Vive L'anarchie, a Contemporary and Feminist Review

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Anarchy (/ˈanəki/): The word derives from a Greek word meaning "having no ruler".

Understanding why the inception of this term was necessary is of utmost importance which would incorporate asking critical questions like how and why the need to break away is one that's so compulsive. The philosophical aspect of the belief in anarchism perhaps stems from the thought process that the uncertainty of life drives us to perplexing thoughts such as the wish to do something revolutionary, diverting from the path we're told God created for us to follow.....even the rare far fetched ideal to leave all worldly possessions behind to ruminate on a mountaintop. Instances of people believing in such things aren't new and have been penned down in ancient holy books such as the Quran, Bible and the Bhagwat Gita among many others but in our modern era, we deem those changes improbable but we must look to those who have dared to lead society into a new form of lifestyle and introduce other forms of living.

When we hear terms like “anarchy”, “revolution” etc. we end up with one picture in our heads- People in huge numbers protesting peacefully with slogans but there is always something we dread of thinking about- “violence”.

We read about historical accounts of social unrest and link the related struggles that incorporate violence as an inseparable part of revolutionary ideas. This connection has been embedded within us hence we fail to realise how much the larger encompassing part of society resists the desire for change in the first place. We may have constitutionally granted freedom of speech but unknowingly we are still bound by societal cages that do not truly allow us to explore our thoughts. Maybe that’s why teachers and parents tell us that rules and regulations separate us from the animals. The question is, are we so scared of those “animals” that we choose to bury them out of sight?

Violence is something commonly associated with anarchists, we must attempt to understand the same without crossing the thin line into justifying. An individual may choose to cause harm for a multitude of reasons usually linked to varying degrees of derangement but violence can also occur if a person wants people to listen but prolonged suppression of their voices lead to destruction and inhumanity.

This can be seen in the curious case of Theodore J. Kaczynski, famously known as the Unabomber- one of the most infamous serial killers in the United States. Kaczynski shortly after being born suffered from extreme hives and spent months in a hospital alone, upon returning he was described as never being the same child he used to be. His parents nurtured his academic success with extreme strictness leading him having a higher IQ than that of Einstein- a magnificent 167.

How exactly did a seemingly innocent and pleasant 16-year-old boy become a mass murderer decades later? The answer is largely unknown but his ignorance and hypocrisy bear most of the blame. A curious case that perhaps could be credited to the development of the Unabomber was the experiments his Harvard psychology professor Henry Murray made him undergo. Kaczynski was told to write down his morals solely to later be debated on against a law student. The Unabomber, a man with vehement disgust towards technology and the alienation from man to nature, was born due to the confluence of two sources- his anger towards his family and his philosophical critique of the world humans live. However, we mustn’t forget the huge impact he had on people’s outlook on technological advancement and rapid industrialisation.

Now that we've examined understanding anarchists, we must break down our false notions. Anarchists aren't always the image we have in mind, a variety of different streams of thought under anarchism exists. One of these streams often overlooked is the role of women- living in a repressive state of society that limits you leads to women even more audaciously drawn to the various themes of anarchy. An attempt to cover most notable names has been made but each of these women and many more deserve volumes written on their revolutionary work.

Emma Goldman was born in Russia in 1869 and later moved to the United States where she grows up to dedicate her life to the cause of the radical freedom of the individual, becoming especially militant after the hanging of several anarchist labour demonstrators. She protested the right to birth control, women’s rights in general and compulsory military service for men. Goldman spent two years behind bars but remained unshaken, later getting exiled, she travelled to Russia and experienced the Russian Revolution and protested the authoritarianism she saw there too. She spent the rest of her years in exile fighting for the rights of people and wrote in detail about her convictions. Very few people have stood up against both the United States and the Soviet Union, which in my belief earned Goldman her place in history as one of the world’s most badass women. Lucy Parsons went down in history as the first non-white female anarchist in the United States. She joined many political movements, was outspoken, fought for freedom and published works on anarchism becoming a figure notable for striving for racial equality at a time when the United States was going through the racially charged Civil War era. Hellen Keller, despite being a writer and educator who became ill rendering her both blind and deaf, greatly influenced anarchist thought with her political works and activism. Finally, we have, “The Most Hated Woman in America” which is Madalyn Murray O’Hair who sued to have “In God We Trust” removed from the American currency and prayer removed from schools, initiated court cases in defence of religious freedom, proclaimed herself a militant atheist and feminist, featured in Playboy magazine speaking openly about sex from a woman’s perspective and founding the American Atheists organization.