

Feminism, Spirituality and Universal Siblinghood

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I will begin by quoting Tim Boyd who once said: *"There are things in life that are so obvious, so clear, and undeniable that it seems strange there should be any need for discussion. The need to empower female population, one half of the planet's population, is such a subject"*. Let us have some perspective on couple of issues before going further.

In 2021 the World Bank estimated that it will take 135.6 years to eliminate gender inequalities in the world. Around 700 million women and girls live in countries where there are no women in government positions; women have only three quarters of the legal rights granted to men. 16 million girls will never set a foot in school and two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women (UNESCO Institute for Statistics). There are other data related to violence, work life, sexuality, etc., that give an account of the situation which I will not mention because they are not the main theme of this talk.

It is relevant to mention the above in an institution whose main objective is universal brotherhood and which has service as one of its three pillars. If TS aims to form an active brotherhood among mankind; to promulgate the essential unity of everything, and

demonstrate that this unity is fundamental in nature; to study ancient and modern religion, science, and philosophy; and to explore the hidden side of nature and mankind; we need to go deeper on any subject that implies any kind of discrimination towards any group of people. When we think of siblinghood, there should be a scenario of equality, equity and solidarity among human beings, without distinction of race, creed or gender.

Let us take the issue further and delve from the point of view of spirituality and universal siblinghood, a term that may be more neutral in terms of gender (kinship may also be appropriate). It is important to reflect upon the kind of language that we use to refer to things, as the words are what we use to understand and relate ourselves to our reality. The power of word is well known:

The spoken word has a potency unknown to, unsuspected and disbelieved in, by the modern "sages" [and] such or another vibration in the air is sure to awaken corresponding powers, union with which produces good or bad results, as the case may be (HPB, Secret Doctrine, V.I, p. 307).



But, even beyond words, how would it be even possible to achieve a scenario of equality and kinship amidst a civilization where selfishness is still prevalent? Maybe if we only focus in the external/material dimension, that can be hard to achieve. The key may be a holistic approach from a wide spiritual conception, that goes beyond of what religion tells. But before, let us examine some of the views that religion conveys about women and the feminine.

Abrahamic monotheistic religions are mainly patriarchal: God is a being with masculine characteristics and is to be feared, the feminine represents what leads man to his downfall. These religions used religious doctrines to justify the subjugation of women. The notion of women as accomplices of the Devil, Lucifer, predominates in Christian history and has served to legitimize their subordination. Women of Muslim origin can be stoned to death on a daily basis for actions that cannot even be called crimes.

All this comes from a misunderstanding of some of the sacred texts. Hence, a deep reading and understanding of sacred texts is necessary. Every religion has an esoteric side and an external (exoteric) side. We could even make reference to the “Doctrine of the Eye” versus “The Doctrine of the heart” that *The Voice of the Silence* mentions. Being the first what comes from a merely intellectual approach to things, and the latter a deep approach that raises from the intuition or *buddhi*. On this respect, let us remind what HPB states in her SD:

Esoteric Philosophy reconciles all religions, strips every one of its outward human

garments, and shows the root of each to be identical with that of every other great religion. It proves the necessity of Divine Absolute Principle in Nature. But no one has ever gone to the trouble of collecting and collating together those facts. The reason for this is, that all such events were recorded symbolically; and that the best scholars, the most acute minds, have been too often darkened by one or another preconception. The religious and esoteric history of every nation was embedded in symbols. The exoteric dogmas may often have been altered, the esoteric never (pp. 307, 312, 320).

Therefore, if the sacred texts have a deeper meaning, it is imperative to look for it, especially among people who aim to study ancient and modern religion, science, and philosophy in a comparative way, acknowledging not only the common ground of the religions but the deeper meaning that lies beneath them all. For instance, the view of women as accomplices of the Devil, Lucifer. HPB states in her SD: “*The expression of the allegorical serpent does not refer at all to the physiological fall of men, but to their acquiring the knowledge of good and evil, which knowledge comes to them prior to their fall*” (V. 2, p. 280).

As HPB mentions, Lucifer is the bearer of light and represents progress, civilization, liberty, independence. Lucifer is the Logos, the Serpent, the Saviour (*Collected Writings*). In the 19th century, rebellious women performed counter-readings of this misogynistic tradition. Lucifer was reconceptualised as a liberator, and Eve became a heroine who eats from the fruit of knowledge and leads humanity out of ignorance: she was the first individual who disobeyed God, which can be interpreted as



not letting the being be led by blind faith.

The birth of the modern theosophical movement played a key role. Most of feminist history has emerged from -and alongside- esoteric developments such as spiritualism, theosophy and paganism. The rise of theosophy and the influence of HPB gave women alternatives for thinking about their place in the hierarchy. Blavatsky, Besant and many other women involved in the Theosophical movement and other spiritual movements were rebellious women in their time and rejected the domination of men, supported the ideal of political, social and spiritual freedom. HPB herself, and later Annie Besant, were among the first women of their time to become leaders of a spiritual movement. Something that even today in the 21st century is almost non-existent or allowed. The Theosophical Society insists on the spiritual independence of all beings and includes men and women equally in all levels of the organization.

Until then, only Buddhism had given women the same position as men in the church hierarchy. But even modern Buddhism was marked by male domination as traditional Asian society did not accept women leaving home and the *bhikkhunis* or female monks gradually disappeared. Even Hinduism, which has a rich pantheon of female goddesses, is not exempt. The reality of many women belonging to this religion is very different, and the idealization of women as divinity is not reflected in dignified treatment and improved opportunities. In the dominant patriarchal vision, introduced with The Code of Manu, 'The dharma of woman' (V.I48) is established, according to which: "During her

childhood, a woman should depend on her father; during her youth, on her husband and her children; if she has no children, on her relatives who are close to her husband and, in their absence, on those of her father; a woman should never govern herself at her own wish."

After having this overview of the conception that religions have about women, it may seem ironical what some global data indicate. According to Pew Research Center, 83.4% of the world's women identify themselves as religious, compared to 79.9% of men. Why would there be more female practitioners in religions that not only do not fully represent them, but also exclude and minimize them?

Perhaps this has to do with the fact that within the being, the drive for the spiritual is greater. That *religare* is intuited as a liberating element. The sacred feminine is mentioned as a way of rescuing that other polarity of creation. We speak of Gaia, mother earth, as a living organism and with this we seek to vindicate the role of engendering that is inherent to the feminine, as well as to rescue the status of equality that all beings of creation have as equally important parts of the ecosystem. That is why in many occasions the feminist movement goes hand in hand with ecological movements that seek to leave aside the model of superiority that man has in nature and see him as one more element of nature and its balance. In fact, in the 'Proem' of the SD it is said that:

By the third symbol —the circle divided in two by the horizontal line of the diameter—the first manifestation of creative (still passive, because feminine) Nature was meant. The first shadowy perception of man connected



with procreation is feminine, because man knows his mother more than his father. Hence female deities were more sacred than the male. Nature is therefore feminine, and, to a degree, objective and tangible, and the spirit Principle which fructifies it is concealed.

Actually, the first Stanza of *The Secret Doctrine* opens by referring to a female eternal principle that is the parent of the universe: “The eternal parent (Space) wrapped in her ever-invisible robes, had slumbered once again for seven eternities”. According to HPB the first something that can be conceived has to be treated as a feminine principle:

That first something which can be conceived has to be treated of as a feminine principle. In all cosmogonies the first differentiation was considered feminine. It is the goddess and goddesses who come first. The first emanation becomes the immaculate Mother from whom proceeds all the gods, or the anthropomorphized creative forces. We have to adopt the masculine or the feminine gender, for we cannot use the neuter it. From IT, strictly speaking, nothing can proceed, neither a radiation nor an emanation (Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge, Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1946)

It is interesting to note that in her first draft of *The Secret Doctrine*, known as the *Würzburg Manuscript*, Blavatsky used the word “mother” instead of “parent” in her translation of the first sloka of Stanza I: “The Eternal Mother (Space) wrapped in her ever-invisible robes (cosmic prenebular matter) had slumbered for seven Eternities” (Theosophy Wiki).

The idea of the sacred feminine as a way

of rescuing the value of femininity and empowerment has been fundamental, and it is necessary to go beyond that meaning so to include all the feminine aspect of creation, which embraces also the feminine aspect of men. In fact, the entire creation has a female and male side, without the other, the manifestation won't be possible:

The active, male, generative principle; and Ether, or the Soul of matter, the light of the fire, for the passive female principle from which everything in this Universe emanated. Hence, Ether or Water is the mother, and Fire is the Father (SD, Stanza I, p. 57).

Let us remember that the spirit has no gender and that the true meaning of spirituality is that of universality: humanity and all that exists is born from a principle such as the one mentioned in the SD: an ABSOLUTE principle (*Parabrahman*) that before manifesting itself has no gender distinction and whose manifestation is given only with the presence of the two polarities: the feminine and the masculine. Both principles play a vital role in the development of the Cosmos and in the evolutionary process of the monad, but the universal divine principle is both sexless and formless. The sex distinction is but a temporary duality that will disappear in the millennia to come as humanity ascends:

The Father-Mother are the male and female principles in root-nature, the opposite poles that manifest in all things on every plane of Kosmos, or Spirit and Substance, in a less allegorical aspect, the resultant of which is the Universe, or the Son. They are “once more One” when in “The Night of Brahmâ,” during



Pralaya, all in the objective Universe has returned to its one primal and eternal cause, to reappear at the following Dawn —as it does periodically (SD, p. Stanza I, 41).

At the universal level, the higher self is neither male nor female and occupies the bodies of men and women by turns in countless lifetimes until it begins to manifest the higher qualities of both, culminating in the appearance of the spiritual androgyne or divine hermaphrodite, as HPB calls it in her *Anthropogenesis*. Therefore, feminism, without a broad, spiritual, conciliatory vision of service and real concern for the human race as a whole (including men), can very easily become the very thing it criticizes and wants to deconstruct: an isolated, endogamous, limiting, discriminatory and violent discourse.

Hence, we advocate here for **humanism**, working from service and spiritual vision to rebuild and strengthen the sense of unity, in which each gender fulfils the dharma that is proper to it according to its innate natural characteristics. The spiritual emancipation of the human soul from the bondage of selfish materialism is the step towards that humanism, that universal siblinghood or kinship.

To speak of feminism within the religious-spiritual context has to do, then, with this holistic, universal, integrative vision and understanding of what underlies the universe. This applies not only to feminism, but to any cause that seeks equality and equity, and that should start from a spiritual vision, even if at the level of manifestation it is dedicated to a specific movement such as feminism, in

the case that concerns us here.

So, to the question of what is the role of the spiritual life to the discussion on feminism and universal siblinghood, we can say that it is the one that starts from the liberation of all conditioning. Most of us are in the prison of our own creation of ideas, prejudices; we are slaves of tradition, of some kind of belief, of faith. It is not possible to reach that freedom through some figure, symbol or idea and, in this sense, the mere affiliation to a religion, as we saw, can be contrary to the ideal of fraternity, unless we go to the deeper sphere of that religion and live its pure teachings and not the interpretations of the same. Freedom implies love. If there is no freedom, there is no love, and love is the force that makes us one. Krishnamurti would say:

When you call yourself an Indian or a Muslim or a Christian or anything else, you are being violent because you are separating yourself from the rest of mankind... So a person who is seeking to understand violence does not belong to any country, to any religion, etc.; but is concerned with the total understanding of mankind.

This comprehensive understanding of the human race is only given from a spiritual vision. If we go to pre-Christian traditions or *Advaita Vedanta* we see a mysticism based on the 'unity of all', on 'non-duality'. This vision transcends ideologies and embraces every person indistinctly, becoming a reference of true spirituality.

As part of any spiritual movement, it is part of our dharma to make inequity disappear. Let us make the ideal of service of and universal siblinghood/kinship a fact



in every moment and start with our own circle. The best activism is that which is practiced in our own lives. Perhaps then we will become an example, and change will begin to manifest itself.

Educating our children in fraternity, non-comparison and non-competition can lead to this. Educating boys from an early age in an egalitarian manner can be a revolutionary act in a society that pressures them to become the manifestation of the masculine that has been perpetuated for centuries. Perhaps it is worthwhile for us to reflect during our meditation or study on questions like this; on our role, according to our personal circumstances, in the fading of differences; on what we can do, from where we are, and from what we are, to end up walking in the direction of a true universal siblinghood. With that, many of the problems that afflict our society would diminish.

To conclude, I want to leave the following in the air: first, by studying theosophy in depth, and understanding karma, we can understand why we are born in a male or

female body in a society like ours and fulfil in a righteous way the dharma that is proper to each gender and use the opportunity to be in this body to go beyond its limitations and to help people in need. Secondly, why Adepts born in a female body are not often mentioned? I hope one day to find and understand the answer. For the time being, from my position still full of immense limitations, I invite you to make a firm resolution to fulfil our dharma as human beings and students of theosophy to make this a world with a higher vibration and to make universal siblinghood/kinship in every sphere alive, by taking action towards any inequality or social injustice.

And let us remember: we are not our desires, we are the Divine Will; we are not our thoughts, we are the Divine Wisdom; we are not our emotions and feelings, we are the Divine Love. And all the Universe and beings are imbued with Divine Will, Wisdom and Love.
