

To be Brahmin and singing in the streets

My name is Soumyalakshmi. I am a lawyer by profession and I work for this group called Alternative Law Forum.

We work for those who cannot find help very easily in this society.

We believe in alternative lawyering, lawyering for a social cause, and we take up cases, we do work, we do research basing on issues that concern us which could be a social issue, an economic issue.

We offer our services to those people who do not find lawyers or educated people to represent them in the system. So, we work for women, children, for the other socially oppressed people like scheduled castes, the people who live in the slums. We work for the disabled people, for the elders, for senior citizens, for the sexuality minorities, and also going a little further, into intellectual property where we believe that holding on to intellectual property, holding on to patent or a copyright is not a socially conscious thing to do.

Property is something, knowledge is something that is to be released

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Intellectual property in that sense talks about knowledge, about ideas, about something that is like you say is not something that can be touched or felt.

In a place where there are people who are fighting for a square meal a day or people who are fighting for a little piece of land to live or to even, you know, barely find proper clothing or proper shelter, what are we talking about patents or copyrights here, but it is also very interesting to know that through this process... There are a lot of rich people in this country who also believe in holding on to intellectual property, patenting on something, or having or holding a

copyright on something and then making money over it, and we sincerely believe that operating on a system like this will only increase the disparity or the divide between the rich and the poor because the ones who hold on to intellectual property are already rich, rich of knowledge, rich of access to knowledge, rich of money, rich of access to money, and there are other sets of people who are deprived and oppressed from having any kind of access to even knowledge. People want to buy books, they are copyrighted. People want to, you know, read something, watch a movie, everything is costly, everything is priced so high – and how do you and where do you get knowledge from?

And so, to submit ourselves into a system where there is a strong intellectual property, right, hold, there is a lot of difference between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots and people who are powerful and the ones who are powerless.

I think through my work I answer to a lot of questions within myself.

It answers to a question or an imagination of myself of an ideal society probably, where there is power, money, knowledge, which is at least to some extent sort of divided amongst all sorts of ego and also there is recognition of right of each other, that you have a right, that you have a right.

Like how I have a right to live the way I want, you have a right, and you have a right, and so, there has to be a sort of understanding between people and that is the right mark of a matured society.

I want freedom for everyone, freedom to choose the way of life.

I want freedom for myself.

I want freedom for everyone, to choose the sort of life that each one of us wants to lead, to sing if I feel like singing, to keep silent if I want to be silent.

For a woman who wants to just, you know, pursue her dreams and not be bound by any sort of social constraints, then she should be free and liberated to do that. If a person who is born into a scheduled caste family feels that he wants to perform poojas to God, then he should be free and liberated from all social constraints to do that sort of a job.

If a person who is born into a very rich family wants to just sing on streets, then he should have that liberty and freedom to do that.

Belief is something where I place my roots in, where I feel grounded to something that I would want to work for, and something that I am living for.

It gives me a secure feeling of a path in which I want to live, the light that guides me to do what I do, and a sense of fulfillment when I know that and then I work for it that this is what I believe in and this is what I am working for and not that. When I say this, it is this, and there is a very strong belief in something and only in that thing.

At a very early stage of my life, I realized that all the social constructs, the way the society works, people, the system, everyone has a different stand towards you if you are a woman.

I think, for that reason itself, I have told myself that I will emerge strong and I shall not let any of these affect me

If I was a man and I did not know what I needed to know, maybe it was a little more easier, but as a woman, I surely have to know what I am doing and what I need to know in the system or even in an attitude, woman needs to have a very confident attitude if she has to make a point.

This is what I have always seen.

Being diplomatic helps, but not all of us can be diplomatic. Sometimes, we lose our temper.

So, you need to be really patient if you are a woman and you are trying to do something like this.

You need to be really strong.

You need to be confident. You need to be intelligent and you need to have a common sense - all this because you are a woman because you need to fight that daily sort of a, you know, a sort of pressure that is working against you from moving forward.

There is a lot of pressure just not from the family, certainly the family because they are very immediate and I live with my parents and so, there is this constant sort of emotion though not very detectable, but there is a lots of, you know, in the form of concern by them to see me settled and, you know, happy with enough money for myself and somebody to take care.

Of course, they have in the form of their dreams for me, and I believe that if I really believe in all these things, none of this should matter, none of this matters as well, it does not matter to me, and I also believe that each one of us should have a liberty and freedom to dream for ourselves as well and not be tied down by somebody else's dream for us.

So, if someone else is trying to put any sort of pressure, I always come strongly out of it because I really, really believe in what I believe and in what I do.

If I really love you, I should liberate you from all sort of boundaries for your growth. I should help you in your growth and not stop or impediment in what you want for yourself if I really you and that is my idea of love.

And very sadly, relationships come with definitions, with boundaries, and with norms of do's and don'ts.

If you really love me, then you shall say something like this or if you really love me, you will not go to work today, you know, starting from little things like that to bigger things like if you really love me then, you shall go to work and help me

out of the situation or it could be starting from what to wear and how to live to things like what would you do in your own life?

I think it is a really, really long fight because the sort of system that we are talking about, I do not know how to call it, maybe it is called patriarchy or the man ruled society.

It is just not the man who is responsible for it.

I think it is each one of us who believe in certain things; in certain things that is just not true, something right .

Because woman, so many times, feels a lot pressurized to even say that “No, I want to go out and do this and I want you to take care of my child” - to even say something like this - or to even walk out of a marriage or to even say that “No, I do not want to make money, but I want to do theatre. I want to do music. I just want to do alternative lawyering if it does not get me any money,” be it man or woman.

To say something like this, it has become very difficult, it is very difficult in the society because we think we have a particular definition of what success is, of what happiness should be, of what is joy, and what are the responsibilities of each one of us. I think those are the things that need to be let for each person to decide of what I need to know, I need to define for myself as to what is my happiness, why is my joy, what do I want to do with the relationship or what do I want to do in profession or with my children.

I believe a lot in love or feelings of all of this, in emotions, in beliefs, and also in individuality, also in growth of self.

If I want to do music today, I should be free to do that and do what I do and in a manner that I want to do which would give me happiness.

I feel that when I am in a situation where I am by myself, where I do not bother about the outside world and I am just.

According to me, when I am blue, when I attain my greens and that is when I am in a purest of joy.

When I am just outside in the fields where I know that no one is looking at me and I am totally happy looking at the nature doing music, I would be very happy in my opposed state of joy and happiness where I am not bothered of what people would say of what I do, whether people would accept me or not, whether people would accept me one amongst them, I should not be having any such fears, a fear of being accepted or rejected puts a lot of constraints on happiness or on fulfillment or attaining of self.

I believe a lot in love or feelings of all of this, in emotions, in beliefs, and also in individuality, also in growth of self.

I believe for a society where there is mutual respect of people irrespective of caste, creed, and color, then, this is what I believe that me as a socially conscious, educated lawyer who socially is in a good position to do something like this has to do and has no option but to have this concern for the society.

I do not give myself any other option of any other belief in my life.

This is my only belief in life.

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