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# FEMININE IDENTITY AND VOCATIONAL-OCCUPATIONAL ROLE

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## **Introduction**

This essay is based on an investigation carried out while serving an apprenticeship for teachers, during the Women Study Seminar, at Cadiz University, Spain, in 1997. It could be made due to a fellowship granted by Kennedy University of Argentine Republic headed, at that time, by Dra. Inmaculada Díaz Narbona.

It contains cases related to Vocational and Occupational Orientation, collected by myself and by colleagues who were supervised, and pertaining to the private as well as to the institutional ambit in Argentina.

Whenever we become aware of the changes occurred all over the world in relation to study and work possibilities, especially in the West, we wonder whether the consulting women have real choice opportunities regarding their life project.

This investigation was intended to find out the variables which influence the “adjustment” or “conflict” of the feminine identity and the occupational role of young women studying at university.

## **From a historical point of view**

Our society is an heir of the Greco-Roman culture. The Pater was the owner of both the woman and her descendants. Said culture comes, in turn, from the primitive horde, where women circulated as goods.

Therefore, from time immemorial, the feminine gender was almost exclusively destined to procreation.

If we start from the mythical story of Eve, created from Adam’s rib, and from the ancient gynaeceum, and get to the present women condition, we can see they are gradually acceding to the public sector, the education, and the work.

The step “from the yard to the square” is not lineal and its social value is not equal to the men’s, depending on the different socio-cultural contexts.

In Spain, women conflicts were interfered by political and social movements. Once more, it can be seen that women freedom is bound to the exercise of Human Rights on the part of every single citizen.

## **From a philosophical point of view**

We can compare the opinions of different philosophers about the feminine gender.

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Aristotle (4 BC) (1) considers friendship between men and women among the forms of friendship based on superiority.

According to Pythagoras (2) (6 BC), there exist in the world a good principle, which created order, light and men, and a bad principle, which created chaos, darkness and women.

Fray Luis de León (fifteenth century) (3) stated that women must be object and not subject of education.

Rousseau (thirteenth century) (4) considered women education must always be at the service of men: "please them, be useful to them and educate them".

Schopenhauer (nineteenth century) (5) commented that "nature has given women the cleverness to protect their weakness".

Engels (eighth century) (6) considered that men subjection to women was due to the need of not being nomads anymore: they wanted to have their own children in order to bequeath them their property.

Kierkegaard (7) had no misgivings about attributing women the ontological category of joke-hoax, since he considered they have no essence in themselves.

According to Nietzsche (nineteenth century) (8), women are not moral human beings; on the contrary, they have what he calls false morals. Consequently, he considered women are naturally inferior and must please men, in favor of whom they lose their freedom.

What has been said proves the discriminatory philosophical view regarding the feminine gender throughout humanity history.

Patriarchal philosophy evidences the hard judgment rendered on female "victims".

### **Women Incorporation to the Education System**

Women incorporation to School is subsequent to men's. The priority was the learning of different skills like embroidery, ill people care, artistic activities, such as playing the piano and painting, and children care as well. This knowledge was considered inherent to the feminine gender and necessary for a successful marriage, of course, in addition to the dowry. The way women are represented in traditional children's tales is enough evidence; we can read: "mum sweeps, mum cooks, mum washes" (...). In accordance with these representations, it is difficult for women to have a relevant social role in the exogamic productive society.

By the turn of the sixteenth century, women were not allowed to accede to education. Gradually, women took part in school courses, but with a differentiated instruction; alphabetization was minimal and they learnt mainly manual skills. Therefore, their education was inferior in quality: for example, they did not study exact sciences. There

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were also differences regarding social classes: the first women who could gain access to education belonged to the upper classes.

### **Situation in Spain**

Women alphabetization in Spain was a great achievement which had to overcome the opposition of characters such as Felipe de Narbona, who stated: “women must not be taught either to read or write”. Until the sixteenth century women access to education was forbidden.

In the seventeenth century, María de Zayas (9) stated the following: “there are fathers who consider of little importance that their daughters can write alleging that, if they can, they become bad”.

The first ones who could receive proper education were girls belonging to upper social classes; poorer ones and those lacking resources could only do it later. The Royal Document of 1783 was the first one that created neighborhood schools for girls. And following a social utility criterion, emphasis was placed on the teaching of manual skills, manners, general culture and religion.

Between 1768 and 1857 women won the battle regarding instruction but, at first, their instruction was different from that received by men. In 1787, in Spain there were 170 schools for men and only 43 for women.

The Quintana report (10), presented in 1814, proposed a reform of Public Instruction, but excluded women from it. Public schools were created in 1821 and teacher’s training colleges in 1838. Teacher’s training colleges for women did not appear until twenty years later.

Important changes occurred. Finally, in the twentieth century, the incorporation of girls within the education system became mandatory in Spain, and they began to receive comprehensive education instead of simple instruction. It was focused on complementing marriage; moreover, there was an increase in the number of treatises on the good wife and mother. At the turn of the nineteenth century, women did not study physics, sciences or geometry; they were encouraged to learn manual skills, which were evaluated severely. At that moment, home was considered holy, and life outside it was dangerous. Obviously, teacher’s attitude towards girls could not be seen as education, but as taming. Both obedience and passivity were demanded.

In 1900 teacher’s training curriculum was revised and brought up to date, and more scientific contents were included. Nine years later, a Decree established mixed education. And in 1911, outlining new working opportunities for women, the Home and Professional School was created. It trained women to work as governesses, midwives, nurses, stenographers and typists.

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Some new careers such as Fine Arts, Nursing and Library Management appeared and the Lyceum for women was created. And the Ibero-American Center of Feminine Popular Culture was founded as well.

In order to train women as professionals, socialists created in Madrid the New School. María de Maeztu was a pioneer in this. She fought in favor of Training Colleges in order to facilitate women the access to the labor market and also became School Adviser on Public Instruction.

Concepción Arenal, a writer who was a forerunner of the defense of women rights, wrote in *“La mujer de su casa”* (11): “It is not true that the woman is weak, but it is true that she is weakened by excess of work, laziness, boredom and the inaction of her highest capacities, due to lack of hygiene, lack of resources, lack of esteem and insufficient instruction (...)”.

During Spanish Civil War, women were devoted to guarantee the subsistence of society and forgot, in part, the conquest of their rights as citizens. Franco forced them to stay at home. For example, in 1939 mixed education was forbidden. In those days, Pilar Primo de Rivera (12), an ideologist of Franco’s regime, wrote: “The only mission women have in favor of the Motherland is Home (...) to make family life pleasant for men we will teach women how to take care of their home (...) and of the house and to know manual skills and music (...) so that when they have children they can teach them the love for God and the belonging to the Falange”.

Consequently, the education was, once more, almost exclusively related to domestic subjects and based on a model which was discriminatory from both the familiar and the educational point of view. And the Church collaborated with this.

After Franco’s regime, the Pedagogic Congress of 1988 declared the education of both girls and boys aged from 6 to 12 obligatory. It was believed that intellect and morals were opposed and it was feared that women maternal role could be damaged. This can be more easily understood if we take into account what Juan B. Orniols (13) said: “neither universities nor institutes are the arsenals where women will receive the weapons which will never suit their feminine charm, will substitute the seductive and poetic flower of their hairdo for the severe and prosaic tassel of doctor (...) Do not educate them to become know-it-alls (...) but do not declare them eternal stocking slaves either”.

From 1970 to 1990, the differences existing between women and men alphabetization were reduced in about a half, although women situation was still unfavorable.

A report presented by UNESCO stated that there are 948 million illiterates in the world, 130 million of which are children who do not attend school and that the two third parts of them are girls coming from marginal sectors of society (1995).

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At Monserrat School, in the city of Córdoba (Argentina), there was a contest to change a 300 year history of women exclusion from that educational option and finally, in 1998, they gained access to said institution.

## **Women and University**

### **Situation in Spain**

In Spain, the first female professor devoted to literature was Emilia Pardo Bazán (1852-1921) who, in 1916, managed to obtain her post, even with the opposing vote of the university council for the only reason of being a woman. The fight of women organizations to enter University began in 1888, with the achievement of ten women who had to ask for authorization in order to accede to higher education.

In Cadiz University, in 1997, the teaching staff is formed by 1562 teachers and only 455 are women; and there are 19701 students, but only 9334 are women. The increase can be considered just modest, taking into account the efforts made to incorporate women into the academic camp; however, the curve is rising.

In Spain, women occupy 94% of posts in elementary education, 80% in primary education and 46% in secondary education. Usually, managing posts are held by men.

### **Situation in Argentina**

Women incorporation to University dates from the turn of last century. The conquests made by Dra. Alicia M. de Justo and by the first Medical Doctor, Cecilia Grierson, graduated in 1898, made it possible for women to have, with effort, a significant place in education, although not always equally significant in the labor market.

In relation to the career orientation, women preferences have varied. At the beginning, they chose careers related to health and social sciences. But nowadays more women study scientific and technical careers, considered exclusive of men. This trend can also be observed in secondary education (technical schools).

In the last university censuses, the number of male and female students enrolled is equivalent. One of the last censuses carried out in the University of Buenos Aires in 1990, showed that 52% of the students were women (13).

It can be clearly observed that certain careers, such as literature, languages, pharmacy and medicine, are mainly chosen by women. This fact was also shown by the census made in 1998 in the University of Buenos Aires. However, nowadays said careers do not offer a fair economic reward.

In 1966, the number of women who studied the above mentioned careers increased: it rose from 66% to 85% in 1980; the percentage is minimal in engineering.

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Nowadays, women who study at university show broader interest in careers connected with sciences. Between 1980 and 1990 women represented 17.4% of engineering students and 10.3% of natural sciences students in Singapore. More than a third part of French students actually training to enter science and technology careers are women. In Hungary, 50% of physics teachers are women (14). In Argentina, women represent 32% of astronomy students, and in the Balseiro Institute there are few Physics fellows. The increase can be seen as modest, taking into account the efforts made to attract women towards careers related to sciences, but the curve is rising.

### **Myths, Legends, Literature and Ideology**

#### **Cadiz Legends: "Teletusa Slave Legend" (15)**

Throughout history, women from Cadiz have always been outstanding due to their beauty and idiosyncrasy. Cadiz, a cosmopolitan city because of its contact with other people and nations, offered a countless amount of amusement and joy both for natives and foreigners who knocked at their doors.

At the theatre, dramas and comedies were performed, and there were supporting performances as well.

Teletusa was a young slave from Cadiz who was sold by her owner to learn how to sing and dance. However, she immediately became the star of the women group, gifted with singing and dancing skills.

"She sang beautifully and moved her hips in an exciting way, and she even made her former owner blaze with passion. He was an old patrician who, after selling her, bought her again to turn her into a lady." She was so popular that her fame was also known in the imperial court of Rome. Soon after buying her, her elderly husband died.

Being free, she left for Rome, where she danced and was also engaged in obtaining political information from Roman senators and soldiers.

#### **Romance: "The Girl who does not want to become a nun" (Nun against her will) (17)**

It was compiled by N. Artero Burgos from the Andalusian romancer tradition and adopted in San Nicolás del Puerto (Seville), and it became a universal folkloric song. It had some other names as well, such as "Romance of the nuns and the dear nuns".

"I wanted to marry a young barber and my parents wanted me to become a nun and enter a monastery. A summer afternoon, they took me for a walk, and round a corner there was an open convent. They made me sit on a chair and cut my hair; no earrings in my ears; no rings in my fingers. But what I most missed, was my shock of hair." (18)

In an unpublished Cadiz version, there appeared a different reason.

"Because of a small talk I had with a youth, my mother put me into a sad monastery."

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Religious and familiar repression became a limit to feminine sexuality. The loss of her hair, her earrings, her rings, represent the stripping of her feminine attributes. Finally, the confinement and enclosure show the sexual repression which ruled in that time and came both from the family and the society.

The romance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries set forth the familiar precepts in opposition to the personal will and the sexual awakening. Nowadays, it is known as a children's song all over the Hispanic world and has become a popular song. Moreover, it is a way of transmitting values and ideologies.

Can it be said that marriage is a job?

We have come to know that in Turkey, at present, young women are examined by doctors in order to verify they are virgin. If they are not, they are expelled from school, even from home, and it will be difficult for them to get married. In consequence, we can confirm that, nowadays, a repressing conception is still hanging over the weaker sex and that the idea of punishment accompanies transgression.

Throughout the eighteenth century, with the bourgeoisie holding the power, virginity became a trophy for men and ambiguous morals appeared in relation to human sexuality.

In 1916, Ramón y Cajal stated in "*Charlas de Café*" that the main calling of the beautiful sex is to honor the home (...). Satisfying their instincts (...) the greatest happiness is to bring up and educate their children.

In 1939, Pilar Primo de Rivera, Chief of Franco's National Movement Women Section, explained that the purpose was to free married women from workshops and factories. The Church took part in this task: if women did not wear a veil, they were thrown away from there (19).

Under Franco's regime, women were confined to the solitude and the darkness; they were only encouraged to fulfill their reproductive role.

### **Women and Work**

Going back in history, in the ancient times each member was essential for the family welfare, families had close relationships, and sons inherited their occupations from their parents. Jobs and occupations could be inherited, but the vocation and ability for them could not. It was a must that a carpenter's son followed his father's steps, as well as the son of a jeweler or of a peasant. Women were engaged in doing the housework and taking care of children.

Therefore, marriage, prostitution, sorcery or becoming a nun have been the typical options for women insertion in society.

Women have always worked. In addition to the "invisible" work at home, they have also made great efforts carrying out difficult chores in the country. As well as this, women have

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worked outside home for payment in order to increase personal and family income, either for pleasure and/or need. This incorporation has been one of the main causes of their economic, legal and social independence which has, in turn, changed the conception of women all over the world and has provoked a corresponding change in the conception of men.

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the United Nations in 1979 (20), sets forth the right to work as inalienable, the right to the same employment opportunities, the right to promotion, job security and the right to receive vocational training and retraining as well as the right to equal remuneration for work of equal value. This is a recent achievement.

In the Middle Ages, women could not engage in manual work. Moreover, in 1866, Medicine French Academy reproached seamstresses the use of sewing machines because they suspected it was a feminine practice of self pleasure.

In order to feel satisfaction outside the frame traditionally set within the home, women had to overcome subjective and social opposition.

Remarkable women, such as Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz, showed us that the creative work, both artistic and literary in this case, could be displayed within the convent, but not outside it. Some others had to sign their work with their father, brother or son name, or use a male pseudonym. As an example, we can mention Colette's case, whose work, at the beginning, was signed by her husband. In the twentieth century, there were demographic alterations due to wars and economic changes, and there was a great demand for manual labor: consequently, women participation and training became imperative. When women took part in the labor market, their remuneration was inferior to men's and, nowadays, it is still so in some countries.

In Africa, even having a very poor technology, women have managed to breed their continent; in Asia, from their position of "landless" they carry out servile and exhausting chores. In both cases, subsistence agriculture is still the main activity for half of the women all over the world.

In the last decade, women participation in the labor market has increased drastically but, regarding their payment, women receive, in average, between 30% and 40% less than men. (In 1918, Alfonsina Storni, in Argentina, had to accept as remuneration for her job as an editor less than 50% of what she should have earned, due to her financial situation and to the fact that she had a child). In the United Kingdom, women earn, in average, only 70% of what men do; in Brazil 51%; in Japan 43% and in Spain 73%. (20)

As regards unemployment all over the world, women are still a very vulnerable group, especially those of childbearing age. At present, in industrialized countries, reproduction rate is decreasing because of its impact on work opportunities.

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During an interview made in Cadiz, Prof. Consuelo Gamero (21), Head of Provincial Women Center, gave us information about work reinsertion programs for women, which are intended to alleviate women unemployment and underemployment. Work pattern is focused on the consideration of personal problems and the teaching of behaviors which could prove effective for occupational insertion. Said programs have the support of the Labor Ministry and are divided into different stages, depending on the requirements of the consulting women. Some of these plans are: OPEM (*Organización y Preformación para el Empleo de las Mujeres* – Organization and Preformation for Women Employment), LUNA and OPTIMA. Within these programs, problems are analyzed in group and they have printed and visual material available for their implementation. Said teams are formed by professionals with psychological background. (22)

### **Women and Life Project**

Vocation, necessity and social pressure interact and show, at present, that women are in a situation very different from that of their grandmothers who were limited by gender and had marriage and maternity as the only possible future. This was the most they could make of their lives.

At the beginning of the century, in Argentina, 15-year-old girls belonging to the upper social classes were given in marriage, by family decision, to an elder man who, obviously, held the power. We can now observe that the age of the contracting parties has risen gradually from 1970 to 1991 in the Civil Registry of the City of Buenos Aires, and there exists a slow balance between the age of men and women; in addition, the number of children per family has diminished lately. (24)

It can be said that the economical crises of the last years, the acceptance of a greater sexual freedom and the diffusion of birth control methods, have influenced in these figures.

There exists a contrast between the education level of the mother and the number of children. As an example, it can be mentioned that out of the 45 professors at Cadiz University, only 5 of them are women and none of them has become a mother.

Their own decision or a duty imposed by their social role?

Andalusia and Canaries, with an inferior education level, have a higher reproduction rate than Cataluña, which has a higher education level. Are Nature and Culture in opposition?

During Franco's regime, married women could not work, buy or sell goods without their husband's authorization. They could not administer their property either. In that dramatic social period, they were encouraged to have ten children and compensated for that because having large families, they raised children for the Motherland. (25)

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Later on, in Spain, the number of children per family descended to 5 and in 1997 it had maybe the lowest birth rate in Europe. This subject is not a private matter anymore, and it has become a national concern which needs to be solved at a social level.

The weight of history influences the feminine identity questions and determines the peculiarities of the work and vocational roles.

In 1993, the International Congress "From Dictatorship to Democracy" was held in Barcelona in order to submit to consideration women role in the transition towards democracy. There arose the interest in the recovery of Human Rights, the citizen freedom and the defense of the feminine gender, which has a psychological and social nature. Since gender behaviors can be learnt, the family and the school have a prevailing function so as to make the myths covering the existing stereotypes disappear, approaching the matter from different points of view.

In Spain, the women movement appeared in the shade of Franco's regime and was obstructed by political and social concerns. At the beginning, it was aimed at obtaining sexual freedom, but later it also included education and labor contests. It became stronger in 1982 with the triumph of the social democracy; in 1983 the Women Institute was created. Said institute was registered in the Culture Ministry and, as from 1988, it was subject to the Social Welfare Ministry. It was intended to promote and develop the principle of non-discrimination against women. At the same time, several government and non-government organizations which carry out an important role regarding said purpose have been created in Spain. Many of these organizations publish material of scientific content intended to be known by the general public, such as the Women Studies Seminar in Cadiz and other classes and seminars organized by universities and which, in most cases, edit their materials enthusiastically.

### **A Clinical Look at Vocational Orientation**

When we analyze the different cases dealing either with individuals or groups, and obtained both from institutions and private individuals, and if we take into account the experience of women belonging to average socio-economic sectors, we can realize the opposition between the traditional women role of wife and mother and the achievement of a professional project. What are the problems women have to deal with in connection with the professional world? Are women with children discriminated in some labor areas? What does this society in crisis expect from women, whose participation becomes more and more important due both to economic needs and to personal life projects? What place do women have regarding social changes of traditional male and female roles? How does the above mentioned factors influence in human reproduction? Are all these concerns only personal or social as well?

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What anxieties, fears and conflicts do all these questions arise in women lives according to the expectations they have in relation to their traditional role?

Whenever we revise the concept of gender, we notice the psychological and social nature of the distinction between the feminine and the masculine. Gender is a role as well as an identity and endures different prescriptions and prohibitions which determine human behavior.

The Clinical Approach in Vocational Orientation allows us to analyze both the personal and social aspects of the problem, reviewing the identifications that may appear, the self-esteem difficulties, the importance of mandates, the guilt feeling as a result of not wanting or not being able to fulfill them, the obstacles arising from interaction and the cultural stereotypes. Consequently, it also let us recover desire, reason of human life, and indispensable for personal realization.

In 1975, the United Nations, aware of women concerns, declared the Women International Year in order to encourage participation in the fight against any form of women discrimination all over the world.

### **Women and Political Power**

As from the existence of equality among citizens due to the attainment of women vote (achieved in Spain in 1931 as a result of the campaign started by Clara Campomayor (26), and in Argentina in 1947 due to Eva Peron's fight) and the existing act establishing a minimum number of political posts for women, which saves for them 30% of the "possible" places in the candidate lists, women are managing to hold offices in the public sector; they advance slowly but firmly. However, there are still few political posts occupied by women. In France and Mexico, the contest for a greater women participation in politics is still taking place.

According to a United Nations report presented in 1997 (27), women represent 13% of government members in industrialized countries and only 6% in developing countries. In Scandinavian Countries they occupy 35% of government posts and 40% of posts in congress. In Finland, 40% of congress members are women; in Norway and Sweden, 35%; in Denmark, 33% and in Germany and The Netherlands, 25%. The percentage in Latin America reveals the average participation of women in Congress: Colombia, 24%; Brazil, 13%; Chile, 12% and Peru, 10%. In Argentina, after the military dictatorship, women participation in politics has increased.

Some of them, such as the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of Plaza de Mayo), who have lost their children, have had a main role in a non-violent fight in favor of Human Rights. Another organization, *Abuelas* (Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo), still try to find their grandchildren born in captivity. At the same time, the number of women who are

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interested in taking part in political activities has increased in all political parties, as well as the number of women who study Political Sciences at Buenos Aires University and at different private universities.

### **Women and Maternity**

According to what Elizabeth Badinter (1981) (28) stated in her book *¿Existe el amor maternal?*, I want to highlight that maternal love is only a human feeling. And, like any other feeling, is uncertain, fragile and imperfect. The roles of father, mother and son are outlined by the needs and values ruling a society.

In 1762, Rousseau published *Emilio*, which gave a real impulse to the modern family, based on homey love. The factors controlling the above mentioned roles are the prevailing ideology, the battle of the sexes and the disputes between parents and children.

In the thirteenth century, the first wet nurse agency was opened in Paris, as a response to the refusal to nurse babies (first sign of rejection towards children).

In the last third of the eighteenth century, the idea of mother suffered a great change, both in function and importance, since they were advised to take care of their children by themselves, giving birth to a myth which is still alive 200 years later: the “maternal instinct” myth. It is considered a favorable value for the human race and the society. It is associated with the terms “maternal” and “love”, which foster the conception and the diffusion of the idea of women as mothers.

In the nineteenth century, a branch of medical science specialized in children appeared and the term “pediatrics” was wedged; this allowed mothers to recover their place next to their children. Maternity sprang up again as an idealized and gratifying role. A good mother was “a saint”.

Women organizations caused a social and family revolution and proposed to highlight the mother and father roles, considering both maternity and paternity as an option. The political and economic variables, the birth control, the access to education, as well as work and creation gave rise to new models of feminine ideals, which were traditionally focused on the exclusive role of wife and mother.

There are not absolute laws for human beings, everything depends on each single person and its characteristics, on its own background and on the social precepts each individual is subject to, everything of which accompanies any personal decision.

The role of Spanish women at the turn of the century is quite complicated, because considering society history, they were influenced by the oppression of Franco's regime, and they are at present trying to recover the time lost.

As from the biblical mandate “in the sweat of your face shall you eat bread”, human beings, without taking into account the gender, have struggled to have a creative job, by

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means of which they can attain a sublime social aim and get remuneration sufficient for their subsistence. Regrettably, nowadays, society suffers fragmentations which result in conflicts affecting the social and psychical structure.

The way has been outlined. The conquest of love, work and creativity must be sustained and increased...

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