

**Gender IV -
Gender Consciousness:
Shifting Family Paradigms in the Post-Culture Era**

Dr. Jernail S. Anand

President, Philosophique Poetica
Secretary General [Ex], World Parliament of Literature
[Italy] and Director, World Institute of Peace [Nigeria]
anandjs55@yahoo.com
Mobile: 919876652401

Prof. Manminder Singh Anand

Assistant Prof. Dept. of English
DAV College, Sector 10, Chandigarh, India
fortune.favours@ymail.com
Mobile: 919876807966

=====
Abstract

All literature is culture centric, and all culture is life-centric. Essentially, it is life out of which culture springs, and culture specificates the contours of literature of a milieu. Hardy's Tess faces the dilemma of a raped woman, and the story brings out the moral ethos of that period. In the same way, Charles Dickens' *'Bleak House'* and *'Oliver Twist'* throw light on the condition of children in the post-industrial revolution society. According to Wikipedia, culture is the social behavior and norms found in human societies. But Marxism and critical theory argue that culture is often used politically as a tool of the elites to manipulate the lower classes and create a false consciousness. This has a particular relevance to the subaltern status of woman in human society, which is under discussion in this article. How culture engulfs a man? It can be argued that a man is not a five feet entity, nine inches thick. This is only a visible dimension of man. The real man lives in a home, which is made up of bricks and cement. Home has so many other members of the family. And, where he lives is a society. And this society has a distinct set of values which defines behavior of the people. In fact, individual behavior is determined by the cultural values of a society. And these cultural values are rooted in the economics of living. Much before the history was recorded, family has been a distinct unit of life, and a man and a woman marry to have a home, a family, and then, procreate. All this seems a well-planned strategy to save human beings from erosion and extinction by wild animals, or even by wild instincts. The issue that comes up here is: what is the composition of the family, and how its various members are located in relation to one

another. The arrangement of a family setting shows how a man is placed in the dominant position, and how a woman has remained a subaltern even before the dawn of civilization. Society is an extension of the family hierarchy only. If woman is a considered second citizen, it is because this idea has been a part of human culture, in which, woman is considered the second sex, and it is not easy to erase the racial memories, however hard we may try. In this article, we have tried to study the political and social aspects of culture which maltreat the female gender and keep the myth of male superiority alive.

Keywords: gender, woman, culture, subaltern, family paradigm, literary theory

Introduction

Woman, Culture and Society [1974] a pioneering work by editors Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere which comes on the heels of the feminist movement of 1960s, challenges anthropology's status quo of viewing studied cultures from a male perspective while diminishing female perspectives, even considering women as comparatively imperceptible. [Wikipedia]. It is common practice to look upon woman as the second sex, second to man in hierarchical values, and having no voice in decision making. When a man dies, it is women who are expected to create a chorus of cries for him, while men maintained studied silence. Simon de Beauvir, in her 1949 work, '*The Second Sex*' opines that motherhood left woman "riveted to her body" like an animal and made it possible for man to dominate her and Nature. How could she ever think of participating in war, when the only option open to her was to set herself on fire, if the fort is about to fall. Society eulogizes such activities of hara-kiri, so as to give a sense of false pride to women, whom the society otherwise treats as subalterns.

Indian society does not tire of telling and retelling itself that woman is the 'avataar' of goddesses, and in the past, she was held in high esteem, and venerated too, like Sita Mata, Ravana's wife Mandodari, Savitri, etc. But a person bred in 21st century, is not ready to be convinced with few examples of great womanhood, while the entire mythology and history is pock-marked with female exploitation. Even Manusmriti does not give respectable status to a woman:

"Dhol, gawar, sudar, pashu, naari, sakal tadan ke adhikari"

[i.e. a drum, an uneducated person, a low-caste man, an animal and a woman... all deserve bashing].

It shows women were treated at par with animals and lower castes, and deserved bashing and harsh treatment. And, if we look back at our traditional culture, women have been maltreated over the centuries, and the traditional image of a woman, still haunts our civilization, in spite of all its advances.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:4 April 2019

Dr. Jernail S. Anand and Prof. Manminder Singh Anand

Gender Awareness – IV Gender Consciousness: Shifting Family Paradigms in the Post-Culture Era

The Cultural Turmoil

The point at issue in this article is: why, in our modern life there is so much of focus on culture, and how this revival of interest in culture can help in ameliorating the condition of woman. The foregoing discussion underscores only one fact: that woman has been treated as second sex. And, this idea dominantly characterizes our culture, our myth, and even our history. It has gone deep down into our racial consciousness. Whenever we think of women, we think of Gandhari, who blindfolded herself for the sake of her blind husband. What does it underline? Does it underline any sense of equality? If so, it is a highly inverted type of equality, an idea nobody would like to imitate in real life. In the same way, Sawayamvara too was a crude custom which assaulted a lady's personal choices. 'Only the brave deserve the fair' is a male chauvinistic statement, which falsifies the reality of a woman's being. When did women think of loving the brave? It was a political stunt. Women loved men who they thought to be best performers. Brave or no, did not come in.

Our films are a faithful reflection of our social norms. Pick any film, it will be clear how a girl is 'loved' by the father so much that she is forced to marry to a rich-rotten boy, instead of a boy of her choice. If there is a pregnancy before marriage, the girl is hounded out of the community. Even today, a daughter cannot marry her love, whereas her brother can. *This is our society in a nutshell. Absolutely indifferent to the needs of a girl, and highly sensitive to the needs of a boy.* In studies too, still people don't like to spend much on a girl's studies, because they know, she has to be married off. And, then comes the most threatening custom: after marriage, a girl leaves the house of the parents, and goes to live in the house of her in-laws. There may have been a hundred reasons behind this 'holy' practice, and the idea of dowry, everything stands turned over its head today.

Zeroing In

To ensure that such equations go on uninterrupted and unquestioned, the society comes up with rituals, rites, and religious ceremonies, which sanction and then, propagate the womanhood of woman, and manhood of man. In this society, all our customs, Karva Chauth, Raakhi, etc, are apparently woman centric whereas in spirit, they too are men-centric. Such festivals are nowadays celebrated with a vengeance, basically because of the market forces. What is the end result? These festivals underline once again the inferior position of a woman in society, and her dependence on the male world. Add to it the promises of 30% reservation for women in seats for MLA or MP. Now, they are pilots, and have been allowed to perform combat duties also. But, with great reservations. Field is not open for her. It is still a guarded venture.

The prevalent culture is also a remnant of the past. Things are evolving and new equations are getting into place, yet, if we look at our society, it is a surging mass of tradition and culture,

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:4 April 2019

Dr. Jernail S. Anand and Prof. Manminder Singh Anand

Gender Awareness – IV Gender Consciousness: Shifting Family Paradigms in the Post-Culture Era

and those who deviate from the set norms, are considered heretics by the society. Add to it the idea of social identity and its re-affirmation on the media. It can be seen that media, on the one hand, presents the most elite programmes from the tinsel world, but it is also not tired of beaming programmes which celebrate our tradition and culture. Cultural studies are a rage these days, and the upsurge of nationalism has brought more and more people in the ambit of cultural passion. Ethnicity is in vogue. Festivals are in vogue. Traditional dresses are in vogue. Traditional thinking is being reinforced by the official media. What are the reasons? Why return to the cultural norms of the past? Is it our societal comfort zone? Or is it the lure for an international identity? Or, is it that the powers don't want people, in particular, women, to shed off the burden of the past, and reinvent themselves?

Gender Consciousness and Cultural Bonds

In the days of rising gender consciousness, we find a strange paradox evolving. On the one hand, there are metropolitan cities in which ultra-modern education is imparted, and with the mass-exposure to the film world, which is now the in-thing with programmes like Kapil Show, there is one set of people who have liberated themselves from cultural bonds, and live in a no-man's land; and, on the other hand, are villages dotted with farmers' suicides and honour killings. This is an incredible gap in Indian consciousness which defies all explanations. If you want change and development, you have to break out of the shell. But every day, we are trying to give a new coating of powerful paint to the shell, so that breaking it becomes a violation of norms. To put it in a simple way, our society is caste-ridden, but it does not mind if doctors marry across the caste. In the same way, if actors lead free lives, and live with actresses without marriage, no hue and cry is raised. But, if it happens in a mohalla in Jalandhar or Ludhiana, people next door would be shouting at the illicit couple. Marriage with cousins is common in Muslim societies. But in northern India, particularly, Punjab, and Haryana, such a marriage brings disaster in the family. By and by, times are changing, and the individual is asserting his mite against the society and suffering too. But, if we want real progress, it will remain elusive until and unless people are ready to re-evaluate traditional culture and replace it with viable patterns which respond adequately to the modern living paradigms.

Marriage is the most powerful cultural tool which keeps the society together. But, it did in the past, when women had no let out. Today, marriage is the greatest breaker of human happiness, because, over the time, values have changed. The sacredness that was attached to marriage, has become symptomatic only. Marriage vows too are not taken seriously. Marriage is no topic in 12th standard social studies books. Living is not a subject in our B.A classes. We are imparting knowledge which has no application. Here is an example of the questions put to aspirants for becoming English lecturers by the UGC: How many plays were written by Shakespeare? This question is not out of the way. But look at the next question: What is the year of publication of

Julius Caesar? Now, what is the examiner testing? Isn't he testing the student's memory? And how it affects his teaching potential if he knows the answer or not? If our education is not helping us in creating a proper living atmosphere, we are bound to suffer if we do not learn the niceties of the new life systems and respond positively.

What compounds the situation is our emphasis on youth festivals. Perhaps by chance, or more possibly, by design, Universities and colleges are engaged in youth festivals with a vengeance in which traditional culture is being propagated. Traditional dresses, traditional dialogues, which recreate our culture, are becoming areas of contest among the students. Apart from this, one most glaring example of tradition thrusting on contemporaneity is the marriage dresses, which after one-time use, are discarded forever. Boys and girls generally wear jeans, but for marriage, they are in costly traditional costumes. And as soon as the marriage is over, these costumes too are placed in the almira. What do we want to show? That we respect tradition? We respect our culture? Even going to temples in the morning is a part of our culture. It shows you are a good guy. *It shows*. And, we all believe in *the show*. We are great showmen. Raj Kapur was. And the most cherished ideal of the modern world is: '*The Show must go on*'.

Culture and Women

What irks common intelligence is that our over emphasis on culture is a measure which is counter-productive. Is it not necessary that we should move ahead and leave the past to the past? Moreover, what was good in our old culture? In our households, woman was never respected. She was forced into unwanted marriages. And, then considered a machine for producing children. Girls were killed as soon as they were born. They were ill-treated by menfolk. It was a man-dominated world. Woman had no say at home, or even in the social realms. This was the set up that gave us a stable family life. But who paid the price for that? It was woman. If today, the apple cart has been upset, it is only because woman has left the kitchen behind. She is getting education, and jobs, and there is vacuum in the home, the kitchen waits for the lady of the house. Children cry because mothers have left them to the care of 'ayaas' or in day-care-centres.

In Punjab, girls often sing a song:

Nach lo ni kudio, ga lao ni kudiyo,
Nachna khelna reh jauga,
Nu koi boojhad jiha jatt lai jaoga.

It means: the girls are telling one another that now is the time to enjoy, sing and dance, and as soon as some foolish Jatt takes you away, you will forget all your joy. Women used to sing such songs which underline a grave tragedy for women. They had nothing to enjoy in married life.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:4 April 2019

Dr. Jernail S. Anand and Prof. Manminder Singh Anand

Gender Awareness – IV Gender Consciousness: Shifting Family Paradigms in the Post-Culture Era

Why? Because, she used to be a daughter, and a sister, and then, a wife, a mother, a mother-in-law. She was never a woman, nor was she ever looked upon with respect as the female gender, the equal of man in running the household, or in larger perspective, the romance of life.

Moreover, I believe that if we go on with the broken families now, and women are sent on combat duties, and jobs which were considered specific for men, if in duties we make no difference, certainly the time is not far, wait for 50 years of progress, when women too will start speaking in a hoarse voice, as men. All feminine sensibilities, which have inspired literature up till now, and even love affairs, can be a thing of the past. Something serious is going to happen, which might challenge the order of nature too. There will be no kitchens in the flats. And no girl will cook at home. There will be no homes. Only flats. Live-in-relationships make it easy to walk in and walk out. No encumbrances. No kids. This is going to happen. Nobody can check a woman when she comes to realize her liberation. In such conditions, it is essential to give a thought what type of a world we want. Do we want no children? If so, we will be writing our own epitaph. Here is a point to ponder. How far it can be supported? It is debatable. Marriage, love, kids, parents, home -- all these things are hanging in imbalance. We are faced with difficult choices. Marry or not to marry, is the question. Kids or no kids is the question. These existential questions have really opened up the society for severe questioning.

Shifting Paradigms

It is clear that emphasis on culture which has become redundant now, in which we have only superficial faith, needs to be given a sacred burial. It is no longer in our interest to return to those values which have been left behind and which have outlived their utility. Woman has found her feet. She has found her head also. It is time, we provide her a free spectrum where a new narrative could be written.

Our emphasis on culture is gender specific, and favours the male child. We need to evolve from this odd situation and work up a new ethos in which traditional values like family, marriage, home, kitchens, kids, etc. are given a new makeover. Our present society is passing through the phase of evolution, which is quite fast, and the labour pains too are very severe. The society that is evolving calls for major shift in social paradigms.

Who is the head of the family? Previously, it was man. Now, if not the woman, we have plural headship. And, this changes the entire ideas of traditional culture. Can a woman be forced into the kitchen? Can she be forced to bring dowry when she is in a job? Is it essential that she leaves her home and goes to live in the in-law's family? In other words, we have to revise all the social paradigms if we want a meaningful life for the youngsters and even for elders. Old-age Homes for the elderly and Orphanages for parent-lost kids are inhuman choices. Society must have

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:4 April 2019

Dr. Jernail S. Anand and Prof. Manminder Singh Anand

Gender Awareness – IV Gender Consciousness: Shifting Family Paradigms in the Post-Culture

Era

a think tank and work out details of the problems we are going to face. It is not the problem of giving more rights to women and bringing her up on the social ladder. The real issue is, how to keep the home alive, how to have a happy environment for our next generation, how to bring happiness to the home. Liberty in itself means lack of discipline unless it is super directed by a will to create better life situations. This is the moment after which the literature will have different characters. Love will have a different set of partners. We MUST not judge the present performers with the lens of the past. We MUST not bring up old culture day in and day out. Let our TV channels and Universities be given clear instructions to propagate the new, work for the new, and create new life patterns, instead of focusing and refocusing on the conflict of the past and the future. That way, we are losing out on our present.

There are already indications enough that the age-old conflict between the two ladies persists even after great serials like ‘Saas bhi kabhi bahu thi’ tried to inject wisdom in the involved actors. No amount of advising with any amount of moral or religious accosting would do, because the contest is of power. Who owns the man? Who owns the property? The mother often loses this battle, and the new lady moves ahead, with the husband, as well as her kids, and never looks back.

I see a big void in human relations. The cultural bonds, if revisited, would seek to bind the woman in the kitchen, and to the role of a mother only, which no one is ready to take. For girls in every household are studying hard, to arm themselves with jobs. If they are to do jobs, the mothers-in-law must rethink who will feed them while their daughters-in-law are in the offices? Instead of fighting, cursing, and burning with jealousy, it is more in place if we try to understand and find a solution to this nagging problem of today.

Women have moved out of those times when family and social culture wanted them to stay indoors, pay attention to the elders, do nothing except minding the kitchen, watering the Tulsi plant, and the kids, and wait for the husband at 5.00 p.m. in the evening, as you saw in Baghbaan. Here, it needs to be pointed out that in Baghbaan, if Amitabh and Hema had a great chemistry, it was because they loved each other. No other sentiment can give you a peaceful life with your spouse. Something missing from the couples of today, who marry with great calculations of having a high time. I have seen young girls, who are lecturers, [enlightened enough] to go for boys who have a good property, and who are well placed, and good earners. A woman’s ultimate desire appears to be to go shopping with a man, who has a bottomless purse. Love, understanding, are mean values, which are often glossed over.

In this way, our references to our culture are retrograde, and bringing it back, is a negative movement, and if we want a better society, based on understanding of the evolving phenomenon, we have to realize the fact that time has come to break away from the deadwood of the past. Time

has come to create a new work ethos, a new home ethos, a new ethos to take care of the elderly. An ethos in which woman is not the only person to be held responsible for everything. There need to be some freedoms also, to marry or not to marry, to remain single, to bear a child or not, and then, to remain together or not. It is most appropriate if we think of introducing live-in relationship instead of marriage, and forget altogether about the idea of marriage, because it is an old world dream, which has flowed into our present life systems, which do not accept it, or we have so much distorted it, that it has gone beyond recognition.

Conclusion

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, it can be safely concluded that the present systems of matrimony, home-making, love, and child-bearing, and age-rearing are sorely inadequate. There is a turmoil in our family life. Home is breaking apart and children are becoming roofless, and rootless at the same time. The idea of women's education which has upset the applecart of the past, has necessitated a new look at the whole system of living, because, family is still the central unit of social life, and if we cannot save it from the earthquakes of time, we won't need a nuclear holocaust to go into permanent oblivion in the next hundred fifty years. Wisdom demands that we must accept the upsurge of the woman, give due regard to her personality, and clearly devise what changes are now required in the idea of marriage, and home-making, so that our previous generation [parents] and our next generation [children] do not suffer while we are busy in building up a career for ourselves.

References

Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex*, (1949 Trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, Random House, Alfred A. Knopf ISBN No. 978-0-307-26556-2.

Rosaldo, Michelle Zimbalist, and Lamphere, Louise, Ed. *Woman, Culture and Society* [1974] Stanford Univ. Press, CA. ISBN NO 9780804708517.



Dr. Jernail S. Anand
Secretary General, [Ex], World Parliament of
Literature [Italy] and Director, World Institute
of Peace [Nigeria]
anandjs55@yahoo.com



Prof. Manminder Singh Anand
Asst. Prof.
DAV College, Sector 10
Chandigarh
fortune.favours@ymail.com