

EDITORIAL

Reflective men will agree that gender justice requires freedom and equality for women. It means the relation between man and woman must be a relation of genuine mutuality, concern and respect. To make this relation possible the demand of the militant feminists is that the women must have enough economic, social, political, and psychological independence as its preconditions. Mutual renunciation of the use of power on the basis of equality of power is another necessary precondition that the breakdown of the relation may not leave the women, as usual, in a position to be overpowered.

One need not, indeed, expouse any given style or type of feminism to discuss, from a philosophical point of view the issues discussed by the feminist and their opponents, namely the ethical issues involved in subordination of women to men, the preferential hiring and the principle of equal opportunity, marriage and the domestic duties assigned to women, rape, sex role and gender, sex designation in ordinary and religious language. The plain sense of the Biblical creation narrative of human being as male and female seems to have been lost in the course of human history. As the Bible itself puts the blame of the first Fall on Eve, it has become some way the source of making women subordinate to men. Can the situation be redeemed through a more objective and realistic study of the gender polarization? The present number of the *Journal of Dharma* takes up this issue and examines it from a number of perspectives. No attempt is made to make the study comprehensive or co-ordinated. No final conclusions are drawn or recommendations worked out.

If we turn our attention to the economic and social aspect of the issue, the struggle of the feminists in the late 19th and 20th centuries mainly was for acquiring political rights and liberties to own properties and enter into contracts and the right of woman defendant to have women on juries and the crucial right to vote. But these rights could not remove the basic political inequalities found in the legal systems concerning labour, marriage and divorce. A long standing widespread attitude perpetuates women's inferior status in the family and society. This attitude is manifested in a variety of ways such as in the desire of a couple to have a boy as their first child. It is not easy to make the women conscious of their self-worth and abilities and standing up for one's rights.

The question how far sex differences are biologically based rather than taught is an interesting topic for the psychologists and anthropologists to investigate. In the scale of the characteristics of typical feminine or masculine sex roles, we may often notice a lack of correlation with the corresponding gender. A male may score very high in the characteristics of the 'feminine' sex role. In persons called "androgynous" a balanced mixture of male and female types are found. Scientists are studying whether this can be proposed as an ideal to be sought after by both men and women. Social and moral philosophers take up the question and examine the androgynous model, or sex-role stereotyping is preferable. Those who wish to develop androgyny as a superior alternative foresees a society in which the sex of an individual is not so noticeable nor felt to be so important as it is today. But on the contrary even if the sex-stereotyping is biologically determined, we should recognize that freedom and equal opportunities for the members of both sex are more important than the preservation of the sex roles through enforced preferential treatments.

Sexism in Biblical or ordinary language has serious practical implications for the way we talk, reflects the way we think, and act. The people who talk about women in a sexist way are likely to engage in activities that discriminate against women. Is it desirable to launch out a programme of action to purify our religious and ordinary language of any trace of sexism? At present the researchers seem to have given up the search for a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that capture our intuitions about sexism in language. However, an elimination of sexist talk about women will certainly help to decrease the degree of discrimination against women.

An area that comes up for consideration in this connection is 'equal opportunity and preferential hiring'. These opportunities are mainly for educational and occupational attainments. Writers on this issue speak of two ways of hiring in which women are given justice, namely, meritocratic system reinforced by distributive educational system and preferential treatment system. According to a good number of feminists, the former cannot do justice to women and so women candidates ought to be hired even if they are not as qualified as the best-qualified non-female candidate. The justification for this system is that the system from which it departs (namely, meritocracy) is also not just.

In the present prevailing culture women are expected to be homemakers and mothers; men are expected to be breadwinners and fathers. As a rule, feminists believe that this conception of marriage is necessarily exploitive and oppressive. According to them marriage contract itself violates three general principles regulating contracts. The consent of the parties does not seem to be free and informed because of the romantic mystification of it in the religious ceremonies. Roles of the contracts are not negotiable but are fixed by the biological needs of procreation. Allocation of sex roles also are not mutable as in the case of other contracts by mutual agreement. These conditions are mostly disadvantageous to the woman and so it maintains its exploitative character. Though studies are under way to understand and interpret marriage, socialists and feminists have not yet come up with any theory about marriage and other issues related to women which is universally acceptable to the contemporary world.

Our generation may have to wait some more time to see a more sound and essential framework within which we can assess the political, psychological and biological implications of women in the society. After everything have been said, and enacted, the question what conception of the nature of women would bring about a social change which will do justice to women still remains unanswered.

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