

**Woman as the ‘Other’: Analysis of Philosophy of Simone de
Beauvoir in *The Second Sex***

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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Introduction

Although, a lot has been written on feminism in recent times, writers have provided information on women's condition and given their interpretation of it, but the kind of systematic analysis that Beauvoir has done in *The Second Sex* is the foremost theoretical work of its kind. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir has analysed the feminine situation from an existential-phenomenological perspective and has frequently used the Hegelian master-slave dialectic for her analysis.

Beauvoir began her work on *The Second Sex* in 1946, this was the time when majority of French women were still being compelled into becoming wives and mothers, had little control over their own pregnancies and expression of their sexuality, were not able to be financially autonomous and were discriminated against in the job market.

The Second Sex focuses on how femininity has been constructed and how women 'become' 'vassals'¹ in a patriarchal society. Its main argument is that patriarchy has constructed 'woman' as man's Other and denied access to an authentic autonomous existence. Men have secured positions which makes them solely responsible for all aspects of public life and respectively women have been confined to a marginalised position in society due to which they are made to support male interests. Beauvoir argues that man has assumed the position of universal subject, and woman is relegated to relative 'Other', or object of male consciousness. Society is consequently structured to perpetuate patriarchal ideology and women are kept in an inferior position. This persistence of patriarchal ideology throughout history has enabled men to believe that they are entitled to maintain women in a subordinate state and women have internalised and adapted to this oppressed situation. Beauvoir argues that both men and women maintain patriarchy, which is why it is able to continue. Sexual oppression

¹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.29

continues because, according to Beauvoir, gender roles are learned from the very earliest age and reinforced continuously. The famous expression that opens the second volume of *The Second Sex*, ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman²’, means that there is no inherent female nature or essence. Here, Beauvoir adapts existentialism’s notion of ‘existence precedes essence’ to the ways in which gendered identity is experienced. There appears to be distinct and determining masculine and feminine identities because society has traditionally organised itself according to a sexual apartheid or separation, embedded in men’s and women’s different biological make-up and reproductive roles. For example, the fact that, to a lesser or greater degree in the world, patriarchal societies traditionally value women’s reproductive capacity more than her intellect, means that laws, institutions and belief systems reflect this view of women’s role in society. Beauvoir accepts that there are certain physiological and biological differences between women and men. A common misreading of *The Second Sex* is that she does not recognise sexual differences.

In fact, Beauvoir recognises sexual difference, but does not accept that the valuing of these differences between women and men should validate the oppression of women and their traditional status as second rate citizens in patriarchal society. For Beauvoir, society is structured in such a way as to favour male projects and aspirations. The obvious question which arises is: How did such a system come into being? In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir provides a thorough survey of the origins and perpetuation of the patriarchal oppression of women. She explains that, since the beginning of social organisation, men, as physically stronger beings, were better adapted to heavy physical work, they were involved in hunting, fishing and defending the tribe. Women were involved in domestic work and raising children. Men consequently had more freedom to invent systems of thought and social and political organisation because they did not bear children. These conceptual, social and political systems then developed to favour male interests rather than society’s interests as a whole. Women have been compelled to adapt to this patriarchal system, which maintains them in a

² De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.330

subordinate condition. Beauvoir argues that women have been associated with their body and sex and traditionally confined to the roles of wife and mother. Marriage and motherhood, as a result, have been advocated as the most important roles for women in society and this has been inscribed in the laws, customs, beliefs and culture of society. As a result, women have been traditionally prevented from working in the public sphere and, hence, have been compelled to depend on a male wage earner to ensure their sustenance and that of their children. Women have adapted to this state of affairs in a variety of ways which reflects 'inauthenticity' to a lesser or greater extent. Beauvoir argues that the way forward for women is to pursue economic independence through productive work and through a socialist organisation of society, which would favour women's emancipation and autonomy.

If we were to summarise her text in two themes, it would be:

- woman is the absolute Other; and
- femininity is constructed.

Beauvoir's analysis of the woman's situation in *The Second Sex* from an existential phenomenological perspective is based on certain key ideas. I would give a brief explanation of those key terms as it would help us in understanding *The Second Sex* more effectively.

Existentialism: Existentialists claim that human beings have no predetermined purpose or essence established by God or nature. They are responsible for forming their lives according to their own values, by reflecting clearly on their situation and relationships and by acting authentically by freely chosen acts. If existentialism could be summarised in four words, they might be 'freedom', 'responsibility', 'authenticity', 'situation'.

Phenomenology: Phenomenology is concerned with analysing the perceptual interaction between people (or consciousnesses) and the world. It focuses especially on how we know what we know about the world through analyzing our respective

'lived experiences' of the world. Phenomenology views all knowledge of the world as 'situated', or related to the perceiving consciousness and context of the given moment.

Freedom: Freedom lies at the very foundation of being, every human being is free, but this freedom is also a cause of 'angst' (anguish) because it constitutes great responsibility. Hence, a person can choose to live authentically by confirming oneself as freedom or in bad faith by fleeing from it.

Situation: In Beauvoir's thought, 'situation' refers to the way a human being as an individual consciousness is engaged in the world with other people, to time, to space and to other products of their facticity. My 'situation' is not something outside or around me, but the glue which binds my freedom and my facticity together. A non-situated consciousness is thus impossible. A key point to be noted is Beauvoir's idea that there exist situations in which a human being can achieve their concrete freedom, and other situations in which freedom and one's faculty for action are severely restricted.

Facticity: Facticity refers to those aspects of one's situation which they have not chosen- for example, the facts of my birth, my body, the existence of other people, my death – and that I cannot choose not to accept as part of my situation.

Transcendence: Transcendence refers to the course of action by which human beings go beyond a given state of affairs towards a further project.

This dissertation aims to explicate Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* and see what she contributes to our knowledge of woman's experience. The dissertation would be divided in three chapters. Chapter one would begin by outlining the main aspects of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic and the way in which Beauvoir has applied it to her analysis of women's situation. Chapter two would evaluate the sources of woman's oppression. The master-slave dialectic permeates Beauvoir's account of woman's oppression, it shows how the category of 'Otherness' and man as a creative

laborer and as one who risks his life, in contrast to woman as a life giver, became superior. It would begin by analysing woman from a biological, psychoanalytical, and historical materialist point of view and then evaluate female development from birth to maturity and learn how she becomes the Other. Chapter three would evaluate her view of woman's emancipation which too has its roots in the master-slave dialectic as she claims 'collective' work to be prerequisite for woman's liberation.

CHAPTER I

Hegelian Ideas in *The Second Sex*

PART I

The Hegelian Master-Slave Dialectic

Beauvoirs's philosophy in *The Second Sex* derived its inspiration from Hegel amongst others in order to analyse how and why woman became the Other. It was Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit* which had the greatest influence on Beauvoir's thought amongst his other works and in particular the master-slave dialectic. The master-slave dialectic is a concept which appears in Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, in his account of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is the feature which sets aside human beings from other things in the world. Hegel introduced the notion of 'alterity', or otherness in his *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, as the necessary condition for the existence of self-consciousness. Each self-consciousness requires the recognition of the Other, then, to achieve self certainty. This self-certainty is achieved through a process, the 'master-slave dialectic' arises at an early stage of this process. Hegel's 'master-slave dialectic' has influenced as we will see much of Beauvoir's analysis in *The Second Sex*. In this chapter I will set out the main aspects of the master slave dialectic relevant to the understanding *The Second Sex*.

For Hegel men, unlike animals, are self-conscious. A necessary condition of this self-consciousness is desire for it is this which forces man to act, to negate the given in accordance with his wishes, and which reveals man to himself as an "I". The complicatedness with desire, however, is that it involves the obliteration of the object, but once this object is destroyed, the subject has nothing over which to exert its sovereignty. The subject must therefore find itself another object to destroy, and this process would go on, leading to an obviously empty regress.

Because the desire for recognition and the self-certainty obtained in its fulfilment, are conditioned by the object, this other needs to be superseded, in order for this supersession to take place, the other must be there. But self-consciousness because of

its negative relation to the object, is unable to supersede it; it is because of this relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well³.

However, Hegel claims, this difficulty is ultimately resolved when self-consciousness finds the world as having other self-consciousnesses and identifies itself in them, then the subject is no longer faced by complete otherness, where only by negating the world can the subject find itself in it. Hegel asserts, each self-consciousness must acknowledge the other as an autonomous subject, "as something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore, it cannot utilize for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord do what the first does to it."⁴ Moreover, each self-consciousness must also realize and accept that its well-being and identity as a subject is bound up with how it is seen by the other self-consciousness. If this recognition is mutual, Hegel argues, then neither side need fear that by acknowledging the other and feeling itself bound to it it has lost itself:

"Each sees the other do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same. Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both."⁵

Mutual recognition, however, can't be established at this stage of self-consciousness because the single self-consciousness is not yet able to achieve a stable sense of its own identity in the face of the other self-consciousness. At this stage "it will exhibit the side of the inequality of the two, or the splitting-up of the middle term into the extremes which, as extremes, are opposed to one another, one being only recognized, the other only recognizing."⁶

As said above, the difficulty with desire is that the annihilation of the object leads to the re-emergence of desire. The subject then turns from objects to other subjects in order to resolve this difficulty because other subjects do not need to be destroyed in

³ Hegel, G.W.F.(1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Trans. By A.V.Miller. Oxford university press. P.109

⁴ *Ibid*, P.112

⁵ *Ibid*, P.112

⁶ Hegel, G.W.F.(1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Trans. By A.V.Miller. Oxford university press P.112-113

order to be superseded. Thus, “self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.”⁷ Man sees himself as a sovereign subject but this remains within himself as belief unless it can find objective expression in the recognition of another separate yet identical being. To achieve affirmation of the certainty of its existence, self-consciousness needs to be recognised as such by another self-consciousness: “self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged.”⁸ But such recognition also represents a threat as in this confrontation of Self and Other, both want recognition of their sovereignty, the total destruction of their own object status and hence the destruction of the Other, so from this confrontation of two self-conscious a life and death struggle ensues. Although each of us knows that we are subjects, we need to persuade the other that we are, for otherwise we may be seen as merely living beings without subjecthood, and so fall short of the recognition we require: “One individual is confronted by another individual. Appearing thus immediately on the scene, they are for one another like ordinary objects, independent shapes, individuals submerged in the being [or immediacy] of Life – for the object in its immediacy is here determined as Life. They are, for each other, shapes of consciousness which have not yet accomplished the movement of absolute abstraction, of rooting-out all immediate being, and of being merely the purely negative being of self-identical consciousness; in other words, they have not as yet exposed themselves to each other in the form of pure being-for-self, or as self-consciousnesses.”⁹ Each self-consciousness then tries to exhibit itself as pure ‘being-for-itself’, or pure existence, with no attachment to vulnerable material objects, such as its own body or the body of the Other. A struggle for life or death is embarked upon to demonstrate this lack of attachment to materiality and thus to prove his/her active universality. So the initial mode of engagement between these two self-consciousnesses is not recognition of each other, but conflict, caused by existential fear and need (for recognition). This conflict between self and Other cannot, of course, end in death because such an outcome would destroy all possibility of recognition. Thus the fight ends when one

⁷ Ibid, P.110

⁸ Ibid, P.111

⁹ Ibid, P.113

opponent's fear of death forces him to submit; his preference for basic animal life to that of his own extinction leads him to surrender his previous notions of himself and he recognises without being recognised in return. It is in this way that there arises a master and a slave.

The master by risking his life and winning his freedom has asserted his being-for-self over his existence as an object. It is for this reason that the fight for recognition is, in Hegelian terms, the most fundamental way for a subject to display its status as a subject to another, and hence to achieve recognition for its subjecthood:

"The presentation of itself, however, as the pure abstraction of self-consciousness consists in showing itself as the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is not attached to any specific existence, not to the individuality common to existence as such, that it is not attached to life... Thus the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle. They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being for themselves to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case. And it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; and thus it is proved that for selfconsciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the immediate form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure being-for-self."¹⁰

For Hegel, it appears, the fight for recognition is the first truly human action in that it contradicts man's animal urge for self-preservation.

The slave has not, however, confirmed his humanity by risking his life. To him slavery appeared better than death and he preferred to accept the life given to him by another. In his own and others' view of him, the slave is simply an animal or thing; he is no more than a being-for-others. The master is the victor in the fight for recognition. But this is a victory devoid of satisfaction as it does not fulfil his original desire for recognition. The recognition he gains from the slave is not that of a fellow human

¹⁰ Hegel, G.W.F.(1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Trans. By A.V.Miller. Oxford university press, P. 113-114.

being but that of a thing; it is a recognition which holds no value. So although on the one hand “here...is present this moment of recognition, viz. that the [slave] consciousness sets aside its own being-for-self,” on the other hand because “what the bondsman does is really the action of the lord... the outcome is a recognition that is one-sided and unequal.”¹¹ At the same time, Hegel argues that contrary to initial appearances, it is the slave that “will withdraw into itself and be transformed into a truly independent consciousness.”¹²

Alexandre Kojève, in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, asserts “Mastery is an existential impasse.”¹³ The fight has not allowed the master to gain autonomy but has in fact made him dependent on the slave: others accept his status as master only by virtue of his possession of a slave and his biological existence is sustained by the products of the slave's work. The master's life becomes one of mere consumption of the products of the slave's work. In Hegelian terms this kind of immediate consumption can give some pleasure but it can never offer the lasting satisfaction which man desires. The master is in an "existential impasse": he has attained what he was prepared to die for but only to find that it is devoid of satisfaction. To attain satisfaction he would have to be recognised by another master, but as this contradicts the essence of mastery- death rather than recognition - this remains impossible. He is recognized by slave which is an animal or a thing for him. The Master, therefore, was on the wrong trail. After the conflict that made him a Master, he is not what he wanted to be in the beginning of that conflict: a man recognized by another man. Therefore, if man can be satisfied only by recognition, the man who behaves as a Master will never be satisfied. His existence is confined to a life and death struggles, his world is one where human dignity is accorded solely through wars of prestige. He cannot transcend this world, so he must remain master or die.

The slave's situation, on the contrary, is not one he actively desired but merely one his fear of death forced him to accept. The consequence of his subsequent slavery is

¹¹ Ibid, P. 116

¹² Ibid, P. 116-117

¹³ Kojève, Alexander (1947), *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Tran. By, James H. Nichols, jr. Cornell University Press. P. 46.

forced labour: He is bound to work for his master, to use his life working for the benefit of another. But paradoxically it is this which contains the germ of his liberation. In his mortal terror he understood that a given, fixed, and stable condition, even though it be the Master's, cannot exhaust the possibilities of human existence. He understood the vanity of the given conditions of existence. Through animal fear of death (Angst) the Slave experienced the dread or the Terror (Furcht) of Nothingness, of his nothingness. He caught a glimpse of himself as nothingness, he understood that his whole existence was but a "surpassed" "overcome" (aufgehoben) death¹⁴. It is through forced labour - that is, work carried on in terror of the master - that man learns to repress his natural instincts to satisfy his desires by immediate consumption. If this repression did not take place the raw object would never be changed, and man's material existence would be confined to what is naturally given: Work, on the other hand, is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing¹⁵. In changing his surroundings the slave also changes and educates himself. The product of work is the worker's production. It is the realization of his project, of his idea; hence, it is he that is realized in and by this product, and consequently he contemplates himself when he contemplates it: "that consciousness, qua worker, comes to see in the independent being [of the object] its own independence."¹⁶

Hegel emphasizes that all three of these elements – fear, service, and work on the world – must be present together. Work carried out against the worker's instinct or immediate desire, carried out in the service of another, and forced work, inspired by fear of death, is the only work which frees, transforms existence, makes it go beyond its initial state of terror, liberates one from the fear of death. The slave therefore realizes a different notion of self than that adopted by the master. In particular, the slave no longer sees the world as alien to it. Rather, in his work the slave labours for someone else's satisfaction of desire, and so learns to respect the autonomous existence of the objects around him, with which he finds he can work. Consciousness

¹⁴ Kojève, Alexander (1947), Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, Tran. By, James H. Nichols, jr. Cornell University Press ,P. 47

¹⁵ Hegel, G.W.F.(1977). Phenomenology of Spirit, Trans. By A.V.Miller. Oxford university press. P.118

¹⁶ Hegel, G.W.F.(1977). Phenomenology of Spirit, Trans. By A.V.Miller. Oxford university press. P.118

thus achieves a new notion of itself as an individual in the world, by now viewing that world as a place to which it is adjusted, not merely because it has diverse 'skills' that make it 'master over some things', but because it possesses 'universal formative activity' which gives it 'universal power' over 'the whole of objective being'¹⁷.

¹⁷ Ibid, P. 118-119.

PART II

Hegelian Concepts applied in *The Second Sex*

In this section I would explicate Beauvoir's application of the 'master-slave-dialectic' to her analysis of woman's situation.

A fundamental premise of *The Second Sex* is the Hegelian idea: "The subject posits itself only in opposition, it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as the inessential, as the object."¹⁸ In other words, Beauvoir claims that "Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought"¹⁹ and that there is a "fundamental hostility"²⁰ between existents. Beauvoir argues that the Other sets up a reciprocal claim to the status of sovereign subject, there is usually reciprocity between individuals and groups. For example, foreigners abroad view the inhabitants as 'Others' but they are ultimately forced to realise that they too are seen in this alien, hostile way; even in that of three travellers who share a compartment and make vaguely hostile 'others' out of all the other passengers on the train. Though, Beauvoir, maintains that there is a natural reciprocity between individuals and groups she claims that this is not true of the relation between man and woman. She argues that the two sexes cannot be viewed as polar opposites both with a claim to sovereignty, for man is defined as both male and neutral- the absolute human type and woman is defined in relation to him. Beauvoir quotes Aristotle, for example, "we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness."²¹ She refers to St. Thomas who regarded

¹⁸ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.27

¹⁹ Ibid, P. 16

²⁰ Ibid, P. 17

²¹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.15

woman as an "imperfect man", an "incidental being"²² and these are all definitions which in themselves illustrate de Beauvoir's notion that between man and woman "he is the subject, he is the Absolute-she is the Other."²³

Further, following Hegel, Beauvoir goes on to explain why humans can't be satisfied in relation to nature: either nature appears as a "purely abstract opposition", an "obstacle" and something which "remains foreign" or else "submits to man's desire and allows itself to be assimilated by him."²⁴ Nature can be possessed only by being consumed, being destroyed. Beauvoir states that the subject cannot assert himself until he meets an Other, who limits and denies him. According to her, "It is the existence of other men that tears each man out of his immanence and enables him to fulfil the truth of his being, to complete himself through transcendence."²⁵ The Hegelian influence becomes more evident in the following sentences:

"But this foreign freedom, which confirms my freedom, also enters into conflict with it: this is the tragedy of the unhappy consciousness; each consciousness seeks to posit itself alone as sovereign subject. Each one tries to accomplish itself by reducing the other to slavery. But in work and fear the slave experiences himself as essential, and by a dialectical reversal the master appears the inessential one."²⁶

That is to say, each self-consciousness attempts to confirm themselves as self-consciousness by proving to be such, to be not bound to nature, to life, and this led, via a life-and-death struggle, to a division between master and slaves, between an essential and independent consciousness and an inessential and dependent consciousness. However, given the fear of death and through work carried out to serve the master, the slave came gradually to experience himself as essential, came actually to attain a certainty as self-consciousness; conversely the master, confirmed by an inessential consciousness, and unformed by labour, found himself at an impasse.

²² Ibid, P. 15

²³ Ibid, P. 16

²⁴ Ibid, P. 193

²⁵ Ibid, P. 193

²⁶ Ibid, P. 193

Alike Hegel, Beauvoir as well, recognizes the potential for conflict in human relations, such as the occasional need for recourse to violence, she also puts forward a solution to this conflict in the possibilities of cooperation and solidarity which exist between people. She sets forward a relation based on reciprocal recognition and interdependence. Reciprocity is an important feature of self–Other relations for Beauvoir. It refers to a manner of relating to oneself and to others as both subject and object and as equal freedoms in the world :

The conflict can be overcome by the free recognition of each individual in the other, each one positing both itself and the other as object and as subject in a reciprocal movement²⁷.

However, this solution, the reciprocal recognition, requires certain presuppositions. It cannot be realized without "friendship and generosity", which are 'man's highest accomplishment" and "his truth"²⁸. Beauvoir emphasizes that this solution demands constant effort.

Therefore, Beauvoir's picture of the human condition is in accord with Hegel's, as he considers that in the process for recognition conflict is fundamental, but also that it can be transcended through mutual recognition.

The above is not about oppression of women. The unique nature of that oppression is reflected when Beauvoir reflects on the nature of man's relationship to woman and says that via this relationship man hopes to avoid his human conditions, i.e. the constant tension and conflict in the human relationship, the need of others and the concomitant risk of being subordinated:

"This embodied dream is, precisely, woman; she is the perfect intermediary between nature that is foreign to man and the peer who is too identical to him. She pits neither the hostile silence of nature nor the hard demand of a reciprocal recognition

²⁷ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.193

²⁸ *Ibid*, P. 193-194

against him; by a unique privilege she is a consciousness, and yet it seems possible to possess her in the flesh. Thanks to her, there is a way to escape the inexorable dialectic of the master and the slave that springs from the reciprocity of freedoms."²⁹

Beauvoir is saying here that man with respect to his relationship with woman, harbors the hope of achieving recognition without being part of this kind of dialectics; logically, therefore, woman has not engaged in a struggle for recognition, it is males who are confirmed as human, as self-consciousness, in relation to other males, males who become either masters or slaves and thus woman neither has become essential nor has had her self-consciousness confirmed. In other words, she remains at a more animal level. Woman has not raised a reciprocal demand for recognition.

Eva Lundgren-Gothlin in her *Sex and Existence* contends, Beauvoir is thus describing two different forms of otherness or alterity: one appropriate for men, the other for women³⁰. The master–slave conflict seeks to establish Self and Other among men, and the non-dialectical relationship of Self and absolute Other between men and women—a relationship based on their biological and psychological dependence on each other. So, while woman is ‘Other’ to man as universal subject, she is not the same type of ‘Other’ as other men against whom man seeks to assert himself.

The relationship between man and woman is, thus, unique as there is no other with which it may be compared. Neither as individuals or as groups do men and women challenge one another. Rather, Simone de Beauvoir asserts, they are a *Mitsein* within the collective :

"Male and female stand opposed within a primordial *Mitsein*, and woman has not broken it. The couple is a fundamental unity with its two halves riveted together, and the cleavage of society along the line of sex is impossible. Here is to be found the

²⁹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.194

³⁰ Lundgren-Gothlin, Eva (1996). *Sex and Existence*, Trans. By Linda Schenck. Athlone London. P.72

basic trait of woman: she is the Other in a totality of which the two components are necessary to one another."³¹

Again, Beauvoir regards the Hegelian idea of Otherness or Alterity as the cause for the origin of the inequality between the sexes. Arguing against Engel's explanation of the oppression of woman, according to whom private property marks the downfall of the female sex, she maintains:

"If the original relation between man and his peers had been exclusively one of friendship, one could not account for any kind of enslavement: this phenomenon is a consequence of the imperialism of human consciousness, which seeks to match its sovereignty objectively. Had there not been in human consciousness both the original category of the Other and an original claim to domination over the Other, the discovery of the bronze tool could not have brought about woman's oppression."³²

Even before the advent of private property there was no reign of woman or matriarchy as proposed by Engels that with private property comes 'the great historical defeat of the feminine sex'³³. Reciprocity between the sexes did not exist. Woman whenever she has been venerated it has been either as a mother or Goddess, woman was never equal or fellow of man, she was the Other. For man the other with whom he had reciprocal relationship has always been another male. The Self/Other duality of which Hegel speaks has never been there between man and woman: Society has always been male; political power has always been in men's hands ³⁴.

In short, Beauvoir, asserts that if we are to explain oppression, we need to supplement Engel's view with the Hegelian view. Although she regards productive activity as playing an important role, she sees the desire for recognition by the Other as more fundamental, which leads to man's domination of woman.

³¹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.19

³² *Ibid*, P. 83

³³ *Ibid*, P. 105

³⁴ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.105

While Beauvoir uses the Hegelian master-slave dialectic to explain the origin of oppression, she does not put man as master and woman as slave in this dialectic because there was no struggle for recognition between them, a fact that explains the unique nature of her oppression. Although the man is the master, the essential consciousness, in relation to woman, the woman is not a slave in relation to him. This makes their relationship more absolute and it explains why woman is the 'absolute Other'.

Beauvoir emphasis on the significance of violence in assertion of subjectivity also echoes the influence of the 'master-slave dialectic' on her work. Agreeing with Hegel, she says:

"The Master's privilege arises from the affirmation of Spirit over Life in the fact of risking his life: but in fact the vanquished slave has experienced this same risk, 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 her; Hegel's definition applies singularly to her. "The other [consciousness] is the dependent consciousness for which essential reality is animal life, that is, life given by another entity.""³⁵

Here, by referring to the first phase of the dialectic, where the master has proved himself as pure self consciousness by not having set life up as supreme, and where the slave is apparently the party for whom the significant reality is sheer survival, life. Beauvoir concludes that this phase of the master—slave dialectic is an excellent illustration of the relationship between the sexes. In the next phase of this dialectic, however, it turns out that the slave, who has experienced the fear of death, who has actually been engaged in the struggle although not prepared to go all the way, has taken a step away from the animal, a step he fulfils through his labour in the service of his master. But what applies to the slave does not apply to woman. In line with Hegel, Simone de Beauvoir, maintains that what an animal values most highly is its own life and the preservation of this life, while humans assert themselves as human by risking life. Thus, in the early days of humanity, man transcended mere animal life in his demands for recognition. Simone de Beauvoir states this explicitly in several passages; for example:

³⁵ Ibid, P.100

"The warrior risks his own life to raise the prestige of the horde—his clan. This is how he brilliantly proves that life is not the supreme value for man but that it must serve ends far greater than itself. The worst curse on woman is her exclusion from warrior expeditions; it is not in giving life but in risking his life that man raises himself above the animal; this is why throughout humanity, superiority has been granted not to the sex that gives birth but to the one that kills."³⁶

In other words, along Hegelian lines, Beauvoir argues that it is in risking one's life, humanity is asserted over animalism. The Hegelian principle of mastery, then, may be seen to underlie Beauvoir's notion of assertion of sovereignty.

Further, Beauvoir, inspired by Hegel's concept of labor, emphasizes the importance of work or productive activity for rational thinking and human development. Unlike the slave in the master-slave dialectic, who has experienced the fear of death, who has actually been engaged in the struggle although not prepared to go all the way, has taken a step away from the animal, a step he fulfils through his labour in the service of his master. But what applies to the slave does not apply to woman. Engels in his *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, argues, in primitive times with the discovery of tin, bronze, iron, copper and the invention of plough, agriculture expands; intensive labour is required to clear the forest and cultivate lands. Because of woman's muscular weakness she got restricted to inessential housework and her absence from the production process eventually lead to her social oppression. Whereas Beauvoir, objecting Engels, states woman is not just a worker, her reproduction function is as important as her productive activity, we have to go beyond historical materialism, which only sees man and woman as economic identities, to understand woman's oppression. She argues, in the preagricultural period, the burdens of reproduction, must have kept woman from participating actively in the production. Beauvoir adopting

³⁶ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.99

Hegel's concept of 'labour' considers giving birth and breast-feeding as not 'activities' but natural functions, they do not involve a project, which is why the woman can't find no incentive in it to claim a higher meaning for their existence; she passively yields to her biological destiny. Because housework alone is compatible with the duties of motherhood, she is condemned to domestic sphere, which confined her to repetition and immanence; the same life repeated itself day after day, this continued from century to century; it produced nothing new. Man's case is radically different. He provide for the group by acts that transcend his animal condition. He constantly produced new tools and expanded his grasp on the world by his continual conquest of the natural environment he realizes himself as existent, he realizes his humanity in them. Man has always transcended the given world.

It is evident from the above that Beauvoir adopting Hegel's concept of 'labour', which refers to conscious activity which results in some kind of object in which the individual is objectified, be it a tool, a building, a book, or a piece of music, thus does not regard the bearing or rearing of child as an activity as it is neither a conscious creation nor can one objectify oneself in the child as one can do in, for example, a hand made tool.

Beauvoir's views on domestic labor too upholds Hegel's concept of productive/creative labour. She asserts, woman's domestic labor has no positive results, she produces nothing and simply perpetuates the given. It gives her no sense of autonomy, doesn't transform her, doesn't externalize her self. Domestic labor is not only unsatisfying, it is technically 'rudimentary'³⁷, it keeps her in a primitive stage of consciousness. It doesn't give her any power/ autonomy as it doesn't involve any technique, she has to obey the physical laws: "One must obey fire, water, wait for the sugar to melt, for the dough to rise, and also for the wash to dry, for the fruits to ripen on the shelf."³⁸ Beauvoir argues, therefore,

³⁷ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.725

³⁸ *Ibid*, P.725

that woman tasks are "too monotonous" to teach her "the laws of mechanical causality."³⁹

While Beauvoir uses the master-slave dialectic to explain the inferiority of women, she simultaneously posits the differences between master-slave and man-woman. Though Beauvoir does not rigorously apply the master-slave dialectic, her analysis of woman's situation, however, cannot be understood without referring to it.

³⁹ Ibid, P.725

CHAPTER II

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR WOMEN'S SITUATION

PART I

BIOLOGY

In the first volume of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir examines how femininity is understood and represented. She focuses initially on three dominant theories of subjectivity and social relations in the 1940's France namely Biology, Psychoanalysis and Historical Materialism, to understand what it is to be a woman. She argues that all these theories are beneficial but that they are also inadequate as they leave certain values unproblematized. The bioscientific model takes as given the values of life and physical strength, the psychoanalytic model assumes the supreme value of the phallus, and historical materialism bases its explanations on the value of the tool. Beauvoir does not add new explanations to these three paradigms. Nor does she present a synthesis of them. Instead, she puts forward a radical investigation that questions the values forming the bases of theories of the relation between the sexes.

From the existentialist perspective, human being has no fixed nature, no essence, no determined way of being. This does not mean that biology, history, and culture are redundant in the context of what a human being may become, but such constituents of one's overall situation cannot determine which meanings, significances, and values will be chosen; meaning and value cannot remain fixed. One's biological sex may be experienced as a boon or a burden, one's skin color may be lived in pride or in shame, and one's social status may be lived in submission or revolt depending on their situation.

Beauvoir begins by focusing on biology because it was and remains a vital in theories of sexual difference. Rivals of feminism usually base their arguments on biological differences to defend sexual oppression. Reading *The Second Sex* today, it is important also to remember that it was written before French women had access to

legalised contraception and abortion and so heterosexual women had less control over their fertility than today.

Thus, Beauvoir presents the female body as a mere hindrance: being dominated by the cycles of menstruation, pregnancies, and nurturing, the female body puts severe limitations on the free choice and self-fulfilment of the woman.

The bioscientific considerations that Beauvoir introduces in *The Second Sex* are not the foundation of her concept of feminine embodiment. The biological facts of sexual reproduction are not represented naively and accepted, but are introduced for critical study. Beauvoir argues that philosophical inquiry into sexual oppression cannot just be founded on the values of life, procreation, or physical strength, it must further also include critical examination of these values. I argue that Beauvoir's notion of embodiment is a critical elaboration of the description of the living body (*corps vivant, corps vecu*) that she found in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. Through Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir was influenced by Edmund Husserl, the founder of the phenomenological movement. She states: "in the position I adopt—that of Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty—that if the body is not a *thing*, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and the outline for our projects."⁴⁰

Husserl in his *Ideas II* points out that we can relate to living bodies in two fundamentally different ways. On the one hand, we can take the attitude of the natural scientist and extract from the bodies all meaning, value, and purpose. Thus the bodies' positions and movements would then appear to us as mere effects of external and internal causes. We can then try to explain and predict their behavior by subsuming them under general laws. In the natural scientific attitude, we no longer experience human beings instead we experience merely 'physical things'. On the other hand, we can take the personalistic attitude, we can, and do, relate to living bodies as meaningful and purposeful agents. With this attitude, we don't explain or predict the behavior of others but respond to their movements and gestures. Such an attitude

⁴⁰ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.68

shows that the living body, our bodily gestures, postures, and movements, is an expression of psychic life. The organs and movements of our bodies form a unity similar to that of the chapters, paragraphs, and sentences of a book. Husserl introduces the textual analogy as follows:

"When I read the "lines and pages" of a book or when I read in the "book" and grasp the words and sentences, then we are dealing with physical matters. The book is a body (Körper), the pages are sheets of paper, the lines are black marks and physical imprints at certain spots of these papers, etc. Is that what I grasp when I "see" the book, when I "read" the book, when I "see" that what is written is written, what is said is said? It is obvious that my attitude is here quite different."⁴¹

In this attitude we study the marks on the sheets of paper as a meaningful whole. In the same way, we relate to living bodies. We do not explain or predict the movements of hands, facial expressions, or bodily postures but try to understand them and respond to their appeals, calls, and demands. Similarly woman can't be just defined in terms of her biology, that is, as a womb. Chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive organs are biological and biochemical abstractions made for the purposes of explanation and prediction; they are not elements of her concrete living body. Beauvoir contends:

"society is not a species: the species realizes itself as existence in a society; it transcends itself toward the world and the future; And once again, physiology cannot ground values: rather, biological data take on those values the existent confers on them. If the respect or fear woman inspires prohibits man from using violence against her, the male's muscular superiority is not a source of power."⁴²

Human beings are never left to their nature. A subject gains consciousness not of a body but of a body subjected to taboos. One's biology doesn't determine what value it

⁴¹ Husserl, Edmund (1989). *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, Trans. by Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer. Kluwer Academic Publishers. P.248

⁴² De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.70

is supposed to carry, rather, biology take son the values conferred on it by the society. "Woman is not a fixed reality, but a becoming,"⁴³ that is, her possibilities as a human cannot be taken away from her, by defining her as a procreative being she is being reduced to a species and nothing more.

Beauvoir further asserts: "The world does not appear to the woman as a "set of tools" halfway between her will and her goals, as Heidegger defines it: on the contrary, it is a stubborn, indomitable resistance."⁴⁴ In *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that we do not encounter the world primarily as just there, present-at-hand⁴⁵ (vorhanden), but as ready-to-hand⁴⁶ (zuhanden). We do not just look at things or listen to them but manipulate them and put them to use, and accordingly, things appear to us primarily in the modes of serviceability, conduciveness, usability, and manipulability: "The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the wind is wind 'in the sails'."⁴⁷ Such a view is rather abstract. It neglects the lived experience of how we experience, and are sometimes encouraged to experience, our bodies. For example, this concept cannot account for the experience and power politics of a black transgendered person living in a white supremacist patriarchy, and its associating potentially oppressive effects on material, psychological and social levels. For Merleau-Ponty, on a more primordial level, we relate to the world in an affective way. Things are not given to us as useful or suitable. Instead, they appear as attractive or repulsive, and we respond to their calls and appeals. Beauvoir, along the same lines, argues that the body is not a thing but a situation, it is through our body that we grasp the world, hence women as a situated embodied subject grasps the world in a different way. To the menstruating, impregnated, and lactating body the world

⁴³ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.68

⁴⁴ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.725

⁴⁵ Heidegger, Martin (1962). *Being and Time*, Trans. By John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Basil Blackwell. P. 75

⁴⁶ Heidegger, Martin (1962). *Being and Time*, Trans. By John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Basil Blackwell. P.98

⁴⁷ Heidegger, Martin (1962). *Being and Time*, Trans. By John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Basil Blackwell. P.100

does not appear as a set of tools, the tools required to dominate matter have no use to her as she is not dealing with matter but life and life can't be mastered by tools, it is subject to its own laws: "No mathematics can make an equation out of this mystery of a spot of blood that changes into a human being in the mother's womb, no machine can rush it or slow it down."⁴⁸ Her body presents itself as an alien vitality. Although alien vitality is evident in the experience of pregnancy, both men and women experience in their bodies alien intentions. Bodily differences that are a matter of degree are imagined as oppositions; for example, although man is prey to uncontrollable bodily secretions, these are wiped out in contrast with flows of menstrual blood, amniotic fluid, and so forth, so that woman alone emerges as leaky and unbounded: "The categories in which men think of the world are established from their point of view, as absolute."⁴⁹ Although bodily differences render each sex mysterious to the other, mystery attaches only to woman: "A mystery for man, woman is considered to be mysterious in essence."⁵⁰ Each sex understands and evaluates itself with reference to the other, but the superiority and inferiority of the sexes that man and woman internalize are socially inculcated. Women do not choose how to 'exist' their bodies because their embodiment has been pre-defined by patriarchal society. Woman's relationship to her body is therefore culturally created. In her account of female biology in *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir states, " woman is her body as man is his but her body is something other than her."⁵¹

Beauvoir says there are certain biological facts which can't be denied- woman has less muscular strength than man, a lower respiratory capacity; she runs slower, can lift lesser weights, there is no sport in which she can physically defeat man; she cannot enter into a fight with the male. Added to that are the instability, lack of control, and

⁴⁸ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.725

⁴⁹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.318

⁵⁰ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.318

⁵¹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.64

fragility. Such a biology makes her more emotional, hysterical, nervous etc. Her grasp of the world is thus more limited than man; she has less firmness and perseverance in projects that she is also less able to carry out. But they do not justify to amount to a sexual hierarchy; they do not explain why woman is the Other; they do not condemn her forever to this subjugated role. The facts acquire meaning once we put them in a situation, they don't carry a meaning in themselves. All the above facts about the female body don't in itself say that a woman is weak, they come to have such a value when it is compared to the goals man has set for himself. but in situations where physical strength isn't required above the usable minimum, man's physical superiority loses its value. Thus Beauvoir says existential, economic and moral reference points are necessary to define the notion of weakness concretely. Nothing has value in itself, and no value is absolute. We, humans, by our activities ascribe value to things; hence it is subject to change. The impact of woman's body on her freedom could be changed by technical innovations, different economic and social structures, and a new set of attitudes on the part of both man and woman, in short, by a transformation of her situation.

When Beauvoir criticizes femininity and regards it as a social construct, she doesn't mean that the way woman experiences their bodies is a social construction. By femininity Beauvoir refers to those ways of behaving, those typical traits and values, that traditionally mark woman off from man. The typical qualities that Beauvoir notes throughout her study include "dependence", "passivity", "docility", "neatness", "narcissism", "timidity", "coquetry", "impotence" etc. which are in no way dictated by her biology.

Beauvoir's account on female biology makes it clear that the special character of women's experience of embodiment has remained unrecognized in the traditions of science and philosophy. Male theorists have taken their own experiences as exemplary and have described the feminine not as a variation but as a deviation. Their perception and imagination have been guided by prejudices: "He grasps his body as a direct and normal link with the world that he believes he apprehends in all objectivity, whereas

he considers woman's body an obstacle, a prison, burdened by everything that particularizes it."⁵²

Women and men are not opposites, she argues, but neither are they identical. Rather than oscillating between these alternatives, we need to start thinking in terms of difference. Beauvoir doesn't hold the view that eventually all the differences between man and woman would disappear, that there is only an random relation between the female body and woman. She holds that in spite of cultural or historical variability in interpretations of sexual difference, a certain relation between the female body and womanhood will always remain. For example, woman's eroticism, and therefore her sexuality, will have a singular form of their own and therefore would engender a sensuality, a sensitivity of a particular sort. Her relations to her body, to that of the male, to that of the child will never be identical with those the male bears to his own body, to that of the female, and to the child.⁵³ Beauvoir reaffirms the significance of biology to the shaping of woman in history and contemporary society: "Because the body is the instrument of our hold on the world, the world appears different to us depending on how it is grasped."⁵⁴

Although biology can't be disregarded, it is not absolute. Beauvoir referring to Merleau-ponty's quote: "man is not a natural species: he is a historical idea⁵⁵", states human beings are different from animals in this regard, unlike other species, the human species is forever in a state of change, forever becoming. Woman's body is an essential element of her situation, whether woman's body will be her prison or not, will it keep her bound to a immanent existence depends on the economic, social and psychological context:

⁵² De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.25

⁵³ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.93

⁵⁴ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.66

⁵⁵ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.68

woman's enslavement to the species is tighter or looser depending on how many births the society demands and the hygienic conditions in which pregnancy and birth occur... in humanity individual "possibilities" depend on the economic and social situation.⁵⁶

PSYCHOANALYSIS

Why psychoanalysis? Because of the importance of sexuality and gender in psychoanalysis. All identity is gendered according to psychoanalysis. Beauvoir, similarly, is concerned with understanding gendered individuality. But despite the fact that psychoanalytic theory and practice opened up new ways of investigating women's lives and experiences, Simone de Beauvoir has some harsh criticisms of it. The major objection is Freud's use of the male as the default against which female sexuality and destiny is measured. For example, Beauvoir quoting Freud: "The libido is constantly and regularly male in essence, whether in man or in woman,"⁵⁷ says, he posits the feminine libido as a complex deviation from the human libido in general.

Freud argues that sexuality begins in infancy, especially through the child's relationship with his or her parents. According to Freud, our libido (basic instinctual sex drive) leads us towards a concentration of energetic excitement and a desire for release. The libido has three stages of focus: the oral, anal and phallic, or genital, stages. The baby from infancy to about age eroticises everything and wants everything and everyone who interests him or her. In infancy, the child makes no distinction between the outside world and the boundaries of its own body; it all merges into one pleasure zone where desires are satisfied. But the infant soon realises that all her or his desires cannot be met. This plays out differently, according to psychoanalysis,

⁵⁶ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.69

⁵⁷ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.74

depending on whether you are a boy or a girl. Freud claims that the child develops an attraction for the parent of the opposite sex and a jealous hatred for the other parent. The child becomes a girl or boy in terms of either the castration complex (for boys) or penis envy (for girls). This is part of the last genital, or phallic, phase of sexual development. The boy, having identified his penis as a source of pleasure, fears that his father, who is the rival to his affections for his mother, might take it away. The logic behind this fear is that the boy has realised that not all children have a penis – i.e., girls exist – and he assumes this may happen to him. But this fear resolves the Oedipus Complex (the process via which he had fallen in love with his mother) and the boy relinquishes his attraction for his mother. The girl, however, sees herself as already castrated – she sees herself as lacking a penis and wants one. She also realises that her mother, her primary love object, has no penis and therefore cannot supply her with one. The girl then redirects her love towards her father. This means that the girl's incestuous desire is never resolved and women have a less well-developed super-ego (the child's internalisation of parental and cultural authority) because they have not internalised their father's authority to the same extent as men.

Beauvoir objects Freud's theory firstly on the basis that he uses what is essentially a "masculine model"⁵⁸ to analyse woman's sexuality and situation. Moreover, de Beauvoir contends that while it is true that girls are attracted to their fathers, this is based more on emotional attachment than sexual desire and emanates from the nature of the father's sovereignty- a sovereignty which de Beauvoir claims is socially based. Throughout her critique Beauvoir accepts many of Freud's descriptions of woman's feelings and behavior but disputes the interpretation placed on them. Thus Beauvoir accepts the existence of "penis envy" but only in as much as the penis has symbolic worth within a world of concrete male dominance. She believes Freud's thesis inadequate in that, by concentrating on anatomy, he fails to explain why male dominance has arisen. She claims that if women envy men, it is simply because of the social power and privilege they possess, and not because of any anatomical advantage:

⁵⁸ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.75

“it is not the absence of a penis that unleashes this complex but the total situation; the girl envies the phallus only as a symbol of the privileges granted to boys.”⁵⁹ If the girl feels deficient in comparison to a boy, it is not because the penis in itself has significance, but that the girl is mapping her sense of inferiority onto the sheer difference between penis and castration.

She further criticises : “Psychoanalysts in particular define man as a human being and woman as a female: every time she acts like a human being, she is said to be imitating the male,”⁶⁰ “When a girl climbs trees, it is, according to [Adler], to be the equal of boys: he does not imagine that she likes to climb trees.”⁶¹ The point of view adopted by psychoanalysts is that behavior of alienation is feminine and behavior where the subject posits their transcendence is masculine, hence, it sees woman's attempt to escape the mutilation and restrictions of femininity as a "masculine protest"⁶² and not as a way to become a more human being.

⁵⁹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.77

⁶⁰ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.85

⁶¹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.85

⁶² De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.85

HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

In analysing woman's emergence as 'the second sex' Beauvoir evaluates the contribution which has been made by historical materialism. According to historical materialism, Beauvoir maintains, "humanity is not an animal species: it is a historical reality. Human society is an anti-physis: it does not passively submit to the presence of nature, but rather appropriates it"⁶³. This concept is closely linked to Beauvoir's notion of 'becoming a woman'. Thus Beauvoir says woman cannot simply be considered a "sexed organism"⁶⁴: "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."⁶⁵ Beauvoir argues that economic and social contexts are crucial in determining the importance attributed to the biological facts of gender: in prehistoric times when physical strength was valued, women were rendered inferior, but the contemporary reliance on technology has minimized to a great extent the inequality of man and woman. In respect of the burdens of maternity, it varies according to the customs:

The burdens that come with maternity vary greatly depending on customs: they are overwhelming if numerous pregnancies are imposed on the woman and if she must feed and raise her children without help; if she procreates as she wishes and if society helps her during her pregnancies and provides child care, maternal duties are lighter and can be easily compensated for in the realm of work.⁶⁶

Beauvoir concentrates mainly on the theories of Friedrich Engels because it was Engels rather than Marx who concentrated on the situation of women in his development of Marxist theory. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the*

⁶³ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.87

⁶⁴ Ibid, P.87

⁶⁵ Ibid, P.68

⁶⁶ Ibid, P.87-88

State Engels retraces the history of woman from the Stone Age, when the land belonged was communally owned by all members of the clan, the rudimentary nature of the prehistoric spade and hoe limited the possibilities of agriculture, woman's strength was adequate for gardening. In this primitive division of labour, the two sexes constituted in a way two classes, and there was equality between these classes. While man hunts and fishes, woman is in control of the domestic tasks; but the tasks of domesticity include productive work- making pottery, weaving, gardening- and as a result woman plays a large part in production. After the discovery of copper, tin, bronze, and iron, and with the invention of the plough, the scope of agriculture enlarges, and intensive labour is required for cutting down forests and cultivating the fields. Then man finds a way out in the labour of other men, whom he reduces to slavery. Private property appears, being the master of slaves and of nature, man becomes the owner also of woman. This marked "the great historical defeat of the feminine sex."⁶⁷ Woman's housework henceforth sank into insignificance in comparison with man's productive labour. Woman loses her authority in the house, paternal authority is established and property is inherited from father to son. This is the emergence of the patriarchal family, in this family woman is subjugated.

Beauvoir criticizes Engels for not acknowledging the unique nature of woman's oppression. His attribution of only productive capacity to woman neglects the fact that woman is also a reproductive being. In addition, women and men have a special interrelationship in their capacity as sexual beings. Therefore in order to understand the unique nature of women's oppression Beauvoir claims "it is necessary to go beyond historical materialism, which only sees man and woman as economic entities⁶⁸."

Rejecting Engels's theory that the origin of private property per se gave rise to the oppression of woman, she supplements his argument with Hegelian Ontology.

⁶⁷ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.80

⁶⁸ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.93

Beauvoir argues the bronze and iron tools made women's labour insignificant in comparison with man's productive labour but only from a particular perspective. It is because man is a transcendent being that he embarks on new projects with every new tool. When he had invented bronze and copper tools he was no more contented with gardens, he wanted to undertake agriculture on a large scale. Woman's lower strength lead to her inferiority because man considered her in the perspective of his project for enrichment and expansion. This perspective is still not enough to explain why man oppressed woman, as the division of labor could have meant a friendly association. This occurrence "is a consequence of the imperialism of human consciousness, which seeks to match its sovereignty objectively. Had there not been in human consciousness both the original category of the Other and an original claim to domination over the Other, the discovery of the bronze tool could not have brought about woman's oppression."⁶⁹

As mentioned above, Beauvoir, further stresses the biological differences between the sexes and asserts that the "burden of reproduction"⁷⁰ must have been a severe obstacle in addition to her physical weakness. Pregnancy, giving birth confines women to long periods of inactivity, as there was no birth control, frequent pregnancies must have taken up much of their time and strength and curbed her active participation in the growth of resources. Because household tasks alone are compatible with the responsibilities of motherhood, she is confined to a domestic life, which perpetuates repetition and immanence; day after day, in identical form from century to century; it produces nothing new.

Beauvoir bases her picture of the history of women on the assumption that, prior to the industrial revolution, women's fertility was virtually unregulated and life, for most women, was spent in a constant state of pregnancy. Historically, then, procreation confined woman to the non-creative aspects of existence. Woman as a mother and housekeeper, in history, maintained the species, created nothing new, repeated the same

⁶⁹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.83

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, P.97

life. Unlike later feminists, Simone de Beauvoir saw procreation as a servitude as a handicap to woman's independence. She was a woman of her time; to her, rationality and technology equalled progress. In line with the philosophers whose work had influenced her, Hegel, Marx, Sartre, she saw domination over Nature as a positive step for mankind, and to her this included woman's domination over her own 'nature'. Activity according to Beauvoir is that which externalizes one's self and allows one to transcend their animal nature. Beauvoir drew the conclusion: "During the nineteenth century, woman in her turn is freed from nature; she wins control of her body."⁷¹ Beauvoir regarded this change as of extraordinary importance to women, since it freed women from a great number of pregnancies which would help her to assume the economic opportunities open to her. The period in which *The Second Sex* was written, woman in France was primarily seen as a wife and mother. At that time, the two basic women rights- the right to employment and contraception, were vital for changing women's situation. In this context, we need to consider her insistence on reproduction as an immanent experience and work as a means to liberation.

Therefore, no biological, psychological, or economic factor has been able to explain the character the human female takes on in society. Her standpoint is summarised in the following well-known quotation: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,"⁷² which means that there is no pre-established female nature or essence, woman is a product of society as a whole. Here, Beauvoir as an existentialist applies existentialism's notion of "existence precedes essence" to the ways in which gender identity is experienced:

No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine.⁷³

⁷¹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.171

⁷² De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.330

⁷³ *Ibid*, P.330

PART II

As a phenomenologist, Beauvoir traces the ‘lived experience’ of the female child from birth to maturity, to elucidate how the oppression of woman founded in history is maintained in contemporary society, how she becomes a woman. Her elucidation of how ones become a woman, as we would see, has to be understood with a Hegelian perspective. She further mentions that by women she doesn’t refer to any archetype; “in the present state of education and customs⁷⁴” must be kept in mind to understand her affirmations, she is not trying to establish eternal truths.

Childhood

Weaning, for Beauvoir, plays an important role in posing oneself as an autonomy, it is necessary to separate oneself in order to realize oneself as a subject. Beauvoir argues that during the first three four years since birth, both boys and girls generally display same behaviour of seduction, and are desirous of approbation, attention of adults. But, weaning takes place not in the same way for boys and girls. It is more harsh for boys than girls. All children seek compensation for the separation of weaning by seductive and attention seeking behavior; the boy is taught to go beyond this stage and is thus escapes from his narcissism by turning his attention to his penis, whereas the girl's tendency for narcissism is reinforced to make herself object. Hence, boys are taught to be independent since childhood. The pride of manhood, grandeur of being a man is narrated to them in order to make him ready for the difficult path he has to take. The penis becomes a symbol of pride, gives him a sense of superiority because of the attitude of those around him. He comes to believe that the phallus is requisite for being superior, he thus equates maleness with phallus. In other words, Beauvoir is arguing that the discovery of the penis does not instantly make the boy feel that he is

⁷⁴ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.328

privileged, pride is bestowed on the penis by adults as a compensation for his weaning, since then he derives a feeling of superiority from his sex.

On the contrary, the absence of the penis plays an important role in the little girl's destiny. Because the subject always searches for themselves in things, the penis as it can be seen and held, the boy recognizes himself in it, the penis becomes his alter-ego, it helps him assume his subjectivity and in turn it becomes a symbol of autonomy, power, transcendence. But a little girl cannot incarnate herself in any part of her own body. As compensation, and to fill the role of alter ego for her, she is handed a doll. For Beauvoir this lays down the foundation for the girl's passivity because contrary to the penis, the doll, as an alter ego, represents the whole body and it is a passive thing. For these reasons, Beauvoir writes: "the little girl will be encouraged to alienate herself in her person as a whole and to consider it an inert given."⁷⁵

Everything around her points towards the fact that men are masters and to be born as woman is to be born as someone inferior in a male world. The hierarchy is first discovered in family. Even though the mother seems to reign the household, it is the authority of the father which is sovereign. He has a 'mysterious prestige': "the hours he spends in the home, the room where he works, the objects around him, his occupations, his habits, have a sacred character. It is he who feeds the family, is the one in charge and the head⁷⁶." Not only her father, her grandfather, uncle, elder brother, every man in her life share this virile prestige. The superior status adult woman give to men, everything helps to consolidate the hierarchy in the girl's eyes. History, literature, mythology, stories she is raised on, are an exaltation of the man. All this enough for the girl to perch man on a pedestal.

Boys too know that in future they have to be fathers, husbands, but these roles don't concern them the most, whereas marriage, motherhood are presented altogether in an

⁷⁵ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.340

⁷⁶ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.348

entirely different way to the girl. It is of paramount importance and gives her life final meaning, it is the ultimate goal of her life:

"Whether ambitious, scatterbrained, or shy, the young boy leaps toward an open future; he will be a sailor or an engineer, he will stay in the fields or will leave for the city, he will see the world, he will become rich; he feels free faced with a future where unexpected opportunities await him. The girl will be wife, mother, grandmother; she will take care of her house exactly as her mother does, she will take care of her children as she was taken care of: she is twelve years old, and her story is already written in the heavens; she will discover it day after day without shaping it; she is curious but frightened when she thinks about this life whose every step is planned in advance and toward which each day irrevocably moves her."⁷⁷

Adolescence

The transformation of the child's body to a woman's is a troubled period for her as her body is 'made flesh'⁷⁸. Puberty brings about far greater changes in the girl, as it doesn't announce the same future to both the sexes. It becomes an alienating experience for her. The development of her body is experienced with surprise mixed with horror, she foresees in these changes a finality that will rip her from her self. The body which the girl identified with her self now appears to her as flesh, it has become an object for others to look at. She feels that her body is no longer hers, it is no longer a clear expression of her self; it becomes alien to her; she is afraid of becoming flesh, she is being reduced by others to flesh. The parents attitude as well contributes to inculcating shame in the little girl. Girls from the very beginning are made conscious of their bodies. This makes her passive, timid, and awkward. Menstruation is a "don't

⁷⁷ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.360

⁷⁸ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.368

ask don't tell" subject in most of the households. Most little girls don't know about it until it happens. It is treated as a taboo, though it is the most natural phenomenon. Menstruation is always accompanied with anxiety as the girl is ignorant about it. For these reasons, puberty by a girl is always faced with repugnance and humiliation.

Development in boys is experienced in a totally different way, puberty marks the beginning of a future which promises various opportunities, they feel they are progressing more towards virility, they feel proud, they are not ashamed or conscious of their bodies. Becoming an adult is intimidating as the freedom it carries along with it, is demanding. But boys don't dread becoming a man, where as for a girl, becoming a women means she would have to confine herself to immanence, femininity would impose limits on her subjectivity, a thousand adventures, joys would be forbidden to her.

Beauvoir infers penis gets its privileged value from the social context, as it symbolises manhood or virility, whereas menstruation becomes a matter of shame for the girl, because it symbolises femininity which is equivalent to inferiority. In a sexually egalitarian society, menstruation wouldn't be experienced with such revulsion. Menstruation inspires such horror in the adolescent girl because others attitude towards it is negative. So the girl starts feeling that she is damaged or weak in some way. But in an egalitarian society as being a woman wouldn't mean being an inferior being, menstruation would not be perceived as a degradation.

For Beauvoir, violence is an important existential component for the assertion of sovereignty: "in challenges, struggles, and individual combat, every consciousness can try to rise to sovereignty⁷⁹." Beauvoir's emphasis on violence clearly echoes the Hegelian concept of mastery. Beauvoir maintains that it is particularly in puberty and early adolescence that boys are encouraged through games, sports, fights, challenges, trials of strength to view their bodies as a means of conquering the world and as a

⁷⁹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. p.90

weapon for fighting. In short, they go through what Beauvoir terms as an important 'apprenticeship in violence'⁸⁰.

Girls, on the other hand, are not allowed to learn 'the lessons of violence'⁸¹. So, girls lack confidence in themselves because they lack confidence in their bodies. While boys become conscious of themselves as a force in the world, girls feel dependent and aware of the need for a masculine mediator. Our body is the means for our grasp on the world and it is through the 'apprenticeship in violence' that boys consolidate their grasp, whether one's grasp would be firm or lose depends on how one lives their body. It is for these reasons that Beauvoir claims the difference between adolescent boys and girls to be that, whereas she feels timid and doesn't see her body as a force to transcend the given and accepts the place already made for her, he can at any moment, rise up against it; and he therefore feels that when he accepts it, he actively confirms it. Beauvoir says:

"This lack of physical power expresses itself as a more general timidity: she does not believe in a force she has not felt in her body, she does not dare to be enterprising, to revolt, to invent; doomed to docility, to resignation, she can only accept a place that society has already made for her. She accepts the order of things as a given."⁸²

Beauvoir asserts the life a girl is condemned to live is 'unhealthy'⁸³, the little girl seeks activity, autonomy: "The exuberance of life is prohibited to them, their stunted vigour turns into nervousness; their goody-goody occupations do not exhaust their brimming energy; they are bored: out of boredom and to compensate for the inferiority from which they suffer, they indulge in morose and romantic daydreams."⁸⁴ Since they can't act much, they talk hurriedly and blurt out serious words with meaningless ones, and end up being misunderstood. Then they turn towards themselves and seek satisfaction

⁸⁰ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. Vintage Books. P.397

⁸¹ *Ibid*, P.400

⁸² *Ibid*, P.398

⁸³ *Ibid*, P.358

⁸⁴ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. Vintage Books. P.358

in narcissism. Their "malaise"⁸⁵ expresses itself in burst outs and dramas, most of the time it is related to their family, either they are hostile to their mothers or they want to monopolize their fathers' love for themselves. Hence, all such things- fantasies, acting out, dramas, talkativeness, nervousness etc. the reason behind all this should not be sought in some mysterious feminine nature but in the girl's situation.

To a great extent, then, it is the notion that the female is at once deprived (and consequently does not feel able to make use) of any opportunities to engage in transcendent pursuits - to act upon and change the world- which underlies most Beauvoir's comments on the development of a girl's life. Thus it is such experiences which lead, according to Beauvoir, a girl to make the passive and dependent existence of marriage and motherhood her "career"⁸⁶. However, Beauvoir maintains that while the girl is more and more oriented towards her passive feminine destiny she is aware of the 'mutilation'⁸⁷ this implies. In other words, the girl is aware of the acute conflict between being a 'true' woman and asserting one's subjectivity. Hence, she maintains: "Indeed, beside every individual's claim to assert himself as subject—an ethical claim—lies the temptation to flee freedom and to make himself into a thing⁸⁸;" but for girls this temptation is stronger as her paths to transcendence are blocked, it is difficult for them not to renounce their freedom. Everything holds back her personal development while social pressure encourages her to find a social position and justification in marriage. As she realizes herself to be physically and morally weaker than boys, forsaking hopeless competition, marriage then seems to be an easy career for her. Even if she is more free-spirited, the advantages enjoyed by men makes prefer marriage over a career, she searches for a husband whose situation is better than her own, a husband she hopes will get ahead faster and further than she could. Thus, Beauvoir says:

⁸⁵ Ibid, P.358

⁸⁶ Ibid, P.396

⁸⁷ Ibid, P.355

⁸⁸ Ibid, P.30

“these are the delights of passivity that parents and educators, books and myths, women and men dangle before the little girl’s eyes; in early childhood she is already taught to taste them; temptation becomes more and more insidious; and she yields to it even more fatally as the thrust of her transcendence comes up against harsher and harsher resistance. But in accepting her passivity, she also accepts without resistance enduring a destiny that is going to be imposed on her from the exterior, and this fatality frightens her.”⁸⁹

Marriage

“The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage.”⁹⁰ It is believed that marriage is the license for woman to attain her complete social dignity and also to realize herself as lover and mother. Marriage has radically different significance for both the sexes: “The two sexes are necessary for each other, but this necessity has never fostered reciprocity.”⁹¹ Man is a "socially autonomous" and "complete individual"⁹²; he is above all a producer, and his existence is ‘justified’ by the work he provides for the group; on the other hand, the role of procreation and housekeeping to which woman is confined does not guarantee her an equal dignity.

The man's purpose in life is action, he needs to produce, create, progress, transcend himself towards the "totality of the universe" and infinity of the future, but traditional marriage doesn’t allow the woman to transcend with him. Within the walls of her home, she will have to conserve the past, maintain the status quo, a stable life, which escapes the threats of tomorrow. But no existent can renounce their transcendence. For woman as well, the harmonious home life has to be transcended toward other ends: "it is man who will act as intermediary between woman’s individuality and the

⁸⁹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. Vintage Books. P.359-360

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, P.502

⁹¹ *Ibid*, P.502

⁹² *Ibid*, P.503

universe⁹³." Hence it is through man that she seeks justification of her being, it is he who confers human worth on her immanence, renouncing her existence she puts it in his hands, he gives it its meaning. This is how ideal marriage is supposed to work. But as we will see, married life does not unfold in this manner.

In the past the wife had a prestige in the family. Marriage today is the continuation of old customs without the honour she used to have. She still has the same duties but not the rights. Earlier the husband and children were more attached to their house and family, they took an interest in the house and considered themselves as the carrier of the traditions. Today marriage doesn't have much of a significance. Man marries to anchor himself in this world, he wants a home, but doesn't want to be confined to it. He likes happiness but doesn't want to make it an end in itself; repetition bores him, he seeks change, risks, resistance, friendships that would dislodge him from the isolation of the couple. The wife on the other hand creates a world of repetition and permanence. Husband and children want to go beyond this. A man is a citizen a producer before being a husband, whereas she is above all and often exclusively a wife.

Once a girl gets married there is no other future in front of her. There's nothing more than this. Forever this home and husband. In the solitude of the new home, in a frozen present she discovers boredom and blandness of facticity. She seeks justification of her existence through housework though it is an activity it is an activity that doesn't take her beyond immanence, and doesn't let her affirm herself. Housework has been praised in poetry and novel by several writers. It brings about a sense of victory. Beauvoir arguing against it compares it to the torture of the Sisyphus:

"Few tasks are more similar to the torment of Sisyphus than those of the housewife; day after day, one must wash dishes, dust furniture, mend clothes that will be dirty, dusty, and torn again. The housewife wears herself out running on the spot; she does

⁹³ Ibid, P.534

nothing; she only perpetuates the present; she never gains the sense that she is conquering a positive Good, but struggles indefinitely against Evil."⁹⁴

Adopting a Hegelian standpoint, Beauvoir criticises domestic work. Transcendence means a progress towards good and not defeating evil, but the wife is not building something new, she is not changing the state of affairs, all the things are fixed, by cleaning the house and keeping it dirt free she is defeating evil, fighting negativity. Preparing meals or cooking can be said to be a more positive work, by cooking she transforms matter into food. It can be an intriguing and fascinating experience to observe the process and gain the end result. Beauvoir argues no matter how much these tasks are exalted, done everyday it becomes monotonous and mechanical, even cooking for those who spent half of their days in the kitchen is a burden. It is nothing fascinating to them. If man performs these tasks he integrates it into his daily life as routine tasks and then looks forward to the positive work he does. But a wife is doomed completely to the inessential and the general. Housekeeping and cooking are generalised activities, it doesn't externalise the self of the person. It doesn't give her autonomy, it makes her dependent on her husband, children. She justifies her existence through them. Though home and food are useful for life it doesn't give any meaning to it. Her work lead to results which are not ends but only means. Work is meaningful when it is integrated into the society.

The differences between the sexes too pose a problem for both of them. By 'differences' is meant difference in age, education and situations, that fail to bring about any real understanding between them: "familiar the spouses are still stranger"⁹⁵. Previously there was a real gap between the two, the naive young girl had no past while her fiancé had 'lived'. Today the gap is not so wide. The young girl is better informed, more prepared for life, but often there is an age difference. This unequal maturity has consequences. The wife is less matured as she is young, hence the husband sees a child in her and the seriousness of the husband overwhelms her. Even

⁹⁴ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. Vintage Books. P. 539

⁹⁵ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.558

when the age difference isn't much the fact remains that their situations are radically different. Marriage is complicated, it involves an erotic element along with a social one which makes it unfavourable for both the sexes. The husband's role reflects a paradox: he is a protector, guide, the wife thrives in his shadow, but he is also the one with whom she shares coitus, an experience which is often embarrassing or bizarre or upsetting.

Advocates of marriage hold that it is conjugal love which makes a marriage last. Married life is based on routine, faithfulness and boredom has repetition and boredom, but conjugal love makes a couple endure all this. But Beauvoir retorts, when two individuals hate each other but still can't do without each other, it is one of the most pitiful conditions. The label 'conjugal love' given to the complex mixture of attachment, resentment, hatred, rules, resignation, laziness, hypocrisy because it serves as an alibi for the absence of real love.

It is still accepted that the love act is a 'service' she renders to the man; he 'takes' his pleasure, and he owes compensation in return, thus, changing it into a duty and a right. The act of physical love or coitus which should be based on a spontaneous impulse, the solemnity of marriage prevents the act from being so. Eroticism consists in a movement towards the 'other', this is its essential character, but in marriages spouses become for each other the 'same'. Eroticism and marriage are contradictory in that whereas marriage is a social institution, eroticism can't be integrated into the social, it is a claim of the individual against the general. There is no reaching out to each other. Each is concerned about their own pleasure, none goes beyond themselves, they consider each other as tools for satisfaction of their needs. Physical love must be free. Marriage while being supposed to socialize eroticism, kills it: "what is certain is that it cannot be integrated into the social sphere, because there is in eroticism a revolt of the instant against time, of the individual against the universal⁹⁶."

⁹⁶ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.92

To expect that a union based on practical, social and moral ties has much chance of bringing about love and satisfaction is pure absurdity. Love is a movement towards the other, towards an existence separated from one's own. Love to be authentic must be free. Feeling is free when it doesn't depend on any outside command. So called 'conjugal love' on the other hand is a recipe for repression, lies and duplicity. Conjugal love is not love, it is not free, it is a duty, it is what society expects of a couple, it is dutiful love. Hence, neither of the two appreciates the other for what they do, as it is taken for granted that they are supposed to do it, for example, it is expected that a wife would be virtuous, devoted, pure, happy. The husband doesn't appreciate her being so, he doesn't understand "that she is an individual of flesh and blood"⁹⁷."

Man imposes himself on woman as her supreme, by marrying her he obliges her to give herself to him completely but her devotion in return changes into tyranny in the husband's eyes, which he tries to escape. Beauvoir here compares the husband's to that of the master in the master-slave dialectic. In oppressing, the husband becomes oppressed. Male are in chains by their own sovereignty. It is because they are the bread earner that the wife makes demands; because he alone practices a profession that the wife wants him to succeed; because he embodies transcendence in her eyes she can't tolerate him being weak in any way; because she is bored she keeps her husband near her for hours; because she is forbidden to rely on herself, she weighs so heavily on man. Even though she is tyrannical, it only manifests her dependence, she is a slave where as the husband is essentially autonomous, though it might look otherwise. He is enchained from inside, whereas woman is enchained from within because she has interiorised her dependency. It might look like that the husband is the victim in marriage but what we are looking at are the visible consequences of a deeper invisible cause. Marriage as an institution oppresses both the spouses. Patriarchy has now turned into a source of distress for both the sexes.

⁹⁷ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.580

Mother

Motherhood is deemed to be the goal of married woman. Without it she is considered to be incomplete; it is believed she reaches physiological and social self-realisation through it.

Beauvoir discusses the different stages of pregnancy and the related changing relationship the mother has with the foetus, from imaginary foetus(early pregnancy) to vomiting (which shoes the conflict between the species and the individual in the human female) to the two adapting to each other, to varying attitude of the mother towards the new born.

Beauvoir describes pregnancy as an ambivalent experience: “She experiences it both as an enrichment and a mutilation⁹⁸.” A woman’s body transcends itself in pregnancy. But pregnancy also makes her more immanent. She is more bound to her body, but her body no longer exists for itself alone: “it is a strange creation that takes place in contingency and facticity⁹⁹.” She feels whole again, the subject-object binary disappears. She is going to bring forth a new existence and her being is finally going to find the justification it couldn’t all this while. But all that she feels is an 'illusion'¹⁰⁰ because ultimately the child that grew in her, she didn’t really make it, it is made in her. Beauvoir doesn't consider childbirth to be a transcendent or creative act: "to give birth and to breast-feed are not activities but natural functions; they do not involve a project¹⁰¹." Beauvoir's view of woman's reproductive role is an off-shoot of Hegel's concept of creative labor, which refers to conscious activity which results in some kind of object in which the individual is objectified, be it a tool, a building, a book, or a piece of music, thus does not regard the bearing or rearing of child as an

⁹⁸ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.612

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, P.613

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, P.613

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, P.98

activity as it is neither a conscious creation nor can one objectify oneself in the child as one can do in, for example, a hand made tool.

Beauvoir further discusses the different categories of woman. One she calls 'breeders'; these are women who just want to be pregnant and lose interest in the child as soon as the child is weaned or born; then there are woman who want to dominate children their whole lives but are horrified by the idea of giving birth, such women becomes mid wives, nurses, grammar school teachers.

According to de Beauvoir, woman's relationship with her child is dependent on a number of factors- her relations with her own mother and the father of the child, her economic and social situation, her own attitude to herself and life in general are all involved. Children are a source of joy to the mother only within a well balanced structure.

The mystification of motherhood has led all to believe that every woman, once she is a mother is supposed to be "good", but that is not the case. A mother is always an unfulfilled woman: sexually frigid or unsatisfied; socially inferior to man; confined to an immanent existence; she has various suppressed desires, frustrations, complexes. But the most delicate and serious of all undertakings, that is, the formation of a human is entrusted to them. For some mothers the child is a thing they can unload their anger on, some want a trained pet for their whole lives, some want a reincarnation of their mother or father or some venerated ancestor in their child, some in order to fill out the emptiness of their existence, renounces herself completely in devoting herself to her child and robs the child of all independence, some in order to redeem their inferiority want a daughter to change her into a superior being, some want a son through whom she can possess the world by possessing him. Mothers beat their children, but they do not really beat their child but are taking their vengeance on the man, on the world, or on herself, but she unloads all that anger on that child. Some woman want a slave for the rest of their lives who would obey her blindly like a trained pet. Some force their children to be like their husbands or not; or to be a reincarnation of a father, mother, or a venerated ancestor Sometimes the mother completely renounces herself

in devoting herself to her child, this is no less harmful for the child as they don't let the child do anything on their own, By all these Beauvoir is trying to convey that there is no such thing as maternal instinct. The mother's attitude depend on her total situation, it is extremely variable.

The attitude of the child towards their mother differs according to the sex of the child. The boy does not understand the explanations his mother tries to give him. As the child grows older, this lack of understanding remains: he enters a world of interests and values from which his mother is excluded; he often demeans her for it:

"The boy in particular, proud of his masculine prerogatives, laughs off a woman's orders: she insists on him doing his homework, but she cannot solve his problems, translate his Latin text; she cannot "keep up" with him. The mother is sometimes driven to tears over this task whose difficulty the husband rarely appreciates: raising an individual with whom one does not communicate but who is nonetheless a human being."¹⁰²

Between a daughter and a mother the scenario is different. Conflict arises between them when the girl wishes to affirm her autonomy, the mother tries to subdue it as she cannot accept that her double becomes an other, she is jealous of all the amusements and activities that free her daughter from the boredom of the household:

"The pleasure man savors in women— feeling absolutely superior—is something a woman experiences only toward her children, and her daughters in particular; she feels frustration if she renounces these privileges and her authority."¹⁰³

From the above we can derive the following conclusions: First, it is a misconception that motherhood in itself can fulfil a women, that it instils meaning into a woman's life. There are so many mothers who are unsatisfied, unhappy, bitter. Second, It is fatal to see a child as a 'panacea'¹⁰⁴: "It is an even more deceptive lure to dream of

¹⁰² De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.636

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, P.639

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, P.642

attaining through a child a plenitude, warmth, and value one is incapable of creating oneself¹⁰⁵.” Children cannot be substitutes for one’s disappointed love; one’s thwarted goals in life, children are not things to fill out an empty existence. They are neither playthings or tools for the fulfilment of parental needs or unsatisfied ambitions. Children are obligations; they should be brought up so as to become happy human beings. Children should be desired for themselves, not for any further selfish gains. A child’s relation with his parents must be impersonal and dispassionate. The young woman must be in a psychological, moral, and material situation that allows her to bear the responsibility; it should be freely assumed and sincerely desired; if not, the consequences will be disastrous. Third, It is a mistake to assume that the child is sure to be happy in its mother’s arms. She says, it is a "criminal paradox"¹⁰⁶ to refuse women from all public activity, to deem them incapable in all spheres, nonetheless, entrust them with the most sensitive and most serious of all responsibilityies, that is, the formation of a human being.

Following Hegel, Beauvoir again forwards work as the solution. It would be better for both the child and the mother, if their mother were not a mutilated person. A working mother wouldn’t be completely absorbed in the child, wouldn’t seek self accomplishment through her child, moreover, a woman with rich personal life would be able to impart the most to her children and wouldn’t be interested in returns. Today a woman is often overburdened when she has to balance work and the interest of her children, this happens because the child’s health, care, education, everything is the mother’s responsibility. In a properly organised society, Beauvoir says, where the child would be cared for and the society would come to the mothers aid, motherhood wouldn't be incompatible with work.

Beauvoir even maintains that children are source of joy and enrichment for the mother unless the circumstances are positively unfavourable. Through her child, the mother

¹⁰⁵ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.643

¹⁰⁶ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.434

accomplishes the fusion she sought in the arms of the male. She is no longer an object subjugated by a subject; nor is she any longer a subject anguished by her freedom:

"But the mother finds in the child—like the lover in the beloved—a carnal plenitude, not in surrender but in domination; she grasps in the child what man seeks in woman: an other, both nature and consciousness, who is her prey, her double."¹⁰⁷

However, she warns against making motherhood the sole justification of one's existence. Even if motherhood within a happy and balanced life brings about a feeling of accomplishment, woman shouldn't seek justification of her existence in her child. It would always be a source of disappointment as not only the ingratitude and failure of the child might make her hopeless, the child can't free her from her immanence. Woman should not seek justification of her existence in someone else, she should assume it freely herself.

Social Life

The family is not an isolated unit, it socialises with other families. As, the man socialises with other members of the society as a citizen and producer, his professional ties don't reflect his social standing; the woman socialises as a 'representative', she represents the family, its living standard, wealth, tastes, etc. through her guise and house.

In her married life, she finds a few artificial escapes: friendships with other females, adultery, socialising, but none provide her with the requisites that would change her destiny. They are diversions and help her endure her married life. Society judges a woman by her clothes. Too much value is attached to a woman's dress up as if it reflects her intrinsic value, thus she attaches so much importance to her appearance and invest so much time and money on clothes and beauty care. It becomes a part of

¹⁰⁷ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.630

her routine and turns beauty care and wardrobe maintenance into an obligation. Same happens with welcoming guests at home. It instead of bringing pleasure becomes a stressful affair. She tries to make it perfect and something or the other upsets her, she is always alert so that nothing goes wrong and this prevents her from deriving pleasure out of it. She is always too much absorbed in what others are thinking of her, her house, whenever she is socialising.

Beauvoir states, the connection a woman shares with other females is not at all like the one between men. Men relate to each other as individuals; they discuss their ideas, projects, but women unite by affirmation of their common universe of immanence. They do not discuss opinions, they try to create a counter-universe of female values which outweighs male values, they grumble about their husbands' habits and ways, the superiority of the men in general. What makes these relationships precious for a woman is its honesty. In front of men women is always pretending to be an inessential other, trying to impress her husband or lover but with other women she can relax and be herself. But such relationships can't transform into a true friendship, though they feel a solidarity with each other, they can't transcend towards each other; together they are turned toward the masculine world.

With regard to adultery, Beauvoir maintains, traditional marriage with its monogamy and conjugal love makes adultery unavoidable. She quotes Engels:

"With monogamous marriage, two constant social types, unknown hitherto, make their appearance on the scene—the wife's attendant lover and the cuckold husband ... Together with monogamous marriage and heterism, adultery became an unavoidable social institution—denounced, severely penalised, but impossible to suppress."¹⁰⁸

Because she doesn't find love in marriage and is disappointed, she seeks another man who rescues her from her routine. However, once her affair cools off and becomes a stable one all the vices of marriage – boredom, jealousy, prudence, deception can be found in it. Furthermore, in patriarchal setting adultery brings more scorn on the

¹⁰⁸ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.453

woman than the man. One reason is that woman's adultery risks introducing illegitimate heirs into a family, but the practice of contraception has decreased its risk to great extent. Because of the enduring patriarchal traditions a married woman's reputation is hampered greatly because of it., customs are more severe for her. All this makes the affair highly guilt ridden for the wife. Such furtive relationship ultimately give her no relief and become a burden and also rob conjugal relations of what is left of their dignity.

All the sections discussed above certifies Beauvoir's famous assertion "one is not born a woman but becomes one." woman's situation gives her this "character" which we call feminine. Woman has been accused of being argumentative, petty, cautious, she lacks accuracy, morality, she is selfish, lying, coquettish; from ancient times till today, nothing much has changed in her character, but nothing is natural about it: "But the types of behaviors denounced are not dictated to woman by her hormones or predestined in her brain's compartments: they are suggested in negative form by her situation¹⁰⁹."

Beauvoir says, woman is made to remain an 'eternal child'. She is trained to recognize masculine authority, hence, she renounces criticising, examining and judging for herself. She blindly obeys the laws, respects the goals and follows the standards set by men. She has not learned the technology that would enable her to grasp the reality around her, hence her obedience and respect isn't based on knowledge but faith in the masculine world.

All that she undergoes in her body and around her can't be changed with technology; no machine can rush or slowdown pregnancy, she has to wait for the food to cook, the clothes to dry, objects that are going to break and wear, dust that is going to revive. All this teaches her 'patience' and makes her 'passive'. She deals with life and not with technology which can dominate matter. Life can't be mastered by tools, it is subject to its own laws. Thus she can't grow any interest in technology as it is of least use to her.

¹⁰⁹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.724

Her sphere seldom allows her to use logic, a syllogism is not going to help her cook or in child care. Her life is not directed towards goals but she is busy in "maintaining" and producing things that are never more than "means"- food, clothes, lodging. As a result, she feels lost in the middle of a world that she fails to understand. She doesn't feel happy in it and complains most of the time. Another typical trait of her is 'resignation'¹¹⁰. They feel powerless against the world and feel suffering is unavoidable, they can't do anything to foil it, they have to endure it. Therefore, Beauvoir asserts, women deal with crises, misery, and misfortune better than men, she accepts everything because she thinks she can't change it. Hence, women are 'conservationists'; they try to keep, fix, arrange rather than destroy and reconstruct. Her life is a repetition, time goes around in circles for her, she doesn't see in the future anything but the duplication of the past. As we know, Beauvoir following Hegel, maintains that human consciousness is attained either by taking part in life-risking activities or activities that objectify one's self in something else. Hence, woman's immanent life keeps her at a more animal level of consciousness.

She can't draw the meaning of grandeur from the life she lives and is satisfied with mediocrity, just like "the slave imprisoned in the harem does not feel any morbid passion for rose jelly and perfumed baths"¹¹¹." Hence, she gives importance to little things because she lacks access to big ones. She is often reproached as being lazy and talkative but the kind of work she does, doesn't really occupy her mind and body in a balanced way, leaving her feeling exhausted but empty at the end of the day. If she is engaged in real action she would be as active, effective and silent as a man. She is generally accused of being selfish but she hasn't known comradeship. So she can't go beyond herself, towards the general interest.

There is much feminine behaviour that can be interpreted as protest. She is accused of being late, but in keeping a man waiting she protests against this long wait that is her whole life. She is always waiting for man's approval, for love, husband's praise, his

¹¹⁰ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.728

¹¹¹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.729

gratitude, her husband's presence, lover's meetings, even she awaits her own pleasure. As a protest she sometimes wants the others to wait for her. But this is a meagre revenge compared to the long hours she has spent waiting.

Her oppressor, man, though is irritated by her faults, wants her to exercise these negative traits so that the hierarchy of the sexes would be maintained just like the colonists or racists who wish the black man to be thieving, indolent and lying, so that the oppressors can justify their oppression.

In respect to religion, Beauvoir asserts: "There is a justification, a supreme compensation, that society has always been bent on dispensing to woman: religion¹¹²." In most religions, man is the master by divine rights, thus woman accepts male superiority without revolt: "It is to man's total advantage to have God endorse the codes he creates: and specifically because he exercises sovereign authority over the woman, it is only right that this authority be conferred on him by the sovereign being¹¹³." But the reason why she embraces religion so readily is because it makes woman no longer inferior to man, but equal as 'a child of God'. Through this she gets some of her dignity back. The will to revolt is avoided by promising a better future in an asexual heaven: "when a sex or a class is condemned to immanence, the mirage of transcendence must be offered to it¹¹⁴." and her passivity is sanctified by religion because why alter this world created by God himself¹¹⁵.

It is clear that none of the above traits manifest a "perverted essence" or "original will"¹¹⁶; they reflect a situation, not predestined or dictated by nature. If the situation which gives rise to them is changed the traits would change:

¹¹² De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.746

¹¹³ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.746-747

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, P.749

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, P.748

¹¹⁶ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.741

Many of the faults for which they are criticized: "mediocrity", "meanness", "shyness", "pettiness", "laziness", "frivolity", and "servility", simply express the fact that the horizon is blocked for them.¹¹⁷

Beauvoir restates:

"It is clear that woman's whole 'character'—her convictions, values, wisdom, morality, tastes, and behavior—is explained by her situation. The fact that she is denied transcendence usually prohibits her from having access to the loftiest human attitudes—heroism, revolt, detachment, invention, and creation."¹¹⁸

It is pointless to compare man and women and try to establish who is better because their situations are radically different. She says, however, if we compare their situations, no doubt, man's is favourable to his development as it provides him with concrete freedom. But that shouldn't be a justification for her resignation, she must object to the limits on her situation and open a future for herself. She can transcend her situation only by means of "revolt"¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, P.729

¹¹⁸ Ibid, P.749

¹¹⁹ Ibid, P.753

Chapter 3

Liberation

Beauvoir asserts woman have not asserted themselves as subjects because she lacks the concrete means; because she feels the necessary connection to man regardless of reciprocity and because she is often very pleased with her role as the Other.¹²⁰

Simone de Beauvoir claims that woman is a transcendent being and should affirm herself as such. She has defined authenticity as the individual living a transcendent life, and enabling others to do the same:

"Every subject posits itself as a transcendence concretely, through projects; it accomplishes its freedom only by perpetual surpassing toward other freedoms; there is no other justification for present existence than its expansion toward an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is degradation of existence into "in-itself," of freedom into facticity; this fall is a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if this fall is inflicted on the subject, it takes the form of frustration and oppression; in both cases it is an absolute evil. Every individual concerned with justifying his existence experiences his existence as an indefinite need to transcend himself. But what singularly defines the situation of woman is that being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other."¹²¹

Beauvoir thus regards it as ethically wrong to oppress another human being and prevent him or her from living a free, transcendent life but she also claims that if one has a choice, it is wrong to choose to live in immanence.

Beauvoir further says that the human being has a tendency to flee from the insight of his/her freedom and responsibility. However, such a way of avoiding the anguish of taking responsibility for one's life is living inauthentically. This is one of the reasons why women are tempted to accept the position of the Other. But being an other, one is

¹²⁰ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.30

¹²¹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.37

alienated, incapable of establishing one's own values and aims, is the prey of the will of others, is unable to live in transcendence:

"Indeed, beside every individual's claim to assert himself as subject—an ethical claim—lies the temptation to flee freedom and to make himself into a thing: it is a pernicious path because the individual, passive, alienated, and lost, is prey to a foreign will, cut off from his transcendence, robbed of all worth. But it is an easy path: the anguish and stress of authentically assumed existence are thus avoided. The man who sets the woman up as an Other will thus find in her a deep complicity."¹²²

Beauvoir regards "doing" as the authentic way of living, human being, who is nothing, should give direction to his or her life, should create an identity, through doing, through consciously chosen actions, and through recognizing himself/herself in these actions. It is in that which one does that one should objectify oneself. Beauvoir points out that the option of living in this way has not been available to every human being, and particularly not to women:

"For many women, the roads to transcendence are blocked: because they do nothing, they do not make themselves be anything; they wonder indefinitely what they could have become, which leads them to wonder what they are: it is a useless questioning; if man fails to find that secret essence, it is simply because it does not exist."¹²³

To Beauvoir, doing means transcendent actions, transcendent acts are associated with productive societal work or activity, be it artistic, creative, social, or political. One should find their self in what one does, but this involves activity in the public sphere.

This authentic way of existing is contrasted with finding an image of or objectifying oneself in what one possesses, both things and other people, or in that which one is. According to Beauvoir:

¹²² De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.30

¹²³ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.320

The curse on the woman vassal is that she is not allowed to do anything; so she stubbornly pursues the impossible quest for being through narcissism, love, or religion; when she is productive and active, she regains her transcendence; she affirms herself concretely as subject in her projects¹²⁴.

Productive activity is conscious, is social and produces an object, used here in the broad sense of the word, in which one may reflect one's existence.

Beauvoir expresses a belief in the possibilities of authentic inter-human relationships based on mutual or reciprocal recognition between the sexes. Simone de Beauvoir's picture of human relations is closer to the view propounded by Hegel.

Beauvoir believes that throughout history woman has been the absolute Other, the Object, in relation to man as the Subject. Beauvoir saw women's historical situation begin to change in the industrial revolution, when they were needed on the labour market, and when new means of birth control started to evolve. None the less, despite the fact that women have begun to participate more in productive work and have acquired legal rights, she believes they are not equal.

The prerequisite for equality is that women, individually and collectively, begin to affirm themselves as subjects in relation to men: that they demand recognition, demand to be seen as human beings of equal value instead of as the Other. However, she also appears to imply, at some points as seen above, that only a socialist society can bring real freedom to all human beings, once private property has been abolished and work has become a free, self-fulfilling activity

Beauvoir emphasizes that the liberation of woman must be collective, and that economic independence is the key.

¹²⁴ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.320

According to Beauvoir, women have not revolted, as have other oppressed groups, because they lacked 'concrete means' to assert themselves as a collective, lacked a shared history, religion and past 'solidarity of labor or interest'; nor lived together in separate areas. Instead, emotional, financial and social ties have bound them to their father and husband¹²⁵. Beauvoir maintains that "they are united by a mechanical solidarity only insofar as they are similar: they do not share that organic solidarity upon which any unified community is founded¹²⁶."

Beauvoir places great emphasis on the value of work. She sees a socialist society based on equality as a prerequisite for real, actual, concrete and positive freedom for all. However, unlike Hegel, Beauvoir does not believe in the 'end of history' or in the abolition of all conflict. Even if the prerequisites for a society without oppression are created, it will be up to every individual to surpass the desire of being, and thus to realize himself or herself as free.

The pattern that Beauvoir describes for recognition refers back to the Hegelian master—slave dialectic: like the slave, woman should objectify herself in work and demand recognition. Were women to affirm themselves as subjects, with projects of their own, and with their own relationships to society, men and women would stand before one another as equals. In this historically determined situation, it would be possible for men and women to establish a relationship marked by mutuality, either friendly or hostile.

If women demand recognition, conflict may arise in their relationship with men, just as it is an omnipresent possibility in the relationship between men. This does not mean, according to Beauvoir, that the relationship between the sexes was conflict-free in the past, but that when women begin to demand recognition, men's objections to their liberation, men's desire to remain 'sovereign subjects' and men's refusal to treat women as equals, all cause conflict:

¹²⁵ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.28

¹²⁶ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.724

"It is no longer a war between individuals imprisoned in their respective spheres: a caste claiming its rights lays siege but is held in check by the privileged caste. Two transcendences confront each other; instead of mutually recognizing each other, each freedom wants to dominate the other."¹²⁷

According to Beauvoir, modern man acts contradictorily — he both accepts woman as 'a fellow being' and wishes to see her remain 'the inessential'. Nor do women, for their part, set themselves up unambiguously as subjects; because of their situation, to a large extent they continue to see themselves as objects. Both men and women are marked by their situations, and both have lived inauthentically in relation to one another, men pursuing 'a dream of alienation' in relation to women and women 'a dream of resignation' in relation to men. Because men and women are one another's 'accomplices', it is difficult for them to meet as free beings. Beauvoir suggests that the struggle between the sexes will continue as long as men and women do not recognize each other as peers¹²⁸. To her, the true relationship between man and woman is one of reciprocity:

"the real relation is one of reciprocity; as such, it gives rise to authentic dramas: through eroticism, love, friendship, and their alternatives of disappointment, hatred, and rivalry, the relation is a struggle of consciousnesses, each of which wants to be essential, it is the recognition of freedoms that confirm each other."¹²⁹

As this makes clear, inter-human relationships between the sexes are not necessarily friendly when the woman asserts herself as subject.

Recognition of one human being by another is associated with what are declared to be the greatest virtues of humanity: friendship and generosity, refraining from

¹²⁷ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.849

¹²⁸ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.851

¹²⁹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.315

asserting oneself as sovereign subject. Beauvoir regards this as both fundamental and as something which requires a 'conversion', an ethical stand, in order for it to take place. According to her, the recognition of the other as a free, transcendent being should thus take place in friendship and generosity, because it is right, true and authentic.

According to Beauvoir, the conflict between consciousnesses, can be transcended: "The conflict can be overcome by the free recognition of each individual in the other, each one positing both itself and the other as object and as subject in a reciprocal movement¹³⁰." The presupposition for the recognition is thus that each party simultaneously and freely regards the other as a subject. She goes on:

"But friendship and generosity, which accomplish this recognition of freedoms concretely, are not easy virtues; they are undoubtedly man's highest accomplishment; this is where he is in his truth: but this truth is a struggle endlessly begun, endlessly abolished; it demands that man surpass himself at each instant."¹³¹

Reciprocal recognition between subjects requires, it seems, that the human being in some way overcome himself or herself, fulfils the highest potential as human, 'his truth', lets himself or herself be guided by the virtues of friendship and generosity. This is not easy, it requires constant effort.

The other may try to dominate, to oppress, the human being, who cannot realize himself or herself without other human beings. Moreover, the assertion of sovereignty is a fundamental tendency and consequently an inclination to oppress and let oneself be oppressed. Beauvoir equates renunciation of this with an 'authentically moral attitude':

"man attains an authentically moral attitude when he renounces being in order to assume his existence; through this conversion he also renounces all possession,

¹³⁰ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.193

¹³¹ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.193-194

because possession is a way of searching for being; but the conversion by which he attains true wisdom is never finished, it has to be made ceaselessly, it demands constant effort."¹³²

Here, conversion is related not only to reciprocal recognition, but also to the renunciation of being.

In summary, Beauvoir, regards human beings as both *Mitsein* and separation, and sees inter-human relationships as both harmonious and conflict-laden. For her, it is possible to transcend the basic tendency to set oneself up as subject by affirming oneself against another, through reciprocal recognition and the cultivation of virtues such as friendship and generosity, thus transcending being, and confirming both oneself and other as subjects, finding oneself in what one does rather than what one has or what one is.

¹³² De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.194

Conclusion

The Hegelian theory which underpins Beauvoir's analysis in *The Second Sex* is its strength and its weakness. It allows Beauvoir to develop the concept of woman as 'the Other,' but give rise to the idea that anything feminine is animal and second-rate. It is the male in Beauvoir's theory who represents culture, humanity, production and activity; and the female who incarnates the opposite of such terms. It is Beauvoir's theoretical perspective based on Hegelian concepts which leads her to perceive the world in this way. Because she sees the process of human development as involving violence, creative labour, dominance, and transcendence of biology, woman's reproductive role and domestic work is not given any value and woman seen as more bound to animal life. Conversely, Beauvoir portrays man as a powerful, transcendent force - risking his life to affirm his sovereignty or attaining his ideals and through his projects creating a human world of techniques and values. It is he who has brought human society to its elevated heights - it is he who, in Beauvoir's theory, has been responsible for all acts of creation: thus art, philosophy, literature, science, medicine, have been exclusively his achievements.

Beauvoir's theory, then, simply leads to the idea that the emancipated woman is man modified in some unimportant and unspecified way by the possession of a different body. From *The Second Sex* it appears that Beauvoir's new woman will, like her male counterpart, undergo "an apprenticeship in violence" and extend her grasp on the world by asserting herself in creative and transcendent acts. In order to make sure that women do assert themselves and are not tempted to abdicate marriage will be prohibited as a career for women and childcare will be a communal responsibility. Once assertive and sovereign woman will be able to choose her own destiny. This in itself will create the circumstances in which the relation of the two sexes would be a relation of struggle. Indeed, Beauvoir posits an ontology premised on a fundamental

conflict between individuals in which each desperately tries to assert their sovereignty: "The temptation to dominate is the most universal and the most irresistible there is¹³³."

Fundamental to most feminist theories is a rejection of masculinity; to be male is not to be identified with humanity. Along with such a devaluation of masculinity is an upgrading of feminine characteristics. Elevation of femininity does not necessarily mean that femininity per se is extolled; women live in a mutilated condition, but a condition which gives rise to positive ways of behaving. Thus, such feminists claim that although women are oppressed - confined to a domestic world - in fulfilling their feminine role, certain modes of behaviour such as being caring, gentle, patient are cultivated and valued. Therefore, women's liberation should not be seen in terms of imitating men. Although critical of the independent and aggressive aspects of masculinity, such feminists believe both sexes have positive features; that we should encourage everyone to express themselves in "masculine" and "feminine" ways.

In arguing that woman's emancipation involves her becoming like man, Beauvoir not only breaks with most feminist theories but also with some of the classic literature on oppression and liberation. In Hegelian philosophy there is the notion that the characteristics of human consciousness are split between master and slave. Thus it is in breaking down this division - the creative slave risking his life and acquiring aspects of his master's consciousness - that the fully human being will emerge. As Beauvoir sees woman's emancipation in terms of her becoming man, it would mean becoming like her oppressor. Indeed Beauvoir's portrayal of the sexes is such, that in the project of becoming more and truly human, woman has nothing to teach man.

It can be suggested that the idea of a hostile, threatening Other is not 'a fundamental category of thought,' but the product of an individualistic and competitive culture. In a patriarchal society which values assertive, domineering subjects, woman's oppression

¹³³ De Beauvoir, Simone (1949). *The Second Sex*, Trans. By Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier. Vintage Books. P.566

is characterised by her relegation to the status of object and 'Other.' We must recognize the mutilated condition of woman's lives but we must also recognize that in fulfilling their feminine role, certain modes of behaviour such as patience, endurance, tenderness, care are cultivated which are valuable. This is precisely what Beauvoir's theory fails to do in *The Second Sex*, and it is this which constitutes its flaw.

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