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THREE PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TOWARDS LIB

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WHEN I was about twentyfive years old, I suddenly had a revelation. I realised that barring a certain area (that of conceiving, bearing and giving birth to children), if men and women were treated, in all other contexts, only as human beings and not as human beings of this sex or that, the total sum of misery in this world may be reduced a little. I was thrilled at this discovery of mine and naively thought that all I had to do was put it before people to have it accepted with glad cries, and me accepted as a messiah. Alas, it only goes to show how naive even the twentyfive-year-olds of my generation were likely to be, for I see now that my seventeen year old daughter has no such illusions about either being able to wrest equality from MCPs (male chauvinistic pig) without total revolution, or finally about that equality reducing the sum of human misery ! But to resume our story. With enthusiasm, I put my message before various friends. To my sorrow and surprise I met, not acceptance, but everything else from downright derision to feeble jokes (or what the mcps thought were jokes) about wives not being able to eat what husbands cooked. At first I was astonished that so much ill will could exist between the sexes without my ever having been aware of it. But then I thought, right, the mcps are bound to resist my efforts at introducing equality, for, the present male-oriented society suits them to the ground. And so I began to redouble my efforts on the Lib front, abandoning, for the moment, all idea about peaceful co-existence. But, wonder of wonders ! Even among the sisterhood my efforts were destined to meet with failure. Slowly through the years, as I met women at various stages of life, in various professions, in all strata of society, I came to understand that not only did my sisters not want equality, they could not have it, for they sincerely believed themselves to be unequal to the men. They felt inferior. I could not understand it. Why ? I asked them, why do you feel inferior ? If men have certain kinds of skills and strengths, you have certain others. If they do certain kinds of work, you do certain others. But it was no use. My logic and my arguments made no impression on their conviction that they were inferior to the male of the species. I worried about this, for in all the other species, it is exactly the other way around. It

is the male who is the quite unnecessary member. A couple of males to every hundred females are quite sufficient for the propagation of the species. There it is the male who puts on beautiful feathers, or an attractive coats, or an enticing voices to woo the female. He sings, dances, builds a nest, offers nuts and other goodies. Why it is then that in the human species the procedure is reversed? Why among us, is it the female who learns to beautify herself, learns the arts of pleasing a male, gives gifts and doweries? The answer was not too far to seek. The human child takes so long to grow up and be a self-supporting member of the community, that most of the useful and creative years of a human female's life are spent in bringing up, educating and looking after it. Thus making it impossible for her to engage in any other profession to earn her own living, or that of her offspring for a space of a couple of decades. Throughout this period she and her children are dependent, for their very bread upon the male. During the early stages of human economy, this worked out as a division of labour, but not as a qualitative or hierarchical division of labour. Slowly the economics of human societies changed. From gathering, hunting and bartering, men moved towards monetary economies. With the sole exception of the woman. For his services and skills, the man began to get monetary rewards, but the woman, for her services to him and to society, still got returns in the form of barter, namely, food, clothing and shelter. As human beings became well established as a species, the value of a woman's services to society declined to the point where her very function of child-bearing began to be a nuisance to it and a threat to its survival. Her special skills became redundant. The division of labour then became qualitative. Society needed all of man's services and skills and rewarded him in money. With that money he could buy all the other services he needed, including the ones that the woman was rendering him. As he became economically more aggressive, her sense of dependence upon him, of being obliged to him for her very survival, of her being inferior to him, deepened. We see the result today, where a majority of not only men, but women feel that the woman is a thing bought by the man with his money.

By the time I came through all this laborious reasoning process, talked about it to friends (whose number, by the way, declined steadily as I became more and more insistent on my equal status with men under any circumstances), read books written about these questions and discussed them, wrote and talked a lot on this and related subjects, I had become older and though not wiser, certainly more resigned. I decided, fatalistically (followers of my career through *Opinion* will remember my conversion to fatalism!) to do what little I could in the lives of those whose lives touched mine and then leave it at that. But by now, word had got around that I was this sort of a cantankerous person. Women began to write to me, putting before me their problems, asking some sort of help, if not help then advice and if not advice, then at least succor and sympathy. The letters fell, roughly, into three groups. One kind wanted

to work at a money-paying job and couldn't because of "resistance to that idea" from husbands. The other kind wanted to go back to school or college, now that the children were grown up, also from a desire that in the future this education would enable them to become economically a little more independent. The third group was simply fed up of their husbands and wanted out but could not get out for they had no other means of livelihood and the husbands were just waiting for them to get out so that they, the husbands, could charge desertion and get out of paying alimony or support. These were the problems of essentially middle-class women. Women more or less like me. In trying to find answers to their problems, some help, some succor, I finally came to realise that though there are things that can be done for them, all of these things would need organisation and determination and sacrifices on the part of the women and a thorough self-examination. So I put my suggestion before the readers of *Opinion*. They are as follows:

1. For the first and second category of women, I could want an arrangement by which they receive a monetary return for their work at home. Assuming a reasonably friendly relationship between the husband and wife, we can stop calling this money "a payment", because a lot of men and women stick at this word, thinking that it denigrates what is basically a loving and sharing relationship. So I would want these couples to make an annual budget based on the family's income. Note, I say *family's* income and not *husband's* income. That budget would include items like "family's clothes" (not "four saris for the wife"), "family's education", "family's food", "family's savings", and so on. Based on this budget, the couple would then make out a monthly budget (or weekly, if the pay comes in weekly). After subtracting for the expenses, whatever money remains would then be shared equally by the husband and wife. What either does with his or her share must remain entirely an individual matter. The wife may use it to finance her further education, may invest in wisely and make herself a nest-egg which may allow her to take a stand in the situation of her wanting to do something against the wishes of the rest of the family, and so on.
2. For those women who, after spending fifteen to twenty years at home, out of the mainstream of the job-market, suddenly find their situation at home unbearable or untenable and want out, I would want a community property law, such as exists in some States of America. This law gives a woman equal share in the man's earnings and in the property, wealth or goods purchased with these earnings. A wife of fifteen years whom the husband tells to march out, can then go to court and demand a half share in his flat or house or zopid; car or bicycle or transistor radio. This is a job for women's organizations and would require an active support from women legislators, jurists and lawyers.
3. The last and third suggestion also concerns organization. The women in the job-markets, that is, women who work at some remunerative occupation outside of the house already have occasion to come together and are thus easily organised (if they wish to be). It is the

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housewife, isolated and imprisoned in her own home and not wishing to come out and pour out her tale of woe (admit loss of face?) who still remains a victim of tyranny. Organisation and vocalisation are the two real weapons against any tyranny and she is not in a position to benefit from either. So I suggest another sort of an organisation for housewives which would help its members in distress, with advice, with actual money, with some shelter, with legal aid, with job-placement—all through liaison with other women's organisations such as women-lawyers (free legal advice), women doctors, women executives or businesswomen. And one last word to think over. Both men and women are really brought up during their most formative and impressionable years, by women. I want to ask mothers to take great and unending care of bringing up both boys and girls absolutely equally; only as human beings, as useful human beings and not as human beings of this sex or that. Don't ever let it pass your lips: "you must learn this or that, because, after all, you are a girl", "you must not do this and that because you are a girl", "what does it matter if he doesn't know this? After all, he is a boy", "Don't ask him to do that, that's a woman's job". Just swear to yourself that you will never do this. Examine every word and sentence that passes your lips for this insidious sexist poison. Determine to live like a pauper on two bits of your own earning rather than like a pretty prattling canary in a gilded cage on someone else's princely salary. You know, Women of the World, Unite! You Have Nothing to Lose But Your Fetters!

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