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Journey of Woman: From Concubine to Commodity

Abstract

The paper aims to study the journey and status of woman from the early known references in scriptures that goes back to Adam and Eve and its development and gradual degeneration till date. The paper focuses on woman as the mother of creation, as deity, as witch, as evil step mom, as prostitute, as concubine and finally as commodity. All waves of feminism have been considered and their role in further worsening the scenario has been highlighted. The paper ends at a positive note and a hope that still a better world can be achieved if woman stop considering male at the centre and herself at the periphery. Female constitute approximately half of the total seven billion population which is much more than enough to change the ongoing discourse of feminism.

Keywords: Concubine, commodity, waves of feminism, desensitization of men.

Woman was created as the companion of man. When Adam had everything that he could ever think and dream of for the gratification of desire of each sense and had everything in its fullest form, he still felt alone while wandering in Heaven, God then created Eve. Eve was created from the ribs of Adam, which was a sign of equality. She was neither created from the head of Adam which would have meant she was superior and nor from the foot of Adam which would have meant she was inferior. One day when Adam woke up from his sleep and found a woman beside him. He looked at her and surprisingly asked who she was?

She replied that she was his companion and was created for his solace. Adam was very happy and thanked God for such a wonderful and magnificent gift. They both lived happily but it was not happily ever after. Mother of mankind is often considered as the reason of man's first fall from heaven but original scriptures narrate differently. Adam and Eve were ordered by God not to take fruit from forbidden tree. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the forbidden tree after being tempted by Satan they were thrown out from the Heaven, but they felt at once their mistake and admitted to God that they both committed a mistake and were fooled by Satan. But in stories which have been narrated and recited from generations to generations, Eve, the first woman is burdened with the initiation of first sin ever committed by mankind. Women even today are accused of being tempted easily and can further easily tempt and taint the life of men and Eve is referred in this context. Now the question arises, did men create this other version of the story deliberately, so the women could not get the status of a companion, with which she was created or history got distort with time. Certainly such questions will never find an answer because woman is mostly absent from ancient manuscripts, whatever is known is known from the oral stories (mostly narrated by men). So, men had every chance of creating women's history as desired.

Time passed by and woman acquired many status and forms. But in every form she was given the status beneath her counterpart. Even in her divine form, she suffered injustice. When she was Sita, she was harassed by Ram, even though she paid the price of Ram's wrath when he cut the nose of Ravan's sister. She became the victim first at the hands of Ravan and then Ram. When she was Sati, she became victim at hands of her father. When she was Draupadi, she was distributed among five brothers against her wish; she was gambled and was victimized at the hands of Pandavas. Sin was committed by Poseidon but punishment was faced by Medusa and in this case, both the oppressor and the oppressed were females. Alcmena was to be burned for a sin she unknowingly committed when Zeus transformed himself into her husband, Amphitryon and intimated with her. Amphitryon was no different than Ram who placed his wife on the pyre to test the veracity of her claim that Zeus visited her disguised as Amphitryon and stole her virginity. However, God intervened and saved her. Even when she was pious Aaisha, she was slandered against.

As if this was not enough that woman also gradually started to get fame as a witch and an evil being. Women in children literature have been presented either as oppressed or the oppressor and men as heroic figure who comes for the rescue. Snow white in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is the oppressed, whom her step mother tries to kill as she is envious of her immense beauty. She is saved by a prince.

Cinderella is tormented and ill-treated by her evil step mother and step sisters and is finally rescued by the prince. Rapunzel is entrapped by a witch and is also rescued by a male hero. In sleeping Beauty, Prince saves princess from the curse of witch.

Gayatri Spivok highlighted that woman was a subaltern who was silenced in literature, but she was more than that she was objectified and commodified. Literature is called as the reflection of life and one of the earliest known myths of English literature, Beowulf, portrays woman as a monster. Chaucer marked the beginning of English literature in true sense and how he describes his female characters needs to be reconsidered. His one of the famous female character was the Wife of Bath, but she was again portrayed as a woman of bad character. If Robinson Crusoe could raise an entire farm on his own in a lonely island, why Moll Flanders had to change partners, rely on men and commit crimes for her living. Entire literature presents woman in such a manner.

Woman was once companion (in monotheism), deity (in polytheism) then she became witch and after that worst of oppressed forms, she became the concubine. In earlier times, concubine was a woman or girl who lived with a man outside marriage and had a lower status than legal wife. In different societies and religions concubinage prevailed in different forms but most of them had one similarity that they were the slave girls who lived with their masters without marrying them and had a status lower than wife and so did her children from the legal children.

In China, concubines were highly popular and they were called *Qie* (female slaves) until it got outlawed in 1949 after the communist party came into power. Female slaves were triply oppressed in ancient China, first they were used as sex toys, then secondly when their master died it was considered that their misfortune caused master's death and third they were burnt alive with their dead masters, so that they could accompany them in after life (just in case of Sati system, where legal wife was burnt with dead husband). However, this practice also stopped later on. Concubinage was a common practice almost everywhere in Asia. Hong Kong officially abolished it in 1971. In Japan, it was common among nobles and merchant classes. It was permissible in Judaism, Islam and Christianity also. So, concubine was a woman who was exploited physically and was made to work like slave but had no rights, she was a true subaltern both sociologically and psychologically. She provided sexual pleasure without asking anything in return, worked without wages and lived without voice and recognition. Another ancient practice that gained popularity during middle-ages was prostitution. In India, one third of the prostitute girls entered the trade out of poverty and forth of them became prostitutes after unsuccessful married life. It is considered as highly

disrespectful profession although portrayed otherwise in *Eleven Minutes* by Paulo Coelho. There are also male prostitutes but prostitute has become a stereotypical word for females only.

Women travelled a long journey to gain equal respect and rights as that of men since the first Seneca Fall Convention in 1848. First wave of feminism focused on political rights, second wave focused on ending discrimination while third focused on micro-politics and challenged previous wave's paradigms as to what is and isn't good for females. Fourth wave of feminism which is associated with the use of social media deals with justice for women and opposition to sexual harassment and violence against women and now is the time for fifth wave of feminism where women need to condemn all the earlier waves of feminism and enjoy their 'femininity' and their biological difference with males. It is more like negritude; the fact of being female will not change so women should stop trying to become what they are not because perhaps they don't even realize what they are; they are the creators. Doing or wanting things that males would do or want or need has reduced women to nothingness and they have lost their identity. Women must enjoy their womanhood and stop considering male at the centre of the system because that is what has created every problem. Many changes took place since the first Seneca Fall but did woman really achieve what she wanted? If all waves were without any flaw than woman should have by now achieved whatever she had wanted because more than one and a half century has passed and woman did not achieve its goals which makes it certain that there is flaw in the motto. The problem with all waves of feminism lies in the fact that woman consider man as the center and herself as the periphery and her race is entirely to reach that center but is it really the fact? Is man really the centre? What if we consider it otherwise? What if woman was the centre and man was the periphery? Ancient stories that we have known from the scriptures, if we critically analyze any story, we will find man doing all the hard work, going out, earning, sweating, bleeding and woman at home relaxing like queen while her drones working, to fill her time she had to look after that small area and play with kids. To which she considered otherwise and considered herself imprisoned, was it really a prison?

If status of woman in religion is needed to be looked upon. In 2015, Christians constituted 31.2% of the total population of the world, while Muslims constituted 24.1% of the total world population, together they 4.1 billion of the total 7 billion people. In Muslims, politics of veil is debated but only three highly revered in Islam are said to be covered-the Quran, the Kaaba and the Woman, the world knows the importance of other two for Muslims and they both are kept parallel with woman, so in Islam alone the importance of woman can

be traced from this only, or if another example is needed than woman as mother is said to bear heaven beneath her feet, and so was Mary for Jesus. Man and woman are biologically different than how can their roles be the same? She plans her role as per man; if man can do it why woman can't? She certainly can, and she has already proved it in every field. By chasing the center, Woman is actually doing things which man would have wanted and it gave rise to a new system. A woman who was abused of spreading and responsible for all evil in past has now been used as a new tool. This time it is to promote business, gain competitive advantage, comparative advantage and get first in the race of materialism, get maximum number of consumers, customers and potential customers. Man now got a very new and apprehensive idea of promoting a woman and that was again a new form of commodity. But this time this has been done as a secondary element to promote the primary asset and that was modern product and services being offered by firms to its customers. The attraction of men towards the physical appearance of women has now taken as a shape and sexual politics around the body of women is created. There are numerous examples which shall prove the above cited context. In an advertisement where the main aim of the firm must be to promote product, introduce its prime features, get people equipped with its secondary applications, pricing, problem solution pattern etc., a woman has been introduced to do all this. Even without a woman this could have been effectively done if firm plays fair with its customers. In some cases, introduction of women in product and service advertisements points towards inefficiency of firm towards producing better quality and high applicability products. There can be hundreds of examples that will put light on this issue. To cite an example Bollywood movie *Insan* (2005) can be considered worthy in which a girl comes for shooting. The director performing the photo-shoot of that girl. Meanwhile producer of the movie came along with his assistant. After watching the photo-shoot, the producer asked his assistant if she was the sister of director. To which his assistant got confused and enquired why he asked so. In reply producer said because she was wearing full dress during photo-shoot. The producer further remarks that unless she would not show off some parts of her body how they would be able to sell the movie and earn high profit. In *Sooryavansham* (1999), a lady conductor with short dress is introduced to sell the tickets at higher and faster rates. Another example could be the advertisement of dairy milk chocolate in which a boy and girl are both shown as licking the chocolates. The basic aim of the advertisement seems that they want to create a male-female body sensation rather than focusing on to promote their brand. The 2007 Amul Macho advertisement is also one among the most perfect example where Sana khan has been assigned the role. Focus is not even on the Amul Macho undergarment but the lady Sana

Khan and all the monkeys that got inspired and has been seen as getting sensations. The list of such ads, movies and magazines is never ending where body of woman is sensualized even where not needed at all for example in shaving cream ads or ad of cold drinks. All the bigger and worldwide reputed brand except a very few has added the role of girls and women in order to create a level of sensation or sex appeal to sell their products. Some more brand that could be recognized are Tuff Shoes Print Advertisement 1995 with Milind Soman and Madhu Sapre in leading role, Calida Print Advertisement 1998 with Bipasha Basu and Dino Morea in lead roles, Fasttrack TV Advertisement 2011, starring Genelia D'Souza and Virat Kohli, Idea TV commercial advertisement, Zatak Deo TV Commercial (2010), Ford Figo Print Advertisement 2013, Lux Cozy TV Commercial Advertisement 2007, Motorola TV Commercial Advertisement, 2008, Wild Stone Deo TV Advertisement 2007 etc.

So, the above-mentioned examples show the status of women which has travelled a long way, from bad to worst. The atrocious part of whole situation is that the woman has intentionally commodified herself. One such example is the Femme Group who shows their bodies off at the name of liberty and equality with men. The only hope for woman lies in the reversal of female ideology who considers male at the center and herself at the periphery and that is why tries to get equal with male. Female constitute approximately half of the total seven billion people which is much more than enough to change the ongoing discourse of feminism and lead it to right direction. To change the ideology of man, a woman first needs to change her own ideology about herself and stop looking down on herself than a male because she is not. Moreover more than emancipation of woman, desensitization of man is required for a better world.

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