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Essay

'One is not born woman,
but become one'

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The Essay.

One is not born woman but becomes one - Simone de Beauvoir.

As early as mid 20th century feminist philosophers put emphasis on that all genders are socially constructed. A child is born without any labelled identity as man or women, it is the society that give name to it.

The notion of womanhood or femininity is accomplished through the active process of creating gender identity through interacting with others in particular social context.

These assigned gender roles comes from century old cultural norms

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that is being followed generation after generation. The claim of womanhood and responsibilities assigned with it are all social and cultural construct rather than purely biological. Simone de Beauvoir argues that femininity is produced through socialization, power structures and lived experiences, not innate biology.

Biological sex mean having different anatomy. In males, its has XY chromosome, with excess of testosterone hormone and genitalia (penis); while, female has XX chromosomes, with excess of progesterone and estrogen levels and genitalia (Vagina). This creates natural visible differences among male and female. Similarly,

socially constructed means having masculine and feminine qualities, behaviour patterns and related roles and responsibilities, which they have to perform in order to live according to societal norms.

If these roles are not followed either it is by men or women they will be considered being

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deviant from society.

The process of becoming woman or the formation of womanhood starts from early age. From childhood, girls are treated differently from boys. Their activities, their toys, their responsibilities from how to behave elegantly to perform house chores all are indicated from early age. Society imposes certain rules and boundaries on women, there are expectations attached to it, which they need to adhere with, to get a recognition in society. In schools, it reinforces distinction between boys and girls through differentiated expectations: girls may be encouraged towards obedience, neatness and emotional sensitivity, while assertive and risk-taking behaviours are discouraged. From teacher interactions to peer regulations, subtly communicate what is considered appropriate female conduct, positioning care, compliance and self-restraints as desirable traits for girls. In this way education functions as not only a site for learning but

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also a mechanism for producing gendered identities.

Gender Expectations imposed on women function as powerful social norms that shape behaviour, identity, and self-perception from an early age. Women are often expected to be nurturing, care giving, emotionally sensitive with social roles tied to domestic responsibility rather than autonomy or ambition. At the same time cultural norms impose strict expectations regarding appearance and sexuality, requiring women to be attractive but not excessive confident yet modest, and independent while remaining accommodating. These contradictory demands create persistent pressure for self-regulation and conformity, discouraging deviation through social judgement or sanction.

Family, religion and media plays a central role in shaping the gender identity by transmitting expectations about what it means to be a woman. Woman's first lesson starts with its own family.

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reinforcing femininity through differential treatments like role modeling, expectations around behaviours, appearance and responsibilities, like performing household chores, taking care of family, self-sacrificing, dress modest, talk lightly, in soft voice these all are first lesson which she learned in the beginning. Further comes a religion, it shapes the whole idea of womanhood or femininity, women rights in inheritance to no power in deciding for lives. They are held in the bubble of being soft, weak and to be protected by men and all decisions should be taken on her behalf. Religion not only promote the ideals of modesty, obedience, purity and self-sacrificing but also framing them as moral or divinely sanctioned. Similarly, media further amplifies these messages by circulating narrow representations of femininity that emphasise beauty, romantic fulfilment and emotional labour while marginalizing alternative expressions of womanhood. Together, these forces normalizes specific gender roles and present them as natural or inevitable, limiting women's perceived

possibilities and reinforcing the social processes through which girls are taught to "become" women.

Simone de Beauvoir concept of 'other' in the Second Sex explains man as subject and women as relating to men. As man represents autonomy, assertiveness, decision maker of the house, whereas women are considered as dependent, and secondary. In patriarchal society, the status of women is undermined, not self-determining and immature. She is considered as the 2nd class gender as regards males. As it not only undermines the freedom, choice of living their lives the way they want, but also ignores them in other spheres of life. As the 'other' women is expected to serve, support and reflect the subject rather than herself, shapes their identities within system that prioritizes male experiences and authorities while rendering women contingent and subordinate.

Social Institutions like families, religion, education system, society

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as a whole define women, she becomes wife, daughter, mother or an object of desire to its counterpart 'men'. Society defines how each role will be played. Marriage and motherhood becomes the markers of female identity, signaling that a woman's value is tied to her ability to nurture, maintain relationships and reproduce, rather than to her individual achievements or desires. Religion and legal systems frequently reinforce these roles, prescribing moral codes and prescribing duties that prioritize women's subordination. Similarly, media and popular culture further perpetuates the notion of women as object of desire, framing femininity around beauty, sexuality and the capacity to attract male attention. Together, these institutions construct the social realities in which women's identities are measured not by their own subjectivity but their utility.

Women also have to experience through their body through menstruation, Sexuality, pregnancy. They lived through social expectations that dictate what is appropriate, desirable

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or permissible influencing how women perceive themselves and interact with the world. For instance, women having child of a man has to go through 9 months of pregnancy, bear the societal pressure of having a first child as boy and if after 9 months if a child born is a girl, on which she don't have any autonomy on deciding gender, will get blamed on giving birth to a girl. This societal pressure not only undermines the freedom of over their body, but also the choice reproduce or not. This society constraints limits women's ability to embrace individuality and sole decision makers of their life.

Lastly, Simone de Beauvoir's claim has also been critiqued and Refuted by modern feminists and Intersectional theorists. The Second sex mainly looks at the experiences of white, middle class, Western women but Intersectional analysis shows that becoming a woman is different for everyone. Factors like race, class, colonial history and economic situation affects how gender

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expectations are experienced and resisted. For instance, women of color often do not fit the traditional ideals of femininity and develop their own ways of resisting these norms. Modern feminists emphasise that women are just passive recipients of social rules, they actively question, negotiate and redefine them.

Similarly Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity adds to this by showing that gender is created through repeated actions which allow people to challenge and change it. Transgender and nonbinary identities also show that becoming women can involve actively choosing one's identity and resisting assigned categories. Altogether these ideas show that womanhood is not fixed but it is a flexible ongoing process shaped by society, personal choice and acts of resistance.

In Conclusion, de Beauvoir's assertion that 'one is not born but becomes women' provides a critical framework of understanding gender as socially constructed and culturally mediated.

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Womanhood is shaped by education, family, media, religion and societal expectations and women are positioned as 'object' or 'other' in relation to men, with their identities measured against male centered norms. Yet within these constraints, women exercise agency, negotiate norms and resist imposed roles demonstrating that gender is dynamic rather than predetermined. Simone de Beauvoir insight remains vital lens for examining the social, cultural and political dimensions of gender in both historical and contemporary contexts.