Understanding the Women's Question: A Theoretical Discourse

Women have often been depicted in culture and history as non-actors. In several studies, she has been constantly projected as victims of Patriarchal and traditional customs and practices or mere slaves of domestic duties. Her subordinate status seems to encompass the great variety of cultures, economic arrangements and regimes in which they live. But contrary to this popular belief that women holds a secondary status in each realm of society - political, social and economic-few studies have celebrated women's strength and creativity in resisting that subordination. Moreover, it is this resistance or struggle for liberation, which remains the basic women question that has to be understood and discussed in this theoretical discourse.

The women question has plagued architects of state and has taken a central place from the origin of political philosophy rooted in the process of state formation, right from the days of Plato and Aristotle. The germs of all ideas about woman, which have emerged during the 20th century and even of that part of these ideas which
appears to be odd and unacceptable to the 20th century people, are found in the views of Plato.

Plato, in the fifth part of his book, *The Republic* has discussed such questions as communism of women and children, improving the breed, sterilisation of some men and women, confining the breeding activity to only those who possess high hereditary qualities, rearing children outside the family atmosphere, and confining procreation to certain years of life, during which vitality is at its peak. Plato believes that, like man, woman should also be given military training and, as man takes part in athletic competitions, woman should do so as well.

Anyhow, there are two points about what Plato has said. One is that he admits that physically and mentally women are weaker than men. In other words, he considers the disparity between man and woman to be quantitative, though he is opposed to the existence of any qualitative disparity in their capabilities. He believes that both man and woman have similar talents. The only thing is that in certain respects woman is weaker than man, but that is no reason why she should have a separate sphere of activity.
The second point is that all that Plato said about the improvement of breed, equal promotion of the talents of both the sexes, and the communism of women and children, is related only to the ruling class, that is the ruling philosophers or philosopher-rulers, because according to him, only this class is worthy of being rulers. As we know, politically he was an opponent of democracy and a supporter of aristocracy. So, what he has said on the above points, relates to the aristocratic class. As for other classes, he has different views.

Plato's argument in Book - V of The Republic is that the difference in men and women's natures is not relevant to the range of possibilities for their vocations. Both may be philosophers, physicians, or warriors, although, of course, individuals will vary in their capacities. All the pursuits of men are the pursuits of women also. Nevertheless he states unambiguously, and more than once, that in all of them woman is inferior to man.

Plato's attitude to women was ambivalent. In some of his writings he advocated a fairer deal for women. In his idealised Republic, he foresees an upper class of 'guardians' among whom the chattel status of women is abolished (i.e. she is no longer owned by
her husband) and in which women were to receive equal education to men.

On the other hand, he ascribed the inferior status of women clearly to a degeneration from perfect human nature. "It is only males who are created directly by the gods and are given souls. Those who live rightly return to the stars, but those who are 'cowards or [lead unrighteous lives] may with reason be supposed to have changed into the nature of women in the second generation'. This downward progress may continue through successive reincarnations unless reversed."¹

Plato subscribed to the view that "the wants of the flesh disrupted the business of politics. Nature should be subordinated to reason and the human body should be subjected to rigorous discipline to prevent any alienation of loyalty to the community-Plato's effort had been to break the identity between women and sexuality and to liberate women from this identity."² His aim was to show that women's nature did not bar them from any office in the state, and that they should receive the same education as men.

Aristotle has expressed his views on the disparity between man and woman and has strongly opposed the views of his teacher Plato. He believes that man and woman differ not only quantitatively but qualitatively also. He says that the two sexes have talents of different kinds, and the functions, which have been entrusted to them by the law of creation and the rights, which have been bestowed on them by it, differ greatly. According to Aristotle, their rules of morality are also different in many respects. It is possible that a moral quality may be excellent in regard to man, but it may not be so in regard to woman and vice versa.

Aristotle's main thrust was to explain the nature of things as they are seen to be. From the subject and low status of women he deduced their inferiority by nature. The reason for women's inferiority lies in a defect. "Women are defective by nature because they cannot reproduce substance of a human being (the soul, i.e. the form), but can only provide the nourishment (the matter)."3

According to Aristotle, man rightly takes charge over woman, because he commands superior intelligence. This will also profit the women who depend on him. He compares this to the relationship between human beings and tame animals. It is the best for all tame

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animals to be ruled by human beings. For this is how they are kept alive. In the same way, the relationship between the male and the female is *by nature* such that the male is higher, the female lower, that the male rules and the female is ruled."\(^4\)

For Aristotle women were not only excluded from participating in politics or excluded from citizenship but also their contributions to the ends of the state were limited to the production of the mere necessities of existence and to reproduction \(^5\).

From the above views of Plato and Aristotle it appears that Plato advocates complete equality between certain men and certain women, to allow them to participate in the same upbringing and education, to give them the same opportunities to achieve success in guardianship. However Plato was vulnerable to prejudices of his age, which considered women to be inferior than man. His errors cause him to become somewhat less of a feminist, although his considered proposals remain revolutionary for his time. Plato recognised that women had something to offer the state, and although the scenario in the *Republic* was predominantly

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unrealistic, the very fact that he considered a new role for women implied he was prepared for change.

Aristotle, on the other hand, had a typical view of women. They were little other than incubators and were certainly not capable of doing anything other than household chores. They had to be ruled by men to be kept in line, and it was their nature to be subordinate. Their souls were inextricably linked to their sex, and this in turn made them psychologically deficient. Plato’s ‘sexless’ soul in a sexed body allowed him to persuade that essentially the nature of men and women was the same, as their souls did not in essence differ. In nearly every way Plato’s view of women was by far the better of the two. Aristotle’s woman was an object; Plato’s woman was a human being with a capacity to be educated. She was ahead of her time, as in the middle ages the status of women was very much inferior to that of men.\(^6\) In the sixteenth century the status of women began to change and the Christian and Aristotelian views, which identified women with sin and imperfection were being challenged.

However later with the feudal state formation, women’s status and role changed and the position was better than that of

the Middle Ages. In the feudal state women of all classes had been economically productive. The reason seemed clear: the family was the unit of production. Women were partners with their husbands in the economic functions of the family, a situation that gave rise to what power called a "rough-and-ready equality."7 There was an independent relationship between husband and wife. The land had been the immediate source of life. The economic basis of the feudal family—that its member made a living from the land—had rested on the unity between capital and labour.

"The feudal family was a self-sufficient economic unit."8 It owned the tools, which it used to grow food for its self from the land. The point to be made is that production and consumption was coterminous, interrelated and both embedded in the economy of the household. There was division of labour based on sex, which varied from class to class. But men and women cooperated in producing a livelihood for the family. Alice Clark wrote "in the seventeenth century the idea is seldom encountered that a man supports his wife; husband and wife were than mutually dependent

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and together supported their children."\(^9\) Family life and work life were part of the same round of activity in the same locale. Though women were economically self-sufficient it does not amply that there was equality among the sexes.

The transition from feudalism to capitalism in the seventeenth century brought changes in the status and role of women. Process of industrialization defined gender roles of men in the sphere of work and women in the home. Women were confined to home while men out to work. Men were identified with production while women with consumption. They led more or less a parasitic or dependent life.

For Rousseau the female body becomes the symbol of all that is dangerous to the political order if not properly contained. He finds domesticated female sexuality the cement of social order. For him the only way to ensure political order was to segregate the sexes and educate them to their appropriate aims, taking care that the passionate aims of women were not allowed to hold away in public space. "But let mothers deign to nurse their children, morals

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will reform themselves, nature’s sentiments will be awakened in every heart, the state will be repopled.”

Feminist theorists have considered how this conceptualization of the women’s body has limited the political status of women. Inveighing against the centuries old exclusion of the female body—particularly its reproductive functions—feminists constructed different theories of how to “transform women into public persons with a public identity.” In addition, feminist social theory has evolved through variety of forms. However, feminist social theory cannot be isolated or understood separately from feminism as social movement, which has sought to achieve women’s liberation over the past hundred or more years. Its objective has remained to eradicate women’s unequal and oppressed position in present-day society and to replace it with the full and genuine equality of men and women. Feminism sees the basic division in world as that between men and women. The cause of women’s oppression is to dominate and control them. History is the unchanging patriarchal structures, through which men have subjugated women. The way to abolish these structures is for

women, of whatever social class, to unite against men, of whatever class.

Feminist movement or women’s liberation movement has changed from being a campaign for equal voting rights to being a radical movement for fundamental gender equality at work and in domestic activities, legal relations and cultural practices. Concern for women’s right dates from the Enlightenment. The 18th century philosopher Condorcet spoke in favour of female emancipation and in 1789, the year of French Revolution, Olympe de Gouges wrote *The Declaration of the Rights of women*. This declaration strongly influenced Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in England in 1792, which challenged the idea that women exist only to please men and proposed that women receive the same treatment as men in education, work and politics and be judged by the same moral standards. She advocated the integration of the women into political arena by “extending the liberal principles of freedom, equality and rationality through a process of education.” 12

Feminist version of equal rights doctrines, had their philosophical origin in M. Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the rights of Women* 1792, and it eventually got expressed through the Suffrage Movement in 1920, which attempted to remove various political and social barriers to women's full participation in society. These reformists struggle can be interpreted as political attempts to achieve citizenship for women. The first wave of Feminism was primarily concerned with the problem of formal equality between men and women.

In the 1960s, Feminism assumed a more radical focus seeking a revolutionary transformation of society as whole. Such a woman achieved a modern milestone. Simon de Beauvoir, whose book *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949); *The Second Sex* (1953) became worldwide best seller and raised a feminist consciousness by appealing to the idea that liberation for women was liberation for men too.

This second wave feminism attacked deadening domesticity—the conditioning of women to accept passive roles and depend on male dominance. Women's organizations for equal rights began proliferating in the late 20th century. They have sought to overcome federal and state laws and practice that enforce the inferior status
of the women by discrimination in such matters as contract and
property rights and especially in matters related to sex and child
bearing.

It was in the year 1975, which United Nations declared
International Women's Year. For the first time, women as
representatives of their countries met in international conferences.
The aim was particularly to advance women's participation in
decision-making and all areas of public life. It is the third wave of
Feminism, which is more sensitive to local and diverse voices of
Feminism.

The Feminist movement or Feminism heeds resistance among
women as well as men in various societies. Its goal varies widely
from country to country. In parts of Africa women's goal may be
elemental-such as removal of bride price. In the Muslim mid-east,
they may seek relaxation of the dress code and the code of
seclusion. In many countries, they may decry the wife's need to get
her husband's permission to sign a contract or bring a lawsuit. In
Western Europe, they may complain of news-media stereotype of
women in industrial societies they may demand equal pay for equal
work vis-a-vis men. Feminism and feminist social theory has been
influenced by Post-Structuralist and Post-modernist analysis,
which gives emphasis on difference and plurality. The universalistic thrust of feminism, as a political movement to oppose male dominance and patriarchy stands challenged, in a world, which is so diverse and varied in culture and tradition. Therefore feminism in west is very different from that of East. Nevertheless, feminism as a whole is a doctrine suggesting that women are systematically disadvantaged in Modern society and advocating equal opportunities for men and women.

Apart from Feminism, Marxism has sought to achieve women’s liberation. But for Marxism the fundamental antagonism in society is between classes, not sexes. The class struggle between exploiter and exploited, whatever their sex, is the driving force of historical change. Women’s oppression can only be understood in the context of the wider relations of class exploitation. Marx and Engel were able to show, by developing the materialistic concept of history, that only the class struggle can achieve socialism and women’s liberation. Marxists are of the view that it depends on class struggle. Unlike feminist who consider women as a separate group and their question, a question of right and justice, Marxist consider there is no independent women question; the women question arose as an integrated component of the social problem of
our time. According to Kollontain in her talk on the women worker in contemporary society “the liberation of women as a member of society, a worker, an individual, a wife and a mother is possible only together with the solution of the general social question, with the fundamental transformation of the present social order.”

Marxism opposes the view of many proponents of women’s movement, who opine that women’s oppression is the product of Patriarchy and male domination is interpreted as a super historical factor, which exists independently of class society or Capitalism. Fredrick Engels in his treaties *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and State, (1884)*, argues that it was the rise of private property and division of society into classes which led to the subjugation of women. Under Capitalism, the production of necessities of life is a social process, while reproduction—the rearing of children is a private process, taking place largely in the enclosed family. The oppression of women has rooted in the dichotomy between the two and fight for women’s liberation cannot be separated from fight against Capitalism.

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14 Ibid, pp. 792 – 794 and 800 - 801
For Marxist the oppression of women, by dividing them and confining them in the four walls of domesticity, leads more often to powerlessness and submission. Only where women, as workers have collective power do they gain confidence to fight exploitation and are then able to fight their oppression as women. Hence, women in order to enter the arena of struggle for their liberation have to leave the isolation of the home and enter the social area of production. For Marx and Engels the emancipation of women demanded the entry of women into social production and eradication of sexual division of labour, which is hierarchal.

Engel’s book *The Condition of the Working Class* shows that both Marx and Engel were aware of the position of the working class women and their strong concern about the plight of these suffering women was same as that of the plight of all working people. He also at one point of time in his book accuses the ruling class in England of actually committing murder. Marx in *Holy Family* (1845) freely paraphrases Fourier and writes “the change in an historical epoch can also be determined by the women’s progress towards freedom, because here, in the relation of the women to the men, of the weak to the strong, the victory of human
nature over brutality is most evident. The degree of the emancipation of the women is the natural measure of the general emancipation”\textsuperscript{15}.

Marx was never against children and women participating in production. What he was opposed to were the terrible conditions in which they had to work and live. At a meeting of the International’s General Council, Marx said, ‘I do not say that it is wrong that women and children should participate in our social production.’ Rather the issue was “the way in which they are made to work in the existing circumstances”.\textsuperscript{16}

He further advocates “the labourers must put their heads together, and as a class, compel the passing of a law and all powerful social barriers that will prevent the very workers from selling by voluntary contract with capital, themselves and their family into slavery and death.”\textsuperscript{17} Marx noticed on the one hand the drawing of the women and children out of social isolation and patriarchal oppression in the peasant family to “co-operate in the great work of social production as a progressive, sound and


\textsuperscript{16} Meeting of the International’s General Council, Minutes, Volume-II, p. 232

legitimate tendency.” On the other hand, “under capital it was distorted into an abomination.” He observed that women had become an active agent in social production. “Anyone who knows anything of history knows that major social transformations are impossible without ferment among women.” (Marx in Letters to Dr. Kugelmann). Marx was of the opinion that women must be incorporated as active participant in political activity and in 1871 he initiated and the International adopted a new rule recommending the establishment of female branches without excluding the possibility of branches composed of both sexes.

Engels in his pioneering work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, puts the women’s question in the context of historical materialism and on the contrary, he showed that patriarchy was nothing eternal. Later on, Lenin following on the footsteps of Marx and Engels also gave great importance to socialist work among women and men. In Lenin’s *On the Emancipation of Women*, in the appendix we find Calara Zetkin’s *My Recollection of Lenin*. In it, we read the following, “Lenin repeatedly discussed with me the problems of women’s right. He obviously attached great importance to the women’s movement,

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which was to him an essential component of the mass movement that in certain circumstances might become decisive. Needless to say he saw full social equality of women as a principal, which no Communist can dispute."\(^{19}\)

Lenin did not regard the work of communist among women as a secondary issue. He even expressed his discontent with the sections in the Communist International for not doing enough in this field and he was very outspoken. He said, "Mobilisation of the female masses carried out with the clear understanding of principles and on firm organizational basis is a vital question for the communist parties and their victories. But let us not deceive ourselves. Our national section still lacks the proper understanding of this question."\(^{20}\)

So the difference of perception that we find between feminism and Marxism is that, Feminism sees women as object of history, as victims of male oppression and history as the story of the unchanging patriarchal structures through which men have subjugated women; while Marxism on the other hand finds the history as the history of class struggle. The class struggle between


\(^{20}\) Ibid, p. 113.
exploiter and the exploited, whatever their sex, is the driving force of the historical change and only the class struggle can achieve women's liberation. Full emancipation of the women can be achieved through the abolition of the capitalist system and that requires the utmost unity of men and women workers in the struggle against Capitalism. It cannot be denied that women's question has always occupied a central place in the theory and practice of Marxism.

While Marxism argues Capitalism as the root cause behind the oppression of women, it becomes even more necessary to understand the place or position assigned to women or the women's question in the liberal democratic theory. Liberal democracy is a system that is necessarily tied with Capitalism. This is the ideology that champions such notions as freedom, equality, fraternity and individualism included in the myth of freedom and freedom of choice, freedom of competition and free markets, all of which are associated with equality, that is free choice and free competition occur between free and equal people, who all have equality of access to the society regulating free market. Liberalism is necessarily tied to individualism and each individual is the one ultimately responsible for what happens in his/her life. The
dominant ideology of Liberalism stipulates that those who are on top legitimately reach that level due to their hard work and natural abilities, and correspondingly, those who do not gain upward mobility fail to do so because they do not work hard enough and naturally lack the skills and the abilities required to climb the socio-economic ladder.

Liberal Democracy is an ideology or theory, which legitimizes and support free enterprise Capitalism and Capitalism is a system that is fundamentally based on and nourished by inequality. It is a system that enhances the subordination of the women. While Capitalism is not good for women, women are in fact good for Capitalism. The subordination and exploitation of women all around the world has been fundamental to the advancement of the Capitalism. Without women's unpaid or underpaid labour Capitalism would certainly not be, where it is today. The ideology of Liberal Democracy has served to promote and protect the interest of Capitalist accumulation.

Though it appears that Liberal Democratic theory caters to women's rights and interests in providing the integration of women into the public arena on equal terms with men by extending the liberal principles of freedom, equality and rationality but in reality
it is not so. The limited state support for women is consistent with Liberal Democratic theory which values freedom above reducing inequality through universally available guarantees of economic citizenship, so without equal access to the market and without state assistance in meeting the child rearing obligations, that fall disproportionately to women, Liberal Democracies require women to reconcile their economic dependency through bargains made with individual men. Thus, women happen to be in more disadvantageous state. In such a system, they are exploited and oppressed even more because the government does not protect their interests. Thus, they provide for capitalism while capitalism may not provide for these women.

In this theoretical discourse on women’s question starting from the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau and discussing at length the theories of feminism, marxism and liberal democracy we get an insight in the varying position or perspectives regarding women’s problem –their rights and privileges, status and role, and their struggle for liberation or emancipation. While these theories provide an understanding on women’s question, yet none of them allows the right framework to understand the third world women. Since our present study is about the women’s struggle for liberation
in Kenya, it becomes fundamental to understand the third world women first; because third world women have a very different kind of existence as compared to the western women. When the two worlds are different, with their own socio-economic history and environment the women's question also differ. So it is relevant in this context to have a third world perspective on women and the present study on Kenyan women will be carried on within this broad framework.

WOMEN QUESTION: A THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVE

The expression “third world” was initially coined at the 1955 conference of Afro-Asian countries held in Bandung, Indonesia to establish a third way –neither with eastern nor with the western block – in the world system, in response to the seemingly new world order established after the Second world war. By the end of the 1950's the term was frequently employed to refer to the underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America.

“Third World” is a term that both signifies and blurs the functioning of an economic, Political and imaginary geography able to unite vast and vastly differentiated areas of the world into a single ‘underdeveloped’ terrain. Frequently this term is applied to
refer to 'underdeveloped' / overexploited geopolitical entities, i.e. countries, regions, even continents. Generally, third world is characterized as underdeveloped or developing countries, which are, faced with major developmental problems. Countries, which constitute the third world, are poorer than some threshold, while countries above the threshold are First World countries. They are often characterized by poverty, high birthrates, and dependence on more advanced countries. The economies of Third World countries are dedicated to developing raw materials and products for more developed countries. This can make it difficult for countries to become self-sufficient, because their economies are set up to meet other countries' needs.

Women who reside in this third world stand an oppositional alliance to that of first world. What seems to constitute the 'third world women' as a viable oppositional alliance is a common context of struggle rather than colour and racial identification. Similarly, it is third world women's oppositional political relation to sexist, racist and imperialistic structures that constitute their political commonality. The political and economic roles from which women are excluded are the very roles that would allow them to allocate resources and values. In other words, they are excluded from the
roles of power. In short, men-usually males of the dominant class impose a social and ideological worldview or cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony "is an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused ... in all institutional and private manifestation." \(^{21}\) The women of the third world face not only a yawning chasm between their conditions and those of their counterparts in the developed world, but in addition, they face another a more insidious and no less drastic disparity with their own men folk. Since the position and status of women is largely determined by the economy, polity, culture and technological advancement of a given society, that is why third world women are worse off than women in western countries. "The third world women constitute a cheap or unpaid labour force and a reserve labour force for both international and domestic economic needs" \(^{22}\)

All third world women do not directly perform household duties. Women domestic servants in Latin American societies or women and men servants in African societies may perform some of the household duties. Yet, it is women as wives or mothers who are


responsible for their administration—that is, sex still determines where the responsibility falls. The social class of women determines how household responsibilities will be performed. Women are members of the social class of their husbands, fathers, or other significant males in their lives. Thus, Helen Safa states that “Women themselves are not a class, but members of another class, depending on their socioeconomic position in society . . . The class position of women is defined not by women themselves, even when they are working, but by their husbands or fathers, whose status they assume. While this is another clear reflection of women’s dependency on men, it does not mean that women cannot acquire class consciousness independently. It does suggest that the process by which women acquire class consciousness will be different and more difficult than it is for men.”

Class distinction exists among groups of Third World women that in the internal social arrangements of a nation may be equal or exceed those based on sex and/or race. That is, class influences the relative social position of Third World women within a particular country. So, the social and economic positions of affluent or professional women may appear to have limited relation to

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working-class or peasant women of their nation. Women are members of an affluent, working, or peasant background; men determine a large part of their socio-economic status, since the male worldview is prevalent. Sexism is a constant factor. Women consistently hold lower social and economic status than men of the same class—that is, ‘liberation’ by class does not mean liberation by sex. Still, peasant and unskilled women in developing nations and many minority women in the United States are ‘the oppressed of the oppressed.’

If we choose to name Third World women as a group, different from the First World we need to understand the experiences they share. To understand the common experiences of Third World women it is important to look at the meaning given to the experience. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, a scholar who writes about Third World Women, uses an example of wearing veils in Muslim countries. In some instances, women are forced to wear veils because of their religion. In other times, women have chosen to put on veils to unite with other women against unfair practices in a workplace. Grouping all of these women who wear veils ignores the meaning given to wearing veils within these two very different contexts. Since these women give different meanings to wearing a
veil, it is not possible to say, "Women in Muslim countries are oppressed because they wear veils". It is not the practice of wearing veils, but the meaning given to wearing veils that can be oppressive. According to Mohanty, women should be grouped according to the meaning they give to their common experiences. It is the meaning of their experience that makes them similar to others, not necessarily the experience itself. In addition, women of third world can be grouped together, for they share a similar kind of experience.

Women are the Third World's powerhouses. In addition to caring for families and homes they are engaged in the production of food, running small-scale businesses and making up a substantial amount of official labor force. Yet, their status rarely reflects this enormous and vital contribution. By any measure - income, education, health, land ownership, legal rights or political power - women get a raw deal. The poorest of the poor are usually women because discrimination cuts off their escape routes from poverty - education, health services, equal pay employment, access to land and finance.

It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that there will only be sustainable development in the Third World when women play an equal part in decision-making. No developing country can afford to ignore women's existing and potential economic contribution, or their pivotal role in determining the health and welfare of a nation's children. All the evidence points to one conclusion: economic growth and improvement in the quality of life for everyone is faster in areas where women's status is higher.

This information sheet looks at some of the obstacles Third World women face, and at the efforts that determined and courageous women are making to overcome them. Women in developing countries are tremendous forces for change in their families, villages, cities and countries. They CAN and DO make a difference - when they get a chance.

Discrimination begins at home with the under-valuing of domestic duties because they don't directly generate income. Yet, when this unpaid work is taken into account, women usually work more hours per week than men. Not acknowledging "women's work" is particularly insulting in the Third World where women also do most of the agricultural work.
An African peasant woman might typically put in a 16-hour day trudging long distances to fetch firewood, animal fodder and water, growing and harvesting food, tending cash crops, and cooking and caring for her family. Not surprisingly, this punishing routine leaves little time or energy to look after her health or to seek education and training - the very things that enable women to break the cycle of low status and poverty.

Despite their pivotal role in Third World agriculture, women rarely have property rights and so are seldom consulted about the land or included in agricultural training programs. Many Third World women now face the added burden of running households by themselves. Globally, a third of all households are headed by women, as migration in search of work or divorce removes husbands from the household.

Legal restraints on access to credit or land ownership prevent them from improving their precarious situation, and contribute to making these single-parent households the poorest of the poor.

Lack of education and skills frequently forces Third World women into the risky "informal" economy as street traders, domestic servants, home workers and seasonal labourers. Although
economically productive to society, once again, this work is rarely recognised in official statistics and the women often get no protection from unions or employment legislation.

In Asia and Africa, increasingly young women have been joining the official workforce in recent years and are experiencing some of the benefits - financial independence, higher status and lower fertility rate through delaying the age of marriage. Children benefit also because women usually devote more of their income to the family’s welfare than do men.

Yet just as women’s domestic work is undervalued, so too are their skills in the world of employment. Most are concentrated in the poorly-paid, low-skilled "women’s" sectors of the economy like Free Trade Zones set up in many developing countries to attract foreign companies. Exhausting 18-hour days in unsafe and unhealthy conditions are the norm, along with sexual harassment and lack of job security. Such poor status of Third World women condemns them to equally poor health throughout their lives.

Unequal access to education consigns Third World women to lives of low status and large families and their lack of awareness excludes women from the full benefits of development and from
making their full contribution as citizens. Despite this, illiterate women still manage to make outstanding contributions towards improving their lives and those of other women.

The Third World debt crisis is proving a huge obstacle to women's advancement. The very things that can help raise their status - education, health care and employment are being decimated as governments struggle to meet crippling repayments. Under International Monetary Fund and World Bank pressure, they are forced to cut spending on social services in return for help with their debt burden. The result is a giant step backward for women: clinics close, girls are pulled out of school, adult literacy programs are cut, food and medicine prices soar, wages are slashed and unemployment leaps, with women usually the first to lose their jobs. Studies suggest that this deterioration in already poor living standards is often expressed in violence, family breakdown and mental health disorders.

Third World women face physical violence and intimidation on many levels. Domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace are common in the Third World, as they are in developed countries. Many poor women are also forced into prostitution to support themselves, parents and children. Practices like female
circumcision, early childhood marriage and nutritional taboos continue to threaten women. For instance, female circumcision (genital mutilation might be a more appropriate term) still commonly occurs in parts of Africa and elsewhere and continues to menace millions of women and young girls.

If discrimination against women in the Third World is formidable, so too are their heroic efforts to overcome it. Women have become organised at an unprecedented rate in the last two decades, establishing networks within and across countries to communicate with each other. Their grassroots organisations are usually characterised by limited funds but high levels of initiative, determination and courage.

Women are the most effective agents for change in the Third World. They are enthusiastic and determined, and are prepared to look beyond the short term. Whatever benefits they gain are usually passed on to their families and, ultimately, their communities and countries. Thus, overwhelmingly they play a very significant role in the political economic and social sphere today and, which they had also done earlier in the pre-colonial and the colonial period. However, unfortunately there contribution - whether it is national liberation struggle or social and economic emancipation or their
own struggle for liberation - goes unnoticed and unrecognized. Such role of third world women will be taken up while examining and analyzing the case of Kenyan women in this present study.

To conclude, the chapter has taken a sufficient discourse into consideration by understanding the entire historicity of women's question. On the basis of this understanding a theoretical debate has constantly evolved in the process. With a departure from the platonic age to the age of globalization the theoretical debate has got much more enlightening ground, which has helped to understand the women's question in a very microscopic way. The third world perspective on women in general and Africa in particular, reflecting the immensely critical aspect of women's question unlike to that of west, has emerged as the central issue to understand the complexities of social relations. The above theoretical discourse provides a formidable direction to our study on women's struggle for liberation in Kenya. Women's question in Africa in general and Kenya in particular will be dealt through a holistic understanding of the above discourse determined by the socio-economic structurality of Africa in general and Kenya in particular in the next preceding chapters, where the struggle for
liberation by women has been understood in the terms of national liberation along with socio-economic, cultural and individual liberation.