



Think India (Quarterly Journal)

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Two-Day National seminar on
"Artificial Intelligence, Multimedia and ICT in Teaching,
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on 23rd and 24th September 2019 at Department of English,
SRI S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College, Sattur, Tamilnadu, India



Simone De Beauvoir's 'Second Sex': An Outlook To Feminist Existentialism

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Abstract

Gender Studies is defined as "a field for interdisciplinary study which is devoted to gender identity and gendered representation". The field also includes spheres such as, Women's Studies, Men's Studies and Queer Studies. This discipline, in specific, gives a wide approach and wide knowledge relevant to the fields of language, literature, media, society and anthropology. The term "gender" is rightly defined in the social and cultural context. Simon de Beauvoir defines, "it is a social and cultural construction of masculinities and feminities and not to the state of being male or female in its entirety".

The field of gender studies generally focuses on the existential differences between men and women, sexual differences and gender characterisation. The objective of the paper is to throw light on Women's Writing, an integral part of Gender Studies. What is a women's writing? It is an umbrella term for women centred books that focus on the life experience of women. Women Writings in English are mainly brought out to question the perspectives of men. Most of the writings by men reflect the happenings around them in their own purview and outlook. Neither did they think beyond their patriarchal limits nor placed themselves in the shoes of women to experience the world at large and the respective societies through the eyes of women. In this context, the writings of Simone de Beauvoir stand very important. The text I have taken here for my discussion is 'Second Sex' by Simone de Beauvoir.

Key words: *Queer Studies, Gender studies, Sexual differences, Patriarchal limits*

"One is not born a woman, one becomes one"

-Simone de Beauvoir

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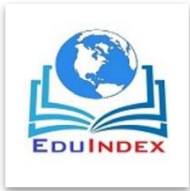
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The Second Sex is a historical document that focuses on the disadvantaged position of women in society. The author in this text has deliberated her views on the social status of women. She also has given alternative ideas to the readers for how women should be treated.

The patriarchal society we live has laid rules for women. Their ideas and perceptions of patriarchal society on women have built around them a strong castle that could not be broken very easily. Men fundamentally oppress women by characterising them “the other” on every level. Man occupies the role of the self, or subject, whereas the woman is the object, the “other”. Every man feels that he is essential, absolute and superior whereas “she” is looked down as inessential, incomplete and inferior. Their dominance is well explicated when they say that the man creates acts and invents, whereas the woman has to wait for him to save her.

We have been witnessing a slow pace of changes in the present situation of women. The women are given plenty of opportunities and options nowadays in choice of education, job and choosing partners which was absolutely denied in the past ages. There is also a question whether every women is given this opportunity or choice of selection. I am sure that not every woman enjoys this liberation. There are some places where female foeticide still prevails. When we talk about the emergence of women writers there are many writers bringing out their perspectives and outlook of women, but still they all remain musings. But there is also some ideological shifts where the great men writers like Girish Karnad,

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Vijay Tendulkar voiced out the sufferings of women in their writings. We are happy that the voices of female are heard and answered.

She then argues that the subordination of women dated since the existence of the universe. The concept of nomadic hunter gatherers since the French Revolution and the bread winner concept till the contemporary ages traced out the emergence and existence of male superiority in society. Again she feels that there is no persuasive justification for them to subordinate women. It also shows their reflection, attitudes, preconceptions and injustices towards women in general. According to Simone de Beauvoir there are certain things that results in the dislocated status of women in the society. The reasons are the differences between men and women in terms of biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism. The dislocation of women in society had existed still the Stone Age where the men as hunters gatherers- Bread winner (they hunt and bring food for family) and the women as (Home maker). There were some historical instances where women took the lead of the country facing many social and political challenges resulting in death. Our patriarchal society is systemized in such a way where the women are tamed and domesticated insisting on their very existence inside home alone. These disciplines bring about undisputable "essential" differences between men and women providing no validating judgement for the reason of women's inferiority or subjugation.

The last part of the first volume of Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex discusses how women are portrayed in Myths and Literary Texts. Women are treated as the idols of worship. They are the representation of nature and motherhood. She also analyses how women are portrayed negatively in some of the works. She summarizes how women are affected much by the misrepresentations of myths and literary texts. The Hindu mythological concept has many goddesses to talk in praise of. They are shown and worshipped as the embodiment of peace, love, anger and others. But the same society that idolizes women treats her as a bundle of flesh. We have been witnessing the widespread violence against women physically, mentally and morally. A research study conducted by UN Women Organization in the year 2017 in its findings proved that nearly 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives. However, some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. Evidence shows that women who have experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence report higher rates of depression, having an abortion and acquiring HIV, compared to women who have not. In this situation goddesses worship supersedes but travels parallel with undue violence against women.

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Simone de Beauvoir tries to summarize the multiple roles played by women in society. Different women react differently. Right from the birth a girl undergoes many hurdles knowingly or unknowingly. It is difficult for her to come up in life when she passes through childhood, into girlhood, into womanhood and into motherhood. At every phases of life she has to prove who she is. This is very much explicated by Virginia Woolf in his writings "A Room of One's Own", where she explains well the need of privacy (a room) to bring out her perceptions and perspectives. She quotes" *Women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets from the beginning of time. Indeed if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some would say greater. But this is woman in fiction. In fact, as Professor Trevelyan points out, she was locked up, beaten and flung about the room. A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant*". She also points out the adaptation of women to various spheres in life as challenging, the threat laid before them as wider and varied, the expectation on diverse roles of women is immense, fault finding is at its helm, individuality of women is misrecognized, no enough room for individual needs and desires.

According to Beauvoir there are many limitations present before women. The multiple roles played by women are always monitored and supervised by men. Women are forced to adopt certain traits which made them even more inferior. They are not allowed to think on their own. They are forced to copy mechanisms. Thus they are not allowed to be productive or creative. She spends her life in serving men and children. She lives the life of her husband and children and not her own. As a result, they are left miserable, incomplete, unfulfilled.

I conclude that the term "equity" is used only in terms of words and it is not practised in the society we live. Gender equality is not a genuine equality. Still there are many independent women who face greater challenges than men do because the traditional values like marriage, reproduction and feminity still continues to chase her. Just as the men if the women were given enough opportunity or a space to think they could shine more than men.

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