
“ . . . WHO IS THE FAIREST IN THE LAND?”

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Abstract: Right from the Genesis of evolution, women has been called to be a “Supernumerary bone “ of Adam, ”an appendage to man” in the patriarchal society. But one should realize that the bone is neither taken from man’s crown nor from his foot. So it is not definitely a criminal mistake of a woman to expect equality and dignity from her opposite sex. The era of looking at women as an inferior to man is slowly fading away, though it happens to be a continuous struggle for her sometimes to establish her identity in the 21st. century too.

Introduction: The very fact that Jacqueline Colaco, a social activist who has coordinated the peaceful annual global walk for India’s Missing Girls in Bangalore from her wheel chair since 2011 inspires all particularly the womenfolk. The same act makes one to contemplate over the subject whether the female can be addressed as ‘fair sex’. The phrases like ‘A Blonde Bombshell’, ‘Tie the knot’ depict the positivity in the social climate; the question always seems to lack a definite answer in human history. The very question that I have pondered in the paper is not whether I belong to feminist organizations or not. I constantly make an attempt to hear my voice, a genuine voice, the voice of my consciousness as a female. Of course I am glad that I do. “Magic mirror in my hand, who is the fairest in the land?” is the most popular question asked not only by the evil step mother but all human beings right from the commencement of civilization. Simone de Beauvoir in “The second sex” comments like this: “Culture, knowledge, art, values –was of man’s making. Men are normative human beings, “the one”; women are “the other”. Men are active, transcendent able to transform their environment; women are passive and “immanent”, that is existing within themselves, with little capacity to affect outside society. Men are the “subjects” of their own lives, the actors; women are “object s”, the acted upon. This is the way the world has always been.”

Though we get a gloomy picture here, this idea has been refuted by Mary Beard a veteran activist and commented in 1953 that women had played a significant role in the civilization and emerged to be a constant force in all human history. De Beauvoir never married and bore a child. Marriage and procreation were considered to be the symbols of “weakness and incapacity”, according to her. This protest is made by her due to some dark ideas already existed in the society. The ideas similar like Jews are inferior origins for the anti-Semite, Negroes are subordinatives for American racists, the locals of Latin Americans are “natives” for colonizers , proletarians are less privileged and sometimes lower class for the greater privileged ones ; and so also the idea that women are submissive to man cannot be considered to be an alien point of view.

The book of Genesis states that woman is created from what Bossuet, a French religious leader and historian called “a Supernumerary bone” of Adam. Thus religion bluntly advocates that woman can never be an

autonomous being. It encourages woman to woo the man blindly. In the patriarchal society, woman is considered to be an ‘appendage to man. ‘Plato thanked God firstly for being creating him a freeman, secondly, for not being a woman .According to the New York Times, November 19, 1961, when a woman reporter at a White house news conference questioned the Democratic party regarding the Job opportunities and equal pay for women, the President Kennedy evaded her question by retorting, “Well I’m sure we have not done enough,” which ended up in laughter from the male press corps. Some unnamed reports published in The Times of India in 2013 has expressed that women workers are exploited and harassed more and more in today’s world. The women workers in garment factories in at present Independent India support this theory.

If it is really fortunate to be a woman in the twenty first century, why should women suffer irrespective of their classes that they belong to? When the professional and the women who enjoy the high status suffer from many stress related problems , women at home are also the easy targets in the society .Unreported rapes are more than the reported ones in the global scenario and sex-related murders are simply threatening. At least one – third of women are either killed or murdered by their beloved husbands or boyfriends. If they escape from this group of menacing men folk, they commit suicide driven by the pressures and the challenges in life. Sylvia Plath, a very creative mind vowed initially never to be confined to home like other women folk and expresses this in Purdah:

“Being a woman is my awful tragedy” she lamented.”From the moment I was conceived I was doomed...to have my whole circle of action, thought and feeling rigidly circumscribed by my inescapable femininity.”

When ‘being born a woman’ is a tragedy to Sylvia Plath, Ntozake Shange views her life in a very different angle. In one of her poems ,she writes, “I have decided to wear my ovaries on my sleeve/raise my poems on my milk/& count my days by the flow...”Plath was unfortunate in life for so many reasons ;one among them was for failing to come across a positive soul like shange.Like Sylvia De Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone , many of them in the women’s movement regarded the female anatomy as an ‘impediment’, the important reason for the ‘Subjection of women. ‘But Anne Sexton strikes a

realistic note of in the following lines- a tune that is sung by many of the future feminists in their writings.

“...Many women are singing together of this:
One is in a shoe factory cursing the machine...
One is at the toll gate collecting,
One is trying the cord of a calf in Arizona,
One is straddling a cello in Russia,
One is shifting pots on the stove in Egypt...
One is dying but remembering a breakfast,
One is stretching on her mat in Thailand,
One is wiping the ass of her child...
and all seem to be singing, although some can not
Sing a note.”

It is an amazing bit of information that our Indian societies right from ancient civilization, have venerated ‘the creative forces of nature.’ It is stated in general by the religious historians that the people who worshipped the Goddesses were deeply religious and for them ‘religion was life and life was religion.’ When women are venerated in our ancient culture and civilization, even among the pre-historic men, we tend to ask questions like ‘Did they (pre-historic men) live in a patriarchal or matriarchal society? ‘Did occurrences like rapes and murders happen frequently?’ Riane Eisler in her essay ‘on The Chalice and the Blade (1987) has carved these beautiful lines:’It is interesting in the connection that there is Neolithic imagery indicating an understanding of the joint roles of women and men in procreation. For example, a small stone plaque from Catal Huyuk shows a woman and a man in a tender embrace; immediately next to them is the relief of a mother holding a child, the offspring of their union.”

The beauty of the union carved in the above lines is possible only when we live in a partnership society that patronizes equality, friendship, mutual understanding, respecting the partner’s space; not definitely in a patriarchal or matriarchal society.

Aristotle viewed women slightly higher than slaves but not men... Woman is often called to be a ‘Fair Sex’, though it is a very old archaic, objectionable expression in many ways. The concept of fairness is often restricted to physical beauty. In Brazil the so called fair sex is fairly or less fairly treated according to her complexion

.A mulatto in Brazil will have less chance when she is compared to her honey-coloured counterpart if the jury happen to be white. Thus Aristotle has got a valid point, when he argued that beauty was considered to be a greater recommendation than any letter of introduction.

Let us also not forget the saying ‘beauty lies in the eye of the beholder!’ The film industry invests a large amount in stars- the stars of unusual attractiveness, of course with mediocre ability to act. The popular culture has greatly influenced the people in modern era and people particularly women desperately make an effort to look impressive in the eyes of their partners and some of them do not even end up in cosmetic surgeries. It is proved that a man who is seen in the company of beautiful women’ get an instant halo-effect.‘Soalso the opposite sex. Even after getting a ‘fair and lovely look’, why are the life partners not very happy in life? When we notice the increased number of divorce cases, one is dubious of what St.Paul told the Corinthians: “Love does not come to an end.” When we lose the trust in the relationships, we lose everything in life. According to the puranas, Manu, the first leader of manavas, writes the Manu Smriti established the caste system and encouraged the practice of untouchability and gender discrimination. We condemned and rejected it. We are fortunately living in an era where even the great religious leader Pope Francis is reluctant to comment negatively on Homosexuality asks “... who am I to judge him?” (The Times of India on July 29, 2013)

Women are advanced now. They are not just confined to walls but on the march almost everywhere. One should realize that the ere of looking at women as ‘an inferior appendage to man ‘is gone.

So many organizations constantly agreed and disagreed about feminist activities, but it is up to the women to put up a brave front and to decide whether to eat the ‘crazy salads’ or not . The word “feminist” can be interpreted as a woman who “has in her the capacity of fighting her way back to independence.”It is proved to be a continuous struggle to establish her identity. Nirbhaya will solemnly nod her head if she were among us!

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