

ON FEMINISM AND FREEDOM: EXPLORING NEW POSSIBILITIES

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of*
Master of Philosophy

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled '**On Feminism and Freedom: Exploring New Possibilities**' submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** is an original research work and has not been submitted so far, in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any University / Institution.

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CERTIFICATE

This dissertation entitled '**On Feminism and Freedom: Exploring New Possibilities**' submitted by **Uttara Bhansali** to the **Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University**, for the award of the degree of **Mater of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or full, for any other degree or diploma of any University.

We recommend that the dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Preface

If one reflects upon the very recent suicide case of former Ms Mauritius, Viveka Babaje, thirty- seven years old, one finds it difficult to comprehend the probable motivating factor behind the attempt. There are speculations about her being serious in a relationship with a person she met just a month back after having had a break-up with a former partner. As some reports say, she was looking forward to a marriage while the accused on the other hand is denying all such possibilities, asserting that they were just friends, and that they never have had a sexual relationship. Now, in the present state of affairs, how is one supposed to understand the proximity and nature of a relation from being 'just friends' or 'lovers committed to marriage' or 'just hanging around' and not committed to marriage? And how is one to understand this particularly in the context of having being sexually intimate or not, or for that matter when the accused in this particular case said, 'we were intimate only to the extent friends are'. Now how is one expected to comprehend this? Isn't it a chaos? How is a researcher expected to analyze this? For any discussion on morality would be accused of being loaded with subjectivity and value- judgment. But would it end the reflection there? Is sociology all about that? Then why did Weber bothered to talk about disenchantment? Or for that matter why are Marxists writings thoroughly influenced by the plight of the have-nots?

As a student of sociology I have been trying to understand these questions for quite a while now. But all debates and discussions seem to get frozen with the questions of value-neutrality, objectivity and a scientific approach. But what about the crises which needs to be addressed beyond that? While working on this dissertation, I found myself entangled with these questions every now and then. Yes, I couldn't be a detached observer. Hence, it also emerged out of a perpetual conversation with my own self. There were times, when I lived my dissertation, whether it was during my evening walks in the campus, or while eating in the mess, or while chatting on-line with some old friends, or eavesdropping a conversation between two people. There were times of dilemmas, restlessness and calm. But I had interrupted this flow through conscious reminders of the research objectives, one is expected to live up to. This attempt, I wish to emphasize, is an outcome of a dialogue between the academic discourse and one's own life trajectory.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A note of acknowledgement is an exception from living up to the standards of being *objective*. Hence, I take it for granted that I can be as expressive as possible here, for the reverence I feel towards a lot of people around. This attempt is dedicated to all of them.

This effort primarily draws an inspiration from the lives of all those women around who have found themselves *liberated in love* and their companions who have made that possible through their *thoughtful reciprocity*. The most unforgettable amongst them would always be a source of eternal light. May I pay homage to her through my actions. And I thank my Guru for having let me know her!!

TO my parents and especially to my father, to thank him like this though wouldn't really be enough. I am what I am, because of him. He has not only taught me how to walk but has always stood by me even if it had hurt him. True, only a father can do that!! And more true is the fact that I owe my life to him!!

TO my husband, for whom this has always been '*our*' work and never '*your*' work. The persistent reflection of this in his attitude have had been the greatest motivations throughout. My incessant mood swings resultant of my incapability to complete the work on the set deadlines were met with immense patience and affection by him. And every time I failed, for him it was always "we" who needed to complete this work!!

TO my Guru who taught me what all these years of my education couldn't teach me and has enriched me for the rest of my life. I know the responsibility is all mine now onwards. All conscious attempts of humility probably fail me when I find myself taking pride in the fact that I am Prof. Avijit Pathak's student. For more than anything else, he's given me a *renewed faith* in humanity. No note of gratitude can ever be humble enough to surpass his own humility. Fortunate I am and so many like me to have known him. I completely owe to myself, all the shortcomings of this project and for having left a scope for a better work. And in this particular context, I am guilty towards my supervisor more than anyone else. I am bound to feel it all the more for I am often reminded of the unlimited patience he invested in me and my work. His immense faith and persistent tolerance in spite of my repeated failures and shortcomings has made this work come alive. I am solely responsible for not having

walked that extra mile which I should have had in order to do justice to his invaluable guidance. Hope I compensate in some way, through my work and life, in future!!

TO my teacher, Mrs. Teresa John Mathew and her husband for showering unconditional love. I have seen her dedication and sincere contribution to the campaign against violence done to women for so many years now. I have also seen her being extremely furious over such ghastly acts of violence. Equally I have noticed her not missing any chance to acknowledge the ardent support of her husband behind all her efforts!!

TO so many people back home (who were mere acquaintances at some point) for having loved me so much. Their presence around has had been completely reassuring in spite of the repeated claims of we having come to reside in an 'individualized' society lately!!

TO Jenifer, who I know, would *always* be there for me like she has *always* been.....

TO Priya and Swadha for making my stay at JNU a fruitful and a memorable one. Our intense conversations have helped me to become more and more aware of my own self. Our bond, I realize is so much above the conveniences, needs and formalism of everyday life. Their unconditional presence in my life makes friendship worth saluting!!

Well, this work is not complete....it's just a beginning towards a way of life...

I falter and falter.....yet I want to walk.....

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INTRODUCTION

FEMINISM AND FREEDOM: NEED FOR A CRITICAL REFLECTION

For a student of Sociology, feminism remains an important domain of inquiry. For it equips one to interrogate the existing social system, which denies equality of opportunity and dignity to all the members, for it is governed by hierarchies, of gender, of caste, to name a few. All the more repressive it would be if an individual at the same time is positioned low (being purely based on one's ascriptive status) in two different hierarchical situations. For instance, one could imagine the plight of a Dalit woman in our society. Precisely that's why one notices why the feminist writings have proliferated on the issue of gender and caste. Feminism emerges as a language of protest against patriarchal domination, male power, and objectification of women. Feminism also raises new methodological questions. Established methods of inquiry are being put to question. It inquires how reflexivity, empathy and human sensitivity can play a key role in the construction of knowledge. Feminism is interesting for a sociologist also because its scope lies beyond the academic-activist discourse. Feminism is also popular in the way it's *received, internalized and appropriated* by a large number of women through popular magazines, television symbols and other images of culture industry. It's to understand this reception, consequent interpretation and appropriation which created a background for me to undertake this research project.

This research proposes a qualitative study and attempts to critically reflect upon the idea of woman's *freedom* with which we have come to identify lately. It begins with an analysis of feminism as a theory and studies its commonly articulated strands as they emerged in the west. It also traces the women's movement in the Indian context, as it commenced as a historic movement dating back to the nineteenth century to the contemporary feminist assertion one could find and relate to in a lot of ways. In her second work, *The Second Stage (1981)*, Betty Friedan, a liberal feminist, accepted that if women in the 1960's were victims of the *feminine mystique*, then women in the 1980's were victims of the *feminist mystique*.

In the first stage, our aim was full participation (of the women's movement), power and voice in the mainstream. But we were diverted from our dream. And in our reaction against the *feminine* mystique, which defined women solely in terms of their relation to men as wives, mothers and homemakers, we sometimes seemed to fall into a *feminist* mystique which denied that core of women's personhood that is fulfilled through love, nurture, home.¹

Is it the assertion of this *feminist mystique* which has come to be articulated in a number of ways in the beliefs and practices of some of us around? This work attempts to explore the same by bringing into focus an emerging trend of a notion of 'freedom' which has come to be popularly associated with the emergence of a 'new woman'. One explores how in this making of a new woman one inevitably and irresistibly draws from the western feminist notions of individualism and negation. This attempt also tries to analyze how a feminist assertion is associated with one's consumption practices. And how this in turn provides an impetus to the practice of hedonism.

As students/researchers we live amidst feminist scholars, feminist publications and academic debates. Hence, we are aware of a language of feminism which protests against patriarchy, as we have already stated. It is a language which reminds women that they are not mere passive puppets of history. They as active doers can assert their agency to make their life-projects meaningful, and in a democracy like ours they have their rights and are equal partners. The proposed work while acknowledges this feminist contribution to our society, it attempts to analyze and see if we have lately come to define the notion of 'personal freedom' too *narrowly* and in a way that is *convenient*. It is an inquiry of how in this quest for personal freedom, it has become *your world* and *my world* and has ceased to become *our world*.

It also seeks to understand how with a feminist assertion one hastens to relate in a way which requires endurance and commitment. In the end, this research plan would attempt proposing an alternative understanding of freedom. An understanding which takes into consideration that men and women are not mere opposites to each other but are in an equal need of each other, not only in the sensual terms, but to flourish, grow and emancipate together through a creative

¹ As quoted in Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (US: Westview Press, 1989), p. 24.

engagement. And it is an attempt to evolve this possibility of emancipation which is inclusive and sensitive to a lot of things, beyond the mere discourse on rights.

One could identify certain research questions, like,

- Why freedom is always associated with ‘paid work?’ It tends to belittle in due course the importance of an engagement of a housewife and a mother. Isn’t this feminism hierarchical then?
- Why the ideal feminist subject, a working woman and not a loving mother? Would giving one’s children a priority over one’s career a ‘compromise’ always?
- By glorifying the masculine world, doesn’t it reinforce the same patriarchy? For it considers whatever men do as emancipatory and expect women to do that.
- Does practicing ‘pleasure without conscience’ symbolize empowerment? Is attaining the choice of having fun in whichever manner and form one wants, empowerment?
- Isn’t it a convenient way to obtain instant gratification by justifying one’s acts under the garb that morality is repressive for women?
- Is negation the only way to emancipate one?
- Is emancipation a mere discourse on rights? Doesn’t it overlook one’s natural desire to love, to relate and to unite?

This is an attempt to study the beliefs and behavioral patterns of those urban middle class educated and independent women who have the liberty to take this freedom for granted. How are their attitudes towards career, family, relationships, and sexuality shaped by what they think freedom is for them? Hence, the focus group of this research is a particular section of Indian middle class women residing in the metropolitan cities, are educated and economically independent.

I

The distinctiveness of the work

Feminist efforts in various ways have helped created awareness. Be it through producing enormous academic literature on the issues of gender and society, dealing with various facets of gender discrimination. Or through the political struggle carried by various women's organizations trying to bring about a change even at the grassroots level. All such attempts are well acknowledged for their contribution in sensitizing one enough of the 'cultural/social' conditioning which stands responsible for the gender discrimination. They have equipped us enough to question any taken for granted assumption which might establish that women are less capable than men.

The idea of this work is not to negate these feminist contributions in any way. More importantly it departs its way from any other attempt of the kind which is critical of feminism, for it delves deeper into the question of emancipation. While one accepts and appreciates the gender sensitization resultant of feminist resistance, one yet finds it important to go further and ask a deeper question. Is 'freedom' only a 'no' to a patriarchal system? Or is 'freedom' also an endeavor in search of a grand 'yes'- yes to humanness, reciprocity, togetherness, love, mutual respect and trust. Is a free woman or for that matter a man composed only of a bundle of rights that utilitarian, legal experts and rationalists would define and sanctify? Or is a human being also an integrated consciousness that lives not just with rights but also with an urge to give, to love, to relate and to transcend in the domain of a deeper union between man and woman, individual and community, discrete self and larger cosmos.

This dissertation began with this question and this question made me restless. Hence, even as a researcher with feminist sensibilities while I saw a series of positive contributions of feminism, I could not remain contented with that only. I feel it is important to keep our quest alive and find out whether we can see beyond feminism as it appears today and create yet another possibility and language of emancipation. Something which is ironically missing in both academic enterprise as well as pop feminism as mediated through culture industry.

II

The Content of the Chapters

With the above mentioned objective in mind, this dissertation is structured into three substantial chapters. To begin with, Chapter one deals with the theoretical- historical trajectory of feminism. It deals with some of the key ideas and questions relating to the discontentment of patriarchy and women's liberation, that feminism as politico- academic endeavor raises. This chapter also looks at the emergence of women's questions in the process of the nation-making project in India. And it also examines how feminist ideas and thoughts further evolved and grew in post-independence India. This chapter gives us an idea about central premises of feminism, its language of freedom, its notion of rights, and its idea of a relationship.

The second chapter begins with an another enquiry. How feminism acquires its popular character through diverse instruments of culture industry, fashion magazines, women's glossies, television reality shows, advertisements and other media-induced market oriented, consumerist spectacles. Although, academic and political feminists would try to separate themselves from this sort of *pop feminism*, for a social scientist, it is however important to look at it. Because in our times many women or men develop a notion of 'freedom', 'happiness', 'relationship', 'commitment' through their everyday engagement with the world they live in- watching television, reading pop-magazines, visiting supermarkets-malls, and other practices of consumption. this chapter has shown particularly after studying different popular representations as well as after taking some interview- how the notion of 'free-liberated' woman is being perceived as certain kind of endless consumption in which only one's 'narcissistic' ego matters. And all the ethico-moral consideration about deeper union, love, relation, endurance, commitment tends to become secondary.

After these two chapters comes the third chapter, which in a way is a distinctive feature of this dissertation. It now speaks of a new possibility, it interrogates the purely rights discourse of academic feminism and the purely consumptionist, immoral, hedonistic orientation of popular feminism. Out of these two sets of interrogations begins a new quest for yet another possibility of emancipation. In this process, this chapter explores the other visions which are generally not taken care of by feminist scholarship. This is about love, as a transcendental domain, uniting the

opposites; it is about overcoming patriarchy, its very rationale that is the rationale of control, domination and power. It's about reciprocity, mutuality, endurance, commitment. It derives its inspiration from many sources- emancipatory philosophies emanating from humanistic psycho analysis of people like Eric Fromm, deep spiritual longing of people like Rabindranath Tagore and J. Krishnamurti and experiences of many others striving for a new world in which one no longer remains merely a discrete individual, concerned only with one's rights but one becomes integrated completely. And world where giving is receiving, and love, caring and trust replace war, domination and political rhetoric. It is a quest for a possibility and as a student of sociology I think this quest ought to be an integral part of the discipline. Because reality and facts are not simply what happens now and what things appear to us. Reality is also pregnant with a possibility and sociological imagination should not remain blind to that possibility.

II

Methodology

This dissertation is primarily reflexive and conceptual in nature. The limited time during the M.Phil work does not permit one to go for a rigorous empirical or ethnographic work. In this sense, the M.Phil dissertation as a conceptual work is a preface to the Ph.D. thesis that I wish to write later. As a conceptual reflexive work, I have relied on the literature which has emerged from the feminist scholars. I have looked at and observed popular magazines and other manifestations of culture industry. I have also interviewed selected women and above all studied the alternative literature that speaks of a new language of emancipation.

In this entire process of reading, understanding and interpreting the text, I have repeatedly challenged the positivist duality of the knower and the known. In the process of knowing the world out there, I also looked at myself, confronted the question that affect my being and evolved through this constant process of reflexivity and dialogue between the self and the world. In a way, the academic journey has also become a personal journey. From methodological dualism to reflexive sociology, from the duality of the knower and the known to the deep engagement of the self in the research and from positivistic technical impersonal value neutrality to empathy, concern and meaningful engagement- this entire dissertation has also made me rethink the technique and methodologies of sociological research.

CHAPTER-I

CONCEPTUALIZING FEMINISM AND ITS LANGUAGE OF FREEDOM

This chapter deals with the theoretical aspect of feminism. True as it is what one of our teachers was telling us in a class the other day, “You need to be firmly grounded in theory to understand anything.” This chapter as I see is an attempt towards the same objective. It tries to put together perspectives of various schools of thought like liberalism, radicalism, and Marxism on feminism, as it emerged in the West. The idea here is not to prioritize the categorization for it forms a different area of study altogether but to delve deeper in the broader implications, assumptions and notions with which feminism broadly seems to agree. But as one finds in the abundantly available literature and any classroom discussion on feminism for that matter, that it inevitably expects an awareness of these categories. To begin with, the three commonly classified are, liberal feminism, Marxian feminism, and radical feminism. True, as feminism emerged in that manner in the west, one cannot deny the importance in studying them in order to understand the basic tenets of feminism as a theory. This is how it emerged and is applicable in the west, as many contemporary Indian feminists would argue while they deny any association with the former. But there are others who accept the ‘inevitable and irresistible’ association between the two. In either case it becomes important to trace the women’s movement in India with its exclusivity, for it dates back from the efforts of the social reformers to the efforts of freedom fighters like Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, to name a few, to the contemporary feminists academicians and activists. This chapter therefore calls for a thorough reflection on them all. Hence, this chapter is broadly divided into two parts, one of them deals with the various strands of feminism as it emerged in the west. While the second half traces the women’s movement beginning from the efforts of the nineteenth century social reformers to the contemporary feminist movement in India.

I

Feminism and the Women's Movement in the west

Feminism, as Jaggar would argue, is a French word. It referred to political, cultural and economic movements, which with a diverse collection of groups aimed to 'advance' the position of women in society. Feminism as a theory believes in the 'social construction' of the 'feminine' and 'masculine' and hence it urges women to discard this categorization and the stereotypical role expectation attached to it. This is to ensure that their agency plays a role in their lives and thus helps them to fight the oppression they have undergone for so many centuries now. For Simon de Beauvoir, 'she is the incidental, the inessential. He is the subject; he is the absolute-she is the Other!' It is this 'otherness' which feminists regard as socially and culturally constructed through differential socialization of both the sexes. And this is responsible for the subjugation of women. Feminism, through its various strands like liberalism, Marxism and radicalism lays down the causal understanding of this subjection and explains why men and women are equal and finally how can this oppression be overthrown by women. The practice of categorizing theories as a method of inquiry into feminist projects is more common in the west than in India. Hence, in order to understand feminist theories, one needs to study the various strands of feminism. Here I have tried to analyze three types of feminism which are very commonly articulated and made use of-liberalism, Marxism and radicalism. I did not include all the theoretical developments because this field is very dynamic and new analysis keep on emerging through theoretical and empirical encounter.²

² Beatrice Kachuck, "Feminist Social Theories: Theme and Variations," in *Sociological Bulletin* (Vol.44, Number.2,September, 1995), p.171.

Liberalism and Human Nature

Liberalism is a political ideology whose central theme is a commitment to the individual and to the construction of society in which individuals can satisfy their interests or achieve fulfillment.³ It is based on the conception that human beings are essentially rational agents. Liberals assume that rationality is a 'mental' capacity. The classical liberals believed in 'metaphysical dualism,' that is, the dichotomy between mind and body where the former is considered superior to the latter and they both are irreducible to and connected only contingently to one another. While the contemporary liberals are, as Jagger claims, not explicitly committed to it. They believe in what she calls, 'normative dualism'. Normative dualism is the belief that what is especially valuable about human beings is a particular 'mental' capacity, the capacity for rationality⁴. Apart from that liberalism draws from what can be regarded as 'abstract individualism', because it conceives of human individuals in abstraction from any social circumstances. It is something, liberals assume, that all men possess in approximately equal measure. Liberal's unanimity, Jagger says, is apparent in their disagreement over defining reason. For some, like Kant and Rousseau, the ends of human action are susceptible to rational evaluation; while for others like Hobbes and Bentham, rationality is simply seen as the capacity to determine the most efficient means for achieving those ends. Whether liberals define reason largely in moral or prudential terms, they nevertheless concur that a just society allows individuals to exercise their autonomy and to fulfill themselves.⁵

Based on the liberalism's assumption of abstract individualism, we can derive that two individuals in a society can have different desires, interests, etc that can be fulfilled separately. While at the same time the resources to sustain human life are always limited. Hence, individuals inevitably would end up being in a competition with one another for there is scarcity of resources. Hobbes states explicitly that humans are motivated by the desire for gain, and Locke comes close to identifying rationality with the desire for unlimited accumulation.⁶ It's based on an assumption of 'universal egoism,' an innate tendency towards placing one's interest over others. Though some liberals like, Locke, Kant, Mill and Rawls do believe in the human capacity

³ Andrew Heywood, *Key Concepts in Politics* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 2000), p. 62.

⁴ Alison Jagger, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (US: Rowman and Allanheld , 1983), p. 28.

⁵ Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (US: Westview Press, 1989), p. 11.

⁶ As quoted in Alison Jagger, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (US: Rowman and Allanheld , 1983), p. 30.

towards altruism or benevolence which places one in a position of conflict to choose between furthering one's own interests or furthering those of others, and one's natural inclination, says Jaggar, is invariably to favor what one perceives to be one's own interests.⁷ Hence, it can be concluded that all individuals though may be constrained by moral considerations sometimes, have a natural tendency towards maximizing their own interests and placing them above other's interests. So in a way we can conclude that all individuals have a common essence. Though liberals do acknowledge the presence of certain psychological differences between individuals, which are a result of 'different social experiences'. This acknowledgement however isn't inconsistent with their assumption of a universal human nature but they do insist that rationality is a potentiality which might be developed differently, in smaller or greater degrees, in individuals depending upon the opportunities they get in life and thereby the experiences they have. Hence, all individuals even though they have an equal capacity for rationality, they might not be equally rational. And individuals who fail to develop their capacity to reason are regarded *deficient*, because they have failed to fulfill their uniquely human potential.⁸

Liberal feminism

The objective of liberal feminism has been the application of the liberal principles and values, individualism, rationalism, freedom, justice and toleration, for the emancipation of women. From claiming equal rights for women to own property and to vote to fighting against laws that give husbands more rights than their wives within marriage, in the nineteenth and the twentieth century respectively, liberals have come to promote legislation that impedes discrimination against women. They range from considering women equal in employment(also demanding equal wages for equal work, maternity benefits like leave on payment, provision of crèche, etc for child-care) to grant equal educational opportunities, etc.

As Jaggar rightly remarks, since traditional liberal theory ascribed rights to persons on the basis of their capacity to reason, early feminists had to argue for women's rights by showing that

⁷ Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (US: Rowman and Allanheld , 1983), p. 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

women were indeed capable of reason.⁹ It is only that they have been denied equal opportunities so as to aid the realization of the potentiality of their rational capacities. Mary Wollstonecraft remarks,

Novels, music, poetry, and gallantry, all tend to make women creatures of sensation and their character are thus formed in the mould of folly during the time they are acquiring accomplishments, the only improvement they are excited, by their station in society, to acquire. This overstretched sensibility naturally relaxes the other powers of the mind, and prevents intellect from attaining that sovereignty which it ought to attain to render a rational creature useful to others, and content with its own station; for the exercise of the understanding, as life advances, is the only method pointed out by nature to calm the passions.¹⁰

Similarly, Mill argues that the ‘so-called’ nature of women is “an artificial thing and is an outcome of “forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others.”¹¹ According to him men have turned the whole force of education to enslave the minds of women. He says,

All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others; to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections.¹²

While Mill asserts that the moral and intellectual differences between men and women are the result of the denial of equal opportunities to women; he also at the same time denies the evidence of there being any natural¹³ differences between them. Liberal feminism asserts that women are capable of full rationality and it’s just their upbringing or ‘sex-role conditioning’ which impedes that. It is fitting that the first systematic, detailed defense of women’s rights came from John

⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (US: Penguin Books Ltd, 1972), p. 152.

¹¹ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (US: The M.I.T. Press, 1869), p. 22.

¹² Ibid., p. 16.

¹³ Those only could be inferred to be natural which could not possibly be artificial-the residuum, after deducting every characteristic of either sex which can admit of being explained from education or external circumstances.(Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, p. 24)

Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor.¹⁴ According to them, all political privileges including the right to vote and the right to access public sphere should be granted to women. Besides they should be provided with equal educational opportunities and the right to choose a profession over a marriage. Such reforms in their opinion would eventually lead to equality. Mill was a utilitarian in the Benthamite tradition. Jeremy Bentham, Mills' mentor, argued that society is a collection of pleasure-seeking and pain avoiding individuals; hence a just society is one which provides scope for maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain.¹⁵ Whatever action or law causes the most happiness and the least pain is right. And since everyone is the best judge of their own pleasure, the extension of suffrage would ensure that everyone's interest would be served and taken care of. Based on these utilitarian principles, Mill advocates the right to vote for women in *The Subjection*. Hence, Mill anticipates that being 'conditioned' women might choose to be at home as a wife and a mother being happy and satisfied with that, thereby avoiding the pain and frustration of any other course of action. So to ensure that women make the right assessment of their own pleasure unhindered by 'custom' and 'conditioning', they according to Mill must be educated for intellectual and moral fulfillment. Also, he acknowledges that guaranteeing human rights is more important than an individual's short-term pleasure or pain.

Similarly, Betty Friedan also acknowledges how girls and boys are treated differently from the moment of their birth. According to her, the 'feminine mystique' is the idea that women are brought up in a manner that they find satisfaction in the traditional roles of being a wife and a mother. She not only advocates women's work outside home for their emancipation but unlike Wollstonecraft, Taylor, and Mill, also proposes counter assimilation of men into the family.

Liberal feminism undoubtedly aspires the development of individuality which would ensure well-being and equality in a society. But as Mill remarks, "It is desirable, in short, that in things that do not primarily concern others, individuality should assert itself."¹⁶

¹⁴ Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory And The Philosophies Of Man* (London: Rout ledge, 1988), p. 12.

¹⁵ Pleasure means productivity, industrialization, more consumer goods: the more productive a society, the more pleasure and, according to utilitarian principles, the more justice.

¹⁶ Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (US: The M.I.T. Press, 1869), p. 24.

Marxism, Human Nature and Women

Marx in *The German Ideology* remarks,

Men must be in a position to live in order to be able to *make history*. But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousand of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life.¹⁷

Marxism emphasizes ‘praxis’, which consists in conscious physical labour directed towards transforming the material world to satisfy human needs. Both socialist and Marxist feminists do not see humans as being differentiated by animals through their capacity to rationality, unlike liberals. “But as biological beings in a continual process of praxis to solve problems of existence.”¹⁸ This further gives rise to new needs and develops means to satisfy them, thereby transform the original human nature. Marxism does not believe in the liberal notion of metaphysical dualism. Rather it emphasizes the importance of biologically based needs, the satisfaction of which is the prime concern for Marxists. Hence as Alison Jaggar rightly puts it, “For Marx, it is the praxis rather than pure rational thought which is the essential human activity.”¹⁹ Rationality is, in Marxism, rather inseparable from praxis. It’s imperative to quote Jaggar here,

This active and historical conception of rationality is a part of the general historical approach that Marxists take to understanding human nature. Far from seeing human nature as changeless, Marxists believe that people’s capacities, needs and interests are determined ultimately by the mode of production that characterize the society they inhabit. Thus human nature itself is a historic product.....human nature must be

¹⁷ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), p. 39.

¹⁸ Beatrice Kachuck, “Feminist Social Theories: Theme and Variations,” in *Sociological Bulletin*, (Vol.44, number 2, September, 1995)

¹⁹ Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (US: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), p. 54.

investigated empirically within specific historical contexts and in particular with regard to the prevailing mode of organizing productive activity.²⁰

The Marxist approach to the question of women's nature and oppression employs historical materialism. In other words, women's position can be known through an examination of the kinds of labour they perform, the organization of that labour, and the social relations that women form with each other and with men as a consequence of their labour and its mode of organization. Marxism's obsession with overthrowing capitalism therefore, enables Marxists to comprehend all social phenomena, including the phenomenon of women's oppression through the understanding of the notion of class.

Marxism and Women (As seen by Marx and Engels)

Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, claim that an increase in population and consequently an increase in needs lead to an expansion in the 'forces of production'. "With this there develops the division of labour, which was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act."²¹

They further remark,

With the division of labour, in which all these contradictions are implicit, and which in its turn is based on the natural division of labour in the family and the separation of society into individual families opposed to one another, is given simultaneously the *distribution*, and indeed the *unequal distribution*, both quantitative and qualitative, of labour and its products, hence property: the nucleus, the first form, of which lies in the family, where wife and children are slaves of the husband. The latent slavery in the family, though still crude, is the first property, but even at this early stage it corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists who call it the power of disposing of the labour-power of others.²²

²⁰ Ibid., p. 55.

²¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), p. 44.

²² Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (US: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), p. 44.

In earlier times, according to Engels, men and women both have had an equally important role in survival and hence women did not have a subordinate position in family and thereby in society. “In the old communistic household, which embraced numerous couples and their children, the administration of household, entrusted to women, was just as much a public, a socially necessary industry as the providing of food by the men.”²³ But with the increased production, as wealth increased, it made men more powerful as compared to women because the developments occurred in male sphere of production (from the invention of agriculture, domestication of animals to the coming up of factories). With that it became all the more important for the men to ensure that their property is inherited by their own biological offspring. For that monogamy came into being. As Engels remarks,

It was not in any way the fruit of individual sex love, with which it had absolutely nothing in common, for the marriages remained marriages of convenience, as before. It was the first form of the family based not on natural but on economic conditions, namely, on the victory of private property over original, naturally developed common ownership. The rule of the man in the family, the procreation of children who could only be his, destined to be the heirs of his wealth—these alone were frankly avowed by the Greeks as the exclusive aims of monogamy.....

Thus, monogamy does not by any means make its appearance in history as the reconciliation of man and woman, still less as the highest form of reconciliation. On the contrary it appears as the subjection of one sex by the other, as the proclamation of a conflict between the sexes entirely unknown hitherto in prehistoric times.²⁴

Moreover, the practice of monogamy got restricted to women and not to men, because that was enough to take care of the prime objective of the same. “By the side of the husband, whose life is embellished by hetaerism²⁵, stands the neglected wife.”²⁶ In fact he claims that the little conjugal love, if at all it existed, was the consequence of ‘an objective duty’ and in no way ‘a

²³ Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1948), p. 73.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²⁵ As used by Engels. He says, “By hetaerism Morgan means extramarital sexual intercourse between men and unmarried women which exists *alongside of monogamy*.” F.Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1948), p. 66.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

subjective inclination'. "If love affairs really occurred between free male and female citizens, it was only in the form of adultery."²⁷

Moreover, it changed the old kinship system from matrilineal to patrilineal. "The overthrow of mother right was the world-historic defeat of the female sex."²⁸

Engels believes that monogamy and the consequent emergence of the patriarchal family are the primary causes of the subjection of women even in modern times. Because the administration of the household became a 'private service' and lost its 'public character.' He remarks,

The wife became the first domestic servant, pushed out of participation in social production. Only modern large-scale industry again threw open to her-and only the proletarian woman at that-the avenue to social production; but in such a way that, when she fulfils her duties in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and cannot earn anything; and when she wishes to take part in public industry and earn her living independently, she is not in a position to fulfill her family duties. What applies to the woman in the factory applies to her in all the professions, right up to medicine and law. The modern individual family is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the woman: and modern society is a mass composed solely of individual families as its molecules. Today, in the great majority of cases, the man has to be the earner, the breadwinner of the family, atleast among the propertied classes, and this gives him a dominant position which requires no special privileges. In the family he is the bourgeois; the wife represents the proletariat.²⁹

Hence it's the capitalist system that oppresses the women as a group and working class as a whole. For Engels, in a way, working class women are in a better position than bourgeoisie women, who do not work outside home and are completely dependent on their husbands. While the proletariat women rather feel not only independent of working class men but also share with their men a common interest of throwing away the capitalist class. Hence, for Marx and Engels the subordination of women is a resultant of the social class phenomenon, a consequence of the capitalist society we have come to reside in. And though they see human nature as being

²⁷ F.Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1948), p. 77.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

biologically sexed, as being necessarily male or female, but they deny the 'naturalness' of women's subordination. They also believe that women in pre-class society were not a subordinate gender, and nor are women under contemporary working class. Hence, for Engels the pre-requisite for the emancipation of women is the "re-introduction of the entire female sex into public industry."³⁰ Though it certainly leads to ambiguity when they consider the development of sexual division of labour as 'spontaneous' and "natural"³¹ while at the same time they advocate complete participation of women in all spheres of life. Marxists claim that legal reforms, as advocated by the liberals, could alleviate but not essentially change the position of women for till the latter has no means to support. Hence, she must marry to live.

Marxism thereby proposes an alternative strategy where feminists can turn the narrow concerns with the vote and marriage law to socialist revolution. Hence, once capitalism is eliminated, women's oppression will disappear.³²

Contemporary Marxist Feminism

Marxism's focus has primarily been on women's work-related issues and has not dealt much with the questions of women's reproduction and sexuality, like, contraception, abortion, pornography, sexual harassment. It attempts to understand how the institution of the family is related to capitalism; how women's domestic work is trivialized as not real work; and how women are given the low-paying jobs.

Among the contemporary Marxist feminists, Rosemarie Tong talks about Benston, Dalla Costa, and Eli Zaretsky. While Benston argues that until and unless women's work at home like cooking, cleaning and child-care, is not socialized, creating equal access to job outside homes wouldn't alone lead to women's liberation. In other words, as traditional Marxism also puts forth, till work at home remains a matter of 'private production', women's status cannot necessarily be improved. The significance of socializing domestic work is not that it will necessarily free women from it, but rather it will enable everyone to recognize how socially

³⁰ F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1948, p. 74.

³¹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), p. 43.

³² Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 40.

necessary such work is, and with this realization society would no longer have the grounds for the oppression of women, considered as doing inferior work.³³

While Marxists feminists like Dalla Costa and Selma James argue that for their emancipation, women need not to enter productive work force, because their work at home is equally productive and needs recognition in forms of wages which should be given for the same. This is the only way to end the inequity as women who enter public industry work a double day that begins with paid and recognized work and ends up with an unpaid and unrecognized work at home.³⁴ Tong also analyses Eli Zaretsky who advocates that the abolition of family in its present form would break down the dichotomy between family and work, male and female, and would thereby liberate women in the true sense. He suggests to view women's work at home as productive and reconsider the idea that women work for men in the private domain of family. In his view women are laboring for capital and not for men and hence it should be recognized by women that they too are part of working class, even though they work at home.

Kollontai³⁵, prominent in the Russian Revolution, says Andrea Nye, spoke of the issues like maternity leave with pay, access to child care and socialization of domestic work. Emma Goldman used a materialist, economic analysis of marriage and prostitution in her work, *Traffic in Women*. She is of the opinion that love is to be completely free, without restrictive norms. Hence, she says there isn't any need for women to wait for marriage or even for a 'meaningful relationship' to experience sexuality. While Kollontai urges that men must learn to be attentive and sensitive to another's needs, considerate of her desires and should offer mutual support. As truly said by Andrea Nye, "changing the structure isn't enough; there must also be a change in personality."³⁶

The dilemma she says is put succinctly by Goldman wherein she argues that more important than the vote, or even economics, is the relationship between people. There one must find 'how to be oneself and still find unity with another, how to feel oneself in profound communication with all

³³ As quoted in Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (US: Westview Press, 1989), p. 53.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³⁵ As analyzed by Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 51.

³⁶ Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 51.

human beings and converse intact one's characteristic qualities³⁷. The problem is not to realize the 'human essence of man', but, more simply, to establish a relation between one person and another. *How can each person in a relationship relate and yet realize themselves individually?* And this dilemma cannot be simple solved by economics, by class dynamics.

Marx in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* has something to say about the questions of relating to one another and to live as a human being. I quote him,

The direct, natural, and necessary relation of person to person is the *relation of man to woman*³⁸. In this *natural* relationship of the sexes man's relation to nature is immediately his relation to man, just as his relation to man is immediately his relation to nature-his own *natural* function. In this relationship, therefore, is *sensuously manifested*, reduced to an observable fact, the extent to which human essence has become nature to man, or to which nature has to him become the human essence of man. From this relationship one can therefore judge man's whole level of development. It follows from the character of this relationship how much *man as a species being*, as man, has come to himself and to comprehend himself; the relation of man to woman is *the most natural relation* of human being to human being.....³⁹

³⁷ Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man* (London: Rout ledge, 1988.), p. 51.

³⁸ Italics in original.

³⁹ Karl Marx, *The Economic And philosophic Manuscript of 1844* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), p. 101.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminist Firestone in the *Dialectic of Sex* asserts that historically women have borne the greater burden for the perpetuation of species. While for de Beauvoir biology though has played an important role in the enslavement of women, yet it isn't enough to answer the question: Why is the woman the other? But for Firestone it was enough.⁴⁰ For radicals, the biological inequality of men and women provided for the basis for the institutions like family which have been developed to keep women oppressed. Firestone doubts men's capacity to reciprocate love which according to her both men and women need equally but the later being economically dependent on men let go the need for the same. Firestone believes what Freud asserts that people are essentially bisexual. 'But while the male half is termed all culture, men have not forgotten their female "emotional" half: they live it on the sly. As the result of their battle to reject the female in themselves...they are unable to take love seriously as a cultural matter.(Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*)'⁴¹ The fact that male orgasm and not female orgasm is intimately related to procreation, necessary for the survival of species, gives men a position of superiority. Hence, biology for radicals is deterministic in the analysis of the oppression of women. The fact that a woman conceives the child who is dependent on her being an infant, has to be nursed by the mother for a long period. Radicals say it not only curtails mobility on the woman's part but make her in turn rely on her husband for a large part of her adult life. Hence their strategies for liberation necessarily talk about a reproductive revolution.

That biological inequality itself became institutionalized and thus protected against the changes that the development of birth control techniques, including abortion, and safer childbirth procedures might have brought about. In this context the radical feminists analyzed love, sexual intercourse, the vaginal orgasm, abortion, rape, courtship, marriage, the sex role system and sexuality. Additionally, 'since sexism is so basic and pervasive an ideology, feminists are continuously extending their critique into areas hitherto unrecognized as 'political'.⁴²

⁴⁰ Roberta Hamilton, *The Liberation of Women* (London: George Allen And Unwin, 1978), p. 84.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴² Roberta Hamilton, *The Liberation of Women* (London: George Allen And Unwin, 1978), p. 84.

Firestone, says Jaggar, believes that technology has the capacity to eliminate the biological basis of women's subordination through the reliable contraceptive technology and on the other, extra-uterine gestation (test-tube babies). Finally there can be as Firestone remarks, "The freeing of women from the tyranny of their reproductive biology by every means available, and the diffusion of the childbearing and childrearing role to the society as a whole, men as well as women." Firestone challenges not the gender but 'sex distinction itself'. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* agrees with Sartre and Beauvoir that all power requires consent on the part of the oppressed.⁴³ And the consent she says is obtained by socialization, wherein family as a key institution ensures that women internalize their 'nature' which is to take a subordinate role.

To quote her,

Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different-and this is crucial. Implicit in all the gender identity development which takes place through childhood is the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by the way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression. Every moment o/f the child's life is a clue to how he or she must think and behave to attain or satisfy the demands which gender places upon one. In adolescence the merciless task of conformity grows to crisis proportions, generally cooling and settling in maturity.⁴⁴

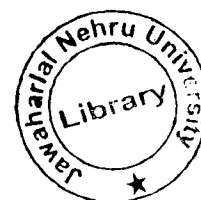
Similarly, Eva Figs⁴⁵ in *Patriarchal Attitudes* argues that it is the social structure which shapes the attitude of men towards women, marriage and the family. Men have created, she says, 'woman' in order to ensure the power which they assert in all areas from the sexual act to religion to economic life. Hence, men derive concrete benefits from their oppression of women and would tolerate no reforms that threaten their role as 'masters'. Therefore, radicals conclude that feminists must struggle against rather than with men in order to achieve liberation. Radical feminists argue that, because men oppress women, feminists must struggle against men and so must acknowledge the need for separatism and a polarization of the sexes.⁴⁶

⁴³ Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man* (London: Rout ledge, 1988), p. 96.

⁴⁴ Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (Great Britain: The Anchor Press Ltd, 1970), p. 31.

⁴⁵ Andrea Nye, *Feminist Theory and the Philosophies of Man* (London: Rout ledge, 1988), p. 96.

⁴⁶ Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (US: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), p. 88.



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The contemporary radical feminists on the other hand celebrate womanhood instead and accept women's close association with nature. Radical feminists reject what they see as the excessive masculine reliance on reason, and instead emphasize feeling, emotion and nonverbal communications.⁴⁷

Radical feminists believe that women's ways of understanding the world contrast with 'patriarchal' ways of knowing.....Patriarchy opposes mind to matter, self to other, reason to emotion and enquirer to the object of enquiry. It posits dualisms within which one side of the dualism is superior to the other side and in this way imposes the hierarchy on nature. By contrast this version of radical feminism claims to be nondualistic.⁴⁸

After having discussed the three strands of feminism at length, it's important to note here that socialist feminist group, as they have emerged lately, attempts a dialogue between Marxism and radicalism. For socialists, capitalism, male dominance and sexism are integrally related and abolition of any of these would need the end of them all. While the recent trend in the contemporary feminist movement is distinct from all of them for it critiques science and celebrates differences. It is here that post- modern feminism acquires importance because it rejoices femininity. It doesn't equate equality with uniformity. With some familiarity with feminism (as emerged in the west) one forms a picture of a new woman who is assertive, does not take anything for granted. She challenges patriarchal domination and male supremacy. She is as capable as men are and she challenges the stereotypical role-expectations. She would not let biology cripple her life-chances and finds rescue in technological revolution. She is perpetually struggling and challenges capitalism. At the same time she is sensitive to her dignity and even interrogates the tenets of science. This is an image of a new woman as appears in the western feminist discourse.

⁴⁷ Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (US: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), p. 95.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

II

The Women's Movement in India

By now the women's movement has gained enough strength and momentum in the country. The women's movement in India looks like an ongoing struggle, ideally it is a striving to assert one's agency to decide one's life project, in a manner which allows one to 'achieve' an identity for oneself by denying the 'ascribed' conditions one is expected to live with, being born a female. It is a movement to obtain, one's right to make a 'choice,' for oneself and the confidence to give up the forced circumstances. True, a lot of things have changed owing to the women's movement which has lasted for more than three centuries now. But the rallies, the protest marches are still on in some part of the country or the other for issues like rape, harassment at workplace, eve-teasing, dowry murders, violence-physical or mental, haven't become a thing of past. One yet cannot move freely, without anticipatory worries of molestation, eve-teasing and even a gang rape, if one decides to move out in the city of Delhi from a campus like JNU post eight at night. Yet one can move freely within this very women-friendly campus unlike so many other educational campuses in the country. The feminist awareness within this campus is not a very recent development and dates back to a couple of decades, and has sensitized the residents enough to respect the dignity of a woman.

And not that the nation wide agitation against the objection of a rightist group to the entry of women to pubs and late night clubs ensures that we won't come across the very serious incidents of honor killings anymore in our society. The diversities resultant of factors like caste, class, region (urban/rural), and literacy dilutes the impact of the women's movement throughout the country. While one does find a women activist group protesting against the violence perpetrated to stop the celebration of valentines' day or for that matter hear young women boldly articulating their opinions regarding the issues like safe sex (something considered a taboo some decades back, especially for women). Yet, one cannot yet be sure of a society free from all sorts of violence done to women irrespective of their caste, class or regional background. An educated woman might have to face instances of marital rape or psychological violence in her life!! For the simple reason that she is born a female and thereby being brought up as a woman. Hence,

the importance of the feminist assertion and their struggle cannot be negated. And one cannot deny that owing to their efforts, the awareness has increased tremendously. Consequent of this is that a large number of women are willing to speak out and stand not only for their own rights but also for the rights of others. This achievement's roots could be traced back to the some major historical events and happenings in India, be it the social reform movement or the 'nationalist resolution of the women's question.' The present women's movement cannot be talked in isolation with them for it represents continuity with them, in some form or the other. Hence, it becomes important here to talk of Indian women's movement in a manner that traces its historical roots in the social reform movement and nationalist movement. Equally important is to analyze the contemporary women's movement, which has an inevitable bearing in some way or the other in the life of many a woman around specially a young urban middle class woman like me.

The social reform movement and the women's question

According to Radha Kumar⁴⁹, the experience of the colonial rule in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century and the establishment of democracy post independence are the two most important formative influences on the feminist movement in India. Also, there is a presence of continuity between the pre-independence feminist movement and the post-independence one and the roots of latter are embedded in the former. Similarly, according to Neera Desai⁵⁰, the social reformers and the participants of the freedom struggle have greatly contributed in shaping the movement for women's equality in India. International Encyclopedia would define social movements as "socially shared demands for change in some aspect of social order. It also has an ideological component, that is, a set of ideas which specify discontent, prescribe solutions and justify change." Also, Gail Omvedt talks about women's movement, as Neera Desai remarks, in more or less the same way. According to Gail Omvedt, "a women's movement is the organized effort to achieve the goals of equality and/or liberation for women. It includes some kind of

⁴⁹ Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing* (New Delhi:Kali for Women, 1993), p. 1.

⁵⁰ Neera Desai, "From Articulation to Accomodation: Women's Movement in India", in Leela Dube's, *Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 289.

ideological understanding or analysis of how these goals could be achieved and it mobilizes women in terms of demands conceived of as steps toward ultimate goal.”⁵¹

The contemporary women’s movement undoubtedly emerged as a part of the social reform movement in the 1880’s. The social reform movement of the nineteenth century, indeed if one notices reveals a preoccupation with the issues concerning women during that time, be it *sati*, female infanticide, child marriage, widow remarriage, education of women, or prostitution. These movements were initiated and majorly spread in Maharashtra and Bengal as these states came in touch with the Britishers relatively early as compared to other parts of India. For it is believed that the reform movement in India was a consequence of this encounter. As Radha Kumar argues, “...the spread of British education, which was part of the policy of building a class which would be loyal to their new rulers, introduced the native elite to ideas which were creating ferment in Britain, especially rationalism, evolutionism, and utilitarianism. Calcutta became an exciting intellectual centre, and most of the early reform campaigns were launched here by an eagerly developing intelligentsia.”⁵² One finds that while the early attempts towards such reforms were initiated by men, the campaign was later joined by their wives, sisters, daughters and other women. The point of departure one encounters from the contemporary feminist movement is in the basic understanding and acceptance in the early years of the women’s movement that the difference between the two sexes is natural, unproblematic and complimentary (as Gandhi would also assert) thereby giving rise to different roles, functions, aims and desires. But the same difference, the nineteenth century reformers would argue, shouldn’t be a reason for the oppression of womanhood. It is inevitable here to begin with Raja Rammohan Roy as he is considered the first advocate of women’s question in the nineteenth century. He propagated women’s education and also raised a voice against the practice of *sati*. Here, Prof Pathak argues, “he relied on the Vedas and put forward his arguments against *sati*. To put it simply, his agenda was to demonstrate that *sati* was not commanded by the scriptures.”⁵³ Roy relied on the *vedas* to prove that *sati* was the ‘least virtuous act’ a widow could perform, and wasn’t at all obligatory. Similarly, Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar launched a campaign in favour of widow remarriage arguing that it was accepted by *shastras*. While for Dayanand Saraswati,

⁵¹ Neera Desai, “From Articulation to Accommodation: Women’s Movement in India”, in Leela Dube’s, *Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 288.

⁵² Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993), p. 8.

⁵³ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 118.

Vedas became the foundation of his ideology. He reinterpreted past and reformed Hinduism, which formed the basis of Arya Samaj propagating thereby monotheism, thereby discouraging the practice of “idolatry, caste, child marriage, brahminical claims of superiority.”⁵⁴ Also his Arya Samaj movement grew tremendously post 1880’s, replacing the orthodox Hindu customs with ‘Aryan ceremonies’, beginning with reformed funeral rites to simplified marriage rites. Arya samajis also advocated widow remarriage, though only for widows without children, and also campaigned for right to education for women. For Dayanand motherhood plays an important role hence the sexuality of women could be transformed into a force to create and regenerate the nation. It becomes important to note here what Uma Chakravarti has to say about “a model of womanhood which came closest to a ‘national’ feminine identity during the late nineteenth and twentieth century till India became independent”.⁵⁵ She refers to the portrayal of a woman in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s novels wherein an Indian woman not only transcends both her sexuality and domesticity but makes it easier also for her husband to do the same, for the wider objective of attaining the liberation for the nation. Hence, we see how one of his characters Shanti in *Anandmath* “is the prototype of the womanhood required by the nation in crisis...”

...the Vedic women who performed sacrifices to the gods by the side of her husband as an equal partner in the offering of oblations....is here dynamised into a figure who fights shoulder to shoulder with her husband in liberating the Motherland from its shackles.....Shanti has thus transcended both her sexuality and her domesticity and made it possible for her husband to do the same. She would provide a model of womanhood, which came closest to a ‘national’ feminine identity during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries till India became independent.⁵⁶

By the late nineteenth century, the number of women participants had increased in the social reform movement. Women like Pandita Ramabai (1858-1992) founded the Arya Mahila Samaj in 1881 at Poona. She analyzed Hindu womanhood in her work, ‘The High Caste Hindu Woman,’ got published in 1887. It consists of an insightful account of the life of a Hindu woman, divided in three stages: childhood, married life, widowhood, marked with rising

⁵⁴ Uma Chakravarti, “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi,” in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid’s, *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), p. 55.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

oppression with each stage. She decided to adopt Christianity in 1883 which enraged many social reformers. It is believed that one of the major reasons behind this was the hypocrisy of reformers around her like Ranade, Tilak and Keshub Chandra Sen. While Ranade himself couldn't marry a widow, Sen married off his minor daughter. Tilak on the other hand was of the belief that women's issues should be addressed post independence. For her these Hindu moderate liberals were a total disappointment. While Tarabai Shinde(1850-1910), who has the distinction of being the first Indian feminist literary critic, gave a full-fledged account of women's oppression during her time. Infact her very famous essay, *Stree Purush Tulana* (A Comparison of Men and Women) exposed patriarchy in a manner which was far ahead of her times. As Vidyut Bhagwat remarks, "Tarabai's exposure of male stereotypes of women appeared almost a century before Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*."⁵⁷ "But Tarabai's work is also significant because, at a time when intellectuals and activists alike were primarily concerned with the hardships of a Hindu widow's life and other easily identifiable atrocities perpetrated on women, Tarabai Shinde, apparently working in isolation, was able to broaden the scope of the analysis to include the ideological fabric of patriarchal society."⁵⁸

Having being analyzed the stance of reformers like Roy, Vidhyasagar or Dayanand, one finds a common thread between their analysis. They all find solace in tradition, they found answers to women's questions in the ancient scriptures, and be it *vedas* or *shastras*. One might in the contemporary times inevitably argue against this for tradition might be seen as a source of bondage; as Prof Pathak argues, "Ideals or even reinterpreted scriptures did not allow a self-determining, autonomous woman to emerge."⁵⁹ Hence the exercise of a woman's agency is missing in this agenda for emancipation as laid down by the efforts of these early reformers. Yet as Gandhi and Shah remark, "important as it is to make such analyses, we cannot lose sight of the fact that it was the first public propagation of the belief that it is not the destiny or fate of women to be oppressed, illiterate and ignorant."⁶⁰ Also as Prof Pathak would assert, "no emancipatory agenda is possible without tapping the indigenous cultural resources.....the

⁵⁷ Vidyut Bhagwat, "Marathi Literature as a source for Contemporary Feminism", in Maitrayee Chaudhuri's(ed.), *Feminism in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2004), p. 309.

⁵⁸ Susie Tharu and K.Lalita(ed), "*Women Writing in India*,"(New Delhi: Oxford University Press,1991), p.222

⁵⁹ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 121.

⁶⁰ Nandita Shah and Nandita Gandhi, *The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1992), p. 16.

feminist critique should not be allowed to be reduced into an orthodox anti-dialogical, one-sided exercise of secular modernity,”⁶¹

Women’s movement during the early and mid-twentieth century

The decade 1910-1920 was one in which first attempts to establish all-India women’s organisations were made. The earlier women’s organizations were either of Arya samaj or Brahma samaj, which was followed by coming up of some local or regional organizations like the Prayas Mahila Samiti in Allahabad, Bharat Mahila Parishad in Benaras, the Mahila Seva Samaj in Bangalore, etc. In 1908, a large scale organization was attempted known as ‘Mahila Parishad’ or Ladies’ Congress’ at Madras which was attended by women all over South India. Two years later Sarala Debi founded the Bharat Stree Mahamandal with the intention of forming an all-India’s women’s organization but it got largely limited to its three branches in Lahore, Allahabad, and Calcutta. Another all-India organization started, at the height of Home Rule movement by Annie Besant with five others which came to be known as the Women’s Indian association in 1917, which was described as the first purely feminist organization in India. By 1930, after the mass participation of women in the Non co-operation movement and Civil Disobedience movements launched by Gandhi, the Indian women’s movement moved on to a different path. While the pragmatic reformism wanted minimum female enfranchisement, the women associated with the nationalist movement wanted adult franchise and gender equality as a Constitutional right. The latter demanded that all social and legal barriers should be removed so that women could have an equal access to all opportunities. The All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) was formed in 1926. “The immediate context within which the AIWC” says Maitrayee Chaudhri, “suggests that its basic intent was to organize women to demand reforms in the system of education.”⁶² Also, with AIWC, “demand for education was broadened to a demand for co-

⁶¹ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 122.

⁶² Maitrayee Chaudhri, “The Indian Women’s Movement”, in Maitrayee Chaudhri’s (ed.), *Feminism in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2004), p. 118.

education; reform of law included marriage, divorce, and inheritance, economic equality included a right to one's husband's income and pension for widows, and the right to abortion."⁶³

Hence, another factor which contributed significantly towards developing women's movement was the massive participation of women in the struggle for national freedom. There is a widespread view that in India feminism and nationalism were interlinked, that is, by participating in the movement for freedom Indian women helped their own struggle for emancipation. The movement, argues Neera Desai⁶⁴, as developed by Gandhi encouraged women to actively participate in it. Aparna Basu quotes Vina Mazumdar who states that Gandhi's greatest contribution towards women's empowerment 'lay in his revolutionary approach to women in society'.

"He respected their 'personal dignity' without belittling their role as mothers and wives' and gave women with men 'equal tasks to perform in the achievement of freedom.'⁶⁵

Gandhi's views and actions in this particular respect indeed calls for a focal attention. He as Malavika Karlekar would argue, gave a reinterpretation of the accepted notions of masculinity and femininity, thereby daring to go beyond the 'ideal typical' constructions of a 'good' man or 'good' woman that too in the early twentieth century. It was absolutely remarkable for Gandhi to have made women active politically and thereby socially during a very vital phase of the nation's history. This participation of women in the political movements, like the civil disobedience and the non co-operation movement, outside home, called for the removal of a lot of handicaps and restrictions socially imposed upon women. Gandhi was against purdah, child marriage and prostitution in the name of *devdasi*. He also encouraged widow remarriage. Women's movement gained strength due to Gandhain leadership. Old women's organizations became strong and new ones came into existence.

⁶³ Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah *The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1992), p. 18.

⁶⁴ Neera Desai, p. 290.

⁶⁵ Aparna Basu, "A Nationalist feminist: Mridula Sarabhai(1911-1974)", in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*(Vol.2, Number 1, 1995), p. 3.

As Gandhi relied more on public opinion than on legislation, he wrote extensively on women's issues in *Young India* and *Harijan*.

They (men and women) are a peerless pair being supplementary to one another. Each helps the other, so that without the one the existence of the other cannot be conceived; and therefore it follows, as a necessary corollary from these facts, that anything that will impair the status of either of them will involve equal ruin of them both.⁶⁶

Bose marvels at Gandhi's wisdom for he articulated the view much before what many in the east and west are asserting now when they say that women and men need not to be identical to claim equality and justice in any sphere. He viewed the responsibility of becoming a mother as no easy task. According to him she who gives intelligent, healthy and well-brought up children to the nation is surely rendering a service. Hence, for Gandhi motherhood and the associated ideals of self-denial, sacrifice, love and perseverance were not a source of oppression as understood by many a contemporary feminists; rather for him they bore potential for true emancipation. Thus as Malavika Karlekar would argue, "Thus the Gandhian woman was to use her traditional qualities to build a new positive image of action, resistance and change."⁶⁷ He 'invented tradition' in a way that it did not break ties with the 'suitable historic past.' As Madhu Kishwar would argue, "He stressed the superiority of women's suffering and self-sacrifice rather than aggressive assertion and forceful intervention to protect their interests and to gain political power."⁶⁸ For Gandhi sacrifice was not denigration associated with femininity, rather for him it was a powerful instrument, which is results from a disciplined mind, something not many could attain. Hence, women for him were more powerful for the mental strength they possess. And he would seek to arouse this femininity within him through the adoption of the maternal, nurturer role.

Similarly Annie Besant's description of feminine activism dwelt on women's self-sacrificing nature-because for her it was a source of sustaining strength. In her presidential address, she spoke specifically of the participation of women in the Home Rule agitation, as they were to play a special role in the movement. For her the strength of the Home rule League was rendered ten

⁶⁶ (*Harijan*, February 24, 1940) as quoted by Anima Bose, "Women in the Ethos of Gandhian Perspective", in Hemlata Swarup and Sarojini Bisaria(eds.), *Women Politics and Religion* (Etawah:AC Brothers,1991), p. 217.

⁶⁷ Malavika Karlekar, "The Relevance of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi", in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* (Vol.2, Number 1, 1995), p. 46.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

fold because of the large number of women participants who brought to the movement endurance, self-sacrifice and feminine nature. In her essay, "The Education of Indian Girls," she writes,

The national movement for girl's education must be on national lines; it must accept the general Hindu conception of woman's place in the national life, not the dwarfed modern view but the ancient ideal. It cannot see in her the rival and competitor of man in all forms of outside and public employment.....Indian greatness will not return until Indian womanhood obtains a larger, a freer and a fuller life, for largely in the hands of Indian women must lie the redemption of India. The wife inspires or retards the husband; the mother makes or mars the child. The power of woman to uplift or debase man is practically unlimited, and man and woman must walk forward hand-in-hand to the raising of India, else will she never be raised at all.....⁶⁹

Sarojini Naidu, too, emphasized the sustenance women could, and would, give to the nationalist movement. She may be remembered chiefly as a poet but she was deeply involved in politics and played a significant role in the struggle for independence. She is remembered for the much acclaimed speech at a meeting of the Indian National Congress in Calcutta in 1917, urging men to count upon the womanhood of India when they need 'torchbearers in the darkness.' She took part in the famous Salt Satyagraha in 1930. She is also remembered for the role she played in setting up AIWC and demanding full franchise that too in 1917 itself. For Sarojini Naidu, "the true standard of a country's greatness lies.....in the undying spiritual ideals of love and service and sacrifice that inspired and sustained the mothers of the race."⁷⁰

One finds certain kind of uniformity in the perception and the possible resolution of the women's question, be it for Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu or Annie Besant. All these nationalists tried to resolve this issue in a way what Partha Chatterjee very convincingly talks about as 'the nationalist resolution of the women's question,' which expects the 'spiritual' self not to lose itself, like the material self which is "required to make all the compromises and adjustments necessary to adapt ourselves to the requirements of a modern material world without losing our

⁶⁹ Annie Besant, *Speeches and Writings of Annie Besant* (Madras: A Natesan and Co., 1875), pp. 73-79.

⁷⁰ As quoted by Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 125.

true identity,”⁷¹ through an unrestrained and unreflective imitation. Thereby a consistent and self-reflective dialogue between one’s inner and outer world is inevitably required to ensure that “this spirituality did not, as we have seen, impede the chances of the women moving out of the physical confines of home; on the contrary it facilitated it, making it possible for her to go out into the world under conditions that would not threaten her femininity.”⁷² For there would lie the true answer to the question of emancipation. Or in other words as Prof Pathak again makes it very simple to understand when he asserts that on the path of emancipation which inevitably leads to one’s entry in the public sphere doesn’t necessarily implies a detachment from one’s inner world, one’s home, one’s feminine essence.

Women’s Movement in Post Independence India

The independent India witnessed a lot of constitutional efforts to uplift the position of women in the society by way of enforcing some legislative measures thereby ensuring the establishment of formal equality and the removal of social disabilities. The fundamental rights as guaranteed by the Constitution try to remove the inequalities suffered by Indian women. Article 14 promises equality before the law while article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex and also makes room for special provisions for women and children. Article 39 directs the state to adopt a policy of equal wage for equal work for both men and women. Also, article 42 provides for certain maternity reliefs. Similarly there were directive principles of the state policy which also guarantee protection of women’s rights. The political participation was also encouraged post independence as women, who had taken an active part in the freedom struggle were elected or nominated to legislative bodies, or occupied other positions of power and social esteem.⁷³ Also, during 1955-1956, acts like The Hindu Marriage Act, The Hindu Succession Act, The Hindu Minority Act, and The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act were passed.

⁷¹ Partha Chatterjee, “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question”, in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid’s(eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women,1989), p.238

⁷² Ibid., p. 249.

⁷³ Neera Desai, “From Articulation to Accommodation: Women’s Movement in India”, in Leela Dube’s (ed.), *Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development* (Delhi: Oxford University Press,1986), p.292

Yet “particularly until the early 1970’s, there has practically been no concerted action towards achieving the goal of equality.”⁷⁴ In the fifties and the sixties therefore, there was a lull in feminist campaigning, and the movement which started in 1970’s was a very different one. “A spate of new women’s organizations was born and old ones revitalized by the nineteenth eighties. The special category of women’s activism was newly researched and expanded with the view of charting its specificities, as well as the ‘logical’ and organic links between feminism and Marxism, feminism and anti-communalism, feminism and anti-casteism, etc.”⁷⁵

The main focus during the early years of independence was on the expansion of girl’s education and improving health services. There wasn’t much focus on the employment opportunities for women as Neera Desai would argue that women were then considered as beneficiaries of economic development and not as active participants. Therefore, the focus of women’s organizations during this time was mainly on running literacy programmes for women or aided nutrition programmes for children. Or at the most providing for some training classes in tailoring, embroidery, etc for economic improvement were their concerns. It was only gradually that with the adoption of a mixed economy which led to the opening up of the tertiary sector that the upper class and urban-middle class women who were opting for higher education could look forward to better employment prospects in academic and medical professions.

The pre-independence movement’s emphasis on a woman’s role as a mother gradually saw a shift to her role a daughter and a working woman. Post 1970’s specifically, the assertion, that gender based structures like the sexual division of labor oppressed and subordinated women, started growing stronger. While, pre-independence feminists had largely accepted this sexual division of labor, the feminists of the 1970’s saw this division quite problematic for by prioritizing domestic domain for women, it tends to restrict the role of their agency in deciding their life projects. Also, in the employment sphere, it encourages a discriminatory practice by not only offering women lower wages for their work but also by relegating them the ‘unskilled’ spheres of work. The helplessness consequent of being born as a daughter in a society like ours came to be clearly articulated in the agenda for emancipation unlike the earlier times, through

⁷⁴ Neera Desai, “From Articulation to Accommodation: Women’s Movement in India”, in Leela Dube’s (ed.), *Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.287.

⁷⁵ Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993), p. 1.

plays and pamphlets. Rallies, protest marches and strikes, signature campaigns became a regular feature whether it was against dowry, rape, or various other forms of domestic violence. Feminist consciousness in the 1970's became aware of the innumerable inequalities, both between men and women and between women themselves, based on caste, class, region, religion, etc. the demands for the right to control over one's life came to be made and economic independence came to be considered vital for realizing this objective along with the right to control one's body. Hence, the definition of rape was made inclusive of rape within marriage and rape with prostitutes. Nowadays, issues discussed and fought for range from honor killings to rape cases, dowry murders, harassment at workplaces, domestic violence-both physical and mental to portrayal of women in media leading to 'objectification of women bodies'. The way the roles stereotypically associated with women are presented by media, in daily soaps and advertisements, in a glamorized manner, has been critically analyzed by feminists like Maitrayee Chaudhri and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan. One of the important milestones of the women's movement recently has been the passing of the women's reservation bill which provides for reservation for women at each level of legislative decision-making, starting with Lok-Sabha, down to state and local legislatures. In other words, one-third of the total available seats would be reserved for women in national, state, or local governments.

One has also seen the proliferation of women's writings post 1970's in academia. One is no longer hesitant to work and research on issues relating to gender whether it's gender and caste, gender and tribe, gender and consumerism, gender and laws and the like. Also, one finds the rising number of women NGO's throughout the country. Some of them have international ties and networks. Hence, representatives keep attending the international conferences and get-togethers to discuss women's issues, be updated and strategize keeping in mind the international. An event of ghastly act of violence against women in one region of the country is met with a nation wide agitation. Or a regional effort to uplift the position of women like organizing dharnas, rallies, etc. receives international assistance, moral and financial, by different women's organizations spread in the global space. Similarly, feminist academicians are seen exchanging views globally through their publications, international conferences and seminars.

Globalization certainly has given a new meaning to the 'indigenous' struggle against atrocities done to women in India. Consequently, one can not deny the association with the west, in theory

and in practice, for it becomes irresistible and inevitable. So, from the early nineteenth century where the 'need to reform' was the focus, to the twentieth century when women's political participation was encouraged, to the contemporary phase where focus shifted to the demand to decide the course of their own lives have gained momentum. Certainly, the women's movement post 1970's has come a long way since then. The right to 'self-determination' or 'self-assertion' can be said to have taken a front seat, for many, even if not all, specially for the urban upper and middle class feminist women. Hence, if one recalls from Sarojini Naidu's assertion of "when you need torch bearers...the womanhood of India will be with you ..." thereby accepting the difference and the complementary roles between the two partners. From this acceptance to an imitation of the masculine thereby refusing to take for granted any such difference, to an affirmation of these differences by certain feminist groups who celebrate this femininity to the extent of rejecting the masculine. One can clearly sense this change, and it would not be any exaggeration to accept this as a journey from one extreme to another. The aim towards this idea of 'self-determination' or 'self-assertion' sounds compatible with, the propagated and practiced idea of 'absolute personal freedom' associated with western feminist movement. This idea of feminism and freedom seems to have instilled faith in India as Madhu Kishwar remarks, "Sections of women's movement in India have picked up not just the term 'feminist' from the West but also all of the norms, assumptions and debates that emanate from it." She narrates how a lot of 'self-appointed theoreticians' in India during the time women's organizations and groups were emerging, started labeling them as belonging to one of these groups- bourgeois feminist, socialist feminist or radical feminist. She would point out various instances wherein it was expected out of *Manushi*⁷⁶ to follow the standards and patterns evolved by the western feminists. For instance, the expectation to take a stand whether this organization was to walk with men, ahead of men or behind men. Since *Manushi*⁷⁷ included articles written by men, some had criticized the same. She further goes on to say in spite of the 'uncritical support' given to the feminists by media in India, the former is often portrayed as have responded with hostility and ridicule just like what western media has had done to their feminist movement. Also according to her, unlike west, men in India have contributed their bit in the movement, yet the feminist

⁷⁶ *Manushi* refers to an organization here which acts as 'a forum for organizing citizen's groups for action on specific issues and promotes social justice and strengthen human rights for all, especially for women.'(as laid down and available at www.manushi-india.org)

⁷⁷ *Manushi* also refers to a journal of the same organization.

literature in India rarely acknowledges this and deal with this issue on the similar lines as being responded in the west. She goes on to argue how in a lot of ways “Since feminism brought with it a certain amount of easy international mobility for many third world feminists, the ideological domination of western feminism and the resultant importation of frequently inappropriate issues was absorbed uncritically.”⁷⁸ She goes on to trace how with the assistance of international funds the focus shifted from a political movement to address political, social and economic issues to ‘development projects,’ based on the development ideology of the west.

Similarly, Suma Chitnis laments that many women in India cannot relate to feminism in India for it is not adequately sensitive to the historicity and values in the Indian context which expects the question of women’s oppression in India to be seen in a different light.

She remarks,

.....it is a pity that the Indian statement of their problem is often couched in statements that sound alien and which, therefore fail to hit the mark. In order that the women’s cause in the country gain the massive support that it needs it is important that Indian feminists understand the Indian context thoroughly and that they phrase their criticisms, their arguments and their demands on behalf of women with sensitivity to the Indian society.⁷⁹

According to her, keeping in mind the distinctiveness of the Indian context while dealing with any women’s issue is very important. For instance, one should be aware of an average woman’s disapproval of the feminist anger in considering men as the chief oppressors and also the majority of them can’t relate to the demand of absolute personal freedom as articulated in the west. Similarly while in the West the focus is on the logical resolution of the conflict through confrontation while in India greater value is placed on the sublimation of ego and to balance conflicting alternatives. While the establishment of legal and constitutional equality is still strived for, in India they are already available but are not fully made use of because of the factors like illiteracy, lack of awareness, the functioning of bureaucracy, etc. Also one need not to forget that Indian women’s movement has a foundation of the social reform movement and the freedom

⁷⁸ Madhu Kishwar, *Off The Beaten Track: Rethinking Gender Justice for Indian Women* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.284.

⁷⁹ Suma Chitnis, “Feminism: Indian ethos and Indian Convictions”, in Rehana Ghadially, *Women in Indian Society: A Reader* (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1988), p. 82.

movement. Hence as Chitnis would argue it is important to “build upon what has been achieved in the past.....although Indian tradition has for the major part encouraged the subservience of women, it contains several elements that can be developed towards establishing equality for women and towards a new assertion of the full dignity of their personhood”⁸⁰ Hence, Indian feminism should build upon such features taken from the tradition keeping in mind the uniqueness of the Indian situation.

III

Need for a quest

As we have observed, feminism has its many branches; also feminists differ politically, ideologically. Yet, the thread of connectedness that unites them is a shared concern: critique of patriarchy, its power discourse, and celebration of a liberated woman with ‘agency’, with ‘rights’, with ‘economic empowerment’. It is no denying the fact that these concerns have generated an awareness and played some meaningful roles, there are nonetheless certain limits to this approach. For instance, its nature of agitation and negation, at times fails to capture the subtle element in human relationships – say, love, care, collective responsibility, maternity, human trust, spiritual longing for oneness. It is too political to have an inclination to the aesthetic and spiritual. It is too modern to be sensitive to the nuances of tradition. It is a language which establishes a hierarchy, between a working woman and a housewife. It becomes unapproachable for those who though believe in the ideals of equality but can not identify with the arrogance of this language. It also discards the beauty of the mundane!

As we have seen, these concerns- integrating tradition and modernity, rights and shared responsibilities, agency and love- can be seen in the writings of some of the Indian thinkers. This shows the possibility of a quest for a new language of emancipation. A language which would assert itself but with an equal sensitivity towards both, emotions or reasons, public or private, culture or nature, masculine or feminine. In fact, it would seek to transcend the duality in itself, between the home and the world.

⁸⁰ Suma Chitnis, “Feminism: Indian ethos and Indian Convictions”, in Rehana Ghadially, *Women in Indian Society: A Reader* (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1988), p. 91.

CHAPTER- II

A SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHT INTO POP FEMINISM⁸¹: LIMITS TO ITS DISCOURSES OF FREEDOM

Along with the academic-activist discourse which forms an important part of our understanding through an engagement with theory and participation respectively, it becomes important to pay attention to the nuances of the popular receptivity of the struggle against women's oppression and its feminist notions of freedom. An analysis, of how the latter is perceived and practiced in everyday lives calls for a critical self-awareness for a young urban educated middle-class woman like me. Hence, the method of self-reflection becomes very important in having written this chapter, while I had spoken at length with some young women of approximately my age and social situation residing in the cities of Delhi and Mumbai. The questions we dealt with were quite personal in scope as they ranged from

- Do you feel empowered? What is empowerment for you?
- Where do you see women's movement in India today? What bearing it has in the lives of people around you?
- Do you believe in the institution of marriage? If yes, when do you plan to get married?

⁸¹ The term feminism invariably implies its academic as well as political connotation. It also involves certain imageries: university educated, politically correct, highly articulate, bright/intelligent women asserting the women's issues, and critiquing the rationale of male power in a patriarchal society. While we speak of 'pop feminism', it narrates something else. It is the way the notion of 'being a feminist' is perceived, internalized, and popularized by innumerable women- not the university educated feminists, but housewives, women in different professions, young girls. It is popularized through popular discourses emanating from magazines, television shows, etc. In this sense, it is like 'pop culture': a creation of culture industry. The 'pop culture' as one notices is different from what one understands of 'folk culture'. While the latter is being carried forward through oral tradition, it still demonstrates 'old ways' of practice which involves one as a producer as well as the consumer. The community feeling is strong in folk culture as it is related to a sense of a place. While the pop culture, one notices, derives its meaning and is articulated through the symbols of culture industry. We are mere consumers and do not create this culture unlike the folk culture. Pop- culture is a media-induced consumerist culture which permeates the everyday life of an urban society.

- What do you think of the sexual freedom exercised by women, like indulging in pre-marital sex, live-in, extra-marital, etc? Do u consider it a recent development? What are the factors, you think, responsible for this change?
- Do you read any w omen's magazines like Femina, etc? What do you think about the advices, suggestions been given in these magazines relating to one's marital, sexual life or the tips on fashion, lifestyle, etc. Do you think that these magazines have helped you in anyway, with advice, suggestion, information, etc?
- Are you a feminist? Why and Why not? From where do you think u got the first idea of what feminism could be?
- What are your goals- personal and professional?

Since it wasn't a structured interview, the due course of the dialogue, issues pertaining to one's belief in the institution of marriage, the alternatives to it, one's present status of relationship, the idea of morality, etc came to be frankly discussed by most of the respondents. One could notice the remarkable confidence with which they articulated their views, beliefs and stance in life be it in asserting that morality has double standards to the comfort in accepting a pre-marital sexual relationship with more than one man.

While I found the results to have some resemblance to the images which I could decipher in the critical analysis of the popular women's magazines, one understands that the large group of women cannot at all relate to these images and notions of freedom. Nevertheless, there is an emerging trend whose traces can be easily found and this trend is the focus of study as represented by the popular media and substantiated by the details and arguments asserted by the young women representatives I spoke to. Hence, the picture media seems to portray of this power centric 'new age woman' cannot completely be ignored. Also, one needs to take into consideration here that this form of print media caters to a large number of consumers. One notices, how important it becomes to be critical of the arrogance which results from one's accessibility to the academic debates and the much jargonized theoretical readings on the latest feminist trends, which makes one look down upon these popular media forms and discard them as 'crap'. No one is denying here that media does not distort with information, opinions, etc, but one cannot blindly do away with its impact which makes a large section of women aware of their

agency. To have a holistic picture, one needs to understand its receptivity in a common woman's life, be it a house wife or a working woman who wouldn't have an access to reading Betty Friedan or the Indian Journal of Gender Studies. For this large section the awareness of the 'realm of possibilities out there' comes in a big manner through these mediums of media at their door-steps. One is sensitive to the feminist critique of media for the latter, it is argued reinforces the gender stereotypes in the society. Yet, one needs to yet delve deeper into what these images seem to represent and if at all they bear any resemblance to changed attitudes and perceptions around.

In an analysis which follows in this chapter through the readings of the various issues and cover stories in magazines like *Femina*, *The Week*, *Outlook* and *India Today* one notices an emerging notion of 'freedom' as represented in one's attitude towards one's career, relationships, consumption patterns, sexuality, success, empowerment, etc. At the same time an attempt has been made to study the attitude and behavior of some young women in an urban location, all falling within the age group of 24 to 27 and are educated and economically independent.

Hence, in the chapter which follows one discusses the feminist debate as an intellectual discourse and analyzes its activist framework which initiated a political struggle and contributed its bit in enabling a lot of women to become change makers in big and small ways. But one also feels the need to go beyond this academic-activist discourse to critically reflect upon the popularly received, interpreted, and appropriated notion of freedom.

I

Feminism as an intellectual discourse

It was in 1986, that the University Grants Commission (UGC) established 'Women's Cell' in various universities and affiliated colleges. These cells conduct activities like workshops, street plays, seminars, and encourage the participation of the students in the same with the objective of sensitizing them towards the issue of gender discrimination. While it was much before in the late seventies itself that the systematic study of women's issues started as 'Women's Studies' in

many universities throughout the country. Eventually, one found that it became one of the very popular choices to study the various aspects of gender with an interdisciplinary approach. Disciplines like Sociology, Political Science, History, Anthropology and Economics have gradually incorporated and encouraged research on the issues pertaining to gender in society. According to Neera Desai, as per the National Conference on Women's Studies, the objective of women's studies is "the pursuit of a more comprehensive, critical understanding of social reality."⁸² Hence one develops an ability to question and interrogate the well established notions of reality, thereby not taking anything for granted. "Established concepts and methods of enquiry are being put to question, and what were once accepted as facts now no longer appear as such."⁸³ Research is being conducted in the areas like, women and violence, at home and at workplace, women and employment, women and health, portrayal of women in media, participation of women in politics, women and law, women and caste, women and environment etc. Andre Beteille rightly remarks when he says "few developments in recent years have generated as much enthusiasm in the Indian academic world as women's studies."⁸⁴ And he asserts that without extensive networks of the women active in the cause of gender studies, this growth wouldn't have been possible. "No purely academic discipline can grow rapidly within universities without promotion from outside."⁸⁵ While some Indian feminists claim to have a distinct identity to that of the west, some agree that the association between the two is irresistible and inevitable. Apart from the regional, national seminars and conferences on issues pertaining to gender and society, access has become possible to debates and discussions even at the international platform. One could see how a platform like International Sociological Association also has a 'research committee on women in society, (RC 32)' whose objective is:

To promote the development of theory, methods, and practice concerning women in society and the gendered nature of social institutions; to encourage the critical evaluation of current sociological paradigms from the perspective of all subordinate groups, including women; to promote perspectives and foster consciousness concerning women's

⁸² In Introduction to Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar's, *Women in Indian Society* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2001)

⁸³ Andre Beteille, "Feminism in Academia: Changes in Theory and Practice," in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, (Vol.2, Number 1, 1995), p. 111.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

rights throughout the world; to improve research, organize meetings, and promote other means of communication, cooperation and collaboration among researchers at the national, regional, and international levels; to forge links with the research committees on women in other international social science associations.”⁸⁶

One would find Indian women representatives as the members and the past-president of this committee. They would encourage participation in the committee’s activities through organizing conferences, publication opportunities, by granting fellowships and aids to pursue research in the relevant field. Hence something which started as a need and has now become popular, research in the field of gender studies has immensely increased in India and abroad. For some it is their call, while for some others it’s ‘in vogue’ to base their research upon the same. A lot of research institutes, dedicated primarily for research in issues related to the status of women in society have also proliferated throughout the country. They provide the scope for education as well as full-time employment to post-graduates and researchers. One also sees how women studies journals, national and international, are popularly accessed. Journals like, ‘Feminist Review’, ‘Gender and Society’, ‘Sign’, ‘Hypatia’, ‘Indian Journal of Gender Studies’ are widely read. Hence, one notices how the scope for feminism, as an intellectual discourse, has widened throughout the country by the way of it becoming a popular choice with academic scholars and researcher.

II

Feminism as a political struggle

One notices how women’s organizations have grown in India, from being mainly arya samajis and brahmo samajis in the nineteenth century to organizations like the all India women’s conference in 1926. From the coming up of the autonomous women’s organizations post-independence, to the proliferation of various NGO’s throughout the country, the political struggle has come a long way. Many of such NGO’s enjoy having ties with international

⁸⁶ The objectives as laid down and available at www.isa-sociology.org

organizations, for example, Oxfam-India, which is an associate of Oxfam International. They would endeavor to connect with national, state and regional level organizations and would target to reach as many people as possible. With such tie-ups they would attempt to reach the grassroots in order to spread awareness. These organizations at the local level would organize awareness creating programmes like workshops, street plays, surveys in order to talk to the local people and try and convince them that the women's oppression in little and big ways in every day life is a form of social oppression and needs to be eradicated. They would undergo programmes to encourage women's education and try to create some employment opportunities for them by creating a market to sell their hand made products, etc. They would mobilize women to organize rallies, protest marches, signature campaigns, etc. For all such initiatives and efforts they are financially aided by international agencies and organizations with which they claim a tie-up. In return, they have to produce the reports of their targets achieved and yet to achieve to these organizations which financially aids them. Such organizations working at local levels have grown extensively throughout the country. They take up specific issues relating to gender like prostitution, education, violence against women, child marriage, etc and work at various levels to spread awareness regarding the same. For example, an NGO which works for women prostitutes would try to spread awareness about the rights of prostitutes as women, would help them fighting the stigma attached to their work, would endeavor to rehabilitate them and their children, would organize classes to spread literacy among them and their children, would spread awareness regarding AIDS and help them to opt for preventive measures, etc. This facet of women's movement in the form of activism has definitely spread colossal awareness as regards discrimination and rights the women are entitled to, and have undoubtedly helped a lot of them to rehabilitate after being the victims to the most ghastly acts of violence against women.

III

An insight into the ‘popularly received’ notion of feminism and freedom

The popular media representation of gender and the related issues might be a consequence of a selective deploying of a ‘feminist discourse’ which has popularized a certain version of emancipation. Nevertheless, its indicative of “the ‘public face’ of the movement, the extent of its penetration into the lives of a large number of middle class women.”⁸⁷ Hence, it makes sense to take cognizance of this popular representation (here in women’s magazines, like Femina, India Today Women, etc) and the way it is received by its consumers. For it might lead to a change in their perception of self and society which would be crucial to any change in the gender ideology and the prevalent theme of emancipation. The much popularized consumerist lifestyle in these magazines, etc. appearing to have an easy access to the goal of women’s liberation, it needs to be analyzed, if at all has any resemblance to the lives of the upper and middle class urban women. The latter also forms the largest section of readers of the magazines analyzed here in this chapter. The analysis of these popular media representations which comes across to one in the form of popular women’s magazines, Page 3 columns in Indian dailies, or television reality shows like *Rakhi Sawant ka Swyamvar*⁸⁸, etc, makes it important to see how this version of feminism, which could be called *pop feminism* is attractive and is being reproduced. What would constitute this ‘pop feminism’ would hence forth be attempted to explore in the followed analysis of the cover stories on women in some of the popular magazines.

It becomes important to understand here that even if a high profile well-read academician considers these magazines as ‘crap’ or ‘trivial’, as they would call it, yet their easy accessibility to a large section of women in our society can not be underestimated. These are those women who might otherwise be unaware of the importance of their ‘agency’, if not for the awareness which comes at their doorstep through media, however diluted its form may be. A forty-four year old housewife might not have an access to read Simone de Beauvoir or Maitrayee Chaudhuri or might lack an opportunity to be a part of the debates and discussions taking place across the

⁸⁷ Ipshta Chandra, *Packaging Freedom: Feminism and Popular Culture* (Kolkata: STREE, 2003), p. 9.

⁸⁸ A reality show which was telecasted on NDTV Imagine, where tv actress Rakhi Sawant was to choose her life partner.

globe, asserting women's rights. But an issue of *grahlxmi* might inform her of the possibilities available to her if she feels the need to engage herself somewhere in any activity or work outside home, or even from home. How does it happen that the present young generation without accepting that they are feminists, would take certain things like economic independence, opting for careers earlier considered to be typically for men, mobility outside home (even migrating from a small town to a metropolitan for studying or working), marrying (when and with whom) with one's own choice, etc. for granted. In fact many of them might be oblivious to the fact that these things which are there for them as 'natural', to get them is yet an everyday's struggle for many in their age group. One wonders if this consciousness which need not to come with a 'feminist assertion' and is taken for granted by a large section of urban middle class young women is a consequence of the awareness spread by television or print media. Is it that the generation of the images of the 'new women', as Ipshita Chandra would argue, "...be part of the process as well as a result, of the popularization of the goals and concerns of the women's movement through the media?"⁸⁹

And we need to understand despite the very popular feminist critique of media, that the latter doesn't pick up from 'nowhere', irrespective of the exaggerated note it might be based on. Also, it has a capacity to influence, positively or negatively, the lives of its consumers by opening up a realm of possibilities.

Nowadays in our everyday lives it's not uncommon to hear justification of one's attitudes and actions under the pretext 'If men can, why can't we?' Young urban women often complain about being deprived of the 'opportunities' men get in our society. An issue of the prestigious magazine, 'The Week,' with its cover story on the changing attitudes of young urban India on virginity⁹⁰ concludes that a new sexual revolution is spurring in urban India and this survey claims to have covered 1,0004 participants across 10 cities. This write-up quotes Sarika Sen, 30, working with an MNC in Gurgaon, "The concept of virginity has never been in favor of women. It has always propagated and satisfied male ego. With women rubbing shoulders with men, it is time society shed its double standards. If you love someone and are sexually attracted to him, why deny yourself the pleasure?"⁹¹ It is not surprising any more that many of her age and sex share the same views and are confident enough to strongly believe in them, assert them and live

⁸⁹ Ipshita Chandra, *Packaging Freedom: Feminism and Popular Culture* (Kolkata: STREE, 2003), p. 10.

⁹⁰ Rekha Borgohain Dixit, "The Virginity Test", *The Week* (September 16, 2007), p. 32.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

by them. A respondent of mine, who is a researcher and is teaching simultaneously, I found was somewhat of the same belief that morality in our society has double standards for it evaluates a woman's attitude differently. She strongly believes that morality is a variable and might have different meaning for different people. For her, any decision related to sexual behavior of the two people in a relation, 'if is consensual and if the two people know what they are doing,' should not be judged by the stereotypical parameters of morality. And she for herself, as she asserts, has set a particular limit to the extent of her physical intimacy with her partner, both of whom are together for more than five years now, for they are not yet sure whether they would settle down together in future. But she wouldn't judge others on this basis. Virginitly, she asserts is 'a state of mind'. She narrated one of her friends who have had been physically intimate with two men till now yet exclaims, "I still feel like a virgin."

Femina for its bumper anniversary Issue of January 2, 2008, elaborately covers the various facets of a woman's life from her work, to family to relationships to sexuality under the cover story, "Breaking Myths, Redefining Roles". When asked women about their favorite past time or what they do during the time they get to relax, one of them, a chef at a hotel in Delhi replied, "Honestly speaking? Adult magazines and movies. Adult, as in magazines that feature nudity. I'm just being honest! It isn't only men who enjoy nudity."⁹² An another respondent of mine, a researcher, was confused when asked if she is a feminist yet accepted to be an ardent believer in the cause of women's liberation(in thought and practice both) and considers 'self-assertion' and 'interrogating every taken for granted thing' as her way of life. She looked quite disappointed by the manner in which the media portrays women and the issues concerning them in tele-serials and advertisements for it reinforces the very established norms and role expectations in the society which deny women their agency. Nevertheless I found out that she downloads and watches pornography, of all sorts, quite frequently. One would be reminded here of the feminist critique of pornography which considers the latter as very exploitative for women. The same respondent said though she feels liberated enough to take all her decisions on her own and can decide her course of life, yet doesn't feel emancipated enough for she feels constrained by the structure. Given an illustration she said she might be confident enough to go for a walk outside in the city at midnight but would not be able to for the fear of molestation and rape.

⁹² Breaking Myths, Redifining Roles", *Femina Magazine* (January 2, 2008), p. 82.

In one of the cover stories in a magazine a woman respondent is quoted saying, “My women friends and I like looking at men’s bodies. We see no harm in it. It’s liberating, in a lot of ways.”⁹³ While their comments on nudity or virginity as such might not be the concern at the moment, what is rather noteworthy here is their confidence in realizing ‘liberation’ in such ways.

In one of the articles in the same issue it says, ‘101 tips from the style goddess’ guide to ‘looking and feeling good’, one of the tips is, “when nothing else works, **SHOW CLEAVAGE** (bold in original). Invest in push-up bras and wear them at all times...then get into that t-shirt or dress with the low neckline. Trust me, everyone will sit up and pay attention.”⁹⁴ As one of my respondents also replied, “whatever one decides to do, one should be comfortable with that.” How on an incident of eve-teasing which happened with a neighbor next door, I hesitantly showed my concern, on the revealing clothes she was wearing, and if that would have been one of the factors responsible for the incident. Little did I know that it would make her aggressive towards what I could think and she promptly replied to which many of this generation would agree that ‘whatever you might wear, even a suit or a sari for that matter, it won’t stop many around from harassing you for the simple reason that you are a woman.’ She went a step further and argued that even if one is ‘comfortable’ walking nude for that matter, no man has the right to violate the person’s space verbally or physically. According to her, it is a matter of how comfortable one is in whichever manner one wants to be.

In the same cover story, the writer quotes a woman she interviewed in Delhi. She says, “There are two kinds of women, those who are ready to compromise and those who are not. Those who do compromise, use every reason to stay in the marriage. They are willing to make adjustments and do what it takes to keep the marriage going. The others want to live life on their terms. **This type is willing to cut people out of her life if need be. She is aware of what she wants. I’m aware of what I want too. And I’m willing to pay the price** (emphasis mine). And no one can tell me that it’s not worth it.”⁹⁵ At an age of twenty- six, marriage, one of the respondents said was not at all a priority. For she wants to explore herself and the avenues around her more in order to decide what she wants to pursue as a stable career. Also, she accepted that she fears any kind of institutionalization. And marriage according to her ‘tames’ one in the stereotypical role

⁹³ Ibid., p. 82.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 139.

⁹⁵ “Breaking Myths, Redefining Roles”, *Femina Magazine* (January 2, 2008), p. 62.

expectations. Marriage would come with a lot of responsibilities especially a child which she thinks she cannot even think about at this moment. As she is still struggling to settle with a career (though she was already employed somewhere) she would be satisfied with. It reminds one of what Anita Harris has to say, "If anticipated childlessness is still a minority experience, the notion of career first, family later is common to young women who aspire to successful professional lives."⁹⁶ The same respondent said that the fear of not getting a suitable groom to marry after some years is inevitable because of her growing age but 'this fear is worth going through' and she wouldn't 'really mind leading a life of a spinster in the future.' All she said at the end of it, 'till you know what you are doing, it is absolutely alright.' Though she doesn't deny the emotional aspect of one's nature which gets fulfilled by a strong and a stable relationship and in her view a partner is a 'pillow' or a 'punching bag', who is there always whenever one feels the urge to unwind. An another respondent, twenty five years old, who worked with an NGO for a while before she left the job for higher studies, preferred 'companionship' to a marriage. When asked how she would define this idea of companionship, she said, "Companionship is not as binding as a life long commitment. But it lasts as long as there is amicability among the two people." For her, marriage isn't very important. She told me that when she was openly putting forward this view while she was discussing the future course of events in her life with her parents, they thought she was simple joking and didn't take it seriously at all. On this she said she doesn't feel empowered for there is difficulty in making people accept of the way you are and what you believe in. While being unsure of how she is going to handle this for she is sure of the reluctance for marriage on her part but doesn't see any possibility of parents getting convinced by this idea. On being asked why it was that she didn't believe in marriage, she said, "Love is important for marriage and I don't think one can love one person for the entire life. Also, it is too much of an expectation out of people specially women, who want to balance career and dependent family." Upon arguing that men as husbands are growing sensitive towards the dual roles stereotypically expected out of a wife who is working at the same time and they do willingly share the responsibilities whether it is helping in the work related to the kitchen or taking care of the children. But she didn't seem to be convinced and according to her, "I am yet to see such instances grow in number in order to get convinced about it all." When asked if she is a feminist, she remarked, "Many feminists around the world aim to turn a

⁹⁶ Anita Harris, *Future Girl* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 50.

patriarchal society into a matriarchal one for they think this is how they can take revenge for all these years of submission. Hence, only to the extent that the equality of rights is sought for, she is a feminist.” If an access to sexual freedom indicates emancipation, to which she replied, “Those who have this freedom are empowered a bit for it does give us the freedom to express ourselves.”

On a similar question when I spoke to another respondent who incidentally got married some months back and works from home, said, “it’s absolutely alright if someone wants to have a sexual relation without marriage. It’s their personal choice.” If the decision of being married, when asked, was solely hers, “No, it wasn’t. It was influenced by the way my parents convinced me. If I had to have my way, I wouldn’t have got married. I would have rather preferred an arrangement where in the person I thought I could live with would have been expected to be with me at my parent’s place without getting married and we would have been together till it would have worked between us.” When asked if she thinks she is a feminist, she replied, “I am a big time feminist. I would not shy beating my husband back if he ever does the same.”

To the question ‘what makes a good marriage then’, replies one from the Femina team, “likemindedness. Compatibility. Also, you need to get into a marriage for the right reasons. And in a sense **you need to shop for the right guy...** (emphasis mine).” One recalls here what Rahul Mahajan had to remark while he was ‘seeming to struggle to select’ his would be wife at a platform where personal and intimate were readily sold for public consumption. He asks one of the guests in one of the episodes of *Rahul dulhaniya le jayega*⁹⁷, “Is there any material which can be taken home amongst them all?” One fails to understand what marriage means to them, be it Rahul Mahajan, or Rakhi Sawant or Rahul’s wife whose father acclaimed to be a ‘proud father’ the moment she was garlanded by Rahul. Marriage for them looked like a commodity to be consumed, and a medium to access the celebrity status and the glamorous name and fame.

A cover story in a magazine talks about motherhood in India which it says, ‘**a mom thing is a joy forever** (emphasis mine)’. It talks about how career women have new options towards motherhood. Lilavati hospital in Mumbai, it says, help women safely freeze their ova for use at a later date, when the women are ready to have a baby. To be a mother is one responsibility two of

⁹⁷ A reality show telecasted on NDTV Imagine, wherein Rahul Mahajan selected one out of many contestants to be his wife.

my respondents accepted they feared the most and keep away from getting married itself for the same before they are satisfied with their professional life. 'It is too much of a responsibility. I just can not stand children crying,' one of them replied. One could recall how the women participants initially nagged when they were expected to take care of kids in the episodes of '*Pati Patni aur woh*⁹⁸', which claimed that the couple who takes care of children, being 'allotted' to them, in the best possible manner would be the winner of the show. The child became a commodity to be handled as best as possible for a particular period of time to earn fame and money.

A reader from Delhi, Poonam Bhasin, in her e-mail response to the editor to this bumper anniversary issue with the cover story "Breaking Myths, Redefining Roles" says, "No one could have described the Indian woman as beautifully as you did. **Her desires, her battles, her lives.....I could relate to every woman you interviewed in some or the other way.....** (emphasis mine). For that, I can't survive without Femina. It is an addiction."⁹⁹

To one of the respondents, in an on-line chat, who before joining an MBA course was working with an advertising firm, when I asked, what she thinks about the popular women's magazines, she said, "I am not a regular reader, but I think they are useful, they interest women. Also, I feel they are a proof that the women population of India cannot be ignored by marketers. This means that they have spending power, they are educated and they make their own decisions, all this spell women's empowerment." She told me that the first time she got an idea of what feminism could be about was through books, mainly fiction. At an age of twenty five, she is looking forward to as she would narrate, "a great job, or a business she starts with, one child, one husband" and plans to settle down in another five years time. When asked about the sexual revolution which seems to be on it's way in the context of a section of urban Indian women and if feminism has contributed to this development, she said, "like other realms, social, psychological, decision making for oneself and for the family, this is one area where changes have come through with the spread of feminist ideas. Because today women (owing to feminism) think they have a right to do anything and everything their male counterparts do. It has disturbed some sensibilities but it's for the good." In continuation with this dialogue when asked if this is a

⁹⁸ A reality show telecasted on NDTV Imagine wherein some celebrity real life couples had to compete amongst in taking care of children as if they were to be their own.

⁹⁹ *Femina* (February 27, 2008), p. 20.

kind of blind imitation of what men have been doing, she said, “That is about what they choose to do with freedom. My point is that why a woman should be condemned for doing something you would turn a blind eye to, if done by a man. If it’s wrong by some standards, it should be wrong for both women and men.” When asked if an access to the sexual freedom denotes any kind of empowerment. She said, “I wouldn’t say access to it but first, having it and second, not being judged based on having and using the power is emancipation.”

‘Beyond the Bed’, the first part of the cover story ‘She, 2004’ (Outlook Magazine) says in italics, “*The urban Indian woman is at the beginning of a new affair, with her body, her unmet desires.*”¹⁰⁰ The write-up comments on how women have come a long way, from ensuring that they hide their undergarments to unlearn all those ‘lingerie etiquette’. It says, “from hiding, to being comfortable with, to flattering even-these are the milestones that map the distance the Urban Indian Woman has covered in her mind about her body. Discovering, along the way, desires that have long being denied, needs that have long being unmet. **Trying to unburden herself of the baggage of the inherited inhibitions, so that she can travel light on the path to new sexual sensibility**(emphasis mine).....she still finds herself at many confusing crossroads as she sorts out sex in her mind. And yet, amidst all the flush and fuddle about sex, today’s city-bred women is at the beginnings of an affair with her sexuality-getting to know it better, familiarizing herself with it’s demands, and enjoying her new relationship with it.”¹⁰¹ What immediately follows is sociologist Shiv Visvanathan’s analysis of the same,

As urban Indian women access more and more spaces in the private and public spheres—at offices, tours, night-shifts, malls, cafes, nightclubs, parties, on roads—they take their sexuality with them everywhere, learn to be comfortable with it everywhere. Because sexuality, unlike sex, is not confined to the bed, its part of everyday life, it’s your attitude. And the portrayal of The Mother in our ads illustrates this new truth. **Ma in commercials earlier was no different from an Ambassador car, both equally unerotic. Contrarily, moms in ads today are smart, savvy, sassy, and yes, sexy women** (emphasis mine).¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Soma Wadhwa, “She, 2004”, *Outlook* (November 24, 2004), p. 38.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

On an entry to a restaurant in a high profile location of Colaba in Bombay, I found myself attracted to a group of women who must have been in their thirties, comfortably sitting, engrossed with their conversations, booze sips and fag puffs. On an another side were a group of children (must have been between 9-11 years of age), enjoying the company of one another. After a while I heard it was someone's birthday being celebrated amongst that group of children. And I found out what took my attention was the presence of the same group of women, who had appeared to be so involved in their socializing, around that group of children while they were singing the birthday song. It didn't take long to understand then that it was a group of mothers who had accompanied their children to a friend's birthday party. As a researcher I got curious to understand the grounds for the ease with which these mothers were boozing and smoking while their children were around. I was left wondering if this zone of comfort existed some years back also or is a recent trend. One tries to understand if this is one of the illustrations of what media would represent as the present age 'sassy and glamorous moms'!

Of 1,086 women being surveyed across ten cities, a considerable number agreed to the importance of 'sexual gratification or pleasure' in their lives, which according to the write-up wasn't a part of 'explicit feminist concern' a decade ago. **"These are the liberating lengths to have travelled on the pleasure trail, (emphasis mine)"** the write-up says.¹⁰³ With the promise of anonymity a married woman confesses to loving her husband very much, and also having had two "serious relationships" and one "mind-blowing physical fling"¹⁰⁴ outside marriage. When asked if she regrets any. She declared, **"None. I felt good and cherish having felt good (Emphasis mine)."** The cover story of Femina quotes Zsa Zsa Gabor-"I never hated a man enough to give him diamonds back." It further says, "And it reflects what a lot of girls nowadays are finding out early enough. That there is no such thing as free lunch. But they are smart enough to realize that they have the option to go for that lunch, and then walk away, without keeping their part of the bargain. **Of course, there are no more lunches from the same source, but at the end of the day, the sea is full of fish, to mix a metaphor.**"¹⁰⁵ One of the respondents I interviewed, a qualified MBA in finance working for more than two years now in an MNC in Bombay, said she was in a relationship with a married man who though doesn't live with his

¹⁰³ Soma Wadhwa, "She, 2004", *Outlook* (November 24, 2004), p. 42.

¹⁰⁵ "Breaking Myths, Redefining Roles", *Femina Magazine* (January 2, 2008), p. 50 .

wife under one roof but is shying away to divorce her for the fear of alimony. It's been almost two years that this respondent has been in a relationship with this man, but neither of them plans to marry and settle down with each other in the near or far future. As I asked her what is so convincing about being together in case you cannot anticipate a marriage, she was speechless. This respondent happens to be a close friend from college. And when I told her that probably its so very much convenient a way of fulfilling one's needs, emotional or physical that she is unprepared to let it go, she did agree and said, 'this is exactly what I have been feeling for some days now but was finding it difficult to accept.' Given the facts that she is economically independent, and stays alone in a huge rented flat, it is not at all difficult to accept this way of life. But that is not problematic for it is a 'consensual' (which also has been the focus of two more respondents of almost the same age group) way to have fun and enjoy life till one could. When both the people are aware that a relationship is just a means and not an end, one could probably search for a prospective groom simultaneously with utmost convenience, like this friend of mine has been doing. True as Anita Harris would argue, "Changed economic conditions combined with the goals achieved by feminism have created new possibilities for young women."¹⁰⁶

The Week covers a story in an another issue on Urban Indian women- 'their profile is the same across cities-high society, licentious, rich, bored, mostly married, adventurous and those who are able to splurge.' "Their husbands are either gay, are busy or are not able to satisfy them. Some unmarried women have boyfriends but they still prefer gigolos for sex," says a Kolkata based gigolo.¹⁰⁷ It further quotes a gigolo's client, a 30-year old woman. She says, "...Whenever my parents are away, I invite gigolos. I do not want to get married and these men fulfill my desires. For the past two years, I have had about five boys at my disposal. For me, life is about enjoyment and this is how I define it."¹⁰⁸

An another respondent, twenty six years of age and a free lance translator, realizes empowerment in winning over her mind which keeps directing her of what would be wise considering the long term objective. For the very objective of attaining "instant gratification (as used by her)" in life,

¹⁰⁶ Anita Harris, *Future Girl* (New York: Rout ledge, 2004), p.6.

¹⁰⁷ Payal Saxena, "The new G-spot-Urban Indian women have new playmates-gigolos", *The Week* (February 10, 2008.), p. 52.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

she doesn't want to believe in long-term goals as she "falls for everyday temptations." According to her morality should be done away with completely. As for marriage, she said she is open to it but not immediately, "may be in five years to come." She believes in doing away with the concept of morality completely for it is forced upon.

The cover story of an issue of India Today has a guest column written by Ekta Kapoor, the Creative Director, Balaji Telefilms. (One need not to mention her K-series daily soaps which have governed the hearts and minds of a lot of urban Indian women for long).She says,

I think women today are sexually liberated free spirits and are willing to acknowledge their libido....it's all about strident self-gratification.....the expression "woman of today" most definitely redefines the very social fabric of the Indian society. However, I think society has today adapted to the redefined dynamics of sexual behavior and women are allowed to take their stance more freely....women today will not stand quiet and be their quintessential selves, they now come out in open and speak their minds and not crumble from within.....breaking these bonds of silence is transformative for women because it allows them to remove facades that once covered their experiences and often gave them a new found sense of empowerment..... I am confident there will be a transformation, in fact, "The Rising" has begun (emphasis mine).¹⁰⁹

This piece of writing truly has a complete bearing on the scripts of all her daily soaps and the way the female characters have been portrayed in them, their dialogues, gestures, thoughts and actions truly reflect the very idea of 'emancipation' this director seems to firmly believe in. Her idea of 'transformation' majorly revolves around the realization of women's libido, whether in their acceptance of 'sexual boredom, guilt, or extra-marital affairs'. Another piece of this cover story quotes a counselor of a large corporate who claims that 'granting sexual favors for professional gains is like drinking coffee for women.'¹¹⁰

One notices how one's consumption pattern which reflects how assertive one could be has come to be associated with how liberated one could be. "Freedom, as a result, is equated with one's

¹⁰⁹ Ekta Kapoor, "The Rising has Begun", Crimes of Passion, Cover Story, *India Today Magazine* (June 23, 2008) p . 40.

¹¹⁰ "Crimes of Passion", *India Today* (June 23, 2008,) p. 41.

ability to say ‘yes’ to the perpetually constructed new needs.”¹¹¹ Successful and independent women are constituted as an all-powerful market, both in terms of their own purchasing power and their influence over family consumption and lifestyle patterns.

The purposes of ‘hanging out’, ‘having fun’, have come to get different meanings altogether with one’s assertion of being comfortable with the way one wants to be. One could see an emerging trend towards a new lifestyle pattern which is a consequence of ‘self-assertion’. Whether it is the freedom to choose one’s leisure activities or sexuality, the comfort level of this group of women appears to be strikingly alike. And as Prof Pathak argues, “We live in an age in which consumerism, its sleekness, its technological miracles seek to legitimate this superficial notion of freedom.”¹¹² They have come to exercise this freedom in spheres of work, family, consumption and relationships. These ideas about choice and freedom are central to contemporary notions of individuality where each individual is responsible for their own ability to manage their lives successfully. “These features of the late modern self pick up on the key elements of some general feminist principles young women’s new opportunities for choice, individual empowerment, personal responsibility, and the ability to what you want to be.”¹¹³

The first page of Femina’s cover story, “The Making of a Queen”, exclaims, “The pageant was about to begin. And in less than three hours, three **unknown women would leave their anonymity behind** (emphasis mine)¹¹⁴, and become India’s reigning beauty queens for 2008.”¹¹⁵ As if their identity is all slaves to their winning or losing this beauty contest. Their identity as a woman or a daughter in their everyday lives isn’t capable enough to make them ‘known’ or probably this way of ‘glorifying’ or ‘crowning’ their ‘beauty’ would ‘emancipate’ them while the whole world look up to them, specially those young women or teens in que, looking forward to their interviews on beauty tips, their attitudes, likes, dislikes and beliefs in life, dying to imitate them and follow their ‘mantra for success’ to be soon where they are today- known in the world of glamour and money.

¹¹¹ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 139.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹¹³ Anita Harris, *Future Girl* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 8.

¹¹⁵ “The Making of a Queen”, Cover Story, *Femina Magazine* (June 4, 2008), p. 54.

It becomes imperative here to intensely reflect on what Prof. Avijit Pathak draws our attention to. He doesn't deny the natural urge to search for 'beauty' around. But "beauty", which according to him is 'primarily a qualitative/aesthetic experience' has been replaced here by a 'universal notion of standardized beauty' and has thereby come to be 'quantified and measured'. Hence, **"the rationale of commerce replaces the spirituality of aesthetics (emphasis mine)."**¹¹⁶

An issue of Femina magazine in its cover story which says, "And the Femina film award goes to..." (It categorizes 14 awards giving away different awards to actresses across bollywood and hollywood), whose The Simply Sexy Award's citation says, "Envy them or admire them, emulate them or hate them, these women are head turners all. They are the stuff adolescent dreams are made of, and their posters adorn many a wall today. They seduce with their smiles and their dimples could be classified as lethal weapons. **We have stood over grates and pretended our skirts would fly exactly like theirs or hoped we had the courage to flaunt our assets like they did.....** (emphasis mine)."¹¹⁷

Now what does that mean? We have come to reside in a society where we have the luxury to lavishly appreciate and strive for ideals like these. Our role models are the 'very seductive' beauty queens, beautiful primarily because they are seductive. Indeed has begun a transformation and many amongst us are consciously or unconsciously swayed by it.

One could identify a set of striking features of 'liberation' as it emerges from the analysis of 'pop feminism', and also from the life patterns, beliefs, attitudes as articulated by some of the young respondents. There is an emergence of the 'new woman', who is

- Confident and economically independent. She has the power to choose and consume in the manner she finds correct.
- Assertive enough to decide her career, relationships and sexual behavior. She is the one who wouldn't care to be judged by what others think of her.

¹¹⁶ Avijit Pathak, Beauty, "Femininity and Global Capitalism", *Mainstream* (February 19, 2000), p. 21.

¹¹⁷ "Show-biz special-Glamour, sparkle, celebrities, gossip, WE'VE IT ALL", *Femina Magazine* (February 27, 2008), p. 50.

- Not the one who is expected to ‘tolerate’ any infringement of ‘personal space’ in a relation. Hence, even if she decides to get married, she would ensure she wouldn’t have to live with in-laws under the same roof.
- Fun- loving and aspires for equal space as enjoyed by men in terms of indulging in activities which give her pleasure and ‘instant gratification’.
- Capable of prioritizing. She would like to be addressed as a ‘working woman’ before being called a ‘savvy and sexy mother’.

IV

A critical reflection

....This critique, let it be stated, is not to retain or restore the ‘purity’ of womanhood. A great deal of feminist writing has already sensitized us. We know that this ideal of ‘purity’ is essentially a patriarchal device designed to rob women of the agency they need to make their life-projects meaningful. **What we are arguing is that the confidence or freedom that these beauty queens seem to represent is terribly superficial.**¹¹⁸ The male gaze-in this culture of patriarchal/global capitalism-has already reduced them into dolls or puppets. **Money or glamour, it has to be realized, do not necessarily emancipate the second sex** (emphasis mine).¹¹⁹

-Avijit Pathak ¹²⁰

The ideals of marketplace have entered our home, our personal intimate relations. Consumption and the consequent disposal whether of things or human beings has come to be taken as a normal way of life. Giving away to hedonistic pursuits is the order of the day for many. The very transient nature of modern day relationships as Bauman would also talk about is consequent of one’s objective of attaining instant gratification. And one’s practice of sexual freedom, one

¹²⁰ Avijit Pathak, Beauty, “Femininity and Global Capitalism”, *Mainstream* (February 19, 2000), p. 21.

might find it difficult to accept, has a basis in Bauman's argument. And it's irrespective of the justifications one might give to convince oneself more than convincing others, that morality has double standards and one should do away with it to raise women to a plane equal to men. One cannot but ignore the rising chaos around and 'Chaos is no answer to a repressive moral system.'¹²¹

And more than the chaos around, one is not at peace within oneself. As S. RadhaKrishnan would rightly remark, "*Adventurous pursuits are leading her into conflict with her own inner nature.*"¹²² Probably that explains what one of my respondents said, "There are times when my heart cries within. I don't know what I want. I know I am a loner." Also the other working in the corporate sector seems to share the same feelings when she said, "I feel quite lonely many a times. And like others I also look forward to having a stable relationship and crave for it." It needs to understand what stops them then from opting for a life-enduring and a committed relationship. In all the cases I analyzed it was the fear of losing the 'personal space' they have got used to living with. The heightened consumerism and hedonism are greatly responsible for declining intolerance among people.¹²³ For some, it has become difficult to think of living together while being responsible towards each other. Probably that explains why some people in their responses articulated their fear of responsibilities in a long-term committed relationship. Also relevant here is to pay heed to an analysis by a clinical psychologist. She thinks our dissatisfaction stems also from the constant reminder of the availability of 'myriad opportunities' to choose from. We keep thinking about the 'perfect match', 'ideal relationship' with the constant reminders by people around that "you deserve better" and it does not let one to be satisfied. One seems to feel convinced that even if one relationship does not work, there will be many others to choose from. This asserts the psychologist, "leaves us feeling uncertain when we finally do choose a partner. Instead of setting to work to bring that relationship alive, we may start to wonder if we really have chosen the "right" one. May be we should search a bit more, for a bit longer? The doubt stops us from truly committing."¹²⁴

It is important to contemplate here what Acharya Mahapragya and Abdul Kalam have to say,

¹²¹ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 144.

¹²² RadhaKrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1927)

¹²³ Ibid., p. 153.

¹²⁴ Linda Blair, "Relationships: mistaking love for lust", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, (15 July, 2010), p. 9.

“When the excess reaches its climax, the road ahead is likely to reach a dead end. We may choose to ignore the rules of Nature, but we cannot escape them. The storm of consumerism is blowing across the planet at a terrific speed. Words like self-restraint, renunciation, integrity, and fixing a limit to our needs and desires are losing importance. When such words lose their meaning, the fall ahead becomes not only inevitable but also imminent. **Externally, everything appears to be doing exceedingly well, but deep inside a process of antithesis has already begun** (emphasis mine)”.¹²⁵

This antithesis as one comprehends might provide some grounds to understand the deeply-embedded loneliness of a few respondents. Or for that matter it could also be an important factor behind the rising suicide attempts, specially those who seem to have been living a glamorous lifestyle, for instance, the suicide case of former Ms Mauritius, Viveka Babaje.

Feminism, as it has come to make sense to many of the urban upper middle class women in India, is a movement for a lifestyle where smoking, drinking, late night clubbing, sexual freedom have become some of the key concerns. Having an equal access to the pleasures of a material culture is what many of these women seem to strive for. “Modern man has transformed himself into a commodity; he experiences his life energy as an investment with which he should make the highest profit, considering his position and the situation on the personality market. **He is alienated from himself, from his fellow men and from nature** (emphasis mine)...Life has no goal except the one to move, no principle except the one of fair exchange, no satisfaction except the one to consume.”¹²⁶ It is like, for example, negotiating and opting for the one who is smart, earns well, and above everything guarantees one the ‘freedom’, the freedom to work outside home, freedom to be in whichever manner one wants to be, freedom to do what one wants to and not do what one doesn’t want to. Above everything, there are vows of providing ‘personal space’ to each other post marriage. Often one reads Sunday magazines of all Indian dailies full of tips on ‘happy marriage’, or should one say, ‘durable marriage’, and one common tip amongst all these is ‘give your partner the required *space*’. Hence, the anticipated provision of ‘personal space’ (the degrees of which is further negotiable) becomes a pre-requisite before one convinces oneself to get into a wedlock or say, a ‘contractual companionship’. For if it doesn’t work or is

¹²⁵ Acharya Mahapragya and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, *The Family and the Nation* (U.P.: Harper Collins, 2008), p. 153.

¹²⁶ Eric Fromm, 1956, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 88.

'incompatible', it is no longer an issue. You can easily file a petition for divorce and let yourself lose from the shackle of it. You are 'empowered enough' to be 'single'. Or you can further exchange your 'personality package' with the one which matches with yours in the market. And it is not at all difficult any more for marriage counselors are at your rescue. They have seen their business flourished manifold over last few decades, with an eternal bond like marriage falling prey to their propaganda and advertisements telling one how to respond and react with your partner during courtship and after. Women's movement has impacted the 'emotional ties' between the two people and has lead to a redefinition of the relationship between men and women and their 'reciprocal freedoms'. Paranoia, mistrust, and insecurity have become a part of most man-woman relationships. The norms of one generation are no longer the norms of another, and it has its own set of repercussions. It's all for fun, and attaining the choice of having fun in whichever manner one wants is also considered empowerment, even if it's practicing 'pleasure without conscience'.

What is required is to question this idea of freedom and to accept the crises in spite of the many promises feminist assertion had lead us into. The kind of meanings that have emerged out of this discourse and the articulation of them in one's way of life when reflected upon calls for an urgent need to devise an alternative, an another language of freedom. An alternative which would be more sensitive and inclusive!! A language of freedom which might be critical of the past but would nevertheless draw from the strengths of the past in order not to blindly embrace all the opportunities modernity presents before us. It needs to be understood what Prof Pathak argues, "A free woman is, therefore, capable of saying 'no'- no to a system that denies her choice and, at the same time, no to a system that reduces sexuality into just hedonistic pleasure and sensation."¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 145.

CHAPTER-III

FREEDOM REDEFINED: RETHINKING FEMINISM AND EXPLORING NEW POSSIBILITIES

In chapter one, we have argued that politico-academic feminism, despite its remarkable contributions- has its limits. And in the second chapter, we have noticed how pop feminism trivializes the notion of liberation/emancipation further. At this juncture emerges an important question: can this popular/mass culture- a product of culture industry- that trivializes freedom fought for by academic feminism? It seems that academic feminism- because of its purely rational/secular/modernist/'rights' discourse lacks the moral/aesthetic/spiritual sensibility to take us to a new language of freedom, a new exploration in the domain of human relationships. Possibly for the alternative quest we have to explore other possibilities which are not generally noticed in the discourse of mainstream feminism. Herein lies the relevance of this chapter.

The feminist assertion promises to redefine one's identity in a manner which seeks to look beyond ascription and makes one aware of one's agency to decide one's life project in the manner one wishes to. The contributions of the women's movement in India as seen from the nineteenth century reform movements to the contemporary feminist struggle has been manifold in bringing about this awareness and assertion. Notwithstanding that, as it has been discussed in the previous chapters, one notices how this approach stands a possibility of giving a birth to an atomized, individualistic person. Their resistance seems to be an act of mere negation. It also tends to become exclusivist in nature by being insensitive to those who do not share the same identity and also to those who might be unable to put complete faith in it's approaches and notions of liberation. Also, it's important to understand here that this assertion tends to reinforce one's identity and leaves little scope for transcending the same. As Prof Pathak argues, "One remains a Dalit, a woman, a Muslim. And the more one defines oneself through these categories (even if assertively), one reinforces the same hierarchical principle that constructs these

oppressive dualities: Brahmin vs. Dalit, man vs. woman, and Hindu vs. Muslim.”¹²⁸ Also, as peculiar to the feminist assertion, it encourages the philosophy of culture of consumption and hedonism in society as the power to consume gets more and more associated with empowerment.

In the analysis that follows in this chapter, one finds how an understanding of freedom for many has come to mean ‘individualism’, ‘negation’, and ‘hedonism’. When one reflects further one feels the need to expand one’s horizon and look beyond one’s identity as a woman. One needs to understand here that one is a human-being and desires to look beyond the discourse of rights for one feels the urge to relate to one another in a manner which emancipates all. The final part of this chapter attempts to deal with the same. How the practice of love as Eric Fromm would talk about bonds two people in a union which not only respect each one’s individuality but also help both the people grow as they are. In other words, one needs to find out how can one maintain the differences and yet be one and dream of a shared destiny.

I

Freedom as individualism: A critique

The underlying idea that feminist discourse stems from is the very rationalist assumption that we being humans are eligible for the basic rights cutting across the hierarchy of gender. Hence, we have the right to satisfy our needs in accordance with our interests and achieve fulfillment as the very notion of liberalism enlightens us. It is also based upon the assumption, as Jaggar¹²⁹ suggests, of ‘universal egoism’ that all individuals have an innate tendency towards placing one’s interest over others. Guided by this philosophy of liberalism, feminist discourses have been successfully echoing the very idea of empowerment in their objections, demonstrations and course of actions leading to liberation. It expects to place oneself in isolation to embark upon a journey of self-fulfillment. Because the moment you place one in relation to other beings, you are, as feminists would argue, providing space for self-exploitation and self-denigration which leaves no scope for self-fulfillment. Hence, the very ideology of feminism necessitates an

¹²⁸ Avijit Pathak, *Modernity, Globalisation and Identity: Towards a Reflexive Quest* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2006), p. 146.

individualistic approach for self-development and growth. The discourses of rights entail a provision for “personal space” at home and at work. The space to decide one’s personal and professional matters in accordance with one’s interests, beliefs, ideas in an individual capacity, assuming that one’s interests, ideas and beliefs may differ from another individual. This space thereby ensures the provision of optimum opportunities for self-development. It’s pre-requisite as is evident in most of the feminist writings is the denial of the recognition of the ideals of love and faith, for they are illusionary and provide scope for a woman’s subjugation. It holds men as being primarily responsible for the present state of women, who have been denied equal opportunity in private and public spheres. Thereby, feminism’s notions of liberation are many a times assertive of an antagonism between the two sexes, also appealing for the reversal of their stereotypical roles at times, like husbands being asked to share the work in the kitchen like cooking and washing utensils.

To quote a young woman looking for a prospective groom through the newspaper matrimonial, says in an article of ‘Equal Matrimony’,

End of the day, it’s about who walks the dog, who calls the plumber, who cooks, does the dishes and packs leftovers into the fridge. I’d take the dog and plumbing every time. There should be even in marriage, scope for division of labor, according to one’s interests rather than gender stereotypes.¹³⁰

Or fighting for women’s right to delay motherhood or for that matter choose not to be one, as true self-realization for most of them lies in their engagement with a ‘meaningful work’ which is primarily related, according to them, to the ‘paid work’ in public domain. And being ‘just’ a loving wife or a caring mother is like crippling one’s agency and life chances for self-development. So, one has the right to give away these ‘stereotypical’ notions of living associated with the ascribed role of a woman. Hence, I have the right to strive for something “better” and “meaningful” by relegating all the attention to myself irrespective of the people around “related” and “dependent” on me. For their presence might be detrimental to my personal growth!!

When talked of contemporary feminists, it is quite evident that their emphasis goes beyond the realm of freeing women ‘from’ the shackles of ‘violence,’ and ‘marginalization’ and their shouts

¹³⁰ “Equal Matrimony”, The Crest edition, *Times of India* (March 13, 2010), p. 36.

of slogans clearly extend for obtaining freedom 'for' 'self-assertion' and 'self-definition'. And they don't halt to reflect if it calls for an absolute lack of contact between a man and a woman for a 'meaningful dialogical interaction'¹³¹ which might not only ensure empowerment of women but also help both men and women to grow as individuals. For even a man's dependency on a woman goes beyond the natural urge for erotic love and has a deeper meaning. The pressure of earning a livelihood and to conform to what they are stereotypically expected to do being associated with masculinity definitely would call for a need for a companionship motivated by more than just sensual love. But our feminists seem to be thoroughly oblivious of this fact. Or probably when reason dictates one to be completely aware of one's own needs and interests and to work in that direction, one can not help being blinded to the need of emotions which is nowhere less important. It is here that Murphy rightly remarks, "*These emotional ties have been substantially altered by the women's movement.*"¹³² Consequently, in this entire movement of antagonism between the two sexes, not only their emotional dependency upon each other has been completely neglected but so is their capacity to empower each other by a meaningful association. "An ethic of self-interest, and a distancing of oneself from the union with others, which began as a form of male-assertion, has become gradually associated with the emancipation of women."¹³³ She also remarks that feminists are gradually becoming strongly attracted to the idea of "absolute personal independence."¹³⁴

One is tempted to draw an analogy here and is reminded of Ashis Nandy's analysis of Tagore's *The Home and the World*, where while Sandip represents a nationalism which under the garb of patriotism fulfils its own motive of seeing the satisfaction of the 'self'. On the other hand Nikhil's love for the country is not blind and is all inclusive; thereby it transcends the national boundaries. To quote Nandy, "...Nikhil feels that as a human one should avoid projecting individual evil into the self-definition of the country."¹³⁵ In a similar manner, probably there is a need to reflect if in this inner battle one is unconsciously giving vent to one's deepest passions under the garb of common good.

¹³¹ Avijit Pathak, "Men and their Paradoxical Feminism", *Mainstream* (January 1, 1994), p.

¹³² Cornelius F. Murphy, Jr., *Beyond Feminism: Toward a Dialogue on Difference* (Washington: The Catholic University Of American Press, 1995), p .36.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism, Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 13.

Moreover, as the idea of individualism grows stronger, with it grows the urge to empower oneself by proving one's worth in the domain outside home, going by the notion of 'meaningful' work. Consequent of it is the compromise of a woman upon her dignity as a woman. For feminism clearly seems to celebrate all that is associated with masculinity and finds the virtues of femininity oppressive, which it says are internalized during the process of discriminatory socialization. But what if one chooses these virtues and ideals voluntarily? Ideals, which are associated with femininity, like love, patience and perseverance. These ideals, says Prof Pathak, when actively chosen, becomes one's strength, no longer oppress and liberate the world. Hence, for him Indian women like Sita, Savitri and Damyanti were not necessarily weak. "Moreover", says he, "these ideals do matter. Because no dreamer of a sane society would deny that we need love, not hatred; faith not mistrust; perseverance and commitment to a life-long objective, not instantaneity and depthlessness. And the association of these ideals with women does not deny their relevance."¹³⁶

Also, would this question of women's emancipation by being inspired by masculine values not destroy the sexual uniqueness and consequently the sexual interdependence? And more than that would it really necessitate the much coveted 'equality between the sexes.'

Here it is worthwhile to quote what the famous psychoanalyst Eric Fromm has to say,

I am not speaking against the equality of women; but the positive aspects of this tendency for equality must not deceive one. It is a part of the trend towards the elimination of differences. Equality is bought at this very price: women are equal because they are not different any more.....The polarity of the sexes is disappearing, and with it erotic love, which is based on this polarity. Men and women become the *same*, and not *equals* as opposite poles.¹³⁷

Murphy quotes Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's work *Feminism without Illusions*, where the former accepts the close association of feminism with individualism and says that the former cannot be understood in isolation with the latter for the latter has shaped women's ways of thinking about

¹³⁶ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity: Contradictions, Paradoxes and Possibilities* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 146.

¹³⁷ Eric Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 13.

themselves and the world.¹³⁸ It becomes important to add here that this idea of freedom not only seems to be inspired by the values of individualism but further strengthens the notion of individualistic living in society. And it seems to be a never ending vicious circle till each one is ready to self-reflect. Objectification of existence as talked about by Murphy is reinforced by the values of individualism where the ideal of personal autonomy guided by the rational approach of the modern world have reduced human associations supposed to be personal, close and intimate relations to “impersonal encounters between two abstractions who use each other for some instrumental purpose.”¹³⁹ A probable consequence of which might be seen in Bauman’s apprehension when he says,

Bonds and partnerships are viewed, in other words, as things to be consumed, not produced; they are subject to the same criteria of evaluation as all other objects of consumption. In the consumer market, ostensibly durable products are as a rule offered for a ‘trial period’, and return of money is promised if the purchaser is less than fully satisfied. If the partner in a partnership is seen in these terms, then it is no longer the task of both partners to ‘make the relationship work’-to see it work through thick and thin, to help each other through good and bad patches, to trim if need be one’s own preferences, to compromise and make sacrifices for the sake of lasting union.¹⁴⁰

It would rather become a matter of obtaining instant gratification from a union between a man and a woman to be disposed off when it fails to give the same. Consequently, there is no scope for connectedness and mutual respect in such a relationship. And the union fails to be a meaningful dialogical association which helps reconciling differences resultant of the sexual uniqueness thereby enhancing creativity giving life its beauty and vitality. On the contrary, the assertion of one’s space and autonomy gets the primary focus in both the partners lives, the expectation of which if not fulfilled leads to temporality of the union. For, as Bauman remarks, “trifling disagreements turn into bitter conflicts, slight frictions are taken to signal essential incompatibility.”¹⁴¹ Life revolves around the questions like, who would cook the meal of the day and who would babysit the child when. For feminism enlightens one and makes one aware of the

¹³⁸ Murphy, *Beyond Feminism* (Washington: The Catholic University Of American Press , 1995), pp. 55-56.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁴⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (US: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 2001), p. 157.

¹⁴¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (US: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 2001), p. 157.

rights one deserves, thereby making one assertive of the same under all circumstances. But at the same time, what also deserves some attention here is the realization of a possibility of reconciliation of differences in a manner which not only empowers both the partners in a union but also makes life worth living together, and not in isolation, for the latter might give one an instant gratification but would leave one eternally longing for an in-depth satisfaction. For it's only in their union and dialogue that these dualities would be transcended, thereby paving way for an empowered and liberated society. Eric Fromm echoes the same thing when he says the full answer to the problem of human existence lies in "the achievement of interpersonal union, of fusion with another person, in *love*."¹⁴²

II

Freedom as negation: A critique

All the movements including the feminist assertion have been inspired by the modernistic belief that one's agency plays a role in one's life project and therefore one has the right to interrogate the established beliefs and practices which might have been crippling the chances for one's self-development. For modernity gives birth to an 'autonomous' individual who's right to a 'private' domain is respected.¹⁴³ Hence, rather than taking it for granted one now understands, courtesy feministic awareness, that gender is a social construct, a consequence of the discriminatory socialization. Being a young urban educated woman in a globalised space, one has an adequate access to the ideas, debates, and the ongoing struggle against discrimination and also to be aware of the means to realize emancipation being guided by the prevalent notions of liberation. One is being convinced by the feminist discourse that this 'urge' to respond to one's partner's and one's child's need is nothing but a consequence of the cultural conditioning one has been exposed to since the time of one's birth as a female. One is hence, as they say, artificially molded to be 'feminine' as this conditioning is compatible with the persistence of the institutions of marriage and family. More important than this is the fact that it impedes the development of one's

¹⁴² Eric Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 15.

¹⁴³ Avijit Pathak, *Modernity, Globalization and Identity: Towards a Reflexive Quest* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2006), p. 9.

individuality by the way of oppression at the hands of one's male counterpart, as feminism makes us aware of. Why cannot then after having learnt this, one has the right not to take this cultural conditioning for granted and strive for a status which is achieved and not ascribed. This is what feminism inspired by the modern idea of interrogation and deconstruction makes you aware of. The implications of this awareness are much desired by the feminists groups when there is an attempt of a complete negation of the gender identity by women striving to be emancipated, in private and public domains. Be it the attempts to disown any kind of alliance with the virtues being identified with femininity like love, dedication, patience and perseverance or an attempt to negotiate with the ideal of motherhood, whether it's delaying the same or giving it up in some form or the other. Or denying any form of association with opposite sex if it comes in way of realizing one's fulfillment and growth. Or relegating one's domestic domain a priority after one's role at the public sphere as the former is considered oppressive. Thereby one tends to give importance to the masculine attributes and ideals, giving into an anticipatory socialization of oneself in a manner which conforms to the masculine world instead. Consequently, the dichotomies of female/male, nature/culture, private/public, emotion/reason, feeling/thinking not only get intensified but their inherent hierarchy tends to oppress one further, both men and women for that matter and fails to liberate one in a manner which according to Gandhi, liberates both the colonizers as well as the colonized.¹⁴⁴ Yet one misses both the points, firstly as Prof Pathak reminds us that the destiny of men and women are so integrally related that feminism affects men equally.¹⁴⁵ And these notions of liberation which glorify the masculine world and looks down upon the feminine, for the reasons proved to be oppressive for womanhood, dictates them to negate the latter, thereby compromising with their specificity and dignity as a woman. Second, it leaves little space for a meaningful dialogical interaction which provides for a room for empowerment of both man and woman, not in isolation but in union which would give men an invitation to willingly experience, feel and understand the feminine world. "Thus, 'freedom' is gained at the cost of growing loneliness. Freedom without relatedness! That is the crisis."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Avijit Pathak, *Modernity, Globalization and Identity: Towards a Reflexive Quest* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2006), p. 147.

¹⁴⁵ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity: Contradictions, Paradoxes and Possibilities* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 151.

¹⁴⁶ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity: Contradictions, Paradoxes and Possibilities* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 151.

The denial of the importance of the feminine work by women striving to be emancipated is though empathetically understood for the fear of lack of autonomy and consequent oppression. Nevertheless, the consequent glorification of the male world ironically reinforces patriarchy rather than challenging it and thereby force women to abide by the notion of freedom which gives an impression that a woman is not free until she imitates what men do and thereby gets dictated by the masculine beliefs and ideas, further intensifying the dichotomy and hierarchy between women/men. On the contrary, there is the need to liberate feminine world from the inferiority attached to it for “the woman’s realm-the private sphere of the home and child-rearing –is just as humane and therefore, ‘rational’ as the public sphere of men.”¹⁴⁷

Also, noteworthy here is the arrogance of modernity represented in the attitudes of that ‘feminist establishment’, which as Madhu Kishwar says,

I am using the term ‘feminist establishment’ to refer to an all-India coterie based mainly in the metropolitan cities which, while maintain a variety of differences among themselves, acquired the power and the clout to interpret feminism and draw up agendas on behalf of all India’s women, that are more congruent with their own hopes, self interest, fears and aspirations than with those of most women.....¹⁴⁸

The arrogance of these feminists fails to identify with the needs and the dreams of the majority of Indian women who on the contrary are not only unable to relate with them but to reach them in itself is a challenge for their accessibility is either restricted to air-conditioned conference halls as theoretical debates keep them engrossed for most of their times or some international NGO’s comfortable office’s revolving chairs discussing strategies for women’s emancipation for the rural corners of the country. All their ‘analysis’ and ‘efforts’ seem to complete with a generalized conclusion by encouraging one to ‘react’ against the disadvantages one has borne being a woman and stand for a ‘no’ to them in whichever manner possible, not taking into consideration deliberately or in deliberately the specificities and uniqueness of each one’s experience !!

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 148.

¹⁴⁸ Madhu Kishwar, *Off The Beaten Track* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 269.

An honest confession of the mother of modern feminism, Betty Friedan comes in through her urge to transcend this reaction and move on to the second stage of feminism,

The second stage cannot be seen in terms of women alone, our separate personhood or equality with men.

The second stage involves coming to new terms with the family-new terms with love and work

The second stage may not even be a women's movement. Men may be at the cutting edge of the second stage.

The second stage has to transcend the battle for equal power in institutions. The second stage will restructure institutions and transform the nature of power itself.

The second stage may even now be evolving, out of or even aside from what we have thought of as our battle.¹⁴⁹

She admits that feminists have locked themselves and the women's movement into a reaction which according to her was 'extreme' and 'deceptive. "*Reaction*," says she "is dangerous in its denial of reality."¹⁵⁰ For it denies the acknowledgment of one's basic needs for nurture, love and support which is an outcome of the fulfillment one gets from the satisfaction of 'warm loving relationships' around. Hence for her there is an explicit conflict between a woman's hope and needs and the rhetoric of feminism. The movement she says doesn't fail in the battle for equality but in the extreme of reaction against women's role as a wife and a mother, which she accepts is a source of identity, power, purpose and self-worth for so many women. While at the same time she also points out with illustrations the discontent resultant of the loss of the 'traditional caring that women had for women, men and children' because of the denial of the need for love and care, for they are considered oppressive. One is reminded here of Mike Newell's movie *Monalisa Smile* where a young student who elopes and marries the one she loves when persuaded by her teacher for higher studies in order not to get entangled merely with the drudgery of housework, says she won't regret being a lawyer, "not as much as I regret not having

¹⁴⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1981), p. 34, italics in original

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

a family. Not being able to raise them. I know exactly what I am doing and it doesn't make me any less smart...To you a housewife is someone who sold her soul ...she has no depth, no intellect, no interests! You are the one who said I can do anything I wanted. This is what I want.”¹⁵¹

Contemporary feminism fails to talk beyond negation and continue in a state of reaction thereby limiting their struggle to sexual politics of intensifying the antagonism between women and men. Thereby not taking into consideration any possibility of broadening their vision which would call for an abandonment of the exclusivist approach which is loaded heavily with arrogance and insensitivity. “For the struggle for feminity is a struggle for a certain basic principal of perceiving life, a philosophy of being. It is a principal and a philosophy that serve not just women but all human beings.”¹⁵² As Friedan urges women to enter the second stage of feminism by uniting equally with men to address the questions of national and social importance, thereby looking beyond women's own special interests. Like the colonial period in India when women were equally conscious of their duties as they were aware of their rights. “....The women were making their demands not from a small-minded desire merely to secure rights, but from a consciousness of their mission to assist in the uplift of their country.”¹⁵³

Feminism has a responsibility to reassert rather the values of the domestic domain in the public world in a way that it challenges the dichotomy between home and work and relegates humane values to home and to feminity. The recognition of the ‘self’ should not be in isolation from the social relations that shape it. “This self does not have to imagine itself as ‘leaving home’ to become a self; selfhood is formed precisely by a robust engagement with the social relationships of everyday existence, including those of domestic life.”¹⁵⁴ However what is needed as Prof Pathak would argue is to create conditions to reconcile both the home and the world.

¹⁵¹ *Monalisa Smile* (American movie) directed by Mike Newell,2003, the dialogue: Joan Brandwyn(the student) to Katherine Ann Watson(the teacher)

¹⁵² Rajini Kothari in Foreward to Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988)

¹⁵³ Radha Krishna Sharma, *Nationalism, Social Reform and Indian Women* (Delhi: Janaki Prakashan, 1981), p. 259.

¹⁵⁴ Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd, *Sentenced to Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife* (USA:Berg Publication,2004), pp. 155-156.

III

Freedom as hedonism: A critique

Hedonism involves a concern with ‘pleasures’, such as eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, socializing, singing, dancing, etc. Hence, a hedonist’s aim is to spend more and more time in indulging in these activities in order to derive as much pleasure as possible. Emotions, says, Colin Campbell, have the potential to serve as immensely powerful sources of pleasure. Modern hedonism presents all individuals with the possibility of being their own despot, exercising total control over the stimuli they experience, and hence the pleasure they receive.”¹⁵⁵ Man’s happiness as Eric Fromm would argue consists in “having fun”, which calls for consuming commodities and people in a manner that leaves one with a sense of instant gratification. Fromm remarks,

Having fun lies in the satisfaction of consuming and “taking in” commodities, sights, food, drinks, cigarettes, people, lectures, books, movies—all are consumed, swallowed. This world is one great object for our appetite, a big apple, a big bottle, a big breast; we are the sucklers, the eternally expectant ones, the hopeful ones—and the eternally disappointed ones. Our character is geared to exchange and to receive, to barter and to consume; everything, spiritual as well as material objects, becomes an object of exchange and of consumption.¹⁵⁶

Hence, the pursuit of pleasure becomes important however short-lived it might be, that’s not the concern. This realization cuts across the hierarchy of gender as the struggle for equal space has definitely yielded results. Consumption for the middle class young urban women have acquired a new meaning altogether, for having a ‘freaking good time’ through ‘hanging out’ by being together and ‘having fun’ with hogging, drinking, smoking, and indulging in sexual acts is the order of the day for a particular section of women. The aim is to have optimum pleasure and this

¹⁵⁵ Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (UK: Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1987), p. 76.

¹⁵⁶ Eric Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 73.

kind of self-indulgence grows with each day for the blind chasing of hedonistic pursuits becomes an important aim in life. As one of the respondents had remarked, it's the realization of 'instant gratification', where she feels empowered.

Moreover, consumption appears to be deceptively empowering women, as Prof Pathak argues, "it portrays women as active, assertive and visible agents having sufficient purchasing capacity to buy innumerable commodities in the market place."¹⁵⁷ One thereby sees the growing appetite to consume, amongst women, both housewives and women at work. Their aspirations to freedom find way through their consumption practices which now distinguish them as the 'new Indian women' who are confident and economically independent. "To 'go out' and buy invokes a relative emancipation in women's active role as consumers."¹⁵⁸

As Leela Fernandes remarks, "Newly available commodities have become the symbols of modernity and status that upwardly mobile individuals and families must acquire. They represent forms of cultural and social capital that individuals obtain in an attempt to improve their social location."¹⁵⁹ This idea of freedom seems to be motivated by the same. Assertion of one's agency through consumption is manifested clearly in the attitude and lifestyle of these new urban Indian women who are 'modern' and 'free'. And this exercise ranges from choosing a commodity to choosing one's sexual life. Feminist efforts have undoubtedly liberated morality from the duality attached to it. Consequently a section of 'free' women are quite comfortable with the newly emerged trend to give in to the fun of a mere 'relating' to one another for the sake of an instrumental purpose, from professional to personal sexual fulfillment. And this, it needs to be understood, it is no answer to the problem of subjugation of women. For acceptance of such hedonistic practices in the name of equal space and freedom would emancipate none, neither women nor men. For realization of empowerment as we have been emphasizing lies in the true union between a man and a woman which rises above the mere act of giving one an 'instant' gratification. On the contrary, a bond which doesn't give one instant results and satisfaction is called off. For "if the human bond is, like all other consumer objects, not something to be worked out through protracted effort and occasional sacrifice, but something which one expects

¹⁵⁷ Avijit Pathak, *Indian Modernity: Contradictions, Paradoxes and Possibilities* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 139.

¹⁵⁸ Rachel Bowlby, "Commerce and Femininity," in David B. Clarks, Marcus A. Doel, Kate M. L. Housiaux(eds.), *The Consumption Reader* (Rout ledge, 2003), p. 169.

¹⁵⁹ Leela Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 72.

to bring satisfaction right away, something that one rejects if it does not do that and keeps and uses only as long as it continues to gratify-then there is not much point in trying hard and harder still, let alone in suffering discomfort and unease in order to save the partnership.”¹⁶⁰ Hence, the concept of “incompatibility” seems to be so much in-vogue. One would rush to conclude it to be an incompatible and not meant to be together a couple, as if marriages are just contracts or partnerships, and can be broken easily without breaking hearts. Or probably Bauman has a better explanation for it when he remarks, “since present-day commitments stand in the way of the next day’s opportunities, the lighter and more superficial they are, the less the damage.”¹⁶¹ Hence, marriage seems to be an ‘unattractive’ idea to consume as it hampers one’s ‘personal space’ for it calls for adjustments at both the partner’s ends which is greeted by lots of reluctance nowadays particularly when satisfaction of erotic desire “without strings attached is so easy to obtain elsewhere.”¹⁶² This we also read nowadays that the metropolitan trend of rich urban women hiring gigolos for deriving sexual pleasure is facing an upward curve.

Similarly articulated are views as put forward by J. Krishnamurti when he says, “there is relationship as long as we are gratified.” As if gaining optimum from a relationship is the only objective. As if every relationship is a stair to put a foot on and climb upward in one’s personal and professional life. Or probably, a relationship is a means to an end of ‘self-fulfillment.’ The moment there is some disturbance in it, we don’t hesitate to discard it. Now, it’s become all the more easily to give up, given the new socio-cultural environment to which feminist ideology has contributed manifold. To quote J. Krishnamurti,

“To most of us, relationship is a term for comfort, for gratification, for security, and in that relationship we use property, ideas and persons for gratification. We use belief as a means of security. Relationship is not merely a mechanical adjustment...”¹⁶³

The access to consumerist lifestyle seems to have disillusioned people by making them into believing that they can obtain anything and everything for they have the power to consume, hence one faces the rising intolerance in their attitudes in a relationship. Consequently, what one finds easy to relate to are the pleasures and temptations of everyday living which are

¹⁶⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (US: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 2001), p. 157.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹⁶³ J. Krishnamurti, *On Relationship* (Cheenai: Krishnamurti Foundation, 1999), p. 32.

instantaneous in nature. Does practicing 'pleasure without conscience' symbolize empowerment? Is attaining the choice of having fun in whichever manner and form one wants, even if it calls for practicing hedonism without any restraint, empowerment?

How ironical it is that while for a few, feminism is a need, a savior of their lives, for others it is a source of recreation to be enjoyed in hi-profile parties, celebrated in pubs or flaunted in air-conditioned conference rooms. Or for that matter the rising popularity of the beauty contests which draw more and more young women contestants' every year! One has to realize here once again that money and glamour do not necessarily emancipate the second sex. To that section of urban Indian women for whom it's no more than a celebration every moment to be felt in a cigarette puff, or a booze sip, this way of celebrating emancipation which is terribly superficial, seems quite 'liberating'. Hence, while the entry of some goons who bashed women up in a pub in Mangalore, under the garb of moral policing, was accompanied by a nation-wide protest and much hyped media publicity. On the contrary, there are everyday incidents of more violent encroachment of personal space which receive a lukewarm response in our society. So, while a large section of women in the Indian society is still fighting the never ending shackles of patriarchy in the form of 'honor killings', etc., there is an emerging group on the other hand which is 'struggling' to be 'absolutely free' on their own terms.

To 'their' state, S.RadhaKrisnan would have rightly remarked,

“To justify our conduct, we are setting up exaggerated claims on behalf of the individual will and are strongly protesting against discipline.

We are confusing self-expression and self-development with a life of instincts and passions. We tend to look upon ourselves as healthy animals and not spiritual beings. We have had sin with us from the beginning of our history, but we have recently begun to worship it. It is not very modern for a man or a woman who is sick of his or her partner to take to another, but what is really modern is the new philosophy in justification of it.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ S.Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), pp. 87-88.

When asked if the practice of hedonistic lifestyle especially in the context of sexual gratification is a recent development. Many of the respondents didn't seem to agree for in their view such cases of pre-marital or extra-marital have been there since long; it's just that they were under cover. True, to an extent as I found their argument, because nowadays one finds an assertion which boldly accepts what one believes in and practices, something which doesn't seem to be a thing of past. This new philosophy of being comfortable as you are, in whatever you do has it's grooming in the very modern feminist assertion. One doesn't shy accepting their beliefs and actions in life anymore as one has an easy access to the comfort of interpreting morality in the way one wants. But now, this section as they seem to have emerged as a brand of a 'new women' can not only exercise their agency but need not bother to be judged on any ground which is influenced by the repressive moral system.

A clinical psychologists' analysis of the recent rise in the divorce rate or the startling high rates of discontentment and lowliness among young people is because of their misunderstanding of what love is. According to her, love for majority of them is getting highly attracted to someone, being obsessed with someone, craving to be with that someone. She further goes on to say that these feelings, however describe lust and not love. While she remarks, "Love on the other hand isn't an immediate feeling. It grows over time. Love is more akin to a friendship than to a coupling. to paraphrase the psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, love is the desire to extend yourself- at whatever personal cost-for the purpose of nurturing the growth and furthering the dreams of another's interest....when we separate "love" from "lust" in this way, it's less distressing to note that one in five people desire someone other than their partner. They're simply confusing lust with love."¹⁶⁵

It's that form of love which could be seen as the one which would not only overcome segmentation but would seek to liberate both, men and women by looking through an approach which is inclusive and sensitive.

¹⁶⁵ Linda Blair, "Relationships: mistaking love for lust". *The Hindu*, New Delhi, (15 July, 2010), p. 9.

IV

Freedom as love: overcoming segmentation

Love is a rose flower: in the morning dancing in the wind, in the sun, as if it'll remain forever with such grandeur, with such certainty, with such authority, so fragile and yet so strong against the wind, against the rain, against the sun. But by the evening the petals would have withered away, and the rose is gone. That doesn't mean that it was illusionary, it simply means that in life everything change.

- Acharya Rajneesh, 'Osho'.

In her essay, "The Education of Indian Girls," Annie Besant envisions an enlightenment which helps women grow beyond the narrowness and trivialities of their present lives to obtain a larger, freer and a fuller vision. A woman should according to her outgrow the rivalry and competition with men, prevalent in the west, resultant of the dwarfed modern view and should be imparted an education which helps them beyond a mere preparation for a learned profession. And helps them to realize the importance of their being as educators and counselors to so many around, from their husbands and children to addressing the issues of national and social importance. Hence, it needs to be understood here that any approach to liberation which is not holistic and is limiting in it's scope that it ignores these vital aspects of a woman's life, would fail to realize it's true objective. Therefore, the entire agenda of replacing men in the spheres associated with them for long wouldn't pave way to any kind of empowerment until it is accompanied by collaboration between the two sexes. For without a dialogue, all efforts would seem futile. "To reduce the woman's part to solely interior and domestic occupations, and the man's part to exclusively exterior and social occupations, thus separating what should be united, would be to perpetuate the present sad state of things, from which both are equally suffering. It is in front of the highest duties and heaviest responsibilities that their respective qualities must unite in a close and

confident solidarity.”¹⁶⁶ Any kind of segmentation tends to belittle the beauty of togetherness which has hidden with it each one’s contribution to another’s self-fulfillment and development, whatever domain as they say one might seem to dominate. For the simple reason that the boundaries get blurred for the union elevates them to a greater level.

Love as an Art

Love, as Eric Fromm would argue is also respecting the other person which is letting her/him grow as she/he is. For him love is a union under the condition of preserving another’s integrity and individuality. Hence, while the two beings become one, yet remain two.¹⁶⁷ And for him the female/male polarity is not problematic and is rather responsible for all creativity. According to him, both of them are reborn in a union. Love, according to him, also is primarily *giving* and not receiving. But giving is generally misunderstood, especially in today’s world where earning maximum profit out of any deal is the order of the day. And as Fromm would argue that falling in love for many is the exchange of ‘personality packages’ which involves ‘mutually favorable exchange’. “Two persons thus fall in love when they feel they have found the best possible object available on the market, considering the limitation of their own exchange values.”¹⁶⁸ Hence, giving without receiving is considered foolish. While when Fromm advocates giving as love, it is the highest expression of ‘potency’ and ‘aliveness’. Hence, when one person gives the other without the intention of receiving, she/he enriches the other. But this act of giving is possible between two individuals “who do not treat each other as objects, but are related to each other genuinely and productively.”¹⁶⁹ Rising above one’s narcissistic orientation, atomized and individualistic belief of living are pre-requisites to practicing this form of love.

Beyond this act of *giving*, love, as Fromm would argue would need elements like *care, responsibility, respect and knowledge* to flourish. Care as Fromm would argue is like a mother’s care for the child, the way she would feed, bathe the child, all these timely gestures of concern speaks a lot about this highest form of care. Love is one’s concern for the growth of that which

¹⁶⁶ Compiled from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, *On Women* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Society), p. 42.

¹⁶⁷ Eric Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 17.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

one loves. Care for the one you love is consequent of the urge to 'respond' to the other person's needs. Fromm would argue that responsibility as commonly understood as duty to be performed is a very faulty way of interpreting it for it is not something which is imposed but is taken voluntarily. For you feel responsible towards the person you love and want to naturally respond to her/ his needs. Yet another very important component of love, as Eric Fromm talks about is respect for the one that is loved. Respect is a willing acceptance of the unique individuality the other person has and to let that person grow as he/she is. Therefore, respect is not possible in isolation to freedom. "It is clear that respect is possible only if I achieved independence; if I can stand and walk without needing crutches, without having to dominate and exploit anyone else."¹⁷⁰ And to respect a person is only possible after knowing him well for this would enable one to understand and interpret a person's behavior and motives in the right manner. It's only then that a person can transcend the concern for one and be sensitive to the other person's needs. Fromm would not find the sexual differences as hampering the scope for growth rather this polarity would lead to blossoming up of creativity thereby paving a way for a shared future, while keeping alive the differences. Therefore he says that each of them when in love is 'reborn.'

Love as Motherhood

On the contrary one realizes that the present age man has given to the luxury of consumption and consequent disposal so much that the previously felt joys, in each other's company, in love, in the comfort of what one could call home, are no longer being felt. Consequently, one finds oneself in a state of a homeless wanderer who is longing for gratification throughout, in spite of all possible material comforts one has procured. For we have made ourselves inaccessible to so many things and people, thereby missing the scope of a deeper realization of beauty around. All is but guided by the motive of obtaining immediate gratification and consequent disposal. Hence, man while seeks to possess and aims to assert him in all walks of life, hides away from ideals which require patience and endurance to abide by but give satisfaction which is long-lasting. Similarly, the idea of being a mother in the present age could be seen finding solace in one being a 'glamorous and sexy mom'. The kind of engagement a metropolitan mom might have with her

¹⁷⁰ Eric Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 24.

child varies from taking them out to malls, restaurants, game parlors, buying them whatever they want in order to please them. For one lacks the perseverance required for the kind of quality engagement a relation like this demands. In fact debates on who would babysit the child when seeps to creep in dual income couples working in the multi national companies.

One is reminded here of the infant-mother dyad, Suddhir Kakkar also talks about, which he says is responsible for a child's social relationships in his later life and the overall development of his sensitivity and capacity to love. To quote him,

The reciprocity between the mother and the infant is a circular process of action-reaction-action in which, ideally, the mother welcomes her infant's unfolding activities and expressions of love with her own delighted and loving responses, which in turn stimulate the baby to increase his efforts and to offer his mother further expressions of gratification and attachment. This mutuality is by far the single most important factor in enabling an infant to create a coherent inner image of a basically reassuring world and to lay the foundation for a 'true self' ...¹⁷¹

Motherhood as Murphy reminds us not only requires passion, emotion and intuition but also demands upon the rational. Since knowledge is based upon experience as well, hence reason would also be an outcome of practice and would not be restricted to the masculine belief of theory. Also, it is a difficult task, which requires a lot of unselfishness, to love a growing child when a mother has to undergo a separation with the former, and yet has to give everything and expect nothing with simultaneously having the 'willingness to bear the separation.' according to Eric Fromm motherly love is the most difficult form of love. A woman can be an affectionate mother in the true sense only if she has the capacity to *love*, if she is able to love her husband, strangers and all human-beings. "The woman who is not capable of love in this sense can be an affectionate mother as long as the child is small, but she cannot be a loving mother, the test of which is the willingness to bear separation-and even after the separation to go on loving."¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Suddhir Kakkar, *The Inner World: A Psycho- Analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 54-55.

¹⁷² Eric Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 44.

Love as Devotion

It is interesting here how Tagore views love and how he sees the union between the two as been transcendental. One could reflect here on the journey of Bimala, the female protagonist in Tagore's novel, "The Home and the World". How she feels fulfilled by her home, yet communicates with the world outside with her husband's motivation, to come back again to her inner world/ home for rescue.

Here Tagore would argue that one finds "a consciousness of these ideals in the women of India-their simple faith in the sanctity of devotion lighted by love which is held to be divine."¹⁷³ Love, according to Tagore, for women has a spiritual meaning and their belief in this lifts them from the very utilitarian philosophy of life. Therefore, he considers women as constant education to men.

My husband used to say, that man and wife are equal in love because of their equal claim on each other. I never argued the point with him, but my heart said that devotion never stands in the way of true equality; it only raises the level of the ground of meeting. Therefore the joy of the higher equality remains permanent; it never slides down to the vulgar level of vitality.¹⁷⁴

Devotion, as Rabindranath Tagore vocalizes through a character Bimala in his novel, "The Home and the World" does not necessarily impede one's way to equality with one's partner. Devotion/Love/Surrender, on the contrary seems to elevate both to a plane which enables a dialogue between the two leading them to a consciousness of an "eternal light" which helps them both to look beyond the materialistic realms of everyday life for a deeper understanding of oneself, each other and the world around. "To be in aspiration and ascension, to move forward at the same pace on the same spiritual path, that is the secret of the lasting union."¹⁷⁵ A union like this would transcend the duality and emancipate both, men and women as according to The Mother "the recognition of this fundamental spiritual equality that can be found as the only

¹⁷³ Rabindranath Tagore, "Woman and Home," from the *Great Works of Rabindranath Tagore* (Delhi: Jainco publishers), p. 225.

¹⁷⁴ Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World* (New Delhi: Wisdom Tree, 2002), p. 13.

¹⁷⁵ Compiled from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, *On Women*, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Society), p. 25.

serious and lasting solution for this problem of the relation of the sexes.”¹⁷⁶ While Tagore would say that essentially men is a lover. “His freedom and fulfillment is in love, which is another name for perfect comprehension. By this power of comprehension, this permeation of his being, he is united with the all-pervading Spirit, who is also the breath of his soul.”¹⁷⁷ For him to feel all and to be conscious of everything is the Spirit. Rabindranath Tagore would go on to argue that for an Indian consciousness everything had a spiritual meaning be it the earth, water or flowers, everything had a meaning beyond being a mere physical phenomenon to be used and disposed off. Thereby everything around had a vital meaning to us, to be related to beyond its scientific usage. There was a sense of sympathy and joy to relate with them. There was a harmony between man and nature. It was this kinship/union with the universe that man could realize. Says Tagore, “the water does not merely cleanse his limbs, but it purifies his heart; for it touches his soul. The earth does not merely hold his body, but it gladdens his mind; for its contact is more than a physical contact-it is a living presence.”¹⁷⁸ When he meets this eternal spirit in all the objects around, when he discovers the significance of the world he lives in, when he is in union with the entire universe, it is then when man according to Tagore is emancipated.

Love as Transcendence

It's worth here to reflect upon Meera's relationship with Krishna. Their relationship is intense and erotic, their love a source of joy to both.¹⁷⁹ Meera's devotion and her sense of oneness with the beloved needs to be seen beyond the popular feminist critic. It delves deeper into one's existence and elevates and emancipates one to a height of true liberation in love. It sees beyond the discourse of rights. It fulfils one's longing for relatedness, a committed and an enduring one. It is with this merging of oneself with the beloved and the sense of oneness with which Mira sings and longs for her beloved, it is truly transcendental.

¹⁷⁶ Compiled from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, *On Women*, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Society), p. 43.

¹⁷⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, “The Relation of the Individual to the Universe,” from the *Great Works of Rabindranath Tagore* (Delhi: Jainco publishers), p. 404.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

¹⁷⁹ Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha, *Women Writing in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 91.

Says Mira,

Unbreakable, O Lord,

Is the Love

That binds me to you

like a diamond,

it breaks the hammer that strikes it.

My heart goes into You

As the polish goes into the gold.

As the lotus lives in its water

I live in You.

Like the bird

That gazes all night

At the passing moon,

I have lost myself dwelling in you.

O my Beloved- Return....

CONCLUSION

CELEBRATION OF AN AWAKENING

We have made thee neither of heaven nor
of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so
that with freedom of choice and with
honour, as though the maker and moulder
of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in
whatever shape they prefer.

-Giovanni Pico della Mirandola(1486)¹⁸⁰

When we look back, we find that the feminist assertion have come a long way now. Beginning from the nineteenth century reforms to equal participation of women in the struggle for freedom, one notices the evolution of a movement of women's rights. It began in the form of efforts to uplift their position in society in the late nineteenth century to mobilize them in a big way to participate in nationalist movement. This evolution further saw a rise through the way the contemporary feminists challenge patriarchy and urge women to speak against the infringement of their personal space. Be it the issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment, women's reservation, or marital rape, attempts have been made to spread extensive awareness through both, the academic as well as activists' efforts. At the same time, with the analysis of

¹⁸⁰ As Quoted in Acharya Mahapragya and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, *The Family and the Nation* (U.P.: Harper Collins, 2008), p. 133.

pop feminism one found an emergence of a 'new woman' who asserts her agency in a manner which shapes her career, relations, sexuality, consumption pattern.

All the above feminist resistance has undoubtedly sensitized us enough. Yet one finds that all of them, be it the academic discourse or the tenets of pop feminism fail to address the questions of a human beings' basic desires to relate, to love, and to unite. For it's not the idea of freedom but its appropriation and also its imposition which is problematic in nature. The way in which it asserts itself, one is bound to fall into the trap. The prescriptions of freedom are greatly inspired by the masculine world, for it is considered a free world. We find amongst ourselves arguments like, if men can do, why can't we?' Besides, the way it imposes itself puts an extraordinary strain upon the relations between the sexes, which otherwise could have been avoided in many relationships around. The 'emotional ties' where a man and a woman are mutually dependent on each other, have been dramatically altered by the women's movement. 'Reciprocal independence' seems to be gradually giving way to 'reciprocal indifference.' The 'distancing of oneself from union with others' and getting strongly attracted to the idea of 'absolute' personal independence, have come to be associated with the emancipation of women. The dialectic, which a woman encounters in the path towards personal autonomy, is of 'receptivity and assertion,' 'self-sufficiency and connection,' 'private and public.' Since the model of women's emancipation seems to be inspired by 'masculine values' there is a constant threat to the persistence of 'sexual uniqueness.'

It seems apparent that to talk of 'women's identity' is inevitably and essentially to think in terms of the degrees of her influence 'outside the domestic domain'. It comes to you so compulsively in everyday life that one is easily swept away with the idea that 'self-fulfillment' could only be realized when you are 'paid' for your work. So, without giving a thought one identifies with an ideal of empowerment which successfully strives to negate 'uniqueness' by encouraging a movement which glorifies the 'masculine world', thereby intensifying a dichotomy between 'reason' and 'emotion' and 'public' and 'private'. Hence, to be 'free' and 'empowered' one necessarily needs to be a part of the movement aiding the 'irrational entry into the men's world', as the feminist ideology promises you to 'liberate' from the 'cage of femininity'. While to think of a woman's identity as a 'mother' or a 'wife' becomes secondary. As the domain of domesticity is rendered repressive for it comes in way of a woman's 'meaningful engagement' outside home. So, one needs to curb the differences and think, act and feel like men do at any cost to liberate

oneself from the 'shackles' of femininity as the latter is considered an impediment in the path to freedom and identity formation. Even if one's freedom and dignity as a woman is compromised upon in this quest for freedom.

I

The beauty of the mundane

The idea is not to negate the importance of a woman's capacity and desire to work outside home. But what one finds problematic here is the glorification of the masculine world thereby reinforcing the same patriarchy one as a feminist aims to resist. In due course one also fails to understand that the entire idea of a *meaningful engagement* might not be the same for everyone. There are women who would love their world of domesticity, in spite of being sensitive to all feminist discourse that this love itself stems from a certain cultural condition. As Rabindranath Tagore asserts that the vision of a paradise could be seen even in things which are *seemingly* insignificant and unprepossessing. This hierarchy within feminism which is a consequence of associating a free woman with essentially the one who is economically independent is the denial of the beauty of the mundane. For instance, one would fail to feel the joy of cooking, for there are better things to be taken care of. Or one would fear being a mother for it might come in way of one's rising career graph. What is needed is not to the denial of the feminine but to create the sensitivity and conditions apt for the reconciliation of both the worlds- the home and the world. There is a need to challenge these dualities: feminine/masculine, home/world, emotion/reason. And this could be done only when not only women but men too become sensitive to the feminine world. It needs to be understood what Prof Pathak argues that ideals when actively chosen by both men and women liberate the world. There is a need for a meaningful dialogue between men and women which would enable men to 'willingly' participate in the feminine world. At the same time the beauty of the mundane need not to be discarded by women themselves even if they wish to participate in the world outside home. Bimala in Tagore's novel sees devotion as a form of love in the mundane, the everyday acts, and gestures. She says,

When my mother arranged the different fruits, carefully peeled by her own loving hands, on the white stone plate, and gently waved her fan to drive away the flies while my father sat down to his meals, her service would lose itself in a beauty which passed beyond outward forms. Even in my infancy I would feel its power. **It transcended all debates, or doubts, or calculations: it was pure music** (emphasis mine).¹⁸¹

II

Towards an awakening

One would want to reflect at this juncture if there is a possibility which while drawing from the modern feminist assertion is also sensitive to the strength's of one's past. It's a quest for a woman who exercises her agency whenever need be yet can relate to the spiritedness, intelligence and the resourcefulness of figures like Sita and Savitri.¹⁸² It is a language of emancipation which mediates between the two extremes, the oppressive elements of one's tradition which propagate complete self-denial and the modern philosophy of individualistic hedonism and absolute self-indulgence. One would inevitably require immense perseverance to indulge in an exercise of self-critical awareness which would build in one, a faith in such a possibility. And living it would be another task requiring endurance and long-term commitment to an ideal which provides scope for one's agency to assert in a manner which ensures freedom, a freedom to access opportunities available and also to say a 'no' to them whenever required. It is a language of emancipation which would help one to internalize that art of discretion.

It is important here once again to reflect on how a consumerist and a hedonistic way of life make one intolerant and intoxicates one enough towards a way of life which hastens to even think of an alternative. It also deteriorates one's mental strength and perseverance because one gets habituated to a way of life marked with abundance comfort and immense luxury. And it seems difficult to give up the comfort for one gets used to gaining instant satisfaction and pleasures

¹⁸¹ Rabindra Nath Tagore, *The Home and the World* (New Delhi: Wisdom Tree, 2002), p. 10.

¹⁸² Suma Chitnis, "Feminism: Indian Ethos and Convictions" in Rehana Ghadially(ed.), *Women in Indian Society* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1988), p. 91.

from things and people. The problematic is that this further wrongs us into believing that pleasure is happiness.

If one reflects, one understands how the lack of sublimating one's desires and passions lead to a perturbed life of restlessness and discontentment. As an alternative, one is not advocating here an absolute freedom from desires and passions but what one is trying to argue is a possibility of an attempt towards sublimating and refining them. The urge for seeking sensual pleasures can be restrained only through the exertion of self-discipline.

It calls for a true awakening which consists of three stages.

“The first is the formation of idea or thought (vichara). We have to create a system of healthy and strong ideas. The second stage is transforming the thoughts or ideas into imprints on the subconscious level of mind (samskara). the third stage is conduct (aachara) to put principles into practice.....there is always a discrepancy between the speech and practice of a person who remains engrossed in attachment (raga) and aversion (dvesha), and this gulf between his thought and deed cannot be removed....we have to have a bridge in the form of samskara to remove the gap between thought and action....we recommend the application of the Anekanta view in practical life....The combination of prudently consuming resources and freedom from attachment to things constitutes the best alternatives.”¹⁸³

The Jain philosophy of *Anekanta* or *non-absolutism* as advocated here is a belief in pluralism-the belief that the same reality can be perceived differently. The first principle of anekanta is *autonomy*; it's the freedom to exercise one's choices while being intimately connected with people around. In other words, freedom of one's choices is important but this freedom is problematic if it's not relative and is absolute. One could practice freedom yet be related to others around. This could be in a way which ensures personal fulfillment but at the same time takes into consideration that we are interdependent on one another and this is one great truth which cannot be denied. And this is the second principle of the philosophy of anekanta, the principle of *relative dependence*. The very modern belief in an individualistic approach

¹⁸³ Acharya Mahapragya and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, *The Family and the Nation* (U.P.: Harper Collins, 2008), p. 163.

underestimates this principle by distorting the way towards sublimation of one's ego. We need to pay heed that we are independent yet we are interdependent. What becomes of utmost importance is to understand that an individual's agency could at the same time be sensitive to a scope for a dialogue, a dialogue between one's choice and the various possibilities of looking at a reality. Here what becomes important is the third principle which talks of *reconciliation*. Differences, paradoxes and contradictions are inevitable but an enlightened person who knows how to reconcile with situations can work with diverse thoughts, conduct and behavior of others in harmony.¹⁸⁴

This awakening which would require a belief in non-absolutism is one way to ensure conditions of equality, reciprocity and dialogue which in turn could facilitate an alternate agenda, a new language of emancipation which would require the practice of love, which as we had discussed in the last chapter, is an art. *Love* is an act of care for the one loved by being able to respond to the needs of the person for one respects the other's individuality by letting it flourish. "Love is effortful; it involves personal sacrifice, and it grows slowly. Love is not about "me"- it's about "you"-what I can do to make your life richer?"¹⁸⁵ That union between the two which would have risen above the trivialities of everyday living by 'giving' and finding joy in other person's well-being, would lead both the partners to attain that elevated height of liberation in love!! "A man must not hesitate to sacrifice his own pleasures, even his life, to assure the happiness and welfare of his wife. The same unselfish love should be reciprocated by the wife."¹⁸⁶ For all human beings want to relate, want to find solace in an enduring commitment. Some are conscious of this need while some are not, being surrounded by an easy access to modern way of attaining instant self-gratification. To grow over these everyday temptations and sensual pleasures which hamper the distant dreams of an equally shared vision of future, men or women, both need to exercise

self-discipline. It's to have *faith* and nurture your children with the same, something which would require a belief in the ideals of selflessness and endurance. "To have faith would though require 'courage, the ability to take a risk, the readiness even to accept pain and

¹⁸⁴ Acharya Mahapragya and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, *The Family and the Nation* (U.P.: Harper Collins, 2008), p. 139

¹⁸⁵ Linda Blair, "Relationships: mistaking love for lust", *The Hindu*, New Delhi, (15 July, 2010), p. 9.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

disappointment.....to be loved, and to love, need courage to judge certain values as of ultimate concern-and to take the jump and stake everything on these values.”¹⁸⁷

This endeavor is a search for a feminism which liberates not only women but also men. It is a perpetual quest for an *alternative* where emancipation is realized through *reciprocity* and *union without the absorption of the other* (as coined by existentialists). It doesn't require a *homogenization of aims* or the *irrational and unmindful entry into the masculine world*. It is a language of emancipation which doesn't give *any prescriptions for liberating one from the cage of feminity*. *It's a quest for that path to freedom where victim doesn't become a victor but liberate both*.

It is an endeavor to facilitate a *meaningful dialogue* between a man and a woman in a relationship which would come with critical self- awareness. It would call for taking into account each one's uniqueness and experiences. And to follow a set pattern of belief is to curb the uniqueness. Freedom, according to J. Krishnamurti is not an abstraction. “Liberation is not an end. Liberation is from moment to moment in the understanding of what is, when the mind is free, not made free. It is only a free mind that can discover, not a mind molded by a belief or shaped according to a hypothesis.”¹⁸⁸ According to him ideas prevent action because action then merely becomes reaction in which ideas become more important than actions. So, complete freedom is possible only with *self-awareness* and *self-knowledge*. Life of the modern man, as J. Krishnamurti would argue is like a pool, stagnant representing permanency which all of us want, we want pleasures to last forever. While for him, life should be like a river: endlessly moving towards the *wider and deeper*.

It is a quest for an awakening towards the wider and the deeper!!

¹⁸⁷ Eric Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 106.

¹⁸⁸ J. Krishnamurti, *On Relationship* (Chennai: Krishnamurti Foundation, 1999), p. 24.

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