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# UNIT 1 RACE AND ETHNICITY

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## Structure

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives
- 1.3 Background
- 1.4 White Feminism and Multicultural Feminism
- 1.5 Emergence of Multiracial/Ethnic Feminism
- 1.6 Black Feminism or Womanism
- 1.7 Third World/Non-Western Feminism
- 1.8 Crypto Ethnicity, Hybridity and Diasporic Feminism
- 1.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.10 Unit End Questions
- 1.11 References
- 1.12 Suggested Readings

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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As you have already learnt in some of your introductory courses, feminism is much more than a movement or a struggle for gender equality, and often intersects with issues of race, class, caste and sexuality. In this unit, we will revisit the question of gender and race in the context of postmodernism. We will examine how the emergence of questions of race and ethnicity have problematized the entire meaning of feminism. We will try to understand how diverse women of different races, cultures, and ethnicities have challenged the concept of 'womanhood' as a generic and homogenous term. How are the diverse views and perspectives of cross-racial feminists included in mainstream feminism? What are the different forms of feminism that developed in the postmodern world? This unit will look for all these answers through various theoretical and textual terrains of writers across the globe, and see how the alliance between feminism and postmodernism has given new dimensions to feminism in this context.

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## 1.2 OBJECTIVES

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After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss new dimensions of feminism resulting from its alliance with postmodernism;

- Analyze how the emergence of race and ethnicity has problematized the meaning of feminism;
- Examine some of the limitations of first-wave feminism from the perspective of race and ethnicity;
- Discuss the challenge to ‘womanhood’ from the perspectives of women of different races, cultures, and ethnicities;
- Underline the interactions between diverse groups of women; and
- Explain the main features of different forms of postmodern feminism.

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### 1.3 BACKGROUND

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As you have learnt in Block 2 of this course, postmodernism has celebrated multiplicity, diversity and inherent contradictions in our existence instead of an affirmed universality. In the previous block, we have also discussed in detail the interface between specific postmodern and feminist thinkers. Earlier, an introduction to feminism and deconstruction was also provided to you in MWG 003 (Block 1, Unit 4). You will find it useful to review these earlier units as you make your way through this course. Let us now try to recapitulate some of the ideas we have come across earlier.

The alliance of postmodernism and feminism can only be appreciated when the oversimplification and homogeneity of ‘feminism’ are subjected to scrutiny. Postmodernism, with its emphasis on ‘difference’, underscores issues of race, color, class, ethnicity and culture as microcosmic differences. In its alliance with feminism, it encourages diverse orientation and heterogeneity. Earlier feminists had identified ‘gender’ as a stable determinate which is the crux of all existential conflict between man and woman. As you have seen, however, postmodernism calls into question the primacy of any one term (in this case ‘gender’), and highlights the inherent instability and indeterminacy of all categories. In this regard, postmodern feminist theorists like Hélène Cixous, Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva have made important contributions. Cixous celebrates the multiplicity of women’s language in contrast to patriarchal language of binary oppositions, and proffers “writing the body” and “écriture féminine” as alternate strategies of writing (see earlier units mentioned above). Luce Irigaray’s work explore show the multifaceted terrain of the female body can abandon the phallic structured language of patriarchy. Julia Kristeva attempts to deconstruct the structuralist approaches to language while Butler problematizes traditional gendered categories and brings out nuances of sex, gender and sexuality through her interrogation of sexual identities. However, postcolonial feminists from different parts of the world have claimed that such discourses do not reflect adequately on issues of race, ethnicity or culture. A more

focused attention to these issues has been brought to the fore in the work of postcolonial feminists, who have attempted to find ways of enabling women to resist essentializing homogeneities. Postmodernism revealed that feminism is made up of complex heterogeneous concerns and discourses; it is not a single approach concerned merely with hierarchies of gender and sex roles but it also interrogates issues related to ethnicity, race, culture, nationality and ideologies.

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## 1.4 WHITE FEMINISM AND MULTICULTURAL FEMINISM

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The term 'feminism' initially referred to a group of white middle class women in Europe and America who protested against patriarchal oppression and the hierarchical male-female binary structure of the society. Such a movement cannot encompass diverse women from different parts of the world since the ideologies of feminism are not neutral but are the reflections of women of a particular race, culture and ethnicity with varied experiences. Feminist empiricism or liberal feminism aimed at equal opportunity of women without taking into consideration 'equality' and 'symmetry' do not mean the same thing for all women. Postmodernism has shown us that 'truth' is not universal because it is subjected to various interpretations from various points of views. Similarly, women across the globe have diverse opinions because of their multiplicity of origin, culture, roles and ideologies. Hence 'truth' is not singular but multiple. Singular notions introduced by mainstream, white feminism may thus be unfamiliar to the rest of the women all over world as these notions may not be able to fully realize the existential dilemma of other women.

In *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991), Donna Haraway criticizes main stream notions of feminism which privileges the category of gender while overlooking the politics of race and culture. Bringing together feminism, science and technology, she introduces the notion of the 'cyborg.' (You may wish to review this notion as previously discussed in MWG 003, Block 4, Unit 5.) A cyborg is a hybrid of machine and organism which she relates to working women of fractured identity, moving from one place to another place. Haraway's 'cyborg' rejects all essentialism, lineage and genealogy. Highlighting multiplicity and contradictions in the light of technology, Haraway comments: "If feminists and allied cultural radicals are to have any chance to set the terms for the politics of techno science, I believe we must transform the despised metaphors of both organic and technological vision to foreground specific positioning, multiple mediation, partial perspective, and therefore a possible allegory for antiracist feminist scientific and political knowledge" (Haraway, 1991, p.149-181).

Haraway offers the idea of the cyborg as something that can unite women across race, culture and ethnicity. What relevance does this have to **multicultural feminism**? The term 'multicultural feminism' was used first by Alison M. Jagger and Paula M. Rothenberg. Multicultural feminism focuses on the significance of race, ethnicity and culture and how these issues have been neglected in mainstream western feminist discourse. Multicultural feminism reflects on multiple feminist views from diverse racial and ethnic women. The various cultural practices of the women belonging to the minority or majority are considered in relation to race and ethnicity. For example, honor killing, sati, forced marriage or amputations of female genitals are now revisioned not merely from a gender perspective but also in relation to the cultural and racial orientation. Feminists now invoke questions such as, how far is culture itself oppressive, and to what extent is it patriarchal? Cultural essentialism is rejected by many feminists in favour of the autonomy of women. Let us look at some of these issues in the light of multiracial feminism in the next section.

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## 1.5 EMERGENCE OF MULTIRACIAL/ETHNIC FEMINISM

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Simone de Beauvoir, in her avant-garde work *The Second Sex* (1949) had interrogated the notion of womanhood by questioning the criteria by which one 'becomes' a woman. In recent times, the category of 'woman' has been further problematized by other factors like race, class, ethnicity and nationality which are also equally significant criteria in 'becoming' woman. The exclusive focus on gender stereotypes now seems to be part of a vague discourse in terms of feminism. The question of 'difference' and the tolerance to embrace that difference and the gradual tendency of feminism to abandon hierarchical and binary ways of thinking is seen as the influence of postmodernism. Feminism's investigation of racism as a by-product of patriarchy has led to the rejection of the prevalent dichotomy of man and woman and the introduction of other frameworks which can more adequately represent women of different geographical and cultural backgrounds. Race and ethnicity thus play an important role in determining such frameworks.

Interestingly, bell hooks, the well-known feminist black critic comments that the flaw of feminist discourse is its inability to arrive at definition(s) that could serve as points of unification. This marks out the impossibility of solidarity between women across racial and geographical boundaries. Judith Butler voices the concern that to identify a singular oppressor (patriarchy) may be a "reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor" (Butler, 1990, p.13).

We see the beginning of racial and ethnic feminism during the second wave of feminism. The word "feminism" soon reflected multiple meanings during

1960s and 1970s. Women of different colors, races, ethnicities and classes attempted to break away from white feminists' ideologies and voiced their individual problems of segregation, marginalization and classifications. Black and Chicana feminists had already raised their voices against dominant mainstream feminist ideologies in the U.S during the 1960s and 1970s. Soon, other feminists across the globe also started raising their voices. Black feminists felt that since the second wave feminists were largely white, the feminism of the 1960s ended up universalizing all women in terms of white feminism.

When women of color started protesting against the hegemony of inclusion and exclusion, a new set of feminist theories and discourses, under the rubric of **multicultural feminism** was born. This strand of feminism did not follow any one unified or particular ideology. American **multiracial feminism** involved women of different ethnicities and racial roots including Native American, Afro-American, Chinese-American, Indian-American, Jewish-American and others who came up with their respective individual opinions on marginalization and sexual dominations. Multiracial Feminism created a heterogeneous matrix that reflected domination of women at different levels and structures: race, class, gender, sexuality, culture, geographical and historical roots. Multiracial feminism never attempted to categorize or unify one form of subordination with another but it aimed at revealing the intricate nuances and subtle ways of oppression and despotism even in the same group and class. One of the key elements of protest of the Multiracial Feminists is economic disparity in the patriarchal capitalist society. This form of domination becomes prominent especially among women of colour because they are doubly deprived of their rights due to racial and gender differentiations. Multiracial Feminism encouraged the expression of plurality of feminist experiences and opinions across race and culture. Not only that, Multiracial Feminism also included diasporic and transnational feminists. It further reflects on the hegemonic power relations under the disguise of 'mutual understandings' and 'cooperation'. The purpose is to emphasize the microcosmic power relations that affect the macrocosmic world, to challenge and destabilize 'notions' and 'universal truth', to deconstruct the universal model of womanhood and to avoid erasure in order to retain originality. It not merely recognizes difference but also shows how difference affects socio-political and economic relations. Multiracial feminism included not only women of color, but also white feminists like Elizabeth Spelman, Sandra Harding, Margaret Andersen and Peggy McIntosh who played significant roles in the movement.

The advent of postmodernism ushered in the question of 'difference'. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) made a turning point. In this book Said has explained that Middle East and Asia have always appeared to the Western people as pre-conceived notions that reflect ideological, cultural and racial bias and

are far removed from reality. Said has criticized the imaginary line that has divided Orient and Occident into over simplified groups with certain characteristics. Such easy reduction of the entire world into binary oppositions reflects the attempt of the western world to prove its superiority and domination over the orient. He exemplified the hyper-sexualised irrational image of Cleopatra that the western world has found to be synonymous with the Orient. Similarly, while white feminists may see a Muslim woman with her veil/ niqab as representing patriarchal oppression, in contrast, Geneive Abdo's description of "Mona" in *No God but God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam* gives a different interpretation where the veil/niqab is seen as a sign of freedom of choice. Thus, multiracial and multicultural feminisms are concerned primarily with articulations of women of diverse communities and races. Multicultural Feminism attempts to discard the stereotypes and the clichés which ethnically diverse women and burdened with, and embrace various cultures and perspectives. Its purpose is to give space to all voices of women across race, culture and ethnicity in terms of representation, instead of privileging white middle class heterosexual women's point of view as the universal discourse for all women. It discards the homogenizing tendency of the feminism of privileged women and focuses on all categories of marginalized women, based on factors of race, ethnicity, class, religion, sexual orientation, age, health status and educational background.

***Check Your Progress:***

*What makes multiracial and multicultural feminisms different from mainstream feminism in the west? List some of the differences in your own words.*

## 1.6 BLACK FEMINISM OR WOMANISM

Black Feminism originated in New York in the 1970s and it soon became a global movement with the establishment of the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) in 1973. We have earlier read about the evolution of this movement in MWG 001, Block 2, Unit 2 (sections 2.7; 2.8). The famous black woman writer, bell hooks, stated that Feminism has failed to include women of diverse racial and ethnic orientation:

Feminism in the United States has never emerged from women who are most victimized by sexist oppression, women who are daily beaten down, martially, physically and spiritually. Women who are powerless to change their own condition of life. They are the silent majority.

(hooks, 1988, p. 2)

For hooks, Black Feminism, with its attention to the question of race is crucial in protesting against the double marginalization of women on the basis of gender and race. Black Feminism recognized that sexism cannot be obliterated as long as racism remains the fundamental hindrance. Bell hooks explains that Black Feminism is primarily concerned with:

Motifs of interlocking racist, sexist and classist oppression, black female protagonists, spiritual journeys from victimization to the realization of personal autonomy or creativity, a centrality of female bonding or networking, a sharp focus on personal relationships in the family and community deeper, more detailed explorations and validation of their epistemological powers of emotions, iconography of women's clothing and black female language.

(hooks, 1997, p. 238)

Hooks reflects on how feminism has been concerned only with perspectives of western white women and has failed to include marginalized, radicalized women. The post-World War II scenario marked the dawn of many newly emerged states followed by capitalism. As a result of socio-political and economic changes, black women began to protest against racist and sexual oppressions. The Black Feminist movement is about the collective struggle of Black women all over the world (ranging from African, Afro-American to Black British and other black women) to regain their voice for a space of their own among the white / black patriarchal and white feminist hegemony. One of the first U.S black feminists, Maria Stewart, comments on the racial marginalization of Black women in feminist hegemony as follows:

We have pursued the shadow, they have obtained the substance; we have performed the labor, they have received the profits; we have planted the vines, they have eaten the fruits of them.

(Stewart cited in Asante, 1996, p.399)

Stewart asks for a united black feminist movement proclaiming “Let every female heart become united”. Zora Neale Hurston, a feminist writer of Harlem Renaissance, famous for her book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1990) remained much in oblivion because of the predominant male writers of Harlem Renaissance. The African American social activist, Fannie Barrier Williams laments:

The colored girl . . . is not known and hence not believed in; she belongs to a race that is best designated by the term ‘problem,’ and she lives beneath the shadow of that problem which envelops and obscures her.

(Williams 1987, p.150)

The American scholar Angela Davis in her ground-breaking work *Women, Race and Class* (1981) has discussed how the legacy of slavery among blacks still persists. She blatantly criticises white woman’s prejudice in their blaming of the ‘sexually available black woman’ rather than disbelieving their male partner’s rampant rape and molestation of black women. For Davis, Black men are victims of racism while black women are doubly victimized by racism and sexism.

Many others such as Ellen Kuzwayo, Lorraine Hansberry, Hudson Weems, William Fannle, Bessie Head, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Ifeoma Okoye, Mariama Ba, Akachi Ejiegbu registered their vehement protests within the rubric of black feminist discourse. Their writings are primarily concerned with the resistance to oppression, suppression, domestic violence and the empowerment of women. The purpose is to create awareness about the epistemological dilemma, slavery and above all the untold disparity between white and black women. They boldly revealed how racism is practised in public and private places, where ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’ continues to divide white and black women.

We can view the strategies adopted by these feminist writers in the light of postmodernism. **Fragmentation** of identity, memory, mind and body is one of the defining features of the postmodernist black feminist theory. This theme of fragmentation has been reflected in mainstream literature on as early as in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1997). In this novel, a fragmented voiceless structure lacking identity or subjectivity becomes the mute signifier of the feminine world. Black feminists have spoken about the symbolic wounded body, mind and memory in order to reclaim their race, culture, history and identity. The lack of recognition of black feminine presence is also seen in this disjointed fragmented structure as a lacuna or a gap. Toni foregrounds the protagonist’s wounded body in her novel *Beloved* (2007) as a body which enables the protagonist to unite with her race. **Fragmented consciousness** in Morrison’s writing abandons the linear progressive movement



of plot and chronology as a textual strategy to highlight the disjointed racial and gendered identities of the characters.

**Sisterhood** is another essential element in the writing of Black feminists. This bond may appear in the form of solidarity, friendship or lesbian relationships to achieve empowerment. Alice Walker used the term 'womanism' in 1983 in her collection of essays called *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* to explore sisterhood as a way of resisting the bondage of black women across the globe. Walker used the term to denote self-assertion of women where both communal and individual identity should be retained. Many Black women writers preferred the term 'womanism' rather than 'feminism' because 'womanism' fulfils the deficiencies of feminism while feminism seemed alien to them because it primarily reflected white women ideologies. Womanism for them is concerned with black roots and orientation. At the same time, womanism for these women celebrated positive male companionship instead of a radical negative approach to the opposite sex. Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo's prose poem *Our Sister Killjoy*, Buchi Emecheta's novel, *The Joys of Motherhood* or Walker's novel *The Color Purple* are examples of womanism.

African writer and feminist, Ama Ata Aidoo (1991) has contextualised the postmodernist theme of alienation and exile from a feminist point of view. She also reflects on how an African woman in search of freedom becomes an anomaly among women of different generations. However, her writings such as her novel *Changes: A Love Story*, portend a hope for betterment of black women. Alice Walker in *The Color Purple* also reflects on how black women are the objects of abuse and violence by black men in their society. Domestic violence, exploitation of women and worst of all how women are indoctrinated to hate their blackness is poignantly represented by Walker. Walker uses a postmodernist technique in her exploration of the subjective conflict of the protagonist Celie and how she evolves, healed by her honest friendship with other women characters of black community. The whole narrative process shows Celie's transformation from objective to subjective position.

Phyllis Alesia Perry, an African-American writer in her book *Stigmata* (1995) uses the postmodernist technique of oscillation between past and present in order to reflect on the fragmented identity of the protagonist Lizzie Du Bose. This fragmented identity has its roots among several women of the past generations. This process of matrilineal narrative focuses on the power of female bondage, the legacies of black women of the past, and a celebration of the space of women, against the backdrop of phallogocentric writings. The wound of slavery becomes the trope to relieve the painful racial oppression of the women of past generations. The term slavery

primarily refers to a system where human beings are purchased and sold illegally against their will and forced to work under inhuman conditions. The practise of slavery was there from the beginning of civilisation due to inequality of power. During colonisation, slaves were obtained, especially from different parts of the African continent, as prisoners, as pawns, tributes and were also kidnapped. Phyllis Perry refers to the painful history of black women who migrated as slaves from Africa to America. Her book invokes the traumatic memory of slavery of these black women and attempts to create a liberating space of resistance. Memory is invoked through the bodily wounds of these women which recall histories of foremothers. It is an attempt to heal the pain by regaining the strength of those forgotten women through their union and collective memory.

Their challenge to overthrow authority, deconstruct convention and to search for a new fragmented form and language is seen as postmodernist in nature. Disjointed narratives, shifting perspectives, fragmented words and broken sentences reflect their postmodern strategy to complement their subjective position of black orientation and forceful appropriation in white culture.

***Check Your Progress:***

i) *How did Black feminism evolve? What were its main objections to Western mainstream white feminism?*

ii) *What is “womanism”? Who coined this term and when? Name some authors associated with this movement.*

## 1.7 THIRD WORLD/NON-WESTERN FEMINISM

Unlike western mainstream feminist thinkers who struggled for equality between women and men, Third World Feminist thinkers explore how inequality is not merely based on gender discrimination but also related to colonialism, race, nationality and class. Let us look at some of these issues in the context of postmodern feminisms in different parts of the world.

### *African Feminism*

Here, we may recall Okot p' Bitek's poems from the collections called *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* (1984) where the poet makes a sharp contrast between the concept of beauty in a white and a black woman. The poet is distressed to see how African woman is dehumanised, reduced to a beast like creature:

Woman of Africa  
 Sweeper  
 Smearing Floors and walls  
 With cow dung and black soil  
 Cook, ayah, the baby tied on your back  
 Vomiting,  
 Washer of dishes

The poet soon bursts out encouraging the women to revolt and overthrow this age old tradition of enslavement:

Listen  
 My sister from Ankole  
 And you from Ruanda  
 And Burundi,  
 Here's a hammer,  
 Smash those pots  
 Of rotten milk  
 Burst open the door  
 Come forth into daylight,

Are you a caterpillar  
 For wasps  
 To lay their eggs in?  
 (Bitek, 1984, p.133)

African feminism is thus primarily concerned with harmony, beauty, respect and power and with retaining the cultural heritage of Africa. African femininity is not antagonistic to masculinity. In the context of literary and cultural discourse, the struggle of African feminists is twofold:

- first, to deconstruct the imperialist monstrous image of black woman as it is reflected in western canonical literature and classics such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (2004); and
- second, to break the passivity of African woman and proclaim that they have a voice of their own.

African feminists rejected the term 'Feminism' as the white woman's burden, and coined alternative terms such as '**Womanism**' and '**Motherism**'. African women felt that they do not share the same position like western women who do not suffer from enslavement. Motherism is concerned more with love and sharing of the two opposite sexes. The Nigerian writer, Catherine Acholonu's use of the term 'motherism' is revolutionary as it stood for love, peace and interactive relation with the environment. Similarly, '**Gynism**,' which refers to a balance between the male and female world from a divine perspective is also used by them.

### ***Latin American Feminism***

The feminist Movement in Latin America is also concerned with motherhood, independence, freedom and suffrage. Latin American women writers like Argentinean Juana Manuela Gorriti, Cuban Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, or Jamaican writer Sylvia Wynter came up with different perspectives on the oppression of women. **Latina feminism** challenges the gender-power relations and the social roles assigned to women. It often takes the form of **Revolutionary Feminism** which is a political struggle to eradicate sexual and racial differences of women. The postmodernist feminists however, added a new meaning to feminism in Latin America. The Mexican author Carmen Boullosa is seen as one of the most significant feminist postmodernist writers of Latin America. Boullosa shows how gender inequality exists in Mexican economic, religious and social contexts. She used postmodernism as a critical tool to challenge gendered codes, conventions and structures. She challenges the universal notion of 'truth'. In her work, *Aura y Las Once Mil Virgenes* (1995), she attempts to deconstruct patriarchal systems reflected in linguistic and capitalist social structures.

### ***Feminism in China***

In China, feminism evolved during the struggle for national independence. Like many other countries, China has been always a male-dominated patriarchal nation where women must remain 'chaste' and subservient to men. The most tortured women of China are those who are maids, factory

workers and prostitutes. The earliest Chinese feminists writers like Bing Xin (1900-1999) and Ding Ling (1904-1986) initially started to clamour for equality and freedom. They endorsed the maternal figure of woman and could not be completely free from patriarchal ideologies. Bing Xin in her poems often evokes natural imageries like moon and sea to celebrate the essence of natural relationships of mother and child. In a way, these feminists failed to question the role of marriage and procreation as a patriarchal imposition that guarantees the survival of women. Maternal identity is the only identity that determines respect and the right to survive in the world and in a way woman's body is confined within the traditional chauvinist requirement. However, their writings do not distinctly show the conscious awareness of such a gender based oppression. China's avant-garde feminist writers Chen Ran, famous for her *Nowhere to Bid Farewell* (1991), is outstanding in her existential quest and process of dismantling such binary opposition between man and woman. In her article called "Gender-Transcendent Consciousness and My Creative Writing" Ran looks forward to a new meaning of love:

When love is gradually separated from the primal purpose of reproduction and detached from the relationship of economic and material dependence; when love is simply for love's sake and is as pure as an art not diluted with any purpose other than love, the history dominated by conventional "love" is over. [...] The hegemony of heterosexuality will eventually corrupt, and from its ruins would arise the gender-transcendent consciousness.

(Ran, 2006, p.102)

Such a celebration of love, free from social and national demands, becomes an articulation of pure joy and emotion, and this can be seen as true freedom. It is a refusal to categorise human emotions into stereotypes. Ran explains that freedom in love involves both psychological and physiological independence.

### ***Indian Feminism***

As we have seen already (MWG 001, Block 1, Unit 2), the Indian history of feminism can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, an Indian origin feminist thinker in her influential essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" comments on how western feminism failed to understand the oppression of Third world women. Feminism in India has not developed under western influence. Even before colonialism, protests against unequal gender discrimination, dowry, child marriage, widowhood, and above all the oppressive inhuman practise of 'sati' (burning of the young bride with her dead husband) had already started. Poets like Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das have given voice to the pathos and trauma of oppression of Indian women. In Indian literature,

contemporary writers like Kamala Markandaya, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale reveal in their individual ways, various facets of struggle, resistance, compromise, and protest in relation to sex, race, class and nationality. Shashi Deshpande's novels show a beautiful interplay of narrative voices and stream of consciousness technique to overlap present, past and future. Novels like *That Long Silence* (1989), or *A Matter of Time* (2009), capture the psychological glimpse of her women protagonists in modern India. In an interview by Lakshmi Holmstrom, Deshpande explains:

My feminism has come to me very gradually and for me it isn't a matter of theory.....For me feminism is translating what is used up in endurance into something positive: a real strength.

(Myles, 2006, p. 65)

Anita Desai focuses on radical female resistance in patrilineal Indian scenario. Desai represents women as both the harbingers of life and its destroyers. Loneliness and alienation through psychological dilemma is captured in Desai's writings. Arundhati Roy in her masterpiece, *The God of Small Things* (1997), captured three generation of doubly marginalised women who are oppressed, repressed and isolated in patriarchal culture.

Poststructuralist, Marxist feminist, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, speaks about a 'strategic essentialism' in the work of some feminist writers. Spivak proposes that differences between women should be acknowledged but through strategic essentialism, which does not allow such differences to be frozen into permanent essences. Spivak felt that postmodernist feminism suffered a crisis due to anti-essentialism and strategic essentialism can rescue feminism from this crisis. Using the term "subaltern woman," Spivak explains that an Indian sati is a 'subaltern' whose voice is lost between a white man and a brown man, each of whom wants to impose a voice on her—either in the form of rescue or in the form of sacrifice. Spivak looks forward to a voice of her own from the subaltern.

### ***Feminism in Settler Colonies***

Besides, Third World Feminism, other forms of feminism also developed among native women of the European colonies. Australian, Caribbean and Canadian feminist writers captured the dilemma of double marginalisation in patriarchal settler colonies. Some white feminists from settler colonies have expressed their sense of isolation from their European counterparts after their migration. Their bizarre condition of alienation, segregation and seclusion are unknown to western feminist discourse. For instance, in Australia, feminist writers like Judith Wright have observed how women, irrespective of whether they are white settler women or Aboriginal women,

are denied of any recognition from the time of imperialism. They are non-existent in the history of Australia. Wright speaks about the patriarchal space extending from public to private. She has also daringly explored the unspoken prejudiced relationships between black native women and immigrant white women. In the poem “Eve to her Daughter”, Wright emerges as the revolutionary Eve who realizes the new role of a woman is not to become a blind follower of Adam but to teach the next generation how to love the nation. In her poems the repeated image of Adam functions as the paternal figure in the world of patriarchy, practicing imperial surrogation with the determination to become the master of Eve as well as of the new land: “Where Adam went I was fairly contented to go. I adapted myself to the punishment” (Wright, 1992, p.134).

The Canadian writer Margaret Atwood in her book called *The Handmaid's Tale* (2010) questions the possibility of ‘truth’ in the light of postmodernism and how the concept of the self is rooted in culture and otherness. Atwood observes that there is nothing universally true but that truth varies from one perspective to another. Atwood defines misogyny (hatred or strong dislike of women) not only in the context of patriarchal control but also in women’s hatred for other women. This dislike or hatred can be seen in the form of sexual abuse, discrimination, marginalisation and objectification. Atwood observes that when women hate one another, the male-dominated power structure does not need to enforce domination because these women regulate one another. Atwood astutely comments on patriarchy’s use of the multiple stratification of women based on class, race, colour, ethnicity, religion, economy and education, to prevent women from unanimously protesting against patriarchy.

### ***Middle Eastern Feminism***

Feminism in the Middle East took an intriguingly different form from any other feminist movement. Although Edward Said’s *Orientalism* had created a furore in the discourse about the history of race, culture and ethnicity, yet it never directly encompassed radicalised women’s subjugation. What it did do was to throw light on orientalist discourse around gender and sexuality, exposing for instance, the sexual obsession with the exotically silent mysterious image of the woman in the harem, to be deconstructed by feminists. **Middle East Feminism** is often aligned with **Islamic Feminism**. In both, the religious issue is subjected to political and ideological debate but emancipation of women is key. Feminists in the Middle East, especially in places like Kuwait, find it very difficult to protest against sexual discrimination because they are often charged with the allegation that their protest is an attempt to westernise the country. The complexity lies in the process of aligning religion and culture. Feminists who protest against, or openly discuss the subordination of women may be accused of blasphemy.

The Arab American writer, Lisa Suhair Majajin *Food For Our Grandmothers* (1994) describes her 'constrained' space of survival where she is marginalised in her own country as well as in America. Azar Nafisi's most popular book *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), is another revolutionary memoir that reflects her refusal to wear the codified veil leading to her expulsion from the University of Tehran where she was teaching as a professor. Women's movements in the Middle East have been inconsistent and controversial because they are either seen as westernized constructions imposed upon non-western women or as a violation of the Islamic framework of the society.

In this section, we have broadly surveyed feminisms emerging in several third world countries. Multicultural feminism takes other, distinctive forms in the diaspora. Let us look at this in the next section.

***Check Your Progress:***

*In your opinion, what distinguishes Third World Feminism from Black Feminism? List some important issues that you think would be of concern to Indian feminists.*



## 1.8 CRYPTO ETHNICITY, HYBRIDITY AND DIASPORIC FEMINISM

Crypto ethnicity refers to the term used by the Canadian born academic critic, Linda Hutcheon, to explain her position as an Italian, born and brought up in Canada and her lingering Italian identity post her marriage to her Canadian husband. This dilemma of identity conflict because of interracial marriage, diasporic location or hybridity often complicates women's lives since sexual oppression and gender discrimination can take various forms. Various forms of Feminism, like Aboriginal Feminism in Australia, Chicana feminism, also called Xicanisma (primarily concerned with Mexican American, Chicana, and Hispanic women's freedom in the United States), or Transnational Feminism developed from the expression of discontent of women at the fringe of these societies. Maxine Hong Kingston, the Chinese American writer in her book *The Woman Warrior* (1977) depicts how peripheral existence in terms of ambiguity of racial identity intensifies the crisis in the life of a woman. In order to search for a voice of the self, Kingston shows how she overthrows the patriarchal voice and searches through the multiplicity of the matriarchal voice of her foremothers.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal, formerly known as Kath Walker is an Aboriginal feminist writer in Australia whose Aboriginal identity and change of name is often subjected to the question of political propaganda. Oodgeroo has written poems on the trauma of belonging to the stolen generation and the marginalization and oppression of white men and black men. However, Judith Wright, the fifth generation white Australian writer in her poem "Two Dreamtimes" offers the image of a beautiful sisterhood between two women of different ethnicity. Wright evokes the radical gendered space of two women segregated by the inscription of miscegenation and sexual contamination: "You were one of the dark children/ I wasn't allowed to play with" (Wright, 1992, p.166.) She transgresses those idealized colonial boundaries addressing 'Kathy' as 'my sister' to "go back to that far time, / I riding the cleared hills, / plucking blue leaves for their eucalypt scent" (Wright, 1992, p.166). Both their bodies embody compassion even after ceaseless violence.

Similarly, Diasporic Feminism reflects on asymmetries, alienation and transnationalism and how they affect the fragmented identities of women. Writers and artists like Monika Ali, Frida Kahlo or Jhumpa Lahiri have developed an alternative feminism where the discourse relates to their enunciation of being trapped in between several cultures. The question of memory, security and erasure are often raised by them. The crucial role of gender metaphors in constructing identity and the manner in which resistance to cultural and sexual obligations is played out often appear in their writings.

Thus, hybridity, creolization, and diasporic feminism challenge the concept of purity and reveal that neither language nor culture are pure in form.

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## 1.9 LET US SUM UP

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Postmodernism has added a new dimension to feminism with its celebration of 'difference' and interrogation of notions of universality. In this unit we have attempted to throw light on a variety of postmodern feminisms which emerge outside or in resistance to mainstream western feminism, and which focus on the significance of race and ethnicity along with gender issues. Postmodernist Feminism aims to explain that there is no single cause for women's subordination and there are multiple approaches to deal with it. We discussed various types of feminist discourses such as Womanism, Gynism, Black Feminism and Diasporic Feminism and their different points of view. An overview of these perspectives would have helped you to understand that race, ethnicity and culture work in an intersectional way with issues of gender, and determine both the nature of women's subordination, as well as feminist attempts to grapple with and surmount oppression.

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## 1.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) How is western mainstream feminism different from feminist movements in different parts of the world?
- 2) What are Womanism and Gynism? How are they related to Black Feminism?
- 3) Explain the notions of Multicultural Feminism and Multiracial Feminism. How can we relate them to Postmodern Feminism?
- 4) Discuss with the help of examples how race and ethnicity are related to gender discrimination and sexual oppression.
- 5) What is Crypto Ethnicity? Do you think that the sexual oppression suffered by a woman of hybrid identity is different in nature to that experienced by a white woman? Explain.

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