INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER I

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Mainstream Moral Philosophy excluded all questions of “Gender” from its purview on the ground that the scope of Philosophy is not desired to be narrowed down by any limited or partial concern. It is argued that the concern of philosophy has always been a universal one; whereas “Gender” speaks about the concrete realities of individual existence, highly specific of specific existence, which does not refer to and hence fails to be a characteristic representation of universal humanness. In no way should it, therefore, constitute the prime or any genuine concern of philosophy. The kind of ethics that is entailed by this sort of philosophical belief is supposed to assume a gender neutral character. But Feminists are committed to develop a critique showing how the traditional ethics together with traditional philosophy, irrespective of the claim for gender neutrality, all throughout remained gender-biased. The only possible way to eliminate this gender biasedness, the feminists say, is to bring gender from the periphery to the centre of disciplinary pursuits. Hence, gender mainstreaming of each and every discipline inclusive of Ethics is an urgency. That is to say, Feminists are highly sceptical of the gender-blind pursuits of mainstream ethics and wish to rebase ethics on concrete realities of individuals’ gendered positionings.

The feminists have identified the traditional ethical theories as basically male centred. These, according to them, have either intentionally excluded women
or else have used certain male moral experience as the standard for all moral experiences, thereby resulting once again in exclusion of women's experiences. This act of exclusion of women's experience from moral discourse has given birth to a tradition that emphasises reason over emotion, impartiality over partiliaty, autonomy over interdependence or dependence, the abstract over concrete, the universal over the particular, and justice over caring. In the moral accounts provided so far by the traditional ethicists human nature is understood as essentially rational and hence male-centred. It is further stated that women can never be as rational as men, since their nature restricts them to the world of emotion or passion only and not to reason. If they are not rational they cannot act as moral agents too. This belief of traditional ethics gets its standard formulation in the sayings of Kant.¹

"This is practically good, however, which determined the will by means of conceptions of reason ...... on principles which are valid for every rational being as such. It is distinguished from the pleasant as that which influences the will only by means of sensation from merely subjective causes, valid only for the sense of this or that one and not as a principle of reason which holds for every one."²

But then again turning to women's case Kant speaks of quite a different thing. The essence of his saying formulates the view that women lack humanly essential characteristic, that is to say, they lack the sort of moral agency which is characteristic of human nature (as rational beings). He adds thus: "Women will avoid the wicked not because it is unright, but only because it is ugly..... Nothing of duty, nothing of compulsion, nothing of obligation ! ....... They do something only because it pleases them ..... I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles?³

Numerous illustrations can be cited from the existing stock of literature in the concerned area to show that how philosophical convention of the like sort has become the standard way of representing women nature as falling short of rational human nature. This exclusion of women's experiences from the moral discourse is
justified on the ground that women cannot be moral agents, since they are not rational. By way of entailment we are thus led to the position that virtues of traditional ethics, so viewed, can nothing but be rational and hence male. And therefore, traditional or mainstream ethics cannot justify its claim for universality, objectivity and gender neutrality — the standards from which were drawn the legitimacy of the various moral maxims or principles of it. What the Feminists strongly object is this — no description of human nature can ever claim universality if it is not comprehensive enough to include all humans under it. If half of the entire human kingdom has to be left out of any such account, it is obvious, that the so-called attribute of rationality either should no longer be treated as essence of human nature or else the features of the excluded portion have to be assessed again afresh with some other criteria that do equal justice to people belonging to both genders. Feminist perspectives to ethics legitimize their entry against this contextuality. The feminists’ critique of the traditional mainstream Ethics is based on this charge that because of its inherent gender bias, in the name of gender distinctions, Ethics has so far been justifying discriminations.

Considered against this backdrop Feminist Ethicists propose to devise new outlines of moral discourse which do justice to women’s experiences and liberate ethics from the chained grip of the so-called reason, objectivity and abstract universality. Nonetheless it is also equally significant to ask in this context, to what extent Feminist approaches to ethics would do justice to the fundamental claims of Ethics as a science, would address the standard of universality, would appeal to universal humanness or else would dispense with the very notion of universal ethics. This issue is quite problematic, since non-inclusion of the variety of women’s experiences already had stigmatized traditional ethics as gender biased. While inclusion of the same may endanger the very existence of Universal Ethics leading only to the formulation of either Male Ethics or Female Ethics or Male Ethics and Female Ethics. The present research work undertaken by us ponders upon and
also assesses the problems and prospects of basing Ethics on differences, both between the genders and within the genders. The title of the dissertation "Gender distinctions in Ethics: Problems and Prospects" draws its justification precisely from this background. The present work also explores the viability of developing some accommodative theoretical framework for ethics which does justice to genders and also is able to sustain its appeal to universality. The study pinpoints that bare accommodation of a new perspective, keeping the existing structure undisturbed may dilute the entire issue. Hence it is more a case for legitimization of gender through recasting of fundamental concepts behind the ethical theory.

Feminist approaches to ethics, often known collectively as feminist ethics, are distinguished by an explicit commitment to correcting male biases they perceive in traditional ethics, biases that may be manifest in rationalizations of women’s subordinations or in disregard for or disparagement of women’s moral experience. Feminist ethics, begins from the convictions that the subordination of women is morally wrong and that the moral experience of women is as worthy of respect as that of men. The goal of feminist ethics is to develop philosophical accounts of the nature of morality and of the central moral concepts that duly treat women’s moral experience. Feminist ethics rejects a priori premise of male superiority. It has opened up a wealth of issues related to sexuality, the bodily self, moral connectedness, care and trust, friendship, emotion and also like these many others.

The history of western philosophy includes a number of isolated but indisputable instances of moral opposition to women’s subordination. Noteworthy examples are Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Frederick Engels’, *The origin of the family, private property and the State* (1884), Virginia Wolf’s *A Room of one’s own* (1929), Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), Carol Gilligan’s *In A Different Voice* (1982), Alison Jaggar’s *Feminist Ethics* (1989) and many others whom we will find even in third wave feminism.
That, a person's moral perceptions are highly influenced by the situational reality of her existence, came to constitute the base of this new Ethics. Gilligan claimed that her women subjects spoke in a moral voice different from that used by the male subjects whose thinking had been taken as normative in most previous moral psychology. She believed that she has identified two distinct moral perspectives: (i) the justice perspective that men supposed to prefer and which was also the preferred perspective in western moral philosophy, (ii) the care perspective which women supposedly preferred but which western moral psychology and philosophy considered as less rational. Gilligan's work had enormous influence in moral philosophy. One important consequence of Gilligan's work was that it challenged and brought out the limitations of moral perceptions held by Western Philosophy, Psychology or Ethics. Her thesis could satisfactorily contest the view that moral rationality could be discovered or defined by reason alone, in which women are altogether neglected. Feminist philosophers argued that the prevalent topics, interests, and modes of argument in moral philosophy reflect a distinctively male point of view, and they sought to change the practice of the discipline to make it less male-biased in these respects. The feminist approach received considerable impetus from the publication of *In a Different Voice*. Gilligan's work was written in response to research by Lawrence Kohlberg, who claimed to have discovered a universal set of stages of moral development through which normal human beings pass as they mature into adulthood. Kohlberg claimed that children and young adults gradually progress toward more abstract and more impartial forms of ethical reasoning, culminating in the recognition of individual rights. However, when Gilligan studied moral development in girls and young women, she found less emphasis on impartiality and rights and more on love and compassion for the individuals with whom her subjects had relationships. Although Gilligan's findings and methodology were criticized, her suggestion that the moral outlook of women is different from that of men led to proposals for a distinctly feminist ethics—an "ethic of care." As developed in works
such as *Caring* (1984), by the American feminist philosopher Nel Noddings, this approach held that normative ethics should be based on the idea of caring for those with whom one has a relationship, whether that of parent, child, sibling, lover, spouse, or friend. Caring should take precedence over individual rights and moral rules, and obligations to strangers may be limited or nonexistent. The approach emphasized the particular situation, not abstract moral principles.

Feminist like Gilligan's critique of traditional ethics brings out the flaws in Ethic of Justice. This ethic speaks of a perspective where from ethical decisions are made on the basis of universal principles, in an impartial manner, with a view to ensuring the fair and equitable treatment of all people. The matters of involvement, harmonious relations and needs of others, that is to say, an overall concern over others in no way do constitute the concern of this ethics. While impartiality, universality, rules and rights are the standard criteria referred to by the ethic of justice, Feminist. Ethics in general thrives on emotional relationships of attachment and networks of concrete relationships, connections, loyalties and circles of concern. In view of the aforesaid contrast between the traditional and feminist ethical perspectives it becomes pertinent to raise the following questions:

i] Is it a fact that men and women manifest different types of morality?

ii] If it is a fact, how are we to explain and analyze this 'difference'? That is to say, how this 'difference' in moral experiences can be theorized?

iii] Which factors contribute to differences in moral perceptions among males and females (biological, psycho-sexual, social or cultural)?

iv] Conformity to which standard – Gender Neutrality or Equality would eliminate better discriminations and injustices grounded on gender? Or

What should be the aspired goals of Feminist Ethics – a gender neutral or gender equal society?
Can we ever significantly talk of Ethics with Gender distinctions without succumbing to the view of preference for any of the genders? Can Ethics satisfy the claims of universality even when accommodative of gendered perspectives? Or, else it should be taken beyond genders?

The research work undertaken by us is committed to address a few issues or queries like those stated in the above paragraphs. The sequence of the chapters is arranged in conformity to the order of contents of thoughts to be placed for thorough discussion and evaluation. The chapterizations will follow the following pattern:

Chapter I : Introduction
Chapter II : Gender Biasedness in Traditional Ethics.
Chapter IV : Women's Moral Selves and Moral subjectivity.
Chapter V : Gender Distinctions and Gender Neutrality: Towards a Gender Egalitarian Ethics.
Chapter VI : Conclusion.

In the second chapter, we would reflect upon the gender biased-ness of traditional ethics. We would try to show to what extent traditional ethics is male centred and consequentially fails to justify its claims for universality and gender neutrality. Historically, distributions of reason (rationality, knowledge, objectivity) have been extended to men and what men do and not to women and what women do. Conceptions of reason and rationality assign higher status (value, prestige) to characteristics which have been associated with males or the activity of men. Political philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Hobbes, Locke and
Rousseau — all stood for natural differences between men and women, men being naturally more rational are suited to politics and public life and irrational women more suited to emotional life of the home. Traditionalists say that women are suited to caring for home and family. The "ears" of traditional Western ethicists have been attuned to male rather than female ethical "voices." Right from the Platonic and Aristotelian period the dualism between reason-passion or mind and body started gaining prominence. Men are identified with rationality and hence contrasted with women whose sphere is believed to be that of emotion and feeling. Through the Association of the masculine values with reason (the feminine with irrational), was created the standard prototype of moral virtues. Hence women's moral agency is said to have often been denied, not simply by the act of exclusion of women from moral debate or sheer ignorance of their contributions, but through philosophical claims to the effect that women lack moral reason. Such claims were made originally by Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and even philosophers like Freud, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and many others. They make a distinction between masculine and feminine values. The masculine values are independence, autonomy, intellect, will, wariness, hierarchy, domination, culture, transcendence, product, asceticism, war, and death over the supposedly feminine values of interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion, body, trust, absence of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace. Feminist Ethicists, in general, argue for freeing ethics from its deep male-biased nature and emphasize on rethinking and reformulation of the ethical concepts.

In the third chapter we shall discuss about the basic features of the different feminist ethical trends. Taken in itself 'Feminist Ethics' is a kind of moral theory which is distinguished by its attention to women's experience of oppression and which seeks to criticize and change unjust social structures and practices. The present chapter encapsulates not only attempts to prepare a critique of mainstream moral theorizing, but also Feminists' attempts to develop new moral theories which
are engaged with women's lives. Feminist ethics shares the general feminist goal of eliminating the subordination and oppression of women and enhancing societal respect for women's viewpoints and capacities. Towards this end, feminist ethics adopts a number of diverse methodological strategies, including the defense of theories and concepts that seem more compatible with women's modes of reflection and understanding than to those of mainstream ethics. Feminists have developed a wide variety of women-centered approaches to ethics, including those labelled "feminine," "maternal," and "lesbian." Each of these approaches to ethics highlights the differences between men's and women's respective situations in life — biological and social; provides strategies for dealing with issues that arise in private as well as public life; and offers action guides intended to undermine rather than bolster the present systematic subordination of women. Considered together the over all aim of all feminist approaches to ethics, irrespective of their specific labels, is to create a gender-equal ethics, a moral theory that generates non-sexist moral principles, policies, and practices. A feminist approach to ethics asks questions about power — that is, about domination and subordination — even before it asks questions about good and evil, care and justice, or maternal and paternal thinking.

There are, for example, liberal, Marxist, radical, socialist, multicultural, global, and ecological feminists who have offered various explanations and sometimes conflicting solutions to the problems posed by the differences between the sexes and these are purported to resolve the value conflicts embedded in contemporary ethical dilemmas. Liberal feminism argues that women and men are essentially similar, and therefore women should be equally represented in public arenas dominated by men — work, government, the professions, and the sciences. Liberal feminism finds the roots of women's oppression in cultural constraints that hinder women from competing in the public world. Socialist feminists refer to four structures which determine woman's condition: production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children. Women must be convinced of their own value. Marxist and socialist
feminisms argue that the source of women's oppression is their economic dependence on men. Radical feminism's theoretical watchword is patriarchy, or men's pervasive oppression and exploitation of women, which can be found wherever women and men are in contact with each other, in private as well as in public. Radical feminism argues that patriarchy is very hard to eradicate because its root — the belief that women are different and inferior — is deeply embedded in most men's consciousness. Radical feminism turns male-dominated culture on its head. It takes all the characteristics that are valued in male-dominated societies — objectivity, distance, control, coolness, aggressiveness, and competitiveness — and blames them for wars, poverty, rape, battering, child abuse, and incest. It praises what women do — feed and nurture, co-operate and reciprocate, and attend to bodies, minds, and psyches. In French feminist psychoanalytic theory, patriarchal culture signifies the sublimation of men's suppressed infantile desire for the mother and fear of the loss of the phallus, the symbol of masculine difference. Psychoanalytic feminism seeks explanations for the differences between male and female sexuality in infant and childhood experiences and promotes dual parenting as well as dual careers for heterosexual couples. Ecofeminism ties environmentalism to feminism. It argues that both these social movements are fighting the same enemy. Feminists define patriarchy as the power of men over women. Ecofeminists argue that patriarchy is also related to the degradation of the natural environment. The natural environment is a sacred realm from which humans can draw spiritual energy. We do not have a right to destroy it; instead it has rights to be respected like any human person. These are beliefs which deep ecology and ecofeminism share.

We shall try to make comparative estimate of these different feminist trends which have suggested several paths that women can work out, each of which is executed to lead towards the singular goal, namely, elimination of gender inequality.
The fourth chapter proposes to discuss how women’s moral selves are denied in the so-called male dominated world, which results in their subordination. Women have been cast, as lesser forms of the masculine individual since the self is believed to be essentially masculine, and the masculine self is essentially good and wise. Women are consigned to selflessness - that is, to invisibility, subservient passivity, and self-sacrificial altruism. It is significant of Feminists’ realization that different moral discourses define different kinds of morality. Feminist reconstructions of the nature of the self are interwoven with arguments that draw out the emancipatory benefits of conceiving the women’s self. This chapter is also intended to discuss the contemporary concept of subject that is appropriate to the task of a feminist reconceptualization of moral theory. The different moral voices speak of different identities or moral agencies which need to be addressed by adequate moral discourses. Some feminists believe that theories on sexuality are also bound to the theories of subjectivity, in the patriarchal world. Feminism has remade ‘subjectivity’ with reference to their relational view of self. The Feminists’ challenges to the traditional model of self bear distinct marks as against that of the Freudians, Existentialists or Postmodernists. Though in many feminists’ works the views on self quite often draw a theoretical base from the basic contours of Freudianism, Existentialism or Postmodernism.

In the fifth chapter we propose to show what problems are obvious with Ethics based on gender distinctions. That patriarchy’s use of gender distinctions in the realm of Ethics has resulted in gender discriminations is an undeniable fact. But can Ethics really be made free from gender biasedness by the adoption of any feminist perspective ? It is important as well to see what problems may crop up if we base Ethics on the fundamental distinction between male nature and female nature. Side by side we also would try to assess how much merit is there in the Feminists’ pledge for gender mainstreaming of Ethics. By drawing a contrasting parallel between the two ideals of Gender Neutrality and Gender Equality we shall
ponder upon the strategic importance and contextual priority of the one over the other, if any, here in this chapter.

The concluding chapter besides presenting, in brief, summing up of the entire work undertaken, also evaluates the contribution of Feminist theories in the domain of Ethics. The dissertation ends with justifying introduction of gender in Ethics. It goes in favour of the contention that our understanding of moral situation becomes definitely better if it is gender sensitized.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

