

Life, Thoughts and Percepts – Need for a Feminine Conscience

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Abstract

Feminism has its source in the inconsequence of inequalities, discriminations, atrocities and problems confronting woman dignity all over the world. Many incompatible, incomprehensive doctrines adopted a universal notion of womanhood subject to prevailing traditional norms preventing a decent quality of life and expressing power of capabilities. Feminist theories perpetuated to assess the compatible goals and aspirations of women for gender parity and elimination of male monopoly. Moreover, the recognition of a highly inclusive notion of personhood necessitated the thinking on social relatedness and communicative interactions. The struggle for equal privileges out of her conscious awakening to the demand that 'all human beings have a capacity to perceive, imagine, think and to live to the normal end of life, its capacity for relatedness with society and environment to articulate the conception of good and have a dignified life' provides a normative standard for moral and intellectual development. Theorists have been arguing against deprivation of capabilities and fighting for equal participation. But the potential in question is that they are not concerned with the ways to provide a strong basis for family and social status that articulates non-coercive aesthetic order which is the foundation of a stronger nation.

The notion of simple autonomy rests on the existence of a well-ordered society that implies all members equally sharing the rights and responsibilities and satisfying the principle of justice and freedom. Neither individual liberalism nor universalism can extract reflective equilibrium as it cannot relinquish the underlying instinctual convictions of forms of life. A criterion of non-coercive, normative commitment can only redeem the comprehensive privileges of woman. Such a commensurability doctrine endorses the atomic premise of shared co-existence.

From the Indian context it can be ascertained that there existed during the Vedic period a form of liberal conception of personal choice possible for women. The personal choice represents a liberal participation in all kinds of human activities including the sphere of knowledge sharing as evidenced by Gārgi, Maitreyī, Āruṇi, Yamī and the like. Most women had a chance to cross their domestic thresholds to exercise their capabilities in society. But what caused the denigration of this status into injustice is still doubtful. The loss in emergence of capabilities and self-expression in the domestic as well as public spheres and the over-sovereignty prescribes to the antithetic oppressive tendencies. A strong basis for autonomy should be generated with the inclusive mindset of men to reciprocate the irreconcilable 'above-law' attitude. A comprehensive methodology of reflective equilibrium followed by development of capabilities' function can radically transform the premise of Feministic injustice. Cognitive perception, imagination and thinking to provide a non-coercive, interactive dimension of womanhood to initiate a new social order of equal participation is the need of the contextual situation without denigrating the constructive values of selfless loving, independent, kind hearted tolerant womanhood.... "Awake, Arise and Achieve comprehensive Knowledge."

Feminism is a socio-cultural movement centered round the global phenomenon of gender discrimination and suffrage against women in the society. Constrained by the framed moral beliefs she hadn't even tried to explore her equality status. But the beginning of the 19th century marks the accentuation of the impulse within womanhood for discrete individuality from a submissive and oppressive to the normative (men and women are entitled to equal rights and respect) against the male chauvinism. Many crosscurrents of social and philosophical expressions defined within the confines of gender inequality had brought significant changes in awareness and attitudes to the opposite sex. Notwithstanding the influence of British colonialization, the impact generated by this sense of awareness has brought a paradigm shift in the disposition of the status of women in society. British education has exceptionally emphasized these thought convictions and asymmetry in relationships.

Did the same tradition prevailed in respect of Indian tradition and never tried to understand the meaningful expressions of womanhood or 'feminism'- a responsibility and appropriateness of association in social life? Did this impose the incapacity in the principle of acquaintance of genuine expression on the part of woman? If we take the history of ancient Indian tradition, we would not find any such asymmetrical 'baldness' of theory or practical concern. Here the law seems more logical in the sense that woman has been the other half of the male existence. Unlike the western traditional and cultural impetus that lacks in categorical necessitation of subjective phronesis on womanhood, philosophical analysis provides enough evidences of practical proposition from women pragmatists. With

both counsels of prudence and rules of skill they had carried the goals as of man.

Such anthropology of knowledge has precisely recourse to clarifying the social concepts of 'feminism'. Instead of remaining as an idle spectator of the knowledge mechanism institutionalized by the male, she had played the true 'half' of her counterpart. She had more worthiness of feeling to be happy because of her manifold role- daughter, wife, mother, caretaker of children and the like. As a dedicated comprehension of the commitment to 'happiness' as the ultimate goal of life' she had argued for the – achievement of the equality, equanimity and contentment of womanhood. This kind of imperative is one which is presented as the apodictic principle for modern social structure.

But the fact that this kind of womanhood, conditioned under the initial creative consequence had gradually progressed into a state of dissimilar way of necessitation of womanhood-

(i) the rules of skill- the articulation of food preparation, the counsels of prudence to the commands from the male-made moral laws the most generalized game

(ii) The contingent conditioning of the 'family' under a subjective subservient necessitations- under the pretext of man alone as the counsel for the so-called 'realization' aiming at the highest happiness. He formulated rules of morality confining women to the state of 'unconditional necessity' just for the satisfaction of the male counterpart.

To introduce the concept of pragmatic imperative of 'feminism' it is to be necessarily identified that the original concept of existential

necessity must be made as the causality guideline to determine the means to the proposition-‘feminism’- the equality, equanimity and contentment triad. It is concordant to the principle- ‘who wills the end, will also the sole means which are in his power’¹. Refusing to follow or perform the net will be in unison with the unfortunate, insoluble consequence of happiness which is against the ideal of attainment of totality of all resting in the infinite. The problem remains insoluble so long as one lies in the specter of classical imperative of male chauvinism.

From this, it follows that the imperative of feminism to survive must determine what action will promote her feministic stimulus that commands her imagination and happiness. It is imaginative because it is a faculty of perceptive as well as objective attitude to society which is male-afflicted. This should bring out the preserving means of credit worthiness of a female essentiality. Perhaps fear of unconscious disgrace among men may possibly make the task appear difficult but a pragmatic approach can categorically bring in the regenerative, reassertive social necessity without destroying the individualistic subjectivity. From a familiar example, ‘avoidance’ is not a solution, lest it might destroy the credit of ‘participation’ which can bring in the mostly desired creative transformations convincingly strengthen the relationships by preventing failure in life.

To the question ‘what is the true origin of feminism in civil society?’ one of the responses that can be postulated as a theory is the state of creative nature itself. The state of nature reveals that women form the foundation of the universe in its entire creative and socio-cultural order. Questions indeed can be raised concerning whether there ever is recognition for this. She is ever tested for her love, care, mercy, loyalty, selflessness, obedience and sincerity. These

propositions cultivated among the family members are no doubt the basis of a general order of morality. Here lies the significance of 'motherhood'. Despite her individual capacity of goodness, reflection and thinking, did she get the appropriate reciprocity in filial piety, kindness, care or recognition in public life? The fact is that she has no time to take care of her own body and cherished wishes because of the spending of most of her time rearing children or attending to the needs of her counterpart. She had seldom shown a disposition to resist these selfish and egoistic tendencies of man. Continued subversion and perpetuation in the family and society as well as the recognition of the structural necessity of her 'being-in-the world' feeling of insecurity, intolerance to and rejection of her demands had made to rethink her inner awakening to unveil the 'equality' status. The concern for voluntary subordination had ended in the betrayal of reasoning. To reconcile the disparity between the two- man & woman in the light of one's thoughts, perceptions and life in the society, there is a need for exploring some dimensions of real situations in terms of commitments towards coping with one's own environment.

The beginning of 'enlightenment' in women has started to produce structural effects and the languishing woman is gaining the 'courage' to trust her own self and reason and think boldly to overthrow male privileges and monopolies. This enlightenment is the mark of maturity that rightly affirms her idea of 'universal motherhood'. But care has to be taken for over-reaction in order to accept the social necessities in a right way. Un-coerced will-formation in a family as well as society existing under constraints of co-operation may nurture disillusionment in the opposite sex and that may probably lead to a bifurcated civil society.

The feministic movements started in Europe and America during 19th century A.D.. In Europe Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot were the leading women personalities. In America and in Vietnam the movement was in vigorous attitude. This was followed by similar involvements in other countries also.

The Necessary but Defeasible:

What kind of presuppositions on 'Feminism' the women are talking about? What if moral thoughts and reflections that lead to moral actions not necessarily related? In order to provide a conceptual framework acceptable to a contingent relationship between man and woman, there is a logical necessity for a stronger relation based on moral behavior. As our enterprise of knowledge is dependent on mental states, competency and capabilities must invariably relate to these mental states since these become expressible in physical behavior. Though there is possibility of occurrence of unpremeditated actions more prevalent because of contingent social insecurity and disillusionment, these are nonetheless subject to strong mental condition. A properly perceived thought initiates action that develops a subversive tendency and more deservingly a sense of satisfaction. If there are characteristic expressions of fear, pain or subversion, this world ends in the defeasible act that leads to degeneration into mere contingency. Many strong and compelling mental states necessarily bring moral actions and capabilities of moral judgments in a discriminatory way. In order to realize unfailing 'moral womanhood', one must self-excel in independently evaluating one's own intrinsic aspects of womanhood. Again, these will certainly regulate 'second order desires' involving coercive behavior and competition for dignity that alienates the social relationships.

Sometimes moved by the virtue of acting morally as a part of moral beliefs remain naturally inclined to male privileges independent reflection become constitutive of their nature (even more prone to ethical principles). The unfolding of true womanhood with its intrinsic pristinity through a valuational system makes us distinguish between the necessary and defeasible to value it as 'śreyas' rather than 'preyas'. Wanting to be different in preferences and purposes not separate from the family/ social constituents appears not to be a rebellion but a prerogative of 'womanhood'. In quest of this approach engaged in reflective self-evaluation need not be identified as defeasible but a capability of developing free thinking. On its parts, such thinking can evolve into changing social equations. This is the way how progress can be possibly made which can bring in drastic changes in the 'life' of women. This should be far from feeling of guilt in moving away from the natural inclinations towards man's monopoly.

The Coercive Reciprocate:

Feminism explicates the liberal vision of society recognizing the inadequacy of male-erected ideologies and struggles for the spiritual, economic, social and racial equality of women. The existence of monopoly of concern requires an effective good will that can counter this pursuit of ends related to competitive vanity and social compatibility. The state of nature does nowhere advocates the tendency of subjugation or an insatiable desire in monopoly formulations in accordance with one's own idea. But because of the necessity inflicted by the social and cultural tradition and the utmost tolerance shown by woman, she has refrained from any coercive choice. In the backdrop of this non-coercive concern, she has now started to pursue the goal of a different structure that admits her

equality conception. This has necessary encounters of interference from the male due to his fear of reciprocate subjugation. This effort can establish the validity of principle that every action pursued to its maximum without coercion leads to the freedom of choice in each individual and co-existence with everyone else in accordance with the universal love is right for the sustenance of human society.

But entering into an imperative of coercive requirement for establishing the sovereignty of women by laws or other measures cannot completely overcome the generated impulse of equality proposition. We can expect concordance only from those who can adapt to the public law. As the practical reason dictates the instinctive impulse within cannot dispose off the self-proclaimed right of subversion, the essential evil of the human society. Of course, a dynamic effort towards acquisition of power and a stance that never harnesses the peaceful co-existence can create, maintain and establish the necessary feministic state of nature. To quote Habermass: 'the emancipation of women means not only establishing formal equality and eliminating male privilege, but overturning concrete forms of life marked by male monopolies'². Habermass argues that disputes in this regard (coerciveness) can be settled by a dialogical commitment to the norms of freedom and equality of its participants.³ the aim is to inculcate the sense of mutual recognition and interaction that cultivate 'participation' relevant from the point of view of feminism.

The Ethics of Contextualization:

To address structural inequalities that had led to failure of development of woman capabilities and her feeling of inexhaustibility of interrelations, a new approach is required that can focus on preventing such failures, revise, reformulate and rethink those aspects that depreciate dignity. This requires a complete transformation of

her unprivileged status emphasizing on an ideology particularly operative in problems of interrelations and gender disparities without translating the real moral 'motherhood'- the subjective dimension. Such an approach is the need of emerging atomic family setup, the question of good life that is of paramount importance and eschews the starting of a new era of gender equality. Since a single context cannot be created or developed contextualization requires translating the needs of the time and environment disregarding interests. A particular context for condition has a substantive commitment to the tradition of the communities from which such states of oppression or disregard emerge feminine traits had always led to relationships of particularity and partiality. It is because justice is denied for a very long period to feminine commitments for gender parity and creative sensitivity have been thought of for anchoring the life to avoid the notion of passive recipient of interests.

The ethics of contextualization requires a continuity of preservation of ethical values such as tolerance, freedom, equality, fairness and dignity considered to be the overall aim of new feminist approaches to ethics that generate unbiased practices. Clearly it is to be remembered that no attempt should be made to abandon any other foundational ethics and values of good. Struggles for emancipation should continue through non-coercive but forced deliberations with the male for equal participation as a comprehensive strategy for mutual recognition. As Zizek points out: 'For within this discursive context, a contingent detail will always emerge to reveal a repressed trauma and shatter our delusions'.⁴ Confronted with a new truth as against something that is designed and injected into human conduct there is a possibility of arising of dislocations in interrelations subsequently accounting for contextual reciprocities. Ethics should be developed

based on good and plausible judgment based on particular contexts rather than universality that can express our feministic stance of dynamic moral life. This is wherein observable deviations are found in the Indian and American as well as the European feministic approaches. It is the mode of reconciliatory approach that can be recommended as justifiable strategy for gender- equal ethics. This never can cause any slump in our stance but will certainly enable to show the capabilities through justification of the right to gender parity.

A Paradigm of Perceptual Knowledge:

Knowledge constitutes the integrating principle- the crux of the thought process. This knowledge eschews courage to think boldly and to overthrow the criticisms leveled against equality claims. Knowledge makes the sense of feeling dignity, freedom and rights of individuals more affirmed. According to Habermass, 'we cannot even make sense of the concepts of meaning, understanding and interpretation unless we rationally evaluate the validity claims that are made by participants themselves count as reasons for action and this requires a performative attitude on our part where we assess what 'they' count as good reasons for action with reference to 'our' standards of rationality.'⁵ This implies that without having specific knowledge we cannot exhibit our potential capabilities in the community as well as the value systems. There must be appropriate discrimination of our ideological dependence that can in principle be transformed to our favour. To this end, a critically evaluated perceptual knowledge of good actions that can bring invariant regularities of social actions is necessary. Just forced laws cannot render progress possible but these laws become inoperative if they do not involve participative and performative attitudes on both gender. Habermass

rightly declares: '..... The goal of coming to an understanding is to bring about an agreement that terminates the inter-subjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust and accord with one another. Agreement is based on recognition of the corresponding validity claims of comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness and rightness'.⁶ The essentiality lies in 'consensus should overcome disagreements through dialogues or arguments'.

Feminism- The Indian Sovereign:

The all-important question now generally viewed and critically evaluated by modern thinkers is: did there exist a coercive relational sphere in gender inequality in ancient India that framed the structural basis of modern feministic disparities? Till the beginning of the 19th century, the freedom to co-exist and recognize each other was under the subjective maxim of a universal law of conduct termed 'dharma' that enables restriction of individual freedom as coercive obligation of duties. Women suffered the most in this obligatory principle. But a careful analysis of the vedic conception of the 'womanhood' provide an 'accord' that stands for liberal vision of society. The ancient Rgvedic premises suggest a liberal vision of society wherein the ideal of establishment of a modern social structure is possible. To put it differently, the argument for effectiveness and the law of 'Dharma' in respect of gender inequality, intellectual discrepancy and diffusive interrelations dictate the ends by means of obligations.

The crucial characteristic that brings us to the virtue of this distinctive episode asserts that woman had the privilege of respectfulness and equal participation in all actions in concord with the 'Puruṣa- Prakṛti'. The vedic 'Brahmavādins' like Viśvavara, Ghoṣa and Apāla point to their active participation in religious discourses on sacred texts⁷. Not only this, but exercise of equal privileges comes

in the way of involvement in religious ceremonies, vedic recital and social gatherings.⁸ This social status is in complete antipathy with the western counterpart where women were made totally subservient even as slaves of domestication. To the Aristotelian vision, 'as between male and female, the former is by nature superior and the latter inferior and this must hold good for mankind in general'⁹. This is in tune with some of the feminist critiques where Puruṣa is treated superior to Prakṛti.

Not only that, but to bring the Upaniṣadic distinction, there is an obligation to follow the moral law by both genders but not to conceive law in the modern sense of inferiority status. By virtue of being part of a larger intellectual community life, the intellectual craving can be found in such women as Maitreyī, Gārgī and the like. Sri Śankara, the great Advaitin, in his bhāṣya on Aitareyopaniṣad, explicitly states that the relationship between man and woman should be one of foundational humanism. Womanhood holds pristine in its cause for lineage that constitutes the foundational existential necessity of a society. Sage Yājñavalkya's advice to Maitreyī captures the idea of womanhood more accurately: 'a husband becomes dearer to wife and vice versa not because of individual necessity but for themselves only'¹⁰. It is the impulse called 'I' that is bound for existential relationships.

The reality of freedom in 'Motherhood' and housekeeper was considered very crucial for the welfare of the family. How nicely she had managed her potentialities proves the unparalleled capability. Even today, management of home is considered the sustaining ground of health, wealth and social necessities that approve her major role in the welfare of humanity. There is ample evidence in Upaniṣads

for treating women as the force behind all activities demonstrated through worship in the form of 'Devi'- Uṣas, Rātri, Pṛthvi, Sarasvati, Kuhu, Rāka.

But there seems a gradual shift in the notion of womanhood in the later vedic period. It is found that all subsequent intellectual exercises got centered on man and the available *smṛti* texts indicate a prescriptive code of conduct for womanhood. 'manusmṛti', the code book of Hindu dharma elaborates the stringent code of conduct for both man and woman. Women had obligatory duties. But the 'strīdharmā' code relegated her status in the quest for knowledge. Because of discharging obligatory performances, their intellectual potentialities did not rise to the required level. This steadily led to the sovereign status of man over woman. Manusmṛti, as criticized by radical feminists, alone cannot be said to be the cause for the gender inequality as it had strict measures to deal with the atrocities on women. The fact is that according to Manusmṛti, there is no denial of education for woman but her initiation to education starts with marriage only unlike her male counterpart who completes education before marriage. It is evident that the husband becomes the teacher and along with the disciples, the women were allowed the right to quest for knowledge. Manusmṛti empowers women with the torch-bearers of lineage.

It is interesting to note that the main cause of denial of rights to women lies in the infiltration of ideologies from the west where no evidence of woman participation in any intellectual quest is evidenced till 19th century. This combined with the contextual sovereignty guided by men in intellectual exercises along with the lesser expression of capabilities by women paved the way for

the impregnated states of affairs affecting the vision of liberty. Another contributive factor is the exclusive joint family concept inclusive of large number of families which restricted the privacy of husband and wife to a great extent. This tended to distinctive isolation, lack of mutual understanding and subservience to the dictates of mother-in-laws. Child marriage enabled to widen the gap between man and woman because of the age difference. The insatiable desire for possession of power became dormant in the absence of internal coercive sanction. The practice of polygamy was a phenomenal factor in affecting the dignity of life of woman. Violence and malevolence along with 'sati' and widow marriage indicative of the existence of monopoly of coercion were the existent problems against woman.

Feminine discrimination in its multiple facets marginalized the women in Indian society by the beginning of the 19th century. Strong reaction from modern reformation activists like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda provided a structural framework for the awakening of women. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, *'it is an invaluable possession for every living being to have learnt to know himself and to master himself'*. 'To know oneself' means to know one's motives and actions and reactions, the *'why' and 'how'* of all that happens in oneself'. The intellectual quest is in all irrespective of gender but requires activation of the inner potentialities. *'the whole world is in a process of progressive transformation. If you awaken, quicker you will speed this process'*. According to Dr. Radhakrishnan, *'though dharma is absolute, it has no absolute and timeless context.'* The only thing eternal about morality is man's desire for the better. But time and circumstances determine what is 'better' in each situation. We cannot elevate social

convictions in the absolute rules without taking into account the concrete attendant circumstances¹¹.

It is due to the reformation movements that women were privileged to more and more opportunities in decision-making process. More participation in intellectual quests and social activities imbibed a sense of assertiveness of individuality. The growing atrocity in families also is a conducive factor in mutual understanding and lessening the coerciveness with men. The enactment of legislations had considerably improved the status of women in the nation. The abolition of practices like Sati and child marriage along with the reservation of 33percent in workplaces and legislatives are but some of the measures taken to ensure the privilege of equal participation of women in the social sphere of present India. Not to leave the missionary work and British rule helped the awakening of women in India. But it is necessary to change the trivial sense regarding women possessed by some men who postulates themselves of superior status above law. Such counterfactual, antecedent or consequent suppositions will lead to coercive functions on the part of men and hence laws or legislations must not remain vacuous ones but contingent. As prophesized by Svami Vivekananda, *'the past has been to the strong physical men, the future to spiritual women'*.

The questions of feminism must preserve the unity and equality in society covenant to the sustenance of the nation. Radical individualism cannot be the apposite reply to the disparities but it can only lead to deterioration in social conditions. That is to say, 'A love with the Mind, the Psychic and the Vital can only prevent woman from shrinking into disparities in mutual relations'.

Summing up, feminism, a consequence of continuous subversion and denial of women's rights has its source in Europe

and America. With the complete denial of equality participation in activities, strong dissension followed by intellectual awakening brought changes in the social status of women. Women movements in Europe spearheaded by Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, and the like came out with their novel ideas to break the established norms of society pegged to gender inequality and assert their independence and rights of pride and prejudices. The fear of changing face of women in the wake of her assertive rights made coercive reciprocates in the minds of men who resisted such movements in time and this non-acceptability created a sense of slower progress in the new conceptions on 'womanhood'. Though similar and strong reform movements took place in America and other parts of the world the progress still remains meager. Different theorists provided variegated structural frameworks for women empowerment; the attitude towards them has not yet been concordant. The male monopoly can only be ended through concord of attitude and not coercive one. Some measures can be considered for perusal-

- i) Mere assertion of difference in sex does by itself produce equality. There is need for awakening in the form of 'humanity' alone as the gender on both men and women.
- ii) Functional integrity possesses intrinsic value in feminiic approach.
- iii) Tolerance is the most precious, difficult and indispensable quality for achieving our goals.
- iv). Love, cooperation, sincerity, dutifulness compassion and equality must be the realistic goal on justice.

- v). 'Samavāya' is the exegetical solution. Mental strength, education and courage can instill a Sense of recognition on equality.
- vi). A non-coercive approach with a fight for justice should be the realistic concern.
- vii). A preferential access to education and work health will improve the status. But the real concern is the change in the mindset of her counterpart who is 'above law' in this.
- viii). Finally, it is woman who has to assert her potentialities and capabilities.
- ix). So Awake, Arise and Achieve the goals of 'womanhood.'

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