

Contextualizing Gender
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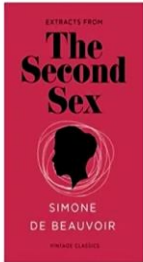
Lecture - 05
Gender Perspectives in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (Volume 2)

Good morning, dear participants and welcome to this module. The previous module had reviewed Beauvoir's analysis of myths surrounding womanhood, as she had discussed in the first volume of *The Second Sex*. Today we shall look at the second volume which investigates how the lived experience -which also happens to be the title of the volume- of women affect their social and emotional upbringing.

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Introduction



- Volume II focuses on the social indoctrination of women.
- Beauvoir traces women's conditioning through their childhood, adolescence and old age.
- She illustrates how women, at every stage, are forced to abandon their claims to transcendent and authentic subjectivity in favour of the acceptance of a "passive" and "alienated" role, surrendering the active and subjective role to men (193).
- Scrutinizing women's lives in various roles (wife, mother, and prostitute), Beauvoir shows how women are reduced to monotonous existence.



EXTRACTS FROM
The Second Sex
SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR
VINTAGE CLASSICS

Source: Vintage Classics

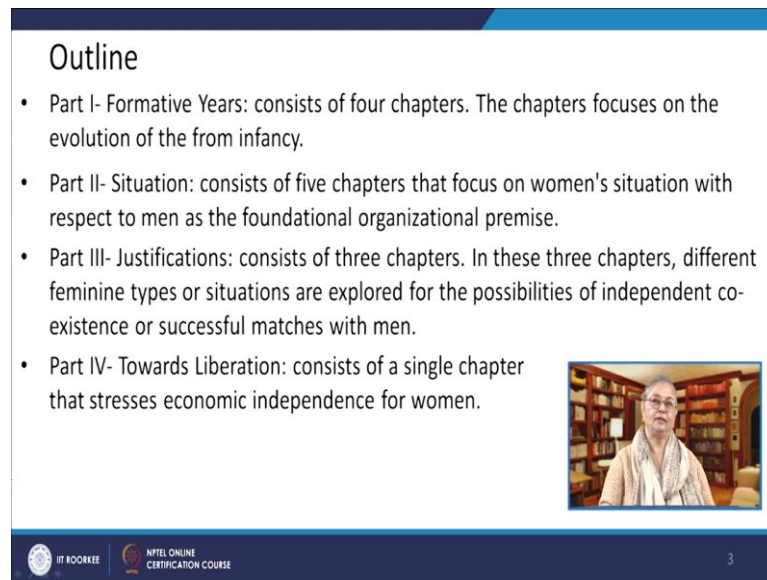


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In the second volume Beauvoir has focused on the social indoctrination of women. She has traced their conditioning through their childhood, adolescence, youth and old age. She illustrates how women at every stage are forced to abandon their claims to transcendent and authentic subjectivity in favor of the acceptance of passive and alienated role surrendering the active and subjective to the men.


Scrutinizing women's lives in various roles for example, the role of a wife, a mother and also a prostitute. Beauvoir shows how women are reduced to monotonous existence.

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Outline

- Part I- Formative Years: consists of four chapters. The chapters focuses on the evolution of the from infancy.
- Part II- Situation: consists of five chapters that focus on women's situation with respect to men as the foundational organizational premise.
- Part III- Justifications: consists of three chapters. In these three chapters, different feminine types or situations are explored for the possibilities of independent co-existence or successful matches with men.
- Part IV- Towards Liberation: consists of a single chapter that stresses economic independence for women.



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In this slide, I have discussed the outline of the second volume. It is divided into four parts and except the last part, part four, the rest of the parts are divided into several chapters. Chapter 1 in part 1 of second volume discusses the childhood.

Beauvoir analyzes how differential treatment towards girls and boys impacts their perspectives towards the rest of their lives. Though infant girls and boys apprehend the world in similar ways they are quickly sexually differentiated, treated differently, by family as well as other social organizations. And girls are raised firmly and gradually to follow certain traits we associate with conventional femininity.


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Part I: Formative Years; Chapter 1- Childhood

- The most iconic sentences in the history of Feminism and Gender Studies; epitomize Beauvoir's conviction that womanhood is not innate in a girl, rather it is taught with the help of subtle conditioning.
- Tracing female development through its formative stages - childhood, youth, and sexual initiation – Beauvoir shows how, at each stage of her upbringing, a girl is conditioned into accepting passivity, dependence, repetition, and inwardness.
- Denied the possibility of independent work or creative fulfillment, she must accept a dissatisfying life of housework, childbearing, and sexual slavishness.

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.

Simone de Beauvoir
www.idhearts.com



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4

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman is the most iconic sentence in the history of feminism and gender studies. It epitomizes Beauvoir's conviction that womanhood is not innate in a girl rather it is taught with the help of subtle conditioning.


Tracing female development through its formative stages- childhood, youth and sexual initiation- Beauvoir shows how, at every stage of her upbringing, a girl is conditioned into accepting passivity, dependence, repetitiveness and inwardness. Denied the possibility of independent work or creative fulfillment, she must accept a dissatisfying life of housework, child bearing and sexual slavishness.

At this point we can also clearly discern the difference which Beauvoir has from the Freudian approach. Whereas, Freud had believed that women think in certain ways because of their anatomy, Beauvoir had believed that they learnt to behave differently owing to their socialization. And she explains that girls tend to show the same aptitudes and attitudes as boys until the age of twelve or so in their lives.

But differences in treatment and expectations grow throughout childhood and increase sharply at puberty carving different personality types.

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- The boy, as he grows, uses his body as a fighting tool to dominate nature. The girl is taught to make herself *other* in order to please and is "treated like a living doll".
- Beauvoir notes that some girls, raised by fathers or on their own, persist in acting autonomously. Often such girls are socially castigated or harshly reprimanded. They are a cause for suspicion, and are themselves uncertain, even rebellious, and often angry.
- The boy's future is open, while the girl will become a wife and a mother.
- With puberty, the insults of a girl's body are compounded. She is made to think of her body as unclean and passive. For girls, sex and puberty are associated with shame and pain. Secrets of sexuality and of pregnancy frighten her.



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As the boy grows, he uses his body as a tool to fight and dominate the nature and his surroundings. On the other hand, the girl is taught to make herself other in order to please and in turn she herself is “treated like a living doll”.

As Beauvoir has mentioned those girls, who are either raised by their fathers or on their own, they persist in acting autonomously. However, often such girls are socially castigated and harshly reprimanded they are a cause for suspicion, and therefore, they may also become uncertain, sometimes even rebellious, and often angry.

The future of the boy is open, while the girl has only one future to become a wife and a mother. With puberty the insults of a girl’s body are compounded. She is made to think of her body as unclean and passive. Sex and puberty for girls are associated with pain and shame. Secrets of sexuality and also of pregnancy frighten her.

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1975 Brut.

Interview with Jean-Louis-Servan-Schreiber (1975)

- Beauvoir explains her stance on the socialisation of girls.
- Does not refuse biological differences between sexes.
- Emphasises the role of social and cultural forces that enforce different ways of being on sexes.

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."

Source: Brut India [YouTube]

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The *Second Sex* was published in 1959; however, we find that in an interview in 1975 Beauvoir had once again asserted her stance on the socialization of girls. Even though she does not refuse biological differences between sexes, she still emphasizes the role of social and cultural forces that enforce different ways and life patterns on different sexes.

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1975 Brut.

Interview with Jean-Louis-Servan-Schreiber (1975)

Simone de Beauvoir
Philosopher

- Beauvoir explains her stance on the socialisation of girls.
- Does not refuse biological differences between sexes.
- Emphasises the role of social and cultural forces that enforce different ways of being on sexes.

Yes, that expression really sums up all of my theories,

Source: Brut India [YouTube]

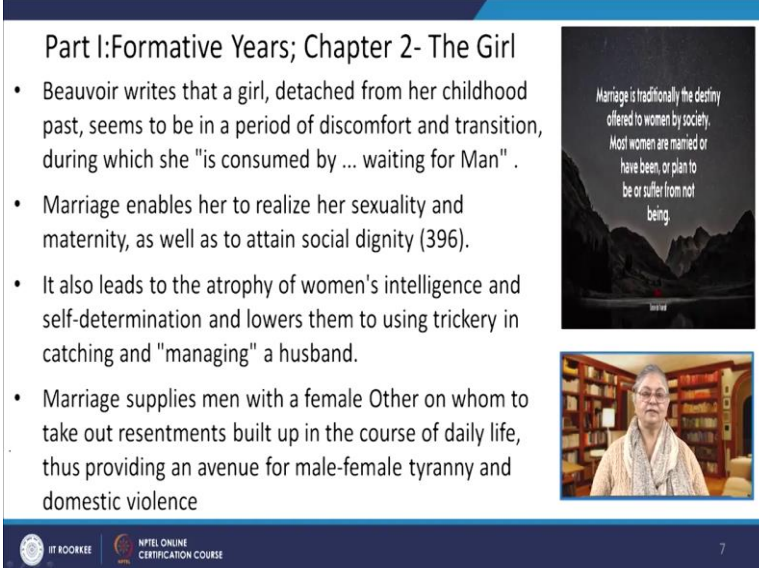
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The separation between boys and girls is further aggravated as the girl succumbs to the hormonal challenges of the body. She is often in physical pain, emotional distress and may also experience mood swings. Her life in a conventional family is consumed by waiting for man.

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Part I: Formative Years; Chapter 2- The Girl

- Beauvoir writes that a girl, detached from her childhood past, seems to be in a period of discomfort and transition, during which she "is consumed by ... waiting for Man" .
- Marriage enables her to realize her sexuality and maternity, as well as to attain social dignity (396).
- It also leads to the atrophy of women's intelligence and self-determination and lowers them to using trickery in catching and "managing" a husband.
- Marriage supplies men with a female Other on whom to take out resentments built up in the course of daily life, thus providing an avenue for male-female tyranny and domestic violence



Marriage is traditionally the destiny offered to women by society. Most women are married or have been, or plan to be or suffer from not being.

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Detached from her childhood past, a girl is in a state of discomfort and transition as instead of pursuing any other activity, her time is consumed only by waiting for man, waiting for marriage.


And marriage enables her to realize her sexuality and maternity, as well as it enables her to attain certain social dignity. It also leads interestingly to the atrophy of women's intelligence and self determination and lowers them to using trickery in catching and managing a husband. On the other hand, marriage supplies men with a female Other on whom to take out resentments built up in the course of daily life. Thus, providing an avenue, for male-female tyranny as well as domestic violence.

The institution of marriage has evolved since the publication of *The Second Sex*. Based on an analysis of a mid-20th century life pattern, Beauvoir's work on marriage and household work belongs definitely to an earlier phase of the development of feminist theory. The next chapter, chapter 3 titled sexual initiation, examines the asymmetry of male and female eroticism, that accounts for differences in initial sexual experiences in the lives of men and women.

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Part I: Formative Years; Chapter 3- Sexual Initiation

- Man's "anatomical destiny" is different from women's "from the biological, social, and psychological points of view," Beauvoir argues (443).
- The loss of virginity for a woman is a breaking with the past, and usually an experience of physical pain. Culturally too, it is more traumatic because feminine imagination is encouraged to have more romantic proclivity.
- Finally, there is in the sexual act the danger and life-changing prospect of a child.
- Although motherhood can be enriching, occupations contingent upon it tend to mire women in activities of immanence – leading to repetitive everyday labor only.
- It can be noted that birth control would be legally denied to the French women until 1967. Castigates Church for not supporting the choice-based legal abortion to women.



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Beauvoir has emphatically commented that man's "anatomical destiny" is different from women's "from the biological, social and psychological points of view". The loss of virginity for a woman is a breaking with a past, and usually an experience of physical pain. Culturally too, it is more traumatic because unlike men, feminine imagination is encouraged to have more romantic proclivity.


Finally, there is in the sexual act, the danger and life changing prospect of a child. Although motherhood can be an enriching experience, occupations contingent upon it tend to mire women in activities of immanence- leading to repetitive everyday labor only. It can be noted of course, that birth control would be legally denied to the French women until 1967. Beauvoir also castigates church for not supporting the choice based legal abortion to women.

The next chapter the lesbian is a testimony to the visionary thinking of Beauvoir. Even though Beauvoir has used the term "inversion", instead of homosexuality as it is contemporaneous with her work.

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Part I: Formative Years; Chapter 4- The Lesbian

- Beauvoir views lesbianism as neither a deliberate perversion nor a physiologically, psychologically, or economically determined fate but, rather, 'an attitude chosen in -- that is, at once "motivated and freely adopted' (Beauvoir. 1969: 424). This choice, she maintained, must be evaluated according to its authenticity; it can be 'a mode of flight' from one's situation or 'a way of assuming it.'
 - Beauvoir comments that the "psychoanalysts' great error ... is that they never envisage [homosexuality] as anything but an inauthentic attitude"(481).
- Beauvoir's non-judgmental appreciation of the fluidity of gender and the range of accompanying identifications and practices, makes her work very contemporary.



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Beauvoir non-judgmental appreciation of the fluidity of gender and the range of accompanying identifications and practices makes her work, very contemporary. She views lesbianism as neither a deliberate perversion nor a physiologically, psychologically, or economically determined fate. But, rather 'an attitude chosen in-- that is, at once "motivated and freely adopted".

This choice must be evaluated as Beauvoir has suggested according to its authenticity. It can be a mode of flight from one situation or a way of assuming it. Beauvoir has also commented that the great error of the psychoanalysts has been that they have never been able to envisage homosexuality as anything, but an inauthentic attitude.

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- Stating that "homosexuality is no more a deliberate perversion than a fatal curse", she concludes: "It is wrong to establish a radical distinction between heterosexual and homosexual" (494).
- Claudia Card in her article, "Lesbian Attitudes and The Second Sex",* posits that Beauvoir's assertion that homosexuality is attitudinal leads us to a range of interesting possibilities about heterosexuality which Beauvoir missed. Card comments, "A great paradox of *The Second Sex* is its failure to draw the appropriately analogous conclusions about heterosexuality. Beauvoir seemed not to see that if 'homosexuality' is a choice, heterosexuality is likewise a choice".

* <https://www.sciencedirect.com/sdfe/pdf/download/eid/1-s2.0-0277539585900445/first-page-pdf>



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Stating that "homosexuality is no more a deliberate perversion than a fatal curse, Beauvoir concludes that it is wrong to establish a radical distinction between heterosexual and homosexual". It would be pertinent at this point to refer to an article by Claudia Card, in her article "Lesbian Attitudes and The Second Sex" Card posits that Beauvoir's assertion that homosexuality is attitudinal leads us to a range of interesting possibilities about heterosexuality, which in her opinion Beauvoir has missed.

Card has commented and I quote, "A great paradox of *The Second Sex* is its failure to draw the appropriately analogous conclusions about heterosexuality. Beauvoir seemed not to see that if homosexuality is a choice, heterosexuality is likewise a choice" unquote. Certain arguments which Beauvoir has presented in this context are to be taken as stated.

For example, her assumption that girls who like conventional feminine appeal to men, or possess a dominating attitude are drawn towards homosexuality; more so in the absence of a male attention. The second part of the second volume is the longest section of the book which we would discuss presently.

And it summaries the many different roles a woman can play in society. It is in the section, that Beauvoir presents her main ideas. Woman are limited in every role they can play in society and are thus forced to adopt certain traits and coping mechanisms. That have made them even more inferior in society.


Because women cannot be productive or creative, they have to give themselves up completely to serving men and children.

As a result; however, most women are left miserable, unfulfilled and temperamental.

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Part II: Situation; Chapter 5- The Married Woman

- Drawing on literature, diaries and anecdotes, Beauvoir presents the beleaguered state of the married woman and the burdens of the married man, developing the view that the failure of marriage is the failure of the institution, rather than the fault of individuals.
- The chapter builds on the organizing premise of the book, the existential understanding, that pronounces women's lives cut off from the mainstream of life itself.
- In other words, woman, as a biological entity and conjugal object, is destined "to maintain the species and care for the home, which is to say, to immanence"—to a turning inward, to an existence bounded by husband, children, and hearth" (506).




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Beauvoir draws her arguments from different diary entries of people, contemporary anecdotes and also from literary representations. She presents the beleaguered state of the married woman as well as the burdens of the married man. Developing the view that the failure of marriage is the failure of the institution rather than the failure of individuals.

The chapter builds on the organizing premise of the book, the existential understanding that pronounces women's lives cut off from the main stream of life itself. In other words, a woman as a biological entity and conjugal object is destined to maintain the species and care for the home which is to say to immanence, to a turning inward to an existence bounded by husband, children and hearth.

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- The disappointments and problems for women in marriage, as well as the burdens of the married man, constitute a narrative that quite thoroughly dismantles marriage. Beauvoir writes that "to ask two spouses bound by practical, social and moral ties to satisfy each other sexually for their whole lives is pure absurdity".
- Marriage provides for man the perfect synthesis of immanence and transcendence, and "these two moments are implied in every living movement"(506).
 - Transcendence is the movement beyond the self, the thrust toward the future, while immanence involves the maintenance of the self, and the integration of present experience with the past.
- This very access to a larger life for the man engenders an inequality affecting both partners.



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Beauvoir says that the disappointment and problems for women in marriage as well as the burdens of the married man, constitute a narrative that quite thoroughly dismantles marriage.


She also says that to ask two spouses bound by practical, social and moral ties to satisfy each other sexually for their whole lives is pure absurdity. Marriage provides for man a perfect synthesis of immanence and transcendence and “these two moments are implied in every living movement” for the men.

Transcendence as we have discussed earlier is the movement beyond the self, the thrust towards the future while immanence involves the maintenance of the self and the integration of present experience with the past in a repetitive manner. This very access to larger life for the man engenders, an inequality affecting both partners.

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- Beauvoir's analysis of marriage and of the position of woman within the institution remains valid in recent critical theories too.
- Her dichotomy between transcendence and immanence can provide an illuminating critique of continuing gender inequities in marriage and also in divisions of domestic work.
- Beauvoir's existentialist ethics not only establishes a moral wrong in marriages in which wives perform the second shift of household labor but also supports the need to transform existing normative expectations surrounding wives and domestic work (Andrea Veltman, "The Sisyphian Torture of Housework: Simone de Beauvoir and Inequitable Division of Domestic Work"*)

* <https://www.istor.org/stable/pdf/3811096.pdf>



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Beauvoir's analysis of marriage and of the position of women within the institution remains valid in recent critical theories too. Her dichotomy between transcendence and immanence can also provide an illuminating critique of continuing gender inequities in marriage and also in divisions of domestic work.

It would be pertinent to refer to Andrea Veltman at this point who has said, that Beauvoir's existentialist ethics not only establishes a moral wrong in marriage in which wives perform the second shift of household labor. But also supports the need to transform existing normative expectations, surrounding wives and domestic work.



In the next chapter, chapter 6 titled Mother. Beauvoir claims that since a woman's body is dedicated to the propagation of the species, motherhood remains to be the natural vocation for a woman. However, human society is never left to nature. She explores the interactions between society and maternity that treats the notion of natural as a problem with respect to the lives of women.

The reproductive function for a very long time has not been a matter of pure biological chance. Legal, moral and emotional conflicts generated by abortion in Beauvoir's days, including prospects for added danger, shame and anguish over the illegal abortion represent some examples.

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Part II: Situation; Chapter 6- The Mother

- Demystifies motherhood by presenting women's experiences of pregnancy and mothering in all their difficulty, complexity, and ambivalence. To her, pregnancy is "a drama playing itself out in the woman between her and herself", promising the woman a new existence and a justification of her existence (612).
- Like the woman in love, the new mother feels needed. Maternal love is perhaps more difficult as there is no reciprocity. Her freedom consists in expecting no compensation for the gifts she bestows.
 - Beauvoir also suggests that birth control and abortion rights, challenges to what she saw as the cult of motherhood, are essential for women's liberation. She resented the religious arguments routinely given against the legalization of abortion.



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However, Beauvoir has been able to demystify motherhood by presenting women's experiences of pregnancy and mothering in all their difficulty, complexity and ambivalence. To her pregnancy is a drama playing itself out in the woman between her and herself, promising, the woman a new existence and also a social justification of her existence.

Like the woman in love the new mother feels needed. Maternal love as Beauvoir has suggested is perhaps more difficult as there is no reciprocity. Her freedom consists in expecting no compensation for the gifts she bestows.

She also suggests that birth control and abortion rights, challenges to what she saw as the cult of motherhood, are essential for women's liberation. She resented the religious arguments routinely given against the legalization of abortion.

Though Beauvoir is in no way a gender essentialist, in the current theoretical atmosphere her insistence on the importance of physiology is more critical than ever. Several of her concerns echo in the 21st century philosophers like and Rosi Braidotti, whom we shall take up in detail in later modules.


Beauvoir's views on motherhood and mothering remain under appropriated when it comes to both feminist metaphysics and feminist political priorities. Beauvoir continues this argument of a married woman's life in the next chapter titled Social Life. And

examines the ways in which family is connected to a larger community usually a group of people, who are socially similar to themselves. It is usually the man in the family who is connected to the community because he is a producer and also a citizen, it is the wife who assumes the social duties.


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Part II: Situation; Chapter 7- Social Life

- Clothing, household furnishings, and elegant parties exhibit public statements about the family and its wealth, taste, and social status. Friendships among women, born in this situation, present opportunities for complicity.
 - Affirmation of their common universe is sought in the exchange of recipes and household hints.
 - They often share sexual secrets, tales of adultery, and admissions of frigidity that negate male sexual domination.
- These women are joined in their objectification, and gather to construct a counter-universe, and a specifically feminine moral code.



Source: Victorian Magazine



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It is in the process of maintaining a social life that certain objects like clothing, household furnishings, the fact of throwing elegant parties, exhibit public statements about the family's wealth, taste and social status.


Friendships among women born in this situation present opportunities for complicity. And affirmation of their common universe is sought in the exchange of recipes and household hints. They often share sexual secrets, tales of adultery and admissions of frigidity that negate male sexual domination. These women are joined in their objectification and gather to construct a counter universe and a specifically feminine moral code.

In chapter 8, Beauvoir discusses how historically, prostitution has been the outlet for male sexual energy, even viewed as unnecessary means for preserving marriage.

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Part II: Situation; Chapter 8- Prostitutes and Hetaeras

- Beauvoir states that the “prostitute is the sum of all types of feminine slavery at once.” She anecdotally illustrates the prevalence of the abuse that transforms a young girl into a prostitute.
- She notes the moral and psychological circumstances which make her life wretched. Also mentions other factors which further objectify her:
 - Illness, drug addiction, alcoholism, humiliating medical check-ups, arbitrary cruelty by police and by clients, and gratuitous violence all reduce the common prostitute to the level of a thing (692).
- Beauvoir describes not only the prostitutes, their conditions and their relationships with pimps and other women, but also the hetaeras or courtesans.




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Beauvoir has categorically stated that the, “prostitute is the sum of all types of feminine slavery at once”. She anecdotally illustrates the prevalence of the abuse that transforms a young girl into a prostitute.


She notes the moral and psychological circumstances, which make her life wretched. And also mentions other factors like drug addiction, alcoholism, humiliating medical checkups, violence by police as well as by the customers which further objectify her. Beauvoir describes not only the prostitutes, their humiliating conditions, their relationships with pimps and other women, but also the courtesans or the hetaeras.

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- In contrast to prostitutes, hetaeras can gain recognition as an individual, and if successful can aim higher and be publicly distinguished.
- Beauvoir posits that these women use not only their bodies but also their entire person as exploitable capital (693).
- Beauvoir also explores the notion of freedom for a woman whose role as expensive sex object is a professional choice. This woman's freedom, despite financial independence, can not be equated with the male freedom of transcendence; as her whole subjectivity is rooted in a man's desires and follies.



Hetaira was a type of prostitute in ancient Greece, who served as an artist, entertainer and talker aside from providing sexual service. Unlike the rule for ancient Greek women, hetairas would be highly educated and were allowed in the symposium.



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In contrast to prostitutes, courtesans or hetaeras can get recognition as an individual and if successful can aim higher and be publicly distinguished. Beauvoir posits that these women use not only their bodies, but also their entire person as exploitable capital.

She also explores the notion of freedom for a woman whose role as expensive sex object is a professional choice. This woman's freedom despite financial independence cannot be equated with the male freedom of transcendence as her whole subjectivity is rooted in a man's desire and follies. After having discussed women in their roles of mother and also in the role of a prostitute, Beauvoir now looks at the condition of women who are getting old.



In her 9th chapter titled from maturity to old age, Beauvoir looks at this movement from maturity to old age, which for women registers a jarringly abrupt change in her opinion. She states that while the male grows older continuously, the woman is brusquely and physically stripped of her femininity immediately.

She is also susceptible to questionable authorities at this stage of her life for example, faith healers, prophets, Charltons.

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Part II: Situation; Chapter 9- From Maturity to Old Age

- A woman's situation changes as she ages.
 - Her husband is likely at the height of his career as she finds herself in retirement. She is no longer swayed by public opinion, and she avoids things she once valued: beauty treatments, social obligations, etc. If she is sympathetic to her daughters, she attempts to live vicariously through them.
- Elderly women find serenity near the ends of their lives.
 - Many, having married older men, outlive their husbands. They come to cherish their independence and develop a kind of cynicism born of "having seen it all" (720).
- But, according to Beauvoir, the greatest freedom an elderly woman can achieve is "... stoic defiance or sceptical irony. At no time in her life does she succeed in being both effective and independent" (722).



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A woman's situation changes as she ages. It is quite possible that her husband is alive and is likely to be at the height of his career. She is no longer swayed by public opinion and she avoids things she had once valued, for example, beauty treatments, social obligations etc. If she is sympathetic to her daughters, she attempts to live vicariously through them. Elderly women also find serenity near the ends of their lives.


Many, having married older men, outlive their husbands. They come to cherish their independence and develop a kind of cynicism born of "having seen it all". But, according to Beauvoir, the greatest freedom an elderly woman can achieve is the "stoic defiance or sceptical irony". At no time in her life does she succeed in being both effective and independent. At a much later stage, Beauvoir further approaches the subject of old age of women in her work *Coming of Age*, which was published in 1970.

It is an inimitable study of the scandalous treatment of aging and the elderly in today's capitalist societies. The next chapter, chapter 10; attempts to grasp the eternal feminine in her economic, social and historical conditioning as a whole. Beauvoir feels that this conditioning is the reason for her facing several indictments, for being considered argumentative, for being considered as petty, selfish, lacking a sense of truth, accuracy and morality.

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Part II: Situation; Chapter 10- Woman's Situation and Character

- Beauvoir in this chapter summarizes how women's situations in society impact their characters in general.
 - Woman's situation has remained largely the same throughout history, leaving her oppressed and unequal when compared to men – it has a corollary in her character also remaining the same, as a woman's character is shaped by her social situation.
 - Women often turn to religion in order to find some peace with their situation.
- Beauvoir claims that woman's situation is *not* a result of her character. Rather, her character is a result of her situation. Her mediocracy, complacency, lack of accomplishment, laziness, passivity – all these qualities are the *consequences* of her subordination, not the cause.



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In this chapter, Beauvoir summarizes how women's situations in society, impact their characters in general. She has claimed that woman's situation is not a result of her character rather her character is a result of her situation. Her mediocracy, complacency lack of accomplishment so called laziness, passivity all these qualities are the consequences of her subordination not the cause.

She also says that woman's situation has remained largely the same throughout history, leaving her oppressed and unequal when compared to men. It has a corollary in her character also remaining the same as a woman's character is shaped by her social situation.

Before explaining what the present situation of the "independent woman" is like; Beauvoir concludes by analyzing, why women often lose themselves to narcissism, love or mysticism. In chapter eleven titled "The Narcissist" a woman is seen both a subject and object; however, she can never be joined as a whole.



Narcissism is an attitude that emerges from women's oppressive social situation. Beauvoir defines narcissism, as a process of alienation in which women view themselves as an object and place a supreme value on their physical being.

As Beauvoir has already established, women cannot exist as subjects themselves. So, they seek transcendence by losing themselves in something else. For some women this “something else” is the object that they represent in the society.

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Part III: Justifications ; Chapter 11- The Narcissist

- According to Beauvoir, a woman gives herself "sovereign importance because no important object is accessible to her"(756).
 - She cultivates a personal style in her clothing and in her surroundings, and engages in passionate and unusual interests designed to represent, rather than occupy her.
- But, it is a failed hedge against objectification, which doesn't work; since she simply creates and recreates herself as object.
- Authenticity is lost in the love of the mirror image. Thus, she is a pretence of a subject—she *performs* a subject she cannot be.
 - Narcissism is the apotheosis of immanence; the ultimate, predictable retreat from objectification and the failure of the retreat.



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A woman gives herself sovereign importance because no important object is accessible to her. She may cultivate a personal style in her clothing or in her surroundings, and may engage in passionate and unusual interests, design to represent rather, than occupy her.

But Beauvoir cautions us it is a failed hedge against objectification and it does not work, since this woman is simply creating and recreating herself as object. Authenticity is lost in the love of the mirror image, thus she is a pretence of a subject; she performs a subject she can never be. Narcissism is thus in a woman the apotheosis of immanence, the ultimate predictable retreat from objectification and also the failure of this retreat.

In the next chapter, The Woman in Love which is the 12th chapter in this volume Beauvoir claims that the word love does not have the same meaning for both sexes. Women believe that love means total devotion that is a devotion of body as well as soul.


However, for men, the woman they love is merely one value among others. This difference is not a law of nature, it is a matter of difference in situation. Man is ambitious and reaches out. Woman chooses to lose herself in another. This loss is her freedom, and love is her religion.

In this chapter Beauvoir studies some of the ways in which women reinforce their own dependency. And they are Narcissists, Women in love and Mystics. All these three types of women embrace their immanence by drowning selfhood in an external object, whether it be the mirror, a lover or God.

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Part III: Justifications ; Chapter 12- The Woman in Love

- According to Beauvoir, love eventually comes to hold "less place in feminine life than ... husband, children, home, pleasures, social life, vanity ... And career"(775). For a woman, rather than fighting on her own account, the "easy way out" is to seek love. Worn out by her adventure, she discovers years too late she has taken the wrong path.
- Unable to see her lover as a man, she worships him as an idol. And when he fails her, when his faults or vulnerabilities reveal that he is not a god, she loses everything. In her disappointment, she refuses him his freedom.
- When a man has had enough, he is comfortable with separation. The woman in love can never give enough. Still, she is not All for him and strives at least to believe she is indispensable to him.



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Interestingly Beauvoir comments that, love eventually comes to hold “less place in feminine life than husband, children, home, pleasures, social life, vanity and career”.

For a woman, rather than fighting on her own account, the easy way out is to seek love. Worn out by her adventure, she discovers years too late, that she has taken a wrong path. Unable to see her lover as a man, because of her conditioning, she worships him as an idol. And when he fails her, when his faults or vulnerabilities reveal that he is not a god, she loses everything. In her disappointment, she also refuses him his freedom.


When a man has had enough, he is comfortable with separation. The woman in love can never give enough. Still, she is not all for him and strives at least to believe she is indispensable to him. In the next chapter titled “The Mystic”, Beauvoir talks about woman who chooses to worship the divinity in god himself and not in man.

Although there are men who make similar choices, there is a prevalence of women who “abandon themselves to the delights of celestial marriage”.


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Part III: Justifications ; Chapter 13- The Mystic

- The mystic borrows from earthly love both the words and the physical effect.
- The mystic gropes "for the supreme source of value," finding it at times in the figure of a mortal man who holds the secrets she seeks (804). Such projections of love (*erotomania*) may take either platonic, or sexual forms.
- Beauvoir cites "The Ecstasy of St. Teresa" – a famous statue by Lorenzo Bernini, the 17th century Italian Renaissance artist, as an example.
 - Like all women in love, the mystic seeks to forget herself in love, to annihilate herself in achieving ecstasy: "They actively apply themselves to self-annihilation by the destruction of their flesh"(808).



The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa,
Source: Gian Lorenzo Bernini.



IT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE | 22

Beauvoir cites the example of a famous statue The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa by Lorenzo Bernini, the 17th century Italian renaissance artist. Like all women in love, Beauvoir suggest the mystic seeks to forget herself in love, to annihilate herself in achieving ecstasy. They actively apply themselves to self annihilation by the destruction of their flesh.


So, the mystic borrows from earthly love both the words and the physical effect. The mystic gropes “for the supreme source of value”, finding it at times in the figure of a mortal man who holds the secrets she seeks. Such projections of love or erotomania may take either platonic or sexual form.

The next chapter, chapter 14 is the last part of the book and Beauvoir considers how independent women are striving for liberation in her own time. Acknowledging a change in situation for women, she also notes that civic liberties remain abstract only if economic autonomy for women does not exist.

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Part IV: Justifications ; Chapter 14- The Independent Woman

- According to Beauvoir's analysis, a man's advantage is that, from childhood, "his vocation as a human being in no way contradicts his destiny as a male"(815).
- For a woman "to accomplish her femininity, she is required to be object and prey"(815). The emancipated woman is in conflict. To confine herself to her femininity would be a mutilation, but so would rejecting, or refusing to acknowledge her sex. Woman is only equal to man if she is a "sexed" human being. Yet for her, the terms are incompatible.
- The woman who has made herself a financial success is still expected to maintain certain feminine standards: elegant dress and a fashionable home, for example. Whereas a successful businessman needn't be bothered with such things in order to sustain his reputation.



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According to the analysis which Beauvoir has presented in *The Second Sex*, a man's advantage is that from childhood, "his vocation as a human being in no way contradicts his destiny as a male". For a woman, "to accomplish her femininity, she is required to be object and prey".

The emancipated woman is in conflict. To confine herself to her femininity would be a mutilation. But, so would rejecting, or refusing to acknowledge her sex. Woman is only equal to man if she is a 'sexed' human being. Yet for her, the terms are incompatible.

A woman who has made herself a financial success is still expected to maintain certain feminine standards: elegant dress, a fashionable home for example. Whereas, a successful businessman need not be bothered with such things in order to sustain his reputation.

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- Thus, the emancipated woman *must* adhere to the conventional femininity of her mother and grandmother, and, at the same time, live and work like a man.
- The basic terms for women remain different from those for men even in such cases. Men pursue sexual partners aggressively. Whereas, as Beauvoir argues, "a woman who is not afraid of men frightens them," and ceases to be attractive unless she is taken by the male (822).
- Thus, the independent woman is caught between her sexual and professional desires.
- Women's health issues are also neglected at their place of work. There is neither sympathy nor allowances for a menstruating worker.



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Thus, the emancipated woman must adhere to the conventional femininity of her mother and grandmother, and at the same time, live and work like a man.

The basic terms for women remain different from those for men even in such cases. Men pursue sexual partners aggressively for example. Whereas, as Beauvoir has argued “a woman who is not afraid of men frightens them” and ceases to be attractive unless she is taken by the male. Thus, the independent woman is caught between her sexual and professional desires.


Besides that, women’s health issues are also neglected at their place of work, there is neither sympathy nor allowances for a menstruating worker. In the chapter on Conclusion, Beauvoir retreats many of her key ideas. She notes that man and woman in her day are still not satisfied with one another.

Their unequal positions are detrimental for both. And the two genders are still engaged in a “combat” because they both seek to dominate the other.


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Conclusions

- Beauvoir wonders if people believe that the "battle of the sexes" is "an original curse," or rather "a transitory moment in human history"(848).
- Beauvoir concludes her work by stating that genuine equality between the sexes would be beneficial for both genders.
- She looks forward to a future when women and men are equals. She concludes that, "to carry off this supreme victory, men and women must, among other things and beyond their natural differentiations, unequivocally affirm their brotherhood."



Source: Pixabay



IT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE | 25


Beauvoir wonders if people believe that the “battle of the sexes is an original curse or rather a transitory moment in human history”.

She concludes her work by stating that genuine equality between the sexes would be beneficial for both genders. And she looks forward to a future, when women and men are equals. And she concludes I quote, “to carry off this supreme victory, men and women must, among other things and beyond their natural differentiations, unequivocally affirm their brotherhood” unquote.

Since its publication, *The Second Sex* has generated many debates and deliberations in literary and political circles and also among feminist. It contains opposed the social conditioning of girls, it challenged the dominant sexual order and became a clarion call for working towards and realizing gender disparity.

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- The iconic sentence -- "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" -- led to academic discussions on cultural conditioning.
- Beauvoir's study of myths in which "femininity" is embedded, paved the way for much feminist cultural and literary criticism in the second half of the 20th century.
- She laid bare the shortcomings of liberalism, Marxism, and psychoanalytic theories as analyses of the formation of femininity, and also of the causes of the continued oppression of women; and set about constructing a systematic philosophical alternative.



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The iconic sentence, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” led to academic discussions on cultural conditioning, her study of myths in which femininity is embedded paved the way for much feminist, cultural and literary criticism in the second half of the 20th century.

She also laid bare the shortcomings of liberalism, Marxism and psychoanalytic theories as analyses of the formation of femininity and also of the causes of the continued oppression of women. And set about constructing a systematic philosophical alternative.


Second wave feminisms from the 1960s onwards would start pursuing these issues. Starting with social conditioning the sex/gender distinction and continuing to how sexuality and gender are intertwined, constructed, reproduced, lived, performed, contested and how elusive both sex and gender can be.

More recently in intersections of female body with technology and new media, Beauvoir’s arguments have proved to be of immense significance.

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- In feminism, Beauvoir has earned numerous accolades "prophetess extraordinaire," "greatest source of inspiration," and "Mother of Us All" (O'Brien 1981, 65; Schwarzer 1984, 67; Ascher 1987).*
- *The Second Sex* - which Beauvoir's U.S. publisher had declared to be "the classic manifesto of the liberated woman" - has similarly enjoyed a totemic status.
- In 1970 Shulamith Firestone declared it "the definitive analysis" of sexism.
- Several post-feminist critics have also acknowledged their indebtedness to Beauvoir.

*Introduction: Debating Simone de Beauvoir (jstor.org)




IT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 27

In feminism, Beauvoir has earned numerous accolades, “prophetess extraordinaire”, “greatest source of inspiration”, and “Mother of Us All”. *The Second Sex* which Beauvoir’s US publisher had declared to be the classic manifesto of the liberated women has similarly enjoyed a totemic status.


In 1970 Firestone had declared it the definitive not definite, but definitive analysis of sexism. Several post-feminist scholars and critics have also acknowledged their indebtedness to Beauvoir.

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- In her article "Gender and Subjectivity: Simone de Beauvoir and Contemporary Feminism," Sonia Kruks – known for her project on the political philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir - makes a case for the philosophical sophistication of Beauvoir's theory of the subject and its significance for feminist theory.
- In Beauvoir's writings, Kruks argues, "we find a nuanced conception of the subject that cannot be characterized as either Enlightenment or post-modern: rather, it is a conception of the subject as situated".
- Unlike Sartre, Kruks argues, Beauvoir distinguishes two different kinds of relations of otherness: those between social equals and those that involve social inequality.



Sonia Kruks
Source: Durham University




IT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 28

It would be pertinent to refer to Sonia Kruks here who in her article “Gender and Subjectivity: Simone de Beauvoir and Contemporary Feminism”, makes a case for the philosophical sophistication of Beauvoir’s theory of the subject and its significance for feminist theory.

Sonia Kruks is known for her project on the political philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir. She argues that in Beauvoir’s writings we find a nuanced conception of the subject that cannot be characterized as either enlightenment or post modern rather it is a conception of the subject as situated. Unlike Sartre, Beauvoir distinguishes two different kinds of relations of otherness, those between social equals and those that involve social inequality.

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- The latter relation, wherein reciprocity is replaced by relations of oppression and subjection, is the condition of woman's otherness.
- It is not only that woman is the *Other*; she is the *unequal Other*. From this perspective, Beauvoir can accommodate a notion of oppression that denies the possibility of choice and transcendence. Thereby she radically departs from the Sartrean notion of the absolute subject and instead pursues a conception of "situated" subjectivity.
- By rereading Beauvoir's existentialism as dialectical and her feminism as a theory of woman's situatedness, Kruks makes a powerful appeal for a more adequate feminist theory of freedom that mediates between action and power, choice and necessity, self and subjectivity.



IT ROORKEE NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 29

The latter relation wherein reciprocity is replaced by relations of oppression and subjection is the condition of woman’s otherness. It is not only that woman is the other, she is the unequal other, from this perspective Beauvoir can accommodate a notion of oppression that denies the possibility of choice and transcendence.

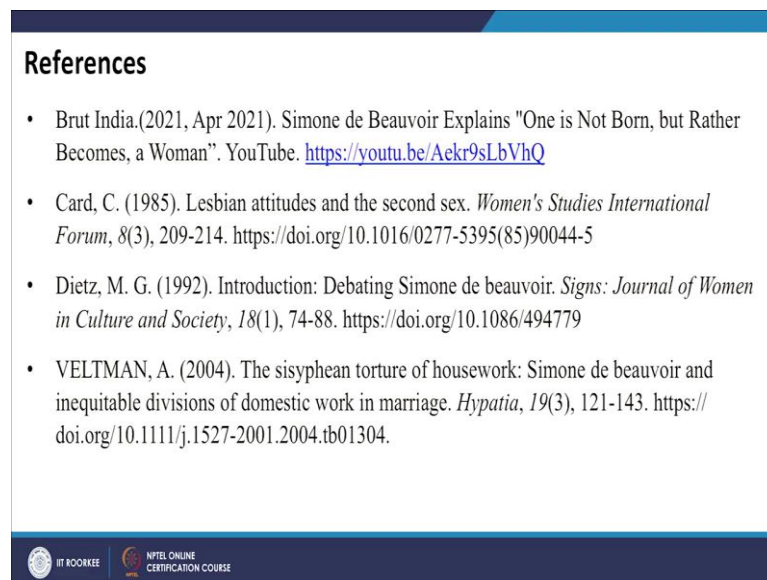
Thereby, she radically departs from the Sartrean notion of the absolute subject and instead pursues a conception of situated subjectivity. By rereading Beauvoir’s existentialism, as dialectical and her feminism as a theory of woman’s situatedness, Kruks makes a powerful appeal for a more adequate feminist theory of freedom that mediates between action and power choice and necessity, self and subjectivity. Beauvoir

is a philosopher whom we shall be referring to in several context in subsequent discussions on gender.

In the coming week we will look at the ways in which the lived experiences of women are intertwined with class, race and economy along with some other factors. We will further discuss the new and emerging concepts in Gender Studies in the 21st century and additionally explore the impact of race and gender on women socialization with the help of critics like Crenshaw, Bell Hooks and Audre Lorde among others.



Thank you.

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