Juliet Mitchell : Psychoanalysis and Feminism.

Juliet Mitchell is a psychoanalyst, author, researcher and professor of repute in the field of Feminist studies . In her work ***Woman’s Estate***(1971), Mitchell argued that woman’s oppression was linked to four essential social structures: production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization.

The task of weaving several strands of feminist theory together seems to have been taken up quite effectively by Juliet Mitchell in her major works, ***Women’s Estate*** and ***Psychoanalysis and Feminism*** (1974), Mitchell sought to combine a critique of socialist thought and Psychoanalysis for feminist theory in what was one of the earliest attempts to make feminism interdisciplinary, and overtly political . In this book she made clear that women’s interior world or her psyche must also be transformed as emphasized by psychoanalytical feminists, for without such a change ,improvements in her exterior world will not liberate her from the kind of patriarchal thoughts that undermines her confidence.

Juliet Mitchell accepted psychoanalysis as being a convenient basis for feminist analysis. Freud’s theory demonstrates how social beings emerge from biological beings .According to Freud gender identity is not inborn but acquired through a process of psychosexual development and is always precarious due to several issues based on repression. Freud theorized female subjectivity as governed by ‘lack’ and the ‘penis envy’ to which this lack gave rise. In some of his texts Freud outlined the varied psychological effects of the absence of the penis in women, which included the development of a masculinity complex, disavowal of difference etc. Juliet Mitchell in her book ***Psychoanalysis and Feminism*** reads it as a symbol of powerful position occupied by men under patriarchy.

Psychosexual development is a process of the ‘social interpretation’ of biology, and not the inexorable manifestation of the biological destiny. Though Freud was studying psychosexual development among a specific group of people, we can understand that as the way in which sexuality is constructed anywhere and at anytime .Mitchell insisted that the particular emphasis of Freud’s analysis and certain incidental features be separated from the general parameters.

Juliet Mitchell agreed with Freud that the oedipal situation is universal. This means that without the prohibition of incest, human society would be an impossibility. According to anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, upon whose works Mitchell relied, if sexual relations were permitted amongst the biological family, there would be no urge and impetus to move out of the confines of the family or to form reproductive alliances with other biological families. This moving out of the confines of one’s own biological family to form reproductive alliances is what creates the expanded network called the ‘society.’ The taboo against incest is what forces people to form other larger social organizations.

Of course a mere taboo is not enough .There must also be some way to facilitate sexual intercourse among families. This facilitation takes the form of an exchange system, specifically the exchange of women among men .If a women is forbidden from having sexual intercourse with her father or brother, she will be pushed to marry some man outside of her biological family. This marriage is a system of exchange that leads to the formation of the society as we know it. Mitchell added that the fact that men exchange women and not vice versa accounts for the patriarchal character of the human society.

Psychoanalytic explanations for women’s oppression do not offer a total explanation for female subordination. In order to free herself from what is holding her back, a woman must do more than fight for her rights as active citizen. She must also probe into the depths of her psyche in order to exorcise the original primal patriarchal father from it .Only then will she have the space to think herself anew and become who she has the power to be.