MWG-001: Theories of Women's and Gender Studies
Guess paper-1

Q1. What do you understand by the plural nature of feminism?

Ans. We will begin by drawing your attention to the title of this section which employs the plural to refer to feminism. Thus, from the very beginning we seek to establish that there is no one history of feminism. Indeed, the unfolding of the history of feminism alerts us to the idea that women all over the world have very different experiences and realities to contend with. No one narration can presume to encapsulate the experience of all women all over the world. In other words, a universal history of feminism is not possible, nor is it desirable. If we must have a broad definition of feminism then it can best be described as a challenge to the oppression and marginalization that women face in their diverse contexts. Since these contexts are different, obviously the experiences are different and hence the feminist challenge to these experiences would also be different. What we could do at best is to plot the broad contours of the attempts that women the world over have made to challenge and change the oppression that they are faced with. Again, a word of caution, it would not be possible for us to look at all such attempts, we will have to make choices and thereby exclude many. But if you find this account of the histories of feminism interesting, we are sure that you will explore further and witness startling differences as well as amazing similarities. But, before we embark upon the history of feminism, we need to spend some time clarifying certain fundamental issues. For instance, how do we define feminism? Does anyone who is concerned with women's issues in general and women's oppression in particular qualify to be described as a feminist? This is an issue that divides scholars and activists alike. It is impossible to define feminism in terms of a core set of concepts. Women in the distant past have sometimes very courageously questioned the social structures that oppressed them, does that make it an instance of feminist resistance (for instance Mira Bai). There are many instances of women 's initiatives and actions from our times that we would hesitate to describe as feminist (the kar sevikas who assisted in the demolition of the Babri Masjid by organizing food and nursing care). There is clearly a kind of consciousness that imbues feminism and a specific historical context that made it possible for feminism to emerge. By familiarizing ourselves with some of the currents in the history of feminism, let us try to achieve some kind of clarity on the question of what is feminism and then its varied history. Feminism as a term emerged long after women started questioning their inferior status and demanding a change in that status. Should all theories and actions intended to "improve" women's position intentionally or unintentionally be seen as feminist? Or is feminism to be understood as a body of thought and action that has its own distinctive history, practice and ideas? We would be more comfortable with the latter position and of course we hasten to add that there is no one history of feminist practice or idea. For centuries, women's voices and struggles have not been heard or recorded. Thus, there is not much access to what women thought, but the fact is that women have always thought about their lives and tried to resist their subordination. Women were not seen as political creatures for most part of history; their lives were seen as confined to the home and the hearth. Thus, not much is known about the political views or aspirations of women, as women's voices in general were not considered worthy of record (much less their political voices which were thought to be non-existent). But the fact is that in the rich corpus of oral history including poems, folktales etc, women's attempts to understand, explain, ridicule and challenge the basis of their lives may be glimpsed. In the next section, we will look at women's early attempts to voice feminist ideas, and their dissatisfaction with their given roles in society.

Q2. Write down about political participation of women in the 20th century

Ans. "Unless women of India work side by side with men, there is no salvation for India, salvation in more senses than one. I mean political salvation in the greater sense, and I mean the economic salvation and spiritual salvation also. (Gandhi, 1925) It was a stirring spectacle, that of tens of thousands of women, who for centuries were chained to the narrow domestic life and whom an authoritarian social system had assigned the position of helots at home, steeping out into the streets

and marching with their fellowpatriots in illegal political demonstrations. (Desai, 1975, p.346) That nationalist leaders desired women's political participation and that women participated in the national movement are accepted facts. There is, however, no consensus on what political participation meant for women and for nationalist leaders. One view is that "even the most cursory examination of women's organized activism from the beginning of the twentieth century explodes the myth still being pursued by many, that women's role in the national movement(s) against imperialism was maledictated and male-manipulated" (Kasturi & Mazumdar, 1994, p.16). The other, as Mies points out is: To draw women into the political struggle is a tactical necessity of any anti-colonial or national liberation struggle. But it depends on the strategic goals of such a movement whether the patriarchal family is protected as the basic social unit or not. The fact that the women themselves accepted their limited tactical function within the independence movement made them excellent instruments in the struggle. But they did not work out a strategy for their own liberation struggle for their own interests. By subordinating these goals to the national cause, they confirmed to the traditional pativrata or sati ideal of the self-sacrificing woman. (Mies, 1980. p.121) Other scholars like Gail Minault and Geraldine Forbes argue that the concept of the extended family in Indian culture could extend virtually indefinitely to justify women's activities beyond the household. The metaphor of the extended family certainly assisted middle class women's performance of some public roles through their associations (Minault, 1982, p. 220-21). While at one time an uncritical lauding of women's political participation in the national movement was common, more recent views have veeredaround to the belief that women's political participation "gave the illusion of change while women were kept within the structural confines of family and society" (Jayawardena, 1986, p.107). You could argue, however, that active political participation often challenges the boundaries of intended models. Indian women also had a history of militant participation in political struggles- in working class strikes, in peasant rebellions, in anti-imperialist and democratic movements. It was simply not ideas (important as they were) which led to the Congress adopting the Fundamental Rights Resolution in 1931. Significantly, the Lahore Congress of Asian Women for Equality, the Geneva International Conference on Women's Equality and the Congress of the Chinese Communist Party adopted a resolution on gender equality in the same year. Here again you will notice the complex ways in which international and national events shaped the modern women's question in India.

Q3. Discuss in detail about the second phase of suffrage movement in India (1927-1937)

Ans. In the years 1928-1937, there were debates on the terms under which women's franchise should be expanded. The British Government supported reservation of seats for women, separate electorates and less stringent franchise qualifications. But most of the leaders of the women's movement opposed separate electorates and reservation of seats for women and demanded adult franchise. The second phase in the battle for female franchise started ten years after the Montague Chelmsford Reforms when the Simon Commission was appointed in 1927 as the first step in the making of a new India Act. The Commission was boycotted by many organizations including the Indian National Congress and the WIA (Women's Indian Association) on the ground that there were no Indians in the team. However, members of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC), a newly founded organization, were divided and some of them led by the Rani of Mandi, met the Commission and presented their demands of votes to literate women and reserving seats for women. Another sop was announced by the Viceroy in 1929 in the form of a Round Table Conference (RTC) to be held in London to discuss the next step towards Dominion Status. Again, this was boycotted by the INC and the WIA. However, the Conference was attended by Begum Shahnawaz Khan and Mrs. Radhabai Subbarayan in their individual capacity and they did not represent any women's organization. They proposed adult franchise as the ideal and special reservation for women as an interim measure. Another important step was the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931, whereby the Congress agreed to attend the Second Round Table Conference. The AIWC, under the chairmanship of Sarojini Naidu, took up the task of preparing a memorandum to be submitted to the Franchise Committee of the Second RTC. A Drafting committee was formed consisting of eight women: Hansa Mehta, Taraben Premchand, Margaret Cousins, Faiz Tyabji, Hilla Fardoonji, Shareefa Hamid Ali, Malini Sukhtankar and Rani Lakshmibai

Rajwade. The memorandum demanded universal adult franchise, mixed general electorates and no reservation, nomination or cooption for women. Various women's organizations were also involved and their approval was taken for the proposal. A fifteen-member deputation of AIWC members led by Rajkumari Amrit Kaur met the Viceroy to appeal for adequate women's representation at the RTC. As a result, a few more delegates were added like Sarojini Naidu and two government nominees, namely Begum Shahnawaz Khan and Mrs. Radhabai Subbarayan. The demand of the women's movement for equal political rights and women's active participation in the freedom struggle led the Indian National Congress at its Karachi session in 1931 to pledge gender equality before the law and universal adult franchise. This pledge was honoured in the Constitution of free India. With the recommendation of the RTC for increased franchise for women and the subsequent approval of the British Parliament, a Franchise Committee was formed with Lord Lothian as the Chairman. The AIWC geared up with a rather impressive delegation which included Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade, Malini Sukhtankar, Lakshmi Menon, C.N. Nallamutha Ammal, Hilla Fardoonji, Begum Sharifa Hamid Ali and Miss S.I. Vincent. The Lothian Committee, which came to India in 1932 and met the delegation, rejected universal adult franchise but recommended that two to five per cent of seats in the provinces be reserved for women and that wives of property owners and literate women be enfranchised. Their recommendations were published as a White Paper in 1933. Meanwhile, in the same year, the Communal Award reserved seats for Muslims and Scheduled Castes. The AIWC rejected the idea of reserved seats for women as they felt that the unity of Indian womanhood would be threatened by the Communal Award which would divide women. The women's organizations once again took up cudgels to reframe their demand for political rights. In a joint meeting of the AIWC, WIA and NCWI a memorandum was prepared to be presented to the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, who appointed a Joint Select Committee to discuss the White Paper. The memorandum consisted of suggestions, demands and protests- suggestions were for the transition period and protests were against reservation of seats and indirect representation of women in the Federal Assembly. The demand consisted of enfranchisement of all men and women above 21 years of age belonging to the urban areas. A delegation of women led by Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy and Begum Hamid Ali was deputed to represent the case of women before the Committees and they reiterated their demand for universal adult franchise. In this they got the full support of British women's organizations which strove to educate public opinion in England. By the mid-1930s, as the pace of the nationalist movement picked up, the AIWC in its 1933 annual session demanded the right to franchise and equal status for women in the future constitution of India. In the 1934 session, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, in a resolution, acknowledged the fact that the Joint Select Committee had granted greater franchise to women and a definite place for them in the new constitution but also regretted the fact that it ignored many of their demands. Their dissatisfaction grew further when the Government of India Act of 1935 was announced, which again rejected the proposal for universal adult franchise. It did, however, increase the number of enfranchised Indians and the proportional suffrage rights of women since until now, only some women had the right to vote. Their numbers increased slightly as their qualifications, age etc were slightly lowered aand some of the previous qualifications were also relaxed. Now, all women over 21 years could vote if they fulfilled the qualifications of property and education; but the women's organizations were disappointed with this and expressed their disapproval of the provisions of the Act. However, they realized the need to educate the women as a majority was not even literate and this was a major hurdle in the way of achieving voting rights. Women soon made efforts to overcome the problem of education and also gave their wholehearted support to the national movement.

Q4. Briefly write down about the following two topics

1. **Western feminism**
2. **Indian feminism**

Ans. Western Feminisms: It is generally believed that feminism first appeared in the 19th century. In the second half of the 19th century state sponsored social reforms were being carried out in Europe. In the backdrop of industrialization, liberalism and growing national consciousness, the domestic policies of most of the European states were influenced by these forces. In the years after the 1880's

various progressive steps were engendered by state governments like universal manhood suffrage, expansion of the popular press, acts and laws to regulate factory hours and working conditions. But they fell short of fulfilling the needs and demands of most workers. The long economic depression that began in 1873 and lasted well into the 1890s added to social and political tensions in almost every country. Many feminists contended that social reforms would be inadequate as long as women were without the right to enter universities or vote. Thus, the suffrage movement took shape and forged ahead with the demand for voting rights for all adult women. Gradually the movement grew strong and drew within its fold various other issues of concern for women. This process of gradual undulation of women's demands is known as 'waves' of the women's movement, Feminism in the Three Waves of Women's Movements The first wave of the feminist movement in the United States began in the 1840's as women opposed to slavery, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, drew parallels between the oppression of African Americans and the oppression of women. They also sought equality in property rights and changes in the marriage relationship. They are mostly known for their efforts for suffrage or voting rights for women. The Seneca Falls convention began the social movement by which women finally won the right to vote in 1920. But other disadvantages persisted, and a second wave of feminism arose in the 1960s and continues today. Sometimes also referred to as the women's liberation movement, the second wave focused on the discrimination of women, and on cultural, social and political issues. Some of the most influential works of the second wave are The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir (which was actually published in 1949 but gained its popularity during this time), The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan and Sexual Politics by Kate Millett. The second wave has often been accused of catering to the needs of the upper middle-class white women and, sometimes, of biological essentialism. Much of the scholarship on second-wave feminism has focused on divisions within the women's movement and its narrow conception of race and class. Feminists in the 1960s and 1970s also formed many strong partnerships, often allying themselves with a diverse range of social justice efforts on a local grassroots level. There were coalitions and alliances in which feminists and other activists joined forces to address crucial social justice issues such as reproductive rights, the peace movement, women's health, Christianity and other religions, and neighborhood activism, as well as alliances crossing boundaries of race, class, political views, and sexual identity. Beginning in the late 1960s, women's health became a primary concern of feminist activists throughout Canada. Women's liberationists located in Vancouver were particularly active. In 1970, members of the Vancouver Women's Caucus organized an Abortion Caravan that traveled across the country in the name of women's rights to accessible abortion on demand. The following year, the women of the Vancouver Women's Health Collective came together to imagine and create new feminist options for women's health care, including the operation of a women-run clinic (Hewitt, 2009). In the 20th century, two names stand out in terms of their originality. Simone de Beauvoir of The Second Sex fame (1949) and Germaine Greer who wrote The Female Eunuch (1970). The latter, like the former, is a monumental work. Both are works of piercing subjectivity, literary feats of self-description whose status becomes over time, ever more artistic and less political. Germaine Greer is the daughter, not the originator, of feminist culture, and she and her work are part of the 'second wave' of feminism. Greer believes that women can change their saga if they so wish to or they may change their lives for the better

Third-wave feminism, begun in the 1980s or early 1990s, addressed feminism across class and race lines and has been grounded in culture rather than biology. Postmodernist feminists, with their interrogation of fixed categories like 'women' and 'gender', belong to the third wave. In the west, some people also refer to a contemporary 'post-feminist' era, which is based on the belief that the main agendas of feminist movements have already been met through an egalitarian society which offers equal rights and opportunities to men and women. However, there has been a groundswell of strong opposition to such assumptions as most third wave feminists continue to struggle in an unequal world.

Indian Feminism: Women, increasingly aware of their rights and duties, helped in the formation of the first women's movement in India. The use of the word 'feminism' in the Indian context was still

peripheral although its impact was being felt all over the country thus leading to the birth of the women's movement. More specifically, in the political context, women were increasingly making their presence felt by way of participation in the movement for national freedom. Women's struggle, the world over, has been marked by the efforts of the 'second sex' in dealing with the various material and non-material inequalities and hierarchies that have affected women's lives across time and space, such as those related to class, gender, 'race', caste, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, education, age or health. Women have, since ages, challenged or fought these inequalities through different types of politics and activism in the public sphere and through individual actions and forms of resistance in the so called 'private sphere'. Like the women's movement elsewhere, the movement in India may also be divided into three phases, if not waves. The first phase began in the second half of the 19th century when socioreligious reforms prompted women's upliftment and gender equality. The second phase begins in the 1920s, when organized efforts were made to take up women's issues. This phase also coincided with the nationalist movement and at times both appeared to merge. Women were also being gradually initiated into feminism. The role played by women leaders and women's organizations also constituted a new feature of this period. The third phase started after independence, more specifically in the 1960's, when in the years after independence, the task of nation-building began. Another phase, the fourth one, has been identified by scholars of women's studies, beginning with the 21st century, when women's issues became more diverse and connected with movements against other forms of inequality and subordination.

Post- independence Scenario: Indian Context Like Western Europe and the United States, India too saw a feminist movement in the early twentieth century and like them it gradually waned after gaining certain demands. Later, a new feminist movement developed which brought together the contemporary radical movements. The sixties and early seventies saw the development of a whole spate of radical movements in India, from student uprisings, workers' agitations and peasant insurgencies to tribal, anti-caste and consumer action movements. These spanned a political spectrum from Gandhian-socialist (that is, nonviolent protest based on explicitly moral values, over specific working or living conditions); to the far left, in particular, the Maoists. The Gandhian-socialists initiated several of the first women's movements in post-Independence India. These included an anti-alcohol agitation in north India, a consumer action and anti-corruption agitation in western India, and a women's trade union, also in western India. Interestingly, however, neither they, nor others, looked upon these movements as feminist, nor did they advance any theories of women's oppression. These were advanced first by two women's groups which were formed in 1975, both of which grew out of the Maoist far left. The Progressive Organization of Women (POW) in Hyderabad offered an Engelsian analysis of women's subordination, and the League of Women Soldiers for Equality, in Aurangabad, linked feminism and anti-casteism, saying that religious texts were used to subordinate both women and the lower castes. Although the imposition of a State of Emergency on India in 1975 led to a break in most agitational activities, there was, in many ways, an intensification of theoretical discussion. In 1977, when the Emergency was lifted, several women's groups had developed out of these discussions which were able to come 'overground', and several new groups were also formed. Most of these groups were based in the major cities, such as Bombay (Mumbai), Delhi, Madras (Chennai), Poona (Pune), Patna and Ahmedabad. Though there was no particular uniformity between them, their members were largely drawn from the urban educated middle class, and this was an important reason for their feeling that their own needs were minor, and different from the needs of the large, and poor, majority of Indian women. These women's groups comprised women from different sections of the far left, and there was, at this time, considerable debate on the class basis of women's oppression, the road to women's liberation, and the role that they themselves could play in this. Historically, the experience of the Maoist insurgency of the late sixties and its repression and disintegration in the early seventies, had led many to believe that a revolutionary transformation of society could only come into being if different oppressed groups, such as tribals, subordinate castes and women, first organized and representedthemselves, and then coalesced to fight their common enemies. The question facing the women's groups, therefore, was how women could organize and

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