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# Waves of Feminism in Literature and their Literary Reflections

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***Abstract:*** ***This research paper explores the evolution of feminist thought across four waves. The first wave, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, focused on women's suffrage and legal rights. The second wave, from the 1960s to the 1980s, addressed reproductive rights and systemic patriarchy. The third wave, beginning in the 1990s, emphasized intersectionality, recognizing diverse identities. The fourth wave, marked by digital activism, confronts issues like sexual harassment and body shaming, reflecting the ongoing evolution of feminist movements.***
***Keywords: Feminist Waves, Gender Equality, Intersectionality, Women's Rights, Digital Activism.***

## I. INTRODUCTION

### *A. Tracing the Evolution: A Study of the Waves of Feminism and Their Impact on Gender Equality*

Feminism, as a manoeuvre and ideology, has considerably influenced literature over the last two centuries. This sway is characterized by different waves, each with its unique propositions, objectives and literary articulations. The inquiry of these waves in literature discloses the evolution of feminist views and its impact on societal predictability, gender expectations and individuality.

### *B. First Wave: The Fight for Right and Recognition*

The first wave of feminism surfaced during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, concentrating majorly on licit issues, most importantly women's enfranchisement. This phase witnessed the munity of female authors who fearlessly challenged the patriarchal status quo. First wave of feminism evolved in the backdrop of Women's Rights and Suffrage movements in America and Europe which played a vital role in showering the key feminine liberal concerns. The Suffragist in America and Europe openly summoned the marginal status of women in society, thereby setting the tone for the first wave Feminism.

Numerous, literary works contributed to the upliftment of the First Feminist wave. *A Doll's House* (1879) by Henrik Ibsen, though written by a male author, stands as a significant piece of art in the first wave of Feminist Literature. It critically evaluates the traditional roles long played by women in marriage and society, portrayed through the protagonist Nora. The play skilfully explores the repercussions of inflicted societal presuppositions on sole liberation. Nora's journey to introspections and her decision of questioning and opposing societal norms by confronting her husband, Torvald, in the last act, makes *A Doll's House* a perineal piece of literature. The play's subtle exploration of women's rights and constant societal hindrance placed on individuals especially women, continues to echo in the mind of the audiences, making it an archetypal that stands relevant even in the twenty- first century discussions on equal treatments of genders. *A Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, another significant work of feminist literature highlights the emotional and psychological challenges faced by women in the nineteenth century. Set in a typical colonial mansion, the story casts light upon the patriarchal dealings with women's mental health during their contemporary era. The protagonist's ultimate slump into insanity is interlaced to her social detention, lack of discretion, and the paternalistic outlook of the medical diagnosticians. *Little Women* (1868-1869) by Louisa May Alcott acts as another notable piece of literature in succouring the first wave of Feminism. The novel transverses through the lives of four March sisters and prospects their individual temperaments, aspirations and struggles, as they handle life's transitions from adolescence to adulthood. Alcott's depiction of inviolable and unconstrained female characters questions typical and orthodox norms, making the novel an important work in the history of feminist literature. The French existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's one of the most influential work *The Second Sex* (1949) is considered by far as the turning point of first wave into second wave of Feminism. *The Second Sex* is a preliminary attempt of approaching human chronicles from feminist point of view. De Beauvoir's fundamental proposal is that- men essentially hegemonize women by categorising them on every level, as the 'Other'. Man inhabits the role of the self, or subject and woman is the object, 'The Other'. He is essential, absolute and transcendent; she is inessential, incomplete and mutilated. He quotes:n"Evidently, it is not reality that dictates to society or to individuals their choice between the two opposed basic categories; in every period; in each case, society and the individual decide in accordance with their needs." (Beauvoir)

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Beauvoir's inspection of the cultural myths and social summons of 'othering' women as the Second Sex in patriarchal society, by such means presented a captivating insights into the operations of patriarchy that influenced the second wave of feminism.

### *C. Second Wave of Feminism: Expanding Horizons*

The second wave of feminism marks its beginning in the 1960's, extending through the 1980's; offering a broadened scope to issues like sexuality, reproductive rights and workplace equality. It was closely associated to a thorough feminist protests and women's liberation movement in the 1960's. The second wave procured the first wave's battle for women's rights and shifted focus to the critique of sexual differences. This wave was structured around five observational aspects:

*1)* Biological
*2)* Experience
*3)* Discourse
*4)* Unconscious, and
*5)* Socio-Economic Conditions.

The second wave peculiarly focused on biological determinism which contradicted the belief that destiny of a women is determined by their bodies. One such work that addresses the vexation of sub-urban housewives and challenges the notion that women found fulfilment exclusively through home-making and motherhood is *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan. Friedan coined the term 'feminine mystique' to describe the societal supposition that women could find fulfilment through housework, marriage, sexual submissiveness and child rearing alone. Friedan included interviews to elucidate women's desire to achieve the Feminine Mystique, after his through observations, he stated that: "Most women with this problem did not go to see a psychologist however…'there's nothing wrong really', they kept telling themselves, 'There isn't any problem'." (Beauvoir, The Second Sex) Beauvoir bluntly points out that the issues was not just submissions of individuality but of thoughts as well. The ability of differentiating between what exactly the issue is, and what can be their possible solutions, faded in the minds of women in society.

One of the many catalyst for the second wave feminism is *The Color Pruple* (1982) an epistolary novel by Alice Walker. The novel explores the tale of Celie, an African- American woman in the early twentieth century, who overcomes oppression through self-discovery and empowerment. Walker through her protagonist pointed out major issues of gender, race and sexuality in optimum manner possible. Similar to the second wave, third wave feminism is contradictory to the androcentric practices and their theoretical positions. The third wave feminists were greatly influenced by the late twentieth century Post-Modernist Philosophers, resulting in notions and articulations of feminism differing strikingly from male supremacism.

### *D. Third Wave Feminism- Inter-Sectionalism and Diversity*

The Third wave surfaced in 1990's, as a reaction in resistance to the comprehended essentialism of second wave. It highlighted intersectionality, recognizing the diverse experiences of women based on race, class, sexuality and other identity markers. The third wave marks a continuous negotiation between feminist theory and politics with forces of globalization, and the new redistribution of power in global scenario.

*Their Eyes were Watching God* (1937) a novel by Zora Neale Hurston marks the celebration of an inter-sectional approach. The novel is widely regarded as the best known work reflecting the Harlem Renaissance. Hurton showcases the miserable life of black women and the oppression that they suffered of both sexuality and racial discrimination. The protagonist Janie, spends a lifetime in finding her true identity, along with advocating for gender equality and freedom for choice making. Equivalently, *Ain't I a Woman?* (1981) by Bell Hooks examines the effects of racism and sexism on black women. Hooks reveals through her book that her contemporary white female reformers were more agitated with white morality than the consequences these morals would cause on Black Americans. By dint of the character of Janie, Hooks argues that the "feminist movement", a largely white middle and upper class affair, didn't accurately coherent the needs of poor and non-white women, thus reinforcing racism, sexism and classism.

### *E. Fourth Wave: Digital Activism*

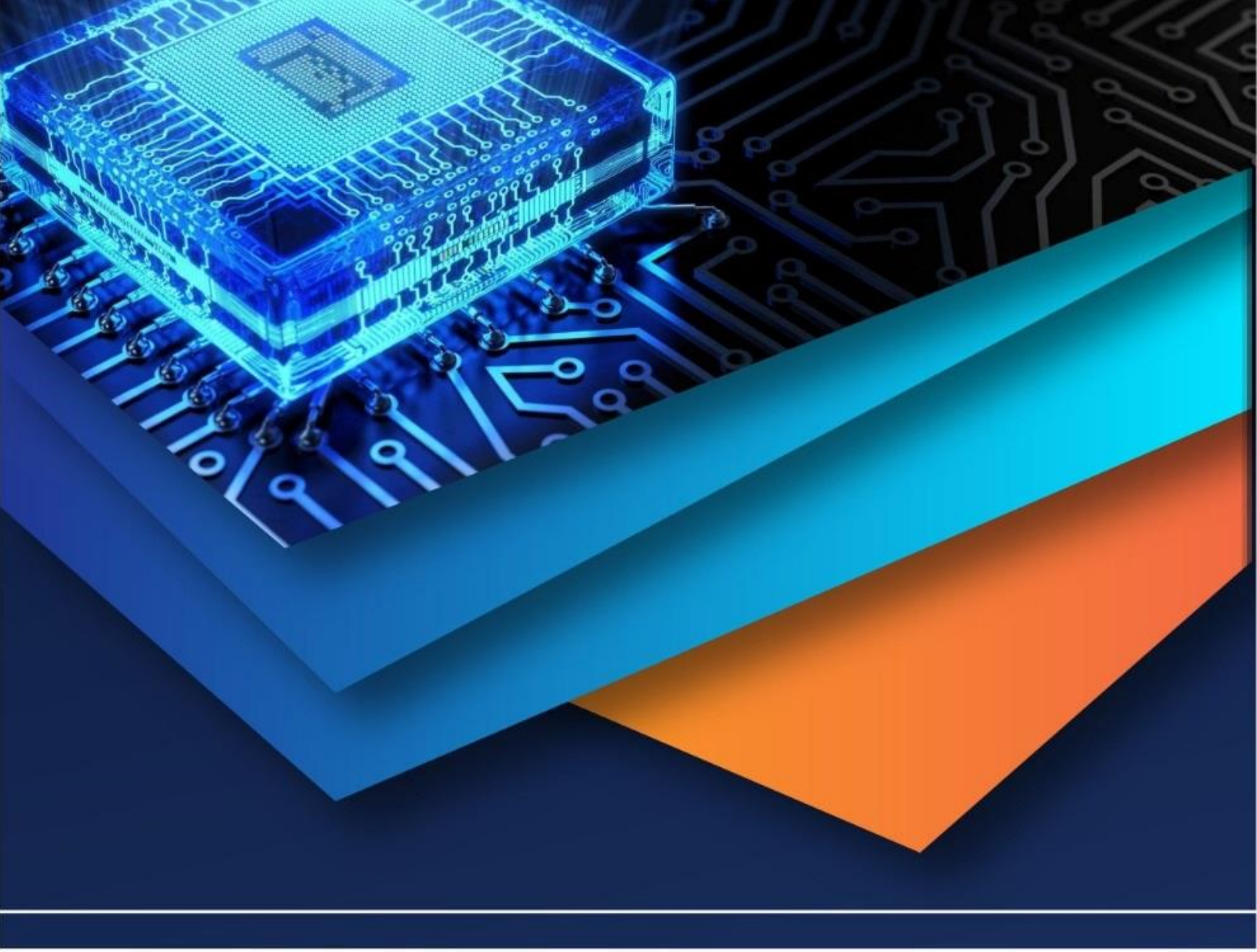
Emerging in the early 2010's, the fourth wave clears the path for more recent issues along with the ancient ones. Issues like online harassment, body shaming and intersectional inequality are broadly addressed in the fourth wave, marking global interpretation and multi-cultural sensitivity. *We Should All be Feminist* a book by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, based on her Ted Talk speeches, discusses the necessity of feminism in modern world and advocates for gender equality. *Bad Feminist* by Roxane Gay, address a wide variety of topics, both cultural and political. Gay explores her thoughts of being a feminist while loving things that could seem odd to feminist ideology, in a seemingly insightful manner.

The waves of feminism have significantly shaped literature reflecting and driving societal changes regarding gender-roles and inequality. From the suffragist themes of first wave to the intersectional and global concerns of fourth wave, feminist literature has evolved to include diverse voices and experiences, enriching literary landscapes, and challenge and inspire readers worldwide.

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