



Research Paper

The Othering of Woman: Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

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Abstract: *The present paper presents de Beauvoir's analysis of psychoanalysis theory. The theory is criticised for applying patriarchal ideas or masculine approach to explain women's experience. And for de Beauvoir, Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis represented adopted man's view point in an attempt to show man to be the ideal model of the human beings. Which situated woman as the Other, the objectified one. The problem that impelled de Beauvoir to examine Psychoanalysis is that it portrays woman in a manner who lacks subjectivity due to the fact that she is a woman and only a man is the qualified being for transcendence. Psychoanalysis perceives woman's biological aspects and shows it is in 'nature' weaker than man. In this regard, the paper unfolds de Beauvoir's the critical approach to disprove Freud's claims through Psychoanalytic theory.*

Keywords: *Subjectivity, the Other, Psychoanalysis, woman.*

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I. Introduction:

De Beauvoir's explication of female subjectivities derived from feminine myths. The underlying idea for investigating on female subjectivities is to find an answer to- why women the **Other**? which is not just an other, but inessential Other in her relation to men. The status female human as Other, is believed to have its origin in the idea of 'woman' as de Beauvoir contends "a woman is not born rather becomes one", this is interpreted as de Beauvoir's stand of disavowing any definitions claimed to have defined the meaning of being a 'woman'. De Beauvoir, following the existentialist notions, rejects any pre-established ideas that promote essence-centric definition of human being in general, and women in particular. It can be described here that 'woman' and 'female', for de Beauvoir convey different meanings. Parallel to de Beauvoir's idea of 'woman' and 'female', Toril Moi states, Her exposit for 'woman' implies embodiment of attributes that have been identified and believed to have designed to relegate female human, de Beauvoir observes "women, stay women, become women. Not every female human being is necessarily a woman, she must take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity"¹. In de Beauvoir's articulation of femininity, it has been precisely identified with the ideas that conform females to a passive and submissive being. Femininity is, therefore for de Beauvoir, a myth. Because, if femininity no longer exist today, then it never existed. Therefore, there is a need to redefine femininity as many female humans have and still believe in the idea of femininity and 'woman'. In this regard, we will analyse de Beauvoir's explication of two theories of psychoanalysis for its understanding of subjectivities and how the theory has treated the idea of woman and femininity.

De Beauvoir's Analysis of the Psychoanalysis theory: Based on de Beauvoir's discernment of Freud's psychoanalytic idea it can be observed that there are two areas that de Beauvoir criticised psychoanalytic ideas concerning women. Firstly, the notions of castration anxiety and penis envy (castration complex) which centre around male organ (phallus). Castration anxiety occurs in a boy when he develops incestuous feelings for his opposite sex parents, and due to which he develops a feeling of rivalry with the father. And because of this incestuous feelings for his mother he fears a castration by his father as a punishment. On the other hand, girl child having found the anatomical differences between in boys and girls miss having a phallus

and thinks she is mutilated or castrated without the knowledge that she was born without one. In both the cases we find phallus plays the central role. It would be safe to assert that these notions are axiomatic proposition in nature. Phallus, according to de Beauvoir, considered of having great importance is due to the symbolic value it emphasises. The phallus manifest power, pride, strength which is again equated with masculinity. Along with power and pride, the masculine symbol is analogous to transcendence. Phallus is a constant source of transcendence for boys, it continuously provide a kind of "alter ego"² that intergrates him with the feeling of transcendence. It is this transcendence that enable males to assert themselves as a subject. It is very much reflected in Freud's theory the significance he has given to the phallus. Freud implicitly assert the universal predominance of males and female's desire to be dominated.

On the other hand the penis envy moment in girl child is not simply due to the anatomical difference at macro level, but because of the same idea of symbolic value phallus represents. De Beauvoir states if penis envy occurs, it is due to the privileges enjoyed by boys and also because of the place father holds in a family. Phallus is discussed of such worth is due to the fact that it symbolizes a dominance which is excercised in other domains and the lack of penis prevents her from being conscious of herself as a sexual being. Taking an excerpt from Adler de Beauvoir explains, the human drama can be seen as an interplay of will to power, inferiority complex and flight from reality. Will to power implies every individual's desire to have authority and rule over others which lead to an inferiority complex due to the realisation that power is yet to attain and lastly flight from reality means when a person move away from the reality due to the fear that he may not be able to cope. The very idea of power for female is associated with masculinity, and therefore in order to achive this power she rejects her own femininity³. Female's urge to assert herself as subject is so strong that her sitaution is epitomized in the conflict between her viriloid and her feminine tendencies. For Freud, only viriloid has the tendency to posit a subject and hence femininity remains with the immanent being. "If woman should succeed in establishing herself as subject, she would invent equivalents of the phallus; in fact, the doll, incarnating the promise of the baby that is to come in the future, can become a possession more precious than penis"⁴, the quote not only suggests female as passive agent but it also raises concern how her subjectivity is supprsed through the absence of phallus. Karen Horney⁵, in her *Genesis of Castration Complex in Women*, explains the emergence of penis envy or castration complex is not necessarily because of symbolic values but it could be because of other factors. Horney extricated Penis envy from symbollic values and its place firmly confirms that in many people this complex is due to anatomical disadvantage. Now for her, the anatomical disadvantage relates with scotophillic instincts particularly urethral instincts that give men more advantages related with the position while urinating and women's desire to pass urine like men. It is true of Horney that female suffers from some anatomical disadvantages as compared to male, but it cannot serve as a reason enough to justify to relegation of feminine characters. We can cite here the example of female, when they reach the age of puberty the process of menstruation starts whereas males are biologically free from such kind of bleeding, as menstruation could bring severe pain to the one going through it and can be stated as a set back. So, it is true anatomical disadvantage in female persist, but however, it is interesting to note here that how ceratin phenomena or processes are construed superior over the other.

The second point of criticism made by de Beauvoir on psychoanalyses is the description of female libido. Freud has done an extensive work of the development of libido in human and it is evident from his lectures on psychoanalysis that libido plays the most vital role to achive a healthy psychic, but according to de Beauvoir, Freud's idea is completely based on masculine model as he mentions libido is male in nature whether it occurs in male or female. The very idea that libido is male in essence would imply two things – firstly, there has been no attempt from Freud's side to examine female sexuality seperately and distinctively. Secondly, it would further reinforce that male is the 'norm' and everything else resonates around or emerges from this norm. Electra complex, as explained by Freud, has a very vague concept, it cannot be taken as a fact, as there is no any basic description to support female libido. It denies female of their authenticity. Libido is described as a form of energy that takes a central part in psychoanalyses and it seems to be of great importance to comprehend human behavior. As libido requires an object of eroticism, so, it would be wrong to assert in many level that a father is the source of genital excitation for his young daughter. De Beauvoir states "what defies the father is by no means the feminine libido". Thereby a notion of passive libido is drawn for female by Freud. This concept of passive libido is baffling as it is defined based on male as a drive or an energy. In connection to the libido de Beauvoir writes "we would more fully encompass reality if instead of defining the libido in vague terms of energy we brought the significance of sexuality into relation with that of other human attitudes – taking,

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capturing, eating, making, submitting, and so forth; for it is one of the various modes of apprehending an object. We should also study the qualities of the erotic object as it presents itself not only in the sexual act but also in observation in general. Such investigation extends beyond the frame of psychoanalyses, which assumes eroticism as irriducible”⁶. On the theory of libido, Erich Fromm, emphasis that it assumes serious patriarchal consequences. According to him, it could not recognize the nature of erotic love due to the polarization of male and female. So, freudian system is based on sexual but not erotic love⁷.

II. Conclusion:

Psychoanalysis, according to de Beauvoir has limited grasp of understanding of subjectivity per se and interpreted on sexual model alone. De Beauvoir observes, there is but one, masculine, libido and no feminine libido with its “own original nature”⁸. That is, Freud’s psychoanalysis has masculinity or virility as his central idea to approach other domain of study, especially the idea of subjectivity. Having masculine model embedded in psychoanalysis, it implies Freud takes for granted the socially constructed ideas of men and women, where the value is placed on virility. Due to valorization of virility as de Beauvoir would deem psychoanalysis as an inadequate theory to account for woman’s otherness. De Beauvoir alleges that psychoanalysis holds women to a fixed destiny, a developmental and teleological life process, precisely insofar as it defines subjects with reference to a past beyond their control. Due to Freud’s ‘sexual monism’ and viriloid idea, the characteristics of femininity and subjectivity are presented as divergent and incompatible with one another. By assigning to women an essence or determinate identity, the psychoanalysis reliance on sexual categories once again renders woman as the other to a subject rather than a subject herself, and thereby denies her existential freedom. Women might be able to be full persons, subjects with agency, but at the expense of their femininity; or they can embark on femininity, but only by sacrificing their independence and agency. This idea of either/or between the masculinization of subjectivity and conform to femininity retains the moral, political and corporeal incarceration that precludes the possibility of being of both a woman and a subject.

Reference:

- [1]. *The Second Sex* (2009), p.330. Borde,C. & Malovany-Chevallier,S.(2009) Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex*. Published in United States by Vintage Books, Inc., New York.
- [2]. Jean-Paul Sartre (2003). *Being and Nothingness*. “Existence precedes essence” The central philosophy of Sartre existentialism.
- [3]. *The Second Sex* (2009), p. 23.
- [4]. *The Second Sex*, (2009) p. 74. It works as a force that pushes a boy to feel frustrated in his transcendence by the father. Female lacks alter ego and because of this she cannot retrieve her intergrity.
- [5]. This idea to posses masculine power is again in the section “The woman in Love”.
- [6]. *The Second Sex* (2009)p. 74.
- [7]. Karen Horney as an analyst contested Freud hypothesis. *Feminine Psychology* describes her ideas and findings which presents anomalies with respect to Freudian findings.
- [8]. *The Second Sex* (2009) p. 76.
- [9]. Freud on his later theories applies Eros (the life instinct), says Fromm, but only limited to the behavior of living organism and it does not extend to the dimension of male-female.
- [10]. *The Second Sex* (2009), p.74.

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