

# Thank God for Women

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It is an undisputed fact that without the female species there would be no life on earth. An inquisitive child that I was, one day I asked my Science teacher when the chapter 'Reproduction' was taken up by her, "Ma'am, who came first- Adam or Eve?" Taken aback for a moment and after a few seconds of thoughtful silence, prompt came her reply, "If you can tell me whether the egg or the hen came first, I shall then answer your question!" But till date that answer I have not been able to procure! Nevertheless a realization dawned upon me that there are certain questions in life to which no answers can be sought, but only a wondrous response: "Waheguru!"

Be it the animal kingdom or the human race, none would have been there without the female species. It is only in variety that there is life. And because of variety, living becomes more enjoyable. Had there been only male species around by some sheer whim of the Supreme Power prevailing in our universe, called The Milky Way, life would have been very dull and uninteresting.

There are always two aspects to a thing. Just as a coin has two sides, one side head and the other side tail, so also in life there are two aspects to everything and both are interconnected; for the other side to turn up, the only prerequisite is a 360 degree turn around. If there is a day, it is linked up with night. If there is good prevailing, then there is also bad lurking around the corner. If there is virtue, there also is sin. The positive and the negative are part and parcel of the one whole. Thus, without woman, man alone feels incomplete. In Punjabi there is a word called – *adhoora*, which best describes the incompleteness of man or woman without the other.

Guru Nanak, in the hymn, *Asa di Vaar* (SGGS: 473) boldly made a reference to the women folk that rather praises and salutes the woman, an unheard-of thing during the times of the Indian Gurus in the sub-continent. I have yet to come across another hymn which speaks about women in the Guru Granth Sahib except a reference to Mata Khivi, the wife of one of the Gurus, for her selfless services to the *pangat* in the Langar. Indeed Guru Nanak broke the age-old tradition of ignoring the women folk, belittling them and calling them evil, a temptress and a seductress, by speaking out his heart and true feelings unperturbed as to what others shall comment. Guru Nanak thus sang:

"Of woman we are born, of woman conceived  
To woman engaged, to woman married  
Woman we befriend, by woman is the civilization continue  
When woman dies, woman is sought for  
It is by woman that order is maintained  
Then why call her evil from whom are great men born?  
From woman is woman born,  
And without woman none should exist.  
The eternal Lord is the only One, O' Nanak  
Who depends not on woman."

If there is someone to give, then there has to be someone to receive. Had the woman not been the receiver, then the onus of conceiving for nine months in the embryo would have fallen on the male gender, but it was not to be so in the Game Plan of the Supreme Power. Everything in this universe is created with a set purpose, and one can only exclaim, "Oh Wondrous Lord Waheguru". But it was with a wondrous exclamation at the Creator's

mystery that such a word was coined.

Almost half the population around the globe are women. It is a matter of concern that the sex ratio of woman–man is on the decline, most alarmingly in the Northern states of India, specially in Punjab. But this choice of the growing embryo arising out of advancement in sciences which has created sex-determiners is like trespassing on God's work of creation. Just imagine if everyone begins to exercise this choice and if only a male child is opted for, then man has to develop alternatives so that the civilization can continue.

The choice of the male child puts into the glare that the girl child is unwelcome and the rejoicing which takes place in households immediately after the doctor announces, "*Ladka hoia*", puts to shame the mothers who were once also a girl child, and do not hesitate to become a party to such discrimination prevalent today. This prevalence proves that the woman still do not have any say and are still being treated as nothing but chattel for the men who use them as and when required.

Does not the celebration of the festival "*Lohri*" highlight this discrimination, yet we Sikhs proudly proclaim that in Sikhism men and women are treated equally. Had they been treated equally then either this festival would have been disassociated with the birth of the boy child or some other festival would have emerged for the equal celebration of the girl child. *Lohri* is out and out a discriminatory festival against the womanhood and deserves no place at all amongst knowing Sikhs.

I would like to share a conversation I recently had with a divorced Sikh young man in Kolkata who had remarried. In the course of the conversation he commented, "My wife is my property. I can do whatever I wish with her." This conversation put me into a turmoil and made me realize that so long as the theory of possessing or treating a woman as a commodity is not washed off from both our conscious and unconscious mindsets, then women will never become as equals.

Guru Nanak says, "*When woman dies, woman is sought for*". But if the girl ratio gets diminished alarmingly and there becomes a dearth of the females, then whom shall we men seek? The only option will be, (with no pun intended) to seek men and the institution of marriage and leading a householder's life will automatically collapse and homosexuality will become the in-thing. Our Jathedars should concentrate more on educating the populace of Punjab to refrain from female foeticide rather than commenting upon Canada's legislature introduced recently legalising 'same sex' marriage.

There are certain bodily needs which cannot be ignored for the all round development of the human race. What we term as physical needs are the same as referred to bodily needs. Incidentally needs are also of two types- physical or bodily and mental or psychological. It is only when both are fulfilled that humans feel fulfilled and contented. The fulfillment of bodily needs are as important as that of mental needs. What are our bodily needs? That of hunger, health and sex. And Guru Nanak realized the importance of satiating the bodily needs so that one can embark upon the journey of spirituality. If any one bodily need is neglected then problems can arise which can deteriorate into illnesses which can result in untimely death of a person. Say, for example, if the hunger need is not taken care of, then diseases like malnutrition, under-nutrition and ulcers can develop which can even take the life of a person before his or her actual time comes. Likewise, if cleanliness of the body and health of a person is not maintained, then also diseases can arise which will keep humans preoccupied with them and keep them away from other priorities in life.

By introducing the *langar* concept, Guru Nanak ensured that none shall go hungry in the Kingdom of God. What better way than sharing part of one's earned and toiled income with the fellow humans! Partaking of food, sitting in congregation amongst the diverse people

from all walks of life, sheds off the feelings of superiority and humbleness sets in.

The creation of *sarovars* (man-made lakes) attached to almost all Gurdwaras in erstwhile undivided Punjab looked into this aspect of cleanliness of the body. It was here at the *sarovars* that people came and partook of the daily bodily wash. During the time of our Sikh gurus the concept of private toilets and bathrooms was not prevalent except in palaces of kings and rulers. With the passage of time the bathroom-cum-toilet has become an essential part in the living concepts of humans.

Now comes the sexual needs of a person. Keeping this in view Guru Nanak stressed on the importance of leading a householder's life. Why? Because both man and woman have sexual energies and both require an outlet or means of releasing this energy. If such energies are not released then repression arises which leads to psychological disorders and development of a person is impaired. Take the case of nuns and brothers of Christian convents and missionaries where it is a known fact that lesbianism and homosexuality are in vogue. Why? Because ultimately the release of the sexual energy is a basic need of a person, whether man or woman. And if such releases do not occur in a man-woman relationship, which is a basic law of nature, then deviations into woman-woman relationship or man-man relationship occur most likely setting in repression.

Repression when piled up or bottled inside our systems has to invariably break loose one day and erupt in the shape of so called evils of society like rape and molestations. Whether rape or molestation takes place anywhere, be it in the confines of a house or on the open in the streets or in the campuses of schools or colleges, it is a forceful act against the wishes and without the consent of the other, condemned by all. And the gravity of a rape or a molestation, if happening inside the walls of a House of Worship like a Church, a Temple or a Gurdwara will not make it more heinous or evil.

The recent hullabaloo over the portrayal of rape of a mother and daughter in the theatrical production, *Bezhti*, staged recently in London has given it an undue publicity over which the producers would be happily filling their coffers. Three things need to be contemplated upon. First, is it not the fundamental right of a person to express his or her views without any fear or coercion? Secondly, do we try to analyze as to what social undercurrents makes the male gender commit such atrocities over the female race? Has this something to do with the centuries-old ingrained concept of treating the women-folk as things to be conquered, possessed and used to one's convenience? And lastly, do we also need a censorship board with religious representations of all communities, on the likes of Film Censor Boards, for theatre, stage plays and T.V.

productions?

The vehement and violent protests by Sikhs in UK was very much uncalled for and unlike of Sikh behavior, but then had not such protests taken place, the matter would have sizzled off into oblivion and become a trend setter for other play writers and directors to embark upon hurting, unintentionally or knowingly, the religious sentiments of other communities, too!

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