

Chapter Two

THE MALE EGO.

The term Male Ego implies not only the person but the authority, the central position and unquestionable Patriarchal social structure that give the male a transcendent role in the family and society at large. The dominance of the Male Ego was brought about by centuries of customs and to a certain extent by superstitious beliefs. The Patriarchal system that prevailed all over the world very often reduced the female to the level of a non-entity. The religions of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Confucianism-, which together cover much of Europe, the Americas, North Africa, the Middle East, India, and China-, have all produced patriarchal cultures.

Traditionally, rights to property and nationality passed through the male line, with the result that woman's legal status was generally inferior to that of men. Until the 20th century, women had no voting rights, limited rights to property, and were, in most respects, subject entirely to their fathers or husbands. Change has taken place more slowly especially in Eastern cultures, where practices such as purdah (the confinement of women to the home), female circumcision, the killing of the female children, and the husband's privileged right to divorce are still found.

The male chauvinism tries to kill infant girls because they prefer sons. They sexually abuse the girl child, turn stalkers, rapists, wife-beaters, bride-burners, vicious aggressors when tempted by ugly opportunities and uglier urges. Gratifying their darkest impulses, pandering to their grisly masculinity, they default on the civilisation contract they have made with women, a contract etched over ages, the pact to be partner, provider and protector to her.

They flout these crucial clauses ruthlessly, with alarming intensity-harassing, humiliating women in places private and public. Failing civilisation itself, almost each critical time it is put to test vis-à-vis the sensitive relationship that has been forged between man woman. Butchering centuries of human evolution, of good faith between genders, with a primordial, predatory ruthlessness, they keep the Male marauder in them alive.

The Male Ego's unbridled chauvinism and his animal machismo are fed and nurtured from birth. He is groomed to claim the lion's share in life, over food, education, property, sex, care and affection. He is primed into being a hunter, to conquer, tame and repress women. By the time he is a Man, he can rip through the most sophisticated surroundings, hurl ridicule at the rules of emancipation, always on the lookout for his prey.

There is a complex and destructive nexus between biology, psychology and socio-cultural influences, which engender such horrendous male violence against women. The most cited reason, as to what propels men into perpetrating these atrocities, is the powerful male hormone testosterone that primes the brain and the muscles for aggression; huge responsibilities that are traditionally perceived as man's burden and the consequent frustrations that find vicious outlets with women.

This inequality enjoys religious sanction also. The history of civilisation itself is man's story. The woman's story emerged but rarely and usually in a supporting role. Therefore, everything has, for millions of years, conspired to assure men that they are at the centre stage.

FACTORS, WHICH HELPED MALE-EGO TO ASSERT ITS DOMINANCE

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

In psychoanalysis, the Ego denotes the central part of the personality structure that deals with reality and is influenced by social forces. According to the psychoanalytic theories developed by Sigmund Freud, the Ego constitutes one of the three basic provinces of the mind, the other two being the id and the superego.

Formation of the Ego begins at birth, in the first encounters with the external world of people and things. The Ego learns to modify behaviour by controlling those impulses that are socially unacceptable. Its role is that of mediator between unconscious impulses and acquired social and personal standards.

In the theory of psychoanalysis, Id is one of the three basic elements of personality. The others are, ego and superego. The Id can be equated with the unconscious of common usage, which is the reservoir of the instinctual drives of the individual—biological urges, wishes, and affective motives. The Id is dominated by the pleasure principle, through which the individual is pressed for immediate gratification of desires.

According to the theory of Sigmund Freud, the energy behind the instinctual drives of the Id is known as the libido—a generalised force that is basically sexual in nature— through which the sexual and psychosexual nature of the individual finds expression.

RELIGIOUS ASPECTS

It can be observed that, in all monastic traditions of the world, the status of a nun is considerably lower than that of monks. In the history of monastic traditions, there could scarcely be traced an incident, wherein even an exalted nun, ever exercised disciplinary action over a monk or even a male novice.

Since women cannot obtain sacerdotal ordination, the Roman Catholic tradition has refused equal status to nuns. The Indians attributed the alienation of women from the highest seats of religious establishments, to the menstrual cycle. They were often denied access to the ritual complex owing to the innate defilement and hence their status was always considered much lower to men.

MANU-SMRITI

Manu-Smriti is traditionally, the most authoritative of the books of the Hindu Code (Dharma-Sastra). It is attributed to the legendary first man and lawgiver, Manu. In its present form, it dates from the 1st century BC.

The Manu-Smriti prescribes to the Hindu his dharma--i.e, that set of obligations incumbent on him as a member of one of the four social classes (varnas) and engaged in one of the four stages of life (ashramas). It contains 12 chapters of stanzas, which total 2,694. It deals with cosmogony, the definition of the dharma, the sacraments (samskaras), initiation (upanayana) and study of the Veda, marriage, hospitality, obsequies, dietary restrictions, pollution and means of purification, the conduct of women and wives, and the law of kings.

The last leads to a consideration of matters of juridical interest, divided under 18 headings, after which the text returns to religious topics, such as donations, rites of reparation, the doctrine of Karman, the soul, and hell. The text makes no categorical distinction between religious law and practices and secular law in its treatment. Its influence has been monumental, and it has provided the caste Hindu with a system of practical morality.

Manu-Smriti denies equal rights to women. In one of its most infamous strictures, it goes onto to stipulate that no woman should be accorded freedom:

' Na sthree swathanthreum arhathee' (No woman deserve the right to be free)

BUDHISM

Buddha was reluctant to admit women postulants into the Order. When the Buddhist nunneries came into establishment as a result of the efforts made by his disciples and sponsors, Buddha expressed his fears that it may augur the decline of the Order. Even today Buddhist Nunneries fail to evoke the grandeur and solemnity of the Monasteries.

Robinson and Richard make the comment:

" Buddhist nunneries are not numerous, and their ratio to male convents does not exceed 1:20 in any of the Buddhist countries. The modal Buddhist monastic attitude toward the nuns is one of embarrassed silence except in Japan, where the general loosening of monastic rules has worked in their favour."¹

WOMEN IN CHRISTIANITY

Women were held in low esteem in the world of the early Church. During that period women were completely at the mercy of men, as the divorce practices put men in a domineering position. With divorce becoming common practice, Jesus himself had to intervene and prohibit it. The understanding of Christ and of the Holy Spirit was a decisive turning point. Paul substituted even the Jewish view of the Patriarchal position of man with a new spiritual interpretation of marriage.

Baskin and Wedeck observe:

" During the periods of Christian persecution, women as well as men showed great courage in their suffering. The fact that they were spontaneously honoured as martyrs demonstrates their well-known active roles in the congregations. In this, representatives of Patriarchal, Rabbinic, and Synagogic

traditions within the Christian Church saw a danger to congregational constitutions." ²

SITUATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN

Muslim women were perpetually caught in the dilemma of modernisation. They were unsure of as to whether modernisation meant liberation from Islam or liberation from Western thought and life. There is a vast heterogeneity as far as the present situation of Muslim women are concerned.

Fazlur Rahman makes the observation:

" There is little information on the situation of ordinary women in premodern Islamdom, but evidence from the modern period underscores the enormous variety of settings in which Muslim women live and work, as well as the inability of the stereotype of meek, submissive, veiled passivity to reflect the quality of their lives." ³

CHOSEN WOMEN

Chosen Women of "Virgins of the Sun" were the women who lived in temple convents under the vow of chastity. Their duties included the preparation of ritual food, the maintenance of the sacred fire and the weaving of garments for the emperor and for ritual use. The Virgins did not belong to noble families. Mostly they were village girls selected for their beauty and talent. They were chosen at the age of 8 or 10 and shut up in the temples. The Virgins were not allowed to leave the temples for six or seven years. Some of them became sacrificial victims, whereas others were sometimes made imperial concubines or the wives of nobles.

HISTORICAL ASPECTS

PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy is a hypothetical social system based on the absolute authority of a father or an elderly male over the family group. The concept of Patriarchy is based mainly on the theories of pioneering anthropologists Lewis Henry Morgan and Henry Maine. Both of them drew their inspiration from Classical Darwinism of the 19th century.

According to Maine, all status or relationship in the earliest societies derived from a Patriarchal kinship system and that all decisions of social consequences were arbitrary judgements of a quasi-tyrannical patriarch.

PATRIA POTESTAS

Patria Potestas is a Latin term, which literally means "power of a father". In the Roman family law, it is that the male head of a family exercised over his children and his more remote descendants in the male line. This power implied his total and unquestioned authority over the persons of his children, amounting even to a right to inflict capital punishment.

Patria Potestas ceased normally only with the death of the father; but the father might voluntarily free the child by emancipation. When the daughter is married, she came under her husband's manus, a corresponding power of husband over wife.

SOCIAL ASPECTS

POLYGAMY

The custom of polygamy happened to be one of the areas where the Male Ego and arrogance exerted its supremacy over the hapless women. Literally polygamy means marriage to more than one spouse at a time. It is obvious that from the male point of view, polygamy may be preferred for several reasons like, the availability of sexual companionship, the economic contributions of the wives to the wealth of the family and the enhanced social status and prestige that accrue to the head of a large household.

PROSTITUTION

Prostitution has been defined as 'the practice of engaging in relatively indiscriminate sexual activity, in general with individuals other than a spouse or friend, in exchange for immediate payment in money or other valuables.' A careful examination of prostitution and related issues will reveal that it is one the acts where the unhindered ruthlessness of the Male Ego comes into play.

Roberta Perkins and Garrel Bennet aptly sums up society's perception of the act of prostitution:

"Through the ages prostitutes have been shunned and reviled by society in general, and punishments have included stoning, whipping, branding, imprisonment, and death. Their clients, on the other hand, have rarely been touched by the law, and in fact in many societies the frequenting of prostitutes may rouse some public indignation but is also considered a sign of virility."

Nanette J. Davis brings out the economic repercussions of prostitution and how it offered the only hope to women who were financially deprived otherwise:

" Until the mid-20th century it was almost the only occupation open to women responsible for their own support. Female prostitutes are very often economically disadvantaged and are usually unmarried and lack skills to support themselves. Many are drawn at an early age into the subculture of prostitution and associated crime. They frequently are associated with a male procurer, or pimp, or with a house of prostitution, or brothel, managed by a supervisor, or madam. " ⁵

PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS

PLATO

According to Plato, the first incarnation of the soul occurs in a masculine body. It is only on subsequent incarnation, the soul descends into the body of the female. From this, it is obvious that Plato refused to grant equal status to women.

C.D.C.Reeve clarifies Plato's position regarding the status that may be accorded to women:

" At other times procreation is explained in terms of a division of a complete, originally androgynous (both male and female) being (as in Plato's Symposium and in the Gnostic Gospel of Philip). There are other non-dualistic doctrines in which woman is considered to be connected in some way with the origins of evil

but not as the embodiment of the evil principle (e.g., in Genesis and the apocryphal late-Judaic Book of Adam). " 6

POLITICAL ASPECTS

FRIEDRICH ENGELS

In his theory Engels explains the way Matriarchy gradually gave way to Patriarchy. According to Engels, family and kinship had their origin from a primitive communism. It was primarily a society of hunter-gatherers. Richard Schmitt, an Engels scholar explains:

" Human society consisted of primeval promiscuous "hordes," and people mated indiscriminately with their brothers and sisters. Eventually, kinship came to be reckoned in the female line, because, with such promiscuity, a child did not know who its father was but knew only its mother's identity. Women, according to this theory, held authority over the family. " 7

This state of affairs could not last long and consequently Patriarchy began to replace matriarchy. J.D.Hunley interprets:

" Groups of men, in Engel's theory, sometimes captured women from other hordes. As humankind advanced, mating between brothers and sisters was forbidden and male warriors were forced to take their brides from adjacent groups. In time, successful groups of males acquired many wives. Patriarchy (authority of the father) replaced matriarchy (authority of the mother) as the condition of human social life. Men might have several wives and concubines who bore

children for them, and these children in turn contributed labour for the extended family group. " 8

PATRILINEAL DESCENT

Most of the Western cultures seem to have followed the patrilineal descent. The prominent characteristic of the Patrilineal descent is that membership in a social group is determined through the father. Greek phantry and the Roman gens offer classical instances of patrilineal descent. It includes a person's father, father's father and grand father, and so on.

A man's children are members of his patrilineal group. However, children of the woman are not acknowledged as members. They have to seek the stamp of her husband's group to gain acceptability. A Woman's own position in the society depends on those factors of acceptability, which the society considers valid.

OTHER WRITERS

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Virginia Woolf is one of the major writers who dealt with questions related to the dominance of the Male Ego and repression of the female self. In 1929, she published her influential essay A Room of One's Own. Here she deals with questions related to women's empowerment. The essay is a classic of its kind in which Woolf maintains that financial independence and privacy, "five hundred a year" and " a room of one's own", are prerequisite for female literacy achievement. She uses the example of Shakespeare's hypothetical sister, who, denied any outlet for her talent, finally "killed herself one winter's night".

DAVID HERBERT LAWRENCE

D.H.Lawrence is one of the most notable writers in English who dealt with the questions related to the dominance of the Male Ego. His novels like Sons and Lovers, and The Rainbow offer explicit treatment of the theme of female subjugation. Lawrence's women are modern, educated, and free from stereotyped assumptions about their role. Most of them are sexually autonomous. They register their unwillingness to settle for an ordinary marriage as a solution to the problem.

JULIA O'FAOLIAN

Julia O'Faolian is an Irish writer whose novels explore the historical and contemporary status of women in a Male dominated society. Her novels like The Obedient Wife and The Judas Cloth explores the fundamental strife women undergoes in a world entirely dictated by male fantasy.

SETHU

Sethu is one of the leading writers in Malayalam who makes an in-depth study of the issues related to Male domination. Pandavapuram, the novel considered as his masterpiece, brings out the agonies of womanhood pitted against the host of male marauders. It is the interpretation of the Mahabharata myth, where five brothers marry a woman. Here the novelist offers a brilliant exposition of the theme of the conflict between male domination and female revolt.

M. MUKUNDAN

In his short stories and novels, Mukundan, preoccupies himself with the theme of the woman being sidelined in a predominantly male dominated world. In his works like Sita, Adithyanum Radhayum Mattu Chilarum, the novelist deals with the question of female individualism. In the tradition-bound society of Kerala, the woman

finds herself in a hopeless plight against the forces that are reluctant to listen to her woes and agonies.

PECULIAR VISION OF HARDY AND VIJAYAN

Hardy sought an objective correlative for his own emotional state in *Women*. His depictions of woman characters bear his deep-rooted conviction about the entire system of things, the complex and interlocking pattern of character, environment, and incalculable providence. Hardy was acutely aware of, and prepared to draw his reader's attention to, 'the certain degradation in renouncing the simplicity of a maiden existence to become the humbler half of an indifferent matrimonial whole.'

He made an introspective study, as to how women's ethos develop and get shaped according to the needs, desires and aspirations of the male counterpart. Hardy termed the women as being part of the timid animal world, 'weak, small and vulnerable'. They are subject to the law, which makes the weaker natured, the prey of the stronger.

Hardy's tragic figures and Vijayan's protagonists are rooted in an unconscious life process. They seek to mould their lives according to their personal will and aspiration. They are driven by a desire to dominate the world they inhabit. It gradually leads them to exert their will on others, especially on members of the weaker sex.

Hardy's reference to the 'President of Immortals' and Vijayan mentioning 'Maya' and 'Karma' may be interpreted as the visible attempts of the Male Ego, to justify its own sense of dejection and frustration. The dominance of the Male

Ego in Hardy and Vijayan leads to the rejection of the ethically ordered universe. It shaped some of their fundamental attitudes towards life.

There could be traced several instances in Hardy and Vijayan, where the Male Ego rejects the ethical belief systems; Henchard auctioning Susan, coercing Lucetta into marriage, Alec's seduction of Tess, Troy's brutal rejection of Fanny, Ravi's incestuous relationship with his step-mother, Prajapathi's bestial acts of sex, all manifest the monstrosity the Male Ego perpetrates against their female counterparts. The male characters in both novelists are in pursuit of the 'unexplored morality of life'.

In its eagerness to be vindictive and dominative, the Male-Ego not only brings the ruin of the female entity, but clashes with rivals of his own sex. The wrestling match between Henchard and Farfrae - the central male contest in the novel- rivalries over business and women, have their parallels in the tussle between Ravi and Nizam Ali inside the Mosque of the King.

In both the novelists, the dominant Male-Ego tends to see the female as the object to be seduced, to cater to its uncontrollable sexual fantasies. He offers an exploration of the unrepressed sexual activity of the Male Ego in Tess with a sensitive exposition of Tess in sexual ecstasy, which is marked by both 'candour and poetic truthfulness.'

Vijayan seems unwilling to subscribe to the social morality and ethics, when it comes to the question of dominance of the Male-Ego. The dividing line between the Male Ego and the celebration of the primeval energies of orgasm seems to get blurred in most of the novels by Vijayan.

NOTES

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