CHAPTER II

DIMENSIONS OF DISORIENTATIONS
Man's attitude to woman has been changing since the dawn of civilisation. Strangely enough, man, on the one hand, glorified woman to divinity in myths and legends but on the other hand, his attitude to her individuality has been highly dubious. If she was projected as a goddess in the ancient literature of the Vedic societies, it was so because he found her less conscious of her freedom as a human being and more meek and docile, ready to be dictated by her master's command. The identity-crisis a woman experienced in relation to that of her male counterpart began with the communal pattern of living in the earliest times and later shifted to mother-right in the matriarchal structure. But ultimately, it was subsumed by patriarchy with the ideal of monogamy coming in vogue. This phase of transition gave man the right of ownership, one implication of which was that he began to look after his wife as if she were a commodity article. In a universe dictated by male-egoistic tendencies in human conduct, the woman, despite the total effacement of her individuality to humour her master, failed to win the appreciation as 'virtuous' which made her plight paradoxical: her over-bearing smiles in openness were chastised as gestures of immodesty but her silence and impassiveness was misconstrued as coldness and frigidity.
The status and the role which the patriarchs of the society assigned to the woman was ambiguous and tragic in that man never treated the woman as equal and the moral pattern of life which he evolved was intriguing. The myth of female servitude finds illustration and support in history, mythology and legendary folk-tales. Since the advent of the popular alchemy of priestcraft, the role that it has been playing to mould the pattern of man-woman relationship has been ambivalent and dilemmatic. The socio-historical framework which was initiated in the name of sanctioning the freedom of woman brought, ironically, regimentation. In the words of Tara Ali Beg it,

"...is not surprising that with evolving ritualistic, religion and growth of Brahminism and the priesthood, invasions for centuries culminating in colonialism for two hundred years, women became increasingly dominated by social rigidities and historical events."1

The depiction of woman in scriptures and the classical literature is highly distorted in that on the one hand, she is projected as an object of worship, while on the other hand, if the weather turned icy, they identified her with a sub-human creature at the worst devoid of any moral sense. The Indian society is marriage-oriented, which implies that it is within the sacramental frame -

1. India’s Woman Power, New Delhi: S. Chand, 1976, p. 4
work of marriage that the woman has to seek self fulfilment. That is, the woman, as such is not as much held in esteem as the woman as a mother – she is led into believing that her dharam urges upon her to surrender her individuality to a household she is destined to serve. The 'seed-earth' symbology as employed by male-sensibility to explain her womanly identity is morally offensive and degrading. The idea goes back to the ancient cult of Mother-Earth; the seed is identified with male and the earth with the female to grow the seed to fruition. Thus the image of the woman as identified with the Mother-Earth is less a glorification of feminine virtue:

"Man provides the seed, the essence for the creation of the offspring; the seed determines the kind; the child's identity is derived from the father for the group placement. The role of the mother is just to receive the seed and through her own blood provide warmth and nourishment and help it to grow."

A look into the value structure of the early society reveals that religious rituals have played havoc in shaping a woman's identity. The illusory concept of salvation distorted man's vision in the wake of which the birth of a female child began to be looked upon as a judgement on evil deeds done in the previous birth.

Religious texts strengthened the belief that the spiritual salvation is possible only when a woman bears sons, not daughters. How dismal and comic to see the priest, without having the precise idea of the right relation between soul and Over-soul instil medievalistic darkness in place of illumination into human mind! It was nothing but a naked display of barbaric primitive religious anarchy. In order to make the bite sharper, the most uncharitable blame thrust upon her was that the woman is the devil-incarnate, whereas the early Vedic period showed her as privileged being, enjoying equality with men-folk in all spheres of life. Knowledge was not a prerogative, both the girls and the boys had to undergo upnayan ceremony before undertaking the study of the Vedic texts. The learned women were called brāhmaṇadāsā and it is believed that they composed hymns which shows that the equal opportunities were also made available to the woman. But in sphere of social activity, ironical speaking, the woman was subjected to her husband. Since she enjoyed the equal opportunities in education, she was less dependent on the family. She took an active part in the industrial life of the community and equally did well in fine arts, music and dancing.

In the Vedic period the women enjoyed considerably a higher status in marriage. The Rgveda held the ideal of a monogamic marriage uniting the parents into an abiding
duality: "May you both abide here together; May you never be separated; may you live together all your lives supporting with sons & grandsons and thus rejoice in your own home." Yet the same text condemns the woman as "fickle-minded and treacherous". The priestly class used animal imagery to degrade a woman that she has the heart of a wolf or a jackal and hence there can be hardly any understanding between a man and a woman but at the same time the religious texts show her exercising sovereignty over the household including her husband's parents. Taking into view her nursing capacity in the old age, the sages became conscious of her essential humanity as a wife, "The wife verily is the home". The woman took part in the intellectual life of the society, she addressed the religious assembly, known as the Vidhata, soon after the marriage as a test of her intellectual level. The Vedic rituals sanctioned a joint offering to man and his wife which of course created confidence in her life. Abinash Chander Bose holds the Vedas in high esteem "from all other Indian literature by the high regard in which it holds the woman." However, no one can lose sight of the ambivalent attitude of the Vedic age towards the

1. Rgveda, Book-X, Hymn 85.42.
2. Rgveda, Book-X, 95, 15 ("na vai strainani sakhyani santi salavrkanam udayany eta")
3. Rgveda, Book III, Hymn 53.4
woman: the birth of a female child was taken as a curse on the family and a hostage to great enterprises. The prayer is made for the birth of a male child in the Atharvaveda, fearing the spiritual insecurity:

"O woman, give birth to a male son. Bring forth another male after him. The mother shalt thou be of sons born and hereafter to be born."

There is a similar reference of prayer for a son even in Kalidasa's Abhijnana-Sakuntalam in which King Dushyant is shown withholding the arrow on the intervention of a holy man that was to kill a deer and Viakhanasa giving blessings for a son. This instinct of gender-bias questioned the doctrine of spiritual salvation. The birth of a female child was an event as if it were a prelude to the domestic tragedy. And the logic which they advanced was primitive that the women had no fighting capacity. This barbaric anti-human notion dehumanized man to the degrees that he left a daughter to the mercy of the wild beasts or destroyed her otherwise:

"Almost everywhere the son was valued more than the daughter. He was a permanent economic asset of the family. He lived with his aged parents and did not migrate like the daughter to another family after the marriage. He perpetuated the name of his father's family. As he grew into adolescence and youth, he could offer valuable co-operation to his family, when

1. The Atharva Veda, Bk-III, Hymn 23.2
it had either to defend itself or to attack an enemy."¹

There are religious texts which take pride in propagating illusory myth of heaven and spiritual salvation. Instead of enlightening man their readings foster moral darkness, fear and cynicism by way of popularising the distorted image of human placement closed on a sonless father in the scheme of the universe. It is ritualism, not religion which possesses human thought again into shackles of medievalism.

"There is no prospect in the after birth of the sonless; never, never will Heaven be his... The man possessing a son is entitled to the Heavenly pleasures can be vividly seen, rather than imagined. The man with son is freed from sins; this is the word of the Vedas. The sonless man becomes very much distressed even at the time of death and while lying on bed that is ground at that time, mournfully thinks. "This all my vast wealth, various things, this my beautiful house, who will enjoy all these."²

The position of Puranic scholars is not much encouraging and humanistic either. They have used highly condemnatory terminology to pass verdicts on the women: in their eyes they are robbers to rob man of his vitality and blood. Apsara Pancacuda indicts the woman for their

lack of modesty. It is the women who are virtually the
genesis of evil, they are humorous and emotionally weak,
they are easily lost in moral wilderness and even resort
to lesbianism whenever they find opportunity to do so.
Pancacuda's sarcasm is reflected in her condemnation of
moral lechery of the woman as a class which like Manu's
codified text is one-sided view of the woman; it frees
man from the role that he plays in corrupting the moral
life in her neighbourhhood:

"Even the women who are honoured well,
loved intimately and looked after with
care become attached to hunchbacks, blind
men, imbeciles and dwarfs... O Brahmin, if
women do not get men for their dalliance
they begin to indulge in abnormal sexual
activity with one another. They do not
stand by their husbands...Women become
desperate when they do not get men, when
they are afraid of servants, when they
frightened of being killed or imprisoned."

The two epics and the Smritis have also been
critical of the woman as a class on grounds of moral
imperfection. She is depicted as "temptress", full of
carnality. The great epic poet, Tulsidas places woman in
the category of donkies, drums and the Sudras who need
occasional beatings. But one can dismiss such a view of
woman-morality as a case of subjectivist creed. The Gita
also follows the lead as taken by the Ramcharitmanasa and

1553.
2. Shri Ramcharitmanasa, V. 58.6
looks upon the woman as a case of low birth, classifying her with the Sudras. It was a popular belief that the women as a class were less intellectual. The Lord speaks, "For those who take refuge in me, O Partha, though they be of inferior birth—women, Vaisyas and Sudras—even they attain the Supreme God." The Mahabharata also uses the text of the discourse that went off between Pancacuda and the sage Narda underlining overlustfulness and beastly sexuality in woman:

"Verily, women are like the words uttered by the wise. Fire is never satiated with fuel. Ocean can never be filled with the waters that rivers bring unto him. the Destroyer is never satiated with slaying even all living creatures. Similarly, women are never satiated with men."  

The 'Anusasana Parva' condemn women as the creation of the Daitya Maya. "She is the sharp edge of the razor. She is poison. She is a snake. She is fire. She is, verily, all these united together." And so does the Ramayana.

"There is none whom a woman sincerely loves. She for serving her purpose does not hesitate to kill even her husband, children or brothers."  

In the wake of such religious distortion, man developed a highly dogmatic view about woman, he took

1. The Bhagwadgita, Chapter-IX, 32. p. 521.  
3. 'Anusasana Parva; Section XL, p. 7  
4. The Ramayana, Aranyakanda, VIII-56.
fancy on his own self-styled superiority and consequently the problems of morality and the norms governing life grew more complex, Man suffered from a fractured vision which continued even to haunt him beyond the Smriti period. When Manu gave his moral code which had a deep impact on a woman’s position in the society. The primary aim of Manu was the good of community - life which involves the security of the household rather than the individualism. He clamps down the woman’s freedom in certain household activities in regard to ensuring the family structure. Manu finds the woman a parasite at every step of life from birth to death:

“In childhood must a female be dependent on her father; in youth, on her husband; her lord being dead, on her sons; if she have no sons, on the near kinsmen of her husband; if he left no kinsmen, on those of her father; if she have no paternal kins ‘men, on the sovereign: a woman must never seek independence.”

Manu prescribes a code of morality for the woman but none for man which is a reflection of his discriminatory attitude to women as a class. His criteria of a virtuous wife is also highly ambiguous. A virtuous wife is one who “slights not her lord, but keeps her mind, speech, and body devoted to him, attains her heavenly mansion and by the good men is called sadhwi, or virtuous.” But Manu

2. Ibid., p. 169.
does not qualify who are the 'good men' to evaluate a woman's morals. Such leanings encouraged tyranny, exploitation and suppression of a woman's freedom and identity. What is tragic about Manu's text is impassiveness and indifference to the plight of widowhood: he is against remarriage but at the same time he permits a brahmin to take another wife after performing the funeral rites of his dead wife. He could "again marry, and again light the nuptial fire." The woman was not permitted to marry again if she so desired. But the whole concept and the argument as advanced by Manu is self-defeating. Was he conscious of the tragic irony whether the woman would receive a humane treatment from the family and society or could she hold or inherit property to live a life of honour or choice in widowhood? Altaker's observation on this equivocal social phenomenon is pertinent: "Man, however, wielded supreme power in society almost every where and was not prepared to sanction a custom adverse to his own interest and comfort." Manu's prejudices further come on the fore when he sanctions the beatings of a wife in case she runs distracted.

1. Ibid., p. 169.
"A wife, a son, a servant, a pupil and a younger whole brother, may be corrected, when they commit faults, with a rope or the small shoot of a cane."

He is also against the practice of assigning headship of a household to a woman of dubious virtue but he is silent on the plight of a family left to the supervision of a man of no virtue. This shows that what Manu was interested in was not the genuine marriage or virtue but the gender-discrimination:

"For he, who preserves his wife from vice, preserves his offspring from suspicion of bastardy, his ancient usages from neglect, his family from disgrace, himself from anguish, and his duty from violation."

The two religious sects-Budhism and Jainism - have not devoted much attention to the duties and ideals of a lay woman, which speaks of the indifference of their founding fathers to or contempt of woman. The Budha in the beginning was reluctant to admit the woman to the order. The Digambara Jains held that salvation is destined to woman only when she is born as man but Budhism does not share this view. Both Budhism and Jainism inducted the woman as nuns in the Order but didn't permit them to "preach before a congregation of monks, though the selected ones among the later could

preach before a congregation of nuns."¹ The Christian fathers also held that it was contrary to nature that women are allowed to preach. Islam also permits woman the readings of the Koran but not its preachings.² In the pre-Budhistic period the woman lived a miserable life having no dignity, honour, feelings and emotions. The age shared the view that matter determines relations which becomes expressive in the treatment meted out to the woman. If the birth of a daughter was interpreted as judgement it was not for any spiritual implications but financial which perverted man's sense of decency. The idea continued to plague his conscience that the woman was a burden from the birth to marriage and the money incurred on her care had no promising return, she being someone else's property in marriage. This destroyed the human feelings and filial bonds of affection which had a devastating impact on woman's identity as well. The wife's identity was measured in terms of a child bearer: "...and except when she took part in certain sacrifices, and was of importance as the wife of the sacrificer, her life was spent in complete subservience to her husband and his parents. She was allowed little authority at home and no part in public activities. If widowed, she

¹. Vinaya, Chullavagga, X, i., 4.
². J.L.Davies, A Short History, p. 238.
became the possession of her father again, or of her son
and relapsed into personal insignificance; though as a
mother of sons she was an exception, for as such she
occupied a unique position which was due to the respect
that she then commanded."¹ The woman inducted into the
Order were known as the Almswoman or the bhikshuni.
Their status and rank in the Order was lower than that of
the monk which shows that the stand-point of Budhism in
regard to man's attitude to woman seemed to be rooted in
the larger frame-work of the period of Hindu conservatism.

"A bhikshuni, though of a long standing,
must bow before a bhikshu ordained much
later than her... A Bhikshuni was not
allowed to spend the rainy season in a
place where there was no bhikshu."²

Thus, the existence of the Order of Almswomen is a
testimony that Budhism did not support the popular cult
that mother-hood is the ultimate destiny and the sole
function of a woman, and that she is an inferior being
and her position is a little higher than animal in plane
of beings, "intermediate between men and animals"³. Thus
the scattered references in Pali Literature and Jatak's

1. Women Under Primitive Buddhism, Delhi: Motilal
2. Nalinaksha Dutt, "Great Women in Buddhism" in Great
Women of India, ed. Swami Madhavananda and R.C.
3. Ibid., p. 4.
stories have painted the woman as a vile and monstrous creature, they warn man to keep them away because they are the great obstacles to the fulfilment of spiritual aspirations. Budha’s reflections on the woman’s unreliability in general seem to have been influenced by the existing texts. Instead of assuring the right place as the woman enjoyed in the Vedic societies, the religio-cultural interpretations in Budhistic texts have projected a perverted outlook in regard to her placement in the social structure. For example, what is the image of a mother which is projected in one of the Jatak’s stories, “In Lust Unbridled”. The protagonist is Bodhisatta’s mother who is portrayed as a lecherous woman to the degrees that she hurls the axe to kill her own son for her young lover:

“So lustful, vile, and degraded are women that, giving the rein to lust, a hag like this, and old as she was, actually thirsted for the blood of so dutiful a son!”

levels of religious attainment. the Swetambara go about clad in cotton robes. Both agree that nudity is not permitted for woman but the contention that salvation is associated with nudity is highly superfluous. That is, in salvation the guise of spiritual liberation sanctioned only to man has been a threat to the women's identity in religious fold. This provided insight into the nature and genesis of the characteristic gender - discrimination and sexuality in traditional India.

The standpoint of Christianity and Islam towards the woman is very much like Hinduism which suffer from ambiguous standards of socio-moral norms: they sanction untrammeled freedom to man and deny to woman what is needed for simple expression of her freedom and individuality. On the one hand, they hail the woman as mother-goddess in art, mythology literature, but on the contrary, they have painted her as inferior and impoverished to sustain the myth of male-dominance. In the wake of paganism, as in the pre-Aryan culture in India, there flourished all the fertility and regeneration myths through female symbolism but underneath the suggestion of degradation is apparent. What is the explanation of Adam's act of shifting the entire blame of the dire event to Eve as if she were alone the source of evil? God accepts Adam's explanation of the sin:
"The woman whom thou gayest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."¹

In the Ephesians also the woman is projected as a mute slave to the husband. The text of St. Paul’s letter to Ephesians is abundantly an injunction to marginalisation of the woman’s status:

"Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands."²

Islam also supports the patriarchal structure of society placing man higher than the woman. Islam advocates man’s sway over the woman in regard to looking after their safety and guarding them against the impending hazards, "Men are protection over women. Men are a degree above them, the women."³ The following verse

"Your women are a tilth for you (to cultivate) so go to your tilth as ye will, and send (good seeds) before you for your souls."⁴

brings in the recurrent symbol of seed and earth which sanctions man to treat his wife as he wills, with utter disregard of the situation whether woman’s emotions and sentiments are honoured: as the tiller’s ploughing the

1. Genesis, Ch.3
2. Ephesians, Ch. 4-5, 23
3. The Holy Quran, Ch.2, XXVIII, 228.
4. Ibid., p.223.
field to sow seeds shows his right of being the sole owner of a patch of land, so the verse shows a woman being converted into a commodity to be owned by man.

Apart from what religion has done to create identity crisis through myths and legends, the historical, political and cultural factors have also been instrumental in denying woman her lawful place in the society. In historical context the woman lost her old traditional honour that she commanded in the Vedic society under the fear of invasions and assaults on her modesty by the foreign rulers. In the primitive societies, survival was continually exposed to the threats of war and invasions and therefore the sons were more in demand than the daughters because they could save themselves and their parents. It is this fear-complex born of the beastly practices to carry away woman as war-prizes that the Islamic tradition of purda became acceptable in the 11th century in India. Man in time of crisis takes extra pains to keep his women protected from the forces of social disorder, one implication of which is to limit their activities and freedom within the domestic circles. But in the state of incarceration the woman is more exposed to the vulgar witch-crafts of the priestly class who take opportunities to exercise its authority on the women and condemn them to live within the stuffy precincts of the household. Such a pattern of
existence fosters ignorance, moral backwardness and superstitions among the women-folk. Even the evil and savage customs of Sati had religio-cultural sanction in context of the belief that the man would need the same things in the next life what he needs in this life on earth. This propagated a myth that the highest duty of a woman is to burn herself with the husband. But no sane person can turn blind to this ill-founded faith that a woman will live in heaven for as many thousands of years as there are hairs on the human body in case she roasts her alive with the husband. The system was inhuman, savage and barbaric. That is why, it could not have the universal acceptance. Even the ancient Hindu texts hardly make any mention of it and if there is any casual reference in the Shastras it is voluntary. "The Rgveda does not mention anywhere the practice of the burning or burial of widows with their dead husbands."¹ However, in some families the moral law as instituted by Manu² was practiced and which destroyed a number of healthy old customs including the remarriage of a widow thereby converting her life into a nightmare. In the words of A.I.I. Basam, the lot of a widow was very hard:

"Moreover a widow was inauspicious to everyone but her own children. Wherever she went her presence cast a gloom on all

¹ Shakuntla Rao, Women in the Vedic Age, Bombay: Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, 1960, p.27
² Manav Dharama Shastra, V, 162
about her. She could never attend the family festivals which played so big a part in Hindu life, for she would bring bad luck on all present. She was still a member of her husband’s family, and could not return to that of her father. Always watched by the parents and relatives of her lord, lest she broke her vows and imperiled the dead man’s spiritual welfare, shunned, as unlucky even by the servants, her life must often have been miserable in the extreme."

The colonial regime witnessed the mounting waves of change with the establishment of the English language and the zeal of Christian missionaries, had a deep impact on the mind of the intellectual and the religious leaders of Bengal. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chander Vidya Sagar came forward to eradicate the social evils and liberate the woman from the rusty chains of tradition and orthodoxy. The rise of the Brahmo-Samaj, and the education system as Macaulay introduced purged Hinduism much of its superstitious character. The Arya Samaj too stressed revival of Vedic pattern of life which held woman in honour and sanctioned equality. The humanists and the religious leaders brought to the notice of Sir William Bentick the pathetic condition of the women, he banned the burnings of the widows in 1818, the Widow-Remarriage Act was passed in 1856, laws were promulgated to ban the child marriage by raising the marriage age of

1. The Wonder That Was India, p. 36
the girl so as to save her from being the victim of man's lust.

With the appearance of Gandhi on the contemporary political scene of the country, the predicament of a woman underwent a sea change since Gandhi opened the door for the woman to fully participate in the political stir. The woman came forward to get themselves involved in freedom struggle movement, they played a constructive role as their men did in the making of the nation. The life of active participation and involvement in mass movements created a distinct identity of the woman, now she considered herself not a weak and a cowardly person, what they needed was the direction, the initiation and the will to shed away inhibition's, fears, and weaknesses:

"She has the right to participate in the minute details of the activities of man, and she has the same right of freedom and liberty as he. She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity as man is in his."  

The anti-feminist forces have been very hostile stance in regard to the women's biological constrains: the women, they hold, cannot be as much the means of production and participate in the productive activities of the economy as men can do. But the whole argument smacks of intrigue and egotism. The findings of the

anthropologists and the sociologists have shown that it was the woman who first invented agriculture and pottery and secondly in the division of labour the food-gathering fell to her share, hunting to man's. And it is sheer irony that man is rated higher in terms of biology for his killing-instinct which is barbaric and has nothing heroic about it. The myth of biological imperfection was exploded during the First World War when the women replaced men to drive vehicles and work in factories. Thus, it is man who sustains the illusion of superiority by assigning work suiting the interest of his class. Margaret Polathick has rightly shown the man-made bungling in division of labour between the two sexes including the child-rearing responsibility which "is no sacred fate of nature, but a social policy which supports male domination in the society and in the family... Man, as the subordinate group, don't want child rearing responsibility, so they assign it to women. Women's functioning as child rearers reinforces, in turn, their subordinate position." Therefore, studies as such amply substantiate the view that women are not biologically inferior, rather the economy factor and the socio-cultural pattern of the two sexes based on power and privileges are the root cause of a women's subjection.

The socio-economic forces have their own distinct role to play in assigning a meaning to a woman's status in the society. With the opening up of job-opportunities in the competitive wage earning market the woman has begun to share household financial responsibilities which the traditionalists look upon as something scandalous, revolting and unconventional, their argument, being that it will pervert the existing value system and corrode the bond of relationship between the mother and the children. There is also a strong likelihood they hold that the children could go refractory and indulge in objectionable activities in absence of motherly surveillance. But it can be interpreted either way. One retrograde view is that a woman's employment leads to the dissolution of the family, whereas its positive gain is that the place of work ensures her greater freedom and opportunities to develop a harmonious personality and relationship outside economic efficiency. A look-back out the Smriti period shows the dismal picture born of the economic insecurity when the custom of polygamy made the woman suffer pangs of humiliation, poverty and exploitation. If Manu sanctioned a husband to take another wife with the consent of the first, does it mean that man should turn blind to the plight of a co-wife in the household? If the woman has nothing to fall back upon it is the cardinal sin, in Jamesian terms, to exploit someone's
weakness for asserting supremacy. Manu accords the sanction to the woman to stay with her parents on the condition that she will not claim any inheritance or maintenance but the disheartening picture which his theory involves establishes the supremacy of the husband over his wife in marriage. Hence, the logic which men advance against women is distorted: if woman employment sprouts seeds of mal-adjustment, the fault lies more "in a social environment than in the context of her job." The socio-economic factors, the garb of religion, encourage the system of devdasis, the Lords hand-maidens. The system goes back to the third century A.D. and lost its original halo with the fading glory of the priestly class when it lost the monopolistic control over the temple. They were sexually exploited by the temple priest who could have illicit relations with them without marrying and then they fell prey to the lust of the management. The centre of evil was rooted in socio-economic factors. As such, their lives became so miserable that they could hardly live on singing and dancing and thus turned to prostitution or to serve as concubines of some powerful patrons of the temple. Thus, the institutions of sacred slave girl, "degenerated into

religious prostitution and from hand-maidens of gods they came to be known as religious prostitutes.\textsuperscript{1}

The social relations are bound up with the ways the men or women produce their material life. In an exploitative system like capitalism, the capitalist class, by virtue of their owning the means of production, propagate a consumerist culture: they exploit the labour power for its profit. The productive forces and the relations of production according to Marx form the economic structure which is known as the economic base or the infrastructure. In a consumer’s society the profit motive is primary, no importance is attached to human dignity. Man as commodity enjoys an important place if he has exchange value and the moment he ceases to be of any material use to one he has been serving through out his life he is thrown away like a garbage. Such a socio-economic proposition does more harm to woman than it does to man.

The three groups of feminist movement launched for woman’s liberation in the west - the moderates, the radicals and the sociolists - have shown their concern with the crisis of a woman’s identity. They have initiated the idea of sisterhood as a strategy of survival in time of distress to assert the identity of

their true self which the traditionalists condemn as an act of disobedience and revolt against the accepted norms of morality. They look upon it as a primitive - militant idea which will pollute the flow of life and they are right since their interest is to keep the woman disjointed and sequestered for easy exploitation which is a reflection of their each of group - loyalty. The very idea of being near to each other is Christian, which assures emotional stability as Juliet Mitchell observes:

"It involves a redefinition of the value and status of personal experience. The personal becomes the political: that is the nature of women's oppression can be analyzed through the medium of accounts of private experiences."¹

The gender discrimination and the resultant socio-economic disparities between the two sexes are the creation of the socio-cultural ambience. The crisis of feminine identity sometime grows so alarming that even a minor scuffle for want of understanding and tolerance and reciprocity, develops into physical and psychological alienation. Marriage that brings emotional compatibility, economic security and love is reduced to a mechanical routine of life devoid of warmth of human passions. The small things such as keeping the bath room

clean, making household purchases together, sending children to school in time become serious threats to her femininity. The findings of a Los Angles psychiatrist Isa Dore Zifer Stein authenticate the dilemma.

"In many homes, it's in the bath room that the seeds of marital discord are sown. Because it is used repeatedly on a daily basis, any areas of dispute regarding that room are rekindled every time a mate enters it. You would be surprised at the petty things that turn a bathroom into a battle ground."¹

The sociologists are of the view that the psychological imbalances and maladjustment in life create identity crisis as the benefits of the advancement of science and technology are shared more by the elite class, being more exposed to the changing cultural environment than the under-privileged. This creates feelings of superiority-complex, not between a man and a woman but between a women and a women. One of the exponents of the theory of moderate feminism is John Stuart Mill. He points out that the factors to subjugate woman are cultural and psychological. That is, the value attached to a woman by man together with her biological constrains binding her to a state of bondage converts the physical fact into a legal right and thus the distinctions and discriminations are the result of 'subjecting environment' and hence artificial. The resultant menace of the existing socio-cultural milieu can be surmounted by making the women

¹. Purnima Sharma and Manju Mathew, "Bathroom Squabbles", The Times of India, 22 June, 1996, p. 1
conscious that nature has created them not as object to gratify man's appetite but live a life of her own as much as her men do: "A mere consciousness... alone would effect an immense expansion of the faculties of their moral sentiments."¹

The radical feminists look upon the crisis of a woman's individuality in context of history. The history of the world is not the history of the struggle of the classes between the bourgeois and the proletariat but the history of the struggle between the sexes to determine relations in terms of reproduction, not production. And therefore, the real cause of female servitude is not economy but the biological reality to convert her existence into a sex class: "Men and women were created different and not equally privileged."² Simone de Beauvoir has enriched the philosophy of this school. Her The Second Sex makes a plea for economic independence. She is militant in her attitude to sex revolution to the extent of exhorting the woman not to marry and bear children. She is critical of the education which is imparted to the women and which narrows down their vision to developing a thinking that they as human being are

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inferior to man. Thus Kalpana Shah takes a middle path
to liberate woman from male oppression which is "not just
the elimination of male privilege but of sex distinction
itself: genital difference between human beings would no
longer matter culturally."\(^1\)

The socialist feminist holds capitalism responsible
for oppression of both man and woman, in a class society
the woman has first to fight out the designs of the
forces of her own exploitation before she can think of
fighting for the cause of the minority oppressed group.
And therefore the female oppression and the resultant
identity - crisis is to be examined into broader
perspective taking in view the capitalist ethos of life,
it can not be discussed in isolation "from all other
oppressions... in a class society and faced with the
global aggression of imperialistic capitalism and the
existence of national liberation struggles women had to
form alliances with other exploited and oppressed groups
to free themselves and their sister"\(^2\) The open advocacy
of this school for abolition of private property and a
change in the relation of production is a positive step
to end gender - discrimination and instil confidence in

\(^1\) Quoted in Deckard Barbara's, The Women's Movement,

\(^2\) Angela Weir and Elizabeth Wilson, "The British
Women's Movement", New Left Review, No. 148,
(Nov./Dec., 1984), p.79
woman to make her feel that she is as vital a component of social life as man is. Marx and Engels hold that man's bourgeois acquisitive thrust and the evolution of family have reduced the woman to a commodity - item in a capitalist society. The communal structure of society broke under the pressure of monogamy into a family as economic unit which replaced the mother-right will the father-right in patriarchy. This led to discord rather than reconciliation of man and woman, it paved way for "the subjugation of one sex by the other as the proclamation of a conflict between the sexes entirely unknown hitherto in pre-historic times."

With the change in the scale of value, there is felt a tremor in patriarchal structure which, if not comprehended in right perspective may result in psychological and emotional violence. No one can turn blind to the social reality that a less literate mother feels uneasy when she sees her school going sophisticated daughter openly defy her motherly commands or would feel as if her traditional image of an authoritarian mother-in-law were collapsing when the educated daughter-in-law refuses to play a submissive role in a nuclear family. She can scarcely appreciate the positive aspect of the growing scale of education which decreases the scale of

violence perpetrated on them by an otherwise ego-centric master. The woman's efforts to seek self-realisation and freedom will be of no avail unless men wholeheartedly show concern with the plight of a woman in society where there is less insight and education to understand each other's concern. There is a greater need to see that the artificial and dubious moral standards do not grow alarming to create identity-crisis by generating a false value-system. The reciprocity involvement, communication and understanding are sustained in life in proportion to the amount of sharing the genuineness of emotions and feelings in theory and praxis. That, is the less the moral hypocrisy, the more is the marital harmony and conjugal happiness.