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*University of Delhi*

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## Contents...

- A Battle of Sexes, or An Alliance of Genders *Dr. Malini Sharma*
- Obesity in Women; Do We Understand It *Sarita Nanda*
- Don't let their live end, Even before it Begins *Dr. Sonia Mehta*
- The Chemistry between Women & Chemical in Cosmetics *Dr. Priti Malhotra*
- Female Foeticide *Dr. Shweta Satyam*
- Women an unsolved Mystery *Dr. Prastavana Mohan*
- The Meaning of Womanhood *Anish Chakravarty*
- Women in India from Operation in Women Empowerment *Pooja Sharma*
- Role of Women in India's Future Development *Ritu Khanna*
- Empowering Women, Empowering India *Arjun Teotia*

# The Meaning of Womanhood

Anish Chakravarty  
Assistant Professor  
Philosophy

*O Men of jurisprudence!  
Callously you show mercy-  
On a person in forlorn state  
Or on a lovelorn friend.  
But O Men, did you know,  
They are damned not due to a sin,  
But due to your masculine heart.  
Yes, a heart of man beats in all men,  
But rarely men, like them-  
Have a deep heart of woman.  
This's a sign of love and amnesty.  
I often do realise to feel...  
Though I've a manly mind  
Yet in your eyes I'm too condemned  
For I long to have a heart of a woman.*

Whether women or men, all aim and strive to have a coherent self. This has been the norm in history, across cultures and religions. This was partly because the self had been usually identified with the soul, so all qualities in us were taken to cohere with the self. Psychologist Sigmund Freud was one of the first to shake this view, and shook it to the extent that we have difficulties in accepting the above view, giving us a different scenario altogether. All the pushes and impulses are not mere deficit in our character, but are due to something unknown. Society and culture are simply accidents of history, i.e. what originates and is followed is arbitrary in nature. For example if two people are brought up in different time or culture, it is due to a certain kind of exposure in length of time that leads to their psychological makeup. The view that self is substantially one is a problematic idea as then the question arise that why we are so different from each other in they we respond to our ambience? Human mind is like a battle ground where there is always a conflict in us between one's own self, as in what we believe to be and how we act. The idea of one universal coherent self has been believed as a truth incessantly across many cultures, and if there is no recognition of coherent self in a person, then according to society that person should be guilty. To exhibit incoherent self is morally condemned.

Post Modernists say that the desire for coherence and consistency burdens us throughout life. The desire for coherent self is not inherent but external. In Lacanian terms, we generally identify ourselves with others, so we do things so as to restore the image that we have due to them. How we grow depends on what is given to us and what we are exposed to. Since society promotes to artificially restrict one's incoherence so that the conflicts in society could be reduced, we are expected to adjust with the social norms. Freud in his psychoanalysis shows that the self is divided. Id is the ocean of unknown forces, which exercises greater power in us much more than Ego and Super-Ego. Ego can only weakly negotiate to pacify and control the Id by allowing those pleasurable impulses which are accepted by a culture and society.

Philosopher Luce Irigaray states like Marx that nature of society and the state is class oriented, divided and is not a neutral entity. Freud and Lacan investigated the nature of self and found it to be fractured, whereas Marx found the state to be divided, following similar line of thought she feels that human discourse which all this while has been assumed to be neutral in a society is sexed and divided. She investigates the nature of society and finds the language is sexed but this is never noticed. In its medium of communication and categorisation, it always privileges one sex over the other. In her article 'In Science, is the Subject Sexed?' Irigaray says that when a phenomena is understood, grasped and conceptualised, it is thought to be done in a neutral way. These concepts do not come from materiality of a thing; the language plays a vital role.

People create their identities through exclusion, so say a law of ideal citizen will be the one which is not shared with criminals. Irigaray in a similar line of thought thinks that if we realise the one sided nature of so many institutions which work on this basis of exclusion then why we are taking language as an exception and treat as if it is not sexed? Language is sexed and the quality of language is masculine. Men consider them to be rational and so language is taken to be rational. Language is not merely masculine but is largely represented in a way that it cheats us to believe that there is something in language which privileges men and make women inferior. Men by making the language with their own vocabulary, have made the language sexed and one sided, and by this they have already won the game, even before it starts and progresses. Irigaray points that the characteristic of human subject is so described that it largely corresponds to masculinity and to the qualities that pertain to men. These qualities are then seen as the ideals of life et cetera. And this makes men convenient and rational to suppress women. However, the truth is that emotions and care which are generally more a trait of women than

reason and physical dominance, are the basic instincts, however, rationality is just an ideal.

In the way we use language, we should be allowed to construct meanings and ways of communication on our own rather than being prescriptive. In Language problem of sex has never been posed before. It is believed that any form of language is free from sexual bias, but the truth is that it is not so, rather it is seen from a male point of view. And since we do not consider human subject to be sexed, the male point of view becomes universal and the human point of view. According to Irigaray, all realisations, all productions, sciences, technology, all human creations are from this male point of view, which she calls the Language of Man. The Language of Man has always been taken to be as universal, which in fact is particular. And if we give something particular the status of universal, then those, in this case women, who do not fall in this particular nature, are looked down upon. This is what has happened with women and history is evidence to it. Sometimes the situations are so terrible that even the questions against this male point of view cannot even be formulated. This is because the language which we use to question the male point of view is itself masculine. She maintains that what men laid down as a law, is a manifestation of male idiosyncrasy of facts. Once we realise that our language is sexed, then all the universality, rationality will be a misnomer. The sameness and neutrality in language will not sustain.

However, the solution to this problem is difficult; if all that has ever existed, so far it is considered to be biased, then where do we start from? Still there can be a way out of this grave problem. Two possible ways can be suggested. Firstly, to question and discard all the accepted norms, actions, criteria etc. so as to run towards the possibility to be treated as infants so as to start afresh and, secondly, to fall back in the system which already exists and run the risk of accepting only a part of the establishment, and keep working to abolish the existing sexual difference. Presently, this sexual difference is seen very superficially. The question is not on how much the language is sexed, but is the language sexed? Irigaray asks, how can we speak about the other without subordinating it with the one that is already there? To look for an answer to Irigaray's question, she pinpoints the problem of epistemological preliminaries where male point of view is to find a justification of knowledge, but presumably from a human point of view, it is absurd to think of justification at the starting point. She does not prioritise the female point of view over the male's but the human.

The areas of meaning and language that are out the sexual bias are not even touched, so if there is no capture to the Reality left, then there is no way to know. Irigaray raises here the problem of criteria. Since all our means to begin are problematic then we cannot begin anew. But she maintains that we do not need necessarily a new criterion or a paradigm, but we can start from where we are. She argues that in Hegelian sense we can take up a claim and take it as if it's the truth or not. Hegel said that if there is a problem with the claimed self, then we realise the gap between the claimed and the actual self. By this we try to bridge the gap between these two selves. To reject the claimed notion of reality out rightly is from the human point of view, is both illogical and impractical, and to accept the present criteria as it is not acceptable either, so we have to start questioning with the aforesaid mentioned suggestions from what we have.

Conclusively, Irigaray thinks this is how women can contribute to humanity within the masculine world without being taken as a complement. She shows positive points from psychoanalysis which picks up this division of sexual difference, which is missed by the folk view of the coherent nature of self which highlights the homeostasis. i.e. a tendency in humans of affinity towards the sameness and the rejection of difference. Thus the true search of the meaning of womanhood and its characteristics can only be exfoliated once we realise that the world in which we live is sexist, where this realisation frees the concept of womanhood to be seen derogatorily through the eyes of masculinity, and allows it to be understood without any sexual bias but only through the eyes of humanity.