conceptualizing feminist consciousness and became a counter to western feminism (Sandoval, 2003, p.75).

The US third world feminists put forth some common views and a theoretical structure different from western feminism. Similar to postcolonial feminist discourses, the notion of the third world is a 'cultural production' symbolizing historical and cultural suppression experienced by those countries. Third world women's writings focus on codification of scholarship as knowledge about women. 'Third world women' thus denotes an analytical category found in feminist writings. While the two streams of feminists within the west, western and US third world, have two different understandings of domination, subordination, and the nature of effective resistance, third world feminism reflects similar feminist concerns and ideology with US third world feminism.

'Third world' is a term popularly used to refer to the three geographical regions covered by Africa, Asia and Latin America. In the twentieth century, the development debates of the seventies used the terms North-South to emphasize the contrast between developed and developing countries. The term 'Tri-Continental' is considered more exact than the 'third world' in order to denote international identification. The First Conference of the Organization of Solidarity of People of Africa, Asia and Latin America held at Havana in 1966 resolved to insist on the 'Tri-Continental' instead of 'Third world' which

was seen as a bland homogenization of 'The South' and the negative definition of the non-west.

In summary, the theory of postcolonial feminism is clear evidence of the fact that there exist feminisms indigenous to the third world countries. The concerns and analyses of third world feminists are rooted in and responsive to the problem women face within their national contexts. By and large, third world/postcolonial feminism questions, challenges and even contradicts western feminism. Women's movements speak in different voices since each of them has a different thrust influenced by different socio-cultural, political, and economic situations. Only within a specific socio-economic and political context, is it possible for women to have similar concerns and points of commonality. In the next section, we will look more closely at the specific characteristics of postcolonial feminism.

***Check Your Progress:** What do you understand by the term 'postcolonialism', both in a historical context, and as a discourse? What is 'postcolonial feminism'? How are its goals similar to those of postcolonial theorists? Try to explain in your own words with the help of examples.*

3.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM

3.4.1 Indigenous Cultural Criticism

As you have seen above, postcolonialism was born out of the cultural critique of dominant, hegemonic powers wherever they may be. Academic discourses produced by writers of erstwhile colonized countries of the third world set the pace for this type of cultural criticism. These writings highlighted the ongoing resistance to colonialism. They undertook the study of cultural practices, extant and surviving, with a heightened emphasis on local and specific effects of colonialism and oppression. In short, postcolonial studies refer to a large and growing body of diverse and often conflicting formulations of the cultural production or writings and debates of oppressed people. Like feminist studies, it critiques the status quo. It is not a discipline or methodology as such, but rather a theoretical and cultural perspective.

The cultural criticism generated by postcolonial feminism is leveled against the first and second wave feminisms which are entirely western in conception, origin, and development. Postcolonial feminism is critical of the fact that the

western constructions of indigenous women do not reflect the real cultural situations of these women. According to postcolonial feminists like Chandra Mohanty, mainstream western feminism represents the other women as ‘a composite, singular, third world woman’. Mohanty, an Indian feminist, reveals that this perception reflects an arbitrary construction. Western feminism homogenizes and systematizes the oppression of women without situating them in their culture, ideology and socioeconomic conditions which are different for different groups. Third world feminists raise serious objections to the consideration of women as “already constituted and coherent groups with identical interests and desires regardless of class, ethnic or radical location... The notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy cannot be applied universally and cross culturally” (Mohanty, 1988, p.52).

The exclusion and marginalization of women within national cultures is true of many countries which gained independence in the twentieth century. Exclusions based on race, gender and class may be culturally inherent. Women’s struggle for equality still continues even after liberation and thus reaffirms the need for, and relevance of, the discourse of postcoloniality.

Postcolonial feminist theory analyzes the relation between western women and indigenous women. Western women used their campaigning skills to advocate the rights of indigenous women drawing attention to the socio-cultural practices of sati, veiling, female seclusion, and other forms of patriarchal oppression. In the colonies of Africa and India, European women campaigned for the rights of indigenous women. Whether their advocacy improved the lives of indigenous women is debatable. The writings of Chandra Mohanty and Hazel Carby (*White Women Listen!*) laid the foundation for the critique of western feminism for having ignored cultural differences of women and became the main plank of postcolonial theorization.

The assumption that what is progressive for western women is necessarily the best for women elsewhere has been strongly criticized and questioned. What was vehemently opposed was the idea that women outside the west need to be saved by benevolent western feminists.

3.4.2 Heterogeneity, Plurality and Inclusion

Western feminists analyse women as a socially constituted homogeneous group across races, classes, and cultures. But women are also material subjects of their history. This means that women’s experiences are not just influenced by their gender but also by the specific contexts of the historical situations that they live in. Since these will vary across time periods and cultures, it would become impossible to speak of all women as having common experiences, problems or traits. While a sexist approach might label women as weak and

emotional, similarly, the concept of women as ‘sisters in struggle’ might end up projecting third world women as powerless, exploited and sexually harassed, and in dire need of being rescued. There are varied reasons for powerlessness. Therefore, postcolonial feminist theory questions the above mentioned binary between the powerful west and the powerless non-west. The non-homogeneity (heterogeneity) of women is raised by feminists like Chandra Mohanty as a counter to the trend of universalisation of women in western feminist theory. The non-homogeneity of women is an obvious fact. Whatever be the approach to the analysis of women, they are a heterogeneous group differentiated by socio-economic, cultural and locational characteristics as well as by degrees of adjustment to cultural and economic process.

Postcolonial feminism raises crucial questions of the plurality of women and the fact of seclusion that undermines the creation of a common, pluri-vocal language accessible for both men and women. Postcolonialism celebrates plurality through its explorations of marginality and heterogeneity. It rejects the universalisation of values and conventions. Edward Said identifies a kind of Eurocentric universalisation in *Orientalism*. The western representations of the East are questioned and their limitations and misrepresentations are exposed. These questions stress the need for recognition of plurality of women-centered experiences as located within their respective cultures and traditions and their critical revaluation of age-old cultural and religious mandates that have lost their present day applicability. In effect, postcolonial feminism seeks to determine whether women can lay claim to their own rights of ownership of that culture.

To sum up, postcolonial theory contradicts a universalized, homogenous concept of women and the exclusion of race, class and other factors in the analysis.

3.4.3 Double Colonization of Women

The most significant issue of postcolonial writings is the status of women in third world countries and cultures. The term ‘Double Colonization’ introduced by Holst-Peterson and Rutherford (1988) has become a durable description of the two forms of dominance, patriarchy and imperialism and of women’s status. Both forms of dominance, patriarchy and imperialism, are comparable and overlapping. Postcolonial feminist writings examine the role of white women in empire at the level of symbolism and also at the level of their functioning. Double colonization refers to women of colonized nations being doubly oppressed due to their race as well as their gender. It analyzes the concerns of women as members of marginalized groups within postcolonial societies, the case of indigenous minorities, and as women with a history of unbroken oppression.

3.4.4 From Margin to Centre

Postcolonial theory highlights the continued dominance of western ways of knowing. Like Gayatri Spivak, Joanne Sharp (2008) also argues that while western ways of knowing are accepted as the single voice of authenticity, other forms of knowing are marginalized by western thinkers since these are often relegated as myth or folklore. Postcolonial theorists have challenged western ways of knowing and writing, and this “single voiced authority” (Kalpana, 2003).

Feminist Theory: from Margin to Centre (1984) authored by African-American feminist and cultural critic, bell hooks, is an important book in the counter-canon of feminism. The importance of this work lies in the fact that it foregrounds and centers the black woman’s point of view which had hitherto been in the “footnotes” of patriarchal discourses. When referring to issues of women, bell hooks observes that within feminism there are displaced postcolonial notions and there is an urge to move to centre stage. Postcolonial feminist theories comprehend not only feminism of the third but also other marginalized peoples in the world. Postcolonial feminist theory uses the inter-connections between gender, ethnicity, race and postcolonial history to draw attention to the issues of the marginalized.

Political oppression and patriarchy are the main planks of postcolonial theories. Colonization and its material effects arising from dominant power structure were brought out both historically and culturally in postcolonial theory. Firstly, there are questions of relationship between western feminism and postcolonial people. Gayatri Spivak questions the prominence given to European cultural notions and values in western feminism. Secondly, the issue of language is a significant one since the bulk of postcolonial studies has been mainly in English. Language implies power. Third world writings used in western universities are primarily those written originally in English, even though translations from indigenous to dominant language and vice versa have recently provided a wider reader circle. Thirdly, postcolonial theory has enabled third world intellectuals to participate in global discourse. Although postcolonial experiences vary widely depending on each culture’s specific history and culture, the discourse of postcolonialism has enabled all of these voices to find a central and powerful plank from which to share their common as well as different experiences.

3.4.5 Parallelism and Intersection

Postcolonial and feminist theories are parallel and convergent, and they intersect each other. Through symbolism of women and their sharing of

oppression and repression with colonized races and culture as colonized, western feminist theory and postcolonial theory run parallel to each other. Both feminist discourse and post-colonial theory have long been thought of as associative and even complementary. Possible similarities between the two can be summed up as follows:

Both discourses are predominantly political and concern themselves with the struggle against oppression and injustice. Moreover, both reject the established hierarchical, patriarchal system, which is dominated by the hegemonic white male, and vehemently deny the supposed supremacy of masculine power and authority. Imperialism, like patriarchy, is after all a phallogentric, supremacist ideology that subjugates and dominates its subjects. The oppressed woman is in this sense akin to the colonized subject. Essentially, exponents of post-colonialism are reacting against colonialism in the political and economic sense while feminist theorists are rejecting colonialism of a sexual nature.

(<http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEnglish/imperial/key-concepts/feminism-and-postcolonialism.htm>)

Further, the role of the intrusive 'male gaze' within both patriarchy and colonialism, defines women and natives in an equally oppressive manner. Both groups - women and colonized - are reduced to stereotypes (virgin, whore, savage, heathen) and denied an identity by the system that entraps them. For example, Zemon Davis (2003, p.135-160) identified striking similarities in the position of the Iroquois (original American Indian people) and white women in the colonial encounter. In addition to focusing on gender, postcolonial feminist theories examine the varied forms of exploitation not only at the level of government but on the ground level as well. As similar theories, both question the established hegemonic hierarchical system. A convergence of the two may be identified in their common focus on the marginalized and silenced, in relation to the dominant.

Check Your Progress: *In what ways do the main characteristics of postcolonial feminism point to some main objections and critiques of western feminism by postcolonial feminists? Can you think of examples which would support the claims and critiques made by postcolonial feminists?*

3.5 POSTCOLONIAL AND FEMINIST THEORISTS

Postcolonial feminists attempt to change the oppressive power relations encoded in the name of race, nation, and empire. They are especially concerned with issues of gender, class, and sexuality. Postcolonial feminist theories are inter-disciplinary and cut across the disciplines of philosophy, political science, human geography, sociology, economics, literature, and media. Notable postcolonial theorists include Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Chandra Mohanty, with the latter two more specifically addressing issues of gender. Postcolonial feminist theory has a two-fold objective: (i) to racialise mainstream feminist theory and (ii) to genderise colonialism and post colonialism. Let us now look at the main ideas of a few postcolonial and feminist theorists whose work has been extremely influential in the area of postcolonial feminist studies.

3.5.1 Edward Said: Orientalism

Orientalism formed the basis for postcolonial theorization. The 'orient' refers to countries east of the Mediterranean. Historically, the term 'orient' meant the oldest colonies of the Europeans extending from India to the Far East. In orientalist discourse, cultural differences from the west were sexualized to categorize the oriental women (including Indian women) and contrasted with the superiority of the European women. In his famous book *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said contends that orientalism or the study of the orient is ultimately a political vision which promotes a binary opposition between the familiar West and the strange East, the inferior 'other'. Said has thus paved the way for a new critique of colonialist thought and development, a new area of enquiry, a colonial discourse. Said attributes a definite meaning to orientalism as follows: "Orientalism is a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient" (Said, 1978).

Orientalism has thus become an academic discipline - referred to as Oriental Studies or Area Studies and denotes teaching, writing, and research on the orient in the varied disciplines of anthropology, sociology, history, philology, etc. Europeans systematically developed Orientalism in order to manage and produce the orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively.

Said adopted a different methodology by adapting Michel Foucault's notion of discourse and the close relationship between power and knowledge. According to Foucault (*Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1969), establishment of knowledges and disciplines is never innocent. Knowledge formation is also formation of power. Said observes that 'ideas, cultures and histories cannot be understood

or studied without their force'. They are relative to power. Therefore, power relations become the backdrop of the study of history and culture.

In his theory of orientalism, Edward Said examines how the knowledges created by various orientalist disciplines have produced a discourse of questionable originality. Those orientalist discourses are responsible for the creation of the category 'other', the oriental as the binary opposite of the west. Conceptually, oriental women are different from their western counterparts.

By redefining Oriental Studies and such western scholarship as orientalism, Said demonstrated its domination as a viewpoint over the oriental territories and people. Oriental scholars mostly produced discourses or texts depicting the East as West's inferior 'other' and itself as a superior civilization in their work in literature, political tracts, journalistic texts, travel books, religious and philological studies. Said consistently demonstrates western domination through the power of knowledge.

In another publication *Culture and Imperialism* (1983), Said pays close attention to anti-colonial and postcolonial writing. Said's theory of Orientalism is ultimately a political vision of reality exposing the binary opposition between the West and East, Europe and Orient. Said's contribution to postcolonial criticism is immense and his work has served as a starting point for those who came after him. Said's ideas have generated widespread interest and influence in English literature, history, comparative literature, anthology, sociology and enabled a very considerable amount of subsequent work, especially in terms of feminist intersections with postcolonial theory.

Racism, even after the disappearance of colonization, still continues to mar public life with incidents of racial violence. Similarly, postcolonial feminist theory questions the exclusion of race in the analysis of women. Edward Said's work has been extremely influential in this regard since it opened up many questions which were taken up by postcolonial feminists in their ongoing struggle against racism and discrimination within the feminist movement.

3.5.2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Can the Subaltern Speak?

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a cultural critic and feminist theorist of Indian origin. Her much quoted essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is considered to be one of the most important texts in postcolonial feminist theory. "Subaltern" originally means a commissioned army officer of lower rank than a captain, but the word has now entered the vocabulary of academic discourse, especially in cultural studies, to imply a subject who is marginalized and oppressed. As used in cultural studies, the term subaltern owes its source to Antonio Gramsci

(Selections from *Prison Notes*, 1971) who adopted it to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of ruling classes. The subaltern is a heterogeneous group and cannot be easily or neatly categorized. Ranjit Gaha is the founder of Subaltern Study Group. He qualifies the subaltern as diverse, heterosexual and overlapping.

Referring to herself as a Marxist, feminist-deconstructionist, Spivak questions the tendency of scholarly writings to exclude and marginalize the subalterns and especially those who happen to be women. Gayatri Spivak is, therefore, hailed as a pioneer in the area of literary and cultural theory for producing the most coherent account of the subaltern woman. In her work, Spivak exposes how major works of European metaphysics (eg. Hegel, Kant, etc) not only tend to exclude the subaltern from discussions but also actively prevent non-Europeans from occupying positions as full human subjects. Since women's groups may have different and changing needs and agendas, working for a common cause may become difficult. Moreover, such groups run the risk of becoming permanently identified with an essential and stable identity which may not be useful over a period of time. Spivak thus proposes the use of 'strategic essentialism' to enable women to fight for their rights from a political platform, without becoming permanently tied down to such a position or frozen identity. Spivak combines deconstructive theory with feminist and Marxist perspectives in her discourse on third world women within a global framework.

The 'new knowledge' of the subaltern has thus created drastic revision in conceptualization and theorizing on women. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies postcolonial Indian women with a radical and economic underclass. She evokes the Hindu woman's subaltern position, her inaccessibility to 'voice' and her 'silenced difficult space of abjection.' Since women are twice colonized, the most oppressed of these women can be seen to be in the position of the subaltern. Spivak observes that there is no space from where the subaltern subject can speak. Spivak persistently critiques western feminism which fails to reexamine its own assumptions and takes them for granted. She comments that the west's intervention on behalf of the subaltern women is self interested. The feminist framework constructed by her has been fruitfully extended by other writers.

3.5.3 Homi K. Bhabha: The Subaltern Can Speak

Another postcolonial theorist, Homi K. Bhabha agrees with Spivak that the colonial (subaltern) is represented only within a disabling master discourse of colonialism. Such a discourse justifies itself by stressing on the degenerating nature of native population. Bhabha asserts that (woman) subaltern people can speak and that a native (woman's) voice can be recovered and is recovered

in the readings of colonial texts and discourses, depending on reading strategies. Bell Ashcroft et al support Bhabha's views. "The existence of postcolonial discourse is an example of postcolonial speaking and in most cases the dominant language is appropriated and is used for representation" (Ashcroft, 1995). The marginal voice, in fact, is heard.

Said's *Orientalism* laid emphasis on imperialist discourses. In more recent times, there has been a growing focus on the previously neglected contributions of postcolonial voices who challenge oriental discourse and its domination. There are considerable texts as histories from below, recovering the experience of those hitherto hidden from history. These articulations are not all completely new either. Marxists feminists and even liberal historians, whose *leitmotif* was the masses, have tried to 'amplify the voices' of the oppressed over the years. In this respect, the theory of discourse of Bhabha (1994) gains significance.

3.5.4 Chandra Talpade Mohanty: Third World Feminist

According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, there is a difference between woman as constructed by 'diverse representational discourses' and women as real material subjects of histories. They are related only arbitrarily. Western feminist writings have 'colonized' the material and historical heterogeneities of women in third world in the form a homogenous 'third world woman'.

This western feminist framework is critiqued by Mohanty. The first criticism focuses on strategies, location, or situation of women vis-à-vis the content analysis. Women of power and struggle are assumed as an already constituted group with identical interests and desires. The second critique is on the methodology by which universality and cross cultural validity are proved. The third concerns the political framework of the model. In short, generalizing and universalizing of women as a category is the major criticism made by postcolonial feminists. The representation of third world women as traditional, feudal, and politically immature are challenged by Mohanty.

In support of her critique, Chandra Mohanty uses examples of western feminists' representation of veiling (as a proxy for sexual segregation and control of women). This allows western feminist discourse to view third world women only in relation to negative aspects of their lives such as rape, domestic violence, forced prostitution, and violation of basic human rights. Similarly, she cites the emphasis on concepts like reproduction, sexual division of labour, the family, marriage, household, patriarchy, etc which are used by western feminists without specifying local, cultural, and historical contexts to represent women's subordination. Additionally, she challenges the confusion of the use of gender with an analytical category in western feminist writings.

In sum, Chandra Mohanty strikes a blow at the **monolithic, generalized representation of third world women**. In particular, she warns against ‘freezing the women in time, space and history’. She deconstructs the notion of a universalized sisterhood by documenting the experiences by women of colour in different societies including the dual system of discrimination articulated by male and female patriarchy.

3.5.5 Feminism in India: Silent and Steady

The common thread running through Indian feminism is that of a liberal position. Whatever is progressive for women in the west may not necessarily be the best for women in India. The Indian feminist approach has been to ‘observe, describe, take an objective realistic view’ of women’s conditions in their social set up. They question the double marginalization of illiterate, tribal and rural women as much as advocating their mainstreaming.

One could say that there are roughly three main bodies of writings on women in India - colonial western, Indian nationalist feminist and current writings. The framework of Indian postcolonialism is essentially Marxist, with emphasis on the low caste, tribal, and what Gandhi termed as ‘underdogs’. Its added concerns are peasantry and matters relating to agency, gender, and psychology. Non-orthodox concepts have also emerged in recent theoretical work which constructs a dialogue with international perspectives. Spivak and Bhabha’s abstract works are best understood (subaltern studies group) in relation to the problem of Indian intellectual culture and its political history. Much of theoretical innovation on feminism took place simultaneously in India and by Indian intellectuals outside India who “created a dynamic field of intellectual energy providing much of the cuttings of postcolonial theory effectively by chalking out its parameters” (Young, 2001, p. 351).

Whereas feminist ideology stemmed from individualism in the West, in India, its impact was class based, silent but steady. Feminism in India is taking deep inroads without much of the hue and cry of the western feminists. Indian writers analyse various complex problems of contemporary life by examining indigenous way role relations and identities. This includes Indian writings in English as well as vernacular regional writings.

To sum up, postcolonial theory contradicts a universalized, homogenous concept of women and the exclusion of race in the analysis. Racial, cultural, and gendered oppressions have negated the right to equality. Decolonization in the metaphorical sense is the essence of postcolonial feminism. It goes beyond mere specificity and historic location. It includes a methodological revisionism. The centrality of western thought, construction of knowledge and production

(writings) are challenged. Such revisions provide the framework for postcolonial feminist theory.

3.6 POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST THEORY: A CRITIQUE

Postcolonial feminist theory is overburdened with abstractions. It has been criticized for not paying adequate attention to concrete issues and the concerns of activists. However, there are currently increasing number feminist writings which do focus consistently on the ‘particularities and political positions’ within the postcolonial context.

Western campaigns against victimization of indigenous women through a unitary focus on symbols of oppression such as the forcible implementation of ‘sati’ and ‘veiling’ have come under question in postcolonial feminist theory. The same symbolisms are shown to have been sometimes used as a way of resistance to colonialism and oppression. Postcolonial feminist theory shows that issues and struggles are relative and contextual and need to be looked at within specific historical and cultural frameworks. For instance, the freedom of reproductive rights (the choice to carry through a pregnancy or the right to have an abortion) has been a key issue in western women’s struggle. Forced contraception, however, becomes a major issue in Black women’s struggle. The issue of human rights becomes more central to indigenous women’s movements. The instance of Algerian women ‘veiled, unveiled and reveiled’ has the bewildering effect of questioning oriental binaries. Cultural differences are relentlessly sexualized. Postcolonial feminist theory confronts western feminists with the diversity of indigenous women’s lives and experiences and the impossibility of one group of women having any necessary immediate access to other’s experiences. The distance between women as groups has to be acknowledged. The main inference is that indigenous women are diverse, and that diversity needs to be respected, even as we fight towards certain common goals.

Further, western feminist theorists have sidelined the issue of race. Race has a central place in postcolonial studies. Postcolonial feminist theory includes theorizing of race and ethnicity and the analysis of gender issues to account for human variations in terms of culture, tradition, social patterns, and ancestry. The inertia to face the problem of race by western feminism is called “white guilt”. The relative ignorance of the situation of indigenous women is highlighted by postcolonial feminism. Spivak, for instance, has called for white feminists to know more about the rest of the world and to recognize that all third world women are not universally oppressed, held in *purdah*, uneducated and abused by their husbands and male relatives. Western

feminism held itself as the campaigner for indigenous women. Their interest was in reforming natives, savages and protecting brown women from brown men. But this approach called 'white women's burden' obscures the other violence's of colonial and post colonial power and distracts attention away from other crucial and pressing issues like human and material development.

In conclusion, 'postcolonial studies' at best refers to a body of diverse and contesting writings. It is not a discipline or methodology. *The Empires Writes Back* aptly demonstrated that it is a creation of literary study. Whether it is viewed as a historical context, as an analytical tool, or as a theory of cultural relations, the validity of the postcolonial lies in its efficacy. How well it has empowered postcolonial intellectuals and enabled the strategy of decolonization is a moot question. Postcoloniality articulates along with economic, social, cultural and historical factors, in practice it works differently in different parts of the world. It conveys patriarchy as a relationship of inequality that is highly variable because it is to be considered always with the other social structures. We need caution and qualification when using the term postcolonialism.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

As you may have noted in your reading of this unit, it is necessary to situate any feminist theory within a particular cultural context. This emphasis is reiterated by Indian feminists as well as all other third world theorists. Chandra Mohanty and Rachel Carby laid the foundational critique against naturalizing all women's oppression without regard to cultural differences. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that politics in one arena can act as colonizing agent in another. Double colonization by both imperial and patriarchal set up is adequately theorized. Kamala Das writing on the position of Indian woman captures the identity of feminist writers and their relation to male society without reference to race and class. Feminist theories in India can be discerned from many women writers in India through their decoding of gender roles.

Feminist critical analysis of institutions and practices point to the systemic and systematic nature of the problem they focus on. Discrimination, exploitation, exclusion, harassment, abuse and violence against women are matters of general concern and public debate. These mistreatments are significantly rooted in particular practices and institutional arrangements imbedded in Indian culture and tradition. Certainly, there is a variety of ongoing changes and their mainstreaming is the major focus. Yet, the powerlessness of women is apparent. In the final analysis, women anywhere are in the structure of power and men rate them inferior, superior or equal as the

situations demand (Markandaya, 1954). Our future and its progress depend on the equality of men and women. It has to be pursued and sustained.

3.8 GLOSSARY

- Subaltern** : It means a subordinate officer of lower rank. Any submissive subject without power of his/her own is addressed as a subaltern. The marginalized are the subalterns.
- Colonialism** : It refers to the policy of having colonies to keep them dependent. It implies domination over its subjects. As a theoretical concept, it implies domination and oppression.
- Postcolonialism** : The lasting impact of colonialism even after independence from imperial powers is called postcolonialism. It is a broad concept covering individual, geographic, historical and cultural specifications. In this unit, postcolonialism specifically refers to issues of cultural diversity, ethnic, racial and cultural differences and the power relations within the postcolonial /liberated people.
- Orientalism** : Orientalism (oriental studies) refers to western scholarship in eastern languages and its cultures across disciplines. Knowledge means power. According to Edward Said Orientalism denotes a western style of domination.
- Third World** : The terms North and South are used to emphasize the contrast between the developed and developing countries. Third world is coterminous with developing countries - Africa, Asia and Latin America. Third world also symbolizes the historical and cultural suppression of those countries.
- Double Colonization** : It refers to two forms of domination simultaneously like imperialism/colonialism and patriarchy/oppression. It concerns the marginalized within the suppressed groups.
- Multiculturalism** : Many distinct cultural groups coexist within one society without prejudice or discrimination.

3.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) “The common thread of oppression runs through all categories of feminism.” Discuss this statement based on your reading of feminist theories.
- 2) Explain the binaries of oriental-western, East-West and us-other.
- 3) a). Examine the concept of double colonization in the context of women in your locality. b). Do American Black women suffer Double Colonization? Explain.
- 4) How are women of the third world heterogeneous? Are all western women homogeneous? Are all women ‘sisters in struggle’? Discuss these questions with the help of what you have read above.
- 5) Explain the goals of postcolonial feminism. Relate some of these to the contributions of some of the main postcolonial theorists that you have read about in the above unit.
- 6) In what ways is postcolonial feminism a challenge to western feminism?
- 7) “Feminism in India is making a tremendous impact with less noise and drama than the west”. What are the justifications for this statement?

3.10 REFERENCES

- Aschroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H. (1989). *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Liberation*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Triffin, H. (1995). (Eds.). *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. (1991). ‘The Third Space’. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity of Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Routledge.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). ‘The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and Discourse of Colonialism’. In *Location and Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Beal, Frances (1970). *Sisterhood is Powerful*. New York: Random House Publishing.
- Carby, Hazel (1982). ‘White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood’. In *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in Seventies Britain*. Hutchinson.
- Davis, Natalie, Zemon (2003). ‘Iroquois Women, European Women’. In Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (Eds). *Feminist Postcolonial theory: A Reader*. London: Edinburg University.

Foucault, Michael (1969). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. A.M.Sheridan Smith (2002). (Tr.). London, New York: Routledge.

Foucault, Michael (1980). *Power/knowledge Selected Interviews*. Brighton/ Harvard.

Holst - Peterson, Kirsten & Anna Rutherford (1988). *Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing*. Inland Book Company.

Hooks, Bell (1984). *Feminist Theory from Margin to Centre*. Brooklyn, N.Y: South End Press.

Kalpana, H. (2003). 'The Polemics of Postcolonial Writing'. In *Postcolonial Theory and Literature*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.

Loomba, Ania (2005). *New Critical Idiom. Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge.

Loomba, Ania & Orkin, Martin (1998). (Eds.). *Postcolonial Shakespeares*. London, New York: Routledge.

Markandaya, Kamala (1954, Reprnt 2002). *Nectar in a Sieve*. Mumbai: Signet Classics.

Mohanty, C.T. (1988). 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses'. *Feminist Review*, 30, 66-88.

Said, Edward (1978). *Orientalism*. New York, London: Routledge.

Sandoval, Chela (2003). 'US Third World Feminism: The theory and the method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World'. In Reina Lewis & Sara Mills (Eds.), *Feminist Postcolonial Theory : A Reader*. London: Edinburg University.

Sharp, Joanne (2008). *Geographies of Post Colonialism: Spaces of Power and Representation*. London: Routledge.

Spivak, Gayatri (1995). 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' In Bill Ashcroft et al (Eds.), *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. New York, London: Routledge.

Young, Robert J.C. (2001). (Ed.). *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. London: Blackwell.

3.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Davies, Miranda (1983). (Ed.). *Third World, Second Sex*. Prometheus Books.

Harding, Sandra & Narayan, Uma (1998). (Eds.). *Border Crossings: Multicultural and Postcolonial Feminist Challenges to Philosophy*. Indiana University Press.

Feminist Theories

Hooks, Bell (1989). *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston : South End Press.

Jayawardena, Kumari (1986). *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. Zed Books.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres (1991). (Eds.). *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Indiana Univ. Press.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade & M. Jacqui Alexander (1997). (Eds.). *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. London: Routledge.

Shohat, Ella (1999). (Eds.). *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Spivak, Gayatri & Harasym, S. (2000). (Eds.). *The Postcolonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogue*. London: Routledge.

UNIT 4 FEMINISM AND NON-NORMATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Sukhpreet Kahlon

Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives
- 4.3 Constructing the Normative
 - 4.3.1 Relationship between Normative, Race, Caste and Gender
 - 4.3.2 Normative Sexuality: Heteronormativity
- 4.4 The Non-Normative
 - 4.4.1 Homosexuality
 - 4.4.2 Emergence of Lesbian and Gay Communities
 - 4.4.3 Critique of Heteronormativity
 - 4.4.4 Transsexuals
 - 4.4.5 Non-Normative Within Normative Sexuality
- 4.5 'The Downtrodden Among the Downtrodden': A Caste Gendered Debate
- 4.6 'The Personal is Political'
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Glossary
- 4.9 Unit End Questions
- 4.10 References
- 4.11 Suggested Readings

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Feminism has a long and complex history. Several issues have come under the purview of feminism and its struggle for women's rights over the decades. This unit will look specifically at the response of, and the relationship between, feminist thought and normative and non-normative relationships. We will begin by trying to explain and understand what is meant by the 'normative' and then move on to analyze what lies beyond it, and why it is termed the 'non-normative'. (You have already been introduced to these ideas in Block 3, especially in Unit 1 which focused on "Issues". It may be helpful for you to review them in the context of our discussion in this unit.) The issue of the 'non-normative' is a significant one from the point of view of feminism. This unit will address aspects related to this issue and the responses of feminist theory to the non-normative.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Explain the concept of the 'normative' and what constitutes the normative;
- Infer who creates, validates, and perpetrates this category of normative and how;
- Find out if there is a commonly accepted model that is seen as being normative;
- Realize all that fall outside its realm and are accorded the position of the non-normative; and
- Explain how feminist theory has responded to the non-normative.

4.3 CONSTRUCTING THE NORMATIVE

In a patriarchal society, the institution of the family is posited as being the norm. The family sanctions heterosexuality and sexual relations within marriage with the aim of procreation. Consequently, the family is one of the most pivotal structures that control women in myriad ways by upholding a model of feminine behaviour. Feminine normativity carries a certain set of expectations that include being docile, self-sacrificing in the interest of the family and home, devoted to the husband and his needs, being a dedicated mother and other such ideals which create and systematically impose the model of normative sexuality through the feminine ideal. Further, the separation of the private and the public wherein the woman's position is set firmly in the private sphere of the house, seeks to physically curtail her movements.

Thus, through the model of the family, patriarchy controls women's desire, agency and body, by seeing it as the property of the man and linking it to family honour and position. Any attempt to deviate from the norm is severely punished. The most obvious example of this is perhaps the 'honour killings' that are prevalent in India. In addition, popular discourse surrounding the woman eulogizes the woman's body and idealizes her as goddess, mother, and nation while simultaneously using these images to enforce control. The woman's body thus becomes a site for social control where the nation, religion, and medicine control women's bodies in order to conform to ideas of normativity.

While generating and mobilizing discourse around the ideal woman, the family also systematically demonizes other models of the family that seek to disengage from heteronormativity and/or the norm of sexual union for reproduction. Consequently, any alternative family structure not only faces derision at the hands of society, but also confronts several hurdles when it comes to interacting

with institutions such as the legal and governmental framework. So, for example, families comprising of same-sex couples are allowed to marry only in a few countries and these families often experience severe bias while acquiring a home or while adopting and raising children, and meet several other impediments in their daily lives. Other non-normative relationships such as live-in relationships between heterosexual couples also face questions regarding property rights, child paternity, and rights of the woman, to name a few. What is significant here is that the state becomes an integral part of the machinery that validates the normative family model governed by the rules of heteronormativity.

4.3.1 Relationship between Normative, Race, Caste and Gender

While sexuality has been at the locus of debates regarding the non-normative, it is essential to recognize that several intersecting factors make up the norm. Class, caste, gender, race, religion, age, and health are some of the most obvious determinants. While gender is one of the major markers of identity, it is not the only one, and consequently, any discussion regarding gender normativity must factor in these other determinants as well. The normative then, is deeply embedded in the ways in which we fashion ourselves in our daily existence. To take a simple example, the conflation between beauty and fair skin, especially in India, defines the ideal of a beautiful woman as someone who is fair, slim, tall, etc. Black is not beautiful in the dominant section of society. The desire for fair skin translates into a manic obsession with fairness creams and other beauty products that seek to fulfill one of the many parameters of what constitutes beauty. In terms of class, as with caste, the normative will always be invested in the upper echelons of society. Poverty can never be the norm; neither can those who belong to the lower castes in a caste-ridden society that is prevalent in India.

To choose that which is not the norm, is to be forever relegated, through a series of intertwined symbiotic structures. Kate Bornstein, commenting on gender and oppression says:

It is like a caste structure— it includes many facets and many aspects of a person's life. The perfect gender is not just male, it is white, it is tall and of slim build, it has money and political power, sexual choice, it is fertile but has control of that fertility, and it is probably American and called Bill Clinton. (Whittle, 2006, p.202)

Simply put, being a part of the norm is to occupy a position of power.

4.3.2 Normative Sexuality: Heteronormativity

Over the years, the problematization of gender relations and sexual identity has led to sexuality being seen as a complex site that is shaped by social and personal experience. As opposed to the earlier conflation of the terms ‘sex’, ‘sexuality’ and ‘gender’, theorists began to recognize the differences between the biologically constructed identity and a socially constructed one. So, ‘sex’ is seen as a biological identity – male or female, and ‘sexuality’ takes into account an individual’s sexual orientation, behaviour and preference; and ‘gender’ is a part of the process of social construction.

Heteronormativity is based on the binary oppositions of gender where it presumes that there are only two sexes and that it is ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ for people of different sexes to be attracted to one another. Both these sexes are represented in their ideal characteristics and social institutions such as marriage and the family are organized around heterosexual relations. It is also heteronormativity that defines the propriety and impropriety of any sexual behaviour. Celia Kitzinger offers a definition, saying, “Heteronormativity refers, in sum, to the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted, ordinary phenomenon” (Kitzinger, 2005, p.478). For example, according to the traditional Hindu ideal, heterosexual relations within marriage, leading to procreation, would constitute a normative model of sexuality. Thus, same-sex couples comprise the non-normative deviants and alternative to the ideal heterosexual couple.

***Check Your Progress:** What do you understand by the term “normative”? Can you think of any examples to explain the role played by this notion in our everyday lives? Examine these examples critically.*

4.4 THE NON-NORMATIVE

In order to understand the vectors that define as well as disseminate the non-normative, we will first look at issues of sexuality while trying to understand non-normative sexuality and its relation to feminism. Secondly, we will discuss the non-normative with respect to the issue of caste in the Indian context.

Thirdly, we will attempt to look at the non-normative as it defines the body. Traditional ideals of beauty and the increasingly invasive power of the medical profession, especially as they impinge on women and govern their functioning, are some of the issues discussed in this section. And in the other sections of this unit, we will learn all these debates in a detailed manner too.

4.4.1 Homosexuality

It is interesting to note that the term 'heterosexual' comes into being only after the term 'homosexual', when 19th century sexologists began to construct theories that explored 'normal' and 'abnormal' sexualities. Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study* (1886) pathologized homosexuality in his work, seeing it and other 'perversions' like it as a sign of individual illness of a larger depraved society. It was in the 1892 translation of Krafft-Ebing's work that the term 'homosexuality' came into general usage. Sexuality, as seen by these sexologists was constructed in terms of the binaries of heterosexuality and homosexuality, where one was seen as inherently positive, normal and desirable; while the other, homosexuality, was only defined in terms of negativity.

Discussing the emergence of the category of homosexuality, Michel Foucault in his book, *The History of Sexuality* says:

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (Foucault, 1976, p.43)

For Foucault, the sexual classification of individuals is the result of the development of a regime of power. According to Foucault, power structures operate through classification and categorization. The sexual classification of individuals, become possible by relying on the medicalization of the sexually peculiar. This implies that those who are seen as sexually normative are treated as a separate category from those who are seen as sexually peculiar. Rather than just a description of behaviours, these categories and labels become attached to individuals in order to define and classify them, so that they can be controlled.

Sexuality then, as it was being labeled and classified with peculiar names by sexologists, was also increasingly seen as something that was characteristic of individuals and needed to be detected. But, while being oppressive, these sexual categories, especially those of 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual', also became new and empowering ways for individuals to identify themselves. It made possible what Foucault calls, "a 'reverse' discourse", wherein, "homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (Foucault, 1976, p.101).

4.4.2 Emergence of Lesbian and Gay Communities

Forging the links between the emergence of a specifically homosexual identity in the latter part of the 19th century with the new patterns of social organization that were being formed at the time, John D' Emilio in his path breaking essay, "Capitalism and Gay Identity", explores the ways in which capitalism facilitated the articulation of such an identity. According to him, the reorganization of the family structure, propelled by capitalism's spread of wage labour and capital, allows for the conditions that foster the separation of sexuality from what he calls, "the 'imperative' to procreate" (D'Emilio, 2009, p.104). This, in turn, made possible the rise of urban communities of lesbians and gay men. Thus, by the time of the Stonewall Riots in New York City in 1969, which sparked off the Gay Liberation Movement, huge crowds of lesbians and gay men could be mobilized.

D'Emilio recognizes that while it became significantly easier at the time for men and women to construct a personal life away from the constraints of the family, it was nonetheless more difficult for women, as they were still economically dependent on men. This recognition gestures towards a nuanced understanding of the lesbian movement, wherein instead of it being willy-nilly brought under the general rubric of the Gay Liberation Movement, it is acknowledged in terms of its own politics and struggle.

Historically, lesbians have occupied a somewhat uneasy position in social movements that organized protests on issues of gender and sexuality. The international women's and gay and lesbian movements were instrumental in raising awareness about concerns regarding the inequality of the sexes and the sidelining of gay issues. Both the women's movement and the gay rights movement questioned and sought to defy traditional beliefs regarding sexuality in order to destabilize the hegemony of heterosexuality. However, as Nitza Berkovitch and Sara Helman point out, "challenging heterosexuality did not inevitably lead to a critique of patriarchy" (Berkovitch & Helman, 2005, p.271). The gay movement largely privileged male sexuality and there were very few exceptions to this sort of gender hierarchy. Lesbian feminists argued for the specificity of the lesbian experience as an experience specific to women and criticized the assumption that lesbians and gay men share characteristics simply by virtue of being same-sex relationships. The shared rejection of heterosexuality alone was not enough to keep the community of gays and lesbians together.

On the other hand, feminists, in their questioning of societal roles and the inequality of the sexes did not question the idea of a 'natural' preference or that of heterosexuality as the norm. Thus, feeling estranged from both these

movements, lesbians felt the need to create a distinctively feminist lesbian politics, one that denaturalized heterosexuality and interrogated the creation of heterosexuality as the normative model of sexuality. Lesbianism then, was seen as being more than a sexual preference, it was a political choice. It defied the power equation that always existed between men and women, and in doing so, lesbianism posed the most radical challenge to the established order. Thus, significantly, it is from the standpoint of lesbian and gay theory that a critique of normative heterosexuality is usually undertaken in feminism.

4.4.3 Critique of Heteronormativity

Several lesbian feminist theorists questioned the ways in which the ideology of heteronormativity is ingrained into the collective psyche of women. They examined the ways in which society assails women with images of heterosexual romance from an early age itself, so that to desire anyone other than the member of the opposite sex is immediately deemed as 'unnatural'. Adrienne Rich's essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), marks an important moment as it urged a feminist reorientation to sexuality by studying oppression based on sexuality. She explores the enforcement and perpetration of heteronormativity by engaging with the work of Kathleen Barry. According to Barry, female indoctrination towards compulsory heterosexuality takes place primarily through the positing of 'love' as an emotion which centers on the primacy of male sexual desire. It is through this, she argues, that girls learn that, "the locus of sexual power is male" (Rich, 2009, p.189). This, in turn, becomes the basis for the assertion of the male sex-right to women. It is this right that, according to her, creates and defends sexual slavery:

In the mystique of the overpowering, all-conquering male sex-drive, the penis-with-a-life-of-its-own, is rooted the law of male sex-right to women, which justifies prostitution as a universal cultural assumption on the one hand, while defending sexual slavery within the family on the basis of "family privacy and cultural uniqueness" on the other. (Rich, 2009, p.189-190)

Thus compulsory heterosexuality functions as a regulatory mechanism that systematically disallows any thoughts regarding alternative gender roles while constantly legitimizing and reinforcing sexual slavery. As Barry points out:

The huge number of men engaged in these practices should be cause for declaration of an international emergency, a crisis in sexual violence. But what could be cause for alarm is instead accepted as normal sexual intercourse. (Rich, 2009, p.191)

Taking this critique further, Rich sees compulsory heterosexuality as being a lie, one that denies the reality and articulation of women's passion for women. She says:

The lie of compulsory female heterosexuality today afflicts not just feminist scholarship, but every profession, every reference work, every curriculum, every organizing attempt, every relationship or conversation over which it hovers. It creates, specifically, a profound falseness, hypocrisy, and hysteria in the heterosexual dialogue, for every heterosexual relationship is lived in the queasy strobe light of that lie. However we choose to identify ourselves, however we find ourselves labelled, it flickers across and distorts our lives. (Rich, 2009, p.199)

Rich proposes the empowering categories of 'lesbian experience' and 'lesbian continuum' as a response to the overarching hegemony of compulsory heterosexuality. 'Lesbian experience' signifies the historical presence of lesbians and the way in which the meaning of that existence is being continually created, and 'lesbian continuum' is seen as 'woman-identified experience', which includes a sort of sisterhood of women, that foregrounds the shared bonding against oppressive patriarchy amongst other experiences. Both these categories create an alternative bond that lies outside of norms of heterosexual behaviour.

Other theorists have also critiqued heterosexuality on the basis of the assumptions that it makes of gender binaries. In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler illustrates the performative nature of gender identity to mount a critique on the ways in which heterosexuality forces us to conform to heterosexual standards for identity. Gender, for Butler, is a social construct and is, therefore, open to contestation. It is thus the performance of gender that constitutes who we are. Drawing on Monique Wittig's notion of the 'heterosexual contract' and Rich's 'compulsory heterosexuality', Butler uses the term 'heterosexual matrix' to signify the power of heterosexuality as it defines natural and unnatural behaviour. She uses the term to:

...characterize a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (Butler, 1990, p.150)

Thus, through such enquiries about what constitutes gender, lesbian feminists saw heterosexuality as a model that made women define themselves through

men, pushing them ultimately towards maintaining the status quo. As all institutions such as religion, media, state, health, etc. sought to perpetrate heteronormativity, by not partaking in heteronormative practices in any way, lesbians saw themselves as holding the key to liberation from all oppression at the hands of heteronormative societies. Thus, it called for a complete cutting of ties from any form of male privilege— economic, social, and political.

The lesbian movement also urged the women's movement to address and recognize lesbianism as being more than just a "bedroom issue". Charlotte Bunch in her essay, "Lesbians in Revolt" points this out and says, "As long as straight women see lesbianism as a bedroom issue, they hold back the development of politics and strategies which would put an end to male supremacy and they give men an excuse for not dealing with their sexism" (Bunch, 1972, pp.8-9). According to many lesbian feminists, the problem with the women's liberation movement was that while it sought to create a community of women that combated the sexism in society, these women continued to maintain primary relationships with men. This was seen as oppressive for lesbian feminists as heteronormativity was seen as the basis for male supremacy and had to be done away with completely in order for there to be structural changes.

Furthermore, while attacking man and the patriarchal norms that delineated the role of a woman in society, feminists failed to recognize their universalizing stance. Issues such as race and class did not receive much consideration by the women who spoke to a universal sisterhood of women. Most feminist theorists were white and belonged to privileged backgrounds, thus failing to take into account cultural differences.

Despite having points of difference, both feminists and lesbian feminists had certain lacunae in their positions with respect to the acknowledgement of other identity positions. The issue of race, and the failure to sufficiently address it, was an obvious and glaring one. Cherrie Moraga wrote, "In this country, lesbianism is a poverty - as is being brown, as is being a woman, as is being just plain poor. The danger lies in ranking the oppressions. The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression" (Cited in Koyama, 2006, p.701). Both feminism and lesbianism were seen as privileging women's oppression as the sole marker of identity, thus viewing subjugation only in terms of sex. Critics such as bell hooks have drawn attention to the ways in which class plays a vital role in determining social behaviour.

Given the complexity of identity formation, several critics have attempted to question the categories by which we define ourselves. Donna Haraway's 1991

essay “A Cyborg Manifesto” offers the concept of a cyborg for feminists to deal with new technologies and their impact on our socio-cultural reality. Haraway responds to radical feminists such as Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich who sought to question patriarchy by examining the origins of the term and its functioning. According to Haraway, any attempt to define oneself by using essentialist categories is flawed as the categories themselves are socially mediated. She uses the metaphor of the cyborg to reject rigid boundaries and suggest that the development of information technology has made us all into cyborgs—human, not natural creations. Any essentialist category of identity—woman, class, race, by virtue of their being human creations, will be incomplete. So, the category of ‘woman’, for example, is implicated in power relations wherein the category itself will be constantly constituted by those in power. Such categories, in themselves, can be oppressive and silencing.

4.4.4 Transsexuals

While discussing non-normative relationships, it is essential to mention non-normative sexualities other than those of lesbians and gay men, such as transsexuals. For a long time, transsexuals were either relegated to the field of abnormal psychology or were seen as fascinating because of their cross-dressing. As part of the advocacy for gender expression, the term ‘transgender’ was coined in the 1980s. It was used by Virginia Prince to refer to individuals whose identities fell between ‘transvestite’ and ‘transsexual’. However, ‘transgender’ as defined by Leslie Feinberg, came to signify a term for all those people who embodied different genders from what was normative and those who were marginalized or oppressed as a result of it. It stood for, “an imagined community encompassing transsexuals, drag queens, butches, hermaphrodites, cross-dressers, masculine women, effeminate men, sissies, tomboys, and anybody else willing to be interpolated by the term, who felt compelled to answer the call to mobilization” (Stryker, 2006, p.4).

Transsexuals have a tenuous history with feminism. Several feminists tended to see transsexuality as a “false consciousness” (Janice Raymond in Stryker, 2006), as they were adopting masculine or feminine stereotypes and altering their bodies in order to do so. It questioned some very basic assumptions—how can a person born with male genitalia claim to be a woman, when it defies the biological basis for being a woman? So, the basic belief of feminists, of there being two sexes and two genders, is thrown into question by the presence of transsexuals and propelled them to be seen as, “the visible symptoms of a disturbed gender system” (Raymond in Stryker, 2006, p.4). The idea that transsexuals become neither men nor women through their surgical reconstructions but rather become pastiches embodying imagined masculinities or femininities is one major hurdle in their social acceptance.

Transsexuals beyond the binaries of sex and gender

As you may have noted from the above, what is lacking is an understanding that sex and gender are fundamentally different for transsexuals. Stephen Whittle points out:

The default assumption that underlies any notion of a transgendered existence is that gender is immutable and it is fixed through biological constraints, and social construction merely affects any representation that the biological may take. This is also the default assumption of feminism—biology is destiny, no matter that in the same breath we say that it is not. (Whittle, 2006, p.199-200)

It is thus pertinent for both feminism and lesbianism to recognize the contribution of women of colour, working class women, and women with disabilities in the fight against women's oppression. Their involvement has provided new direction to a movement that needed to think beyond the binaries of sex and gender. The acknowledgement is fairly recent and there still needs to be an articulation of a commitment to their struggle. Further, feminists and lesbians also need to expand the boundaries of women's experience in order to include transsexuals. Instead of being threatening entities with their questioning of the body as a primary source of identity, their unique positionality needs to be recognized. As Koyama succinctly puts it, "...it is never feminist when some women are silenced and sacrificed to make room for the more privileged women" (Koyama, 2006, p.703).

4.4.5 Non-Normative within Normative Sexuality

Within normative sexuality, there can be several relationships that are considered to be non-normative. Describing the highly relative nature of what is taken as normative or non-normative by a particular social group, Ofelia Schutte gives the example of noticeable age difference in a heterosexual relationship where it is gender normative for the older person in the relationship to be male and the younger to be female. She says, "The converse of this model is non-normative in part because it questions the normative link between sexuality and reproduction and because it defines the normative, youth-oriented, images of female attractiveness and beauty imposed on us by a masculine-dominant culture" (Schutte, 1997, p.43).

Live-in relationships provide another example. Even though a majority of live-in relationships are heterosexual arrangements, their acceptability in the Indian context is highly problematic. Posing an alternative to the institution of marriage, these relationships are highly subversive as they foreground individual

choice at several levels—from pre-marital to doing away with boundaries of class and caste as the determining factors of union based on mutual consent. Shunned by the protectors and champions of traditional norms and morality, live-in relationships face several problems in their functioning. From finding accommodation to property rights, couples in these relationships are often asked to produce a marriage certificate. Even Hindi cinema's engagement with live-in relationships is problematic and skewed at best.

The status of live-in relationships has come under scrutiny in recent times. Although such relationships are not seen as being an offence, they are not accorded the same status that married couples are either. So, issues such as domestic violence and property rights for women become highly contested in such relationships. Though there are certain cases where the courts have endorsed the right of a woman to claim maintenance from the man after being in a live-in relationship for several years, this matter is problematic. It is felt by many that relationships that are based solely on individual choice cannot enjoy the same status and rights as the socially sanctified institution of marriage.

***Check your Progress:** How would you explain the notion of the “non-normative” in terms of sexuality? Discuss this with the help of examples which illustrate some of the issues that you have read about so far.*

4.5 ‘THE DOWNTRODDEN AMONG THE DOWNTRODDEN’: A CASTE GENDERED DEBATE

In India, the caste system is the oldest hierarchical system that has systematically relegated people to certain social spaces on the basis of their caste. As mentioned in the introduction, caste is an important marker of identity that fixes the normative with the higher castes. Women, who occupy a secondary status under patriarchy, are doubly oppressed under the caste system. It has been said that the status of dalit women in India is that of being the downtrodden among the downtrodden, the ones who are marginalized at several levels. Being a dalit woman means being subjected to the inequalities that come with belonging to a lower class, facing the hostility that society feels towards the lowest class as well as the patriarchal control that seeks to regulate their movements and their bodies, thus facing the cumulative oppression of their gender, class, and caste.

In her essay 'Dalit Women: The Downtrodden Among the Downtrodden' (2008), Ruth Manorama lists four features of caste that have a significant impact on gender. According to her, social division of labour, marriage alliances and the control of sexuality therein, hierarchical relations between caste, and ideas of purity prescribing social interaction, form the features that constrain women within the hierarchy of caste.

Female sexuality, deemed as being dangerous and threatening to the social order, attains new dimensions in the context of caste where there is the additional threat of the purity of the bloodline being sullied. Marriage alliances, like elsewhere, become a way of establishing and strengthening social networks.

In the context of caste, however, marriage becomes doubly significant as the most forceful way of maintaining caste ideology. The metaphor of an earthen pot is often used to signify women's bodies. Just like the pot, a woman becomes a vessel that carries the seed of the next generation and can be easily defiled and broken. Emphasizing the sexual susceptibility, a woman's body becomes a heavily guarded site that has the potential to 'pollute' the caste. Sexual intercourse with a lower caste man can thus destabilize caste hierarchy. Upper caste women, then, are more vulnerable to such defiling than women belonging to the lower castes. As the adage points out, 'Superior seed can fall on an inferior field but inferior seed cannot fall on a superior field' (Dube, 2008, p.471). Thus, fearing the danger of such subversion, marriage within the caste is strictly imposed as the norm, and non-normative relationships, culminating in inter-caste marriages, are severely punished. This is why Ambedkar felt that inter-caste marriage was the most effective way of annihilating caste. He observed:

Where society is already well-knit by other ties, marriage is an ordinary incident of life. But where society is cut asunder, marriage as a binding force becomes a matter of urgent necessity. The *real remedy for breaking Caste is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste.*

[Emphasis in the original]. (Rao, 2003, p.23).

The non-normativity of inter-caste marriages is evident from the fact that even in recent times, there are dire consequences to such an act. In recent times, several killings related to inter-caste marriages have been reported. In fact, the killing of the bride and groom involved is usually done in the most gruesome manner possible to serve as a warning to those inclined to follow their errant ways. Family members, in their desire to salvage the family honour, are often responsible for murdering the miscreants. The extent of the

community outrage can be judged from the fact that communities do not condone these brutal acts; instead they usually deem it necessary.

As always, the imperative to maintain sexual relations within the caste bear down on women much more than on men. By engaging in sexual relations with lower caste women, upper class men are able to bypass caste ideology. Sexual violence and the assertion of power therein is claimed as a right by men of the upper castes. So, control of resources and caste hierarchy become integral factors that underlie sexual exploitation. Historically, this can be seen in the '*devadasi*' system where religious explanations were given for the systematic sexual exploitation of women from dalit communities.

As has been pointed out in the earlier section, the universalizing stance of feminism came under severe attack in the 1980s and 1990s by black feminists who felt that their voice was being appropriated by privileged white women. In the Indian context, the engagement of women's movements with the lives and concerns of dalit women has also remained rather cursory. The National Women's Conference that was started in 1982, took up the dalit women as a sub-theme only in 1994 in its fifth conference. Women's movements have clubbed dalit women's issues under the general fight for women's right to education, employment, property and land ownership, justice, etc. Although many of the concerns overlap, specific issues that arise of the double bind of caste and gender have not found a voice within the movements.

The movement for dalit rights, while articulating the struggle against caste oppression and hierarchy, also subsumed the particularity of the position of dalit women. It claimed that dalit women enjoy more liberty than other women by virtue of their contribution to the family income. The necessity to work due to sheer poverty accorded them the freedom to work alongside men and outside of their home in various occupations. But, despite this, they are denied equal wages and suffer the gender inequality that arises out of patriarchal control. So, while the main impetus in the dalit movement is to fight for entitlement to land or insuring minimum wages, women's right to own property or issues of equal wages regardless of gender do not take precedence. Raising the dalit women's question within the movement is then considered as having the potential to dilute the larger cause that may weaken the movement itself, where caste will be sidetracked by gender.

As a response to this glaring lack, several autonomous dalit women's organizations asserted themselves in the 1990s. In his article, "Dalit Women Talk Differently", Gopal Guru calls for an understanding of the specificity of dalit women's subjugation. Dalit women are subject to two distinctly patriarchal structures— one being the brahminical form of patriarchy that oppresses them

on the basis of their caste, and the second being more private forms of control by dalit men who control the sexual and economic labour of women. Addressing the failure of both anti-caste and feminist movements to take cognizance of their particular issues, dalit Bahujan feminists draw attention to the relationship between caste ideology, gender relations, and broader struggles for democracy and social justice.

The dalit feminist standpoint needs to be included by non-dalit feminists so as to incorporate the experience of the marginalized within non-dalit feminist theory. The issue of inter-caste marriage also needs to be addressed to do away with the compartmentalized and divisive way of looking at society. The specificities of caste, class, and culture need to be factored in by women's movements to reach out to those who remain the downtrodden of the downtrodden in society.

4.6 'THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL'

One of the main concerns of feminism has been the woman's right over her body. The woman's body, throughout history, has been socially constructed, moulded, and regulated by both patriarchy and capitalism. From childhood, girls are taught to be conscious of their bodies and bodily functions. They are encouraged to learn feminine traits and behave in culturally normative ways. Further, within reproductive heteronormativity, a woman's primary role is seen as being that of a mother, a role that validates her identity as a woman. Women who are unable to bear children consequently face ostracism by society and are labeled as not being 'normal'.

The second wave of feminism addressed the concerns of a woman's right over her body and raised questions about beauty in order to protest against the way in which women are objectified and judged primarily on appearance. What makes one beautiful or what is seen as being beautiful is highly subjective and is dependent on a culture's notions of beauty. Yet, historically, strict norms of beauty have been laid out for women to conform. In fact, the parameters of beauty weigh down upon women in severely oppressive ways. This is most evident when it comes to the marriage market. The term 'marriage market' is used here very consciously as the institution of marriage is the most obvious and deeply ingrained way in which the norms of beauty circulate. Matrimonial advertisements across the country lay down the picture of the sought after bride as being fair, slim, beautiful, and homely. It is pertinent to note that standards of beauty do not apply to men in such a systematic fashion. The only pressing consideration while opting for a suitable groom is a financial one. Matrimonial advertisements ask the man to be financially stable and

thus, reaffirm their place in the public sphere. Thus, gender roles remain firmly entrenched in the binary opposition wherein the woman is expected to fulfill the role of a housekeeper and the man, that of the breadwinner.

In her article, “Women, Embodiment and Personhood” (2010), Maithreyi Krishnaraj looks at the way in which cultural notions of beauty are embedded in the psyche of women and how women are made to go to extreme lengths to conform to the prescribed body. Recalling an exhibition displaying the history of women conforming to oppressive standards of beauty, she says:

...from foot binding in China, to whale bone corsets in England to make the waist narrow, to wearing heavy earrings to lengthen the ear lobes among tribals within India, to copper rings around the neck to lengthen the necks in sub-Saharan Africa...the story is endless. (Krishnaraj, 2010, p. 41)

Resisting such labels and expectations, the women’s movement fought for women’s right for self-determination. Seeing the ideal of beauty as a patriarchal construct of what men desire in women, feminists challenged the ideal itself.

Feminist Critique

In the West, the feminist critique of make-up and other beauty practices was a part of the movement in the 1960s. In America, women protested against beauty pageants, as they were seen as pandering to feminine normativity with respect to the body. In 1968 and then in the following year, protesters gathered to demonstrate against the Miss America pageant, held at Atlantic City. For them, beauty contests epitomized the ways in which women are objectified and judged primarily on the basis of their appearance. This propelled feminists to take up the slogan ‘All women are beautiful’. This position was however challenged in the 1980s and 1990s when liberal feminists saw the realm of the private as an arena where women could exercise their agency and choice. Thus, for example, choosing to buy make-up was seen as an affirmative practice as it emphasized the choice that women could exercise over their lives. Further, if gender is socially constructed and performative, as suggested by postmodern theorists such as Butler, then some argued that if beauty practices were adopted in disruptive ways, then it held the potential of becoming transgressive.

Such a distinction between the public and the private sphere has been contested aggressively by feminists across the world. While liberal feminists saw the private as a domain that was free from politics and therefore a sphere where women could exercise their choice, radical feminists felt that such a distinction

facilitates patriarchy as it keeps the politics of male power hidden under the guise of it being a private realm. As a result, fundamental issues such as marital rape and domestic violence are not dealt with under the pretext that it is a 'personal matter'. The slogan, 'the personal is political', enabled women to recognize that the ways in which male dominance was deeply embedded in the ways in which women looked at and constructed themselves. Sheila Jeffreys in her book *Beauty and Misogyny* elaborates:

The concept that the personal is political enabled feminists to understand the ways in which the workings of male dominance penetrated into their relationships with men. They could recognize how the power dynamics of male dominance made heterosexuality into a political institution, constructed male and female sexuality, and the ways in which women felt about their bodies and themselves. (Jeffreys, 2005, p.11)

According to Jeffreys, the feminist critique of beauty has been undermined by postmodern ideas that have led to a disregard for the materiality of power relations. The effect of such beliefs has been that women are now seen as having the power to 'play' with beauty practices. Within this framework, fashion magazines and popular culture are seen as inspiring creative choices rather than being integral in disseminating dominant ideology.

It is interesting to note that the cosmetics industry gained massive popularity in the United States in the 1920s and 30s, as this was the time when women were entering the public workspace. This correlation is interesting as it gestures towards the idea that women were accepted from the relegated position of the private to the public, but only if they ascribed to normative, masculine ideals of beauty.

From the pursuit of fashion fuelled by images of waif-like models to surgically enhanced body parts and the increasingly commonplace disorders like bulimia and anorexia, the pursuit of beauty places huge demands on women to conform to masculine aesthetics. The role of media is significant as it bombards people with tantalizing images of perfect women with perfect bodies. Furthermore, this normative prescribed body is central to the ways in which patriarchy, capitalism and the state exercise control over the woman's body.

Aside from beauty practices, the normative feminine ideal also imposes itself through the function of reproduction. Marriage and child-bearing are identified as being the trajectory that every woman's life must 'normally' follow. In fact, the inability to produce a child can even become grounds for the breaking up of a marriage wherein the onus of the blame is put on the woman.

Historically, the anxiety over women's bodies has led to an increased medicalization of women's diseases and ailments. Seen as mysterious sites that needed to be clinically mapped and understood, the woman's body becomes a site for medical intervention and control. Hysteria, for example, was seen as being an exclusively female disease and various disorders were seen as emanating from this disease in women. In the late 19th century, women were believed to be prone to certain nervous disorders that were seriously aggravated by the use of their mental and creative faculties.

Modern medicine, in collusion with capitalist enterprise, has made the woman's body the site for experimentation and business. While the pressure to look a certain way has led to beauty practices adopted by women becoming more invasive and brutal, the necessity to produce children has led to a boom in business for fertility clinics that promise results by subjecting women's bodies to a series of interventions. In their article, 'Body, Gender and Sexuality: Politics of Being and Belonging', Sabala and Gopal discuss the engagement of the women's movement with the role of the state in its attempt to control women's bodies:

The women's health movement in its critique of the state's targeted population control has campaigned against reduction of women's roles to being just mothers, while also reducing women's bodies as sites of "decreasing the nation's numbers." (Sabala, 2010, p.47)

4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we learnt that while the privileging of heterosexuality in patriarchal societies is evident, the recognition that normative sexuality and heterosexuality are not interchangeable terms is crucial. The way forward perhaps lies in critically engaging with issues of non-normative sexuality instead of sweeping them under the carpet or demonizing them. Feminist thought, in its turn, needs to engage with categories of gender and sexuality and rethink the easy binaries that are no longer possible. This will allow both men and women to forge bonds that will ultimately enable alternative family structures and community living. This will, in many ways, lead to the ideal of most feminists - that of equitable gender relations in a society ridden by differences of caste, class and gender.

4.8 GLOSSARY

Normative : It refers to prescribing or establishing the norms.

- Heteronormativity** : It explores the privileging of sexual discourse of opposite-sex relationship by attributing bias towards the sexual discourse of same-sex relationship.
- Object** : It refers to the object of one's sexual desire. For instance, Freud refers to mother as the object-choice. It is the earliest association.
- Perversion** : It refers to the search for "abnormal" sexual objects in the absence of repression. It denotes the difference of individuals from what the society has constituted as 'normal'.
- Transsexual** : A person who crosses over from one sex into the other. They undergo sex surgery to change the sex organs. Thus, they become fully part of the new and changed sex role or identity.

4.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Explain and discuss the categories of the 'normative' and 'non-normative' by locating your discussion within the general debate surrounding these categories?
- 2) Based on your understanding, summarize the major theoretical contributions to feminist and non-normative discourse?
- 3) How can you relate what you discussed in Q. 2 above to caste-gendered discourse in India?
- 4) How does patriarchy determine the way in which women look at their bodies?
- 5) Why are dalit women seen as being 'the downtrodden among the downtrodden'? Discuss.

4.10 REFERENCES

Berkovitch, Nitza & Sara, Helman (2005). 'Global Social Movements'. In Philomena Essed, David Theo Goldberg & Audrey Kobayashi (Eds). *A Companion to Gender Studies*. Malden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing.

Bunch, Charlotte (1972, January). 'Lesbians in Revolt'. *The Furies: Lesbian/Feminist Monthly*, Vol.1, 8-9. Retrieved from <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/furies/>

- Butler, Judith (1990). *Gender Trouble*. New York and London: Routledge .
- D’Emilio, John (2009). ‘Capitalism and Gay Identity’. In Ann Snitow, Christine Sansell & Sharon Thompson (Eds.), *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. Delhi: Aakar Books.
- Dube, Leela (2008). ‘Caste and Women’. In Mary E. John (Ed.), *Women’s Studies in India: A Reader*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, Michel (1978). *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. London: Random House.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins (2003). ‘Why I Wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper”?’ In Nina Baym (Eds.), *The Norton Anthology of American Literature 1865-1914*. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Guru, Gopal (1995, Oct.14-21). ‘Dalit Women Talk Differently’. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 30 (41/42), 2548-2550. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4403327>
- Haraway, Donna (2006). ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’. In Susan Stryker & Stephen Whittle (Eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader*. (pp.103-118). New York & London: Routledge.
- Jeffreys, Sheila (2005). *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Practices in the West*. East Sussex: Routledge.
- Kitzinger, Celia (2005, November). ‘Heteronormativity in Action: Reproducing the Heterosexual Nuclear Family in After-Hours Medical Calls’. *Social Problems*, 52(4), 477-498.
- Koyama, Emi (2006). ‘Whose Feminism Is It Anyway?: The Unspoken Racism of the Trans Inclusion Debate’. In Susan Stryker & Stephen Whittle (Eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Krishnaraj, Maithreyi (2010, April 24-30). ‘Women, Embodiment and Personhood’. *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLV(17), 39-42.
- Manorama, Ruth (2008). ‘Dalit Women: The Downtrodden Among the Downtrodden’. In Mary E. John (Ed.), *Women’s Studies in India: A Reader*. (pp. 455-466). New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Rao, Anupama (2003). (Ed.). *Gender and Caste*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Rich, Adrienne (2009). 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence'. In Ann Snitow, Christine Sansell & Sharon Thompson (Eds.), *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. Delhi: Aakar Books.

Sabala, Meena, Gopal (2010, April). 'Body, Gender and Sexuality: Politics of Being and Belonging'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45(17), 24-30, 43-51.

Schutte, Ofelia (1997, Winter). 'A critique of Normative Heterosexuality: Identity, Embodiment, and Sexual Difference in Beauvoir and Irigaray'. *Hypatia*. 12(1), 40-62.

Stryker, Susan (2006). '(De) Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies'. In Susan Stryker & Stephen Whittle (Eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader*. (pp.1-17). New York and London: Routledge.

Whittle, Stephen (2006). 'Where did We Go Wrong?: Feminism and Trans Theory— Two Teams on the Same Side?'. In Susan Stryker & Stephen Whittle (Eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader*. (pp.194-202). New York and London: Routledge.

4.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Barry, Kathleen (1979). *Female Sexual Slavery*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Cranny-Francis, Anne et al (2003). (Eds.) *Gender Studies: Terms and Debates*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Essed, Philomena, David Theo Goldberg, Audrey Kobayashi (2009). (Eds.) *A Companion to Gender Studies*. Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.

UNIT 5 DISABILITY AND FEMINISM

Renu Addlakha & Shubhangi Vaidya

Structure

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Objectives
- 5.3 Introducing Disability
- 5.4 Disability in India
- 5.5 Gender and Disability in India
- 5.6 Disability and Feminism
- 5.7 Feminist Disability Studies
- 5.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.9 Glossary
- 5.10 Unit End Questions
- 5.11 References
- 5.12 Suggested Readings

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Disability challenges our fundamental notions of reality, the world, culture, and most importantly, our own bodies. Disability has been historically viewed as a physical or mental limitation affecting an individual. Spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, blindness, deafness and speech disorders, amputation, mental retardation, autism, etc. are some examples of disabling conditions. Current perspectives move beyond viewing disability as an individual limitation to looking at it as a social issue that is the outcome of social discrimination and stigmatisation.

More importantly, women with disabilities suffer the triple discrimination of being women, being disabled, and being poor. In this unit, key feminist concepts of gender roles, body image, sexuality, and care are used to analyse the impact of disability on women. Beginning with an understanding of the concept of disability, you will read more specifically about disability in India, its relationship to questions of gender, and the inter-relationships between disability and feminism. Through a feminist perspective, we will question and challenge dominant assumptions about disability so that we arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the inter-play between gender and disability.

5.2 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you should be able to:

- Broadly define the concept of disability;
- Describe a range of discriminations faced by people, particularly, women with disabilities;
- Explain the relationship between feminism and disability; and
- Identify the major feminist disability scholars and describe their important contributions to making disability an agenda of the feminist movement.

5.3 INTRODUCING DISABILITY

After women, disabled persons represent the largest minority group in society particularly in the light of the fact the chances of developing a disability increase exponentially as one grows older. Thus, in a way, everyone is only temporarily able-bodied in the course of the lifespan. Furthermore, accidents and injuries are a major source of injury. Therefore, disability is not a unique experience of particular individuals labelled as disabled but of each one of us at some point in our lives.

Disabled persons are also not a homogeneous group: type and degree of disability, gender, class, caste, race, ethnicity, sexuality, residence, and other cross-cutting social, economic, political and cultural factors frame the experience, perception, and understanding of disability as a phenomenon involving multiple forms of oppression. But what is a disability and what does it mean to be disabled in the first place? Disabilities may be congenital or from birth. For instance, most mental retardation is congenital. Malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies may result in disabling conditions in children in the form of stunted physical and mental growth. When disabilities are acquired later in life due to accidents, injuries or advancing age, they may be characterised by episodic upsurge of symptoms and/or progressive degeneration. Many mental illnesses like schizophrenia, multiple sclerosis, and Alzheimer disease fall in this category. A disability may be static such as the loss of limb due to an amputation. Then there are also hidden and visible disabilities. Diabetes and epilepsy are hidden disabilities while leprosy and blindness are visible conditions. One of the bones of contention in defining the concept of disability is how to conceptualise the disabling consequences of diseases, particularly chronic diseases, within the disability paradigm. In parts of the world conditions like diabetes, cardiovascular disease and HIV/AIDS are legally recognised as disabilities, while in other places including

India, the legal regime on disability is more restrictive and only recognises a handful of physical, sensory and mental impairments as disabilities. Nonetheless, irrespective of the conditions recognised as disabilities, a disability, generally, has two components, i.e. the medical limitation and social prejudice, which often gets translated into discriminatory behaviour towards the disabled person. In legal documents and policy statements, disability is defined in terms of what qualifies for public assistance.

Now that you have a broad understanding of the concept of disability, let us look more specifically at disability in the Indian context.

5.4 DISABILITY IN INDIA

Persons with disabilities are the most neglected and disempowered section of the population. Due to their marginalised status, they are denied the fundamental civil, political, social and economic rights that are the prerogative of all citizens in a democracy. The plight of women with disabilities is even worse, since they have to confront the double oppression of gender and disability. Indeed not only are they a socially invisible category but their plight is worse than both men with disabilities and other non-disabled women.

Conservative estimates show that 18.49 to 21.92 million persons suffer from some form of disability in India accounting for 1.8 to 2.1% of the total population (census of India 2001)¹. Using a wider definition of disability which includes conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 6%-10% of the population suffers from identifiable physical or mental disability. That comes to over 70 million persons in India. It should be noted that estimates of the total number of persons with disabilities in a country vary depending on the definition of disability used, degree of impairment, survey methodology including use of scientific instruments for identification and measurement of the disabling conditions. Such phenomena as war, ethnic conflict, HIV/AIDS, industrial injuries, and road accidents are increasing the number of disabled persons. Ironically, enhanced life expectancy has increased manifold the incidence of old age-related, chronic disease induced disabilities worldwide as well.

Historically, there has been a deep-rooted cultural antipathy to persons with disabilities. Throughout the ages, the disabled have been looked down upon with disdain, almost as if they were sub-human. They have been portrayed as medical anomalies, helpless victims and a lifelong burden for family and society. Even in religion and mythology, negative characters were attributed some form of deformity, be it Manthara, the hunchback in the *Ramayana* or Shakuni,

the “lame” of the *Mahabharata*. Indeed, the law of karma decreed that being disabled was the just retribution for past misdeeds. Such constructions of the disabled by the non-disabled has the dual effect of not only justifying the complete marginalisation and disempowerment of a whole population group, but also leads to the internalisation of such negative stereotypes by the disabled themselves. This acceptance translates into passivity, dependency, isolation, low self-esteem, and a complete loss of initiative. Pity, segregation, discrimination, and stigmatisation became normalised in the management of persons with disabilities. Needless to say the plight of women with disabilities is even worse.

Instead of giving rights to disabled citizens and empowering them, a culture of charity and welfare has been systematically promoted in India since the colonial period. Medical rehabilitation including distribution of assistive aids and appliances, special schools, vocational training in low-end occupations and sheltered employment, have been the pillars of state policy for the disabled. Furthermore, electoral politics of caste and gender have pushed the disabled to the margins of the political landscape making them a weak political constituency. They have in fact been systematically disenfranchised by the political system. Things began to change marginally after 1981 (International Year of Disabled Persons) when the issue of disability was opened up at the national level. The changing international climate focussing on human rights and empowerment of marginal groups impelled the government to make some policy changes such as token reservations in educational institutions and employment. But real progress in the form of concrete legislation to deliver the promise of equality of opportunity and social justice only came in 1995 with the passage of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities and full Participation) Act. Other legislation soon followed. One of the positive outcomes of economic liberalisation and globalisation has been the introduction of a view of disability as a human right and development issue rather than simply a matter of charity and welfare. This perspective is slowly entering deliberations primarily due to the efforts of voluntary groups like the Disability Rights Group in Delhi (a cross-disability coalition of NGOs working in different parts of the country, playing a pivotal advocacy role) that lobbied with the government both for passage of the 1995 legislation, and for the incorporation of disability in the 2001 Census.

In the following section, let us attempt to draw some connections between what you have read above, i.e. disability in India, and questions of gender.

5.5 GENDER AND DISABILITY IN INDIA

How a person with a disability experiences the condition and is perceived by others is largely dependent on whether s/he is male or female. For instance, Michelle Fine and Adrienne Asch point out that women with disabilities experience “sexism without the pedestal” (1988, p.1) , i.e. they are doubly disadvantaged because not only do they experience disability- linked discrimination but they experience sexism without any of the recompense that non-disabled women may claim as wives and mothers. Men with disabilities also experience a similar assault on their masculinity. For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between masculinity and disability, refer to the unit entitled ‘Disabled Masculinity’ (Block 2, Unit 3 in MWG 004).

The 2001 Census estimates that there are over nine million women with disabilities in India constituting 3.5% of the population. Some researches estimate that there are over 35 million women with disabilities in India (Bacquer & Sharma, 1997). Others put the figure at 20 million, 98% of the disabled are illiterate: less than 1% can avail healthcare and rehabilitation services (ActionAid, 2003, p.15). But these statistics are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to gauging the level of neglect, isolation stigma and deprivation that characterise their lives. The majority of women with disabilities in India suffer the triple discrimination of being female, being disabled and being poor.

While being a man and being disabled are very incongruous, being female and being disabled also implies a certain level of continuity as both are to varying degrees associated with notions of weakness, passivity, and dependence. But the likeness is only superficial because a disabled woman is also considered incapable of fulfilling the normative feminine roles of homemaker, wife and mother. Then, she also does not fit the stereotype of the normal woman in terms of physical appearance. Since women embody family honour, disabled girls are kept hidden at home by families and denied basic rights to mobility, education, and employment. They are less likely to be given in marriage than disabled men. Doubts around the capacity of women with disabilities to be sexual partners, homemakers and mothers abound. They are not considered capable of performing household chores, efficiently, having meaningful sexual relationships or producing and rearing healthy children. Under these circumstances, they may be married off to older already married or men in poor health. In short, women with disabilities do not have the same options of marriage and motherhood as non-disabled women. Being nurturing and caring are core characteristics of normative constructions of femininity, but women

with disabilities are themselves in need of care. This inversion reduces them to the status of being lesser than women.

Being powerless, isolated and anonymous, women with disabilities are extremely vulnerable to abuse and violence. In addition, help in activities of daily living like dressing, eating, and other bodily activities, renders the disabled woman more vulnerable to abuse both at home and in institutions. She will be less able to defend herself in a risky situation because she may not be able to run or scream for help. Then, persons with developmental disabilities may be too trusting of others and hence may be easier to trick, bribe or coerce. They may not understand differences between sexual and non-sexual tactile behaviour. Persons with speech and hearing difficulties may have limited communication skills to report abuse. Furthermore, since disabled persons are often taught to be obedient, passive, and to control their behaviour, this will render them easy victims

Women with disabilities face violations of their rights at every level. They are considered a financial burden and social liability by their families; they are denied opportunities to move outside the home, and have access to education; they are viewed as asexual, helpless and dependant; their vulnerability to physical, sexual and emotional abuse is enormous; their aspirations for marriage and parenthood often denied; they grow up ensconced within the walls of home or special institutions isolated and neglected with no hope of a normal life. A poignant picture of their plight is depicted in the recent Bollywood movie *Black* in which social class and family compassion are only partially successful in alleviating the life of the female protagonist who has multiple disabilities.

Although a rights-based approach has entered the disability rights movement, the specific concerns of women with disabilities have not yet found a place neither in the government policies and programmes nor in the voluntary sector. Legislation is a key tool for social empowerment but existing legislation on disability is silent when it comes to the concerns of women. Ironically or expectedly, the disabled rights movement all over the world including India is male dominated. It may even be blatantly sexist. Even within the women's movement, women with disabilities rarely figured as a distinct group in international covenants until the Beijing declaration in 1995. The Beijing document, *Platform for Action*, specifies women with disabilities as a particularly vulnerable group with little access to information on their fundamental rights. This is a serious lacuna, which needs to be rectified at various levels. One of the most important features of *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which was passed by

the General Assembly in 2006, is the incorporation of a separate article on women with disabilities. Being a signatory to this Convention, the India state is henceforth duty bound to incorporate a gender perspective in all its policies and programme in the disability sector.

Check Your Progress: What are some of the reasons which make women with disabilities especially vulnerable? Try to explain with the help of your own examples - either from real-life situations, or from books that you may have read, or films/movies that you might have seen.

5.6 DISABILITY AND FEMINISM

Even though the principle of the personal is political shows up very starkly in the way in which disabled women are portrayed in society, they have been missing from the mainstream agenda of feminism. Women's studies all over the world including India has tended to reflect a non-disabled or able bodied perspective, and it is this perception that has generated a critique within feminism itself by women with disabilities. The critique of feminism from the disability perspective has been done through key feminist concepts of gender roles, body image, sexuality and care.

Feminists with disabilities like Jenny Morris (1992) pointed out that disabled persons were rarely considered physically attractive. In fact, asexuality is intrinsically associated with persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities. According to Harlan Hahn (1988), desexualisation results in asexual objectification (as against the sexual objectification of women critiqued by feminists). Since physical appearance is so critical for a woman's identity, a negative body image will necessarily result in developing a negative self image undermining self confidence and increasing the sense of worthlessness. Furthermore, the denial of disabled women's sexuality and expulsion from traditional gender roles has not protected them from the threat of male violence, which is actually exacerbated due to their relative powerless position in society. According to Fine and Asch:

“The popular view of women with disabilities has been one mixed with repugnance. Perceiving disabled women as childlike, helpless, and victimised, non-disabled feminists have severed them from the sisterhood in an effort to advance more powerful, competent and appealing female icons (1988, p.4).

Furthermore, heterosexuality, work, and motherhood that are 'normally' associated with women in general were not used to describe women with disabilities who were uniformly considered to be passive, dependent, and deprived. Feminists have critiqued the traditional roles of daughters, wives, and mothers as oppressive but these may be the very roles that women with disabilities aspire to precisely because they are denied to them. Fine and Asch refer to this as 'pervasive rolelessness', the lot of women with disabilities. Nasa Begum (1992) points out that access to conventional gender roles is an issue for disabled women. Consequently, the feminist struggle against the oppression of the institutions of marriage, family and childcare will be different for women with disabilities.

Even in the enumeration of differences based on colour (white/black women), ethnicity (Jewish women), class (upper class/working class), and sexuality (heterosexual/lesbian women), when disability is added, the reality of subjective experience is rarely captured leading to further objectification and alienation of women with disabilities. If diversity of experiences and forms of oppression are the real building blocks of feminist research, then the omission of disability is a major lacuna. As Morris vehemently points out:

Disabled people - both men and women - have little opportunity to portray our own experiences within the general culture - or within radical political movements. Our experience is isolated, individualized ; the definition which society places on us centre on non-disabled people' s judgements of individual capacities and personalities and are dominated by what disability means to non-disabled people. This lack of a voice, of the representation of our subjective reality, means that it is difficult for non-disabled feminists to incorporate our reality into their research, their theories; unless it is in terms of the way the non-disabled world sees us. (1993, p. 59).

Under these circumstances how can the standpoint of disabled women be understood if they are an absent subject? And the knowledge thus produced is likely to be alienated. For instance, in the feminist research on care-giving (Davis, 1984), the focus has been on women as carers, not as those cared for. This in turn translates in the violation of the right to motherhood of disabled women because they are viewed as incapable of caring.

Many disabled persons including disabled feminists are of the view that disability can also be a source of strength, celebration and empowerment like race and class when it is viewed through the subjective lens of those directly experiencing it rather than the story of a perpetual passive victim. Only when this experience is politicised, can it become the springboard for genuine participation, integration, and empowerment of disabled persons.

There is no doubt that feminist categories of analysis and perspectives of analysis of the body help to illuminate the personal and social dimensions of disability. For instance, feminist ethics questions the notion of independence as a desirable, even viable category (Kittay, 1999). In her detailed analysis of disability constituted as a form of abnormality in cultural representations), Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2002) locates feminist disability studies within the broader arena of identity politics and the body. Feminist disability studies foreground the ability/disability binary as a category of analysis, questioning the notion of biological normality and highlighting the socially constructed nature of the body.

5.7 FEMINIST DISABILITY STUDIES

The previous sections have broadly mapped the intersections between gender and disability and given you an insight into the manner in which feminist thought and disability perspectives can mutually enrich and expand each other.

This section will introduce you to some seminal contributions in the field of feminist disability studies. What exactly is feminist disability studies? According to Rosemary Garland-Thomson, it is much more than studies about women with disabilities.

“Like feminist studies itself, feminist disability studies is academic cultural work with a sharp political edge and a vigorous critical punch... it seeks to challenge our dominant assumptions about living with a disability. It situates the disability experience in the context of rights and exclusions. It aspires to retrieve dismissed voices and misrepresented experience in the context of rights and exclusions. It helps the social processes of identity formation. It aims to denaturalize disability. In short, a feminist disability studies re-imagines disability” (Garland-Thomson, 2008, p.197). Feminist disability studies counters or challenges oppressive narratives that dominate the collective understanding of disability. According to Garland-Thomson, these include the bio-medical narrative, which sees ‘impairments’ as flaws or defects that can be ‘put right’ through technology/bio-medicine; the ‘sentimental’ narrative that views disabled subjects as “lessons in suffering”; the narrative of ‘overcoming’, that views disability as a defect that must be compensated for; the narrative of ‘catastrophe’ that sees disability as a dramatic, disastrous event that elicits great coverage or utterly defeats a person and the narrative of ‘abjection’, that views it as a sorry state that must be avoided at all costs (Garland-Thomson, 2008, p. 206). Feminist disability studies, on the other hand, look at the disability experience as part of the great variation of humankind, rather than as a great disaster or calamity. Let us now briefly review some of the

seminal works that have contributed to our understanding and appreciation of disability as an integral part of life, embodiment and relating to the world.

Michelle Fine and Adrienne Asch's collection of essays, *Women with Disabilities: Essays in Psychology, Culture and Politics* (1986), set the stage for much future work in the area. Fine's introduction 'Beyond Pedestals' analyses the convergence of gender and disability as axes of exclusion and oppression. The other essays pertain to a wide range of issues including embodiment, sexuality, relationships, dependence, subjectivity, and the medicalization of the body.

Pride Against Prejudice: A Personal Politics of Disability (1991) by Jenny Morris is an influential text which draws on the author's personal experience of disability and critiques the exclusion of disabled women from the feminist agenda. Particularly significant is the conflict within feminism between disability and the right to abortion. Morris holds that selective abortion of disabled fetuses is a form of genocide. Morris looks at the concepts of masculinity and femininity and how they are applied to disabled men and women. Masculinity as a social construct can be very oppressive for disabled men, as it celebrates strength, performance, the ability to support a family. To be masculine is, therefore, the opposite of being dependent. Cultural representations of disability also highlight the awfulness of dependence for men, thereby making it even more demoralizing for them.

Elsewhere, Morris also addresses the need for disabled feminists to tackle the experience of impairment. The 'social model' of disability, which focuses on external and societal barriers, constraints and attitudes has, in a sense, pushed aside the experience of the disabled body. This marginalizes the experiences of people with learning difficulties, mental health difficulties, and chronic or progressive illnesses. By denying the experience of the body, disabled people run the risk of having their behaviour and appearance 'policed' by a sexist world.

The issues of bodily suffering and limitation and their relegation as stigmatized states, find powerful expression in Susan Wendell's highly influential work *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* (1996). Wendell argues that disability studies have strong masculinist influences which valorize strength and independence and do not take into account the experiences of women or the chronically ill. Diagnosed with 'myalgic encephalomyelitis' or 'chronic fatigue syndrome' in 1985, Wendell engages in her book with definitions of disability, and who produces them, for what purposes and to what effect. She analyses the ideological underpinnings of the concept of 'normalcy' and its critical importance in the construction of a 'disabled identity'.

Another important work is the Marian Corker's *Deaf and Disabled, or Deafness Disabled: Towards a Human Rights Perspective* (1998) which calls for a greater inclusion of Deaf persons into the disability community and Deafness into disability theory.

Carol Thomas's sociological study, *Female Forms: Experiencing and Understanding Disability* (1999) studies in detail the gendering of disabled subjects. By including the voices of disabled women and using their narratives as the starting point of theory building, she practices the teachings of 'feminist standpoint theory' wherein the participants in the research are not just data for the researcher, but active participants in knowledge construction.

One of the neglected areas in disability studies is that of intellectual or cognitive impairments. The issue of care, dependency/independence, and embodiment are deeply interwoven in the discourses on intellectual disabilities. An important narrative in the feminist disability studies literature is Eva Kittay's *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency* (1998). Kittay writes movingly about her personal experiences of mothering a mentally disabled daughter and then moves on to a philosophical and politically informed critique of the highly individualistic liberal western notion of 'independence' and 'equality'. She asserts that liberal ideology negates and devalues the need for human interdependence and mutual care. Disability forces us to acknowledge the universal need for mutual assistance and interdependence and its incorporation into a human rights agenda. Feminist theories of justice, such as those articulated by Martha Nussbaum in her *Frontiers of Justice: Disabilities, Nationality, Species Membership* (2006) claims that the disabled do not participate in the social contract of justice and speaks of interdependence and inclusiveness as the basis for justice rather than rivalry and competition.

The books and authors discussed above have paved the way for a virtual explosion in feminist disability studies, in the past two decades. They have complicated feminism by forcing it to contend with the complexity of human variation and the reality of the 'lived body'. At the same time, disability studies have been informed by feminist thought, forcing it to deal with the way gender intersects with disability and the implications of this intersection on identity and discrimination.

5.8 LET US SUM UP

You have seen in this unit how disability has been historically viewed as a physical or mental limitation affecting an individual. Disabilities such as spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, blindness, deafness and speech disorders,

amputation, mental retardation, autism cause disabling conditions. Thus, through this unit we have learnt about the concept of disability. The unit also discussed major scholarly works that dwell on the gender impact of disability on women. A lot of the work in this connection has been done in the Western countries reflected in the citations of Western feminist scholars in this unit. Most of their insights have been validated by Indian scholars like Anita Ghai, Renu Addlakha, Meenu Bhambhani, Asha Hans and Annie Patri. Since 'women with disabilities' is still more or less invisible as an academic category and public policy issue, a lot of their work has been focussed on making a space for this issue in different fora, including the academy. Consequently, important critical concerns germane to the Indian reality, for example, such as the interface between disability and caste, reservation policy and gender among a range of other issues, await detailed investigation.

5.9 GLOSSARY

- Discrimination** : It refers to the act of differentiating between stimuli or of recognizing or understanding between the things.
- Identity** : It refers to the sense of self and the nature of personhood. Identities are perceived through categories such as similarities and differences. Identity is not static. On the other hand, it is fluid in nature. It also refers to a sense of belonging. Identities are also human managed entities in day to day life.
- Rights** : This is a broad term that addresses the issues related to citizenship, equality, justice and legitimacy. Rights are theorized as active or passive. It is contested as claims, power, liberty, and immunity. It is contended as the mirror image of duties.
- Mental Health** : Mental illness is classified in to neuroses and psychosis. Neurosis refers to over reaction to reality. Psychosis refers to the loss of contact with reality.
- Stereotypes** : It refers to a partial, prejudiced, biased, exaggerated view about a group, class of people, tribe, etc.
- Stigma** : The social attribute that discredits particular groups or individuals. It is applied in the context of body, character and social collectivities.

5.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) Group Discussion

Discuss the following:

- a) How does disability affect the experience of gender?
 - b) How does gender affect the experience of disability?
 - c) In what ways are the experiences of men and women with disabilities different and similar?
- 2) There is an idea that persons with disabilities are freer than their non-disabled counterparts because they are less subject to gender role expectations. Is this true? If so, is the price of disability worth the potential freedom it may offer?
 - 3) Popular Indian cinema has started engaging with disability related issues too. Write a critical review of any recent film dealing with disability and discuss it with your peers at your Study Centre (examples, 'Guzaarish', 'My name is Khan', 'Iqbal' in Hindi).
 - 4) Try and identify a person with disabilities or the carer of a person with disabilities in your community. Using the ideas/concepts in the unit, discuss their experiences of disability. Write a note of about 500 words and compare it with your colleagues at the study centre.

5.11 END NOTES

¹ Please note that these figures are dated, since the 2011 Census has just been concluded in February 2011, and the most recent macro-level data on disability is yet to be made public. In addition a new disability law to replace the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995 is currently in the drafting stage.

5.12 REFERENCES

Action, Aid (2003). *Just People-Nothing Special, Nothing Unusual*. Bangalore: Books for Change.

Bacquer, A.& Sharma, A. (1997). *Disability: Challenges vs. Responses*. New Delhi: Concerned Action Now.

Begum, Nasa (1992). 'Disabled Women and the Feminist Agenda'. *Feminist Review*, 40(1), 70-84.

Corker, Marian (1998). *Deaf and Disabled? Or Deafness Disabled*. Buckingham, U.K: Open University Press.

Davis, Hillyer Barbara (1984). 'Women, Disability and Feminism: Notes towards a New Theory'. *Frontiers: Journal of Women's Studies*, VIII (I), 1-5.

Fine, M. & Asch, Adrienne (1988). 'Introduction: Beyond Pedestals'. In M. Fine & A. Asch (Eds.), *Women with Disabilities: Essays in Psychology, Culture and Politics*. (pp. 1-37). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie (2002). 'Integrating Disability: Transforming Feminist Theory'. *NWSA Journal*, 14(3), 1-32.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie (2008) 'Feminist Disability Studies'. In Nick Watson (Ed.) *Disability* Vol. IV. London and New York: Routledge.

Hahn, H. (1988). 'Can disability be beautiful?' *Social Policy*, 18(1), 26-31.

Kittay, Eva Feder (1999). *Love's Labour: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency*. London and NY: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Morris, Jenny (1991). *Pride Against Prejudice: Transforming Attitudes to Disability*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.

Morris, Jenny (1993). 'Feminism and Disability'. *Feminist Review*, 43(1), 57-70.

Nussbaum, Martha (2006). *Frontiers of Justice, Nationality, Species, Membership*. Harvard: Belknap Press.

Shwerwin, S. (1984). 'A Feminist Approach to Ethics'. *Dalhousie Review*, 64(4), 704-713.

Thomas, Carol (1999). *Female Forms: Experiencing and Understanding Disability*. Buckingham, U.K: Open University Press.

Wendell, Susan (1996). *The Reflected Body; Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*. London and NY: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

5.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

Begum, Nasa (1992). 'Disabled Women and the Feminist Agenda'. *Feminist Review*, 40(1), 70-84.

Fine, M. & Asch, Adrienne (1988). 'Introduction: Beyond Pedestals'. In M. Fine & A. Asch (Eds.), *Women with Disabilities: Essays in Psychology, Culture and Politics*. (pp. 1-37). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Ghai, A. (2002). 'Disabled Women: An Excluded Agenda of Indian Feminism'. *Hypatia*, 17 (3), 49-60.