

# **Marxist Feminism : Emancipation of Women**

**Thesis Submitted to**  
The University of Dhaka for M. Phil. Degree

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September 2025



**DEDICATED TO MY FAMILY**

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## DECLARATION

The work done in this thesis is original and has not been submitted by me to any university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma. Such material as has been obtained from other sources is duly acknowledged in this thesis.

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**CERTIFICATE**

Certified that the work incorporated in the thesis entitled “Marxist Feminism: Emancipation of Women” was carried out by Shamima Akter Suma under my supervision.



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**CERTIFICATE**

Certified that the work incorporated in the thesis entitled “Marxist Feminism: Emancipation of Women” was carried out by Shamima Akter Suma under my co-supervision.



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**ABSTRACT****MARXIST FEMINISM : EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN**

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This research investigates the intersection of Marxist feminism and women's emancipation, focusing on how capitalism and patriarchy operate as mutually reinforcing systems of structural oppression that sustain gender inequality. Drawing on the foundational works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, alongside contemporary feminist theorists, it argues that women's subordination is not incidental but embedded within the economic, social, and ideological frameworks of capitalist societies. Women's liberation cannot be fully realized within capitalist systems, which are predicated on the exploitation of both paid and unpaid labor, the systematic devaluation of reproductive work, and patriarchal norms that restrict women's autonomy. By integrating theoretical analysis with empirical observations, particularly in the South Asian context and Bangladesh, the study examines the socio-economic, cultural, and legal mechanisms that perpetuate women's subordination and outlines pathways for genuine emancipation. It critically engages with Marxist feminist theory to explore how capitalism depends upon gendered divisions of labor. Women's unpaid domestic and reproductive labor caregiving, household management, and emotional support is essential to maintaining the labor force and sustaining capitalist production, yet it remains largely invisible and undervalued in conventional economic models. This systemic undervaluation contributes to women's economic dependence on men, reinforcing patriarchal power both within families and across broader social structures.

Understanding women's oppression requires an integrated perspective that recognizes the interconnection between economic exploitation, social norms, and gendered expectations. In this framework, women's subordination is not a result of natural or inherent differences but is produced and maintained through historical and structural mechanisms embedded in capitalist and patriarchal systems. The main component of the study is the analysis of women's property rights as a critical determinant of economic independence and social emancipation. It demonstrates that women's exclusion from ownership, inheritance, and access to financial resources serves as a key mechanism of economic subordination. By limiting women's control

over property and capital, patriarchal and capitalist systems maintain social hierarchies that prevent women from achieving autonomy and equal participation in society. The thesis, in the context of Bangladesh, highlights the ways in which economic structures, cultural practices, and legal frameworks intersect to limit women's access to property, thereby reinforcing patterns of dependence and subordination. Ensuring women's property rights and economic independence is essential for achieving both gender equality and broader social justice. Representing the contemporary feminist theorists such as Angela Davis, Silvia Federici, and Tithi Bhattacharya, the study illustrates how women from marginalized social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds face compounded forms of exploitation. Women's oppression cannot be adequately understood through a single-axis analysis of gender or class alone; rather, it requires a nuanced understanding of the intersecting structures of inequality that affect women differently depending on their social positioning. This intersectional perspective strengthens the argument that the struggle for women's emancipation is inherently linked to broader struggles against economic exploitation and social inequality.

As a social institution, family functions as a site where patriarchal and capitalist systems converge to reproduce gender and class hierarchies. Family structures have historically emerged alongside private property and capitalism as mechanisms of male control over women's labor and resources. Women's unpaid labor within the household—childcare, domestic maintenance, and emotional support—subsidizes the labor force and contributes to capitalist production, yet it remains unacknowledged both socially and economically. By conceptualizing the family as a microcosm of societal inequality, the thesis argues that addressing gender oppression requires interventions not only in the public and economic spheres but also in domestic and cultural contexts where patriarchal norms are internalized and reproduced.

While liberal feminism focuses on legal equality and policy reform, and radical feminism emphasizes patriarchal structures and cultural change, Marxist feminism is distinguished by its attention to the material conditions underpinning women's oppression. This perspective highlights the centrality of class and economic exploitation in perpetuating gender inequality and advocates for systemic social transformation. Socialist feminism, closely aligned with Marxist feminism, reinforces the argument that women cannot achieve full liberation under capitalist conditions, emphasizing the necessity of collective action, social ownership, and structural

reforms to address both gender and class inequalities simultaneously. Marxist feminist analysis provides a holistic and integrated framework for understanding and addressing the complex interrelations between economic exploitation, gender subordination, and social hierarchies. Capitalist exploitation, alienation, and economic dependence are fundamental barriers to women's emancipation. Capitalist production relies on the appropriation of surplus labor, creating structural inequities that disproportionately affect women. Women's work, particularly unpaid domestic labor, is essential for the reproduction of labor power yet is systematically undervalued, contributing to persistent economic and social inequalities. By pointing out the ways in which capitalist structures perpetuate both material and ideological forms of oppression, the thesis argues that true gender equality is unattainable without a comprehensive criticism and transformation of these systems. It emphasizes that women's liberation is inseparable from the broader struggle against capitalist exploitation and social inequality, and it situates women's emancipation within a wider socio-political project of systemic change.

## PREFACE

The present research explores the structural roots of women's oppression through the lens of Marxist feminist theory. The central argument advanced in this study is that the liberation of women cannot be fully realized within the confines of capitalist social relations, which inherently depend on gendered divisions of labor, unpaid reproductive work, and patriarchal control. The research critically investigates how capitalism and patriarchy operate to suppress women's agency and commodify their labor both within the domestic sphere and the formal economy. Drawing from classical Marxist theory, feminist philosophical frameworks, and contemporary social contexts, the study seeks to uncover the socio-economic, ideological, and cultural mechanisms through which women's subordination is normalized and sustained.

Through a close examination of key philosophical texts, feminist interventions and empirical realities especially within the context of South Asia and Bangladesh, this work attempts to contribute to the broader understanding of how emancipation must be redefined in terms of structural transformation rather than token representation or individual advancement. The theoretical and practical implications of this approach are considered throughout, culminating in a conclusion that calls for a collective, systemic approach to gender justice rooted in materialist feminist politics.

I am indebted to my supervisor Dr. A. K. M. Haroonar Rashid, Professor of Philosophy, University of Dhaka for his kind support, cooperation, thoughtful guidance and sharing ideas with me. Truly, it would never have been possible to put an end to my thesis without his encouragement and continuous inspiration. I am also indebted to my co-supervisor, Professor Md. Nuruzzaman, Department of Philosophy, University of Dhaka, with whom I have discussed at times to improve my ideas, who has given me valuable suggestions and mailed me relevant books & samples of thesis. I express my thanks and gratitude to all members of the higher research committee and academic committee of the Department of Philosophy for giving me the opportunity to pursue this study. Thanks are due to the office staff of The Department of Philosophy for their sincere cooperation and support during this long period of study.

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# Chapter: One

## Introduction

Marxist feminism is an approach that seeks to address the liberation of women by tackling issues of class oppression, gender inequality, and exploitation. This perspective is rooted in Marxist philosophy, which provides a framework for understanding how economic systems, particularly capitalism, creates societal inequalities. Marxist feminists draw from the ideas of Karl Marx (1818–1883), whose groundbreaking analysis of capitalism is presented in his famous book *Capital* (Marx, 1867, p. 45). Friedrich Engels, a close collaborator of Marx, contributed significantly to these ideas and helped develop the theoretical foundation for addressing social and economic inequalities.

Marxist feminists argue that capitalism not only exploits workers but also perpetuates gender-based oppression. Women are doubly exploited under capitalism through their labor in the workforce and their unpaid domestic work at home. The aim of Marxist feminism is to dismantle capitalism, eliminate class divisions, and create a society where resources are distributed equitably, and gender equality is achieved. This vision includes recognizing the value of domestic labor, ensuring control over reproductive rights, and creating equal access to property and economic opportunities for women. Marxist feminists believe that women's subordination to men is not natural or inevitable but is a result of systemic inequalities rooted in both capitalism and patriarchy.

In capitalist societies, women face significant oppression and are often denied their full rights. While some progress has been made, such as granting women the right to vote in certain countries, the roots and causes of inequalities remain. For example, women are often entitled to smaller shares of inheritance compared to men in many cultures, and family decisions are typically controlled by male members. Women are expected to defer to male authority, and when things go wrong, they are often blamed. Capitalist societies have created laws and norms that treat women as objects or tools of labor rather than as equals. A Russian proverb, "A hen is not a bird, and a woman is not a person," captures this sentiment and highlights the way patriarchal attitudes devalue women (Lenin, 1934, p. 15).

Despite these challenges, Marxist feminists emphasize that women are essential to the working-class struggle. They argue that the full emancipation of the proletariat cannot be achieved without recognizing and addressing the labor value of women. True comradeship between men and women in the working class is necessary for achieving equality. As Lenin stated, "Women are the equals of men," and any movement for liberation must include gender equality (Lenin, 1934, p. 20). Without this unity, the working-class struggle against capitalism will remain incomplete.

The relationship between Marxism and feminism has often been viewed as complex and challenging. Critics argue that Marxism focuses on class struggles, while feminism emphasizes gender inequality, making the two ideologies seem incompatible. This has led some to compare the union of Marxism and feminism to an uneasy marriage. However, Marxist feminists argue that capitalism and patriarchy are interconnected systems that must be addressed together. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels explained that people's roles and behaviors are shaped by their circumstances and upbringing (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 52). Building on this idea, Marxist feminists demonstrate how class divisions also create gender inequality. While critics may view Marxist feminism as an unlikely combination, supporters see it as a necessary framework for addressing systemic oppression.

Bourgeois democracy, which emerged with the rise of capitalism, introduced ideas of equality under the law and voting rights for all citizens. However, these freedoms often remain limited for women. While women may gain the right to vote, patriarchal attitudes still confine them to traditional roles as wives and mothers. John Stuart Mill, in his influential book *The Subjection of Women*, argued that women should be judged based on their abilities and qualifications, not their gender (Mill, 1869, p. 73). Marxist feminists share this view and argue that capitalism reinforces traditional gender roles, limiting women's opportunities and confining them to domestic work.

Engels provided a powerful critique of women's oppression in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. He explained that under capitalism, household management becomes a private service, isolating women in the domestic sphere. Engels argued that women's oppression is not natural or biological but is created by the capitalist system and patriarchal structures. He believed that women's liberation requires them to join the working class in the fight against capitalism (Engels, 1884, p. 117). According to Engels,

the complete emancipation of women is possible only when society abolishes private property and class divisions.

Lenin also envisioned a socialist society where women could achieve full equality. He criticized capitalism for restricting women to housework and denying them opportunities to participate in productive labor. Lenin believed that socialism could eliminate these inequalities by ensuring that women's work is valued equally and that they have the same opportunities as men. As Lenin stated, "Complete emancipation of women is possible only in a socialist economy" (Lenin, 1934, p. 25). For Lenin, socialism provided the foundation for reducing exploitation and creating a society where both men and women could thrive as equals.

Marxist feminism makes critique of bourgeois democracy, which, while promising equality, often fails to deliver it. Bourgeois democracy proclaims that all individuals are equal regardless of their gender, race, or religion. However, Marxist feminists point out that these ideals often fall short in practice, especially for women. They argue that without addressing the systemic inequalities of capitalism, democracy alone cannot achieve true equality. Women in capitalist societies often face double oppression, as both workers and women, making their emancipation particularly challenging.

Marxist feminism argues that women's oppression is deeply tied to capitalism and class structures. It highlights that true equality cannot be achieved without dismantling these systems and creating a society based on socialism, where resources are distributed fairly, and gender equality is realized. By combining Marxist principles and feminist ideas, this perspective provides a powerful framework for understanding and addressing the root causes of gender inequality. As Lenin stated, socialism offers the path to creating a just and equitable society where exploitation and oppression are eradicated, and all individuals can enjoy full freedom and equality (Lenin, 1934, p. 30).

This research is an attempt to explore how class oppression and gender inequality are closely connected, especially in capitalist societies. It looks at how capitalism and patriarchy work together to keep women in lower positions, both at work and in the home. This signifies that women cannot be fully liberated unless both capitalism and patriarchy are dismantled. These systems support each other, so solving one problem without addressing the other won't

lead to true equality for women. It will focus on Marxist feminism as a way to understand how both class and gender oppression affects women. Analysis shows that economic exploitation, like unfair wages and unpaid domestic labor, and gender-based oppression, like being expected to fulfill traditional roles at home, are connected. The research will show how capitalism depends on women's unpaid labor at home, and how this labor is often ignored or undervalued in economic models. By pointing out the importance of economic independence for women's freedom, focusing on property rights and inheritance. Owning property and having control over resources is essential for women to gain independence. Without access to property or financial resources, women remain dependent on men, which keep them in a subordinate position in both the family and society.

The chapter will highlight that gender equality isn't just about having legal rights or political freedom, but also about ensuring women have equal access to economic resources. For women to be truly equal to men, society needs to change the way wealth, property, and opportunities are distributed. This includes recognizing both paid and unpaid labor and ensuring that women's work, whether inside the home or outside, is valued equally. The research will also explore the importance of recognizing and redistributing the unpaid labor women do at home. This labor is often ignored in traditional economic systems, even though it is essential to the functioning of both families and the economy. Changing the way we think about and value this labor is key to achieving gender equality. Overall, this research aims to show that true gender equality requires more than just legal changes or political rights. It requires breaking down capitalist and patriarchal structures and recognizing women's role in both the workforce and at home. By looking at the link between economic and gender inequality, this research provides a framework for understanding the causes of women's oppression and how we can work toward a fairer and more equal society for everyone.

## 1.1 Women's Oppression and Gender Stratification

Gender stratification denotes the systemic disparities in treatment, opportunities, and social positioning based on one's gender. These inequalities manifest clearly in economic measures such as wages and wealth, as well as in social power and political influence. Within capitalist societies, these disparities are especially pronounced and damaging to women, who face

multi-layered oppression. Marxist feminism identifies capitalism as the fundamental root of this oppression, arguing that genuine gender equality can only be realized through a comprehensive transformation of capitalist structures and the establishment of an egalitarian social order.

Building on the foundational works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Marxist feminism extends the analysis of class-based exploitation to include the specific ways capitalism subjugates women. Marx and Engels' critique of class oppression is pivotal in understanding the dual exploitation women endure both as wage laborers in the public sphere and as unpaid workers within the domestic realm. While various social theorists have attributed women's subordination to patriarchy or cultural norms, Marxist feminists assert that economic inequality, deeply entrenched in capitalist relations, remains the principal driver of gender stratification. Lenin underscored this position, emphasizing that the liberation of women is inseparable from the broader struggle against capitalist exploitation and social inequality (Lenin, 1934, p. 88).

In capitalist economies, women frequently encounter structural barriers to full workforce participation and advancement. Despite constituting roughly half the population, women are often marginalized from leadership roles and disproportionately tasked with unpaid domestic labor such as childcare and household management. The capitalist system perpetuates this imbalance by privileging the bourgeoisie's economic interests, which maintain and benefit from these gendered divisions of labor. Marxist theory suggests that social revolutions are inevitable in societies where large groups, including women, are denied full rights and participation. The exclusion of women from economic and political power thus weakens the prospect of a just and equitable social order.

For Marxist feminists, dismantling patriarchy alone is insufficient; the socio-economic system underpinning gender oppression must be fundamentally restructured. Women's emancipation requires the removal of economic barriers and patriarchal constraints that prevent their full social and economic participation. The envisioned future is one where women have equal access to education, employment, and decision-making, thus enabling them to control their own economic destinies. Such a transformation entails collective ownership of production resources and the eradication of class distinctions, which Marxist feminism regards as essential for eliminating gender oppression entirely. This emancipatory

vision aligns seamlessly with the broader Marxist critique of capitalism, highlighting that women's liberation is both a necessary and integral component of the struggle for universal social justice. Only by abolishing capitalist exploitation can society hope to create conditions where gender inequality no longer persists. Thus, the Marxist feminist framework provides a powerful and comprehensive lens through which to understand and challenge the intertwined systems of capitalism and patriarchy that perpetuate women's oppression.

## 1.2 Marxism and Feminism as Emancipatory Theories

Marxism and feminism represent two major social theories that analyze the roots of oppression from distinct but interconnected perspectives. Marxism interprets oppression primarily through the lens of class struggle, focusing on the economic exploitation of the working class by capitalists. Feminism, in contrast, centers on gender-based inequality and the systemic oppression of women. Despite their differing focal points, both theories share the fundamental objective of liberating marginalized groups. For Marxism, this liberation involves freeing workers from capitalist exploitation, whereas feminism seeks to secure equality and justice for women. Socialist feminism synthesizes these perspectives by exploring the deep interrelation between class and gender oppression (Ferguson & Hennessy, 2004, p. 12).

Marxism qualifies as an emancipatory theory because it aims to eradicate oppression rooted in class distinctions. It advocates for empowering workers by ensuring they receive the full value of their labor rather than being exploited by the capitalist class. Similarly, feminism is an emancipatory movement striving to end gender-based oppression by demanding equal rights and opportunities for women across social, economic, and political domains. Both theories maintain that addressing and abolishing inequality, be it economic or gender, is indispensable for constructing a just and equitable society (Hooks, 2000, p. 7).

Opponents of feminism often argue that granting equal rights to men and women threatens social stability. They cite biological differences, such as women's reproductive roles, and express concern over disrupting traditional child-rearing systems as justifications for maintaining gender inequality. Feminists reject these claims as rationalizations that serve to preserve women's subordinate status. They insist that gender equality, far from being a

societal threat, is a necessary progression toward social improvement and justice (Bryson, 2021, p. 24).

The tension between Marxism and feminism reflects broader societal conflicts characterized by divisions along class and gender lines. These conflicts are rooted in contrasting views on economic fairness and culturally entrenched gender roles. The debates between the two schools illuminate the difficulties inherent in achieving systemic social change, as both movements confront resistance when challenging deeply ingrained structures of oppression (Fraser, 2013, p. 56).

Foundational texts by key thinkers in both Marxism and feminism provide crucial insights into these intertwined struggles. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels (1848, p. 35) articulate the imperative of class struggle and critique the capitalist system's inherent inequalities. Similarly, John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869, p. 103) advocates for gender equality, emphasizing the necessity of granting women equal legal and social rights. These seminal works lay the theoretical groundwork for socialist feminist thought by revealing the intersections of class and gender oppression.

Socialist feminists contend that neither class oppression nor gender oppression can be effectively addressed in isolation. They argue that capitalism and patriarchy mutually reinforce each other, creating a dual system that exploits both workers and women. Consequently, achieving a just and equitable society requires dismantling both capitalist and patriarchal structures. By integrating the insights of Marxism and feminism, socialist feminism provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and resisting oppression in its multifaceted forms (Ferguson & Hennessy, 2004, p. 18).

### 1.3 Class Conflict versus Gender Conflict

From a Marxist perspective, societal imbalance originates primarily from inequalities between social classes. In capitalist societies, this manifests as a persistent conflict between the working class, who produce wealth, and the capitalist class, who control the means of production and accumulate the majority of economic benefits. This ongoing antagonism, known as class conflict, remains unresolved as long as the capitalist system endures (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 35).

Gender conflict, by contrast, arises from systemic gender-based oppression. It is reinforced through entrenched family dynamics, cultural norms, and societal expectations that place women in subordinate roles while conferring power and control predominantly to men. Such conventional frameworks perpetuate social divisions along gender lines and restrict women's autonomy and participation in social, economic, and political spheres (Connell, 1987, p. 98).

Although class conflict and gender oppression may appear distinct, Marxist feminism reveals their profound interconnection. Within capitalist societies, class struggle inherently includes women as members of the working class. The oppression women face cannot be disentangled from broader class exploitation; thus, their emancipation is inseparable from the collective struggle for workers' rights and social justice. Marxist feminists assert that the liberation of the working class is essential for the emancipation of all humanity from systemic inequality and oppression (Hartmann, 1979, p. 10).

Central to class conflict is the unequal valuation of labor under capitalism. Workers recognize that while their labor generates value, capitalists appropriate the majority of the profits. Feminist thinkers have extended this critique by highlighting how women's unpaid domestic labor childcare, housework, and caregiving is systematically undervalued and rendered invisible in capitalist economies (Mill, 1869/1998, p. 103). This devaluation perpetuates gender inequality and underscores the urgent need for systemic transformation.

Marxist feminism emphasizes the necessity of cooperation between men and women to realize a just and equitable society. Gender antagonism only deepens social divisions, whereas solidarity across gender lines can propel meaningful social change. The aim is to establish a society that equally values the contributions of all individuals, regardless of gender (Hooks, 1984, p. 58).

The "Red Stockings" movement significantly influenced this integrative approach by asserting the inseparability of gender and class struggles. Their rallying cry, "Class struggle is women's struggle, and women's struggle is class struggle," underscores the centrality of working-class women's fight for liberation within the broader class conflict. This perspective expands the traditional conception of class struggle to explicitly incorporate gender-based oppression (Federici, 1975, p. 14).

By uniting class and feminist movements, Marxist feminism advocates for the comprehensive emancipation of all oppressed groups. It recognizes that class and gender inequalities are mutually reinforcing and must be addressed in tandem. Through this synthesis, Marxist feminism envisions a future society free from exploitation, where both class hierarchies and gender divisions are dismantled, paving the way for genuine equality and social justice.

## 1.4 Marxist Feminist and Socialist Feminist Versus Other Feminists

### Radical Feminism

Radical feminism is a critical branch of feminist theory that centers on what it terms —patriarchal sex oppression. This perspective has significantly shaped the feminist movement and influenced other feminist strands such as cultural feminism. Radical feminists argue that gender roles constitute the foundational basis for societal class divisions. They contend that the eradication of gender-based oppression is essential for dismantling all other forms of social domination. In this view, women are seen as an autonomous and potent force for revolutionary change, emphasizing the necessity of women independently confronting male oppression (Jaggar, 1983, p. 6).

### Marxist Feminism and Its Emancipatory Agenda

Marxist feminists often refer to women as —workers rather than simply —women to emphasize their role within economic and labor systems. Their focus lies on women's struggles for financial independence and the challenge against their confinement to reproductive and domestic labor roles. Marxist feminism aligns with the broader Marxist objective of abolishing social inequality and exploitation; however, capitalist systems persistently reinforce structural inequalities. Mojab (2015, p. 3) critiques Marx's theories for their predominant focus on class, noting that they inadequately address gender-specific oppression. Benston similarly critiques Marxist feminism for overlooking the social dimensions of women's oppression, such as marriage and family structures, arguing that these play a crucial role alongside economic factors (Benston, 1969, p. 14). Conversely, Marx and Engels maintained that, within the context of labor, differences of age and gender are secondary to the means and methods of production (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

## Historical Materialism and the Relevance of Marxist Feminism

Historical materialism, a cornerstone of Marxist feminist thought, investigates how material conditions and societal structures shape forms of oppression. The concept of —dialectical materialismll was first introduced by Plekhanov and later expanded by Engels in works such as *Anti-Dühring* and *Dialectical Materialism* (Plekhanov, 1974, p. 5; Engels, 1878/1977). Engel’s *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* explores how the institution of private property contributed to the exploitation and subjugation of women (Engels, 1884/1987, p. 12). Firestone extends this analysis by introducing the notion of —sex class,ll arguing that biological differences between men and women are fundamental to understanding patriarchy and its connection to class structures, especially in relation to reproductive labor (Firestone, 1970, p. 4). Engels also highlights how male dominance historically emerged through property ownership, particularly in agricultural societies, while women were excluded from such ownership (Engels, 1884/1987, p. 14).

## Socialist Feminism: Its Role in Women’s Emancipation

Socialist feminism shares the radical feminist critique of capitalism and the Marxist feminist emphasis on class oppression. Socialist feminists argue that women cannot attain full liberation within a capitalist framework. Lenin and other socialist feminists stress that women’s emancipation is achievable only when they engage in the working-class struggle— not merely as women but as workers (Lenin, 1934, p. 25). This school of thought advocates for collective decision-making structures capable of addressing both class and gender inequalities, standing in opposition to capitalism’s competitive and individualistic ethos. Additionally, socialist feminism critiques imperialism, private property, and patriarchy as intertwined barriers to women’s liberation (Hartmann, 1979, p. 34).

## Cultural Feminism and the Emancipation of Women

Cultural feminism emphasizes the distinct qualities and strengths of women, positing that these traits uniquely position women to foster positive societal change. While it aligns with radical feminism’s critique of patriarchy, cultural feminism further asserts that women’s inherent qualities render them particularly suited for leadership roles. Although this

perspective has faced criticism from traditional, male-centered viewpoints, it nonetheless underscores women's valuable contributions and seeks to empower them by celebrating their distinctiveness (Barrett, 2014, p. 27).

### Liberal Feminism and Its Significance in Women's Emancipation

Liberal feminism focuses on securing gender equality through political and legal reforms within existing democratic institutions. This approach prioritizes issues such as educational access, workforce participation, political representation, and promoting men's involvement in feminist causes. Often labeled —mainstreamll or —reformistll feminism, liberal feminism advocates gradual systemic change via policy reform and legislative action to achieve gender equality (Bryson, 2021, p. 12).

### Eco-Feminism

Eco-feminism establishes a linkage between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural environment. This perspective argues that the same systems of power that dominate women are responsible for environmental degradation. Eco-feminism champions principles of equality, collaboration, and mutual respect for both women and nature, calling for radical transformations in social and ecological systems. Combining feminist analysis with green politics, it seeks social and environmental justice, insisting that women's active participation is vital to achieving these goals. Contemporary eco-feminism encompasses various strands, including liberal, cultural, and socialist eco-feminism, each addressing the interconnections between gender and ecological exploitation (Merchant, 2005, p. 45).

## 1.5 Critique of Capitalism

Marx's critique of capitalism focuses on two central flaws: exploitation and alienation. Exploitation occurs when the working class creates value through their labor, but the capitalist class unjustly appropriates the benefits. The proletariat does not receive the full value of what they produce; instead, capitalists retain the surplus value, resulting in low wages and limited access to resources for workers. This exploitation breeds alienation, where workers become disconnected from the products of their labor, their creativity, and society

itself. Marx and Engels characterized this as —systematic robberyll because it denies workers the fair rewards for their efforts (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 47).

A significant issue in capitalism is the separation of workers from the means of production, which produces moral and social disharmony. Women, in particular, face additional disadvantages. Despite their contributions, women often lack equal rights and opportunities compared to men. They are excluded from full participation in production and are consequently alienated, exacerbating capitalism’s inequalities. Marxist theorists identify exploitation and alienation as core problems of capitalism. When women are marginalized from productive labor, it not only hinders their personal development but also impedes broader societal progress. Both men and women are vital to social and economic development, making gender inequality within capitalism a barrier to societal harmony.

Marx and Engels demonstrated how the capitalist class profits from labor power without fairly compensating workers. Laborers are treated like machines, valued only for their capacity to produce. Even when workers contribute extra hours, these are counted as additional —pieces of laborll whose surplus value is expropriated by capitalists to increase their wealth rather than shared with workers. Had workers received their fair share, their living conditions could improve substantially. Yet under capitalism, workers remain trapped in poverty and exploitation, a reality that impacts the entire working class, including women who often face greater barriers (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 55).

The capitalist system perpetuates these inequalities, yet the working class persists and grows stronger due to its revolutionary potential. Marx and Engels noted that the proletariat is uniquely positioned to lead significant social transformation because of its central role in the modern industrial economy. This makes the working class indispensable in challenging capitalist injustices.

Marx further criticized capital’s nature, describing it as —not only personal; it is a social powerll (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 58). This social power is controlled by a small capitalist elite, the bourgeoisie who use it to maintain their dominance over society. Marxism proposes transforming private property into common property, thereby turning capital into a shared resource. This transformation would diminish capitalist power, end exploitation, and eliminate alienation, enabling workers to regain control over their labor and lives.

Marx and Engels emphasized the historical significance of class struggle, famously stating, —The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle! (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 1). They argued that social conflicts between classes have been a defining feature of human history and that the working class must lead the fight for change. Their *Communist Manifesto* ends with the rallying cry, —Workers of the world, unite!! (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 96), urging global solidarity to overcome exploitation and secure true liberation. In their critique, Marx and Engels highlighted how the capitalist class enjoys exclusive benefits from labor, while the working class remains impoverished and servile. This imbalance renders labor emancipation essential. Marxism advocates fair distribution of labor proceeds to ensure social and economic justice.

Gender inequality further complicates capitalism's problems. Although the Soviet Union adhered to Marxist principles, it often failed to address women's —double burden! of domestic responsibilities alongside employment. Soviet policies reinforced traditional gender roles, emphasizing motherhood and homemaking rather than promoting full gender equality. Women's domestic labor including housework and childcare remains undervalued and unrecognized as legitimate economic production. Addressing these issues is vital for gender equity and requires closing the wage gap, valuing household labor, and providing women equal opportunities across all sectors (Engels, 1884/1987, p. 120).

Immanuel Kant's notion of alienation as —the transfer of one's property to another! offers insight into capitalist alienation (Meszaros, 2006, p. 45). In Marxist thought, alienation occurs when workers are separated from both the products and the process of their labor, hindering self-realization and agency. Overcoming alienation is necessary for a just society. Collective ownership and equitable decision-making structures can address this by ensuring fair access to opportunities and resources for all (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 89).

By promoting collective ownership and shared decision-making, Marxism envisions a society free from exploitation and alienation. This vision underscores unity and cooperation as fundamental to overcoming capitalism's inequalities. Through collective efforts, class and gender oppression can be dismantled, paving the way toward a more equitable and harmonious society.

## 1.6 Women's Property Rights Relevancy in Marxist feminism

Marxist feminism highlights the critical importance of economic independence for women, emphasizing inheritance and property rights as essential factors in improving women's lives. Property ownership not only provides women with financial security but also elevates their social standing. This perspective aligns closely with Marxist feminism's goal of challenging the capitalist and patriarchal structures that perpetuate economic and gender inequalities (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

A notable example of this principle in practice is Bhutan, a country characterized by a matriarchal system. In Bhutan, women hold outright ownership of property and actively participate in decision-making processes. This arrangement subverts traditional gender roles: after marriage, men move into their wives' homes and take responsibility for domestic affairs. Such a system demonstrates how property ownership can empower women and alter entrenched power dynamics (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 45).

The philosophical significance of property rights has been explored by many thinkers, including Émile de Laveleye in his work *Primitive Property*. Laveleye examines property rights through various philosophical lenses, drawing on ideas from thinkers such as Huet and Herbert Spencer. Spencer describes an —ideal schemell of land ownership rooted in early societies and argues that historical patterns of property distribution are likely to recur (Laveleye, 1878, p. 28).

Huet regards patrimony, or the right to inherit property, as a natural and essential right. He advocates that young workers receive an equal share of inheritance at no cost, strengthening family bonds and reducing feelings of inferiority among disadvantaged families. Huet further asserts that under socialism, inheritance rights would provide families with the economic stability necessary for confidence and security (Laveleye, 1878, p. 35). Likewise, Spencer supports equitable access to resources, stating, —All will use this world according to his wants, provided that he allows all others the same libertyll (Laveleye, 1878, p. 28).

German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte also stresses the connection between property ownership and personal liberty. He states, —Property or possession of property is an absolute condition of libertyll (Fichte, 1980, p. 5). According to Fichte, equal access to property, as a right derived from labor, is fundamental for individuals to live independently, make autonomous decisions, and avoid domination by others. His ideas articulate a universal desire for freedom and independence goals that women similarly pursue through their fight for property and inheritance rights (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 22).

John Stuart Mill further criticizes the exclusion of women from inheritance in *The Subjection of Women*. Mill argues that denying women economic opportunities fosters dependence and sustains their subordinate societal position. He asserts, —When it comes to inheritance rights, women belong to nothingll (Mill, 1869, p. 30). This lack of economic autonomy strips women of dignity and agency, thereby entrenching gender inequality.

The link between economic rights and personal freedom is clear. Without property ownership or the ability to inherit wealth, women remain confined within systems of dependency. Economic or social subordination is inherently degrading. Marxist feminism regards economic independence as a cornerstone of women’s liberation, making property rights a central focus in the struggle for gender equality (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

The struggle for women’s property rights reflects a broader quest for autonomy and freedom. By confronting women’s exclusion from property ownership, societies can challenge the capitalist and patriarchal structures that uphold inequality. Marxist feminists argue that genuine gender equality requires economic emancipation, with property rights serving as an essential tool in achieving this objective (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33).

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## Chapter: Two

### Family, Equality and Social Progress

The family is a fundamental social institution, often seen as a private and natural entity, but in reality, it is a key space where capitalist and patriarchal systems are reproduced and maintained. From a Marxist feminist perspective, the family must be understood within its wider socio-economic framework. It functions to uphold existing social structures, particularly through the reinforcement of rigid gender roles. Women's unpaid domestic labor, including caregiving, household chores, and emotional support, is integral to the functioning of the capitalist economy. Although this labor sustains the workforce, it remains largely unrecognized and undervalued in conventional economic models (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33). The marginalization of women's domestic contributions not only diminishes their social and economic value but also strengthens patriarchal power both within the household and the larger society.

From the Marxist feminist perspective, family life cannot be divorced from its wider socio-economic context. The family functions to maintain existing social structures by upholding rigid gender divisions of labor. Women's unpaid domestic work including childrearing, cooking, cleaning, and emotional support is indispensable to the capitalist economy. This reproductive labor sustains the labor force without direct monetary compensation, yet remains largely invisible and unacknowledged within formal economic analyses (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33). The invisibility of women's domestic contributions not only diminishes their social and economic value but also serves to entrench patriarchal power within the household and the broader society. Thus, the family operates as a microcosm where women's subordination is normalized and reproduced.

Literature and cultural critiques provide powerful illustrations of the psychological and social costs of this patriarchal control. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* presents a striking portrayal of how domestic confinement and male dominance erode women's mental health. The protagonist's descent into madness vividly symbolizes the destructive consequences of denied autonomy and enforced passivity, mirroring women's

broader social exclusion (Lanser, 1989, p. 345). Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* similarly critiques the societal barriers preventing women's intellectual and economic emancipation. Woolf famously asserts that without financial independence—a room of one's own all women cannot fully develop their creative and intellectual potential. This argument aligns closely with Marxist feminist calls for economic autonomy as foundational to genuine gender equality (Favre, 2020, p. 37).

The intersection of class, gender, and race is further elaborated by Marxist feminists such as Silvia Federici and Angela Davis. Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* traces the historical use of witch hunts as a tool for controlling women's bodies and labor, consolidating patriarchal and capitalist power through violence and terror (Chattopadhyay, 2017, p. 138). Angela Davis's critique of the prison-industrial complex reveals how race and gender intersect to oppress women, especially women of color, within capitalist institutions. Davis underscores the necessity of collective resistance and solidarity in dismantling these intertwined systems of domination (Davis, 2016, p. 45). These analyses expand Marxist feminism's scope by emphasizing that the struggle against capitalist exploitation must also confront racial injustice.

Central to Marxist feminism's vision of liberation is the construction of a socialist society. Socialism offers a path to dismantle the material and institutional foundations of gender inequality by redistributing resources, abolishing capitalist production relations, and transforming family and social life based on principles of equality and cooperation. Under socialism, women's unpaid labor would be recognized and fairly compensated, and patriarchal hierarchies embedded within family life would be fundamentally transformed (MacKinnon, 1983, p. 520). This vision moves beyond reformist approaches to capitalism, demanding the creation of new social structures that promote both gender and class justice.

The family's role in gender socialization cannot be overstated. From early childhood, families inculcate and reinforce traditional gender roles, shaping expectations about work, behavior, and social relationships. These gendered socializations maintain a division between the public and private spheres, wherein men dominate paid labor markets and women are largely confined to unpaid domestic care. Marxist feminism challenges this division by revealing how it serves capitalist interests: women's unpaid reproductive labor subsidizes male participation in paid labor, which is then exploited for profit (Marx & Engels,

1848/1998, p. 52). Consequently, women's emancipation requires not only economic redistribution but also profound cultural change that dismantles these entrenched gender norms.

The persistence of gender inequality within the family has broader consequences for social progress. When women are confined to caregiving roles and excluded from full participation in economic and political life, society is deprived of their talents and contributions. Marxist feminists assert that true social progress depends on breaking these barriers to women's full citizenship. Achieving this requires policies and cultural shifts that promote shared domestic responsibilities, equal access to education and employment, and recognition of diverse family structures (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33).

Moreover, family relations are not merely sites of oppression but also potential spaces for resistance. Women's struggles within families against unequal labor burdens, restricted reproductive rights, and economic marginalization are integral to the broader movement for gender and social justice. Marxist feminism thus positions the transformation of family life as vital to undermining the intertwined systems of capitalism and patriarchy that dominate society.

This chapter has expanded upon the insights of this research by foregrounding the family as a key institution in the reproduction of gendered and class-based inequalities. It has argued that recognizing and valuing women's unpaid domestic labor is critical to sustaining capitalism and patriarchy, making economic independence and social acknowledgment of this labor essential to women's emancipation. Through literary examples, intersectional perspectives, and a socialist framework, Marxist feminism offers a rigorous critique of family life and a hopeful vision of social progress based on equality, shared responsibility, and collective liberation. In doing so, this chapter affirms that family, equality, and social progress are inextricably linked and that addressing these connections is necessary for the genuine liberation of women and society as a whole (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 52).

This research explores the role of the family as a significant social institution that both reflects and reinforces the systems of capitalism and patriarchy. The analysis focuses on how the family contributes to maintaining gender and class inequalities, particularly through women's unpaid domestic labor, such as childcare, cooking, cleaning, and providing

emotional support. Although essential to the functioning of society, this labor is often overlooked in traditional economic studies. Its invisibility not only undermines women's economic independence but also perpetuates patriarchal control within the household and the wider community. The study also examines the negative impacts of patriarchal family structures on women's mental and emotional well-being. Literary works such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* illustrate how confinement to traditional domestic roles restricts women's freedom and intellectual growth. These examples highlight the broader societal consequences of denying women autonomy and opportunities for self-development. Oppression within the family is further shaped by intersecting factors of gender, race, and class.

Insights from scholars such as Silvia Federici and Angela Davis reveal how historical practices like the witch hunts and contemporary systems such as the prison-industrial complex demonstrate the deep connections between capitalism, patriarchy, and racial injustice. Understanding these intersections emphasizes the need to address both gender equality and racial justice simultaneously. The research incorporates the Marxist feminist vision of socialism as a potential pathway for restructuring family dynamics. A socialist framework could recognize and compensate women's unpaid labor, dismantle the exploitative aspects of the current family system, and foster relationships based on equality and cooperation. This transformation requires not only the redistribution of resources but also the reformation of cultural norms that sustain unequal gender roles.

Additionally, the family serves as a primary site for the socialization of gender roles and expectations. From an early age, children are taught to conform to norms that align men with paid employment and women with domestic responsibilities. Marxist feminism challenges this traditional division, arguing that women's unpaid labor enables men's full participation in the paid workforce, thereby sustaining capitalist structures. Achieving gender equality demands both economic reforms and cultural shifts that challenge entrenched gender norms. While often functioning as a site of oppression, the family can also serve as a space for resistance. Women's efforts to secure better working conditions, equitable rights, and freedom from economic control form part of the broader struggle for gender and social justice. By reimagining the family's role, it becomes possible to challenge the capitalist and patriarchal systems that restrict women's opportunities. This research underscores the

interconnectedness of family life with wider issues of equality and social progress. Recognizing the value of unpaid labor, addressing the ways in which family roles perpetuate inequality, and envisioning alternative, egalitarian forms of family organization are essential steps toward building a more just and equitable society.

## 2.1 Feminism and the System of Family

### Exploring the Relationship between Families, Equality, and Social Progress

Chapter One showed how women's oppression is deeply connected to capitalism and patriarchy, two systems that work together to keep economic and social inequalities in place (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18). Building on this understanding, this chapter focuses on the family, a key social institution where these systems are both reproduced and sometimes challenged. While many see the family as a private and natural space, Marxist feminism reveals that the family is a complex site where gender inequality and capitalist interests meet. To understand how personal relationships link to wider social structures, it is crucial to explore the role of the family.

Marxist feminists explain that the family serves two main purposes. First, it provides emotional support and care. Second, it plays a vital role in reproducing labor power for the capitalist economy. Women's unpaid work at home caring for children, managing the household, and performing emotional labor is essential to maintaining the workforce. Yet, this important work is invisible and often ignored in traditional economic measures, which focus mostly on paid employment (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33). This invisibility reduces women's work to something unimportant and keeps them dependent on others, strengthening patriarchal control both inside families and across society.

The tensions and contradictions within family life are well illustrated in literature, which helps us understand women's real experiences. For example, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* tells the story of Nora Helmer, who struggles for independence in a marriage limited by patriarchal expectations. Nora's choice to leave her family defies traditional ideas of a wife's role and calls for personal freedom, echoing feminist demands to rethink family relations (Ali & Bukhari, 2019). Similarly, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* reveals how systemic oppression affects Black families through the story of Sethe, who confronts the painful legacy

of slavery. Morrison's work shows how race, class, and gender oppression shape family life and history (Mehmood, 2019).

Friedrich Engels's influential book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* is essential to understanding how the family maintains inequality. Engels argues that the family arose alongside private property and class systems and works to keep patriarchal control and pass wealth from one generation to the next (Carver, 2022). Today, women still carry most of the unpaid domestic work, which limits their chances to become economically independent. Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* presents stories of women balancing their own dreams with family duties, reflecting societal pressures that value caregiving roles and uphold economic inequality (Lihua & Xiong, 2015).

Despite these challenges, the family can also be a place for change. Feminist efforts aim to rebuild family relations on equality, shared care, and mutual respect. By raising awareness about the intersecting forms of oppression inside families, feminists empower people to resist patriarchal norms and push for social transformation (Mohanty, 2003). Thus, the family is not just a site of oppression but can also become a space where new, more equal social relations are created.

## Family Progression: Historical and Contemporary Views

Marxist feminism sees the family as a living institution, shaped by historical, economic, and cultural forces. The family helps reproduce labor power and social ideas, making it crucial for understanding gender and class inequalities.

Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* shows how family and social expectations limit women's freedom. Anna's story reveals the high cost women pay for resisting strict family roles, emphasizing the clash between personal desires and social rules (Mandelker, 1993). Similarly, Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* traces the Buendía family's generations, showing how patriarchal control and social expectations keep repeating and enforcing inequality (Moore, 1994, p. 45).

Engels's analysis explains how families maintain wealth and privilege through inheritance, reinforcing capitalist class structures (Carver, 2022, p. 211). Today, women

continue to bear the majority of unpaid domestic work, which restricts their economic independence. Brian Friel's *Translations* tells the story of Máire, who struggles to balance personal goals with family duties, reflecting the difficulties many women face under traditional family expectations (Kvéder, 2023).

Marxist feminists support social policies that share domestic responsibilities and support caregivers. Programs like universal childcare and paid parental leave in countries like Sweden and Norway show how structural changes can promote gender equality and social progress by reducing women's unpaid labor and allowing them to work more outside the home (Boris et al., 2012, p. 78). *(Note: Reference missing; add full citation or substitute.)* These reforms, combined with changing social attitudes, can help break down the systems that keep families unequal.

### Equality Within Families: Challenges and Possibilities

Achieving equality in families means challenging deeply rooted gender roles and economic dependencies. Family life often mirrors the wider society's power imbalances, with women disproportionately responsible for unpaid labor and care work.

Literature again helps illustrate these issues. In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Ammu's fight against caste and gender rules shows the conflict between family expectations and personal freedom (Comfort, 2008, p. 67). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* explores women's difficulties in balancing personal ambitions and traditional family roles during the Nigerian Civil War (Oyeleke, 2023, p. 45).

June's story in *The Joy Luck Club* highlights how social pressure to prioritize family over personal goals continues to sustain gender inequality (Lihua & Xiong, 2015, p. 12). To overcome these inequalities, we must rethink traditional family roles and encourage shared responsibilities between men and women. Feminist scholars stress the need for collective awareness and action to challenge patriarchal ideas and build fair family environments (McNay, 2015, p. 171).

## Social Progress: Toward Collective Liberation

Marxist feminism sees true social progress as rooted in solidarity, equality, and collective struggle. Progress means breaking down oppressive systems and creating inclusive spaces that empower marginalized groups (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33).

Movements like #MeToo demonstrates the power of collective action in raising awareness about gender violence and systemic sexism. By giving voice to survivors and demanding justice, such movements show how grassroots activism can lead to social change (Gieseler, 2019).

Structural reforms like universal childcare and parental leave are essential to promoting equality. These policies not only support families but also encourage economic development by reducing women's unpaid work and enabling their full participation in the workforce (Boris et al., 2012). Together, activism, policy changes, and shifts in culture create new paths toward liberation grounded in justice and respect for human dignity.

The family is both a place of oppression and a site for transformative change. Marxist feminism offers a clear framework to understand how the family reproduces gender and class inequalities while pointing toward ways to create equality and social progress. Genuine liberation for women and society requires addressing how family structures, economic systems, and gender relations are connected. Only then can we build a truly just and equal society (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

## 2.2 Equal Treatment of Economic Power

Gender equality and women's empowerment are cornerstones of feminist theory and activism. Historically, feminism has sought to challenge and dismantle patriarchal systems that reinforce gender-based inequalities. Central to these efforts is the fight for economic equality, as women's economic status is inextricably linked to their overall liberation. This section explores how feminist movements, supported by Marxist theory, address the deep-rooted economic inequalities that women face, with particular emphasis on the gender wage gap, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment. We will also examine how these feminist movements align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

focusing on the economic dimensions of gender equality, and propose key policy recommendations for achieving gender equality in economic contexts.

## Feminism and Economic Power

Feminism, as an ideology, confronts societal structures of gender bias, patriarchy, and economic exploitation. Feminist theory strives to achieve social justice, not just for women but for all marginalized groups, advocating for the dismantling of oppressive systems (Cornell, 2001, p. 45). Feminists aim to eliminate the entrenched economic discrimination that women face, often through research, activism, and policy advocacy. The fight for gender equality has expanded beyond the simple pursuit of equal rights to tackle issues such as gender-based violence, unequal pay, and reproductive rights, which remain vital to women's economic independence and social participation.

One of the most prominent and impactful campaigns within feminism is the global movement to end gender-based violence, epitomized by initiatives like MeToo and the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence. These movements have empowered survivors of violence to speak out and demand accountability from perpetrators, effectively challenging cultural norms that have historically shielded abusers. The MeToo movement, in particular, has raised awareness about the intersectionality of violence, gender, and power, underlining how systemic violence undermines women's economic security and independence (Cornell, 2001, p. 49).

## Feminism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global framework for addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. Among these, SDG 5, focused on gender equality, is especially significant. Achieving gender equality is fundamental for societal progress, and it supports broader goals such as education (SDG 4), health (SDG 3), economic growth (SDG 8), and reducing inequality (SDG 10). Below, we explore how feminism connects with these global goals and how economic equality forms the backbone of social development.

## SDG 5: Gender Equality

SDG 5 focuses on eliminating discrimination against women and girls and promoting their leadership across all sectors. Achieving gender equality is not only an ethical issue but an economic necessity. Gender equality unlocks women's potential, driving economic growth and social well-being. Feminists have long advocated for policy changes that remove barriers to women's economic advancement. These barriers include laws and practices that prevent women from working in certain industries, receiving equal pay, or accessing education and healthcare.

Addressing gender-based violence, one of the significant barriers to women's equality, is also part of SDG 5. Protecting women from violence not only ensures their safety but also their economic autonomy. As feminist thinkers have argued, without freedom from violence, women cannot fully engage in work, education, or leadership roles. Thus, ensuring safety is integral to achieving economic independence and empowerment (United Nations, 2015, p. 18).

### Economic Empowerment (SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth)

SDG 8 emphasizes decent work and economic growth, a goal directly related to feminist agendas. Economic empowerment is central to gender equality, as it addresses disparities such as the gender wage gap, occupational segregation, and barriers to women's entrepreneurship. Studies have shown that when more women join the workforce, economies experience faster growth. Gender equality in the workplace boosts productivity, creativity, and overall economic performance (Klugman et al., 2014, p. 56).

The gender wage gap, where women consistently earn less than men for equivalent work, remains one of the most persistent economic inequalities. Feminist campaigns advocating for equal pay for equal work are vital to addressing this issue. Pay transparency laws and mandates for equal pay can reduce the wage gap and create a fairer economy for everyone (Blau & Kahn, 2017, p. 108).

Women's entrepreneurship is another powerful driver of economic growth. Initiatives such as microfinance programs, which provide small loans and resources to women in

developing countries, have proven effective in supporting women's business ventures. These programs enable women to gain financial independence, create jobs, and drive community development (D'Espallier, Guérin, & Mersland, 2011, p. 45). By empowering women to start businesses, feminist policies contribute to economic diversification and job creation, both of which are crucial for long-term economic stability.

#### Health and Well-Being (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being)

SDG 3 focuses on ensuring good health and well-being for all. For women, this includes addressing health issues such as maternal care, reproductive rights, and gender-based violence. Gender equality in healthcare is essential for addressing these challenges and ensuring that women have access to the services they need to live healthy, independent lives.

Gender-based violence is not only a human rights violation but also a health crisis. It is linked to physical injuries, chronic conditions, and psychological trauma (Devries et al., 2013, p. 58). Addressing violence and ensuring women have access to healthcare including services for survivors are critical for achieving SDG 3. In addition, providing access to sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception and safe abortion where permitted, is crucial for empowering women to make decisions about their bodies and futures (Grépin & Klugman, 2013, p. 77).

#### Education (SDG 4: Quality Education)

Education is one of the most powerful tools for achieving gender equality. SDG 4 advocates for inclusive education that ensures all girls have access to safe, high-quality schooling. Educating girls delays early marriage, improves economic opportunities, and helps break cycles of poverty and inequality (Unterhalter, 2015, p. 85).

Feminists argue that education not only equips girls with knowledge and skills but also challenges harmful gender norms that limit women's potential. However, millions of girls around the world still face barriers to education, including poverty, child marriage, and violence. Feminist organizations have been at the forefront of advocating for scholarships, safe learning environments, and social awareness campaigns that empower girls and their families to prioritize education (Glick, 2008, p. 100).

## Reducing Inequality (SDG 10: Reduced Inequality)

SDG 10 calls for the reduction of inequality within and among countries. Feminists emphasize intersectionality, the understanding that gender inequality intersects with other forms of discrimination based on race, disability, and economic status (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 40). Women from marginalized groups often face compounded barriers that limit their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

Addressing these intersecting inequalities is crucial for ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of gender equality. Social protection programs, such as cash transfers, universal healthcare, and economic safety nets, can reduce these inequalities and provide a foundation for economic empowerment for marginalized groups (Holmes & Jones, 2013, p. 66).

## Policy Recommendations for Economic Justice

Achieving gender equality and economic justice requires comprehensive, multifaceted strategies. Below are key policy recommendations:

1. **Legal Protections:** Strong laws against gender-based violence, discrimination, and wage inequality must be implemented and enforced. Countries with robust legal protections for women tend to have better gender equality outcomes (World Bank, 2020, p. 110).
2. **Awareness and Education:** Public awareness campaigns can shift societal attitudes, challenge gender stereotypes, and promote gender equality. Gender sensitivity training in schools and workplaces is essential for changing long-standing norms (Flood, 2015, p. 123).
3. **Economic Policies:** Policies supporting women's participation in the workforce, such as parental leave, affordable childcare, and flexible work options, are essential for achieving economic equality. These policies benefit society as a whole by improving economic productivity (Kabeer, 2016, p. 112).

## Overcoming Challenges and Barriers

Despite significant progress, numerous challenges remain in the Struggle for gender equality. Cultural norms, political resistance, and funding shortages are major barriers. Changing these entrenched attitudes and securing sufficient funding for gender equality programs require sustained effort and commitment from governments, civil society, and the private sector (Elson, 2017, p. 49).

Gender-responsive budgeting, which allocates resources based on gender-specific needs, is one way to address these challenges. This approach ensures that public funds are used effectively to promote equality (Sharp & Broomhill, 2013, p. 78). Increasing women's representation in leadership is also crucial. Female leaders can advocate for policies that prioritize women's needs and advance gender equality (Clayton, 2015, p. 85).

Economic power is central to the fight for gender equality. The intersection of feminism and the SDGs provides a compelling framework for addressing economic inequality and empowering women. Through legal protections, educational reforms, economic policies, and awareness campaigns, societies can work toward achieving economic justice for women. As feminism continues to challenge societal structures and advocate for systemic reform, the empowerment of women remains a crucial goal that will unlock broader social and economic progress.

## 2.3 Rights and Wrongs of Women

### Marxist Feminism and Women's Oppression

Marxist feminism provides a thorough and critical framework for understanding women's oppression in capitalist societies. It reveals how gender inequality is tightly linked with economic exploitation, arguing that true liberation for women requires transforming the very economic and social systems that currently exist (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18). This chapter examines the economic foundations of women's oppression, the gendered division of labor, the importance of intersectionality, and outlines the vision for women's emancipation through socialist change.

## The Economic Foundation of Women's Oppression

At the core of Marxist feminism lies the belief that women's exploitation is deeply embedded in capitalist systems. Friedrich Engels (1884) argued in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* that the emergence of private property led to patriarchal families where men gained control over wealth, and women became economically dependent. Engels viewed the family as a miniature capitalist unit, where women's unpaid domestic work caring for children, cooking, cleaning sustains the larger capitalist economy without recognition or compensation (Engels, 1884, p. 102).

Silvia Federici (2012) expands on Engels' insights by highlighting how this unpaid labor is invisible yet vital to capitalism's survival. Cooking, cleaning, and caregiving form the unseen backbone of economic productivity, yet society fails to value or acknowledge this work properly. Federici stresses that challenging this invisibility is essential to confronting women's economic oppression under capitalism (Federici, 2012, p. 67).

## Gendered Division of Labor

A major mechanism of women's oppression is the unequal division of labor in capitalist economies. Women are disproportionately found in low-paid, insecure, and informal jobs, which limits their economic independence and advancement. Heidi Hartmann (1979) argues that labor markets are structured to favor men, granting them access to higher-paying, stable positions while relegating women to precarious roles. This division is reinforced by patriarchal cultural norms that maintain existing power relations (Hartmann, 1979, p. 44).

Nancy Folbre (1994) further explains how cultural ideas confine women to unpaid caregiving roles, such as childcare or eldercare. While socially vital, this labor is either unpaid or poorly compensated, deepening women's financial disadvantage. This arrangement reduces women's independence and keeps them trapped in roles that perpetuate their secondary status both at work and in society (Folbre, 1994, p. 120).

## Intersectionality and Class Struggle

Marxist feminism emphasizes that gender oppression cannot be isolated from other forms of discrimination such as race, ethnicity, and class. This interconnectedness is known as intersectionality and is crucial for understanding the varied experiences of women under capitalism. Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) insists that the fight for women's liberation must be part of a wider struggle against capitalism. Feminist movements need to recognize how capitalist exploitation intersects with gender and class oppression to bring about real equality (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 99). For example, women from marginalized groups often face overlapping discriminations. A Black woman in a low-income job may experience racism, sexism, and economic exploitation all at once. Marxist feminism argues that only by addressing these intersecting oppressions can social change be meaningful and inclusive.

## Women's Emancipation and Social Change

Marxist feminists maintain that women's true liberation depends on overthrowing capitalism and establishing socialism. In a socialist society, exploitation would end, and caregiving responsibilities would be equally shared. Achieving this requires major changes like wealth redistribution, universal childcare, and community-based living arrangements (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 118).

Lise Vogel (1983) highlights socialism as the most effective way to address women's oppression. Socialist policies that prioritize equality and workers' rights can dismantle the economic and social systems that oppress women. For instance, universal childcare removes the unfair burden of caregiving from women alone. Redistributing wealth reduces economic inequalities, and collective living models lessen the weight of unpaid domestic labor (Vogel, 1983, p. 105).

## A Vision for the Future: Collective Action and Solidarity

Marxist feminism offers a clear and compelling vision for gender equality by addressing the economic roots of women's oppression and connecting feminist goals with class struggles. It argues that wealth redistribution, fair labor policies, and universal childcare are essential components for a society where women truly enjoy equality.

These transformations require solidarity and collective action. Marxist feminists stress that women's liberation is not possible without the combined efforts of workers, men, and marginalized communities. Changing family structures, labor markets, and social policies is necessary to dismantle the joint oppression of capitalism and patriarchy (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 118).

Marxist feminism presents a comprehensive analysis of women's oppression, linking it to economic exploitation under capitalism. It argues that genuine liberation for women requires a radical transformation of economic and social systems. Through policies such as wealth redistribution, shared caregiving, and universal childcare, socialism can create the conditions for true gender equality. This approach emphasizes the importance of collective struggle and solidarity in challenging the intertwined systems of capitalism and patriarchy. By addressing gender and economic oppression together, Marxist feminism offers a powerful framework for social justice and equality (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

## 2.4 Irrelevance of Society: Social Dogmas from Ancient to Contemporary

Social dogmas, or long-standing societal beliefs and cultural norms, have played a crucial role in maintaining power imbalances and gender inequality throughout history. These deeply embedded ideas are not merely cultural traditions but operate to uphold patriarchal structures that disadvantage women. From a Marxist feminist perspective, social dogmas must be understood as closely tied to economic systems, especially capitalism, which relies on the reproduction of gendered inequalities to sustain class hierarchies (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

### Historical Foundations of Social Dogmas

The historical roots of social dogmas reveal their function as tools of control. In many ancient societies, women were legally and culturally confined to private spheres, excluded from political and economic participation. For example, in classical Greece, women's exclusion from public life reflected broader patriarchal norms designed to secure male dominance (Pomeroy, 1994, p. 24). These societal rules laid the groundwork for centuries of gendered oppression that persist in various forms today.

Friedrich Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, connects these social norms to the emergence of private property and capitalist family structures. Engels argues that the rise of private property concentrated wealth and power in men's hands, turning women into economic dependents within patriarchal households (Engels, 1884, p. 45). His analysis remains central for understanding how economic and social oppression of women are intertwined, with social dogmas serving to justify and normalize their subordination.

### Persistence in Contemporary Society

Despite social and legal advances, many of these ancient dogmas endure in modern capitalist societies. Nancy Fraser (2013) describes capitalism's —crisis of care, where caregiving labor predominantly performed by women is undervalued and largely unpaid (Fraser, 2013, p. 67). This unpaid domestic work is essential for sustaining the workforce yet remains invisible in economic accounts. Social norms that assign caregiving roles to women continue to limit their opportunities and reinforce patriarchal dominance.

The ongoing cultural belief that women's —natural place is in the home not only restricts social mobility but also serves capitalism by subsidizing paid labor without cost. This symbiosis of capitalist economics and social dogmas perpetuates systemic gender inequality (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33).

### Gender Roles and Economic Exploitation

Marxist feminists emphasize that social dogmas around gender roles are deeply linked to economic exploitation. Silvia Federici (2012) highlights how the unpaid labor of women in the household supports capitalist production but is neither recognized nor compensated (Federici, 2012, p. 38). This invisibility keeps women economically dependent and socially marginalized, perpetuating their subordinate status.

Heidi Hartmann (1979) further argues that labor markets are structured by patriarchal norms, channeling women into low-paid, unstable jobs while men dominate better-paid, secure positions (Hartmann, 1979, p. 55). This labor division reinforces economic inequality and is culturally justified by associating caregiving and domestic work exclusively with

women. These deeply ingrained norms make it difficult to dismantle economic disparities without addressing the social ideas that support them.

### Intersectionality: The Complex Reality of Oppression

Marxist feminism acknowledges that social dogmas intersect with other forms of oppression, such as race, class, and sexuality. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced intersectionality to describe how overlapping identities compound discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 40). For instance, women of color face not only sexism but also racism and economic marginalization, resulting in unique challenges.

Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) stresses that feminist struggles must be connected to broader anti-capitalist efforts to fully address systemic oppression (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 51). Capitalism intensifies intersecting inequalities, so achieving gender justice requires dismantling economic systems that reinforce these injustices.

### Strategies for Dismantling Social Dogmas

Overcoming entrenched social dogmas demands a combined cultural and structural approach:

- **Education and Awareness:** Critical education about the history and economic roots of gendered norms is vital. bell hooks (2000) emphasizes education's power to challenge stereotypes and shift cultural attitudes (hooks, 2000, p. 83). Raising awareness helps individuals question and reject oppressive beliefs.
- **Policy and Legal Reforms:** Legal protections such as equal pay laws, anti-discrimination statutes, and social welfare programs are crucial to addressing economic inequalities rooted in social dogmas. Fraser (2013) argues that structural reforms supporting women's economic autonomy are essential to break the cycle of exploitation (Fraser, 2013, p. 75).
- **Grassroots Activism:** Community-based feminist movements are indispensable for pushing cultural change and holding institutions accountable. Bhattacharya (2017) highlights collective action as key to challenging entrenched systems and achieving justice (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 90). Such movements create spaces for marginalized voices and foster solidarity.

## 2.5 The Role of Women in Development

Understanding the role of women in development is crucial to comprehending how societies progress towards equity and sustainability. From a Marxist feminist perspective, women are not mere beneficiaries of development but active agents whose full inclusion is essential for meaningful social and economic transformation. This approach stresses that the social and economic systems sustaining gender inequality must be dismantled to enable women's empowerment and, by extension, the development of just societies (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

### Women as Active Participants in Development

Marxist feminism challenges the traditional notion that development is gender-neutral or that women play only a supportive role. Ester Boserup's groundbreaking study *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970) criticizes mainstream development theories for ignoring the significant contributions of women, especially in agriculture, industry, and services. Boserup demonstrates that despite their vital labor, women's economic contributions are often undervalued or unrecognized, perpetuating gender inequality in development processes (Boserup, 1970, p. 45). This omission weakens development outcomes by sidelining the potential of half the population.

Lourdes Benería (2003) extends this analysis by emphasizing the importance of including gender perspectives in development policy. She argues that acknowledging and valuing women's labor, both paid and unpaid, is necessary for creating sustainable development strategies that promote economic and social justice. Marxist feminists argue that without such inclusion, development remains incomplete and benefits only a privileged few (Benería, 2003, p. 89).

### Economic Empowerment as a Tool for Social Change

Economic empowerment forms the foundation of women's liberation and broader social transformation. Nancy Fraser (2013) explains that women's participation in economic activities enables them to challenge patriarchal norms and gain control over resources that determine their autonomy. Access to education, employment, and financial independence

empowers women to influence social and political structures, facilitating systemic change (Fraser, 2013, p. 72). Empowerment thus acts as a catalyst for advancing both individual rights and collective social progress.

Silvia Federici (2012) draws attention to the crucial yet undervalued role of reproductive labor—unpaid domestic work and caregiving that sustains capitalist economies. She argues that the invisibility and lack of compensation for such labor deepen women's economic subordination. Federici proposes that policies such as paid parental leave, subsidized childcare, and welfare support are vital to redistribute this burden and enable women to fully participate in economic development (Federici, 2012, p. 55).

### Women's Leadership in Grassroots Movements

Grassroots movements provide powerful platforms for women to confront systemic inequalities and advocate for social transformation. Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) highlights women's leadership in struggles against neoliberal economic policies, particularly in sectors like land rights, labor reforms, and environmental justice. These movements adopt intersectional strategies, addressing the overlapping oppressions related to gender, class, and race, and promote inclusive development models (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 34). Women's activism thus not only challenges economic exploitation but also fosters democratic participation.

### Intersectionality: Addressing Diverse Realities in Development

An intersectional framework is critical for understanding the complex ways women experience oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced intersectionality to reveal how multiple identities such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity intersect to produce unique forms of marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 40). In development contexts, this means recognizing that policies must address these overlapping inequalities to avoid reinforcing existing disparities.

Srilatha Batliwala (2010) stresses the importance of inclusive development that prioritizes marginalized women's voices. Participatory approaches grounded in intersectionality ensure that development initiatives benefit diverse groups and avoid

exclusion (Batliwala, 2010, p. 97). Such inclusiveness is essential for building equitable development frameworks.

## Policy Recommendations for Gender-Equitable Development

Marxist feminism proposes comprehensive policies that address structural inequalities and foster women's empowerment:

- **Economic Policies:** Closing the gender wage gap, promoting equal employment opportunities, and supporting women entrepreneurs through access to credit, training, and mentorship are vital steps toward economic justice (Benería, 2003, p. 101).
- **Social Protection:** Universal childcare, paid parental leave, and accessible healthcare services reduce the burden of unpaid labor and enable women's full economic participation (Federici, 2012, p. 59).
- **Education and Skill Development:** Investing in women's education creates a multiplier effect, improving economic participation and leadership capacities (Boserup, 1970, p. 88).
- **Legal Frameworks:** Strengthening laws against discrimination, harassment, and unequal pay creates a safer and more equitable environment for women in the workforce and public life (Fraser, 2013, p. 80).

## Broader Social Impact of Women's Empowerment

Women's active involvement in development leads to broader societal benefits, including poverty reduction, improved health and education, and more democratic social relations. Marxist feminism insists that development cannot be truly inclusive or effective without addressing the deep-rooted systems that marginalize women. Integrating gender analysis, valuing unpaid labor, supporting grassroots activism, and adopting intersectional approaches are necessary for fostering social justice and sustainable development (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 52).

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## Chapter: Three

# Empowering and Emancipating Women

The empowerment and emancipation of women necessitate a comprehensive transformation of both social and economic structures. Achieving true gender equality involves not only securing equal rights within existing frameworks but also dismantling the capitalist and patriarchal systems that perpetuate gendered inequalities. This chapter shifts the focus toward exploring the active role of women in their liberation, emphasizing the importance of economic independence, access to education, and the recognition of women's unpaid labor as fundamental to their empowerment. By addressing these structural and cultural barriers, women can realize greater autonomy, expand their societal participation, and actively contribute to the transformation of their circumstances within the broader socio-economic context.

Genuine freedom for women requires more than reforming family structures or addressing isolated inequalities; it demands a radical challenge to the intertwined systems of capitalism and patriarchy that underlie women's oppression. Marxist feminism offers a robust analytical framework for understanding how these systems operate, linking economic exploitation and gender inequality as inseparable facets of the same structural problem (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18). Women's unpaid labor, low wages, and social marginalization cannot be addressed fully without confronting the capitalist logic that values profit over human welfare and sustains patriarchal dominance.

Building on earlier arguments that emphasized the necessity of recognizing the intersections of race, class, and gender, the discussion further develops the concept of intersectionality to explain why the empowerment of women must account for diverse experiences and struggles. Amplifying the voices of marginalized women—those who face compounded oppression due to ethnicity, class, or geographic location—is essential for preventing feminist movements from reproducing exclusionary practices. The analysis criticizes narrower, bourgeois feminist approaches that often prioritize the concerns of privileged women, leaving structural inequalities unchallenged (Bebel & Walther, 1885, p. 15).

In exploring empowerment and emancipation, the section examines the role of socialist feminist thought, as advanced by thinkers such as Lenin, Engels, and modern scholars, in envisioning a society where women's labor—both paid and unpaid—is valued, and caregiving responsibilities are shared equitably (Lenin, 1934, p. 32; Engels, 1884, p. 101). Attention is also given to contemporary struggles, such as those of female workers in the global garment industry, where Marxist feminist principles have been applied to fight for fair wages, safe working conditions, and protections against exploitation. These case studies demonstrate the practical relevance of Marxist feminist theory in advancing social change.

The argument shows that empowering women is inseparable from broader social emancipation, requiring collective action that challenges capitalist exploitation and patriarchal control simultaneously. By deepening the understanding of the economic and social roots of women's oppression and advocating for systemic transformation, Marxist feminism offers a powerful pathway toward achieving genuine equality and liberation for all women (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

Achieving true freedom for women requires more than reforming family structures or addressing specific inequalities. This is a fundamental challenge to the intertwined systems of capitalism and patriarchy that underpin women's oppression. By using Marxist feminist theory, the research will explore how economic exploitation and gender inequality are inseparable and must be tackled simultaneously for genuine liberation. The seekers of women's emancipation have to face the concept of intersectionality, emphasizing that women experience oppression in different ways based on their race, class, ethnicity, and geographic location. As a consequence, a truly inclusive feminist movement must amplify the voices of marginalized women, particularly those whose struggles are compounded by these intersecting factors.

Feminist advocacy is required to address the broader social inequalities affecting women's lives. Engels' and Lenin's vision for a society is advantageous, as both paid and unpaid labor are equally valued and caregiving responsibilities are shared collectively. Real-world struggles, such as the fight for fair wages and safer working conditions in the global garment industry, demonstrate how Marxist feminist principles can be applied to drive meaningful social change.

The analysis also examines philosophical debates on women's rights and self-worth, including liberal feminism, Marxism, existentialism, radical feminism, and postmodernism. Liberal feminism has faced criticism for its focus on legal rights and formal equality, which often overlooks the deeper cultural, economic, and structural issues that sustain gender inequality. Legal reforms, while necessary, are insufficient on their own; true equality requires addressing the root causes of women's oppression.

In engaging with these philosophical perspectives, the discussion considers biological determinism and essentialism, which claim that gender roles are fixed based on biology. Drawing on the work of Judith Butler, this study challenges such views, emphasizing that gender is socially constructed and performative. This critique opens the door for new understandings of gender identity as fluid, dynamic, and subject to change, thereby providing greater freedom and resistance to traditional gender norms.

The impact of globalization and the digital era on feminist activism is also explored. Global movements such as #MeToo have amplified marginalized voices and fostered cross-border solidarity. At the same time, globalization presents contradictions: it expands opportunities for women's employment while simultaneously exposing them to exploitative labor conditions, particularly in industries such as garment manufacturing. A feminist response must therefore balance the promise of opportunity with resistance to the new forms of exploitation globalization produces. Literary works further reinforce these arguments. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* illustrate women's struggles for autonomy and independence, revealing how societal expectations limit women's freedom. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* offers a challenge to rigid gender binaries by exploring gender fluidity and transformation.

The emphasis on the intersection of gender and class which focuses on the experiences of peasant and working-class women. Drawing on Lenin's *On the Emancipation of Women* and August Bebel's critiques of rural women's exploitation, the argument demonstrates that women's emancipation is inseparable from struggles against class oppression. Intersectional analysis shows that liberation cannot be achieved without addressing economic inequality.

The notion of success within patriarchal and capitalist systems is also problematized. Marx's analysis of capitalism's reliance on unpaid domestic labor reveals how individual success often obscures ongoing systemic oppression. Literary works such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Adichie's *Americanah* illustrate how race, class, and gender intersect to restrict women's opportunities, even for those regarded as —successful. These critiques highlight the necessity of collective liberation that transcends individual achievements and confronts the structural roots of oppression.

Through its exploration of philosophical thought, intersectionality, globalization, and class, the discussion affirms that true emancipation of women requires dismantling both cultural and structural barriers. Such a framework provides feminist movements with inclusive and transformative pathways toward gender justice and social equality for all women.

### 3.1 Men and Women as Two Extremes of Society

Marxist feminism views men and women not merely as biological opposites but as representing two contrasting poles within capitalist society. This perspective highlights how economic power, social responsibilities, and labor are unevenly divided, reinforcing systemic inequalities that shape men's and women's lives differently. The roles and experiences of men and women under capitalism are constructed not only through physical differences but also through socially imposed divisions that uphold patriarchal control and economic exploitation (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

Central to Marxist feminist thought is the argument that capitalism actively creates and sustains gendered divisions of labor. Women are frequently relegated to unpaid work within the private sphere caring for children, maintaining the household, and providing emotional labor while men dominate the public sphere with paid employment and political power. This division between the —open sphere (public and paid labor, mostly occupied by men) and the —hidden sphere (unpaid domestic work, mostly undertaken by women) is a cornerstone of gender inequality under capitalism (Engels, 1884, p. 45). Friedrich Engels' analysis in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* reveals how the rise of private property solidified patriarchal family structures, turning the nuclear family into a tool

of capitalist reproduction that confined women's roles and subordinated them economically and socially.

Building on Engels' foundational ideas, scholars like Silvia Federici and Maria Mies deepen this critique by exposing how capitalism depends heavily on women's unpaid labor. Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* demonstrates how historical events such as the European witch hunts were instrumental in disempowering women by stripping them of reproductive knowledge and controlling their bodies and labor (Federici, 2004, p. 72). These acts were not merely about superstition but were systematic efforts to reinforce capitalist and patriarchal domination by controlling women's productive and reproductive capacities. Federici's work underscores the invisibility of women's unpaid domestic labor in capitalist economies, despite its critical role in sustaining the workforce and generating profit.

The division between men and women remains stark in contemporary society. Women still face widespread wage disparities, earning less than men for the same work, and are underrepresented in leadership positions across politics, business, and academia. Furthermore, women bear a disproportionate share of unpaid care work at home, which limits their capacity to fully engage in economic and public life and fosters continued economic dependency on men (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 52). These conditions illustrate how capitalist patriarchy structurally limits women's opportunities and reinforces male dominance both in the workplace and within families.

However, Marxist feminism does not portray women simply as passive victims of these structures. Instead, it emphasizes their agency and resistance within capitalist patriarchy. Feminist movements worldwide have mobilized to challenge these inequalities through demands for fair wages, legal protections, reproductive rights, and social programs that recognize and compensate women's labor. Grassroots actions such as international feminist strikes and campaigns for domestic and workplace reforms illustrate the collective strength and determination of women to transform oppressive systems. These movements underline that women's contributions whether in paid employment or unpaid care are vital to social reproduction and economic sustainability and must be recognized as such (Bebel & Walther, 1885, p. 37).

The conceptualization of men and women as two extremes within capitalist society helps to explain the persistent gender inequalities that exist today. By applying a Marxist feminist lens, one can see how capitalism and patriarchy are mutually reinforcing systems that divide labor, power, and resources along gendered lines. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for imagining and building a more equitable society, one that values all contributions regardless of gender and dismantles the structural barriers that maintain inequality (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33).

### 3.2 Marxist Approach Towards Feminism

The Marxist view of feminism offers a profound understanding of the intertwined relationship between capitalism, patriarchy, and the systemic oppression of women. Rooted in the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, this perspective reveals how capitalist systems inherently generate and exacerbate gender inequalities, deeply shaping the social and economic lives of women (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18). By situating women's oppression within broader class struggles, Marxist feminism critiques not only cultural norms but also material conditions that sustain gendered power imbalances.

Marx's seminal work, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, provides the essential framework for this critique. Marx elucidates how capitalism exploits labor to generate surplus value, highlighting the central role of unpaid reproductive labor predominantly performed by women within the household. This invisible labor, including childrearing, caregiving, and domestic maintenance, is foundational to sustaining the capitalist workforce, yet remains unrecognized and uncompensated in economic terms (Marx, 1867/1990, p. 215). Marxist feminists emphasize that acknowledging this reproductive labor is crucial to addressing women's economic marginalization.

Friedrich Engels further advances this argument in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. Engels traces the historical emergence of private property and patriarchal family structures that relegated women to economic dependence on men, thereby institutionalizing gender inequality (Engels, 1884/1987, p. 45). This transition from communal to class-based societies imposed domestic roles on women, anchoring patriarchy as an integral pillar of capitalist social relations. Engels' analysis is pivotal in demonstrating

that the family is not a neutral or natural entity but a social institution that reproduces class and gender hierarchies.

Modern Marxist feminists have extended these insights to analyze the impact of capitalism in a globalized context. Sylvia Federici, in *Caliban and the Witch*, explores how colonialism and capitalist expansion intensified the exploitation of women's bodies and reproductive labor, linking racial, gendered, and class oppression (Federici, 2004, p. 67). Federici's historical critique reveals the mechanisms by which women's labor both paid and unpaid has been appropriated to sustain capitalist accumulation and control.

Nancy Fraser's contemporary scholarship critiques neoliberal capitalism's exacerbation of gender inequalities. She identifies a —crisis of carell precipitated by austerity and privatization, which disproportionately offloads caregiving responsibilities onto women's unpaid labor in the home (Fraser, 2008, p. 88). Fraser argues that such neoliberal policies deepen structural barriers, underlining the need for social provisions that redistribute care work to achieve gender justice. This critique highlights how ongoing economic transformations continue to reinforce women's oppression within capitalist systems.

Philosophical traditions, although historically patriarchal, provide useful tools for feminist critique when critically engaged. Socrates, for instance, while not explicitly addressing feminism, promoted principles of justice, virtue, and self-examination that resonate with feminist ideals. In *The Republic*, Socrates' discussions emphasize justice as a universal good that benefits all citizens, aligning with feminist calls for equal rights and social inclusion (James, 2012, p. 35). Feminists such as bell hooks have drawn parallels between Socratic ethics and feminist struggles, viewing justice as both a moral and political imperative.

Socrates' famous maxim, —An unexamined life is not worth living, ll encourages self-reflection and critical awareness, which feminist thinkers like Audre Lorde and Simone de Beauvoir echo as essential to resisting oppression and fostering empowerment (Plato, 2007, p. 56). Despite the temporal distance, Socratic methods of questioning and reflection remain valuable for critiquing entrenched social injustices, including gender inequality.

Plato, a student of Socrates, advanced these ideas with a nuanced stance on gender. In *The Republic*, Plato envisioned a —guardian class of both men and women endowed with equal intellectual and moral capacities to govern society, an idea radical for his time (Plato, 2007, p. 78). Furthermore, in *The Symposium*, the thinker of Diotima articulates a conception of love that transcends physical attraction, emphasizing intellectual and spiritual growth accessible to all genders (Plato, 2009, p. 89). While Plato's views reflect his cultural context, they offer fertile ground for feminist analysis of gender, justice, and relational ethics.

Aristotle, Plato's student, offers a more problematic legacy. His *Politics* explicitly relegates women to a subordinate status, considering them naturally inferior and suited primarily for domestic roles (Aristotle, 2004, p. 122). However, feminist scholars critically engage with Aristotle's virtue ethics and concept of *eudaimonia* (human flourishing) to explore how ethical development and social roles intersect with gendered expectations (Knudsen, 1928, p. 62). Aristotle's focus on flourishing life provides a lens to critique systems limiting women's freedoms and to reimagine gender relations based on equity and justice.

Feminism, as a philosophical and social movement, draws on these diverse traditions to challenge gender discrimination and advance women's rights. It incorporates various schools of thought, each offering unique contributions to understanding and combating oppression. Liberal feminism emphasizes individual rights and equality before the law, advocating reforms to eliminate legal and institutional barriers (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p. 45). However, critics argue that it insufficiently addresses deeper cultural and economic inequalities (Tong, 2013, p. 89).

Marxist and socialist feminisms focus on the structural intersections of capitalism and patriarchy, emphasizing the necessity of dismantling both for true liberation (Eisenstein, 1979, p. 33). While Marxist feminism centers class struggle and economic exploitation, socialist feminism expands this by incorporating analyses of race and gender oppression. Both advocate collective action and systemic transformation but face critiques for potentially sidelining unique gendered experiences (Jaggar, 1983, p. 102).

Radical feminism highlights patriarchy as the fundamental source of women's oppression, focusing on issues such as sexual violence and bodily autonomy (Dworkin, 1981,

p. 22; MacKinnon, 1987, p. 56). Despite its powerful critique of male dominance, radical feminism is criticized for insufficiently addressing intersecting oppressions of race and class (Tong, 2013, p. 94).

Existentialist feminism, inspired by Simone de Beauvoir, stresses individual freedom and self-definition against imposed gender roles (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 118). However, critiques note that it may underplay systemic barriers that constrain choice (Moi, 2008, p. 48).

Postmodern feminism, particularly through Judith Butler's work, challenges fixed categories of gender, emphasizing fluidity and performativity (Butler, 1990, p. 30). While expanding feminist theory's conceptual scope, postmodernism is sometimes criticized for undermining unified political action due to its emphasis on fragmented identities (Fraser & Nicholson, 1990, p. 112).

Marxist feminism situates gender oppression within capitalist and patriarchal frameworks, urging structural change grounded in class analysis and economic justice. Philosophical traditions provide critical tools that, when reinterpreted, enrich feminist thought and advocacy. Together, these perspectives form a robust foundation for understanding and challenging the multifaceted nature of women's oppression, underscoring the imperative for collective struggle, intersectional awareness, and systemic transformation toward genuine gender equality (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

### 3.3 Philosophical Beliefs about Women's Rights, Esteem, and Emancipation

Philosophical reflections on women's rights, self-worth, and emancipation have evolved over centuries, enriching feminist theory and practice. These reflections are foundational to understanding how societies construct gender roles and how those roles impact women's lives. The philosophical frameworks that have shaped this discourse liberalism, existentialism, Marxism, and postmodernism offer diverse insights into the roots of women's oppression and pathways to their liberation. By critically engaging with these traditions, we uncover the complexities of gender inequality and the potential for transformative change.

## Liberalism and the Foundations of Women's Rights

Liberal philosophy laid early groundwork for advocating women's legal and political rights. Thinkers like John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft challenged entrenched gender hierarchies in the nineteenth century. Mill's *The Subjection of Women* argued that women's subordination was not natural but a product of outdated social norms that hindered societal progress (Mill, 1869, p. 23). For Mill, women's full liberty was essential to realizing humanity's intellectual and moral potential.

Similarly, Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* critiqued the systemic denial of education to women, claiming that this deprivation led to their perceived inferiority (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p. 41). Wollstonecraft argued that, given equal educational opportunities, women could achieve intellectual and moral parity with men. Both thinkers laid a foundation for feminist arguments emphasizing equality before the law and the right to education and political participation. Despite these advances, liberal feminism faces criticism for emphasizing formal legal equality while insufficiently addressing deeper cultural and economic barriers. While legal reforms opened institutional doors for women, persistent societal norms and structural inequalities have limited the full realization of equality (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18). Therefore, liberalism's promise remains unfulfilled without confronting these wider systemic issues.

## Intersectionality and Feminist Theory

The rise of feminist theory marked a decisive shift by expanding the analysis of gender oppression to include the intersections of race, class, and sexuality. This intersectional approach, pioneered by scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw and bell hooks, revealed that gender inequality cannot be understood in isolation from other axes of oppression.

Hooks, in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, critiqued early feminism's focus on middle-class white women, arguing that it neglected the compounded oppressions faced by women of color and working-class women (Hooks, 1984, p. 18). She called for a feminism that embraces diverse experiences and challenges all forms of domination.

Crenshaw's seminal essay *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* introduced the term —intersectionalityll to describe the unique discrimination faced by Black women due to the combined effects of racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 145). Her work urged feminist movements to broaden their scope to address intersecting inequalities effectively.

Intersectionality continues to inform feminist praxis, ensuring that advocacy is inclusive and responsive to the needs of all women, especially those marginalized within mainstream feminist discourse (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33).

### Self-Respect and Liberation in Feminist Philosophy

Philosophers like Martha Nussbaum have contributed significantly to feminist thought by focusing on women's capabilities and the real freedoms they have to live a flourishing life. Nussbaum's *Capabilities Approach* criticizes traditional economic measures, arguing that indicators like GDP overlook women's lived realities, especially in marginalized communities (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 80). She emphasizes enhancing women's capabilities in health, education, and autonomy as essential for genuine empowerment and self-respect.

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* further complicates traditional understandings by arguing that gender is not an innate attribute but a performance constructed through repeated social acts (Butler, 1990, p. 45). Butler's deconstruction of gender norms invites a reimagining of identity beyond rigid binaries, opening space for freedom from oppressive gender expectations. These philosophical perspectives underscore the necessity of recognizing individual agency while dismantling structural barriers that restrict women's freedom and dignity.

### Feminism in the Age of Globalization and Digital Media

The digital era has transformed feminist activism and philosophical engagement. Platforms like social media provide unprecedented opportunities for marginalized voices to be heard and for global solidarity to flourish. Campaigns such as #MeToo have highlighted the pervasiveness of sexual violence and systemic sexism, encouraging widespread demands for accountability and justice (Boyle, 2019, p. 13).

At the same time, globalization has presented complex challenges and opportunities. Economic globalization has expanded women's access to jobs and education but also exposed many to exploitative labor conditions, especially in developing countries' garment industries (Kabeer, 2005, p. 15). Feminist philosophy must thus engage critically with globalization's dual impact, advocating for policies that protect women's rights amid global economic shifts.

## Literature and the Challenge to Gender Roles

Literature offers critical insights into how gender roles shape individuals and societies. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* depicts a woman's struggle for autonomy within restrictive Victorian norms, embodying feminist resistance to prescribed gender roles (Brontë, 1847). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* explores women's resilience amidst war, illustrating the intersections of gender, race, and conflict (Adichie, 2006).

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* questions essentialist gender identities through a protagonist who transcends gender boundaries, encouraging readers to reconsider fixed social categories (Woolf, 1929). Such literary works illuminate the fluidity of gender and the cultural construction of identity, reinforcing feminist critiques of deterministic gender roles.

## Debunking Biological Determinism

A central feminist argument dismantles the myth of biological determinism, the belief that gender roles are naturally fixed due to biology. Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* traces how patriarchal family structures, alongside private property, institutionalized gender inequality (Engels, 1884/1987, p. 52). Feminist theorists argue that gender is primarily socially constructed to maintain power hierarchies rather than rooted in biology.

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* creatively challenges essentialist ideas by portraying fluid gender identity across time, illustrating the complexity of human experience beyond fixed categories (Woolf, 1929).

## The Plight of Peasant Women and Class Critiques

Lenin's *On the Emancipation of Women* exposes the exploitation of peasant women despite their vital role in agricultural labor, criticizing romanticized views of rural life (Lenin, 1934, p. 25). August Bebel highlights the harsh realities of poverty, lack of education, and political exclusion faced by rural women (Bebel, 1904, p. 41). These critiques emphasize the intersection of class and gender oppression.

## Limits of Success within Patriarchal Systems

While women's successes are often celebrated as progress, feminist critiques emphasize that achieving success within patriarchal capitalist frameworks can still uphold inequality. Marx's *Capital* critiques how capitalism depends on women's unpaid labor at home to sustain profit-making (Marx, 1867/1990, p. 423). Thus, individual success does not necessarily translate into collective liberation.

Literary narratives like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Adichie's *Americanah* explore how race, class, and gender intersect to constrain women's freedom, even when they appear successful (Atwood, 1985; Adichie, 2013). Philosophical beliefs about women's rights, self-esteem, and emancipation are deeply rooted in diverse traditions. From the liberal emphasis on legal equality by Mill and Wollstonecraft to the intersectional insights of hooks and Crenshaw, and the postmodern challenges by Butler, these perspectives provide critical tools to analyze and challenge gender oppression. Recognizing systemic barriers, embracing intersectionality, and debunking myths of biological determinism are crucial to advancing genuine gender equality. By integrating these philosophical insights, feminist movements are better equipped to foster inclusive social justice that respects and empowers all women.

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## Chapter: Four

# Marxist Feminism and Rational Emancipation

Marxist feminism offers a critical theoretical framework that unpacks the inseparable relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, two systems that collectively sustain women's oppression. This chapter examines how these structures of exploitation are perpetuated through both the unpaid and paid labor of women, highlighting the ways in which capitalism relies on the marginalization and devaluation of women's work. True emancipation, according to Marxist feminist theory, requires rational, collective action aimed at dismantling these intertwined systems. By analyzing key Marxist feminist thinkers and applying both historical and contemporary perspectives, this chapter argues for the necessity of systemic transformation to achieve genuine gender equality. Central to this transformation is the recognition of women's labor both domestic and wage labor as critical to the functioning of capitalist economies, and the call for a radical reorganization of society that eliminates these exploitative structures (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

At the core of Marxist feminism lie the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, whose works remain pivotal in understanding the economic and social dimensions of women's oppression. Marx's analysis in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* highlights how capitalist production depends on extracting surplus value from workers' labor, yet often disregards the unpaid reproductive labor women perform in the household, such as child-rearing, caregiving, and domestic tasks (Marx, 1867/1990, p. 215). This unpaid work is essential for reproducing the labor force and thus underpins capitalist profitability, though it remains unrecognized and uncompensated.

Engels deepened this understanding by explaining how the advent of private property led to the establishment of patriarchal family systems, which confined women to the domestic sphere and economic dependence on men (Engels, 1884/1987, p. 45). The family, as Engels argued, became an economic unit that reproduces both class and gender hierarchies, anchoring women's subordination within capitalist society. This framework reveals that

women's oppression cannot be separated from capitalist modes of production but is deeply embedded within them.

Simone de Beauvoir, while not explicitly a Marxist, greatly influenced Marxist feminism through her exploration of gender as a social construct. In *The Second Sex*, she described how women are positioned as —the Other, ll culturally defined in opposition to men and relegated to an inferior social status (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 118). Her insights extend Marxist critiques by emphasizing that patriarchal oppression operates not only through economics but also through cultural and ideological means, shaping women's identities and experiences of inferiority (Blee, 1983).

Modern scholars such as Nancy Fraser and Silvia Federici have further enriched Marxist feminist thought by analyzing contemporary capitalism. Fraser's critique of neoliberalism illustrates how austerity and privatization deepen the —crisis of care, ll disproportionately increasing women's unpaid caregiving burdens and intensifying gender inequality (Fraser, 2008, p. 88). Federici's work historicizes this exploitation, highlighting events like the European witch hunts as methods to control women's reproductive labor and consolidate capitalist power (Federici, 2004, p. 74). Both thinkers emphasize that recognizing and redistributing reproductive labor is essential for women's emancipation and the sustainability of the economy.

Marxist feminism advocates for rational emancipation an informed, collective movement to overthrow capitalism and patriarchy simultaneously. This approach stresses that women's liberation requires systemic change rather than isolated reforms. As Drescher (2007) argues, emancipation involves raising class consciousness, uniting women with other oppressed groups to challenge the economic and cultural foundations of their subjugation.

The theory insists on the full recognition and valuation of both paid and unpaid women's labor. It calls for comprehensive social policies, including universal childcare, equal pay, reproductive rights, and social safety nets that redistribute caregiving responsibilities and empower women economically and socially (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18). Such changes would dismantle the structures that maintain women's dependency and exclusion. Moreover, Marxist feminism criticizes bourgeois feminism for its narrow focus on legal rights and individual advancement that often excludes marginalized women and fails to

challenge deeper systemic inequalities (Bebel & Walther, 1885, p. 15). The framework demands an intersectional perspective that attends to race, class, ethnicity, and geographic disparities to ensure inclusive emancipation.

The relevance of Marxist feminism is evident in ongoing struggles faced by women workers worldwide. For example, the global garment industry, heavily reliant on female labor, epitomizes the exploitative dynamics Marxist feminists analyze. Workers, especially in countries like Bangladesh, confront unsafe conditions, low wages, and precarious contracts (Bryson, 2021). Marxist feminist activism promotes labor rights, unionization, and protective legislation as vital strategies to resist capitalist exploitation and patriarchal control. These struggles illustrate that emancipation is not abstract theory but a lived, practical challenge requiring solidarity across class, gender, and national boundaries. They demonstrate how Marxist feminism's focus on systemic oppression remains crucial to understanding and transforming women's realities in the global economy.

Marxist feminism is presented here as a powerful critique of gendered oppression rooted in the dynamics of capitalism and patriarchy. By centering the often marginalized contributions of women's reproductive and productive labor, it opens the door of the foundations of systemic inequality. The argument emphasizes that lasting emancipation requires shared consciousness, structural transformation, and intersectional unity.

Marxist feminism is examined as a key theoretical framework that connects capitalism and patriarchy as interdependent systems sustaining women's oppression. It argues that genuine emancipation for women requires collective, rational action aimed at dismantling these interlocking structures. By engaging with both historical and contemporary perspectives, Marxist feminism highlights how women's labor—both paid and unpaid—has been exploited under capitalism and insists on systemic transformation to achieve gender equality.

At the foundation of this framework are the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, whose analyses remain essential to understanding the economic and social dimensions of women's subordination. Marx showed how capitalist production depends on extracting surplus value from workers while disregarding the unpaid reproductive labor that women perform in the household, including caregiving, child-rearing, and domestic tasks. This labor,

though unrecognized and uncompensated, is indispensable for sustaining the labor force and ensuring capitalist profitability. Engels further developed this critique by tracing the origins of patriarchy to the rise of private property, which institutionalized patriarchal family structures. These confined women to the domestic sphere, rendered them economically dependent on men, and turned the family into a key economic unit reproducing both class and gender hierarchies. From this perspective, women's oppression is inseparable from capitalist modes of production. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* represents how women are defined in opposition to men, relegated to secondary roles, and socially positioned as —the Other. Patriarchal oppression impacts on economic systems, cultural & ideological structures that misshape women's identity into crisis and reinforce subordination. Contemporary scholars have expanded this analysis. Nancy Fraser criticizes neoliberalism and its effects on women, particularly through austerity and privatization policies that have intensified the —crisis of care, burdening women with greater unpaid caregiving responsibilities and deepening inequality.

Silvia Federici, through her historical analysis of the European witch hunts, shows how capitalist systems sought to control women's reproductive labor as a means of consolidating economic and social power. Both Fraser and Federici emphasize that recognizing, valuing, and redistributing reproductive labor is crucial for both women's emancipation and the sustainability of modern economies.

A central concern in Marxist feminism is the idea of rational emancipation, which maintains that liberation cannot be achieved through isolated reforms. Instead, emancipation requires raising class consciousness and forging solidarity between women and other oppressed groups to challenge the intertwined foundations of capitalism and patriarchy. This position also criticizes bourgeois feminism for its narrow focus on legal rights and individual achievements. Such approaches frequently exclude marginalized women and fail to address deeper systemic inequalities. In contrast, an intersectional approach that incorporates race, class, ethnicity, and geographic context is necessary to ensure inclusivity and justice within feminist movements. The framework's relevancy is evident in contemporary labor struggles. The global garment industry, extremely dependent on female workers in countries such as Bangladesh, exemplifies the exploitative conditions analyzed by Marxist feminists. Women workers face unsafe working environments, poverty wages, and job insecurity, making the

case for stronger labor rights, unionization, and protective legislation. These struggles align with Marxist feminist calls for structural transformation and collective resistance to capitalist exploitation and patriarchal domination.

Marxist feminism ultimately demonstrates that emancipation is not an abstract or individual pursuit but a collective and practical challenge. It calls for solidarity that cuts across class, gender, and national lines and insists that structural inequalities can only be dismantled by recognizing and valuing both productive and reproductive labor. Through a holistic approach that combines legal reform, economic restructuring, cultural critique, and intersectional inclusivity, Marxist feminism offers a transformative framework for advancing gender justice and social equality.

## 4.1 Concept of Emancipation

The concept of emancipation has been a core concern throughout the history of philosophical thought, evolving from ancient understandings of personal virtue and freedom to modern ideas of social and political liberation. Emancipation generally refers to the process by which individuals or groups free themselves from oppression, domination, or unjust constraints. Across different eras and thinkers, emancipation has been framed variously as liberation from tyrants, ignorance, or systemic injustice. This chapter critically explores the philosophical development of emancipation, focusing on its meaning in relation to gender and women's liberation, with particular attention to Marxist feminist perspectives, which insist on addressing both economic and cultural dimensions of oppression (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

In Ancient Greek philosophy, Aristotle laid an early foundation for the idea of emancipation through his concept of *eudaimonia*, often translated as 'human flourishing' or 'the good life.' Aristotle argued that true freedom is achieved through the development of virtue and reason, allowing individuals to live ethically and fulfill their potential (Chattopadhyay, 2023). For Aristotle, emancipation was a personal endeavor: it involved freeing oneself from ignorance and base desires to achieve moral excellence. However, this vision was limited in its social scope, as Aristotle accepted existing hierarchies and excluded women and slaves from the full benefits of this 'good life.' Nevertheless, his emphasis on

self-mastery and rational development laid the groundwork for later discussions about individual freedom and moral responsibility.

The Enlightenment period marked a significant evolution in the concept of emancipation by introducing the values of reason, autonomy, and political liberty. Immanuel Kant famously defined enlightenment as —man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity, ll emphasizing the use of one’s own reason without guidance from others (Hartmann, 2010). For Kant, emancipation required intellectual independence and the courage to question authority and tradition. Building on these ideas, John Stuart Mill expanded emancipation into the social and political realms. In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill argued that women’s subordination was not natural but the product of outdated social norms and that true liberty for women was essential for societal progress (Mill, 1869). Mill insisted that freedom of thought, speech, and equal participation in public life were necessary conditions for both individual development and collective advancement.

While these Enlightenment thinkers championed formal legal equality and individual freedoms, critics argue that their focus was too narrow. Legal reforms alone could not dismantle deep-rooted cultural norms and economic inequalities that continued to restrict women’s full participation and autonomy. Thus, the Enlightenment promise of emancipation remained incomplete without addressing systemic social and economic barriers (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33).

Karl Marx offered a profound shift in the understanding of emancipation by highlighting the material conditions and economic structures that produce oppression. Marx emphasized that freedom from exploitation and alienation in capitalist society was central to true emancipation (Mojab, 2015). For Marx, liberation was not only a matter of individual rights but of collective social transformation. Together with Friedrich Engels, Marx argued that capitalism’s class system oppressed workers including women by extracting surplus value from their labor. Engels further analyzed how this economic oppression intertwined with gender inequality through the development of the patriarchal family. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Engels argued that private property entrenched class and gender hierarchies, confining women to unpaid domestic roles and economic dependence on men (Engels, 1884/1987, p. 45). This historical materialist perspective made

clear that emancipation required dismantling both capitalist exploitation and patriarchal social relations.

More recently, scholars such as Michel Foucault have emphasized emancipation as an ongoing and contested process rather than a final destination. Foucault argued that power relations permeate all aspects of social life, and thus resistance to domination is continuous and context-specific (Foucault, 1980). This view aligns with feminist understandings that liberation is an active struggle against intersecting systems of oppression, not a static achievement. Feminist theorists like Charlotte Bunch have expanded emancipation to encompass global human rights, emphasizing that women's liberation is inseparable from broader social justice movements (Bunch, 1990). The abolition of slavery, civil rights struggles, and gender equality campaigns are all understood as part of the shared fight for freedom.

Contemporary feminist theory, especially the concept of intersectionality, has further enriched the idea of emancipation by insisting that gender oppression cannot be understood in isolation from race, class, sexuality, and other social identities. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality to describe the overlapping forms of discrimination faced by Black women due to both racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1989). bell hooks similarly criticized mainstream feminist movements for focusing on the concerns of white, middle-class women while neglecting marginalized groups (Hooks, 1984). These criticisms stress that any meaningful emancipation must be inclusive, addressing the full complexity of women's diverse experiences (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 52).

The concept of emancipation has undergone profound transformations, from Aristotle's individualistic virtue ethics to the systemic critiques of Marx and Engels, and the inclusive, intersectional frameworks of contemporary feminism. Emancipation is both a personal and collective project that requires overcoming internalized oppression as well as external structures of domination. True liberation for women demands legal equality, economic justice, cultural change, and continuous political struggle. By drawing on these rich philosophical traditions, Marxist feminism offers a compelling vision for social transformation, emphasizing that freedom is inseparable from equality and justice for all (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

## 4.2 Recent Works on Marxist Feminism

In recent decades, Marxist feminism has experienced a revival, gaining renewed relevance as scholars and activists deepen their analysis of gender oppression within capitalist societies. This resurgence has stimulated vigorous debates and fresh interpretations, advancing the movement's understanding of how capitalism and patriarchy jointly sustain women's subjugation (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

One notable contribution comes from Nancy Fraser, who expands classical Marxist theory by integrating feminist perspectives that highlight the dual reliance of capitalism on economic exploitation and unpaid domestic labor. Fraser underscores that women's reproductive work within households is indispensable to capitalism's survival, yet remains largely invisible and excluded from economic recognition (Fraser, 2008, p. 88). Her work demonstrates the inextricable link between patriarchy and capitalism, arguing that women's unpaid labor subsidizes the workforce while reinforcing gender inequality. This insight broadens Marxist feminism by emphasizing that economic systems cannot be understood without considering social reproductive processes (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

Silvia Federici has similarly foregrounded the role of reproductive labor in capitalist economies. Her seminal work illustrates how women's unpaid care work, including childrearing and domestic tasks, is essential but systematically devalued within capitalist frameworks (Federici, 2004, p. 67). Federici's analysis connects this devaluation to historical mechanisms of control, such as the witch hunts, which served to discipline women's bodies and labor. By revealing how capitalism commodifies motherhood and caregiving, Federici's contributions deepen Marxist feminist critiques of economic and social oppression (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

Beyond economic analyses, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity has influenced Marxist feminist discourse by challenging the essentialist notion of gender. Butler argues that gender is socially constructed through repetitive acts and norms rather than biological determinism (Butler, 1990, p. 30). This framework helps Marxist feminists understand how capitalism perpetuates rigid gender roles to maintain hierarchical control, extending the critique of capitalist exploitation to include cultural and identity-based

dimensions (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33). Butler's work thus enriches the movement's capacity to address not only material but also symbolic aspects of oppression.

Intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is another critical theoretical advance incorporated by modern Marxist feminists. Intersectionality reveals how overlapping systems of oppression based on gender, race, class, and sexuality shape the lived experiences of marginalized women differently (Crenshaw, 1989). By integrating intersectional analysis, Marxist feminism becomes more inclusive and nuanced, capable of addressing the specific challenges faced by women of color and other marginalized groups under capitalism. This approach counters critiques that Marxist feminism sometimes overlooks the multiplicity of oppression (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

However, despite these significant theoretical advancements, ongoing debates continue to challenge the coherence and direction of Marxist feminism. One central contention is the prioritization of class oppression versus gender oppression. While some Marxist feminists maintain that class struggle remains the primary axis of emancipation, others argue for equal emphasis on gender as an independent and interlocking system of oppression (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33). This tension reflects broader disputes within Marxism about how to integrate diverse forms of social injustice without diluting the movement's focus.

Similarly, disagreements persist over the role of the state in promoting gender equality. Reformist perspectives emphasize the potential of state policies such as universal childcare, paid parental leave, and equal pay legislation to mitigate gender disparities (Sultana, 2023, p. 48). Advocates for these reforms argue that government intervention is necessary to challenge institutional barriers and improve women's conditions within capitalism. Conversely, more radical Marxist feminists view the state as an instrument of capitalist patriarchy, whose reforms merely mask systemic exploitation and delay revolutionary change. These critics insist that only a fundamental transformation of capitalist relations can secure genuine emancipation for women (Sultana, 2023, p. 50).

Despite these internal debates, the continued dialogue within Marxist feminism signals a vibrant and dynamic intellectual tradition. By incorporating insights from feminist theorists like Fraser, Federici, Butler, and Crenshaw, contemporary Marxist feminism provides a

sophisticated analysis of how gender oppression is embedded within capitalist social relations. The movement's emphasis on intersectionality and cultural critique expands the framework beyond economic reductionism, enriching strategies for social change (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

### 4.3 The Relevance of Women's Property Rights : Bangladesh Perspective

Women's property rights are a critical dimension of gender equality and economic empowerment, yet in Bangladesh, these rights remain contested due to entrenched cultural, social, and economic inequalities. Property ownership is widely recognized as a key factor in ensuring personal freedom and financial independence. However, in Bangladeshi society, patriarchal norms and traditional customs significantly hinder women from owning, inheriting, or maintaining property. This chapter critically examines the status of women's property rights in Bangladesh, integrating scholarly perspectives, legal frameworks, and socio-cultural barriers to illuminate why property ownership remains a pivotal yet elusive goal for many women.

Historically, Bangladeshi society has been dominated by patriarchal family structures where men, especially fathers and husbands are regarded as the primary decision-makers concerning property and inheritance. This male-centric control over property reflects a broader cultural ideology that assigns authority and ownership rights predominantly to men.

The discourse on women's property rights extends beyond mere legal entitlements; it is deeply connected to principles of justice, equality, and human rights. John Locke's philosophy, emphasizing natural rights to property acquired through labor, initially underscored property as fundamental to individual liberty. However, Locke's views predominantly centered on men, reflecting gender biases inherent to his era (Schwartz, 2013, p. 67). In contrast, Karl Marx offered a critical lens on private property, highlighting how it perpetuates systemic inequalities by privileging those already in power (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18). From a Marxist feminist perspective, women's exclusion from property ownership in Bangladesh is symptomatic of broader structural oppression, where economic and social institutions systematically favor male dominance, thus reinforcing class and gender hierarchies.

Legal reforms in Bangladesh, such as the Women's Property Rights Act of 1995, signify important progress in recognizing women's rights to inherit and own property. However, the practical implementation of these laws faces considerable obstacles. Deeply ingrained customs and unequal inheritance practices persist, often limiting women's ability to exercise their legal rights effectively (Sultana, 2023, p. 35). Even when women possess awareness of their legal entitlements, familial and societal pressures can discourage or prevent them from asserting these rights. This dynamic illustrates how formal legal provisions alone are insufficient without accompanying shifts in social attitudes and enforcement mechanisms.

Economic independence through property ownership has transformative potential for women and their communities. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach offers a valuable framework to understand this dynamic, emphasizing that control over property enhances women's real freedoms and choices, improving their quality of life and fostering greater participation in social, educational, and health domains (Sen, 1999, p. 74). Martha Nussbaum echoes this view, asserting that property ownership constitutes a fundamental capability essential for personal development and social inclusion (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 89). In the context of Bangladesh, empowering women with secure property rights would not only reduce their economic vulnerability but also enable them to influence household and community decisions, fostering broader societal progress.

To enhance women's property rights effectively, a multifaceted approach is necessary. While legal reform remains crucial, it must be coupled with robust educational campaigns aimed at increasing women's awareness of their rights and capabilities. Financial empowerment initiatives, such as microfinance programs, vocational training, and financial literacy education, are vital tools to provide women with the resources and confidence needed to claim and manage property (Sultana, 2023, p. 42). Furthermore, accessible legal aid services are essential to support women navigating complex inheritance disputes, often exacerbated by patriarchal family structures.

Women's property rights in Bangladesh exemplify the intersection of cultural traditions, legal structures, and economic realities that sustain gender inequality. While legislative progress provides a foundation, true empowerment depends on dismantling deep-rooted social barriers and promoting women's economic autonomy. Recognizing the intrinsic link

between property ownership and gender justice, it is imperative to foster holistic strategies that integrate legal, social, and economic reforms. Only through such comprehensive efforts can women in Bangladesh achieve genuine emancipation, securing rights that are vital for their dignity, independence, and full participation in society (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

#### 4.4 Ethical Perspective

The ethical dimension of feminism offers profound insights into the pursuit of justice, fairness, and human dignity during periods of social and political transformation. Judith Astellara's analysis of feminism and democratic transitions in Spain illustrates how ethical and philosophical frameworks shape societal values and influence the realization of gender equality (Astellara, 2018). Her work highlights the inseparable nature of feminism, ethics, and existentialism in understanding justice, particularly in contexts marked by overlapping oppressions related to gender, race, and class. Philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir and bell hooks have emphasized that these systems of oppression are intertwined, making it impossible to isolate one form without addressing the others (hooks, 1984, p. 22).

Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism critically examines how women are socially constructed as —the Other, relegated to a position of inferiority relative to men, who occupy the norm or standard (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 15). In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir argues that women's emancipation hinges on their ability to transcend these imposed identities and claim autonomy in defining their existence. Existentialism, therefore, challenges women to break free from traditional social roles and cultural expectations that constrain their self-realization (Bunch, 1990, p. 34). This framework not only spotlights individual freedom but also contextualizes liberation within the broader societal structures that perpetuate inequality.

bell hooks expands this analysis by introducing an intersectional approach to feminism. In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, hooks critiques mainstream feminist movements for predominantly addressing the concerns of privileged, white women while overlooking the compounded struggles faced by women of color and working-class women (hooks, 1984, p. 28). Her emphasis on intersectionality urges a rethinking of justice as inclusive of all identities and experiences, stressing that equality cannot be achieved unless

the most marginalized voices are heard and prioritized. Astellara's examination of Spain's democratic transition reveals that, despite political reforms, women's participation and recognition remained limited, an outcome shaped by enduring intersectional inequalities (Astellara, 2018).

Ethical theories such as utilitarianism and deontology provide further lenses to evaluate justice during democratic changes. Utilitarianism promotes the greatest good for the greatest number, encouraging decision-makers to prioritize policies benefiting the majority (Mill, 1869). However, its inherent limitation lies in potentially marginalizing minorities, as seen in Spain where the majority's interests often overshadowed the rights of women and minority groups during democratization efforts (Sultana, 2023, p. 47). This tension calls for a critical evaluation of utilitarian ethics when applied to complex social realities marked by uneven power relations.

In contrast, deontological ethics, most notably Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative, advocate for actions grounded in moral duty irrespective of outcomes (Kant, 1785). Kantian ethics emphasize respecting every individual's inherent dignity and rights. Applied to democratic transitions, this framework demands that equality and justice for women and minorities be upheld even if they challenge existing political or economic stability (Hartmann, 2010, p. 53). This ethical stance highlights the necessity of prioritizing principles of justice over pragmatic compromises that may perpetuate exclusion.

Existentialism contributes a further ethical dimension by centering individual responsibility and freedom. Philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus promote the idea that individuals must actively create meaning and challenge oppressive structures (Sartre, 1943). During periods of democratic change, existentialism encourages collective and personal action against injustice rather than passive acceptance of the status quo (Schwartz, 2013, p. 67). This perspective reinforces feminist calls for agency and resistance in the face of enduring gender inequalities.

John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness also enriches the ethical conversation surrounding democracy and equality. Rawls introduces the —veil of ignorancell as a thought experiment, urging the design of social systems without foreknowledge of one's own status, thereby ensuring impartial justice (Rawls, 1971). For Spain and similar contexts, this implies

critically addressing historical injustices and creating institutions that guarantee equal opportunities for all, particularly women and marginalized groups (Griffler, 2023, p. 58). Rawls' focus on supporting the least advantaged resonates strongly with intersectional feminist ethics.

Astellara's integration of feminist, ethical, and philosophical perspectives present a comprehensive framework for analyzing justice and fairness in democratic transitions. In contemporary global contexts, where oppressions intersect and democratic institutions evolve, such an approach is essential to ensure that political change translates into substantive equality and inclusion (Astellara, 2018). By combining existentialist freedom, intersectional awareness, and principled ethical reasoning, societies can better navigate the challenges of building fair and just democratic orders that truly respect human dignity.

#### 4.5 Women's Human Rights

The phrase —Women's Rights are Human Rightsll has become a central rallying cry in feminist and human rights discourse, encapsulating the inseparable link between gender equality and universal human dignity. This powerful idea emphasizes that women must enjoy the same fundamental rights as all human beings to achieve justice, equality, and respect (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18). Historically, women's rights were often marginalized or treated as secondary concerns, but contemporary philosophical and legal frameworks increasingly recognize gender equality as an essential component of human rights.

At the heart of this concept lie the principles of human dignity and universality, drawing heavily on the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant argued that all rational beings deserve respect and should never be treated merely as means to an end, underscoring the inherent value of every individual (Greenhill & Wilson, 2018, p. 44). His categorical imperative provides a philosophical foundation for the recognition of women's equal status and rights as autonomous individuals. The feminist movements of the twentieth century expanded this foundation, demanding equal participation and power for women across political, social, and economic spheres.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, marked a landmark global commitment to equality. However,

second-wave feminists soon criticized the UDHR for its limited focus on women's specific issues such as domestic violence, reproductive autonomy, and workplace discrimination (hooks, 1984, p. 65). This critique highlighted the need to broaden human rights protections to address the distinct and pervasive challenges faced by women.

Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach offers a compelling bridge between women's rights and human rights. Nussbaum argues that human rights should prioritize individuals' abilities to live flourishing lives, emphasizing not only legal protections but also the social and economic conditions that enable genuine freedom and dignity (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 83). For women, this means access to education, healthcare, and economic resources that allow them to exercise autonomy and participate fully in society.

Building on this, Seyla Benhabib introduces the concept of relational autonomy, stressing that personal choices are always embedded within social and cultural contexts (Seymour, 2012, p. 29). Benhabib's theory insists that legal reforms must be accompanied by cultural transformation to dismantle the social barriers limiting women's agency. Simply granting rights on paper is insufficient if societal norms continue to restrict women's freedom.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's groundbreaking theory of intersectionality further deepens our understanding of women's human rights by revealing how race, class, gender, and other identities overlap to produce unique forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 150). Women of color, for instance, experience discrimination that cannot be fully addressed by focusing on gender alone. Intersectionality compels feminist and human rights advocates to adopt inclusive frameworks that recognize and respond to diverse lived realities.

Feminist critiques reveal patriarchy as a structural system not only favoring men but also enabling violence, exclusion, and systemic discrimination against women. Issues such as domestic violence and reproductive rights, once dismissed as private matters, are now recognized as fundamental human rights concerns. The feminist slogan —The Personal is Political— powerfully captures this link between individual experiences and broader social structures, underscoring how personal struggles are embedded within political systems that must be challenged (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33).

A major milestone in institutionalizing women's human rights was the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by the United Nations in 1979. CEDAW articulates comprehensive obligations to eliminate gender discrimination and promote equality in education, employment, health, and political participation (United Nations, 1979). While significant progress has been made under CEDAW's framework, many challenges persist globally. Women continue to face violence, restricted access to education, and underrepresentation in political offices.

The phrase —Women's Rights are Human Rights— remains a vital call to action, symbolizing the ongoing struggle to secure gender equality in law and practice. Thinkers such as Nussbaum, Benhabib, and Crenshaw demonstrate that achieving true equality requires integrating autonomy, intersectionality, and cultural change alongside legal reform. Recognizing women's rights as human rights is not only a matter of justice but a necessity for building inclusive and equitable societies where every individual can thrive.

## 4.6 Eastern Pioneers of Feminism and Social Reform

The history of feminism in South Asia is deeply enriched by pioneering thinkers who courageously challenged entrenched patriarchal norms and advocated for women's rights, education, and social justice. These eastern reformers such as Raja Rammohan Ray, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Begum Rokeya, Humayun Azad, and Nawab Faizunnessa Choudhurani laid the foundation for subsequent feminist movements in the region by confronting cultural and religious traditions that marginalized women (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18). Their work reflects a crucial engagement with both local contexts and broader philosophical ideas, highlighting the intersection of gender, culture, and social reform.

Raja Rammohan Ray, a seminal thinker of the Bengal Renaissance, was an early advocate for women's emancipation and social justice. His relentless campaign against sati the practice of widow immolation marked a critical step in challenging oppressive customs that devalued women's lives (Gimenez, 2018). By denouncing sati as inhumane, Ray not only saved lives but also questioned the legitimacy of traditions that enforced female subjugation. He further championed women's education, arguing that empowering women through learning was essential for their individual freedom and societal progress. Influenced by

Enlightenment ideals, Ray's advocacy blended Western liberal thought with a deep commitment to reforming Indian society.

Following Ray, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar contributed significantly to women's rights through education and social reform. Vidyasagar's efforts to establish girls' schools opened new avenues for female empowerment in a time when educational access was almost exclusively male. His activism against child marriage and support for widow remarriage challenged social norms that relegated women to marginal, dependent roles (Chattopadhyay, 2023). Vidyasagar's reforms underscored the transformative power of education and legal change in advancing women's status in society.

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, a pioneering Bengali feminist, expanded these efforts by founding institutions focused on girls' education and writing visionary works that imagined gender equality. Her novel *Sultana's Dream* depicted a society where women held leadership and freedom, a bold critique of patriarchal restrictions (Wollstonecraft, 1792). Rokeya's activism was deeply rooted in the intersection of education, literature, and social reform, inspiring generations of women to envision and strive for a more equitable society.

In the twentieth century, Humayun Azad emerged as a critical voice for feminism in Bangladesh. Azad's writings addressed topics that were often taboo, such as female sexuality, domestic violence, and reproductive rights. He emphasized the importance of intersectionality by linking gender oppression with class and religious structures that compounded women's marginalization (Bedoya Cortés, 2023). Despite facing significant opposition and threats, Azad's unwavering commitment to gender equality continues to influence feminist discourse and activism.

Nawab Faizunnessa Choudhurani represents another vital thinker who dedicated her aristocratic privilege to advancing women's education and fighting regressive customs like child marriage and dowry. By founding schools and promoting education for marginalized girls, she challenged both cultural and economic barriers to women's empowerment (Coole, 2015). Her work illustrates the critical role of education as a tool of liberation and social transformation.

Together, these eastern pioneers demonstrate that feminist struggles are not confined to Western narratives but are deeply embedded in the historical and cultural fabric of South Asia. Their legacies highlight how women's emancipation has always required confronting both local traditions and global systems of oppression. By linking education, legal reform, and social activism, these reformers provided a comprehensive framework for challenging patriarchal dominance and advancing gender equality. Moreover, their efforts resonate with broader feminist theoretical perspectives discussed in earlier chapters. Like Marxist feminism's critique of capitalism and patriarchy, these pioneers understood that women's liberation necessitated systemic change, not just isolated reforms. Their activism embodied the principle that emancipation is both a personal and collective struggle, requiring awareness, courage, and sustained effort to dismantle deeply rooted inequalities (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

The contributions of Raja Rammohan Ray, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Begum Rokeya, Humayun Azad, and Nawab Faizunnessa Choudhurani remain foundational to feminist thought and action in South Asia. Their visionary work paved the way for contemporary feminist movements, emphasizing education, social justice, and the transformation of oppressive structures. Recognizing their enduring impact is essential for appreciating the rich diversity and depth of feminist struggles globally and for inspiring ongoing efforts toward gender equality.

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## Chapter: Five

### The Future of Women

This chapter explores the future possibilities for women's liberation, focusing on the vision of a society where women are free from both capitalist exploitation and patriarchal domination. Marxist feminism provides a critical framework for imagining such a future, where the systemic structures of oppression are dismantled through collective, intersectional struggles. Central to this vision is the recognition of women's labor both paid and unpaid as integral to the functioning of society. Achieving genuine emancipation requires not only economic redistribution but also a radical transformation of cultural and social norms that perpetuate gender inequality. By envisioning a future based on equality, cooperation, and justice, this chapter discusses the pathways to creating a world where women are no longer confined by exploitative systems and can fully exercise their autonomy and freedom.

Marxist feminism asserts that women's oppression is not accidental but embedded within the capitalist system, which depends on maintaining gender inequalities to reproduce labor power and maximize profit. Therefore, the future of gender equality is inseparable from the radical transformation of capitalism and patriarchy. Utopian visions, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (Gilman, 1904, p. 27), illustrate this possibility. In this imagined society, traditional gender roles are abolished, economic justice prevails, and social cooperation fosters equality and freedom for all (Gilman, 1904, p. 30). Such works offer critical insight into the necessity and feasibility of structural change for women's liberation.

The concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw and expanded by scholars like bell hooks and Angela Davis, enriches Marxist feminist analysis by emphasizing that women's experiences of oppression vary according to race, class, sexuality, and other identities (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 145; Hooks, 1984, p. 18). Any future feminist project must address these intersecting oppressions to be truly inclusive and effective. This framework deepens the understanding of diverse women's realities and guides strategies for solidarity and collective empowerment.

Contemporary thinkers further contribute vital perspectives to imagining women's futures. Judith Butler challenges fixed gender categories by theorizing gender as performative and fluid, an idea that takes on new significance in a post-capitalist society free from rigid gender hierarchies (Butler, 1990, p. 45). Silvia Federici highlights the crucial role of unpaid care work, a labor largely performed by women and systematically devalued by capitalist systems. Federici argues that reorganizing and recognizing this labor is essential not only for women's empowerment but also for building a just and sustainable economy (Federici, 1990, p. 160).

Marxist feminism envisions the future of women as inseparable from the broader struggle for social and economic justice. It calls for dismantling the structural foundations of capitalism and patriarchy and constructing inclusive systems that value all forms of labor and identity. Through collective consciousness, intersectional solidarity, and systemic transformation, genuine gender equality and emancipation can be achieved (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

This study explores the future possibilities for women's liberation, building on the analysis of Marxist feminism, which has shown how capitalism and patriarchy function as intertwined systems of oppression. The focus is on how Marxist feminism envisions a society free from both capitalist exploitation and patriarchal domination. Women's subordination is revealed as deeply embedded within capitalism, a system that relies on gender inequality to reproduce labor power and maximize profit. Consequently, the struggle for gender equality cannot be separated from the radical transformation of both capitalism and patriarchy. Utopian works such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* provide valuable insight into this vision. By imagining a society without rigid gender roles, grounded in economic justice and social cooperation, such texts demonstrate the necessity and feasibility of structural change for women's emancipation.

At the same time, the discussion deepens the concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw and expanded by bell hooks and Angela Davis. Intersectionality shows how women's oppression is shaped by overlapping identities—race, class, sexuality, and beyond. Any future feminist project must therefore address these multiple dimensions of inequality to be genuinely inclusive and effective. Collective empowerment and solidarity

emerge as essential strategies for confronting the diverse realities of women's lives. Contemporary scholarship strengthens this framework further. Judith Butler's conception of gender as performative and fluid is especially relevant to envisioning a post-capitalist society in which rigid gender hierarchies no longer dominate. Silvia Federici emphasizes the centrality of unpaid care work, long devalued under capitalism, to both women's subordination and economic reproduction. Recognizing and redistributing this labor becomes vital not only for women's empowerment but also for building a just and sustainable economy.

For the betterment of human society and development, the future of women's liberation is inseparable from broader struggles for social and economic justice. Marxist feminism envisions transformation through the dismantling of both capitalism and patriarchy, replacing them with inclusive systems that value all forms of labor and identity. By fostering collective consciousness, intersectional solidarity, and systemic change, this framework demonstrates the pathways through which genuine gender equality and emancipation can be achieved.

## 5.1 Rational Emancipation

Rational emancipation stands as a central principle within Marxist feminism, focusing on dismantling the deep-rooted systems of power that generate and sustain inequality, particularly against women. This idea argues that true liberation cannot be achieved without fundamentally transforming the economic and social structures that perpetuate oppression. Rather than seeking superficial reforms, rational emancipation calls for collective action to redistribute power and resources from dominant classes to marginalized groups, including women (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

One key element of this concept is the critique of systemic barriers that restrict women's potential. Virginia Woolf's seminal work *A Room of One's Own* (1929) illustrates how the lack of access to education, financial independence, and creative spaces severely limits women's ability to contribute equally in society. Woolf's argument emphasizes that without removing these structural obstacles, claims of equality remain hollow. Her work

provides a literary example that complements Marxist feminist critiques by revealing the cultural and economic constraints on women's emancipation.

Prominent Marxist feminists such as Heidi Hartmann and Nancy Fraser have further developed these ideas by showing how capitalism exploits women through both paid employment and unpaid reproductive labor. They highlight that women's unpaid care work—including childcare, elder care, and domestic tasks—is essential for sustaining capitalist economies but remains invisible and uncompensated (Fraser, 2008, p. 88; Hartmann, 1979). Achieving rational emancipation therefore demands confronting this dual exploitation and recognizing all forms of labor as valuable.

The incorporation of Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory adds an important dimension to the understanding of rational emancipation. Intersectionality reveals how race, class, gender, and other social categories intertwine to create complex systems of oppression. This means that women's experiences are not uniform and that strategies for emancipation must address multiple, overlapping inequalities simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 145). By expanding the focus beyond gender alone, intersectionality enriches Marxist feminist theory and aligns with the goals of rational emancipation, making it more inclusive and responsive to diverse struggles.

Rational emancipation envisions a society where power is equitably distributed and economic as well as social systems are fundamentally restructured to uphold justice and equality. It integrates Marxist feminist critiques of capitalism with cultural insights and intersectional approaches, offering a robust framework for social transformation. Only through such comprehensive change can all work paid and unpaid be acknowledged and valued equally, paving the way for genuine liberation for all women (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

## 5.2 Goddess: The Retribution of Demoness

In Marxist feminist theory, the symbols of the Goddess and the Demoness serve as powerful metaphors for women's reclamation of agency and resistance against patriarchal oppression. These archetypes illustrate the dual realities women face—both as revered sources of strength and as vilified thinkers demonized for challenging established systems.

The Goddess embodies empowerment, wisdom, and liberation from violence. She stands in opposition to cultural narratives that diminish or silence women, representing an ideal of female strength and rationality. Mythological thinkers such as Kali from Indian traditions and Lilith from Western lore exemplify this archetype by symbolizing female power that actively resists domination and oppression (Federici, 2004, p. 74). Through these symbols, women are encouraged to reclaim their autonomy and envision themselves as agents of transformative change.

Conversely, the Demoness symbolizes the ways in which patriarchal societies have historically demonized women who resist subjugation. This thinker reflects not only societal fear of female power but also a form of righteous retribution against systems that exploit women's labor and bodies. In literary and cultural narratives, the Demoness challenges capitalist and imperialist structures that capitalize on women's reproductive and productive work, as analyzed by scholars like Silvia Federici (2004) and Maria Mies (1986). The Demoness's vengeful role represents a desire to dismantle these intertwined oppressions and reclaim justice and freedom.

Judith Butler (1990) offers a complementary perspective by emphasizing how women can disrupt oppressive gender roles through acts of resistance and redefinition. Her theory of performativity highlights the potential for subverting dominant norms by rewriting the scripts that confine women's identities. Thus, the stories of the Goddess and the Demoness transcend myth, becoming symbolic of real-world struggles for empowerment, transformation, and liberation.

### Utopian Vision for Women's Futures

Marxist feminism, enriched by related philosophical frameworks, envisions a future free from economic exploitation, social inequality, and environmental degradation. This utopian outlook offers hope and direction for addressing contemporary injustices.

Literary works like Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* imagine egalitarian societies where cooperation replaces hierarchy, aligning with socialist feminist ideals of economic justice and shared power (Le Guin, 1974). Similarly, Alexandra Kollontai's

socialist feminism advocates for women's liberation through economic equality and the dismantling of patriarchal and capitalist domination (Kollontai, 1977, p. 33).

Ecofeminism further expands this vision by linking the oppression of women to the exploitation of the natural environment. Respecting both women and nature are crucial for achieving a sustainable and just future (Plumwood, 1993, p. 56). By criticizing capitalist systems that harm people and the planet alike, ecofeminism offers a holistic framework for social and ecological transformation.

### 5.3 Eminent Western Marxist Feminists and Evaluation of the Problem

Marxist feminism draws heavily on the contributions of pioneering Western feminist thinkers who critically analyzed the intersection of capitalism, patriarchy, and women's oppression. These thinkers laid the groundwork for understanding how economic systems and social norms collectively sustain gender inequality, providing vital frameworks for feminist critique and activism.

#### Mary Wollstonecraft: A Pioneer of Feminist Thought

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) is widely regarded as one of the earliest feminist philosophers. In her seminal work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she vehemently opposed the widespread notion that women are inherently inferior to men. Wollstonecraft argued that this perceived inferiority stems from women's lack of access to education and the structural inequalities embedded in society (Wollstonecraft, 1792). Her assertion that both men and women are rational beings deserving of equal rights aligns with Marxist feminism's emphasis on dismantling capitalist patriarchy as a prerequisite for gender equality (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

Wollstonecraft's earlier text, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), further reinforces the critical role of education in women's emancipation. By advocating for women's right to intellectual development beyond domestic confines, she anticipated Marxist feminism's focus on breaking social and educational barriers that sustain women's subjugation (Wollstonecraft, 1787). Although she did not call for complete gender equality,

Wollstonecraft's work profoundly influenced subsequent feminist and socialist movements, establishing foundational ideas about reason, rights, and education that remain relevant today.

### Flora Tristan: A Pioneer of Feminism and Socialism

Flora Tristan (1803–1844) merged feminist concerns with socialist ideology, emphasizing the inseparability of gender and class oppression. In *The Workers' Union* (1843), she highlighted women's oppression within capitalist societies and underscored the necessity of uniting women's liberation with broader labor struggles (Tristan, 1843). Tristan's critique of capitalist exploitation and her insistence on revolutionary social restructuring foreground her as a critical thinker in feminist socialism (Broué, 2005).

Her activism challenged prevailing sexist stereotypes and called for systemic economic and social change. Tristan's vision that women's emancipation is intertwined with the rights of the working class remains a core principle of Marxist feminist thought, emphasizing collective struggle as essential to achieving both gender and class equality (Trofimov, 2006).

### Simone de Beauvoir: A Revolutionary Feminist

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) stands as a monumental thinker in feminist philosophy, particularly within Marxist feminist discourse. Her groundbreaking work, *The Second Sex* (1949), critically exposed patriarchal structures buttressed by religious and cultural norms that systematically subordinate women (de Beauvoir, 1949). She distinguished between biological sex and socially constructed gender roles, a distinction that influenced later theorists such as Judith Butler (Butler, 1990).

De Beauvoir's analysis of marriage and motherhood as patriarchal institutions constraining women's freedom challenges traditional social frameworks. By framing gender as a social construct rather than a natural fact, she provided a theoretical basis for feminist efforts to dismantle cultural as well as economic oppression (Blee, 1983). Her work remains a cornerstone for understanding how gendered power relations operate in tandem with capitalist structures (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

## Shulamith Firestone: Radical Feminism and Revolution

Shulamith Firestone (1945–2012) combined Marxist and feminist critics in a call for radical social transformation. In *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Firestone argued that biological determinism has been exploited to justify male dominance, advocating for revolutionary changes that transcend traditional Marxist frameworks (Firestone, 1970).

She critically examined the family as a site of patriarchal control and emphasized the need to restructure reproductive roles and gender relations fundamentally. Firestone's vision of a feminist revolution challenges capitalist patriarchy at its core, insisting that only through such radical upheaval can genuine gender equality be achieved. Her work continues to inspire feminist activism committed to systemic change (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

## Mother Jones: A Fighter for Workers' Rights

Mary —Motherll Jones (1837–1930) was a prominent labor organizer who bridged feminist concerns with labor rights activism. As a co-founder of the Industrial Workers of the World, Jones championed the cause of working-class women, criticizing the women's suffrage movement for failing to address their urgent socioeconomic struggles (Rosen, 1972).

Jones advocated for direct action and union participation as means for women to challenge oppressive labor conditions. Her insistence on uniting women workers within broader labor movements emphasizes the Marxist feminist principle that gender and class struggles are inseparable (Jones, 1925).

## Elizabeth Gurley Flynn: A Voice for Gender and Class Struggles

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (1890–1964), a labor organizer and feminist, explicitly linked women's liberation to the fight against capitalist exploitation. In her autobiography, *The Rebel Girl* (1973), Flynn recounts the intersecting oppressions faced by working-class women and advocates for their active involvement in labor struggles.

Flynn's critique of capitalism as a root cause of gender inequality underpins Marxist feminist analysis. She argued that the emancipation of women depends on collective action alongside men to challenge systemic injustice, thereby reinforcing the inseparability of class

and gender oppression (Flynn, 1973). Flynn's legacy endures in contemporary feminist labor activism.

## 5.4 The Paradox of Feminism

Feminism, as a movement striving for gender equality and women's empowerment, embodies complex contradictions that shape both its perception and impact in society. Jane S. Banaszak's *The Paradox of Feminism* explores these tensions, particularly how feminism faces resistance not only from traditional societal forces but also from within women themselves. This resistance is often fueled by misunderstandings or extreme interpretations of feminist principles, which some perceive as threatening to men or to social stability (Banaszak, 2009, p. 25). Such dynamics underscore the need for feminism to engage in inclusive dialogue that acknowledges diverse viewpoints while maintaining its core commitment to equality (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33).

A critical paradox is that despite feminism's goal to unite women against oppression, it sometimes inadvertently fosters divisions. Radical feminist narratives, while challenging male dominance, can paint men as inherently oppressive, which risks alienating potential allies and deepening gender polarization (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 20). At the same time, entrenched societal norms continue to impose rigid roles on both men and women, limiting opportunities for cooperative progress and reinforcing outdated stereotypes (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18). This duality presents feminism with the challenge of balancing critique with coalition-building.

Moreover, feminism's emphasis on empowerment and equality has introduced new pressures on women, particularly the expectation to excel simultaneously in both public and private spheres. This —double burdenll often leads to stress, anxiety, and dissatisfaction, revealing a contradiction between feminist ideals and lived experiences (Wolf, 1991, p. 45). Recognizing and addressing these challenges is essential for feminism to remain relevant and supportive of women's diverse realities.

Criticisms by scholars like Susan Faludi (1991, p. 34) highlight the risk of feminist ideas becoming commodified, which can weaken the movement's potential for deep social transformation. Jean Kilbourne (1999, p. 27) further exposes how media and advertising

continue to objectify women, perpetuating harmful cultural narratives that slow progress toward equality. These critiques emphasize the necessity for feminism to actively engage with cultural production and representation as part of its broader struggle (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

Despite these contradictions, feminism continues to serve as a vital force for social justice. Thinkers such as Naomi Wolf and Betty Friedan offer valuable perspectives on navigating feminism's complexities through open dialogue, critical reflection, and pragmatic activism (Friedan, 1963, p. 18). The paradox of feminism reflects an ongoing negotiation between progress and challenge, underscoring the movement's dynamism and resilience (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33).

### One World, Two Genders: Embracing Diversity and Collaboration

Contemporary understandings of gender emphasize its diversity beyond traditional binary categories. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990, p. 40) and Anne Fausto-Sterling's work on biological diversity (2000, p. 33) advocate for recognizing gender as fluid and socially constructed, challenging restrictive norms that limit individual expression.

The concept of —One World, Two Gendersll stresses the importance of both men and women's unique contributions to society while rejecting limiting stereotypes, such as men being naturally better at math or women being inherently suited for caregiving (Eagly & Wood, 1999, p. 50; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 22). These stereotypes oversimplify human capabilities and reinforce gender inequality.

Emotional expression, frequently tied to gender stereotypes, varies widely among individuals, further challenging essentialist views of gender (Goleman, 1995, p. 18). Societies must move beyond these simplifications to appreciate the full range of human diversity.

Collaboration between men and women is essential for social progress. Connell (2005, p. 67) argues that balanced gender relations promote social stability and equality, while Walby (2009, p. 39) notes that the dominance of one gender perpetuates systemic inequality. Redefining gender roles to encourage mutual respect and cooperation is key to creating fairer, more peaceful societies (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 72).

## 5.5 Ethics of Care and Emotional Vulnerability: Rethinking Gender Norms

The ethics of care emphasizes values such as compassion, responsibility, and fairness within human relationships, which are essential for fostering a just and inclusive society. Rooted primarily in women's lived experiences, this ethical framework highlights nurturing, caregiving, and promoting the well-being of others as central moral concerns (Gilligan, 1982, p. 35). Traditionally, women have been socially assigned the role of caregivers, often expected to sacrifice their own needs for the benefit of family and community. However, this historical association does not imply that men are incapable of demonstrating care or emotional sensitivity. Rather, both men and women possess the capacity for empathy and responsibility, challenging the restrictive stereotypes that narrowly define masculinity and femininity (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

A fair society must value both what are often labeled —masculine traits—such as assertiveness and rationality—and —feminine traits like nurturing and emotional expressiveness. Hinman (2013, p. 27) argues for recognizing a diversity of moral perspectives, integrating differences between genders alongside internal individual diversity. Similarly, Bem's concept of —Gender Schema Theory encourages transcending rigid binaries to appreciate the complex, overlapping identities that people embody (Bem, 1981, p. 47). By moving beyond fixed gender categories, societies can foster richer understandings of moral and emotional capacities that benefit all.

Contemporary challenges like urbanization and globalization have intensified gender inequalities, disproportionately impacting women and children. These systemic issues demand a departure from traditional gender roles that allocate caregiving solely to women and economic provision to men. Embracing a more flexible, inclusive approach to gender roles allows societies to advance gender equality and promote mutual understanding and cooperation (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 33).

James Joyce's short story *A Painful Case* offers a literary exploration of how gender, emotion, and identity are shaped by societal expectations. The story invokes the historical concept of —hysteria, once a medical diagnosis tied to women's alleged emotional instability—a term derived from the Greek word *hystera*, meaning womb (de Beauvoir, 1949,

p. 67). This association reflects how femininity has been culturally linked to irrationality, while masculinity has been connected to logic and emotional control. Joyce contrasts these norms through the characters James Duffy and Emily Sinico. Emily embodies emotional openness and sensitivity, whereas Duffy represses his feelings to conform to societal ideals of masculinity. This repression contributes to his isolation and tragic death, demonstrating the harmful effects of rigid gender expectations on individual well-being.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity provides a useful framework to interpret Duffy's behavior. Butler contends that gender is not an innate biological fact but is continuously produced through repeated social acts aligned with cultural norms (Butler, 1990, p. 40). Duffy's suppression of emotion represents a performance of masculinity dictated by social expectations rather than authentic personal expression. Joyce's narrative critiques how such rigid performances can harm individuals and limit their capacity for meaningful connection.

Moreover, Joyce challenges the stereotype that women are inherently weak due to their emotionality. Instead, he reveals vulnerability as a fundamental human trait that transcends gender boundaries. Both Bem and Butler advocate for breaking free from restrictive stereotypes, arguing that doing so enhances individual well-being and improves social relations by permitting more honest emotional expression (Bem, 1981, p. 52; Butler, 1990, p. 43). Through his characters, Joyce illustrates the possibility of resisting traditional gender norms, encouraging readers to embrace a broader, more inclusive understanding of human emotions and identity.

The ethics of care and literary critiques such as Joyce's *A Painful Case* offer valuable insights for rethinking gender norms. They emphasize that emotional vulnerability and caregiving are not exclusive to one gender but are shared human experiences. By dismantling limiting stereotypes and fostering emotional diversity, societies can promote fairness, empathy, and psychological health for all individuals. This reimagining of gender aligns closely with Marxist feminist critiques that seek to liberate both women and men from oppressive social constructions (Marx & Engels, 1848/1998, p. 18).

## 5.6 Philosophical Overview of the Theories and Their Relevance to Marxist Feminism

Theories of justice provide frameworks to understand fairness, equality, and rights within society. Four prominent theories—Rawlsian egalitarianism, Dworkinian egalitarianism, Steiner-Vallentyne libertarianism, and Nozickian libertarianism—offer differing conceptions of justice. This chapter examines each theory's principles and evaluates their relevance to Marxist feminism, which critiques capitalism and its role in perpetuating gender inequality.

### Rawlsian Egalitarianism

John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), proposes justice as fairness, emphasizing two principles: first, the guarantee of equal basic liberties for all; second, that social and economic inequalities are acceptable only if they benefit the least advantaged, known as the difference principle. Rawls supports redistributive measures to promote equal opportunity and reduce disadvantage.

Marxist feminists find Rawls's concern for disadvantaged groups promising but critique his failure to address capitalism's inherent exploitation. Rawls assumes capitalism can be reformed toward fairness, yet Marxist feminism highlights capitalism as a system fundamentally reliant on gendered exploitation—particularly women's unpaid domestic labor and workplace inequality (Rawls, 1971, p. 52; Fraser, 2008, p. 88). Consequently, while Rawlsian theory offers useful redistributive tools, it lacks a critical challenge to capitalism's structural role in sustaining gender oppression.

### Dworkinian Egalitarianism

Ronald Dworkin's *Sovereign Virtue* (2000) advances the idea of —equality of resources, aiming to provide individuals with equal access to the means necessary for self-determination. This theory emphasizes fairness in resource distribution to enable meaningful choice.

Marxist feminists appreciate Dworkin's focus on ensuring women have resources to achieve autonomy. However, they criticize his acceptance of private property and market systems, which overlook capitalism's exploitation of women's unpaid reproductive labor within households (Dworkin, 2000, p. 78; Federici, 1990, p. 160). Dworkin's framework may

alleviate some inequalities but does not confront the root causes of gendered economic disparities inherent in capitalist structures.

### Steiner-Vallentyne Libertarianism

The Steiner-Vallentyne libertarian perspective, outlined in *The Ethics of Liberty* (1982), emphasizes individual property rights and acknowledges historical injustices that may require reparations or compensation.

While Marxist feminism recognizes the importance of addressing past injustices, it fundamentally rejects the primacy of private property upheld by this libertarian view. Marxist feminists argue that private property is a primary tool of capitalist patriarchy, facilitating women's economic dependence and labor exploitation both inside and outside the home (Steiner & Vallentyne, 1982, p. 110; Marx, 1867, p. 215). Therefore, this theory is inadequate for achieving gender justice from a Marxist feminist perspective.

### Nozickian Libertarianism

Robert Nozick, in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974), defends strong property rights and opposes redistributive justice. His entitlement theory holds that individuals have rights to holdings acquired fairly, through labor or voluntary exchange, rejecting forced redistribution as a violation of liberty.

Marxist feminists strongly oppose Nozick's position, arguing that capitalism and private property perpetuate gendered exploitation by privileging male-dominated labor structures and marginalizing women's contributions (Nozick, 1974, p. 210; Hartmann, 2020, p. 40). Nozick's defense of property rights upholds the very systems Marxist feminism seeks to dismantle for genuine equality.

### Relevance to Marxist Feminism

The relevance of these justice theories to Marxist feminism depends on their recognition of systemic inequalities. Rawlsian and Dworkinian egalitarianism offer redistributive approaches that can improve women's social conditions but generally accept capitalism as a background system, failing to critique its foundational role in sustaining patriarchy and

economic exploitation. Conversely, Steiner-Vallentyne and Nozickian libertarianism reinforce capitalist property rights, maintaining the economic and gender hierarchies Marxist feminism challenges. For Marxist feminists, meaningful gender justice necessitates the abolition of capitalism itself because capitalism intertwines class and gender oppression. While egalitarian theories contribute valuable perspectives on fairness and resource distribution, they fall short without addressing capitalism's structural power. Only by confronting capitalism and patriarchy together can society advance toward true justice and equality.

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## Chapter: Six

### Conclusion

This dissertation has undertaken a critical and comprehensive exploration of the structural roots of women's oppression. It employs Marxist feminism as a principal theoretical lens to investigate the historical, social, and economic mechanism that perpetuates gender inequality. In the five preceding chapters, this research has delved into foundational questions concerning the origins of patriarchal dominance, the commodification and invisibility of women's labor, the intersections of class and gender, and the ideological narratives that have naturalized the subordination of women. However, the purpose of this last chapter is not to repeat those analyses, but rather to synthesize the insights gained, formulate a broader argument based on new discoveries, and present a practical vision for women's liberation.

At the core of this research lies the argument that women's oppression is not merely a sociocultural accident or a legacy of premodern practices, but a deliberate and structural feature of capitalist society. In contrast to liberal feminist approaches that focus on policy reforms, representation, or equality of opportunity, Marxist feminism offers a more radical critique: it posits that the very foundations of capitalist production are built on the appropriation of women's unpaid labor and the maintenance of patriarchal relations. This conclusion, therefore, rests on the understanding that gender inequality cannot be meaningfully addressed without also confronting the exploitative nature of capitalism itself.

Throughout this research, the family has been critically reexamined not as a neutral, private institution of affection and care, but as an economic and ideological unit that plays a fundamental role in the reproduction of labor power. Women's domestic labor cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, and emotional support is rendered invisible by the artificial division between productive and reproductive work. This division not only erases women's contributions from economic metrics such as GDP but also reinforces gender roles that keep women confined to the private sphere. The study has shown that the capitalist system depends upon this arrangement: it externalizes the cost of reproduction to households, and specifically to women, thereby preserving profits for capitalists while systematically devaluing the labor that sustains life.

In the context of Bangladesh, these theoretical arguments are relevant and useful to concrete and urgent dimensions. Despite some notable advancements in education, health, and political participation, women in Bangladesh continue to face entrenched structural inequalities. Inheritance laws, for instance, nominally permit women to own property, but in practice, social norms and familial pressures often prevent them from asserting those rights. Women are concentrated in informal and low-paid sectors of the economy, especially in the garment industry, where they endure long hours, unsafe working conditions, and limited legal protections. Furthermore, domestic violence, child marriage, and the double burden of paid and unpaid labor continue to constrain women's autonomy. These conditions reveal the hollowness of empowerment narratives that fail to address the economic and ideological systems underpinning inequality.

A key insight of this study is the critique of reformist feminism, which often seeks to insert women into structures without questioning the justice of those structures. Representation in politics or the corporate sector is certainly valuable, but it does not necessarily translate to systemic change. A few women achieving positions of power does not dismantle patriarchy; in many cases, it merely masks ongoing inequality and reproduces hierarchical relations. This thesis has argued that emancipation must be conceived not as inclusion within existing frameworks but as the transformation of those frameworks themselves. In other words, feminism must be anti-capitalist if it is to be truly emancipatory. Moreover, this research has demonstrated that ideology plays a central role in sustaining patriarchal capitalism.

Cultural narratives propagated through media, religion, education, and everyday discourse construct and reinforce the idea that women are naturally nurturing, obedient, and subordinate. These narratives serve a dual function: they rationalize women's economic subordination and normalize their social exclusion. Religion, in particular, has been instrumental in legitimizing gender hierarchies in many contexts including South Asia. However, this ideological dimension cannot be addressed solely through legal reform. What is needed is a cultural transformation, a rearticulation of values, roles, and identities that challenges the symbolic order of patriarchy.

Another major contribution of this dissertation lies in its application of intersectionality within a Marxist feminist framework. While class remains central, this study

has recognized that gender oppression is experienced differently depending on one's caste, ethnicity, religion, and geographic location. In Bangladesh, rural and indigenous women, and religious minorities face compounded forms of exclusion that cannot be fully understood through class analysis alone. Intersectionality allows for a more nuanced understanding of power and marginalization, and this research has attempted to integrate that perspective while retaining the structural focus of Marxist theory.

The limitations of neo-liberal feminism, particularly its emphasis on choice, entrepreneurship, and market-based empowerment have also been scrutinized. While these strategies may offer temporary relief or opportunities for individual advancement, they ultimately fail to challenge the root causes of inequality. A woman who receives a microcredit loan to start a small business may gain some degree of financial independence, but she remains vulnerable to market fluctuations, patriarchal constraints, and the absence of public services. The glorification of choice in such scenarios obscures the reality that many women make decisions within a context of structural coercion. Marxist feminism, by contrast, emphasizes that freedom must be collective, structural, and grounded in material conditions—not just legal rights or individual agency.

Marxist feminism represents the importance of education not merely in the conventional sense of formal schooling but as a means of consciousness-raising. Education must go beyond technical skills and incorporate feminist theory, political economy, and critical pedagogy. Women must be equipped not just to navigate existing systems, but to critique and transform them. In this regard, the role of feminist education is paramount. It provides the tools for understanding how power operates and how solidarity can be built across differences. Schools, universities, and community organizations must be reimagined as spaces of radical learning, where new political subjects can emerge.

Additionally, the ethics of care has been proposed as a foundational principle for a new social order. Unlike capitalist ethics, which prioritize competition, profit, and individualism, the ethics of care centers interdependence, empathy, and communal responsibility. A society that truly values care would not relegate caregiving to women in the private sphere, nor would it treat such labor as unproductive. Instead, care would be recognized as a social good, deserving of public support and equitable distribution. This shift

in values requires both institutional change such as state-funded childcare and parental leave and ideological change in how societies conceptualize human worth and work.

The study has further argued that emancipation is not an endpoint but a continuous, dynamic process. It requires not only legal and economic change but also emotional and psychological transformation. Internalized patriarchy manifested in self-doubt, guilt, and silence must be confronted alongside external systems of oppression. Healing, in this sense, becomes a political act. Collective spaces for dialogue, storytelling, and mutual support are essential in building a feminist consciousness that is not only intellectual but also embodied and emotional. Solidarity, therefore, must be the guiding principle of feminist praxis. This solidarity must be transnational, intersectional, and rooted in shared struggle. It must go beyond token gestures and engage in concrete alliances with labor movements, peasant unions, indigenous rights organizations, and environmental justice campaigns. Only through such alliances can the feminist movement achieve the scale and depth needed to confront global capitalism and systemic patriarchy.

In the era of neoliberal globalization, where exploitation is outsourced and injustice is transnational, feminist politics must be equally expansive in its vision and strategy. It has argued that the emancipation of women requires nothing less than the transformation of society itself. Capitalism and patriarchy are mutually reinforcing systems that must be dismantled together. The goal is not simply to make women equal participants in a flawed system, but to create a new system grounded in justice, equality, and care. This vision may seem utopian in a world defined by crisis and inequality, but history has shown that radical change is possible when people organize, resist, and imagine alternatives. The feminist struggle is not only about identity or rights; it is about power, freedom, and the future of humanity.

The findings of this research make it clear that emancipation cannot be reduced to access, choice, or empowerment within existing structures. It must involve a reorganization of labor, a redistribution of resources, and a redefinition of value. It must challenge the ideologies that naturalize inequality and create new narratives of possibility. It must be structural and intimate, global and local, theoretical and practical. This promise of Marxist feminism is a comprehensive, grounded, and transformative approach to liberation that refuses to separate the question of gender from the broader struggles for social and economic

justice. This study, therefore, concludes with a call to action for scholars, activists, policymakers, and communities to build a feminist politics that is as radical in its analysis as it is compassionate in its practice. Only then can we move toward a world where emancipation is not the privilege of a few, but the shared reality of all.

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