

The Differences Between Woman and Man

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The differences between woman and man! What an absurd idea! In spite of our living in the second half of the twentieth century there are still people here and there who think as if they were in the middle ages and maintain old and out-of-date ideas of differences between women and men and think that men and women are not the same as each other.

No doubt they wish to infer like the men of middle ages that woman is an inferior sex; that woman is not full human being; that woman is the link between animals and mankind. They think a woman does not have the ability or the esteem to live an independent and free life and that she is obliged to live under the patronage and guardianship of man. Anyhow ideas like these are now obsolete and out-of-date. Now it is established that all those idle speculations were quite fictitious and that in the period of their domination over women men had vigorously supported these arguments while the true position was really just the reverse. Woman as a matter of fact is the superior sex and man is the inferior and imperfect sex.

But no in the twentieth century due to the astonishing progress of science the differences between men and women have become clearer and more well-defined. There is no idle speculation or fiction in these hard facts. These are scientific and experimental realities. Nonetheless these differences have in no way any bearing on the question as to whether woman or man is or is not the superior sex the other sex being lower inferior or imperfect. The law of creation brought these differences into being in order to make the relationship of a man and a woman within the family more firm and the foundation of their unity more secure.

The law of creation planned these differences so as to allocate with its own hands the rights and duties of women and men. The law of creation has laid down these differences in men and women with a purpose just like the purpose that is found in the differentiation of the functions of the different organs within a single body.

If the law of creation has designed every organ the eyes the ears the legs the hands and the spine in a particular form it is not because it has given a preference to two eyes for example and has unduly discriminated in their favour showing cruelty to one part as compared with another.

Is it a question of symmetry or one of imperfection and perfection?

One of the things which surprises me is that some people insist that the difference between men and women in their physical and psychological make-up should be depicted as women

being imperfect and man being comparatively perfect. This would show that the law of creation had some ulterior motive in creating woman an imperfect being.

The idea that a woman is an imperfect creature arose among the people of the west before it did among us easterners. Men of the west were quite unjust in their jeering at women and in calling her imperfect. Sometimes they claimed to be representing the church and remarked 'A woman should be ashamed of being a woman'. Sometimes they said Woman is a being who has long hair and is short of understanding'. 'A woman is the last of all savage beasts whom man has tamed.' 'A woman is the last link between animals and human beings ' and so on.

More surprising than this is that a section of the people to the west have recently done a complete volte-face and now want to prove by one thousand and one different arguments that man is an imperfect inferior and humble being and that woman is perfect and superior sex. If you my dignified reader had gone through the book *The Natural Superiority of women* written by Ashley Montague which was serialized in *Zan-e ruz* you would have seen how strenuously and with what shower of nonsensical talk the author wanted to prove that woman is more perfect than man. That book in so far as it presents the results of the discoveries of medicine psychology or social statistics is very valuable but when the writer himself proceeds to draw "inferences" and wants to deduce conclusions in support of his theory which is represented by the title of the book he goes to the extremes of nonsense.

Why should they consider woman to be so inferior and worthless an object one day and then be obliged the next day to make amends for the past and do away with all deficiencies and defects from the face of woman and transfer them to the face of man? Why should it be necessary to interpret the differences between man and woman as an imperfection in one and perfection in the other and be obliged at one time to take the side of one and at another time to support the other?

On the one hand Mr. Montague insists on representing woman a species superior to man yet on other hand he represents the distinctive attributes of man as being the result of historical and social factors and not the result of natural factors.

In fact the differences between men and women are a matter of symmetry and not one of imperfection or perfection. It is the intention of the law of creation that these differences should be the source of a better relationship between women and men who are without doubt created to live together. To live a single life is contrary to the law of creation. This point will become clearer during our subsequent discussion in connection with our clarifications of the differences.

Plato's theory:

This matter is not one that has only recently been put out for discussion. It is at least two thousand four hundred years old because it was discussed in the same form in Plato's Republic.

Plato claims in unambiguous terms that women and men possess similar capabilities and that women can carry out all the obligations and responsibilities which men are charged with and benefit from all the rights that men enjoy.

The origin of all the new ideas which have come up for consideration concerning woman and what is more certain other ideas which people in the twentieth century have deemed to be excessive and consider unacceptable are also found in the thoughts of Plato. That these ideas belong to a man who is called the father of philosophy may look strange to the reader. Plato in Book V of his Republic argued in favour of the State's control over women and children in connection with the improvement and the well-being of different generations of its depriving some women and men of their right to reproduce and of its allocation of the right to reproduce exclusively to those who have especially excellent and distinctively superior qualities.

He further more urged in favour of the arrangement whereby the education and training of children was carried on outside the environment of the family and of permitting reproduction only in certain years of the lives of men and women the age at which they would be most full of vitality and vigour.

Plato is of the opinion that women should also be given military training in exactly the same way as men and that they should also take part in athletic competitions exactly as men do. However there are two noteworthy points in what Plato said. Firstly he admits that women in Physical as well as spiritual and mental powers are weaker than men that is he admits of a difference between women and as regards quantity but he does not believe in their being different as regards the quality of their talents. Plato believes that men and women are alike in their talents though of course woman is weaker than man in all respects; but he asserts it does not necessarily follow that men and women have a special ability to do one task rather than another.

Plato thanks God for his being born a man and not woman especially because he considers woman to be weaker than man. He says; " I thank God that I was born a Greek and not other than Greek that I came to this world as a free person and not a slave and that I was born a man and not a woman."

The other thing is that whatever Plato said in respect of the well-being of children their training the similarity of the make-up of men and women and the state's control on women and children all of it concerns the ruling class that is philosopher- rulers whom he considers

specifically worthy to be rulers. As we know Plato is in politics against democracy and favours an aristocracy. All that Plato said concerned the aristocratic class and as far as people out that .class are concerned his views were different

Aristotle against Plato:

After Plato the other figure of the ancient world whose thoughts and opinions we are acquainted with is Plato's pupil Aristotle. In his Politics he expressed his ideas concerning the differences between women and men and vehemently opposed his teacher Plato. Aristotle believes that the difference between women and men is not only in the quantity of their abilities but also in the quality. He says the nature of the abilities of woman and man is different and that the functions which the law of creation imposes upon each one of them and the rights which have been designated to them are different in many respects.

According to Aristotle excellence in the morals of men and women are also different in many respects. A certain behaviour may be regarded as a virtue for a man and yet may not be commendable for a woman and in exactly the same way a certain behaviour or comportment may be praise-worthy and excellent for woman but not considered worthy of a man.

The views of Aristotle ousted the views of Plato in the ancient world and the thinkers coming .after them gave preference to the views of Aristotle over those of Plato

The opinion of the modern world:

All that has been stated above concerns the ancient world. Now we have to see what the modern world says. The modern world does not rely on mere guesses and conjectures. Instead relies on observation and experiment on statistics and figures on the study of the thing itself. In the light of profound medical psychological and social studies more and multifarious differences between women and men have been discovered. These could not have been discovered by any means in the ancient world.

Those in the ancient world who used to judge men and women did it simply on the grounds that one has a large frame and the other a smaller one; one is more coarse and the other more delicate; one is taller and the other shorter; one has a stronger voice and the other is soft-speaking; one is more hairy and the other has a more smooth body. The greatest extent they went to was to take into account the difference in the time of puberty or to look at the differences in intellect and sentiments. Man was considered a symbol of intellect and woman a symbol of kind and affectionate feelings.

However other kinds of differences have recently been discovered besides these and it has been discovered that the worlds of women and men are different to each other in many

respects.

We shall mention all the differences between women and men which we were able to gather from the writings of the great scientists and then we shall deal with the question as to how many of these differences are based in nature and how many are the result of historical cultural or social factors. A number of these differences can be listed by anybody after a little experience and attention and some of them are so clear and self-evident as to be impossible .to deny

Reciprocal differences:

Physique: Man normally is of a larger frame and woman has a smaller body; man is taller and woman is shorter; man is more coarse and woman is more delicate; man has a stronger voice and is harsh in his tone while woman is more soft speaking and more melodious in her voice; the development of a woman's body takes place sooner than the development of man's body to the extent that it is universally said that the foetus of a girl develops sooner than that of a boy. The muscular development and strength of a man's body is greater than that of a woman. A woman's power of resistance to many diseases is greater than a man's. Woman reaches the age of puberty earlier than man and also becomes unproductive sooner as regards the reproduction powers. A girl starts speaking earlier than a boy. The normal brain of a man is larger than the normal brain of a woman but with attention to the proportional size of their bodies the brain of a woman is larger than that of a man. The lungs of a man have the capacity to inhale more air than the lungs of a woman. A woman's heartbeat is quicker than a man's.

Psychology: Man has a greater preference for physical exercise hunting tasks involving movement than a woman. The sentiments of man are challenging and war-like while the sentiments of woman are peaceable and convivial. Man is more aggressive and quarrelsome and woman is more quiet and more calm. A woman refrains from taking drastic action both with regard to others and with regard to herself and this is the reason for the smaller number of suicides in women than in man. In a mood for suicide man will take a hastier course in comparison with woman. Men will use a gun hang themselves shoot themselves or jump from the top of a lofty building while women tend to use sleeping pills poison and so forth in such a crisis.

The feelings of woman are aroused quicker than a man's. Her sentiments are excited sooner than those of man; that is a woman in matters with which she is involved or of which she is afraid reacts sooner and with more acuteness just as she feels while a man is more cool headed. A woman is naturally more disposed than a man towards decoration ornaments beautification adornment and dress. The feelings of woman are more transient than those of

man. Woman is more cautious more religious more talkative more timid and more formal than man. The feelings of a woman are motherly and these feelings are clearly visible in her childhood.

Woman is more concerned with the family and her attention is subconsciously directed more than man towards the importance of a home. In activities based on reasoning and in abstruse intellectual problems woman cannot equal man but in literature painting and all matters that are related to aesthetics she is not behind man. Man has more ability to keep a secret than woman and he keeps unpleasant private matters to himself better than a woman. This is the reason why men are victims to some psychological illnesses more than women. These illnesses develop as a result of his keeping his confidences to himself. Woman is more soft-hearted and instantly resorts to weeping and occasionally to fainting.

Feeling towards each other:

Man is the slave of his own passions and woman holds herself fast in the love of man. A man loves a woman because he has admired her or chosen her while a woman loves a man because she has perceived his worth or has previously made an avowal of her sincerity. Man wants to take possession of the person of the woman and to wield power over her and woman wants to conquer the heart of man and prevail upon him through his heart. Man wants to master woman through her head and woman wants to influence man through his heart. Man has a desire to embrace woman and woman has a desire to be embraced. Woman desires to see bravery and courage in man and man wants to see elegance and charm in woman. Woman considers the support of a man the most valuable thing for her. Woman is able to control her sexual drive more than man. The sexual drive of man is aggressive and that of woman passive .and inciting

The Rights of Women in Islam, Ayatullah Murtada Mutahhari, P. 167 - 175