

Email: editor.creativesaplings22@gmail.com

DOI: https://doi.org/10.56062/gtrs.2023.2.08.449%20



A Note on Feminism and Post-Modernism

P. D. Satyapaul Kumar*

Research Scholar,

Department of English,

Andhra University, visakhapatnam

P. Rajendra Karmarkar

Department of English,

College of Arts and Commerce,

Andhra University.

ABSTRACT

The Western hemisphere's physical and cultural ambience of the past four decades was the stage for the emergence of feminism and post-modernism. A study of the contrasts, similarities and interrelations, various artistic forms and media of expression render a vivid diversity and widespread popularity to these two isms- hence the apt title to this article should be – "A Note on Feminism and Post-modernism". Recognizing and rejecting the flourishing undercurrent of unitary and biased, fictitious notions and extracting the different lifestyles, values, thoughts and history of another kind that are overshadowed by the rational logic, tradition, culture, and history of age old male chauvinistic perspectives; and accepting and encouraging the natural plurality in the existence and expression of human beings- if these are considered to be the general characteristics of feminisms, then post-modernism and feminism ought to be allies. But we find this connection very complex when we observe the changes in feminisms caused by the influence of post-modernism.

Keywords: Feminism, Modernism, Post-modernism, Chauvinism, Plight of women, Psychological and Social Revolution, Political and Social Strife, Ethnic Studies, Post-Structuralism.

INTRODUCTION

The Western hemisphere's physical and cultural ambience of the past four decades was the stage for the emergence of feminism and post-modernism. A study of the contrasts, similarities and interrelations, various artistic forms, and media of expression render a vivid diversity and widespread popularity to these two isms- hence the apt title to this article should be –"A Note on Feminism and Post-Modernism." Recognizing and rejecting the flourishing undercurrent of unitary and biased, fictitious notions and extracting the different lifestyles, values, thoughts and history of another kind that are overshadowed by the rational logic, tradition, culture, and

Corrosponding E-mail: satyapaul99@gmail.com https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1434-1108

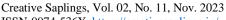
Received 05 Nov. 2023; Accepted 22 Nov. 2023. Available online: 25 Nov. 2023.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

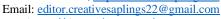
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International



^{*} Authors: P. D. Satyapaul Kumar and P. Rajendra Karmarkar







history of age-old male chauvinistic perspectives and accepting and

encouraging the natural plurality in the existence and expression of human beings- if these are

considered to be the general characteristics of feminisms, then post-modernism and feminism

ought to be allies. But we find this connection very complex when we observe the changes in

feminisms caused by the influence of post-modernism. Post-modern and Post-Structural

concern with discourse and language has spawned an interest in the construction of identity

and the concept of difference.

The history of feminism can be classified into three stages. The first stage or "THE FIRST

WAVE" corresponds to the sequence of movements in the first two decades of the 19th century

aimed at attaining equal rights for women through adult franchises. These rights won with

difficulty in the political and judicial spheres paved the way for the women to demand equal

status in all walks of life.

In fact, after attaining adult suffrage for women, we came to understand the grave indifference

meted out to women in the prevalent social structure. That-"the mechanism responsible for

providing equal rights always sides with the dominant group of society as a result of which the

complete justice to the oppressed class is a mirage" - is clear. Feminists have responded to post-

modern ideas in a number of ways. Some feminists argue that feminist theory has always dealt

with post-modern issues and indeed, has more to offer than male-centric post-modern writers.

Though we can't ascribe a definite period to the "Second Wave" in feminism, we can say that

it started in the late 60s'. The outstanding feature of the second wave in feminism is the

realization in feminists that until and unless there is a complete psychological and social

revolution, the plight of women can't be alleviated. Consequently, they set out an in depth study

coupled with political and social strife in order to confront the issue from various angles.

The feminist theory evolved out of the influential movements of the 60's and 70's. But the

earlier inspiration and boosting given by the writers like Virginia Woolf (A Room of One's

Own 1928) and Simone de Beauvoir (The Second Sex, 1949) is undeniable. The widespread

of criticism on feminism during the last five or six decades is the outcome of self-introspection

and discussion among the feminists on one hand and criticisms from the quarters of

psychology, socialism, post-modernism, ethnic studies, post-colonialism, theories of lesbian

studies- on the other.









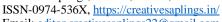
Simone de Beauvoir has challenged the male definitions of woman and called on women to define themselves outside the male/female dyad. Women, she urged, must be the subject rather than the object (other) of analysis. This concern was echoed and expanded by other feminists, particularly those calling for the recovery of women's voices and the development of knowledge from the standpoint of women.

As a result, feminism gave way to cultural feminism, post-structuralist feminism, social constructionism, equality-difference, feminism-gender theory etc. Some people welcome this plurality as post-modernism favors plurality, whereas some supporters of feminism regret plurality as they fear that it will affect the objectives of feminist movement. There is no awareness in the feminist theories of the 60's and 80's that the entire concept was being carried out in a specific historical background / backdrop.

For instance, if we look at the efforts to pinpoint the root cause of the exploitation of womenthey range from the basic physical differences between men and women to the concept of private and public with regard to home and society, women's labour, sexuality of women, domestic responsibility of procreation etc. In this context, some of the features of modern Western culture were wrongly felt to be universal. The seeds of this folly applicable to the contemporary scholastic world were sown in the era of Enlightenment of the 18th century. It has been the tradition of modern Western culture to carry out scholarly studies to invent universal and integrated principles for social and natural truths. However, the objective of explaining the true nature of God's creation had already been with the Western intellectual tradition. By the 20th century, the search for the ultimate truth and its basic principles was abandoned in scientific investigation, but the zeal continued in the fields of philosophy and humanities.

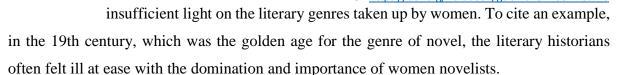
The studies on feminism of the 60's and 70's concentrated on the experiences of women under patriarchy. Owing to the long-standing menacing male chauvinism, the voices of women were suppressed and their lives were distorted, and the needs, opinions, and feelings of women were considered to be of little importance. In such oppressive times, there was no existence for women. To study this oppressive history and to bring out the voice of women, there was a two-phase effort in literary criticism in Britain and America. Critics like Kate Millet proved that most of the so-called Canonical literature spewed venom on women, and misogynistic political and mental oppression occupied most of the literature. Annet Colodney, Judith Fetterly another found fault with the literary historians for their ulterior motives in demeaning and projecting









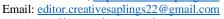


There were strong attempts to make berths for women writers in the literary history of mid 70's. While writers like Ellen Mores suggested that there should be special tradition for women writers, Eliane Showalter contended that the women writers' culture was only a subculture but not a flow of mainstream culture. Substantiating her contention, she strongly pleads that women are drawn away from the concept of collectivity due to their self-denial/frustrated attitude, their fame being temporary, and the literary history of women is strewn with obstacles.

Sandra Gilbert, Susan Guber analysed the reaction of women writers against the severe cultural restrictions imposed on women and especially against bourgeois culture, and literature oriented sexual creed of women, that barred the initiative and creativity of women. This duo succeeded in throwing light on the fact that the literary works of women writers contain similarities in the plot, images, figures of speech, symbols, structure, narrative techniques etc., with their cultural estrangement, the violence they were subjected to in patriarchy and ghastly incidents they experienced - the more the banal realities were suppressed, the stronger they surfaced through the works of women writers.

Another women writer, Adrienne Rich, Appreciated the distinctive creativity of women despite their markedly different life styles from that of their counterparts I.e. men with regard to motherhood etc., (The Mad Woman in the Attic, 1979). But these writings lack the awareness that the generalizations made in them are restricted to a specific time, period and culture. On the other hand, based on Freudian psychology, Nancy Chodorow theorized that the sexual existence of women is built differently from that of men. Chodorow propounded that in the growth of women the stages of motherhood and pre-oedipal are a deciding factor, and as a result of which, the "self' of women unlike that of men, is not defensive by drawing boundaries around it but has friendly traits of accepting the relationship, diversity, and contention. Around the end of 70's there was a cleavage between the supporters of a strong theoretical base for feminism and those who felt that theorization was nothing but the reflection of the male chauvinistic tendency. The latter group feared that the attitude of theorization of feminism would estrange it from its targeted political objectives. Here lies the key point between feminisms and post-modernism.







The former groups were deeply influenced by the French theoreticians Julia Christera, Ellen Suisse, Louis Eragueri. This trio introduced the idealist tradition in opposition to the empirical philosophy prevalent in America /and Britain, and tried to achieve a universal outlook that had nothing to do with history. They made use of the analytical methods put forward by Derrida that "an incident is always temporary and relative and the incident lies in the differential relationship of the other linguistic contexts" and the theories of Yak Lacan deftly applying the Freudian Principles to linguistic philosophy. According to Jacques Derrida Western philosophy rests on binary opposites, such as truth/falsity, unity/diversity or man/woman, whereby the nature and primacy of the first term depends on the definition of its opposite(other). These definitions are as embedded in their opposites as they are in the nature of the object being defined. Derrida and Lacan also resolved that there was "no presence but void" in the center of the linguistic system. However, Lacan attributed the unconscious desire rather than linguistic difference, as the reason for this. The child is under the delusion that since language is in the existence of a symbolic order made of general order of things, penis, father etc., it fulfills his desire. The self-consciousness of a girl growing up in such a linguistic world is possible only by yielding to the influence of phallocentric symbolic order. Extending this theory, the French feminist women writers propounded that due to the non-availability of linguistic and social symbolic order to the women, basically they tend to tilt towards non-symbolic discourse thus evading the tyranny of Logic and Reason. Eragueri and Sis opined that the women's writings emerge from their physical consciousness, which is prior to the stage of language and symbolic order. These writings forego the women's sexual organs, bodily oozings and their periods; phallo-centric symbolic order and its delusive contentment of desire. Julia Christeva's duality of semiotic and symbolic concept explains that the writings of women are personal and destructive with irony and pun as its natural features.

The feud between feminism and post - modernism reached its climax with the advent of new historicism, theories of Michael Fucho, John Badhrilhart, and John Fransiwca Leotard. There is much similarity between the contentions of the feminists and the flaying of the trends about the 'self, wisdom and truth' since the era of enlightenment by post-modernism. Feminism successfully questioned the neutrality and the clarity of the ruling and the academic systems in introducing wisely universalizing the male chauvinistic perspective of a particular culture and race. However, it is noteworthy that the feminist theories of the 60's and 80's reflected the perspective of middle class white women of Eastern Europe and North America. Post-modernism exhorts us to be alert with the generalizations brought about by forfeiting the

Creative Saplings, Vol. 02, No. 11, Nov. 2023

ISSN-0974-536X, https://creativesaplings.in/



DOI: https://doi.org/10.56062/gtrs.2023.2.08.449%20

historical, regional, social and cultural limitations. All the contexts of

feminisms in fixing the reason for the exploitation and suppression of women are related to

modern Western culture. To attribute universality to these contexts is remaking the follies of

essentialist and epistemological theories of the Enlightenment.

However, a number of feminists have sought a middle ground in relation to post-modern

thought. While agreeing that post-modernism, takes to its logical extreme and as practiced by

its mostly white middle-class male proponents, appears to undermine feminists' search for a

better, more egalitarian world.

As a result of this, the nature of the problems of the women of other regions and sect is

neglected. Meanwhile, the plurality and the flexible, the equal inclination towards various

perspectives of post-modernism pours cold water on the fire of the movements towards the

capture of power. This is the problem with total relativism.

As Sabine Lovibond said, "How can anyone ask me to say goodbye to emancipatory 'meta-

nacatires' when my own emancipation is still such a patchy, hit-and-miss affair?"

It is apt to site the argument of Seilaben Habib questioning the conclusion of Leotard that

language has no capacity for real proposition and the parameters to prove a thing always depend

on place and context. Leotard weds the rejection of modern epistemology with proofs. And it

is the contention of Ben Habib that this unscrupulous combination results in two types of

dangers.

--Plurality of values: which makes it impossible to criticize the efforts of execution and

liberation.

-- This theory importance to a discourse over the rest inwardly gives, thus making plurality

meaningless.

Another problem posed to feminism by post-modernism is 'gender definition' the 'theory that

portrays the physical differences of sex and gender i.e., natures of men and women are mutually

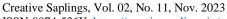
contradictory' faced severe criticism. There is no relationship between gender and sex.

No feature ascribed to masculinity is found in women. And at the same time, many features of

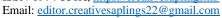
masculinity can be found in women also. We come across the natural phenomenon of women

in men as well. In fact, the divisions of manhood and womanhood are mere compulsive

classifications. This dual frame shrinks the pluralities and possible diversity of personality of







individuals. On the other hand, the cultural mechanisms prescribe the

heterosexual theory of Fucho as natural. Any sexual relations other than heterosexual are not

acceptable. In this view gender and sexuality are interdependent. It is not possible to define

gender completely until the primacy given to heterosexuality is removed.

Suezen Bordo criticized the complexity of postmodernists while praising the continuous

change, mobility and performance; the postmodernists described the "body as a perfect lively

thing permitting the trespassing of the limitations. Suezen Bordo Mound fault with such

descriptions. She opines that our bodies have got their own limitations with regard to shape,

size, movement and change and viewing it the other way is nothing but denying our physical

being. We can take the body as a symbol for principle. Maybe that the reality of the world is

incessantly plural and heterogeneous but there are limitations and pros and cons to the

comprehension and sense of human beings. Post-modernism, nourishing plurality to a much

extent, hints at renouncing theorization either complete relativity or renouncing theory.

In the words of Jane Flox

We can't claim simultaneously:

(1) Sense, self, wisdom are built socially. Hence, our learning to the possible extent depends

on the social contexts and practices and

(2) the feminist theory unfolds the truth eternally?

To counter this uncertainty, Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson.h " attempted to define a

feminist oriented post-modernism. They advocated the repeal of totalization and essentialism.

Diversity shouldn't be appreciated for the sake of diversity, but anything should be viewed as

a tool that curbs the faulty generalizations in a given historical and regional situation. It should

be noted that post-modernism/s is (are) also the rising ideology under a particular contextual

background. Post-modernism failed to project an all time ideals to counter the blunders of

modernism. This tendency should be a part of the understanding of post-modernism. Whether

failure or success, the attempt for equality, after all, can't help itself becoming a pervasive ideal.

Though each wave of feminism had a different vigor and vibe, however, both post-modernism

and feminism strived to destabilize patriarchy and the societal implications of such norms.

Feminism and Post-Modern, both movements have made a mark for themselves in the canon

of literature, art and politics, however, its influence and impact is more to be seen in the

Western Hemisphere but the same intensity has not been made across. The ideas of feminism









and post-modernism cannot be easily encapsulated in one single phrase, but its ideologies keep resonating in all literary and non-literary works. With significant works that fall under the category of feminism and post-modernism, these two movements have become ever ending discussions and ideologies with constant evolution and developments. Despite three waves of feminism, the concept of feminism still remains waverly and each individual has a different hold on the subject. Unfortunately, Post-modernism and Feminism theories are being discussed far and wide, however there still remains a lack of lucidity and a lot of arguments are still under consideration. The concepts and theories are interpreted differently in the two hemispheres.

The first wave of feminism, which began in 1848, was only pointing at women suffrage, thus giving them an equal voice in electing their leader, thus enabling them to choose a leader for equal benefit. The second of feminism began in the 1960s and 1970s to fight the unjust discrimination and issues of equality, perhaps the most significant thoughts have been brought up here, and the real struggle for equality and the incongruities have been tried to be answered and looked into, however, all the ideals of the second wave have not been considered rightly and are often misinterpreted. The second wave started in the United States of America and gradually it spread across the world. The object of domesticity has been discussed during this wave for the first time, and de facto inequalities have also been brought to the point of revolution which have created a great stir in the society. The third wave of feminism aimed at redesigning the entire dynamics and structure of feminism and society in connection to gender-masculinity and femininity. This was also the period, when emphasis has been made on the oppression and the plight of the society. Civil rights have been asked for women too.

Post-modernism, another significant ideology, and literary theory, seems to complement the concept of feminism. Post-modernism is a pragmatic approach, thus it rejected the principles of the past and people started to doubt objectivity and empiricism started to crop into their lives. For the first time, people started to doubt even practicality. The Literature produced too was not only a reaction to Modernism, but was fragmented. Post-modernism is a composite of various parts and ideas that have coexisted. It began in the 1970s and a contemporary of the second wave of feminism, thus both post-modernism and feminism began to question and challenge the already existing norms of the society, and post-modernism has taken it a step forward by even doubting objectivity. Therefore, the postulates of both have always been under study, reconsideration and research. The principles of both have rendered different meaning to different cultures, however the crux of these remains the same, in its own way.

Creative Saplings, Vol. 02, No. 11, Nov. 2023

ISSN-0974-536X, https://creativesaplings.in/



DOI: https://doi.org/10.56062/gtrs.2023.2.08.449%20

So, both post-modernism and feminism have been absorbed differently in the

western hemisphere, and this research article attempts to bring to the surface the various stages

and waves of each and how each has been considered and reconsidered. How the ideas have

underwent changes and developments until the recent past. As the ideologies and concepts are

undergoing constant change, it is essential to know the emergence, various stages and

developments and this paper analyzes each wave and ideology and presents a comprehensive

picture of it. To have an understanding, feminism, and post-modernism have been studied, but

the focus of this article remains with the Western Hemisphere for a detailed study,

understanding, and analysis. Therefore, this article presents an insight into both feminism and

post-modernism from the western perspective.

References:

Post-modernism and Society-Edited by Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi, Mac million

Education, 1990.

Feminism/Post-modernism – Edited by Linda Nicholson, Pub: Routledge, 1990, pp.133-156.

The "Difference" of Post-modern Feminism – Teresa L. Ebert in college English, Vol.53, No.

8, Pub: National Council of Teachers of English, 1991.

"Post-modernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory"- Sings: Journal of Women in

Culture and Society (summer, 1987)- Pub: The University of Chicago Press, pp.621-643.

Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism- Nancy Fraser and

Linda Nicholson in "Theory, Culture and Society, -5 (2-3) -1988-pp.373-394.

Post Modernism (Phil Papers)-" The New Classicism in Art and Architecture"-Charles Jencks,

Pub: Rizzoli, Newyork, 1987.

Years 5001- The Conquest Continues, Noam Chomsky, Pub: M. A, South End Press,

Boston, 1993.

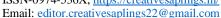
Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge – E. O. Wilson, Pub: Vintage Books- A Division of

Random House, Inc, Newyork, 1999.

Fashionable Nonsense, Abuse of Science- Alian Sokal and Jean Bricmount, Imprint Pub:

Picador Press, 2014.









"A Post-modern Critique of Third World Woman: Some Observations" (Pg.no.210 to 217) –In Panorama of World Literature Eds: Dr. Arvind M. Nawale, ISBN: 978-81-7273-653-8.

"Indian Women Novelists in English: A Critical Evaluation" (Pg. no. 131 to 136) In Feminine Fragrance - Reflections on Women Writing in English, Ed: Dr. Arvind M. Nawale, ISBN: 978-93-81030-28-8.

The Second Sex, - De Beviour, Simone, trans. And Edited- H.M. Parshley, Jonathan Cape, Thirty Bedford Square, I.st.Pub in Great Britain,1953.

The History of Sexuality, Vol-1: An Introduction, Foucault Michel, Trans. from the French by Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, Newyork, -English Trans. Random House, Inc, 1978.

"Foucault on Power: A Theory For Women"- A Chapter by Hartsock Nancy in L. Nicholson – Feminism/Post-modernism, Pub: Routledge, First eds. 1989, London, pp.157-175.

The Politics of Post-modernism, - Hutcheon, Linda, 2 nd ..eds. Pub: Routledge, 2002.

- Gender/Body/Knowledge, - Eds. Alison. M. Jaggar and Susan Bordo- N. J. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswik, 1989.

The Post-modern Condition: "A Report on Knowledge" –Theory and History of Literature, Vol.10, Trans. From French by Geoff Bennington and Brain Massumi, Foreword by Fredric Jameson, Pub: M N: Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 1984.

"The Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism"-eds. Mohanty Chandra Russo, Ann and Torres Lourdes-I N, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991.

Colonialism and Modernity: Feminist Representations of Women in Non-Western Societies – by Ong Aihwa, Inscription, ¾,1988, pp.79-93.

"Writing Post-Orientalist History of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography" by Prakash Gyan in Society for Comparative Study of Society and History, Pub: Vol.32, No.2 (apr.1990), Cambridge University Press, pp.383-408.

"Deconstructing Equality-Verses-Difference: or, The Uses of Post-Structuralist Theory For Feminism, Feminist Studies" by Scott, Joan, 14, 1988, pp. 33-50.

"Feminism, Science, and the Anti-Enlightenment Critique" by Harding, Sandra, (eds) L.Nicholson Feminism/Post-modernism, Pub: Routledge, London, 1990, pp.83-106.







The Strategy of Economic Development- by Hirschman, Albert, Pub: New Haven CI, Yale University, 1958.

Women Development and Survival in the Third World -by Afshar, Haleh (eds), Pub: Longman, vii,1991,325p;22cm.

"Feminism, Post-modernism and Gender Skepticism" by Bordo Susan, in L. Nicholson (eds)-Feminism/Post-modernism, Pub:1990, Routledge, London. Pp.133-156.

On Deconstruction Theory and Criticism After Structuralism by Culler Jonathan, Pub: Cornell University Press, 1982, Ithaca, NY.

Of Grammatology, Derrida Jacques, trans. Gayatri Spivak, Pub: John Hopkins University Press, 1976, Baltimore, MD.

The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse On Language by Foucault, Michel-Pub: Tavistok, 1972, Newyork.

Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings (1972-19770) by Foucault Michel, Pub: Pantheon, 1976, Newyork.

Feminine Psychology Reissue, by Horney Karen, Pub: Norton Import, 1st Feb,1994.

"Feminism as an Extension of Existentialism- Women in Indian English Fiction" by Meera Bai. K, in The Commonwealth Review, 6.1 (1994-95) pp.135-140.

"Feminism in Commonwealth Literature- A Difference of View" by Wattal Ameeta Mulla in The Common Wealth Review, 6.1 (1994-95) p.14 (with quotes).