

## **RADICAL FEMINISM IN SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S *THE SECOND SEX* TREATISE: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL**

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### **Abstract**

Radical feminism represents one of the types of the feminist theories founded on the attitude that the society is based on the patriarchal grounds, because of which women are marginalized and discriminated against. Feminism is a contemporary social and political movement, motivated by individual and collective experiences of women, which is based on the claim that a society is based on patriarchal principles, according to which men are privileged over women, which results in discrimination against women in public and private life. Although feminism is often considered a unique ideology, this theory actually makes a large number of routes created under the influence of various factors that may be related to the historical and cultural specificity. These are simply what Simone de Beauvoir represents in *The Second Sex*, which is the key and rationale for this paper in order to see how philosophically correct her stance is, through the use of philosophical analysis.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Radical Feminism, Marxism, Patriarchy, Discrimination, Sexism

### **Introduction**

Feminism is one of the philosophical concepts and movement that has raised a lot of controversies among scholars and laymen in the society. It is not a new phenomenon, rather it is as old as the human desire to be treated fairly and judged equally. Feminism represents the position that societies prioritize the male point of view, and that women are treated unfairly within those societies.<sup>1</sup> According to scholars feminism is a range of social movements, political movements, and ideologies that aim to define, establish, and achieve the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes.<sup>2</sup> Feminist movement have campaigned and continue to campaign for women's right, including the right to vote, to hold public office, to work, to earn fair wages, equal pay and eliminate the gender pay gap, to own property, to receive education, to enter contracts, to have equal rights within marriage, and to have maternity leave. A lot of efforts have gone into fighting gender stereotypes and seeking to establish educational and professional opportunities for women that are equal to those of men. Feminists have also worked to ensure access to legal abortions and social integration and to protect women and girls from rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence.<sup>3</sup> These developments have led to the emergence of different shades of the feminist philosophy and movement including Third-wave feminism, Standpoint feminist theory, Fourth-wave feminism, among others. It is in this consciousness of the plight and place of women that the French Existentialist philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir is perceived as of radical feminist.

Simone de Beauvoir became well-known for her 1949 treatise *The Second Sex*, a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a foundational tract of contemporary feminism. De Beauvoir defines women as the "second sex" because for her, in the history of philosophy, women are defined in relation to men. The woman is seen as a second class citizen, who has a lower social, economic and political status. She is viewed as primarily ornamental and nurturing. "This vitriolic notion of womanhood can be likened to that of the Negroes who were seen as second class citizens by the whites. In her feminist thoughts, anchored on her existentialist philosophy, De Beauvoir asserted that women are as capable of choice as men are, and as such can choose to elevate themselves, moving beyond the "immanence" to which they

were previously resigned and reaching "transcendence", a position in which one takes responsibility for oneself and the world, where one chooses one's freedom. Simone de Beauvoir was sad that men had made women the "Other" in society by application of a false aura of "mystery" around them. She argues that men used this as an excuse not to understand women or their problems and not to help them, and that this stereotyping was always done in societies by the group higher in the hierarchy to the group lower in the hierarchy. She made allusion to the fact that a similar kind of oppression by hierarchy also happened in other categories of identity, such as race, class, and religion, but she claimed that it was nowhere more truly than with gender in which men stereotyped women and used it as an excuse to organize society into patriarchy.

In this very radical feminism, de Beauvoir rejects anything including motherhood, marriage, culture and tradition that could ever be used to put women in an inferior position to men. This study is an attempt to examine de Beauvoir's radical feminism with a view to showing that she was on the extreme with some of her postulations. In the light of these, the paper opines that most of the issues she raised can be classified as stereotypes, and if they are stereotypes, they can be overcome, because they are not ontological to the nature of either men or women.

### **Conceptualizing Radical Feminism**

Feminism is a contemporary social and political movement, motivated by individual and collective experiences of women, which is based on the claim that a society is based on patriarchal principles, according to which men are privileged over women, which results in discrimination against women in public and private life. Radical feminism is a perspective within feminism that calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts, while recognizing that women's experiences are also affected by other social divisions such as in race, class, and sexual orientation. The ideology and movement emerged in the 1960s. Radical feminists view society as fundamentally a patriarchy in which men dominate and oppress women. Radical feminists seek to abolish the patriarchy as one front in a struggle to liberate everyone from an unjust society by challenging existing social norms and institutions. This struggle includes opposing the sexual objectification of women, raising public awareness about such issues as rape and violence against women, challenging the concept of gender roles, and challenging what radical feminists see as a radicalized and gendered capitalism that characterizes the United States and many other countries.

According to Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, "the end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist movement, not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally.<sup>7</sup> While radical feminists believe that differences in genitalia and secondary sex characteristics should not matter culturally or politically, they also maintain that women's special role in reproduction should be recognized and accommodated without penalty in the workplace, and some have argued compensation should be offered for this socially essential work. Radical feminists assert that global society functions as a patriarchy in which the classes of men are the oppressors of the class of women.<sup>8</sup> They propose that the oppression of women is the most fundamental form of oppression, one that has existed since the origin of humanity. As radical feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson writes in her foundational piece *Radical Feminism*:

The first dichotomous division of this mass [mankind] is said to have been on the grounds of sex: male and female ... it was because half the human race bears the burden of the reproductive process and because man, the 'rational' animal, had the wit to take advantage of that, that the child bearers, or the 'beasts of burden,' were corralled into a political class: equivocating the biologically contingent burden into a political (or necessary) penalty, thereby modifying these individuals' definition from the human to the functional, or animal.<sup>9</sup>

Radical feminists argue that, because of patriarchy, women have come to be viewed as the "other" to the male norm, and as such have been systematically oppressed and marginalized. They further assert that men as a class benefit from the systematic oppression of women. Patriarchal theory is not defined

by a belief that all men always benefit from the oppression of all women. Rather, it maintains that the primary element of patriarchy is a relationship of dominance, where one party is dominant and exploits the other for the benefit of the former. Radical feminists believe that men (as a class) use social systems and other methods of control to keep women (as well as non-dominant men) suppressed. Radical feminists seek to abolish patriarchy by challenging existing social norms and institutions, and believe that eliminating patriarchy will liberate everyone from an unjust society. Ti-Grace Atkinson maintained that the need for power fuels the male class to continue oppressing the female class, arguing that "the need men have for the role of oppressor is the source and foundation of all human oppression".<sup>10</sup>

Analytically, the main difference between radical feminism and other directions of this theory lies in the extent to which the social system based on the power struggle between the sexes, patriarchy, the rule of men in which women are subordinate category is considered to be the root of all further oppression, inequality and injustice. The view that the patriarchal society is generally unjust system in which women are categories of people exposed to various types of discrimination and exploitation, is a universal feature of feminist thought and the starting point for all routes within feminism, which, however, differ in the further formulation of this paragraph, its implications and desirable methods for the solution of problems of the female population. Radical feminist theory is based on the fact that gender inequality is the foundation of all other inequalities and oppression. Repression against women takes place in the patriarchy that is a hierarchical system of male domination over the female gender, which consists of, and is maintained due to the characteristics which include: The obligatory motherhood and limiting the reproductive freedom; the social construction of femininity and female sexuality through the creation and presentation of subordinate image; violence against women; institutions that favor the dominance of men over women, such as the church and the traditional family models.

The unique position of radical feminism is anchored on the idea that, in order to end the oppression of women, the patriarchate has to be abolished, which potentially includes: incitement and rejection of traditional gender roles and the ways in which women are presented and constructed in the language, the media, as well as in their personal lives; anti-patriarchal constructions of female sexuality by banning pornography and rejection of traditional models of relations between the sexes; and achieving reproductive freedom.

Further, another important aspect of feminist research of concept of power is the very idea of its desirability, or the fact that many feminists, although were often accused that they have the desire to be likemen, in fact, never showed any jealousy towards men because of their repressive roles, nor it considered those roles to be desirable and worth fighting for. Although the need for domination over the other people is considered to be an essential aspect of patriarchy within radical feminism, this aspect is generally not seen as a 'natural' state, but as a factor of human interaction or as a principle of social organization. Anne Wilson Schaefer states that the belief that the domination is desirable state, and that power operates by uniform distribution for someone to have more, someone else must have less - is just one of the myths of the patriarchal system.<sup>12</sup> As already stated in paragraph by Marilyn French, the establishment of power over other people is a process that takes time and requires the same amount of energy as well as other ways of directing others to cooperate, which negates the belief that repression is in the short-term interests of the one who performs it. Accordingly, if the position of hegemony and domination gradually loses its appeal after it is established, the idea that power is fundamentally preferred over others becomes hard to defend. Finally, given that the patriarchal hierarchies by feminists are blamed for many social problems such as the deliberate destruction of the natural environment, inadequate systemic reactions to individual and collective problems and political attitudes that at the international level lead to permanent confrontations, the idea that this kind of power in any meaningful, functionalist way serves the interests of society, also seems indefensible. The third key concept of radical feminism is the repression, which in this direction is explained with the help of a specific system of common beliefs and concepts that describe the patriarchal society. Radical feminism is based on the assumption that all human activity is the result of certain social restrictions and coercion, and although every social system contains specific forms of interactive constraints, they do not have to cause

repression. Under the patriarchal system, however, interaction and communication are limited in a way that creates and maintains the rigidity that is perceived as repression.

### **Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophical Sexism**

In her memoirs, *The Force of Circumstance* (1963), Beauvoir looks back at *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and criticizes it for being too abstract. She does not repudiate the arguments of her text, but finds that it erred in trying to define morality independent of a social context. *The Second Sex* may be read as correcting this error as reworking and materially situating the analyses of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Where Beauvoir's earlier works blurred the borders separating philosophy and literature, her later writings disrupt the boundaries between the personal, the political and the philosophical. Now, Beauvoir takes herself, her situation, her embodiment and the situations and embodiments of other women, as the subjects of her philosophical reflections.

Where *The Ethics of Ambiguity* conjured up images of ethical and unethical figures to make its arguments tangible, the analyses of *The Second Sex* are materialized in Beauvoir's experiences as a woman and in women's lived realities. Where *The Ethics of Ambiguity* speaks of mystification in a general sense, *The Second Sex* speaks of the specific ways that the natural and social sciences and the European literary, social, political and religious traditions have created a world where impossible and conflicting ideals of femininity produce an ideology of women's "natural" inferiority to justify patriarchal domination. Beauvoir's self-criticism suggests that her later works mark a break with her earlier writings. We should, however, resist the temptation to take this notion of discontinuity too far. Rather than thinking in terms of breaks, it is more fruitful to see *The Second Sex* in terms of a more radical commitment to the phenomenological insight that it is as embodied beings that we engage the world. Our access to, awareness of, and possibilities for world engagement cannot be considered absent of consideration of the body.

Before *The Second Sex*, the sexed/gendered body was not an object of phenomenological investigation. Beauvoir changed that. Her argument for sexual equality takes two directions. First, it exposes the ways that masculine ideology exploits the sexual difference to create systems of inequality. Second, it identifies the ways that arguments for equality erase the sexual difference in order to establish the masculine subject as the absolute human type. Here Plato is her target. Plato, beginning with the premise that sex is an accidental quality, concludes that women and men are equally qualified to become members of the guardian class. The price of women's admission to this privileged class, however, is that they must train and live like men. Thus the discriminatory sexual difference remains in play. Only men or those who emulate them may rule. Beauvoir's argument for equality does not fall into this trap. She insists that women and men treat each other as equals and that such treatment requires that their sexual differences be validated. Equality is not a synonym for sameness.

*The Second Sex* argues against the either/or frame of the woman question (either women and men are equal or they are different). It argues for women's equality, while insisting on the reality of the sexual difference. Beauvoir finds it unjust and immoral to use the sexual difference as an argument for women's subordination. She finds it un-phenomenological, however, to ignore it. As a phenomenologist she is obliged to examine women's unique experiences of their bodies and to determine how these experiences are co-determined by what phenomenology calls the everyday attitude (the common-sense assumptions that we unreflectively bring to our experience). As a feminist phenomenologist assessing the meanings of the lived female body, Beauvoir explores the ways that cultural assumptions frame women's experience of their bodies and alienate them from their body's possibilities. For example, it is assumed that women are the weaker sex. What, she directs us to ask, is the ground of this assumption? What criteria of strength are used? Upper body power? Average body size? Is there a reason not to consider longevity a sign of strength? Using this criterion, would women still be considered the weaker sex? A bit of reflection exposes the biases of the criteria used to support the supposedly obvious fact of women's weakness and transforms it from an unassailable reality to an unreliable assumption. Once we begin this questioning, it is not long before other so-called facts fall to the side of "common sense" in the phenomenological sense.

What is perhaps the most famous line of *The Second Sex*, “On ne naît pas femme: on le devient” (1949, 13), translated in 1953 as “One is not born but becomes a woman” (1953, 267) and in 2010 as “One is not born but becomes woman”<sup>13</sup> is credited by many as alerting us to the sex-gender distinction. Whether or not Beauvoir understood herself to be inaugurating this distinction, whether or not she followed this distinction to its logical/radical conclusions or whether or not radical conclusions are justified are currently matters of feminist debate. What is not a matter of dispute is that *The Second Sex* gave us the vocabulary for analyzing the social constructions of femininity and a method for critiquing these constructions. By not accepting the common sense idea that to be born with female genitalia is to be born a woman this most famous line of *The Second Sex* pursues the first rule of phenomenology: identify your assumptions, treat them as prejudices and put them aside; do not bring them back into play until and unless they have been validated by experience.

Taken within the context of its contemporary philosophical scene, *The Second Sex* was a phenomenological analysis waiting to happen. Whether or not it required a woman phenomenologist to discover the effects of sex/gender on the lived body’s experience cannot be said. That it was a woman who taught us to bracket the assumption that the lived body’s sex/gender was accidental to its lived relations, positions, engagements, etc. is a matter of history. What was a phenomenological breakthrough became in *The Second Sex* a liberatory tool, by attending to the ways that patriarchal structures used the sexual difference to deprive women of their “can do” bodies, Beauvoir made the case for declaring this deprivation oppressive.<sup>1</sup> Taken within the context of the feminist movement, this declaration of oppression was an event. It opened the way for the consciousness-raising that characterized second-wave feminism; it validated women’s experiences of injustice. What from an existential-phenomenological perspective was a detailed analysis of the lived body, and an ethical and political indictment of the ways that patriarchy alienated women from their embodied capacities, was, from a feminist perspective, an appeal that called on women to take up the politics of liberation. Several concepts are crucial to the argument of *The Second Sex*. The concept of the Other is introduced early in the text and drives the entire analysis. It has also become a critical concept in theories that analyze the oppressions of colonized, enslaved and other exploited people. Beauvoir used it again in her last major work, *The Coming of Age* (1970), to structure her critique of the ways that the elderly are “ordered” by society.

Beauvoir bases her idea of the Other on Hegel’s account of the master-slave dialectic. Instead of the terms “master” and “slave”, however, she uses the terms “Subject” and “Other”. The Subject is the absolute. The ‘Other’ is the inessential. Unlike Hegel who universalized this dialectic, Beauvoir distinguishes the dialectic of exploitation between historically constituted Subjects and Others from the exploitation that ensues when the Subject is Man and the ‘Other’ is Woman. In the first case those marked as ‘Other’ experience their oppression as a communal reality. They see themselves as part of an oppressed group. Here, oppressed ‘Others’ may call on the resources of a common history and a shared abusive situation to assert their subjectivity and demand recognition and reciprocity. The situation of women is comparable to the condition of the Hegelian ‘Other’ in that men, like the Hegelian Master, identify themselves as the Subject, the absolute human type, and, measuring women by this standard of the human, identify them as inferior. Women’s so-called inadequacies are then used as justification for seeing them as the ‘Other’ and for treating them accordingly. Unlike the Hegelian ‘Other’, however, women are unable to identify the origin of their otherness. They cannot call on the bond of a shared history to reestablish their lost status as Subjects. Further, dispersed among the world of men, they identify themselves in terms of the differences of their oppressors (e.g., as white or black women, as working-class or middle-class women, as Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist or Hindu women) rather than with each other. They lack the solidarity and resources of the Hegelian Other for organizing them into a “we” that demands recognition. Finally, their conflict with men is ambiguous. According to Beauvoir, women and men exist in a “primordial *Mitsein*”. There is a unique bond between this Subject and its ‘Other’. In contesting their status as inessential, women must discover their “we” and take account of the *Mitsein*. Beauvoir uses the category of the Inessential Other to designate the unique situation of women as the ambiguous Other of men. Unlike the Other of the master-slave dialectic, women are not positioned to rebel. As Inessential Others, women’s routes to subjectivity and recognition cannot follow the Hegelian script.

This attention to what Beauvoir, borrowing from Heidegger, calls a “primordial *Mitsein*” may be why she does not repeat her earlier argument that violence is sometimes necessary for the pursuit of justice in *The Second Sex*. Often criticized as one mark of Beauvoir’s heterosexism, this reference to the *Mitsein* is not made in ignorance of lesbian sexuality and is not a rejection of non-heterosexual sexualities. It is recognition of the present state of affairs where the heterosexual norm prevails. If patriarchy is to be dismantled we will have to understand how hetero-normative sexuality serves it. We will have to denaturalize it. To Beauvoir’s way of thinking, however, the institutional alienations of heterosexuality ought not to be confused with the erotics of heterosexual desire. The realities of this desire and the bond of the “primordial *Mitsein*” that it forges must be taken into account: not only is it used to enforce women’s isolation and to support their inability to identify a common history, it is also responsible for the value and relationship that Beauvoir calls the “bond”, a situation-specific articulation of the appeal found in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. A brief but packed sentence that appears early in *The Second Sex* alerts us to the ways that Beauvoir used existential and Marxist categories to analyze the unique complexities of women’s situation. It reads:

Hence woman makes no claim for herself as subject because she lacks the concrete means, because she senses the necessary link connecting her to man without positing its reciprocity, and because she often derives satisfaction from her role as *the Other*.<sup>14</sup>

This statement needs to be read in the context of Beauvoir’s ethical-political question, “How can a human being in a woman’s situation attain fulfillment?” Between the statement and the question we discover that the ethical-political issue of fulfillment does not concern a woman’s happiness. Happiness may be chosen or accepted in exchange for the deprivations of freedom. Recalling the argument of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* we know why. As Others, women are returned to the metaphysically privileged world of the child. They experience the happiness brought about by bad faith, a happiness of not being responsible for themselves, of not having to make consequential choices. From this existential perspective women may be said to be complicitous in their subjugation. But this is not the whole story. If women are happy as the other, it may be because this is the only avenue of happiness open to them given the material and ideological realities of their situation. Beauvoir’s existential charge of bad faith must be understood within her Marxist analysis of the social, economic and cultural structures that frame women’s lives. Though Beauvoir will not argue that these structures deprive women of their freedom, neither will she ignore the situations that make the exercise of that freedom extremely difficult. Her assertion that a woman feels a necessary bond with man regardless of a lack of reciprocity, however, escapes existential and Marxist categories. It is crucial to Beauvoir’s analysis of women’s condition and draws on the notion of the appeal developed in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. In making an appeal to others to join me in my pursuit of justice I validate myself and my values. Given that my appeal must be an appeal to the other in their freedom, I must allow for the fact that the other may reject it. When this happens, I must (assuming that the rejection is not a threat to the ground value of freedom) recognize the other’s freedom and affirm the bond of humanity that ties us to each other. In the case of women, Beauvoir notes, this aspect of the appeal (the affirmation of the bond between us) dominates. She does not approve of the way that women allow it to eclipse the requirement that they be recognized as free subjects, but she does alert us to the fact that recognition in itself is not the full story of the ethical relationship. To demand recognition without regard for the bond of humanity is unethical. It is the position of the Subject as master.

Moving between the statement that women are pleased with their alienated status as the Other and the question, “How can women achieve human fulfillment”, Beauvoir argues that women’s exploitation is historical, and therefore amenable to change. As an existential situation, however, women are responsible for changing it. Liberation must be women’s work. It is not a matter of appealing to men to give women their freedom, but a matter of women discovering their solidarity, rejecting the bad faith temptations of happiness and discovering the pleasures of freedom. Further, though Beauvoir alerts us to the tensions and conflicts that this will create between men and women, she does not envision a permanent war of the sexes. Here her Hegelian-Marxist optimism prevails. Men will (ultimately) recognize women as free subjects.

The last chapters of *The Second Sex*, “The Independent Woman” and the “Conclusion”, speak of the current (1947) status of women’s situation, what has changed and what remains to be done. Without ignoring the importance of women’s gaining the right to vote and without dismissing the necessity of women attaining economic independence, Beauvoir finds these liberal and Marxist solutions to women’s situation inadequate. They ignore the effects of women’s socialization (the subject of volume two of *The Second Sex*) and they are inattentive to the ways that the norm of masculinity remains the standard of the human. The liberated woman must free herself from two shackles: first, the idea that to be independent she must be like men, and second, the socialization through which she becomes feminized. The first alienates her from her sexuality. The second makes her adverse to risking herself for her ideas/ideals. Attentive to this current state of affairs and to the phenomenology of the body, Beauvoir sets two prerequisites for liberation. First, women must be socialized to engage the world. Second, they must be allowed to discover the unique ways that their embodiment engages the world. In short, the myth of woman must be dismantled. So long as it prevails, economic and political advances will fall short of the goal of liberation. Speaking in reference to sexual difference, Beauvoir notes that disabling the myth of woman is not a recipe for an androgynous future. Given the realities of embodiment, there will be sexual differences. Unlike today, however, these differences will not be used to justify the difference between a Subject and his inessential ‘Other’.

The goal of liberation is our mutual recognition of each other as free and as other. She finds one situation in which this mutual recognition (sometimes) exists today, the intimate heterosexual erotic encounter. Speaking of this intimacy she writes, “the dimension of the other remains; but the fact is that alterity no longer has a hostile character.”<sup>15</sup>

This is because lovers experience themselves and each other ambiguously, that is as both subjects and objects of erotic desire rather than as delineated according to institutionalized positions of man and woman. In Beauvoir’s words...the erotic experience is one that most poignantly reveals to human beings their ambiguous condition; they experience it as flesh and as spirit, as the other and as subject.<sup>11</sup>

The concept of ambiguity, developed abstractly in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, is erotically embodied in *The Second Sex* and is identified as a crucial piece of the prescription for transcending the oppressions of patriarchy. This description of the liberating possibilities of the erotic encounter is also one of those places where Beauvoir reworks Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment. For in drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of the ways that we are world-making and world-embedded subject-objects, she reveals the ways that it is as subject-objects “for the world”, “to the world”, and “in the world” that we are passionately drawn to each other.

### **Simone de Beauvoir Sexism and Marxism: Any Nexus?**

Theories of conflict assume that society is made up of opposing factions whose relationships are based on the shape and balance of power, and then analyze the social relations in accordance with the position of the factions fighting for power. Since, as already noted, radical feminism is based on the basic assumption that the poles are confronted, that men in the patriarchal system, have power and carry out repression against women, as well as company and various relations within it may be best explained by just watching the sex ratio towards this situation, this line can be defined as a theory of conflict. In order to establish radical feminism into the context of general sociology and sociological theories, and according to its definition as a theory of conflict, it is important to compare the similarities and differences of radical feminist with theory of conflict on whose basis this kind of feminism arose, or Marxism. In the beginning it is important only to point out that the similarities between Marxism and feminism are generally numerous, which, among other things, led to the formation of the direction known as Marxist feminism. This theory, as its name portray it, was created in the ranks of the female members of the Marxist organization of the United States, such as, for example, “Students for Democratic Society”. These women dissatisfied with their marginal status within leftist groups used the Marxist theory in order to define the political situation of women in capitalist society and on the criticism of the limited Marxist perspectives have developed new direction of feminism, which, in fact, is the improvement of Marxist dialectical conceptualization of repression against women. These materialistic conceptualization, although previously recognized in Marxist literature, until the

emergence of the aforementioned feminist directions were generally ignored as an analytical topic. The starting point of Marxist feminism is the claim that capitalism, with its emphasis on the creation of economic dependence, and the root of repression carried out against women and inequalities between the sexes are ultimately determined by the capitalist mode of production, while the general social divisions are related to the class. Women's subordination is seen as a form of oppression that is held because it serves the interests of capital. In addition to Marxist feminism, feminist direction largely inspired by Marxism, is also a radical feminism.

As already pointed out, radical feminism, like some other feminist approaches, is basically inspired by Marxist political theory, and is based on the Marxist assumption that it is not enough just to study society, but it is necessary to completely transform it. Both theories are based on the basic assumption that society is made up of opposing factions defined by relationships based on the distribution of power, and then analyze the society and all its processes from the perspective of fundamental power struggle. Social conditions which allow the maintenance of specific power relations, the long-term repression of a faction in the conflict, represent the next fundamental similarity of Marxism and radical feminism. In both cases, the process of repression is the result of two distinct but mutually dependent and complementary factors, where the first represents the direct use of force by the dominant populations against 'recalcitrant' members of subordinate categories, and the second is the internalization of the worldview of subordinate category, which is based on the belief in the accuracy and naturalness of subordination, and, therefore, in fairness of socio-political system in which the processes of repression are going on. The function of this internalized worldview or ideology, is the creation and maintenance of a system of rules and values through which members of subordinate populations themselves believe in the 'naturalness' and 'natural tradition' of their inferior position in relation to members of other categories. In other words, although the members of the subordinate class are aware of differences of their social class position as individuals in the presence of individuals from the other categories, they have a belief that this categorical distinction is the 'natural' and 'fundamental' division and not the social construction based on injustice and inequality. It is this system of 'justice illusory' that minimizes the possibility of real large-scale conflict in a society based on oppression of certain categories of people who, consciously or unconsciously, accept their inferior position, and live in illusion of 'natural' division of roles, rights and power. These psychological and cultural bases of values enable the functioning of repressive societies based on gender and or class distinctions, and lead to fourth common characteristic of Marxism and radical feminism.

Both theories have stated that the weak point of the repressive system is the fact that the success of repressor depends on whether or not they will forever have to use repressive methods to subjugate subordinate groups. Radicalizing the awareness of subordinates, or the termination of the participation of women in the repression that is performed on them. Within Marxist theory, there are also less radical directions, based on the propagation of non-cooperation and discipline of subordinate populations, that would lead to paralysis and inability of repressive system to function in a way that the repressors would be forced to either accept the need for negotiations in order to gain the voluntary cooperation by subordinates, or that every time they resort to lengthy and exhausting violent methods of coercional feminism solution for repression sees in erosion of ideology and raising the awareness of subordinates, or the termination of the participation of women in the repression that is performed on them. Within Marxist theory, there are also less radical directions, based on the propagation of non-cooperation and discipline of subordinate populations, that would lead to paralysis and inability of repressive system to function in a way that the repressors would be forced to either accept the need for negotiations in order to gain the voluntary cooperation by subordinates, or that every time they resort to lengthy and exhausting violent methods of coercion. Although Marxism and radical feminism are based on the basic assumption that society is made up of opposing factions defined by relationships based on the distribution of power at this point, however, theories diverge on the issue of defining the opposing faction, respectively the opponents in the struggle for power. On the one hand, Marxism is crossing its formative relationship with fighting forces for the accumulation of material goods, regarding ownership and control of the means of production in order to further their accumulation, and describes two opposing classes-the working class and the class of owners of the means of production as the opponents in the struggle for power. On the other hand, radical feminism is based on the relations between the



sexes as a fundamental social conflict from which they arise and upon which other social processes are based on, and which is defined by the dominance of the male over the female sex, in the system based on the subordination and exploitation of women.

### **Viewing Beauvoir's Philosophical Sexism with the Lens of Philosophy**

Since the recent turn to French philosophy for literary and cultural theorists have been informed by semiotics or post structuralism, the prior existential humanist generation of Simone de Beauvoir has been for the most part ignored or hastily dismissed. This is true of both the psychoanalytically inclined poststructuralist feminists and their Foucauldian counterparts. Frequently, Simone de Beauvoir is cited, but her ideas are not rigorously analyzed, for they are treated as having been fundamentally transcended by the poststructuralist turn. Some revisiting of de Beauvoir's strategies has occurred among poststructuralist feminists, but often the framing of their interest has meant that de Beauvoir's ideas are assumed to be spoken by a universal masculine discourse and thereby fundamentally awed, or by focusing on de Beauvoir's social location or de Beauvoir's life as a text of her philosophic ideas are given little attention.

Very recently, a collection of appreciative postmodern readings on *The Second Sex* have been published, challenging simplistic representations of de Beauvoir's feminism as a modernist project of feminist liberation, and celebrating it for having anticipated the contemporary philosophic concerns of identity, history, gender and representation. Although this book departs from the more popular denunciation of de Beauvoir, its postmodern disposition fails to value the usefulness of de Beauvoir's philosophic ideas, and sees her existential apparatus as outmoded. Less troubled by a postmodern reading of texts, we think de Beauvoir's ideas are relevant in contemporary feminist debates.

There are many passages in *The Second Sex* where de Beauvoir denigrates female sexuality, pregnancy and child rearing, and these are cited as examples of de Beauvoir's misogyny and the basis for claiming that de Beauvoir believes liberated women should emulate men. De Beauvoir's actual statements regarding sexuality are not explored; instead Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous echo popular denunciations of de Beauvoir's 'phallic' feminism. Had they scrutinized her text, that de Beauvoir does not celebrate the disembodied transcendent male subject as the goal for women, nor does she simply denigrate the female body and its passive reproductive functions, the usual parodied reading. De Beauvoir calls for surpassing the present gendered duality of transcendence and immanence, for both ought to be integrated into a single existence. She is all too aware of how transcendence has historically been designated as a male domain and women have been relegated to the sphere of immanence. But she does not call for women to embody existing forms of transcendence. She says: "The fact is that every human existence involves transcendence and immanence at the same time; to go forward, each existence must be maintained, for it to expand toward the future it must integrate the past, and while intercommunicating with others it should and self-confirmation".<sup>16</sup>

This has not as yet been achieved and it surely will not be in its present masculine form. Again, to fully understand de Beauvoir's position on female sexuality, one cannot simply read her pejorative comments on maternity, menopause and menstruation or her descriptions of female sexual anatomy as anti-women. For that would treat their meaning as essential and axed rather than socially and historically constructed. De Beauvoir recognizes bodily and sexual differences, however she immediately adds that these facts have no significance in themselves, they take on different values according to the economic and social context. She remarks, "the burdens of maternity can be crushing if women are obliged to undergo frequent pregnancies and if she is compelled to nurse and raise children without assistance; but if she procreates voluntarily and if society comes to her aid they are lightened. The meaning of pregnancy varies from one society to another. Only if one interprets de Beauvoir as producing universal and timeless truths about maternity and women, can she be read as misogynist. This is precisely what the French poststructuralist feminists have done. De Beauvoir was not inattentive to sexual difference.

In *The Second Sex*; she is acutely aware that feminine sexuality is predominantly male denied at the time she was writing. She describes the debilitating effects of contemporary femininity where women are denied as objects of male desire and are compelled to produce the progeny of their husbands.

However, de Beauvoir's negative statements regarding 'feminine' sexual experiences must not be seen as symptoms of a patriarchal society in which women's experiences are masculinized rather than universal statements about women. If one accepts Kristeva's phallogocentric thesis, which sees philosophic work governed by principles of non-contradiction, coherence and linear thinking, therefore denoted by the male imaginary, then de Beauvoir's discourse is a masculinized one.

Since the 'feminine' is constituted within a repressive economy of phallic discourse (language and Stavro: The Use and Abuse of Simone de Beauvoir culture are denied by the male imaginary and thereby appropriated by the masculine), the prospects for women transforming themselves outside the masculine is limited. Hence the problem of female agency arises. The prominence of the psychosexual and linguistic tends to subordinate social/political/economic relations to the psychic register producing a theory that gives too much rein to sexuality in determining subject hood. Finally, since discourse is constitutive of social relations, this is a very limited approach to understanding the complexity of the world. Political reality is read off phallogocentric discourse, hence there is a failure to look at the specific historical situation and the forces that produce and sustain these discourses. The weakness of this approach is evidenced in the treatment of de Beauvoir by the feminists of difference: phallogocentrism is deduced from her universal humanism and all her feminist strategies are inscribed in the male imaginary. This does not do justice to the complexity of de Beauvoir's thought, nor does it understand the specific historical context in which their feminist meaning emerges. The *Second Sex* was written in France in the late 1940s; women had just been given the vote and were denied most educational and employment opportunities afforded men. For de Beauvoir it was necessary to oppose those who identified women as biologically or psychologically suited to mothering, for it was precisely these sorts of arguments that plagued women who were striving to participate in public/political life. De Beauvoir challenged the notion of 'anatomy as destiny' and the idea of the eternal 'feminine', and the notion of a distinctively female libidinal economy. When de Beauvoir says that 'One is not born, but, rather becomes a woman' she stresses that woman is a historical-cultural product, rather than determined or a natural species.

De Beauvoir believes that gender is socially and culturally acquired, part of one's present social identity, which could be otherwise. In the postwar period, when women were assumed to be psychologically different from men, and these differences justified their exclusion from the public realm, de Beauvoir's strategy of arguing that those differences are socially and culturally constructed is hardly a masculinist strategy, but in fact a progressive feminist one. De Beauvoir's critique of mothering and maternity must be understood in the context where abortion and birth control were criminalized; maternity was not a choice but culturally and socially required. Given this situation, it was hardly liberating for women to celebrate maternity, for it is precisely the naturalization of mothering and the romanticism around mother and child relations that preserved traditional gender roles and the sexual division of labour and kept women out of the public domain. Similarly, drawing attention to women's experiences of pain, emotional stress and morbidity accompanying female puberty, pregnancy and menopause does not enslave women to her body, nor does it denigrate. De Beauvoir's strategy of 'making visible' painful experiences, most often ignored, counters the romanticism that traditionally accompanies experiences of femininity and maternity. This strategy is neither phallogocentric nor misogynist but is required to challenge patterns that inhibit women's agency, hence feminist. Another target of de Beauvoir's poststructuralist critics is the significance she attributes to women's rational capacity, for, they argue, this reveals her commitment to the masculinized modernist value of rationality and perpetuates the effacement of the body.

### **Conclusion**

Radical feminism is one of the directions of feminist theory, formed on the view that the social system is based on a patriarchal basis, resulting in the marginalization and discrimination against women in all spheres of society, de Beauvoir represents.

The second sex is a key term with its origins from the famous work *The Second Sex* published in French in 1949 by Simone de Beauvoir. This term is the replacement of the "female" or "woman". She pointed out that women always define themselves "I am a woman" while men never bother but position them

as the representative of human beings, which indicates that “men” and “women” are definitely not the symmetrical terms. She noticed that the lawyers, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists kept trying to show that female’s attachment state was formed by fate and contributed to well-being of humanity, “One is not born, but rather becomes, women”. In other words, because of the inferior nature of women, equalities between sexes will be a mirage forever. Concerning the discussion of gender differences, exactly as Beauvoir had once said “woman is just a uterus”. That is to say, female’s fate was decided on this anatomy and when facing this Nature Order, all the efforts which attempt to challenge the female’ unfair treatment of gender discrimination melt into thin air. Furthermore, talking about discourse, female discourse has been suppressed by male’s ruling language fundamentally.

In 1949, De Beauvoir Published *The Second Sex* which is regarded as the Bible of feminism and classic of feminism theory. In this book, Simone de Beauvoir used existentialism to analyze and study female issues. Meanwhile, she explored Freudian, Marxist, Hegelian and other classical critical theories to expose the inherit qualities of female to be the other. Beauvoir also bitterly pointed out that the western society was totally male-dominated, and female in this society are “the second sex”, the “other” of men: “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential.

All in all, a serious of conception about women: delicacy, vulnerable, sensitiveness, tolerance and considerateness, etc. are the products of society and culture. They are formed by the male based on their needs but not the result of female’s specific physical structure. As a result, Simon De Beauvoir suggested using “the second sex” this term to substitute for the term “female”. She believed that this substitution may probably weaken various prejudice and discrimination which are forced on women by traditional ideology and finally achieve the goal of gender equality, which in any case does not suffice to justify her stance rather we would advocate for complimentary in both social and domestic responsibilities.

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