

Pol Sc Help

Marxist Feminism
Alexandra Kollontai
Winged & Wingless Eros

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PAST YEAR'S QUESTIONS

Syllabus: Alexandra Kollontai: Winged and wingless Eros; proletarian woman; socialization of housework; disagreement with Lenin

2019: What are Alexandra Kollontai main disagreements with Lenin on Women's Issue?

2018 : Discuss Feminism of Alexandra Kollontai.

Life and Time of Alexandra Kollontai

- **Was born** in 1872, as **Alexandra Mikhailovna Domontovich** at Saint Petersburg, Russia in a aristocratic but liberal landowning family.
- Her **father** was army general; **mother** belonged to landowning class of Finland.
- **Education:** good education in history, politics, economics. Knew Russian, English, German, French, Finnish, and many other languages
- **Influence:** Marx, Engles and August Bebel (German socialist thinker)
- **1993** married **Vladimir Kollontai**, her cousin. 1998, left him and later on married **Pavel Dybenko**, a fellow Bolshevik revolutionary and military officer
- **Revolutionary phase: 1899-1917**
 - 1899: returned Russia, joined RSDLP ; 1906: joined Menshevik faction of RSDLP
 - 1908 : exiled to Germany, 1915: she broke with the Mensheviks and joined the Bolsheviks
 - 1917: returned to Russia, had a short but very inflential political career in Soviet Govt.
- **Political Career: 1917-21**
 - 1917: Central Committee member, 1917-18 **Commissar** of social welfare, 1920: **director** of **Zhenotdel**
- **Political outcast, Diplomatic career: 1922-45**
 - 1922: sent on diplomatic 'exile' after falling out with Lenin on many issues
 - 1925-26: briefly returned to Russia in 1925-26 to oppose new marriage code
 - From 1923 to 1945 served as diplomat and ambassador to Norway, Mexico, Sweden; died in 1952
- **Books:**
 - *Social bases of women's question ; Sexual relation and the class struggle ;*
 - *The family and the Communist State,*
 - *Free Love; A Great Love; Love of the Worker's Bee*
 - *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman.*



Alexandra Mikhailovna Domontovich(1872 –1952)

- Revolutionary socialist,
- Marxist Feminist,
- Novelist,
- Diplomat, Politician

Instrumental in publication of **Robotnitsa**- women's magazine and setting up **Zhenotdel**(1919)- Women's Department of the communist Party

FEMINISM OF KOLLONTAI

Marxist vs Bourgeois Feminism

Radical Socialist Feminism of Kollontai

- Was **Marxist Feminist**; but went much ahead of Marxism in her feminist thoughts
- Marxism in her Feminism
 - **Class dimension to Feminism**: Not men but class structure is the main culprit for Women's misery
 - Triple burden of working class women as worker, housewife, and mother
 - Working class women share more of her problems with working class men than the Bourgeoisie feminism
 - *"For the majority of women of the proletariat, equal rights with men would mean only an equal share in inequality."*
 - **Bourgeoisie Feminism**: fighting for political rights(voting) and socio-economic rights in capitalist social order
 - Doubted liberal feminist will raise issues of working class women once their limited purpose of getting equality within the capital social order is achieved
 - Working class women fighting both against class exploitation(with male) in public domain and unequal rights(against men) in private domains.
 - *" There can be no socialism without women's liberation and no women's liberation without socialism"(Inessa Armand)*
 - **Her Solution**: Socialization or collectivization of Motherhood, Child rearing, and household duties ; Psychological and emotional freedom to women- not dependent of marriage, family, husband

Workplace Rights, Motherhood, Domestic Work

- Not only **perfect equality at workplace** but also **special facilities for women workers**
 - no night shift, less surveillance, rest periods, rest rooms, maternity relief, crèche, communal canteen
- **Public facility to lessen Domestic chores**
 - State providing communal housing, public laundry, canteen, communal kitchen, crèche, nurseries, etc
- As '**commissar of social welfare**' she did a lot in this respect:
 - Single women was given equal facility as married woman. Divorce and Abortion rights, homosexuality de-criminalized, protection to children out of marriage, etc.
 - The state had the responsibility to set up crèches, milk kitchens, Maternity provisions at workplace, consultation centers for pregnant women
- **Motherhood:**
 - Marriage and sex were personal affairs; but motherhood was a social concern
 - State/community should take care of proper welfare of prospective mothers and child rearing
 - **Separated child bearing from child rearing:** not necessary that mother only should rear the child
- **Liberating women from marriage, family, domestic chores:**
 - No domestic bondage, No burden of child rearing, no fear of being left out and separated from children, no dependence on husband- Society/state will take care of women's issue
 - Socialization of maternity & child care, collectivising domestic burden ; actually collectivisation or nationalisation of nucleus family- communal facilities for eating, laundry, maternity, child care!

Class dimension of love, sex, relationships

- Monogamous marriage is feature of capitalist society. It is **egoistic**, **inequal**, and **possessive** - wife as male's property
- Bourgeoise 'Marriage-love' is hypocrisy- sham (false, bogus)
- Women should have psychological freedom to develop mutually respectful and equal relationship with all members of the collective
- Women should free from relations based on economic considerations/calculations
- Relationship between men & women should have **3 conditions**
 1. **Equality** : an end to masculine egoism and the slavish suppression of the female personality
 2. **Mutual recognition of the rights of the other**, of the fact that one does not own the heart and soul of the other
 3. **Comradely sensitivity**, the ability to listen and understand the inner feelings of the loved person
- Men-women love relationship is subordinate to the more powerful emotion of **love-duty to the collective - Love-comradeship**
 - *"Bourgeois morality demanded all for the loved one. The morality of the proletariat demands all for the collective."*

Winged and Wingless Eros

Psychology and Sociology of Love

Winged and Wingless Eros- Introduction



EROS: GREEK GOD OF LOVE

- **KAMADEVA: INDIAN GOD OF LOVE**



Historical and Class Account of Winged and Wingless Eros

- Tribal Society:
 - love was seen as a **kinship attachment** (love between sisters and brothers, love for parents).
- The Ancient Society (pre-Christian period)
 - Placed **love-friendship** above all else.
- Feudal Society:
 - Love in marriage- wingless Eros
 - Idealized **platonic love** between members of the opposite sex outside marriage- **Winged Eros**; example: **Knight and his lady love**
- Capitalist Society:
 - Mixed winged & wingless eros into **marriage-love**
 - **monogamous marital love** as an ideal to solve atomistic society, inner loneliness, have stable family, protect capital.

Winged Eros in Communist Social Order

- **Love-comradeship**

- The ideal of **love-comradeship** – multi faceted love relationship among equal members of the collective
- involves the recognition of the rights and integrity of the other's personality, a solid mutual support and sensitive sympathy, and responsiveness to the other's needs.
- The aim of proletarian ideology is that men and women should develop these qualities not only in relation to the chosen one but in relation to all the members of the collective.
- The proletarian class is not concerned as to which shades and nuances(finer varieties) of feeling predominate in winged Eros.
- The many threads bringing men and women into close emotional and intellectual contact will develop and feelings will emerge from the private into the public sphere.
- **love-solidarity** will become the lever that competition and self-love were in the bourgeois system.
- Reformed winged eros in proletarian society will eliminate(remove) male egoism, inequality, possessiveness, complacency of male partner, and self-renunciation of the woman
- The only stipulation is that these emotions facilitate the development and strengthening of comradeship and social-solidarity
- **In a nutshell, directing the emotional energy of Winged Eros away from couples towards strengthening the community/collective.**

HER DIFFERENCES WITH LENIN

Two Shades of Kollontai

Positive Phase of her relationship with Lenin

- Since **she joined RSDLP in 1899**, she had to fight the powers in the party on putting women's question at the center-stage of socialist revolution.
- For the party, feminism would weaken class struggle
- Without any support from the party, In 1905, she established 'society for mutual help of working women'
- Later on **RSDLP divided into Menshevik and Bolshevik**; she first sided with Menshevik.
- But due to Lenin's support for women's question, she joined Bolshevik in 1915
- Lenin, in 1917, from Switzerland sent 4 letters, '*Letters from Afar*', to Kollontai, to be published in 'Pravada'
- In 1917, she was the only supporter of Lenin on his April Thesis, not working with the provisional Govt, and early revolution.
- With support on women's question from Lenin, she was Instrumental in publication of '**Robotnitsa**' - magazine for working women by the party and setting up **Zhenotdel** - women's department in the party
- She became member of central committee of the Party, and in 1917 was made **People's Commissar of social welfare** ; in 1920 she became director of Zhenotdel

Her differences with Lenin

- by 1921 she was standing against Lenin on many issues.
- **New Economic Policy-1921**, which, she believed, diluted socialist agenda, disillusioned workers, favoured peasants, promoted private property, petty Bourgeois
- She questioned socialist commitment, social responsibilities of household duties, women's question, NEP, inner-party democracy ; before that in she also opposed **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk-1918**
- Dilution in Party's commitment to collective care of household duties; freeing women from dependence on men
- **Worker's opposition movement**-1921: for genuine control of proletarian of the communist state, right to dissent in the party
 - Kollontai became the movement's mentor and advocate.
- She also supported the '**left opposition**' - a faction within the Russian Communist Party de-facto headed by Leon Trotsky.
- The Left Opposition opposed New Economic Policy by contending that it had weakened the Soviet Union by allowing the private sector to achieve an increasingly important position in the Soviet economy while the centrally planned, socialized sector of the economy languished
- Her association with **Worker's opposition and left opposition directly put her opposite Lenin**, who believed that a country torn by civil war required less idealism and more control over from above
- **After falling out with Lenin, she** narrowly escaped expulsion from the party for factionalism **and later on sent on Diplomatic 'Exile'**

Her survival during Stalin Era

- After Lenin died in 1924 and Stalin rose to power within even more abusive and regimented system of party leadership she was sidelined from mainstream communist politics.
- She was sent on diplomatic mission to Norway
- She returned to Moscow in 1925-26 to agitate against repressive changes in marriage laws
- But she was questioned for her role in '**workers opposition**' as part of Stalin's purge movement of the old Bolshevik
- Luckily for her she escaped from a full trial and possible death but her life as a central figure in Soviet politics was over
- In fact, it is still at question how she could save her life from Stalin's purge movement where most of the other supporters and leaders of '**workers opposition**' were executed.
- 1929: Stalin abolished Zhenotdel, all pro women's decrees were reversed; to him, women's question was solved!
- Thereafter she had a very quiet life as diplomat and novelist.
- She served as Ambassador to Soviet state in Sweden and before that diplomat in Norway and Mexico
- Her later writings in support of Stalin's views and program were not of her own it seemed to the have compromised for her diplomatic carrier and possibly her life.

References

- **DU reading List on this topic**

- A. Kollontai, (1977) 'Social Democracy and the Women's Question', in Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai, London: Allison & Busby, pp. 29-74.
- A. Kollontai, (1977) 'Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to the Youth', in Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai Allison & Busby, pp. 201-292.
- C. Porter, (1980) Alexandra Kollontai: The Lonely Struggle of the Woman who defied Lenin, New York: Dutton Children's Books.

- **Online Resources:**

- **JSTOR JOURNAL ARTICLES:**

- **Alexandra Kollontai and Marxist Feminism** by Jinee Lokaneeta ; https://www.jstor.org/stable/4410544?read-now=1&seq=7#page_scan_tab_contents
 - *Aleksandra Kollontai: Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution* by Beatrice Farnsworth; *Alexandra Kollontai: The Lonely Struggle of the Woman Who Defied Lenin* by Cathy Porter
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173520?seq=1>
 - **Kollontai's Contribution to the Workers' Opposition** by BARBARA EVANS CLEMENTS ;
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24649507?seq=1>
 - **Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Aleksandra Kollontai** by Beatrice Brodsky Farnsworth ;
https://www.jstor.org/stable/1851172?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandra_Kollontai#Works
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left_Opposition#Leading_members_of_the_Left_Opposition

- **You Tube Videos:**

- **Kollontai And Revolution: There Is No Socialism Without feminism**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ES6XGkANYhU&t=64s>
 - **A Rebel's Guide to Alexandra Kollontai - Emma Davis** : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRIFLAZ7S2s&t=2243s>

THANKS FOR WATCHING!

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