

Towards reclamation of the Wild Feminine Psyche : Archetypal reflections on female way of life

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For centuries, women have faced social and psychological neglect which has dragged them away from their own inner essence. What enhances the solemnity of the problem is not just a lack of understanding of their psychic reality from their male counterparts, but self-denial of their own inner beings by women who are chasing the masculine ideals blindly. The answer to the age old question of inequality lies first and foremost in the acceptance of women by women themselves. Men and women are created differently and this difference needs to be cherished rather than obliterated. Women, more than ever are in a need to embrace their own Wild feminine essence personified by the Wild woman who represents a psychological reality of their existence. The Wild woman lives in the heart and psyche of all females and seeks active fulfillment in their lives. Understanding and realization of the Wild Woman and bringing her into their everyday life is the only salvation for modern women who are more than ever distant from their inner psychic realities.

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"I want to put my paws over my eyes and groan, for I see what they do not see..." (Estes, 1992)

Such is the predicament of human mind, that we are often blinded by things that seem too apparent and move away from things that are hidden beneath layers of social and cultural experiences and accumulations. It would not be entirely wrong to propose that one of the fiercest debates that has garnered much interest in general public life as well as academia has been that of the "battle of the sexes". One can see this debate being pondered upon by generations and generations of scholars and philosophers alike. One of the few earliest psychologists to have presented a rather radical view on the gender-battle is Dr. Carl Gustav Jung. It has by far been discussed by most of his staunch believers and ardent followers that Jung is difficult to read, not only because of the subject matter he deals with but also because at more places than one, he seems to be far ahead of his time. Not only did he reflect upon and openly discuss a few issues that seemed too far-fetched for his time, he made no qualms about being vocal about challenges he could foresee far ahead of his time, much to the displeasure of his contemporaries.

One of the chief propositions made by Carl Jung is that human psyche is not unilateral singularly functioning machinery but rather complex blends of delicately balanced opposites that exist in a dynamic inter relationship. Jung (2003) was forthright in discussing the complex notion of gender and allied issues and he moved forth with an assertion that masculinity and femininity are vital principles that are found in biological men and women alike. Thus, he arrived at the notion of what he called the contra-sexual archetypes. The term archetype herein refers to those primordial images of mankind that govern all of man's action and existence. These are the exemplar models of all human behavior, and man is bound into an unconscious repetition and replication of archetypal images. From acts as basic as eating and sleeping to complex acts of going to war, all actions are archetypally rooted.

Jung (2003) posits that there are two guiding principles of masculinity called as the Animus and femininity called as Anima that make up human psyche. On one hand, the animus governed by the logos represents ability for calculated action, logic and rationale and on the other the anima stands for connectivity, emotionality and receptivity. Guided by the Yin, she is passive, full of instinctive wisdom, subjective and concerned minutely with relatedness to people and things. Governed by the Yang principle, the animus is creative, arousing, generating, phallic, aggressive and discriminatory (Hill, 1998). What needs to be clarified here is that while discussing these masculine and feminine principles, Jung asserts clearly that he is talking about masculinity and femininity in general and is not describing or defining the social attributes of any gender. Both these reflect principles and are therefore nothing more than an accumulation and reflection of primordial archetypal images. They do not suggest social roles to be attributed to any gender and nor do they reinforce any existing stereotype relating to gender roles in society. Rather, he posits that both are contained within each individual, to the extent that a person ceases to be a unipolar entity and derives much of one's creative power from the existence of the contra-sexual within.

Issues and Challenges in Traditional Understanding

Much Jungian literature has dealt so far with the issue of gender and gender roles. The purpose of the present work is to enlist and emphasize upon the notion of the feminine and its Wild essence. Therefore, a detailed account of previous works is not required at this juncture. What shall suffice here is to provide a very brief account of the Jungian view of gender roles to the reader before shifting focus to the feminine in particular.

Being rooted firmly in a biological approach to reality, Jungian authorship has laid emphasis on the existent biological differences between men and women. One of the pioneers of this work, Anthony Stevens has written at length about the biological basis of sex differences. Among many others, he posits that physical differences between men and

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women in terms of height, weight, muscular development and so on are genetically determined. He suggests that “growth and development of boys and girls are clearly programmed differently from the moment of conception”, citing that even physical “superiority” of men begins to manifest in the womb itself resulting in faster growth of male fetuses, and boys being heavier and longer at birth (Stevens, 1982). Hence, it is not a social pressure but a biological manifestation that men are better at athletics and sports; they are biologically programmed to be so. He even goes on to explain issues such as male polygamy from a biological perspective. Elsewhere, Zinkin (1992) highlights male superiority in terms of visual motor skills while suggesting that women are more specialized at mothering and nurturing and are much ahead of their male counterparts in verbal abilities.

To a naïve and immature reader this might sound offensive. But what needs to be understood is that this so-called offence comes from years and generations of social neglect and incorrect understanding. The reason one might feel offended about such biological truths is rooted only in long years of social conditioning where it has been taught over and over that only the male ideal of life is “better”. Jungians however do not shy away from dismissing such neglect and take a clear stand in suggesting that these differences do exist in reality and “to attempt to abolish them on ideological grounds is not just plain silly, it is impossible; it represents a preposterous violation of the archetypal intent” (Stevens, 1982). Therefore, from an archetypal perspective, the notion is very clear. Men and women are different and there can be no logical denial of the same. The problem is not in the difference, but in the way this difference is perceived and transmitted across generations. Comparing men and women is nothing short of comparing apples and oranges and complaining each single day as to why a particular orange fails to taste like the best apple one has had. This is precisely the irony. The real battle between the genders is therefore not centered on a difference, but on an almost compulsive need to turn a blind eye to the obvious fact that differences do not always imply a negation or decimation of the other. It is necessary to differentiate between the genders, of course, since they were made differently and is it not a well known fact that things made differently would be made for different purposes? What a needle can do so effortlessly, a sword can't dream to achieve in a million attempts.

In his work, Jung attempts to explain, at least partially, the depth psychological reason behind a lack of understanding of the feminine. He does not turn a blind eye to the issues of patriarchy and male domination in the social and academic world, but he suggests that the reason that men have an incomplete understanding of the feminine principle is because a “woman always stands just where the man's shadow falls, so that he is only too liable to confuse the two” (Jung, 2003). Such an assertion is not to be confused in terms of social standing of the genders, but what Jung really is

pointing towards is a more basic and fundamental acceptance of the fact that for a man, the woman and the experience of her is something alien. Since he has never himself experienced the first hand life of being a female, a man cannot fully comprehend her conscious experience of life. Therefore, for a man, the woman is but a shadow of his own existence, it is the un-lived yet very potential part of his own being and existence that takes him forward and onward, such that over a period of time he begins to see the other gender through the experience of his own latency.

Elsewhere Jung also suggests that it is nothing but a logical fallacy that one understands the other from his own perspective in such a manner that he “presupposes another's psychology as being identical with his own” (Jacobi, 1953). Thus, there are two issues inherent herein. Jung suggests that for men, women represent their other half, the half which they do not have any conscious experience of, and therefore can be known only through projections of the inner. While writing on the unconscious life of females, Jung accepts that he cannot know the feminine side in any way other than through the explorations of his own unconscious feminine side, his anima. This is aggravated further by the belief in popular culture that what one is should be taken as the benchmark for “normalcy” and what is different from oneself should be regarded as nothing but a fallacy, an erroneous occurrence in nature that is best left out of public view. Thus, the long standing male bias towards the feminine arises, according to Jung, through a logical although unconscious misapprehension primarily, and only later is it aggravated by social structures and political motives of either gender.

Towards an archetypal understanding of the feminine concerns

As already stated above, according to Jung, the anima with its origin in the Yin principle represents the feminine principle in men, and interestingly also in women. The difference being that in men the anima, or what Jung also calls as the “soul-force”, is the contra-sexual, the other towards whose integration they must work for the growth of their personality. For women, the anima is not the contrasexual but the source of the feminine, the guiding principle for their growth and individuation. Jung prescribes “individuation” as the process of becoming what one was destined to become in a whole and graceful manner. It is the path and process of finding one's true individuality in the outer world. According to Chang (2009), the process of individuation entails a dual process of finding the truth about one's destiny as well as searching for a true meaning in one's life with a purpose of achieving a “personal sense of wholeness and authenticity” rather than “perceiving oneself in terms of an externally imposed social function”. The problem for women's journey of individuation therefore is that in trying to find a personal meaning of their own lives, they are drawn into a process of elongation of their own self denial and a continuation of enforced conformity and suppression of their true selves in a society that is increasingly governed by male ideals.

Much of popular culture is governed by male ethos and a masculine view of the world. Due to the inherent error of judging a female from their own standpoint, men have erroneously ended up creating a world where only the masculine ideal is upheld and strived towards. Archetypally, Jung suggests a great fear and the unknown feminine mystery as a reason for men progressively running away from the feminine point of view. Increasingly the culture has begun defining and promoting a man's view of the world. The issue is not whether it is right or wrong, but a more basic issue is that a man's view is different from the woman's. A more grave error arises when women themselves fall prey to the very ideal that they are fighting against and begin defining themselves and their role in the society from the male point of view. The problem increases manifold when generations of women after women die fighting the masculine ideal and striving to be like the men in a world created by the rather than accepting, understanding and cherishing their own biology and psychology. Jung indeed was far ahead of his time when he asserted that women are "more psychological than men" (Jung, 2003), since they have a greater capacity for living out the mysterious emotional side of the continuum which the male mind can seldom comprehend. Unlike other authors of his time, Jung did not shy away from taking a stand for the feminine and being vocal about his reverence and awe for the same. Sadly, as men and women progressed into modern ways of life, they began to drift further and further away from their own basic psychologies. Men, in their absolute fear of the feminine, and due to an uneasiness in not being able to logically put together a part of the world that they did not belong to, began negating it further and further. Sadly, women who could have steered clear of such a fallacy became unwilling prey to the same.

Tuby (1982) suggests that women today are in a great muddle because they tend to be unaware of their own psychic reality that transcends their conscious minds and they too have undergone years of social conditioning into believing that they must absolutely accept and live by a man's view of the world. Women today need to go through what Jungians popularly call the "dark night of the soul" and each woman must find her own answer to the particular problem of reclaiming the lost feminine essence. The problem with the present way of life of the women is that they themselves are finding it extremely tough to value themselves for who they are and what they are about. Because they are unable to value themselves, they end up blindly copying the male ethos of public and more so private lives. Owing to much promotion of the same in media, women are driven farther away from their own essence and due to subjugation of not only their public but also their personal lives; they find themselves completely at a loss for understanding and responding to the ever increasing call of their own inner being. And is it not a known fact that the more one runs away from one's own shadow, the more closely at heels it follows, until one is ready to stop and enter into a willing relationship with the same. Jungian scholars suggest that in copying male way of life and

rejecting their own biology and motherhood women are rejecting their own psychological foundations. While a man is made in the image of the mind and has capacity for action, a woman is made in the image of the soul and has capacity for feeling. Growing emphasis on the male way of life is leading to what Jungian scholars suggest a "pathological exaggeration of the masculine" and a "pathological feminine diminishing". The problem for women increases manifold in wake of the fact that there is a double rejection that the feminine ideal is facing, firstly at the obvious hands of the fearful men and secondly at women's own blind conscious which is busy aping the male, forgetting and moving farther away from its own deeper essence.

Jungian authorship is vocal about the fact that women are endowed with immense creative powers due to their psychological nature and their capacity for intuition and deep feeling, but this very creative potential is smothered when women are caught in the unconscious imitation of the male way of life. Jung (2003) suggests that a woman's dissimilar psychology is a source of information for things and ideas for which the man has no eyes and therefore must be regarded in its own right for the prosperity of civilization. Men understand the feminine nature of the soul complex through the actual influence of women in their waking lives, from their own unconscious feminine sides and from the inherited image of the woman in their collective unconscious. They do not have a direct lived experience of the feminine ideal and therefore end up assigning an inferior consciousness to women, which is nothing but a false assumption. The sad part is that the views and opinions of the society at large are usually taken to be common sense understandings and therefore increasingly women fall prey to accepting these opinions of themselves without question. In trying to look too much like what the world expects them to look like women end up creating a "too-good" persona for themselves which suits the societal ideals only too well for their own unconscious liking. Thus they end up feeling increasingly frustrated and confined in their existence. Jung (2003) suggests that "whoever builds up a too good persona for himself naturally has to pay for it with irritability". No wonder the more modern the society becomes, the more blindly do the women begin aping the masculine ideal. And Jung warns us well in advance of his own time, that this "mental masculinization" of women has grave consequences for the psychological life of women because the more one lives out the opposite in oneself, the more one relegates one's own conscious life to the background to the effect that one's individuality suffers tremendously. In living a male's way of life a woman is inflicting grievous injury to her ego-self axis and Jung suggests that in "the masculinity if the woman and the femininity of the man are inferior, and it is regrettable that their full value should be contaminated by something that is less valuable" (Jacobi, 1953). Thus, more than ever there is a need for women to stop this aping of the masculine ideal and to restore the feminine, more specifically the Wild Woman within.

The Wild Woman Archetype in female psyche

The seminal work in the area of uncovering the Wild feminine has been done by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992). Primarily engaged in her study of the wolves, Dr. Estes came upon an interesting realization of the stark similarities between lives of wolves and women and suggested that the unconscious lives of females closely resembled that of wolves in terms of their abilities to care for and nurture what they create and to fiercely protect their pack and their mate. Estes calls this essence of the feminine psyche as the “Wild Woman” who represents the instinctual archetype of female psyche, signifying that it comes naturally to all females. The Wild Woman is the prototypical woman whose cycles and symbolic representations change but who in essence does not. She is a metaphor for the force that funds all females and her wildness is symbolic of the innate integrity of the female psyche that has healthy boundaries and leads a natural life. The Wild Woman has her origin in the psychoid unconscious which is the deepest part of one's being and therefore she is the source of the feminine, that which gives health and prosperity to all women. She is all-in-one for the woman: her teacher, leader, model, inventor, initiator, mother and healer.

By rule, archetypes are never known tangibly but only through the effects that they produce in our lives. Thus, the wild woman is known in lives of all females during times of intense longing and in the unknown and unnamed power women experience during pregnancy, while tending to their young or nurturing a love relationship. She is archetypally the reason why women experience bouts of fatigue, depression, powerlessness, chronically doubtful and uncertain of their own existence, sometimes even at times when things are turning out absolutely wonderfully for them on the outside. The wild woman is what gives a woman the “anger of the lion” and “the wisdom of the child”. She is the many-women-in-one who gives a multidimensional depth to the feminine psyche. She is the unashamed original rebel who is unshaken and merges a woman's true sacred being with all she has ever been and all she is yet to become.

Estes (1992) eloquently points out that the proof for her existence is our mere being, “since we are the psyche, we are the proof of her existence”. In asking for a proof for her being, one would be asking for a proof for one's own existence. One is because one is, no questions asked! A study and exploration of the Wild woman is essential because more than ever there is a need to recover the natural ways of the instinctive feminine psyche and a need to re-balance the masculine and the feminine ideals by exploring the untouched feminine and elevating her presence in life.

Uncovering the Wild Woman in Indian Mythology

Jung suggested that much of what is required to be known about a culture can be known from its mythology, since mythology reflects the true essence of the collective in a pristine manner. So, if one needs to uncover and understand

the wild woman in the Indian context, one must look at the portrayal of the feminine in Indian mythology. Jung suggests that the behavior of the gods and goddesses in the heavens above serves as a true ideal for the behavior of men and women on the earth. The way women are treated at present, might be the result of years of social constructions around gender and sex roles, but how women are treated in mythology represents the psyche in its purest form. The women of the world must raise their eyes to the heaven above to invoke the goddesses whose behavior shall serve as a guiding light unto their own and enable an understanding of the true feminine essence devoid of social manifestations and expectations.

Unlike some other major cultures of the world, Indian culture raises the feminine essence to a high altar which is manifested in the presence of cornucopia of Goddesses who are revered in various forms in the country. For the purpose of the present work, only a brief glimpse at the world of the Indian Goddesses shall suffice in demonstrating their inherent wildness. Again, it needs to be kept in mind that wildness here is not used in the modern sense of going haywire or being out of control but in an archetypal sense of being free and close to basic nature. Since Indian mythology is vast and expansive, in order to contain the voluminous amounts of data, the source for the references in present section has been limited to Dr. Devdutt Pattanaik's (2000) work on the female goddesses. His extensive work shall suffice for demonstration purposes.

Pattanaik's rich and insightful work on the Indian Goddesses brings forth some very essential characteristics inherent in Indian mythology. He demonstrates the importance of the physical body in the lives of females by suggesting that a “woman must accept her biology, man does not have to” (Pattanaik, 2000). In order to become more truly individuated women must, more than ever accept their physical body in whichever form they've been bestowed with and seek to nurture and nourish it well. In his work, Pattanaik recounts the tale from Mahabharata of the daughter of a sage who performs austerities and is yet denied entry into heaven till she goes back to earth and fulfills her biological obligations. Only then is she allowed to enter the gates of heaven.

The association of the female to the material principle in the form of prakriti goes back to more ancient Indian traditions that describe the female as the material principle associated with intuition, emotion and carnality. Indian scriptures talk about the supreme entity Lord Brahma, whose daughter Shatarupa is the material principle that has the capacity to transform into various forms, symbolically representing the Wild woman's multifaceted form. She is the woman who has a thousand forms and is equally comfortable in sifting through these forms. The Indian gods on one hand create the world and have the power to destroy it, but even the Gods are incapable of any action without the female principle. “To create, Brahma needs information that comes from

Saraswati...to sustain Vishnu needs wherewithal which is provided by Laxmi...Shiva becomes the destroyer, acquiring strength and inspiration from Shakti.” (Pattanaik, 2000). Thus, the masculine principle in itself ceases to be the end-all of creation. In Indian scriptures, the status of a wife is elevated into being more than a home maker and key to worldly pleasure into being someone who can fight demons with the power of her chastity and who alone can enable a man to repay the debts of his ancestors. Indian mythology regards killing a woman as a graver sin than abortion and a woman is seen as capable of inciting blind passion in man. The Indian Goddess embodies the Wild feminine essence in as much as she becomes the docile Gauri who nurtures and the fierce Kali who destroys evil and fights lone battles with fiercest demons. It is interesting to note that the same Goddess denotes the mother as well as the killer, representing the multiple forms of the feminine psyche. Women can, psychologically speaking, be both the destroyer and the creator. She is capable of bringing forth creation and raising her young with tender passion and yet she is also capable destruction that baffles the conscious human mind. As the goddess of death in mythology, Mrityu, the female principle is fierce and unforgiving causing death to what must die, irrespective of the age and stage and unlike her male counterpart, Yama, she is shrewd and resorts to killing in anger. Once widowed, the female goddesses return to a wilder state of being indulging their unbridled sexuality, using sex not as a physical pursuit but as a medium for spiritual fulfillment.

Pattanaik (2000) suggests that the behavior of the Indian Goddesses is Wild and by rule anything wild needs to be domesticated because it entails a “tendency to overrun civilization”. So women running Wild in mythology are restrained in whichever manner possible. Perhaps, the social life of females is no different. Because the society fears their Wildish essence, women are chained psychologically into believing that they are not good enough and whatever roles they play in social life from motherhood to that of a homemaker are unworthy of appreciation. It makes women seek a denial of these very basic psychological aspects of themselves, it makes them hate the idea of motherhood, of having to look after and nurture a family and so on. Whereas, in effect, these “tasks” for them are not inferior but make up their psychological basis and thereby command due appreciation.

Once set free, the Wild essence of the feminine invokes a psychic energy of its own and ceaselessly carries on its pursuit till its goal is achieved. Just like the Indian Goddesses exemplify, the feminine essence is dynamic in existence and entails multiple forms, all of which seek nourishment in equal measures. Women have been restrained so far in intense fear of their basic wild nature that is incomprehensible to man with his logical mind. Women themselves have been negating this ever growing need to understand and cultivate this seemingly intense

contradiction that makes up her psyche, for she is burdened with a capacity to love and hate with equal measure. Her body is for her not only an instrument of physical pleasure but also a medium for spiritual fulfillment. Each month a woman is reminded of her biological roots while the culture reinforces a negation of the same which is harmful for the female psyche. It causes a woman to become increasingly shriveled in her existence which needs to be ceased with immediate effect in order for a woman to be able to grow and thrive burgeon both materially and spiritually.

Reclamation of the lost Wild Woman

For centuries now women have fallen prey to the fallacy of living up to the male ethos and way of live and indulging in fierce battle with men in striving for equality, while being unaware or ignorant of the fact that this equality is being sought on none other than male principles of life which negate feminine identity in the first place. A more radical way of approaching the feminine psyche therefore is to understand that men and women have differences and these differences need to be rejoiced rather than fought against. For what good is the world if everything and everyone were to be a perfect facsimile of each other? The growing concern for the females therefore is to turn inwards rather than outwards and reclaim their own basic Wild essence, elevating it to its due and just position in their lives. The call of the Wild feminine in the psyche shall be incessant till the time due attention is paid to it firstly by the females, and through them by the other half of the population. A strict effort is needed by each woman to invite and enliven the Wild woman within in order to reclaim for herself a more fulfilled life. Just like the Goddesses in the heaven above become worthy of reverence only when they live out their fierce passionate and Wild side, the women down below can achieve their true ideal by living out the Wildish feminine essence in themselves.

Out of the many ways and practices advocated by Dr. Estes towards reclamation of the Wild Woman within, she suggests that women must pay enough attention to their inner instinctual lives, their inner animal Self and give it enough space to manifest itself in their lived lives. Instead of being caught up forever in the healer-archetype and wishing to be-all for everyone all the time, women must learn to take out enough quality time for themselves and indulge in the passions of their hearts and minds. They must learn to indulge in whatever act of creation they feel belongs to them. For some women, cooking might be the creation their heart strives for, and for others tending to a garden and for yet others it might be painting, singing, dancing, raising their kids devotedly so on and so forth. To indulge in creation is the ultimate act of feminine wisdom that brings women closer to their Wild. They must learn to reclaim also their physical bodies before they can reclaim their psychic lives. Women need to work together, help each other grow and move forth into accepting their physical bodies in whichever form and color and shape and learn to love and be with them. Being in company of elder women who have seen the seasons of time

and acquired wisdom is also something that helps women gain access to timeless wisdom in stories of the Old women.

Reclamation of the Wild Woman thus, though slow and tedious, is the ultimate salvation for the women if they do wish to lead a more fulfilling life in accordance with their Wild Woman. What's interesting and intriguing is that there can be no one single path to this recovery. Every single woman, all over the globe has to get attuned to her own inner being and seek for herself the path that suits her most. As many women on the face of the earth, as many are the paths to recovery of the lost Wild Woman.

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