

SUBVERTING THE PATRIARCHAL PARADIGM

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A few days back, wandering around with books in my hand, I came across a very interesting word – “Matriarchy”. It refers to a social organisation in which women hold a position superior than that of men. I couldn’t get out of my head the idea that a social construct where women are superior is so rare that we didn’t even realise a word used to exist for it, lest using it, given even a 10 year old school boy not only knows, but also uses the word patriarchy while writing his school essays. Strange? Not really. I’d hoped to be more stunned by it, but I wasn’t. No wonder women are still fighting for equal pays and equal status in the society, the shackles of patriarchy are holding their feet way too tightly.

There’s a story in Sufism of a great woman saint, Rabe’a al-Adiwiyah, who was believed to be seen running through the streets of her hometown, Basra, carrying a torch in one hand and a bucket of water in the other. When someone asked her what she was doing, she answered, “I am going to take this bucket of water and pour it on the flames of hell, and then I’m going to burn down the gates of paradise using this torch, so that people will not love God for the fear of hell or want of heaven, but because He is God.” A woman so strong she burns heaven and drenches hell. Though hell and heaven are made-believe places, the idea of a paradigm where opportunities and status in the society depend on the gender you were born with, seems no different to me and the idea of strong independent women drenching the ideological hell doesn’t appear too far.

Undoubtedly we’ve come a long way in this road of equality, but we’re definitely not there yet. The idea of a man working as a full-time father is still awkward to comprehend, women are still fighting for equal pay for the equal work done, gender bias and objectification is still in talks and women are still being called out for fighting for their rights.

Coming from a country where we talk of unity in all its diversity, the idea of division of roles between genders sounds peculiar, doesn’t it? I’ve been made to understand that despite all the physical, mental and demographic differences between men and women, there is no occupation that specifies role for a specific gender, be it homemaking, business or any other profession. This idea of gender roles has always appeared disparaging because it sets boundaries, it restricts and defines what a person is supposedly born to do irrespective of what they want to do.

Wonder what your mother would be if her life did not revolve around caring for others, making sacrifices for her family and giving up all her dreams to be a mother? Who would she be if she were able to live for herself? Maybe she would've been a strong, rebellious activist if she didn't think she had the responsibility of a child, or a successful sports player if her parents didn't think it was time for her to get married, or an implacable business woman if she wasn't conditioned in a way that told her to put the needs of others before her own? I guess we'd never know because these wings were cut before they even began to grow by the very hands of her parents and her relatives, rather unknowingly, falling a prey to this confining system of patriarchy.

Patriarchy is not just about men oppressing women. It is about men and women being told what they should be, how they should be and who they shouldn't be. It has boundaries, it has restrictions and any person who tries to step out of those boundaries is dragged within by the society, humiliated and ashamed for trying to be different. Ever heard a guy being told to not cry like a girl? Or a girl being told to not sit like boys? Or a guy being told he has to be the main source of income in the family, even if it means giving away his passion to do so? The list is pretty long and so is the aftermath of this system.

Gender is a spectrum, it is not a binary distinction of male and female. Patriarchy, when dividing roles and rules to this binary often fails to include the spectrum that the gender is, leaving the society with closed minds and ignorant thoughts about the other sexes. This is the prime reason why parents of a bisexual child tell them it's just a phase and they will get over it. This is the prime reason why most of the people choose not to come out of the closet and lead a life of lies. This is the prime reason that the strong ones who choose to be true to themselves have to fight for respect and the most basic rights for the rest of their lives. This is the prime reason why people of the LGBTQ community are looked at with a derogatory sight, as if they should be guilty for how they're born and who they choose to love. This is the prime reason for this country to be the epitome of irony for talking about unity in diversity but not being able to accept people for who they are.

However, it cannot be denied that the society is changing. We're moving forward, we're accepting changes and we're breaking the stereotypes. No matter how long and hard the road is, I have faith that this road has a destination. The society shall break free from the shackles of this system, including and respecting all the sexes equally. The two E's, namely

education and empathy, will carve its way to bring the change we want to see in the society. We, the youth of this country stand together, being the change we aspire to witness. We'll question the old traditions, we'll raise our voice to what is wrong, we'll scream so loud that the society will have to hear, we'll fail and we'll try again... but we won't stop. For the future generations to have a better society, let's get to work.

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