

Importance of First Wave of Feminism (Feminist Theory)

Aarti

Jamia Milia Islamia University
Department of English (Delhi)
Net Qualified

Abstract:- Today information in relation to feminist movements . The first wave of feminism, also known as the suffrage, we will talk about the four Waves of Feminism. This is one of the most important and historical movement, which was a social and political movement that took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Europe and North America. The movement sought to achieve women's suffrage, or the right to vote, as well as other basic rights and opportunities that were denied to women at the time. This article will examine the concept of the first wave of feminism, its historical context, key figures and events, and its legacy. It is that feminist movements in different parts of the world seem to be so different, but also similar in many ways. What do we mean by first wave and why it is important and what are its factors related.

I. INTRODUCTION

The first wave of feminism emerged in a time of great social and political change in Europe and North America. The Industrial Revolution had transformed the economy, leading to the growth of cities and the rise of the middle class. Women played a significant role in the new industrial economy, working in factories and mills alongside men. However, women's legal and social status remained largely unchanged, and they were denied basic rights and opportunities that men took for granted.

At the same time, new ideas about equality and democracy were emerging. The French Revolution of 1789 had proclaimed the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, but these principles were not extended to women. In the 19th century, movements for social and political reform gained momentum, including the abolitionist movement to end slavery, the labor movement to improve working conditions, and the temperance movement to end alcohol abuse. Women played important roles in these movements, but they were often excluded from leadership positions and denied the right to vote.

There are many ways to understand the historical movement of feminist theory. When they were fighting for suffrage, they were suffragettes but, what Martha Lear is saying is that the Second Wave comes after the first. So there are several ways in which we will going to talk about the feminist movements and feminist theory in relation to past events and legacy.

The term Wave then became so much important which helped in connecting the different eras of feminism and different groups. The first wave allowed women suffrage and struggle in many ways that women have thought about themselves and their place in the world is very long. So, wave then produces, a seeming notion of togetherness and a seeming notion of universality. These are also the reasons why the term wave has been critiqued. Some of the key events or figures related to first wave of feminism was led by a diverse group of women, including suffragists, social reformers, and political activists. Some of the key figures of the movement include:

- Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906): An American suffragist and abolitionist who played a key role in the women's suffrage movement in the United States. Anthony co-founded the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1869 and worked tirelessly for women's right to vote until her death in 1906.
- Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928): A British suffragette who founded the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903. Pankhurst and her followers engaged in direct action, including hunger strikes and window-smashing, to draw attention to their cause.
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902): An American suffragist and women's rights activist who co-founded the National Woman Suffrage Association with Susan B. Anthony. Stanton was also a writer and philosopher, and her work helped to establish the intellectual foundations of the women's rights movement.
- Millicent Fawcett (1847-1929): A British suffragist who founded the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1897. Fawcett and her followers used peaceful protests and lobbying to campaign for women's suffrage.

New Historicism and the idea of experience in feminist theory, we spoke about women's roles and where is it that women actually exist in history and Waves become an important way to recover these voices and to recover ways in which women have been thinking about themselves in relation to the movement of nations, worlds, politics, law, sexism, cultural movement and a whole gamut of things that testify to the fact that woman have, and will always be active participants in public debate, and the shaping of public narrative and discourse.

The first wave of feminism was marked by a number of important events and milestones. Some of the key events include:

- The Seneca Falls Convention (1848): A gathering of women's rights activists in Seneca Falls, New York, where attendees drafted the Declaration of Sentiments, a document calling for women's right to vote and other basic rights.
- The Suffrage Parade in New York City (1913): A massive parade in which thousands of suffragists marched through New York City to demand the right to vote. The parade was a turning point in the suffrage movement and helped to build momentum for the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
- The Representation of the People Act (1918): A law passed in the United Kingdom that granted women over the age of 30 the right to vote.

The first wave of feminism, which occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was a significant movement in feminist theory and activism. This movement was primarily concerned with women's suffrage, or the right to vote, and was marked by a series of protests and campaigns across the Western world. In this essay, we will explore the importance of the first wave of feminism in feminist theory, looking at its historical context, key figures, and major achievements.

Historical Context The first wave of feminism emerged in a time when women's rights were severely restricted. Women were denied the right to vote, and were excluded from many aspects of public life, including education, employment, and political representation. At the same time, women were expected to fulfill traditional roles as wives and mothers, and were often viewed as inferior to men both intellectually and socially.

In this context, the first wave of feminism represented a major challenge to the status quo. It sought to address issues of gender inequality and discrimination, and to secure greater rights and opportunities for women. This movement was fueled by a growing sense of feminist consciousness, as women began to question and challenge the prevailing social norms and expectations.

Key Figures The first wave of feminism was led by a number of prominent figures, many of whom played a significant role in shaping feminist theory and activism. These included Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucretia Mott in the United States, and Emmeline Pankhurst and Millicent Fawcett in the United Kingdom.

These figures were united in their commitment to securing women's suffrage, and used a range of tactics to achieve this goal. These included organizing rallies and protests, lobbying politicians, and engaging in civil disobedience. Their efforts were often met with hostility and resistance, but they persisted in their efforts to secure greater rights and opportunities for women.

Major Achievements The first wave of feminism was marked by a number of major achievements, many of which had far-reaching implications for women's rights and gender equality. Perhaps the most significant of these was the achievement of women's suffrage, which was secured in a number of countries during this period.

Other important achievements included the establishment of women's organizations and advocacy groups, the promotion of women's education and employment opportunities, and the recognition of women's legal rights in areas such as property ownership and divorce. These achievements laid the groundwork for future generations of feminists, and helped to establish a new paradigm for gender relations and women's rights.

II. FACTORS

The first wave of feminism, which took place during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was a crucial movement that paved the way for subsequent feminist movements. This essay will examine the key factors that contributed to the emergence of the first wave of feminism, as well as the major achievements of the movement. Specifically, this essay will discuss the political, social, and economic factors that led to the emergence of the first wave of feminism, and the ways in which the movement sought to address issues of gender inequality and discrimination.

Political Factors One of the most significant political factors that contributed to the emergence of the first wave of feminism was the movement for women's suffrage. Women in many countries were denied the right to vote, which prevented them from having a voice in political decisions that directly impacted their lives. Women's suffrage became a central issue for the first wave of feminism, and suffrage campaigns were organized across the Western world. In the United States, suffrage activists such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were instrumental in advocating for women's right to vote, and their efforts ultimately led to the passage of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution in 1920, which granted women the right to vote.

Another important political factor that contributed to the emergence of the first wave of feminism was the progressive movement. This was a broad-based social and political movement that sought to address a range of social and economic problems, including poverty, labor exploitation, and political corruption. Many feminists saw the progressive movement as an opportunity to advance their own agenda, and worked closely with progressive activists to promote women's rights and gender equality.

Social Factors Social factors were also important in the emergence of the first wave of feminism. The Victorian era, which preceded the first wave of feminism, was characterized by rigid gender roles and a strict moral code that placed a premium on female virtue and chastity. Women were expected to conform to these ideals, and were often subject to social ostracism or even legal penalties if they failed to do so.

These social norms and expectations contributed to the emergence of the first wave of feminism by creating a sense of discontent and frustration among women who felt trapped by these strict gender roles. Feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill argued that women's oppression was not only unjust, but also detrimental to society as a whole, as it prevented women from contributing fully to the social, political, and economic life of their communities.

Economic Factors Economic factors also played a significant role in the emergence of the first wave of feminism. Women's economic opportunities were severely limited during this period, and they were often excluded from many professions and industries. Women were also paid significantly less than men for similar work, and were often subject to exploitation and abuse in the workplace.

The first wave of feminism sought to address these economic issues by advocating for women's right to work and for equal pay for equal work. Feminists such as Florence Kelley and Alice Paul were instrumental in organizing labor unions and advocating for better working conditions for women. They also campaigned for the right to own property and to control their own finances, arguing that economic independence was essential for women's freedom and autonomy.

Achievements of the First Wave of Feminism The first wave of feminism achieved a number of significant successes, many of which had far-reaching implications for women's rights and gender equality. One of the most significant achievements was the attainment of women's suffrage. Women in many countries were granted the right to vote during this period, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and several other European nations.

The first wave of feminism, which took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was a time of significant social and political change. However, the movement also faced a number of challenges and difficulties, including opposition from social and political institutions, internal divisions within the movement, and a lack of support from some women. This essay will examine the various difficulties faced by the first wave of feminism, and the ways in which feminists responded to these challenges.

Opposition from Social and Political Institutions One of the major difficulties faced by the first wave of feminism was opposition from social and political institutions, including the church, the state, and the medical profession. Many of these institutions were deeply invested in maintaining traditional gender roles and were hostile to the idea of women's liberation.

The church, for example, saw women's role as primarily that of wife and mother, and opposed feminist demands for women's suffrage and greater educational and employment opportunities. The state was similarly resistant to feminist demands, and governments in many countries resisted granting women the right to vote, arguing that

women were not qualified to participate in the political process.

The medical profession also played a role in opposing feminist demands. Many doctors believed that women were physically and intellectually inferior to men, and that they were not suited for certain types of work or activities. This belief was used to justify the exclusion of women from many professions, as well as to justify their exclusion from higher education.

Internal Divisions within the Movement The first wave of feminism was not a monolithic movement, but was characterized by a range of different perspectives and priorities. This diversity led to internal divisions within the movement, which sometimes made it difficult for feminists to present a united front.

One of the major divisions within the movement was between suffragists and anti-suffragists. While suffragists sought to secure women's right to vote, anti-suffragists argued that women's suffrage would undermine traditional gender roles and the family structure. This division was particularly acute in the United States, where anti-suffragists were often wealthy and influential women who saw themselves as defenders of traditional values.

Another major division within the movement was between "radical" and "moderate" feminists. Radical feminists argued for a more sweeping transformation of society, advocating for the elimination of all forms of gender-based discrimination and the complete equality of men and women. Moderate feminists, on the other hand, sought more incremental change, focusing on specific issues such as suffrage, education, and employment.

Lack of Support from Some Women Finally, the first wave of feminism also faced a lack of support from some women, particularly those who were wealthy or privileged. Many of these women saw themselves as benefiting from the traditional gender roles that feminists were seeking to challenge, and were resistant to the idea of women's liberation.

In some cases, wealthy and influential women actively opposed feminist demands, using their social and political power to block the progress of the movement. For example, anti-suffragists in the United States formed powerful lobbying organizations and worked to influence public opinion against women's suffrage.

Feminist Responses to These Challenges Despite the challenges and difficulties faced by the first wave of feminism, feminists were able to make significant progress in advancing women's rights and gender equality. One of the key strategies used by feminists was the development of effective political and social networks, which allowed them to organize and mobilize support for their cause.

Feminists also used a range of tactics to challenge opposition from social and political institutions. They organized protests, rallies, and marches, and used the media to raise awareness about the issues facing women. They also worked to build alliances with other progressive movements, such as the labor movement and the civil rights movement, which helped to strengthen their political power and influence.

The first wave of feminism, which began in the late 19th century and lasted until the early 20th century, was a period of significant social and political change. Women's rights activists during this period fought for a range of issues, including the right to vote, access to education and employment, and the abolition of gender-based discrimination. Despite the significant progress made during this period, the first wave of feminism faced a range of challenges and obstacles. This essay will explore the various challenges faced by the first wave of feminism and the strategies used by women's rights activists to overcome these challenges.

Challenge1: Institutional Resistance One of the major challenges faced by the first wave of feminism was institutional resistance. Social and political institutions, such as the church, the state, and the medical profession, were deeply invested in maintaining traditional gender roles and were hostile to the idea of women's liberation. For example, the church saw women's role as primarily that of wife and mother and opposed feminist demands for women's suffrage and greater educational and employment opportunities. The state was similarly resistant to feminist demands, and governments in many countries resisted granting women the right to vote, arguing that women were not qualified to participate in the political process.

Strategies Used: Women's rights activists during the first wave of feminism used a range of strategies to challenge institutional resistance. They organized protests, rallies, and marches, and used the media to raise awareness about the issues facing women. They also worked to build alliances with other progressive movements, such as the labor movement and the civil rights movement, which helped to strengthen their political power and influence.

Challenge2: Internal Divisions within the Movement Another major challenge faced by the first wave of feminism was internal divisions within the movement. This diversity led to internal divisions within the movement, which sometimes made it difficult for feminists to present a united front. One of the major divisions within the movement was between suffragists and anti-suffragists. While suffragists sought to secure women's right to vote, anti-suffragists argued that women's suffrage would undermine traditional gender roles and the family structure.

Strategies Used: Feminists used a range of strategies to address internal divisions within the movement. They sought to build bridges between different factions, for example by organizing joint events and meetings. They also worked to create coalitions with other progressive

movements, which helped to build a sense of shared purpose and common goals.

Challenge3: Lack of Support from Some Women A third major challenge faced by the first wave of feminism was a lack of support from some women, particularly those who were wealthy or privileged. Many of these women saw themselves as benefiting from the traditional gender roles that feminists were seeking to challenge and were resistant to the idea of women's liberation.

Strategies Used: To address this challenge, women's rights activists during the first wave of feminism sought to build broad-based support for their cause. They worked to create alliances with other progressive movements, which helped to broaden the appeal of the feminist movement beyond traditional women's issues. They also sought to create spaces for dialogue and engagement with women who were skeptical or resistant to feminist ideas, in the hope of winning them over to their cause.

Challenge 4: Lack of Unity Across National Boundaries A fourth major challenge faced by the first wave of feminism was a lack of unity across national boundaries. Women's rights activists in different countries faced different challenges and obstacles, and the strategies that worked in one context did not necessarily work in another. This made it difficult for the movement to present a unified front on global issues, such as women's suffrage or the abolition of gender-based discrimination.

Just sort of information, let us go through a list of countries and see when is it that they gave women the right to vote. We start with New Zealand in 1893, Finland 1906, Denmark 1915. In Iceland in 1915 only women over 40 were given the right to vote. Think about that woman can be rational beings allowed to choose how they are governed, but, only after the cross the age of 40, not at age of 20, 19 into adulthood same way as men. And contrast this with the ways in which in current day narrative, women are considered to have a capacity to mature much faster than men. Russia 1917, Germany: 1918, UK 1918, Brazil 1932, Turkey 1934. Lo and behold France only 1944. Clearly, it is only in the early in the twentieth century, that one begins to see first wave efforts bearing fruit across the world. This is not to suggest a direct connection between first wave movements and first wave activism in the US and the rest of the world, but, there are ways in which feminist theory begins to have the visibility and legibility across the world in different political context. Japan 1945, India comes into being in 1947 and gives women the right to vote along with the men at the same time. Greece 1952, China 1953, Mexico 1953, Egypt 1956. Canada and Australia first nation women and indigenous Australians won the right to vote in 1960 and 1962 respectively. Recall then, the ways in which age works in Iceland, these are the same ways in which ethnicity, ethnic identity, average null identities seem to work for women. That until 1960, 1962 they were not considered to have enough political acumen to be able to vote. At the same time, we continue to hear narratives about women not having the capacity to wield power, to wield

political citizenship to understand what is going on, being infantilized continually even in the contemporary world and then think about the ways in which we discussed the First Wave as encompassing a set of ideas and narratives and not necessarily relating to a particular set of political goals, starting in 1848 ending in 1920 and then we are done. I would suggest that we continue to think about the goals of the First Wave as important even in the present moment. What were these goals and issues? Equal political rights for women, equal opportunities for education and employment, right to own property, right to be financially independent and right to own property even as first wave borrowed energy from, and also competed with the anti-abolitionist movement. Often women, and these were white women in the US made the argument that what kind of a political milieu is this in which even African and American men get the right to vote but white women do not. There was opposing of gender against race as opposed to making certain actions with the movement that was anti-slavery. And this is problematic for a number of reasons because it is an exclusionary set of possibilities being suggested were feminist theory that goes against the core of how we are understand the role of exclusion in the world. And therefore, first wave of feminism has been also being critiqued for this idea of political freedom, only for white women.

The first wave is fairly easy to understand, but, the thing to remember is that the things people were suggesting during the time were very revolutionary. Women had been writing about the rights of women, their capacity to be realized beings, their capacity to be publicly responsible people for a very long time. However, if it is only during this period there was sustained political movement to give them the rights, the way that women had been imagining themselves. Let us look at with an examples of a few key text during this time. Let us start with the "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" prepared by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. We will then go on to another important text from 1792 that poses the rights of the woman in a slightly different vein but still an important precursor to First Wave feminist theory and lastly, let us read some very important and interesting passages from Virginia Woolf's, *A Room of One's Own*. If you recall, there was a throw away reference to Virginia Woolf in relation to New Historicism Or recovering women's history, where we had spoken a very briefly about the Wolf Saying, what about Shakespeare sister? Why is it that we never hear about any kind of women from the era of Shakespeare? Did women not have imagination? Did they not have the capacity for genius? Could they not write? How is it that in the Elizabeth in era, we only hear about men? So, we will go through this wonderful text called *A Room of One's Own*.

There are no possible ways according to this Declaration for women to be realized beings in society. And the Declaration also clearly points to the fact that it knows that this is an uphill task. They are suggesting that they understand fully well what is it they seeking to change, and you can see that it takes them some time 1848 to 1920 is not small. However, clearly there is also a plan: employ agents, circulate tracts, petition State and National Legislatures, and

enlist religion and public opinion on their behalf. What are the ways in which they had to persuade, to push, to break open the boundaries of understanding in order to further the feminist movements and its goals.

I want to move on different text which argues very differently than the Declaration Of Sentiments and Resolutions for why is it that women need full rights in society. This is the "Vindication of the Rights of Woman" from 1792, where Mary Wollstonecraft goes on to say the following. "Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to co-operate unless she know why ought to be virtuous? Unless freedom strengthens her reason till she comprehends her duty, and see in what manner it is connected with her real good? If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be patriot; and the love of mankind, from which an orderly train of virtues spring, can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind; but the education and situation of woman, at present shuts her out from such investigations. The main argument is meant to support women's rights in order that women can become effective companions. Women will only co-operate with a larger endeavor for truth, if, they know why they ought to be virtuous. Freedom strengthens reasons and if the goal is for a reasonable companion to man then women deserve freedom. Children must be educated by women, by mothers who are patriots in order to produce patriotism, and such can only be produced by considering the moral and civil interest of mankind. But, the education and situation of woman, at present shuts her out from such investigations. So, Wollstonecraft is suggesting here that women are valuable entities, but not in their own right as individuals but, as companions, wives, and mothers. In other words, in their capacity to further the education of the child and the existence of man. She goes on to say, "Let there be then no coercion established in society, and the common law of gravity prevailing, the sexes will fall into their proper places. And now that more equitable laws are forming your citizens, marriage may become more sacred. Your young men may choose wives from motives of affection and your maidens allow love to root out vanity." In other words, there is a broad moral project to Wollstonecraft's text. Vindication of the rights of woman, but woman, as necessary companion to man were of course the sexes will fall into their proper places.

Think of vindication of the rights of women as a modification of that, where Wollstonecraft argues that such capacities of women are important in public space as a counter and as a foil to men's capacities; they will only feed into the larger project of patriotic, moral, mankind. the present moment but, also from the point of view of 1792, that from 1848 to 1920 is when women are even able to make the argument the women can be politically responsible. 1792 is further back from that. Perhaps one of

the things to consider is that women had to find different route to make the argument for equality and this may have been the only possible route available during that time.

A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf. In chapter three if I remember correctly, Woolf suggest this: "It would be better to draw the curtains; to shut out distractions; to light the lamp; to narrow the enquiry and to ask the historian, who records not opinions but facts, to describe under what conditions women lived not throughout the ages, but in England, say, in the time of Elizabeth. In the text Woolf is investigating the question of what it takes for women to write fiction. What does it require in a woman's life for her to be able to produce fiction as a larger genre, and as a writer of worth in the world? And the answer of course in the title is, A Room of One's Own, but, in the process even as she suggests this, gathering together all other kinds of ruminations and thoughts, she asks the question of where is it that women were in Elizabethan England. Why is it that we have no records of their lives? What were the conditions in which women lived? I asked myself; for fiction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground as science maybe; fiction is like a spider's web attached ever so slightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible; Shakespeare's plays for instance seem to hang there complete by themselves. But, when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but, are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in."

So at the end the First Wave, and I want to make a quick reference to one another figure before we move on to a summary of the First Wave. Margaret Sanger is another important figure to emerge at the edges of the First Wave. Nurse by training, who herself came from a large working class family, and she witnessed her mother's 18 pregnancies and 11 births. Having seen this for herself, she was convinced that women's rights were also inextricably tied up with women's control over their own reproductive capacities. She opened the country's first Family Planning Clinic in New York in 1916, even as provision of contraception was a criminal offence. Five years later she founded The American Birth Control League, culminating in her co-founding the International Planned Parenthood Federation in 1952. Her work, along with the work of Maria Stopes in the UK, is always quoted and often spoken about, as one of the first kind of important movements in reproductive rights for women, which we will also go on to discuss in relation to Second Wave. However, the thing to also remember is that both Margaret Sanger and Maria Stopes are controversial figures because of their associations with eugenics.

III. CONCLUSION

The First Wave is a chronicle of a women campaigning in multiple ways for women's public rights. It reinterprets Renaissance thought: the idea of liberty and the right to happiness; argues for inclusion and political, civil, and economic rights. It is often associated with primarily women's suffrage. First Wave was borrowed from ongoing movements for man's equality and rights, therefore, liberalism and liberal feminism as well. Their platforms may vary but they campaigned for women as equal and rightful inhabitants of the world, and therefore its governance. Limitations of First Wave Feminism are often suggested to be around its race politics. First Wave Feminists furthered this kind of focus on women and their identities. the first wave of feminism was a critical movement in feminist theory and activism. It represented a major challenge to the prevailing social norms and expectations, and sought to secure greater rights and opportunities for women. Through the efforts of key figures such as Susan B. Anthony and Emmeline Pankhurst, the movement achieved a number of significant successes, including women's suffrage and the establishment of women's organizations and advocacy groups. These achievements laid the foundation for future feminist movements, and helped to establish a new paradigm for gender relations and women's rights that continues to shape feminist theory and activism today.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Virginia woolf 1929 A Room Of One's Own.
- [2]. Mary Wollstonecraft 1792 A vindication of right for women.
- [3]. Simone Beauvoir 2010 The Second Sex.