

Chapter Two

From Being to Becoming: Tracing the Journey of the ‘Other’ through Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*

Reading *The Second Sex* repeatedly gives us new insights into the reasons behind the subordination of women. Simone de Beauvoir’s voice and ideas are carried forward through this book in the present world where there is a dire need to revisit her ideas to establish a strong resistance against patriarchy which has been lost these days and also to work for the empowerment of those oppressed women who are still unaffected by feminist movements. The revival of ideas, which have long been lost or forgotten, is the need of an hour for a better future for which it is necessary to read the most powerful text of the feminist theory, that is, *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir. This chapter gives an overview of the ideas shared by Beauvoir in her famous book.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86), born in a bourgeois family, was strictly controlled by her mother just like Doris Lessing. Her catholic upbringing did not allow her to have an independent identity. Even her French identity did not allow her to achieve elite education which was against the laws and customs of France. Beauvoir belonged to the first generation of European women to be educated at par with men. She was the pioneer of her time, youngest woman, and the ninth woman in France to pass the prestigious agregation examination in philosophy, a highly competitive postgraduate examination which serves as a national ranking of students. While studying, she met Jean Paul Sartre (1905-80), the French existentialist philosopher, who influenced her a lot. But many

readers see her merely as a disciple of Sartre which Moi calls a myth and tries to shatter it. Simone de Beauvoir was writing in 1940s when her views were radical for her time, but she established a base for all other feminists to identify the distinction between sex and gender. She writes that gender is a social construct and women are socially trained and conditioned to assume feminine roles. She also thinks that women can change the society profoundly by claiming for full freedom, justice, and equality. Toril Moi writes:

Beauvoir thought that women would change profoundly in a society granting them full freedom, justice and equality. In 1949, she thought such an era was about to begin. To her, women were poised on the threshold of a new, free, creative existence and she gladly makes the young Arthur Rimbaud's ecstatic faith in the creative future of women her own. (Moi 3)

Gender is a social construction and its meanings are allocated according to biological traits and functions. Many feminists see gender as an ideology because it naturalises woman's role as natural, pre-ordained, and unalterable; it is seen as a social performance; and it promotes the inequality between sexes. Beauvoir establishes that biological sex and social gender are tools in the hands of patriarchy to maintain inequality between men and women. She argues that through mystification and stereotyping, patriarchy has always established its control over women who are seen as the negative of the men. Beauvoir refutes the idea where women are mystified as useless beings while charming qualities, like modesty, pride, and delicacy, are attributed to them making them dependent on men. These women are also forbidden to show their talent and their worth in action because they are considered to be passive objects and they are made to believe that they could achieve truth only with the help of men. This is the reason why Anna

Wulf, the protagonist of Doris Lessing's novel *The Golden Notebook* and famous writer, later, in her life faces the problem of writer's block.

Beauvoir also finds that women are equally responsible for their oppression as they accept the stereotypical roles silently. In her book, *The Second Sex* (1949), she writes that the origin and the cause of female subservience to men lie not in any natural inferiority but in the age-old dominance of men. Man has set up laws to show woman as other due to which she is unable to make claim for herself as subject because "she lacks the concrete means" and believes in her secondary role (Beauvoir 10). The relationship between a man and a woman is like that of master-slave relationship where both are interdependent for their needs, yet it is the oppressor who has the control over the situation making the oppressed handicapped. She writes that a woman, who wants to be dependent on man, is committing a moral fault. The body of a woman is subjected to laws and customs due to which the consciousness is formed through actions within a society. The worst effect on a woman is during war when she is divinised or is made a slave and, in both the cases, is forced to give up her identity. She is blamed for the failure and downfall of man. These myths can be shattered only if a woman will assert herself as human being and stop dreaming men's dreams.

A woman is not considered an autonomous being and it is also believed that a woman cannot think of herself without a man whereas vice versa is possible. Beauvoir investigates the reasons for this otherness in history, psychology, biology, and sociology. She also builds up the ideas in her book on the basis of the works of Hegel, Marx, Kant, Heidegger, Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Levi Strauss and also quotes from the works of different male philosophers, like Montaigne, Diderot, J. S. Mill, Erasmus, or

Agrippa, who try to defend women which shows that Beauvoir is unbiased. On the other hand, she offers a critique of the few writers, like Hesiod, Pericles, Plato, Aristotle, Xenophone, Archilochus, Hipponax, Hippocrates, St. Thomas, Alfred Fouillee, M. de Montherlant, M. Claude Mauriac, and D. H. Lawrence, who promoted the differences between men and women and reduced women to semi-slavery by seeing the emancipation of women as a threat. For example, Dr. Johnson, a severe critic, offers a vituperative attack on women writers where he has compared them to dogs who walk on their hinder legs and says that though women are incapable to do the task with perfection, but still they do it. *The Second Sex* brings out the anger and outrage among the French establishment which finds this book to be a threat to their position.

Beauvoir begins her arguments by asking certain questions like whether the category of woman still exists or will exist and if there is a woman then what place she should hold in the world. She questions, “Is femininity secreted by the ovaries? Is it enshrined in a Platonic heaven? Is a frilly petticoat enough to bring it down to earth?” (Beauvoir 3). The complete work of Beauvoir depends on the question “What is woman?” or why a woman is always defined as the other (5). She has been the partner of Sartre so her book reflects existentialist philosophy and focuses on the binary oppositions of self/subject and other/object. The former is active and male while the latter is passive and female. There is an asymmetrical relationship between the two and woman always acquires a secondary place. The qualities associated with the ‘other’ are immanence and passivity.

Beauvoir emphasises that biology, history, and innate human nature do not determine of what we become rather free actions constitute the transcendence. Through

Hegel and Sartre, she explains 'Otherness' as a fundamental category of human thought. She propounds that the subject can establish itself as essential only in binary opposition to an object which is established as inessential and writes:

The category of *Other* is as original as consciousness itself. The duality between Self and Other can be found in the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies; this division did not always fall into the category of the division of the sexes, it was not based on any empirical given. . . . No group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself. (Beauvoir 6-7)

In Volume I, Simone de Beauvoir talks about the 'invention' of the other sex, that is, woman through physiology, psychoanalysis, anthropology; through ancient, medieval, and modern history, and through myths. In Part Two, she traces out this subjugation through 'History' and in Part Three, she talks about different classical myths created by Montherlant, Lawrence, Claudel, Breton, and Stendhal which have established the secondary position of women. In Volume II, she also traces the root cause of this suppression through childhood, adolescence, motherhood, ageing, prostitution and talks about sexuality in open when women of that time dared not even write about it.

Beauvoir also turns to myths and how biology, history, and psychoanalysis contribute in the formation of 'Eternal Feminine' myth. Myths of the mother and the virgin form an ideal image which is very difficult to break leading to a sense of loss of identity and individuality. Beauvoir writes that a woman is always what a man desires of her and all that she does not attain. She emphasises that a woman is always defined by a

man and does not have existence of her own. Perfect obedience is expected from a woman and if she fails to do so, she is punished like Eve who fails this test and wanders off against Adam's wishes and as a result she gets seduced. She eats the forbidden fruit with the belief that after acquiring knowledge she will be on an equal footing with Adam.

. . . so to add what wants

In female sex, the more to draw his love

And render me more equal and, perhaps,

A thing not undesirable, sometime

Superior: for inferior who is free? (Milton 9.821-25)

The punishment which Eve gets is death. Posner, in his book *Law and Literature*, writes, "Two of the numerous punishments visited on Adam and Eve and their descendants require elucidation: gender inequality and political oppression" (Posner 263). Eve is subjected "to thy husband's will/Thine shall submit: he over thee shall rule" (Milton 10.195-96). She is also made to experience the pain of childbirth. The myth has already been established where Adam and Eve are unequal, where Adam's physical appearance "declar'd absolute rule" and Eve's appearance "implied subjection" (4.299-300, 4.307-08). As is also written:

. . . Though both

Not equal as their sex not equal seemed:

For contemplation he and valor formed,

For softness she and sweet attractive grace:

He for God only, she for God in him. (Milton 4.295-99)

A woman is always subjected to man's force as Eve also says, "The rest we live/Law to ourselves, Our reason is our law" (Milton 9.653-54). Posner, further writes, "A government of men must take place of a government of (natural) laws" (Posner 264). He also writes, "Milton cannot, without courting a charge of heresy, contradict a factual claim made speculate that the bible story is based on man's fears of seduction of their wives, or daughters, symbolised by the temptation of Eve by an animal that resembles a phallus." (267)

A woman, sometimes, uses these myths for her own advantage such as she thinks that a man is placed at a privileged position and in marrying him she can also acquire a social standing, but she does not realise that a man wants to tame her just as he wants to control nature. Nature is considered to be inferior to culture where nature is the social entity and culture is the bio-physical entity. Men include themselves in culture along with ritual, politics, mind, and social while they relate women to nature and also include their biological process, childbirth, body, and domestic life in it as they believe that all these are naturally made for women. These men portray women as the nurturers, mothers, objects, and the one to be acted upon representing emotions while men are workers, subjects, and actors representing brains where women are excluded from decision making and higher positions in any profession. Writers, like Mrs. Gaskell, wrote with their husband's surname and felt that they could achieve social status and social recognition through their husbands. G. B. Shaw said that it is very easy to put people in chains than to keep them away from these chains if those chains bring prestige to them. This is the reason why a woman passively wanted to be recognised as someone's wife.

Beauvoir feels that myths are the tools and ideological structures which naturalise the oppression of women, to define them as 'other', and to impose their own laws and customs on them. She also suggests a solution that one should not build relationship found on myths that is of master and slave relationship rather a real relationship must be established based on sincerity, romance, adventure, dream, happiness, and love. Just like myths, other institutions, like religion, family, education, society, and law, are social and cultural structures which maintain inequality between men and women. Italian communist Antonio Gramsci gave the concept of 'hegemony' which is used by a social class to achieve control and power over weaker sections not directly, but by creating an environment where the subordinate classes accept in their own oppression unquestioningly. This is how these structures have created hegemony, that is, by persuading and convincing women about their subordinated position.

Beauvoir deals with feminine myths created by Montherlant, D. H. Lawrence, Claudel, Breton, and Stendhal. She quotes Nietzsche who believes that the Eternal Feminine is exalted only during the periods of weakness and the hero has to rise up against the Magna Mater. He always looks for deficiencies in women. Similarly, Montherlant, in his works *Exile*, *Les Olympiques*, and *The Bachelors*, portrays mother as major enemy who always wants to retain her sovereignty by locking up her son in her womb's depth, by cutting the wings of her child, by pulling him back from the heights, by turning him moron, and diminishing him just as a woman lover traps him and who "wallows in immanence" and loves her lover in his weakness and when he is defenseless (Beauvoir 222). Though he believes that sportswoman can acquire a spirit or a soul due to autonomous exercise of her body, yet the feminine flesh repels him. He believes in giving

and not in receiving which would make him dependent and does not even deal with his equal for the fear of risking his superiority.

Beauvoir offers a critique of Montherlant who is obsessed with his image of God, a 'superior being', the one who is not engendered, one who renounces flesh, or the hero for whom marriage shatters his "magnificent solitude" (Beauvoir 223). She also criticises him for living under an illusion of autonomy as he chooses freedom without an object; for alienating his liberty in the interests of his ego; for creating a false image of the hero, and for closing himself up in "a museum of mirages" (234). He is also criticised for his admiration of Nazi ideology, for being a sadist and nihilist. For him, transcendence of a man lies in the term of his state and he tries to pass all his insufficiency in a woman.

Beauvoir, then, deals with D. H. Lawrence who sees woman not as an object confronting subject, but an opposite pole necessary for existence. He believes in male supremacy, pride, and virility, symbolised in phallus which is absent in women. For Lawrence, transcendence of a man lies in phallus. He believes that "[m]asculine arrogance provokes feminine resistance" (Beauvoir 239). Unlike Montherlant, Lawrence rejoices in flesh and does not abhor or dread his birth in this world rather he cherishes his mother and portrays his motherly characters in terms of their femininity. But Lawrence detests sexually conscious women or those who have detached or aggressive attitudes because these women do not let the man reach the height and he advises men to renounce their personal love. Beauvoir criticises him saying that Lawrence presents the ideal picture of a real woman who assent to their position as 'Other' unhesitatingly.

The other myth created by Claudel is also dealt by Beauvoir. Claudel is a Catholic who believes that Eve's disobedience had brought misery to women. He is criticised for believing in hierarchies and for equating woman with flesh and for considering her merely as auxiliary. He expects fidelity, loyalty, sweetness, and humility in woman. He treats all the relationships of woman towards man as the relations of vassalage whether it is of woman to husband, or daughter to father, or brother to sister as he says a woman should devote herself completely to her family, country, and church. Unlike Montherlant and Lawrence, Claudel shows the man in his weakness as he believes that man is a carnal and lowly being who should always be aware of his origin, sins, and his death.

The poet, Breton, looks at woman as an enigma, as an erotic object, as a perturbing element who "wrests man from the sleep of immanence", whose love is a stumbling block for a man, who is mysterious like nature and he instructs woman that she should always pay attention to her beauty (Beauvoir 254). The objectification of woman into spoon shoe and the table-magnifying glass, by Breton, is strongly criticised by Beauvoir for denying human base of woman and for not treating them as subject. But he is praised for treating transcendence as a banal mystification that engenders war, stupidity, bureaucracy, and negation of the human, unlike Montherlant, Lawrence, or Claudel, he, rather, inverts the hierarchy by believing that truth lies in immanence.

Stendhal also loves women sensually, right from his childhood, and wants them as judges. He prefers their love rather than any other friendship, and creates pathos in women characters when they try to achieve and accomplish themselves in spite of the obstacles that surround them, but he always confines his heroines to the authority of a husband or a father. He is criticised by Beauvoir for believing that women lack reason

and common sense, and for his comparison of intelligent women with monsters, though he desires to have an intelligent mistress. Stendhal blames women for their idleness and calls them “a desert of boredom” as he hates seriousness (qtd. in Beauvoir 263). He hates women who are idle, stupid, envious, talkative, mean, cold, emotionless, pretentious, harmful, condescending, without charm, and full of admiration for self. Stendhal is praised by Beauvoir for projecting himself in his women characters and also for representing them as human beings first which none of the other novelists have ever done before. She appreciates him for being a romantic and a feminist because he believes in individual happiness and woman as a transcendent being which might lead to the emancipation of women.

Beauvoir criticises Montherlant who feels that he can be moved only by the woman who can enable him to measure his virile power; whereas for Lawrence it is the woman who can renounce herself for him; for Claudel it is the woman who submits herself to the man and to God; for Breton it is the one who brings salvation for the humanity, and for Stendhal it is the woman who helps man to accomplish his destiny.

Through the detailed study of myths, whether they are archaic or established by her contemporary writers, Beauvoir refutes the ideas that women appear as *flesh*; they are considered to be same with nature; they are destined to immanence; they are passive objects who can bring peace and harmony, and they are established as inessential. The myth is created about the ‘privileged other’ through whom the subject accomplishes himself and Beauvoir calls this myth “a transcendent Idea” as these myths operate differently for different person (Beauvoir 277). She points out the contradictions created by these myths where the saintly mother is juxtaposed with the cruel stepmother. A man

tries to establish himself through the other which is why he sees woman as an intermediary between nature, that is foreign to man, and the peer who is too identical to him. Beauvoir shows that society and individual play crucial role in deciding the values and qualities that are projected in woman which she is expected to follow. She blames a man for not understanding woman properly and making her feel alienated from her own body.

Beauvoir feels that a woman is considered to be mysterious and how myths are created and constructed to make her remain a mystery. She tries to define “mystery” as the situation where the language of a woman is unheard, where she exists but is hidden beneath the veil due to which men call it a mirage which vanishes as soon as one tries to approach it (Beauvoir 279). She tries to show that a person is always measured by his acts and the mystery lies not in sex rather in situation because if a woman enjoys social and economic privileges, then the mystery is reversed. She strongly criticises the idea of defining woman objectively because the woman is kept at the margin. The success of a woman is in contradiction with her femininity since she is required to make herself an object, to be the other, and not to dream of her own subjectivity. This highlights that myths, laws, and customs are imposed on women. In the Volume I, *Facts and Myths* of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir has traced that it is difficult to define a woman through biological, psychical, or economic destinies, but society defines her through these references.

Beauvoir criticises Freud and his masculine model which assumes a woman to be a mutilated man who suffers from penis-envy. He also tries to replace the notion of value with that of authority. According to Beauvoir, the wholeness represents feminine

virginity and man's love for wholeness makes the notion of virginity precious while it is also seen as a mystery for men. In many places, men dread taking a virgin wife because they consider it to be powerful and threatening, while few others demand the opposite when the question of property is involved. A virgin woman is often compared to a virgin land that has always attracted the explorers. She is related to many other non-living things. She rejects the idea of normality created by psychoanalysts to underrate woman as secondary and says that women are not the playthings of contrary drives.

Beauvoir also criticises Freud for relegating women to terms like 'determinism', 'immanence', 'alienation', 'alterity' against which Beauvoir talks about 'choice', 'freedom', and 'project'. She rejects the notion that the boy is the norm whereas the girl is a deviation from it. Freud talks about libido as "male in essence" and denies female libido having its own original nature and emphasises on male superiority (Beauvoir 51). Freud defines libido as the sexual energy which is denied by reality where Id is the reservoir of libido whereas for Carl Gustav Jung, it is a psychic energy which expresses itself only through symbols. Jung rejects the idea of Freud that all human behaviour is motivated by sexuality. For Jacques Lacan, these libidinal relations are fantasised relation with mother where she is the object of desire. Freud also fails to explain the origin of drives for which he is again criticised.

Beauvoir criticises Adler who sees a girl equal to a man only if she is able to climb tree. She refutes this notion that such activities are considered to be male domain only and if a girl enters into this domain, she is either not allowed to do so or considered to be outrageous in her actions. The other notion of mother finding penis substitute in her

child is also not accepted by Beauvoir. She also rejects the notion of historical materialism which sees man and woman only as economic entities.

Beauvoir criticises Engels' book *The Origin of the Family* for giving a superficial account of transformation of the society from matriarchy to patriarchy and for excluding women from the categories of 'bourgeois' or 'proletarian' due to the introduction of metals. He writes that in the Stone Age, when the land belonged to all members of the clan, females contributed to the work through gardening, pottery making, and weaving and played important role in economic life. With the discovery of metals, this agricultural land expanded for which intensive labour was required, so men were hired instead of women because women were considered to be weak, which is seen as the "great historical defeat of the female sex" (qtd. in Beauvoir 64). When private property appeared, man became the proprietor of woman, and alienated women from property. Domestic works, gradually, were rendered insignificant. Due to all this, paternal right replaced maternal rights as the transmission of property took place from father to son which led to her social and economic oppression. There was no economic independence for women, yet they lived under an illusion that they were free.

Beauvoir, rather, feels that reproductive function of a woman should be considered equal to that of the productive function at work because a woman spends equal energy in both these acts. She also suggests that a woman can achieve her individuality and economic independence only if she is free from her reproductive servitude, but, she feels, that it is unachievable until the political and social authority lies in the hands of men. Beauvoir writes that female values should also be regarded as equal to male values instead of juxtaposing and confining women to immanence. She argues:

It is the male who opens up the future towards which she also transcends; in reality, women have never pitted female values against male ones: it is men wanting to maintain masculine prerogatives who invented this division; they wanted to create a feminine domain—a rule of life, of immanence—only to lock woman in it. . . . Today what women claim is to be recognized as existents just like men, and not to subordinate existence to life or the man to his animality. (Beauvoir 77)

Even Griselda Pollock remarks:

Under the phallogentric order, there is the One, identified with or appropriated by the masculine, and what is not man, deemed damaged, reduced, unfit for full participation, weaker, a mere vessel, the object not the subject of desire, the seen and not the see-er, the spoken and not the speaking. (Pollock 179)

Through history, Beauvoir proves that man maintained his reign over the world after the invention of tools while woman was confined to her role of motherhood, which was seen as a natural function for women. Throughout her life, a woman is taught to accept male authority silently and blindly and this seems to her a transcendental reality and this mute acceptance makes her powerless. Beauvoir writes:

Generally, as her faith is blind, she respects the laws simply because they are laws; the laws may change, but they keep their prestige; in the eyes of women, power creates law since the laws they recognise in men come

from their power; that is why they are the first to throw themselves at the victor's feet when a group collapses. (Beauvoir 657)

Beauvoir shows how Amazon women were strong enough to risk their lives in wars, but, in later eras, women were considered fit only to give birth to the lives. The goddesses which were worshipped were also usurped by male by creating a counter league of gods in order to establish their sovereignty and authority over women. The main problem which Beauvoir finds in women is that they derive their prestige not from their positive values but from man's weakness; they have no desire for bringing any 'real' revolution that could bring the change all over world, and they do not think of abolition of sexual differences completely. She argues that a man never presents himself as an individual of a certain sex whereas a woman has to specify it and she is always seen as 'wrong'. A woman is always seen in relational terms like a man is seen as the ideal, the norm, the subject and the woman is the deviant or the other, the variation and flawed version of the male, the object who seeks perfection by trying to be like man.

Beauvoir believes that a woman should also be considered as consciousness for herself, but she is prevented from assuming the status of human being. Gender inequality is old and deeply entrenched in all aspects of society; it is sophisticated and resilient; and it evolves and adapts with changes in social structures so it remains even more elusive and adamant. A man acts differently in different situations, that is, when he is benevolent towards a woman, he may create an illusion of "abstract equality", but when there is a clash between them, he renounces that equality. (Beauvoir 14)

Beauvoir criticises the tendency of men to brand women as theirs so that no one can lay claim over them and only they want the right to conquer them. Beauvoir also points out that, a man needs a woman to check his qualities like virility, charm, seduction, tenderness, and cruelty. Beauvoir writes that “femininity” is equated with “alterity and inferiority” and it is associated with inferiority, shame, illness, suffering and death though some women try to overcome this mutilation by taking active parts in sports, social, intellectual, and mystical activities. (Beauvoir 340)

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir explores how women are always defined in relation to men at various stages of their lives, or how she is constructed differently by a man as he associates a woman with “womb”, “ovary”, and “female” (Beauvoir 5). She also shows the socioeconomic oppression of women following the Marxist model of oppression of the working class. Elaine Showalter writes that though writers, like George Eliot, Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, have contributed a great deal for feminist literary criticism, but it developed into a shape with Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, and Betty Friedan because they emphasise on the female ‘self’ and portray their fears and anxieties through their characters, irrespective of the cultural and patriarchal construct.

Beauvoir writes that men try to find justification for the subordination of women in Biology to which she contests by giving examples of one-celled animals, heterogenetic gametes where the process of self-fertilisation and cross fertilisation takes place. She also cites many examples of insects and other forms of life where female is superior just as in the case of praying mentis and at other places where father plays a nurturing role only to highlight that the differences are man-made and not natural. She rightly points out “One

is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (Beauvoir 293). Beauvoir proves that biologically both male and female principles become neutral in the process of union as both gametes of male and female lose their identity to form a new identity. The biological changes which take place in a woman are huge due to which she is considered to be emotional.

Beauvoir denies that biological differences can be taken as a tool to be unjust towards women and she calls for a change in women. She sees gender as a social category where women are socially constructed, conditioned, trained, and prescribed to assume feminine roles. She encourages women to take up charge of their own choices which could help in bringing social transformation. She also constitutes that ‘woman’ is a biological entity whereas ‘feminine’ is a social construction. Beauvoir feels that the reason of subordination of a woman cannot be read in biology alone so she tries to trace the reasons in social, economic, and psychological contexts also.

A woman is forced to marry without any option of divorce, if required and is seen as a procreating machine. Her lower wages are justified based on her weak structure and less efficiency in work. Women writings are rejected as irrational and sentimental because these writings deal only with the issues pertaining to homes. According to Beauvoir, a world where men and women are equal; where women get equal wages; where women can earn their living is easy to imagine, but all this seems like a utopian world and reality is yet to be achieved. She suggests that marriage should take place at free will where one can walk out of marriage and women can be freed from slavery of motherhood only if voluntary maternity is promoted.

A man has always been associated with terms like subject, master, who rules, the god, man for the fields whereas a woman is always seen as the slave, the object, the devout, and woman for the hearth. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, calls a woman an inferior being and equates her with slave who is worthless. Chaucer, in his *The Canterbury Tales*, ridicules and satirises women characters where the major criticism has been of Wife of Bath. John Donne's beloved in his sonnets is muted and chided by her lover. Few heroines of Shakespeare, like Rosalind (Ganymede) in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and other strong women characters also conform to their traditional roles as they get married in the end. During Restoration Age, there was no portrayal of strong women characters since French culture of moral degradation was embraced and adopted with the restoration of Charles II to the throne. Women were mostly ridiculed like Mrs. Loveit in George Etherege *Man of Mode*. In Augustan Age, women, like Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock* by Alexander Pope, were criticised for being spend-thrift and also for spending their whole time in front of dressing room and for being obsessed with self adornment.

Women writers, like Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot, portrayed their protagonists in a strong light, yet at the end these women characters conformed to the patriarchal institutions of marriage or were killed. Jane Austen's popular novel *Pride and Prejudice* clearly follows the theme of marriage as the novel, itself, begins with the statement, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (Austen 1). The Victorian Age had been very strict towards women and they were confined to four walls of the house and were expected to perform domestic duties like sewing, cooking, knitting, or painting until the

nineteenth century. Women were not given voting rights and they received education by their governesses at their homes limiting their scope only to feminine works.

Virginia Woolf ventures into male field and experiments with the structure of the novels also by introducing techniques like stream of consciousness. Woolf pleads for a marriage of minds and also for harmony between sexes. But, still, women are denied to express their feelings, thoughts, and anguish and the writers take up this task and do not portray ideal woman and housewife rather they present a true picture of frustrated and alienated women, by delving deep into the psyche of woman and portraying her subjectivity, thoughts, and desires. They try to find out the solution to the problems of women by locating the center deep within them, unlike male writers who concentrate only on external things. The change has taken place in the depiction of women, but the question that still needs to be answered is whether all this has really shaken the patriarchal oppression, or the stereotypical roles defined for women, or even the notion of looking at women as sex-objects.

Men have also set the ideals of feminine beauty for women which need to be questioned where customs and fashion bind women in strict adherence making it difficult for women to walk in tight shoes or tight dresses. Beauvoir writes:

Customs and fashions were often applied to cut the feminine body from its transcendence: the Chinese woman with bound feet could barely walk, the Hollywood star's painted nails deprived her of her hands; high heels, corsets, hoops, farthingales and crinolines were meant less to accentuated the woman's body's curves than to increase the body's powerlessness. . . .

Makeup and jewels were used for this petrification of the body and face.
(Beauvoir 182)

The erotic part of a woman is enhanced by men for their own gratification and she is asked to use different embellishments and make-up to look beautiful as she is still valued for her face and figure. The obsession for beauty is criticised by Beauvoir who believes that women delude themselves into believing that they re-create themselves through dress, make-up, several beauty treatments, but the fact is that in this attempt they are getting alienated from their true selves. Beauvoir critiques these women because they are ready to forgo their transcendence just to seek the attention of men. She suggests that women should spend time in doing constructive work instead of whiling away their time in gossiping and wasting time on irrelevant issues.

Beauvoir criticises Renaud de Montauban who, in his diatribe, writes, “Go back into your painted and golden quarters, sit ye down in the shade, drink, eat, embroider, dye silk, but do not busy yourself with our affairs. Our business is to fight with the sword and steel. Silence!” (qtd. in Beauvoir 111). But these days, due to marketisation, the focus is now on cosmetics, jewellery, and other beauty products which have also swayed away women from their paths of achieving freedom and from their real problems. Urvashi Butalia says, “What’s more disturbing though is the way in which women’s day has turned into an opportunity to market different products.” (Butalia)

The problem also arises when educated and independent women become self-centered and they discriminate with other uneducated women. But in order to achieve true freedom, there is a dire need to work together leaving aside any kind of

discrimination. The modern age has added to the dilemma of an independent woman and has left her dwindling between tradition and modernity. Her quest for identity faces a strong opposition from the male society and this obstructs her path to assert herself not only in her family but also in society. This loss of identity results in disintegration and alienation. In terms of free choice for woman, Beauvoir argues that a woman is constructed in relation to the action of others. She criticises Aristotle who has confined woman to her sex and her lack of qualities like rationality which, he believes, is the major cause of their oppression.

As for existentialists, the most important is the free individual and its lived experiences and in many situations women feel a threat to their existence which has also been a major concern for existentialists. Beauvoir promotes the idea that an independent woman, now, no longer requires the protection of her father or husband or her own children which, earlier, made her dependent on males. She is now economically independent and can look after the household as well.

A woman is bound in vicious, perpetual repetition of household work and waits for her husband and children to return from their places while she is not allowed to venture out and perform other activities. This challenges her existence just as in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* where two tramps Vladimir and Estragon are waiting perpetually for a person/a god/a thing about whom they have no information and who does not come to meet them. Beauvoir criticises Balzac's idea in *Physiology of Marriage*, in which he shows his insensitivity towards women by claiming that women should not complain or blame men for their harshness. He also writes that men should not be moved by the emotional outburst of women as women are born to bear all pains naturally.

Through psychoanalysis and historical materialism, Beauvoir analyses familial, sexual, and material life of a woman, but she concludes that all these are not enough to give a complete picture. Psychoanalysis determines women's sexual development where women are seen as alienated objects due to which they are unable to perform any conscious action. She writes, "Nature does not define woman: it is she who defines herself by reclaiming nature for herself in her affectivity." (Beauvoir 50)

Tracing the history of women, Beauvoir realises that women's entire history is written by men. Men have created, moulded, guided, controlled, and established the values, customs, and religions which curb and limit the powers of women. Beauvoir cites several examples where men have convinced women that they play an important role in the society while, on the other hand, they are punished and reprimanded if they take to action. The ambitious woman and heroine are seen as strange monsters. Rosa Luxemburg or Mme Curie showed that historical insignificance has doomed women to inferiority.

The Volume II of *The Second Sex* begins with the often quoted statement "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" challenging the idea that women are born 'feminine' and Beauvoir claims that it is society and other factors that construct 'a woman' (Beauvoir 293). In an "Introduction" of the Second Volume *Lived Experience of The Second Sex*, Beauvoir begins with an idea that though women have overthrown the myths of femininity, yet they are unable to achieve their independence completely because of their human condition where they are brought up by women as women for men and their destiny is to get married and to remain subordinated to men. In this volume, she, basically, enquires how women are forced to accept the condition of femininity and how they are trapped in this universe.

In the first section of the book, Beauvoir traces the life of a woman right from her childhood, through her adolescence till her experience of lesbianism and sexual initiation, if she has any, and shows how at each stage this woman is forced to accept her immanence, passivity, alienation, and objectivity in place of transcendence, man's activity, and subjectivity. She feels that a girl is trapped in a vicious circle which she is unable to break due to her incapability to question it or to affirm her freedom against it. The girl is bullied and mutilated and her activities are curtailed, but she, still, feels herself to be an autonomous individual and sees herself present in transcendence only to realise later that she is destined to be a passive object. Right from her childhood, a woman depends on many men for guidance like father, brother, uncle, relative, or friend and she is attuned in such a manner that she tries to seek the shoulder of one man when another man fails to support her. A girl believes that she is a woman and she belongs to a closed and limited world dominated by men.

A girl faces existential crisis when she enters an adolescent phase where she is forced to give up her sovereignty and her rights to be a subject and hence she does not remain an autonomous individual as she is always desired and seen as an object/other. Beauvoir writes that it is believed that any self-assertion of an identity by a girl will diminish her femininity and her attractiveness which is why a young girl is not allowed to transcend the natural and social order.

In the chapter "Situation", Beauvoir deals with the situation of wife, mother, and prostitutes and she shows how these women do not transcend through their work and creativity rather they are bound to monotonous existence of producing children, looking after the house, and gratifying the sexual needs of their men. Marriage is considered to be

the ultimate goal for a woman and to be the wife and the mother of someone is more important than her own wishes and desires. Mother is regarded as 'sacred' only if she is married and an unwed mother is seen as a blot and a threat to the society which is still prevalent today. Beauvoir tells her readers that women are not directed by her hormones or any predetermined structure of her brain rather she is shaped in a cast by her situation. She always acts like a play thing or like an obedient child due to the lack of proper opportunities for her. A woman is not allowed to venture in an outside world to gain their independence and is shut up in the kitchen, limiting her horizon. In this male dominated world, a woman finds it difficult to have an independent world of her own as she is always thought to be dependent on man.

In Part VII titled "Towards Liberation", Beauvoir talks of independent women and supports voting rights for women which would help them gain autonomy only if these rights are accompanied by 'economic freedom'. But a woman is always seen to be dependent on her husband and is silent against her abuser. Beauvoir does not ignore the negative effect of this economic, social, and mental freedom which women gain because independent woman, still, feels torn between her professional interests and her sexual vocation and is unable to strike a balance between the two. If ever she tries to do this she has to pay a huge price for it.

Beauvoir also criticises three attitudes in women "The Narcissist", "The Woman in Love", and "The Mystic" because all these types of women submerge their identity into an object thus losing their freedom on their own. For the narcissist the object is 'herself'; for the woman in love it is her beloved, and for the mystic it is the absolute or

God. She talks about love between women as an option which might not be an absolute alternative to heterosexuality.

The connection of woman with nature is highlighted by Beauvoir who cites several examples where woman goddesses of fertility are worshipped and are equated with the mother earth. A man feels cursed and horrified of being born and being bound in mother's womb. She is seen as impure once she gains the age of puberty and is seen as a threat and many purification ceremonies are performed in many countries. Different myths are created when a woman is menstruating. Just like nature, she is shaped by human will in accordance with man's desire. A woman is seen in terms of flesh or glorious body and is compared with the countries also. Beauvoir writes how Jerusalem and Babylon are seen not only as mothers, but also as wives, Babel and Tyre are virgin cities and prostitute cities. France is called the eldest daughter of the Church.

Some other issues of feminism have recently cropped up like some feminists object to the idea of identifying woman/mother with nation. For example, India is seen as Mother India which needs to be protected by men so that her territories remain safe from intruders. They have always found the nation-state, civil society, and religion as tools to control women. In their opinion, this concept weakens the feminist movement while promoting the domination of men in terms of protection of a nation with whom a woman is being identified. Here also a woman becomes the guardian of virtue and tradition and as an object to be controlled. Postcolonial critic, Elleke Boehmer, argues that male role is seen as metonymic in establishing the notion of nation where they represent the complete national community whereas female serves as metaphor in form of mother, symbolising national territory and values. Many feminists objected to the particular values assigned to

a woman's body as mother, seductive, material, sexual, and procreative. Women are always seen as self-sacrificing mothers or faithful wives. Though women assist men in almost all activities, yet they are kept away from the sources of production. They play important role in the society still they are relegated to the margin. They are asked to sacrifice their own will, wishes, and desires for the sake of their family and society. This leads to the obliteration/destruction of their 'individuality' and of their 'selves'.

Nira Yuval-Davis, in her book *Gender and Nation* (1997), argues that the struggle for reproductive rights has been at the centre of feminists struggle. Women's movements, all over the world, campaigned for citizenship rights and reforms within nation. A woman is seen as the cultural reproducers of nation as she symbolises borders which need security. Davis writes, further, that this is the reason why women's dress codes, behavior, and rights are closely monitored and regulated by fundamentalists. The major factor which has adversely affected women is war within and outside nation which results in the increasing crimes against women like rapes and massacres. Yuval-Davis suggests a 'transversal politics' as an alternative to the universal binary within feminism where a woman rooted in her own identity should also try to put herself in a situation of women of other nation without homogenising the other. This, she finds, is the major solution to achieve solidarity with other women as it is a step towards the idea of 'unity in diversity', that is, to retain differences and simultaneously seeking commonality.

Most of feminist criticism owes to the work of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), a treatise on feminism which tries to find out various problems faced by women and offers a challenge to male cultural hegemony. Many feminists have already focused on and talked about the oppression of women before Beauvoir, but what makes

her different is that she “takes ‘femininity’ by the throat to shake out illusion, examining women’s circumstances along with the cultural sleights of hand which deceive and confuse.” (Rowbotham x)

Many American feminists, like Betty Friedan, are also influenced by Beauvoir which paved the way for second-wave feminism during 1960s. They, further, elaborate the distinction between sex and gender. These feminists believe that though the reproductive system of men and women are biological, but they are invested with particular meanings through a social process. For example, motherhood is seen as a symbol of true ‘female’ and the climactic moment of the woman’s life while a barren woman is considered to be a blot for the family and is seen as incomplete. The role of bearing and nurturing children is seen as a ‘natural’ job of women. It is this civilising/socialising process that makes the female a woman.

The maternal rights of a woman are set against the rights of foetus as was observed in the case of Savita Halappanavar, the dentist in England. She suffered a miscarriage when she was 17 weeks pregnant and sought medical treatment at University Hospital Galway. She repeatedly asked for an abortion, but was told that, Ireland being a Catholic country cannot allow abortion till the foetal heartbeat was present, although it was non-viable. The doctors could not perform an abortion out of the fear of severe punishment by Irish Law as the foetus’s heart was still beating. She was, later, diagnosed with septicemia which led to multiple organ failure and resulting into her death on 28th October 2012. Due to widespread of media and awareness among women, these days, many rallies and protests were held, calling for a change in the abortion laws in Ireland which the protesters claimed led to Halappanavar’s death. But in France, the

abortion has been legalised till twelve weeks after the conception under the Veil Law in 1975. Abortions, at later stages of pregnancy, are allowed if two physicians certify that the abortion has to be done if there is risk to the life of the pregnant woman or the child, yet to be born, suffers from a particularly severe incurable illness.

Virginia Woolf, in her essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929), writes that a woman writer should not be self-conscious of her gender and should not focus on reversing the polarisation of men and women rather she should focus on a greater task, that is, the collective idea of subjectivity. This will pave the path for the construction of identity and will emphasise on the idea of being united and connected with each other.

Even Beauvoir also offers many other solutions and changes in the social structures like universal childcare, equal education, contraception, legal abortion for women, liberation, economic freedom, equal opportunities, and complete independence from man. She does not exclude women belonging to different race, class, ethnicity and writes that the liberation must be “collective” (Beauvoir 777). Rosi Braidotti feels that Beauvoir's focus was on the need to ignore the division of self and the other and to create a bond of solidarity among women. This idea of ‘collectivity’ or ‘connectivity’ has been missing due to which several other neglected groups stood for themselves like Dalit women, Black women, Third world women, gays, and lesbians. This idea of ‘collective’ empowerment should be, in true sense, the goal of all feminist discourses which can bring equality to all in the world doing away with caste, class, colour, creed, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and countries and so on. The solution provided by Lauretis is that one should not cover or do away with conflicts or with differences rather ‘we’ should

“continue to articulate and to examine them (differences), listening to one another and also, on occasion, not listening.” (Lauretis 29)

Simone de Beauvoir’s revolutionary and radical magnum opus *The Second Sex* (1949) treats feminine dilemmas and hurdles and tries to suggest solutions to gain freedom. This book is really informative as it tells the difference in the treatment of a boy and a girl or a man and a woman and helps us locate the status of woman in society. Though this book was written in 1949, it is still relevant in the present situation because there is a dire need to look at the root cause of the oppression which Beauvoir has tried to discuss and the readers have forgotten about it.

Beauvoir has tried to trace male oppression historically, mythically, anthropologically, biologically, psychologically, and through literature. She shows that it is due to these factors that a man is always seen as ‘one’ and as a positive norm. She ends her work by demanding some concrete measures which would really emancipate women leading to their freedom and individuality. She demands that women should take risks and face dangers to achieve transcendence. This was the first book that came out with strong theory showing that women have always been seen as ‘negative’, the ‘other’ resulting in the loss of their own individuality and their self-identity.

Beauvoir has raised certain questions like what are paths open to her (woman)? How can she find independence within dependence? What circumstances limit woman’s freedom? Can she overcome them? These crucial questions raised by her are relevant in today’s time also. These questions need to be examined in today’s context where the increasing crimes against women whether it is on roads, or in the homes, or even at their

workplace have seen an increase. Although many women are enjoying their privileged positions, yet many women, still, face life threatening incidents. In this context, the study of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is relevant as she feels that it is art that can restore worth of a woman and can free humanity. Hence, this work is an attempt to restore worth and importance to women through application of Beauvoir's ideas in the select novels of Doris Lessing.

Simone de Beauvoir rightly says that the factors which unite us are far more important in our lives than the gender differences that divide us. Beauvoir feels that there is an urgent need to overthrow the dialectic division of self and the other to create a bond of solidarity between her and all other women. She works out for a solution wherein she suggests that women should try to become subjects in their own rights and should not confine to the roles imposed upon them by men. As an existentialist, she emphasises on the true meaning of existence of women. In the same fashion, Doris Lessing narrates her own real life experiences through her fictional characters and also highlights the problems faced by women at familial, social, economic, political, professional, moral, and educational fronts and how these women are struggling to find the meaning of their existences. The first stage of life of a woman, that is, childhood and maturity is dealt with in the third chapter.

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