

# FEMINIST THEORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

DR. VANDANA SINGH  
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR  
P.G DEPT. OF ENGLISH  
MAHARAJA COLLEGE, ARA

# WHAT IS AN EXAMPLE OF FEMINIST THEORY?

2

The **theory of feminism** supports the notion that there are biological differences between men and women. For **example**, "women are kinder and more gentle than men," leading to the mentality that if women ruled the world there would be no wars.

# WHAT IS FEMINIST THEORY IN PSYCHOLOGY?

3

- **Feminist psychology** is a form of **psychology** centred on social structures and gender.
- **Feminist psychology** critiques historical **psychological** research as done from a male perspective with the view that males are the norm.
- **Feminist psychology** is oriented on the values and principles of **feminism**.
- **What are the main features of feminism?**
- **Feminism** advocates social, political, economic, and intellectual equality for women and men.
- **Feminism** defines a political perspective; it is distinct from sex or gender.
- **Feminism** means very different things to different people.
-

# UNDERSTANDING THE BASIC CONCEPT OF FEMINISM

4

The word feminism is used to define a political, cultural or economic movement intended to establish equal rights and legal safeguard for women.

- Feminism includes political and sociological theories and philosophies apprehensive to the matters of gender difference, as well as a movement that promotes gender equality for women and women's rights and interests.
- Most feminist movements and theories were headed by leaders who were mostly middle-class women from Western Europe and North America.
- However, at least since 1851, women of other parts of the world have proposed alternate feminisms.
- This tendency enhanced in the 1960s with the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the downfall of European colonialism in Africa, the Caribbean, parts of Latin America and Southeast Asia.
- Subsequently that time, women in former European colonies and the Third World have proposed "Post-colonial" and "Third World" feminisms.

# WHAT IS FEMINIST THEORY

**Feminist theory encompasses** a range of diverse ideas, all of which originate with the following beliefs:

- (a) society is patriarchal, structured by and favoring men;
- (b) traditional ways of thinking support the subordination of women and the neglect or trivialization of issues particularly affecting women; and
- (c) this patriarchal order should be overthrown and replaced with a system that stresses equality for both sexes.

**Feminist theory impacts** all institutions—medical, legal, academic, and social, for example—and can be used to illumine all issues affecting humans. The diversity of thought within feminist theory lies in the fact that women across the world differ from each other in many ways—including race, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexual orientation, or educational background.

For example— these differences result in varying views of feminism and gender equality as expressed in liberal feminist, Marxist–socialist, radical ‘libertarian’ and radical ‘cultural,’ postmodern, and global feminist theories. Yet for all the diversity within feminist theory, there remains the belief that despite women's many differences, women everywhere share some basic ‘sameness.’

# BROAD DIVISION OF FEMINIST THEORIES

6

Judith Lorber distinguishes between **three broad kinds of feminist** discourses:

- Gender reform feminisms
- Gender resistant feminisms
- Gender revolution feminisms.

# GENDER REFORM FEMINISMS

7

- Feminist language reform or feminist language planning refers to the effort, often of political and grassroots movements, to change how language is used to gender people, activities and ideas on an individual and societal level.

# GENDER RESISTANT FEMINISMS

8

Feminist resistance is always intertwined with and in interplay with resistance to feminism. Analysing feminist resistance and resistance to feminism in gender equality work sheds light on the possibilities and challenges involved in transforming gender relations through this kind of work.

It is suggested that this is a novel approach as much of feminist theorizing on the issue has focused on the neoliberal disciplining that gender equality planning results in.

The theoretical framework for the analysis builds on Foucauldian notions of power and resistance where the two are conceptualized as deeply intertwined.



# GENDER REVOLUTION FEMINISMS.

9

- Through this **movement**, women gained equal rights such as a right to education, right to work, and right to vote. One of the most important issues that the Women's Liberation faced was the banning of Abortion and Contraception, which the group saw as a violation of Women's Right.

For e.g:- Act of Abortion got legalised by Irish Government in UK after an Indian origin lady died due to dead foetus and was not allowed to abort

# WHAT EXACTLY IS FEMINIST THEORY OF LITERATURE?

- ❖ Anarcha Feminism
- ❖ Liberal Feminism
- ❖ Cultural Feminism
- ❖ Feminist Existentialism
- ❖ Radical Feminism
- ❖ Marxist Feminism
- ❖ Psychoanalytic Feminism
- ❖ Post Modern Feminism
- ❖ Black Feminism
- ❖ Islamic Feminism

10

# ANARCHIST FEMINISM

11

According to Anarchist Feminist Theory **patriarchy** is a expression of uncontrolled hierarchy. '*Anarcha*'-feminists rely on the idea that the fight against patriarchy is a crucial part of class struggle, and the struggle against the State. In this way, this viewpoint sees struggle as a compulsory part of feminist struggle.

# SOCIALIST FEMINISM

12

- Socialist feminist theory associates with the domination of women from Marxist concepts such as exploitation, oppression and labour.
- They consider imbalanced standing in the workplace and the domestic sphere holds women down.
- According to Socialist feminist; prostitution, domestic work, childcare and marriage are the ways by which women are subjugated by a patriarchal system which degrades women and the extensive work done by them.
- Socialist feminists assert that women are unable to be free due to their financial dependence on males. Women are subjects to the male rulers in capitalism due to an uneven balance in wealth. They see economic dependence as the driving force of women's subjugation to men.

# MARXIST FEMINIST THEORY

13

- **Marxist feminism** analyzes the ways in which women are exploited through capitalism and the individual ownership of private property.
- According to **Marxist feminists**, women's liberation can only be achieved by dismantling the capitalist systems in which they contend much of women's labour is uncompensated.

# RADICAL FEMINISM

14

- It considers that the male are controlled by the capitalist hierarchy and women can free themselves only when they get away from dominating patriarchal system.
- Radical feminists feel that there is a male-based power structure in the society and it is responsible for oppression and inequality.
- Some radical feminists understand that there is not any replacement other than the total relocating and reconstruction of society in order to achieve their goals.

# LIBERAL FEMINIST THEORY

15

- Liberal feminism proclaims the equality of men and women through political and legal reform. It is an individualistic form of feminism and emphasises on women's capability to maintain their equality through their own activities.
- Problems important to liberal feminists comprise reproductive rights, voting, education, equal pay, affordable childcare and health care, and abolition of domestic violence against women.

# BLACK FEMINIST THEORY

- Black feminism discusses that sexism; class oppression<sup>16</sup> and racism are intricately bound together.
- According to them all systems of feminism attempt to overcome sexism and class oppression but they overlook that race can discriminate against numerous people, including women, through racial prejudice.
- It developed after the initial feminist movements that were led explicitly by white women who encouraged social changes such as woman's suffrage.
- These movements were white middle-class movements and had overlooked oppression based on racism and classism.
- It pointed out that black woman experienced a different and more intense kind of oppression.



# POSTCOLONIAL AND THIRD-WORLD FEMINISM

- Postcolonial feminists maintain that oppression relating to the colonial experience, has downgraded women in postcolonial societies.
- They encounter the hypothesis that gender oppression is the main force of patriarchy.
- Postcolonial feminists object to interpretations of women of non-Western societies as a passive and overlooked victims and the depiction of Western women as modern, educated and empowered.
- Third-world feminism has been defined as a group of feminist theories established by those feminist activists who developed their views and took part in feminist politics in third-world countries.

# MULTI-RACIAL FEMINIST THEORY

18

- Multiracial feminism is also known as women of colour feminism and offers a standpoint and examination of the lives and experiences of women of colour.
- The theory was developed in the 1990s and by Dr. Maxine Baca Zinn, a Chicana feminist and Dr. Bonnie Thornton Dill, a sociology expert on African- American women and family.
- For e.g Writers of Indian origin residing in foreign countries face this multi-racial segregation often.

# LIBERTARIAN FEMINIST THEORY

19

- According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Classical liberal or libertarian feminism considers of freedom as freedom from coercive interference.
- It suggests that women, as well as men, have a right to such freedom due to their position as self-owners.

# STANDPOINT FEMINIST THEORY

20

- Since the 1980s, standpoint feminists have claimed that feminism should examine women's experience of inequality related to racism, classism and colonization.
- In the late 1980s and 1990s, postmodern feminists maintained that gender roles are socially constructed, so it is difficult to generalize women's experiences across cultures and histories.

# POST-STRUCTURAL AND POSTMODERN FEMINIST THEORY

21

- Post-structural feminism, also known as French feminism, uses the perceptions of various epistemological movements, linguistics, political theory, race theory and other scholarly currents for feminist concerns.
- Many post-structural feminists maintain that difference is one of the most dominant tools that females possess in their struggle with patriarchal domination.

# ENVIRONMENTAL / ECO-FEMINIST THEORY

22

- This theory links ecology with feminism. It associates the exploitation and domination of women with that of the environment.
- Eco-feminism maintains that there is a connection between women and nature which originates from their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal society.
- For e.g :-  
The moon is my mother. (Sylvia Plath, Collected Poems 28)

# SYLVIA PLATH AND HER WORKS

23



## Full List of Lifetime Works

### ☐ Poetry collections

- ☐ *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960)
- ☐ *Ariel* (1961-1965)
- ☐ *Three Women: A Monologue for Three Voices* (1968)
- ☐ *Crossing the Water* (1971)
- ☐ *Winter Trees* (1971)
- ☐ *The Collected Poems* (1981)
- ☐ *Selected Poems* (1985)
- ☐ *Plath: Poems* (1998)
- ☐ *Sylvia Plath Reads*, Harper Audio (2000) (Audio)

### ☐ Collected prose and novels

- ☐ *The Bell Jar: A novel* (1963), under the pseudonym "Victoria Lucas"
- ☐ *Letters Home: Correspondence 1950-1963* (1975)
- ☐ *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams: Short Stories, Prose, and Diary Excerpts* (1977)
- ☐ *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* (1982)
- ☐ *The Magic Mirror* (published 1989), Plath's Smith College senior thesis
- ☐ *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*, edited by Karen V. Kukil (2000)

### ☐ Children's books

- ☐ *The Bed Book* (1976)
- ☐ *The It-Doesn't-Matter-Suit* (1996)
- ☐ *Collected Children's Stories* (UK, 2001)
- ☐ *Mrs. Cherry's Kitchen* (2001)

List from : [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia\\_Plath](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Plath)

# SYLVIA PLATH AS A FEMINIST

- She illustrated that women have no existence because their identity<sup>24</sup> is not independently but with the male in all the spheres of life. She notes in her poem “Lady Lazarus” that:

I am myself. That is not enough. (Plath, Ariel 56)

- She feels, something is lack in her perhaps she is talking about the memories of her husband Ted Hughes who left her alone for another woman named Assia.
- In her poem “The Jailer” Plath said that she has achieved identity by being the object of desire of the jailer, and now man is depended on her:

What would the light Do without eyes to knife,

What would he Do, do, do without me?

(Plath, Collected Poems 227)



# SYLVIA PLATH AS A FEMINIST POETESS

- Sylvia Plath was a remarkable twentieth Century American writer. She expressed her deep feelings about death, nature, identity, feminist sensibility.
- Sylvia Plath described through her writing that male has been dominating for the ancient time, and women are known as the subordinate of man, also in modern time because they worked as the assistants.
- She noted that within the patriarchal society women's roles have been set already to play; they have to live in a limited circles of life. She portrayed women as if they feel suffocated within domestic prison. She presented the predicament of women through the image of the moon which Plath uses in her poems as a traditional image of female passivity. The moon is relied on the sun because the moon gets its light from the sun.

So in the same way women are said to be reliant on men.

Plath remarks:

It has a gothic shape

The eyes lift after it and find the moon.

# SYLVIA PLATH AS A FEMINIST POETESS

- Sylvia Plath stated in her works that there is a hope and chance to be free from the male dominated world.
- Plath's search for liberty is a way in which she can free herself from the fetters of patriarchal structure and liberation is possible only through literary struggle.
- She notes that she wears the smile of completion. She said that the woman smiles because she has achieved the goal. She is perfect because she has no longer to be judged under anybody's standards.
- In her poem Lady Lazarus Plath presented the reflections of the liberation and triumph over man. She says:

Out of the ash I rise with my red hair

And I eat man like air. (Plath, Ariel 120)

# REFERENCES CITED

27

## Feminist Theory

- Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories ed. by Code, Lorraine
- Gutenberg.org