**When empowerment is crime!**

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“Unless the issue of the empowerment of women is addressed, the practice of women being unfairly treated will remain unresolved”—Kapil Sibal

In addition to scientific and technological advancements, the world today has moved towards better integration of relationship between men and women because of empirically-proven data and irrefutable information for better understanding of each other’s attributes. Researchers have proved that other than the facts that one set is male and the other female, that one has the ability to procreate but not without the help of the other, there is no difference in the intellectual make-up of either sex. This clearly means that both have been endowed with equal capabilities which stand revealed when opportunities come their way. There are certain characteristics peculiar to both but these are not supposed to undermine value of any one sex or reduce it to an inferior level. Rather they are there to complement one another for harmony and comfort. Where this notion is over-run by cultural and/or so called religious dogma, indefensible tensions arise leading to unreconciled disputes and arguments that end in nothing but impasse.

The emancipated woman of today unquestionably owes a lot to those men and women who, over the last couple of centuries, have struggled tremendously and gone to great lengths to restore her importance as a human being with substantial rights and privileges denied to her by the dominating males. Those who stood up and are still doing so against all odds were and are extremely brave, whose thoughtfulness for their fellow beings shows in their unrelenting efforts to secure for them respect and a decent life. Not only did they contribute in the form of solid academic treatises but also through practical movements and judicial activism that caused them much distress, hardships and frustrations, yet they steadfastly have and still are pursuing their aim.

The important things in this entire furor are maturity, sense of understanding and appreciation of realities by the male members of this earth. They are the ones who have successfully managed to overcome their miscomprehensions about the fairer sex, have accepted her inert potential, submitted to her enormous knack for multi-tasking, recognized her organizational skills, believed in her sincerity and reposed confidence in her intellectual faculties. They have come to terms with her existence as bearing the same value as their own and do not look upon her as frail, dumb or vulnerable. Families that have adopted this mental level are happier and fairly content compared to those which still consider women as liability and property.

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Generally it is assumed that women who are better educated than their husbands tend to look down upon them while such men, due to their inferiority complex, find ways to snub their highly qualified wives. In our society, if a woman earns better than her man, he becomes a victim of his friends wisecracks and in turn makes his own and his wife’s life miserable but if he is a sensible person, he would not only ignore derisive remarks but would ensure that nothing comes in the way of his family’s happiness. As education spreads and more girls join businesses and professions, this thinking will also mature. Some popular movies have depicted the notion whereby men have been shown to switch jobs with their wives by staying home while their better halves become the earning hands. Again, this kind of rational revolution will take time to find its place, especially in men’s minds because for one, it is difficult to digest that women could be superior in talents and two, the embedded fear of insecurity in their hearts that if their partner is more successful than them, they will eventually abandon them. Interestingly, in majority cases where couples are in professional competition, women have no ego problems if their partners are more successful. Unlike men, they do not interpret the partner’s success as their own failure. This kind of an attitude is universal and is not just confined to South Asia, according to research conducted by psychologists.

Recently, in a social media group, the case of 27-years-old girl from Kohat, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Hina Shahnawaz, who was murdered by her male cousin on February 6, 2017 came up for discussion. Her fault was that she had dared to attain high education and was single-handedly supporting her widowed mother, sister and sister-in-law by working at an NGO in Islamabad and earning a handsome salary. The fact that she was courageously facing her dreadful domestic situation without taking help from male members of her family became offensive to one, who found extinguishing her life as the only solution to curbing her emancipation. One wonders how the survivors would be faring after her death. Have the so-called ‘self-respecting’ males stepped forward to take over the destitute family? How easy it was for Hina’s cousin to pump four bullets in her body only to satisfy his false ego and what a tragic end to a woman who braved through all kinds of hurdles to reach a position of power and financial independence!

Killing a living being requires cold-blooded insensitivity, brutality and extreme negative motivation-to deter other females from following in the footsteps of women like Hina Shahnawaz. This illogical and uncalled for reaction is probably to subdue future Hinas from exercising their rights to learn, to earn a livelihood, to live life on their own terms and to desist from displaying superiority which their male counterparts are incapable of matching. In other words, if any woman tries to defy the norms, her best place is the grave to which she is promptly transferred by her impassioned male relatives.

What is the solution to this kind of perversion and destructiveness (borrowing from famous book of Erich Fromm, Anatomy of Human Destructiveness? How long will the woman, particularly from the feudal and traditional backgrounds, continue to suffer such ordeal, sometimes in the name of honour and many a times in exerting her independence? These questions are mind boggling that forces one to rethink about the social, cultural and moral values sans ethics imposed upon human beings.

Patriarchy is accused of female subversion but somewhere along the road, perhaps, females themselves are responsible for their woes-when they gossip about another female’s rise to power as being dependent less on her intellect and more to do with her being a femme fatale, when they discuss other women in the company of their male relatives, when they misbehave with their female in-laws, when they discriminate between upbringing of their sons and daughters, when they praise their brothers for audaciously treating a rebellious sister for wanting to marry a person of her choice.

The mother of Hina’s killer has a lot of answering to do. Had she instilled respect for women in her son’s heart, perhaps his reaction at his cousin’s rise would have been different. Perhaps he would have been more appreciative towards her achievements and instead of eliminating her, encouraged his own sisters to tread the same path to self-determination and independence. He could have made her a role model for the younger generation to carve out a blissful life for herself and her family. Alas, it was not to be!

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