

Topic:

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

Essay Outline

● Introduction

Thesis Statement: "Womanhood is not something that can be defined on the basis of biological system and differences but it is a social phenomena; society, culture, media and educational system shapes the behaviour of women."

● Background of Statement

- a. Existentialist theory of 'being' and 'becoming' is the basis of this statement
- b. Choices, actions and social interactions rather than anatomy decides one's behaviour

● Sex vs Gender Debate for the explanation of Womanhood

- a. 'Sex' is determined biologically while 'gender' is purely a social phenomenon.
- b. Case in Point: Margaret Mead's study of

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'masculine' and 'feminine' behaviour in contrast

• Role of Social Structures in Construction of Gender

- a. Patriarchal structures play important role in constructing differences between male and female behaviour and actions.
- Political and economic fields are specifically dominated by patriarchy.
- b. Cultural norms also lead to the construction of gender, as seen in Afghanistan and other such countries.
- c. Religious influence specially interpreted by extremists is the major driver of construction of gender.
- d. Media and education plays important role in shaping human behaviour.

• Counterargument - Biology defines gender.

- a. Essence precedes existence as a counterargument of 'becoming' concept.
- b. Rebuttal - Biology influences but does not determine social roles.

Evidence: Diverse female identities across the

world.

• Changing Conceptions of Feminism and Womanhood.

- a. Feminist movements starting from 20th century shaped the concept of womanhood as a result of social construction rather than innate.
- b. Feminist movements also helped in regaining the basic human rights for woman.

• Contemporary Challenges and opportunities.

- a. **Challenges.** Developing countries are still facing the problem in providing equal opportunities to both male and female.
- b. **Opportunities.** The rise of digital and social media and globalization has provided the world with opportunity to change the redundant concepts about females.

• Conclusion,

The Essay

'One is not born woman but becomes one'. (Simone de Beauvoir) This statement is deep-rooted in the concept of construction of gender by this society rather than defining it biologically. This statement draws a clear distinction between the two concepts 'sex' and 'gender'. According to feminists, women are subjected to systematic process socialization which molds their behaviour, necessities and aspirations. They go through a predefined system of norms which shape their identities rather than discovering and accepting their own selves. History reveals that traits which are specifically associated with womanhood-like submissiveness, emotionality and domesticity- are not innate but they have been constructed by all of us and women, from very

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early age are subjected to this predefined system. They shape their behaviour according to these norms. Womanhood is not something that can be defined on the basis of biology but it is a complete social phenomena. Society, culture, media, religion, educational system are the structures which shape womanhood. These institutions are completely dominated by patriarchy and thus limit women's autonomy and generalise gender inequality around the globe. So de Beauvoir's assertion remains quite relevant as it exposes how a socially constructed phenomena is easily termed as natural and this concept needs to be eliminated which suppress women from accepting their own natural identity.

Simone de Beauvoir was an existentialist philosopher who, along with Sartre, insisted on the concept of 'Existence precedes essence' and theory of 'Being' and 'Becoming' became the

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ideological basis of this very statement. According to the existentialists, a person is not born with a specific identity but 'it shapes its own identity' (Sartre). de Beauvoir in her book '**Second Sex**' insisted that anatomy does not define one's behaviour and identity but their choices, actions and social interactions are the reasons for the construction of one's identity. A person is not born carrying specific behaviour but they learn with the exposure to society.

**'Gender is not something one is,
it is something what one does.'**

(Judith Butler)

There is also a debate on definition of sex and gender as two different terms. 'Sex' is defined biologically while 'gender' is defined as something purely social construction. Sex, according to feminists, are two and defined as male and female.

Whereas gender is something can't be defined upto a specific number. It varies from person to person, area to area and culture to culture. It is not binding at all. Every area have their own societal structures which define the behaviour of its inhabitants. To describe this very concept and to prove it

Margaret Mead studied the 'masculine' and 'feminine' behaviour in contrast. She compared the Western construction of gender behaviour to tribes of Papua New Guinea. According to her studies females of **Arapesh Tribe** were gentle and expressive just like those of western countries. But the males of that tribe were also gentle, submissive and emotional like their females.

This very difference suggests the contradiction between the male construction of identity in both regions. Similarly **Chambri Tribe's** females were independent, dominant, decision-makers and leaders while males of that tribe were

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were dependent and submissive to their females. It is completely opposite to the construction of gender identity in western countries. Hence Margrate Mead concluded that

"Gender is not unyielding and fixed in nature but it is molded by culture."

There are many different structures that help in construction of gender.

Firstly it is the dominance of patriarchy in various fields of society. Specially the fields deciding the strength of a country. Politics is one of them.

In almost all countries of the world male dominant parties cover more than 70% of parliaments around the globe.

According to the reports of 2023, only thirty states were headed by female leaders. It is the most important issue since there is hardly any representation of females and their issues remain suppressed. As in Pakistan, there are

very few female politicians who win their seats in parliament through election.

In 17% of women more than 10% are rewarded with reserved seats. They hardly get a chance to openly participate and campaign for their elections. With less percentage of female leaders, the women's issues are hardly conveyed to authorities and the problems remain there.

Similarly in economic fields, male dominant market prevails. Gender wage gap is a major issue faced by females. Occupational segregation i.e. confinement of females to low paying and low scale jobs is also a major issue faced by females. Moreover domestic chores and work-place security is a major challenge. All these causes help in shaping the identity and behaviour of females. As Mary Wollstonecraft says

"Women are made weak by various prejudices inserted into her."

Cultural norms and values also play major role in construction of gender identity of females. Females are allotted with specific roles i.e. role of women as mother, daughter and wife, rather than a human being. Although it is a universal behaviour yet studies of Margrate Mead makes difference. Those studies suggest that women are not born with these roles they perform rather they adapt to what they learn. As we are aware of the cultural differences between Western and Eastern nations. Each state has its own norms & values. For instance Afghanistan, where women are hardly allowed to participate in society, have limited access to business and higher education opportunities are rare, females have developed dependence on males and they've become completely submissive. Similarly the construction of gender identity differs from one area to another in the

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same state or nation. In Pakistan there is a huge difference witnessed during Aurat March campaigns as a whole group of women was against the slogans of independence. So the culture and values of an area affect differently on the construction of gender identity.

Another important structure that influences the gender construction is religion. Religion has always been a sensitive issue specially in Muslim countries as people are more serious for religious instructions. Extremists interpret the instruction of religion in their own favour and use it as basis of their Extremism. They never uttered the ayat of Quran where Allah says.

"The believing men and believing women are allies of each other."

(Sura Al Taubah)

Similarly Christianity has interpreted the epistles in their own manner. e.g. Creation order in Genesis is narrated

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as 'Eve created as a 'helper' for Adam. They insisted on women's role in church as being quiet. Hence the religion is used as a source to construct identities of women.

The most important and growing cause of social construction of gender is media portrayal and educational system. Media plays important role in shaping public opinion. With the rise of social media and its access to everyone in the world has made its part bigger. Portrayal of women as more weak and timid creature in series and films has effected the formation of identity of women. Construction of beauty standards for female and male has influenced the natural ^{behavior} of them.

Education is also an important factor in shaping gender identity. Reinforcing stereotypes and limited and specific career choices lead to the difference in behavioural adaptation.

Females' gender identity is driven by

above mentioned factors. They behave as they encounter the situations of their society and apt to the values of their very culture. They are hardly left with any choice of being independent and self choice. If they try to act according to their nature, they are criticized. As Simone de Beauvoir says:

"Man is defined as human being and woman as female - if she tries to act like human being, she is said to be imitating man."

Although there are many people who argue that gender is determined solely by biology and it is innate. They claim that 'Essence precedes existence' - person is born with the gender and behave accordingly. They refuse the concept of 'becoming' and support the 'being'. They say that sex is the driver of identity and behaviour of a gender.

This is a very limited concept

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of describing the vast theory of social construction of gender. Biology determines what a person will be called in society but the roles they perform are totally determined by society. It is evident from the concept of varied and diverse female behaviours around the world. If biology has to define the gender identity it should be the same but it is not. It varies from one step to another. Even a country ~~doesn't~~ have ~~not~~ specific roles and behaviours for women.

With the change in time, the world witnessed progress in women's behaviours. Before mid 20th century, women were not provided with any freedom specially in West. Feminist movements brought great changes in social structures as women struggled and gained the right to vote. Later it developed and

women get right to divorce and more. All these developments influenced the concept of womanhood in 21st century. Women become little independent and started considering their own identity less impacted by pre structured values. Although the progress is slow yet there are changes.

Present world, with the rise of globalization and social media, has conjured the concept of gender identity as social construction. It is facing challenges as well. Since the developing countries, which are hard to get impacted by foreign campaigns due to strong patriarchal structures, are still seem to be failed in providing equal opportunities to both sexes. In countries like Pakistan, where culture and other values are considered seriously, early marriages, higher education for females, equal job opportunities, exposure to public affairs

and economic independence are still not carved out. These opportunities seem to be distant for now.

Yet with the changing world order and growing media influence on the lives of people is also making people aware of the global trends and opportunities. Females are now more interconnected and are aware of the equal rights their law and constitution provides them. Moreover the current feminism is more about realization of the true self of women and women are ready to accept their identities as they are. So the growing world and globalization has ^{somewhat} changed the redundant concepts about nature of females.

To conclude the whole discussion, Simon de Beauvoir's statement of 'one is not born but becomes a woman' is profoundly relevant. A person ~~do~~ not decide their role and behaviour on birth rather they learn it through society. The

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society has a pre defined system of structures, embodying patriarchal dominant structures whether in politics, market, education, media or domestic, female's identity is shaped by these. And according to J.S Mill they are not natural but 'eminently artificial things' inserted by society. A woman is not born with shyness, dependence and frailty but she becomes one under the influence of society.