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# **FEMINISM: A NECESSITY OR A RELIC OF HISTORY?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Feminism is a rather powerful word which encompasses and demonstrates the struggle that women have gone through under is still going through till this day. Feminism began because of the atrocities that women faced around them and for the way they were treated from time immemorial. Many religious books have also suggested that women are inferior to men and should be treated differently than men. The idea of feminism means the idea of equality. Throughout history, a huge number of people have raised their voices against the inequalities that women face either in their personal or professional life. It is believed that the first wave of feminism came into being in the 18th century however, women were exposed to such atrocities even way before this time.

Even before the 18th century, already many specially women had started realising that they were being treated differently just on the basis of their sex. Through the protests and the contributions of the feminists throughout history, there have been notable changes made for women across the globe which includes many amendments made in various countries. The right to equality is a basic fundamental right which is provided irrespective of the sexes, gender, or race.<sup>1</sup> There are various definitions of the term feminism given by many dictionaries', authors, feminists, celebrities, etc. Though the wording of these definitions might differ, but the essence of these definitions remains the same that is – Women should be treated equally to Men.

**Keywords** - *Feminist, Non- profit Organization, matriarchal society, upliftment, status.*

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<sup>1</sup> Diva Rai, 'Right to Equality', August 20, 2019, <https://blog.ipleaders.in/right-to-equality-2/>

## **INTRODUCTION**

**Bella Abzug** defines feminist “*as a person who believes that there has to be social, economic and political equality for all females.*”<sup>2</sup>

**Merriam Webster** believes that “*feminism is that when men and women should have equal rights and opportunities.*”<sup>3</sup>

**The Oxford dictionary** defines feminism as “*the advocacy quality of the success and the establishment of the political social and economic rights of the female sex.*”<sup>4</sup>

The feminism movement has been bifurcated into 4 waves which have been distinguished to demarcate the various struggle movements and the different opinions and views that each of these waves carried with them. The waves were followed one after the other and currently, we are in the 4th wave of feminism. Although, we have come a long way from where we started, yet there are millions of people who are still suffering to this day.

## **FIRST WAVE OF FEMINISM**

In the western world, this wave began in the 19th and early 20th century.<sup>5</sup> The main focus of this wave was on the basic legal rights of women and the problems they had faced since ages. The women were given no legal standing in politics or business and were seen as a liability – the unmarried women were a liability for the father and the married women were the liability of the husband. The signing of the ‘Declaration of Sentiments at the Seneca Falls Convention’ was the first-ever women’s rights convention which was created because women (Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton) were denied seating in the ‘World Anti-Slavery Convention’ in 1840.<sup>6</sup>

The American women's suffrage Association came into being in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was broadly female-led. It was formed for the upliftment of women in the patriarchal society and also to gain the basic right to vote through some legal amendments. This association later merged with the

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<sup>2</sup> History.com Editors, ‘Bella Abzug’, May 22, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/bella-abzug>

<sup>3</sup> ‘Merriam Webster’, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/definition>

<sup>4</sup> Elinor B., ‘Feminism’, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism>

<sup>5</sup> Tara Anand, ‘A brief History of Feminism’, April 24, 2018, <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/04/24/summary-first-wave-of-feminism/>

<sup>6</sup> Tara Anand, ‘A brief History of Feminism’, April 24, 2018, <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/04/24/summary-first-wave-of-feminism/>



National American Women Suffrage Association as they strived for the common goal to give legal standing to the women in the society. The first State to grant suffrage to women was Wyoming in 1869.<sup>7</sup> The greatest change that revolutionized everything for women was the Nineteenth Amendment of the United States which stated that the citizens of the United States would get the right to vote despite their sex.

However, the racial discrimination that the black woman faced was not much talked about during the first wave but there were some communities which had recognized the rights of black women and had equated them to that of white women.<sup>8</sup> There were many other countries like the US which had recognized that women too needed a legal standing and the basic rights in the society which led to the large-scale formation of associations around the globe, however, women were not given enough importance like the United States.

## **SECOND WAVE OF FEMINISM**

The 19060's marked the beginning of the second wave of feminism which extended till the late 1980's.<sup>9</sup> Feminists of this wave were motivated because of the 'Civil Rights Movement which focused on equality and justice. During this time there was huge discrimination based on employment as women were unequally paid and did not get equal job opportunities. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Pay Act of 1963 were amended so that there would be no discrimination on the basis of sex when the employers had to hire their employees.<sup>10</sup> The incidences of rape and domestic violence never came to the surface and were always looked over. This wave merely focused on the issues of equality, discrimination and political inequalities were also taken into consideration.

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<sup>7</sup> Martha Rampton, 'Four Waves of Feminism', October 25, 2015, <https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism>

<sup>8</sup> Lynn Varacalli Cavanaugh, 'A brief History: Four Waves of Feminism', June 28, 2018, <https://www.progressivewomensleadership.com/a-brief-history-the-four-waves-of-feminism/>

<sup>9</sup> Tara Anand, 'A brief Summary of the Second Wave of Feminism', April 25, 2018, <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/04/25/summary-second-wave-of-feminism/>

<sup>10</sup> Britannica, 'The Second wave of Feminism', <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>

Betty Friedan was a second-wave Feminist and had helped and contributed to the Feminist movement during this time.<sup>11</sup> She focused on improving the lives of the woman who had to accept that being oppressed by men was natural and that their only job was to take care of their families and to nurture their children. Unlike the First wave Feminists, women of the second wave focused more on the theoretical aspects as to why women were oppressed for such a long time and there were many campaigns that were held in order to educate all women around the globe to understand that they are more than just slaves of men. They were 3 kinds of a feminist which can be identified in this wave.<sup>12</sup>

1. **Liberal feminists** - who wanted to integrate the women to fight for their rights
2. **Racial feminists**- who had wanted to change the patriarchal society completely and to give equality to the women
3. **Cultural or the difference feminists** -who wanted to make women more like men and they also refused to accept that men and women are the same.<sup>13</sup>

In the second wave, there were more educated women who had established associations as compared to the first wave. The African American women also started to form associations however, they still had to face racial discrimination and were oppressed and were looked down upon by the society at large.<sup>14</sup>

### **THIRD WAVE OF FEMINISM**

The third wave of feminism began as early as the mid-1990s and continued till 2011.<sup>15</sup> We had a fairly developed world by this time and the entire globe had recognized different cultures and diversity. Media helped in a big way for the feminist movement in the third wave as now the information could reach people much faster. Feminists of this time continued the work that was

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<sup>11</sup> Ohio Humanities, 'Betty Friedan, The Three Waves of Feminism', April 27, 2018, <http://www.ohiohumanities.org/betty-friedan-the-three-waves-of-feminism/>

<sup>12</sup> Swati D, 'Different types of Feminism and their Subsets', <https://www.sociologygroup.com/different-types-of-feminism/>

<sup>13</sup> Swati D, 'Different types of Feminism and their Subsets', <https://www.sociologygroup.com/different-types-of-feminism/>

<sup>14</sup> Constance Grady, 'The waves of Feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained', July 20, 2018 <https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/16955588/feminism-waves-explained-first-second-third-fourth>

<sup>15</sup> Britannica, 'The Third Wave of Feminism' <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>

left by the second-wave feminists.<sup>16</sup> By this time women had a clear standing in the world and had flourished across all fields in the world.

There were many support groups that had worked for the racial as well as the gender inequalities that were prevalent and strived to achieve social justice.<sup>17</sup> Most of the third wave feminists were either daughters or granddaughters of the second wave feminists and mostly contributed to continuing what their mothers and grandmothers had created. They had many opportunities in regard to politics employment and a good career but the rural parts across the globe still saw the rise of patriarchal society. The poor people lacked education and were not much aware of their rights as a woman. The women of these areas still believed that their sole role in society was to take care of their families and to do the household chores.

It can be seen that though the developed countries were able to somewhat provide women the basic rights that they deserved, but at the same time, the countries that were underdeveloped or were developing still did not see much change as against the developed world. The reason behind this was the lack of education and the stubbornness of some societies. Many support groups had worked for the racial as well as gender inequalities that were prevalent and strived to achieve social justice.<sup>18</sup> Most of the third wave feminist were either daughters or granddaughters of the second wave feminists and mostly contributed to continue what the mothers and grandmothers had created.

## **FOURTH WAVE OF FEMINISM**

The fourth wave of feminism began in 2012 and is prevalent till date.<sup>19</sup> This wave has been by far the most impactful as women around the world have tried to help women of not just their own society but also from other countries across the globe. Many influential people and celebrities have advocated for Women’s Rights through their Social media platforms such as Selena Gomez,

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<sup>16</sup> Tara Anand, ‘A brief Summary of the Third wave of Feminism’, April 27, 2018, <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/04/27/brief-summary-third-wave-of-feminism/>

<sup>17</sup> Constance Grady, ‘The waves of Feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained’, July 20, 2018 <https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/16955588/feminism-waves-explained-first-second-third-fourth>

<sup>18</sup> Tara Anand, ‘A brief Summary of the Third wave of Feminism’, April 27, 2018, <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/04/27/brief-summary-third-wave-of-feminism/>

<sup>19</sup> Britannica, ‘The fourth Wave of Feminism’, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-fourth-wave-of-feminism>

Taylor Swift, Emma Watson, Michelle Obama, etc.<sup>20</sup> The remarkable difference between the other three waves and this wave is that many men have also joined this moment who believe that women are equal to men like Harry Styles, Mark Ruffalo, Chris Martin, Will Smith, etc.<sup>21</sup> There has been a notion that to be a feminist you have to be a woman, but this stereotype is somewhat broken by the men who joined and became feminists and contributed towards the empowerment of women. Though there were men who had supported women in the other mentioned three waves as well, but they were not much popularised because they did not get much media attention.

With the rise of social media platforms, it is seen that more and more women are understanding that they are equal to men and have got a right in society. There are many cases of sexual harassment, rape, fat-shaming and other such issues which have cropped up and are increasing day by day.<sup>22</sup> Though social media platforms are an excellent source for the promotion of Women's rights and to create awareness of the same, however, many women receive many harsh comments from people around the world on their profiles either calling them names or body is shaming them. There were many high-profile incidents that took place such as the brutal gang rape of Nirbhaya in December 2012 in India which had caused international outrage and gave rise to many amendments being made in the Indian Penal Code.<sup>23</sup>

In the United States Donald Trump won the presidential elections in 2016 and also made many remarks about women. There was a huge scale protest against his winning. The Women's March was held after his coming into power and more than 4.6 million people had participated in it.<sup>24</sup> There were cases of increased gang rapes assault, dowry deaths, acid attacks, etc, that were never reported not just in India but across the globe. With this there came many amendments which were made in the different laws of different countries for example the Indian Penal Code had inserted

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<sup>20</sup> Lauren Alexis Fisher and Chelsey Sanchez, '37 Inspiring women who shaped Feminism' March 2, 2020, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/g4201/famous-feminists-throughout-history/>

<sup>21</sup> Megan Werft, '27 Famous Men who are Proud to be Feminists', April 20, 2017, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/27-famous-men-proud-to-be-feminists/>

<sup>22</sup> Constance Grady, 'The waves of Feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained', July 20, 2018 <https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/16955588/feminism-waves-explained-first-second-third-fourth>

<sup>23</sup> Britannica, 'The fourth Wave of Feminism', <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-fourth-wave-of-feminism>

<sup>24</sup> Britannica, 'The fourth Wave of Feminism', <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-fourth-wave-of-feminism>

the provisions which had punished the people who are responsible for acid attack which was not present earlier.<sup>25</sup>

Another remarkable thing that happened was the #metoo movement which was started by Tarana Burke in the United States of America for those women who had suffered and had gone through some sort of sexual violence which was committed on them and was made mostly for the women of colour.<sup>26</sup> There were many allegations raised by women who had been facing sexual violence from not just strangers but also from their families, colleagues, and their bosses. It was revealed that Harvey Weinstein had been sexually harassing women for years by the help of the #metoo movement.<sup>27</sup>

Many victims across the globe started sharing their stories on social media with the #metoo which was shocking. This also showed that there were many cases which never got reported either in the police stations or in the courts. This moment also got a lot of hate from the people who believed that women were doing and sharing false stories and were making false accusations to gain followers on their account. Dozens of politicians, businessmen and entertainers were also accused and many of them also surrendered and had confessed that they had committed such acts of sexual violence on women.<sup>28</sup>

Though there have been drastic changes which have uplifted women all through these years and we have come a long way from the first wave to the fourth wave, there are still many women who are suffering on a daily basis and need to be educated more. The women today are aware of their rights but still have to succumb to such inequalities that they face and many of them do not get to raise their voices against the violence either sexual or physical or mental that is done on them.

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<sup>25</sup> Shruti Jain, 'The rising Fourth Wave: Feminist activism on Digital platforms in India', <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-rising-fourth-wave-feminist-activism-on-digital-platforms-in-india/>

<sup>26</sup> Gurvinder Gill and Imran Rahman-Jones, 'Me too Founder Tarana Burke: movement is not Over', July 9, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-53269751#:~:text=Tarana%20began%20using%20the%20phrase,Harvey%20Weinstein%20of%20sexual%20assault.>

<sup>27</sup> Prue Clarke, 'Stuck on the third? A guide to Fourth Wave Feminism', <https://futurewomen.com/leadership/gender-diversity/fourth-wave-feminism-guide/>

<sup>28</sup> Martha Rampton, 'Four Waves of Feminism', October 25, 2015, <https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism>

## **FAMOUS FEMINISTS AROUND THE WORLD – A TIMELINE**

Here is a timeline of the famous feminists around the world who helped bring in change in society and made remarkable contributions to uplift women. The under-mentioned names are the ones who were not afraid of raising their voices against the discrimination that either they had faced themselves or had seen others go through.

### **First Wave Feminists- Pioneers**

1. **Mary Wollstonecraft** (1759-1797) - she was a feminist philosopher, and she used her voice to fight against gender inequality in her time. She wrote the incredibly famous – ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Women’ which had challenged Rousseau’s theories which claim that women are inferior to men. She was very well known in the world of feminists and was a great English writer.<sup>29</sup>
2. **Sojourner Truth** (1797-1883) - she had courageously fought against gender inequality and all types of racial discrimination. She was born as a slave but was freed in the year 1927 and from then on made it her goal to fight for her rights and to uplift other women. She has been stated as the first African American women to have won a lawsuit in the United States when she had to fight to get her son returned to her who was at that time sentenced to life imprisonment. She spent most of her life campaigning for rights of women, African American’s, and all slaves.<sup>30</sup>
3. **Susan Brownell Anthony** (1820-1906) - she was among the America's first leaders to have fought against the slavery movement and the suffrages movement. She gave many lectures around the States on women empowerment. In the year 1872, she along with 15 other females she voted in the presidential election but for this they had been arrested and were convicted for the same.<sup>31</sup>
4. **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** (1815- 1902) - she played a major role for the women rights movement in 1848 and she was the one who had planned the famous women's rights

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<sup>29</sup>The Editors of encyclopaedia of Britannica, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft’, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mary-Wollstonecraft>

<sup>30</sup>History.com Editors, ‘Sojourner Truth’, January 16, 2020, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/sojourner-truth>

<sup>31</sup>Hanx Official, ‘The 15 most famous Feminists throughout history’, February 19, 2021, <https://www.hanxofficial.com/blogs/naked-truths/the-15-most-famous-feminists-throughout-history>

convention which took place in Seneca falls in the State of New York. Her work in - The Declaration of Sentiments, had asked for equal treatment for all women around.<sup>32</sup>

5. **Emmeline Pankhurst** (1858-1928) - she had the most wonderful ideas to make sure that everybody knew about equal voting rights for all women. She would go on to changing herself to rails, which would include acts of violence and hunger strikes. Shortly after her death, British women over the age of 21 got their right to vote.<sup>33</sup>

### **Second Wave Feminists (1960's – 1980s)**

1. **Simone de Beauvoir** (1908-1986) - She was a French writer and was one of the most important feminists of her time because she was very vocal and was always calling out the patriarchy system for its flaws. Her work of 1949 - The Second Sex, had helped many other second wave feminists to realise their importance in society as well.
2. **Gloria Steinem** (born in 1934) - she spent most of her life campaigning and advocating for women's right and was also the founder of - Miss Magazine, which was only dedicated to promoting the cause and creating awareness of the issues that women faced.<sup>34</sup>
3. **Bell hooks** (born in 1952) - she was a black feminist scholar, theorist, and cultural critic. She had written the most popular book - Feminism is for everybody, which made it more accessible and relatable for all. She beautifully explained what feminism means and how it can be applied by everyone.<sup>35</sup>
4. **Germaine Greer** (born in 1939) - she was also one of the most important persons who had raised her voice against feminism in the second wave. In her work - The Female Eunuch, she critically stated women had to face repression because of the power of the patriarchy. She fought for the liberation of women particularly the sexual liberation of women. She states that women these days are searching for less than what total equality means.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>The Editors of encyclopaedia of Britannica, 'Elizabeth Cady Stanton',

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Elizabeth-Cady-Stanton>

<sup>33</sup>Hanx Official, 'The 15 most famous Feminists throughout history', February 19, 2021,

<https://www.hanxofficial.com/blogs/naked-truths/the-15-most-famous-feminists-throughout-history>

<sup>34</sup> Lauren Alexis Fisher and Chelsey Sanchez, '37 Inspiring women who shaped Feminism' March 2, 2020,

<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/g4201/famous-feminists-throughout-history/>

<sup>35</sup>Hazel T. Biana, 'Extending Bell Hook's Feminist theory', <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol21/iss1/3/>

<sup>36</sup> Lauren Alexis Fisher and Chelsey Sanchez, '37 Inspiring women who shaped Feminism' March 2, 2020,

<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/g4201/famous-feminists-throughout-history/>



5. **Betty Friedan** (1921-2006) - she was one of the most iconic persons for the famous movement in America. Her book of 1963 - *The Feminine Mystique* was a tool that helped many women of her time. The women's strike for equality was organised by her on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the equal rights amendment. She also co-founded the National Organization for women along with many other organizations which aimed at ensuring the protection of women right.<sup>37</sup>

### **Third wave Feminists (1990's to 2011)**

1. **Madonna** (born in 1958) – along with being a global celebrity, she has contributed immensely towards spreading awareness of the need of feminism in our world today. She throughout her career has empowered many women and has helped many to realise their worth. She has motivated women to own their sexuality and to take full charge of their own lives.<sup>38</sup>
2. **Oprah Winfrey** (born in 1954) – she has her own successful show and has started the Oprah Winfrey leadership Academy for all the girls which strive at providing support to women to thrive in life. She has also helped many women realise their own strengths and has shown that women should not face oppression.<sup>39</sup>
3. **Naomi Wolf** (born in 1962) – she is seen as one of the most profound feminists of the third wave with her best-selling copy of - *The Beauty Myth*, in which she boldly states that beauty that is created is a social construct which is mostly dictated all the men around the world. She has also written many books which advocate women's rights and has made it easier for everybody to understand what feminism stands for today.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Hanx Official, 'The 15 most famous Feminists throughout history', February 19, 2021,

<https://www.hanxofficial.com/blogs/naked-truths/the-15-most-famous-feminists-throughout-history>

<sup>38</sup> Lauren Alexis Fisher and Chelsey Sanchez, '37 Inspiring women who shaped Feminism' March 2, 2020,

<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/g4201/famous-feminists-throughout-history/>

<sup>39</sup>Marie- Claire Chappet, '30 Majorly empowering feminist icons that empower us every day', March 8, 2020

<https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/feminist-icons>

<sup>40</sup>Marie- Claire Chappet, '30 Majorly empowering feminist icons that empower us every day',

March 8, 2020 <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/feminist-icons>



## **Fourth wave Feminists (2012 onwards)**

1. **Malala Yousafzai** (born in 1997) - she was only 11 years old when she had spoken against the Taliban on her BBC blog which describes all the brutal conditions under the Taliban rule. She also survived their retaliation which was extremely violent and has always fought for the education rights of all girls in her country.<sup>41</sup>
2. **Emma Watson** (born in 1990) - she is famous around the world for her work with the United Nations. She made a speech at the UN which stated that feminism is not only a fight just for women but is also required to be fought by men too. She had created the hashtag - #HeForShe movement.<sup>42</sup>
3. **Michelle Obama** (born in 1964) – She has contributed immensely towards the various feminist movements around the globe and has also made heavy donations towards the non-profit organizations who want to bring in a change in society. She has given many speeches not only for women’s right’s but also on the issues of racial discrimination faced by black women to date.<sup>43</sup>

## **SUGGESTIONS**

Women who face any sort of inequality should call out those people because of whom they are suffering and should also help other women to do the same. This can either be done by directly telling the person that they are wrong or with the use of social or print or electronic media. Women should also support those non-profit organizations which work for the empowerment of women so that they can create awareness among the people who are not very well educated and do not have the opportunities. Participating in peaceful protest can also help to a great extent to bring in political and lawful changes.

Women should have access to education not only in the well-developed countries and the well-developed cities but also in the developing countries and the rural areas. This will ensure that they become more aware of their rights and this can also help them to seek help when required. Young

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<sup>41</sup>Naomi Blumberg, ‘Malala Yousafzai’, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Malala-Yousafzai>

<sup>42</sup>Hanx Official, ‘The 15 most famous Feminists throughout history’, February 19, 2021, <https://www.hanxofficial.com/blogs/naked-truths/the-15-most-famous-feminists-throughout-history>

<sup>43</sup>Marie- Claire Chappet, ‘30 Majorly empowering feminist icons that empower us every day’, March 8, 2020 <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/feminist-icons>

girls should also be counselled from time to time so that they can understand what their rights are and how they can fulfil all their aspirations without being hampered by anybody. Supporting other women is very crucial and women should be encouraged to get more and more involved in the various dimensions of their professional lives too.

## **CONCLUSION**

Women have been able to achieve things which were unimaginable 100 years earlier because of the great feminists and the great feminist movements all around the globe. Feminism has been instrumental in bringing change in the lives of the women of today as compared to the women who lived earlier. Feminism has tackled issues like education for women, reproductive rights of women, their physical autonomy, equal pay, equal rights, equal opportunities and many more things. There is no doubt that through feminism women have become more aware and have reached great heights.

However, this does not mean that equality has been achieved in all spheres of life. There have been many wrong notions about feminism and many people still believe that feminism is only a way to achieve fame and followers on the internet. Many people also believe that feminism means that women should be placed above men. Many have gone as far as to say that feminists hate the man and are trying to be superior to men.

Feminism does not stand by these things and it simply means that there should be equality between men and women. Men and women should be placed on the same pedestal and should not be differentiated from one another merely on the basis of sex. Feminism is not just a relic of history but is indeed required for today as we have come far from where we had started yet; we are far from being called as a community which has achieved equality. Therefore, feminism becomes an absolute necessity today and we cannot ignore the atrocities that women face till this day.