



FATHER'S PARENTING

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INTRODUCTION

Women all over the world for centuries have been bearing the consequences of living in a male dominated society. But with the gradual passage of time daughters of eve have stated to raise their voice against this oppression. In order to fight against male domination and to earn equality within the society feminist have to first and foremost understand the basic idea behind the feature of male domination and to identify the fuel which has been helping it to run hassle free for so many years.

Women all over the world are standing on the same platform, which in all cases or situations is secondary to that of men. This paper attempts to shed light on the reasons which helps in the well working of this institution.

NANCY CHODOROW'S THEORY

Nancy Chodorow in her essay proposes that it is woman's mothering process, that leads to gendered identity. She puts forward the ideas that a mother is naturally able to relate to a female child more easily than to the male child, This bond or connection between the mother and the female child helps in the development of the feminine identity within the female child.

However the case is exactly the opposite with the male child. Chodorow highlights that a male child is unable to relate to his mother and in turn searches for a separate identity for himself. In this process he builds an exact contrary identity for himself to that of his mother. Iris Marion Young puts it correctly that "because of her own gendered identity, the mother identifies with her girl child more than with her boy child." (*Iris Marion Young, Pg-23*)

This new identity constantly feels threatened of the other identity, thus they try to suppress this other identity by means of power and strength.

Thus Chodorow tries to highlight that it is due to woman's mothering process that gendered identity arises which serves as the basis of male domination.

IRONICAL VIEW

Chodorow's reason behind the working of the vicious circle of male domination is not able to satisfy many feminists. Theorists like Nancy Hartstock and Sandra Harding are able to buy her theory. To support my argument I would like to quote from Sandra Harding's work "thinking of mature women as good for nothing but mothering" (*Sandra Harding, pg112*), but there are other feminist writers like Iris Marion Young who are not equally impressed by the theory or the reason proposed by her, according to Young "they pose their claims in terms of what is common to all (male-dominated) societies." (*Iris Marion Young*)

Ironically Chodorow does not even once blame men for the strong existence of male domination; she merely seems to be puppet in the hands of the powerful, alleging the one who has always been held guilty.

According to my reading the reason proposed by Chodorow seems to be an anti-feminist take on the institution of male domination. Her reasons seem to be an attempt to please the powerful sect of the society.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Every individual has a different take on any subject. What may be right for one may be incorrect for the other. I firmly believe that generalizing the idea of male domination is highly incorrect because of the fact that it is, not catholic. In India, itself we have a number of micro societies where women have an upper hand over men, but even then we do not refer to these societies as female dominated. A possible reason for the exclusion of this term is the strong impact that the word male domination has on our mindset which has become so predominant and widespread that that we cannot accept any other word in its place. Young supports the same view point and says that "there is extraordinary variability in the cause and degree of male domination." (*Iris Marion Young, Pg-30*)

MY TAKE

Drifting away from Chodorow's theory, I believe that woman's mothering is not the reason behind the existence of the institution of male domination. Contrary to it, I believe that it is father's parenting which results in a hierarchical division of the society, which in turn results in subjugation of a particular community on varied basis.

I believe that a mother treats both the male and the female child equally. She tries to instill the qualities which are an inseparable part of her, such as caring, loving and nurturing within her children irrespective of their gender.

In order to give spine to my hypothesis, I would like to pin point the example of the novel Sons and Lovers by D. H. Lawrence. The novel deals with the life of Mrs. Morel and her son Paul Morel. In the novel Mrs. Morel is the sole active parent. She is the only parent who is involved in the nurturing process of her son and the role of the father is almost omitted. It is worthy to note that in the course of the novel, Paul unlike his father does not turn out to be a drunkard and an oppressive miner rather because of his mother he turns just the opposite of him. His father whose life was filled with bleak and colossal color of the coal, he wanted to fill, his life with varied colors, he wanted to paint the beauty of the nature in order to earn his living.

As opposed to the idea put forward by Chodorow in her theory regarding male domination, Paul Morel does not exhibit any of the characteristics of male domination. Neither does Paul develop a separate identity for himself nor does he try to drift away from his mother. Contrastingly throughout the novel Mrs. Morel and Paul exhibit a unique bond in which both of them enjoy respect and honor.

I believe that Mrs. Morel was able to shatter the vicious circle of male domination solely because of her parenting, she was able to gain respect not only for herself but also for the two women who entered the life of her son. In order to further support my view I would like to draw a parallel within the novel The Color Purple by Alice Walker. In the text we find two exactly contrary forms of nurturing, one provided by Celie the stepmother and the other provided by Mr. ___ to Harpo.

Mr. ___ was an epitome of male domination. He bought Celie from her stepfather and merely used her to satisfy his lust. She had been a victim of his constant abuse and was often beaten up without any reason by him. His style of parenting was based on oppressive and dominating qualities, which he harbored within himself and wanted to instill within his son. He was a stereotypical man who loved oppressing all the women in his life and he taught the same lesson to his son Harpo. He even tried convincing Harpo that he should often beat his wife Sophia if he wanted to gain respect from her. Adhering to his father's advice Harpo tries to overpower his wife not only when they were fighting but also when they were having sex. He always wanted to be on the top.

But all his efforts seemed in vain as Sophia never allowed Harpo to overpower or to subjugate her. She was determined to beat him up as hard as he would beat her. Therefore it was ultimately because of Mr.'s ___ parenting which only focused on overpowering and domination that gradually their marriage came to a dead end and they parted their ways in order to lead a healthy individual life.

The other kind of parenting that Harpo receives is that by Celie, her stepmother. Though Celie does not harbor any kind of affection for Harpo but the advices which she gives him from time to time helps him abundantly in his life. It was to Celie's caring nature, which sparked confidence within Harpo to share his true feelings with her. He acknowledges his love for Sofia, shedding his stereotypical gendered identity which artificially had been created by his father, and cries in her arms. Celie's advices help Harpo to introspect and further help him to alter his ways and to reform himself. By the end of the novel with the help of Celie's caring attitude he is able to reconcile with Sofia and restore his marriage.

Therefore the reason put forward by Chodorow in order to answer the complicated question of male domination falls flat on its face. The example of the two texts mentioned above provide us examples of the situations where woman is the sole nurturer of the male child, in both the above mentioned situations the male child does not confirm to the rules of male identity rather they muster up strength in order to set themselves aside of the stereotypical gender roles.

CRUX

Men do not want to lose the power of oppression and subjugation as a consequence of which they keep passing the baton of authority to the other identity with which they associate the most, in most cases they associate themselves only with the other male identity, but there have been some cases where they have been able to identify themselves with the female identity and have nurtured them as a male child and have also allowed them to hold the reign of domination.

Therefore according to the hypothesis that I try to put forward, even a woman can sit on the throne of authority and dominance only if a male is able to identify with her identity on equal terms and is willing to nurture her.

The first example that comes to my mind in order to support my argument is that of our first female Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. A woman of substance and one of the most charismatic leader, who bridged her way from gungi gudiya to one of the most influential leaders that the world could ever witness. According to an article written by A.K. Bhattacharya “she was initially considered as the gungi gudiya or a dumb doll by all the veteran congress leaders who decided to project her as an alternative candidate to checkmate Morarji Desai’s claim to succeed Lal Bahadur Shastri as India’s next prime minister in the year 1966. But Indira Gandhi could not meet the expectation of the veteran congress leaders and soon took the charge of the government and later the congress party, well quite unlike the gungi gudiya.”

She was the only child of Kamla and Jawaharlal Nehru. Not much do we know about her mother and the role that she played in her nurturing. She frequently remained ill and spent most of her time in Switzerland, trying to recover from her periodic illness. Therefore we can infer that due to her illness her mother could not play an active role in her nurturing and it was ultimately her father who nurtured her in a fashion there by making her able to dominate and govern.

Furthermore the famous novel Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen further helps me to strengthen my argument. Elizabeth Bennet is the protagonist of the novel. She is the only woman in the entire novel who is able to drive Mr. Darcy so made in love that he willingly trespasses the deeply rooted class division within the English society. She was the most intelligent and quick witted of all the Bennet sisters. Unlike any of her sisters she could converse very well and put her point equally well before her audience. It is not Elizabeth’s beauty but her lively wit which attracts Darcy towards her, this analysis could be drawn from Darcy’s statement for Elizabeth at a ball “She is tolerable but not handsome enough to tempt me.”

Another quality which separates Elizabeth from all her sisters is that, unlike all her sisters she was not very close to her mother instead she could more easily associate herself with her father Mr. Bennet though we cannot assume that Mr. Bennet would have played an active role in the nurturing of any of his daughters, but both of them could identify with each other more than any of the other family member. Mr. Bennet may not be an active parent but, he always supported his favorite daughter in the decision that she made for herself. In one of the scenes in the novel, Mrs. Bennet tries to persuade Lizzy to marry Mr. Collins, but she is determined not to marry him, she turns to her father for support and she is not let down by him, it is then that he utters the unforgettable lines “Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins and I will never see you if you do.”

Hard Times by Charles Dickens is another novel, which justifies the point that more than woman’s mothering it is father’s parenting which is responsible for the development of an oppressive identity. The novel provides us a perfect example of father’s parenting. No light is shed on the mother of Louisa and Tom Gradgrind jr., the readers get no insight into the relationship between the mother and her children.

Thomas Gradgrind was a man of logic and facts, described himself as an “eminently practical” man. He raised his children on the same practical grounds. He does not distinguish between his children Louisa and Tom on the basis of gender, and nurtures equally terribly. The impact of this nurturing is varied on both his children. His son Tom is the perfect example of his nurturing, he turns out to be a man who is never able to reciprocate the love of his sister. Making his father’s parenting as his base, he ruins other people’s life in order to safeguard his own life. In the course of the novel he destroys the life of his own sister, who loved him more than anyone and also that of Stephen Blackpool, who was a petty factory worker.

However Louisa turns out to be the only character who transforms completely in the course in the course of the novel. She does not confirm to the Victorian ideals of femininity. She is the sole character in the novel who is able to tell Thomas Gradgrind about his wrong methods of nurturing. By the end of the novel she turns out to be a happy character, who is able to take the steering of her life in her own hands. It was because of her father's parenting that she was able to mould not her life but also the life of her father in order to meet a happier end.

Therefore the hypothesis that I propose according to my understanding is supported and justified by a number of fictional examples as well as by a number of real life examples. Furthermore my idea is supported by Nancy Hartstock who defines "masculinity as a method of conceptualization whose main emphasis on mutually exclusive dualities."

Women for centuries have been subjugated by men. However there have been a few women who have been able to draw themselves out of this whirlpool. All these had certain aspects which were common to all of them. All of them were nurtured in a particular fashion. In all the examples which have been cited by me, every woman was able to steer her own life solely because her father played an active role as a parent, taking interest in her development and growth. Therefore it would not be wrong to conclude that more than woman's mothering it is father's parenting which fuels the institution of male domination.

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