The slogan 'Personal is Political' has been deployed by feminist social work as an invitation for all of us to take oppressive private matters for public-political redressal. What is glossed over in this urgency is that the personal has been allowed to coincide with the private! This article argues that the personal is not private and urges us to go beyond private/public binaries. It concludes that the personalist social work reckons better with this corrective to aid feminist social work in the latter's emancipatory journey.

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INTRODUCTION

This private is the public for those for whom the personal is the political.

Catharine MacKinnon (1992: 359)

The slogan 'Personal is Political' has become commonplace today and has been adopted, because of its immense creative energy, by gender aware and feminist social work, too, as a truism. In this article, I try to examine and rethink this statement without belittling its importance and promise for the future.

I re-examine the theoretical feminist claim that the personal is the political where the personal, as instanced in Mackinnon's statement above, stands for the private and the political is the public. My central contention is this mistake, which wrongly collapses the personal and the private has gone unnoticed and in personalist social work, there are possibilities that this wrong receives a corrective, which could prove adequately productive for feminist social work practice.

When feminists argue that the personal is the political or in brief personal is political, they have meant:

Placing the family in the realm of the private and a personal protected patriarchal privileges. The separation of the private from the public meant that the issue of unequal or unfair treatment within the family remained untouched... Hence, in the interest of justice and democratization, they strongly advocated that affairs of the family also be opened to public examination. (Mahajan, 2003: 12)
Personal as private then is political in the feminist sense so far as such coercive private matters could be brought to public scrutiny or legislation. With the insistence to discover this political nature of the private, various resistance movements under the rubric of social action or gender aware social work have responded appropriately by taking so called private matters of many women for public scrutiny and legislation. This is all fine till the time when the 'personal is political' slogan is engineered to stand for this phenomenon; it makes personal one with what goes on in the private sphere. This article argues that this is historically borne in mistake so much so that we too, in our everyday life, use personal and private interchangeably. The personal-private binary has been historically separated, theoretically established and tested through existing forms of social work approaches and, therefore, attempts to go a long away to aid feminist social work, which despite sharing much of the premises (and also misgivings) of Western feminism, has immense emancipatory potential.

THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE DIVIDE: MEANING, THEORY, HISTORY

Today, public/private have become a part of our everyday vocabulary so much so that their meaning seems self-evident and ready at hand. Public means all the citizens of a state and also 'unconcealed, not private' (S.8, expln. 2, Indian Evidence Act [1 of 1872]). The operative principle here is, 'everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity' (Arendt, 1958:50). Etymologically, the meaning 'of the people', public is built into the optic of the 'public sphere' — where public opinion is formed among people who are political equals (no distinction of class or rank is made) through the mediation of publicity form (media) and is connected to certain forms of representation (elections, referendum), deliberation (for example, debates in the Parliament) and political authority (that government is most legitimate, whose authority rests on a changing public opinion). In Hindi, janta is the closest equivalent of the word 'public' meaning crowd, a collection of people, and aam janta — another word specifies the average, ordinary character of the word public in India.

Private classically means that which is not open to or belonging to all; it does not rest on the principle of publicity or equality of persons (an example of which is the family). In post-medieval English and Latin usage, private stood for an existence withdrawn from public life or anyone not working in an official capacity. Again, private stood for that which belongs to the individual and not to the state. In India, following our colonial induction, private has been defined as not public, or opposed to public; not open to public, apart from the state; belonging or concerning to one or more individuals (S.75, Indian Evidence Act [1 of 1872]). The individual as a private person (when not acting in official
capacity) and family (often organised around private property), sex and such matters give a content to the private and privacy. Privacy, though not a constitutional right as in the United States, is defined in the Indian Penal Code as freedom from unauthorised oversight or observation; seclusion (S. 509, IPC [45 of 1860]).

The public-private binary (whose historical roots have been traced to classical Greece) acquired its modern meaning through the mediations of medieval Roman Law and eighteenth century Europe. Aristotle makes a distinction between household (oikos) and the space of the city state (polis) where through deliberation (lexis) and common action (praxis) a shared, common and in a loose sense 'public' life beyond bare essentials or necessities was sustained. The private realm of necessities (subsistence, reproduction) was the household. Therefore, property 'and the art of acquiring property' was considered a part of 'managing the household' (Aristotle, 1988:5) and participation in the polis was restricted by one's status or rank as a master of oikos.

In the medieval age, in Roman Law, one encounters terms like publicus and privates but without the standard usage (Habermas, 1996:5) because everything public-private ultimately resided in the person of the monarch (more on this later). However, in Roman Law — the first systematic legal document — the privacy of the home (domus) was sanctioned (Black, 1988: 593) and Roman Law itself was 'private law' in that it would have application only for individuals or relations of coordination. Public law would administer affairs of the state or relations of domination. But similar to the Greek city state, it was the status of the individuals that determined their participation in the medieval public sphere. We enter modernity when men entered the realm of contract from that of status, from duties to that of rights. Equality was a prerequisite of such a contract. Particularly, at the break of the medieval age, in the wake of civil or commercial law, in eighteenth century Europe, a democratic climate was created where all were equals before the law and the public sphere was thus — in a sense — open to all. This meant the formation of public opinion through the media (enabled at that time by the advent of print capitalism) and institutionalisation of state sovereignty which would rest, henceforth, with the people or the public. A new category of legitimacy was created. This also engendered the rise of civil society where the subjects would fulfil two roles at the same time: as a property owner or bourgeois he/she would pursue his/her private interests and as a citizen he/she would bear equal rights granted by the state. This also — as a part of the public sphere — ensured the separation of society (family) from the state and that the state would not intervene in societal matters and expectedly, privacy would be located in the societal realm henceforth. The state would ensure privacy, but would not intervene. Its closest analogy was the market: the state would ensure a free market by itself not intervening in it and the free market was not only of commodities
but a great market place of ideas and exchange of opinion in which, irrespective of birthmarks and the stink of status, anybody could participate. The modern public sphere had arrived. It was just a step further when Marx would denounce universal suffrage and invoke the proletariat as the class with 'universal suffering' (Marx, 1983:320) and would mock this artificial equality of publics before the law and the market (alleging that they masked real inequalities) and thought of smashing the private-public divide by abolishing private property, which he thought was at the core of this suffering. The rest is history and its repetition. No wonder that the public—private divide has been considered as the core of our modern existence.

Now, the problem arose with the reception of this history that we have been narrating. Feminists pointed out, and with much justification that the public sphere that emerged out of the European experience in the eighteenth century and was consolidated in the nineteenth century, was exclusively a male domain. Women being identified with the private and home were excluded from participation in the public discourse and, therefore, denied a political identity.

But was the private really apolitical where care, love, fraternity and affection naturally reigned? Feminists showed that this was a male construction too. The interior of the home was as much infected by relations of domination-subordination, exploitation, exchange and disenfranchisement as was the public outside. Therefore, they urged, that women come out with issues which were erstwhile considered private and submit them to public scrutiny. Women's education, in the nineteenth century assumed the form of such an agenda. No wonder that this was considered an aesthetically opportune moment for the slogan 'personal is political' and it did receive a warm welcome. It went right into the hearts of millions of women shedding mute tears, while drifting within the insurmountable domestic comportment of 'privacy'. The point is, how far does this compulsion travel to become a mistake? This easy conflation between private and personal, is this admissible?

What I propose to do in the rest of the article is to argue — taking this moment as the occasion — that this is a serious but historically guided theoretical mistake and there are ways, within social work, to offer a corrective. But before that, let us rehearse what is at stake and how the problem is relevant for social work.

RELEVANCE FOR SOCIAL WORK

Personal as Private in Feminism

We have been arguing that because of political reasons, personal and private have been used interchangeably and this is not correct. Among such discourses, feminist discourse is one where such an instance is available. A vast amount of literature is available on this; given limitations of space, one or two examples will suffice.
A feminist superstar, Catharine MacKinnons' construction is a glaring example: 'the private is the public for those for whom the personal is the political' (1992: 3'59). In feminism the 'personal is political' slogan, going beyond the limited but strategic goal of 'consciousness raising', stands for the observation:

that the identification of women/women's interests with the private sphere is one of the major mechanisms of women's historical and continuing subordination; and... that demystifying and challenging the distinction is the first step in women's liberation. (Ubéroi, 2003:206)

Summarily put, women should cease to think of the home as the place where their interests lay and identify with it; rather, they should realise the political nature of the private sphere and challenge this comportment by bringing oppressive private matters to public light. According to these feminists, the 'personal is political' slogan services as an active vehicle for this purpose (thus completing the personal-private identification). Besides, following the social action vis-a-vis social work debate in recent times has meant numerous non-governmental organisations moving to the court for revision of existing (erstwhile private matters like) family laws, inheritance, marriage and rape laws; recognition of alternative sexual lifestyles (same sex marriages), while using the public language of non-discrimination, equality, and so on, and debating it in the public sphere. Let us hint at its problematic nature on which we shall elaborate later.

If 'personal' is taken to mean — as they genuinely are — personal emotions or extreme personal relationships like friendship or love, it would be tautological to say that they are political in nature and could be taken to the public sphere for the scrutiny of all and laws can be made on it. But whether social work awaits this corrective or not needs to be factually established.

Personal as Private in Feminist Social Work: Repetition as Error

In this section we are about to prove that feminist social work has adopted from feminism the slogan 'personal is political', which, however, has wrongly though purposively collapsed the personal and the private. In this respect, nothing can be a better demonstration than that which comes from the global practitioners of international social work — the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in their towering and voluminous Encyclopedia of Social Work. In the entry covering social work practice with women (2001: 2529—2539), the authors (M.B. Jenkins and P.W. Lockett) cite from a source 'Ten Propositions and Assumptions of Feminist Practice' as a revealing guide for feminist social workers or 'direct' social work practice with women. There 'politicisation' is included as a basic philosophical value
with a terse elaboration, 'All practice is inherently political in consequence; feminist practice is explicitly political in intent' (Jenkins and Lockett, 2001: 2533). Now, having declared this hyperbolic goal, the authors elaborate the same and state that '...individuals and collective pain and problems of living always have a cultural and/or political dimension'. They further state that 'we are all connected; there are no personal private solutions...'. Notice the personal-private equality in alignment with 'personal is political' in the above statement.

For a supplement, apart from the leaders, here is another theorist, 'In feminist social work personal problems are defined as political, thereby focusing on social justice campaigns to increase the allocation of resources to gender-specific programs' (Martin, 2003:28). These excerpts prove more than adequately that feminist social work has adopted this feminist truism without a systematic critique.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE 'PERSONAL' AS THE REPRESSED IN WESTERN SOCIAL THEORY

Now, having proved that the personal-private coalition has continually infected feminism and feminist social work, let us see how are we able to separate it, in terms of history and theory. And then how would that corrective be subsumed under the rubric of the existing genres of social work? Therefore, it is high time that we offer this corrective by way of history first and then theory.

It might be productive then to ask that in the history of the public-private binary that we have been retelling, where is the personal there? The absence is truly eye-catching. The state of the personal is somewhat dubious and absent in all classic European discussions — even in Jurgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt.

Let us try to recover this repressed history by requesting the reader to take a detour to the portion on medieval senses of public/private. It was the person of the monarch which was considered to have been the seat of everything public or private; it means, by adopting a Hobbesian argument, he represented all and everything (Hobbes, 1997:88) (the modern forms of representation begins by questioning this self-representation). Although Habermas does cursorily refer to the process through which the 'modern state apparatus became independent from the monarch's personal sphere', he rarely engages with it (Habermas, 1996: 29):

The important thing to understand is that the medieval public sphere, if it even deserves this recognition, is tied to the personal. The feudal ford and estates create the public sphere by means of their very presence. (Habermas, 1974: 51)

But the personal sphere of the monarch — and what it means in the Western tradition is somewhat available in G.H. Mead from the standpoint of a social behaviourist. Mead meticulously charts the
components of this personal sphere where the people within the same
state 'can identify themselves with each other only through being
subjects of a common monarch...' (1972: 311). Mead traces the
phenomenon to the ancient empires of Mesopotamia and observes, 'It is
possible through personal relationships between a sovereign and subject
to constitute a community, which could not otherwise be so
constituted...'. For the Roman instance, we can borrow from Max Weber
the diffused origins of the Public Law-Private Law distinction, which as
Weber shows was 'once not made at all. Such was the case when all law,
all jurisdictions, and particularly all powers of exercising authority were
personal privileges, such as, the "prerogatives" of the head of the state...
[who was] not different from the head of the household' (Weber, 1978:
643). This world of the personal or as Weber calls it 'patrimonial
monarchy' forms, in a sense, the prehistory of the private—public
distinction. In the Roman Empire, through the mediation of Roman Law,
Mead notes, while the emperor—subject relationship was 'defined in legal
terms' — through sacrificial offerings made to the emperor, the subject
was 'putting himself into personal relationship which in a certain sense
went beyond the purely legal relations involved in the development of
Roman Law' (Weber, 1978:312). In India, considering the King's person
as sacred, it was assumed that he had influence over crops, cattle, rain
and general prosperity. So again, the subjects, in order to relate to cattle,
the mediation of the King was involved in a metonymic gesture, through
whose presence, people could relate and be present to themselves
(Hocart, 1927: 9). In this sense, personal is that which predates both the
public and the private and what is historically interesting is to discover
when and why the collapsing of the personal and the private began, to
which today's feminists are but victims.

This major point then needs mention: the qualitative leap when
personal came to be identified with the private. Now private property is
as old as Greek antiquity: Aristotle had argued in favour of and Plato
had wanted to abolish private property. That is not the point; the first
signs of historic conflation of personal as private were available in the
natural law10 (or natural rights) tradition and despite a lot of caveats,
one of its representative voices still remains — John Locke. In this
tradition, property, for the first time, is placed in the person.

Though the earth, and all inferior creatures be common to all men,
yet every man has a 'property' in his own 'person'. This nobody has
any right to but himself. The labour' of his body, and the 'work' of
his hands, we may say are properly his. Whosoever... he hath mixed
his labour' with, and joined it to something that is his own, and
thereby makes it his 'property'... that excludes the common right of
other men. (Locke, 1982: 130)

When 'his property' or private property is derived from personal
capacities of labour, the first motivated mix up between the personal
and the private occurs. And then having had its eighteenth century initiation, it became a cornerstone of liberal theory where property becomes an attribute of personality. If you take away property from me, I become a non-person because (private) property is in my person. Here there is natural ownership before there is legal ownership. Here is a classical example in Hegel, 'Not until he has property does the person exist as reason' (1991:73). Hegel goes at length to show how property is required to supersede the 'the mere subjectivity of personality'. In fact, this is the personal in Hegel invested with some kind of immediacy, but lacks in content that is Hegel's 'abstract personality'.

Since my will is personal and hence as the will of an individual [des Einzelnen], becomes objective in property, the latter takes on the character of private property.... (Hegel, 1991:77)

This would be picked up by liberal capitalism and now onwards property being in person and that which makes objective, tangible personality possible, private became the realm of liberty, reprieve and freedom. Marx would fall heavily on all of this and in fact this discourse finds its final resolution in Marx only. His argument was just the reverse: in a society without private property, the personal selves of men freely blossom. Therefore, this hyphenation between the private and the personal is more an ideological investment necessary for liberal history than a structurally indispensable relation.11 With this, our narrative of historical recovery or historical demystification of the personal reaches a benchmark and awaits if the personal—private distinction can be theoretically grounded as well.

PERSONAL Vs. PRIVATE VIS-A-VIS THE PUBLIC: THEORETICAL DISTINCTION

After hinting at a historical reconstruction, it would then be interesting to examine if the distinction can be sustained theoretically as well. Notice that when we were revisiting the etymological meaning of private and public, we did not refer to a person or personal. But if we had done so, the personal—private difference would be restored even in that. The word 'person' is derived from old Latin persona, meaning mask, particularly one worn by an actor; the word personal is also derived from persona. Now one reason for wearing this mask was to enable the audience to identify the character's personality, who — because of the distance — could not always traverse it visually. Therefore, while private (often) meant a solitary existence removed from public life, person or personal grew up in response to a collective audience — in communicative complicity. Armed with this insight, we are now able to expand on the distinction theoretically.

*Personal is Phenomenological, Private/Public are Political:* We are aware of the criteria for public and private. Private/public are stable
categories which are defined by legal-juridical indices and people go to the court for redress\textsuperscript{12} if they feel violated. But genuine personal matters like that of love and/or friendship cannot be legislated and are not the subject of litigation. There is a unique uncertainty and indeterminacy associated with the decision or the destiny of a person in these cases (nobody knows whether A loves B — even B does not) which makes it a phenomenological\textsuperscript{13} notion and not a political one.

**Private is Opposed to the Public, Personal is not:** Personal, unlike the private, is not necessarily opposed to the public. I might choose somebody to be my lover, it's my personal choice and I might want to declare my choice to the public. This makes love a personal relationship, and not a private one. Consider some more examples: When 'personal attacks' are made in politics they may not intrude into somebody's sacred domain of privacy, but are essentially directed against a person and in this sense they are personal attacks. I have a personal opinion and nobody can stop me from saying it to the television interviewer. But consider sex — sex is private in the sense I cannot choose to have sex in the public; or private property is famous for its exclusion of the public.

**Person/Personal are not Spheres like the Private and the Public:** The interesting point is, while public/private spheres are categories that are tied to certain phenomena, 'personal' is a category that is peculiarly tied to the 'person'. There is no 'sphere\textsuperscript{14}' which is or ought to be explanatively employed here. We may be fathers in our private sphere and officers in the public office, but a person is not simply a father or an officer. We might perform our public or private actions, but a person cannot be reduced to these actions. He is both a father and an officer. A dangerous mafia don outside, is a caring father at home. That in the agency of his person he combines these irreconcilable roles and the way he does it constitutes the personal agency of the person.

**Personal is Both Private and Public and/or Beyond:** Let us remember that in Indian law, the personal is defined as anything referring to a person — they may be private matters or public affairs. In this sense, personal is both public and private. A person at times is a private person or assumes public roles. But as he/she belongs to both, it can be as well argued that he/she belongs to neither, or belongs to both by virtue of crossing both these floors time and again. And as such the personal becomes a third not reducible to the two other registers. It is impossible to reduce it to private/public functions because it is able to grasp and escape both the limits at the same time.

Now, having clarified the personal vis-a-vis both the private and the public, we need to focus more on its difference from the private because that is what provides us the cutting edge to dismantle the personal-private synonymy. To validate the personal-private difference, let us proceed by deploying the best contemporary classic discussion of privacy.
Parent's landmark paper titled 'Privacy, Morality, and the Law' (1983) is memorable for many reasons. One of them is, of course, that he demolishes here all the classic comfortable notions (some of which I have used above) of privacy we have taken for granted. Here is a short synopsis of his destruction:

(i) **Privacy consists of being let alone.** Parent argues that there are 'innumerable ways of failing to let a person alone which have nothing to do with his privacy. Suppose, for instance, that A clubs B on the head or repeatedly insults him. We should describe and evaluate such actions by appeal to concepts like force, violence, and harassment' (Parent, 1983: 272); not violation of privacy.

(ii) **Privacy consists of a form of autonomy or control over significant personal matters.** Parent wonders at the example of a person who voluntarily divulges all sorts of intimate, personal, and undocumented information about himself/herself to a friend. 'She is doubtless exercising control... But we would not and should not say that in doing so she is preserving or protecting her privacy. On the contrary, she is voluntarily relinquishing much of her privacy. People can and do choose to give up privacy for many reasons' (Parent, 1983: 273).

(iii) **Privacy is the limitation on access to the self** Parent retorts by saying if by access we mean physical proximity or an exemption from snooping or surveillance, then solitude or peace could be more viable alternatives. But is peace or solitude privacy? No, because '...it confuses privacy with the existential conditions that are necessary for its realization. To achieve happiness I must have some good luck, but this does not mean that happiness is good luck. Similarly, if I am to enjoy privacy there have to be limitations on cognitive access to me, but there limitations are hot themselves privacy. Rather, privacy is what they safeguard' (Parent, 1983: 275).

Now having demolished nearly all of the received definitions of privacy, Parent comes out with a terse formulation of his own definition of privacy which survives, and I think quite plausibly, the above objections. 'Privacy is the condition of not having undocumented personal knowledge about one possessed by others. A person's privacy is diminished exactly to the degree that others possess this kind of knowledge about him' (Parent, 1983: 269). Parent adds, 'What I am defining is the condition of privacy, not the right of privacy' (1983:269).

Let us just take hold of the word personal in the above definition. What is personal here is that which is a prior condition of privacy. Personal may provide the private or privacy with a content, but personal is not privacy. Nothing can be the condition of something unless it is different from that which is being provided with the condition by courtesy of the former or unless we are ready to mess up, in the most unphilosophical manner, the precondition of a definition with the definition itself.
PERSONAL/PRIVATE DISTINCTION AND EXISTING FORMS OF SOCIAL WORK APPROACH

The distinction that we are proposing provides the key to correcting the personal-private mix up. That this corrective needs to be incorporated into social work practice has already been stressed. But are there existing forms of social work practice wherefrom this corrective can be recovered — in the style of an immanent critique? Yes, they are namely personalist and critical social work.

In the previous sections, we have noticed how love, pain or grief are personal emotions in the sense that nobody really knows, finally, if I am in pain or not, in love or not. This indeterminacy is not available with the private, which can be dealt with in the courtroom. Betrayal in love cannot be taken to the courtroom. But the corresponding pain can be shared, which proves we often do not consider pain as private and excluding others, try to own it absolutely. In fact, any attempt in that direction might lead to a fatal breakdown. Pain or mourning, if shared, becomes normalised. Social work, particularly casework, psycho-analytic or psycho-therapeutic counselling establishes this truth more than others. Further, the fact that the personal does not have a private nature and, therefore, is not opposed to the public has been emphasised, though indirectly, with greater force by critical social work in the West. But let us begin by recovering an example from the East.

To justify a public condolence meeting after the passing away of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya (the great Bengali litterateur and arguably the first theorist of modernity in India), there was a debate\textsuperscript{17} between Rabindranath Tagore and Nabin Chandra Sen. Sen's contention was that grief is a personal emotion (in the private sense) and, therefore, a public condolence meeting was quite meaningless and simply a bad European inheritance; the show was totally artificial with the public not at all aggrieved and rather going for an evening's amusement. Tagore retorted by saying that to consider personal grief as only a privative emotion would be a mistake. Otherwise, why is there ceremonial mourning at the death of our close ones?

At the death of one's father whether one is really aggrieved or not is unimportant; society says-you are bound to express grief before me and according to my customs...The way in our country 'ceremonial mourning of father's death is staged in the open and as it is incumbent upon every bereaved one that he mourns the loss of his father also in the open. (Tagore, 2003: 506, 507)\textsuperscript{18}

Tagore also emphasises how through social mourning the excessive nature of personal loss becomes somewhat tolerable. Therefore, from Tagore's argument, we can infer the following:
(i) personal grief in our *samaj* (society) is bound by customs and, therefore, is not private; it can be collectively shared through symbolic behaviour; and

(ii) personal grief being indeterminate, nobody knows whether one is really aggrieved or not. This helps grief retains its personal nature.

Having been aided in our endeavour to distinguish the personal and the private, let us connect this indigenous incident to disciplinary discourses in social work. In a landmark paper by Allan, included in a book on critical social work, the author is in agreement with Tagore's views on the socially constructed nature of personal grief 'because of the rules and norms relating to how we are "allowed" to grieve, who is "allowed" to grieve, and who we are "allowed" to grieve for' (Allan, 2003: 177).

Allan's discussion is relevant because of its contemporaneous nature. Following Paul Halmos, from a society of pastoral care (or sacred personal care rooted in traditions/customs to which Tagore refers), we have arrived at a professionalised secular personal care in modernity. The journey, therefore, is from communitarian pastoral care to secular personal rational care marked by the emergence of personal service societies and the appearance of counsellors as 'therapeutic social change-agents', who provide 'the secular replacement of pastoral care' (Halmos, 1978, 49). The generic name of this care is significant: personalist social work.

If tradition or custom is the existence of ancestral rules and the unquestioned (pre-enlightenment and pre-scientific) collection of other people, in today's secular post enlightenment societies, what happens to personal grief? Does it become privatised? Do we separately cry behind closed doors? Or *a la* Tagore, is it shared by religious or ritual mourning? But in a functionally differentiated society, ritual mourning can rarely become exhaustive: for instance if somebody is shocked at his/her lover's death, no familial/communal/social mourning is forthcoming. The new, contemporary personal appeals to other people in a different form and personalist along with critical social work addresses this phenomenon. The aggrieved may go for either action-oriented or relational healing (Halmos, 1978:178).

Individuals are then expected to participate in some sort of mutual help or therapy to bring about resolution of their mourning... [Through individual counseling and] a sense of community, social workers can contribute much by helping to build stronger communities and social infrastructure that help when grief strikes, and by linking those who grieve with existing communities of support... Ensure that people who are grieving have access to information and personal experience, to practical and emotional resource, and to justice. (Halmos, 1978: 180, 182, 184)

Notice then, this personal is not at all limited to the secluded sphere of privacy — even in the midst of capitalist modernity — but its face is
turned towards 'others' for support in a different way. The relief comes in when one 'disowns' the shock and distributes it — even if unequally — among others. Here there is no political possibility as is beautifully expressed by a poet, Tours tears are not political, they are real water.' Thereby the slogan 'personal is political' fails again for the last time. And what helps us discover this non-privative nature of the personal and deploy it in social work practice is an existential phenomenology (which deals with how our existence and our experience is embedded in various life-worlds) and not any version of liberal political theory (which does not encourage looking beyond the public-private binary and, therefore, wants to see everything like the personal also as a version of this private).

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK THEORY AND PRACTICE

This article has argued that the personal is beyond the private-public binary and tried to point out how, in feminist discourses including feminist social work, personal has been wrongly used as a synonym of the private. The article has tried to advance a corrective from within social work. Private/privacy is opposed to public/publicity and resists public scrutiny — the stuff by which the public is made. Personal — the way we do not know what a person is, what his/her real/final intentions are or whether somebody is genuinely aggrieved or not — makes the personal (which is largely unpredictable and indeterminate in the final instance) unlike the private. Private/public being legal juridical categories have specific indicators. The absence of these indicators make personal relationships — like love or friendship — remain outside legislation. This thesis — as per the proposal of the article — has been shown to have been adopted and demonstrated by personalist social work.

If the article has been correct to argue — with a lot of historical, theoretical and also social work evidence — that the personal is not private, what results is the slogan 'personal is political' — which was espoused with this similarity in mind, and deployed derivatively by feminist social work, fall flat. The slogan has to be revised in a major way if not altogether abandoned; the feminists themselves have to undertake this reconstruction. But in all this it has to be seen that the feminist liberationist spirit is not offended; it has a long way to go.

Feminism had argued in this wake that women should stop identifying themselves with the private sphere and demystify the urgency with which home and house work have been valorised as their natural forte. It follows from any argument that the above is possible only when women stop identifying their personal self with the private.

When the client's personal emerges independent and shows mastery over both the private and public spheres (which in reality constitutes his/her environment), then the accusation that social work though being
interested in the interface of person and environment has failed to adequately address it (Roberts, 142-143), will not seem convincing anymore.

The network of services and social work that has been designated as personalist (and from where this article draws much of its argumentive force) becomes the core descriptive index of what social work is after all. When Halmos was talking about personalist social work it was 1978 and rarely were we taught this taxonomy in our student days. But in 2004, a canonical book on social work defined social work thus:

"Social work can be defined as an exercise in engaging with people to facilitate the telling of their story around a particular problem relating to their well being, that is, to articulate what has happened to them and why. Its interactive base makes social work a relational profession. (Dominelli, 2004:5)"

This is a far cry from the usual neutral designation of 'helping people to help themselves'. That the problems faced by people form a part of their personal autobiography is acknowledged here and the articulation of this narrative is what is deemed important. We have talked of relational healing earlier in this article; now we learn social work itself has emerged as a relational profession, that is, its another effective way of relating to unknown people. And it is no surprise that this theorist, after having clarified the new relational nature of social work, talks about personal social services which 'can be provided by a plurality of providers — the state, the voluntary, commercial or household sectors' (Dominelli, 2004:6).

We have now arrived at the consequence or impact of this article. By this, social work is nothing but personalist. If people ask, is social work liberal capitalist (where private absorbs the public)? We shall say, no! If people ask, is social work classical Marxist (where the public usurps the private)? We shall say, no! Then what is social work? Social work is personalist: a narrative science of relations. So in its final impact, the article imparts the major premise of social work — the personal — is to be built into its definition henceforth. And this is no hara-kiri! Even the recent tendencies, some of them documented above, evince this conclusion.

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NOTES

1. For instance, the quote by Mahajan (2003: 12) repeats this conflation.

2. For example, our vyaktigat in Hindi means — without an alternative — both personal and private, as if they are one.

3. Ambivalences in the principle of privacy derived from the system of private property and from a family caught up in the requirements of the market' (Landes, 1995:96)

4. Vyaktigat in Indian cultural settings do convey some of these meanings. For more on Indian cultural notions of the binary, see Madan (2003).

5. There are of course disagreements on whether Roman Law guaranteed an order of 'private law' in the strict sense (Habermas, 1989:76).


7. Recently, a historian has traced the colonial attempts to institute the Indian public to 1793 when the regulations of Lord Cornwallis were 'printed and promulgated' for the Indian public and a special press was set up for the purpose (Ray, 2003: 548-549).

8. Separated from the state, the church was the first private to engender the secular colour, so characteristic of modernity.

9. I shall make a point on why, while marking the site of the personal, this word 'sphere' should not be deployed in the way Habermas does it.

10. I am bypassing the 'rights to persons' in Roman Law (and the Hegel-Kant debate on that) and the theory of personal property later in English common law since neither of these could be said to have — despite linguistic overtones — founded property in person.

11. For a brilliant exposition of the incompatibility of personal rights and property rights, see Bowles and Gintis (1986: 34-41).

12. In this sense, let us not be misled by what goes on by the name of personal laws; they are but remnants of private or customary laws.

13. Phenomenology is the discourse of subjective experience bereft of pre-suppositions and pre-existing categories.

14. Etymologically, sphere, is referred to an area of activity and public/private arenas do refer to a collection of actions whereas the personal refers to the agency of these actions.

15. Parent excludes from his definition documented personal information available in public or institutional records.

16. Italics mine.

17. I am indebted to Partha Chatterjee for attracting my attention to this debate (Chatterjee, 2001).

18. I have been helped in translation by Prabir Basu and Surbhi Tiwari.

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