

Concluding Remarks

Looking back, I can say with some feelings of satisfaction, achievement and hope that this project for writing the thesis for Ph.D. has finally come to a completion for submission. It is clear to me that the present decision does not mean moving an arbitrary closure to the work that I have been engaged in over the years. It is a statement of my acceptance that a fresh beginning has to be made to deal with new issues that I have identified for further investigation and analysis. It strengthens my initial hope that an engagement in bioethics from feminist perspectives is a worthwhile pursuit. In many ways, working on this project has been a significant learning experience for me as a student of philosophy, feminism and bioethics. Before undertaking this project, I used to believe that the world of concrete particulars can be easily comprehended and articulated with the help of abstract universals. Therefore, in discussions of philosophical issues pertaining to ethics and social philosophy, I would tend to approach concepts and theories from an essentialist and idealist perspective. I would feel tempted to search for ideals that should be categorical, universal, fundamental, and preferably final or ultimate. Working on this project proved to be not an easy task as I had imagined. I had to struggle to unlearn some of the lessons of my past training. This was a demanding task as I came to learn from the writings of various contemporary feminist philosophers, thinkers and activists that our lives may have similarities and resemblances, but they are never identical, not always the same. My readings of texts relevant to my work during the period of my research made me more aware of the conceptual, foundational and interdisciplinary, and a definitive but a tentative character of philosophical investigations. This new awareness of the goals, issues and methods of philosophical inquiry has opened new horizons for my thinking.

As I mentioned in the introduction, I had set for myself a few aims and objectives for my study. My main aim was to explicate both the shortcomings and power of patriarchal ideology and its rhetoric by which maternal subjectivity of women has been negated and objectified by positing the myth of an essential maternal self. I wanted to explore the possibility of rethinking or revisiting the received concepts and theories of choice and coercion or oppression as expounded from

feminist perspectives so that it may be possible for us to think afresh of ways in which women can enhance the domain of reproductive choices for themselves, and launch effective struggles against their oppression and exclusion from the public sphere according to concrete local and global conditions. My aims included an exploration of the ways in which patriarchal practices and new reproductive technologies converge in using rhetoric to influence, regulate and control women's procreative functions for serving the cause of male domination in patriarchal cultures, and commercial interests of the medical research corporations mainly controlled by men.

Rhetorical uses of language are multidimensional, complex and dynamic elements in the ongoing human discourses ever since the beginning of human civilisations. Human discourses have evolved in a dialectical manner, recalling, envisaging, creating and responding to changes in living conditions due to ever increasing growth of new knowledge and skills, new forms of work, changes in social practices with the emergence of new structures of power and authority impacting ethics of interpersonal relations. We use our linguistic skills and engage in conversations, dialogues and arguments to persuade one another about the validity, correctness, truth and goodness of the ideas, principles and perspectives that we are putting forward for consideration, acceptance and approval of the other(s). For the very possibility of human communication to be efficacious, it is a presupposition of logic and ethics of human communication that we must mean what we say/write. This norm may not be followed by many of us some of the times, but its universal violation will result in the very collapse of the practice of human discourse. The moral of the story is : speak the truth always, do not tell lies. Be prepared to face criticism and disapproval if you do not follow the norms of truth and goodness. The distinction between 'good' and 'bad' rhetoric is drawn to disapprove the use of 'bad' rhetoric in persuading others of the merits of the proposed principle or perspective. This was the first lesson that I was reminded of while working on the first chapter of the thesis. However, as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill had cautioned, and many other philosophers have similarly done so, human beings are tempted to commit, to use G.E. Moore's famous phrase, 'naturalistic fallacy', i.e. choosing to justify and defend what is usually being done in one's community or culture by insisting that this is what ought to be done, what must be done. This temptation comes easily to those who are, or think, rightly or wrongly, that they are, beneficiaries of the ongoing practices.

Instead of listening to reason, and accepting the wrongness of prevalent practices, history of philosophy is replete with instances of use of rhetoric for defending what has been seen and accepted as usual, and natural. Abundance of arguments in favour of universality and inevitability of patriarchy can be seen as an unhappy illustration of the naturalist fallacy.

Procreation of new generations of human beings has been a necessary precondition for the very survival, continuity and regeneration of human life. The role of women as mothers, giving birth to children, and taking care of them has been common in all societies, past and present. Biological production is a natural process. In the history of emergence and evolution of human cultures and civilisations, this natural process was gradually metamorphosed in to a social and cultural affair subject to norms, obligations, prohibitions and taboos. This transformation was the beginning of patriarchy and subjugation of women, domination of men in controlling and regulating social life, including the life of women. It was no longer left to women to choose and decide when and with whom they wanted to mother their child. It was the prerogative of their parental family to decide whom they would be married to, and later the decisions of their husbands and in-laws would regulate and govern their lives. Religious scriptures stipulated the divine sanctions for the confinement of women to their reproductive responsibilities. I have analysed justificatory and explanatory accounts of the origin and stabilisation of patriarchy and also provided critiques of the same from a feminist perspective in the second chapter of this thesis. I have shown that even if patriarchy emerged and evolved during a specific stage or period of human history, it has no justification to continue as its practices are unethical. Patriarchal ideology and its practices are based on the alleged fact of inferiority of women in comparison to men. By denying women their subjectivity and control over their reproductive agency, patriarchy creates and promotes a false view that the natural, essential and ideal role of women is to devote themselves exclusively to becoming good mothers and confining themselves to the domestic sphere to look after their children and families.

The dynamic character of the institutions and experiences of motherhood demands a constant reconsideration and re-appraisal of competing alternative perspectives on motherhood time and again. There are various facets of motherhood

that can be often mutually conflicting and result in contestations over the role, and significance of motherhood in lives of women in different situations. A fundamental issue that has dominated various debates on motherhood is whether it is a matter of choice or coercion. Patriarchy provides rhetorical answers to this question with the aim of essentialising and idealising motherhood for women. Feminist critiques of patriarchy aim at making it an issue of choice for women as they believe that present practices, prevalent all over the globe, explicitly or implicitly coerce women to become mothers. In the present study, an attempt has been made to understand the rhetorical character of arguments for and against the conflicting views; whether women choose to become mothers or they are coerced to become mothers. I had the opportunity of conducting phenomenological case studies of the lived experiences of women as mothers, expectant mothers and potential mothers for writing a paper for a conference on motherhood. My interviews with these women made it amply clear that there is much more to the experience of mothering than what we hear or read in the public discussions about the topic in the media or general conversations. In these personal and confidential conversations, my subjects shared with me their mixed and varied feelings of conflict, ambivalence, fear, apprehension, compulsion, coercion, disapproval, condemnation, seclusion, isolation, depression, being abandoned, frustration, anger, disappointment, hope, joy, and delight about their experiences of mothering or their hopes for mothering. It became evident to me, during the conduct of these phenomenological case studies, that patriarchal ideology is so deeply ingrained in our psyche that neither men nor women are free of it, irrespective of the level of their education or caste-class background or ideological orientation. A mind-set relatively more free of patriarchal thinking and acting may be possible only when both men and women learn to cooperate through working together for pursuing and achieving common human goals for human well being, consciously making an effort to help each other from becoming victims of gender prejudices and prevailing gender hierarchies. The task of a philosophical study of motherhood, from a phenomenological perspective on motherhood as an experience and institution of women's oppression, is to lay bare the prejudices underlying ideational structures which inform our experiences and understanding of motherhood. I propose to continue pursuing this project further in future.

During the last fifty years or a little more, human reproduction has become a subject of intensive medical research and technological intervention in a big way. Inventions and expansion of new reproductive technologies have provided unforeseen facilities, opportunities and services for controlling and regulating human reproduction through researches in the areas of conception, contraception, infertility, IVF, pregnancy, abortion, artificial insemination, genome sequencing and so on. The major achievement of these reproductive technologies is to separate the natural link between sexuality and reproduction. This separation seems to have opened seemingly miraculous possibilities for women to become mothers and reproduce without engaging in sexual relations with men. This separation between reproduction and sexuality has also made it possible for men and women to explore and indulge their sexuality without any fear of impregnation of women. It may be noted here that though the medical-technological discourse is about human reproduction and sexuality, it is women who are directly affected by these technologies in male dominated patriarchal societies. I have attempted to show in the fourth chapter of the thesis that most of these technologies do not respect women as human subjects but treat them no better than mere bio-medical bodies for their instrumental and medical invasions. For the medical experts engaged in research or reproductive health care in maternity hospitals, women as persons do not exist, their subjectivity does not matter. Despite the dangerous side-effects on women's health due to use of chemicals and drugs, implantations or instrumental invasions, exposure to radio-active procedures of clinical observation in these maternity hospitals, women are usually not properly or adequately informed about what they are going in for. Their consent for 'treatment' is obtained without providing them information which must be provided for obtaining 'informed consent'. Commercialisation of reproductive services in such clinics and hospitals has also added to the dehumanisation and objectification of women through fragmentation of their body parts for 'expert' attention when women seek help from such clinics and hospitals. It is mostly men who are in positions of authority on the basis of their special knowledge and expertise, and they lack an empathetic capacity to understand women's difficulties and problems. Such an attitude of indifference or hostility towards women's subjectivity can be a result of the fact that these technologies and medical facilities have been developed not in a response to women's need and demands but to serve the interests of medical research community and the business interests of those who set up maternity hospitals and clinics. Some feminists

have campaigned against the development and use of such technologies by forcefully propagating that neither women need such technologies nor did they ever ask for the same.

Given the rampant gender- inequalities within families and society at large, and asymmetries of power relations among men and women, medical experts and patients, policy planners and common citizens, providers and users of reproductive technologies, it is apprehended that with the spread and acceptance of such technologies, there is a great threat to women's control over their own bodies. With the import of more advanced technologies in these non-modern traditional societies, women are likely to become greater victims of new controls over their minimal or already missing reproductive freedom. It may also be further relevant to note that even in modern western societies of Europe and North America, it is only a very small segment of privileged women who may be really in a position to exercise their reproductive choice or freedom. In the various international conferences organised under the ambit of the United Nations, the issue of reproductive rights of women as a human right has been a subject of intensive debate. Women's 'reproductive rights', from a feminist perspective, are rightly understood not in terms of women's sexual freedom but in terms of the availability of real choices for women to have the freedom 'to birth or not to birth'. It has been emphasised in these conferences that one important goal of the women's movements for reproductive rights is to make men and women aware of the issues and concerns to human reproduction so that women can gain access to relevant medical information so that women become capable of informed choices about safe reproduction. In these conferences, supporters of women's reproductive rights have strongly argued that reproduction is a fundamental human right in the sense that neither the state nor any other group, community, institution or individual should be allowed to deny or interfere in a woman's autonomy over her reproductive processes. As a person, a woman must not be denied her freedom to assert or affirm her reproductive agency as she may like to choose.

I have discussed the differences of views among 'embracing' and 'resistance' feminists about their approach to the reproductive technologies in view of the divergence in their perceptions over the future impact of these technologies on the lives of women in particular and social life in general. If I was asked to choose strictly

between these two approaches, I will not like to join the camp of the embracing feminists. I am well aware of the disastrous and hazardous consequences of consumerist spread and irrational use of various technologies which are a threat to the very survival of life on our planet. However, I have suspicions about the effectiveness of the agenda of a complete rejection of technology in general, and new technologies of reproduction in particular. In my view, it may not be a technology per se but its use and consequences which can be positive or negative for human well being and quality of life. But I am also aware that it may not be within our human capacity to anticipate all the possible consequences of our actions well in advance. Technological innovations are a small part of human actions, and same holds true of our engagements in technological research as in other spheres of human activities. Therefore, it may not be fair to take an extreme position and oppose all technologies lock stock and barrel. I think that we have to deal with these questions not in isolation but in the larger context of political-economy where we need find ways to put checks and balances on pursuit of undue profit and domination. It may be more appropriate to support the resolution passed at the FINRRAGE Conference in Sweden:

“We seek a different kind of science and technology that respects the dignity of woman kind and all life on earth. We call upon women and men to break the fatal link between mechanistic science vested industrial interests and to take part with us in the development of a unity of knowledge and life.”

Women need to come together to share among themselves their experiences of their sexuality, which is largely repressed, and often exploited in male dominated patriarchal societies. They must develop the courage to start speaking about the unspoken, to talk about the taboo topics. They need to come forward to discuss their experiences of gender discrimination in their early childhood. Perhaps both men and women have to come together to break the barriers of patriarchal prejudices to make it possible that women are not victims rhetorically enforced motherhood and to learn to celebrate motherhood as a matter of their free choice, for the joy of celebration of life not as an empty ritual but as an active self-conscious chosen engagement.