

ALTERNATIVE THINKING AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE FOR WOMEN'S WELLNESS

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The ancient philosopher who positioned mankind in an awkward combination by declaring that man is a 'social animal', was perhaps wise enough to know that the future generations will work with that simple terminology of his statement in multiple ways to find out the 'alternative thinking' it consisted of. The problem with 'man' is not only being social, but also being animal in the creaturely sense, and being different from animals in the sense of being human. The problem with the term 'man' was it conveyed the sense of mankind including womankind, which should not be an issue of loss of identity for the feminist activists.

Thankfully the title of the seminar that keeps its subject within the arena of 'thinking' and safeguards the speakers from the vicinity of 'activism' which simply means we are going to talk about thinking as a process and thought patterns emerging from the one. These are the areas of our concern because they are the original resource of all human actions. "To me," wrote Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912), "any dependence, anything which destroys the complete selfhood of the individual, is in the line of slavery."

Women constitute the prime populace of the globe, forming the most vital section of every civilization. Living as the source of service for others, women cook and work to feed their families work in gardens and are dedicated to other decisive actions such as raise children and taking care of the homes.

They are in charge for countless things that create the prevalent component of human society. However, the adverse element out of this load of duties on women is that they are subjected to severe gender-based discrimination, injustice and violence that end up leaving them disabled or dead at the close of their lives. Miserable women mean miserable societies. Women must be protected from any form of violence and abuse if we aim at achieving any meaningful evolution.

The talk that I wish to create should begin not from the beginning when the system of patriarchy began in our society but from the beginning from where we began to think as women, the times when we as women received the education, the freedom to think and talk and the times from where we started looking at ourselves as individuals. This point roughly grounds us in early and mid twentieth century and historically from the pre-Independence India moving towards the post-Independence India and up to now.

Anachronistically we can try to understand out patterns of thinking which are profoundly rooted into the patriarchal tradition of social cultural and political systems around and simultaneously find the illustrations of change and transformation only when the alternative thought patterns emerged. So my grandma's generation never happened to participate in the formal debates nor wear genes nor ever thought of doing these things while my mother's generation when they were young women, five or six decades back, did not ever imagine a woman going to an office as a respected social employee and travelling along across miles without feeling the need to have a male protector. I know that the security we claim in democratic nations for women is often questioned and damaged by the crimes and the outburst of criminality yet I am trying to generalize for the approximate view of changing generations and sensibilities of women from the past to present.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) wrote: "To define individual duty is difficult; but the collective duty of a class or sex is clear. It is the duty of women ... to bring children into the world that is superior to their parents; and to forward the progress of the race." However forward we may go on the progressive path of human development and claim the civilization of its best type, the basic issues and concerns of our cultural and existential survival have been prevailed and remained in the same positions as they were for centuries. Civilization has been interpreted as a kind of 'paralyses' by great thinkers on these lines.

Literature has a very vital record of the complete historical flow of how women have been fiddled with from century to century, from place to place and nation to nation and have probably succeeded in surviving all odds against their freedom and independence. So, positioning ourselves in the latest times of progress and technological advancement if we look at the past women of different

Eras, it is not easy to make a statement of changing cultures, thought patterns across the globe from time to time. One has to indeed propel through the complex spheres of nation, community, class and caste structures along with the gendered societies, literate-illiterate, urban-rural, and such multiple binaries with their cumbersome impact on the changes that occurred.

Since the theme is social dialogue for woman's wellness, let us first look at the possibility of defining women's wellness which itself is ambiguous. Do women have their own independent views on their own wellness or the society full of men as well as women will once again chart out the frame of how the wellness of women should be considered and achieved. A woman has no creed originally and she belongs to no province geographically. She has no language of her own, till she learns to speak and is accepted by the listeners with that language as her own expression.

Woman is seen as either a daughter or a wife, a mother, a beloved, a worker and a servant most of the times in her living. The language she speaks is in fact the language of the 'man' who possesses her, socially. The region she moves in is neither native nor foreign to her and she acclimatizes herself in the region she is located in as per the need and creed of the man who claims her as his possession. Thus women have a disadvantageous positioning not only to be traumatized physically and psychologically but they had to live in the very existentialist crisis placed as an isolated 'outsider', the 'other' individual, the 'invisible' victim and the marginalized loser at all cost in their lives. The obvious meaning of these intended statements in simple terms is, the discrimination via gender overpowers the other discriminations in areas like religion and region, nationality and identity of culture, class and caste, language, community and so on.

The alternative patterns of judgment like the liberal feminist thinking can work within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into that structure. The accepted wisdom through the practice of Marxist and Socialist approach recognizes that women are oppressed, and attributes the oppression to the consumerist or personal property system. The description of socialist feminism is lightly mentioned as a marriage between Marxism and radical feminism, with Marxism the dominant partner.

Marxists and socialists often call themselves radical, but they use the term to refer to a completely different root of society that happens to be the economic system. The rise of cultural

feminism as another alternative thinking type to the major types of feminist ideology got rolling as a framework separate from radical feminism. The difference between the two is quite striking: whereas radical feminism was a movement to transform society, cultural feminism retreated to vanguards, working instead to build a women's culture.

Some of this effort has had some social benefit: rape crisis centers, for example; and of course many cultural feminists have been active in social issues but as individuals, rather than as part of a movement.

Historically as various movements for social transformation fell apart or got co-opted, folks got distrustful about the very possibility of social reform. Majority of them turned their attention to fabricating alternatives, so that while they couldn't change the prevailing society, they could shun it as far as possible. Notions like 'women are inherently kinder and gentler' are in the essentials of the cultural feminism, and remain a major element in it. There is a mention also of the type called 'Eco-Feminism' which apparently more spiritual than political or theoretical in nature. It may or may not be enveloped up with female divinity-ritualism in worship and humanist principle in vegetarianism.

The analogous patterns are often drawn between the social ill-treatment of the environment, animals, or resources and its recovery by women. In defying the constraints of patriarchal culture, the eco-feminists claim that they can defend against the robbing and devastating the Earth. As one of the alternative thinking ideologies, "Feminism articulates political opposition to the subordination of women as women, whether that subordination is ascribed by law, imposed by social convention, or inflicted by individual men and women."

There is a very strong possibility of creating the social dialogue through the use of feminism and its types as the example of alternative thinking in family, workplaces and social gatherings. "Feminism also offers alternatives to existing unequal relations of gender power, and these alternatives have formed the agenda for feminism movements" that enables people in the belief that freedom and diversity benefit women, whether or not the choices that particular women make are politically correct. They respect all sexual choices, from motherhood to porn.

They do not look to government for privileges any more than they would accept government abuse. The want for legal equality and the same respect to men is conveyed in the form of individualist feminism. In short, these are the types emerging from feminism with their eternal calls for freedom, choice, and personal responsibility. "I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat, or a prostitute." Rebecca West, 1913

So the moment we find a woman transgressing the designed borders of her societal cultural existence in the frame of patriarchy, we brand her with a terminology like a feminist, a rebellion, an outrageous thinker to be considered as a threat to the social order. Understanding this scenario of how woman's place is odd and her position as a growing individual embarrassing to the society, one has to see the need of 'alternative thinking' even more urgently than ever. My father, who happened to be a teacher of English, fortunately, was a man of alternative thinking. He convinced my mother in 1980s that she has to educate herself by joining the weekend classes for women and do at least a graduation.

To me as his eldest daughter, he brought up like a son, rather than like a girl child and I can see the difference now when I come across every second woman trapped in one's own confusion of what is right or not for her. Alternative thinking is like that oxygen bag we use only in times of crisis and forget in the normal living. Why the crisis will emerge at all if we start maintaining our social psychological health by breathing this oxygen in routine...?

Alternative thinking pulls you outside the box. It is an alternative way of thinking that places you in the non-mainstream space. Alternative thinking is a practice of thinking in a different way than the expected or established ways. It is this difference of thought pattern that makes you stand in your own place as original, creative, innovative or reformatory person.

The way one thinks is the way one designs one's actions in life for future. The way one changes one's pattern of thinking one can change the pattern of events and consequently create happiness or unhappiness. I used to often hear a story of race between the tortoise and the hare since my childhood. All my friends felt bad that the tortoise has this heavy shell on the back due to which it cannot

Run as fast as the hare and they also mocked the smartness of the hare while he slept on the way thinking that the final victory is only his. No one thought of the positive interpretation as one possible way of thinking about these two animals that represented speed, slow or fast and the meaning of victory in social sense.

As I kept on thinking about the same story again and again I came across a few interpretations different from the stereotyped ones and I liked those thoroughly as they were the best examples of alternative thinking. The first was about how the tortoise wins but loses that midway nap the hare enjoyed, because of his constant work and moving on, he got overstressed by the time he reached his goal point and finally the story does not really tell us whether he was able to live the next breath after receiving his trophy. In the same way the hare was actual winner because he may miss the victory apparently but he enjoyed his journey which was so romanticized by the midway nap.

Secondly the pressure of moving on was so much on the nerves of the tortoise that one can only predict a developing stress-borne disease in its application to human. The hare in this sense would be taken as a jolly, happy-go-lucky creature with light-hearted approach to the competitive context of life and should be taken on this account as an ideal 'be-like' model for living in this world. Thirdly, the tortoise might have for sure missed all the nature scenario and beauty of the world around as it was all the while occupied with the one-direction move-on business but the hare obviously looked here and there to relish the beauty around as it finished the distance faster.

The hare found the 'break' needed to breathe out the stress; the tortoise would not be able to describe the 'experience' part of his journey if it was giving the victory-speech as interestingly as the hare would narrate his 'failure-saga' with lot of interesting diversions. These three alternative interpretations not only taught me the significance of alternative thinking as anti-conventional way of living but also indicated the possibilities of creativity for converting the negativities into different positive meanings.

Alternative thinking makes you special in your thoughts and the way you put forth your thoughts, without branding your position as 'abnormal' or 'anti-establishment'. It is a kind of thinking that can be causal force and source of change, growth, progress and positivity in living the personal as well as

collective life. The thought pattern which can be the outcome of alternative thinking is grounded in human values like equality, freedom, independence and healthier lifestyle for all.

The human values can be maintained by humanist thinking which forms the essential part of alternative thinking. The thoughts that divide and nourish dualities cannot be reformative and cannot lead to progress. This does not mean the differences are erased or rejected. There is a possibility of happiness and health by accepted differences of class, caste, creed or nationality just by placing the human concerns above all.

The very purpose of social dialogue and alternative thinking is to create and promote the understanding between the divided sects, regions, religions and classes in society. Women being the better half component of all these constituent parts of social and cultural human existence are bound to be the most significant source of life. I think the best use of alternative thinking can develop an alternative space required in every walk of life for women as well as for men and create the best world in turn, full of health and happiness. When every thinker starts with an aim of being positive, human and linguistically polite enough to be understood, clear enough to be reciprocated, the conflicts that arise out of misunderstandings will be easily escaped in communication and social dialogue. People will think positively and act humane, the civilizations will no more be interpreted as a paralyzing influence of education and the sense of 'social, as well as dialogue' will be achieved perfectly on both the personal and the collective plane.

No religion or spirituality would be required to function for the connectivity between humans in such an ideal world...! Let us dream of that 'sweetness and light' and begin from this day to think alternatively, practice and develop the habit of alternative thinking only in the right directions, keeping in mind the positivity, progressive path of life and perfection.

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