

The Women's Century

The 21st century will be a women's century; men will be replaced by dogs.
– *Anonymous.*

Introduction:

This article is primarily about how relationships between men and women will evolve during the 21st century. To some extent, the trend of what I want to describe is already visible, building up in the last 25 years or so. That trend will only speed up and create a monstrous wave that will inundate the planet. For women, it will offer the opportunity to finally break free of the clutches of tradition, and for men, it will offer the opportunity to see their true natural potential which is devoid of any special powers bestowed by culture and tradition. Those who turn down these opportunities will come to regret their choices later in life.

Let us begin with a few real-life stories (well, one is from a movie!).

Story 1:

Chitra is a young woman in her early thirties. She has a degree in Bioengineering and works in a hi-tech company in San Francisco. She makes a decent six figure salary, and her husband has a decent career of his own. Chitra has a huge passion for the theatre and she both acts in and directs Hindi-language plays. Her husband is very supportive of her hobby, and he looks after their son and other household duties when Chitra is busy with her practices or performances. Chitra often travels to other cities with her theatre troupe and her husband and son follow her around to watch her shows.

Story 2:

The famous actress Ann Hathaway plays the main character in the movie “The Intern”. She is a high-flying founder/CEO of a high-energy startup. Ann's husband is a full-time housemaker by choice. He wants Ann to fully focus on her stressful job as a tech founder. He stays home, cooks for both Ann and their daughter, helps the girl with her homework and other school

activities. He often walks their daughter to and from her preschool and as a result gets to know many of the young mothers of other kids. He hooks up with one of them and has an affair with her. When he is discovered by Ann, instead of denying, getting defensive or throwing a tantrum, he owns up his mistake, apologizes, and offers a reasonable approach for redemption. Ann is obviously pained to discover his affair but accepts him back graciously.

Story 3:

Bhavya is a senior manager in a large enterprise. She is married and has a daughter who wants to make a career in cricket. Bhavya and her husband see nothing wrong in her choice and are fully supportive. Bhavya knows that her husband, although a loving father, is disinterested and incapable and hence useless in the endeavor of promoting their daughter's career. So, she takes matters in her own hands, takes a few years off (by quitting her coveted job) to be able to take her daughter around the cricket circles, to use her own connections to introduce her to influential people, and to find opportunities for her to play in tournaments. Her husband, in the meantime, knows his limitations and is content to play the housewife. He works from home, pays the bills, looks after the house, and so on, while the two ladies roam around the city playing and watching cricket.

Story 4:

Gabby Thomas is probably now a household name (circa 2024). She won several medals in the 2024 Paris Olympics, including a gold in the 200-meter sprint. She graduated from Harvard University in Neurobiology and then did a master's in Public Health. She pursued athletics in parallel and won numerous awards during college. She meant to pursue a career in medicine, but after discovering her talent in athletics, she turned pro. She is passionate about helping people who don't have health insurance and regularly volunteers her time to pursue that passion.

Story 5:

Susmita and Ravindra are a US-based older middle-class couple with two sons, one of whom – Pratik – lives with them. Pratik is a struggling journalist and has no income yet. Ravindra was laid off from his factory job a year ago and has given up looking for work. The family now has visa

issues, which they are trying to sort through with the help of a lawyer friend. Susmita is the president of the local Bengali Association, which is all volunteer work. She runs a Montessori school at home and that earns her some money. She heads a non-profit Bengali language teaching activity for kids across the US. She is a Krishna devotee and is a registered member of the ISKCON community and is active there too. She has multiple health issues including diabetes and asthma. But on any day, if you meet or call her, she has time to have a friendly chat with you, to help you if required.

The promise:

The fact that the 21st century women are altogether a different breed should be apparent to anyone who doesn't live with his eyes closed. These women are educated, ambitious, independent-thinking, and they not only want to take charge of their own lives, but also aspire to participate in societal activities at large and contribute to solving problems of the world. These women move around in society confidently, work shoulder to shoulder with men, and are not conscious of their bodies and their looks. They are eager to experiment with what they wear and how they color their hair and don't care what others say about it.

The stories narrated above indicate this new trend. Gabby Thomas certainly comes across as an amazing and extraordinary young woman. But her story is unusual only in a matter of degree. Women like Gabby can be spotted all over the place if you care to look around and observe keenly. They may not be superlative achievers like Gabby, but they are certainly pursuing an amazing range of activities with full vigor and enthusiasm. They have their feet dipped in all kinds of waters and don't shy away from trying new adventures. These women appear to live up to the true potential of the word "multi-tasking".

Susmita, although not exactly a young 21-century woman, is very much an example of how women are tackling major challenges single-handedly.

Chitra's husband is an example of a man who recognizes this new wave and adjusts his contribution to his family accordingly. He is still free to pursue his career and interests, but his disposition towards his wife and his family is an enlightened one.

Ann's story is interesting in two aspects. One is, once again, the willingness of her man to play a supportive role. But the second aspect is even more interesting because upon discovering her husband's affair, Ann, unusually and graciously, agrees to give him a second chance.

The repercussions:

In the 21st century, men will see their importance in women's minds and lives diminish. There is already statistic showing a growing number of young women reluctant to marry. Divorce rates are on the rise all over the developed world. Several married women are opting for just one child, and even more astonishingly, some are refusing to have any! So, traditional views on "what women want" are getting challenged in a serious manner. Even that oldest-of-all belief – that a woman's primary purpose in life is to experience and enjoy motherhood – is getting challenged.

Why marry?

Traditionally, a woman needed a husband for several reasons. An important one was financial security. In the 21st century, this reason is already being challenged by women – especially in the middle and upper-middle classes. Young unmarried women no longer look at the guy's salary or property to judge his value as a potential life-partner. Women who do not have a "man's financial cover" are not only taking care of themselves but are also raising children and supporting their parents. In our story of Bhavya above, she is not worried about taking a few years off and becoming "dependent" on her husband. She knows it is a temporary break taken for a very good reason – in the interest of the family – and she is confident of returning to corporate life after seeing her daughter off on a smooth pitch.

The other reason for women to get married used to be for personal safety. Women either lived with their husbands or their parents or brothers/sisters, but rarely alone. Physical safety of single women is a major concern today – even in developed societies. In addition to trying to reform men and change their mindset, more women need to join government and the police force to enforce some real change through law and order. My guess is that this problem will at least cease to be a blocking

issue for women from breaking the tradition of depending on a man for their personal safety.

But the main reason for women to marry, of course, was to fulfill what they felt (or were told) was their primary purpose of life – to have a family and raise children. The 21st century women may still continue to feel this obligation, but their traditional willingness to sacrifice everything – such as their personal freedom, their happiness, their desire to pursue other interests, etc. – will weaken substantially. They may indeed pursue this urge as single mothers if necessary, by utilizing modern tools such as sperm banks and IVF, and in other novel technological ways that are sure to evolve in the not-so-distant future.

The feminine circle:

More than men, the “feminine circle” will become the most valuable resource for the 21st century woman. She will consult her mom, sisters, and other women friends to not only solve problems, but also to plan her numerous creative adventures. I already see that happening today. Women have given up on their husbands and they routinely undertake major house remodeling projects or plan family excursions to exciting destinations all with the help of other women. Mothers have networks of other mothers to guide them in the educational journeys of their children.

Men to become obsolete?

Does this all mean men are going to be obsolete in the 21st century? Well, let us hope we don't come to that! Women will still need men – but for the right reasons. These women will no doubt still adore their fathers for their ability to guide and solve problems in a way distinct from their moms. Assuming of course, that these dads are an evolved breed whose natural love for their daughters is also an enlightened one. Armed with this positive experience with dads, women will find it helpful to have male friends to get the “man's point of view” in solving life's riddles.

Heterosexual women will of course want lovers, and that is one role men naturally love to play. Women will not shy away from giving high priority to their sexual desires, and as a result, men will, unlike in the past, take the trouble to learn how to please their women.

Women will need sperm-donors if they want to have children, and men still have a monopoly on the machinery required by nature to be such donors. Of course, sperm banks may diminish an individual man's value in this department.

Sensible women will welcome male partners (preferably actual fathers) to share their family duties, such as raising their children.

And finally, there is a special joy in sharing an adventure with a loving, caring, and respectful man. Women will certainly welcome the presence of such Krishna-like men in their lives.

As women become the truly independent and fully empowered 21st century women, they will need to also accept certain ground realities. They will realize (which they really should have by now) that they cannot dump all their expectations on one man. It is not only impossible for that man, but also unfair on him. If women want "exclusive" and "loyal" company, they are better off having dogs instead of men. If they prefer more intelligent company than dogs, they may have to settle for a string of affairs during their lifetime.

What does the 21st century mean for men?

How do all these revolutionary changes happening on the feminine side affect men?

My guess is men won't change much – at least not all of them. Unlike women, men have already been free to do what they want anyway! Men will continue to be men; boys will be boys. They will get to enjoy women's company without having to marry them. Who would not like that!? But these men will feel lonely in old age and will regret that they did not do enough to hold on to their women.

Men will have to fend for themselves, because after leaving Mommy's house, they won't have devoted wives cooking for them and ironing their clothes anymore. Men will thus have to become more self-reliant and take care of their needs. I think new generations of men won't even have those expectations.

But men will also benefit immensely from capable women around them, because women will continue to be the kind and caring people they always have been. If you happen to be a lucky man allowed to be in their company, you will get a free ride on the pleasures and adventures designed by these women. I feel like such a lucky man myself today!

Having lost easy access to women through the marriage system, men will have to find their women the hard way – by means of their true masculine charm or something else that women might find attractive.

Taking a more optimistic view, it is possible that men's thinking and attitudes will evolve as they observe the phenomenal changes happening in the female species. As growing boys, they will get to observe closely and intimately their own moms who represent this new breed of women. It is possible then, that, they will see the value in sticking with their hard-won women and be willing and enthusiastic partners in their high-energy journey.

Final thoughts:

Will the 21st century really turn out for women the way I have described? I think that it is a real possibility, but it will depend on a lot of favorable factors. I am aware that today the kind of women I have described above are a small fraction of the total female population. Majority of women today still languish under the domination of men, of in-laws, of religious dogmas, and of the society at large. There is still quite a distance between today's reality and the promise of the 21st century. Dads (and moms) allowing their daughters to grow up in a free, positive environment is a crucial factor. Girls having access to educational and career opportunities on an equal footing is a necessary factor. Nations providing physical safety to their womenfolk is a critical factor.

I think it is also up to the women. Women will certainly see opportunities to be truly free – both in the outside world of career, sports, politics, and entertainment, and in the world of homes and relationships. It would be a pity if, instead of grabbing these opportunities women try to follow old traditions by becoming "housewives" and allow their men to dominate them. Indeed, whether it's because of their natural programming or

something else, girls may begin with naive expectations and ideas about their place in the world. But they will learn quickly. The feminine circle I mentioned above will be instrumental in not only grooming the girls properly but also in acting as a support system in the event of missteps. If women are lucky, they will meet sensible, respectful, supportive, intelligent, and caring men who are willing to become co-travelers and enjoy long-lasting relationships with their beautiful, creative, and talented women.

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