

## Making the History of Philosophy: A Feminist Critical Analysis

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*The main objective of this article is to discuss the androcentrism in the discipline of philosophy, by examining the exclusion of women from the philosophical canons. It is indispensable to analyze how the issues of power and knowledge worked in the making of the history of philosophy worldwide by omitting women thinkers. There were enormously efficient intellectual women from ancient times; but they were not heard much, and they were never included in the books on the history of philosophy. There is a need to rewrite the history of philosophy to place the critical thinking and intellectual engagements by women philosophers to make them enter the canon. Feminist philosophy has abundant resources to explore the existing scopes of philosophy such as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics and further critical areas. The discussions of socio-political philosophy cannot avoid the philosophy of feminism and gender; to analyze social phenomena including injustices based on religion, region, ethnicity, class, caste, etc. Those aspects have been neglected in the history of moral philosophy with its dominant rationality, abstract absolutism, along with misogyny. This article attempts to critically analyze these issues by discussing the philosophical contributions of some women thinkers from Western and Eastern cultural contexts who initiated debates over areas of moral and social philosophy. Such an attempt is made here by referring mainly to the inputs by two women thinkers from ancient and modern time in the West and the East. Aspatia and Diotima from ancient Greece, Sulabha and Gargi from ancient India, Wollstonecraft and Beauvoir from the modern Western context, Tarabai and Ramabai from the modern Indian context, would provide the points of discussion in this article. These women philosophers are discussed in a limited way and later interventions in feminist ethics are mentioned as examples to argue the relevance of women thinkers and to address the issues of their exclusion from the history of philosophy.*

**Keywords:** History of Philosophy, Patriarchy, Power, Gender, Feminist Ethics, Feminist Philosophy, Women Thinkers

### Introduction

All prominent compilations on the history of philosophy would show that philosophy has always been patriarchal in its contents and methods. There were enormously efficient female intellectuals in antiquity and later periods, but they were not heard much, and they were never included in the books on the history of philosophy. Addressing this issue historically, some women thinkers from philosophy departments in Western countries initiated documenting the female philosophers and their works with websites and published books.<sup>1</sup> The female name Hypatia of

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<sup>1</sup>Waithe, 1987. Gardner, 2023, O'Reilly, and Pello, Eds. 2023. Also see the link <https://ecc.historyof>

Alexandria was well-known for her intellectual engagements as a Neo-Platonist philosopher and mathematician during 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>2</sup> But her works were lost due to the attacks from the powers of religious authorities, who eventually executed her publicly. The dynamics of various institutional power and gender are palpable from Hypatia's murder; still, no later philosophers attempted to get her name listed in any documentation on the history of philosophy, until feminist philosophers' initiative. Recent references show that there were other names of women thinkers such as Theano, Themistoclea etc. who existed around 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE during the time of Pythagoras.<sup>3</sup> Later during Socratic and Platonic periods in the history of Western philosophy, there were women thinkers such as Aspasia, Diotima, Hipparchia, Arete etc. from ancient Greece.<sup>4</sup> Some of them appear as strong characters in Plato's dialogues. But no later studies on those Socratic dialogues written by Plato, took up the women interlocutors in the dialectical enterprise developed in ancient Greece. And that shows how the male-centric power structures in philosophy was constructed by careful exclusion of female names.

With reference to the documentation edited by Mary Ellen Waithe, some women philosophers were identified in the medieval and early modern periods, but they also did not become part of the Western philosophical canon.<sup>5</sup> Women in antiquity have made many important contributions to classical philosophy in Asia too.<sup>6</sup> In ancient India many women were engaging intellectually with sages and seers in Vedic and Upanishadic periods around 1000 BCE.<sup>7</sup> The female names among ancient Indian philosophers include Lopamudra, Maitreyi, Gargi, Sulabha etc. These women appeared in ancient Indian scriptures as engaging in dialectics along with male sages and seers elaborating upon topics as rhetoric, spirituality, self, enlightenment and gender too. Not only in Vedic tradition but in Buddhist tradition also we can find women philosophers. During Buddha's lifetime between 800-600 BCE, there were women known as *Theris* or elderly, who literally contributed thorough their philosophical poems that were later compiled as *Therigatha*.<sup>8</sup> In medieval period Akka Mahadevi wrote poems (around 12<sup>th</sup> century CE) on spirituality as well as rejection of social norms, and Pandita Ramabai, Tharabai Shinde, Savithribai Phule etc. were women who wrote social-philosophical treatise in modern period.<sup>9</sup>

Due to the commencement of Women's Studies and Gender Studies as academic departments, some universities have started including women thinkers' names and works in the curriculum of philosophy in recent decades. There was no discussion regarding the inclusion of women philosophers into the canon until

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womenphilosophers.org/#hwps.

<sup>2</sup>It is evident from the fact that the Society for Women in Philosophy, which was founded in 1972 by some Western feminist philosophers, initiated a journal in the name Hypatia and first published it in 1986.

<sup>3</sup>Waithe, Ed.1987

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>See Pang-White, 2023; Kim, 2022; Waithe and Dykeman, Ed. 2023.

<sup>7</sup>Waithe and Dykeman, Ed. 2023.

<sup>8</sup>Pollock, 2015. Chakraborty, 2018.

<sup>9</sup>O'Reilly, Catharine R and Pello, Caterina. Eds. 2023; Chakravarti, 1998; Shinde, 2004.

feminists from philosophy departments in the West initiated it in the late modern times. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* published in 1967, which contains articles on over 900 philosophers, did not include an entry for any of them. Thus, it becomes indispensable to analyze how the issue of intertwined power and knowledge, worked in the making of the history of philosophy both in the global West and East. When women thinkers took it as obligatory and discussed the issues of making the history of philosophy documented, the necessity for making a new area called philosophy of gender and feminism arises for sure. It is required to declare the method of gender analysis as part of feminist philosophy and the different streams in it. One stream of work is to see the fact that philosophical works of women philosophers through various time periods were excluded from the history of philosophy. It will include the feminist critic of the narrations and documentation of history of philosophy as patriarchal, and a documentation of women philosophers to rewrite the history of philosophy. Another stream of feminist philosophy is to understand the philosophical contributions of women thinkers who initiated different modes of analyses in varied fields of philosophy.

It is noteworthy that along with the documentation of women thinkers and their integration into the philosophical canons, various attempts are being made in recent years to do studies on the works done by women in philosophy. In *A History of Women Philosophers*, Mary Ellen Waithe (1987) has documented women philosophers from worldwide in four volumes, comprising female thinkers in the classical world, from 500–1600 CE, from 1600–1900CE and later.<sup>10</sup> References show that before the attempt of Waithe (1987) in the second half of 20th century in doing the documentation of women philosophers, Gilles Menage had written *Historia Mulierum Philosopharum* in the 17th century (1690) on women thinkers, though it was not translated very soon into English.<sup>11</sup> He had found around sixty-five women thinkers from various writings in antiquity and dedicated this book to the most intellectual woman of his time Anne Lefevre Dacier.<sup>12</sup> Other than this documentation of women thinkers by a male thinker, later in the 19th century another prominent male philosopher John Stuart Mill has written women's issue in his book *The Subjection of Woman* (1869). Though we find such rare thoughts among philosophers on women and their historical condition, it is also notable that while other areas of the humanities are at or near gender parity, philosophy remained more male-centered. Though this scenario has rapidly changed in the West during last few decades, it is only recently at least some modern and postmodern woman philosophers are studied in developing ontological and epistemological insights at the research areas in India. In interdisciplinary research projects the women thinkers are included but not much in the curriculum of philosophy departments. So that, it is apparent that there is a prerequisite to rewrite the history of philosophy to place the critical thinking and engagements by women philosophers in detail.

An analysis on the contributions of some female philosophers by placing them

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<sup>10</sup>Waithe, Ed. 1987.

<sup>11</sup>Twomey, 2023:137.

<sup>12</sup>*The History of Women Philosophers*, translated from the Latin with an introduction by Beatrice H. Zedler, Lanham: University press of America (1984).

in the particular historical and geographical contexts would facilitate the interpretation of patriarchy in the documentation of the history of philosophy. Such an attempt is done here by referring mainly the contributions by two women thinkers from each ancient and modern time philosophy in the West and the East. Aspatia and Diotima from ancient Greece, Sulabha and Gargi from ancient India, Wollstonecraft and Beauvoir from modern Western context, Tarabai and Ramabai from the modern Indian context, would provide the points of discussion in this article. The works of these women philosophers and some later interventions of female thinkers are deliberated in a limited way as examples to argue the presence and relevance of women thinkers, and thus to address the issues of their exclusion from history of philosophy.

### **Women Thinkers in Ancient Western Philosophy**

During the pre-Socratic period there were women philosophers who themselves wrote texts of various themes especially on moral philosophy, and there are claims of them being the earliest texts by women in the West. These women are called Pythagorean women and the collections by *Stobaeus: Eclogarum Physicarum and Florilegium* in 5<sup>th</sup> century CE and other writings in Dutsch (2020) and Pomeroy (2013) compile their existence as philosophers.<sup>13</sup> Since philosophy and history are all dominated by male protagonists, these women are to be labelled as pre-Socratic thinkers or Pythagorean women. It provides evident gender insensitivity in terminological and historical enterprise that they were named as Pythagorean women following Pythagoras. This also resonates the patriarchal power structures in the realm of making of knowledge. Though most of these women were presented as either a lover or wife of Pythagoras, there were also women who were teaching Pythagoras. Diogenes Laertius (180-240 CE) noted that Pythagoras got his ethical views from a woman priestess named Themistoclea.<sup>14</sup> The scarcity of references doesn't give space for any critical analysis on this point to evaluate whether any higher position was attributed to her during that time. But obviously her name also hasn't constituted a school of philosophy in her name. Theano who is known as the wife of Pythagoras had written philosophical works but her legacy didn't make the canon. With the evident chronological confusions in documenting ancient history, Theano could also be identified to be a name before Pythagoras around 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, and so she might be appropriate with the time of Thales to provide thoughts on, her being a replacement for the so-called first philosopher Thales, according to a feminist point of view.

A feminist analysis on presentation of the group of female philosophers who lived during Pythagorean period, would have to notice the status of women as domestically tied and subordinated. It is mentioned as a great point that the women who wrote a series of letters and treatises and were also known to be experts of the household.<sup>15</sup> There are many discussions about the feminine virtue and home making in the texts that would brew gendered concepts, but Pythagorean school restricted even men to keep monogamy and to be religiously dutiful. Some observed that in both

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<sup>13</sup>Twomey, 2023.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, p.136.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

stages of the history of Pythagoreanism, in the fifth-century Pythagorean societies and in the Hellenistic Pythagorean writings, the women who are credited with authoring texts were viewed as an intellectual, a thinker, a teacher, and a philosopher. But ‘the available evidence is more complex and conveys the idea of the Pythagorean woman as both an expert on the female sphere and a well-rounded thinker philosophizing about the principles of the cosmos, human society, the immortality of the soul, numbers, and harmonics.’<sup>16</sup>

Although we can find online references and writings nowadays on later women philosophers such as Aspatia, Arete, Diotima, Hipparchia etc. who were active between 5<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, and they are not even mentioned in any documented books on ancient Western philosophy generally referred in university curriculum.<sup>17</sup> During their life period, academic philosophy was generally confined to the male philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, to place them as the fathers of Ancient Western philosophy. The woman thinker Aspatia is a name mentioned by Plato in *Menexenus*, in which Socrates says Aspatia taught him. Though the topic in those dialogues is given as funeral oration, rhetoric, gender issues etc. are all being topics in dialogues of Aspatia as well as Diotima in the dialectics. On Aspatia’s life there are many different versions that would show her as courtesan at one level and as a thinker and philosopher from whom Socrates learnt a lot.<sup>18</sup> She also has been a character in play written those days along with Pericles as counterpart. It is well known that people such as Aristophanes pictured women intellectuals cynically.<sup>19</sup> The power structures in knowledge systems would get revealed if we look at this particular female character, whose sexuality and gender are being scrutinized by male literary artists.

The woman named Diotima (440 BC) as a character who develops the idea of *Eros* in Plato’s *Symposium*, is understood as Socrates’ teacher or mother by some readings. She is just taken as mythical character by some people, but also imagined as the same person as Aspatia by some scholars. Waithe asserts from a feminist analysis that Diotima must be a real woman who existed those days since her ideas that are presented seem to be different from that of both Socrates and Plato.<sup>20</sup> The power structures in knowledge systems would get blurred if we look at this particular female character. Why Plato created this character as an interlocutor among all other men, is a question to be thought about, no matter if she really existed or not. Most of the names heard during Socratic-Platonic time period, could be contested since they appear as characters engaging with dialectics in Plato’s writings. Diotima is given high hand in the dialectical course among male thinkers who dominated the social discussions, and even she is placed to win Socrates through arguments. Her discussions are proving that the knowledge making is beyond gender. And her situatedness as an interlocutor makes us rethink gender in Plato’s philosophy and his lifetime in Greece. Sheffield explains gender categories are an explicit feature of the text *Symposium*, but Plato’s playful provocative use of them is not just dialectical

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<sup>16</sup>[https://www.cambridge.org/core/publications/elements/cambridge-elements-series/women-in-the-history-of-philosophy/listing?aggs\[productTypes\]\[filters\]=ELEMENT&sort=canonical.date:desc](https://www.cambridge.org/core/publications/elements/cambridge-elements-series/women-in-the-history-of-philosophy/listing?aggs[productTypes][filters]=ELEMENT&sort=canonical.date:desc).

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Henry, 1995.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Waithe, 2023.

ploy to reflect on then existing social norms of sexuality and gender.<sup>21</sup> The gender-muddled portrait of Diotima, placing her as female figure of Socrates and making her substantiate the philosophical thinking is beyond gender, doesn't necessarily prove Plato as gender neutral. Sheffield sounds to subscribe to the idea that Plato was not misogynistic and was even gender sensitive to imagine Philosopher Queens who have responsibility for civic education in the Republic. This is taken as an argument for understanding that moral education was not exclusively male-centered. But it is notable that Plato has also made contradictory statement in the same book that women are not rational as men and they cannot be leaders. The text proposes at some level the State would be ruled by men and women are also creatures to be ruled and taught by men leaders. The idea of Queen might have been as a counter part for King for Plato, that's why even Diotima was represented as a female version of Socrates. Arguments of Diotima might have been presented by Plato to establish the equality between sexes which was not in the society during his time. Peter Adamson also points out that the communism in Book 5 of Republic, which has only a limited appeal for the modern feminists.<sup>22</sup>

Whatever may be the contradictory case in the Republic, the book Symposium tried to prove virtue and even philosophy as gender neutral. It suits to the wish of intellectual women in various socio-cultural contexts would dream, since they are facing gender discrimination and power plays under conceptual systems of knowledge. Diotima's part in Symposium would lead us to accept the dialectics Plato brought in through her evidently facilitate thinking over gender aspects. Sheffield maintains that Plato tried to evoke the situatedness of the gender by recognizing the importance of embedding the philosophical thinking within socially articulated spaces that are dominated by men. Identifying the situatedness that the knowing subjects itself gives us much space to make the gender issues involved in the process of making knowledge. The interlocutors are not innocent and waiting outside the violations of language and culture, but they had all kinds of arrogance to face a woman. Diotima brings in the genealogy of love meant by *Eros* is the love for truth. Socrates also joins in developing this concept by arguing human beings who produce knowledge also attains *eudaimonia* just like the people who produce offspring for that purpose. *Eros* and *eudaimonia* are not only physical aspect but mental or conceptual basically.<sup>23</sup> The arguments in Symposium around these topics would allow the interlocutors to do in-depth scrutiny of the existing prejudices on gender, love, value, truth etc.

The prominent part that makes history in the philosophical canon is the dialectical engagement that Diotima did with interlocutors for placing physical pregnancy and mental pregnancy equally relevant to attain *eudaimonia*. The dialectics on *eros*, goes on to the themes of pregnancy, midwifery and birth, to validate women and men both could be pregnant in soul or in body. Those who are pregnant in soul could create wisdom and virtue, and they are also humans who could thus attain *eudaimonia* regardless of gender. Pregnancy is categorized as female, but the philosophical point is that physical pregnancy is a much larger phenomenon, which covers human creativity of all kinds. This is grounded in clarifying genus and species correctly, and

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<sup>21</sup>Sheffield, 2023.

<sup>22</sup>Adamson, 2023.

<sup>23</sup>Plato, Symposium, Trans. Christopher Gill, Penguin Classics, 1999, Penguin Books, London.

is made more explicitly about *eros* as the desire for knowledge about truth. As Sheffield noted down there is no sublimation in this account of sexual eros onto eros for knowledge and so on; nor is eros for the intelligible form of a metaphor. The whole of desire for good things and happiness is eros (205d1-2).<sup>24</sup> It is also notable that the mythical stories about the birth *Eros* from resourceful Poros and resourceless Penia, being discussed by Diotima in a different way.

However, the critical issue from feminist point of view then is to identify the risk involved in conclusions that would hold philosophical thinking is beyond gender. The discussions on topics such as moral education, reproduction, beauty, pregnancy, midwifery, giving birth etc. are going on to prove the philosophical thinking is beyond gender or gender-neutral. Though both ideas are problematic according to the modern and postmodern feminist critical thinking, these were very strong interventions that can happen in the patriarchal symposiums in ancient Greece. Though Diotima's existence as a real woman is in question, we could find a real woman named Hypatia in Neo-Platonic period. Her writings are lost due to the rivalry from religious power against her intellectual freedom that enlightened many young people to become non-believers during that time. This shows the patriarchal power structures existed from antiquity through religion and later through developing social and moral institutions such as democratic State, judiciary, academy and family, in Western countries.

### **Feminist Philosophers' Engagements in Modern Western Thought: Some Excerpts**

Though there are references about women in philosophy engaging with the so-called fathers of modern rationalist philosophy in early modern period, they didn't enter the canon. All those women who have been systematically excluded from philosophical thought were brought into books as feminist women philosophers in late modern time. This was done by women at various philosophy departments who consciously made feminist arguments to address the androcentrism in the discipline. Noted modern philosophers recorded are many, but Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) are taken here as examples for discussing the contributions by women philosophers in modern time. Since the dominant discussion ever in moral philosophy caused women being perceived as ethical and moral carriers, it is essential and suitable to take the contributions of women thinkers in the field of moral philosophy to make a feminist analysis. According to feminist thinkers, the major discussions of morality during the rationality dominated modern world never tended to be gender sensitive. In a way it developed a more severe patriarchy than that seem to have existed in ancient moral philosophy and social organization.

Feminist philosophers have criticized the historical exclusion of women from the philosophical tradition, through their engagement with various areas of thought systems. Many modern women thinkers worked with philosophy departments in the global West have developed metaphysical, epistemological and ethical philosophy. It is notable that the area of ethics had been a great concern for women thinkers as it affected the worldview and thus the everyday life. Feminist philosophers thought

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<sup>24</sup>Sheffield, 2023, p.30.

that more deliberations are mandatory on the dominant moral philosophy, as the patriarchal ethical dimensions were always around women human beings, historically making them responsible for any moral flaws within the social institutions. Women are always conceived as the vehicles of morality in cultures and societies due to these basic concepts. If we take a look at the contributions of women philosophers during modern times, we could see they initially wrote with regard to ethics by developing feminist ethics. Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir as important thinkers among the most known feminist philosophers in modernity, made their interventions and initial writings in the area of ethics. Wollstonecraft discussed the rights of women and de Beauvoir analyzed the contemporary male ethicists to develop a feminist ethics by writing her first book *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947).

Traditional philosophy would doubt whether feminist ethics had any philosophical basis at all. Then what is defined as philosophical and non-philosophical is another question that should be thought about. A revisit into the areas/branches of philosophy, and methods of philosophizing is entailed in the discussion of feminist ethics. An investigation into the women in philosophy, who ventured into the introduction and perpetuation of feminist philosophy, ethics constitute the major feminist version of philosophizing. The historically acclaimed traditional version of ethical theorization is being questioned by feminist philosophers of ethics, for its arguments of reason and justice. Thus, feminist ethics becomes critical as well as creative, to include emotion, interdependence, vulnerability etc. to bring out an ethics of care, instead of an ethics based on reason and universality as defined by traditional ethicists. Gardner, in her book *Women Philosophers* (2003) has elaborated on the dominant model of moral philosophy which was traditionally developed by the moral concerns of particular class of men known in philosophy.<sup>25</sup> She also explains the exclusion of women from the history of philosophy and the social pressures and limited access to educational and publishing possibilities that would have made women philosophers invisible. While modern women philosophers started intervening into the traditional ethical issues with reference to their own excluded status, they developed the area of feminist ethics.

Miller opines that, even when purporting to be universal in scope, much of Western ethics has been falsely so.<sup>26</sup> Ethical theories answer two key questions about our shared moral lives. They ask basic questions as what ought to do and how should one live etc. The critical endeavour of feminist ethics analysed how other ethical theories recommend acting and living in ways that both fail to detect and contribute to the oppression of women. The creative endeavour of feminist ethics can take the next crucial steps of determining how we ought to act and how we can live well through specifically feminist methods. Feminist ethical theories describe right action and good character in ways that express distinctly feminist values. The creative aim of feminist ethics is ultimately to imagine and create the mechanisms to overcome women's oppression. In the project of feminist ethics we can find various streams as virtue ethics, care ethics, liberal feminist ethics, transnational ethics, relational ethics, Intersectional ethics etc.

Mary Wollstonecraft who lived in the period of eighteenth-century enlightenment in Europe, is found as the first person who tried to write about women's rights and

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<sup>25</sup>Gardner, 2023.

<sup>26</sup>Miller, 2017.

initiated feminist ethics. But her version of feminist ethics was also a kind of virtue ethics as that was articulated in the noted work *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle, the main fore-father of ethics in Western philosophy. So, it was after about twenty centuries, a woman proclaimed the rights of women through her writings. The book *A Vindication of Rights of Women*, published by Wollstonecraft in 1792 made a revolution in ethics, and highlighted some roots for a feminist ethics during the era of much celebrated Kantian ethics in Europe. Kant was developing his moral philosophy, by his notable books *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788, known as the second *Critique*), *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790, the third *Critique*) and *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797). Feminist ethics of Wollstonecraft started with an analysis of subjugation and oppression faced by women, a concept that never has been the subject matter of traditional philosophy. But she was never listed as an enlightenment philosopher among those who thought and wrote during the so-called Eighteenth-century Enlightenment era.

Virtue ethics of Wollstonecraft differed from the Aristotle's virtue ethics in this sense of neglect on oppressions in society that denied rights of women. But she refers the point of self-love from Aristotle and propounds a kind of virtue ethics and it is an all-encompassing moral theory which holds that the best life for individuals is commensurate with a good society and good family. Interestingly enough self-interest and our public duties are argued as identical and not at odds when we realize what is truly good for ourselves and for others. "Wollstonecraft's argument for a moral friendship between man and woman becomes the main contribution to develop a feminist ethics that would solve the oppressed state of being experienced by female entities. The political, social, economic, and personal equality of women would be assured by such feminist version of ethics of self-interest and ethics of friendship that were even misunderstood as narcissistic in studies on classical virtue ethics of Aristotle. Though Aristotle considered women as incapable of reasoning and thus inferior to men, Wollstonecraft utilized his concept of self-interest to upgrade women's self-confidence to make sure on the justice they themselves were denied. The element of self-love as a virtue for all human beings would upgrade the status of women who exercise such ethical stance, according to Wollstonecraft."<sup>27</sup>

Wollstonecraft discussed the leading moral philosophers of her time especially Kant, Hume and Rousseau extensively. According to her, the prominent ethical theories as deontology of Kant and utilitarianism developed by Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) did only very limited analysis of systems of oppression. Though the book *The Subjection of Women* [(1869) 1970] by John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) is a noteworthy exception that proposes for the equality of the sexes, (he wrote it with his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill.) philosophers' general neglect of oppression is to be criticized. This issue of insensitivity towards lifeworld experiences of oppression and discrimination might be due to the fact that those who wrote the texts of the Western philosophical canon were mainly men and they were rarely subjected to oppression themselves. Their lifeworld was different from those of women who experienced subjugation and so they never could theorize the ethical issues properly addressing all kinds of human entities.

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<sup>27</sup>Holt, 2021.

Perspectives on ethics were developed by philosophers with no gender sensitivity, and that has facilitated the making of society patriarchal and social mores as misogynist. This issue has been discussed by the feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in modern time, by posing the very ontological questions on ethical discussions. She critically refers Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Sartre for deriving a feminist version of existentialist mode of ethics, and proceeds to refer Husserl for defining ethics on her own way. She has elaborated critical points on the existing ethical explanations by philosophers, to expound new forms of ethics. During her existentialist phenomenological enquiry and ethical interpretations, she wrote on the moral norms prescribed by the societies as anti-woman to compile a book, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, a long philosophical essay first published in 1947. Simone de Beauvoir raised a main objection against existentialism that the precept ‘to will freedom’ is only a hollow formula and offers no concrete content for action’.<sup>28</sup> According to her there is an ethics, only if there is a problem to be solved. With this statement de Beauvoir invokes Hegelian ‘displacement’ to understand ethics, but draws a critique on the ‘aufheben’ which could be understood as transcendence or rejection. She asserts the importance of being in the world instead of rejecting it, and accepting the ambiguity involved in it. Beauvoir’s ethics establishes the responsibility of being in the life world, not only as a valuable choice but also as the genuine freedom. The moral freedom is in order to create the space for an authentic morality capable of being realized within the situational relationships which is the characteristic of the human condition. The trap of transcendence towards an absolute is problematized by her by showing the ambiguity in defining ethics simply rationally on the basis of universals. This kind of an ethics enable us to understand the issues between individual and collective cases of oppressed and the oppressor.<sup>29</sup>

But the later initiatives in feminist ethics turned to be taking up the situational relationship aspect of Beauvoir into another concept of relationality in the late 1980s. The rise of relational ethics as a prominent step within feminist ethics, was initially in conjunction with the works of different female philosophers such as Nel Noddings. In an analysis of women’s moral decision-making in the 1980s that turned into a book named as *In a Different Voice* (1982) by a psychologist Carol Gilligan, claimed that she found a difference in the way men and women perceived moral problems. While women gave prominence to care and empathy for the relationship, men took justice and rights as measure for moral decision making, as per the result of her empirical analysis. Through this she tried to propagate an ethics of care, and that got high momentum and acceptance as feminist ethics. But there are various criticisms within feminist scholars against this kind of feminist ethics which is reassuring the stereotypical gender concepts that conceive femininity as more caring and empathetical while masculinity got conceptualized otherwise. A few years after Gilligan, Nel Noddings published *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984), which provided a deeper analysis into the care concept by identifying people as the care provider and the care receiver along with the processes involved in caring. In this book, Noddings argued that morality requires a sentiment of ‘natural care’ which she calls as pre-ethical, just like the caretaking that a mother

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<sup>28</sup>De Beauvoir, 1948:78.

<sup>29</sup>Maya, 2020.

engages in for her child, or a maternal animal for her offspring are equally examples of this natural care.<sup>30</sup> Though she concludes that care ethics is applicable and relevant for all regardless of gender, the motherly natural care concept was taken under scrutiny for feminist criticism citing the issues of essentialism, parochialism and slave morality.<sup>31</sup>

With reference to such criticisms her revised version of the feminine approach to ethics, appeared with the renewed subtitle *A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* in 2013, in which she develops the concept of relational ethics within feminist ethics. But relationality theory also undergoes criticisms since relationality and care ethics would raise the issue of autonomy for women themselves who fought for it with feminist philosophy. Marilyn Friedman is an American philosopher, the W. Alton Jones Chair of Philosophy at Vanderbilt University, talks about the issue of autonomy within the relationality theory.<sup>32</sup> Relational theorists of ethics find the autonomy as only a matter of degree and of life stages. Human beings are not born autonomous but becomes autonomous through stages of inter-dependence. This fact was not considered as important aspect by the traditional ethicists as Kant who proposed ethical judgments as categorical and thus deontological or duty bound. This kind of rationality based categorical judgements will not assure justice to all human beings according to feminist ethics, especially because it conceived only men as rational beings and thus the authority of moral judgements. Recent developments in feminist ethics are based on relationality of human existence, and such arguments by feminist philosophers also addressed the dominance of rationalist metaphysics and epistemology in the Western history of philosophy.

### **Women Philosophers in Ancient India: Myth and Reality of the Religious Discourse**

Though the academic realm of Indian philosophy doesn't recognize female names, in India there were women in the Vedic period and Buddhist tradition that dates back to 800-1000 BCE.<sup>33</sup> The history of philosophy in India is closely connected to religious scriptures, and women thinkers were also appearing in them. No matter the women behind the female names were myth or reality, the texts of religion is a proof to conclude there were female philosophers in ancient India. Vedas, Upanishads and Epics are depicting female characters who are strongly engaging with philosophical discussions around themes of virtue, duty, ethics, spirituality etc. Various references claim that women sages in India were intellectuals and had engagements with the male counterparts in Vedic and Upanishadic periods. About 30 names of women are there in the Rig Veda itself. There were women scholars like Lopamudra, Visvavara, Ghosha, Sikata, Nivavari, Apala, Soorya, Indrani, Urvasi, Sarama, Joohu, Vagambhruni and Poulomi Sachi are well known women, who are revered and are associated with individual Rig Veda *Manthras*.<sup>34</sup>

In the oldest text of the Upanishads, written around 700 BCE- 1000BCE, excerpts

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<sup>30</sup>Noddings, 1984.

<sup>31</sup>Card,1990; Robinson,1999; Davion,1993; Toronto,1994.

<sup>32</sup>Friedman,1997.

<sup>33</sup>Waithe, Dyken. Eds. 2023.

<sup>34</sup><https://samyuktajournal.in/researching-the-icons-women-seers-in-the-rig-veda/>.

from the philosophical conversations of the female philosophers Gargi and Maitreyi with the sage Yajnavalkya are available. Maithreyi, Gargi and Sulabha were names in Upanishads as intellectual women who engaged debates with male sages.<sup>35</sup> Though Gargi and Sulabha as wandering *yogini* or *sanyasinis*, who made arguments with men, Gargi is popularly tied with Maithreyi mentioned as the intellectual wife of Yajnavalkya. It might be because both of them had dialogues with sage Yajnavalkya. But Gargi is as unique as Sulabha mentioned in Mahabharatha, because they were intellectual women who were not householders to be a wife. They were philosophers who devoted to knowledge making, but they never got enough reference in the Vedic and Upanishadic tradition that we include in the discipline of Indian philosophy.

Gargi Vachaknavi, is the daughter of sage Vachaknu, popularly known as a philosopher who composed several hymns that questioned the origin of all existence. In Brihadaranyaka Unpanishad King Janaka of Videha, who is also seen in the later text of epics Mahabharatha, is mentioned as organized a *brahmayajna*, a philosophically oriented ritual around the fire sacrament, and Gargi was one of the eminent participants. There she challenged the sage Yajnavalkya with a volley of perturbing questions on the soul or ‘*atman*’, a main metaphysical idea of Upanishads and later Vedic schools. Gargi’s arguments and questions confounded the learned man who had till then silenced many eminent scholars. Her question - “The layer that is above the sky and below the earth, which is described as being situated between the earth and the sky and which is indicated as the symbol of the past, present and future, where is that situated?” - flattened even the great Vedic men of letters.

Ruth Vanitha says Sulabha was mentioned in Rg Veda with a whole *samhitha* in her name, which was later lost. She becomes another example for how the writings of women and the writings on free women were disappeared due to patriarchal power play in making knowledge and documenting history and knowledge.<sup>36</sup> ‘Sulabha was a peripatetic Indian ascetic yogini who engaged in lengthy philosophical debate with philosopher King Janaka. We do not know precisely when she lived. The account of their discussion is reported in the epic Mahabharata. Their debate covers many philosophical issues including the nature of being, of personhood, of certainty, and of women’s capacity for enlightenment. In that regard we find Suhabha arguing that “My body is different from your body. But my soul is not different from your soul...” A complete translation of the debate between philosopher-King Janaka and ascetic yogini Sulabha is included in Ruth Vanitha’s writings in the book *Women Philosophers from Non-Western Traditions: The First Four Thousand Years*.<sup>37</sup> The anachronism in Sulabha being mentioned in Rg Veda, Upanisad and Mahabharatha would create complexity in believing her as a real woman.<sup>38</sup> She is a character appearing in the Epic Mahabharatha who engages in serious dialectal process with King Janaka who was also mentioned in earlier texts of Upanishads. So the existence of both Janaka and Sulabha as real persons could be debated, but the point to be taken here is that the topics of gender in philosophy were introduced through their dialogues.

In the text Mahabharatha that is thoroughly dialogical, Sulabha’s greatest

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<sup>35</sup>Mookherji, 1998.

<sup>36</sup>Vanitha, 2003.

<sup>37</sup>Vanitha, 2024.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

contribution is to offer one of the most explicit accounts on how to engage in dialogue with others.<sup>39</sup> When She enters as a wandering ascetic woman for the dialogue with Janaka, he asks her humiliating questions about ethnic background and family status. Her gender becomes a topic for insulting her with a doubt on her intellect to engage in dialectics and she was publicly put down by the King before starting the dialogue. But her arguments that perplexed his thoughts obliged him to accept the female thinker, though he tried initially to degrade her in the name of social status and identity. Without giving a direct response to the King's insulting questions, Sulabha argues that there should be a structured way to engage in debates between interlocutors. By doing so, she points out towards an ethics of conversation. She also demonstrates that how one thinker makes an argument is part of what measures one's knowledge claims.<sup>40</sup> Brian Black maintains that her arguments address the issues related to the experiences of women.<sup>41</sup> He opines that what Sulabha says is a genuine female perspective and relevant to remember the way we understand women philosophers in Indian context. If Sulabha was a real woman or just a character, is irrelevant question since it gives us thought provoking ideas of engendered ethics and methods of dialectics. Myth and reality would not make a difference since Indian philosophy in antiquity revolves around mythical stories in texts of religion. It is the same case with knowledge making and imparting methods worldwide, that they listen to mythical or folkloristic stories to follow the ideas given by characters in them. So Sulabha's dialogues that flourish on rhetoric, ethics, gender, worldly life, renunciation and spirituality etc. would definitely make her enter into the canon of Indian philosophy.

Though the chronology would seem to be vague in locating Vedas and Upanishads, numerous arguments provide an idea to fix them at least one thousand years before Common Era. With similar questions of historical timing, Buddhist women thinkers also existed in history as per references that became available for researchers in recent decades. The first ever written document by women worldwide, is supposed to be the *Therigatha*- a collection of philosophical poems written in Pali language by early Buddhist *Bhikkunis* (Buddhist nuns) known as *Theris*. These women were intense in intellectual level to make critical analysis of worldly life. They sound like strong feminist who left the subordination related miseries in the households joined Buddhist monasteries. There were such women thinkers even from the time of Buddha, and their existence through their writings proves the feminist philosophical thought dating back to the 8th century BCE. There are many names such as Soma, Sumangalamata, Mutta, Uttara, Sujata, Rohini, Vimala, Nandutara, Anopama etc. who have written powerful philosophical analysis on aspects of life through the poems included in *Therigatha*. 'Basic Buddhist ideas common to all schools of early Buddhism are obvious in the poems of *Therigatha*.'<sup>42</sup> The ideas about cosmology, the law of moral cause and effect or rebirth, nirvana, four noble truths, *dhamma*, *pratityasamudpada* are all rectified in the verses of *Therigatha*. Some readings on the poems explicitly claim that 'Sumangalamata celebrated the life by becoming a homeless world-

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<sup>39</sup>Black, 2023.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid, p.41.

<sup>42</sup>Pollock, 2015, p.xxiv.

renunciation and escaping the pestle and cooking pots of the 'householder'.<sup>43</sup> Soma also fought against conceptions such as the domestication of women and her cooking skill, by attacking the ideas about the 'two-finger intelligence of women'.<sup>44</sup> Though not in the position meant of the term 'householder' in its feminist critical perspective for which denotation is of man in power, the women who became *Bhikhunis* obviously entered to renunciation to free them from the 'household worker' status of subordination. And this reveals the deep-rooted subjugation of women in family system of Indian culture, no matter what religion they followed.<sup>45</sup> The same reason is ostensive towards the exclusion of women thinkers from the history of philosophy.

### **Women Thinkers in Modern India and the History of Social Philosophy**

In the modern period, we can identify many women in India who contributed to socio-political philosophy and activities with ideologies for social transformation. They are not recorded as thinkers in the history of socio-political philosophy. Women in India had done their role through their life activities and also by writing down their thoughts. Pandita Ramabai is a social thinker and social reformer lived during 1858-1922, who contributed to Indian philosophy extensively with her activities as well as writings. She did a hermeneutic account of *Manu-Smrti* to ponder her critical views on the anti-woman Hindu customs that are propounded by the text, while fighting with her own life situations spoilt by superstitions of religion. Christian concepts are also debated by her strongly on its patriarchal elements after her conversion to Christianity. She had converted to Christianity in abhorrence with Hindu customs that torture women in many ways at various stages of life through the superstitious ideas. But later she found Christian concepts were also problematic due to its patriarchal nature, that she experienced after her conversion to Christianity and work in England.

She worked for sensitizing people about the Hindu customs that are anti-woman. She pointed out the superstitions about Hindu wives and widows, herself having survived such life experiences. She converted to Christianity with a testimony that 'there were only two things on which all the sacred Sanskrit texts such as *Dharmasastras*, the epics, the *Puranas*, and the modern poets, the popular preachers of the present day and orthodox high-caste men, were agreed. That is, women of high and low caste were bad, worse than demons, unholy that they could not get *Moksha* as men could.'<sup>46</sup> Ramabai proclaimed that *Manu-Smrti* is one of the best examples for scriptural attempt to make women hateful beings in the eyes of the world. It is true to any feminist critical analysis that the ancient Hindu texts have influenced the mind-set of people to conceive the gendered entities, and to prescribe woman as only there to serve the man. The famous quotes such as '*na sthree svathanthryamarhathi*' (woman doesn't deserve freedom) from *Manu-Smrti*, the text known as the handbook of law and order in India, are still being celebrated in modern society and even at the wedge

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<sup>43</sup>De Lamotte, Meeker, et al. 1997.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Subrahmanian, 2015.

<sup>46</sup>Chakravarty, 1998.

of postmodernism.<sup>47</sup> Ramabai looked at this text to see how women are given low status in Hindu religion. With reference to the text, we will find many verses to be debated on its tendency to fix the woman's status as domesticated, secondary and subordinated to men.<sup>48</sup>

Ramabai who wandered around the world then to discuss women's low status caused by religious ideas, irritated the church authorities. They couldn't justify Ramabai's rationally philosophical approach towards Christianity and the way she argued about how religion oppressed women. The question of propriety of Ramabai teaching English men was merely a façade for the religious authorities to question her. They feared the status of 'professor' might go to Ramabai, and it would make more difficulty to control her. There was a great anxiety also that Christianity would lose its hold over her while she returned to India from England. But she concentrated more for working with educating women and changing the community in which she was born and suffered as widow. For raising fund to do those works she travelled to America and engaged herself in lecturing and writing on issues of gender in religion-oriented societies, though Anglican missionaries were ambivalent to her trip.

In 1882 Ramabai had come to Pune and founded the *Arya Mahila Samaj*, just before her departure to England for conversion to Christianity.<sup>49</sup> It was the same year Tarabai Shinde, published '*Stri-Purusha Tulna*' (A Comparison of men and Women) to debate the inequalities that women suffered in Indian religious societies. Tarabai also vehemently criticized the texts of religion that controlled the thinking capacity of women. Omvedt declares the works of Ramabai and Tarabai as early Indian feminism, and asserts that it was due to their efforts there was a beginning of education for girls in India.<sup>50</sup> Tarabai Shinde's *A Comparison between Women and Men*, written in Marathi originally and published in 1882, provides us with one example of such a woman's voice, speaking directly and passionately on the ways in which she saw men in colonial society as having silenced and disempowered Indian womenfolk.<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, Tarabai was born into a middle-class family, she got education and some exposure to address social hierarchy of caste, religion and gender. While learning to read and write in Sanskrit, Hindi and at least the mother-tongue was not easy for a girl during her time in modern India, she experienced that freedom and thus worked for other women too. She was vigilant in social reform activities along with Jyotirao Phule and Savithribai Phule who initiated the social reform movement *Satyashodhak Samaj*. They established a school of untouchables in 1848. Tarabai and Ramabai worked to start a shelter and education for upper-caste young widows during the same decade. It is to address the pathetic life condition of huge number of young Brahmin widows who were not allowed to remarry or pursue any other interest as education and employment.

The social reform activities resulted from the thinking and speaking faculty of women philosophers were concealed in the history compilation in India due to patriarchal religion and culture. Women thinkers such as Ramabai and Tarabai put

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<sup>47</sup>Maya, 2008.

<sup>48</sup>See, Subrahmanian, 2015 and Maya, 2008.

<sup>49</sup>Omvedt, 2006:26.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>O'Hanlon. 1994.

forward radical views as they debated on various factors that oppress women. They attempted to make women visible by making conceptual dialogues in the society and working along with various other women socio-political activists who never got listed in any documented history of social philosophy. These women have done their best works that would free women individuals to think and live outside subordinated situations in institutional structures of household, caste, class, ethnicity, region, religion, culture etc. Unlike the Western countries, India being a country with such multiple factors of intersectionality that would play with gender inequality in social organizations, thinkers would have to identify that in philosophizing.

## **Observations**

It is obvious that the women thinkers worldwide contributed immensely into the intellectual realm, but were excluded from the philosophical canons. The reason for the exclusion also doesn't require any proof than the fact that the historical developments of philosophical thinking were compiled and recorded by male thinkers only. The power dynamics that play at multiple levels to exclude and subjugate women in the social life are evident in the realm of making knowledge as well. Even if philosophy is an academic area to think over anything and everything, it seems the thinkers and academics consciously avoided the thought on social inequality based on gendered hierarchy. Any analysis that will enable us to clarify the androcentrism in the field of philosophy, would also facilitate us to understand the issue of exclusion of women worldwide from the philosophical enterprise. The omission of women philosophers in documented philosophy is explained by the feminist philosophers in the West during recent decades. They took it as their responsibility to document female thinkers' names and works.

There are many women philosophers in the history of thought systems all over the world, and to understand what they thought and wrote about philosophical problems is crucial. In ancient Greece where philosophical thought is supposed to have born in the Western context, we can find many women who existed even before the starting of prominent Socratic period. We could observe many women thinkers along with Pythagoras, though they didn't have their own identity than being addressed as Pythagorean women. These women engaged with discussion on life and household matters by philosophically treating them to derive ethics and moral laws. Though they are depicted as women who are experts in household as well as intellectual activities, it is important to take note of their existence. Then we could see many names including Aspatia and Diotima in Socratic period who debate over various concepts including gender, as interlocutors in the dialogues of Plato.

In Indian context, there are many women from Vedic and Upanishadic texts, who we find as initial philosophers engaged with intellectual pursuit. Among them Sulabha and Gargi prove to be philosophers who did debates with reference to liberation and led their life in intellectually spiritual engagements. Sulabha is different from the other women characters who were depicted as wives or mothers of any sage or King, as she was a wandering *yogini* or *sanyasini* (female ascetic) who immerse in philosophical arguments. Gargi is popularly tied with Maithreyi

who is mentioned as the intellectual wife of Yajnavalkya. It might be because of the references that both of them had dialogues with sage Yajnavalkya. But Gargi is as unique as Sulabha mentioned in Rg-Veda and Mahabharata, for she lived as individual and intellectually spiritual woman. They were philosophers who devoted to knowledge making, but they never got enough reference in the Vedic and Upanishadic tradition that we include in the discipline of Indian philosophy. Early Buddhist *Bhikkhunis* who wrote *Therigatha* were not like the spiritual characters of women earlier depicted from the Vedic and Epic texts in Indian Hindu tradition. They were mostly women who came out of the householders' pestle to free them to the liberated state. They wrote on such subjugated states of women in the households with mundane worldly life no matter they belonged to which religion.

We could find a comparative element in the ancient women thinkers of the West and East. Diotima during Socratic period also brings in the topic of liberation of women in her dialectics as the ancient Indian female thinkers did. And it is noteworthy that she takes the discussion into a philosophy beyond gender, as the way Sulabha did. Both these women philosophers, though appeared as characters in books, proposes the possible existence of women thinkers and the gender discussions in ancient time, in a way suggesting to transcend the gender and be spiritual. The style of arguments they make are of dialectics and the contents in the dialogues are to be understood as a call for gender equality as well as liberation for women. This liberation is akin to the spiritual state that could be attained by women too which was denied to them in any religion conceptualized by male world. Sulabha questions the prominent Indian scriptural argument that women would attain *Moksha* or salvation only with their husband by serving them. Diotima questions the pregnancy concept and *eudaimonia* by arguing that pregnancy is not just physical but it could be intellectual and thus of producing wisdom. Both these women seem to be subscribing spiritual and intellectual existence of women, by marking a similar path of renunciation among women philosophers from East and West.

Diotima and Aspatia from ancient Greek philosophy, Gargi and Sulabha from ancient Indian philosophy, prove to be dialecticians who contributed into metaphysical and spiritual matters in philosophy. These women were highly engaged with dialectical and rhetoric arguments with male philosophers. Dialectics being the first ever philosophical method, it is tangible that women thinkers also subsidized into that enterprise. If we check with the women thinkers in modern western philosophy, we can see many philosophers who thought and wrote on the diversified areas such as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics etc. Women philosophers who dealt with ethics and developed feminist ethics are important to be noted especially because women are always conceived as the carriers of morality proposed by patriarchy in various societies worldwide. These women philosophers questioned the existing normative moral philosophy by declaring and rejecting them as gender insensitive rationality-based theories developed by men protagonists. Though they followed some sort of virtue ethics established by the philosophical fathers and forefathers, they have developed their own ethical concepts that would address social issues of inequality and injustice that women face due to the existing patriarchal moral concepts prevailing even in the modern society. Later modern women thinkers are bringing out new versions of relational ethical philosophy where autonomy and inter-

dependence are conceptualized differently. Along with relationality the multiple forms of patriarchy with reference to religion, region, class, caste, ethnicity etc. are being addressed by feminist socio-cultural philosophy.

In Indian context we cannot find much early modern women thinkers from specifically philosophy departments, though recent decades witness writings on feminist philosophy. The nineteenth century social reform activists such as Ramabai and Tarabai are illustrations of the way in which religion oriented patriarchal philosophy in India was questioned by women. These women wrote critical notes on the scriptures that are counted as the basis of Indian philosophy. It is noteworthy that the modern India and ancient India witnessed women attacking the scriptural misogyny to develop gender sensitive philosophy. The ancient women thinkers both in Greece and India would seem to be debating over spirituality to suspend the aspects of binary conceptions such as mind Vs body and man Vs woman. Same issue is discussed in a different method by modern feminist philosophers to reject the dominant rationalist thought of dichotomy developed by male protagonists.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Women thinkers who existed during various historical periods worldwide were never noticed, even by the academic public, since the power of making knowledge and recording it was all in the hands of men, just as was the case with other forms of power. The central issue of this article was that all compilations on the history of philosophy had been inherently patriarchal, since they systematically excluded the significant contributions of women thinkers. The article justifies the need for a critical re-evaluation and rewriting of this history of philosophy, to integrate the marginalized voices and to address the androcentrism within the discipline. In essence, the article serves as a feminist critique, advocating a more inclusive and accurate representation of philosophical history that acknowledges and values the intellectual contributions of women, thereby challenging the male-centric narratives that have dominated the field. Feminist socio-political philosophy initiates the conceptual discussion of the patriarchal history of philosophy that eliminated women thinkers in its documentation. Though women philosophers of all historical periods have contributed in various branches of philosophy such as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics etc., their names are not included in the documentation of history of philosophy. This was criticized by feminist philosophers in recent centuries and attempts are still ongoing to document women thinkers and include them into the canons.

This article attempted an analysis on the contributions of some female philosophers by placing them in the particular historical and geographical contexts to facilitate the interpretation of patriarchy in the documentation of the history of philosophy. This was done by referring mainly the contributions by two women thinkers from each ancient and modern time philosophy in the West and the East. Aspatia and Diotima from ancient Greece, Sulabha and Gargi from ancient India, Wollstonecraft and Beauvoir from modern Western context, Tarabai and Ramabai from the modern Indian context, delivered the points of discussion in this article. These women philosophers are discussed in a limited way and some later interventions of female

thinkers in the area of feminist ethics are mentioned as examples to justify the relevance of feminist philosophy and to address the issues of their exclusion from history of philosophy. In-depth analyses of these female thinkers and the areas they deliberated are still to be investigated.

The commencement of Women's Studies and Gender Studies as academic departments, brought up the feminist critics from various disciplines, but women philosophers are still absent from various lists. This fact reminds us the urgency to revisit the curriculum of academic philosophy and to include the works of women philosophers. The philosophy of late modern feminists and postmodern thinkers is getting some attention in recent past to develop insights and critics on ethical, ontological and epistemological aspects in the interdisciplinary research realm. Still, there is a need to consciously connect them to philosophy departments by rewriting the history of philosophy to place the women philosophers from all time periods to make them enter the canons. Interventions by feminist philosophers into the contents and methods of patriarchal traditional philosophy would definitely bring a change in making the history of philosophy gender sensitive.

It is quite evident from various references recovered in recent decades that women in the history of philosophy engaged with their contemporary male thinkers and took part in philosophical debates with them who were prominent during their times. Thus, they developed feminist philosophy which has abundant resources to explore the existing scopes of philosophy such as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and aesthetics, along with further critical analytical methodologies. And the discussions of socio-political philosophy cannot avoid the philosophy of feminism and gender, to analyze social phenomena including injustice based on religion, region, ethnicity, class, caste etc. This article engrossed in discussing these issues by citing some excerpts from the works done by women thinkers during different historical stages. Still more attempts are to be made by philosophers to take part in the process of addressing the exclusion of women philosophers from the history of philosophy, by tracing their works and conversing with their thoughts.

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