

Kant on Femininity

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Any sensitive reader, conversant with Kant's moral philosophy gets fascinated by the notion of the Kingdom of ends. No matter whether it is called romantic or utopian his notion has the power to grip one's imagination and to make one frame a certain mental picture of a morally perfect society where dignity of every human being *qua* human being is respected irrespective of the class, race or gender to which he or she may belong. However, when such a reader turns from Kant's theoretical writings regarding moral conduct to the more practically oriented ones, the reader is in for a shock and a disappointment especially, if the reader happens to be a woman. This is not so because women are invisible in Kant's philosophy, it is rather the very mode in which they become visible that poses a problem. For one thing, what one finds here, is clearly offending to women; moreover it problematizes the issue regarding the relation between Kant's theoretical and practically oriented philosophy, at the same time raising a question regarding the very plausibility of an abstract moral theory.

Kant speaks about women in his writings which are generally regarded as not possessing the theoretical rigour that characterizes the *Critiques*. They consist of observations, remarks about the nature of women and also of prescriptions, advices regarding their conduct and status. Chronologically speaking, Kant first refers to women in *The Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* [hereafter '*Observations*'] which was written in 1763, that is, in the period of the so called pre-critical writings. Although, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* [hereafter '*Anthropology*'] was published much later, i.e. in 1797; it must be remembered that it is basically a manual for a course which Kant was offering for some thirty years before he decided to publish it. If it is assumed that during these years no major changes had taken place in Kant's views, then in one sense, there is no chronological gap between the two texts. His political writings which are more theoretical in comparison to these more or less coincide with the period of his critical

writings. Since there is no internal inconsistency in his views on women as expressed in these works, it can be safely assumed that taken together, they present a coherent whole. But once they are juxtaposed with his moral theory, they do not just fail to cohere with it, but also challenges its credentials. What follows is an attempt to understand Kant's views about women primarily from within the frame work of Kantian philosophy itself. I will not dwell upon the major themes of the too well known Kantian moral philosophy, but rather will go on to state his views regarding women and then try to analyze and evaluate them.

Before we embark upon an exposition of these views, a few remarks on the nature of the above mentioned texts are called for. These texts do not fully share the a-priorism which is otherwise a characteristic mark of Kant's writings, but they are written with an empirical bent of mind. This does not mean that they deal with particular empirical facts or situations. They deal with practical matters; nevertheless they are philosophical texts searching for the universalities embedded in particularities. '*Observations*', as the title suggests, records the author's observations which apply not to particular historical groups of people but to man in general, and to what the author takes to be natural, a-historical groups of people classified on the basis of their sex or nationality. '*Anthropology*' does not stop at making observations about men and their groups, but moves on to offer suggestions and prescriptions. This is very much in the spirit of the basic purpose with which it has been written; namely providing a guidance about "...what man as a free agent makes or can and should make of himself."¹ The political writings both reflect the then existing political viewpoints and also analyze them criticizing some of them while endorsing some others. The prescriptive or the normative part of these writings is important as it can be seen as serving the purpose of paving the way from the factual which is narrated descriptively, to the ideal which is spelt out at abstract theoretical level. Its claim to legitimacy is grounded in the presupposed neutrality and the objectivity of the descriptions. So, any challenge to the normative, ultimately puts a question mark at the level of the descriptive. The difficulties encountered here obviously have a bearing upon our understanding of the ideal as well. If the difficulties are found to be unsurmounting, the ideal will have to be either reformulated or rejected. If on the other hand, the ideal is to be retained, the prescriptions will have to be reformulated on the basis of more adequate descriptions.

Let us begin by noting Kant's characterization of women in the '*Observations*'. The importance of the book is brought about by its translator

as follows.

"It is not a work of philosophy taking up a position and arguing it as fully as possible, but it is a work that has a philosophy, implicit and sometimes explicit, around which the empirical observations are gathered."²

In his remarks on women Kant quite typically tends to essentialize femininity in terms of its differences from masculinity. So much so that although he is supposed to discuss both the sexes the major portion of the section devoted to this discussion focuses on the qualities of women and the qualities of men are referred to only by way of comparison to the former. The book, authored by a male and addressed to male readers discusses those aspects of human nature which are exhibited not by men folk; for it is assumed that they know these fairly well, but by the 'others', the females, who are different. The chief contrast that Kant draws is that women belong to the 'fair sex' which is known by the mark of the beautiful. Men, on the other hand, can be called the 'noble sex' and the proper point of all masculine qualities is the sublime. This is not to deny that women can have noble qualities and the men the beautiful ones, but Kant wants to emphasize that there are certain specific traits that clearly distinguish women from men. Moreover, he thinks that this distinction is nature-made and hence must not be lost sight of when we engage in the deliberations regarding praise or blame, education, ways of advancement in terms of moral perfection etc. He says, "For here it is not enough to keep in mind that we are dealing with human beings, we must also remember that they are not all alike."³ Once the distinction is framed in such a manner, it is not hard to imagine the details. Women are said to have a strong, inborn feeling for the beautiful, which among other things result in their interest in dressing up and adornment. They enjoy light hearted conversation and amusing trivialities. They are good hearted, sympathetic and impassionate. As far as their intellect is concerned, "The fair sex had just as much understanding as the male, but it is a beautiful understanding whereas ours should be a deep understanding, an expression that signifies identity with the sublime."⁴ The details of this difference are worth quoting at length:

"To the beauty of all actions belong all the mark that they display facility, and appear to be accomplished without painful toil. On the other hand, strivings and surmounted difficulties arouse admiration and belong to the sublime. Deep meditation and a long sustained reflection are noble but difficult and do not well befit a person in whom unconstrained charms should show nothing else than a

beautiful nature. Laborious learning or painful pondering, even if a woman should greatly succeed in it, destroy the merit that are proper to her sex and because of their rarity they can make of her an object of cold admiration but at the same time they will weaken the charms with which she exercises her great power over the other sex. A woman who has a head full of Greek, ...or carries on fundamental controversies about mechanics...might as well even have a beard; for perhaps that would express more obviously the men of profundity for which she strives. The beautiful understanding selects for its objects everything closely related to the finer feeling, and relinquishes to the diligent, fundamental, and deep understanding abstract speculations or branches of knowledge useful but dry."⁵

Kant goes on to add that rather than instructing women in cold and speculative manner, men should put more stress on broadening their feelings in both morality and arts, as "Her philosophy is not to reason, but to sense"⁶ He further declares,

"I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles, and I hope by that not to offend; for these are also more extremely rare in the male. But in place of it Providence has put in their breast a fine feeling for propriety and a complascent soul."⁷

In a similar 'non-offensive' tone he asserts that

"... no insult can be more painful to a man than being called a fool, and to a woman than being called disgusting." In a very generous (?) manner Kant treats what were called the defects of the nature of women like vanity, as 'beautiful faults'.⁸

In speaking about the effect that traits of each sex have on the opposite sex he notes that the fascination that men have for women is primarily based on sex instincts. Nature desires to ennoble man and to beautify woman by the sexual inclination, that is why women have a sensitivity for the noble in men while the men have an appreciation for the women's beauty. In the matrimonial bond which emerges from the mutual attraction, "... the united pair should, as it were, constitute a single moral person, which is animated and governed by the understanding of the man and the taste of the wife."⁹

'*Anthropology*', which offers a knowledge of man from a pragmatic point of view, places the discussion "On the character of the sexes" within the broader theme of the final destiny of the human race. Kant asserts that our attempt to characterize the female sex must use the principle, that does not depend on

our choice or goal but on the higher purpose of nature for the human race. "Nature's ends are: 1) the preservation of the species, 2) the cultivation of society and its refinement by woman."¹⁰ For this, nature intends to bring men and women together into an intimate union. Since they are rational beings, the union of men and women does not remain only physical, but results in the creation of a domestic union—a family. Kant believes that the harmony and stability of such union requires a hierarchical relation, where one party is superior and the other is subject to the former. In the state of nature, where strength is most important, man is always superior, but with the advancement of culture, women also achieve a kind of superiority over men.

"As culture advances, each party must be superior in his own particular way: the man must be superior to the woman by his physical strength and courage; the woman to the man, however, by her natural talent for gaining mastery over his desire for her."¹¹

He goes on to assert that the proper nature of women can be known only in the later stage,

"... for while civilization does not produce these feminine qualities, it allows them to develop and, under its favorable conditions, become discernible."¹²

In order to fulfill the purpose of the preservation of the species, nature endows women with child bearing capacity and implants a fear for physical harm in their nature, thus making them timid. Whereas men are provided with greater strength, women are provided with more art. For the sake of the second purpose, nature bestows modesty and eloquence of speech and expression in women, so that they should rule men through these. It is by using these qualities that they lead to cultivation and refinement of their sensibilities, which is a kind of preparatory training for morality.

Given the 'natural' difference between them, it is no wonder that the feminine and the masculine virtue or lack of virtue are very different from each other.

"She should be patient; he must be tolerant. She is sensitive; he is responsive.—Man's economic system consists in acquiring, women's in saving.—The man is jealous when he loves; the woman is jealous even when she does not love, because every admirer gained by other women is one lost to her circle of suitors.—The man has taste of his own; the woman makes herself the object of everyone's taste.—"What the world says is true, and what it does, good" is a feminine principle that is hard to unite with character in the strict sense of

the term.”¹³

A major theme in Kant's deliberations is the institution of marriage. Kant describes the historical changes that have come about regarding the status of women in what one commentator calls “Kant's evolutionary theory of marriage.”¹⁴ He seems to imply that women get due respect only in a monogamous marriage. He asserts,

“Scepticism about marriage, however, is bound to have bad consequences for the whole female sex; for women would be degraded to a mere means for satisfying man's desires, which his satisfaction can easily turn into boredom and unfaithfulness. – It is by marriage that woman becomes free: man loses his freedom by it.”¹⁵

The marital status being so important for women, Kant thinks that it is understandable that women try to please all men.

“For a young wife is always in danger of becoming a widow, and because of this she scatters her charms over all the men whom circumstances might make potential husband for her, so that, should the situation occur, she would not be wanting for suitors.”¹⁶

This is echoed in the following remark – “Within marriage, the man solicits only his wife's desire; the woman, however, the desire of all men.”¹⁷ A striking remark is also made about scholarly women, which is completely out of place in the discussion of matrimonial life. It is as follows –

“As for the scholarly woman, she uses her books in the same way as her watch, for example, which she carries so that people will see that she has one, though it is usually not running or not set by the sun.”¹⁸

One of the major questions about marriage life that Kant addresses is regarding the supreme command of the household, for he believes that there can be only one person who co-ordinates all activities in accordance with his end. His verdict is as follows:

“I would say...: the woman should reign and the man govern; for inclination reigns and understanding governs. The husband's behavior must show that his wife's welfare is the thing closest to his heart. But since the man must know best how his affairs stand and how far he can go, he will be like a minister to his own monarch who thinks only of amusement...so that the monarch can do all that he wills, but on one condition: that his minister lets him know what his will is.”¹⁹

The preceding discussion makes Kant's opinion about the nature and worth of women amply clear and there is hardly any need to comment upon them. Basically, he treats them as being physically weaker than, and intellectually inferior to men. Kant ends this section by admiring nature for her rich treasure of arrangements, her "wisdom of gradually developing natural tendencies, and using it for practical purposes."²⁰ This is a clear indication of how satisfied he is about these arrangements and how convinced he seems about their 'naturalness'.

Kant's views on marriage have to be understood basically on the background of his views regarding sexual relations. Kant's categorical imperative does not allow any one to use the other person as merely a means to one's own end, and this is what precisely happens in a sexual relationship according to Kant. However, Kant does not on that account denounce sexual relations completely, nor does he try to restrict them to the intentions of procreation alone. Aware as he is of the power of sexual inclinations, and of the nature's purpose of preservation and refinement of the species, he works a way out through the concept of marriage. The debasement of the other's personality in sexual relation can be compensated for only by way of reciprocity of such debasement. In the first part of *The Metaphysic of Morals*, namely, 'The Metaphysical Elements of Justice' Kant argues that marriage, as a special kind of contract, gives two individuals mutual right to acquire the other person as a partner. It is an acquisition not of an organ or of an act, but of an individual, a person. Two persons reciprocally possess each other and use each other for satisfying their own inclinations. Such reciprocal and hence moral possession is possible only within marriage, more precisely still, within a monogamous marriage. Sex outside marriage, is condemned by Kant completely as it reduces the involved individuals to animality. Only sex within marriage is worthy of human beings; for only within marriage there can be a life long commitment to treat each other as persons rather than things.

Kant insists,

"If only one partner yields to the other his person, his good or ill fortune, and all his circumstances to have right over them, and does not receive in turn a corresponding identical right over the person of the other, then there is an inequality here. But if I hand over my whole person to the other, and thereby obtain the person of the other in place of it, I get myself back again, and have thereby regained possession of myself; for I have given myself to be the other's property, but am in turn taking the other as my property,

and thereby regain myself, for I gain the person to whom I have myself as property. The two persons thus constitute a unity of will. Neither will be subject to happiness or misfortune, joy or displeasure without the other taking a share in it."²¹

It looks as if in this account, Kant is treating women as equal to men by insisting on reciprocity. However, a fuller understanding emerges only after we look into the account of the civil status that he has to offer to women in his political philosophy. The civil status accorded to the husband and the wife is so radically different, that it leads to inequality within the family, as the wife never receives a right over the person of the husband in the identical manner in which the husband has right over the wife.

In the 'Metaphysical Elements of Justice' Kant discusses the notion of citizens and introduces his ill-famous distinction between active and passive citizens. As can be expected, all women are classified under the category of the passive citizens along with apprentices of a merchant, artisans, servants, minors, and all those who depend for their subsistence and protection on other persons. There are three essential juridical attributes of a citizen:

"...first, the lawful freedom to obey no law other than one to which he has given his consent, second, the civil equality of having among the people no superior over them except the other person whom he has just as much moral capacity to bind juridically as the other has to bind him; third, the attribute of civil independence that requires that he owes his existence and support, not to the arbitrary will of another person in the society, but rather to his own rights and powers as a member of the commonwealth (hence his own civil personality may not be represented by another person in matters involving justice and rights.)"²²

The passive citizens are said to be lacking such civil personality and hence though they are part of commonwealth, they are not its members and are not fit to vote. Without providing any argument, Kant claims that this civic inequality is not incompatible with the equality of all human beings *qua* human beings. He asserts that even passive citizens have a right to be treated in accordance with the laws of natural freedom and equality; thereby assuring that, "...everyone be able to work up from this passive status to an active status."²³

It looks as if women are denied the status of active citizens in so far as they are not independent, and it can be hoped that if they achieve independence, they will be eligible to participate actively in civil affairs. Unfortunately, such

vertical mobility is not possible in the case of women, as in his article "On the relationship of theory to practice in political right" Kant says,

"The only qualification required by a citizen (apart, of course, from being an adult male) is that he must be in his own master (*Sui iuris*) and must have some property (which can include any skill, trade, fine art or science) to support himself."²⁴

This, in principle, excludes women from the category of active citizens, thereby indicating that there is more to this exclusion of women that meets the eyes.

So, what is the status of women according to Kant? Perhaps he himself would have said that by nature men and women are equal, for they excel each other in different domains, and also that as rational beings they have equal moral dignity. But even he would have to admit that he thinks that in both domestic life as well as civil life they are subordinate, and should ever be so! Are Kant's claims about the so-called natural equality justified? Is it possible to remove the inconsistency between the moral status and the civic-political status of women? Does Kant offer any sound justification for the secondary status of women in civic life? Let us now turn to some of these questions.

II

It has been pointed out earlier that Kant's normative claims regarding women are based on his descriptive claims about their nature. If the latter are true and authentic, they enforce the former to a great extent. Actually, it goes without saying that this description is something which most women will find untrue, unjust and offending. One can only add, that the image of men that emerges in contrast with that of women is also not true or just. This is because both of them are based on the stereo-typical images prevalent in the kind of patriarchic bourgeois society to which Kant belonged. In the guise of neutral, impassionate description, what actually appears is a conventional understanding, which tends to essentialize and universalizes the conditional and the historical. Even though Kant looks at human history as a dynamic process progressing towards a goal, nature of people is treated generally in an a-historical manner; leaving out the references to the socio-cultural forces that determine it.

In examining these claims briefly, it must be noted first of all that it is a

plain falsehood that all women by nature have less physical strength and intellect than all men. It is not possible to sustain such a claim on the basis of empirical enquiry, to say the least. Secondly, it is wrong to suppose that the differences which are generally found between men and women, regarding different capabilities are created by nature and hence to treat them as unchangeable. It is an acknowledged fact now that the differences in the upbringing, the socialization process of boys and girls, contribute greatly to such differences. Kant himself comes very near to such an acknowledgement when he observes that the feminine qualities are revealed only in a state of civilization. But he immediately reverts to his naturalism by suggesting that, civilization only provides with conditions favorable for emergence of such qualities, that have been implanted in women by nature.

It is quite tempting to say that Kant is doing that inadvertently and therefore his views can be questioned, but his intentions cannot be doubted. But some of his remarks in '*Observations*' clearly indicate that he was well aware of the fact that women are not always and everywhere the same, i.e. the way in which he portrays them. He notes that the savages in Canada give the greatest actual regard to the feminine sex and in this surpass even the European civilized world. The Canadian women

"...actually exercise authority. They assemble and deliberate upon the most important regulations of the nation, even upon the question of war or peace. They thereupon send their deputies to the men's council and generally it is their voice that determines the decision. But they purchase this privilege dearly enough. They are burdened with all the domestic concerns, and furthermore share all the hardships of the men."²⁵

Are we still to suppose that this was not an enough evidence for him about the actual capabilities of women? Why did the example of the Canadian women not make him revise his opinion about the 'naturalness' of these differences?

More importantly, he does not treat these differences as accidental, i.e. as emerging accidentally from the contingent conditions of natural processes, but rather as essential for the purpose of nature treated as providence. In a way both men and women seem to be playing into the hands of the nature whose wisdom they may fail to understand. But the role that each sex plays seems to be peculiar. Let us grant that as far as procreation is concerned, the biological role of women is of a very special kind. Still certain questions can be raised about Kant's position here also. For example, is it true that the women

have to be physically weak and psychologically timid in order to perform their role? If the nature has entrusted the women with her most dear possession, would it not be wise on her part to make women strong and brave in order to protect it?

Secondly, does the stability of family necessarily demand a hierarchy between the husband and the wife? Kant assumes that if this relation is based on equality, it will be full of strife and competition. But once the assumptions about natural weakness of women and the need for a hierarchy within family come together, it simply follows that women get a subordinate role. Even though Kant does not explicitly call it thus, he clearly implies it. For most of what according to him are feminine virtues actually underlie her dependence on men. Within the Kantian framework the men dominate not just in the 'public' domain, but also in 'private' domain. The need for coordination within domestic life is not to be fulfilled through an open discussion and mutual consent [which is so important for Kant in civil life], but solely in terms of 'his' end. It is significant that marriage is a union for Kant unlike friendship, which is a unity. For in a unity, the persons retain their individualities, whereas in a union they are supposed to dissolve them, merge them with each other. The 'unsocial sociability' which otherwise is said to be extremely essential for the development of individuals as well as nations, has not been assigned any role within the family. It does not occur to Kant that even here this attribute and conflicts that emerge from it can have some positive effects on the individual development of both the wife and the husband.

The role that Kant assigns to women in the state of civil society is justified in terms of Kant's teleological concept of history; which is spelt out in a brief but highly condensed manner in his article on "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose." This is an Idea that no amount of empirical or scientific study can prove or disprove and yet it is necessary not as a constitutive principle, but as a regulative one. The idea is that the journey of history is not without any purpose or direction, but rather moving towards a definite destination chosen by the providence. Nature has endowed man with reason with the intention that he should attain through his own efforts a moral perfection, i.e. complete moral autonomy. From being an '*animal ratiabilis*', he should make himself the '*animal rationale*.' It is not possible to achieve this in the life span of an individual member, but can be achieved by the species in a progressive manner. Nature forces the individual members on this path progress by the way of the mutual antagonism, the 'unsocial sociability' that they always experience. Due to this, man forms society and

tries to live a law-abiding life. The role that nature assigns to women here is to cultivate and to refine the society.

"It made her precociously shrewd in claiming gentle and courteous treatments by the male, so that he finds himself imperceptibly fettered by a child through his own generosity and led by it, if not itself, at least to its clothing, the cultivated propriety that is the preparatory training for morality and its recommendations."²⁶

What Kant implies is that it is because of man's attraction for the women and their desire to please them, men become more sober and gentle. This requires the capacity to control one's passions and inclinations and unless one develops such a capacity, moral development can never be actualized. Being cultured, is in a sense a precondition of being moral and women help the species to arrive at this threshold of morality. Prima facie it may seem that Kant is honoring women by saying that nature entrusts her with this great responsibility. But in fact this is only a lip service paid to women, as is evident from their status in the civilized society. Her 'natural' attributes which play a crucial role in the nature's scheme now disqualify her from taking up any meaningful part in social life. Kant asserts,

"A woman, regardless of her age, is under civil tutelage [or incompetent to speak for herself (unmundig)]; her husband is her natural curator, though if a married woman has property of her own, it is another man."²⁷ Further,

"... just as it is not woman's role to go to war, so she cannot personally defend her rights and engage in civil affairs for herself, but only through her representative."²⁸

It is not possible to defend Kant's views about women's political rights by saying that Kant is merely echoing the views of his own times, as the possibility of giving equal rights to women was being discussed in his own times. The mayor of Kant's city, Theodor von Hippel, who was a friend of Kant and a lawyer, was a spokesman for equal human and civil rights for women.²⁹ Why did Kant not support him, and why did he restrict political freedom of women so severely in spite of believing in the equality and dignity of all human beings? Howard Williams notes the ambivalence in Kant's attitude to major political issues. "...for, at times, he appears to be advocating the most radical of political changes (when donning his philosophical hat), and, at others, he appears to be advocating the most cautious of conservatism (when donning this everyday, realist hat)."³⁰ But are his views merely conservative or are they reactionary?

Generally, this is treated as a tension present within Kantian philosophy between the radicalism inherent in the ideal of equality of all persons propounded at the theoretical level and the conservatism exhibited in the discussions of actual inequality at the level of practice. This has been rejected by Susan Mendus, who feels that there are no such tensions in Kant's treatment of women. She rightly claims, "What is wrong with Kant's political philosophy in so far as it concerns the status of women is not simply that it expresses a cautious conservatism and eagerness to defend the status quo. Rather the elevation of contingent practices to the status of requirements of reason represents a categorical denial on Kant's part that anything other than the status-quo might be either feasible or permissible and that is justified by appeal to pure reason."³¹

The only justification for such an elevation of contingent practices to necessary requirements of reason can be based within Kantian philosophy, on the teleological concept of history, with its hope for progress towards the better. Kant was well aware of the fact that there is not a priori guarantee that the mankind will achieve it's ultimate goal, for the presence of evil in man's nature is perhaps as powerful as his moral disposition. Yet he felt that the hope for reaching this goal

"... is as well based as is necessary for us not to despair of our race's progress towards the better, but to promote its approach to this goal with all our prudence and moral illumination (each to the best of his ability)."³²

The spirit behind this remark is well-taken, but even then the question whether it is really necessary to accept this 'idea of reason' for understanding history remains open. For the a-historicity of the pure reason, does not accord well in the historicity of the idea of reason. The way in which Kant formulates the idea, is an historical outcome of the modern thought and society. In some other culture, in some other epoch, the idea can be formulated differently.

One of the major difficulties about this teleological concept of history is that the attempt to connect the facts pertaining to a particular era with the ultimate purpose of nature in the manner in which Kant undertakes it in the case of women; may end up justifying the present injustice in the name of a just society which is supposed to emerge in some remote future. William Galston very aptly notes,

"The difficulty, one may say, is that human history is a game played for very high stakes, and even according to Kant the goodness of

the end is somewhat hypothetical whereas the evil of the present is real and palpable. Our hopes for the future might lead us to condone or even applaud the evil that surrounds us when we might have exerted ourselves to mitigate it. If our hopes are wishful and illusionary, does not human suffering stain our hands?"³³

The issue of teleology raises many questions that lie beyond the scope of the present paper, it may suffice here to note that the notion of teleology in Kant is problematic and although it made appearances in different guises after Kant in philosophy of history, nothing can compel us to accept it today.

On the other hand, even if we accept the teleological perspective and go along with Kant in saying that history is destined to take human race towards a perfect manifestation of moral autonomy, we need not accept the justification of the intermediary states such as ones characterized by women's subordination. In fact it can be argued that elevating the women from the subordinate to the equal status is a necessary pre condition of attaining the final goal. This takes us once again to the notion of the passive citizens.

Being a passive citizen, is being denied the three attributes of the active citizen namely, independence, equality and freedom. That is to say being a passive citizen is being deprived of the right to pursue one's own happiness in one's own way. It is also being denied the rights equal to the rights of active citizens, even though one has not committed any crime against the society. More importantly still, it is being denied the right of being a co-legislator of the laws of state in the sense of being subject only to those laws to which one has given one's free consent. In short, being a passive citizen, is being deprived of civil autonomy.

The question that can be raised at this juncture is whether the ideal of moral autonomy of every person can be realized without granting civil autonomy to all persons irrespective of race, gender, ethnicity, etc? Kant nowhere explicitly says that women are not capable of having moral autonomy, although as is evident from the discussion of his views in '*Observations*' and '*Anthropology*'; he entertains serious doubts about their capacity to think and act on principles which are pre requisites of morality. Even then, let us assume for the time being that in principle, he accepts that they can attain moral autonomy but; how does he hope to enable them for this by keeping them under civil tutelage? If paternalism is to be rejected at the level of republican government, why should it be endorsed within the family unless Kant is treating women in some sense as being less than persons and hence not worthy of respect?

According to Kant, the highest revolution is the inner revolution of man which occurs when a person through his own experience, without imitating any one or asking for anyone's help attains the goal of moral autonomy. By keeping women under perpetual tutelage is Kant trying to protect them or to deprive them from attaining this highest goal of human life? Are we to suppose that denying about fifty percent of humanity the right to move from humanity to personality is also a part of the plan of the providence? In fact it can be argued that as long as women are denied this right and the opportunity associated with it, the plan of the providence can never be completely executed. Remaining within the Kantian framework, it is possible to argue that nature has not bestowed reason and thereby the capacity to achieve moral autonomy on women simply in order to be wasted. If both men and women are being used by nature to serve its own purpose, there is no reason for her to put unjust restrictions on women and to deny her the opportunity for moral development. The fact is that since nature has distributed the capacity of moral development equally among all human beings, both men and women can become morally autonomous. But civil autonomy, which is a precondition of moral autonomy is neither given or taken away by nature. That one group in the society is deprived of this autonomy, is a part of social reality for which not nature, but society itself is responsible. Unfortunately Kant chooses to turn away from this fact and to defend man-made conventions in terms of the so-called goals of nature.

It is important to note that such an attitude towards social discrimination is upheld by Kant not only in the case of gender differences, but also the racial ones. In *Observations* he remarks that the differences between the white and the black races of man are as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour.³⁴ He gives an example of a man who said something stupid and asserts that the proof that it was stupid was that "this fellow was quite black from head to foot."³⁵ That is why Charles Mills comments,

"So Immanuel Kant, the theorist of abstract noumenal persons deserving of equal respect, is simultaneously one of the founders of the dark ontology of sub-persons and racial disrespect that black activists as Garvey against have traditionally had to fight again."³⁶

The foregoing discussion reveals the fact that we cannot afford to ignore the gap between Kant's moral theory and his practical philosophy, for it is very difficult to accept both simultaneously. As suggested earlier, if the ideal of moral autonomy at the personal level, and that of the public use of reason and a just constitution at the political level is to be retained, drastic changes

are called for elsewhere in the system, especially, in connection with the problems of social discrimination and injustice thereof. Perhaps the attempts for such reformulations will further reveal the difficulties in connecting the abstract noumenal morality to the concrete phenomenal actualities of acting moral subjects. It is one thing to propound a moral ideal at the level of abstract egos, stripped off of all their peculiarities, it is another thing to translate such an ideal into the reality of the embodied particular egos. The postulates of morality like freedom, have, if at all, a very unstable, weak foundation in actual social practices. Until these practices provide the framework in which freedom of choice can be exercised, this freedom remains a hollow concept and the idealism implicit in a theory based on this concept remains deceptive and vain.

I do not want to go to the extreme of claiming that Kant is deliberately and very subtly defending what we consider as unjust practices in the name of gender or race. I am aware of the possibilities of using Kant's own theoretical ideas in such a way as to avoid inconsistencies that arise at a level of actual social practices. I am also not prepared to accept that Kant's views on women express either a mere 'unthinking prejudice' or reflections of an 'honest but narrow-minded bourgeois.'³⁷ My modest claim is to point out that even a philosopher of as great potential in terms of intellect, vision and moral integrity; as Kant is not free from gender bias. This awareness helps in generating a new dialogue with the tradition from a consciously adopted perspective of gender analysis.

"Feminist readings of Kant, like any self-conscious hermeneutical engagement both with the world of text and with one's own contemporary realities, create philosophy anew. Thus we should remember that when women become scholars—and enter the "public" exercise of reason, they do not grow beards (as Kant joked). But they do open paths of rethinking the contents and methods of education and intellectual discourse more generally."³⁸

It is with this hope of opening new paths that the present hermeneutical exercise with the Kantian world was taken up.

Notes and References

*The first Marathi draft of this paper in an abridged form was presented in *Maharashtra Tattavadnyan Parishad* held in Nagpur in 2002.

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