

**RHETORICS OF CHOICE AND COERCION ON MOTHERHOOD:  
REVISITING BIOETHICAL DEBATES FROM FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES**

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
for the award of the degree of*

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**ZAIRUNISHA**

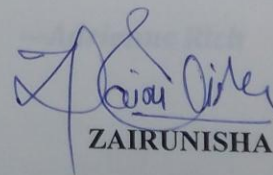


**CENTRE FOR PHILOSOPHY  
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JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
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2017**

## DECLARATION

Date: 20<sup>th</sup> July 2017

The thesis entitled, "**Rhetorics of Choice and Coercion on Motherhood: Revisiting Bioethical Debates from Feminist Perspectives**" for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full for any other degree or diploma of this University or any other institution.



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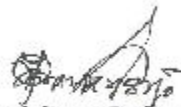
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Rhetorics of Choice and Coercion on Motherhood: Revisiting Bioethical Debates from Feminist Perspectives" submitted by Ms. Zairunisha, in the fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is her original work. It has not been submitted so far in part or in full, of this university or any other institution.

This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
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*“All human life on the planet is born of woman. The one unifying, incontrovertible experience share by all women and men is that months-long period we spend unfolding inside a woman’s body. We carry the imprint of this experience for life, even into our dying. Yet there has been a strange lack of material to help us understand and use it. We know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood.”*

**—Adrienne Rich**

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## INTRODUCTION

All of us, as Adrienne Rich boldly and sharply put it, are born of our mothers; we have no other way as yet. However there was no guarantee that we may have been born, even if our mother was eagerly waiting and ardently praying for our birth. There could have been a miscarriage, a still birth, a forced abortion against her wishes. It is a miracle for her and us that we survived, and live. Having been born, and survived, most of us, (please note: *not all of us*), i.e. some of us are brought up under the 'loving' care of our mothers, and we grow up under the 'protection' and support of our families and communities. The fact of the matter is that our mothers are expected/ required to devote their full time to our care and nourishment, left with not much time of other things that may have thought to be important. In ideal circumstances, the institution of family is expected to provide adequate nourishment, protection and security to its infants and children who are vulnerable to various kinds of dangers and threats. Infants and children can feel safe and protected only when they can trust the elders around them. But the reports in the media and the National Crime Bureau (NCB) reports, available in the public domain for the last so many years, indicate that children, particularly girl children, have to live, i.e. are coerced/ forced to live, under the threat of sexual abuse and brutal violence within the family. This can prove quite dangerous for their physical, psychological and moral development. This shows the gap or the gulf between ideals and reality in our everyday life, and that too in an as close and intimate an institution as the family itself where children's bodies and minds/souls are not safe and secure from abuse and violence by the elder members of their own families or close neighborhood. Living with traumas of violent invasions and abuse, such children may become mentally so disturbed or challenged that they may not be able to develop the self-esteem necessary for being able to think for one self, of making choices, taking decisions to change one's situations.

If we are more fortunate, or to put it more correctly, better placed in comparison to helpless children mentioned above or other victims of poverty and various forms of exclusion, we do get sent to schools and hopefully can make it to colleges and universities to have our education. Please again take note of the fact that



a large number of children do not get an opportunity to go to schools, and some who can go to school of some kind or the other, with the Right To Education (RTE) becoming a fundamental right after a less than a decade old amendment in the Indian Constitution to meet global commitments, most of them have to drop out much before reaching the age of fourteen years, the year stipulated for *completion* of compulsory education under the RTE. It is also noteworthy that if you are a girl, which ever strata of society you may belong to or come from, your brother is likely to get a preference over you in getting access to opportunities for better (and perhaps more expensive) education.

After ‘completing’ our education, some of us *become* privileged enough to choose our career(s), but many of us have to take up whatever job or work that comes our way. Please note again that girls still continue to be excluded from equal access to opportunities for employment in comparison to boys despite their right to education and employment without any discrimination on the basis of gender/sex as provided in the fundamental rights under the constitution. Availability of rights on a legal piece of paper, even if it is as privileged a paper as the constitution of the republic may be, provides no guarantee that the rights will be legally and politically enforced if there is a lack of a corresponding social will to support, defend and implement such rights by removing all obstacles in their way and punishing the violations and violators of such rights. *Equal right to equal education for all children* of the republic, without any discrimination on the basis of gender, caste, class, region, religion, language and so on is a pre-requisite for opening the door to equal work opportunities without any discrimination between men and women hailing from any caste, class, community or region.

Following the path of life so diligently taught to us by our elders, (is it to be taken that this unchangeable eternal path was divinely ordained or already laid down in our community’s traditions for us to be followed without any modification?), many of us try to, whether we like it or not, and do manage somehow to settle in life by getting married, setting our own families, having our own children, and teaching them to learn to grow, and to be better than us, in respectfully and happily following the glorious and rich traditions of our community and nation. Please again take note of the fact that there is a greater pressure on girls to get married in comparison to the

boys, and girls start living with it much earlier than the boys in their families,. In fact it is possible for a family to coerce a girl to get married in comparison to a boy who can resist as he may be economically more independent of the family in comparison to a girl. The possibilities of success of resistance against coercion are greater in case of boys in comparison to girls, not only in case of resistance against early or forced marriage but also in other spheres of life as well.

Like the day or night of our birth, a time, though surely expected but not so welcome, suddenly comes when we are, in a way, sent off from the world, death being our inevitable human destiny. It is a fact of our existence, beyond any doubt, that we did not choose to be born, may be that our parents made the choice, perhaps in our name, perhaps for themselves, perhaps for the sake of fulfilling the wishes of their parents, perhaps for honoring the call of ‘the’ community, or ‘the’ nation. We come to know only what we are told about our birth. If this is what is true about our birth with which we begin our life in the world, the terminal point of our life, our death is not very different. Unless we succeed in our attempt to commit suicide, or we are allowed to be beneficiaries of legally permitted euthanasia, it is again another significant fact of our being human that ordinarily we do not choose to die either. Little wonder that metaphors of birth and death occupy a vital space in various human discourses invoking myths, legends, history, literature, arts, and philosophy. The metaphor of ‘mother-power’ plays a very significant role in various human discourses as woman is taken to be a symbol of both birth and death. For her mysterious power of procreation, unique capacity of giving birth which the male lacks, woman, as mother, is glorified. Due to a mysterious belief in her potential destructive power, perhaps a lurking apprehension of her *refusal to cooperate or participate* in procreation, she is demonized and becomes a source of awe and fear.

At the surface level, what has been mentioned above, despite some cautionary clauses added here and there in between (on the analogy of *\*t&c apply*), can be taken as a broad narrative of a common thread weaving the texture of life of humankind that has been shared or worn from generations to generations in almost all societies since the very beginning of the history of human civilizations. It is taken as if such narratives provide a factual and objective description or explanation of the emergence and sustenance of diverse religious, sexual, social, economic, political,

scientific, technological, cultural, educational practices and institutions which have mainly served the cause of hierarchical stratification and regulation of societies all over the world. A careful look at the contemporary world shows that our social life is full of diverse discriminatory practices which put individuals and groups in disadvantageous positions in comparison to some other individuals and groups. Inequalities continue to plague our social relations in such subtle ways even in our newly christened 'Global Village' that many remain invisible to us as long as we ourselves do not experience their deleterious and disastrous consequences in/for our own lives.

The unequal hierarchies of gender have been often defended and justified in different ways, for example, in various religions in the name of absolute respect for the commands of the sacred scriptures manifesting the divine will. Evolutionary perspectives on human biology, findings of psycho-analysis, researches in human genetics, psychology of women, and cultural anthropology have often been invoked and used in more recent times to defend the necessity and inevitability of patriarchal institutions and practices which reduce women's identity to their reproductive function.

New reproductive technologies are being invariably invented in the advanced industrial countries. What to say of the possible negative features or consequences of such technologies, most of the people in the developing countries are not even aware of the new work going on in these advanced fields of medical and health research. Medical and health experts in the developing countries are often co-opted for conducting research on ignorant people in the name of helping them in solving their reproductive health problems. Furthermore, most of the governments in the developing countries are obliged to undertake strong measures for population control in their own economic and national interests as well as to adhere to the decisions taken at the global level for population control. When the Governments of China or India take a policy decision to impose a restrictive norm of only 'one child' or 'two children' per couple, are they leaving any choice or control to women regarding their own reproductive bodies? By regulating reproduction, and using public health services and medical experts to implement such policies, the government transfers its authority to the medical practitioners and public health workers to take control of

women's reproductive activities. The questions of choice, coercion and control regarding motherhood are very important questions for personal and social life of women, and policy makers in the field of medical services, particularly relating to public policies and facilities required for the safety and proper care for reproductive health of women.

I wanted to understand the ethics underlying social reality of mothering, whether it was really a matter of free choice for the individual woman or was it a matter of social pressure (coercion) which forces a woman to marry and become a mother. On the basis of informal conversations that we had shared as students in the girls hostels of Banaras Hindu University (BHU), University of Allahabad (AU) and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) during my studies over the years, I had formed a preliminary view that even most of the educated girls were under pressure from their families to get 'married and settled with children' before they cross the 'right' age for their marriage and becoming mothers. Of course, there were considerable variations as to what will count as 'right age'. And many of the girls were following suit but by their own choice as they would often say. But there were also girls who had taken to modern liberal ways of thinking in which freedom of choice was a supreme value for living one's own life. Depending upon their class, urban or rural and family background, cultural and educational situation, many of them did attempt to resist the family pressure with courage and strength despite disapproval and criticism, and some time they were successful also. It was becoming difficult for me to decide as to who was being coerced and who was making choices; those who cared for the traditional ways of thinking or those who cared for the new ways of thinking. The availability of new reproductive technologies were further adding to the complexity of the situation and complicating the issues all the more. Discussions over these issues would always get heated, full of sparks some times, and rhetoric would take over the debate among the adversaries. I felt intrigued. I started reading literature on the subject with a view to clear my doubts and for finding answers to my questions. But the multiplicity of conflicting views was becoming more intriguing for me. Availability of diverse and conflicting views on this fascinating subject pertaining to mothering, birthing and rearing further deepened my curiosity.

From my readings, my earlier view was strengthened that a substantial number of Indians, inspired by ancient classical cultural heritage in the era of momentum for revivalism of ancient traditions, value the birth of male children from the newly married couples, as soon as possible, soon after their marriage. Little wonder that there is tremendous family and social pressure on the young couple, particularly the wife, to conceive a baby. But as the time passes by, this pressure starts overwhelming the wife, more than the husband, as the 'good news' that she has become pregnant has to come from her. In good old days, the good news was taken as a matter of celebration, hope and prayers for a male child. The issue would usually rest in peace till the birth of the child in the case of the first pregnancy. However, with the coming of new technologies, the news brings with it new tasks for critical scrutiny, secretly arranging for a sex-discrimination test to determine whether it would be a boy or a girl. Despite the legal ban on sex-determination tests and female feticide, such curiosities, howsoever perverse and immoral they may seem or be, do not die and there are complaints that illegal sex-determination tests continue to be performed despite the ban. Another aspect of the scenario also deserves attention as it is a major contributor to the rising need of import of new reproductive technologies in the country. According to the ICMR Reports made public for many years, 10-15% of married couples in India are infertile. A substantial number of such couples would like to have children, at least one child, for overcoming mental, spiritual, moral, religious, social, cultural, and family pressure. Earlier, they would prefer to go in for an adoption of a child from amongst their kith and kin. With the availability of ARTs (Assistance Reproductive Technologies), traditional ideas, values, and attitudes on parenting through adoption have undergone a considerable change since the couple is likely to have their own biological child. They can now use ARTs either to go in for surrogacy or use IVF for giving birth to their own child. The availability of these technologies has raised new ethical and legal issues in the field of bioethics. The possibility of use of ARTs, particularly new techniques for modifying the DNA of human eggs, sperms and early embryos, also known as germ-line editing, achieved through genome sequencing are being seen from two perspectives. Supporters of use of procedures of genome sequencing in human reproduction are seeing it as a way to the radiant future in which it would become possible to scan a child's genetic blueprint for identifying possible traits and defects of the yet to be born child long before birth. This would provide requisite

information to the parents to be able to make their choices and take decisions to avoid a heavy burden on the possibly disabled or damaged life of the yet to be born, in the light of their family economy, and the interests of their other children. The opponents, however, argue that though it may have become possible to reconstruct (pre-construct?) the genome of a fetus by analyzing a saliva sample of the father and a blood sample from the pregnant mother, but such technical information would be so complex and confusing for the parents, the data will consist of billions of pairs to be matched for analysis, that they may not be in any position to make any relevant use of such information. Despite the complexity of information likely to become available through Genome sequencing at present, a day may come when it could be possible for educated well informed adults to grasp the meaning or purpose of genome sequencing. It may become possible for some couples to give informed consent to undergo such procedures, but an embryo can neither comprehend nor consent nor choose to get its genes screened. Medical experts may counter that parents have a right to seek such information in the interest of their future child and their family But how can it be ensured that these parents will not be tempted to wait for a 'perfect designer's child' when such assurances may be provided by ARTs clinics. How shall we be able to stop the rebirth of old eugenics in the garb of genomic sequencing to protect the future children from hereditary genetic disorders? Moreover, this pre-natal testing was initiated primarily for protection from such disorders that could threaten the life of the baby in early infancy. But as technologies are advancing, the governments and medical professionals may start using these technologies for a greater control, and bigger profits to avoid any unusual variations or differences which are being projected as possible defects, and advising the parents in favour of abortion.

I chose to set following aims for my study:

1. To engage in an analysis and critique of rhetoric for exploring the ways in which patriarchal practices and new reproductive technologies converge in using rhetoric to influence, regulate and control women's procreative functions for serving the cause of male domination in patriarchal cultures, and commercial interests of the medical research corporations mainly controlled by men.

2. To explore the possibility of rethinking or revisiting the received concepts and theories of choice, coercion and oppression as expounded from feminist perspectives so that it may be possible for women to think afresh of ways in which they can enhance the domain of reproductive choices for themselves, and launch effective struggles against their oppression and exclusion from the public sphere according to concrete local and global conditions.
3. To explicate the poverty of patriarchal ideology and its rhetoric by which ambiguous maternal subjectivity of women has been negated and objectified by positing the myth of an essential maternal self.
4. To interpret and evaluate the contribution of prominent feminist philosophers and thinkers to enhance our understanding of mothering as specific feminine lived experience and motherhood as patriarchal institution for suppression of women for excluding them from the public sphere which privileges men.

In view of the above aims of my study, I have devoted the first chapter of my thesis, entitled “Interrogating Rhetorics: Demystifying Maternal Self” to analyse and review such views and arguments which present motherhood not only as the ideal for women to guide their life-world but also prescribe this goal as an essential condition for the fulfillment of their identity and existence as women. Since most of such expositions and arguments are of a rhetorical character, it was relevant to discuss the ideas of Plato and Aristotle on the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ rhetoric to move beyond the widely prevalent pejorative sense of ‘rhetoric’. In the pejorative sense, the main or primary goal of ‘rhetoric’ is invariably seen or understood as success in persuading one’s audience or readers to accept the validity or truth of rhetorician’s ideas through a manipulative or misleading style of presentation of ideas, without caring to engage in a ‘rational’ scrutiny of the fallaciousness or emptiness of one’s preferred position. However, after showing the weaknesses or shortcomings of rhetorical arguments in comparison to logical or rational arguments, both Plato and Aristotle draw a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ rhetoric in the following manner: ‘Bad’ rhetoric is unethical as it masks or conceals the truth to achieve its polemical goal and efficacy. In contrast, ‘Good’ rhetoric aims at revealing the truth and goodness of the perspective or principle being argued for. Therefore, use of good rhetoric is ethically right. Good rhetoric can be used for defending truth

and goodness. Heuristically, this may sound fine but we must keep it in view that as cognitively finite and imperfect beings, we can neither know the absolute or ultimate truth(s) nor comprehend the absolute or ultimate good, and the way of achieving it. Therefore, we have to learn to face and live with our limitations with our commitment to pursuit of truth and goodness as ideals.

I have attempted to argue that for achieving effective communication for purposes of persuasion, it may not be possible to avoid the use of rhetoric in polemical debates, particularly concerning essentially contested issues, concepts and theories concerning the ontological, epistemic, ethical, aesthetic and social dimensions of the human condition. As Richard Rorty had aptly put it, philosophy is an ongoing conversation among the humankind about itself. Therefore, issues of human freedom, necessity, contingency, possibility, actuality, inevitability, choice, coercion, subjectivity, objectivity, mental, physical, self, other, rights, obligations, oppression, and injustice are such issues which can be examined from various perspectives for different purposes in changing contexts and situations.

Through a study of the evolution of patriarchal conception of the maternal self, I have drawn from the perspective of Beauvoir who has provided a feminist existentialist phenomenological account of the embodied feminine self which is inherently ambiguous due to its finitude. For Beauvoir, a gendered embodied self exercises its freedom and makes its choices always in concrete situations. I have discussed her critique of Sartre's conception of abstract freedom where freedom of the for-itself is always in opposition to and conflict with the other for-itself. Making a distinction between ontological freedom and moral freedom, Beauvoir shows that my freedom is possible only through the recognition of respect for the freedom of the other. Thus, for Beauvoir, concrete freedom is always inter-subjective, inter-dependent and reciprocal. Woman's choice as freedom is a presupposition for the possibility of her becoming an active autonomous subject since possibility of transcendence from any given situations or facticity can be envisaged only by projecting a future for realization through one's engagement

Coercion is antithetical to choice in the sense that it either obstructs or denies the very possibility of choice for the coerced. Coercion is situated between the polarities of freedom and unfreedom. For Beauvoir, a situation can neither be



absolutely free nor be absolutely *unfree*. A situation without choice or coercion is a mere phantasy. There are two levels or kinds of coercion: Individual and structural. Individual coercion is an interpersonal relation among individual in which they coerce each other and do not recognize or respect the freedom of the other. Structural coercion is institutional and normative in which individuals and/or groups are coerced by being deprived of their freedom of choice on the basis of their exclusion from or being confined to certain sphere of activities against their will.. Patriarchal ontology is a coercive ontology as it denies any subjectivity to women and reduces them to a merely reproductive phenomenon by treating their maternal body merely as a 'womb'. It is possible to achieve freedom from coercion by struggling against the obstruction against choices or denial of choices. For example, a woman can overcome her immanence by refusing to disobey the norm obliging her to marry and being forced to become a mother. Beauvoir shows the conflict between patriarchal ideology and the lived experiences of mothers to establish that it is not natural for every woman to see bliss and realization of her 'true' nature in becoming a mother. Such ambivalent attitudes of mothers, or ambivalent desires of women about becoming a mother or not, for Beauvoir refute the patriarchal essentialisation of motherhood for women. Beauvoir is not against motherhood. She is arguing against enforced or coerced motherhood by demystifying motherhood. For Beauvoir, authenticity of maternal self is possible only through a recognition of and living with our existential ambiguity. A denial or evasion of choices is a condition of immanence which can be overcome only through an active rejection of any imposition of condition of immanence on oneself. For women, it is possible to question forced imposition of motherhood on them. In order to overcome their immanence, and to achieve their transcendence, women must reject the patriarchal myth that they can find essential or real meaning of their life only by becoming mothers and devoting their full time to motherhood.

Having shown the fallacious character of patriarchal rhetoric which mystifies motherhood as the essential and only function of women as maternal bodies, I move on to the second chapter of my thesis, entitled "Mothers, Mothering, Motherhood and Patriarchal Coercion". The main aim of this chapter is to argue against the claims that patriarchy is a natural, inevitable, and universal social structure. I have attempted to argue in this chapter that the patriarchal structures and practices have

been socially constructed by men to control and confine women solely to maternal function. By excluding women from other spheres of human activities, these practices devalue women and their maternal function. Drawing from the ideas of Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich and Garda Lerner, I have attempted to argue in this chapter that identity of mothers is socially constructed and enforced on women. Women are not biologically destined to be mothers.

Patriarchy is a complex hierarchical social structure of gender division grounded in such socio-cultural and political views which hold that reproductive function of giving birth is an essential function of women and the very source of their identity. Women are indoctrinated to believe in such a view through a glorification of motherhood. Myths of motherhood project glorious images of women as mothers and try to create a make believe that the eternal fulfilment and real happiness of women lies in their realization of their 'maternal self'. I have discussed four rhetorical accounts which attempt either to justify, or both justify and explain, or only explain the emergence and universality of patriarchal institutions and practices in human societies. These accounts are : i) Theological, ii) Biological, iii) Historical Materialist, and iv) Social Constructionist.

I have attempted to show that the first account, i.e. theological account, irrespective of the religious traditions in which it may be located, is primarily justificatory in character as it claims that woman was created by God, the Creator, as subordinate to man, and for performing the task of procreation. Theological accounts justify patriarchy by privileging man and subordinating woman not only in social life but also in their position or location in the path to emancipation from the fallen human condition for which woman is blamed. Similarly biological accounts also see woman's position and role as a female organism having procreation as her natural and essential biological function, which is explained in terms of the natural maternal instinct. This account is actually not true of human biology but a social interpretation of women's biology to claim an explanatory power whereas its main goal is to use selective scientific information from biological studies for the justification of patriarchy. Unlike the theological and biological accounts, the historical materialist account of the origin, stabilization and perpetuation of patriarchy is not a justificatory account. It claims to provide an explanation in terms

of sexual division of labor in the development of production and reproduction of goods and life in terms of a historical transition from primitive communist society to the emergence of a class divided society. The emergence of class divisions and class conflicts are seen as sources of oppression and exploitation in the new mode of production.

It is hoped that with the revolutionary transformation and a re-emergence of classless society will result in removal of all forms of oppression, including women's oppression. Feminist critics of historical materialism, including Beauvoir, have pointed out that the gender question is different from the class question and needs to be addressed separately. The social constructionist account identifies sources or causes of the emergence of patriarchy and its perpetuation primarily in terms of relations and structures of social power, in privileging of men and the exclusion of women through ideological legitimating of masculinity as superior to femininity in the maintenance of social order. Since patriarchy is socially constructed, it follows that it is neither natural nor inevitable in the long run though it may have been universally present so far.

Questioning and rejecting patriarchal views of women as biological bodies, feminists argue that a woman is not merely a biological body but a living embodied gendered self who is capable of experiencing the world, reflecting upon her experiences, and forming her projects along with others in situations in which she finds herself. It is also argued that scientific studies are inadequate to comprehend the lived experiences of human beings as they neglect or ignore the subjective dimension of lived experiences of both men and women as human subjects and agents. Feminists are also critical of such women who accept man's definition as his relative beings. They point out that it is such an acquiescence which makes women perceive themselves through the lenses of the patriarchal masculine world. To overcome the imposed biological socially destiny, women have to recognize that they live in social situations and their body itself is socially situated, making the body itself as a social situation.

Feminist reject patriarchy for confining women to procreative functions, domestic roles and making them as an excluded other from the man's world. As a result of such an exclusion, women encounter the world in three ways: i) They see

the world and themselves separate from each other; ii) they find the world as hostile to them; iii) they feel that they are inessential in the world, their presence does not really matter. Beauvoir points out that prescribing procreation as a sole function for women results in excluding them from possible entry into the realm of transcendence which is an exclusive privilege of men in patriarchal society. I have attempted to show that many feminists question coerced maternity and argue in favour of voluntary motherhood for which social situations have to be so created that it becomes possible for women to combine their work in the public sphere with their life as mothers. This may be possible by respecting women's reproductive choices as their right among their other human rights as equal to men.

In the third chapter of my thesis entitled "Paradox of Reproductive Choices : Right to Choose or Control!", I have attempted to show that though women are life givers and sustainers of life, they do not have any rights to make their own reproductive choices and decisions. This paradox is manifested in the absence or exclusion of reproductive rights for women in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948. This paradoxical exclusion was justified in the name of impartiality and gender neutrality of the human rights discourse. Since then, several attempts have been made by feminists and women's rights groups to demand the urgency of addressing specific issues relating to women's rights in terms of their lived experiences as mothers in concrete situations. Feminists have strongly objected the male-centricity of human rights which makes them only within "rights of men" and not "rights of women and men." Feminists reject the male-centric model of human rights as it fails to deal with rights relating to women-specific maternal function and situations. In this context, Adrienne Rich's distinction between experience of motherhood and institutional motherhood is relevant. It is unfortunate that women have to experience mothering in the patriarchal institution of motherhood. Thus, it can be argued that the received models of human rights, i.e. equality model and the liberal framework are not appropriate for rethinking human rights for women. It is not 'women's equality with men' but the issue of 'fairness of women as reproducers' which needs and deserves attention for articulating women's reproductive rights as human rights. Feminists reject the liberal view of individual autonomy as a model for human rights on the ground that women cannot make their reproductive choices in isolation or separation from or

independent of others. Following Beauvoir, it can be argued that women's rights have to be situated in such a manner that their situated subjectivities are so enshrined that their ability to resist external controls is not diminished. This becomes all the more important because in the earlier decades of twentieth century, women had gain accessed to reproductive freedom as a result of developments relating to contraception, abortion and artificial insemination. It was hoped that new reproductive technologies will support women's quest for reproductive freedom.

“Modern Reproductive Technologies, Men and Motherhood” is the fourth chapter of the thesis. In this chapter, I have made an effort to consider the positive and negative aspects of the new forms of reproductive technologies ARTs which are being promoted and heralded as unprecedented opportunities for women to enhance their reproductive choices. These technologies, it is claimed will provide facilities for IVF, ID, IUI, Artificial Insemination, Sperms and Eggs donation, Surrogacy, sex pre selection, genetic editing of embryo, genome sequencing and so on. it is claimed that these technologies will enable the women to have better reproductive care and save them from passing on any hereditary or genetic disorders to the new born. On the surface, it would seem that ARTs will bring a revolution in reproduction which will be advantageous for the women in making their reproductive choices. There are many feminists who see an enormous emancipatory potential for women as mothers. They are of the view that a time may come soon in future when technology will liberate women from their reproductive and sexual slavery by reproducing life through artificial reproduction. Contrary to optimistic view about ARTs as held by embracing feminists, there are feminists who reject ARTs by highlighting the controlling nature of ARTs which would regulate women's bodies and may also control their social life. Such feminists are known as resistance feminists. I have discussed some of the critical issues and objections raised by resistance feminist against the use of ARTs. It is argued that the modern medical science has developed using ‘mechanistic medical metaphors’ which encourage the view that a woman's body can be treated as a reproducing machine designed for producing babies, and medical professionals are mechanics who work on bodily processes and emissions as matters of order or disorder in the task of baby production. It would be evident that such a mechanical metaphor results in negation of a woman's subjectivity and objectification of her body and reproductive condition. For these medical

professionals, a woman's body is not a living body of a human being but merely a biomedical body in which medical, bio-chemical and instrumental interventions can be done for rectifying any malfunctions they perceive.

It is assumed that they judge and act in the best interest of the woman, and for protecting the foetus she is carrying in her body. They usually do not listen to their 'patients' with care and attention which is expected of them. Being denied their gendered embodied subjectivity, the women start feeling depersonalized and alienated in the authoritarian environment of the maternity clinic. Resistance feminists reject ARTs on the ground that it perpetuates the patriarchal view that a woman's fulfillment lies in realizing their maternal nature. ARTs are advertised as capable of providing miraculous solution to the problems of infertility; as if without having their own biological children women are 'misfit' and 'incomplete.' ARTs encourage and reinforce a false obsession among women for becoming mothers by having children of their own. ARTs have a wide range of side effects on women physical and mental health. Information about such effects is not sufficiently shared with women well and advance of their treatment under the ARTs. It is also alleged that the consent forms required to be filled by the 'patient' before taking treatment are very complicated due to the technical medical terminologies. Therefore, the clause of informed consent is never met in the true sense. Considerable field work has been done on the ways in which commercialization and professionalization of women's medical health care, particularly relating to reproductive health and child birth, has been snatched by men from the hands of women, resulting in men becoming more authoritative as 'specialist' in controlling women's maternal health and reproductive functions. Many of such reproductive technologies and professional controls have entered India only a few decades ago. This has presented many ethical, legal and social challenges for women and their social life and status. We are not yet prepared to face these challenges. This is reflected in the need of making new laws for dealing with surrogacy and working of IVF clinics. We need to be vigilant about the threats and dangers which a convergence of new reproductive technologies and deeply entrenched and strong patriarchal practices can create for women in India. An analysis of the agendas underlying the rhetorics of choice and coercion invoked for supporting and defending or attacking the use of new reproductive technologies can enrich our sensitivity, perception and understanding of the significance of emerging

issues in bioethics as well as that of women's movements for acceptance of reproductive rights as human rights.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTERROGATING RHETORICS: DEMYSTIFYING MATERNAL SELF

“Can man be free, if woman be a slave?”

—Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Queen Mab*<sup>1</sup>

In existentialism, a capacity to make choices is an indispensable condition for becoming of self in the world. It is essential for self to choose freely, that is, resist and overcome coercion in order to achieve authentic selfhood. Selfhood is not a given but rather an achievement, accomplished by making free choices and performing actions. Like other existentialists, Sartre, in his work *Being and Nothingness*, asserts that freedom to choose is the very nature of self. In other words, for Sartre, the self is not free to cease to be free. In this way, our self is made by choice that we make; I am what I choose, by choosing not to choose I annihilate my selfhood. For Sartre, each self is condemned to be free, yet it is always possible for a self to coerce another self and challenge or negate the freedom of the other self. By over emphasising the absoluteness of the individual's freedom to choose, Sartre questions the possibility of reciprocal recognition of mutual freedom by ignoring the possibility of being coerced. Due to a constant possibility of such coercion, sometimes subtle and invisible but also direct and in crude forms, our choices can become unclear, confusing, and uncertain. Therefore, the issue of genuineness of choice becomes a complex and intractable issue in everyday social life. Such ambiguous choices are often defended or justified by using rhetorical discourses or tools in which most of us engage/ indulge in and or practice it sometimes without even our being aware of it. The rhetorical reconstruction of choice and coercion further creates ambiguous situations that deny or restrict choices for a certain group(s) of individuals. Consequently, it becomes precarious for self to differentiate and choose between real choices, pseudo- choices, and choicelessness. Under patriarchy, choices are rhetorically constructed and differentiated within the realm of sex/gender divisions. The sexed-self can have only finite choices in its concrete particular situations that seem to be real choices, but in reality they may present indistinctness between coercion and choice.

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<sup>1</sup> Shelley, 1812: 2.



The purpose of the present chapter is to explore and analyse the persuasive and perpetuating rhetorical understanding of patriarchal ideas of choice and coercion, that is, the way sexist social structures intervene in the rhetorical construction of maternal self and its choices. What does an existentialist choice mean for self? Can a self make absolute choices or its choices are within the matrix of social situations and values? How patriarchy structures and limits choices and such social constructions are used deceptively for the positing of maternal self? To address these questions and issues, the chapter primarily focuses on the lived experience of women as maternal selves; the ways they experience and exercise their reproductive choices in their feminine embodied subjectivity within their situatedness. In so doing, firstly, an attempt will be made to understand the nature of rhetoric and how it influences individual and social thinking which informs our choices. Works of Plato and Aristotle will be briefly discussed as they have reflected on the nature of rhetoric and commented on its positive and negative aspects, strengths and shortcomings. Further, I will use existential phenomenological perspective in order to understand the various facets and degrees of choice and coercion, in our every day life. I shall also focus on the emergence of the maternal self in relation to the concrete world. In this regard, I shall draw insights from the works of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. The question of feminine choice is central to Simone de Beauvoir's phenomenology; I will follow her ideas by comparing and contrasting the same with Sartre in terms of women's situatedness and their freedom to choose. Additionally, the views of Ann Cud and Shay Welch are also relevant to comprehend social structures and forms of coercion and their implications for the possibilities of making choices. Initially, I will consider the meaning of choice in terms of transcendence, situatedness and interdependence, and coercion in terms of oppression, domination and immanence to examine how choice and coercion are rhetorically defined in patriarchal structures and practices. In this chapter I will argue that women are deprived from making actual choices due to the sexualised social construction of the self and rhetorical nature of justifications of such constructions. By doing this, an attempt will be made to explore and expound the existential meaning of a woman's *choice* in relation to maternal subjectivity.

Existentialism usually understands human existence in terms of our ability to choose freely. Existentialists claim that the self is irrevocably and entirely free to make choices and set its own projects. From a phenomenological perspective, the

meaning of existential self and its choices are grounded in intentionality of consciousness that the self into its lived experience of the world. Existential phenomenology analyses self as an ‘existential phenomenon’ which is situated, responding, experiencing and acting in the world free from all prejudices. In this way, existential phenomenological description reveals the meaning of self as being free in the world. However, this freedom of self is rhetorically constructed and socially conditioned. Self has to make its choices within given situations. So, first and foremost, we need to explore the meaning of rhetoric itself in order to comprehend the rhetorical construction of self and its choices.

### **1.1 Rhetoric as a tool of persuasion**

*“Whenever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric; wherever there is meaning, there is persuasion.”*

— Kenneth Burke<sup>2</sup>

Self is a communicative being. It forms and reveals itself in its concreteness through the intersubjective relations with others and the world by means of linguistic nodes. Rhetoric shapes linguistic nodes in stylistic and effective manners which directly influence our (my as well as other’s) worldly decisions and choices. According to Beauvoir, speaking and thinking cannot be done in isolation; these are intricately associated with other’s thoughts that are expressed in the form of dialogues and discussions with others in terms of persuasive speech or writing. Beauvoir emphasises that transcendence can be achieved through linguistic reflection on one’s situation.<sup>3</sup> However, in common parlance, the term rhetoric has a negative connotation. It is understood as an art or technique of persuasion for effectively convincing an opponent or a listener /reader without using or ignoring appropriate reasoning or evidence for or against a view. In this way, rhetoric is invariably regarded as unreliable and antithetical to truth. In this context, Robert Wardy asserts that, “Rhetoric is ‘mere’ rhetoric. It is a capacity to manipulate others to do what the possessor wants from them by ignoring what they want.”<sup>4</sup> But whether this pejorative

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<sup>2</sup> As quoted by Ijsseling, 1976: 1.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted by Heinamaa, 1999: 121.

<sup>4</sup> Wardy, 1998: 10.

meaning of rhetoric is construed by us or it is rooted in its very nature. Does patriarchy use rhetoric in its negative sense and, if so, how does it affect our choices? In order to seek answers, we need to dive deep into the origin of rhetoric.

When we look back at the evolution of views on rhetoric in western philosophy, we find that rhetoric was central to the Greek and Roman academic discourses. It was an interdisciplinary art of learning influential uses of language to convince others of the truth as the main purpose of philosophy. The English word 'rhetoric' is derived from Greek '*rhetorike` techne`*' which specifically denotes the art of speaking and writing correctly and convincingly, that is, '*ars bene dicendi*' and '*ars persuadendi*'.<sup>5</sup> Study of rhetoric encompasses theoretical science and practical skills of persuasive argumentation and communication that facilitates self in interacting with the world and experiencing the other selves in its true sense.<sup>6</sup> However, the powerful skills of rhetorical persuasion started gaining an obfuscating and pejorative meaning when an individual or a group engaged in universalising its own lived experience or understanding as the definite, universal and holistic experience, ignoring questioning and rejecting other ways or aspects of understanding the world. This is the reason why art or skill of rhetoric came to be viewed as distinct from philosophy whose primary purpose is to search and discover objective truth.

To show the contrast between rhetoric and philosophy, Socrates points out that philosophical wonder is the quest for objective and universal truth that is possible only through rational and authentic knowledge (*episteme*). In contrast, 'rhetoric' conveys linguistic style of persuasion whose success is based on subjective opinions (*doxa*) that lack scientific and logical scrutiny (*episteme*). Exercises in rhetoric are not acceptable as these are inappropriate for serious philosophical discourse. Ironically, rhetoric is often employed by philosophers as a stylistic tool in order to reject and undermine an opponent's viewpoint to validate their own ideas and privilege them as the ultimate truth. So, even though, rhetoric was negatively viewed, philosophers did not prevent themselves from using it to present their views in *effective way* irrespective of their truth or validity.

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<sup>5</sup> Ijsseling, 1976: 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Discussing the criterion of truth and nature of rhetoric, Plato, in his dialogic works *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, has used persuasive method of argumentation to convince his interlocutor sophists about his stance and undermine their perspectives. For instance, in debate with sophists on the nature of rhetoric in *Gorgias*, Socrates asks Gorgias about his expertise in rhetoric as, “Come then? Since you claim to be skilled in rhetorical art, and to be able to make anyone else a rhetorician, tell me with what particular thing rhetoric is concerned...”<sup>7</sup> Here Socrates demonstrates his ambivalent stance about rhetoric by denouncing it through employing rhetorical method of argumentation that reflects acceptance of rhetoric in a sophisticated manner. At one place in *Gorgias*, Socrates reminds Gorgias that the purpose of any agreement in arguments is to achieve truth, “any agreement between you and me must have really attained the perfection of truth.”<sup>8</sup> He rejects rhetoric on the ground of its use for serving verbal flattery, enjoyment and avoidance of the ideals of truth and justice. His main concern is to alert others about dangerous consequences of rhetoric for not having any moral and rational objectives but only persuasion as its goal. Socrates claims that “rhetoric, it seems, is a producer of persuasion for belief, not for instructions in the matter of right or wrong.”<sup>9</sup> However, at the same time, he accepts the possibility and value of the use of ‘good rhetoric’ which is anchored in moral good. Socrates sums up his view in these words:

But among the many statements we have made, while all the rest are refuted this one alone is unshaken—that doing wrong is to be more carefully shunned than suffering it; that above all things a man should study not to seem but to be good both in private and in public; that if one becomes bad in any respect one must be corrected; that this is good in a second place,— next to being just, to become so and to be corrected by paying the penalty; and that any kind of flattery, with regard either to oneself or to others to few or to many, must be avoided; and the rhetoric is to be used for this one purpose always, of pointing to what is just, and so is every other activity.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Plato, 1937: 449d.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 487e.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 455a.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 1937: 527b-c.

Similarly, in *Phaedrus*, Socrates challenges the claim of Phaedrus regarding a disconnect between rhetoric and truth by saying that one who knows what is the truth and capable of showing it to others is a good rhetorician and a philosopher too:

If he has composed his writing with knowledge of the truth, and is able to support them by discussion of that which he has written, and has the power to show by his own speech that the written words are of little worth, such a man ought not to derive his title from such writing, but from serious pursuit which underlies them... I think, Phaedrus, that the epithet “wise” is too great and befit God alone; but, the name “philosopher”, that is “lover of wisdom”, or something of sort would be more fitting and modest for such a man.<sup>11</sup>

In Socrates’ voice, both dialogues argue for making a distinction between ‘good rhetoric’ and ‘bad rhetoric’ rather than rejecting rhetoric altogether. Evidently, he is not rejecting the use of rhetoric, but attempts to caution its users from the risk of the misuse of rhetoric in terms of ‘bad rhetoric’ that promotes subjective opinions, beliefs instead of objective universal truth. This is the core reason why Socrates not only denounces ‘bad’ rhetoric but also appeals to save philosophy from such bad rhetoric and rhetoricians whose purpose is not seeking truth rather creating deception that endangers the moral foundations of human life. Extending this line of thought, Aristotle has taken Plato’s exposition of rhetoric further that helps to comprehend a clearer picture of it.

Aristotle, in his book, *The Art of Rhetoric*, defines rhetoric as the desirable art of argumentation whose purpose is to enhance rational deliberation rather than mere linguistic decoration. He questions all negative connotations of rhetoric that consider it as mere verbal manipulation and decorative style of persuasion. In doing so, he analyses rhetoric, by its very meaning as a method of intersubjective argumentation. According to Aristotle ‘rhetoric is a counterpart of dialectic’<sup>12</sup> and, like dialectic, it is an art of doing rational argumentation. He makes three fundamental claims about rhetoric: firstly, rhetoric, like dialectic, can be employed in any general subjects as it does not belong to a particular science; secondly, both are needed in any controversial situation where supporting arguments are required for further strengthening the claim, and to make it more easy to convince someone on real, true and just things; thirdly, it

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<sup>11</sup> Plato, 1937: 27c-d.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, 1960: 1354.

is not less than an essential art for mentally expressing yourself in the world in a logical way<sup>13</sup>. Aristotle indicates the significance of speaking or communication for humans in his book *Politics*, by emphasising that permanently and continuously silent self are either Supreme Gods or inferior beasts. In this way, Aristotle emphasises the argumentative aspect of rhetoric by showing its resemblance with dialectic for logical and intellectual considerations in speech acts. Accordingly, for Aristotle “rhetoric, then may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever.”<sup>14</sup> It is important to note, as Shai Frogel clarifies, that in the above meaning of rhetoric, Aristotle is primarily focusing on *revealing and searching the possibilities for persuasion instead of possibility of persuasion under any situation*.<sup>15</sup> It shows that rhetoric is not merely a collection of rules for persuasion, but rather a method of expanding the horizon of argumentative discussion in which consequences are based on the strength of persuasion.

Apart from presenting rhetoric as an art of persuasion, Aristotle, like Plato, also draws attention to the negative and positive uses of rhetoric which are similarly applicable on other subjects or art forms. He says “for as these, rightly, used, may be of the greatest benefit, so, wrongly used, they may do an equal amount of harm.”<sup>16</sup> Any art can be both used and abused depending upon the way it is aimed, perceived and given meaning. He is against the misuse of rhetoric in the form of ‘bad rhetoric’ that is especially, focuses on ornamentation and beautification of language with a desire to win debates through persuasion. He supports ‘good rhetoric’ that discusses the structures of arguments whose aim is to search various possibilities for persuasion in order to attain truth and justice. This distinction of ‘good rhetoric’ is based on the criteria of morality and rationality that cannot be taken away from it. In this regard, Barbara Couture points out in her work, *Towards the Phenomenological Rhetoric* that there are two reasons behind the rejection of rhetoric from the serious discourses—self attempts to validate its self-representation by absolutising its relativism and personal resistance against validation by others for such self identity. Such approaches towards rhetoric exclude it from the realm of objective truth and confine it within the

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<sup>13</sup> Frogel, 2005: 25.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, 1960: 1355.

<sup>15</sup> Frogel, 2005: 26.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

subjective sphere of illogical, hackneyed expression and disengages rhetoric from the philosophical endeavour.

It is thus clear that value of rhetoric, as an art of persuasive communication, depends on user's perspective and purpose. On moral and rational grounds, it can be employed for presenting/revealing objective truth that is the aim of philosophical discussions. But, it can also be used for subjective motives that may lead to the obliteration of truth in service of self preferences and desires. Categories of 'good' and 'bad' rhetoric can help us to discriminate between the legitimate and illegitimate use of the power of rhetoric in framing our choices. In patriarchal social discourses choices are very much imbued with such intentional meanings of good and bad use of rhetoric. Women have to learn to make their choices by transgressing the spell of patriarchal rhetorics.

In the context of motherhood, two kinds of rhetorics are being practised in patriarchal societies to articulate competing views on women's maternal self and their choices. These can be categorised as the rhetoric of choice and the rhetoric of coercion. Rhetoric of choice is specifically used by the followers of patriarchal ideology who argue that since capacity for freedom is natural to all human beings, it automatically follows that women are as free as men to make choices about their maternal self. Their choices in this regard are free from any internal and external coercion whether they want to become mothers or not. From this perspective, it is claimed that women have the freedom to choose to not to become pregnant if they do not want. In case of unwanted pregnancies, they have the freedom to choose to have an abortion. However, it is emphasised that it is a natural desire for a woman to become a mother to fulfil her womanhood. They maintain that all the assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) are invented to assist them to fulfil their maternal desires and choices. Although women are free to choose and use these technologies, their true fulfilment and happiness according to patriarchal discourses resides in becoming a mother. By using such rhetoric, these thinkers assert women's freedom to choose in every sphere of life. In other words, women are assumed to be free to make choices about their procreative self. But they also naturalise and essentialise women's identity and role solely under the institution of motherhood by a sleight of hand. This directly contradicts their previous assertion of women's freedom. If motherhood is

natural and indispensable for the very identity of women then how can they be free to exercise their freedom over their embodied self? It shows the latent and silent coercive content underneath the openly displayed choices for women.

Another form of rhetoric i.e., rhetoric of coercion is used by many pro-feminists. They contend that women's choices are illusory in patriarchy due to its authoritarian and coercive nature. Patriarchal ideology creates hierarchical order in social life where men are at the top, while women are placed in a significantly lower position. Women are oppressed in heterogenic patriarchal world and their choices are influenced by their marginal status. In their subordinate status and roles, it may seem that they are free to make autonomous choices, but in reality they are not. Their procreative choices regarding motherhood are socially conditioned. Their conditioning is so much hegemonic and invariably invisible to them that sometimes they do not even realise that their choices are actually controlled and regulated under the patriarchal social structures. Mostly, their longing to have a child is socially coerced rather than their free choice. In this scenario, reproductive technologies are contributing to perpetuate the prevalent patriarchal ideology of women being treated solely as mothers. This needs to be stopped by rejecting the use of these technologies. If we give this argument a careful consideration, it seems that through an over exaggeration of invisible forms and modes of coercion, such feminists tend to undermine and devalue the desire for motherhood. For them, a woman's desire for giving birth to child only reflects her submission to patriarchal influences. They ignore the fact that such a desire on the part of a woman could be as genuine desire like other desires of human beings. Many feminists perceive maternity as an obstacle to women's emancipation from male domination. For them, the prison has to be broken or destroyed by refusing to become a mother and rejecting motherhood as an institution. In the process of critiquing patriarchal ideology, such feminists tend to stigmatise those women who desire to have children and experience their child bearing capacity as a creative power which men lack. It is not necessary that motherhood is always imposed or thrust on women. It can be a strength of their femininity and a source of an altruistic feeling of creating another life and caring for it.

Both the above rhetorics on maternal choices present their positions as absolute truth by ignoring the positive aspects of the contrary arguments. The



question is whether these opposing views and competing rhetorics on motherhood are capable of providing and resolving the dilemmas and conflicts faced by women in making their procreative decisions and choices. Motherhood is related with women's embodied self. It should be a woman's freedom to choose whether, when, where and how she wants to make her choice regarding maternity. Dogmatic supporters of these contradictory arguments either ignore or overstate patriarchal aspects of the argument resulting in distortions of the real situations of women becoming mothers. They give more emphasis on convincing others of *their* standpoint as the final truth by using rhetorical skills that put their arguments into the category of 'bad rhetoric'. Such rhetorics have negative consequences in terms of further mystification of ambiguities of lived experiences of women in a male dominated world. Patriarchy often uses bad rhetoric to domesticate and oppress women by essentialising and idealising motherhood neglecting the views and desires of individual women. Similar shortcoming can be seen in some feminist critiques and rejection of motherhood.

As finite beings our choices are not absolute. Choices are finite and circumscribed in such a manner that they can be exercised only under certain concrete situations. These situations limit our will to resist coercion and the kind of choices that are imposed on us. In other words, self makes choices but is influenced or informed by various facets of its situation. Human situations are embedded in biological, economic, physiological, socio-cultural and psychological factors. Self is situated in relation to others. The gendering of the Self-other(s) relationships also has an impact on the ways in which we make our choices and use rhetoric to justify them. The purpose and content of the man to man dialogue may not be the same as a man to woman dialogue or a woman to man dialogue in a patriarchal society. The same gender conversations may be seen as different from opposite gender conversations in a non-modern traditional community. This complexity we shall leave aside at present.

In a patriarchal world each self is differentiated as a sexed self. Self is socially constructed and situated as a sexually differentiated being. In other words, self is a gendered embodied self that can be categorised as a masculine self or a feminine self who performs its choices according to its given differentiated conditions. However, the world primarily belongs to the masculine 'subject' where women are kept aside. Men construct choices to facilitate themselves in accordance with their status and

location. In a sense, choices are created solely by/ for men and imposed on women in the form of rhetorics which are ultimately regulated by men. These choices influence women's life and its acknowledged value essentially as mothers in the world around them. But the problem is whether the situatedness of a self as woman/man affects the choice that it makes or self is capable of overcoming its situatedness through its absoluteness. For feminists, the situatedness of a self does affect its choices. Self is unable to see through the rhetoric because of its structural situatedness. Thus, to understand the nature of choice, it is crucial to know the relation between situatedness and absoluteness of self. Feminine self is an embodied situated self. In this sense, women's choices are often conditioned in the ways she is viewed in the social world, but at the same time, as a human, she is condemned to be free. The next section is an attempt to consider the ways of engagement of self with its choices.

## 1.2 Choices in Situations

*"A man is at the same time freedom and facticity; he is free...but free within situation."*

— Beauvoir<sup>17</sup>

In the above sentence of *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, Beauvoir aims to reveal the fundamental complexity of the nature of freedom and its relation with self. Self is intrinsically free to choose, yet its freedom is always embedded in its concrete and particular situatedness that may provide meaning to its existence as an embodied subject. Beauvoir considers two kinds of freedom that self possesses— ontological freedom and moral freedom. Ontological freedom is inherent to our being human. Through ontological freedom, self unveils the world and gives meaning to it.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, despite the coercive constraint one cannot abnegate ontological freedom. However, there is a possibility in the self to evade its ontological freedom in order to escape from the emerging responsibilities; doing so would be to live in 'bad faith'. In this context, Sartre says, "he is no longer anything but a freedom which perfectly reveals itself and whose being resides in this revelation. But as we pointed out at the beginning of this work, most of the time we flee anguish in bad faith."<sup>19</sup> This situation

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<sup>17</sup> As quoted by Cohen Shabot, 2007: 371.

<sup>18</sup> Beauvoir, 1976: 12,74.

<sup>19</sup> Sartre, 1985: 59.

constitutes the denial of the moral freedom. Moral freedom lies in taking whole responsibility for our ontological freedom. Beauvoir points out, “to will oneself free is to effect the transition from natural to morality by establishing a genuine freedom on the upsurge of our existence.”<sup>20</sup> The self-willed transition from ontological freedom to moral freedom transforms us into authentic self.

Sartre assumes ontological freedom as the very condition of our being human, and accepts the necessity of moral freedom in order to achieve its absoluteness. In his work, *Being and Nothingness*, he states that freedom is embedded in the very existence of self. Self or ‘being-for-itself’ is condemned to be free, that is to say, man cannot escape from his freedom and has to engage with its responsibilities in any situation. His situation cannot impede him from availing or exercising his freedom. There is no separation between being human and being free. He mentions “what we call freedom is impossible to distinguish from the being of “human being.”<sup>21</sup> Although, Sartre accepts the significant role and place of facticity in human life, which is neither self created nor chosen but rather given, yet these contingent situations cannot circumscribe one’s freedom. These situations create background under which self can create its own meaning and give value to its life-world. He writes “facticity is only one indication which I give myself of the being to which I must reunite myself in order to be what I am.”<sup>22</sup> Sartre makes it clear with the example of Hegel’s ‘master- slave’ dialectics. For Sartre, a slave in chain is as free as his master in terms of his free choice to remain a slave or revolt against the given situation of slavery. The choices are always open or constrained for the slave as well as for his master within their concrete situation illuminated by their free projects. Sartre holds:

To be exact, just because the life of the slave who revolts and dies in the course of this revolt is a free life, just because the situation illuminated by a free project is full and concrete...the situation of the slave *can not be compared* with that of the master. Each of them in fact takes on its meaning only for the for-itself in situation and in terms of the free choice of its ends ...there is no absolute view-point where one could place oneself so as to

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<sup>20</sup> Beauvoir, 1976: 25.

<sup>21</sup> Sartre, 1985: 25.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

compare different situations, each person realizes only one situation-*his own*.<sup>23</sup>

For self, situations emerge through concrete levels of operations or relations among class, gender, technology, education, work, culture, past, history and so on. But for Sartre, facticity of situation is finally irrelevant to freedom. In this way, Sartre argues for the absoluteness of freedom which is self-founded. An objection has been raised against Sartre that if self is situated in the given facticity, how can it be possible for the self to exercise and avail its absolute freedom regardless of all coercive constraints that are imposed on a self in a given situation? In response to such questions, Sartre explicitly claims that absoluteness of human freedom is not associated with our lived social world, but as an ontological condition of our being human. For Sartre, “to be free does not mean, to obtain what one has wished (in the broad sense of choosing). In other words success is not at all important to freedom.”<sup>24</sup> Sartre points out that freedom to choose is primarily linked with an individual’s *autonomy* to choose freely, to form free projects and to pursue them, instead of its success to achieve the desired results or consequences of freedom. For Sartre, the ability to have a desire, i.e. projecting ourselves towards future projects; it does not matter whether these desires are fulfilled or not, successful or not. A slave is free in terms of his project to escape from his given situation and he understands the value of his project by planning and performing his actions accordingly. In this way, Sartre declares that it is always possible to envisage free projects irrespective of constraints and obstructive situations.

Discussing the facticity of human situations, Sartre mentions that it is something which is indeterminable and given to for-itself. In Heidegger’s words, we are ‘thrown into the world’ without any choice. However, at the same time, it is possible for me to transcend my facticity through my free choice. In other words, facticity of a self cannot determine and constitute what it is. It is only I myself who can freely choose what I aim to become within my contingent situation and bear whole responsibility for it. Sartre writes, “In a certain sense I *choose* being born. This choice itself is integrally affected with facticity since I am not able not to choose, but this facticity in turn will appear only in so far as I surpass it toward my ends.”<sup>25</sup> In

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 550.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 483.

<sup>25</sup> Sartre, 1985: 58.

this sense, no coercive situation can limit or impinge the self from availing its absolute freedom. He maintains that, “my freedom by freely choosing itself chooses its limits; if you prefer, the free choice of my ends (i.e. what I am for myself) includes the assumption of the limits of this choice, whatever they may be.”<sup>26</sup> In this manner, Sartre illustrates the indestructible and indeterminate nature of freedom and its attached responsibility that remains unaffected in any worldly situations. Kruks in her work, *Situation and Human Existence*, points out that Sartre’s description of freedom is that even though, for Sartre choices are always grounded in certain kind of situations which are neither purely objective nor subjective. However, Sartre can be said to be a radical subjectivist in terms of giving final emphasis on ontological freedom and its responsibilities that constitute situation for consciousness as a ‘common product’ which provides a common base for everyone (for slave and master) that is actually inadequate in real situations. In this way, Sartre’s emphasis on freedom treats an individual as an abstract individual who is unaffected by his social situations and other individuals in exercising choices.<sup>27</sup>

Situations, in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, are fundamentally individualistic as these are constituted by an individual consciousness. However, situations are interconnected, in the sense that self intertwines each other’s situations on the common ground. This intervention of the Other within my self-constituted situation, for Sartre, is an intrusion of the other(s) and a threat to my freedom. The Other is a self-constituted opposite subject that objectifies me for himself. In this sense, two freedoms are always in conflict as they reduce the Other self into ‘thinghood’ and transcend the other freedom under their constructed situations. This conflict has no final solution but an incessant struggle. For Sartre, the other, or ‘being-with-other’ is a contingent facticity which is born when the Other attempts to infringe my freedom. Nevertheless, in Sartre’s words, there is always a possibility of reverse reaction and I constitute the Other as my object. He points out, “they include within them a comprehension of my selfless which can and must serve as my motivation for constituting the Other as an object.”<sup>28</sup> In this sense, Sartre stresses that my ontological freedom remains indestructible by the Other. There is always a possibility to retain my choices and react as a response to Other’s transcendence. Notably, despite my

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<sup>26</sup> Sartre, 1956: 530.

<sup>27</sup> Kruk, 1990: 68.

<sup>28</sup> Sartre, 1956: 291.

objectifying the other, I cannot reject Other's ontological freedom too that forever remains permanent and possible threat or 'explosive instrument' for my freedom. Thus, the Other stays as an opposite and conflicting object in my subjective consciousness with whom no reciprocal relation can be possible.

As mentioned earlier, for Sartre, self is defined as freedom-in-situation, yet situation cannot determine the freedom of self. Self can transcend its situation as an absolute self. Consequently, for Sartre, there is no difference between situations of two individuals and their freedoms. Sartre has been criticised on the ground that the material conditions of the less privileged will become unchangeable because of the imaginary assumption of equal possibilities of choices to transcend their situatedness. Furthermore, there would be no reason for others to work to help such less privileged persons to improve their situation as they are free beings and can choose their desired situations. Moreover, since two individual's relations are always encountering conflicts due to their absolute freedoms, a self cannot be supportive and helpful towards another self. However, in contrast, it has been seen that the concrete situations of individuals circumscribe and condition the choices of self that affect its life-world. The self simultaneously maintain reciprocal and conflicting relationship with Other(s) that cannot be ignored.

For investigating the social background of women's situation and subjectivity, Beauvoir began with a consideration of the concept of freedom within the concrete particular conditions of embodied self. Like Sartre, Beauvoir claims that "every man is originally free."<sup>29</sup> That is to say, freedom is subjective and inevitable. Self is free, unique transcendence and a 'for-itself'. She says, "men do not to begin with depend on each other, because to begin with they *are* not: they must become. Freedoms are neither united nor opposed: they are separated. It is in projecting himself into the world that a man situates himself in situating other men around him."<sup>30</sup> Man's rejection of ontological freedom leads to bad faith whereas; acceptance of its whole responsibility paves the way for an authentic moral life. Self is predestined to choose freely and project itself as free self in to the world. Nevertheless, for Beauvoir, actual freedom resides in the possibilities of concrete particular situations; in the sense that

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<sup>29</sup> Beauvoir, 1976: 25.

<sup>30</sup> As quoted by Kruk, 1990: 86.

individual's freedom could be limited, coerced and varied in different situations. Beauvoir insists:

I maintained that from the perspective of freedom as Sartre defined it—that is, an active transcendence of some given context rather than mere stoic resignation— not every situation was equally valid: what kind of transcendence could a woman shut up in a harem achieve? Sartre replied that even such a cloistered existence could be lived in several different ways.<sup>31</sup>

Beauvoir does not agree with Sartre's account of subjective freedom and situation as common product. She doubts the inevitability and absoluteness of freedom in coercive situations. Sartre claims that even situations are individualistic and incommensurable in the sense that self can exercise its choices even in coercive situations. For Beauvoir, all of us are free to choose, act, interpret our lived experience but it is only possible in some concrete particular background and given conditions to which we respond in different ways and give new meaning, value to re-shape or recast the given situation. These situations grade and limit an individual's choices. Beauvoir puts it, "a man is at the same time freedom and facticity: he is free...but free within a situation."<sup>32</sup> Similar to other selves, a slave is free to transcend and project himself but in terms of qualitative difference. He can employ choices only within his restrictive or confining concrete situation as slave which is not created but given to him. In this sense, choices of slave cannot be the same as that of the master. His freedom is more limited and future less open in comparison to that of master. Beauvoir characterises this limited freedom under the concept of *immanence*. The immanence is an *entrapped transcendence* that locks the self within its given facticity and precludes it from an 'open' future. Thus, Beauvoir argues that the self can only attempt to make choices under its existing immanence. There are degrees of difference in freedom of individuals in accordance with their given situations. Here the questions that can be asked are: how different selves interact with their different freedoms? Are individual freedoms obstructive or supportive for each other in terms of self and Other relation?

Beauvoir describes the ways self encounters and employ its freedom in relation to others. She moves beyond Sartre's conception of subjective freedom by

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<sup>31</sup> Beauvoir, 1975: 434.

<sup>32</sup> As quoted by Cohen Shabot, 2007: 371.

introducing its new interpretation as intersubjectivity of freedom i.e. ‘freedom-with-other’. For Beauvoir, the very structure of subjectivity is interdependent. Self is an absolute freedom but it cannot exercise its freedom in isolation. Beauvoir maintains that “man can find justification of his own existence only in the existence of the other man.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, subjectivity is always in relation with other subjectivities. This means that my freedom can only be achieved in relation with others’ freedom and others’ freedom in relation with mine. She writes, “the existence of the other as a freedom defines my situation and even the condition of my freedom”<sup>34</sup> Beauvoir make it clear here that although the other objectifies and threatens me yet my freedom gets meaning and recognition only through the *reciprocal* relation with other free self. She claims that, “to will oneself free is also to will others free”<sup>35</sup> She reiterates that freedom requires ‘open future’ which is possible in relation with others.

Only the other can create a need for what we give him; all appeal, all demand comes from his freedom; in order for what I have established to appear as a good, the other must make it his good: then I am justified in having created it. Only the freedom of the other is able to give necessity to my being.<sup>36</sup>

In this way, differing from Sartre, Beauvoir underlines the ambiguous nature of human existence in each individual’s relation with others and the world. We experience conflicting aspects of the self as an object for others and unique subject for itself together. In other words, the other self perceives my existence as an object, whereas for me, I am a subject ‘I’ exists only as a subject. She mentions, “We have seen that man is present in the world in two ways. He is an object, a given which is surpassed by other transcendences; and he himself a transcendence which thrusts toward the future.”<sup>37</sup> As a free self, I can transcend from my given situation and project myself towards future. However, again this projection is confine within my given situations. In this way, we can say that human self is a mixture of transcendence and immanence, freedom and unfreedom at the same time. Similarly, self is a consciousness and corporality, not just mechanical or biological body but a lived body

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<sup>33</sup> Beauvoir, 1976: 72.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>36</sup> As quoted by Scarth, 2004: 67.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 67.



and a situation which is influenced by social, cultural and historical conditions. Freedom of a self is also ambiguous in the sense, it has to be recognised by other and I also recognise other's freedom in a same way regardless of its conflicting nature:

We depend upon the freedom of the other: he may forget us, misrecognise us, use us for ends which are not our own... what the other creates starting with me will belong to him and not me. I can act only assuming the risk of this future; they are the inverse of my finitude and in assuming my finitude I am free.<sup>38</sup>

The ambiguity of our situated embodied self, and its choices, shows the “tragic ambivalence” of life only humans are aware of, but not animals. We are aware of the possibility of our indefinite freedom but we are also aware of the fragility and limitations of our existence as being human. Commenting on this contradiction, Beauvoir says, “The more widespread their mastery of the world, the more they find themselves crushed by uncontrollable forces.”<sup>39</sup> This ambiguity is not only an aspect of the conscious embodied self but also of the ways in which individuals make their choices in concrete particular situations. This lived experience of human ambiguity, as Beauvoir claims, can be resolved neither by our free will nor by our rationality.

It can be said that Beauvoir's focus on inherent ambiguity of every human situation makes her universalist as she accepts ‘ambiguity’ as a universal feature of situated self. I propose to argue that it would be wrong to call her universalist in the sense that ambiguity for her is a way to understand the lived experience of human subject encountering others in the world. This is clear from Beauvoir's claim that “as long as there have been men and they have lived they have all felt this tragic ambiguity of their condition.”<sup>40</sup> As human selves, we have to confront ambiguity of human condition and our situations without being able to overcome or eliminate it. Therefore, any claim of eradication of ambiguity from human life are no more than a temporary illusion or a bad faith. She criticises those who declare the elimination of ambiguity by accusing that they “eliminate the ambiguity by making oneself pure inwardness or pure externality, by escaping from the sensible world or by being

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>39</sup> Beauvoir, 1976: 9.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 7.

engulfed in it, by yielding to eternity of enclosing oneself in the pure moment.”<sup>41</sup> In this way, Beauvoir attempts to argue that instead of evading the fundamental ambiguity of self, efforts need to be made to understand human situation more accurately under such conditions and search new ways to handle it or to find and give new value or meaning to our lives.

Thus, our accepting and confronting the absurdity of human life and a commitment to choose our projects open up new freely chosen projects and possibilities for us. Any evasion of or escape from this situation encloses all possibilities of our future projects and enslaves us within our immanence, and suffer the coercion of our facticity that self can't even realise. A coerced self, sunk in its facticity, not only loses its choices but also perceives its situation as its destiny. True that we are not always responsible for our facticity but we need to see it through and try to overcome it. For this, we need to search and identify the ways in which self is being coerced and how social ideologies and structures plays crucial role in its entrapment. The next section of the chapter will take up the issues of coercion in relation with self.

### **1.3 Structures of Coercion**

*“An institution is coercive if the institution unfairly limits the choices of some group of persons relative to other group in society.”*

— Ann E. Cudd<sup>42</sup>

Coercion is a social phenomenon which is understood as antithetical to freedom of choice. In this sense, coercion shows the polarity between freedom and *unfreedom* that forms a background for self and its actions within its situations. A situation without choice or coercion is mere fantasy. Moreover, no situation can either be absolutely free or absolutely coercive. The situation of absolute freedom invalidates the problematic of human existence, that is, its uncertainty, finitude and ambiguities. In a similar vein, the reverse condition of absolute coercion implies the termination of human existence/life which closes all doors for human projects. Self always experiences itself as located between these polarities; it is not possible for the self to

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>42</sup> Cudd, 2006: 131.

avoid either of these polarities. A self may experience various forms and degrees of coercion and choice at different time and spaces.<sup>43</sup> We experience coercion only when restraints are imposed on us by other(s) without leaving any suitable option for reaching our aims. As Michael A. Weinstein underlines that, “when restraint with respect to any planned action is experienced as the result of the efforts of another person or a group people, and no more satisfactory alternative action has replaced the original planned action, coercion has appeared.”<sup>44</sup>

Coercion can be looked at two levels—individual level and structural level. Some traditional theorists view coercion as an interpersonal relation in which a person manipulates and controls another person’s life-world by regulating or curtailing her/his choices directly or indirectly. MacCormick is of view that “coercion entails deprivation of any real choice on the victim’s parts as to what he is to do or suffer.”<sup>45</sup> Some feminists interpret structural level of coercion in terms of *oppression*. They relate coercion with a social group (men) and institution (patriarchy) that unjustly, unequally oppress and control the other social or group (women) life world through their practices and norms for the purpose of their own benefits and privileges. In patriarchy, these two distinct understandings of coercion are linked and work together in the sense that individual instances turnout to be a result of group level coercion in the form of oppression and vice-versa. In this section, I will attend to the structural dimension of patriarchal coercion and the way it is associated with individual self and group. In so doing, I will take up specifically, patriarchal oppression as a form of coercion that focuses primarily on the issues of *women’s oppression* and limits the possibility of free choices for them.

Coercion is a dynamic phenomenon which has many facets in patriarchy. In her attempt to understand women’s oppression in patriarchy, Shay Welch, in her book *Existential Eroticism*, distinguishes between traditional approaches to the understanding of oppressive relations between individuals and feminist approaches which see the oppression of women not as a simple relation between individuals but a play of systemic forces such as institutions and social groups resulting in coercion of individuals because they are women. Distinguishing between different kinds of

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<sup>43</sup> Pennock and John W. Chapman, 2007: 64.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>45</sup> MacCormick, 1970: 16-17.

coercion in patriarchy may help in an appreciation of the ways in which different forms of coercion affect different women in different ways depending upon their position and situation.<sup>46</sup> Various components jointly constitute a structural form of coercion for members of the oppressed group(s) who are circumscribed by denial of their real choices. Such a denial perpetuates itself without any obstruction. Commenting on the perpetuating nature of coercion, Ann Cudd says that “this cyclic nature of oppression is coercive because individuals remain within and help perpetuate the cycle as a result of their adherence to their particular social stereotypes, which leads to fewer and worse life choices as a result of out-group designation.”<sup>47</sup> Patriarchy designates the oppressed group as a group of *women* who are sexually differentiated and demarcated from the oppressor group of *men* within the given social structures.

According to Beauvoir, human self is fundamentally ambiguous. It is an amalgamation of immanence and transcendence, facticity and subjectivity, that opens the possibilities of envisaging choices for it. Beauvoir describes the way oppression curtails human freedom and reduces men and women into their immanence in the following way:

Reduced to pure facticity, congealed in his immanence, cut off from his future, deprived of his transcendence and of the world which that transcendence discloses, a man no longer appears as anything more than a thing among things which can be subtracted from the collectivity of other things without its leaving upon the earth any trace of its absence.<sup>48</sup>

From the beginning of civilisation women have been treated as unequal and inferior to men. Women have been coerced to accept their immanence due to enforced circumstances of lack of access to transcendence, a major cause of women’s oppression. Beauvoir views the cause of oppression in mostly unrecognised and implicit ambiguity of the self. In patriarchal social structures, the ambiguity of a woman’s identity is reinforced by differentiating her as the ‘Other’ of the masculine Self and fixing her identity with physical acts on the basis of her sexuality. Such

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<sup>46</sup> Welch, 2015: 62-3.

<sup>47</sup> As quoted by Welch, 2015: 63.

<sup>48</sup> Beauvoir, 1976: 100.

discrimination not only closes the door of choices for women but also closes the open possibilities of future that are available to men.

Beauvoir begins her work, *The Second Sex* by asking the question on the way women are deterministically defined and interpreted, and how they are excluded from the category of subject and identified as the inessential Other of the Self i.e. *Man*. Beauvoir declares, “She determines and differentiates in relation to man and he does not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute: she is the Other.”<sup>49</sup> The question arises here that if the woman is a subject like man then why is she perceived as the Other? For finding an answer, we need to reflect upon the concept of self. We will see the difference of self and other exists in the unending struggle between two self consciousnesses. Sonia Kruks interprets the struggle of consciousness from a beauvoirion perspective. In Sartre’s idea of struggle between two consciousnesses, man always makes an effort to secure his subjectivity by objectifying and reducing women under the category of Other. Nevertheless, for Beauvoir, the relation of otherness can be possible both between equals and unequals. The unending struggle in the first condition leads to reciprocity by recognising the Other as equally free being; whereas in the second situation, the conflict leads toward tensions in which the dominant group always is in some gain by subjugating the other group and maintaining its subjection.<sup>50</sup> This emerging concept of otherness from the struggle is not only the cause of women’s oppression but also the cause of their coercion in many ways such as, threats, compulsion, duress, constraints, violence, repression etc. which women experience in their lives every day.

Beauvoir sees the conditions and circumstances of women’s oppression rooted in a misleading view of human subjectivity and freedom according to which only men are seen as sovereign subjects, capable of making free choices and women are seen as the other-objects for men’s control to suit their desires and ambitions. But reducing a transcendent subject to immanence is either a lapse or a fault. For Beauvoir, whether there is a degradation of oneself to facticity, or an infliction of immanence on the other, these have to be seen as cases of an absolute evil:

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<sup>49</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 6.

<sup>50</sup> Kruks, 1990: 100.

Every subject posits itself as a transcendence concretely, through towards other freedoms; there is no other justification for present existence than its expansion towards an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is degradation of existence into ‘in-itself’, of freedom into facticity; this fault is a moral fault if subject consents to it; if this fault is inflicted on the subject, it takes the form of frustration and oppression; in both cases it is an absolute evil.<sup>51</sup>

Ironically, oppressors live in the illusion that they are absolute subjects, possess infinite freedom, are not tied to the materiality of the world. They coerce and rhetorically persuade the oppressed or others about their situation as unchangeable and abject natural *facts* rather than a social imposition by the oppressor:

The tyrant asserts himself as a transcendence; he considers other as pure imminences: he thus arrogates to himself the right to treat them like cattle. We see the sophism on which his conduct is based: of the ambiguous condition which is that of all men, he retains for himself the only aspects of transcendence which is capable of justifying itself; for the others; the contingent and unjustified aspect of immanence.<sup>52</sup>

Becoming a victim of such a make-belief, woman falsely envisages her freedom in her immanence. A woman is left with no other option but to explore her existence and choices within the realm of man-made world where men force her to live and perceive herself as the (excluded) Other. In this way, women lock themselves into the situation of immanence which is actually created and imposed on them by men. In a sense she is not certainly responsible for her own situation. The ‘woman’ is a product of man’s constitution who intervenes and modifies her freedom through his actions rather than she is a constitutor of her own situation, Beauvoir says, “when an individual or a group of individuals is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact he or they *are* inferior...Yes, women in general *are* today inferior to men, that is, their situation provides them with fewer possibilities.”<sup>53</sup> In contrast to Beauvoir’s view, Sartre would hold women responsible for their situation regardless of the force of their circumstances since they are, like men, absolute freedoms. In response to Sartre’s

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<sup>51</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 17.

<sup>52</sup> Beauvoir, 1976: 102.

<sup>53</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 12.

position, Beauvoir maintains that women's rootedness in this situation is a result of their continuous survival in the way in which some women accept it for the given privileges and protection, whereas, some other women are incompetent to envisage the real alternatives that result into passive resistance and resentment leading to the cessation of their possibilities of real choices.

Due to socially constituted situations, women find that they are repeatedly doomed, compelled and destined to live in obedience to men's rules and commands. In this sense, Beauvoir distinguishes herself from Sartre to give meaning of subjectivity by saying that the subject is not just an absolute freedom but only a concrete freedom instantiated in concrete situations of coercion. To distinguish between abstract and concrete freedom, Beauvoir provides an illustration. The dreams of a young girl, which are already written in heaven and she will search for them every day without creating or changing the world for fulfilling them. Such conditions of immanence are inflicted upon women as perpetual destiny which is attached with their procreative body. She encounters the world not as an embodied feminine self but as a sexed body whose primary purpose is to procreate for perpetuation of life. Women's bodies, Beauvoir argues, are biologically constituted and socially constructed. A woman's body is a situation based on the ways in which it is given meaning in society. In this way, Beauvoir characterises women's embodied subjectivity as *situated subjectivity* whose primary and prescribed sex-role is to perpetuate the species. She illustrates how patriarchy defines women's bodily situatedness exclusively in terms of its maternal function:

Woman? Very simple, say those who like simple answer: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female: this word is enough to define her...The term 'female' is pejorative not because it roots woman in nature, but because it confines her in sex...the word female evokes a saraband of images: an enormous round egg snatching and castrating the agile sperm<sup>54</sup>.

Beauvoir traces the emergence of patriarchal account of woman that uses the term 'womb' as an alternative meaning of being woman. A woman is essentialised as mother. Patriarchy projects women's bodily maternal function as their essence which is actually a situation. In contrast, man is a transcendental subject who defines himself

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 21.

as well as women. Women are circumscribed and biologically condemned to perform their bodily procreative role and considered as inferior embodied objects, whereas men are privileged and hailed as capable of transcending their bodily boundaries and consequently privileged as rational subjects. He is the *man*. Being defined in such a way, his horizon expands naturally and socially, but for women, she is just an ‘ovary’. By acquiescing to this view, woman accepts to place herself in the patriarchal realm of essential maternity where her oppression and domestication are biologically justified.

Human subjects *qua* subjects have an inherent quest for transcendence. No wonder that some women do try to confront their situations of immanence to overcome them. This is attempted through all consuming love, narcissism and mysticism but such efforts worsen women’s condition and further incarcerate them by lauding their servitude as a fantastic sovereign freedom. Such fanciful beliefs are no more than deceptive pictures of their reality and often deprive them from establishing and maintaining real relation to the world, which seems to be a making of their own choices. She neither evades nor rescues herself from such situations as her choices are not necessarily the *choice* for transcendence but informed by her immanence. In their inner struggles, women are taught to find meaning for themselves only in their immanence which is, in one sense, a self defeating act that snatches from their hands the possibility of their own free choices and hands them on a platter to the others, i.e. men.

In this scenario, Beauvoir suggests that emancipation or transcendence for women from their given oppressive situations can be possible only through alteration of circumstances in the form of external struggles for their own existence as free selves. In other words, emancipation cannot be achieved through isolated choices of solitary individuals but only through collective social movements that can modify the situation of oppressed women through institutional alteration. The struggle can begin by limiting and denying or resisting the freedom of oppressors in order to expand the prospects of human freedom. For this, a social ‘revolt’ and ‘sacrifice’ is needed. Beauvoir emphasises that “we have to respect freedom only when it is intended for freedom, not when it strays, flees itself, and resigns itself. A freedom which is



interested only in denying freedom must be denied.”<sup>55</sup> The struggle must involve specific revolts against concrete situations of oppression. Because of its uniqueness, each revolt further requires ‘sacrifice’, sometimes such revolts may end up in failure and frustration. So, since revolt involves sacrifice(s) on the part of individuals, which does not guarantee success and change for better in concrete particular situations of the oppressed, the struggle has to be engaged not in terms of abstraction and generality but by framing concrete agendas for specific goals.

One might object that Beauvoir, by rejecting the idea of universality due to the uniqueness of individual self is indirectly supporting the notion of universal freedom for all human beings through her vision of struggle against oppression and freedom for all. In my view, this is a misleading criticism. It is worth keeping in mind that Beauvoir is not questioning the universality of concepts. Following the logic of concepts, Beauvoir accepts the universality of concepts for the very possibility of intelligible discourse. But she doesn’t favour the absolutisation of concepts in the garb of their universality. For Beauvoir, every discourse is embedded in its concrete particular situations that are contingent but sometimes unavoidable. We attempt to seek the cause of every individual instance of oppression within the framework of freedom. When she says “seek to serve the universal cause of freedom,”<sup>56</sup> it doesn’t involve absolutisation of any specific conception of freedom. Concrete freedom could be understood only in particular situations that become meaningful in one’s relation to others. Beauvoir clarifies that isolated individuals cannot expand the horizon of their freedom as freedom needs to allow other’s freedom for the extension of one’s own freedom itself. She points out, “the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, it can be said that our projects are formed in relation to how the others engage and open themselves for us as free beings and respect our free choices.

Beauvoir looks at the distinct features of struggle whose expansion results in revolt, sacrifice, failure frustration, disappointment, joy of gains and achievements etc. She illustrates and analyses the ‘tension’ that take place in the struggle between oppressed and oppressors. During revolt, the oppressed treats the oppressor in the

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<sup>55</sup> Beauvoir, 1976: 90-91

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 91.

same ways as it was being treated earlier; like an object, a thing or an instrument. Notably, for Beauvoir, struggle for existence is not a silent revolt but rather a violent protest against the oppressors who are “masters, tyrants, and executioners...a blind force, a brutal fatality.”<sup>58</sup> Beauvoir’s account of ethical tension about oppression reminds us of Immanuel Kant’s doctrine of ‘categorical imperative’ that human beings should not be treated as means, as objects, and as human beings we must respect the other’s freedom. However, we can say that in contrast to Kant, Beauvoir’s demand for struggle against oppression seems to support the treatment of oppressor as an object in order to overcome the ‘givenness’ of the oppressed. In that way, Beauvoir promotes the idea of temporary ‘sacrifice’ of morality for achieving human well being in which failures can be possible. It can be said that Beauvoir attempts to promote discrepancy in ethics in the sense that she endorses the idea of limiting oppressor’s absolute freedom if it is so required. It is true that Beauvoir favours the need of resisting the oppressor to promote freedom from oppression. This ‘tension’ reveals the ambiguous and risky situations that humans have to face in their quest for transcendence from immanence. She rightly claims that “no action can be generated for man without its being immediately generated against men”<sup>59</sup> Humans have to struggle *against* oppression and *for* expansion of their freedom and others simultaneously. Revolutionary acts may involve limiting other’s freedom and yet be humanising for the oppressor, which is not incompatible with her ethics of ambiguity.

The struggle against coercive patriarchal structures reveals the inherent picture of feminine self as an ambiguous phenomenon. This ambiguous nature of feminine self is misrepresented in patriarchy as an inevitable maternal self. In the next section, an attempt will be made to show the ambiguity of destiny of woman though fixed by patriarchy, that is, ambiguity of maternal self and the way patriarchy employ its rhetorical tools to justify its mythical certainty.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 99.

## 1.4 Ambiguity of Maternal Self and Rhetorics

*“But pregnancy is above all a drama that is acted out within the woman herself...she is proud of it; but she also feels herself to be the playing of dark forces, she is torn, assaulted.”*

– Beauvoir<sup>60</sup>

From the above line of thought, Beauvoir develops a phenomenological account of maternity by describing lived experience of maternal self. For comprehending the meaning of maternal phenomenon and its lived experience, she brackets all the existing assumptions or presuppositions of maternity to reveal the reality of the maternal idealizations, myths, norms, and practices that make maternity an essential feature of the fulfilment of womanhood. Alison Stone extends the beauvoirian demystification of maternal reality in the following manner:

Debunking the myths and idealizations that conceal motherhood’s more complex and troubled reality. These myths run deep in Western culture: at their centre the iconic figure of the Virgin Mary, cradling the baby Jesus in countless depictions, serenely happy to protect him and nurture his growth. This imagery feeds into the broader ideology that women’s supreme happiness lies in the maternal role for which (supposedly) they are naturally destined.<sup>61</sup>

For Beauvoir, self is neither disembodied as described by thinkers in the Cartesian tradition nor merely embodied as earlier phenomenologists claim but rather a gendered embodied self in situations. We encounter/come across a self only through its body. Being embodied is a precondition for becoming a self but not sufficient for the continuity of a self. My dead ‘body’ is not my ‘self’. And my ‘self’ enacts itself through its gendered performances in relation to other selves and the world. Embodied self experiences the world through the lenses of gendered differentiations in which woman’s self can be seen as maternal self. This sexually gendered maternal self is not ontologically destined but ambiguous due to subjectivity, freedom and openness of future situations. From an existentialist point of view, human self is never pre-determined. In this sense, as a self, a woman’s embodied self is continuously in the process of becoming through her perceptions and interpretations of her situations, giving them meanings, making more or less free choices, and performing her actions.

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<sup>60</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 551-2.

<sup>61</sup> Stone, 2017: 125.

However, the femininity of a woman's self is bounded when opportunities to make choices are snatched away from her hands. Beauvoir points out that it is not the 'woman' but her alleged *femininity* or 'feminine' self that becomes the cause of her gendered oppression. Such structural coercion, though socially sanctioned, needs to be challenged and rejected for thinking afresh about the possibility of genuine and authentic maternal choices transcending the prevalent but latent patriarchal beliefs and structures.

Woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming; she has to be compared with man in her becoming; that is; her possibilities have to be defined: what skew the issues so much is that she is being reduced to what she was, to what she is today, while the question concerns her capacities; the fact is that her capacities manifest themselves clearly only when they have been realized: but the fact is also that when one considers a being who is transcendence and surpassing, it is never possible to close the books.<sup>62</sup>

From the above remarks of Beauvoir, it becomes clear that she does not accept any situation as the ultimate or final situation of transcendence for humans, both men and women. In human history so far, a *his-story* dominated by men, men have believed and acted in a manner as if they are absolute sovereign subjects capable of transcending and surpassing their given facticity. From Beauvoir's observation, 'it is never possible to close the books', it follows that possibility of transcendence is open for women, and patriarchy is not inevitable. Beauvoir underlines that when women wish and attempt to transcend their facticity, the patriarchal society classifies them under the category of "masculine-feminine" to question and disapprove their struggle against male domination and oppression. Women's struggles for transcendence from their immanent 'femininity' are suppressed by branding their activities as 'masculine protest' and condemning their choice as 'inauthentic'. Beauvoir retorts:

Whenever she behaves as a human being, she is declared to be identifying herself with the male. Her activities in sports, politics, and intellectual matters, her sexual desire for other women, are all interpreted as a "masculine protest", the common refusal to take account of the values

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<sup>62</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 45-6.

towards which she aims, or transcends herself, evidently leads to the conclusion that she is, as subject, making an inauthentic choice.<sup>63</sup>

Beauvoir explicates the patriarchal practices in which woman is seen and treated as a womb, a thing and a vessel. Nevertheless, she counters such a dehumanising view of women by pointing out that “the body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is a grasp on the world and the outline for our projects.”<sup>64</sup> That is to say, the body is not an object but a situation in the sense that it is a living and experiencing body. She writes, “it is not the body-object described by the scientists that exists concretely, but the body lived by the subject.”<sup>65</sup> This lived body is not an inert biological fact but a concrete particular and sexually differentiated living body whose lived experiences are situated within the realm of its feminine subjectivity in relation to other subjectivities. For Beauvoir, in all societies, past and present, any acknowledged feature of a woman’s body is grounded in the way she is valued and given meaning in the prevailing patriarchal social structures.

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir has documented the ways in which matrix of biology, history and culture plays a crucial role to set situations for women’s lived experience as mothers in the framework of patriarchal structures. She illustrates the stages of women’s lived experience in a chronological order, beginning from childhood through phases of girlhood, sexual initiation, marriage, motherhood, maturity and then old age. Women are encouraged and trained to map their life’s excursions centring around their becoming mothers. For such reasons, women’s experiences of their maternal bodily functions, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation and child care, entrap them into domestic realm. From their early childhood, every girl is trained for becoming a good wife, a good mother caught in repetitive tasks of procreation, taking care of child and family well being throughout their life after marriage. They are taught the ‘virtue’ of ‘giving’ and not the ‘vice’ of ‘seeking’. Women’s maternal acts are regulated and controlled by man-made institutions under which women get enslaved primarily as wives and mothers. Beauvoir says, “women’s inferiority... originally came from the fact that she was restricted to repeating life, while man invented reasons for living, in his eyes more

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 428.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 52.

essential than the pure facticity of existence; confining women to motherhood is the perpetuation of this situation.”<sup>66</sup> The imprisonment in the form of institutionalisation of maternal work not only works on physical level also but on an ideological level as it attempts to reduce women’s existence solely to maternity.

The normative institutionalisation of maternal function both idealises and essentialises motherhood. This is achieved by overlooking the paradoxical nature of the project and dichotomies on which it rests. Patriarchy projects women’s fulfilment and ultimate happiness in motherhood, that is, desire for motherhood is projected as a natural instinct that has to be satisfied by women for their own sake. Contrarily, it is also claimed that every ‘good woman’ ought to fulfil her feminine obligations by becoming a ‘good’ mother. Women who do not want/like to be/become mothers are not ‘good’ women.

Furthermore, such multifaceted situations create ambivalent emotions in women towards their maternity that is not similar for every woman. Women may share a common ground because of their anatomy and biological (procreative/reproductive) functions. However, their needs, aspirations, fears, hopes, and attitudes towards motherhood often vary according to the situations in which they find themselves in different cultural spaces and historical epochs. Mothers are not always natural as projected by patriarchy but there are ‘unnatural mothers’ as well. Beauvoir provides instances from various sources indicating maternal ambivalence that puts them into the category of unnatural mothers. For instance, sometimes a woman may feel that only by carrying on the pregnancy she can protect herself from an increase in domestic violence. In some other situations, she may feel that she is entrapped by outside forces, compulsions of perpetuation of human species, or both. Alternatively, there may be a woman who desires to “retain”, and another woman who wants “to expel the alien foetus”, or she may have mixed or conflicting desires during various stages of her pregnancy. For one woman pregnancy may be seen as “enrichment”, while for another woman it may be a sense of “alienation from her body”. A woman may feel proud about her swelling belly<sup>67</sup> and expansion of her bodily consciousness, but for another woman, it may be a distortion of her body and self. A woman may feel being enslaved in the child’s hand for fulfilling its demands;

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<sup>66</sup> Beauvoir, 582.

<sup>67</sup> Zerilli, 1992: 123.

on the other hand, she may choose to submerge herself completely in maternity. Beauvoir writes:

Pregnancy is above all a drama playing itself out in the woman between her and herself. She experience it both as an enrichment and a mutilation; the foetus is part of her body and it is a parasite exploiting her; she possesses it and she is possessed by it; it encapsulates the whole future and in carrying it she feels as vast as the world; but this very richness annihilates her, she has the impression of not being anything else.<sup>68</sup>

The above passage reveals the inherent duality and conflicting nature of maternal experience, but may sound demeaning and disturbing to mothers. Beauvoir makes it clear that the existential authenticity of mothers can be possible only when they are prepared to deal with this paradoxical and ambiguous situation with responsibility and courage. Patriarchy idealises as well as it condemns motherhood; it would be a courageous step for a potential mother to recognise ambivalence and reject the idealisation of motherhood. Feelings of maternal ambivalence may be emotionally disturbing and painful experience, yet it is essential for authentic life. On maternal ambivalence, Rozsika Parker aptly says:

the mother's achievement of ambivalence—the awareness of her co-existing love and hate for the [child]—can promote a sense of concern and responsibility towards, and differentiation of self from, the [child]. Maternal ambivalence signifies the mother's capacity as less than admirable—and to hold a more complete image of her baby.<sup>69</sup>

Beauvoir sees desire for maternity as an ambiguous desire. A desire, or a lack of desire, for becoming a mother is neither maternal not antimaternal, but rather a mixed and contradictory feeling<sup>70</sup> that cannot be generalised as the maternal instinct for all women. She claims that “maternity is a strange compromise of narcissism, altruism, dream, sincerity, bad faith, devotion, and cynicism.”<sup>71</sup> This leads Beauvoir to reflect upon the ambiguity of maternal feelings as she underlines that, “the meaning of

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<sup>68</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 551-2.

<sup>69</sup> Parker, 1995: 22.

<sup>70</sup> Zerilli, 1992: 120.

<sup>71</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 570.

pregnancy...[is] ambiguous, it is natural for the attitude to be ambivalent as well.”<sup>72</sup> Contrary to the dominant biological interpretation that claims that women have an inevitable maternal instinct, Beauvoir maintains that women can choose according to their own desires and preferences.

As already mentioned earlier, for Beauvoir, motherhood has to be a subject of choice rather than an inevitable natural inclination as prescribed in patriarchal ideology. Only in a non-patriarchal society women can be free to choose their own meanings of maternity and free to act accordingly. She claims, “Pregnancy and motherhood are experienced in very different ways depending on whether they take place in revolt, resignation, satisfaction or enthusiasm.”<sup>73</sup> Beauvoir values an individual mother’s contradictory and conflicting experiences of maternity as she can feel satisfied or at the same may revolt against others. Beauvoir states that:

One must keep in mind that the decisions and feelings the young mother expresses do not always correspond to her deep desires. An unwed mother can be overwhelmed in material terms by the burden suddenly imposed on her, be openly distressed by it, and yet find in the child the satisfaction of secretly harboured dreams; inversely, a young married women who joyfully and proudly welcomes her pregnancy can fear it in silence, hate it with obsessions, fantasises and infantile memories that she herself refuses to recognise.<sup>74</sup>

However, most of the times, maternal choices are not a result of conscious decision-making that leads women to live in self-delusion, that is, an inauthentic life. Beauvoir suggests that the child should not be the only limit of a woman’s horizon. It is necessary for mothers to have a right and freedom to engage in public realm outside mother-care work. For doing this, society can co-operate with mothers by providing them proper childcare support so that mothers do not feel maternity as a burden. Beauvoir says, “in a properly organized society where the child would in great part be taken charge of by the group, where the mother would be cared for and helped, motherhood would absolutely not be incompatible with women’s work?”<sup>75</sup> They can freely make their choices regarding maternal decisions in accordance with their

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 554.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 546.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 546.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 582.



feelings of joy or burden, or their desire to have children or not, in the light of a free and reflective appraisal of their situation. Through collective struggles, women can free themselves from coercive structures, overcome social constraints, and exercise freedom. With appropriate social support, not only they can lead a better family life while pursuing a chosen career, but also authentically fulfil their social role as mothers.

Beauvoir declares that the authenticity of maternal self can only be possible by realising, recognising and living with our existential ambiguity. A denial of alternatives available for oneself is a refusal to accept one's freedom that makes one's self an authentic self. However, women's escape from freedom is socially and culturally glorified that presents a false picture of saving them from the risk of facing future failure and having their own projects. In this way, escaping from facing and pursuing the possibility of transcendence at any cost is an immoral act and an obstruction in achieving authenticity and a cause of their oppression. In this sense, Beauvoir accepts and respects the possibility of free and authentic motherhood. In other words, it is not necessary that maternity always oppresses and imprisons women. Women can engage themselves in the world along with their maternity and avail all the worldly opportunities for their transcendence, instead of seeing it as an animal function for species perpetuation. Beauvoir gave a clear and a straight forward answer to Friedan's question on free maternity that "the state should discourage or even disallow women choosing full-time motherhood and constrain all mothers to undertake paid work."<sup>76</sup> At another place, Beauvoir mentions that she is not against motherhood as such, but is against the way it had been perceived as slavery.<sup>77</sup> Thus, for Beauvoir, mothers can and must become proper selves or subjects by recognising their unavoidable ambiguity. A recognition of ambiguity is the first step towards self transcendence. It is the only remaining possibility for achieving subjectivity. As Beauvoir aptly puts, "assume our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of our genuine conditions that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting."<sup>78</sup> Thus, Beauvoir criticises patriarchal constructions of maternal institutions that impose motherhood in the form of women's destiny and natural culmination of their womanhood. She emphasises that the quality of maternal experience of a woman

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<sup>76</sup> As quoted by Stone, 2017: 123.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>78</sup> Beauvoir, 1976: 9.

depends on the particular concrete situation that gives different meanings to their maternity, i.e. the meaning of maternity is primarily based on the perspective of individual feminine self. Having a child should be a woman's choice rather than an institutional command imposed on her.

In patriarchal ontology feminine self is seen essentially as a reproductive phenomenon, in the sense that there is no separation or distinction between feminine self and the maternal body. A woman's self is equated merely with her body and understood as maternal self or subjectivity. Irigaray comments on this view as "in our patriarchal culture,...the woman [cannot] control her relation to maternity, unless she reduces herself to that role alone...there is no difference between being mother and being a woman,...there is no articulation to be made, by the woman, between these two desires of hers."<sup>79</sup> A patriarchal culture is rhetorically so constituted that women are quietly made to learn to not to recognise themselves as a self who can exercise their choices freely and create their own meanings. Patriarchy interprets women's self or subjectivity in a masculinist way that is, in relation to their maternal body by excluding them from the category of free self that shapes the construction of their meanings and choices. Such interpretations of feminine body as maternal self are further justified by biology. Biology interprets women's body as naturally inclined for procreation. Biologically speaking, it is woman's inherent instinct that reveals her destiny as mother not as independent self. In contrast, Beauvoir draws our attention toward the ambiguous nature of 'embodied' maternal self that is not destined for maternity rather a social *situation* structured by patriarchy. Maternity is one of the acts of feminine body that is not a necessity for her being a feminine self. Beauvoir demystifies the idealised nature of 'maternal self' by recognising and disclosing the disassociation between women's feminine subjectivity and lived experience of maternity with its fundamental ambiguity in terms of ambivalence, complexities, difficulties that doom women to their immanence.

In western philosophy, though the self is usually differentiated from the body, yet a woman's self is viewed as identical with her maternal body. Traditional thinkers such as Descartes believed in disembodied 'I' i.e. self. For him, self is completely distinct from the body. In contrast to the body, a conscious "self" is capable of

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<sup>79</sup> Irigaray, 1985: 143.

choosing its own meanings and interpreting the world accordingly by transcending from its situatedness. Alison Stone in her work *Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Maternal Subjectivity* defines primary features of the self:

To be a subject one must not only have and live through experience, one must also *author* the meaning of that experience, and must exercise some *autonomy* in doing so, departing from given horizons of meaning to regenerate new meanings adapted to one's own situations and history.<sup>80</sup>

This distinction between the self and the body is somewhere associated only with men, while women are seen only as bodies, that is, primarily as maternal bodies. A woman's self is perceived and confined in their bodily act of procreation without having any autonomy. In this way, it is hard for a mother to get recognition as a free self who can exercise her choices and generate her own meanings. One may object here that mothers also have their lived experiences and they give meaning to their self in the sense that they are not just bodies but subjects. It can be said that mothers do attempt to render their experiences and choices within their capabilities. However, our thoughts, imagination and experiences are inherently influenced by the socially set masculinist structures that have effects on mothers' subjectivity that they often fail to recognize themselves as subjects to be acknowledged and respected by others. They often feel the loss of their subjectivity and its recognition.<sup>81</sup> But, if we consider mother as a subject, as Stone puts it, it can be a new understanding, that is, a maternal subject who is capable of giving meanings in relation to her maternal body.

Such a new interpretation of 'self' in terms of the possibility of an autonomous feminine self can be articulated only with the questioning and rejection of patriarchy. Irigaray claims that "any theory of the subject will have always been appropriated as masculine"<sup>82</sup> that means historically, female subjects have been inevitably associated with their maternal body. Their subjectivity is either denied or reduced to maternity. In other words, women themselves cannot exercise the distinguishing of self from the body because of their lived experience of maternity under the spell of patriarchal ideology. Women can only visualize their subjectivity under the set structures of

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<sup>80</sup> Stone, 2012: 2.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>82</sup> Irigaray, 1987: 133.

masculinity in which they are mere objects of procreation. Irigaray adds in continuation that:

In subjecting herself to any such theory, woman without knowing it renounces the specificity of her own relationship to the imaginary. Subjecting herself to objectivization in discourse—by being “female.” Re-objectivizing her own self whenever she claims to identify herself “as” a masculine subject.<sup>83</sup>

Such a view of the feminine subjectivity reinforces women’s structural oppression and exclusion from the category of free self by assuming their essential and inevitable association, as females, with their maternal body. In this sense, subjectivity for women begins to mean their ‘maternal self’, which in truth involves women’s objectification and exclusion from their transcendence. Beauvoir argues that mothers need not confine themselves solely for maternal work. For achieving autonomy required for transcendence, the children must be taught to become capable of separating themselves from their mothers, by breaking the bodily bonds of dependence. In Beauvoir’s words, “a dangerous misconception about two currently accepted preconceived ideas strongly emerges from the descriptions we have made. The first is that motherhood is enough in all cases to fulfil woman: this is not at all true. Many are the mothers who are unhappy, bitter and unsatisfied.”<sup>84</sup>

To that end, in this chapter, I have attempted to analyse and discuss existential notions of choice and coercion. I have also considered the ways in which sexist social structures intervene in the rhetorical constructions of an imagined maternal self and its choices. Beauvoir’s thesis on ambiguity of maternal subjectivity has helped to demystify patriarchal myths of motherhood as imagined, projected and valorised in the minds of men and women. The persuasive rhetorical presentation of patriarchal ideas and practices of choice and coercion creates serious social mystifications, especially in the context of women’s role as mothers. Patriarchy defines woman as reproductive phenomenon or a maternal body by idealising, naturalising and essentialising it. From the very beginning of their infancy, women are taught to identify themselves with motherhood so that they may perceive their happiness and fulfilment in becoming ‘good mothers’. Beauvoir underlines the conflict between

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>84</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 579.

patriarchal practices and lived experiences of mothers. Through her existential phenomenological account, Beauvoir questions the patriarchal ideology of motherhood by revealing the ambiguous nature of maternity. Patriarchy entraps women within their given facticity. Walls of patriarchy can be smashed by acknowledging the ambiguity of feminine desires and ambitions, by refusing to accept motherhood as essential to being a woman. Women can achieve this by taking responsibility for their freedom through equal and reciprocal relationships which respect their intersubjective freedom. Women can achieve the authenticity of their maternal self, says Beauvoir, by choosing projects which can provide meaning and purpose to their life beyond or besides motherhood, presently projected as their inherent destiny. In order to become authentic feminine subjects, women will have to comprehend basic structures, institutions and practices of patriarchy which presently constitute and regulate the meanings of 'mother', 'mothering' and 'motherhood' for women. Patriarchy is often apprehended and defended as an inevitable universal social system that sets rules and regulations for men and women to control, imprison and devalue women solely for maternal work. Here the question is whether patriarchy is really inevitable, and its rules, therefore unchangeable or is it rhetorically structured man-made system, amenable to change? I will attempt to look for answers to these questions in the next chapter. I shall attempt to do so by analysing how patriarchy controls women's life would by coercing them to remain confined to a life of immanence by perpetuating its ideology of motherhood as the essential identity or destiny of women.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MOTHER, MOTHERING, MOTHERHOOD AND PATRIARCHAL COERCION

*“All human life on the planet is born of woman ...we know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood.”*

— Adrienne Rich<sup>85</sup>

Through the above insight in her classic book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich has drawn our attention to the inadequacy and multiplicity of our understanding of motherhood; the term seems self evident to all, yet definitions of motherhood remain contested and problematic due to its diverse connotations in various discourses and contexts. It is equally hard to give meaning to the inter-related terms ‘mother’ and ‘mothering’. The following remarks of Evelyn N. Glenn are illustrative of the complexities highlighted by Adrienne Rich:

Mothers are romanticized as life-giving, self-sacrificing, and forgiving, and demonized as smothering, overly involved and destructive. They are seen as all-powerful-holding the fate of their children and ultimately the future of society in their hands and as powerless subordinated to the dictates of nature, instinct and social forces beyond their kin<sup>86</sup>

However, alternatively, such remarks on mother, mothering and motherhood open up space for the possibility of diverse and complex answers to the questions: who mother is? What is mothering? And how are mothers and mothering associated with motherhood ? Adrienne Rich provides an answer to these questions by differentiating between a woman’s experience of mothering and institution of motherhood, characterising them as *potential* and *institutional* in which the term mother designates a person or a woman who gives birth and mothering refers to their biological potential to give birth and become mothers. In other words, mothering indicates woman’s embodied lived experience and her relation with her own body and child, whereas motherhood denotes the institutionalisation of mothering practices through prescribed social norms and regulations employed to control women and ensure dominance of men within patriarchal power structures. Such maternal concepts are crucial for

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<sup>85</sup> Rich, 1976: 15.

<sup>86</sup> Glenn Nakano, 1994: 11.

patriarchal discourses about women as they structure their life-world by locking women's identity in maternity and coercing them to perform the maternal role as their destiny.

In patriarchy, a woman is identified with motherhood and regarded as a complete woman only when she gives birth to a child, (in Indian context, especially a male child). As a good mother, she is obliged to fulfil her physical, emotional and social responsibility of care and nurturing her new born. Due to imposition of enforced motherhood, a woman is deprived of her freedom to make reproductive choices and she is socially coerced to do the care work for her children and family. For this purpose, discourses of choice and coercion are used as rhetorical devices to keep a rigid control over women's procreative capacity. Woman's identity is both circumscribed and glorified primarily as mother. To understand the unfortunate and tragic circumstances of women's life as glorified but enslaved mothers in patriarchal societies, we need to understand the basic ideological construction of patriarchy with reference to motherhood. Patriarchy defines women and situates them in accordance with its own purposes and needs. As a consequence, women are doomed to live their life as *excluded other* or relative being of men, made dependent on men for their very survival and existence.

In the present chapter, I will attempt to examine the nature and ideology of patriarchy in order to understand its constructions of the phenomena of mother, mothering and motherhood. I will try to present and analyse various arguments given by theologians, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, historians and philosophers in favour of universality and inevitability of patriarchy. It needs to be taken into account that patriarchy coercively essentialises, naturalises and idealises women as mothers by institutionalising and glorifying motherhood to control their sexuality and reproduction. For this, works of Darwin, Engels, Gerda Lerner and Adrienne Rich will be discussed briefly. They have commented on the ways patriarchy emerged and gradually established an identity or unity of maternity and feminine self. Furthermore, an attempt shall be made to review the biological arguments that are used to favour and defend maternity as women's biological destiny. I will argue that a woman is not merely a biological organism but a living embodied self that experiences the world and can set her own projects in relation with others. Women's bodies are socially situated in such a manner that their potential

maternal act has been metamorphosed into the essence of being a woman. Such a mystification turns them into, what Beauvoir calls, the excluded Other, inferior to men in all aspects. The concept of the Other and its roots in women's biology are discussed in detail in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Finally, I will critically analyse different feminist perspectives in order to explore the whole issue of enforced or coerced motherhood. Thus, this chapter will present argument(s) against the claims that patriarchy is a universal social structure. I will rather argue that it is 'man-made' hierarchical power structure of gender division grounded in socio-cultural views of reproductive function of women to serve social needs that can be changed as these are socially constructed and not naturally given or made.

## 2.1 Patriarchal Ideology and Motherhood

*"But first we must ask: what is a woman? Tota mulier in utero, says one, woman is a womb"*

— Beauvoir<sup>87</sup>

Patriarchy is a way of organising social life in which men dominate women and subjugate them to oppress and exploit them. It would be relevant to keep in view that the term 'patriarchy' has its roots in the Greek term '*patriarch*' which meant 'rule of the father'. In ancient times, 'patriarchy' meant 'rule of/by the father' in which strong men controlled their subjects. The subjects included not only women and children but also other men, young and old, who were socially, economically and politically subordinate to their powerful male rulers.<sup>88</sup> Viewing patriarchy simply as a social system in which men dominate women, on the basis of the claim/belief or alleged evidence that men are stronger, rational and therefore, superior to women, is not very illuminating. In fact such a view tends to obscure and undermine the complex set of factors or forces that function jointly in the making and perpetuation of a patriarchal social order.

Patriarchy is a complex social system in which sexual, cultural, political, economic, moral and legal practices and structures jointly reinforce the subjugation of women by working almost in tandem. To understand the essence of patriarchy which

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<sup>87</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 21.

<sup>88</sup> Geetha, 2009: 4.



underlies its diverse forms in different societies, or the same society at different times, we need to understand and not to forget that gender is not the same as the natural or biological difference between the males and the females. Though grounded in the natural sexual division of reproductive functions, gender is a socio-cultural category. It is a fact of nature that only women are capable of becoming pregnant for creating and nurturing life which males cannot achieve as males. However, this procreative difference among male and female has been viewed and interpreted as the major cause of women's subordination by ancient thinkers. Pythagoras and his successors maintained that world is a composition of two kind of determinate forms, the first were seen as good, limit, right, light, form, and, the other as bad, limitless, dark and inferior. There are ten contrasted categories such as limit/unlimited, odd/ even, good/bad, male/female, light/dark, one/many, rest/motion, right/left, straight/curved, square/oblong. In this sense, in drawing the table of oppositional categories, 'Male' is classified as separate from its opposite side in the table and construed as superior to female. In later Greek thought, it has been observed that maleness was linked with strength, activeness, and determinate form whereas femaleness was correlated with passivity, weakness, and indeterminate matter.<sup>89</sup>

A reason for this contrasted set of alignments could be due to a similarity of views among these ancient Greek thinkers about the significance of the reproductive differences between the two sexes. They viewed father as provider of formative principles; the actual causal force of procreation, while mother was perceived as matter which received and nourished the form provided by the father. In *Timaeus*, Plato compares the role of limiting form with father and the role of indefinite matter with mother. Through such a distinction, Plato primarily, attempted to show the exclusion of knowledge from those symbolically assumed as feminine. Knowledge is allied with reason or mind and matter extruded from it. The world of forms, for Plato, is rational and reflective (self-existing ideas). It is connected with world-soul or Cosmic Reason in which only reflective rationality of human minds can participate. However, this reflective cosmic Reason seems blurred in women's soul in comparison to men. He says that their souls are the fallen and mutilated souls of reasonless men. In contrast, Aristotle brought the platonic forms into the mundane world and developed a hierarchical view on form and matter in relation to male and female.

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<sup>89</sup> Lloyd, 1984: 2-3.

Since forms are always superior to matter, in this sense, women are inferior to men, so they are naturally controlled and ruled by them. Women are seen as means for procreation in service of men. In this process, for Aristotle, men's sperm provides soul or form while women's menstrual blood gives matter to the offspring. He says "The form, is better and more divine in its nature than the Matter, it is better also that the superior one should be separate from the inferior one. That is why whenever possible and so far as possible the male is separate from the female."<sup>90</sup>

Furthermore, Plato posits that women are deviated form of nature, formed instead of men, which was a necessary requirement for the preservation of future new life. Thus, the purpose of woman's existence is procreation, otherwise she is characterized as a disabled, inferior and deformed being. Plato states that "a woman is as it were an infertile male" and even in regard to reproduction, "a male is male in virtue of a particular ability, and a female in virtue of particular inability."<sup>91</sup> Aristotle also assumes that woman is naturally defined by her reproductive function and her other duties within her household. Likewise, even a modern philosopher, Rousseau justified natural subjugation of women. He claims that:

The relative duties of the two sexes are not, and cannot be, equally rigid. When women complains of the unjust inequality which man has impose on her, she is wrong; this inequality is not a human institution, or at least it is not the work off prejudice but of reason: that one of the sexes to whom nature has entrusted the children must answer for them to the other.<sup>92</sup>

In a similar vein, many other modern philosophers, including Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, believed that women are less rational and more emotional. Descartes describes women's major responsibility, as sensuous body to allure rational men, and preserve it, so that men will rejuvenate and relax themselves. In this way, he assumes that women not only have a lesser capacity for reason than men, their reason is different from men's reason. Immanuel Kant places practical reason at the centre of his moral philosophy and lays emphasis on universality of principles of moral conduct. However, he asserts that women's moral consciousness is less developed than men. Kant was sceptical of women's capacity to lead a moral life guided by universal moral

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<sup>90</sup> Okin, 1979: 82.

<sup>91</sup> Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy, 2004: 126.

<sup>92</sup> Okin, 1979: 115.

principles. His negative views are evident from his following adverse remarks about women:

Nothing of duty, nothing of compulsion, nothing of obligation! Woman is intolerant of all commands and morose constraint. They do something only because it pleases them, and the art [of moral education] consists in making only that please them which is good...I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles.<sup>93</sup>

Like Kant, Hegel also accepts reason in terms of consciousness, nevertheless he believes in a progressively advance stage of consciousness where there is no difference between real and rational or Reason and nature which is not possible for mentally inferior women to achieve. According to him, women's consciousness belongs to a 'nether world', which means the shadowy insubstantial inner and immature stage of conscious world that is called family. Since women's ethical life is confined within family, they don't have access to the broad domain of self-conscious as men have. Lloyd points out that for Hegel, "She does not attain *consciousness* of it, or to the objective existence of it, because the law of the family is an implicit, inner essence which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness, but remains an inner feeling and the divine element that is exempt from existence in the real world."<sup>94</sup> These dichotomies show that fundamentally fixed polarities between men and women which represent two different levels of hierarchical relations of power manifested in social patriarchal structure of society. This socially constructed dualism asserts that women have been naturally appointed for procreative function and interfering in nature's arrangements means questioning and obstructing the rhythm of universe.

Additionally, it is said that in the ancient times of food-gathering and hunting and the stage of proto-agriculture, this sexual division of labour resulted in the domestication of women for the protection of infants and pregnant women. Patterns of kinship order vary from society to society, time to time, as they are cultural constructs to regulate the activities of biological subjects living in a symbolic, moral, legal and political system. Our gender consciousness is formed in an all encompassing ensemble or constellation of various kinds of activities and situations. Our identities

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<sup>93</sup> Kant, 1960: 77.

<sup>94</sup> Lloyd, 1984: 84.

and activities become engendered in the sense that they are gender-constituted and gender-regulated. The symbolic realm gradually starts emerging as almost separate from and relatively independent of the natural order. Gradually, it starts regulating not only the natural human functions but also leads towards an increasing control over nature itself. Patriarchy starts controlling sexuality, particularly women's sexuality, in terms of politics of gender controlled by the dominant males. Women's social role, though it is claimed to be derived from her essential biological nature, is confined to become a good wife, and a loving caring mother. V. Geetha has put it very aptly in following words:

Patriarchy rests on defined notions of masculine and feminine, is held in place by sexual and property arrangements that privilege men's choices, desires and interests over and above those of the women in their lives and is sustained by social relationships and cultural practices which celebrate hetero-sexuality, female fertility and motherhood on the one hand and valorise female subordination to masculine authority and virility on the other.<sup>95</sup>

Many feminists have expressed different views on patriarchal ideology to disclose the various facets of patriarchy. In her work *Sexual Politics*, radical feminist Kate Millet states that patriarchy in its general form signifies male domination, and the familial and dyadic power relationship with female under which men dominate women and young men.<sup>96</sup> Following Max Weber's *Herrschaft* i.e. 'a domination and subordination relationship', she presents a political dimension of sexes by comparing power division between men and women. Rejecting reductionism and biological determinism, Millet argues that family is a basic unit of patriarchy which socializes, justifies and reinforces sexually different roles of children, their temperaments and women's subordinated status.

Millet's analysis of patriarchy does provide an account of power dimension operating in the relations between men and women, but leaves unexplained foundations and forms of this domination. It doesn't explain the relationship between sex and social classes and how it is related with social relations of production and reproduction. Rather it is more concerned with women's struggles against male

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>96</sup> Murray, 1995: 7.

supremacy and attempts to develop a strong critique of patriarchal practices and institutions such as marriage, family, normative heterosexuality, and women as biological reproducer. In this context, revolutionary or radical feminism has attempted to see patriarchy in terms of its root cause of gender differences inherent in biological differences between sexes i.e. reproductive capacity of women. Shulamith Firestone, in her polemical work, *The Dialectic of Sex*, claims that women's procreative ability is the basic source of their oppression under male domination. Supporting Firestone's view, Sheila Jeffrey argues that there are two kinds of social class structures existing in society, first class is based on production i.e. economic class and; second is established on the basis of reproduction, which she calls reproduction class. Patriarchal ideology defends hierarchical structures of the second type of class system that includes men's ownership over women's procreative power.<sup>97</sup> In a similar vein, Finella Mckenzie identifies the three aspects of women subordination and men's power to control them such as women's different procreative capacity, their lack of control over this capacity and their dependence on men for reproduction. Men have turned women's biological dependency into a psychological dependency,<sup>98</sup> which constitutes a strong and perpetual foundation of patriarchy. She is of the view that women's dependence on men for reproduction makes them bodily and mentally vulnerable that established unequal status by where men have taken control of their reproductive power.

Revolutionary feminists elucidate patriarchy primarily in terms of procreative differences between sexes. Nevertheless, some aspects of patriarchy remain unaddressed and unexamined. Accepting biological reductionism, they confine their analysis of women's oppression primarily to her child bearing. But such an approach cannot explain peculiarities of other facets of gendered social relationships. Since they do not situate sexed bodies in any social system, it becomes hard for them to provide reasons for imbibing social aggressiveness as a dominant character in male, and passive and dependent trait in female. Furthermore, giving more importance to burdens of labour for procreation, they often neglect economic basis of class relations or positions on motherhood and mothering. Moreover, their conception of a non-patriarchal society and suggestions about ways for its achievement are also unclear.

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<sup>97</sup> As quoted by Grosz, 1999: 66.

<sup>98</sup> Beechey, 1979: 67-78.

This creates a misleading picture that their rhetoric against coercion is only an ineffective and, therefore, an empty rhetoric. For them, in a patriarchal society men are always dominating, subordinating and coercing women to serve male desires and interests.

In this array, Christine Delphy has presented a materialist account of patriarchy according to which there are two modes of production. In every capitalist social structure, there is an industrial mode of production that promotes capitalist exploitation, and the other is family mode of production under which women as mothers give their services in the form of domestic care, child bearing, nurturing of infants and other familial duties. According to Delphy, the family mode of production is the main cause of women's oppression and their exploitation, because in family men put double control over women's productive and reproductive acts. In her account, she tries to explain patriarchy in capitalism, and the supremacy of family over all social relations.<sup>99</sup> But here, she hasn't discussed the linkages between conditions responsible for women's exploitation in capitalism and family. Also, accepting family as the sole cause for exploitation is unable to address the relative significance of factors responsible for women's exploitation and oppression within family as well as in the labour market.

In contrast to these two feminist thinkers, Marxist feminists try to analyse contemporary forms of patriarchy in terms of their relationship with various levels and stages of capitalist mode of production. They view patriarchy in terms of two categories; first in terms of ideology and the second in terms of reproduction, sex or gender system.<sup>100</sup> Juliet Mitchell offers a theoretical account of patriarchy, by observing that it is a universal symbolic 'law of father' which prevails in human societies. According to Mitchell, in patriarchal society only fathers and their legitimate descendants, not any other men, can claim power over women. Using Freudian concept of incest taboo, Althusser's concept of class-society, and Levi-Strauss's account of women as exchange objects, she claims that exchange of women by men among themselves, is rooted in universal principles that operate in all cultures. This account of patriarchy, though underlines the universality of patriarchy, it somehow neglects an analysis and explanation of historical emergence of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 72.

patriarchy. However, she doesn't elaborate the reasons behind women exchange by men. Also the significance and role of symbolic order in the working of patriarchy is not made clear.

Another group of Marxists, and feminists influenced by Marxist thought, such as Engels, Beichey and others, examine patriarchy within social relation of reproduction with relative emphases on industrial production. They analyse women's oppression in term of their domestication and reproductive role such as childbirth, abortion and so on. According to Engels and other Marxist feminists, it is necessary to understand the productive structure of society in order to make sense of the reproductive patriarchal system:

The determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life...this itself is of twofold character. On the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence...on the other hand the production of human being themselves. The social institutions under which men of a definite country live are conditioned by both kinds of production; by the stage of development of labour on the one hand, and of the family on the other.<sup>101</sup>

From the above remarks of Engels, Marxist feminists attempt to situate power relations in reproduction by analysing the capitalist mode of production. Thinkers such as Harrison, McDonough, Hartmann and Eisenstein assume that the roots of contemporary structures of patriarchy can be found in the interrelationships between reproduction and production in which men control over family, marriage, women's sexuality and fertility. Harrison and McDonough claim that the forms of patriarchy may vary according to the class i.e. in a bourgeois family, control of women's sexuality and fertility is more concerned with procreation of heirs, whereas a proletarian family is more interested in the procreation of labour force as additional earning hands for the family, yet the nature of patriarchy remains the same in both classes. They illustrate:

Although as Marxists, it is essential for us to give analytic primacy to the sphere of production, as feminists, it is equally essential to hold on to a

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<sup>101</sup> Engels, 1968: 78.

concept such as the relations of human reproduction in order to understand the specific nature of women's oppression.<sup>102</sup>

Similarly, Zillah Eisenstein points out that the main problem feminists face regarding the subordination of women is to formulate the problem of women as both producers and reproducers, i.e. mother and worker. She argues that capitalism and male supremacy are interrelated with each other and determining factors of women's oppression, "The...dynamic of power involved...derives from both the class relations of production and the sexual hierarchy relations of society."<sup>103</sup> She is of the view that contemporary society is not only a capitalist society which exploits labourers, both men and women, but also a sexist hierarchical society which oppresses women by confining them as mothers devoted to child care and house-work. Eisenstein emphasises that capitalist-labour and man-women relations are not just economic or gender relations but also cultural practices which are carried forward and perpetuated from one generation to another. In this sense she tries to argue that women's oppression is not biological differentiation but rather it's a social and cultural conceptualisation and ideological interpretation of biological differences. On the basis of an analysis of various accounts of patriarchy provided by the various hues of feminists, it can be said that the patriarchal ideology represents the legitimisation of male domination over means and relations of production as well as reproductive power of women, which is the main cause of women's subordination and suppression.

But can there be a reversal of categories, in the sense that is there any possibility of female domination and male subordination or is it always male domination? It can be said that contrary to patriarchy, the term 'matriarchy' is some time used to signify a female dominated social system in which elder females or mothers exercise their political and social authority over males and they control all social relationships and power. Claims have been made about the existence of matriarchal societies in the ancient past. These are based on practices of matrilineal and matrilocal families still prevailing in some parts of the world. There is a belief that in the prehistoric era or at a primitive stage, societies were matriarchal. But due to lack of proper evidence and convincing arguments, it is hard to say whether this form of society ever existed or not. Additionally, it has been observed that, in matrilineal

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<sup>102</sup> Beechey, 1979: 76.

<sup>103</sup> Eisenstein, 1977: 89.



and matrilineal societies, males are indirectly dominant as mother's brother or elder male of the family. In this scenario, many anthropologists, sociologists, sociobiologists and philosophers have argued that there has never been a matriarchal society, i.e. a social order dominated by women. Some critical feminists have maintained that if patriarchy is evil, so would be the case with matriarchy as any form of domination is evil, whether absolute power is in the hands of males or females. Nevertheless, there are philosophers who reject the universality and inevitability of patriarchy and challenge this notion by arguing that patriarchy is not natural but a man-made creation which is changeable and replaceable. Regarding the origin and existence of patriarchy, there are various myths, legends and arguments in support of patriarchy. Such arguments can be classified as theological, biological determinist, historical materialism, and social constructionism.

The theological argument is given by thinkers from religious traditions who believe that male supremacy and female subordination are divine creation which is eternal and hence imperishable. They state that "what has survived, survived because it was best, it follows that it should stay that way."<sup>104</sup> Therefore, it need not be challenged or questioned. They defend their position by invoking metaphors from the book of Genesis in the old Bible where it is depicted that God created woman out of man's rib and man from dust of the earth which shows women's subordination to men. The symbolic story of Genesis suggests an unbridgeable gap and dichotomy between male and female as Adam was created from dust and Eve is created by God from Adam's rib. This dichotomy is further extended and reinforced in the form of sexual division of labour by another story of fall of man where God punishes Adam to work in the sweat of his brow and Eve will give birth to life in pain and raise the generations.<sup>105</sup> Additionally, God says to Eve that her all desires only for her husband who will rule over her.<sup>106</sup> Rousseau, in this regard, viewed women as a major source of evil charter, "women as source of danger, as a repository of externalized evil, is an image that runs through patriarchal history." He further states in his writings that "Since she is unlimitedly powerful in the sphere of sexuality, consequently she must be subjugated and dominated in other realm even if a balance of power, let alone man's superiority, is to be maintained. Since she is portrayed as a door of evil and sin,

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<sup>104</sup> Lerner, 1986: 26.

<sup>105</sup> Sarna, 1966 3-4.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

her subordination is viewed as her justified desert.”<sup>107</sup> In this context, John Calvin’s description deserves mention here:

Since in the person of the man the human race had been created, the common dignity of our whole nature is without distinction...The woman...was nothing else than an accession to the man. Certainly, it cannot be denied, that the woman also, though in the second degree, was created in the image of God ...We may therefore conclude, that the order of nature implies that the woman should be the helper of the man. The vulgar proverb, indeed, is, that she is a necessary evil; but the voice of God is rather to be heard, which declares that woman is given as a companion and an association to the man, to assist him to live well.<sup>108</sup>

Traditionalists accept the established dichotomy between Adam and Eve imputed in the mythological story of the Genesis. They try to vindicate the sexually different work roles as divinely ordained for men and women. Women are admired or appreciated for their reproductive ability. Giving birth and rearing children is the chief purpose of their life while, men with their greater physical strength and aggressiveness are the providers of resources for survival.

This pervasive argument for gender dichotomy, inherited from religious mythology, is favoured by biological determinists to reinforce the idea of the universality of sexual inequality and male supremacy. The basic argument is that women have biologically evolved for procreation. It is argued that women are bodily weak while men are stronger and predisposed towards adventure taking risks from which it is concluded that women must be dominated by men. To justify their arguments such biologists make use of Darwin’s evolutionary theory called ‘Natural selection’ or ‘principle of preservation’. Natural selection as Darwin depicts is a kind of process/ through which individual variations get their value and importance. The selection processes works either by inducing proliferation or by giving favourable or hostile situations and conditions for survival. Those life forms proliferate who survive and become capable of providing procreative continuity with succeeding lineage. As Darwin says:

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<sup>107</sup> Okin, 1979: 100.

<sup>108</sup> Calvin, 1948: 129.

If ...variations useful to any organic being do occur, assuredly individuals thus characterised will have the best chance of being preserved in the struggle for life; and from the strong principle of inheritance they will tend to produce offspring similarly characterised. This principle of preservation, I have called, for the sake of brevity, Natural Selection; and it leads to the improvement of each creation in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions.<sup>109</sup>

Furthermore, one of the offshoots of Darwin's natural selection i.e. sexual selection emphasises that behavioural differences between sexes are primarily sexual. This selection is a result of competition for sexual counterparts not as a natural struggle for individual survival but continuation of the species through procreation. Darwin, also favoured the idea of inherited instincts of women by saying that 'the social feelings are instinctive or innate in the lower animals; and why should they not be so in man?'<sup>110</sup> Darwin further added that the feelings of mother for her children is one such instinct, and posits that the 'maternal instincts' lead them to reflect 'greater tenderness and less selfishness' and to show 'these qualities toward her infants in an eminent degree.'<sup>111</sup>

A similar argument has also been given by other thinkers to validate women's maternal instinct. American sociologist Alice Rossi, who was previously a supporter of sexual equality, has changed her views now by claiming that women's ability to rear children is a product of their biological condition that endowed them better than men in care work. Due to this reason, she claims that women should work for child care to use their biologically given talent to support their families rather trying to be like men in their assigned work or seeking equality with men in public life.<sup>112</sup> Describing the evolutionary emergence of femininity, biological essentialist George Romanes also says, that the 'maternal instincts' were one of the 'strongest of all influences' on the development of the feminine type....also, on the basis of Lamarckian theory, he claims that these instinct had come to be present in women by their very biology, and they manifested themselves not only in adulthood but also in

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<sup>109</sup> Darwin, 1896: 104-5.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 98

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 563.

<sup>112</sup> Rossi, 1977: 2, 25.

childhood with the attachment and preference of girls for dolls.<sup>113</sup> These biological theories, it seems, again reinforce and represent the prevalent beliefs about patriarchal image of women as mothers or reproducers and care takers of their babies. This created a separation between men and women—women are circumscribed and biologically condemned to their bodily reproductive role. Women are considered as inferior embodied workers whereas men are privileged and hailed as capable of transcending their bodily boundaries and privileged as rational beings. Biological determinism further invokes dualistic dichotomous categories of reason/ passion, mind or spirit / body, culture/nature, public/private, thought/extension that are seen as strengths of maleness and weakness of femaleness. Since these dichotomous categories are associated with superior and inferior aspect of men and women respectively, inferior has to controlled and dominated by the superior.

As Sherry Ortner, in her paper “*Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture?*” focuses on the socio-cultural biases on women by comparing them with nature:

First, women’s body and its function...seem to place her closer to nature; second, women’s body and its functions place her in social roles that in turn are considered to be at a lower order of the culture process than man’s; and third, women’s traditional social roles, imposed because of her body and its functions, in turn give her a different psychic structure ...which...is seen as being closer to nature.<sup>114</sup>

Ortner attempts to show that in the cultural and normative framework of all known societies, women’s subordinate status is universal. The uniform subordination of women is not due to their biology as such but it is mainly based on social attitudes towards their biology. The reason for placing women closer to nature is social construction of their biological capacity for and engagement in reproduction of future life. Moreover, she suggests that in every social structure, culture is valued higher than nature. Women were devalued by nature which is inferior to culture. For achieving progress in social and cultural life, men found it necessary to separate from nature in order to transcend it. As Nature provides its selfless services in the form of fruits, shelter, etc. which is constant and cyclical, women were also expected to follow their natural cycle of reproduction. Their reproductive functions such as menstruation,

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<sup>113</sup> Romanes, 1887: 667.

<sup>114</sup> As quoted by Lerner, 1986: 25.

pregnancy, and menopause were perceived as natural processes that make them to be universally regarded as inferior to men.

In contrast to the accounts discussed above, Historical Materialists provide a different account of the origin of patriarchy. According to them women's subjugation and male supremacy started historically with the origin of family and private property. In his work, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels mentions that women's subordination and class division is a historical development. Like his predecessors J.J. Bachofen and L.H. Morgan, Engels also assumes that primitive communist societies were egalitarian but, may or may not be matriarchal. He mentions primitive division of sex labour in following words:

The man fights in the wars, goes hunting and fishing, procures the raw materials of food and the tools necessary for doing so. The woman looks after the house and the preparation of the food and clothing, cooks, weaves, sews. They are each master in their own sphere: the man in the forest, the woman in the house. Each is owner of the instruments which he or she makes and uses...What is made and used in common is common property—the house, the garden, the long boat.<sup>115</sup>

Furthermore, Engels speculates that with surpluses from herding turning into property, men wanted to make them secure for themselves and their heirs. Gradually, men gained control over women's sexuality by institutionalising of motherhood, establishing families through marriage to distinguish their offspring as legitimate. Due to these developments in the public and personal spheres in the life of man, families turned into patriarchal families, in which woman as a wife became private labour or service provider to her husband and his family with her exclusion from other activities in the public realm. Engels states that "the overthrow of mother right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children."<sup>116</sup>

In this way, patriarchy was established. To legitimise and stabilise men's domination and control of women, strong views about universality and inevitability of

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<sup>115</sup> Engel, 1972: 218.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 220-21.

patriarchy were articulated to control and regulate the social lives of the human beings by making different institutional norms and rules for the conduct of men and women. In the context of women, patriarchal ideology postulated motherhood within marriage as a fundamental institution for women by essentialising and naturalizing their feminine identity in terms of their sexual, procreative and nurturing role. Barbara K. Rothman attempts to show the dualistic patriarchal reflections on motherhood in her book, *Recreating Motherhood* by pointing out that in patriarchal society **women are seen as mothers of men's children** rather than **men being seen as the children of women**. The literal meaning of patriarchy is the 'rule of father' which shows father's supremacy and mother's subordination. In other words, women are perceived not as subjects, owners of their bodies but as objects for bearing and nurturing of men's "seed", for creation of future generations as the inheritors of their husbands. She states that "Men control women as daughters, much as they control their sons, but they also control women as the mothers of men's children. It is women's motherhood that men must control to maintain patriarchy."<sup>117</sup> These socially assigned roles or identity markers lead to the perpetuation of the conviction that women are sexually different from men and their fulfilment lies primarily in heterosexual relations within prescribed maternal practices.

The patriarchal ideology of motherhood is socially constructed on hierarchical sexual division of labour in which men control women's reproduction and mothering by portraying them as natural care givers and love labourers for their men's offspring. For this very reason, patriarchal society excludes women from public realm and circumscribe their maternal embodiment within the domestic sphere of married family life by mythically glorifying them as divine 'Mother Goddess' in the form of universal creative power of life. Patriarchal ideology has been articulated in various mythological texts that shape women's lived experiences and material conditions of lives.

There are various myths found in western and eastern mythological texts such as Bible's Book of Genesis and Vedic verses in which women are extolled and valorised for their motherhood. The fundamental roots of patriarchal motherhood can be found in the form of maternal face of men described in the Book of Genesis,

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<sup>117</sup> Rothman, 1989: 15.

named as “begats” where it is mentioned that from Adam to onwards all men having “begot a son in his likeness, after his image.” And after the birth of this first born son, the men are described as having lived so many years and begot sons and daughters. The text then turns to that firstborn son, and in turn his firstborn son after him. Women appear as the “daughters of men who bore them offspring.”<sup>118</sup> These biblical statements indicate the supremacy of men over women’s procreative capability and their maternal work. In a similar vein, a cult of Virgin Mary or Madonna in western world (Christianity) shows how a female human has acquired a divine mother goddess status in her life through virginal conception of Jesus by the grace of God and ever idealises for her sacred maternal elaborates. As Elizabeth Johnson posits:

Starting with the transfer to her of the iconography and devotional practices originally directed to her of toward the Great Mother in the Mediterranean region. She is addressed as the Mother par excellence, Mother of God, Mother of Mercy, Mother of Divine Consolation, our Mother...In devotion to her as a compassionate mother who will not let one her children be lost, what is actually being mediated is a most appealing experience of God.<sup>119</sup>

Similarly, Indian tradition also lauded women’s sexuality solely in terms of motherhood. There are many Vedic hymns and verses in which women are deified and venerated as mother goddesses. They are regarded as the universal feminine energy and latent power (Shakti) through whom God creates, preserves, and destroys the universe. People worship a malevolent and benevolent Shakti or Divine Comic Mother Goddess, calling her by many names such as Maa Kali, Durga, Jagdamba, Lakshmi, Sarswati, and so on. Similarly, the ideal Hindu mother is seen as a manifestation of the divine mother Shakti, referred to as Maa, Mata, Devi, and Amma, among others, who are expected to hold a respectable status in society. One of the oldest texts, *Devi Mahatmaya Purana* illustrates the divinity of mother’s position as follows:

*Yaa Devi Sarva Bhooteshu, Matru Rupena Sansitha* ||  
*Namastasyai, Namastasyai, Namastasyai Namaha* ||<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 15

<sup>119</sup> Johnson, 1992: 102-103.

<sup>120</sup> Devi Mahatmaya Puran, 1999.

“The above verse means that the goddess who is omnipresent as the personification of universal mother, I bow to her, I bow to her, I bow to her again and again.”<sup>121</sup>

*Jagamba Vichitramatra Kim Paripoorna Karunaasti Chenmayi* ||

*Aparadha Parampara Param Na Hi Mata Samapekshate Sutam* ||<sup>122</sup>

The verse says that “O mother of the world, you are the one who looks after her children. Your love and kindness towards me is no surprise O mother goddess. Being a mother you forget all our sins and correct us without abandoning your children”<sup>123</sup>

The Mother Goddesses are symbolically linked with fertility, maternal love, nurturance, and procreation. Likewise, human mothers are envisaged as a divine mother Goddess attributed with qualities which are explicitly illustrated in the various religious mythological texts such as, *Manusmirti*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata*, etc. which glorify the maternal role by presenting an ideal picture of women as mothers. This essentialisation of woman as mother is emphasised and glorified to the extent that a woman is perceived as complete being only with her achievement of motherhood. In this regard, Krishna Raj says “symbolised in mythology (*Ramayana and Mahabharata*), legends and popular culture, she stands as eternal icon to represent the generative, nurturing power of life, itself celebrated in temples and sculptures, poetry and literature.”<sup>124</sup> Such glorification of motherhood, as essentialists say, is a major reason for the social structure of the human species to sustain itself and survive to through the ages by justifying motherhood as a natural maternal instinct. Nevertheless, such a confinement of women within maternal sphere excludes them from the public sphere of life to their extreme disadvantage.

The valorised image of maternity is further strengthened in by patriarchal ideology by emphasising on natural basis of women’s biological functions in terms of essential and universality of the so called maternal instinct. This theory is invoked to establish the belief that women are naturally suited to perform maternal role. Many votaries of this view argue that traditional division of labour for child care being assigned to women is quite compatible with divinely ordained sexual differences

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<sup>121</sup> English Translation by Vinod Sood,

<sup>122</sup> Devi Mahatmaya Puran, 1999.

<sup>123</sup> English Translation by Vinod Sood,

<sup>124</sup> Krishnaraj, 2010: 3.



between men and women. In this way, women are attuned than men for child care as they have a divinely ordained or a natural maternal instinct which is lacking in men.

Moreover, many feminists such as Van de Warker, William McDougall and others attempt to show that feminine characteristics such as ‘maternal instinct’ were well accepted and established in biology. For instance, Van de Warker, Thomas and Allan argue that maternal instinct can be located in reproductive organs or uterus and cerebral organs of senses. Another thinker, William McDougall claims that the social behaviour of man is influenced by specialized instinct which is not to be replaced by seeking or imposing sharing of mother work on the different sexes but by valorising women’s traditional care work and biologically ingrained traits to support this work. John Bowlby also assumes that maternal traits such as being affectionate and motherly feelings for new born’s nurturance are occurrences of biological processes during pregnancy and parturitions. In support of this claim, John Bowlby points out that there are specific increases of maternal hormones in natural mothers which cannot happen in substitute mothers. Also, it has been observed that a young mother’s response to her first newborn is unlearned, and yet it happens due to the secretion of oxytocin hormone which is responsible for the nipple erection and uterine contraction. In this regard, Helen Black Lewis urges to all women to give importance and value to their pervasive traditional maternal role which is now devalued because of the unfair and exploitative practices and structures in society. She states that ‘Society should give a higher valuation to ‘affectionateness’— a trait which, has been endowed by biology more on women than on men.’<sup>125</sup>

As we have seen in the views discussed above, the biological basis of motherhood has been socially so constructed that it has been used rhetorically to make maternity women’s destiny. But biology does not provide sufficient ground to understand the ways in which social life and women’s bodies are intertwined and engaged with each other to result in their oppression. Arguing against the deterministic biology, Simone de Beauvoir insists that the women’s bodies are not merely a biological fact but rather a *social situation* under which the maternal act has been turned into the essence of being a woman. Social situations influence our perceptions towards biology that cannot be permanently tied with the individual’s

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<sup>125</sup>As quoted by Sayers, 1982: 66.

inherent bodily destiny. Beauvoir questions the patriarchal assumption which claims that women's bodies are biologically destined for procreation. In the next section, an attempt has been made to explore how biology is socially interpreted and associated with situated bodies in order to give sexually differentiated meanings for the perpetuation of traditional roles of an individual mother.

## 2.2 Biology of Women: Destiny or Situation(s)?

*"Women's biology need not be her destiny, but... her reproductive fate is largely shaped by forces beyond her control."*

—Betsy Hartmann<sup>126</sup>

Biology is understood as a science that studies life and looks for its meaning in terms of bodily processes, functions and anatomy of living organisms. Through various functions of the human bodies as sexual organisms, biology demarcates the factors that are responsible for procreation of species and discloses factual account of the beginning of life. However, some biologists believe that these biological facts manifest themselves in the form of social structures. In other words, they claim that the predetermined and unchangeable biological facts are the foundation of seemingly diverse and changing human social life. In *Making Sex*, Thomas Laqueur discusses the deterministic scientific evolution of sexual differences from one sex to two sex theory in terms of two models i.e. 'one-sex-model' and 'two-sex-model'. Believers in 'one-sex-model', such as Galen, Vesalius and Dorothy Sayer, maintain that women's and men's bodies are different configurations of the same body parts, that is to say; a woman's body is isomorphic to man's body.<sup>127</sup> Laqueur claims:

The corporeal theatrics of a world where at least two gender correspond but one sex, where the boundaries between male and female are of degree and not of a kind, where the reproductive organs are but one sign among the many of the body's place in a cosmic and cultural order that transcends biology.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Hartmann, 1987: 10.

<sup>127</sup> Laqueur, 2003: 77.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

In his book, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, Galen writes that women have all the bodily parts that men have. Maintaining the anatomical similarity among both the sexes, he suggests, “turn outward the woman’s, turn inward, so to speak, and fold double the man’s [genital organs], and you will find the same in both in every respect.”<sup>129</sup> He clearly divulges that both the sexes have different reproductive anatomies but their sexes are connected with each other. We find similar views in Dorothy Sayers’s *The Human-Not-Quite-Human* where she states that:

The first thing that strikes the careless observer is that women are unlike men. They are “the opposite sex” (though why “opposite” I do not know; what is the “neighboring” sex ?). But the fundamental thing is that women are more like men than anything else in the world.<sup>130</sup>

One –Sex-model biologists regard women’s body-organs as an invert form of men’s genitals, a reverse form of men’s reproductive organs. The ‘one-sex-model’ was not primarily based on gender-sex differentiation ideology but it reflected the differences in the way it was defined and accepted. Through a careful look, it can be said that such biological explanations were neither related to socially structured gender differences of sexes nor could adequately show the basic separation between men and women as distinct biological phenomena. Nevertheless, such representations of human reproduction tended to perpetuate a kind of previously established hierarchy between male and female sexes in which women are always seen as subordinate and inferior to men’s body regardless of their complementary bodily sexual functions. Such representations result in legitimatisation of prevailing sexual oppression and subjugated location of women.

A subsequent acceptance of the ‘two-sex-model’ account that asserts undeniable biological sexual differences among both sexes explicitly exposes the latent gendered ideology of ‘one-sex-model’. An acknowledgement and endorsement of such accounts directs towards confirmation of the patriarchal view of sex-differences. In this model, men and women are viewed as absolutely different bodies. They are disassociated with each other, and therefore, perceive the world differently. In Walter Heape’s words:

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 1.

The reproductive system is not only structurally but functionally fundamentally different in the Male and the Female; and since all other organs and systems of organs are affected by this system, it is certain that the Male and Female are essentially different throughout...They are complementary, in no sense the same, in no sense equal to one another; the accurate adjustment of society depends on proper observation of this fact.<sup>131</sup>

The 'two-sex-model' theory emerges in the form of the essentialisation and naturalisation of two sexually differentiated bodies that are not seen as intersubjective lived bodies but rather, as mere organism for specific roles in procreation. Commenting on such a sexed-objectivist perspective, Toril Moi says "it sexualizes not only the whole person, whether this person is a woman, a man, or a so-called 'pervert', but the whole world of human activities."<sup>132</sup> In this way, the possibility of independent biological thinking was transformed into biological determinism that was mandated by the followers of patriarchy. They caution that any kind of change in social meaning of biology may lead to the destruction of species in terms of inability of procreation in women. They engage themselves in thinking of a woman's body as exclusively evolved for maternity. W.K. Brooks holds view that:

The position which women already occupy in society and the duties which they perform are, in the main, what they should be if our view is correct; and any attempt to improve the condition of women by ignoring or obliterating the intellectual differences between them and men must result in disaster to the race.<sup>133</sup>

Biologists further strengthen their patriarchal view of the feminine body by arguing that the natural desire for maternity is a 'biological instinct' and interpreting women's body as a 'procreative object' that is essentially designed for the institution of motherhood. The basic aim underlying this idea was to deny feminine subjectivity by reducing women's life activity essentially to the so-called natural procreative functions. In this regard, Moi aptly states that "the more science they read, the less obvious the meaning of the body became."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>132</sup> Moi, 2005: 14.

<sup>133</sup> Moi, 2001: 370.

<sup>134</sup> Moi, 2005: 15.

To justify their arguments, many biologists made use of Darwin's theories to sanction and validate their deterministic and sexed interpretation of women's body in terms of imbued *maternal instinct*. Similarly, the view of Sexual differences is endorsed by Edward Clark and Henry Maudsley. By adopting the law of conservation of energy for interpreting evolutionary biology, they argue that energy spent by one part of the body reduced the amount of energy available to other organs of the body by the same degree. According to this view, women's energy is primarily meant for the functioning of her reproductive system. Therefore, a woman's employing her energy for various physical and mental activities unrelated to maternity is dangerous for the existence of future human life. Clark warns that the energy utilised by women for academic tasks will reduce their potential of fertility capacity.<sup>135</sup>

In Maudsley's understanding, involvement of brain functions in other realms takes away stored energy available for the proper growth of women's procreative system.<sup>136</sup> In the same vein, Spencer holds that women might be intellectually more capable and equal or even superior than men but, due to their destined biology, it can be fulfilled at the cost of their procreativity. For Spencer, doubtlessly nature must have bestowed women with 'specialized instinct' in the form of 'parental instinct' more than men to protect and nurture their vulnerable offspring. Notably, his stress on parental instinct meant that women should keep themselves away from any engagement in public enterprises to comprehend the value of maternity for human life. He states:

Under special discipline, the feminine intellect will yield products higher than the intellects of most men can yield. But we are not to count this as truly feminine if it entails decreased fulfilments of the maternal functions. Only that mental energy is normally feminine which can coexist with the production and nursing of the due number of healthy children.<sup>137</sup>

Spencer also attempts to justify the prevalent social sex roles in terms of biological nature by employing the principle of 'survival of the fittest'. Nature not only bestowed the fitness of different sex roles in men and women, it also imbibed such a sexual division of labour in male and female at the first place. Another pioneer of

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<sup>135</sup> Sayers, 1982: 12.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>137</sup> Spencer, 1972: 31.

more recent socio-biology, E.O. Wilson further claims that the traditional roles of sexes are a result of human evolutionary determination in which any interference for change is not only biologically futile but also ethically inaccurate as well. For him, contemporary sex roles are determined by human's continuous by working under immutable genetic mechanism:

In the hunter-gatherer societies, men hunt and women stay at home. This strong bias persists in most agricultural societies and on that ground alone, appears to have a genetic origin... the genetic basis is intense enough to cause a substantial division of labour even in the most free and most egalitarian of future societies.<sup>138</sup>

Similarly, in his work *The Law of Heredity*, W.K. Brooks discusses the biological differences between women and men that affect their social roles and practices. He assumes that "if there is fundamental difference in the sociological influence of the sexes, its origin must be sought in the physiological differences between them."<sup>139</sup> Thus, natural biological facts were invoked consciously or unconsciously to justify social norms and situations as the biological truth of human existence.

The pervasiveness of such accounts of human reproduction, privileged as a natural-scientific view of inevitable maternal instincts among women that are essential for sexual difference and division of labour among women and man. Metaphors and idioms are very different but meaning-content remain almost the same. This self-proclaimed 'scientific' discourse only echoes the patriarchal ideology in a new voice and, a new tone. In this fashion, biological theories reinforce and represent the prevalent meanings and interpretations about patriarchal image of women as mothers. Contrary to such deterministic biological views and their social interpretations, Beauvoir argues that, "in truth these [biological] facts cannot be denied: but they do not carry their meaning in themselves. As soon as we accept a human perspective, defining the body starting from existence, biology becomes as abstract science".<sup>140</sup> Body is an amalgamation of facts and impressions. Defining body as a mere fact by ignoring the impact of ideological meanings on it carries an inadequate explanation. In order to understand the meaning of existential embodied

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<sup>138</sup> Wilson, 1975: 48-50.

<sup>139</sup> Brooks, 1883: 243.

<sup>140</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 47.

subjectivity of women as a whole, Beauvoir urges that we need to seek phenomenological description of the gendered human body as an existential phenomenon.

Beauvoir develops a phenomenological account of the human body. For Beauvoir, though human body is biologically constituted yet it is a socially situated phenomenon. To understand the human body as an existential phenomenon, we may begin with the philosophy of Husserl who defines phenomenology as a foundational science of philosophy and method that deals with our lived experiences and our relation to the world. This phenomenological method is applicable not only in philosophy but also in all natural and human sciences. In this sense, human lived experiences provide a common ground for philosophy as well as other disciplines. All sciences begin by suspending our everyday practices in order to understand the actual form of the world in its totality in terms of past, present and future. Husserl states that in order to comprehend the meaning of an enveloped worldly body as it appears to us, it is necessary to suspend all previous presumptions and prejudices about the phenomena.<sup>141</sup> This suspension unveils the essential structure of the phenomena in its experience and consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty extends Husserl's method by extending the significance of specific and particular embodied experiences in our perceptual knowledge and actions. In his view, knowing essence of a phenomenon is not sufficient until and unless we know the origin of the essence within its particular specific experience. Consciousness, for Merleau-Ponty, encountered in its embodiment is associated with the world and worldly bodies. This embodiment is not an object among objects but rather a living subject. It is a starting point of the meanings as well as the sedimentation of various meanings and experiences that form background for the new meanings and norms. In this way, self creates new meanings along with all such pre-existing cultural and historical practices, meanings and values.<sup>142</sup>

Similarly, seeing the human body only as a biological organism is insufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of the living embodied subjects. With the suspension of all natural scientific prejudices and assumptions, our bodies come in

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<sup>141</sup> Kohak, 1978: 38-47.

<sup>142</sup> Heinamaa, 1997: 26.

front of us as beginnings of new meanings, actions and scientific acts rather than as mere physical objects for analysis. Merleau-Ponty claims that the scientific theories of external bodily functions are inadequate for grasping the internal dynamics of human bodies in terms of their experiences, functions, and activities. A comprehension of this dynamics discloses the intertwined and intersubjective nature of body. In other words, our body engages itself physically as well as mentally and socially when it encounters with other worldly subjects and bodies. The intersubjective engagements of the body with the world indicate that it is not simply a biological organism but an ambiguous phenomenon which is neither totally associated with inside the world nor it is outside the world. Merleau-Ponty writes “the world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself”.<sup>143</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, the human body is not just a fact but a medium of experiencing and having the world.

Merleau-Ponty’s account of the human embodied subjectivity is the point from where Beauvoir begins her investigation for the nature of women’s body in order to understand *woman* as an existential phenomena which is not purely a body but a sexed body encountering the world as a feminine embodied subject. Drawing from the foundations of the woman’s question from her predecessors, Beauvoir asserts, “if the body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp upon the world and the outline of our projects.”<sup>144</sup> For disclosing the primacy of women’s bodily phenomenon as situation, Beauvoir insists that we do go beyond body as a biological fact and embrace it as a living and experiencing body. She writes “it is not the body-object described by the scientists that exist concretely, but the body lived by the subject.”<sup>145</sup> This lived body is not a mere biological object in the laboratory for scientific experiments, but a concrete particular and sexually differentiated body whose lived experiences are situated within the realm of its feminine subjectivity in relation to other’s subjectivities. She says:

The existent is a sexuate body; in its relations with other existents that are also sexed bodies, sexuality is thus always involved; but as the body and

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 41.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 52.



sexuality are concrete expressions of existence, it is also from here that significance can be ascertained...<sup>146</sup>

For Beauvoir, the basic feature of women's body is grounded the way it is valued and given meaning in patriarchal social structures. She argues that a woman's body "is not a body but as a body subjected to taboos and laws that subject gains consciousness of and accomplishes herself."<sup>147</sup> Biological explanations cannot catch or touch the roots underneath the social values and norm that women are forced to live with/on as sexually differentiated bodies that set their social position as *excluded Other* from men. In other words, according to Beauvoir, man does not view woman as a subject in herself for herself but as a relative being to him. Simultaneously, a woman also perceives and makes herself in the way that the world or man demands from her. Beauvoir states:

Her body not enough to define her; it has a lived reality only as taken on by consciousness through actions and within a society; biology alone cannot provide an answer to the question that concerns us: why is woman the *Other*? The question is how, in her, nature has been taken on in the course of history; the question is what has humanity made of the human femal.<sup>148</sup>

At the same time, in emphasising the significance of the inter-subjective and the social, Beauvoir does not deny the objective significance of biological facts of the body. She concedes the undeniable fact of female reproduction i.e. women's role in procreation is much time consuming and physically risky in comparison to men. Men are biologically capable of impregnating many women and father many children often without risking their incarnated bodies whereas women have to risk their lives and bodies even in bearing their children. For Beauvoir, this biological dimension has a historical basis and is an important factor in women's social situatedness. Furthermore, she accepts the objectivity of biological facts for scientific measurements and data analyses of the body as merely a body. However, scientific study is inadequate to reveal the meaning of subjective existence of the situated bodies. On the basis of mere biological facts, women's destiny cannot be fixed as procreators. She argues, "But I refuse the idea that [the biological facts] form a fixed

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 49.

destiny for her. They do not suffice to constitute the basis for a sexual hierarchy... they do not condemn her for ever after to this subjugated role.”<sup>149</sup>

For challenging and refuting the fixed and inevitable destiny of a woman, Beauvoir also reiterates the basic existentialist philosophy of being human:

The definition of man is a being who is not given, who makes himself what he is... as Merleau- Ponty rightly said, man is not a natural species: he is an historical idea. Woman is not a fixed reality, but rather a becoming; she has to be compared to man in her becoming, that is, her possibilities have to be defined.<sup>150</sup>

Such existential interpretation of being human reflects the changing/transcending nature of feminine subjects. Similar to men, women are equally capable of becoming autonomous by transcending facticity of the given situations. As free subjects, women can reshape their situations and give new meaning to their body and life world, in the sense that maternity cannot be their fixed ultimate destiny. They can transcend from their immanence at any point of time. In other words, women can transcend from their given bodily situation. Like Merleau-Ponty, for Beauvoir, human freedom is linked with our bodily situations. Unlike Sartre, Beauvoir argues that freedom cannot be absolute, rather bound up with the ways it is exercised in a particular situation. The body is a situation of my lived experiences both towards me and the world, that is, I live the world through my body which constitutes my experiences and influences my projects.

Women’s experience of their freedom is located within the social framework that confines them to their maternal body and gives meaning to their embodied subjectivity. As Beauvoir puts, “woman like man, is her body; but her body is something other than herself.”<sup>151</sup> What Beauvoir means to say here is that women’s lived experience of their bodies is associated with patriarchal meanings and values constituting and regulating the feminine body that enforce its oppression and objectification on women by reducing them from their transcendental subjectivity to corporal objectivity. To put it in Beauvoir’s words, “Woman’s enslavement to the species and the limits of her individual abilities are facts of extreme importance; the

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 61.

woman's body is one of the essential elements of the situation she occupies in this world."<sup>152</sup> Thus, it is not women who can choose any meaning for their embodied subjectivity, but chosen meaning is socio-culturally situated. Beauvoir claims that:

A society is not a species: the species realises itself as existence in a society, it transcends itself towards the world and the future: its customs cannot be deduced from biology; individual are never left to their nature; they obey this second nature, that is, customs in which the desire and fears that express their ontological attitude are reflected.<sup>153</sup>

In this way, Beauvoir defines women's embodied subjectivity as *situated bodies* whose primary and paternally prescribed sex role is to perpetuate the species. She begins her book, *The Second Sex*, by raising the question *what is it to be a woman?* That reflects relation of a woman with her female being, her becoming feminine and resulting femaleness. In her attempt to answer this question, Beauvoir illustrates the ways in which patriarchy defines women's bodily situatedness as maternal objects:

Woman? Very simple, say those who like simple answer: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female: this is word enough to define her...The term 'female' is pejorative not because it roots woman in nature, but because it confines her in sex...the word female evokes a saraband of images: an enormous round egg snatching and castrating the agile sperm.<sup>154</sup>

Beauvoir traces the emergence and stabilisation/ perpetuation of patriarchal definition of woman that uses the term 'womb' as an alternative meaning of being women. A woman is essentialised as mother. Patriarchy projects women's bodily maternal function as their essence which is actually a situation. In contrast to this, man is a transcendental subject who not only defines himself but defines women also. Women are circumscribed and biologically condemned to perform their bodily procreative role and considered as inferior embodied objects whereas, men are privileged and hailed as capable of transcending their bodily boundaries and consequently privileged as rational absolute sovereign subjects. He is the *man*. Being defined thus, his horizon expands naturally and socially and economically but, woman, for him, she is just an

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 21.

'ovary'. Acceptance of such a view situates her into the social realm of maternity and her objectification is justified biologically in terms of the maternal instinct.

In this way, Beauvoir questions and rejects biological determinism by arguing that biological facts are inert in themselves and get their meanings from various contexts such as economic, social, political and psychological etc. However, such facts play an important role in social situatedness of women. In this sense, mere biology is inadequate to define the existence and meaning of being a woman. Reducing women's life to their immanent biological function is the source of their subordinate position and agonising experiences as child bearers. The body cannot define the question of women, women have to define themselves through their interaction with the world and the way they live their embodied situation, conscious choices and activities. They are condemned for their maternal biology that turns them into the Other within their own space. Being identified as mother, they have to lose themselves for living under the cultural imperative of self-sacrifice. They have to escape from their own self to devote themselves solely for maternity as becoming Other to themselves as well as for men's Other. Patriarchy reduces women's feminine embodied subjectivity to maternal subjectivity that becomes the locus of their oppression. In this context, Beauvoir reminds us of man's delusion that he is the One and she is for always doomed to be cast as the Other.

### **2.3 Otherness of Mother: Issues of Exclusion and Inclusion**

*"Man seeks in woman the Other as Nature and as his fellow being. But we know what ambivalent feeling Nature inspires in man, He exploits her, but she crushes him, he is born of her and dies in her; she is the source of her being and the realm that he subjugates to his will."*

— Beauvoir<sup>155</sup>

Otherness is a natural appearance in the life of a self conscious being. A self is other for other's self and at the same time, it is also another for itself. Similarly, a woman's or man's embodied self are other for one another as well as they are also an others for themselves. However, this sexually differentiated otherness becomes problematic when men begin interpreting women's otherness within their own desired framework,

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<sup>155</sup> Beauvoir, 1997: 175-76.

and women start assuming and accepting their otherness through this men-constructed permanent framework. This constructed Otherness of female embodiment, as Beauvoir claims, is the Otherness of 'masculine world' where men associate female subjectivity with their sexuality, nature, necessity, body as man's Other. According to men's patriarchal masculine mythology and oppressive social norms, they have women's Otherness only for their required sexual and procreative domain that excludes them from rest of the worldly spheres of human activities and achievements. In this way, the natural condition of otherness has turned into unbridgeable dichotomy between men and women in which man has become 'One' and 'the Subject' who treats woman as his 'object' and the 'Other'. In this regard, Beauvoir says, women are not born but made, and they are made as the *Other*.

If we look at women's history, it is full of ample evidences of male/female duality in which female has been treated as the category of Other. Beauvoir has focused on the binary of self/subject and Other /object on one hand and binary of Man and Women on the other. These opposite pairs are related with each other, as man is always seen as a Subject and Woman is seen as an object or the Other. Beauvoir, in her work, *The Second Sex*, point out that the word 'Other' has three connotations, i) i.e. separately existing entity, ii) hostile and iii) inessential. She concedes that this classification is influenced by Hegel's work:

These phenomena would be incomprehensible if in fact human societies were simply a *Mitsein* or fellowship based on solidarity and friendliness. Things become clear, on the contrary, if, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed— he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object.<sup>156</sup>

She further elaborates that the Self/Subject is the active, knowing subject of traditional epistemology, and is by default male whereas the Other, who exists for the Self/Subject in an asymmetrical relationship, is the female and feminized, occupying a secondary place in both concrete activity and subjective consciousness. She is also denied rights as an equal member of society. The Other is not an equal complement to

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<sup>156</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: p.17.

the Self/Subject, but rather serves as a projection of everything the Self/Subject rejects: immanence, passivity, voicelessness.<sup>157</sup> Similarly, Sartre also highlights this binary through the concept of *Pour-soi* (for-itself) and *en-soi* (in-itself).<sup>158</sup> Like Hegel,<sup>159</sup> Sartre saw the *en-soi* as an object that is constituted under the reflective eye of the *pour-soi*.<sup>160</sup>

To analyse the reason behind the dichotomy of the One/man and the Other/woman, Beauvoir refers to the dialectical relationship between master and slave, which she borrowed from Hegel's dialectic of master and slave consciousness, and compares it with man and woman. For Hegel, the superiority of Master came into the picture from his affirmation of Spirit over life to give his own life at risk in struggle. This condition is also experienced with the vanquished slave, but Beauvoir is of the view that:

Hegel's [master-slave] dialectic would apply far better to the relationship of man to woman....<sup>161</sup> whereas the woman is originally an existent who gives *life* and does not risk *her* life; there has never been combat between the male and female and her; Hegel's definition applies singularly to her.<sup>162</sup>

According to Hegel, the slave has surrendered himself to the master and became a dependent consciousness on the Master's consciousness who has allowed him to survive. However, men and women's relationship is different from the oppressive Master-Slave relationship. It is women's own choice to be possessed by male rather than make an effort to transcend herself, whereas male always attempts to maintain masculine privileges on the basis of this dichotomy in which he circumscribed her femininity according to his choice.<sup>163</sup> In this manner, the biological and material conditions of women from primitive hordes enabled men to establish their supremacy.

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 443.

<sup>158</sup> *Pour-soi* is the transcending, creative, self; the *en-soi* is reified contingent object self that is immanent and inauthentic.

<sup>159</sup> Hegel also talks about the relationship of master-slave: on the one hand there is "the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is to live or be for another." Hegel, 1977: 115.

<sup>160</sup> Sartre, 1956:142. Manu had portrayed women's secondary situation as other in society by arguing that there is no circumstance which allows her to assert herself independently; she is always dependent upon other to assert her identity. In Indian society a women's position is enhanced when she is considered as a good wife, good mother and this enhancement goes on to next level when she bears a male child.

<sup>161</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 76.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 77.

According to Beauvoir “The worse curse that was laid upon women” was the exclusion of women from hunting in early nomadic stage where man put his life at risk and raised himself from the animal level whereas woman remained confined to perpetuate herself as life giver. She writes, “For it is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal; that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills.”<sup>164</sup> Men have attempted to escape from procreative destiny by actively participating in the projects of inventing various resources for maintaining life whereas women riveted their life in repetitive cycle of motherhood; for preserving human species. Beauvoir states, “Man has set himself as master over woman; man’s project is not to repeat himself in time: it is to reign over the instant and to forge the future. Male activity, creating values, has constituted existence itself as a value; it has prevailed over the indistinct forces of life; and has subjugated Nature and Woman.”<sup>165</sup>

Being seen as the Other, being excluded from the masculine sphere, women are debased both mentally and physically and are treated as intellectually and emotionally inferior, physically weaker and therefore fully dependent on men. The only function that could help her get some social status within the hierarchy of unequal gender relations was her reproductive ability which consequently became an object of patriarchal ownership. The ownership of the “womb” and the prohibition of sexual intercourse with other men were strictly enforced through rigid regulative norms to ensure that the identity and legitimacy of the child was unequivocal or unambiguous as a ‘heir’ to his father’s privileges, including his property.

Barbara Katz Rothman mentions that a woman’s womb is seen as a “flower pot” into which a man plants his seed through which she produces a child.<sup>166</sup> In other words, it is a social and historical construction, relegating to the background, she it is at best a biological resource, to be accessed and harnessed at will. As the Other, she is inferior, dependent, object of passion and incapable of reasons. She is coerced, denied any option to make her own choices, to obey the norms prescribed by the master(s) ruling the patriarchal society. Patriarchal ideology glorifies and venerates motherhood to make women tempted to respect their self image as creators and sustainers of life. The self image of a woman’s body is in seeing her essence in becoming a mother.

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>166</sup> Rothman, 1989: 38.

This is defeated in either situation where she becomes a mother and in the contrary where she is unable to become a mother. In either of the situations, her position reduces her to the other. There is also a denial of her identity other than being a mother, which is sanctioned by society as a mother only, and not even by herself in the form of the third sex. In other words, her feminine embodiment is situated only in her maternal embodiment that has become her immanence. A woman always views herself, as Beauvoir posits, within the boundaries of immanence whose transcendence is not possible without breaking the fixed identity of motherhood which makes women seen as others. Beauvoir concludes her Introduction of *The Second Sex* by writing:

A free and autonomous being like all human creatures, nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego (*conscience*) which is essential and sovereign.<sup>167</sup>

Beauvoir argues that woman's maternal embodiment determines her femininity, social status and justifies the power of man over her. She expounds this argument in term of immanence and transcendence which is adopted from Sartre. According to her, like man, woman "is an existent human being who is as a result of being embodied experiences immanence, the 'en-soi'— the brutish life of subjection to given condition...constraint, contingency."<sup>168</sup> Sartre accepts the possibility of human existence as transcendence of immanence with its self-consciousness, also the pour-soi can imagine other alternatives to what exists and how he can act to understand and achieve them. Women also have a similar ability, desire and possibility, like, men, to transcend their immanence by engaging in freely chosen works and projects of life in order to realise and justify existence, restructuring of the world, reorganising and recreating themselves.

But the duality between men and women as self/ other creates obstacles that complicate her condition. Since the self-consciousness itself is hostile to other consciousness by its very nature, as it is only posed in the presence of and opposition to other (s). Men constructed women's Otherness to define her feminine embodiment

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<sup>167</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 117.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.



in opposition to their masculinity, in reality which is not. Additionally, for the confirmation of independent embodied subjectivity and their feeling of transcendence, men do not concede her existence as a free being necessary for human self-consciousness. Consequently, men deny the possibility of women's experience of transcendence and restrict her within the boundaries of immanence. In this argument, Beauvoir not only tries to address the value of women's embodiment but also attempts to avoid the fallacy of seeing these conditions and experiences of them as pre-determined, essentialised maternal female embodiment. In doing so, she theorizes women's embodied subjectivity from the lenses of immanence and transcendence to assure the possibility of women's self-determination and their transcendence. Seen from Sartre's immanence and transcendence distinction, embodiment is the site of immanence and subjectivity is the locus of the possibility of transcendence. This immanence/ transcendence duality can be understood in terms of the embodied aspect of human existence, its givenness, facticity and materiality considered as the very ground or point of departure for the possibility of human freedom and transcendence. In this sense, the duality of immanence and transcendence creates the groundwork for significance of contradictions for women's embodiment and their situations. Thus, patriarchal notion of otherness designates women's embodiment in contrast to men's embodiment. Men reshape women according to their own suited norms and necessities that restrict women's free existence and choices. Although both men and women are entitled to and have the possibility to transcend their situations, but women's situatedness grasps her embodiment within her immanence i.e maternal embodiment which become the cause of her exclusion from the man made masculine world who situate them in her procreative destiny which men left behind in the process of transcending themselves that needs to be criticised. The last section of the chapter examines and criticises various patriarchal views in defence of coerced motherhood.

## 2.4 Feminist Critiques of Coerced Motherhood

“Coerced motherhood is an assault on women... She must have right to reproduce free.”

—Rowland<sup>169</sup>

Women’s struggle is a quest for emancipation from patriarchal coercion. Feminist philosophers constantly raise questions and issues regarding women’s situation in public and private domain. They attempt to direct our attention towards underlying multiple existing sexual differences and male-biased practices in society. For this, feminists revive seemingly settled debates, theories and postulates of universality and eternity of patriarchal coercion and female subordination to revile male biases, prejudices, flaws and misinterpretations of women’s condition in earlier social and scientific researches.

Feminists critically analyse the theological arguments based on the Bible which could be seen as an ancient supportive text of the patriarchal ideology and which have been used by patriarchal authorities for centuries to define women’s essential role in society and justify men’s power and their subordination through allegories and stories of Genesis, the fall, and St. Paul. These stories have become a core of feminist criticism in the West as which they try to find out the path for their emancipation from male coercion. Although the followers of patriarchy interpret and reinterpret the Bible to establish male supremacy over women yet, some feminists have reinterpreted the Bible to posit and defend women’s intellectual supremacy as an unexpected response to imposed limitations and constraints over them. Helie, the earliest woman who wishes to live as ‘consecrated virgin’ replies to the judge that “It is better to marry than burn” that “yes it is better... but not for everyone, that is, not for holy virgin.”<sup>170</sup> Further she states that “men are not bound by laws promulgated for women.” This was the first time when a woman raised the voice for her interest by interpreting biblical statement. Another interpretation given by Christine de Perizan in her book, *The Book of the City of the Ladies*, in which she interprets the story of Genesis in a novel manner:

There Adam slept, and God formed the body of one of his ribs, signifying that she should stand as his side as a companion and never lie at his feet like

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<sup>169</sup>Rowland,1992: 276-77.

<sup>170</sup> As quoted by Lerner, 1986: 144.

a slave, and also that he should love her as his own flesh ...she was created in the image of God. How can any mouth dare to slander the vessel which bears such a noble imprint?...God created the soul and placed wholly similar souls, equally good and noble, in the feminine and masculine bodies...[w]oman was made by the supreme craftsman. At what place was she created? In the Terrestrial Paradise. From what substance? Was it vile matter? No, it was the noblest substance which had ever been created: it was the body of men from which God made woman.<sup>171</sup>

Through the above interpretation, Perizan attempts to discredit patriarchal readings by giving a turn to the narrative to draw a favourable conclusion out of it. She uses the term ‘noblest substance’ for the body matter of Eve i.e. was the same as that, to claim the equality of women. Through this explanation, she also tries to silence those who claim female weakness because she was born from flesh not from earth.<sup>172</sup> She further interpreted Augustine’s comment on woman that she was created not in God’s image but in his ‘likeness’ allegorically means that God created not body but soul which represents equality between the sexes regardless of their bodily differences. In a similar vein, another feminist, Isotta responds to the episode of sin in which Eve’s sin was portrayed as worse than Adam. She insists that Eve’s sin was not her weakness rather her pride:

It is clearly less a sin than desire the knowledge of good and evil than to transgress against a divine commandment, since the desire for knowledge is a natural thing, and all men by nature desire to know...Eve, weak and ignorant by nature, sinned much less by assenting to that astute serpent, who was called “wise,” than Adam— created by God with perfect knowledge and understanding—in listening to the persuasive words and voice of the imperfect women.<sup>173</sup>

In this argument, Isotta highlights Eve’s curiosity and desire of knowledge which, she claims, is natural to all human beings, whether men or women. She tries to show natural aspect of human behaviour common in males and females both. Eve who is a symbol of female category, her actions are considered as equal and free to men. In this way, Eve was a lesser sinner and got less punishment than other. She became capable

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 147.

to produce herself with her fruitful body, God chose her to bring forth life, in comparison to man who was cursed to see the dust. Ester Sowerham illustrates the story of the Fall and God's punishments for both:

Justice he administered to Adam; albeit the women doth taste of justice, yet mercy is reserved for her. And of all the works of mercy which mankind may hope for, the greatest, the most blessed, and joyful is promised to woman. Woman supplanted by tasting of fruit, she is punished in bringing forth her own fruit. Yet what by fruit she lost, by fruit she shall recover.<sup>174</sup>

Similarly, there are many other readings in which thinkers and philosophers have raised their voice against prevalent masculinist bias of biblical texts where women were shown in a denigrated position and sent to earth only for procreative purpose. These feminists not only challenged the traditional stereotypes about male and female, but also attempted to place women at a higher position by giving new feminist interpretations and meanings to the Bible. These readings primarily focus on giving new meanings to the notions of freedom, autonomy, and dignity between two sexes. In this way, feminists begin to question the pervasive acceptance of opposition and duality between sexes which is used to posit male superiority over female inferiority.

The ideals of maleness and femaleness have been presented as sex-specific *virtue* within the hegemonic structure of sexual differences. The virtue of preferred separate traits for them; for female as weak, inferior, non-rational, passionate, caring, submissive, passive nurturing and contrary to male norms, against these traits, male known for aggression, strength and reason. There are many thinkers and philosophers who naturalised and essentialised this unfair splitting of sexes by assuming them as universal and a necessary requirement for the very survival of human species. List of such thinkers is not short. It includes, as already mentioned earlier, such great names as Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Hegel and many others who conceived of rationality in terms of transcendence from feminine weaknesses. Lloyd has exposed the biases of 'men of reason' against females in excluding them from the realm of 'pure reason'. Women have been taught and made to unwittingly internalise the male biases. Lloyd and other feminist thinkers

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<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

maintain that it is hard for women to accommodate themselves into masculine ideals of rationality, freedom, and equality.

The very idea that women have different (for men, 'difference' here means 'inferior'!) intellectual and moral traits in contrast to men has been partly formed within philosophical and cultural traditions which are now being questioned and rejected by feminists as a reaction. For instance, a vigorous defence of the ethics of the personal, situational and particular can be seen as a feminist response to the Kantian 'masculinist' notions of universal categorical and impartial; or warmth of concrete emotions against the cold abstract logic of Reason. Although, thinkers often have claimed to develop their thoughts free from contingent effects of their historical or personal situations, and social contexts in which they were thinking, their thoughts are deeply affected by, the prevalent social constructions of gender differences of maleness which is now visible. There are variations in philosophers' thoughts in different periods, but one peculiar commonality throughout history was; these philosophers were predominantly male, and the absence of women in the intellectual traditions meant that the conceptualisation of rationality or Reason was solely taken as a male concern. Lloyd has convincingly shown that philosophy is seen as an ideal of Reason through exclusion of feminine.<sup>175</sup> This exclusion has been achieved by essentialising women as mothers and glorifying them as Mother Goddesses.

Feminists criticise any such arguments which are based on biological determinism by challenging the covert and male-centric scientific prejudices in the formation of biological explanations for practice inequality among men and women. It has been charged against mainstream biologists, zoologists, anthropologist, and physiologists that they have produced accounts and explanations in support of excluding women from the public sphere by distorting the evidences or speculations without any real evidence. For instance, primatologists study primate behaviour through anthropomorphic masculine prism to validate human patriarchy by claiming evidences in support of male chimpanzees patriarchs. One of the leading primatologist, Sara Hrdy has revealed that in such studies a limited number of samples for the study of biological difference among sexes have been broadly overstated through biased cultural interpretations. These moral codes and values

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<sup>175</sup> Lloyd, 1984: 109.

which further apply on sex differences are themselves cultural product. Sexual differences are biological while gender-role differences are constructed during the various phases of human history. Pregnancy and parturition is a sexual phenomena among all primates, including humans, but patterns of caring and nurturing children vary from species to species which are not same as gender oriented socio-cultural construction for women peculiar to humans.

Hardy has done field studies of sexual behaviour of primates and their parental attitudes and relations with their infants. She came to India to study the increasing cases of infanticide behaviour among langur monkeys to find an answer to the question: why the female monkeys were ‘rewarding’ the killers of their infants by becoming sexually receptive to the same male monkeys who had eliminated their unweaned infants? Hrdy makes it clear that *male langurs never copulate ‘unless first solicited’ by the female; rape is unknown*. Many primatologists had earlier studied this strange sexual response to males indulging in killing of their infants. They had presented the explanatory hypothesis that this strange phenomena was due to human interventions in the extinctions forests leading to langurs being forced to live under stress in ‘unnatural’ crowded habitats’ and female langurs choosing or preferring to, submit to, stronger patriarchs to achieve reproductive success. Hrdy chose to study the behaviour of these monkeys in greater detail in different habitats for the next nine years. Her findings were contrary to the previous studies, which were showing the ‘male observer biases’. Hrdy found that the killer male was an outsider and not a member of the group. Mother of the killed unweaned baby had lost all her genetic investment with the death of her baby. Males from her group, including the father of her infant, had not been able to protect her child. In order to protect her next child, she was left with no other choice but to mate with the killer who will not attack their child.<sup>176</sup> The female monkey was not making any choice as she had no other alternative to choose. On the basis of her long experience of primate studies, Hrdy came to the conclusion that the debate over “whether or not women have maternal instincts” is a “pointless and ill-informed” debate. She writes: “the early literature on the biology of motherhood was built on patriarchal assumptions introduced by earlier

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<sup>176</sup> Hrdy, 200: 27-54.

generations of moralists. What was essentially wishful thinking on their part was substituted for objective observation.”<sup>177</sup>

From Hrdy’s above remarks, it becomes clear that argument for excluding women from public arena ( getting education and doing outside work) due to stress that is dangerous for women’s reproductive functions is based on sexist social and biological prejudices that reproduction is the sole purpose of women’s existence. Same is the case with the argument put forward on the basis of the law of conservation of energy that women’s devotion for academic study will reduce the available energy for the production of procreative organs. Contrary to such misleading views, the fact is that the formation of reproductive organs continuously and gradually happens throughout adolescence. Menstruation is merely a climax of repetitive menstrual cycle of women’s fertility years which has not any connection with loss of energy. Even if we apply the conservation principle to women’s biology, it does not mean that energy utilized in study is diverted away from the proper development of the procreative organs and processes. Now it is beyond any doubt that women’s reproductive health remains unaffected by their pursuing education and other public engagements. In this manner, the so called ‘reproductive’ hazards’ have been allegedly identified and projected by completely unsound considerations in the name of scientific evidence. Furthermore, as Janet Sayers suggests, exclusion of women from higher education and work force, in the name of spurious biological considerations, is founded on the hostility of men within these sectors against women being employed in these jobs and to their resistance against sexual equality because of their fears that women may get jobs in these occupations at their expense.<sup>178</sup> For these reasons, these sectors bolster sexism by avoiding giving jobs to women rather than providing appropriate working conditions for women and creating conditions for employment for all.

Recently, Brian Easlea has argued that men’s fear of women’s emancipation originates primarily from their need to defend their ‘elusive masculinity’. Men’s gender identity remains elusive, because boys have to live with the challenge of forming a secure ‘personal identity’ which has to be different from the identity of

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 535.

<sup>178</sup> Sayers, 1985: 22-23.

their primary caregiver of their mother, a woman.<sup>179</sup> However, the primary consideration in the purportedly biological arguments, first against equal education, and second against equal employment, has been to protect the interests of educated male elite and of industrial capital respectively. These arguments have certainly appealed to pronatist sentiments. Premises of arguments for, the exclusion of women on the biological basis from higher education and highly paid employment vary as to whether the relationship postulated between the ‘biological’ and the ‘social’ is one of determinism or of choice. With the entry of women in academic studies, thanks to substantial success of feminist movements and other changes brought about by anti-colonial and socialist movements, academic studies are getting modified and male biases have started coming under critical scrutiny. It is becoming clear that many debates between supporters and critics of patriarchy are ideological debates using rhetorics of scientific determinism (coercion) or rhetoric of respect for human subjectivity and individual freedom (choice) will continue to remain inconclusive.

From the above discussion, I propose to close this chapter by concluding that ‘patriarchy’ refers to the male coercion and control over women’s freedom in public and private realm, particularly by institutionalising motherhood and enforcing it as an essential feature of a woman’s ‘true identity’. This has become primary cause of women’s oppression, subordination and exploitation. It establishes the institutionalised masculine system of male power relations under which women are viewed merely as procreative bodies for bearing and rearing men’s offspring. In this way, primary focus of patriarchy is to continue hierarchical power relationships among men and women to ensure perpetuation of masculine, dominant coercive role, and women’s feminine, subordinate role. Patriarchy considers the social world-order created by it as natural and universal, and therefore, inevitable. Patriarchy attempts to justify or legitimise the assumption of universality and inevitability of male domination and women’s subordination. This has been achieved through an essentialisation and glorification of women as mothers. Women’s tacit acquiescence to male domination limits their physical, mental, social and psychological development. Mary Wollstonecraft and J.S. Mill had shown that the beneficiaries and defenders of patriarchy will continue to give all possible arguments in defence of male domination as it suits them best. Both of them have been explicit in their critiques of

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<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-5.



patriarchal ideology that human mind has a tendency to accept the long established prevalent practices as if they are natural and necessary. They were of the view that privileging of rational and scientific scrutiny of social institutions and practices began in the post-enlightenment modern age. Earlier, it was not reason but the dictum ‘might is right’ prevailed. They had hoped that logic of reason may help the coming generations to appreciate the value of human equality, autonomy, dignity and justice in guiding public life, which will show the irrationality of patriarchal beliefs and practices. But it seems that their hope may be fulfilled only when women and men work together in the cause of fairness and justice for all, particularly for the empowerment of marginalised sections of humanity, of which women constitute the half of human population. Maternal embodiment has been used as a tool for excluding women from participating in public world social power, authority, choice and decision making. They are not even allowed to claim their power and control over exercising their own reproductive capacity. Till science- fiction phantasies and wild imagination of many scientists, working in the newly emerging inter-disciplinary field of new reproductive technologies, neuro-sciences, artificial intelligence, cybernetics and cognitive studies, come true, we can continue to live as natural beings-biological as well as social. But which future we shall have to live in, and live with, depends upon what choices, which decisions we collectively make for the survival of natural human life on our planet. A solitary individual’s isolated choices and efforts are unlikely to make any significant difference in cracking the hold of patriarchal ideology on the minds of people.

## Chapter Three

### PARADOX OF REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE: RIGHT TO CHOOSE OR CONTROL!

*“The struggle for reproductive right is political one which requires strategies for dealing with obstacles and for creating conditions conducive to women’s self-determination.”*

—Asha Moodley<sup>180</sup>

Reproductive rights are a prerequisite for women to overcome their procreative vulnerability. Through these rights, a woman can make choices to have a control over her body and sexuality. For this reason, the slogan “A woman’s right to choose” is universally recognised and seen as a woman’s right to reproduce or not to reproduce. Reproductive conditions such as conception, contraception and abortion are primarily a woman’s concern as these are related to her own maternal body. Therefore, a woman should have a right to choose whether, when, how, where and with whom they would consent to become pregnant or not, and give birth. This right is also known as ‘*right not to reproduce*’ as it establishes that a woman is not destined, and therefore, cannot be forced to being a reproducer. Alternatively, against the abusive practice of forced sterilization, and advancements in ARTs for infertility treatment, it becomes necessary to take account of the ways women can choose to give birth that is, ‘*right to reproduce.*’ However, as an individual, a woman’s choices are structured in such a way, that, being male dependent, she is expected to ‘ought to choose or not to choose’ within the patriarchal framework. Supporters of patriarchal control over women’s sexuality can never accept a woman’s freedom to choose.

*Voluntary motherhood* is not a matter of right for women. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, for a single woman to choose to be a mother. The paradox is that although, women are creators and sustainers of new life, they have no right to exercise any choice or control over their own reproductive selves. Their femininity is circumscribed within their material conditions and social relations. Beauvoir calls it ‘situatedness’ of human condition in the sense that our freedom is not absolute, capricious and arbitrary freedom. Rather it is always situated against the backgrounds of history, culture, biology, psychology, religious, social, and political conditions. In such conditions, women’s choices are controlled and dominated by

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<sup>180</sup> Moodley, 1995: 8.

men and society for maintaining masculine control over women. Women are not treated as 'equal humans' in society and therefore, their rights have never been taken into consideration in discussions of human rights in the name of gender neutrality and impartiality.

As human beings, women are supposed to be entitled to equal human rights with men, but they are not actually treated as equal to men. Feminists have raised their voice against such discriminatory attitude towards women. They have supported women's reproductive rights as Human rights. The demand for equal status to woman's reproductive rights as human rights, i.e. rights for safe motherhood, legalisation of free and safe abortion, and freedom to control their body against any expropriation can be regarded as the cornerstone of feminist political movements. Many new wave feminists, emphasising on the differences between men and women, are demanding that a woman should be given special rights for safe, secure and responsible motherhood without affecting her rights for education, work and other rights granted to males as human rights. Various gatherings and world conferences have been organised for discussing women's right as their human rights.<sup>181</sup> However, voluntary and safe motherhood is yet to be accepted as a distinct human right. The greatest threat to women's reproductive health is the social denial of women's right to equality.<sup>182</sup> Even though they may have been declared as equal citizens in many state constitutions, but the lack of proper implementation of right to equality has deleterious implications on their reproductive lives. Rowland claims that:

Women must have the right not to reproduce and mother because the alternative would mean that they are compelled to do so. Coerced motherhood is an assault on women and children. Access to safe contraception and abortion, as yet not achieved by all women in any country, is essential to a woman's autonomy. She must have right to reproduce free from enforced sterilisation or forced abortion. On the other hand there can be no concomitant right to have a child: the right to live without bodily

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<sup>181</sup>Many conferences have been organized to consider issues and problems relating to women's condition. The first gathering for women's right in the United States was held on July 19-20 in 1848, in Seneca Falls, New York. More recently, 1993 UN world conference on human rights as women's right was held in Vienna. The Fourth world conference on Women was held in Beijing on September 1995.

<sup>182</sup> Cook, 2002: 12.

<sup>182</sup>Rowland, 1992: 277.

coercion is not the same as the right to draw on community funds or resources as if one were owed a child /product.”<sup>183</sup>

Right to reproduce freely is a necessary condition for the maternal well being of women. Coercive motherhood not only demeans maternal subjectivity but also diminishes the personhood of a mother as well as her child. Women need to be provided rights and necessary conditions in terms of proper education, health facilities, opportunities for work and employment so that they can exercise their control over their bodies to make free decisions regarding their sexuality, procreation and other aspect of their life without any external constraints or coercion.

This chapter aims to discuss the significance of procreative freedom as a right in women’s life as a human right— a recognition crucial for acknowledging women as being complete persons, and not less than persons. Lack of such an acknowledgement is the cause of gender related wrongs and invisible oppression of women in society. Women’s needs and rights remain unnoticed and unidentified as individual subjects. No wonder, they can’t have full control over their reproductive function. With this in view, I shall explore the reason behind such right remaining unrecognised as human rights for women. I shall discuss the historical emergence of women’s rights by analysing various feminist voices speaking of their bodily right to choose and control. In doing so, I have drawn ideas from the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, J.S. Mill, Simon de Beauvoir, and Barbara Katz Rothman. They have discussed the problem of women’s human rights in great detail. Reproductive freedom, in the form of “rights”, is vital for women as maternal embodied being. Women can acquire true freedom only when rights will be formulated in accordance with their lived experiences. For their distinct rights, we need to understand women’s uneven situational and sexual status in society. I shall attempt to show that present universal human rights are insufficient for women as these have been formulated by the male mindset without thinking of women as concrete particular individuals who have special maternal bodily requirements. Thus, reproductive freedom can only be possible through changing socio-cultural arrangements and male orientation towards women’s maternal embodiment, their reproductive decisions and parental rearing practices.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

### 3.1 Women's Rights in Male Centric Human Rights Discourse

*“To the proposition that women, first and foremost, are human beings, who like all other people in our society, must have the chance to develop their fullest human potential.”*

— Betty Friedan<sup>184</sup>

Human rights are considered as first and foremost universal moral rights that must be acknowledged and respected by all human beings in all times and places, irrespective of the material and social conditions in which they may be placed. The primary concern of human rights is to save and secure a minimal level of dignified and respectful living conditions for human beings necessary for a good human life. Abdullahi An-Na and Francis M. Deng have underlined the importance of human rights by stating that “we trust that all societies and cultures, in their wide variety of ways and means, are dedicated to protecting and promoting human rights, which we believe are owed to all human being by virtue of their very existence.”<sup>185</sup> Human rights are necessary to ensure the dignity of every person as a human being irrespective of one's race, gender, religion, class, caste, region nationality and language. These rights include right to life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression, and equal treatment as a human being<sup>186</sup>. For this reason, these are high-priority rights applicable to all persons.

Similarly, the view of women's human rights claims that women be allowed to share equal basic human rights with men since women are human beings. However, these basic human rights were not implemented in case of women since traditional human rights were implicitly assumed to be “the rights of men” and therefore, formulated with male household heads in mind. They were conceived as rights of male individuals active in the public sphere. Women were deprived of fundamental human rights mostly as they were excluded from the public sphere in society. Existing theories, compilations, and prioritizations of human rights have been mainly constructed to serve a male model. As a result, there was no space for women, their needs and aspirations as human beings.

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<sup>184</sup> As quoted by Botting, 1894: 2.

<sup>185</sup> An-Na'im and Deng, 1990: 11.

<sup>186</sup> Fran, 1981: 12.

Mary Wollstonecraft, in her treatise, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, reveals the gap between abstract principle of rights and its actual practice in the patriarchal structure under which women are situated and excluded from access to their basic rights. She strongly pleaded for the need of women's human rights on the basis of rational theology and consequentialist ethics. According to rational theology, human rights are obliged to follow God's Moral Law through the faculty of reason. For Wollstonecraft, rights are equivalent to duties which are given by God to human beings. Humans should respect and perform duties as ordained by God. So, women's human rights should be respected. Wollstonecraft developed her Vindications of rights for/of women by assuming a priori that human beings, both male and female, are divine creations endowed with the faculty of reasoning. Human beings can use their reason to understand and follow divine moral principles which are a part of God's providential plan. As creatures of God, women are entitled to same rights as men. She emphasised the capacity to give birth as a special feature of human female's embodiment and pleaded for a woman's right to education about the challenges and responsibilities of motherhood. Wollstonecraft asserts that "let woman share the rights and will emulate the virtues of man, for she must grow more perfect when emancipated...(if) women have not any inherent rights to claim, and by the same rule, their duties vanish, for rights and duties are inseparable."<sup>187</sup>

Wollstonecraft did not hesitate from taking support of the consequentialist argument to show the intrinsic and extrinsic social benefits that will accrue to men if women are granted the rights which men enjoy. In building her case for equal rights for women, she assured her male readers that when women will get a free access to their human rights, men's life will become better as they would have "more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers."<sup>188</sup> Thus, she uses theology as the foundation for making women's human rights universal and moral on the one hand, and consequentialism for showing the social and personal benefits of granting human rights to women. The potential of women to contribute to social progress will become visible only when they get a chance to develop themselves freely crossing the unjust exclusions imposed by patriarchy. It may be relevant to mention here that Wollstonecraft had the courage to

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<sup>187</sup> Wollstonecraft, 1999: 283.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 280-284.

point out that “Men, in general, seem to employ their reason to justify prejudices, which they have imbibed, they can scarcely trace how, rather than to root them out...a kind of intellectual cowardice which make many men shrink from the task, or only do it by halves.”<sup>189</sup> Referring to education as women’s human right, she maintained that even if women are not given the same education as men have, it would morally not be wrong to provide an argument for women’s right to education on rational, theological and consequential grounds.

Following Wollstonecraft, J.S. Mill, in his book, *The Subjection of Women*, defended the idea of equal rights for women to enable them to overcome their historical subjugation. He supported the view of women’s equal rights on utilitarian grounds. Rights are essential for development of social institutions and excluding women from it not only creates hindrances in their life but also it is an obstacle in human progress. The progress of any society is based on giving equal opportunities to all men and women in order to develop their talent and pursue their aspirations and goals. Women are equal to men and if they are given equal opportunity to choose, this would enhance their potential.

Mill highlights the transition from the prevalence of ‘law of might’ to the ‘law of right’ or the ‘law of force’ to the ‘law of reason’ in the conduct of social relations from the times of antiquity to the emergence of the modern society in the western Europe, particularly in England. He argues that human beings tend to see and justify social and political practices as if they are natural. He shows that the practice of slavery had been defended maintaining by that men were by their very nature either slaves or masters:

Aristotle held this opinion without doubt or misgiving; and rested it on the same premises on which the same assertion in regard to the dominion of men over women is usually based, namely that there are different natures among mankind, free natures, and slave natures; that the Greeks were of a free nature, the barbarian races of Thracians and Asiatics of a slave nature.<sup>190</sup>

Mill clarifies that he is going back to Aristotle since the arguments given by him were very similar to the fanatic attitude of the American slave owners in maintaining that

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>190</sup> Mill, 2015: 16.

Black people were inferior to the Whites and incapable of doing any work other than manual work, “that black race is by nature incapable of freedom any marked out for slavery.”<sup>191</sup> Mill also observes that the supporters of absolute monarchy had defended the claim that it was the ‘only natural form’ of government. “the law of force...has always seemed the most natural of all grounds for the exercise of authority.”<sup>192</sup> Mill takes illustrations from the pre-modern history to demonstrate that whatever is ‘usual’ in social life starts appearing as ‘natural’ and whatever seems ‘unusual’ is seen as ‘unnatural’, against nature. Mill’s main aim to argue for women’s equality with men was to justify the demands of women for education and suffrage. He denies that the gender differences among men and women were natural differences. He underlines the fact that:

All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections.<sup>193</sup>

Mill distinguishes between the pre-modern world and the modern world by highlighting that before the arrival of modernity, human beings had to live their lives according to the place/location/status in which they were born as they were “chained down by an inexorable bond to the place they are born to.”<sup>194</sup> The arrival of modernity started freeing humanity from such chains of birth. Mill claims that women also need and deserve to be freed from the chains of birth as had been done with the abolition of slavery in case of Blacks in America and other parts of the world. Mill maintains that “freedom of individual choice is now known to be the only thing which procures the adoption of the best...The social subordination of women thus stands out an isolated fact in modern social institutions...a single relic of an old world of thought and practice.”<sup>195</sup> Mill’s arguments for women’s equality with men are based on the

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 22-24.



progressive view of history in which modernity is regarded as morally and socially superior to old traditions of faith. He argues that with the grant of right to education and right to vote and participate in public life, women shall be able to contribute to the progress of society.

For a proper study of women's rights, Beauvoir is of the view that "an investigation of women's rights as human rights must first reveal the meaning of human existence as lived experience. Indeed, a description of lived experience will reveal the conditions under which moral, or any type of experience is possible."<sup>196</sup> She further suggests that "the distinct possibilities of the moral dimension of human experience, under which human rights gain certain conceptual clarity and legitimacy, must begin, then, with a description of the lived experience of human persons as embodied subjects."<sup>197</sup> Human rights are distinct moral rights that must be understood and implemented in terms of the ontological account of being located in-the-world in terms of demands such as physical health, education, economical conditions, social needs and choices of inter-personal relations. In this way, Beauvoir places a great emphasis on the ontological necessity in the matter of including women's human rights in concrete particular instead of harping on universal human rights in general.

In her early ethical work, Beauvoir draws a distinction between abstract freedom and concrete freedom, general and particular in the context of ontology of situated subjectivity to focus on oppressive conditions of women's lives. She also argues in defence of a provision of distinct women's rights for their not being treated as the inessential always less than human. Explaining the sense of freedom, she has discussed two kinds of freedom— firstly, ontological or natural freedom that refers to a person's fundamental freedom to choose between at least two possibilities of affirmation and denial, and secondly, practical freedom that signifies the actual access to freedom a person has due to the presence or absence of favourable or unfavourable social, economical, cultural, and political conditions. She provides a critique of Sartre's emphasis on absoluteness of abstract freedom that our embodied subjectivities are always situated in the world among others who may severely limit, constrain, or completely remove or contribute to the enhancement of our practical freedom. In a patriarchal society, women are confined or restricted in many ways due

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<sup>196</sup> Linsenbard, 1999: 147.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

to male supremacy and domination over them. Their choices and freedom are always bound within the framework of male power and desire. Human rights, in such an unequalitarian framework, cannot be sufficiently or equally applicable in different situations in which women are placed. Nevertheless, Beauvoir also states that it does matter the ways in which others suppress and limit our practical freedom, though in a sense, we always remain ontologically free beings. Here again Beauvoir distinguishes between oppression in its general sense among human beings, in terms of class and other stratification, and oppression in its particular forms, specific to women because of their being women. This sharp distinction between men and women justifies the demand of distinct rights for women whose situated embodied, gendered subjectivity is not the same as men's subjectivity.

Women's human rights can be analysed and understood within the framework of Enlightenment assumptions. Radhika Coomaraswamy is of the view that underlying the assumption of Enlightenment project, women are depicted as "free and independent, and as endowed with rights and rational agency."<sup>198</sup> Similarly, Adetoun Ilumoka states that "the human rights discourse has been embedded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment project with its emphasis on 'individual civil and political liberties, property rights and the rule of law' which is premised on a notion of society as a collection of isolated, autonomous, individuals, free and equal, interacting in a marketplace."<sup>199</sup> Further Ilumoka addresses the questions which arise due to the fact that "the assertion of rights embodies both 'is' and 'ought' statements in proclaiming what ought to be by reference to what is."<sup>200</sup> In a sense it is assumed that since the rights are naturally inherent in human beings, they ought to be respected. Ilumoka points out that the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, declares that "inherent dignity and equal and inalienable right of all members of the human family...as being the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world and to the need to avoid tyranny and oppression that lead to rebellion." Such accounts of human rights take the term "human" for the universal person or all human beings rather than a particular person as she lives in the world.

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<sup>198</sup> Coomaraswamy, 1994: 40.

<sup>199</sup> Ilumoka, 1994: 310.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 309.

It is possible both theoretically and practically, to explicate, justify and defend the claim that certain rights are inherently available to persons as persons, regardless of their race, gender, caste, class cultural, ethnicity, social, economic and political conditions. However, revisiting the ontology of human rights as rights of persons qua persons, women's rights as distinct human rights may be defended ontologically in favour of women as different from men, but as persons. In other words, women can claim certain rights ontologically for themselves as persons. In this way, she is fundamentally entitled for certain universal human rights and this entitlement ought to be universally applied for women.<sup>201</sup> The irony of human rights is that these rights are made and ascribed not from any individual's point of view, but rather to classes or groups. In this context, Wiredu argues that the most fundamental of the declarations of the United Nations on the subject (of human rights) is actually a *universal declaration*. But this declaration, despite its claim to universality, fails to take note of its limitations for women and other deprived sections. The declaration needs to be reformulated to include some other specific rights to enable women and other deprived communities to avail their universal rights.

It is well known that from the outset of post-World war –II era, women have been included for entitlement to human rights in various declarations. Although The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 along with other two declarations— United Nations International Covenants, on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNICESCR) and Civil and Political Rights (UNICCPR) announce the equal rights for all humans irrespective of their gender and sex, yet, women are discriminated all over the world on the basis of their sex and gender. In most of the countries, sex discrimination is evident in education, employment and health sectors. Violations of women's fundamental human rights have been reported in abundance over the years.<sup>202</sup> Even though, Universal Declaration of Women's Rights held in 1967 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or CEDAW in 1979 have been approved and signed by governments of many countries, accepted law and cultural practices in most of these countries are far away from the fulfilling the clauses of these conventions. Furthermore, the gender-neutral language of the Universal Declaration to claim equal rights for women with men is problematic.

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>202</sup> Bunch, 1994: 32-34.

Kaufman and Lindquist have pointed out that this gender-neutral language is, “a double-edged instrument if it is used to punish women for failing to conform to the conventional norms expected of men.”<sup>203</sup> They have noted that for the first time in 1968 Universal Declaration of Women’s rights departed from gender-neutral language to address issues such as pregnancy, health care, maternity leave, and affirmative action for women in education and employment. However, some rethinking is required for placing women along with men in view of their distinct situations. Foundations of gender-neutrality declarations assume sexual equality which is not applicable in real life conditions where men and women are not only located but also treated differently.

It is especially during the U.N. World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, when a worldwide petition drive was launched which, as Friedman says, “took off like a rocket.”<sup>204</sup> The large gathering and meeting brought together women from all regions and various women’s human rights groups on one platform. The petition had appealed that conference should “comprehensively address women’s human rights at every level of its proceedings” and identify gender-based violence “as a violation of human rights requiring immediate action.”<sup>205</sup> One of the NGOs participants from Asia-Pacific region characterised pervasive “patriarchy” in following word: “Patriarchy which operates through gender, caste, class and ethnicity, is integral to the problems facing women. Patriarchy is a form of slavery and must be eradicated. Women’s’ rights must be addressed in both the public and private spheres of society, in particular in the family”.<sup>206</sup>

The deliberations and resolutions of the Vienna Conference had considerable and significant impact on Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 where importantly “cultural” support or justifications for the violation of women’s human rights in the name of ‘community rights’ were strongly questioned and rejected. The statement was articulated in these words:

While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the

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<sup>203</sup> Kaufman and Lindquist, 1995: 121-22.

<sup>204</sup> Friedman, 1995: 28.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>206</sup> Bunch, 1994: 5.

duty of states, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.<sup>207</sup>

The articulations of these declarations would carry meaning only when they are transformed into effective actions which has been lacking. These resolutions have so far remained futile in providing justice to women and protect their human rights.

In such a situation, where a lot has been “declared” but so much remains to be done or implemented, some solace can be found in feminist writings. Some feminists are of the view that financial assistance for such organisations, intellectual and political support, continuous gatherings for raising consciousness about women’s human rights may be helpful in this context. Wiredu suggests that our main concern is to deal with particular situations of deprived persons within the framework of universals. For an adequate implementation of the human rights we need both universal as well as particulars to work together.<sup>208</sup> Beauvoir reflects necessity for the justification of the universal claim that persons are fundamentally free in the world when the situation of the “other” concerns each one and every one. She says in *Pyrrhus et Cineas* that “I must therefore endeavour to create for all men situations which will enable them to accompany and surpass my transcendence. I require for men health, knowledge, well being, leisure, so that their freedom does not consume itself in fighting sickness, ignorance, misery.”<sup>209</sup> She cautions in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that “...only man can be the enemy for man; only he can rob him of the meaning of his acts and his life because it also belongs only to him to confirm it in its existence, to recognize it in actual fact as a freedom.”<sup>210</sup>

Beauvoir believes that each particular human project is grounded in the universals and this is the way human rights may be justifiably defended. Women’s human rights cannot emerge without the unity of individuals, only with support of individuals they would become real and not in isolation. Beauvoir states that “the meaning of my own free projects is contingent upon the existence of others. It is only through the recognition of others that I may be affirmed or negated in my chosen way of being-in-the-world: ‘only the freedom of the Other is able to give necessary

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<sup>207</sup> As quoted by Okin, 1998: 45.

<sup>208</sup> Wiredu, 1996: 3.

<sup>209</sup> Beauvoir, 1944: 115.

<sup>210</sup> Beauvoir, 1984: 82.

freedom to my being.”<sup>211</sup> Such an approach to women’s human rights further draws our attention to a woman’s situation as a concrete particular human being needing and deserving special reproductive rights. The question that we have to face is: why equality model of human rights is pervasive when needs of both sexes are different? For finding an answer to this question, it is relevant to discuss Rothman’s critique of the libertarian view of human rights.

### **3.2 Women’s Reproductive Rights as human Rights**

*“Support the human needs and desires to have some measure of control over nature and biology, and over fertility, and to believe that it is ethical to do this.”*

— Marge Berer<sup>212</sup>

The previous section of this chapter has attempted to show that the universal foundation of human rights that appeals for equal treatment to everyone neglects the concrete and particular situation of women as distinct persons. Women have various biological, reproductive and child care concerns and requirements that demand additional rights. The male oriented model of human rights forgets and ignores women’s different and unique functions of maternal embodied self such as menstruation, conception, contraception and lactation that are not sufficiently incorporated in the formulation of human rights that needs to be rethought. In this manner, these equality based universal human rights are completely inadequate for meeting women’s special reproductive needs and functions. However, despite the inadequacy of human rights for women as maternal self, many liberal feminists support human rights on the basis of its equality agenda, that is “equality with men”, as they assume men and women are fundamentally equal beings, and they don’t need separate and distinct human rights. Barbara K. Rothman commenting on libertarian views of equality by underlining the value of women’s distinct reproductive rights in these words:

This is a different aspect of the distinction between “equal pay for equal work.” and the much more troubling, much more revolutionary idea of “comparable worth.” A woman lawyer is exactly the same as a man lawyer.

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>212</sup> Moodley, 1995: 8

A woman cop is just the same as a man cop. And a pregnant woman just the same ...well, as uh,...It's like disability, right? Or like serving in the army? ...Pregnancy is just pregnancy. There is nothing else quit like it. that statement is not glorification or mystification. It is a statement of fact. Having a baby grow in your belly is not like anything else one can do. It is unique.<sup>213</sup>

Followers of Libertarian ideology hold that women's rights should be the same as that of men. For them, all persons, irrespective of their sex and gender are equal members of society. One cannot be discriminated in achieving education, employment and health services on the basis of race, sex, religion, class, and caste etc.. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that women have a different and unique reproductive function and consequential tasks in the world. In that scenario, the equal treatment for different physical and mental needs will be futile as it will not address the issues unique to women as they are lacking in case of men. Barbara Katz Rothman says:

Liberal feminist works best to defend women's to be like men, to enter into men's worlds, to work at men's jobs for men's pay, to have the rights and privileges of men. But what of our rights to be women? The liberal argument, the fairness argument, the equal rights argument, these all begin to break down when we look at women who are, or becoming, mothers.<sup>214</sup>

Rothman comments on liberal views on equality attitude by comparing between physical capabilities and capacities between men and women. It might be possible that they can get same education and do the same job and get the same pay. We can see no disabilities as such in doing any physical and mental work. But, when we start considering reproductive acts or functions, these exclusively belong to women and their maternal body. Conception, pregnancy and parturition are the functions that separate women from men, and create different requirements for women. This unique experience of motherhood can neither fit in the equality model of human rights nor in their liberal frameworks. All these ideologies are blind to the women's reproductive needs, and distinctness. Women are viewed as valueless in comparison to men, though 'glorified' as mothers.

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<sup>213</sup> Rothman, 1989: 194.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 194.

Although, liberal feminists raise their voice for demanding women's rights, their rationality, yet undermine the bodily account of women by demanding for equal parenthood for children on the basis that men can also equally participate in rearing and care of the infants in the same way as women do as mothers. They neglect or deny the difference between nurturance by men and women. Unlike man, a woman nurtures a child with her flesh and blood or her milk that remains as unrecognised and menial, only considered as bodily work. However, the equal seed contribution theory distributes half –half elements for birth of children between both men and women. In this way they devalue women's lived experience of their maternal bodily self that is separate from men's bodily function and experience.

Liberal ideology, in this way, supports the Cartesian dualistic model of mind and body. For them, mind has a superior position over body. On this ground, the physical work of women such as gestation and lactation has no value. There is a general lack of respect for such “menial” bodily works or acts of *mothering*. Mothering is inferior to or lesser than mental rational work. If women engage in men's rational work, it is equally important because it is men's work; but mothering remains an unpaid and devalued work. Women are devalued for their mothering and reproductive work. The value and significance of mothering will be visible not through rhetoric of glorification but through actual provisions which will enable women to combine ‘mothering’ and other pursuits with dignity, without avoidable inconveniences and guilt of being ‘uncaring mothers’.

Liberalist model of equality conceives of human individuals at such an abstract level that leads to a different problem. Alison Jaggar notices that the liberalist believes in “abstract individualism” that means “essential human characteristics are properties of individuals and are given independently of any social context.”<sup>215</sup> This leads to a particular conception of equality. Liberal Feminists are continuously trying to remind male law makers that women are as equal as men. The request, as Abigail Adam's puts it, “remember the Ladies” has always been ignored in the emergence of capitalism. Alison M. Jaggar states that:

Liberal philosophy emerged with the growth of capitalism. It raised demand for democracy and political liberties that often expressed deeply held moral

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<sup>215</sup> As quoted by Rothman, 1989: 195.



convictions about the inherent equality of men....Consistently over the centuries, feminists have demanded that the prevailing liberal ideals should also be applied to women.<sup>216</sup>

If we assume that all humans, as individuals, are identical and in some way can put in the same category, then the ideal of equality will be in the focus in deliberations over 'equal rights'. Ensuring that all humans, being essentially identical, will be treated in an identical manner. It would be wrong and unfair to deny equal treatment to human beings simply because they belong to different categories of people. For instance, liberal feminists reject ideologies that treat black and brown people different from white, old from young, and females different from males. But can such a view be able to solve an individual's problems and needs as a concrete particular entity. Rothman states that:

Equality rights sounds good, and in many ways it is a fine goal and one that has yet to be achieved for any of these groups: racial minorities, old people, women, disabled people. But a focus on "rights" ignores *needs*. Special attempts to get help based on need get called "reverse discrimination." Women as mothers are especially hard hit by this narrow equal rights approach. For one thing, those individual who are not yet rational—our babies and children –need an awful lot of care and attention, and that falls to our lot. Liberal thinking, including liberal feminism, is a bit shy on what to do with the children – and other deeply needy people. Even achieving a liberal goal of including men as child tenders does not solve the problem: it remains individualized, privatized.<sup>217</sup>

Rothman argues that provision of equality right is not the solution for the mother's problems. We cannot deny that mothering is a different work with different bodily needs and other requirements, which is not possible to be fulfilled by a liberalist approach. For this very reason, Rothman argues for her view by claiming that:

Giving women all rights of men will not accomplish a whole lot for women facing the demands of pregnancy, birth, and lactation. Because of the focus on formal equality, because of the value of mind and body, and because of all this happening in patriarchal system, liberal thinking tends to diminish

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<sup>216</sup> Jaggar, 1983: 27.

<sup>217</sup> Rothman. 1989: 195.

the significance of the physical parts of motherhood. The liberal feminist claim too boils down to women having the right to be like men. If some women choose not to assert those rights, choose not to be like men, then largely that's their lookout.<sup>218</sup>

Following this, it is not wrong to say that the equality right, proposed by liberal feminists is inappropriate and inadequate in the context of women as mothers. Their reproductive and child-care needs required a proper attention which is not possible without giving the unique maternal task a specific space in human rights discourse. Accepting reproductive rights as human rights indicates the universal approval on women's physical, psychological, social and career needs as necessary for the very existence of women as women, and their freedom from being forced to become like men for claiming their rights. As Elizabeth Porter posits that:

Reproductive rights are part of reproductive freedoms that affirm ideals of equality and autonomy. Given women's body, sexuality and reproductive potential, reproductive rights affirm equality as an extension of the principle of bodily integrity and self determine. Given the social position of women, a defence of autonomy is important. Insofar as women are not only responsible for pregnancy but also usually for the care of children, women must be the ones who ultimately decide on contraception, abortion and childbearing.<sup>219</sup>

In this sense, reproductive rights have to be looked from a 'women-centred' perspective towards women's sexuality, pregnancy, childbearing and contraception. In this regard, Barzelatto and Hempel have provided three basic principles of women-centred approach which are connected with each other by law and health.<sup>220</sup> Their approach attempts to provide a critique as well as an alternative to the increasing control of male experts, resulting in subordination and depersonalisation of the expectant mothers, in the provision of reproductive health services and management and control of new research in ARTs. Looking from the perspective of lived experiences; men do not have any direct experience of going through conception, becoming pregnant and giving birth. Therefore, to improve reproductive health, it is necessary to respect and trust women's experiences in framing policies and guidelines

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>219</sup> Elizabeth, 1994: 2.

<sup>220</sup> As quoted by Freeman and Isaacs, 1990: 54.

and taking any specific decisions about reproductive health care services. They are also of the view that women choosing to become mothers must be provided access to proper information about the various medicinal and other technical interventions, invasions, and their side effects. Choosing to mother is not a matter of falling or becoming sick. Therefore, women must be entitled to play an active role in any decision making about their reproductive conditions during the various stages of their pregnancy and delivery of the baby. These essential qualities of respect, of dignity and control are linked to the improvement of health and reproductive decisions. In doing so, law provides some primary tools for conceptualising, promoting and protecting women's autonomy. Reproductive rights can provide a legal framework and medico-legal categories to make women entitled to control their reproductive lives.

The second principle places an emphasis on the understanding and addressing reproductive health in context of women's own lived experience. It is hoped that this kind of re-conceptualisation will be helpful to uncover the issues of health and illness related to women's reproduction. The good relation between a practitioner and a patient is crucial. For instance, the stipulated condition of informed consent required to be provided by patients to doctors for medication and surgery and quality of care in family planning programs show the ways in which ethics and law can influence health care.<sup>221</sup> In this way, law helps to shape and regulate the social conditions of women in which they live. Law can mandates relations between men and women too by making rules of marriage, divorce and sexuality that has a significant influence on women's reproductive health. The understanding that reproduction is not just a biological process in women's bodies, rather it involve many other issues and concerns as well, can change societal thinking and responsibilities towards women's existence who are presently seen as mere containers or fields for harvesting men's seeds.

The third principle to reproductive health stresses on the necessity of connecting various levels of framing policies and plans of actions, such as international, national, and local communities where policies and programs are implemented for developing an understanding of reproduction as quality of life.<sup>222</sup> These principles attempt to reflect the importance of women oriented thinking before the formulation of any reproductive rights so that, women's reproductive health will

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<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

be benefited from it. A careful look at the history of the various world Conferences, national and international gatherings, local struggles, and efforts shows both achievements and disappointments. In the process of achieving the status of reproductive rights as women's human rights, women from all over the world have started to get together and share platforms to discuss their lived experiences among themselves, and to make men learn to hear them.

There are many conferences and meetings that have been organised for the recognition of women's reproductive rights. The Conference of Human Rights in 1993, has declared the value of women's human rights as inalienable integral and distinct part of the universal human rights in terms of women's right to reproductive choice and health care. The provisions of declaration include the urgent need of provision of highest standard of physical and mental health and equal rights to access family planning services. The family planning services can facilitate women to exercise their ability to control and choices over their reproductive functions which in turn have far reaching effects on the realization of their economic rights and health including maternal mortality. The Fourth World Conference on Women, adopted the declaration that "recognition and reaffirmation of the right of all women, to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility" (para-17) and "equal access" to and "equal treatment" of women and men in education and health care and enhancement of "women's sexual and reproductive health" (para-30).

Various movements for women's health all over the world have supported the inclusion of health as a basic requirement necessary for women's reproductive human rights. By this time, reproductive rights have been connected with fundamental human rights to health care for good life. Additionally, this women's right to health comprehensively includes the sexual and reproductive health and freedom to have control over their bodies and access to free choices. In other words, women can freely exercise their reproductive freedom as 'right to choose' without any interference that further recognises the autonomy, dignity and bodily integrity of women as individuals. The issue of reproductive health has also received great attention in the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994. In Beijing International Women's Conference, definition of reproductive health was further expanded by incorporating other necessities in the followings:

Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matter relating to reproductive systems, its functions and processes. Reproductive health, therefore, implies that people to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and women to be informed and have access to safe, effective, affordable method of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant.<sup>223</sup>

First time, Beijing Conference has provided the stage for pro-choice groups to exercise reproductive rights through a policy of free contraception, and abortion without any coercion, rejection of sexual discrimination and domestic violence which was universally recognised. Although the drafting of policies had a positive impact on women's reproductive conditions, yet most of the declarations and clauses remain unimplemented due to the lack of cooperation and necessary actions expected from the concerned governments. Manipulative tone of the wording of such declarations language is another reason for their failure in a practical life.

The idea of reproductive rights as women's specific human rights is seen as essential for women as procreators. In recent years, new rights have been introduced for the well being of women. Women are also becoming aware about the need of articulating their rights and choices in new situations arising due to new by rights gained by them as a result of their long intensive struggles and movements. However, a lot more still needs to be done by governments and communities for proper implementation of the rights already accepted in the UN Declarations. This is not possible without full cooperation and support of men. No freedom can be achieved in seclusion or isolation. In this context, Linda Gordon states that "Reproductive

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<sup>223</sup> UN Department of public International Beijing Declaration, *Reproductive Health and Human Life*, 1994: 11-12.

freedom can't be isolated from other human freedom that one can't be free to reproduce unless one is free in every other way and vice versa.<sup>224</sup>

### 3.3 Right to Choose and Control: Feminist Perspectives

*"Having choices that are real involves changing the world."*

—Rosalind Pollack Petchesky<sup>225</sup>

Now we can say that reproductive freedom in terms of 'right to choice' and 'control' is central to women's maternal self which requires right to individual freedom to make decisions concerning their lives. In this sense, individuals have a *prima facie* 'right' to make choices about their own biological bodies, their reproductive resources, without diminishing the same rights of others. This liberal view of freedom as consisting of individual rights depends on a conception of individuals as self-sufficient, independent being with relatively insignificant relations with other individuals or their well-being. It implies that individuals can exercise their rights to choose and control without limiting similar rights of others on the basis of their self-interest which is closely linked with their bodily integrity, liberty and autonomy. However, it is difficult for women to freely make reproductive choices over their own bodies to control their reproductive destiny, in isolation from or independent of others. Presently, they cannot impregnate themselves on their own. They are situated subjectivities; their freedom is interdependent and situated in relation with others. Their decisions regarding pregnancy, abortion, birth control, child care and maternity depend on their material and social situations in society. The degree of women's access to freedom and control over their bodies depends upon with the support or resistance from fellow individuals in their families and communities.

Reproductive freedom can be understood from two perspectives — One is *individualistic* and the other is *social*. First perspective on reproductive freedom is associated with biological nature of women's body, sexuality and reproduction such as pregnancy, parturition, abortion and contraception which is based on the principle of 'bodily integrity' or 'bodily self-determination'. This view of reproductive freedom emphasises that women must be able to become more free in exercising their

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<sup>224</sup> Goden, 1977: 404.

<sup>225</sup> Pollack Petchesky, 1984: 356.

reproductive capacities. It holds that no woman should be forced to become a mother unless she chooses to become a mother. No woman should be stopped from becoming a mother if she wants to. The second perspective takes into account the historical and moral backgrounds that situate women and regulate their life in terms of socially determined requirements. Such a perspective assumes that social structures are historically developed, therefore, under the existing structures of sexual division of labour, women are responsible for care and rear of the children. Thus, the reproductive decisions about abortion, contraception and childbearing should be taken by women in the light of their situations and projects.<sup>226</sup> The first perspective represents the ‘fixed’ dimensions of the biological person and connects it with “natural rights”. The other perspective implies that seemingly sex-based division of labour can change with changing historical social arrangements, thus, it may not be possible for women to transgress the social restrictions they face in exercising their reproductive choices. Such a view can be linked with the social determinist theory of individual behaviour in which there is almost no space for genuine free choices.

The idea of “right to control over one’s body” is based on Leveller’s idea of “property in one’s own person.” This view was connected with nature, and simultaneously associated with the idea of “natural rights” to own property and goods. Leveller states that:

To every individual in nature is given an individual property by nature, not to be invaded or usurped by any: for every one as he is himself, so he hath a selfe propriety, else could he not be himself, and on this no second may presume to deprive any of without manifest violation and affront to the very principle of nature, and of the Rules of equity and justice between man and man....<sup>227</sup>

Leveller’s above remarks show the individualistic and possessive features of self i.e. a control over one’s possessions, including one’s body and mind. Although, Leveller has phrased the statement in masculine terms, yet his notion was not only an assertion of individualism in an abstract sense but particularly a rejection of the commodification and commercialisation of the bodies in growing labour market by saying that the body of an individual is neither a property nor a transferable thing but

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<sup>226</sup> Pollack Petcheshy, 1980: 663.

<sup>227</sup> As quoted by MacPherson, 1962: 140.

associated with himself on one hand. This statement has a negative connotation which is exclusionary and asocial when is applied on persons as concrete and physical being, on the other hand, the positive aspect is that it discloses the idea of individual's "self-determination." Similarly, Marxist feminists also talk about the concept of "concrete individuality" i.e. "the individual" conceived as situated in historical class societies and closely tied to the social fabrics. This aspect has been further explored by Agnes Heller and Herbert Marcuse. They maintain that "the end of socialist change for Marx is finally the contentment of each individual's needs which are always concrete and particular in a specific socio-historical context."<sup>228</sup> Heller says that, for Marx, needs are primarily associated with individuals and in order to understand needs as socially generated such needs remain the needs of individual human beings. She further states that "when the domination of things over human being ceases, when relations between human being no longer appears as relations between things, then *every* need governs 'the need for the development of the individual,' the need for the self-realization of the human personality in a concrete social situation."<sup>229</sup>

In a similar vein, H. Marcuse in his work "On Hedonism" argues for the individual's "happiness." Through his critical reflection on hedonism, Marcuse presents a liberatory direction for overcoming contemporary forms of oppression and repression that generate a sense of alienation among individuals from their connectedness with their own bodies, and with social and natural world. In a capitalist society, these elements are "complete immediacy of sensuality" which is prerequisite for development of individual's personality as a one dimensional man in the bourgeois social world. The control over one's body is a basic aspect of such immediacy and receptivity as a necessary requirement for being a person and engaging in conscious activity. Additionally, right to control over body is also associated with women's demands for reproductive choices. M. Sanger, asserts that "woman's natural right to ownership of and control over her own body-self-right inseparable from Women's intelligent existence..."<sup>230</sup> It is evident that pregnancy happens in a women's body and unwanted pregnancy can be barrier in maintaining their sexual health and as a potential bearer of foetus.

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<sup>228</sup> As quoted by Petcheshy, 1980: 665.

<sup>229</sup> Heller, 1976: 67-73.

<sup>230</sup> As quoted by Pollack Petcheshy, 1980: 666.



The connection between women's freedom and their bodily control represents moral as well as material necessity. Accepting biological reality is different from accepting biological determinism. Biological reality is related with women's biological potential and limits. That only women can get pregnant is a creative capacity or power, but this very creative potentiality could also become a source of confinement. There are ample sources that remind us of imposed chastity rules for women, fertility cults, pollution rituals, prohibition against abortion, and men's fear of women's reproductive capacity imagined as a mysterious power (womb envy). The inability of men and society to fully regulate women's reproductive capacity, or to absolutely mediate women's connection to their bodies, presents the dialectical nature of the biological female situation.

Along with biology, women's reproductive situation is also related with social and cultural institutions. It is true that women bear children, but the primacy of motherhood is socially ascribed in their lives. The subtle and invisible ways in which male dominated institutions affect women's lives cannot be ignored. Also, the sterilization abuses mainly happen with poor, low caste and deprived class people. Furthermore, it has been observed that the birth control methods, such as pills are dangerous to women's health irrespective of class, caste or community. Irreversibility of some methods of birth control raises question on the genuineness of reproductive "choices". Politics behind reproductive policies of many states all over the world is guided by the policies which put greater constraints on comparatively poor women coming from marginal or peripheral sections and minorities, to check or put a stop on their having children.

In this way, the issues relating to "choices and control over bodies" have a subtle but strong political dimension. The claim about "women's right to choose" in itself is insufficient as its implementation has complex political dimensions. The claim has to address the moral questions of when, under what conditions, and for what purpose procreative decisions are to be made. For instance, an abortion decision may have to be taken not because a pregnant woman "owns" the foetus, or it is her bodily part, but the pregnancy may be the result of an undesired bodily "invasion". After recognising the situation of conflict between foetus's life and women's needs, some feminists merely say that women must have a right to choose, as it is their body and since it is their primary responsibility for caring the child born. The question who

should decide is not merely a political but also a moral and social question. Such a decision involves social and moral values women ought to bring in their reflection when they consider the issue as to the way they should decide? Can a woman seek an abortion on the ground of gender of the foetus?

Furthermore, the notion of “right” in itself is not a static and fixed issue to be discussed in abstraction, divorced from concrete social conditions. Rights are claims that are staked within a given order of things, persons and relationships. They are demands for individual(s), or for “no admittance” to other(s), but they do not reject the social structure itself, the social relations of production and reproduction.<sup>231</sup> In the case of right to abortion, one may seek necessary services but may fail to recognise prevalent social relations, sexual divisions in which women are responsible for care and nurturance as well as their real straggles in various spheres of life.

The second form of reproductive freedom is social i.e., the social relations of reproduction. As already discussed, some Marxists are of the view that reproduction is not merely a biological act, but rather an economic cultural and social activity as it is determined by its constantly changing material conditions as well as social relations. Marx has discussed and analysed three aspects of social life i.e., production of conditions of material life, emergence or development of new needs, and human procreation—reproduction within the family is also a social relationship. It includes natural and biological, social and cooperative relations among men and women through sexual and procreative practices. Thus, for Marx, social activities are cooperative, purposive and conscious.<sup>232</sup>

For Marx, the institution of family serves an economic and social function. It regulates and controls procreation for setting the issue of paternity in disputes about the inheritance of property. Its main purpose is not just satisfying sexual needs but an interactive context that people create together. The patriarchal family establishes the domination of men over women’s sexuality. The practices and institution of family have varied from one society to another society, and different periods of history within the same society. These variations are, according to Marxist feminists, related to the changes in the social divisions of labour with the development of different

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<sup>231</sup> Mitchell, 1976: 384-85.

<sup>232</sup> Marx, 1967: 419-22.

modes of production. Thinkers such as Ellen Ross, Rayna Rapp, Jean-Louis Flandrin, Jeffrey Weeks and others assume that meanings of sexuality and sexual practices vary within the framework of history and cultures, and it shows that how the natural activities are influenced and mediated by social structures.<sup>233</sup> In this way, sexual and maternal experiences of women can be seen from the perspectives of material conditions and social relations. Material conditions are the set of limits or constraints on biological procreative process such as access to birth control methods and Assisted Reproductive technologies; class and caste divisions and the distribution of health related facilities; nutrition and employment for women. Social relations reflect the specific ways of social networking or social arrangements that include women in relation to their own partner(s), kinship ties, neighbourhood, family planners, religious communities, market, and the local institutions governing. In this regard, Georg Lukacs clarifies that “progressive socialisation of ‘natural being’ through ‘social practice’ is the very essence of history.”<sup>234</sup> Thus, the alleged duality and separation between natural and social dimensions of human affairs is an illusion. It would be a mistake to split biological and social aspects of procreation in a woman’s life. Hilda Scott articulated this view as follows:

Marx’s observation ...suggests looking for the dialectical relationship between the natural and social sides of reproduction, instead of regarding them as two parallel but independent processes. In this view, human population is seen as the unity of biological and social aspects which condition each other, the social aspects being the chief but not the only factor.<sup>235</sup>

In contrast to the ‘social relations of reproduction’ historical dynamism of consciousness based on social divisions, different power relations and resources, institutional and cultural structures under which biology, sexuality, and procreation of humans are performed that are not just complicated but complex.<sup>236</sup> The most basic level of consciousness involves gender, caste and class divisions. The use of

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<sup>233</sup> Pollack Petchesky, 1980: 672.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Scott, 1974: 159.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 673.

contraception named diaphragm was unavailable in America to poor women because of their material conditions.<sup>237</sup>

The complexity of social relations of procreative functions is related to various forms of consciousness, conflicts in relations of production and the forms of class struggle according to different historical eras. The historical and anthropological studies reflect that reproductive relations are based on class, caste and cultural social division. For instance, Devereux has provided instances from societies in which going for abortion or retaliation against forced termination of pregnancy are acts of protest or disobedience. Such instances show that women have struggled to assert their reproductive freedom which is bound by prevailing material conditions and social relations.<sup>238</sup> There are times when antagonism remains repressed and sometimes under particular conditions birth control and abortion become ground of open gender and class disputes. The cultural practices in which abortion and infanticide are stigmatised or female infants are seen as demeaning, people may resort to these options still with impunity but it shows their subordinate position. In a similar vein, women may have right to reproduce and bear babies but they are completely excluded from other functions. In this way from the Marxian point of view, one can say that women make their reproductive choices and decisions but they do not make them freely under socio-cultural conditions in which they are situated.<sup>239</sup>

In present scenario, medicalisation of reproduction authorises medical obstetrician and gynaecologists to gain control over reproductive functions and processes rather than enabling to women exercise their choices over their bodies. Various governments and private population control agencies often cooperated with medical profession, as “medical indications” and “medical effectiveness” are used as indirect sources of action to control population. However, institutional and financial power base of such agencies remain independent of women. Also, the commercialisation of birth control products and services reflects some other interests related to the hidden profits, concerns other than women’s health. Further, it seems that the amalgamation of medical, corporate and state interests inform and regulate women’s choices under the stratifications of caste, class, and race. Historically, it is

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<sup>237</sup> Gordon, 1977: 309-12.

<sup>238</sup> Devereux, 1967: 98.

<sup>239</sup> Marx, 1963: 15.

evident that sterilization abuses are often slapped by medical practitioners on low caste and income women and men. Women are denied information about birth control on the basis of the casteist or racist assumptions that they are 'incompetent' to manage advanced methods due to their poor background. However, women's groups, in various parts of the world have struggled, raised their voice and launched movements against such political discriminations. Right to abortion has been defended with the slogan "women right to choose" in such feminist movements.

The materialist ideology describes justification of these struggles against reproductive freedom in terms of socially determined needs i.e. moral imperatives itself come out to define historically and culturally women's position through motherhood. Since it is women who bear and rear children and take their responsibilities, and the conditions of contraception and reproduction affect them directly, therefore, reproductive choices should be made by women whether, when and with whom and under what condition to have children irrespective of medical, social and interventions. Furthermore, materialist view also illustrates the historical contingency of the conditions in which women seek reproductive options for themselves. Historically, it seems that the women exercise their "reproductive choices" within the framework in which motherhood and reproduction still shape their relationship with rest of the society. A materialist ideology attempts to transcend such existing socio-cultural situations of reproductions so that women can avoid their choice without any prerequisite gender biases, and gender will not become final factor of reproductive responsibly. It implies that there should be change in pervasive social structures and mindset of men that bearing and rearing should be equal responsibility of men and society. This is the only way when biases of needs would change and then reproductive freedom of control and choices would not be primarily associated with women only. It can be understood in Alison Jaggar's words as:

Marxist feminist defence of abortion, which argues that the "right" of women to an abortion is "contingent" upon "women's situation in our society...if the whole community assumes the responsibility for the welfare of mother and children, [then] the community as a whole should now have a

share in judging whether or not a particular abortion should be performed....<sup>240</sup>

To sum up, I have attempted in this sub section to underline the paradoxes of reproductive rights in terms of various forms, sometime visible but often invisible, of choices and degrees of controls on women's embodied self. Rights are crucial for development of humans as persons in this manner, reproductive rights are prerequisite for women as mothers. Reproduction happens through her body, by her becoming pregnant, and the development of the foetus for a baby being born. It is solely her right to make choices to control her reproductive self. Thus, it should be women's right to exercise their reproductive rights and get these rights recognised as distinct human rights. However I have also drawn attention to the fact that equality based male oriented traditional model of human rights fails to recognise women's reproductive human rights as separate rights from others. Although, there are various gatherings, movements, struggles in which have been engaged by women for a long period of time, but women's right to choose and control over their maternal bodies is yet to be recognised. All attempts and efforts for achieving the goal in many parts of the world have raised the awareness about the significance of the issue. The material and social conditions of women and their social situatedness in oppressive and male dominant world, even if they get their reproductive rights, it would be hard for them to exercise. Without social and family support, it is not easy for women in isolation to make their independent reproductive decisions.

We can imagine a society and conditions under which a woman shall be empowered to make her choices and take control over her body and reproductive life—to freely give her decisions as whether, when, with whom, and in what condition she will make her choice about having or not having children. The difficulty behind such imagery, as Petchesky points out is that the social relations of reproduction tend to neglect or deny the level of reality immediate for a woman that it is her embodied self in which conception, pregnancy, and lactation occur and which is disregarded by others altogether. In order to make this connection, a theory of reproductive freedom and right has to have a new alternative conceptual frameworks in which the uniqueness of mothering function of women is respected and steps are taken to

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<sup>240</sup> As quoted by Pollack Petchesky, 1980: 677.

articulate and implement such working and living conditions in which mothering function does not obstruct their other human aspirations and goals. Feminist thinkers have made significant attempts in this direction, the results of which are evident in various changes in the fields of education, works, health and child rearing practices in different parts of the world. But much remains to be done for realising the dream of right to reproductive choice for women.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MODERN REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY, MEN AND MOTHERHOOD

*“The social structure creates needs- the needs for women to be mother,... the needs for ‘perfect’ children-and creates the technology which enable people to make the needed choices.”*

— Barbara Katz Rothman<sup>241</sup>

In patriarchy, women are viewed as *relative beings* whose choices are structured to serve men’s perspective. However, the development of technologies and their positive impact on humanity have opened up possibilities for new choices in various spheres of life. These choice are necessary for woman also in order to become an authentic self, and technologies have a potential to envisage *hopes* for future possibilities of free choices in terms of ‘voluntary motherhood’ against patriarchal ideology of ‘coerced motherhood’. Advances in new reproductive technologies (ARTs) can make it possible for women to free themselves from their destined role of maternity by separating sexuality from reproduction. For instance, free access to contraception, abortion and artificial insemination not only pave a way to enhance choices but also have the potential of enabling women to take control over their own bodies and reproductive selves. But are these reproductive technologies always there to emancipate women and enhance their choices? Or just a new way to keep women subordinated to men and serve social needs? Why is it still considered valuable for men and women to have their own biological children? There are dark sides of technologies that are hardly realised and often ignored.

Technologies are merely blind tools that do not have any meaning in a social vacuum, it is their use that gives them meaning and value for us. If technologies open the doors to new choices, at the same time they also close the doors for some others. In this manner, the same technology can be used or abused depending on the way and purpose for which it is employed. Beauvoir has indicated the dangers of minor reforms through technologies in these words: “it has to be said that quite miserable reforms always have some value but that they are dangerous as well.”<sup>242</sup> In patriarchy, technologies are regulated and controlled by men to further oppress women to continue their confinement within maternal immanence. Due to this reason,

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<sup>241</sup> Arditti, Klein and Minden, 1989: 32.

<sup>242</sup> Schwarzer, 1984: 68.



these reproductive technologies are not only diminishing women's choices, but also crushing their maternal self by viewing them merely as baby manufacturing machines.

The present chapter attempts to critically analyse the meanings of *women's choices* in relation to the use of reproductive technologies within existentialist phenomenological framework. The new reproductive technologies seem to provide new reproductive opportunities for women to enhance their procreative choices, but often disable them, and contribute to perpetuate patriarchy in new ways by treating women's bodies as procreative machines, and for making profits for the pharmaceutical companies and medical practitioners. This has deleterious implications on mothers' lives as they are becoming fragmented, depersonalized, and alienated from their procreative selves. With that in my mind, I have analysed the deep rooted phallogentric prejudices in medical sciences and technologies, and their internal link with women as maternal bodies. I have discussed the arguments for and against the use of these reproductive technologies in the contexts in which these are used with a view to explore to truth behind their use and abuse. In so doing, the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone, I.M. Young, Robyn Rowland, Jyotsana Gupta have been taken into account. They have analysed the ways in which women are situated within the patriarchal structures where technologies have become a rhetorical controlling tool, yet it seems they are librating one. I propose to argue in this chapter that the men made modern reproductive technologies are '*rhetorical artefacts*' that marginalise and control women's feminine embodiment by medicalising and objectifying their maternal subjectivity instead of providing them emancipatory choices.

#### **4.1 Medicalisation of Birth and Mothering**

*"When science treats the person as a machine and assumes the body can be fixed by mechanical manipulation, it ignores, and it encourages us to ignore, other aspects of ourselves, such as our emotional or our relations with other people."*

—Emily Martin<sup>243</sup>

Although, maternity is a natural act, yet in modern time, it has become medical and technological affair. Women have faced reproductive problems in various ways in

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<sup>243</sup> Martin, 1987: 19-20.

different times across cultures in terms of infertility, unwanted fertility, and remaining childfree, and have sought means to overcome these problems. They often used the services of midwives or women healers for obtaining help for contraception and conception, performing abortion, and getting concoctions to ease labour pain during child birth. However, after the new technological developments in the fields of conception, contraception and abortion, it has become possible for women to enhance their reproductive freedom and choices. Jyotsna A. Gupta puts it in these words, “with the development of contraceptive technologies, it became possible to have sex without reproduction [and] later, with the development of [conceptive] technologies such as artificial insemination and in vitro fertilisation, it became possible to have reproduction without sex.”<sup>244</sup> This new way of reproduction defines all socially constructed human reproductions that take place without sexual intercourse with the help of modern reproductive technologies i.e. ARTs or NRTs that includes IVF, embryo transfer, sex pre-selection, genetic engineering of embryos, cloning and much more. Renate Klein elucidates new reproductive technologies “as the full range of biomedical/ technical interferences during the process of procreation, whether aimed at producing a child or preventing/terminating pregnancy.”<sup>245</sup>

These new technologies assist human reproduction in three basic categories as described by Jyotasna A. Gupta, that are— for the prevention of conception and birth that includes termination methods and contraceptives; for assisting reproduction in the form of aiding or stimulating conception; and for genetic purpose and for prenatal diagnosis that incorporate sex detection and sex-pre selection. It is claimed that the basic aim of these technologies is to improve reproductive health of the expectant mother, and promote the procreation of babies without any genetic disorders, free from hereditary diseases. These claims go to the extent of the possibility of planning of ‘perfect baby’ or ‘designer’s baby’. But, whether these reproductive technologies are really assisting and choice providing tools for women or not, feminists have two different views. The feminists who accept ARTs as emancipatory tools are known as *Embracing feminists*. The other group of feminists who oppose ARTs on the basis of their oppressive and exploitative nature are called *Resistance feminists*.

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<sup>244</sup> Gupta, 2000: 13.

<sup>245</sup> Spallone, 1989: 15.

Embracing feminists support the use of ARTs as emancipatory tool for women on the ground that these are instruments for fulfilling women's reproductive desires and relieve them from their hereditary biological destiny. They tend to see that these technologies can help women in avoiding pregnancy or terminating pregnancy as long as they do not wish to have a child and become a mother. Similarly, infertile couple can be helped to have a child, and single women to have babies without engaging in sexual relations with men. The emergence of the new technologies was hailed as a great leap forward in the project of modernity for expanding our control of the natural world of which our being born and dying are facts of life. The project of modernity had aimed at making our lives and activities subject to human rational control. Some embracing feminists are of the view that reproductive technologies have opened the path for women to reach such a vantage point from where they can make their rational choices in accordance with their desires and aspirations.

It has been documented by many scholars that throughout human history, women had to suffer various forms of oppression, exclusion and denial of freedom due to a devaluation of their reproductive bodies. By compiling and analysing details of myths, literature, cultural and religious practices, ideologies, psychology, biology and philosophy, Beauvoir provided ample evidence that men have projected women as threatening and dangerous for men's transcendental spiritual and rational pursuits. Women were excluded from the public sphere of human activities as they were confined to their 'essential' function of motherhood, i.e. reproduction. Some Embracing feminists claim that reproduction by nature is oppressive for women and technology has the potential to disembody this reproductive act and give relief to women from the burden of pregnancy. Another reason or why they advocate ARTs is that their use will not only liberate women from coerced reproduction but also provide opportunities for new reproductive choices for those who are infertile, transgendered/trans-sexuals, gays/lesbian, and challenged persons to overcome their limitations and fulfil their desire for biological child. In this manner, it is hoped that ARTs can be used to overcome pervasive gender inequalities and question dichotomies such as male/female, culture/nature, society/biology machine/human and so on for achieving liberation for women from oppression.

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir has defended reproductive technologies as a liberatory tool against the tyranny of patriarchy. Contrary to patriarchal claims, Beauvoir does not see motherhood as women's destiny, fulfilment and ultimate happiness but a matter of free choice. She maintains that for a woman, "Becoming a mother...means total emancipation for her, if she sincerely desires her pregnancy."<sup>246</sup> Beauvoir took note of the advantages of technological developments for women as she emphasised that "today enormous deployment of energy can be commended at the touch of a switch."<sup>247</sup> She was confident about her hope in future technologies to enable women to overcome their limitations in unequal social situations. She was of the view that "Technical developments can cancel out the muscular inequality separating man and woman."<sup>248</sup> Her faith in the potential of technologies as a means of women's emancipation led her to think about the realm of motherhood as well. She says, "Birth control is official and numerous methods have been discovered to dissociate these two formerly inseparable functions: the sexual and the reproduction"<sup>249</sup> Such discoveries are essential for women to get control over their own body and self in order to make free maternal choices. She claims that:

Birth control and legal abortion would allow women to control their pregnancies freely. In fact, what decides woman's fecundity is in part a considerable desire and in part chance. As long as artificial insemination is not widely practised, a woman might desire to become pregnant but be unable to conceive. And, on the other hand, she is often forced to give birth against her will.<sup>250</sup>

Beauvoir assumes that reproductive technologies have a potential to free humanity from the imprisonment of biology that has vital implications for women's lives. In favour of artificial insemination, Beauvoir further claims that:

With the artificial insemination, the evolution that will permit humanity to master the reproductive function comes to completion. These changes have tremendous importance for woman in particular; she can reduce the number

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<sup>246</sup> Beauvoir, 2009: 48.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 546.

of pregnancies and rationally integrate them into her life, instead of being their slave.<sup>251</sup>

Similarly, the other second wave feminist Shulamith Firestone in her work *The Dialectic of Sex* asserts that the root cause of women's oppression and subjugation resides in the biological difference between men and women. She mentions that:

Women throughout history before the advent of birth control were at the continual mercy of their biology—menstruation, menopause, and “female ills” constant painful childbirth, wet nursing and care of infants, all of which made them dependent on males (whether brother, father, husband, lover, or clan, government, community-at-large) for survival.<sup>252</sup>

Against patriarchal ideology of natural motherhood, she attempts to show the unnatural process of pregnancy which is not only painful but also *barbaric*. She illustrates that:

I do not believe, as many women are now saying that the reason pregnancy is viewed as not beautiful is due to cultural perversion. The child's first response, “what's wrong with that Fat Lady?”; the husband's guilt waning of sexual desire; the woman's tears in front of the mirror at eight months—are all gut reactions, not to be dismissed as cultural habits. Pregnancy is the temporary deformation of the body of the individual for the sake of species.<sup>253</sup>

Firestone asserts that such oppressive “natural” and “cultural” conditions can be bypassed through the use of reproductive technology. For her, only technology has a power to erase the line between men and women. She says, “The reproduction of the species by one sex for the benefit of both would be replaced by (at least the option of) artificial reproduction: children would be born to both sexes equally, or independently of either....”<sup>254</sup> She pleads to the other feminists to encourage the use and development of ARTs in order to emancipate women from the biological tyranny. She says:

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<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>252</sup> Firestone, 1972: 8.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

The full development of artificial reproduction would provide an alternative to the oppression of the biological family...the double curse that man should till the soil by the sweat of his brow and that woman should bear in pain and travail would be lifted through technology to make humane living for the first time a possibility. The feminist movement has the essential mission of creating cultural acceptance of the human race.<sup>255</sup>

Marge Piercy, another feminist thinker in her book, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, has demonstrated her support for ARTs by following Firestone's reproductive project. The first demand on Firestone's list is that '[t]he freeing of women from the tyranny of reproduction' by using all possible means, and rejection of childrearing role to the society as a whole, to men and other children as well as women.<sup>256</sup> Piercy in her fictional city, called *Mattapoissette* questions/denies the women's biological ties to reproduction by projecting children being born through machines, people are sexually ambiguous (means gender neutral), and every child has three parents, not all women, who take care of them. At another place, a man is shown breastfeeding. Luciente, one of the characters states that "it was a part of women's long revolution, when we were breaking all the older hierarchies. Finally there was that one thing we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in birth."<sup>257</sup> Like Firestone, Piercy also upholds the idea that child rearing should be socialized instead of its remaining mother or sole work of women.

Furthermore, some feminists reject the Cartesian dualistic or dichotomous notions of 'masculinised' feminized bodies and support the idea of "post-natural" body. In this regard, Susan Stryker says that "the critical question for third wave feminists to address is how to deal with questions of embodied differences—whether that is specifically racial difference, sexual difference (including intersex conditions) or the kind of difference reproduced by transsexuals which I see as a precursor to a whole range of issues around biomedical technology and the 'post-natural' body."<sup>258</sup> Contrary to resistance feminists, she emphasises women's embodied difference instead of material commonalities. Also, she rejects the idea of woman-nature

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>256</sup> Lublin, 1998: 184.

<sup>257</sup> Piercy, 1998: 106.

<sup>258</sup> Stryker, 2003: 121.

essentialism which is accepted by resistance feminists. According to her, it is wrong to attach female as nearer to 'nature' and male to 'techno-culture' and patriarchy.

In favour of post-dualistic and post 'natural' body, cyber feminist, Harway, introduces the image of 'Cyborg' meaning cybernetic organism which is the 'integrated circuit' and combination of both organism and machine. This theory explodes the binary structure under which these symbolic dichotomies exist. As Harway posits that human here is defined by self contained body clearly distinguishable from techno-cultural contexts.<sup>259</sup> In this way, cyber feminists attempt to subvert the female techno stereotype that women are associated with nature and men with technology by exposing the historic and illustrating women's full connection with technologies. In this regard, Allucquere Stone says that technology has changed the pervasive notion that women are associated with 'nature'. The new 'nature' that women have incorporated is technological nature called cyborg. This redefinition of women's nature allows these feminists to transgress deep-rooted cultural associations of women with nature. It also disrupts traditional binary of patriarchy which actual disempowers men by using new reproductive technology and computer technology by women.<sup>260</sup>

Moreover, embracing feminists argue that technologies are helpful to transcend the limits of our body boundaries. They help the people with bodily disability and people who want to have babies but it is not possible for them without other means, for instance lesbians and gay men, women and men with different kinds of infertility. They want their biological child and people with congenital disabilities or carriers of defective genes which they wish to prevent to be passed on to their children. They use technology to avoid reproductive deficiencies. They choose technology as their free choice. In this way, these feminists view ARTs as a tool for women to transcend their bodily boundaries. It is considered as women's reproductive choice and control rather than exploitative and oppressive.

In contrast to embracing feminists, resistance feminists believe in the power of 'natural reproductive body' which becomes distorted with the use of ARTs. They also tend to see ARTs as a source of vulnerability, because it seems a subtle extension of

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<sup>259</sup> Haraway, 1991: 163.

<sup>260</sup> Stone, 1999: 85-6.

the patriarchal ideological mindset to control women's reproductive body and nature which is based on men's "womb envy" i.e. their fear and their alienation from nature due to their limited reproductive role. For this reason, reproductive technologies are designed and used by men to conquer their womb envy from nature.<sup>261</sup> Resistance feminists disclose the deep rooted socio-political and economic inequalities around ARTs that are masked by manufacturers of ARTs in various ways. They reevaluate the issue of 'choice' and 'coercion' in the light of culturally marked gender differences and techniques of control. Finally, these feminists argue that in order to acquire free bodily choices, women need to develop strategies for getting control over their own sexuality and reproduction along with staying free from the use of patriarchal tool i.e. ARTs. The resistance feminists hold the view that ARTs, as a *patriarchal technology*, further establishes control over women's maternal selves by giving them in the hands of new patriarchal authorities in terms of medical experts, capitalist mindset manufacturers, as well as state technocrats<sup>262</sup>.

Supporters of women's control over development and use of ARTs begin with the premise that women's reproductive capacity is a basis of their identity and empowerment or confinement; therefore, they argue that it should be regulated and controlled exclusively by them. Geer says, "Refusing to be defined, discriminated against and disadvantaged because of our female biology should not be confused with a demand to be deprived of it."<sup>263</sup> This assumption underlying the expression that by intervention to alter women's natural reproductive bodies through ARTs leads to weaken and undermine them. It also presents threats to women's autonomy, power, choices and control over their bodies. Feminists such as Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Irene Diamond, Margaret Atwood, Carolyn Merchants, and others have cautioned against these threats by addressing prevalent forms of patriarchal dualistic analogy of men/technology and women/nature. Irene Diamond has reflected on finding ways to strengthen women's connection with nature by linking their reproductive problems with environmental degradation.<sup>264</sup> Similarly, Margaret Atwood, in her work, *The Handmaid's tale*, claims a miserable future of human society of due to such reproductive fundamentalism. The increasing pollution through ARTs caused mass

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<sup>261</sup>Rowland, 1992: 292.

<sup>262</sup>Lam, 2015: 43.

<sup>263</sup>Greer, 1999: 325.

<sup>264</sup>Diamond, 1998: 97.



infertility, since there is a chance of giving birth to more deformed child. Shiva point out that ARTs shifts the power of nature from women to male doctor by establishing maternal knowledge and skill from the woman/mother to the medical experts.<sup>265</sup>

Some feminists do not trust Western scientific technological paradigms which are apparently based on men's domination of nature and their vicious approach towards with women. This is further evident from Carolyn Merchant's book *The Death of Nature*, in which modern science is demonstrated as the essence of Man versus Nature i.e. Woman. She explains the way the metaphor of 'dominant nature' has moved from nature as a living organism to nature as a machine in the modern age of scientific revolutions. She argues that 'death of nature' happens with the success or victory of a 'mechanistic metaphor' for nature. This shows the victory of science and technology on the one hand, and the seductive lure of defeating 'mother nature' in various ways on the other hand.<sup>266</sup> Through these theories, feminists illustrate the 'patriarchal technoscientific' idea which is ingrained in throughout modern western thought processes and still continuing to be perpetuated by the tools of new reproductive technologies.

Resistance feminists caution that ARTs are a further extension of a deep rooted technoscientific patriarchy that encompasses both ways—control of knowledge and use of technological apparatuses. These two dimensions are mutually supportive as science creates cultural framework for the amalgamation of new technologies such as ARTs. In this context, Patricia Spallone has illustrated the ways in which technologies are redefining the meaning of procreation in society at the cost of women's life by imposing coercive social/ethical rules and norms. These coercive social relations also provide ample ground for the growth of such technology.<sup>267</sup> This dislocation of authoritative power from women to technology further disembodies women by interrupting in women-nature relation both symbolically and literally. Such practices reconceptualise the woman-nature relation by reducing women into merely mechanical body parts calling it 'techo-docs'<sup>268</sup> and connecting them to motherhood.

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<sup>265</sup> Shiva, 1999: 58.

<sup>266</sup> Lam, 2015: 44-45.

<sup>267</sup> Spillone, 1989: 4.

<sup>268</sup> Lie, 2002: 23.

It represents ‘man-the-scientist as father’ which reminds Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein. According to Lie:

An implicit new story of procreation is that science has gained insight into the totality of process. Symbolically, woman is no longer ‘the creator of children’ in accordance with the cultural theory of *matrigenesis*, but rather one of the several participants of the process.<sup>269</sup>

It follows that women are deprived of their procreative choices and lose control over their bodies. Men have gained all women’s procreative control and exploiting it for profit and power.

Furthermore, it is believed that ARTs discourse allows liberal rights feminists to get abortion rights. They say that pro-ARTs position actually is pro-choice. Nevertheless, Raymond points that “[to] be pro-choice ...is not necessarily to be pro-woman.”<sup>270</sup> In a similar vein, Spallone questions the ARTs claim that it provides women [an]other reproductive “choice” by showing that ARTs are actually felicitating various requirements of medical scientists, research scientists and state for further technological progress. Rowland argues that an infertile woman actually does not have choice in patriarchy where they are identified for their procreative role. Therefore, they are forced to seek assistance from ATRs which seems as if they are doing so voluntarily. In this situation, infertility becomes “disease” and women are coerced to embrace ARTs treatment. In this regard Barbara K. Rothman wrote that “what is passed off as ‘choice’ may means less choice for mothers, showing how the social and cultural infrastructure that accompanies any new technology become the most significant aspect of technological change.”<sup>271</sup> Similarly, Rowland counter argues in her book, *Living Laboratory*, that “it seems that, in gaining the choice to control the quality of our children, we may be losing the choice not to control the quality.”<sup>272</sup> For instance, the historical and socio-cultural perceptions of disabilities, the fears of possibilities of genetic ‘abnormality’ may enforce the use of ARTs in the name of making ‘better’ or ‘rational’ choices.

Feminists argue that real choice cannot be possible in unequal relations which undermine the autonomy of women. The questions who and what ultimately controls

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>270</sup> Raymond, 1993: 85.

<sup>271</sup> Rothman, 1984: 25.

<sup>272</sup> Rowland, 1992: 286.

and which choices are available, simply end into polarized debates for or against ARTs and not necessarily with the participation of women who are likely to use it. This scenario precludes the deleterious effects of ARTs which diminish actual question of choice. Highlighting this point, Rebick says that “In a class and race divided society, freedom of choice for one woman can mean virtual slavery for another, for example contract motherhood’; thus, protecting some women from the exploitation that NRTs will inevitably bring justifies the abrogation of some women’s individual freedom of choice.”<sup>273</sup>

Many feminists support contraceptive technology but not conceptive on the basis of availability of ‘choices’ rhetoric. Rowland puts it in this way, that “a woman’s right to choose” is “a woman’s right to control” and this control comes through abortion which enables them ‘to control their lives in a less than perfect world’. However, for conceptive choices, she assumes that these choices finally decrease women’s procreative control over their own bodies.

Radical feminist opponents of the new reproductive technologies do not pit nature against technological, nor do we extol a new version of biology is destiny for women. Opposition to these technologies is based on more political feminist perspective that women as a class have a stake in reclaiming the female fetus, to the state, and most recently to those liberals who advocate that women control our bodies by giving up control<sup>274</sup>.

Following these two opposing feminists arguments for and against the use of ARTs, it has been observed that both have assumed different notions of liberation within the framework of patriarchy and confinement of women’s bodily choice over their bodies. They concede that woman’s body is controlled and regulated by men, nevertheless; they take different positions and give separate explanations on the relative advantage or disadvantages of ARTs within patriarchal and capitalist structures. Resistance feminists believe that ARTs are oppressive rather than emancipatory due to their controlling patriarchal aspect whereas, embracing feminists view ARTs as liberationist because these technologies make women free from their biological confinement or deficiencies and are based on sexual equality. Similarly, on the

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<sup>273</sup> Rebick, 1993: 88.

<sup>274</sup> Raymond, 1993: 91.

question of choice, resisters posit choice as a social construction and ARTs restrict these choices by imposing set of rules such as who should reproduce and what types of children they should have! It may encourage birth of specific sort of children while others are to be discouraged from being born. In contrast to this view, embracers believe in promotion of ARTs due to its assisting role that provides various choices not only to women but also to others who desire for it. They challenge the preconceived notion that women and technology are different from and against each other. But it is argued that whether we use ARTs or not, are women free to make their choices in a manmade patriarchal society wherein their bodies are perceived as a procreative machine and they are identified with their procreative roles? What is the meaning of woman's body for medical technologies and why the body play an important role in situating one's position in society? These questions are relevant because women's subordination is rooted in their reproductive bodies and consciousness.

#### **4.2 Women's Bodies as Biomedical bodies**

*“The politics of the (feminine) body, as we know it, are the politics of a social body either denied or disciplined, ideologically encoded or fantastically constructed (any or all at once).”*

—Mary Jacobus<sup>275</sup>

A human being is considered as a unified entity consisting of mind and body. Generally, mind signifies human intellect and consciousness, while body is viewed as an extended matter. However, these distinctive features of mind and body are associated with a split between men and women to legitimise the received stereotype of sexual differences between men and women. A woman is identified exclusively with her reproductive body that serves the ground for her devolution by men. Medical sciences treat her as a natural reproducer, her body as a container or a machine for reproducing babies, and doctors work as mechanics to help her in using ARTs procedures for conceiving and producing perfect babies. Apart from their reproductive functions, women's bodies are viewed as inferior, weak, source of disease, and unable to take care of them. Their bodies are supposed to be morally deficient and

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<sup>275</sup> Jacobus, 1990: 9.

existentially disabled, and therefore incapable of exercising full independent agency in a masculine world. Thus, they are incompetent for making their autonomous bodily choices. In this situation, medical sciences claim to help women and their bodies in the best possible ways for the continuation of humanity. This approach turns women's bodies into biomedical bodies.

The quest for autonomy of being entitled to making choices or having control over one's body is rooted in prevalent binary between mind and body which can be traced back to the ancient Greek philosophy and Judeo-Christian theology where soul or mind is hierarchically accepted as separate from and superior to the body. Christianity, incorporated its strands of dualism from Platonic dualism, within episteme, believes that the human soul has to take the path of achieving highly spiritual life, and body comes as an obstacle in man becoming pure rational being, and therefore, has to be rejected.<sup>276</sup> The development of modern science and technology brought with it a renewed belief in dualism. Cynthia Russett points out that the superiority of mind over body established and explained through the "mechanistic medical metaphor" related with body function as superior machinery regulated by the laws of nature. This metaphor was taken by medical sciences to explain the idea that human body is like a machine and mind is engine which is controlling the whole machine. For a woman, the metaphor was imagined as inverse in proportion that is opposite to men. Whereas males were high minds in control of bodies, the uterus was the controlling organ in the female body.<sup>277</sup> This continuously prevailing view of body as machine, that is, body is a combination of various parts, created a platform for perception that body is an object which can be treated as physically detached and separated from mind. As Emily has elaborated it in following words:

The Cartesian model of the body as machine operates to make the physician technician, or mechanic. The body breaks down and needs repair; it can be repaired in the hospital as a car is in the shop; once 'fixed', a person can be returned to the community... Electronic monitoring was widely accepted in medicine with almost no reservations because it fits so perfectly into the medical model of the body as a machine.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Schildriek, 1994: 12.

<sup>277</sup> Hadd, 1991: 165-6.

<sup>278</sup> Martin, 2001: 56.

Emily points out that this body metaphor was dominant metaphor in early scientific medicinal development. Medical practitioners treat ‘procreation as production’ and bodily emission such as menstruation and menopause as disorder or the failure of production. Doctors are supervisors and mechanics and a woman is seen as a ‘labourer’, whose ‘machine’, i.e. uterus, produces the ‘product,’ babies. Through the illustration of the body metaphor, she attempts to show the technological dominant body impositions in our life which not only has power to dominate, but also it has gradually become an autonomous force that is regulating our bodies. In this context, David Noble discusses the way these technologies became autonomous part of our society to which we have to adjust:

Our culture objectifies technology and sets it apart and above human affairs. Here technology has come to be viewed as an autonomous process, having a life of its own which proceeds automatically and almost naturally along with single path. Supposedly self-defining and independent of social power and purpose, technology appears to be an external force impinging upon society, as it was, from outside, determining events to which people must forever adjust.<sup>279</sup>

In this way, the status of women in medical world is no more than baby manufacturing machines. They are invisible as a culturally distinct category but traditionally placed at a reductive level as reproducers. Their bodies are recognised with their internal reproductive functions such as menstruation, pregnancy, parturition and menopause that are long processes in comparison to men providing sperms. This reproductive body essentially stands for the female that is valorised and glorified as a life-giver. It is their responsibility to involve themselves in necessary reproductive process which is biologically given. Their bodies are considered as incomplete without men, only men’s sperm has a capability to realise their complete womanhood as mothers.

New reproductive technologies have taken advantage out of this culture milieu of women by splitting or analysing the wholeness of their bodies in the world of fragmented bodies where they are undermined in two ways— firstly, their reproductive parts are perceived as entities separable and separate from woman that

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<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

can be directly managed. Medical sciences give primary importance to women's reproductive function rather than women as persons. Kathryn P. Morgan called this marginalisation of women's body parts as 'sexual objectification' by saying that "[a]n individual woman experiences the fragmentation of the integrated experience of fertility as she, personally, comes to be seen as a 'difficult' assemblage of organs and processes, some of which may be malfunctioning."<sup>280</sup> And secondly, the foetus is viewed as a discrete person and independent from mother's body even in pre-conceptus time. Maternal body is an object, a removable container in which reproductive process happens, not a person or a subject. Religious, medical and legal discourses treat foetus as whole 'subject'; a full person with autonomy and all its rights. E. A. Kaplan describes it in following words:

The foetus is presented as already a full blown subject, a baby rather than an entity *in process*. The emphasis is all on the baby- to- be read back into the zygote. Further, the fact that this is all taking place in the mother's body is....ignored. The photos have no boundary to them that might represent the limit of the mother's womb or fallopian tubes. The mother is simply not a part of anything.<sup>281</sup>

The biological immanence of women's maternal body i.e. the being-in-the-body makes them unable to transcend from their situatedness. Caught in the immanence of maternal body, a mother cannot be a subject. Biologically speaking, despite their sexual differences, both men and women have same material bodies through which they perform their physical and mental acts. Nonetheless, women are made to believe and imagine themselves within the boundaries of reproduction processes. For this reason, they are always readily willing to sacrifice their personal desires for fulfilling the higher goal of species needs.

The dominant biological nurturance process of women further linked them to Mother Nature which is wild and chaotic. This deficient moral capability needs to be controlled by the rational master mind, her man. Women have been invariably portrayed as unable to control their reproductive processes and passions that deprive them from becoming mature persons. Similarly, normative construction of medical

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<sup>280</sup> Morgan, 1987: 74.

<sup>281</sup> Kaplan, 1992: 204.

syndromes such as hysteria and its modern day counterparts, anorexia nervosa and bulimia, are strongly gender oriented, and indicate someone who is in need of control by others.<sup>282</sup> Whereas, any man who does experience or manifest the characteristic symptoms of such syndromes, far from being confirmed in his gender identity, is likely to be deemed deficient in his masculinity. Although, past elaborations for her body such as wandering womb, have been superseded by more recent constructions of female disorder, sophisticated medical reference to hormones, pre menstrual tensions, menopausal irritability and the like are no less rooted in an essentialist view of women's bodies and women's nature that justifies the basis or need for medical interventions for moral and health grounds. Consequently, the health care system, with rationality of male power, has the responsibility of taking control of feminine irrationality which is not result of woman's ill health, but the strong images about their feminine bodily nature, entrenched in folk-lore for centuries.

It is also evident that before 1800, European medical sciences had accepted 'one sex model' meaning biologically there exists only one sex body, and women's bodies are an inferior version of men's bodies. As Thomas Laqueur has argued that the two sex model is a later feature adopted by medical sciences for anatomical knowledge. Early anatomists such as Galen, Berengario and Vesalius had proposed that female generative organs are isomorphic with those of the male.<sup>283</sup> Vesalius, in his book, *De Humani Corporis, Fabric* has observed that body has only one sex. The configuration of both organs might be different from each other but their structure, forms and names given to apparently corresponding male and female parts, were the same. For instance, the internal location of female testes, were called as the ovaries, or the penile vagina was explained as a lower stage of anatomical development and was considered as a female inferiority. In this way, women were not viewed as sexually different, but physically and ontologically imperfect formed version of what was intrinsically the same as that of men. In this way, medical sciences had recognised the isomorphic truth about the two bodies in terms of their sexual indifferenciation and ontological unity which was displaced with the acceptance of dualist split of mind as masculine and body as feminine. Nevertheless, at the same time body was seen similar to natural world which had traditionally been feminised for long and was

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<sup>282</sup> Shildric,1994: 20.

<sup>283</sup> Laqueur, 2003: 39.



coming under the control of science. The body was stripped of its fleshy protection and penetrated by empirical instrumental dissections. This contributed to the devaluation of woman's body which was already being seen as an imperfect male body.

Viewing the women's bodies as inferior to men's bodies, it was assumed that reproductive contribution and role of women was neither significant nor worthy of any choice. From Aristotle to Galen many writers undermined female agency in the reproductive functions. Though, Galen accepts the involvement of both male and female seeds for conception, female seeds were less valued, colder and less active. Unlike female seeds, male seeds were regarded as more active, heated and valuable for the formation of babies. Galen is reported to have claimed: "Now just a mankind is the most perfect of all animals, so within mankind the man is more perfect than woman, and the reason for his perfection is his excess of heat, for heat is Nature's primary instrument<sup>284</sup>." Aristotle had believed in single active seed theory in which seed provided by men were necessary for the formation of foetus 'form', in which women was just a provider of 'a material'. This lack of heat or temperature in women is considered the main cause of their underdeveloped genitalia and incapability of producing quality seeds of their own. This is also the reason why women's brain did not work at the level of men. As Maclean posits, "[woman's] colder metabolism causes her to consume ( 'burn up') food less fast, thus leaving residues of fat and blood which are necessary for the nutriment of the foetus and for the eventual production of milk."<sup>285</sup>

Furthermore, the monthly menstruation process was also seen as a loss of vital blood and toxic waste material additionally underlined the wastefulness of women's bodily energy and their inadequate intellectual capacity. The reproductive functions also viewed as the inherent lack of women's control over their bodies and self. Sartre put the materiality of women body in such a negative way that "[t]he obscenity of the feminine sex is that of everything which "gapes open"...."<sup>286</sup> This uncertainty of women's bodily boundaries present challenges to the duality of self and other, unsettling ontological certainty and threatening to undermine the basis on which the

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<sup>284</sup> Shildrick, 1994: 25.

<sup>285</sup> Maclean, 1980: 34.

<sup>286</sup> Sartre, 1956: 613.

knowing self establishes control. These paradoxical situations represent women's bodies more embodied than men and that embodiment is neither complete nor secure. And these boundaries breached one again in pregnancy with self and other.

In this manner, a woman's body was socially and medically presented as a reproductive 'machine' for the production of babies. It could be treated and handled separately like other useful worldly objects. The indeterminacy of her body as an inferior to men's bodily heat makes it more vulnerable in terms of their choice and control. Their uncontrolled reproductive functions such as pregnancy and menses were taken as indirect indications of their lack of control over them. This needed to be controlled by medical professionals who were men. Ehrenreich and English describe the medicalisation of women's body in these words:

Everything that seems uniquely female becomes a challenge to the rationalist scientific intellect. Woman's body, with its autonomous rhythms and generative possibilities, appears to the masculinist vision as a 'frontier', another part of the natural world to be explored and mined. A new science—Gynaecology—arose in the nineteenth century to study this strange territory and concluded that the female body is not only primitive, but deeply pathological.<sup>287</sup>

Thus, a woman who was essentially identified with her reproductive body is now separated from her body, a container for others which does not belong to her. The whole medical practices in gynaecology were devoted to make the women realise her responsibilities towards their babies or the other self, not for themselves. For her, motherhood is a not a process of selfhood instead depersonalisation of their own self.

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<sup>287</sup> As quoted by Rowland, 1992: 203.

### 4.3 Depersonalisation and Alienation of Birth Mothers

*“Pregnancy does not belong to the woman herself. It is a state of developing fetus, for which woman is a container; or it is an objective, observable process coming under scientific scrutiny; or it becomes objectified by the woman herself as a ‘condition’ in which she must take care of herself.”*

–I.M.Young<sup>288</sup>

A ‘person’ is characterised as a self-conscious autonomous being who is capable of reflecting upon his experiences, making choices and taking responsibility for his acts. As embodied subjects, both men and women are entitled to be treated as persons. However, the medicalisation and institutionalisation of maternal self results in depersonalisation and alienation of women’s subjectivity. A pregnant woman is seen merely as a ‘reproductive body’ or baby production machine and treated as ignorant of her own procreative condition, and therefore, not competent to make any informed ‘rational choices’. This split leads women to feel alienated, fragmented, disconnected, objectified and mainly depersonalised from their own subject bodies and other yet to become a subject body i.e. foetus and their self.

The concept of person is defined by many thinkers in several ways from diverse perspectives in Western and Indian philosophical traditions. Following Cartesian dualistic account of an abstract disembodied and non gendered rational self the essential characteristic for being a person is to be a conscious thinking rational being. In a similar vein, for John Locke, a person is “a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and as it seems to me essential to it.”<sup>289</sup> According to Robert Noggle, “Autonomy and freedom are necessary for an individual to be a person. Only rational being can be subjects to the moral law. Respecting person means respecting a person’s rationality, choices, decisions, ends and goals. We must respect persons because of their rationality.”<sup>290</sup> But how does a person come to exist? Well a human person can exist only by existing as a thinking human being. Every human being comes into existence after his being born to a mother. Being born to a mother is necessary for a human being to come into existence. But mothers, as

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<sup>288</sup> Young, 2005: 46.

<sup>289</sup> Locke, 1997: 9.

<sup>290</sup> Noggle, 1995: 58.

women, are less than persons as they have been denied rationality. How can one become a person without learning and knowing to be a person, and/or without becoming trying to become one. Philosophers' desire to and escape or evade the ambiguities and ambivalences of human finitude and lack of perfection creates more dilemmas and paradoxes. It would be more appropriate, according to Beauvoir, to face and confront the challenges of gendered embodiment than to divinise human persons by seeing them as God like unborn, immortal disembodied beings. In this context, it is significant to mention contemporary Indian thinker Satya P. Gautam who has given an account of 'person' draws which upon social construction of personhood. He claims that "one is not born as a person one becomes a person; from a biological organism (belonging to human species) one acquires the status of a person through the process of socialisation by which one becomes aware of one's rights and obligations within the community in which one participates as a member."<sup>291</sup> In contrast to the Cartesian view of personhood, such an account acknowledges gendered as well as embodied nature of personhood. As he further states:

The process of becoming a person does not obliterate the fact that one is natural, living and embodied being. Human beings qua biological organism and qua physical objects continue to be governed by natural laws in spite of their transcendence from a state of nature into a state of culture. The interpersonal-relationships that human beings enter into are a manifestation of their attitude which affirms their personhood as distinct from their being biological organisms or physical objects.<sup>292</sup>

Gautam illustrates the process of becoming a person by saying that the self-consciousness of a person is not inborn, and becoming person is a gradual praxis achieved through participation in one's socio-cultural milieu and a critical engagement on one's lived experiences. In this manner, not only one's identity is based partly on one's facticity which includes both natural and historical circumstances and partly on one's projects. The possibilities of transcending the inherited identity are also rooted in the received socio-cultural practices, roles, responsibilities, obligations and rights. These routine engagements and activities enhance an individual's self understanding. Through a gradual participation in these

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<sup>291</sup> Gautam, 1983: 59.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid, 59.

activities one can understand their relationship with them. Additionally, through this process of socialisation, one becomes aware of one's natural abilities and limits as well as one starts acquiring new abilities by learning and experiencing.<sup>293</sup> It is essential to point out here that the availability of opportunities to an individual is also relevant for exercising one's abilities. In this fashion, it can be said that the gendered role ascribed to a woman as mother is a socio-cultural construction rather than her inborn embodied character. Within this construction, paradoxically, women tend to accept the ascribed identity as mothers, as if it is rooted in their very biological nature. She started perceiving a split between her maternal body and self, and becomes detached from herself and foetus. On the other hand, due to socio-cultural factors, she loses her abilities to make free choices and decisions over her body. In thinking about the use of new technologies of reproduction, both women and men have to recognise that human choices in all spheres are made in concrete social contexts, and not in an abstract vacuous realm.

Medical techno-sciences pathologise pregnant women by treating them not as active 'persons' but as 'patients' and bodily reproductive functions as 'disorders' that needs to be urgently cured. Through the instrumental interventions and impersonal settings in which obstetricians 'work on their patients' ignoring the maternal subjectivity and experiences of waiting/ expecting mothers, they reduce and devalue women's control over their bodies and their personal experiences. Ehrenreich and English state obstetricians' attitude towards women as of "medical writers (who) considered women to be inherently weak and psychologically unstable, and the ovaries and uterus to be the cause of a great number of diseases and disorders, both physical and psychological."<sup>294</sup> Medical practitioners consider normal reproductive functions such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause as occasional disorders of women that require medical interventions by providing therapies.

As Rothman points out that even the practitioners who reject pregnancy as a disease treat normal pregnancy 'symptoms' such as nausea, weight gain, low haemoglobin count, water retention as the symptoms that need treatment in term of prenatal care. In medical textbooks, for instance, they mention 'nausea' in pregnancy as 'neurosis' that "may indicate resentment, ambivalence and inadequacy in women

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Young, 2005: 56.

ill-prepared for motherhood.”<sup>295</sup> Furthermore, they have extended area of treatment by further including other pregnancy acts associated bodily and psychological processes such as child development, sexuality and aging, and so on. As E.D. Pellegrino and D.C. Thomasma report that the main purpose of medical sciences is to give “relief of perceived lived body disruption” and “organic restoration to a former or better state of perceived health or well-being.” They say:

When a patient consults a physician, he or she does not in one specific purpose in mind: to be restored and made whole, i.e., to be relieved of some noxious element in physical or emotional life which the patient define as disease—a distortion of the accustomed perception of what is a satisfactory life.<sup>296</sup>

However, this aspiration is not properly attended when the patient is a pregnant woman seeking help to sort out her situation. Since medical experts define themselves as curing professionals, they diagnose the reproductive situation as some disease or ill-health which has to be cured. Moreover, medical sciences are already plastered with male biases in terms of medical model of a healthy male body. They conceptualise ideal normal healthy being with unchanging, stable conditions of equilibrium, instead of seeing the changing body of a pregnant woman. This change for them is abnormal and a signal of dysfunction and infirmity. In this way, they refuse to acknowledge the ‘universal law of change’ which is central to corporal existence, particularly to like children, old people and pregnant women too. Also, they ignore the saying that “the concept of health is much less a scientific concept than a normative concept referring to human well-being and the good life.”<sup>297</sup>

Additionally, by objectifying women’s bodies, medical practitioners distort the organic unity of mother and foetus relation. Rothman says that “mother/foetus are seen in the medical model as a conflicting dyad rather than as an integral unit.”<sup>298</sup> The foetus is viewed not as mother’s integral emotional and bodily part but as a separate organism which has its needs that have to be observed separately and attended in isolation from the mother. One of the branches of medical sciences called “Foetology” buttresses the formation of foetus as an autonomous person having

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<sup>295</sup> Rothman, 1979: 27-40.

<sup>296</sup> Pellegrino and Thomasma, 1981: 122.

<sup>297</sup> As quoted by *Young*, 2005: 59.

<sup>298</sup> Rothman, 1989: 48

special requirements entailing specific of medical concerns. Elizabeth Kane says that “as the foetus becomes personalised, women are presented as less like people, they are dismembered and fragmented. They become eggs, ovaries, wombs, body parts disconnected from the whole person—merely vehicles for breeding babies.”<sup>299</sup> In such a way, medical sciences focuses more on foetus as a potential person rather than on the requirements of mother’s health as an individual autonomous person. Routine diagnostic tests and ultrasounds pictures depict separate existence of foetus that denigrates women’s own embodied experience. Petchesky states that “photographs [of fetuses] have represented the foetus as primary and autonomous, the women as absent or peripheral.”<sup>300</sup> During delivery, as Hadd says, foetus is taken out of women’s body “through the use of visual images, given a form and legitimacy of its own by the doctor and then given back to the woman as though it were the doctor, not the mother, who created the foetus.”<sup>301</sup> They ignore all the information shared by the mother preferring technologically generated information which is controlled by them. In the whole scenario, they discount mother’s experiences within her body. Petchesky has made a point that “to suggest that feeling is somehow more natural than seeing contradicts women’s changing historical experience.”<sup>302</sup> Here, she emphasises that technologies reinforce the belief that foetus is a distinct ‘object’, not the part of women’s body, but grows in it as if the mother’s body is a container. Consequently, this feeling of “other” from her body and foetus force them to think over their bodily subjectivity. In this regard, as Alison Stone assumes that “To be a subject one must not have or live through experience, one must also *author* the meaning of that experience, and one must exercise some *autonomy* in doing so, departing from given horizons of meaning to regenerate new meaning adapted to one’s own situation and history.”<sup>303</sup> They see their subjectivity discounted from their bodies as an object, ‘the glass womb’ through the use of technologies which can be utilised for justifying the individual person’s existence—a foetus.

With impersonal instrumental treatment from medical science toward maternal body, women tend to feel depersonalised which is associated with alienation

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<sup>299</sup> As quoted by Rowland, 1992: 157.

<sup>300</sup> Pollack Petchesky, 1987: 62.

<sup>301</sup> Hadd, 1991: 172.

<sup>302</sup> Rolsalind Petchesky, 1984: 65.

<sup>303</sup> Stone, 2012: 2.

from their embodied subjectivity. It may be possible that her body shows different set of impressions, but under the control of medicine, she understands it opposite. There are some discomforts connected with pregnancies that even healthiest women may sometime experience, such as nausea, shortness of breath, but medical sciences diagnoses such signs as weaknesses of their bodies. The instrumental interventional orientation of practitioners leads to alienation of women in two ways— firstly, the use of normal procedures in a passive mode. It has been observed that hospitals do not allow women to walk during labour, usual horizontal posture for birth, but they prefer using intravenous equipment, monitors, and pain-relieving drugs to inhibit a women’s potential to move during parturition. Secondly, continuous use of reproductive instruments devalues women’s own procreative experiences. These procedures objectify and ignore woman’s personal unique knowledge and sensations of her body with foetus life which they had earlier, such as feeling of movements of foetus, uterus contractions, with immediacy and certainty that can’t be sharable. Now the uses of sonograms, fetal heart sensors, and fetal monitors undervalue this knowledge. In this manner, use of these instruments has reduced and replaced women’s experience more through such so called objective means.<sup>304</sup>

This alienation is further intensified since medical practitioners are usually males. It can be said that women can understand women’s bodily experience better than men. Men are unaware of women’s lived experience of their own bodies. Male practitioners may not be able to have that bond with their female patients which female practitioners can have. As Pellegrino and Thomasma propose, “Humanistic writers about medicine often suggest that a basic condition of good medical practice is that the physician and patient share the lived body experience.”<sup>305</sup> As already pointed out, pregnancy and parturition involve unique body subjectivity that is hard to explain to those who do not have such experience. Therefore, it would be better to have more women obstetricians to make up for this inadequacy.

Another kind of alienation that women experience is the hierarchical structure of seniors to juniors and subordinates in medical settings. Doctors maintain the authoritative relation by treating women as subordinate to them. As Young says, “ the relationship between doctor and patient is usually structured as superior to

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<sup>304</sup> Young, 2005: 58.

<sup>305</sup> Pethegrino and Thomasma, 1981: 114.



subordinate.”<sup>306</sup> They pretend that they know much better about women’s body than them. They have institutionalised medical profession in terms of increasing social authority, legal system with organised religion<sup>307</sup>. Doctors project themselves as perfect fatherly figures not ready to take any challenge to their expert opinions. Authoritarian dimension of doctor- patient relations further increases in gynaecology and obstetrics by the dynamics of gender dominance. In patriarchal societies, men have authoritative power of knowledge over women patients and objectification of body processes. All these aggressions of power are experienced by women as another form of gender power hierarchy.

Observing pregnant woman’s bodies from a self-certified objective, natural scientific perspective, being used to exchanging parts from the body of one person to the body of another person, divorced from feeling and emotions, medical practitioners become indifferent, and sometimes even hostile to the subjective experiences of their ‘patients’ or ‘clients’. Emily Martine remarks that “The body as a machine without a mind or soul has become almost familiar, but the body without the integrity of even its parts will necessarily lead to many readjustments in our conceptions of the self, and the shape that will emerge is far from clear.”<sup>308</sup> Practitioners of reproductive technologies, tend to get used to seen woman not as persons but as ‘uterine environment’, ‘wombs for rent’ and so on. Her ova can be used in other women or turned into embryos for some other women as if they are interchangeable organs available for sale or rent in the baby market. The establishment of various specialisations in hospitals and departments on the basis of women’s different body parts and reproductive requirements that indicates reduction of women to mere research objects for experimental work.

On the basis of the above, it would not be wrong to say that the medical sciences tend to treat women as less than persons that leads to their depersonalisation and alienation from their own maternal self. They may believe that they are fulfilling responsibility of providing proper care to needy women and helping in the advancement of research but this has deleterious consequences for their lives and their

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<sup>306</sup> Young, 2005: 59.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>308</sup> Martin, 1987: 20.

consciousness. Such women may be made to see themselves as they are victims of a false-consciousness promoted through patriarchal ideology.

#### **4.4 Challenges of Assisted Reproductive Technologies [ARTs]**

*“A conflict of discourses necessarily characterizes the arena of reproductive technology, where nothing is stable: scientific “information,” popular struggles both feminist and anti-feminist, and the shifting meaning of motherhood and womanhood for individuals with diverse ethnic, racial, religious, sexual, and migration histories are all under negotiation.”*

—Rayna Rapp<sup>309</sup>

Although reproductive technologies are often advertised as capable of providing solutions to any procreative problem, yet it is not true. Many women who go in for obtaining help for solving their problems for fulfilling their desire for becoming ‘blessed’ mothers have to face not only negative impact on their health but also live with the frustration of returning disappointed despite investing huge financial resources. Most of the clinics do not provide correct information about the rates of failure and the health hazards linked with the use of their services. They attract their clients by impressing them with the rosy pictures of their success.<sup>310</sup> Mass media is used by the promoters of reproductive technologies to publicise the ‘miraculous’ achievements and unprecedented successes. As a result, society at large is made to believe that these technologies are a ‘boon’ and funding agencies enthusiastically allocate resources for the establishment and developments of more advanced procreative arrangements. However, these coercive technologies are criticized by better informed. They shed light on various moral and social challenges that arise due to commercialisation, and proliferation of such medical clinics. These technologies promote essentialisation and medicalisation of motherhood, objectification of women, strengthening authoritative approach of medical professionals, and blind faith in technology that leads to an increase in women’s social vulnerability and further marginalisation in making their choices.<sup>311</sup>

Resistant feminists cite reasons for opposing ARTs which encourage and strengthen the desire for having one’s own genetic children, whatever be the cost.

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<sup>309</sup> Rayna Rapp, 1990: 30.

<sup>310</sup> Wolf, 2003: 38-41.

<sup>311</sup> Donchin, 1996: 1.

This supports chauvinism and pronatalism. It supports the idea that the happiness and fulfilment of women's life in having their own children which is intensely socially conditioned rather than a biological desire. Most of the women want to have children because it is the thing to do and feel 'misfit' if they fail to do it. A similar feeling may disturb a woman whose husband is infertile. But in both conditions, having children without a genuine desire can lead to suffering and a lack of care for the child. At the same time, in the absence of pronatalism, some women want child. They do not dare to remain voluntarily childless as it is necessary for the human survival. Others may think that the genetic link is necessary for the desire for children which has not rational basis. In this scenario, ARTs again intensify pressure on women to produce biological children rather than providing them free choices.

In India, a married woman has to live under enormous social, religious, moral and psychological pressures on her to become a mother. She is repeatedly asked and reminded that by becoming a mother, she will be fulfilling her spousal obligations and responsibility towards her husband and his family by giving birth to a male progeny, a heir for the family, and a harbinger of their salvation or emancipation. The lure of ARTs for infertile women can be understood in the matrix of social, cultural and religious value or significance of motherhood in traditional ways of life in India. Anjali Widge reports that "fertility defines womanhood and womanhood is defined by a woman's capacity to mother."<sup>312</sup> Having to live in such situations creates immense anxiety, frustration and pressure among women to do whatever possible to have a baby. No wife likes to face the humiliation of being accused of not performing the expected role of becoming the mother of her husband's child or children. For avoiding the trauma of humiliation, women would have no other option but to suffer perilous procedures of which promise them the solace of becoming a mother, if everything goes well. Exploiting women's fear and dreams, ARTs clinics are flourishing at the cost of women's health. Janice Raymond says "Technological reproduction has made medicalised access to the female body acceptable and medicalised abuse- that a woman will endure anything to become pregnant."<sup>313</sup> In other words, despite various unsuccessful attempts of using ARTs, women are left with no other choice but to wish to use it again and again for experiencing the bliss of procreation. The couples

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<sup>312</sup> Anjali Widge, 2002: 60-74.

<sup>313</sup> Raymond, 1998: 35.

repeatedly urge the physicians to fulfil their desire regardless of the economic, psychological, and bodily costs.

Contraceptive techniques are criticised by some feminists for their hazardous consequences for the health of women, such as hormonal disorders, physical and mental sickness and other disabilities. These technologies produce a wide range of side effects which women are not cautioned about when they are prescribed the use of such contraceptive technology. Women are socially coerced to use these and do not have much choice to reject such options. In a patriarchal society, it is women who have to risk their life instead of the joys and pleasures of men. Men continue to have full control over women's life and bodies and set their fundamental role in the family i.e. procreation. Being trained to solely identify with this role, a woman is ready to suffer anything to perform it. Reproductive technologies buttress such an ideology and take benefit out of it in the sense that practitioners of ARTs often neglect or reject the complaints of women for the sake of mere profit measures. The success rates of various ARTs are only 10-15 per cent. They put women's health at serious risk. According to a SAMA research survey study, women often change their clinics with the hope of a more appropriate treatment but the success rate was often not satisfactory. Three among five had miscarriages after two, four and five month of pregnancy because of treatment failure which is blamed as their failure and not of ARTs.<sup>314</sup>

These procedures have raised many unanswered moral questions and ethical dilemmas. To cure or overcome the condition of childlessness or infertility, the ARTs clinics offer several choices or options to the couples approaching them for help. Surrogacy, IVF, IUI, ID, GIFT and ICSI are among the main methods offered by fertility clinics. Cases of infertility related to low sperm count or issues related to women's age problems are referred to approach donor bank for acquiring sperms or eggs which may turn out to be quite expensive. Use of such therapies open many challenging ethical and legal issues for aspiring parents, children, surrogate and donors. The issue of determining real father(in case of donor sperms) and real mother (in case of surrogate or donor eggs) becomes problematic. ARTs are propagated as promising to assist needy families in having their 'own' children. But do these parents

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<sup>314</sup> SAMA, 2006: 45.

really get their own children? If not, why one should not go for ‘adoption’ instead of ARTs? More so, when so many children are available for adoption, and adoptions do not result in any dangerous side effects on the bodies of adopting mothers. Gimenez points out “Arts has the potential to alter relationships and result in several possible kinds of woman-child relations: genetic, gestational and social.”<sup>315</sup> Though most of the ARTs clinics are opened in the name of helping the infertile couples to have children of their ‘own’, it would not be wrong to say that their main interest is in the profit that they can make. These clinics offer their services in unregulated and unmonitored market conditions. No wonder that poor people are constrained to sell their services to the clients of these clinics in the name of providing altruistic services for needy helpless unfortunate couples.

Some commentators on ARTs such as Ronald Dwarkin, Margaret Atwood, Rowland and Stanworth have noted that ARTs has contributed to the “deconstruction of motherhood”<sup>316</sup> These technologies are decomposing mothers into “ovarian mother, uterine mother, and social mother.”<sup>317</sup> This fracturing of motherhood disembodies women and destroys their integrity, liberty, sovereignty and places the procreation in the hands of profit making firms dealing with medicine and technology. This practice marks the flourishing of patriarchy in an unprecedented manner because medical science has been used by men to develop a greater control over women as mother.<sup>318</sup>

It is evident that younger women have comparatively better chances of successful conception and fewer complications in comparison to older women. Old women have high risk of miscarriages, stillborn birth, hormonal imbalances, caesarean sections and postpartum hemorrhage in comparison to younger women.<sup>319</sup> The ethical problem is that women going in for ARTs are not informed about the complications they may have to suffer because of their age or other health factor. Most of the women going in for ARTs are not capable of comprehending the medico-technical and legal language for filling the ‘Informed’ consent Form’ before being admitted for treatment. Sometimes these forms are signed by the husband on behalf of the women. Doctors hardly give appropriate time or provide counselling to explain

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<sup>315</sup> Gimenez, 1991: 334-350.

<sup>316</sup> Stanworth, 1987: 10-35.

<sup>317</sup> Rowland, 1992: 32.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>319</sup> Raymond, 1993: 56.

what the ‘patient’ is going to get. They give high-pitch publicity to justify and defend success rates of ARTs rather than providing correct information to patients about the failure rates and other complications and hazards of ARTs.

The proliferation of ARTs industries has resulted in severe health complications and hazards in women’s lives. A woman’s body only is treated only as a mindless reproductive machine for production of ‘perfect’ babies. The fertility clinics conceal the lack of certainty in the efficient and successful use of ARTs by presenting it as a sure boon for curing the disease of infertility. All procreative options for subjugated women end at the door step of miraculous ARTs. This is achieved by claiming to assist patients and finally calling the negative results as the play of fate or the will of God. Force of circumstance does not allow a woman make a choice of either remaining childless or going for an adoption. She has to accept ARTs as only way ahead destiny irrespective of its side effects, complications of procedure, and possibilities failure. The glamour and lure of ARTs industries entices childless couples to alter all pre-established norms, relations and perspectives for regulation of reproduction. Availability of fertility clinics and their fascinating appeals through mass media are continuously transforming common people towards procreative options by introducing new ways and ideologies of motherhood, though they claim to be saving people from childlessness. Heteronormative parenthood is reinforced through the rejection of voluntary reconciliation with childlessness or taking recourse to adoption for having a child.

There is the urgency of initiating a movement for highlighting the need of a comprehensive and effective legislation to ensure an accurate, transparent use of ARTs which must enable women to make informed individual choices without any pressure, constraints or lack of adequate information. This can be achieved only by legislating explicit, unambiguous and effective laws and guidelines to make ARTs service providers fully responsible and culpable for any harm or damage they may cause to their women clients who make use of their services and actions. According to SAMA research group of women and health report, doctors themselves admitted government guidelines are impractical and not legally binding.<sup>320</sup> Director of Medical Education, C. R. Maity stated that, “Artificial reproductive clinics in the city were

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<sup>320</sup> SAMA, 2006: 34-78.

registered as ordinary clinics till recently, which is why the government knows so little about them. We admit to the glaring lapses in the system.”<sup>321</sup>

Apart from this, these technologies distort the perception of one’s personhood that needs to be reconceptualised. Medical sciences place more focus on the foetus as a person rather than women’s personhood. Women personhood and right to autonomy is undermined in relation to the protection of the foetus. As Rosalind Petchesky appeal that “reconceptualise foetus [and] placing back in the uterus, the uterus back in the womb in the woman’s body, and her body back in the social space.”<sup>322</sup> This is the only way women can claim their dignity and autonomy as persons in society. An acceptance of women as persons at par with men is necessary for changing their status and value in the patriarchal world.

Through the above discussion on women’s choice and the use of reproductive technology, I have attempted to critically analyse the institutionalisation and commercialisation of reproductive technology and its deleterious effect on women’s life. In patriarchy, motherhood is not just a biological function, but a matter of social status or its denial for being a woman. Due to such idealisation of maternity women are coerced to undergo precarious ARTs procedures. Defenders of ARTs argue that these procedures are helping women in achieving their desired wish for procreation. However, it seems that instead of helping women, these technologies result in their enslavement as they further strengthen patriarchal norms. They remain mere objects of men’s sexual desires and providers of sons for their salvation. Due to this reason, they become depersonalised, alienated, and fragmented beings whose primary work is to fulfil social needs at the cost of and risk to their life. I have attempted to show that the use of ARTs complicates inter-personal relations when the donor sperms and eggs are used for fertility treatment. Such technologies, subservient to patriarchal social power relations between men and women, subjugate women all the more. In this scenario, I can say that women’s procreative choices may seem to be free choices, but it is not true. These ‘choices are controlled and influenced by patriarchal ideology in which man-made reproductive technology has started to play an important role by promoting the view that ARTs can enable women to perform their essential duty of motherhood by helping them to overcome their natural or biological deficiencies

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Donchin. 1996: 447.

which disable or obstruct them from becoming mothers. Since motherhood is not the biological destiny of women but a matter of personal and ethical choice to be exercised by a woman in social situations, we would do well to question the dehumanising unethical consequences of the uncontrolled commercial use of these technologies.



## Concluding Remarks

Looking back, I can say with some feelings of satisfaction, achievement and hope that this project for writing the thesis for Ph.D. has finally come to a completion for submission. It is clear to me that the present decision does not mean moving an arbitrary closure to the work that I have been engaged in over the years. It is a statement of my acceptance that a fresh beginning has to be made to deal with new issues that I have identified for further investigation and analysis. It strengthens my initial hope that an engagement in bioethics from feminist perspectives is a worthwhile pursuit. In many ways, working on this project has been a significant learning experience for me as a student of philosophy, feminism and bioethics. Before undertaking this project, I used to believe that the world of concrete particulars can be easily comprehended and articulated with the help of abstract universals. Therefore, in discussions of philosophical issues pertaining to ethics and social philosophy, I would tend to approach concepts and theories from an essentialist and idealist perspective. I would feel tempted to search for ideals that should be categorical, universal, fundamental, and preferably final or ultimate. Working on this project proved to be not an easy task as I had imagined. I had to struggle to unlearn some of the lessons of my past training. This was a demanding task as I came to learn from the writings of various contemporary feminist philosophers, thinkers and activists that our lives may have similarities and resemblances, but they are never identical, not always the same. My readings of texts relevant to my work during the period of my research made me more aware of the conceptual, foundational and interdisciplinary, and a definitive but a tentative character of philosophical investigations. This new awareness of the goals, issues and methods of philosophical inquiry has opened new horizons for my thinking.

As I mentioned in the introduction, I had set for myself a few aims and objectives for my study. My main aim was to explicate both the shortcomings and power of patriarchal ideology and its rhetoric by which maternal subjectivity of women has been negated and objectified by positing the myth of an essential maternal self. I wanted to explore the possibility of rethinking or revisiting the received concepts and theories of choice and coercion or oppression as expounded from

feminist perspectives so that it may be possible for us to think afresh of ways in which women can enhance the domain of reproductive choices for themselves, and launch effective struggles against their oppression and exclusion from the public sphere according to concrete local and global conditions. My aims included an exploration of the ways in which patriarchal practices and new reproductive technologies converge in using rhetoric to influence, regulate and control women's procreative functions for serving the cause of male domination in patriarchal cultures, and commercial interests of the medical research corporations mainly controlled by men.

Rhetorical uses of language are multidimensional, complex and dynamic elements in the ongoing human discourses ever since the beginning of human civilisations. Human discourses have evolved in a dialectical manner, recalling, envisaging, creating and responding to changes in living conditions due to ever increasing growth of new knowledge and skills, new forms of work, changes in social practices with the emergence of new structures of power and authority impacting ethics of interpersonal relations. We use our linguistic skills and engage in conversations, dialogues and arguments to persuade one another about the validity, correctness, truth and goodness of the ideas, principles and perspectives that we are putting forward for consideration, acceptance and approval of the other(s). For the very possibility of human communication to be efficacious, it is a presupposition of logic and ethics of human communication that we must mean what we say/write. This norm may not be followed by many of us some of the times, but its universal violation will result in the very collapse of the practice of human discourse. The moral of the story is : speak the truth always, do not tell lies. Be prepared to face criticism and disapproval if you do not follow the norms of truth and goodness. The distinction between 'good' and 'bad' rhetoric is drawn to disapprove the use of 'bad' rhetoric in persuading others of the merits of the proposed principle or perspective. This was the first lesson that I was reminded of while working on the first chapter of the thesis. However, as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill had cautioned, and many other philosophers have similarly done so, human beings are tempted to commit, to use G.E. Moore's famous phrase, 'naturalistic fallacy', i.e. choosing to justify and defend what is usually being done in one's community or culture by insisting that this is what ought to be done, what must be done. This temptation comes easily to those who are, or think, rightly or wrongly, that they are, beneficiaries of the ongoing practices.

Instead of listening to reason, and accepting the wrongness of prevalent practices, history of philosophy is replete with instances of use of rhetoric for defending what has been seen and accepted as usual, and natural. Abundance of arguments in favour of universality and inevitability of patriarchy can be seen as an unhappy illustration of the naturalist fallacy.

Procreation of new generations of human beings has been a necessary precondition for the very survival, continuity and regeneration of human life. The role of women as mothers, giving birth to children, and taking care of them has been common in all societies, past and present. Biological production is a natural process. In the history of emergence and evolution of human cultures and civilisations, this natural process was gradually metamorphosed in to a social and cultural affair subject to norms, obligations, prohibitions and taboos. This transformation was the beginning of patriarchy and subjugation of women, domination of men in controlling and regulating social life, including the life of women. It was no longer left to women to choose and decide when and with whom they wanted to mother their child. It was the prerogative of their parental family to decide whom they would be married to, and later the decisions of their husbands and in-laws would regulate and govern their lives. Religious scriptures stipulated the divine sanctions for the confinement of women to their reproductive responsibilities. I have analysed justificatory and explanatory accounts of the origin and stabilisation of patriarchy and also provided critiques of the same from a feminist perspective in the second chapter of this thesis. I have shown that even if patriarchy emerged and evolved during a specific stage or period of human history, it has no justification to continue as its practices are unethical. Patriarchal ideology and its practices are based on the alleged fact of inferiority of women in comparison to men. By denying women their subjectivity and control over their reproductive agency, patriarchy creates and promotes a false view that the natural, essential and ideal role of women is to devote themselves exclusively to becoming good mothers and confining themselves to the domestic sphere to look after their children and families.

The dynamic character of the institutions and experiences of motherhood demands a constant reconsideration and re-appraisal of competing alternative perspectives on motherhood time and again. There are various facets of motherhood

that can be often mutually conflicting and result in contestations over the role, and significance of motherhood in lives of women in different situations. A fundamental issue that has dominated various debates on motherhood is whether it is a matter of choice or coercion. Patriarchy provides rhetorical answers to this question with the aim of essentialising and idealising motherhood for women. Feminist critiques of patriarchy aim at making it an issue of choice for women as they believe that present practices, prevalent all over the globe, explicitly or implicitly coerce women to become mothers. In the present study, an attempt has been made to understand the rhetorical character of arguments for and against the conflicting views; whether women choose to become mothers or they are coerced to become mothers. I had the opportunity of conducting phenomenological case studies of the lived experiences of women as mothers, expectant mothers and potential mothers for writing a paper for a conference on motherhood. My interviews with these women made it amply clear that there is much more to the experience of mothering than what we hear or read in the public discussions about the topic in the media or general conversations. In these personal and confidential conversations, my subjects shared with me their mixed and varied feelings of conflict, ambivalence, fear, apprehension, compulsion, coercion, disapproval, condemnation, seclusion, isolation, depression, being abandoned, frustration, anger, disappointment, hope, joy, and delight about their experiences of mothering or their hopes for mothering. It became evident to me, during the conduct of these phenomenological case studies, that patriarchal ideology is so deeply ingrained in our psyche that neither men nor women are free of it, irrespective of the level of their education or caste-class background or ideological orientation. A mind-set relatively more free of patriarchal thinking and acting may be possible only when both men and women learn to cooperate through working together for pursuing and achieving common human goals for human well being, consciously making an effort to help each other from becoming victims of gender prejudices and prevailing gender hierarchies. The task of a philosophical study of motherhood, from a phenomenological perspective on motherhood as an experience and institution of women's oppression, is to lay bare the prejudices underlying ideational structures which inform our experiences and understanding of motherhood. I propose to continue pursuing this project further in future.

During the last fifty years or a little more, human reproduction has become a subject of intensive medical research and technological intervention in a big way. Inventions and expansion of new reproductive technologies have provided unforeseen facilities, opportunities and services for controlling and regulating human reproduction through researches in the areas of conception, contraception, infertility, IVF, pregnancy, abortion, artificial insemination, genome sequencing and so on. The major achievement of these reproductive technologies is to separate the natural link between sexuality and reproduction. This separation seems to have opened seemingly miraculous possibilities for women to become mothers and reproduce without engaging in sexual relations with men. This separation between reproduction and sexuality has also made it possible for men and women to explore and indulge their sexuality without any fear of impregnation of women. It may be noted here that though the medical-technological discourse is about human reproduction and sexuality, it is women who are directly affected by these technologies in male dominated patriarchal societies. I have attempted to show in the fourth chapter of the thesis that most of these technologies do not respect women as human subjects but treat them no better than mere bio-medical bodies for their instrumental and medical invasions. For the medical experts engaged in research or reproductive health care in maternity hospitals, women as persons do not exist, their subjectivity does not matter. Despite the dangerous side-effects on women's health due to use of chemicals and drugs, implantations or instrumental invasions, exposure to radio-active procedures of clinical observation in these maternity hospitals, women are usually not properly or adequately informed about what they are going in for. Their consent for 'treatment' is obtained without providing them information which must be provided for obtaining 'informed consent'. Commercialisation of reproductive services in such clinics and hospitals has also added to the dehumanisation and objectification of women through fragmentation of their body parts for 'expert' attention when women seek help from such clinics and hospitals. It is mostly men who are in positions of authority on the basis of their special knowledge and expertise, and they lack an empathetic capacity to understand women's difficulties and problems. Such an attitude of indifference or hostility towards women's subjectivity can be a result of the fact that these technologies and medical facilities have been developed not in a response to women's need and demands but to serve the interests of medical research community and the business interests of those who set up maternity hospitals and clinics. Some feminists

have campaigned against the development and use of such technologies by forcefully propagating that neither women need such technologies nor did they ever ask for the same.

Given the rampant gender- inequalities within families and society at large, and asymmetries of power relations among men and women, medical experts and patients, policy planners and common citizens, providers and users of reproductive technologies, it is apprehended that with the spread and acceptance of such technologies, there is a great threat to women's control over their own bodies. With the import of more advanced technologies in these non-modern traditional societies, women are likely to become greater victims of new controls over their minimal or already missing reproductive freedom. It may also be further relevant to note that even in modern western societies of Europe and North America, it is only a very small segment of privileged women who may be really in a position to exercise their reproductive choice or freedom. In the various international conferences organised under the ambit of the United Nations, the issue of reproductive rights of women as a human right has been a subject of intensive debate. Women's 'reproductive rights', from a feminist perspective, are rightly understood not in terms of women's sexual freedom but in terms of the availability of real choices for women to have the freedom 'to birth or not to birth'. It has been emphasised in these conferences that one important goal of the women's movements for reproductive rights is to make men and women aware of the issues and concerns to human reproduction so that women can gain access to relevant medical information so that women become capable of informed choices about safe reproduction. In these conferences, supporters of women's reproductive rights have strongly argued that reproduction is a fundamental human right in the sense that neither the state nor any other group, community, institution or individual should be allowed to deny or interfere in a woman's autonomy over her reproductive processes. As a person, a woman must not be denied her freedom to assert or affirm her reproductive agency as she may like to choose.

I have discussed the differences of views among 'embracing' and 'resistance' feminists about their approach to the reproductive technologies in view of the divergence in their perceptions over the future impact of these technologies on the lives of women in particular and social life in general. If I was asked to choose strictly

between these two approaches, I will not like to join the camp of the embracing feminists. I am well aware of the disastrous and hazardous consequences of consumerist spread and irrational use of various technologies which are a threat to the very survival of life on our planet. However, I have suspicions about the effectiveness of the agenda of a complete rejection of technology in general, and new technologies of reproduction in particular. In my view, it may not be a technology per se but its use and consequences which can be positive or negative for human well being and quality of life. But I am also aware that it may not be within our human capacity to anticipate all the possible consequences of our actions well in advance. Technological innovations are a small part of human actions, and same holds true of our engagements in technological research as in other spheres of human activities. Therefore, it may not be fair to take an extreme position and oppose all technologies lock stock and barrel. I think that we have to deal with these questions not in isolation but in the larger context of political-economy where we need find ways to put checks and balances on pursuit of undue profit and domination. It may be more appropriate to support the resolution passed at the FINRRAGE Conference in Sweden:

“We seek a different kind of science and technology that respects the dignity of woman kind and all life on earth. We call upon women and men to break the fatal link between mechanistic science vested industrial interests and to take part with us in the development of a unity of knowledge and life.”

Women need to come together to share among themselves their experiences of their sexuality, which is largely repressed, and often exploited in male dominated patriarchal societies. They must develop the courage to start speaking about the unspoken, to talk about the taboo topics. They need to come forward to discuss their experiences of gender discrimination in their early childhood. Perhaps both men and women have to come together to break the barriers of patriarchal prejudices to make it possible that women are not victims rhetorically enforced motherhood and to learn to celebrate motherhood as a matter of their free choice, for the joy of celebration of life not as an empty ritual but as an active self-conscious chosen engagement.

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