

Darwinian natural selection has made flowers attract bees, butterflies, and other insects by throwing out a variety of colour and form in order to attract pollination and reproduction. Perhaps a similar process is instinctively and unconsciously working in women to try to look attractive to men in order to make way for sexual intercourse and procreation. On the other hand, there is no justification for self abnegation by women of many of the skills that men have kept within their province.

Have you observed how people and institutions have been particular about specific addressing titles for women? Women are referred to as 'Miss' if they are not married or 'Mrs' if they are not available. The focus is on the marital status as though being married to a man is what defines a woman. There is no such yardstick for men who are allowed to be married or unmarried or gay. In modern times, the title 'Ms' has been applied in deference. But here again it means nothing more than the suggestion that being married or unmarried is not anyone's business. Everybody wants to know if a particular woman is married or not; in other words whether she is an appendage to a man.

Male dominance and male chauvinism is present everywhere. It has been so throughout human history. Social anthropologists have reported some instances of Indian and Polynesian society under female dominance (i.e. matriarchal societies) but these examples have been too few to make a mark. It was only some decades ago that females even in the West achieved equality in property rights and political suffrage. In most parts of the world they still do not have these rights. In the Middle East religious dogma has pushed women to a lower status where even their dress forms are dictated by Sharia Law; similar restrictions are not placed on men who are free to dress as they please. The Islamic God is not shown as a figure due to Islam's opposition to icons and images but Christianity refers to 'God the Father' and Jesus was the 'son of God'. Why not a 'daughter of God'? Early Christian theology denigrated the status of women. **The 13th century scholar and saint, Thomas Aquinas, said that woman was "created to be man's helpmate, but her unique role is in conception . . . since for other purposes men would be better assisted by other men."**

Of all religions, however, Hinduism has been the most oppressive with regard to the role and status of women in society: (a) Girls are to be married when 5 years old. (b) The vicious dowry system is prescribed in the Vedas. (c) If the dowry is insufficient the bride may be burnt. (d) Widow burning

is also sanctioned in the Vedas and Puranas. The codes of Manu treated women as the property of men with no rights of their own. In practice, modern India has changed a lot but the influence of the sacred scriptures still powerfully make up the collective psyche of people in the country. It was the Indian influence that spread to Sri Lanka and the idea that woman is the property of man remains a lingering belief. The dowry system

female subjugation, rape, and victimisation underlying the whole distressing episode. The psychological or psychiatric need that impelled Josef was to dominate the female species notwithstanding the hard reality that his victim had been his own daughter.

Psychologists investigating rape incidents have pointed out that the offenders have been propelled by a weird drive to dominate the particular woman concerned more than to

## THE PERSISTENCE OF



# MALE DOMINATION

is entrenched in Sri Lanka, too, although its virulent Indian corollaries are absent in the island.

No doubt we have had instances of female leaders who led their tribes, communities, or country. There have been over a dozen Prime Ministers who were women. In numerous lands women have come to the fore in education and jobs, and many of the jobs that were once the prerogative of men have been taken over by women. All this is fact. However, the deep seated position is that a male-dominated world generally consider it awkward that women should lead and even such rare occasions of leadership have been subjected to sexual jokes in private means' lobbies. It was reported recently in the Australian newspapers that Liberal politician Troy Buswell has previously admitted to snapping a Labor staffer's bra strap and been accused of making sexist remarks to another female MP. Last week he confessed up to sniffing a female colleague's chair in a room full of people.

What would you make of the horrible recent revelation in Austria about a man named Josef Fritzl incarcerating his daughter and her seven children off an incestuous relationship, in a dungeon for 24 years? Newspapers reporting this incident have focused, rightly, on the disgusting act of incest involved. However, one can discern a dimension of

derive sexual gratification out of her.

This gives a clue to the second-rate position that women have held throughout the ages. This position at root has sexual origins namely it relates to man's subliminal desire to dominate the woman. Stereotypically the woman plays a recipient role of submission during the sexual act and the vagina is the receptacle for the male penis.

In our value system the female is not



commonly extolled for her possession of virtues such as intellectual prowess, technical skills, or managerial abilities-qualities expected from the male but equally capable of being performed by women. The popular attention is on her possession or otherwise of beauty and physical attraction. Commercial advertisers and marketing people exploit this and in the process reinforce it. It is interesting to observe how women themselves cooperate in the reinforcing act by doing themselves up to highlight the social construction of their image as a species meant to attract and little more. Darwinian natural selection has made flowers attract bees, butterflies, and other insects by throwing out a variety of colour and form in order to attract pollination and reproduction. Perhaps a similar process is instinctively and unconsciously working in women to try to look attractive to men in order to make way for sexual intercourse and procreation. On the other hand, there is no justification for self abnegation by women of many of the skills that men have kept within their province.

To be sure, women have progressed considerably over the years in achieving equality with men and women's rights to equality in gender treatment have been enshrined in international law. Nevertheless, male chauvinism continues to taint human behaviour in this 21st century. The perception expressed by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century (referred to above) appears to dominate the psyche of most ordinary people in the world today.



Shyamon Jayasinghe



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## SPICE CORNER

**Monday - Thursday 10.30am to 8.00pm**  
**Friday - 10.30am to 9.00pm**  
**Saturday - 10.30am to 9.00pm**  
**Sunday - 10.30am to 8.00pm**

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