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18 June 2022

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/114328/>  
MPRA Paper No. 114328, posted 07 Sep 2022 04:01 UTC

# **Four Waves of Feminism: A Blessing for Global Humanity**

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## **Abstract**

This paper tries to analyze the development of waves of feminism. In the human civilization, “Feminism” is considered as a mass movement, which has commenced by women of all groups to remove all forms of feminist oppressions by men that are prevailing in a patriarchal society. The world has already experienced four waves of feminism that act against women’s abuse and oppression. The first wave of feminism arises in the United States and Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and concerns with the achieving voting right, equal opportunities, and other legal rights of women. Second wave of feminism has initiated by both white and non-white women of Western countries as well as in developing countries, starts in the 1960s and ends in the 1990s. It works for equal education and employment opportunities, maternity leave, birth control and abortion rights, etc.; and fights against domestic violence issues, marital rape issues, sexual harassment and rape, etc. Third wave of feminism

presents a dynamic critique to the previous feminist political trends, and extends from the 1990s to 2000s. In this movement, women find themselves as strong and rebellious, and working women in various occupations are not subjected to a sexist patriarchy. Fourth wave feminism starts around 2012, which offers a new feminism that depends on online social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc. After the development of waves of feminism, various laws have been established in many countries of the world to support the participation of women in all activities of the society. This study takes attempts to discuss aspects of four waves of feminism elaborately.

**Keywords:** Feminism, waves of movement, Black women, feminist oppressions, suffrage, social media

## 1. Introduction

Feminism is a belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes in every stage of the society. The term “*Feminism*” is coined in 1837 by the French utopian philosopher and radical socialist Charles Fourier (1772-1837), to indicate “*the illness of womanly qualities appearing in men*” (Delap, 2007). Feminism is originated in the USA and Europe; later it is spread in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and gradually in other continents, and finally it is established worldwide. It is an umbrella term for a number of cultural phenomena related to women oppression under the patriarchy (Dicker, 2008). Additionally, in some countries it works against forced marriage, female infanticide, wearing veils in public atmosphere, widow burning, female genital cutting (FGC), etc. (Peay, 2005). Notable feminist writers, activists, and philosophers are Olympe de Gouge, Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan

B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Emma Goldman, Hildegard Bingen, Christine de Pisan, Olympe de Gouge, Jane Austen, bell hooks, Alice Paul, Alice Walker, etc. (Brezina, 2005).

The evolution of the feminist struggle with elapse of time is often referred to as ‘waves’ of change. The global civilization has already passed three waves of feminism and forth wave is running since 2012. The first wave of feminism begins in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Western countries. The main target of it is to create opportunities for women. It focuses on the achieving of the women’s suffrage (Rampton, 2015). The second wave of feminism covers time from the 1960s to 1980s that tries to uproot the cultural inequalities, gender norms, and attempts to establish the egalitarian role of women in the society. Its primary target is growing of self-consciousness for minority groups. The third wave of feminism is developed through the backlash of the second wave. It extends from the 1990s to 2000s, which refers to the diverse strains of feminist activities. It focuses the movement from communal objectives to individual rights (Jain, 2020). The feminists of this wave try to show the diverse range of exploitation and oppression through the attributes of age, race, and class (Hundleby, 2012).

Women who born during the 1960s and 1970s (Generation X) and move to civil rights around the 1990s, considered that third wave of feminism starts in the 1990s. They focus on individualism and diversity (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). Feminist movements have accelerated some other movements that are not directly related to feminism are “The Civil Rights Movement” in the USA; and the collapse of European colonialism in Africa, the Caribbean, parts of Latin America and Southeast Asia (Haines, 1995; Springhall, 2001). Consequently, some forms of feminism, such as Postcolonial, Third World, and later Black feminisms have

developed. Feminist theory has developed from feminist movements; and displays a variety of disciplines, such as feminist geography, feminist history, and feminist literary criticism (Rampton, 2015).

The fourth wave feminism is developed around 2012 to the empowerment of women, and to create greater gender equality in the society through the use of internet facilities. Women share their experiences about sexual abuse, violence, harassment, etc. around the world within a moment using online social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr, and blogs. They also share their personal stories related to women rights (Munro, 2013). Some popular hashtag campaign feminisms are #BalanceTonPorc, #AndNow, #QuellaVoltaChe, #YoTambien, #WoYeShi, #NotinMyName, #BoycottAliZafar, and #BabaeAko, which have developed respectively in France, Canada, Italy, Spain, China, India, Pakistan, and Philippines (Cochrane, 2013; Retallack et al., 2016).

## **2. Literature Review**

Caterina Peroni and Lidia Rodak have analyzed different perspectives and positioning of the waves of feminism, such as gender-based violence, abortion, sisterhood, and self-determination. They have described genealogies and changes in feminist repertoires, action, and subjectivation. They have shown the emerging of “*hashtag feminism*” and the “*call-out*” culture that focus on vulnerability as “*a socially shared condition*”, and have built new forms of recognition and solidarity among women (Peroni & Rodak, 2020). Khadija Alhumaid has reported on four prominent American feminist intellectuals and philosophers: Maxine Greene, bell hooks, Christine Sleeter, and Patti Lather; with their lifestyles, experiences, careers and beliefs, impacted the educational field. In chronological order she has

discussed the four waves of feminism experienced as a sociopolitical movement. She believes that feminism fights for equal rights to vote, education, and employment; equal payment, reproductive rights, etc. and also works against rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment (Alhumaid, 2019).

Gray Mel and Boddy Jennifer investigate social workers' daily experience of women's abuse and oppression, and examine contemporary feminist movements and point to future directions for feminist social work. They also indicate that postcolonial feminism, with its awareness of culture and context, has most usefulness for social work (Mel & Jennifer, 2010). Maxine Molyneux and her coauthors focus on three prominent themes in feminist activism, such as i) campaigns to defend democratic rights, ii) gender-based violence, and iii) sexual and identity rights. They have analyzed four distinguishing features of the 'new feminism' on the basis of history and context, politics, resources, and opportunities (Molyneux et al., 2021).

Ruth Phillips and Vivienne E. Cree have observed that at present there is a greater enthusiasm of feminism across the world, which predicts that fourth wave feminism is prevailing globally (Phillips & Cree, 2014). Shruti Jain has realized that the digital space can reinforce feminist movements by encouraging inclusion and improving accessibility in organizing collective action. The digital space represents a new opportunity for building global feminist networking and to create an opportunity for active participants in their own revolution, irrespective of geographical boundaries. It also offers a safe space and a way to share common experiences, organize and resist repressive gender regimes (Jain, 2020). Sueli Carneiro has depicted Brazilian black women's struggle within the national feminist movement. They have tried to establish a new political world, where

gender, race, and class interact; facing more complex challenges to gain equitability of gender and race (Carneiro, 2016).

Farinaz Basmehchi has gain the experience of three waves of women's movement. She has believed that third and fourth waves are happened within frothy years, and a lot of incidents are in common but many things are different. She takes attempt to examine the differences and similarities of these two waves by using text mining method (Basmehchi, 2017). Katy Day and Rebecca Wray have argued that fourth wave feminism has been characterized by growing numbers of new feminist organizations, online communities and activist campaigns. They have the socio-cultural, historical and political changes (Day & Wray, 2018). Kira Cochrane states that during the fourth wave of feminism, many online mobilizations on media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, etc. have emerged. Further, some more blog campaigns and hashtags are seen in the society that follows "Everyday Sexism Project, Feministing, Counting Dead Women Project, #Fem2, #YesAllWomen, #HeForShe, #ToTheGirls, #EverydaySexism, #MeToo, #NoMore, and #TimesUp" (Cochrane, 2013).

### **3. Methodology of the Study**

Methodology provides the research design and analysis procedures to perform a good research (Hallberg, 2006). This study is a qualitative research method that aims to discover meaning and understanding (Parahoo, 2014). Feminism is an attempt to provide equal rights and opportunities irrespective of male and female. It tries to uphold the identities, experiences, knowledge, strengths, in all step of the society. It attempts to make conscious women about their rights. It wants to see the end to sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression and to achieve full gender

equality in law and in practice (Rampton, 2015; Fan, 2017). At the start we have tried to highlight on the feminism. Then we have taken to discuss four waves of feminism.

We have consulted secondary data sources unsparingly to complete the article with a satisfaction. The valuable materials for this study are included by the analysis of the published books of renowned authors. Additionally, we have studied the published papers of world famous printed journals and e-journals, handbooks, etc. to enrich this paper. We have searched internets and websites to collect valuable materials from Google scholars (Mohajan, 2012, 2017b). In a research, an author must be conscious about ethical consideration (NASW, 2021). In our research we have tried to properly cite the collection of the resources. A successful researcher is always concern about reliability and validity of his/her research procedures. Throughout of this entire research we have tried to maintain the reliability and validity as far as possible (Mohajan, 2017a, 2018).

#### **4. Objective of the Study**

Core objective of this study is to discuss feminism and to indicate the remarkable incidents in various waves. Some other subsidiary objectives are;

- to investigate the fruitful outcomes from feminism,
- to highlight the benefits of the global society after the development of feminism, and
- to explore the role of online social media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century feminism.



## **5. Waves of Feminism**

Feminism is a social theory and political movement, and believes that all oppressions in society, such as sexism, sexual exploitation, everyday sexism, and sexual discrimination need to be ended off. It also acts on behalf of women's rights and interests (Fan, 2017). Feminist political action challenges various topics, such as reproductive rights, abortion rights, educational rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, salary equality, voting rights, representation, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and sexual violence (Fan, 2017).

The history of the feminist movements is divided into four waves. Each wave indicates a specific cultural period and involvement of women with the media. Feminist movement stands on a series of political and social activities, which changes the social, political, and cultural position of women in the society. Although feminism has many forms and has passed through the multiple waves, its importance is prevailing for alleviating women's subjugated positions in the modern societies (Malinowska, 2020).

### **5.1 First Wave Feminism**

The term "*The First Wave of Feminism*" was coined in March 1968, in an article in New York Times Magazine, by journalist Martha Weinman Lear entitled "*The Second Feminist Wave: What Do These Women Want?*" It is categorized as focusing on the fight for women's political power (Lear, 1968). It takes place mainly in the USA and the UK from the 1820s to 1940s when women being treated as second rate citizens in male-dominated societies and is represented by the liberal feminism. Its primary goal is to gain equal rights for women and for the securing

voting rights (Rampton, 2015; Malinowska, 2020). It is an important era of history that makes a significant social change and creates an enlarge floor for equality for women in every field, such as right to citizenship and vote, right to education, right to own property of father, etc. It aims at social reformation from the patriarchy and liberation from oppression of racial bias (Jepsen, 2000; Dicker, 2008).

“*American Equal Rights Association*” is formed in 1866, and after collapse of it, the “*National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA)*” is formed in early 1869, and the “*American Women Suffrage Association (AWSA)*” is formed later in that year. NWSA wants to work for uplifting women in national level, whereas the AWSA demands right to vote of women. Finally, in the same year the two bodies merge into the “*National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)*”. In 1916, NAWSA has broken and the “*National Woman’s Party (NWP)*” is formed by young feminist Alice Paul (1885-1977) (Campbell, 1989).

The 19<sup>th</sup> amendment to the US constitution passes in the Senate on June 4, 1919 and Congress gives the right of vote to women in 1920 (Allen, 2017). Within the 1950s women of the most European countries and colonies get partial/full voting rights. Women of the most of the European countries, such as Russia, Germany, Austria and the UK receive the right to vote in 1918, Belgium in 1919, US and Canada in 1920, Ireland in 1928, and Spain in 1931, etc. (Martin, 2000; Sneider, 2010).

It focuses the achievement of political and legal rights, such as basic rights of voting, education, work, and access to public space for women (Herouach, 2019). Further, it supports the idea of equal property rights and a dignified position within

the household for women. It also stresses on economic, sexual and reproductive rights of women in the society. Three main types of feminism, such as liberal, radical, and cultural feminism have emerged during this movement (Rampton, 2015).

In Britain, some activists believe that women presence in the political area would be beneficial for the society. They demand voting right; consequently, “*The Representation of the People’s Act*” is passed in 1918 that grants women the right to vote. But it is restricted to women age above 30 and who owned houses. The activists take efforts and succeeded to reduce the age to 21 years for women to vote without the ownership of property. On the other hand, in the USA the wave moves in a different political path and US activists believe that the abolition of slavery is necessary before the right of vote for women. The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution has established the right of vote to women in all the US states (French, 2008).

The first wave has both boon and bane achievements for the women. It unites global activists for a common goal and the movement proceeds smoothly through a methodical structure. It primarily focuses on the plight of White women, mostly belonging to the Western middle-class, and ignores the plight of Black women. Some activists are against the passage of the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment of US constitution, which would have given Black men the right to vote before them. Moreover, it is racial bias and encouragement of segregationism (Rampton, 2015).

Feminists in this wave give priority of protest through public gatherings, speeches, and writing. Various newspapers and magazines, such as *The Lily*, *The Lady’s*

*Magazine, Provincial Freeman*, etc. are owned and edited by women during this period (Malinowska, 2020).

## **5.2 Second Wave Feminism**

The duration of second wave feminism starts in the 1960s and ends after a period of three decades, in the 1990s. Sexuality and reproductive rights are dominant issues in this movement. After the naming the first wave of feminism, Martha Lear also coins the term “*second wave feminism*” in 1968 (Lear, 1968). The movement emerges in the wake of World War II when many women enter the labor force, and challenge current notions of the women’s role in the family, workplace, and society (Dominelli, 2002). During this wave several types of political feminism, such as Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, and ecological feminism rise in the society (Jaggar, 1983).

The movement starts with the protests associated with the Miss America Pageants in Atlantic City of the USA in 1968 and 1969. Because, it is an event of objectification of women’s beauty, and throws “*oppressive*” feminine artifacts, such as bras, girdles, high-heels, makeup and false eyelashes into the wastebasket (Freeman, 1975). The activists observe that pageant competitions are paraded like cattle, and they have declared that “*women were victims of a patriarchal, commercialized, oppressive beauty culture*”; and consequently, demand for stopping the competition [Snyder, 2008]. The second wave of feminism is extended the domain of feminine politics against sexist ways of men to the private lives of women. The first wave of feminism is led by only white middle-class women of the west, but the second wave is propelled by both white and non-white women of west as well as in developing countries (Alhumaid, 2019). In 1969,

feminist Carol Hanisch has coined the slogan, “*The Personal is Political*”, and in 1977, the Combahee River Collective (CRC) has coined the slogan “*Identity Politics*” (Smith, 2012; Milstein & Castro-Sotomayor, 2020). Each of these slogans is the most outstanding achievement in second wave feminism, and shows cultural and political inequalities. These slogans demonstrate that race, class, and gender oppression are all closely interrelated (Hanisch, 2006; Rampton, 2015).

The movement is supported to empower the women on reproductive rights and sexuality. It works against the background of civil rights and anti-war sentiments (Davis, 2017). It extends many other matters, such as equal education opportunities, equal employment opportunities, equal pay in workplaces, paid maternity leave, birth control and abortion rights, the establishment of adequate childcare facilities, rights of equal access to political and economic positions, and women and children’s safety. It also focuses against domestic violence issues, marital rape issues, sexual harassment and rape, misogyny, official legal inequalities, pornography and prostitution, and the sexual objectification of women’s bodies. It also wants to create rape-crisis centers and women’s shelters, and to bring changes in custody laws and divorce law. It takes various attempts to eliminate gender inequality from the society (Leidholdt & Raymond, 1990; Tong, 2009).

Although the women have gotten political rights in first wave of feminism, still they feel that they are confined into the domestic chores as a mother and a housewife (Friedan, 1963). They have observed that sexual, psychological and personal aspects of women’s oppression cannot include in political rights. They believe that feminist owned bookstores, credit unions, and restaurants are among

the key meeting spaces and economic engines, which will be benefitted the women (Munro, 2013).

In the second wave, the women of developing nations are included and tried to make the wave color based on the ideology of solidarity and sisterhood. American activists observe that women's movement has lacked in solidarity (Rampton, 2015). The struggles of women of color, and their voices are often silenced or ignored by white feminists. To cover this deficiency, women form a social class where race, gender, and class come together to lead to their direct and indirect oppression on patriarchal class (de Beauvoir, 1949). In this wave, some demands are rational and of course necessary to women. This movement is ended through the intra-feminism disputes of the feminist sex wars over issues, such as sexuality and pornography (Gerhard, 2001).

### **5.3 Third Wave Feminism**

The third wave feminism is represented by diverse modes of thoughts and extents from the 1990s to 2000s. It brings to light issues of heteronormativity and body positivity (Kurtis, 2016). The term "*third wave feminism*" is coined by American writer, feminist, and activist Rebecca Walker, daughter of feminist Alice Walker, in her famous article "*Becoming the Third Wave*" in 1992 (Walker, 1992). It is led by the scholars and activists of Generation X, who born in the 1960s and 1970s in the developed world. Actually, many of the third-wave feminists are second wavers' daughters (Munro, 2013).

Third wave feminists see themselves as capable, strong, and assertive social agents, and also believe that they have "*more opportunities and less sexism*" than

that of first and second waves (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). The third wave feminism is often also called “*power feminism*” because; during this movement women are strong and rebellious, and working women in various occupations are not subjected to a sexist patriarchy (Wolfe & Goldberg, 2000; Iannello, 2010). It starts through the surging from the new postcolonial and neoliberal world order. It presents a dynamic analysis that gains a global appreciation with comprehensive ideologies, such as cultural feminism, black feminism, and postmodern feminism. It stresses on the idea of “*universal womanhood*”, which focuses on moving from communal objectives to individual rights (Güldenren, 2019).

It supports reproductive rights, and fights against sexual violence and sexual harassment in workplace, rape and gang rape, and unfair maternity leave policies. It is global because “*women are of many colors, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and cultural backgrounds*” and celebrates sexuality in a positive way (Fisher, 2013; Brunell & Burkett, 2021). There are various feminist approaches in third wave of feminism, such as lipstick feminism, girlie feminism, riot grrl feminism, cybergrrl feminism, transfeminism, netgrrls, and grrl feminism (Ferriss & Young, 2006; Stermitz, 2008; Lankford, 2010).

#### **5.4 Fourth Wave Feminism**

The world has faced the fourth wave feminism since 2012, which is based on online technology. Activists and writers of Generations Y (Millennials), who born from 1981 to 1996, and Generations Z, who born in the mid to late 1990s to 2010s, are the feminists of fourth wave feminism. Most of the feminists of Generation Z are children of the feminists of Generation X (DeChane, 2014; Turner, 2015). Both third and fourth waves of feminism happen within a very limited period, and one

mixes with the other. Consequently, a lot of incidents are common in both of the waves. Fourth wave feminism is not officially acknowledged as a feminist movement (Baumgardner, 2011). As it is internet dependent, changes caused by media advances and globalization; leads to awareness but not to the willingness to change problems (Guardado, 2015).

Feminism that is originated from social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, considers as the fourth wave feminism (Rivers, 2017). It is forms of interaction and contacts among women, which mainly take place online (Rampton, 2015). During this movement, social justice campaigns have erupted on social media, such as #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. Ealasaid Munro has called it “*Hashtag Feminism*”, which is started around 2008 based on the “*culture of call-out*” that creates hubs for women as “*consciousness-raising groups*” (Baumgardner, 2011; Munro, 2013; Blevins, 2018).

In this movement, the social media becomes a real catalyst to fight against women’s harassment, professional discrimination, media sexism, and gender shaming. It tries to empower men, women and transgender people, promoting the acceptance of all possible bodies (Phillips & Cree, 2014; Maclaran, 2015). It is highly related to the use of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr, and blogs. Aim of this wave is justice for women and sexual harassment and violence against women by men (Chamberlain, 2017).

Weibo is known a Chinese Twitter has grown into a discussion board for Asian women, which offers local feminists views with a new bottom-up activism (Lixian, 2015). Tiktok becomes popular in China and then in the USA, which shares short movies ranging from fifteen to sixty seconds. TikTok prefers to fight for female



rights, whereas Weibo contains broad anti-male sentiments. Both of these permit the fourth wave feminism concerns sexually liberty, body acceptance and feminine ambition. Weibo has control on Chinese Government, but TikTok has not (Kaye et al., 2021, 2022).

## **6. Conclusion**

In this study we have observed that women are oppressed, marginalized, and abused worldwide due to their gender. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century the world has seen four waves of feminism, and the global women have been benefited from these. Before the feminism women in all nations are considered as the second class citizens. They have been deprived from all basic human rights.

The first wave of feminism is led by only white middle-class women of the USA and Europe. In this movement, the women have achieved voting rights and demand for some other rights, such as right to education, right to access to public space, right to property of father, etc. In the second wave feminism, Non-white women of West as well as in developing countries are involved with the White women of West. Sexuality and reproductive rights were main demand in this movement. Some other demands of them are equal opportunities for education, employment; maternity leave, birth control and abortion rights, etc. They become active against domestic violence issues, marital rape issues, sexual harassment and rape, misogyny, etc. During the third wave feminism, women became strong and powerful. They have fought against sexual violence, rape, and sexual harassment in workplace. The fourth wave feminists are using online technologies, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to communicate and share their feelings and to create awareness among women.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, society has realized that women must be independent and make choices for themselves in education, social works, jobs, careers, and couple life in public as well as at home. To make the society developed and sustainable, all forms of patriarchal oppressions, such as sexism, racism, class oppressions, imperialism, etc. must be eradicated from the society.

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