

Real Freedom is Freedom from Harmful Stereotypes

The process of awareness regarding woman's problems and demands has not achieved any significant progress, either on the cultural or on the social level. Her claims have received a restricted response which consists in the recognition of her right to education, work and suffrage. Her oscillation between the traditional role of wife and mother and her new roles in the fields of education and work has blocked her ambition and forced her to be contented with secondary responsibilities in the private or in the public sector.

In spite of her success in both education and work, she is still enslaved to stereotypes which create in her an inferiority complex, a state of diffidence favoring the habits of cowardly submission, faith in fate and fear of adventure and defiance.

Within this negative philosophy, the patriarchal system works to assert man's superiority and arrogance. Inherited myths affirm that she was created out of man's rib, that she was born to be a wife and mother because, biologically and socially, she is unable to achieve personal independence. Without marriage and motherhood, she is reduced to a state of nothingness. The same sources pretend that it is better for a woman to marry a mediocre, worthless fellow than to remain unmarried; that barrenness is a shame and a result of an inherited or acquired curse, that it is a woman's duty to seek motherhood at the expense of her health and life.

Among the generally accepted stereotypes is the one which imposes chastity on woman but not on man. Though adultery and sexual intercourse outside marriage are condemned by developed religions, public opinion tends to overlook man's amorous adventures and even to admire them, while a woman who sins against chastity is said to defile her honor and that of her family; therefore she deserves to be killed and her blood would wash off her shame.

According to popular tradition, a woman "was born" to please others

and be a source of enjoyment to the eye and to the ear. Hence her constant worry about her appearance, her huge efforts to embellish her face by treating it with cosmetics, to dye her hair, hide her age and her physical defects. Of equal importance is her endeavor to acquire a sweet tongue, to learn dancing and singing by which she could win her husband's favors.

A similar tradition says that a woman "was born" to be a source of blessing for her family, seeking their interest before her own, following the path of women saints and martyrs who sacrificed themselves for the benefit of their family or clan, their group or their community (Esther, Judith, Joan of Arc, etc.)

A woman's life, whether she is a wife, a mother, a sister or a daughter, has to revolve around a man. If she claims any of her rights, she has to obtain his agreement. If she works, it is for him that she reserves the fruit of her work. If he monopolizes his parent's inheritance, she excuses his greed out of weakness and cowardice or out of goodness and leniency. If she practices a job or a profession, she hopes to lure with it a prospective husband. If she participates in elections, she does it to add her vote to his, increase his prestige and give a new evidence of her enslavement.

As a housekeeper, she readily accepts overwork because she was made to believe that the home is her kingdom, her reason for existence and her main source of happiness. She devotes her time and energy for her family without any return except food and lodging. If she reaches old age and becomes unable to work, she is tormented by the idea that she has to require help and become a charge for those whom she served all her life. She feels like a burden which her family has the right to reject and throw off. It never occurs to her that now she has the right to claim an indemnity or a pension, like other workers who retire after a long period of effort.

Surely the kind of liberation achieved by the woman of to-day is no more than a farce. It has given her the right to wear trousers, to smoke and to hunt a man, but it has failed to change her mentality or that of society regarding her status. Educated or not, old-fashioned or modern, she is still enslaved to the above mentioned traditions and feels unable to eliminate their impact on her life and personality.

A young girl is usually obliged to accept an inconvenient marriage because she is afraid of living alone. If she chooses single life, she is over-ridden by worry and is apt to develop a variety of complexes. Her problems are neglected or superficially treated because those who deal with them lack faith, seriousness or honesty.

One might think that the above description is negative and pessimistic. It could not be otherwise because it is a natural result of the persistence of traditional methods used in the upbringing of children in both family and school. These methods are at the root of the **distorted personality** which characterizes both men and women, since injustice toward the latter results in spoiling both groups.

The troubles suffered by Lebanon and other Arab countries are a clear evidence of the defective training which tolerates and encourages in youth a number of primitive traits such as: jealousy, rivalry, emotionality, aggressiveness, greed and money worship, flattery and lack of frankness, duplicity, tribal fanaticism, nepotism, sectarianism, favoritism of the strong against the weak.

According to our traditional beliefs, a country is only a farm whose tenants compete and fight over its products, each trying to obtain the lion's share in profits. Everything becomes a tool used to satisfy the appetite of the greedy. **Woman is one of those tools.**

Against this entrenched way of life, a **cultural revolution** must be waged by a group of honest and experienced leaders who would plan for the formation of really freed men and women, freed from the blemishes of the past, intent on developing a totally renewed personality, and on building up a modernized nation.

From an article
by the Editor