A QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN MORAL WOMANHOOD

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Woman as an element in the total complexity of human life has undergone an evolutionary crisis in which is concealed a choice of personal identity. The resurgence has occurred from a perilous subversive construction of the past which was born of as a combination of egos and interests dovetailed into each other to form a family and thence to a society, a consolidation by common life motive and unification by need for achieving this end. Man has created a system of civilization which has only a limited role delegated to the woman counterpart. This unification for the need of satisfying appetites of differing contents had always triggered the pressure of struggle within the selfhood of woman but for the inescapable law of a Gnostic life. The evolutionary nature has pressed for an awakening to the knowledge of personhood. The realization of the innate equality of both the genders has turned the woman towards the vision of change, a feeling necessitated as an imperative need of the time. But the will to make it fully possible is still lagging in many. To be effective such a vision of change must take shape in its collective form and woman whose whole attempt is to realize in her the change must help others in their endeavor to bring in a new law of life of equality that can also be supported by legal acts. It is not the need of a separate life with its own rule of living but a combination of regulated egos and interests developed in each other.

A review of the past shows the bewildering status of woman in the community- the ignorance of equality imposed upon oneself. A contamination of the life in the form of different levels of incompatible existence for men and women coming in contact within life with the former subjugating the latter in the name of *dharma* prevailed upon the human existence. Time has brought illuminations in woman that threw her to the new role clarity in the family. It can be found that in the Vedic period itself such a rethinking can be evidenced in the form of active roles by women like Gārgī, Maitreyī and the like. These women jewels despite their existence on stringent laws of dharma had excelled in knowledge discussions. But it is peculiar that each of the attempts of resurgence was nullified by men. The raising of consciousness taking up the whole life into new age of non-subversive thoughts is the first and foremost necessity to affirm the vitality of existence of any in the evolutionary nature of the universe.

The aim of this presentation is to discuss the question as to what are to be counted as the principles and problems of identity of 'womanhood'. The inquiry is mainly focused on moral reflections. The causality of her existence asserts her inevitable necessity in a family framework. Her consciousness, thoughts and power to act require a greater assimilation in the arena of modernity. The causality on the denial of power of judgment has been analyzed and the ways to emerge with a unique personal identity of 'womanhood' are projected. A great danger still persists is in the form of confines of man to his subordination for his spurious lust satisfaction. The recourse to the idea of a new 'womanhood' preserving the moral reflections of 'right' and 'wrong' is to be unveiled and that solves the problem of 'identity' or 'liberty' of woman. This is centered on the principle of emergence- to emerge out of the confines of man to a state of inescapable equality. Her effective efficacy *(pravṛttisāmarthya)* should become explicit for the well being of herself and the whole world.

The common mistakes on the part of woman are to look at her problems through the dimensions of ignorance. What makes her subservient is the spirit of attraction towards the male and his strength, desire for home life, security of the members and affliction to motherhood- the moral obligations. This is why she has failed successively to unveil her personal identity. It is no secret that most of the women feel oppressed and because of such a feeling they revolt. Such revolts were not uncommon in the past and still continue-may be openly or secretly. Only a strong rethinking and reconstruction of her role can liberate her from the state of conflicts and resulting stress. Intellectual culture has indispensably created a niche of a good, wide-ranging, subtle and strong mental instrument. Today's woman is not a silent spectator or a subservient element of a community but a pro-active element escaping the violent whirlpool- the forces of oppression and depression.

Morality and Womanhood:

Morality is concerned with the nature of human relations. The principle of morality attempts to govern one's outward conduct by way of certain rules which are mentally construed upon. It is also an expression of one's attitude with others. It is never individualistic as there is no moral behaviour without interactions. From this context it can be asserted that morality in case of womanhood can be expressive of her relationship with the family members at first, and then to the relationship with the society. Her moral action is only a reflection of the inner potentiality to distinguish between the right and wrong

or the good and the bad. Tradition has set her moral ideals without her full consent to be accepted as moral obligations and it is pity that even after such a long time no major change is acceded upon to realize her status in the family. Though there were some attempts to liberate woman from the confines of man such efforts seem more unsupportive.

The issue of moral perfection as thought by most of the scholars in India is nothing but the contextual basis of what is called *'Dharma'*.[1] But *'dharma'* in its true purport stands for obligations that stands for righteousness, virtue, the capacity to discriminate the right from the wrong or the good from the bad and could not solely be treated as a moral concept. It stands for obligations that are to be practical and accepted by all people irrespective of class, gender, caste or creed. Some of the moral obligations such as serving the wishes of husband and looking after children are the natural concepts of social life where woman has a pivotal role, but the denial of right to education and the like are more preferably to be treated as *'adharma'* or immoral. There was a time when woman had to consent with the ideal- 'Pitā rakṣati kaumāre bhartā rakṣati yauvane. Putro rakṣati vārdhakye na strī svātantryamarhati.'[2] The subservient woman is ever denied of her moral right to live in this world where even the God has not specified any discriminatory obligations. The constraint in the form of this adharma denies her propensity to act morally more because of the subservience to man – in this context the moral womanhood has attained the status of subversive tendencies. This has led to numerous genuine moral conflicts between the two sexes. The result is that the capacity of woman to reasonably reflect became subverted by this adharma.

Now considering the *'personhood'*, consciousness is its essential element whereas in *'moral personhood'* it is founded on the nature of ego. Freedom from ego leads to moral personhood and thence is divinity. All persons including women are capable of reasoning and reflective transcendence which denote one's efficacy to cross over the confines of one's own interests and accommodating the reflective values in others. Moral action is reflective of one's consciousness and is congenial to her nature. When somebody refrains from moral action, it becomes antagonistic to the general moral expectations and it leads to confrontations and conflicts of all kinds. This is because of the fact that morality is a mental construe that all are obliged to use for some purpose. But only when morality is looked upon as the light of consciousness, there will be freedom from those mental constructions and there will be propensity to equality.

On the backdrop of the exhibits on ancient Indian framework of society, it is viable and meaningful to understand the concern of human dissimilarity - man and woman – dissimilarity for creative purpose only. Even then considering our more fundamental sameness as human beings rather than the gender distinction, it is necessary to find a common ground of existence. Human beings, irrespective of gender, have their own backgrounds in feelings and thought processes. In this context, he has held woman to his captive thought because of his strength and never tried to sense her feelings. It is true that woman cannot be man but she can encounter man in the sense that we all are human beings and are equal despite our being different in body structure, not in the mind. Both man and woman are infinitely responsible for the *'other'* governed by the universal law of creation. This responsibility for the *'other'* may not be based on one's allegiance or sameness to other but acceptance of the difference. The ignorance-ridden attachment of woman to motherhood has reduced her to the particular shade of moral preservation that is subservient to man.

It is a common belief that whatever men do will turn to be morally right and commendable. But this lacks the reflection on the morality of actions before performing them. Rules of family/society are based on the actions of men and because of people's familiar and societal habits the members become subject to these actions. Some actions lacking prior and proper mediation are not subject to moral reflection and nevertheless get condemned. Therefore such actions may lead to dissatisfaction mainly in women and they revolt either openly or secretly. Because man has gained preeminence it is not possible for woman bound by dharma to get liberated from this easily, and again the attachment to motherhood stands as a hindrance. There should be deserving traits of moral reflections on the part of men to judge the case of necessary actions regarding the bestowing of equality to the opposite sex. If these kinds of moral reflection occur, there will be no encounter between man and woman. When the attitude is directed towards the good or related judgment, it is morality of both - *personhood.*

The natural propensity in woman (that was hidden till) to a lifestyle based on moral reflections has now compellingly started to arise. The more important reasons comprise of the accessibility to education for woman and the 'responsibility' to the 'family' factor. The moral womanhood has changed its way to a moral judgment of the good/bad, right/ wrong. The mental state of woman has risen from the weaker sense of logical dependence to one of necessary

moral liberty. Still there are innumerable instances of unfeasible relationships that degenerate into a mere contingent one. Again the intense lust for sex originating from the natural factors of the mind and body has become a defeating situation obstructing moral reflection. This means the original constitutive nature is veiled upon by motives of self-interest in women also.

Causality, Casualty and Emergence:

The traditional Indian concept of causation presupposes a spatio-temporal framework of events that involve the two principles of Puruṣa and Prakṛti. It is the Prakṛti, the symbol of energy that is always subordinate to Puruṣa. It is the contingent relation between these two that brings the whole world. Puruṣa is considered as the male antecedent to man and energy (śakti) is the female antecedent to woman. In this relational structure the 'invariable antecedent' Puruṣa as the effect - the world as the cause to Prakṛti occurs later in time. But it is undeniable that both are the necessary conditions for the effect and in the absence of one of these, the effect cannot occur. It is this invariable antecedent condition that is applied to man and woman. Man thinks that the relation is only a contiguous one and at the same time woman is subordinate to him. Based on this framework of relations the *'dharma'* or code of conduct have been formulated and considered as moral obligations.

According to feminists, this causal relation holds well in the case of *'horizontal causation'* (relation between man and woman, Puruṣa and Prakṛti), but it is invalid in the case of *'vertical causation'* (cause that can produce effect without this). Succession does not work without this cause and hence the concept of subordination has to be made redundant. It is also held that the relations are a causal necessity and hence woman is ever subordinated to the laws of causal necessity alone and not to the man. The intricate inner structure is not much different and hence it is bewildering to accept any kind of subordination. Such conceptions are governed solely by the self-determined moral conceptions of man. The *'support'* criterion for equality proposition comes from the fact that the possession of attributes such as *'inherence'* of the self as well as other attributes cannot be enumerated as different. The only thing is that the *'typology'* of man and woman is a resulting consequence of the organization of the elements within - not the elements themselves. It is the *purpose* pursued by man that he has superimposed on womanhood that distinct identities are framed. The so-called woman entities are postulated to give substantial difficulties to the practical pursuits of man such as knowledge. This is perhaps the most vacuous idea of egoism in man. The idea of *'moral*

good' in woman has been made to relapse into that of a 'pleasurable thing' acting to the tune of willing/lust of 'others'. This is the casualty.

Casualties of these inescapable thoughts are numerous. Men have convinced themselves that women are to be attached to motherhood and can only be an anathema in the philosophic quest for knowledge. This is really a fallacy of thought as justified through the excellence of philosophical thoughts of Maitreyī, Gārgī etc. Even the revered sage, the all-knowledgeable Yājñavalkya has shown no incompatibility towards women in their quest for knowledge and there are exemplary evidences of arguments with the same as disclosed in the Upaniṣads. It is difficult to understand all this indiscrimination and make sense of it. Only a time-honoured solution within the premises of one's social structure can help avoid undeniable or unacceptable thoughts. But to liberate from these, woman should effectively come forward and provide some sort of obvious substitutes of thoughts and action.

To examine the problem of causality the first and the most significant aspect is the denial of the access of knowledge to woman. Knowledge was perilously thought off as limited to the confines of man in ancient times. But in a change to modernity the domain of knowledge was penetrated upon by woman also because of her quest for knowledge supported by strenuous efforts of revolutionary thinking. The outcome of this is that she has raised her status to a new level and also showed her capability to be not lagging behind that of man. The synthesizing activity which constitutes the basis of knowledge is personalized by each woman. It is certainly a way of her emergence from mere subordination to man who has now started to feel the unprecedented fall from his higher position. Though it is, in actuality, not a degradation of his status, the elevation of the status of woman has irked him and the result is that of more perpetuating conflicts of ego. Another significant impact is that there is the enacted delegation of responsibility of motherhood to men that now it is proper to call it as *'parenthood'*. This conjectures well with the equality status of woman with man. There is an incongruous casualty that comes in the form of denial of right to live in – the undeserved trait involved in female infanticide/ foeticide. The female progeny is not allowed to see this world or to live in it which the Reality has even not denied. Thus, it is accorded the dubious distinction of obstinate human-hood. Does man have been denigrated into the form of perpetrator of mischief and does woman consequently be the object of punishment? While traditional Hinduism has

equated woman as '*Mother, sister, daughter and the wife*' '*the ājñāśakti*', '*the kriyāśakti*' and the '*willing power*', '*the Goddess of wealth, patience and dharma*', the energy without which man cannot survive, the members of the Hindu community are indulging in such malicious acts of relegating woman to a lower status of existence.

The Emergence:

Now, to talk about all the moral views for restructuring a society based on the gender equality status it is difficultly said than done. It is much complicated to judge the particular moral concepts to make it more acceptable in a societal setup based on the laws of dharma. A general framework of open mind without antecedent notions of dharma and the attitudes of patience, empathy and understanding are vital to emerge out of the moral indignations. Rules and laws of *dharma* framed on the basis of sound judgment of the rights and wrongs are to be agreed upon and followed without restrictions in their particular shade of moral preservation of good and bad. Only then there will be the feeling of fair and square. Moral obligations are must as these will provide a frame work that can be used as a guide to abide by. Contexutal changes should be accounted and accommodated from time to time.

It is also important that the capacity to act on one's own has to be developed in order to come out from the confines of any nature. This will enhance the capability to achieve freedom from inordinate subordination and have functional integrity. The capacity to nurture the intrinsic consciousness and become aware of our status requires a sincere effort to dispense off the ego-born desires and thereby to develop a harmonious existence with our counterparts. In a family context both man and woman are equal and are mutually responsible for the '*other*'. In the emerging scenario in the world over, woman is piercing into the '*activities*' that were made confined to man. But the nature of employment has put stress on woman to delegate responsibility to her partner. It is really a change from despair and attachment to motherhood. The responsibility of motherhood now has been partly taken over by man because of inevitability. Similarly some moral considerations are modified to suit the new environment. Similar efforts/ actions will certainly bring in the uniqueness of Identity of '*Womanhood*'.

The Contingencies in Creative unfolding of Freedom and Identity:

The problem of freedom from the confines of man is an ethical truism. Though efforts in this direction have already started and yielded positive

results they are insufficient and deserve further serious and critical attention concerning moral dimensions. The creation of a niche for womanhood is the need of the hour that only can lead to unique 'Identity'. The idea of Identity faces two main contingencies:

1. The first one deals with the judgment about the full freedom to woman taking care of the awareness about the consequences of such freedom.
2. A harmonious or peaceful coexistence with the partner without exploiting the other.

In this process one has to face two opposites- preserving and maintaining one's individuality and the other feeling of difference with others but being attracted towards them. The freedom component again has to confront some hindrances that are either to be defied, opposed, or even to be destroyed. Much more difficulty lies in accommodating the changes in oneself. The following tendencies are contingent:

1. **Desire**: Desires are the demands for satisfaction arising from the nature of objectivity. Desire for uniqueness is a motivation. But when this desire is adverse to one's capability it may lead to frustration. Excessive engagement in desiring leads to negative emotions, defiance, rebellion and will even end in destructive tendencies. There should be a movement towards self-awareness and development of positive desires not to confine oneself to the stupefied acts of others

2. **Attachment**: Attachment to motherhood, attachment to the male for his strength and lust or comforts of married life and attachment to home life for secure life as well as allegiance to tradition are the major hindrances to the activity of creating a personal identity and moral freedom. The engrossing over-attachment when taken for granted can never help in orienting oneself to the goal of Identity.

3. **Ego**: It is the intrinsic enemy that is perilous to the act of breaking the bonds of confinement. This leads to inimical subjugation. The result is indulgence in the influence of hostile forces and there is no deviation to the perception of woman confines heavily conditioned by background beliefs. Another implicit difficulty is that conflict of ideas will result and the psychological instincts will rule over and that may lead to destruction or effacement of others that is not good for the society. Ego should not be allowed to overtake the intellect and power of reason. This curtails liberty and freedom. Access to knowledge can deny ego its role.

4. **Feeling of Despair**: It is because of reciprocal stance that is to be adopted by

man as well as woman through the faculty of intellect and power which espouses one to the distinctive capacity of moral reflection. The mind preoccupied with avowedly superfluous thoughts fall as victim into the confines of each other. The result is despair and that further leads to depression and prevents any motivational acts on Identity. It is by the virtue of the faculty of intellect, self-reflection and control of the mind such desperate feelings can be overcome.

5. **Fear**: The authoritarian attitude of man brings in the element of fear. Man is capable to use force and subjugate the opposite. He may also show violence. Fear never allows one to progress since it is the result of subjugation. The fact that all are endowed with and capable of developing and making progress must be made clear in the anew and changing environment. The question of threats must be subdued without alienating the opposite sexes. Then only one will be able to achieve the goal of uniqueness of Identity of moral womanhood.

It is impossible to develop identity of moral womanhood if women could not become self aware about their roles and responsibilities in the new cultural complexities. A systematic effort to chart out the path for achieving freedom is the sole means that can make her capable of coping the present subversive situation.

So **awake, arise and act** is the message for woman empowerment.

References:

1. Śāṅkarabhāṣya of Bhagavadgītā-Introduction.
2. Manusmṛti.