Chapter Two

WOMAN AS AN INDIVIDUAL

In our society we usually see women either as devoted wife or all-enduring mother. But such understanding is a serious distortion of her image of an individual. A person may have multiple identities, viz. ethnic, religious or familial. But in modern times, one’s individual identity is regarded as the true reflection of his/her own self. While dealing with the problem of women’s identity we have to confront several questions, such as – How do we define individuality? How could we locate one’s individual identity? Or for that matter, how do we relate the notion of individuality with the image of middle class Bengali women? Traditionally the notion of individuality is reserved for men as he is not bound by familial identities like women but have the opportunity to participate in the public sphere. So the relation between the question of individual identity and public sphere is an important part in this debate. In order to understand all these aspects we shall first look at the positions of some leading political theorists, then we shall analyse how theorists have dealt with the problem of women’s individual identity within the modern theoretical framework. But before we go into theoretical discussions we may consider for a while the national award winning film ‘Unishe April’ directed by Rituparno Ghosh. The film portrays the character of Sorajini Gupta, played by Aparna Sen, who is an internationally famous dancer. She has a daughter but she had lost her husband much before. Instead of being a dancer she could have remained at home and performed her duties as a wife and mother; what many other middle class women would have done. If she had done it then her status would have been confined in terms of her relation with her children and with her husband. By becoming a dancer, she established her own individual identity in society. However, for making her own identity she came out from the family or the private sphere. In other words she participated in the public space because in the private sphere she is confined by the familial identities. No doubt Sorajini Gupta is an exception as most of the women would not have been able to go beyond their familial identities to establish their individual
identity. But does it signify that the individual identity is a matter of the public domain? This is the first question we need to address.

**INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY: THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING**

Any discussion on individuality should begin with the nature of ‘rights’ which we enjoy as a member of a nation-state. According to our common understanding rights are certain claims which are to be recognized by a higher authority or state, necessary for developing our own self. In other words rights are certain conditions by which a person can realize his own self. Note however that these rights have been granted to the individual for the development of his own individuality. These are not given to him on the basis of his status as husband or father or son in his own family. Familial identity is not the basis to grant a person rights in the modern society. For example: as a member of Indian state, whatever rights we enjoy that have been recognized by the Indian state, not on the basis of our relation with our family members but as individuals to fully express our own individuality irrespective of creed, colour or gender. The direct relationship between the individuality or one’s self-identity and individual rights also shows that the rights system excludes the family and familial relations from its jurisdiction. Now, we could turn our attention to analyze the most vital question that: how can individuality be defined?

Charles Taylor on the question of identity points out that recognition is the vital aspect regarding one’s identity. In his theory of recognition he claims that our sense of well-being and moral goals depend critically on how we see ourselves reflected in the

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1 The film ‘UNISHE APRIL’ has portrayed the mother-daughter relationship in somewhat different manner as it is found in literature and other film narratives. Talking about Bengali literature we can mention ‘SUBARNALATA’, the novel written by Ashapurna Devi where the protagonist Subarna not only understood her mother Satyabati but got the inspiration from her to fight against all odds in her family. Satyabati was uncompromising and honest about her own stand. Even she left her home in protest of bearing patriarchal values by her family members. In case of the relationship between Sorojini & Aditi the situation is different. Instead of getting inspiration from her mother’s achievement Aditi on the contrary believes that her mother not performed her role as mother and wife. She accused her of being responsible for her father’s death, even she was never careful to him. For Aditi, her mother’s dance career is so important for her self that she could not present at home when her father was dying. From this perspective Aditi celebrating the age old concept of Bengali housewife what her mother is not. Considering the attitude of her generation it is quite surprising that she is echoing such conservatism in assessing her mother’s role for the family.
eyes of others. Since all questions of who we are arises from social interactions and each person is inter-subjectively interwoven with others, he or she is dependent on the reactions of others for his or her self-image and identity. In a sense the establishment of healthy and rewarding inter-personal relations is thus postulated as a condition for the development of the independence and sense of worth, of individuality. The desire to achieve an identity that is authentically one’s own has emerged as a central theme of modern self-hood. This means that we typically feel ourselves to be the unique possessors of various qualities and potentials and deserve some respect in relation to these.\(^2\) Taylor develops the argument that to achieve an identity a person requires recognition from his peers for his particularity, being granted recognition with respect to his qualities and attributes. The need for authenticity encourages the belief that he should demand to belong to a society that is prepared to hear his voice and that recognizes his capacity to forge an identity worthy of respect.\(^3\) Following Taylor’s definition, it is clear that identity is a matter of the public domain when he says that identity is a recognition which depends critically on how we see ourselves reflected in the eyes of others, we should assume that these ‘others’ must be free individuals. In a family everyone is bound by his or her relations with other family members, they cannot be free individuals as the ‘others’. The existence of the free individuals, who are not bound by any familial relations, is possible beyond the private sphere of family. In other words attaining of individual identity can only be possible in the public sphere in terms of the other’s recognition of his particular qualities or attributes.

In a way it also suggests that the public domain gets more importance over the private realm. In ancient Greece, according to the understanding of city-state system, it was held that the private sphere of family represented ‘Particular’ and Polis or the public sphere represented ‘Universality’. Since the Greek city-states, there was no separation between society and state so that the polis also represented the political realm. In this political realm every citizen joined and participated in political activities as part of direct democracy. But the body of citizens who directly participated in government, was


\(^3\) Ibid. P. 152
constituted only by free men; slaves and women were excluded from such an ideal democratic system. Women were confined to their families which chiefly performed reproductive functions and provided domestic labours. In Greek city-states, the polis or public sphere was the sphere of men who were participating actively in government. So from the very advent of political philosophy the public sphere became the sphere of universality because family is the realm to satisfy the biological needs through its reproductive functions and domestic labours. Such dichotomy between public and private reappeared in modern political discourse where the public domain is considered as the sphere of individual freedom and rights, whereas family or private sphere remains as the domain of personal ties based on personal emotions and desires. Since women continue to play their reproductive functions within the family, naturally the public remains the domain of the male. Particular is always subordinated to what is Universal; the private domain of family is considered to be less important than the public sphere. In this sense individual rights are a matter of the male dominated public world, addressing only individual men.

From this theoretical understanding it is now easily conceived that individuality or one’s self-identity exists in the public sphere because in a family one’s identity is confined to one’s familial roles. According to this understanding to realize her self-identity women have to participate in the public world. By staying within the private realm of family she could only attain her familial identities with respect to her relations with her husband or father or children. But her appearance in the public sphere in other words, is the appearance in a sphere which is male dominated. To participate in the public sphere she has had to adopt masculine qualities which are the codes of conduct of this domain. Besides such theoretical understanding, we should look at those few literary works to see that how these writers addressed the question of individuality while elaborating on the situation of women in society. For that we turn our attention to the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, J. S. Mill and Simone de Beauvoir. Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of Women’s Rights* tries to give an impression about her fellow women in the context of eighteenth century English society. J. S. Mill discusses the legal

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discriminations and subordination of women in relation to their marital status. Finally, Simone de Beauvoir examined the nature of gender role socialization as the source of all kinds of discrimination beyond legal rights in second half of twentieth century.

TOWARDS SELF IDENTITY: EARLY PHASE OF WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

The literary debate on the question of women’s rights and identity was integrally connected with the women’s movement. In fact unlike other social movements, women’s literature developed in terms of their struggle against their subordination. On the other hand the existing difference between theory and practice seems to be invisible. In case of women’s movements, all literary and theoretical attempts were part of movements of practice. It was first wave women’s movement which shaped the direction of all theoretical endeavours for women’s journey to get justice. Again, from the perspective of individuality the bone of contention is why the public, not the private, is considered as the only sphere of one’s identity. To get the nature of women’s movements we can look back to the development of citizenship as it is evolved as far back as three millennia. But though citizenship has existed for nearly three millennia, women have had some share in civic rights in the most liberal societies for only about a century. Aristotelian arete, Ciceronian virtues and Machiavellian virtues are at one and the same time quintessentially male and citizenly qualities.5 As Rebecca West reflects, the word ‘idiot’ comes from a Greek root meaning a private person. Idiocy is a female defect: intent on their private lives, women follow their fate through darkness as deep as that cast by malformed cells in the brain. It is no worse than the male defect, which is lunacy: they are so obsessed by public affairs that they see the world as if by moonlight, which shows the light of every object but not the details indicative of their nature.6 Citizenship was traditionally based on property ownership and property was overwhelmingly in male


hands. Even in liberal states under the common law tradition, down to the nineteenth century, married women were rendered civically non-persons by the device of ‘coverture’: they were subsumed into the legal identity of their husbands, who ‘covered’ them – and owned their property. Women had no separate identity in the eyes of law, in other words they had not been considered full citizens of the state. If they were not full-fledged citizens, without having civil rights, how could it be possible for them to be individuals? An example of this condition can be drawn from Canada. In 1916 a woman was appointed as a magistrate in the province of Alberta. When she appeared in court her rights to judicial status was challenged on the grounds that, as a woman, in the eyes of English Common law, she was not a ‘person’. Only 13 years later did the Privy Council concede that Canadian women could be ‘persons’ in law.\(^7\)

Legal sanction was the first step towards women’s identity as persons. From the classical age of Europe it was held that engagement in public discussions and critical appraisals of personalities were very essential for both, the polis and the republican style of citizenship. In due course of time after granting citizenship right to women, it was found that such right did not affect their status. In other words women remained as passive as they were before because no necessary condition was provided so that they could participate in public life as being women. Actually citizenship was designed in terms of man’s image. Though in early medieval centuries, some women were prominent in trade and crafts, areas of activity which later became regulated by guilds in terms of active involvement in the public sphere. But in that period, citizenship was municipal citizenship and it was tightly bound to guild membership. Women were excluded from these male fraternities; women were accordingly excluded from any form of citizenship.\(^8\)

A major step in this direction was taken place during French Revolution when French women started to campaign for women’s rights. In 1790 a group organized the ‘cercle social’ for this purpose. Most famous – or notorious in the eyes of many men – the self-styled Olympe de Gough, pamphleteer and playwright, in 1791 produced a pamphlet titled ‘The Declaration of the Rights of Women’. This made the point that women should

\(^7\) Derek Heater (2004) *A Brief History Of Citizenship*, Edinburge University press, Pp. 120-121

\(^8\) Ibid. Pp. 121-122
be treated as the equals of men by closely echoing the language of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*. Articles in this declaration emphasized that a woman is born free and equal to a man in rights; the principle of all sovereignty rests essentially in the nation, which is but the reuniting of woman and man; all citizens and citizens, being equal in law’s eyes, should be equally admissible to all public dignities, offices and employments. Women have the right to mount the scaffold, so she should have the right equally to mount the tribune. It is very clear that for these women, citizenship and civic rights were the first requirements to assert women’s identity in a male dominated society. That’s why in nineteenth century England, women’s suffrage became a serious issue. When, in 1866, the liberals introduced a Reform Bill for the extension of the franchise; a committee presented to the House of Commons an impressively supported petition for the inclusion of women. John Stuart Mill, at the time and briefly an MP, supported the amendment in the debate the next year. It failed, of course, with the accompaniment; it must be said, of some acidic comments.

English women were able to actively participate in local affairs before they achieved the national franchise and their participation in local bodies kept alive in the national suffrage movement which resulted in the formation of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). In 1903, a new body, the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed. Finally, in 1918 women aged over 30 years were given the right to vote, then in 1928, those over 21. Against this background Wollstonecraft and Mill formulated their arguments in favour of women’s rights. That’s the reason why the question of women’s citizenship and voting rights frequently reappeared in their writings. Wollstonecraft also dealt such questions by going beyond their legal status. In other words she examined the question of how the civil and other rights became irrelevant for women in terms of asserting their identity in the public sphere. Regarding the nature of their writings Wollstonecraft and Mill mainly represented the contemporary English middle class understanding and it is true even for Beauvoir. But in early nineteenth century context, belonging to the middle class background and

9 Ibid. Pp. 122-123

10 Ibid. P. 126
believing in the progressive image of the class, both Wollstonecraft and Mill found some hope for the improvement of women of this section in terms of their legal status in their society. Even the intellectual catalyst was the traditional liberal concept of benevolent progress. This is the reason why their writings are the major theoretical justifications concerning the identity question of middle class women.

**MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT : THE STATE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY**

The importance of Mary Wollstonecraft lies in the fact that she was the first women writer who, being a woman advocated for the equal rights and dignity for them. Her concern was to provide equal rights including the right to vote for women. While advocating such political right, she did not ignore the existing condition of women in their contemporary English society. In other words she did not confine her views on the question of women’s legal and political rights but tried to find out women’s actual condition in society. Before going into details about Wollstonecraft, we may look at Carole Pateman’s comments about women’s citizenship which could help us to provide vital link to understand Wollstonecraft’s findings. Pateman, while formulating her critique of the notion of ‘universal citizenship’ in classical political theory, suggests that the gendered division between the ‘private’ and ‘public’ spheres, premised on the male norms, explains women’s exclusion from politics i.e. public life. For Pateman, marriage contract is the root of women’s oppression because it makes women dependent on their husbands who control their sexuality and deny their public participation. Hence, though women enjoy and are entitled to full citizenship rights, remain as a passive community of a political system even today. In that sense from the ‘Declaration of Independence’ to the ‘Beveridge Report’, the great statements assumed that men are the citizens or they are the only participants of public life and that women existed, if not all, in a region, outside political discourse. Notwithstanding, the formal recognition of citizenship rights are the most necessary part for every form of participation, because it gets a favourable

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condition and ensure our rights to participation. However, Pateman’s analysis is a powerful critique of liberal political philosophy that raised crucial questions about the roots of women’s exclusion from citizenship. Wollstonecraft did the same in her essay of ‘Vindication of Women’s Rights’.  

Historically, in achieving full citizenship, women had to meet with long and violent resistance in society Wollstonecraft represents that part of history when women were not a full-fledged citizens but dependent beings of their husbands. Though Britain was the only liberal state but such liberal model base did not apply to women in terms of individual autonomy, the core of liberal values. In eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, married women had no autonomy even in the family, where both in theory and in practice they were subordinated as dependent wives. In the age of Wollstonecraft the social liberal discourse about the private/public divide, was supported as individual rights against the state. The British idea of the ‘private’ implied that women’s need could be met within the family. Pateman pointed out that married women in the nineteenth century, particularly in Britain lacked fundamental civil rights and she questioned ‘independence’ as the central criterion for citizenship because it was based on masculine attributes and abilities.  

When the citizenship itself is the recognition of masculine qualities, naturally women do not consider being a part of citizens as they lack those attributes and qualities of men. The notions of liberal discourse on individual rights are not applied for women.  

Indeed, the first wave of citizenship rights opened up a debate about social rights at the beginning of the nineteenth century but it did not address the issue of women’s rights. Though women’s suffrage was the key issue for women’s organizations at the turn of the century, women’s political and social rights were not part of the debate about citizenship. Pateman observes that women’s suffrage in Britain was a long and violent process that did not follow logically from the extension of the franchise to all men but met with fierce resistance from many men and some women. Even Wollstonecraft’s own attempts failed to change anything. Pateman suggests that the reason for the length

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13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.
of the struggle for womanhood suffrage was not merely question of participation in government of the state that was seen to be at issue but patriarchal structure of relations between the sexes and the conditions of masculinity and femininity. According to Pateman those women who participated in anti-suffrage movement argued along the same lines in both U.S.A. and Britain. They wanted the protection of women, which they believed could be secured through the separation of the private and public as well as men opposed suffrage because the vote was seen as a threat to the family.\(^\text{15}\)

While Pateman analyzes about the citizenship in Britain, Wollstonecraft responded to the situation of her contemporary society through her writing of *Vindication of Women’s Rights*. ‘Vindication’ was a protest as well as an attempt to entitle women to those rights which could enable them to participate in the public domain. Wollstonecraft wished to see women as independent beings because men achieved citizenship by the virtue of his independence. To deal with the question of independence, she had to find out how society was portraying women. In other words she examined the status of women in her contemporary society. Here we should remember that there is a close relation between independence and citizenship in common understanding. From the legal-institutional perspective we cannot have citizenship rights unless and until the country is free or independent. If the country is ruled by another nation-state in that case people of that country cannot be called citizens but instead, subjects. But it is also possible that being free from all other external powers and influences a country may not grant civic and other rights to all people within its territory. In most of the cases, large sections of the population have been deprived from citizenship and women constitute the maximum number of them. Britain was no exception to that. But Wollstonecraft’s attempt was much more complex and difficult because the notion of independence is also based on masculine attributes and qualities. Theoretically, women cannot have the access to these male qualities, as a result that they are not to be an independent being and citizen. But at the same time she cannot reject the liberal framework as Wollstonecraft wanted those rights for women which had been granted for men in society. Both the aspects are very much present in her analysis of women’s rights. ‘Vindication’ was the

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
path-breaking work which acted as a sub-discourse within the libertarian language of an emergent middle class bourgeoisie and presented the idea of individualism from the perspective of women in society.\textsuperscript{16}

In ‘Vindication’ Wollstonecraft begins with the remark that our nature and capability must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue and knowledge that distinguish the individual and direct the laws which bind society and that form the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue which naturally flow if mankind be viewed collectively. Yet some deeply rooted prejudices have clouded reason and spurious qualities have assumed the name of virtues. But the most unfortunate thing is that men in general, seem to employ their reason to justify prejudices, which they imbibed rather than to root them out. As the society is founded on the nature of man, such prejudices is being justified in the name of virtues of men or women and their natural rights. But it is one of the absurd sophisms which daily insult common sense.\textsuperscript{17}

Wollstonecraft here looks at how women are being brought up in their families. In society women are told from their infancy and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of property, would obtain for them the protection of man and should they be beautiful, everything else was irrelevant or useless. But children, as she grants, are innocent, until epithets like man or woman is applied.\textsuperscript{18} She insists, ‘a girl whose sprits have not been dampened by inactivity or innocence tainted by false shame, will always be a romp and the doll will never excite attention unless confinement allows her no alternative.’ Girls and boys would play harmlessly together, if the distinction of sex was not inculcated long before nature makes any difference. With respect to this comment Wollstonecraft could be also named as the first woman writer who turned her attention towards the socialization pattern of women. To carry it further she says, “if fear in girls, instead of being cherished, perhaps, created or merely treated in the same manner as cowardice in boys, we shall

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\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. Pp. 13-14
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. Pp. 21-22
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quickly see women with more dignified aspects.” It is clear now, that she wanted that women should come out from their closed rooms to the public domain to achieve their independence because that is the only way to get citizenship. But if it is not possible then the foundation of their weakness would have continued and the gracefulness would be preferred to the heroic virtues.19

The task before her was to define women as independent beings. For that she had to criticize Rousseau who not only rejected women’s independence but also propagated the need for a different kind of education system for women. Actually ‘Vindication’ was written in response to Rousseau’s political and educational writings, which differentiated between the roles of men and women on the basis of ‘nature’. In particular, Wollstonecraft challenges Rousseau’s claims that women were irrational, or women have lack of rationality. She argues that in denying them the capacity for reason, Rousseau denies women not only the right of citizenship but their basic humanity as well.20 To reason, Rousseau comments, “if man did attain a degree of perfection of mind, when his body arrived at maturity, it might be proper, in order to make a man and his wife one, that she should rely entirely on his understanding and the graceful ivy, clasping the oak that supported it, would form a whole in which strength and beauty would be equally conspicuous.” Rousseau proceeds to prove that women ought to be weak and passive; this brings the end of their own existence. Such a non-existent being should never for a moment feel independent, she should be governed by the fear of exercising her natural cunning and make a coquettish slave of herself in order to render herself into an alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to man; for whenever he chooses to relax. It infers that she was formed to please and be subjected to him, and it is her duty to render herself agreeable to her master.21 According to Rousseau men depend on women only to account for their desires, the women on the men depend both on account of their desire and their necessities. Men could subsist better without them than they without men. He carries

19 Ibid.  Pp. 46, 67, 61
20 Ibid.
22 Ibid.  Pp. 86, 28
forward the arguments which he pretends to draw from the indications of nature. Rousseau further insinuates that “truth and fortitude, the corner-stones of all human virtue, should be cultivated with certain restrictions because, with respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought to be impressed with unrelenting rigour.” If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree; or virtue is a relative idea and consequently their conduct should be founded on the same principles and have the same aim. But it is quite surprising that men dominating society do not seem to accept this inferiority but at times use it to suppress their rights.22

In a sense Rousseau denied the question of women’s independence and by that way rejected their citizenship as a non-rational being. But as we find in her letter to M. Talleyrand, Wollstonecraft like other male writers, considered independence as the grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue. Now, Wollstonecraft has to repudiate the common view of women as inferior beings and to do it she claims that in terms of masculine attributes women are weaker beings but what she plays in her role as daughter, wife and mother exhibit natural strength and healthy nerves.23 Unfortunately moralists have agreed that the tenor of life seems to prove that man is prepared by various circumstances for a future state, they constantly concur in advising woman only to provide for the present not for future. So that gentleness, docility and spaniel-like affection are, on this ground, consistently recommended as the cardinal virtues of the sex but disregarding the arbitrary economy of nature. Wollstonecraft observes that women are everywhere in this state for in order to preserve their innocence as ignorance is courteously termed, truth is hidden from them and they are made to assure an artificial character before their faculties have acquired any strength. She writes, “taught from their infancy that beauty is women’s spectra, the mind shapes itself to the body and roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adhere its prison.” So confined to such a prison, their thoughts constantly directed to the most insignificant part of themselves and seldom

23 Ibid. Pp. 07, 31
extend their views beyond the triumph of the hour. To Wollstonecraft, the whole women need to be emancipated from this confinement.24

It signifies that domestic confinement is the main source of all these civilizations which women bear, as an inferior being and for that their independence has been denied. Wollstonecraft suggests that this domestic confinement begins in a woman’s life when she gets married. Though society views that marriage is a way of satisfying women’s pleasure but such societal view imposes other duties on them which imprisons her within four walls. From the experiences, as she observes, marriage cannot succeed because women are not considered as men’s companion rather they are prepared to be their mistresses. The present harmony, what is subsisted between them is not real but superficial because women as the other party in marriage are not allowed to become the equal partner of man. They are prepared to be remain as dependent beings of their husband’s and son’s.25 However, these mistresses should be chaste beings and for that they should maintain modesty. Wollstonecraft believes that “as a sex, women are chaster than men but that virtue also ascribed to them rather an appropriated sense. Even men also insist that women ought to have more modesty. The question of women’s reputation is mainly confined to this single virtue – chastity. If the honour of women be safe, she may neglect every social duty, nay, ruin her family by gaming and extravagance, and yet still present a shameless front – for truly she is an honourable woman!” Wollstonecraft refused to accept that for getting reputation women need only the virtue of chastity. Here she quotes the observation of Mrs. Macaulay, who says “there is but one fault which a woman of honour may not commit with impunity”. She then justly and humanly adds – “This has given rise to the trite and foolish observation that the first fault against chastity in woman has a radical power to deprave the character. But no such beings come out of the hands of nature. The human mind is built of nobler materials than to be easily corrupted and with all their disadvantages of situation and education, women seldom become entirely abandoned till they are thrown into a state of depression by the

24 Ibid. Pp. 36, 47
25 Ibid. Pp. 64, 180, 94
venomous rancour of their own sex”.

So, what about the man? It is beyond proof that neither they depend on women nor they confine within domestic duties like a woman. They do not have any need to maintain chastity as the supreme virtue in their life. On the contrary from their childhood they are prepared to be independent beings, taught from the beginning that marriage is not the only thing in their life rather it is a way for them to relax, and beauty or delicacy are not their propriety. But the problem is that Wollstonecraft is writing in the second half of the eighteenth century Britain where she cannot totally disregard the traditional attributes of women. She proposed a kind of change which brought them liberty and right to participation through citizenship in public life. That aim in mind she wanted education for women but here again she countered Rousseau on his scheme of education system.

For Wollstonecraft, education means such attention to a child as will slowly sharpen the senses, from the temper to regulate the passions as they begin to ferment and set the understanding to work before the body arrives at maturity, so that the individual may only have to proceed, not to begin, the important task of learning to think and reason. Consequently the most perfect education is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart or in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent. But it is recommended for women because according to the existing social views, women cannot enjoy or sufficiently entitled to this education in terms of their nature. They need different kind of education, suitable for them. Criticizing this whole argument, Wollstonecraft points out that if it is acknowledged that women’s first priority is to fulfil her family duties, even then they cannot be confined within the domestic world without having any general education. Because unless their minds take a wider range and are kept in ignorance they become in the same proportion the slaves of pleasure as they are the slaves of man. Nor can they be shut off from the great enterprises though the narrowness of their minds often makes them marred, what they are unable to comprehend. Private

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duties are never fulfilled properly unless the understanding enlarges the heart of women and that public virtue, which is attributed only to man, is an aggregate of private values.27

Dismissing all fanciful theories and considering women as a whole, instead of a part of man Wollstonecraft says that women are not created merely to be the solace of man and the sexuality should not destroy the human character. Such error probably was led by viewing education in false light not considering it as the first step to form a being, advancing gradually towards perfection, but only as a preparation for life. Thus, understanding, strictly speaking, was denied to women, and sublimated into wit and cunning for the purpose of life, was substituted instead. The false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject, considers women as non-human creatures and men have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers and the understanding of the sex has been so bubbled by this specious homage that the civilized women even of the present century with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect.28

If this is the situation, it is inevitable for Wollstonecraft to criticize Rousseau on this point. She challenges what Rousseau says about education which normally inculcated that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point – to render them pleasing. The woman who is only taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams and that cannot be have much effect on her husband’s heart when they are seen every day, when the summer is passed and gone when the husband ceases to be a lover, the time will inevitably come, her desire of pleasing will then grow languid or become a spring of bitterness, and love, perhaps the most evanescent of all passions, gives place to jealousy or vanity, whether she be loved or neglected by her husband, her first wish should be to make herself respectable and not to rely for all her happiness on a being subject to like infirmities with herself. But in the education of women, the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporal punishment. Since in youth their faculties are not brought forward by emulation

27 Ibid. Pp. 23, 190, 210
28 Ibid. Pp. 01
and having no serious scientific study, if they have natural sagacity, it is turned too soon on life and manners. They dwell on effects and modifications without tracing them back to causes and complicated roles to adjust behaviour are a weak substitute for simple principles.\textsuperscript{29}

But to render mankind more virtuous and happier, both sexes must act on the same principle. Also, to render social compact truly equitable and in order to spread those enlightening principles, which alone can ameliorate the fate of men, women must be allowed to find their virtue on knowledge which is scarcely possible unless they be educated by the same pursuits as men. Notably, Wollstonecraft does not prescribe any special education system only for women and that indicates that she does not believe in exclusivity for progress of women rather she wishes for mutual dependence on each other obviously on more equal terms. She sadly observes that in school, girls were enduring wearisome confinement. They were not allowed to step out of one broad walk in the garden as nature directs to complete her own design, in the various attitudes so conducive to health. The exercise of their bodies and minds would help them to acquire that mental activity so necessary in the maternal character, united with the fortitude that distinguishes steadiness of conduct from the perverseness of weakness.\textsuperscript{30}

If, by receiving this form of education women become strong and rational mothers, it is then hard to argue for men that women are not virtuous beings since they have the most precious virtues. And the way she claimed the citizenship for women that again fall in the trap of masculine world because she accepted the masculine attribute and quality which prevailed in society, for women. Carole Pateman points out in Wollstonecraft’s writing that “The claim that women cannot obtain full citizenship as women - that is as autonomous individuals sexually different from men. To achieve full citizenship women must become ‘like men’ and give up their experiences, needs and interests ‘as women’.”\textsuperscript{31} No doubt Pateman’s argument is a powerful critique of liberal political philosophy which raises some crucial questions of qualifications about the roots

\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid.] Pp. 29-30
\item[Ibid.] Pp. 190, 194
\item Birte Siim (2000) \textit{Gender And Citizenship : politics And Agency In France, Britain And Denmark}, P. 33
\end{enumerate}
of women’s exclusion from citizenship in modern democracies. Secondly, what Wollstonecraft says, it does not pay sufficient attention towards the family which not only privileges men and masculine attributions and qualities but as the most important institutional form of patriarchy it subordinates women by various ideological and structural devices. The problem is, that Wollstonecraft cannot go beyond this liberal framework and according to the liberal tradition family is defined as a biological entity, naturally the total emphasis of liberal philosophy is on the public sphere and family virtually excluded from its domain. But this serious mistake of Wollstonecraft was later addressed by other writers and we may get more insights in Mill’s work who discusses the question of women’s subordination in terms of legal status where marriage is the most important issue.

Addressing the question of women’s identity in society Wollstonecraft realized the necessity to appear in the public sphere and she fought for citizenship as the first requirement for it which at least legally enables women to participate there. Education is the most important instrument for women to get the desired independence and citizenship, also enabling them to maintain their private duties. In that sense, according to Wollstonecraft education should be directed to form women as good citizens and let women share the rights. Women should emulate the virtues of men for she must grow more perfect when emancipated or justly the authority that claims such a weak being to her duty. But every writer represents his own age and since every age has its limitations, some inherent weaknesses can be found in her writing and Wollstonecraft was not an exception. She presents her whole argument in terms of man’s position in society and presents the binary aspect of women’s social circumstances. She ignores the multiple aspects of oppression which are no less important in case of women but finds the solution for all on women’s education. Historically in nineteenth century Bengal too, education for women constituted a large part of the reforms movement, directed towards women’s improvement in society. Though Wollstonecraft’s emphasis on women’s education was followed by other intellectuals and social reformers in Britain, they ignored the fact that education may impose new forms of restrictions and oppressions for them. Still Wollstonecraft was largely successful to represent women’s status in her contemporary Britain. In the second half of the nineteenth century following after Wollstonecraft, John
Stuart Mill provided more valuable insights and new dimensions by examining women’s legal subordination in which marriage plays a vital role.

**JOHN STUART MILL: MARRIAGE AND LEGAL SUBORDINATION OF WOMEN**

As a writer and philosopher John Stuart Mill enjoys a unique position in the whole of liberal philosophy. Through his writings Mill on one hand upholds individual rights and identity over everything else. On the other hand, he influenced feminist thought, in nineteenth century England. Following Wollstonecraft, liberal feminists in nineteenth century were concerned mainly about the right to vote, equal legal rights as their husbands, the right to education and right to be integrated in to the political process via representation.32 Mill tried to address all these issues from his liberal perspective and there is a direct relation between his notion of individuality as he propagated in his ‘On Liberty’ and his concern for women’s rights, what we find in ‘The Subjection of Women’. Mill’s intention in ‘On Liberty’ was to examine and define the liberty of the individual against encroachment from authority or from other individuals.33 In ‘On Liberty’ Mill clearly asserts that the liberty of individual must be limited, he must not make himself a nuisance to other people. But if he refrains from molesting others in what concerns them and merely acts according to his own inclination and judgment in things which himself the same reasons which show that opinion should be free, prove also that he should be allowed without molestation, to carry his opinions into practice at his own case. It is desirable, in short, that in things which do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself. To give any fair play to the nature of each it is essential that different persons should be allowed to lead different lives.34 While discussing the relationship between the public and domestic worlds Mill also emphasizes the extent to which the

rights bearing individual of much liberal political thought is constituted in important ways by intimate as well as public relationships. In Mill’s eyes, no ‘individual’ can properly be viewed as an isolated or as atomistic entity. His view of the individual as fundamentally constituted in and by interpersonal relationships was an important contribution to the liberal understanding of individual autonomy. Mill’s insights concerning the relationship between the public and private worlds and the nature of the individual and individual autonomy makes ‘The Subjection of Women’ an important text in the history of women’s writing.

Individual liberty and self-determination are the themes that figure prominently in Mill’s writings and are extended to the women’s questions. ‘The Subjection of Women’, makes a strong claim for equal status in key areas that women do not enjoy namely the right to vote, right to equal opportunities in education and employment. But before ‘The Subjection of Women’ in 1851 Mill wrote a formal protest against the laws that would govern their marriage. He objected to the whole character of marriage relation as constituted by law…for this amongst other reasons that it confines upon one of the parties to the contract legal power and control over the person, property and freedom of action of the other party, independent of her relationship between his ideas about women’s subordination and contemporary legal structures. Mill sets forth the fundamental argument in the first paragraph of ‘The Subjection of Women’ that “it is that ‘the principle’ which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement and that it might to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other”. His concern was to show that women’s lack of equality has created not simply different resources and realms of action for men and women, but a relationship of active domination in which women have to conform themselves to men’s will.


35 Ibid. Pp. 399
For Mill the dependence of women on men is the primitive state of “slavery lasting on generations of institutions grounded on inequality” and men’s active domination can be compared as women’s subordination to slavery. The slave-like relationship between women and men made it impossible in Mill’s eyes, to know the ‘nature’ or capacities of either sex, or whether these differ in any way for such power relationships, inevitably distort both the actions and perceptions of those, involved in them. Marital relationships based on equality would transform not only the domestic but also the civic characters of men and women and provide a model of mutual respect and reciprocity that children would imitate in their own adult relationships. In his speech on the “Reform Bill” of 1857, Mill talked of that “obscure feeling” that women had no right to care about anything except “how they may be the most useful and devoted servants of some men”. To Auguste Comte he wrote, comparing women to “domestic slaves” and noted those women’s capacities and ‘seeking’ happiness not in their own life but exclusively in the favour and affection of the other sex which is only given to them on the condition of their dependence. He says that the social and economic system give women little alternative except marriage, so that there is practically no opportunity but to join in marital slavery.

But once she married, the legal personality of women is subsumed in that of her husband. In his eyes, women are in a double bind: they were not free within marriage and they were not truly free not to marry. Through marriage, a husband assumes control of his wife’s property and her body. John Stuart Mill advocated women’s legal and political rights to end women’s subordinate position in society. He denied that women were inferior to men by virtue of having “women’s nature” such as being nervous, initiative or having “amatory propensities”. Women’s subordination in society, according to Mill, does not come from any natural causes but from custom and the legal system. Even for Mill, the relationship between husband and wife has to be grounded in legal

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid. Pp. 401
38 Ibid. Pp. 401, 403
equality. Legal reforms are necessary to eliminate the spousal domination that corrupts the relationship between husband and wife. To Mill, this corruption affects their relationship both as intimate companions as fellow citizens. In a way he denounced the marital slavery and suggested that it should be replaced by ‘marital friendship’ which constituted understanding. In much previous liberal political theory and English and American law concerning what kinds of relationships were legitimate in the private or domestic realm.

But as he saw, that marriage is ultimately a ‘Hobson’s Choice’ for women. Because an unmarried woman even if she were of the middle or upper classes, she could not attend any of the English Universities, and thus she was barred from a systematic higher education. If somehow she acquired a professional education, the professional associations usually refused to allow her to practice her trade, “No sooner do women show themselves capable of competing with men in any career, then that career, if it is lucrative or honourable is closed to them”. Law and custom ordained that a woman has scarcely any means open to her of gaining a livelihood, except as a wife and mother. The presumed consent of women to marry is not in any real sense a free promise but one socially coerced by the lack of meaningful options. Further, the laws of marriage deprived a woman of many of the normal powers of autonomous adults from controlling her earnings, to entering contracts to defending her bodily autonomy by resisting unwanted sexual relations. Indeed the whole notion of women ‘consenting’ to the marriage, ‘offer’ of a man implied from the outset a hierarchical relationship. Such a one way offer did not reflect the relationship that should exist between those who were truly equal beings, who are able to create together by free discussion and mutual agreement an association to govern lives together.

Mill says that laws and systems of polity always begin by recognizing the relations they find already existing between individuals. They convert what was a mere physical fact into a legal right, give it that sanction of society and principally aim at the


41 Ibid. Pp. 401

42 Ibid. Pp. 404
substitution of public and organized means of asserting and protecting these rights, instead of irregular and lawless conflict of physical strength. Those who had already been compelled to obedience in this manner are legally bound to it.\(^4^4\) In fact in support of women’s legal equality Mill used the utilitarian argument that an action should be chosen over its alternatives if its consequences lead to the greatest good of the greatest member and treating women as political and legal equals will bring about the greatest good of the greatest number. Mill says, “Whatever women’s services are most wanted for the free play of competition will hold out the strongest inducement to them to undertake. And as the word implies, they are most wanted for things for which they are most fit, and by the apportionment of which of them, the collective faculties of the two sexes can be applied on the whole with the greatest sum of valuable results”. Further, Mill argued that each human being or person is capable of making rational decisions without any higher authority and hence has the right to choose his or her vocation or parliamentary representation.\(^4^5\) From this position Mill supported women’s right to vote and right to choose their representative in the parliament because there is no logic of giving women education and yet keep them politically and legally subordinated to men.

Notwithstanding, Mill was equally aware about the fact that *The Subjection of Women* could not end by law and the reformation of education, of opinion, of social inculcation, of habits and finally of the conduct of family life itself.\(^4^6\) By saying it Mill actually indicates the different natures of upbringing for men and women. While finding out the element of male domination on women, Mill asserts that men learned to “worship their own will as such a grand thing that it is actually the law for another rational being”. Such self worship as Mill says, arose at a very tender age, and blotted out a boy’s natural understanding of himself and his relationship to others. A boy may be “the most frivolous and empty or the most ignorant and stolid of mankind”, but by the mere fact of being born a male he is encouraged to think that “he is by right the superior of all and every one of an entire half of the human race, inculcating probably some whose real superiority he

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44 Ibid.

had daily or hourly occasion to feel”. By contrast, women were taught ‘to live for others’ and “to live no life but in their affections and then further to confine their affections to the man with whom they are connected, or the children who constitute an additional indefeasible between them and a man”. The result of this upbringing is that women’s sensibilities are systematically warped and both they and men suffer the consequences of the inevitable distortions of reality which seem to be natural to men. For Mill, this sexual difference is the result of social circumstances which shapes the dominant traits or characters.

To transform this situation for women, Mill very clearly propagated the need to participate in public life. Mill finds, like his predecessor Mary Wollstonecraft, the quest of women’s identity beyond the subordination of men. Even his support for women’s education, right to vote actually addressed the basic question of her participation in public life, the only domain to establish one’s own individual identity. But locating individuality within the sphere of public life, he seems to be conservative as he did not talk about any change in the domestic sphere. Mill did not attack the traditional assumption about men’s and women’s different responsibilities in an ongoing household, although he was usually careful to say that women ‘chose’ their role or that it was theirs by ‘nature’. He by and large accepted the notion that once they marry, women should be solely responsible for the care of the household and children, men for providing the family income. He seemed to shut the door on combining household duties and a public life. Mill says, that like a man when he chooses a profession, when a woman marries, it may be in general understood that she makes a choice of the management of a household, and the bringing up of a family. As the first call upon her exertions, during as many years of her life as may be required for the purpose and that she renounces, not all other objects and occupations, but all which are not consistent with the requirements of this. Mill assumed

46 Ibid. Pp. 411
47 Ibid. Pp. 410
48 Ibid. Pp. 414
that, though women should have the right to participate in public life but most women were in fact wanted only to be wives and mothers. But how it is possible for women to choose between being a wife and mother where they are totally dominated by men, rather to be a wife and mother and to remain within a family is their destiny. They are forced to be and perform their duties in terms of their familial relationships.

Because of this, some contemporary women writers have asserted that Mill’s vision of equality in terms of their own identity did not adequately challenge the existing sexual division of labour and that it subtly re-inscribes gender roles. Christine di Stefano argues that Mill was only prepared to grant women equality with men if they manifested traditionally male characteristics like working in the public sphere and that they did not attend sufficiently to women’s difference from men. Actually the problem lies in his notion of individuality. He made the famous distinction between self regarding and other regarding worlds when he says that an individual should be free to assert himself in self regarding matters which do not affect others. Under such understanding it would be possible that he may face obstruction from his other fellow individuals who are equally to assert their individuality in self regarding matters which is in one way not possible in other regarding matters. For example an artist who portrays someone’s figure which is apparently a self regarding matter cannot be obstructed or hindered by some other individuals belonging to his or different professions. But if he obstructed by his father, that will not be a consideration for Mill because for that artist his father is not an ‘other’ individual as he belongs within his familial relationship. In other regarding spheres he accepts the intervention of higher authorities to preserve everyone’s rights. So in that sense, both correspond to the public sphere and on the question of the private sphere in his notion of individuality. But in case of women in quest of her identity, the problem can be found in the nature of the socialization process, where family plays the most important role. Simone de Beauvoir explores this aspect in her writings while addressing the question of women’s identity.
The significance of Simone de Beauvoir and her book ‘Second Sex’ lies in the fact that it presents before us the pattern of socialization which maintains the subordination of women by men despite of having formal equality. When a baby is born, the first question we ask that is whether it is a boy or a girl. Not whether the baby the doing fine or not how the mother is doing. In other words from the very first day we are born, our sex defines how people treat us. If she is girl, she should be encouraged to be sweet calm and helpful, but in case of a boy he must be strong, active and independent. All through our lives, we are constantly reminded how to live up to the traditional roles of men and women. This is the process of socialization. ‘Socialization’, briefly is that process by which children are transformed into social beings who have taken on particular norms and values and known what kinds of self fulfilling prophecy, a self-perpetuating system which goes on from generation to generation. If children were taught to ‘be all that you can be’ rather than to ‘be as you are supposed to be’ things would be radically different. Noteworthy is that this process is related with women’s oppression – sex role socialization. Sex role or often gender role socialization is that kind of process by which children come to be not only social beings but either ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ ones, which of course involve clusters of attributes and behaviours seen, within particular societies, to be appropriate for females and males respectively. In ‘Second Sex’ Beauvoir made a detailed analysis of the gender role socialization in different phases of a women’s life.

Beauvoir begins her analysis with this remark “one is not born rather becomes a woman”. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society but the civilization as a whole that produces this

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creature intermediate between male and eunuch, known as feminine. But as she claims, up to the age of twelve the little girl is as strong as her brothers, and she shows the same mental powers as there is no field where she is debarred from engaging is rivalry with them.\(^55\) This initial sameness is lost when boys are persuaded that more is demanded of them because they are superior to give them courage, for the difficult path they must follow. Pride in his manhood is installed in him. He does not spontaneously experience it rather through the attitude of the group around him.\(^56\) The fate of little girls is something else. That is why they find themselves situated in a world differently from boys and a constellation of factors transform this difference, in their eyes, into inferiority. The passivity which is the essential characteristic of the ‘femininity’ - a trait that develops in them from the earliest years, which is imposed upon them by their teachers and by society. On the contrary, for boys, their mode of existence in relation to others leads them to means for a dominating nature and a weapon for fighting. There is no fundamental opposition to their concern for that objective figure which is theirs and their will to self-realization in concrete projects. But in women, Beauvoir explains there is from the beginning a conflict between their autonomous existence and their objective self, their ‘being-the-other’. She continues that women are taught that to ‘please’ she must try to please, she must make herself object. She is treated like a live doll that does not have any kind of liberty.\(^57\)

Beauvoir says as the girl becomes more mature, her universe enlarges and masculine superiority is perceived still more clearly.\(^58\) She is pressed to become like her elders, a servant and an idol.\(^59\) According to feminist understanding, socialization and gender role is inculcated at first by mothers differentially between children of different sexes through their behaviours towards them.\(^60\) As Beauvoir points out, the mother

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55 Ibid. P. 285

56 Ibid. P. 294

57 Ibid. P. 301

58 Ibid. P. 296

herself respects her boy’s manliness but prepares her daughter to be a wife, mother, grandmother. Mill points out that marriage is a ‘Hobson’s choice’ for women because of her status in society, for Beauvoir, because of the nature of gender role socialization, marriage for a girl is only an honourable career and one less tiring than many others, but it alone permits women to keep her social dignity intact. A girl since childhood looks to the male for fulfilment and escape. He is the liberator, he is rich and powerful, he holds the keys to happiness, he is prince charming. Actually she resigns to such submission. This means that she is made inferior to boys in terms of maturity and morals. Now she is incapable of rivalry with them which was possible for her up to the age of twelve. When she becomes aware of how weak she really is, she loses most of her assurance. This begins her evolution towards femininity, in which she assumes her passivity and accepted dependency. Even the adolescent girl is not given the encouragement accorded to her brothers. Girls, believe that outstanding success is reserved for men, they are afraid to aim too high. To be feminine is to appear weak and docile. She must repress her spontaneity to replace it with the studied grace and charm taught by her elders. Any self assertion will diminish her femininity and her alternatives. But through self-assertion in independence and liberty the boy acquires his social value and concurrently this prestige as male, the ambitious man. As an adolescent girl she dreams but for which she does not yet have the courage or the opportunity for undertaking in real life. It is a most unfortunate condition for a girl to feel passive and dependent at the age of hope and ambition, at the age when the will to live and to make a place in the world is running strong. At just the conquering age, a woman learns that for her there is to be no conquest,
that she must disown herself; that her future depends upon man’s good pleasure. All her eagerness for action, whether physical or spiritual, is instantly thwarted.67

In such a situation, what little else can she do except marriage? Marriage, Beauvoir points out is a destiny traditionally offered to women. The most celibate women of society is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious or even indifferent in regard to that institution. Though, in modern era, marriage is a union, freely entered upon by the consent of two independent persons, the obligations of the two contracting parties are personal and reciprocal. But like periods of childhood and adolescence, marriage is also different for men and for women. The two sexes are necessary to each other but this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them. A man is socially an independent and complete individual who finds self-fulfilment as a husband and a father. On the other hand, women are confined in their reproductive and domestic roles. While maintaining this role her status is reduced merely as a slave or vassal in the family.68 Marriage enslaves a woman to a man whose name she takes, she belongs to his religion, his class, his circle, and she joins his family. Beauvoir says that to do all this, she breaks more or less decisively with her past, and becoming attached to her husband’s universe.69

In patriarchal regimes, Beauvoir finds, it may happen that engaged persons chosen by parental authority have not even seen each other’s faces before the wedding day. Although, according to the traditional concept of marriage it is the man who takes the woman, that is why we say that boys get married. They look marriage for an enlargement a confirmation of their existence, but not the mere right to exist, which is the destiny of girls.70 Beauvoir makes it clear that the gender role socialization, which shapes the childhood and youth, affect women much deeply than they do to men. What is interesting is that society thinks a single woman as a socially incomplete being even if she makes her own living; if she is to attain the whole dignity of a person and gain her

66 Ibid.  Pp. 365, 378
67 Ibid.  Pp. 447-448
68 Ibid.  P. 451
69 Ibid..
full rights, she must wear a wedding ring. Maturity in particular is respectable only for married women. The important task of every married woman as Beauvoir puts it is to provide the society with children. This duty placed upon women by society is regarded as a service rendered to her husband. But motherhood is acceptable to society only if the woman is married because unwed motherhood remains an offence to public opinion which is not respectable for her and which could also lead her child to become a social handicap for her in life. A point should be remembered that the mother’s relation with her children takes from within the totality of her life and chiefly depends on her relations with her husband, her past, her occupation, even herself. It is wrong to assume that to become a mother she will attain a man’s status. There has also been no dearth of talk about the sacred rights of a mother. The actual fact is through marriage the motherhood of a woman is glorified. In other words, it is only through subordination of women by men in the form of husband, motherhood will be celebrated. This glorious motherhood, for Beauvoir, beyond a point becomes meaningless. As the man or father remains the economic head of the family, obviously the children are much more dependent on him than her mother though the mother is much more occupied with her children than the father. So that after a marriage she becomes a slave of her family and after being a mother, she get same status but virtually children are more obedient to their father who is the bread earner for them than their mother who raises them.

Confined in the home, women cannot establish their existence. She lacks the means requisite for self-affirmation as an individual and in consequence her individuality is not given recognition. In such a situation what would be the nature of women’s social life? Does any social life exist for them at all? Since we now understand that the processes of socialization as intimately concerned with the internalization of sets of reciprocal expectations which exist between the child and others. In many ways this is a ‘learning theory’, in which the child takes over specific behaviours of various kinds. The
child is itself active in the entire process. It is the child who makes choices and then
enacts these rather than being merely passive in a process of simple internalization.75 This
learning process is continued from childhood throughout the life and it determines not
only individual’s private life but also shapes his social world. Because of this learning
process in terms of social expectations, the man is joined to the community as a producer
and citizen, by bonds of an organic solidarity based upon the division of labour. But for
the wife, the relation with her husband is most pure and like her husband she has no
occupational demands, she has the leisure to keep up and having ‘at-homes’ she
maintains those relations which are not of practical use.76 Practically, there is no social
life for her. Beauvoir says, in the house, while attending her work she is merely clothed,
to go out, to receive, she ‘dresses up’. This formal attire signifies her social standing vis-
à-vis her husband.77 In a sense, her social life as a whole is the reflection of her husband’s
position in society.

In society masculinity and femininity both condition and arise from social action.
Each of us as members of society takes on board as our own the ‘knowledge’ of sex and
gender as they are socially constituted. As children learn to discursive practices of their
society, they learn to position themselves. Correctly as male or female, since that is
required of them to have a recognizable identity within the exiting social order.78 And
women, as Beauvoir feels, have never constituted a closed and independent society rather
they form an integral part of the group which is governed by males and in which they
have a subordinate position.79 That’s why in a society man is a free agent who confronts
other free agents under laws fully recognized by all, but women need the men in order to
gain human dignity. Everything happens to women through the agency of others and
therefore those others are responsible for her woes. The world before her has been made

75 Simone de Beauvoir (1993) The Second Sex, P. 555
76 Ibid.
77 Brouwn Davies (2002) Becoming Male Or Female, P. 283
78 Simone de Beauvoir (1993) The Second Sex, P. 628
without and against her.\textsuperscript{80} Even if women are economically independent, the majority of them do not try to escape from the traditional feminine world; they get from neither society nor their husbands the assistance they would need to become in concrete fact the equals of the man.\textsuperscript{81}

But economy is the most important sphere in which women could get the vital opportunity to represent themselves in public sphere. As Beauvoir looks at it, the women who are economically emancipated from man are not at all that in a moral, social and psychological situation identical with that of man. The way she carries on her profession and devotion to it depends on the context supplied by the total pattern of her life. When she begins her adult life she does not have behind her the same past as does a boy, she is not viewed in the same way. The advantage man enjoys which makes itself from his childhood is that his vocation as a human being in no way runs counter to his destiny as male. But in order to realize her femininity the woman must make herself an object and pray which is to say that she must renounce her claims as sovereign subjects. It is this conflict that especially marks the situation of the emancipated woman.\textsuperscript{82} To be precise economic factor is not enough to transform her condition in a society, ruled by masculine order. But to change this situation she does not refer any radical transformation of family system from which the gender role socialization begins. She like Wollstonecraft and Mill keep faith on the public sphere in order to be a complete individual, on equality with man. Women should have more access to the masculine world. When saying it, Beauvoir is equally aware of the fact that there are still many social circles in which her appearance is not concretely recognized. To a man, it seems natural that his wife will do housework and raise the children.\textsuperscript{83} Most important, that for her substantive participation, she must negotiate with her feminine image. As a whole Beauvoir thinks and analyzes the entire situation from common understanding of individuality and identity which is located at the sphere of the public.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid. P. 647
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid. P. 714
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid. Pp. 715-716
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid. Pp. 720-721, 729
The limitations we find in Beauvoir’s writing while analyzing the gender role socialization from women’s point of view is she avoids the gender role socialization for men which demands huge responsibilities and strong attitude. It may not be possible for all men to fulfil these requirements and for them this socialization pattern is oppressive. For those cases, gender equality is not only to emancipate women but also men. But Beauvoir did not consider this aspect. The most important limitation is when she locates women’s individuality she accepts the division between the public and private where the private or family is not included as a sphere where a person can be recognized as an individual human being because of his familial relations. Accepting traditional dichotomy, she does not wish to challenge the traditional rights system which represents only the public sphere. Like any other male writer at the end considering the public domain as the sphere of one’s identity because there a woman can exercise her rights as an individual which creates a situation to express herself.

**QUESTION OF IDENTITY OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY BENGALI MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN**

If the public domain is the only space where an individual’s identity can be recognized, then we must say that in the nineteenth century context, the identity question or any discussion about the identity of middle class women was not conducive at all. They were not totally confined to their family but they did not have any sense about their own existence in society. They had to maintain every duty and custom performed in a traditional Bengali family. On the other hand they faced some brutal practices which not only violated their sanctity as women but as human beings. They did not have any dignity in society; everything was for their male counterparts. Indeed the first half of nineteenth century is considered as a transitional period when an old system was being replaced by a new system. The political change of 1757 entails deep rooted changes in other spheres of life in early nineteenth century which practically brought far more changes in the Indian society. The middle class, which was chiefly the product of the British rule, slowly and

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gradually, came in contact with the west. The impact was under the influence of western education and its propagated modernity, made the middle class start to think about progress of their society which was at that moment under the shackles of superstitions and ignorance. The extent to which the middle class Bhadralok was able to receive modern education, to that extent they felt the need to improve the condition of their women to maintain and upgrade their own class status.

The extent to which India was traditional could be gauged from James Mill’s *The History of British India*. For Mill, the adjective ‘traditional’ seems to synthesize disparate cultural characteristics to the satisfaction of the west. According to Mill, tradition is associated with stereotypes of mysticism and spirituality, dowry, wife-burning, female infanticide overpopulation, primitive technology, peasants and villages, so India in particular has been projected as a ‘traditional’ society. It has long held a binary relationship to the west’s self-representation, ramified through its package of science and rationality, technological-economic development, open society and political freedom.85 Now it was the mission for the Bengali Bhadralok to modernize and for that they initiated a series of reforms. Most of them addressed women’s question in reconstructing their image as women of respected middle class Bhadraloks. As part of social reforms movement, wife-burning was prohibited in 1829, by the initiative of Raja Rammuhan Roy and next, widow re-marriage was made legal for which Vidyasagar struggled long. Besides such legal measures, the education programme was chalked out for them. Here again we find Vidyasagar who took the main initiative to educate women, though the education programme was first started by missionaries in the early nineteenth century Bengal.86 This process was continued and the condition of middle class women improved. But within this modernizing process, no argument was made in favour of their public participation. In other words the question of identity did not at all become a matter of concern at any moment in the project of modernization. Measures had been taken to improve the status of women within the family which would not disturb the traditional


male superiority but enable her to become a modern housewife and a devoted mother. Even the education proposal as such, which systematically confined women into their own family and familial relations, were not allowed to appear in the public domain.

Actually the modernization process and the reforms movement helped to construct a particular image of middle class women, ‘Bhadramahila’ and according to this construction a middle class woman should make herself a modern ideal wife by which she can uphold the status of her husband. Before we go to the next chapter, we could once again look at the film ‘UNISHE APRIL’. At the very beginning of the film we find the death of the husband of a famous dancer Sarojini Gupta, who incidentally was not present at that time. But what needs to be noted is her relatives’ remarks, which suggest that Sarojini cares only for her dance career; she does not look after her husband or her daughter. In other words whatever her identity in the public that should be sacrificed by her in order to be a good wife and mother like other Bengali women.

Theoretically, what Mary Wollstonecraft wrote was mainly an attempt to describe women’s position in her contemporary English society followed by the attempts of Mill and Beauvoir who related women’s status with marriage and different kind of socialization processes both in family and outside world. Actually their writings drew our attention to the adverse objective and subjective conditions which could prevent women in attaining their individuality. But locating individuality in the sphere of public domain the these writers inherently shared the understanding of mainstream political theory concerning the issue of women’s identity. For the Bengali middle class women such understanding of individuality does not seem to have much significance at least in the context of nineteenth century Bengali society. Essentially the image of Bengali women was constructed to establish a respectable position for the emerging Bengali middle class Bhadralok. Here lies the significance of the notion of Bhadramahila which does not allow Bengali women to find out her individuality by participating in public domain; rather the notion represented traditional image of wife and mother under the superficial understanding of modernity. But to get idea about this image of middle class women we need to look at it from its historical perspective Otherwise we may not be able to understand the true nature of the social construction of the ‘Bhadramahila’, as projected in nineteenth century Bengal.