

MODULE-2
GENDER STUDIES AS A DISCIPLINE
TOPIC- SECOND SEX

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SECOND SEX

- By a French feminist theoretician **Simone de Beauvoir**
- Published in **1949**.
- major work on feminist philosophy
- influenced women and women's movement world wide.
- criticized as pornography and Church included it in the list of forbidden books.
- The views expressed in the book were unheard of the time it got published.
- hardly any books on women from feminist perspective at the time.
- The profound insights on women's oppression were first of its kind and the book left ripples on society's attitude and treatment to women.

- It discusses how women are treated historically and explained how women were oppressed in the society and continued to be the second sex.
- She examines the structures, attitudes and presuppositions which maintain the inequality between sexes.
- Woman all through history is defined as the 'other' of man who takes the privilege of being the 'self'.
- Woman "is the incidental, the inessential, as opposed to the essential.
- He is the Subject; he is the Absolute-she is the Other.
- " Woman is treated as the other of man and the 'other' is defined by man himself.

- Based on this myth of the woman as 'inferior other' that gender inequality perpetuated in society.
- Beauvoir argues that women must become 'subjects' in their own right.
- They need not be restricted to the roles imposed on them by the male dominated society.
- The concept of the 'Eternal feminine' constructed on the mythical image of the mother, the virgin, the motherland and nature were portrayed as traps to tie women to impossible ideals and thereby to deny their individuality.

- Beavour pointed out that history disclosed many of these fantastic roles consist of contradictory ideals.
- For example, women as mothers are depicted as respected guardians of life and there are as many representations of mothers in history as harbingers of death.
- Thus woman as mother is both respected and despised.
- She connects subordination of women with reproduction and explained that physiology should not be basis of values.
- Women are biologically capable of bearing children.
- This is an indisputable statement.
- Economical and social factors attribute to biology and for that reason reproduction cannot be seen from purely biological point of view

- The following values are associated with are social
- a. Motherhood becomes a symbol of the true female
- b. No woman is complete unless she bears children
- c. Nurturing a child is the woman's natural job.
- sexual difference is real and unalterable, it cannot be the grounds for inequality.
- Social and economic factors attribute to biological reality act as ground for injustice.
- She observed women had a subordinated status in Ancient Greek and Roman civilizations.
- Christianity also perceived women as menial creatures.

- Apostles like Paul commented on women thus ‘of all the wild animals, none can be found as harmful as women’.
- Though Beauvoir found some changes in the position of women in the nineteenth century their legal status remained unchanged.
- Industrial revolution brought her from the seclusion of home to the public; but they were paid very little.
- She also critically looked at the birth control on Egyptian women.
- Beauvoir's assertion, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" destroyed the myth that women are born "feminine" and distinguishes between sex and gender.

- Femininity is constructed and not natural.
- Woman is trained to fit into feminine roles.
- Woman is trained to think, talk and act in particular ways that suit the role.
- The roles like 'daughter' or 'mother' are not natural but social.
- Beauvoir traces the education of woman from her childhood and adolescence and illustrates how women are forced to relinquish their claims to transcendence and authentic subjectivity by a progressively more stringent acceptance of the "passive" and "alienated" role to man's "active" and "subjective" demands.

- She suggested ways and means to reclaim woman's self. Women should think, act, work and create on the same terms as men.
- Woman should declare herself as equal instead of despising her.
- Beauvoir wanted changes in social structures to ensure women's equality. She advocated universal childcare, equal education, contraception, legal abortion and economic freedom for women's emancipation.

- The Second Sex always maintains that each individual, regardless of sex, class or age, should be encouraged to define him or herself and to take on the individual responsibility that comes with freedom.