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## Revisiting J.S. Mill and the Liberals' Critiques of Women's Subordination

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### Abstract

Women's subordination is the fundamental aspect around which feminist philosophy first emerged in the United States during the 1970s. It is often claimed that as long as women's subordination exists, feminism will persist. This assertion reflects the inherent ideas of the feminist movement that became entrenched after the 1950s. This paper re-examines women's subordination by situating feminist debates within a broader philosophical framework. Liberal philosophers such as J.S. Mill were among the earliest to denounce women's subordination, and the paper therefore foregrounds Mill's critiques. Mill envisioned "perfect equality" as the replacement for women's subordination. Nevertheless, he did not define what "perfect equality" entails, revealing a tension in his understanding of equality—whether it connotes absolute equality or not. The paper argues that Mill's contribution is best understood as a reformist intervention that initiated the debate yet left unresolved the philosophical and political meaning of 'equality' *per se*. Ultimately, the paper contributes to feminist philosophy as well as historiography by reframing subordination as a historically contingent, philosophically contested, and politically transformable condition.

**Keywords:** Women's subordination, J.S. Mill, Feminist philosophy, Feminism

### Introduction

In her provocative essay coauthored with Catherine Clement titled 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/ Ways Out/Forays' <sup>[i]</sup>, Hélène Cixous posed a question: Where is she? Following this question, they provided a list of hierarchized yet oppositional dyads such as "Activity/passivity, Sun/Moon, Culture/Nature, Day/Night, Father/Mother, Head/Heart, Intelligible/Palpable, Logos/Pathos." They found that the first member in each of these pairings represents masculinity while the second represents femininity. In other words, women are passive and subordinate to men. The subordination of women is not an event that takes place against women at some point in time in the past or present. It is also not an institution that comes to exist overnight that people conscientiously endorse on some principle to govern the society.

Several theories emerged which explained the questions of women (in)subordination. These theories have diverse arguments and are packed with disagreements. Nevertheless, there is one agreement and one goal which is common to all these theories. They agreed that there are inequalities between men and women; these inequalities are due to women being subordinated to men, and their common goal is to end this inequality. Alison M. Jaggar asserted "In a sense, Feminism has always existed. Certainly, as long as women have been subordinated, they have resisted that subordination" (Jaggar, 1983, p. 2). <sup>[1]</sup> Feminists believed that finding the root or sources of women's subordination was their primary task. Feminists found different locations of the origin or root of women's subordination. Karl Marx believed that 'modes of production'- a social organisation evolved out of individual needs of produce and the means of its production- shaped the individual relations in the society. Marxist feminists rejected the views that favour the theory of biological difference for women's subordination. Instead, they located the root of women's subordination to the property relations of the early society. Engels classified four stages of development of the family in which the drastic changes in the relationship between men and women took place in the third stage, called the 'pairing family'. This stage marked the turning to the patriarchy from the matriarchy, which Engel called "the world historical defeat of the female sex"

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(Engels, 1993, p. 120).<sup>[8]</sup> Frederick Engels believed that the introduction of private property and the introduction of inheritance through the patriarchal lines made women subordinate to men. In other words, the emergence of class society is the origin of women's subordination. According to Kate Millett, Men and women does not belong to the same category of class. Under patriarchy, men became dominant over women. Therefore, Millett argued, men belong to dominant sex class and women to dependent sex class (Millett, 1969, rep. 2000). Marxist feminists assert that capitalism perpetuates women's subordination by making women dependent on men. For them, class domination is primary and hence, women's subordination is secondary. They argue that existing inequality will come to an end when socialism comes to exist.

Simone de Beauvoir, an existentialist philosopher, agreed with the biological difference between men and women. Nevertheless, according to Beauvoir, sex is something related to biological, which is unalterable, and gender is related to a social construct that can be altered. Simone de Beauvoir, in her *The Second Sex*, argues with a powerful phrase that "one is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 293).<sup>[6]</sup> She argued that "not every female human being is necessarily a woman; she must take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity" (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 3).<sup>[6]</sup> She further argues that man is considered to be a subject, an absolute and essential, whereas woman is an object, an inessential 'Other'. Men treated women as fundamentally inessential and different beings; hence, women became subordinate to men. Radical feminists believed that women's subordination was deeply embedded in society and found to be an immanent part of every society. Shulamith Firestone, a staunch radical feminist, argued that women naturally had engaged with reproduction. This made them physically weak and dependent on men. This is the origin of the sex-based inequality. Firestone further argues that this inequality is not unchangeable. With the development of technology-contraceptives and abortion techniques- however, biologically defined roles can be overcome (Firestone, 1972, pp. 1-15).<sup>[9]</sup> Other radical feminists argue that sex and gender are inseparable. Both sex and gender must give primacy to the analysis of women's subordination. Monique Wittig goes beyond the dominant feminist claim of biological differences between sexes. Wittig argues that not only the mind but body is also socially constructed. According to Wittig, one is not born as a woman; it is a social construct. Wittig goes on to argue that there is no sex; it is the oppression that creates sex. Subordination of women embedded in the construction of sex. Wittig argues that the 'sex' must be abolished and completely rejected the categorisation of human beings based on sex (Wittig, 2002, pp. 1-21).<sup>[15]</sup> 'French Feminist'<sup>[ii]</sup> such as Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva expanded Beauvoir's argument. Both Irigaray and Kristeva accepted Beauvoir's postulation of gender as a social construct. However, they have divergent views on her construction of women as objects and 'Other'. According to Luce Irigaray, women shall be considered as subjects to end the problem of 'Other'. Julia Kristeva, however, upheld women as 'subject in process' (Hekman, 2014, pp. 27-46).

### Early Liberal feminists

Liberalism was the dominant political and social theory born in the wake of capitalism in Europe. Different liberal philosophers contributed differently to liberalism's long intellectual history, which encompasses the philosophy of enlightenment, utilitarianism, etc.; hence, it is difficult to define it. However, Liberalism<sup>[iii]</sup> can broadly be defined as the ideology that believes in individual liberty and equality (Bunnin & Yu, 2004, p. 385).<sup>[3]</sup> The philosophical conception centred around this ideology is called liberal philosophy (Audi, 1999, p. 502).<sup>[2]</sup> It encompasses value, freedom, human nature, individual autonomy and self-fulfilment. It emphasises the reason and individual rather than the community. The notion that all individuals have equal reasoning capacity is fundamental to the liberal philosophy because liberal assumes it as the individual's ultimate value. In other words, liberal assumes individuals have intrinsic, unalienable values that lead to the primacy of individual autonomy. The individualism of the liberal conception has four inherent aspects (Craig, 2005, pp. 572-573).<sup>[5]</sup> The first aspect is considering each individual rather than in groups or communities. The second aspect comprises the Individual's capacity to live and act on their own terms. It includes individual freedom to get 'self-fulfilment' and 'self-interest' (Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, 1983, pp. 33-34).<sup>[11]</sup> The third aspect is the primacy of individual reason- individual judgment shall be valued, and no one, including the institutions, shall dictate that judgment. The individual judgment must be respected and not be underestimated by other individuals and institutions. The fourth aspect is Equality. It not only meant the equality of all individual but also providing opportunities and leading their lives.

Liberal philosophers do not create divisions of people based on sex or gender. They prefer the word 'individual' in their proposition of liberal thought rather than men/women, male/female binary. Liberal Feminists question whether these liberal principles apply equally to all individuals beyond the boundary of gender and sex. Further, they look at society through a liberal lens and analyse it. Subordination of women was one such area they heed as a matter that needed to be addressed urgently. With this sense of urgency, J.S. Mill's influential work *The Subjection of Women* was published in 1869.

As early as 1694, Mary Astell had asked to treat women as 'rational subjects.' She argued,

"For since GOD has given Women as well Men intelligent souls, why should they be forbidden to improve them?....., is it not as cruel and unjust to preclude women from the knowledge of the one as well as enjoyment of the other?" (Astell, 2007, p. 22)<sup>[1]</sup>.

Astell neither directly challenged the existing patriarchal concepts nor religious beliefs; instead, she argued within the religious frame. However, Astell influenced many others and questioned women's subordination with such limitations.

Mary Wollstonecraft, another well-known figure for women's rights, cogently argued in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* that women can exercise reason equally as men. The biological difference between men and women cannot be the justifying ground for unequal political rights. According to Wollstonecraft, women appear inferior because of a lack of education. In other words, the social inequality, not the biological facts, deterred women's

advancement. Liberal feminists, in searching the roots of women's subordination, taken on this line of argument, assert that sex is an inherent property of both humans and animals but gendering roles present only to humans. Thus, they implicitly attribute women's subordination to gender roles (Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1993, p. 117).<sup>[11]</sup>

J.S. Mill, a liberal philosopher of the nineteenth century, was the champion of individual equality who spoke against women's subordination in his *The Subjection of Women*. In his flamboyant style, Mill rejected the principles which give privilege to one sex over another. Mill argued that this flawed principle was the main reason for the impediment to human advancement. Then what is the alternative to this principle? Mill suggested the replacement of what he called the "legal subordination of one sex to the other" with the principle of "perfect equality" between the sexes (Mill, 1997, p. 1)<sup>[13]</sup>.

### **A priori concept of 'existence' for the justification of women's subordination**

The nature of the existing relationship between individuals was not just and conformed with reason. This relationship was based on mere conjecture of physical differences between men and women. It exists continuously because it presumably came to exist from time immemorial. It is a fact that women are physically weak as compared to men. Mill argued that the existing relationship is based on recognising physical differences, and the legal system converted it to legal rights. This old unfair principle of relationship made women bondage to men (Mill, 1997, pp. 4-5)<sup>[13]</sup>. Nevertheless, Mill argued, physical inferiority does not necessarily mean the inferiority of mental capabilities.

In an attempt to elaborate on how women are subordinate by this unjust principle, Mill compares it with the slavery system. Slavery existed for a long time, but according to the time and progress of human society, its rightfulness was questioned and challenged. It was ultimately abolished as contemporary moral values no longer accept it. However, the vestige of slavery- the inequality of rights between individuals- still exists in different forms. Slavery was invalid, but inequalities between men and women were validated. Mill argues that the existence of such inequalities is not because they come to exist from time immemorial but the "law of the strongest". "No presumption in its favour, therefore, can be drawn from the fact of its existence" (Mill, 1997, p. 5)<sup>[13]</sup>. Where all forms of domination and arbitrary power are relinquished and deemed outdated, domination of one sex over another still exists. All inequalities or unjust power existed from the earliest to the present, but only an iota of the population enjoyed. However, in this present form of domination, the whole male sex is the beneficiary. This was why women could not question the validity or legality of this kind of relationship.

### **Theory of 'Human Nature' and the subordination of women**

Human nature became one of the premises feminist philosophers used to analyse women's subordination. Is there anything called 'human nature'? Do men and women have different 'human nature'? Or do they have equal human nature? There has been a long debate among feminists; nevertheless, they rejected any theory grounded in favour of the perpetuation of women's subordination (Holmstrom, 2005, pp. 280-282)<sup>[10]</sup>. Feminists are divided

on the question of human nature. Some of them accept that the different human natures exist for men and women, while others reject and argue that there is only one human nature. The former became known as 'difference feminism' and the latter as 'sameness feminism' (Watson, 2017, pp. 71-72)<sup>[14]</sup>. Both accepted the existence of inequality between men and women.

The notions of human nature emerged on the presumption that humans have naturally distinctive tendencies different from animals. These 'natures' have varied even between human beings. These natures induce the actions or propensities of human beings. However, this presumption is challenged on the grounds that the propensities of human beings are shaped by culture or the way of nurturing. Feminists tried to separate what humans have by nature from culture/nurture (Watson, 2017, p. 71).<sup>[14]</sup>

Difference feminism, also known as gynocentric feminism, asserts that men and women naturally have inherent differences. Women have specific roles, distinct from men, of reproduction, child rearing, motherhood, etc. These specific roles detached them entirely from the public. They argue that these differences should be valued in a similar pattern of valuing masculine natures. In other words, femininity should not only be recognised but also be valued. They further argue that cultural devaluation of femininity is the root cause of inequality between the sexes (Watson, 2017, pp. 73-74).<sup>[14]</sup>

Early philosophers often overlooked, of course, the mental capability of women. Plato, for instance, stresses that all individuals have different natures irrespective of sex; however, he underlined women as weaker (Holmstrom, 2005, p. 281)<sup>[10]</sup>. Others like Aristotle (384-322 BC) and Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804 AD) emphasised human nature as the reasoning capacity of humans. Both Aristotle and Kant somehow agreed that women are not fully human in terms of reasoning capacity (Watson, 2017, p. 72).<sup>[14]</sup>

Opposing this view, sameness feminism argues that there is only one, not two, 'human nature'. They argued that men and women are essentially the same. Women endured inequality because of their differences from men (Watson, 2017, pp. 73-74).<sup>[14]</sup> However, apart from these arguments, J.S. Mill contextualised the role of human nature in women's subordination in a different frame.

So much progress and changes occurred in the evolutionary march of humankind. Sundry of social organisations were there, many have ceased to exist, many became mutated at some point and continue to live till recently, and some are still practised today. Earlier, the fortune of the individuals was decided by birth. Mill pointed out, men are born with different natures; for example, Greeks were born with "free natures", and Thracians and the Asiatic of "Slave natures". Greeks are free people, and the Thracians and Asiatic should be slaves as it is their nature. Similarly, blacks are inferior to whites because the "black race is by nature incapable of freedom, and marked out for slavery." Mill provided number of examples of similar cases where one group of people dominated or used power or overpowered another large group of people just because they thought it is natural. The subtext of Mill's argument can be simplified in this way: if a group of people with power, apparently small in number, accepted any social norms, it becomes usual and natural, and eventually, it became a part of customary practice, no matter what other group of people in large number willingly accept it or not. "The subjection of women



to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural”, Mill argued (Mill, 1997, p. 12).<sup>[13]</sup> This was how women, comprising half of humanity, were subordinated by men. Men continuously enjoy dominance over women simply because it is natural. Women should, by nature, be confined to domestic roles and are unnatural to live at par with their male counterparts. Such a flawed process of naturalising social norms goes against the principle of equality and reason, which liberals held with pride. This conception of natural/unnatural and usual/unusual social norms has no basis. Mill argues that Englishmen do not feel unusual to say that a queen heads England. Nevertheless, those same Englishmen felt it was unusual for women to be a Member of Parliament or join the military as soldiers.

The domination by one group over another can be of two types. First, the superior groups dominated the other by using force. In this case, the other group have the propensities of protest against the domination. Second, another group allow domination without protest. Mill argued that those favouring women's subordination by men held the views of the latter type of domination. The women's subordination is justified because women do not protest against it, and it is presumed that their incapacities for protest are taken for granted, for they remain under men. What is the reason for women's incapability to resist such domination by men? Does it mean that women wholeheartedly accept this rule by men? or is this simply a case of not conducive for them to protest?

Some contemporary feminists argue that it is not always right to look at inequality through a sex/gender lens. The idea of this group of feminists is also known as 'dominance feminism'. They argued that equality is all about power. The distinction between men and women based on sex/gender is to ensure men have power over women. They further argued that the hierarchy of power facilitates inequality, and to bring equality, such hierarchy must be abolished (Watson, 2017, p. 74).<sup>[14]</sup>

Women wanted equal rights is evident from their writing, as I mentioned above, the case of Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft, and recent writings of several women's activists and organisations for women's rights. If they accepted the subordination, they would not demand access to education, professions, occupations and the right to suffrage (Mill, 1997, p. 13)<sup>[13]</sup>. Men use power over women. They feel it is natural because they are used to it. They remained desirous of power because they feared losing their supremacy over women. With power, they remained rulers; without it, their position would be equal to women, and there would be no such propensities of the ruler and the ruled<sup>[iv]</sup>. Here lies the subtlety of men's quest for power. Is this 'power' of men a real problem for women, or its misuse? Let us say both because the misuse of power can only be challenged when women have power. There must be equality in power sharing. Mill argues that people do complain against the ill-usage of the power but not the power itself. In the case of women, they complain about the ill-usage of their husbands, resulting only in the repetition of ill-usage. Because the law was framed only to deter men's misuse of power, it did not provide equal power to women. Mill argues that when all the forces are against women, they cannot be rebellious against men and remain subordinated. Men caged women as slave with no freedom and rights. According to Mill, it is a peculiar case that men wanted

from women not only obedience but also sentiments. The situation of women Mill inferred in *The Subjection of Women* as Slaves. It does not end there. Men wanted women to be their favourite slaves, by will and choice, bodily and mentally submitted to them. Mill argues that the relationship between master and slave is maintained by fear. However, as men wanted women to be more than obedient slave, they nurtured and inculcated them to fulfil their dreams. Mill further argued that women do not decide to become a 'woman'. What 'woman' should be or how 'woman' should be was decided by men. Men imagined the ideal woman with all the qualities mentioned above. Women are brought up with glorifying the uniqueness of the femaleness. They encourage retaining femininity, a kind of femininity that does not qualify to be free and independent. Women are instructed to rely on men- husband and father- and submit to them. There is no space for their will and choice as women are deemed to be unfit for standalone. Men thought women to be sacrificed for their happiness and service to them. "All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others, to make complete abnegation of themselves...." Mill further argued (Mill, 1997, p. 14)<sup>[13]</sup>. Women live for the expectations of men. Women's minds got enslaved; they were taught to rely on men. Men think women are incapable of governing by themselves. Women get all their desires and expectations from men. Mill affirms that if women are considered rational beings and provided education accordingly, with full freedom as men, it becomes a miracle for human advancement. With the progress in human society, the contemporary moral values, Mill argues, have no place for such inequality of rights.

### Locating 'women' in the trajectories of human progress

The early social formation is different from the modern. In early society, Human beings are chained by the law of force. Their fate was already decided when they were born because none was born without a fixed social position. This legally binding social position forced them to live in that position. Even though they wanted to change their fate, they were not allowed. Because the law did not allow a slave to be a master, serfs could not be knights. They must bear whatever ordeal of their life. Because they were not free to use their faculty to make themselves and to live the life they desired.

Modern society is the fruit of the experience of a thousand years, upholding individual rights where human beings are now free to use their faculty. Laws no longer restrict them to fixed social positions. They are now free and independent. They can choose any profession they like. Society is opened up for all individuals who have talent and are compatible. Fate and fortunes are now decided by competition. Within all such changes, only one thing remained static: women were excluded. These things are confined to the male sex only.

Women are not free yet. They are still bound by laws that restrict their freedom. Both the institutions and the law are not ready to allow the use of their faculty. Women are still under the yoke of men. J.S. Mill described the situation of women as "disabilities", and it is the only thing that remained as a relic of old society (Mill, 1997, p. 18)<sup>[13]</sup>. Women are confined to domestic chores because they were taught it as their duty. They are not given a chance to prove themselves to their abilities. Their situation is because of

certain presumption which is incorrect. These presumptions push them beyond realisation. The nature of the women, that men presumed, does not exist. In the words of J.S. Mill, it is an “artificial thing” (Mill, 1997, p. 21) <sup>[13]</sup>. Men inculcate women to make the imagined ideal women. The way men influenced women, or how they enslaved their minds, distorted the entire characters of the women. Even in the earliest society, where slaves were not treated humanely, such a preponderance of character distortion did not happen. Human beings are susceptible to the society they grow up. Their character formation depends on how they are schooling. For example, there are considerable differences in the worldview of the people of rural areas and the metropolitan city. Similarly, the attitude of the orthodox, conservative school students differs from that of the secular school. For women, their entire education, morals and values are to push them to remain subordinate to men.

Mill opined that what comprises the two sexes, or what is the “natural differences” between the two sexes, is very difficult to answer. What men thought that they knew everything about women is erroneous. Because whatever men talk about women is their own construct, which may or may not conform with reality. Their narrative is construed to ascertain their set-up for women. What men claim to possess knowledge about women is based on their experience with or about women. In other word, men’s knowledge about women is one-sided and correspond to conjecture. Providing or bringing to a conclusion based on conjectures of knowledge is not only unfair but against the wisdom of mankind. To come to a balanced judgement, one must contemplate both sides of the narrative and be free from predetermined thought. The men’s authoritative nature and women’s feeling of repression prevented the transcendence of knowledge about women. According to J.S. Mill, men can learn about women from their own wives. Man, for this purpose, must be a competent judge and must have a sympathetic, adaptive and understanding nature to his wife. So that his wife might feel free to share her thoughts, or he can read her mind by what Mill called “sympathetic intuition.” However, men lost this chance to get a more profound and true understanding of women.

There may be differences among the women on their ontological condition because the experiences of women are diverse. The experience of black women may be tremendously different from women of white; lower-class women may have a different experience from upper-class privileged women. These diversities must be considered before establishing generalisation of or against women. The generalised knowledge of women that men claimed to acquire is incomplete and will remain so until women’s testimony is heard. Mill argued,

“[w]e may safely assert that the knowledge which men can acquire of women, even as they have been and are, without reference to what they might be, is wretchedly imperfect and superficial, and always will be so, until women themselves have told all that they have to tell.” (Mill, 1997, p. 24) <sup>[13]</sup>

Men laugh at women when they write anything about fellow women. Very few women called attention to put up their concerns. Their contribution, though meagre, was discredited by men. It was difficult for women to undo the generalised, foregrounded belief about women. Mill refutes that Men claim to acquire knowledge of women; “most men know absolutely nothing [about women].” (Mill, 1997, p. 25) <sup>[13]</sup> Therefore, they are not qualified to lay down laws on

women’s vocation. Through these processes of laws, women were enslaved under men. Mill argues that no such law is required in modern society. Women should decide what is best for them through their own experience and use of their faculty. Let the women come out of men’s grip; let them decide their preference in society. The free play of competition shall bind both men and women. Only the competent have the right to occupy any position in society. If women fail to break through in competition, there is no reason to protect them. What women wanted, according to Mill, was to remove similar protection in favour of men.

The foregrounded opinion of men about what women should be, as Mill asserts, is a wife and mother. Even the twentieth-century women hold this primordial view. Marriage is widely believed to be the ultimate goal of the women. They believed motherhood was the highest virtue of women. This is perhaps the result of the men’s infusion of women about, in the expression of Simon de Beauvoir, how their “situation” should be throughout history. Mill argued this situation is because of men enforcing to women. Men provided Hobson’s choice to women.

The married woman must live under her husband. She can ask demand whatever from him, but she cannot do anything of her own volition. Neither can she own property nor claim legal rights over her children. This is not simply a moral obligation but a legal one. If she violated it, she will get punished. Mill argued that the condition of women is more than a slave. The law, in this case or another, as Mill consistently argued throughout *The Subjection of Women*, was made to make women live as dependent on men. The legal aspects peculiar to women are not only discriminatory per se but repressive. The law not only stands against her favour but is also a significant barrier to claiming her rights.

## Conclusion

The cartesian philosophy of mind-body intersection is the basis of discord for embodied and disembodied knowledge. Cartesian believed that the mind exists independently and separable from the body. Therefore, knowledge is disembodied, a product of the individual mind, not of the body. Feminist epistemologists used this philosophy in their analysis of women’s condition. Liberal philosopher influenced by Cartesian philosophy, used the Cartesian framework to analyse women’s subordination. Here is the point where contemporary feminists disagree with liberals. They argued knowledge is embodied and, by using the Marxist framework, asserted that it originates from a particular standpoint. Embraced to the intellectual current of the nineteenth century, Mill was highly reform-minded. Rejecting the perpetuation of women’s subordination, Mills overtly rejected sex roles. There is no female nature or male nature as such; there is only human nature, and ‘sex’ has no role in it. Mill argues that women have physical weakness, which does not necessarily mean they are mentally weak. Women have reasoning capacity as that of men. According to J.S. Mill, the ontological status of women may substantially change if they are provided access to all opportunities provided to men. The justifications for women’s subordinated position are grounded on conjectures and do not comply with reason. Mill idealised women as free citizens. According to Sandra Zerilli, Mill assumes “asexual femininity as a moralising force” <sup>[4]</sup> and puts values above sex (Delap, 2020, p. 51). <sup>[7]</sup> Utilitarian philosophy, which Mill embraced, held the view that happiness is meant

for everyone; it gives priority to all individuals. It does not give priority to one group of people over other. Nevertheless, Marxist feminists challenged the liberal conception of providing equal opportunity to all individuals. They argued that it is impossible to achieve such equality in the capitalist system wherein the wealth is concentrated in a few hands. Mill, as other liberals did, staunchly favours providing access to education for women. Women cannot be, in the expression of Immanuel Kant, 'fully humane' because of the lack of education. They affirm that if provided education, women are no less than men. However, liberals do not say that men and women are identical or similar even in terms of rationality. Liberals fail to provide a concrete explanation to the question of the absoluteness of equality between men and women. Mill argued, as mentioned above that women's subordination must be replaced with 'perfect equality.' However, Mill nowhere defined what perfect equality is. Whether this 'perfect equality' corresponds to 'absolute equality' is also uncertain and lacks corroboration to claim it. The term 'equality' has a legal and political connotation. Mill apparently used it in a reformist sense and utility. Although Mill brought up the issues of 'women's question' to a new height, there was inconsistency in his teleological arguments for the end of women's subordination.

#### End Notes

<sup>i</sup> This essay is a book chapter in their coauthored work *The Newly Born Women*.

<sup>ii</sup> By French Feminist, I refer to Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous.

<sup>iii</sup> By liberalism, I refer to only classical liberalism of eighteenth-century England, not contemporary liberalism.

<sup>iv</sup> In England, by law, the wife should regard her husband as the lord.

<sup>v</sup> Quoted in Delap L. *Feminisms: A Global History*. London: Pelican, 2020.

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