Good morning, dear students! I shall divide my presentation on the Feminist criticism in two parts. Today, it is the first part of this. Hope you’d let me know your views upon it. I would like to suggest you to read the following books for a better understanding of the subject: 1.Belsey, Catherine and Moore, Jane(eds), The Feminist Reader; Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism 2.de Beauvoir, Simone, The Second Sex 3.Eagleton, Mary (ed) Feminist Literary Theory; A Reader 4. Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies, ed by Mary Evans 5.Humm, Maggie(ed) Feminisms: A Reader.

The Feminist Criticism is an offshoot of Feminism. Therefore, let us first know what is Feminism. Feminism is a social movement that seeks equal rights for women. Feminism in general has along political history, developing as a substantial force in America and Britain and then stretching out the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This refers to the women’s rights vis-à-vis women’s suffrage and the movements in this regards were the crucial determinants in shaping some social, political and economic reform. Widespread concerns for women’s rights dates from the Enlightenment. Its first important expression was Mary Wollstonecraft’s ‘*A Vindication of the Rights of Women’*(1792). The 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, convened by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and others, called for full legal equality for women with men, including full educational opportunity and equal compensation; thereafter the women suffrage movement began to gather momentum. From America the movement spread to Europe. American women gained the right to vote by constitutional amendment in 1920, but their participation in workplace remained limited, and prevailing notions tended women to remain at home. Milestones in the rise of modern Feminism included Simone De Beauvoir’s ‘The Second Sex’(1949) and Bettty Friedan’s ‘The Feminine Mystique’(1963) and the founding in 1966 of the National Organization for Women. Maggie Humm’s ‘Feminisms’(1992) is a seminal book in this context which emphasized the different ‘materiality’ of being a woman. It spread new knowledge about the embodiment of women drawing on psychoanalytic, linguistic and social theories about gender construction and difference.

Feminist criticism studies and advocates the rights of women. Using feminist criticism to analyze fiction may involve studying the repression of women in fiction. How do men and women differ? What is different about female heroines? And why are these characters important in literary history? -The theory is applied to deal with such issues . The feminist criticism also may deal with stereotypes, creativity, ideology, racial issues, marginality and more.

Feminist Philosophy: This reefers to the loosely related set of approaches in various fields of philosophy that emphasizes the role of gender in the formation of traditional philosophical problems and the concepts and the ways in which traditional philosophy reflects and perpetuates bias against women. In social and political philosophy, liberal feminists have advocated making women’s political and economic opportunities equal to those of men; socialists or Marxist feminists have argued that women’s oppression is inherently economic in character; and radical feminists have criticized liberal political notions such as equality and autonomy as inherently “masculine”. In the late 20th century feminists influenced by post modern philosophy and literary theory pointed pot the potential racial, cultural, and class biases of academic feminists attempting to speak for all women and argued that ( one such critic is Gayatri Spivak) no single description of women’s experience or women’s oppression can be valid for all.

FIRST –WAVE FEMINST CRITICISM: According to Eagleton, Virginia Woolf was the ‘founding mother of the contemporary debate’- who announced many of the issues later feminist critics were to focus on. According to Maggie Humm the first wave of feminist criticism may be said to have ended with ‘The Second Sex’(1949) of Simone de Beauvoir.

Woolf produced two key texts which are major contributions to feminist theory: ‘A Room of One’s Own’(1929) and ‘Three Guineas’(1938). Like other ‘first-wave’ feminists, Woolf is principally concerned with women’s material disadvantages compared to men- her first text focusing on the history and social context of women’s literary production , and the second on the relations between male power and the professions(law, education, medicine etc.) Although she herself abjures the label ‘feminist’ in Three Guineas, Woolf nevertheless promotes a wide ranging slate of feminist projects in both books. In the other book, she argues that women’s writing should explore female experience in its own right and not form a comparative assessment of women’s experience in relation to men’s.

Woolf’s general contribution to feminism , is her recognition that gender identity is socially constructed and can be challenged and transformed, but apropos of feminist criticism she also continually examined the problems facing women writers. She believed that women had always faced social and economic obstacles to their literary ambitions, and was herself conscious of the restricted education she had received.

One of Woolf’s most interesting essays about women writers is ‘Profession for Womeen’, in which she regards her own career as hindered in two ways. First, she was imprisoned and constrained by the dominant ideologies of womanhood. Second, the taboo about expressing female passion prevented her from ‘telling the truth about(her) own experiences as a body’

Simone de Beauvoir- French Feminist and founder of the newspaper ‘Nouvelles feministes’ and of the journal of feminist theory: ‘Questions feministes’ marks the moment when ‘first wave’ feminism begins to slip over into the ‘second wave’. De Beauvoir’s work carefully distinguishes between sex and gender, and sees an interaction between social and natural functions: “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman…only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an ‘other’.”

SECOND –WAVE FEMINST CRITICISM:

The dominant themes of the Second-wave Feminism were: the omnipresence of patriarchy; the inadequacy of women of existing political organization; and celebration of woman’s difference as central to the cultural politics of liberation. And these can be found running through many major second-wave writings, from Germaine Greer’s ‘The Female Eunuch’(1970), which explores the destructive neutralization of women within patriarchy, through the critical reassessments of socialism and psychoanalysis to the radical feminism. Subsequent French Feminist critics writing during the1970s acknowledged Beauvoir’s critique but focused on language as a tool of male domination, analyzing the ways in which it represents the world from the male point of view and arguing for the development of a feminine language and writing.

Feminist criticism became a dominant force in Western literary studies in the late 1970s. From this time, the theory is more broadly conceived in terms of applying it to linguistic and literary matters. Since the 1980s , however, feminist literary criticism has developed and diversified in a number of ways and is now characterized by a global perspective.