

Part One : Philosophical

Chapter - I

INTRODUCTION

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Dilthey had introduced the term "hermeneutics" to denote the discipline concerned with the investigation and interpretation of human behaviour and institutions as essentially intentional. In Existentialism, it implies enquiry into the purpose of human existence. In the proposed project "hermeneutics" would be employed in an inter-disciplinary manner, bridging in a way Sociology and existential outlook. A study, based on the behaviour of partners in marriage living in the metropolitan city of Kolkata, would be undertaken and interpreted in terms of such categories as Structure, Experience of Boredom, Escape from Boredom and Search for Freedom etc., as also of the paradoxes generated thereby.

The method would mainly be analytical - descriptive with reference to the phenomena of social conventions, expectations, routinisation of life, alienation, monotony and creativity etc, as they manifest or surface in the relationship of partners in marriage in a metropolitan scenario. A part of the project would be concerned with an understanding of the existential framework of the relationship in marriage. In this part of the scheme we shall try to explicate the feelings of boredom, escape and freedom on the part of the actors within the marriage syndrome. The usual method for sociological thinking consists of observation of data and generalisation. The data in the present context are

inextricably ideological, since metropolitan life is invariably subject to the interplay of ideological forces. Life in a metropolis is also exposed to factors such as political or economic. Either of these is enough to generate feelings of frustration and anxiety. Without denying the causal efficiency of such factors, marriage-partners amongst the educated middle class, employed in a metropolitan area, are motivated more by ideological considerations besides others.

In his *Man in the Modern Age*, the philosopher Karl Jaspers has offered an important insight into the plight of the family and home-life in modern-day conditions. Conventional connubial relations screech under the stress of the commercial mentality of the age. There is technicisation of love, growing eroticisation of it, frequency of abortion, ever increasing incidence of divorce and loosening of sex from marriage. The study would include consideration of city-based working women in this focus.

Metropolitan cities thrive on the tension between tradition and modernity, between the ethics of law and the ethics of situation. The ethics of law imposes a predetermined pattern to live by. Life in rural agricultural communities, as well as in smaller towns, is often lived securely under the sovereignty of laws, customs, social conventions and the local ethos. The notion of "situation" is hardly encountered there. Rural societies are usually governed by the ethics of Law. But urbanity, properly so-called, and more so in a metropolis,

tends diminish the rule-element in the lives and belief-systems of people. They tend to think that their actions are determined, or need to be determined by the unique situation in which they find themselves. There is a garb of anonymity and ambiguity in respect of roles and identity of the persons in metropolitan situations. They find themselves 'thrown' in the situations. Gradually a kind of anti-nomianism (alienation, anomie) arises.

Further, life in a metropolis is futuristic; people tend to live in terms of projects (Sartre, Simon de Beavoieur). An ethic that stresses law is an ethic that looks to the past, to tradition, custom, the way things have always been done. Such an ethic brings stability, emotional security, but also the danger of stagnation. An ethic that stresses the situation is, on the contrary, future-oriented; it looks to the new; an action is determined with regard to the new. In a metropolis the conditions of life change fast; we have to meet situations that are new and for which no exact rules or precedents seem available. Metropolitan life seeks an ethic that takes the risk of emphasizing the situation rather than the law, the future and the new rather than the traditional.

Observations : (a) It is point of common observation that in a metropolis, when partners in marriage are of middle-class upbringing, educated and both of them are working, they find/seek surplus relationships within the framework of the conventional ones in the family. The data in support of the

observation is neither meagre nor deviant. The partners of the above description do not reject or discard their conventional roles; they do attach a value of their roles as wives, husbands, and parents; they do not always break away from their obligations to the persons-in-law either. And yet their ideas about the quality of life at the emotional plane, in its total significance, is found to be inadequately realisable within their conventional and routine roles. There remains, even grows, a longing or demand for something new, an expectation for a novel manner of realizing one's individuality beyond the confines of the monotony of married life. A relief from the routine is earnestly looked for; and the situations the working women in a metropolis face, and at times voluntarily encounter, promise such a relief.

(b) The married and working woman seeking relief from her routine existence, craves for something different. Her experiments with the modes of relief from routine may, in the beginning, start at her home with her spouse as well as her children and the inmates of the family. These consist of eating out on Sundays, going for a cinema show or a theatrical performance; if some extra money is available, shopping may be planned, and looking for avenues to acquire gadgets and so on. But it has also been observed that boredom sets in sooner or later, and what at one time appeared new gets routinised and old enough to be unattractive.

(c) Extra work outside the bounds of the family undoubtedly has its hardships. But it nevertheless provides scope for release of pent-up energy, making it possible to realize one's surplus self. Roles within the marriage relationship tend to exhaust and to an extent delimit one's creative potentials by pinning one down to acknowledged or conventional framework. Entering into an ambiguous or unconventional relationship has its brighter aspect of activating surplus or creative side of human beings

(d) Relevant facts being what they are, one may take a deep critical look in this context at the very institution of marriage. No doubt, it is the basis of family and familial ties; it gives a sort of comradeship and security. But does it not also set up ownership-oriented relations and attitudes over the minds and bodies of persons, hindering the flowering of personality? Is not there often revolt within the nuptial association, with some form of truce achieved when breaching out of the purdah (household) is tolerated? In this connection, it may not be inappropriate to make an incisive probe into the interrelated problems of love, sex and marriage.

Paradoxes of the adventure :

The tryst with unacknowledged relationship outside marriage has its own problems.

(i) What once seemed new and fresh may come to be felt to have become conventionalized as soon as expectations begin to arise. (ii) The lure of freedom may prove itself to be a delusion, and boredom sets in. (iii) Married women social workers have complained that their sense of freedom has got lost in the interactive situation as expectations begin to define their roles. Restrictive demands of social service rob away even the last vestige of freedom. This may happen in the case of political workers as well. Personal relationships, just as ideological relationships, tend to bind rather than enfranchise. Boredom appears to be an inescapable factor of the unregenerate human situation.

Dialectics of Structure and Freedom :

Marriage is a structured relationship. It is conventional, routinized in so far as the roles of the partners are concerned, and arouses expectations apropos the roles. The structure restricts deviations from the roles and expectations. It is an acknowledged relationship and hence public. Individuals within the structure of marriage are not identified as individuals *per se*, rather with the roles. There obtains a tension within the structure between individuality of the partners vis-à-vis their roles. The tension is perhaps more acutely felt by the wife, more so if she is educated and has an access to a wider world beyond her family in connection with her job in a crowded city.

It is also a fact that structure has its credits; it is secure, comforting and not ridden with anxiety. Freedom, on the other hand, as destructed escape from acknowledged relationship is private, socially ambiguous and undefined in terms of roles.

It is also found that no permanent escape to freedom is possible. Structure is entered into for convenience, security and social identity. But its public character, entailing acknowledged roles and expectations, is experienced as unduly restrictive and a consequent loss of personal identity.

Destructuring factors in a metropolis :

- (i) Education, awareness about the value of personal selfhood, and alternative models of goods life.
- (ii) Technology giving leisure from household chores, the media disseminating wider perspectives of life.
- (iii) The motorpolitan life demands expensive standard of living, and offers avenues for making a higher standard of life possible.
- (iv) Structural rigidity is lessened in the anonymous crowd. There is a taste of freedom as escapes from strucure become viable while still retaining the structure. The metropolitan working woman seeks enjoyment of fulfilment both within and beyond the structure of marriage relationship.

Ethical Significance of the Metropolitan Scene :

Respect for individual freedom is a value of recent origin. Mill and Russell have argued forcefully in its favour. Awareness of the value of individual freedom has gone a long way in making the structure less rigid, and sometimes, a little too loose. There is a consequential bifocality among the married women of metropolis. In the way of realizing their individual freedom they have broken the rigidity of the structure without at the same time destroying it. They enjoy a sort of double citizenship, structural as well as non - structural identities. Between the extremes of losing their identities in the structure and that of casting away every traditional commitment, the metropolitan married woman chooses the mean between the two. She seeks to create a relationship that loosens her chains. The quest of self-perfection has taken the metropolitan married woman outside the structure, beyond her routinized, acknowledged relationship with her spouse. She looks for a new identity. For her a new ethical code has yet to emerge.

Towards the closing sections of the *Communist Manifesto* Marx had deplored the woman's loss of individual identity in Capitalist society. The logic of the exploitation of women was sketched by Engels in *The Origin of Private Property, State and the Family*. The insight and wisdom of these writings have become evident in the existential situation of metropolitan women. They are no longer content with palliative traditional vocabulary of empty evaluative notions. They

seem to have come to self-consciousness, and refuse to be identified without remainder with their roles in the structure. By escaping from the structure, women today are seeking to evolve their potentials and further dimensions of creativity beyond it. This is a move, *not* intended to the *contra-structural*, rather *asructural*. A revision of the entire concept of relationship between spouses may have to be undertaken, as in Camus' story "The Adulterous Woman". A novel idea of friendship as value, irrespective of the structure of marriage, has already taken roots in metropolitan society. The nature, implications and significance of it deserves another study, and there is already a growing literature, novels and stories around the phenomena of extra-marital affinities and friendships.

An essential part of the project will be based on the responses of married working women and men to a questionnaire. This will be taken up in the second part of the thesis.