



LOVE AND THE INTELLECTUAL WOMAN

DR. CHHAYA R. SUCHAK

(Psychology)

Vijaynagar Arts College, Vijaynagar

Dist – Sabarkantha. (GJ) INDIA

ABSTRACT

The concept of modern feminism, seemingly arrived in America overnight some two or more decades ago. But this overnight discovery of feminism was based on a long period of maturing and nurturing. Probably the reason why the build up was not easily apparent was because it was mostly the effort of individuals of different times, perceptions and approaches to the problem of women's emancipation. Looking back today on the history of the feminine revolution is like going on a trip into a past which, as we rediscover it, makes us realise that there were enough hints, clues and signals in the books, movies, articles and conferences/demonstrations all of which, at the time of their occurrence, could not be seen in their holistic entirety.

INTRODUCTION

It is in this spirit of rediscovery that one can re-read Dorothy and Red, Vincent Sheean's decades-old memoir of the marriage of Dorothy Thompson and Sinclair Lewis. Most people will remember the book, if at all, as an intimate chronicle of a famous marriage lived at the centre of a vital time: America between the world wars. They may also remember it as a compelling portrait of two enormously intelligent, talented people in continual conflict with a fiction of love and marriage that the two of them, together, created out of whole cloth: the cloth being a mutual emotional need to not face the fact that they had never really loved each other and were hopelessly misdated.

DR. CHHAYA R. SUCHAK

1Page



Reading the book today, one will realise that what was the record of a life – Dorothy Thompson’s – which, as a whole, deserved to take its place in the collective history of the slowly maturing feminist consciousness; a life that was a tonece consciously defined – that is, defined itself – by the essential misogyny of its environment, and yet unconsciously, beneath the deceptively smooth surface of fame and accomplishment, was continually groping its troubled way towards those feminist questions that, if they had only been properly framed, would have suddenly thrown the whole of a severe emotional confusion into relieving focus. But how could these questions, in 1935, have been properly framed ?

Dorothy Thompson was one of a generation of accomplished women who made no common cause with the general condition of women. She thought of her life as a self-willed one and, if she thought about it at all, would have said of other women’s lives: anyone with talent, energy, and drive can do what I have done, what’s all the fuss about ? Yet, she had in fact internalised the traumatic conflict of a human being living – by the dictates of her culture – an “unnatural” existence, and throughout her adult life the question of being a woman as well as a working human being dogged and confused her. It was a conflict that erupted again and again in her, flaring up, dying down, moving always towards the edge of full awareness, then falling back again into the half-truths that comprised intelligent thought on ‘The Woman Question’ in the 1930s.

Thompson was one of the strongest, most independent, and most ambitious of women, capable of reaching to the furthest limit of political thought in her time, but – like all but the rarest of free spirits – only to the limit of her time. Thus, she absorbed the most highly intelligent confusions about what it is to be a woman, suffered grievously over the role of love in a woman’s life, and in general confused and denied her own powers. Yet, so great was her vitality, so enormous her will to life, that the deepest dictates of her nature struggled successfully with emotional disctates of her culture. She could not help but be. And in the very act of being she unconsciously helped push social time forward. Her life is a classic case of that two-steps-forward-one-step-backward, lurching, cumulative movement towards the moment when an idea becomes an attitude.

Dorothy Thompson was born, the daughter of a Methodist parson, in 1894 in upstate New York. She received a spare, American Protestant upbringing, attended Syracuse University (then a Methodist institute in her father’s “conference”), and emerged from childhood a scrub-cheeked, large-boned, naively self-confident American girl possessed of a brash intelligence and a formidable eagerness for the world. She became a journalist, rose quickly in her profession; and by the early 1920s was a foreign correspondent in Central Europe. One day, having tea at the Ritz in Budapest, she looked up to see standing in the doorway the handsomest man she had ever laid eyes on. She fell instantly, irrevocably in love with him-

DR. CHHAYA R. SUCHAK

2P a g e



and she married him. His name was Josef Bard; he was a mediocre Hungarian Jewish journalist, magnetically attractive to women, a man of lazy lust, emotional decadence and one-raised-eyebrow morals (all qualities Thompson later came to identify with Budapest itself).

To the twenty-year old Dorothy, Bard was a poet; a man of depth and worldliness, the quintessential European who set in motion in her very young American self yearnings and longings she could neither identify nor resist. Needless to say, the marriage was a disaster. Bard unnerved her, humiliated her, and turned her into an anti-Semite (“You are so treacherous... they say it is a Jewish characteristic”). Nevertheless, it was many years before Dorothy could free herself of him. The man was complicated, he did teach her a great deal about herself, and he did introduce her to the artistic, intellectual, and political circles of Eastern Europe that made her worldly and developed her extraordinary gifts both for intelligent political analysis and courageous self-inspection.

Dorothy Thompson met Sinclair Lewis on her thirty – third birthday in July of 1927 in Berlin. She was at this time the chief Berlin correspondent for the Curtis newspapers. Lewis was forty two and the most famous American writer alive. Each was on the verge of divorce from their first marriage. They met at a press conference, and he instantly determined to have her. She was taken aback, flattered, and flustered, and of course ultimately worn down. Within a matter of weeks they were both “desperately in love.”

They really were two famous, lonely, emotionally suffering people, each drawn to a fantasy of the other, each fixed by a terrible longing to love the other. Lewis was in fact a dedicated alcoholic, a morbidly insecure and unaware man whose bottled up sexuality was the cause of more hatred, cruelty and anguish between them than anything else. Dorothy was an aggressively straightforward woman, eager as a college girl to “understand” everything, dedicated to the wistful notion that proper analysis brought instant correction. They never understood each other, or what each other’s lives were all about. Above all, they never faced squarely their irremediable division-that the language of his expressive inner life was profoundly literary while the language of hers was profoundly political. Driven as they both were by emotional need, they were incapable of seeing what was so abundantly there to be seen. Thus, they lied to themselves, and the more they lied to themselves the more determinedly they lied to each other. They were married in 1928, lived thirteen hellishly unhappy years together and separated with their emotional dreams of life broken.

Although the ostensible object of Dorothy and Red is the marriage, the dominant figure of the book is unquestionably Dorothy Thompson herself. Through her diaries and letters we find ourselves in the presence of that alone which makes a book come to life; a live human being



struggling to make sense of herself and what she is living through. In this particular case, the human being struggling is positively impaled on the cross of femaleness.

The single most important thing about Dorothy Thompson is that she lived her life as “the brilliant exception.” This made her both privileged and freakish. The journalists, politicians and intellectuals with whom she shared her work, her thought and her concerns were all men; other women in her circle were wives. Her opinions were sought and respected, her work published and paid attention to – and at the same time, a diplomat in Berlin addressed foreign press conferences with the salutation: “Mr. President, gentlemen, and Dorothy”. Then, the marriages she made were both those of a political woman to literary men: a classic reversal that brought both admonitions and snickering.

The diaries she kept are exactly like those of most men of distinction leading public lives; magnificent mixtures of political analysis, social observation and emotional angst, all thrown together, (for example, three paragraphs on the European crisis of the moment, followed by two on how Lewis is torturing her, and then one about the historical meaning of elitism: or, conversely, three paragraphs on Lewis ending with “Hindenburg made a damn fool speech last night”). They are the kind of diaries then accepted as stimulating in a man, uncanny in a woman.

She was surrounded at all times by a world of the most ordinary, respectable misogyny, one in which her authenticity as a woman was always suspect. Her own biographer, Vincent Sheean, a friend of thirty years, makes abundantly clear that while he loved Dorothy dearly he never quite considered her as beautiful, intelligent, and highly (perhaps too highly) informed, with a confident manner that was becoming to her fresh and original personality, although in other women it might not have been so.” And Sheean writes of her first husband: “It is noteworthy indeed that Josef, when he wishes to praise the distinctive qualities of his remarkable wife, speaks of her energy, ambition, will power, her ‘will-to-life’, and other elements in a character which sound more masculine than feminine.”

Thompson would have denied – with a good deal of bravado – that any part of this pervasive atmosphere mattered a damn to her. “Any fool knows that distinguished women are as rare as distinguished men and cannot be judged by ordinary standards,” she writes, thus avoiding the fundamental issues her peculiar position raised. But her private thoughts reveal the anxiety these issues caused her. In her diary for 1927, she records a conversation with a German writer:

“Charles Recht.....told me I was biological monstrosity, that no man would stick to me because I'd give them all an inferiority complex, and a lot of other



very hard, nasty, and I think, unjustified things. After all, he doesn't know me at all.... Recht made me sick too with the statement that all men experienced physical revulsion after intercourse with women. Said it was biological law.... I know what he says isn't true ! The damned man got under my skin though."

Thus, although she was in essence a political creature with an intense, lifelong interest in the nature of government and the inner workings of society, she was always prey to the accusation that her exuberant pursuit of these interests was proof of her "unnaturalness." (Imagine her male counterparts having any part of their energies drained by a similar preoccupation!).

Absurdly, concomitantly, perhaps in reaction to her accusers, she was endlessly involved in her mind with the business of love and she was haunted by the conviction that what she needed above all else to make herself whole was "creative marriage." This conviction was her emotional downfall; it gave her the illusion of being deeply in touch with herself when in fact it sabotages any genuine route to her real self; the illusion was fed by the wisdom of her day and experienced by her as natural desire.

In 1926, Dorothy wrote to her first husband: "I have in me the capacity to be deeply faithful to one man whom I love and who loves me; what I want is to find that person and build a life with him which shall have breadth, depth, creative quality, dignity, beauty and inner loyalty. If I do not find him I shall go it alone." The point of this important last sentence is that she didn't really believe it. (And neither until very recently did anybody else; it is painful to consider that it is exactly the kind of letter, with the same discrepancy between apparent and actual meaning, that thousands of women could have written as recently as ten years ago). Secretly, although all her life she was an unstoppable workhorse, Dorothy Thompson was never actually convinced that for a woman love was not more important than work, and that if push came to shove she could not go it alone. Secretly – although life repeatedly forced upon her evidence of her own strength – she yearned for the one, the only, the magical man who would make it all come together for her. This man in her imagination – the one who would give her the "creative marriage" she needed to make herself "whole" – she mythicised, and to him she gave tremendous powers over herself. When she met Lewis she was a goner.

On September 27, 1927, Dorothy and Lewis were due to attend a fancy dinner party in Berlin. Dorothy had got a new dress and silver shoes for the occasion. An hour before the party Lewis was dead drunk and the evening was clearly lost. She went to his hotel room to attempt to revive him. Hopeless. The entry in her diary for that night reads:



“Dead to the world. I was beside myself. I washed his face but he only came to enough to smile at me with fishy, dead eyes. (Those wide aufgerissene Augen). I cried terribly. Something in me collapsed.... All the time I was sobbing, I saw how everything is going.... I saw that everything has been a dream.... like the dream of a child who says ‘When I grow up.....’ I saw all this and thought, ‘I will get up and go. Somehow I will reconstruct my life. There is still work....’ And I knew that there was not even that. I saw that being a woman has got to me, at last, too. I saw that if Hall (Lewis) goes now, I am finished. I cannot live by myself, for myself. All my heart cried out: this is my man, the one man, and he has come too late ! Nothing left for me but to become brittle or to rot. All the time Hal was making love to me. Feebly, but tenderly. I kissed his breast and he yearned toward me....”

In the deepest part of herself she believed Lewis to be more important than she was. She believed her gifts were inferior to his gifts. She believed he was, ultimately, the stronger of the two, although, patently, she was the stronger of the two. She mythicised him, she never mythicised herself. In March 1928, in Italy, waiting for Lewis’ divorce to come through, she wrote to him:

“I see you with your torn open eyes, your face scarred as though with flames, your long-legged body leaning against the wind, the pain in you, the sweetness in you, the mad anger in you which constantly rises to defend you against becoming one of the settled and contented of the earth; the urge in you to pain, to castigation, because in you is the world, in you is your own civilisation, which you will castigate until it is pure and worthy to be loved... But I do not castigate you; salvation is by passion and by understanding. You, beloved, furnish the passion.... I shall try to understand.”

Above all, she mythicised her need for him. In November of 1927, in Russia, on the greatest assignment of her life (the tenth anniversary of the Russian revolution), an American woman travelling with the journalists dies suddenly of a brain tumour and Thompson writes to Lewis in Berlin:

“And now all of a sudden, she’s dead, from a abscess in the brain, or something. And I’ve wanted all day to run home to you, because it scared me, and I don’t feel quite safe anywhere except with you, darling, darling.”

A dozen letters follow this one, all bleating about how she can’t go on without him, how she can’t pay attention to what’s happening in Moscow. She can’t, she can’t, she needs him, she



needs him. What is hilarious and exasperating and deeply significant about all this is: She didn't run home to Lewis, she stayed and did her work, and produced an important series of articles on Russia; but the effect on her emotional understanding (that she was in fact work-independent first and love-dependent second) was nil. She never got the message. And because she never got the message, she never properly respected her relation to work; she believed through much of her life that she plunged into work in order to save herself from the emotional turmoil that loving Lewis had inflicted on her – not that she plunged into work because the expressiveness in her, the exuberant life force in her, was so pre-eminently that of a working, thinking being.

Thus, she was a woman of power and potency who ignored the lessons of that power and rejected the goodness of that potency. Yet, she did no more and no less than millions of others alive at that moment. Her confusions were at one with the confusions of her time. In that same fatal November of 1927 she wrote in her diary:

“The reason why modern women are so unhappy and why they unconsciously hate men, is because they have gotten better and men have gotten worse. They will not let men swallow them up, because the swallows aren't good enough. I will give my body, soul and spirit to a man who can use it up to make a Damascene blade, but not to someone who will hammer out of it a lead paperweight. Women know that making money.... isn't worth the expenditure of whatever flame of life is in them.... Leora (in Arrowsmith), protesting against any cheapening of Martin's passionate dream, was only refusing to reduce the price on her own complete gift.”

This is pure Laurentian half-truth. (“It's because the men aren't men anymore that the women have got to be”). It is both an indictment of Western civilisation between the wars and a damnable usage in that indictments of the oldest, most wrong headed notion in the world of what Woman is, what Man is, and what the proper, ideal relation between the two is. Dorothy would give her “body, soul and spirit to a man who can use it up to make a Damascene blade.” There she is – the strongest woman of her moment, at the top of her world – longing for the restoration of an ideal world in which she could give herself to a man who would do great deeds; instead of glorying in the great deeds that she herself would do, was in fact doing.

At the same time (there is no end to this mess), she knew, And in the knowing suffered bitterly. On February 13, 1929, six months after her marriage to Lewis, the following entry occurs in her diary:



“I told him I didn’t want to go to Florida because of my lecture date on the 21st. He then got angry and sneered at me: “You with your important little lectures. You, with your brilliant people.... You want to talk about foreign politics which I am too ignorant to understand.”

When he talks so my heart freezes up. And then, in a minute he is very sweet again. Oh, my God. I really don’t know whether I love or hate him-but tonight I was bored with him.

“I say to myself ‘You are totally unimportant and you are married to a man of genius – if you give up your life to making him happy it is worth it.

“But it isn’t ! It isn’t ! I can really do nothing for him. He is like a vampire – he absorbs all my vitality, all my energy, all my beauty – I get incredibly dull. If ever I begin to talk well he interrupts the conversation. He is not above calling me down in front of people because the dinner is bad – he did so when I had been too ill to bother about ordering the dinner, talking to me in a tone I would not use to a servant.

It’s either give up my work or give up Hal. My work! I can’t live and work in a world where I cannot plan from one day to the next. Yet if I give up work he will throw it up to me some day... Indeed, he has already done so....

“And my very mind degenerates.... I know so well what I want of life :

“I want to understand all manner of things better. I know I have taste and a good head. My creative gifts are negligible. But I should like to contribute to a clearer and deeper understanding of the things I understand. My gifts are pre eminently social.

“What I need : More knowledge.

“What I prize : human relationships, of all kinds, passionate, tender, intellectual understanding.

“What I want :” a home which will be a centre of life and illumination for people who can really contribute to the development of the humanities.

My gifts : interpretative : power to draw and record others. My interests: all humanities; politics; literature insofar as it is not precious but deals with living ideas; economics; all the attributes of civilised living – cooking, house – furnishing, manners.

DR. CHHAYA R. SUCHAK

8P a g e



My passion : creative men.

And this leads me to this relationship where what I prize, what I want, what interests me, my gifts all are stultified and rendered sterile.”

It is a heartbreaking document, this diary entry; heartbreaking and deeply important. “My passion; creative men.” In a single sentence she has entirely undercut the noble manifesto that precedes it, demonstrating superbly the power of blind emotion over penetrating intellect. She has thrown into relief the net of socially determined awareness in which are caught even the most psychologically astute minds, the most feeling intelligence, the most energetic of spirits. Thompson “understood” every thing, but her emotional sense of herself as a woman had been moulded by the thought of her time, and in the end that psychological factor dominated her and made her more closely resemble the spirited, “rebellious” heroines of nineteenth-century novels than the women who would come two generations after her.

On August 25, 1934, Dorothy Thompson was expelled from Nazi Germany by decree of the secret police. She was the first American correspondent to be expelled from a foreign country. Overnight, she became internationally famous. Within months she was one of the most influential political journalists in the world. Throughout the war years she was consulted by presidents and prime ministers, read daily by millions, and known to every household in America. Sheean writes:

“When all is said, it is through and in politics, both national and international, that Dorothy takes her place in the history of the time....She had a sense of mission about the real and present danger (the rise of fascism), as she saw it, both to the U.S. and to the Western world. This was the passion of her work and gave it an incredible intensity at times, more like a crusader’s call to arms than like anything normally known in journalism.”

Her fame, when it came, was hateful to Lewis. It finished their marriage. Although she “knew” better, she could not bear to see the marriage actually going. The early 1940s – even while she is running about the world trying to help save Europe from fascism – are filled with anguished letters to Lewis; letters in which she tries to explain their love, to give it significance, to rescue their life through what was always of paramount importance to both of them; words. She could not let go; not then, not for years afterward.

The liberation of women in the longest, most complicated revolution on record. Thompson was in every real respect, a soldier in the army of the revolution. “While she could not see the



shape of the war, she nevertheless participated in a number of its battles. Today, thousands of women who are neither as intellectually or emotionally developed as Dorothy Thompson know, with clarifying power, about their lives that which she with all her sumptuous gifts could not know about her life. But if she had not lived her life-exactly as she lived it – we would not today know what we do.

REFERENCE:-

1. Women's Development In India, A. K. Sharan, Anmol publications.
2. Social Change and Social Control, Rajendra K. Sharma, Atlantic Publication.
www.atlanticbooks.com
3. Society and Social Psychology", A. K. Sharan, Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi
4. Social Psychology, Anda Prakashan, Ahmedabad
5. Applied Social Psychology : A Global Perspective, V. K. Kool And Rita Grawal
6. Adjustment Psychology, Parshwa Publication, Ahmedabad.
7. Applied Psychology, Parshwa Pablication, Ahmedabad.
8. Personality Development, Chintan Prakashan, Rajshthan
9. www.google.research