

***“Some introductory notes
to a social symphony”***

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It is an honour for me to give this talk. I will try to offer an interesting mixture of big and little facts and ideas – first about freedom and then about peace-making. I will cite some 20th-century writers whom some of you youngsters may perhaps not have encountered before, and may be glad to know about.

A first-rate mid-20th-century Western thinker and writer about social “gender inequality” was Simone de Beauvoir (1906-1986). She envisaged in 1949, in a book entitled *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949; more than a thousand pages long*), that women and men would *together* implement an emancipation of women from passively submissive roles in society, and that

*I read the book in translation in the 1960s. The translation was of poor quality and gave her an reputation in Anglophone countries of being an inelegant writer.

two crucial steps toward that emancipation would be increases in the use of contraceptives and in women's access to paid employment. (She meant decent paid employment, not prostitution. Here I should perhaps mention that in the USA, but not in France, the government had during World War II urged women to work in industrial factories since so many men were engaged in fighting the war abroad.)

A token of the fact that women have gained more access to decent gainful employment since the decade when Simone de Beauvoir was writing that book is that some of them have gained employment as the leaders or foreign ministers of their countries – women with names like Indira, Golda, Margaret, Angela, Hilary and Sushma....

One way of sustaining paternalism in Western culture in the first half of the 20th century had been – in Germany – a crunchy slogan the most common version of which was “*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*” (“children, kitchen, church”). There were variants with other K-words such as “*Kleider*” (“clothing”) or “*Kultur*”. The thrust was, however, always in keeping with the opinion of the

German emperor, Wilhelm II (whose wife bore him 7 children in the first 11 years of their marriage), that German women shouldn't be concerned with "the attainment of alleged rights" (Wilhelm felt that the men could do whatever ought to be done about that), they should, instead, immerse themselves in "quiet work at home and in the family" (*"in der stillen Arbeit zuhause und in der Familie"*).

A revised version of the slogan in the 1980s – “*Kinder, Küche, Karriere*” – may be realistic for some modern women. Many of you know more about that than I do. I think it’s too facile if it refers to women only and not to men too. If it refers to both, then it offers implicitly a chance for men with jobs to enrich their lives by working shorter hours and spending some of each day on “quiet work at home and in the family”.

A recent sign of the times apropos is that a politically right-wing but nonetheless offbeat and thoughtful Harvard Business School professor, Arthur Brooks, has for several years now, been publishing gender-free remarks in the following vein: “A lot of our happiness is out of our control.... But some of it we can control. It requires [that] *we* [my italics; this means men as well as women] invest in four things *each day*” [again my italics], namely, “faith, family, friends and work in which we earn our success and serve others.”

A big recent fact which might have pleased Simone de Beauvoir had she been able to observe it is that the social norms of courtship are now changing radically wherever young women have been to school and have access to the Web. Women used to be ignorant about things like geography and national economies. (A tiny but representative historical fact is that Gandhi's very sensible and down-to-earth wife was uncertain whether London is in England or *vice versa*.)

But now they know a lot, and they know that lots more babies isn't the need of the day and that a woman can be womanly enough without bearing a big brood. In the West, where love matches have been normal for a long time, women used to accept a lot of ill-mannered behaviour from the young men courting them, in order to be reasonably certain of fulfilling their natural instinct to have children and raise them. But now we are seeing (let me cite Shakespeare out of context) "...a sea-change / Into something rich and strange."

Let me mention here some recent (in the last half-dozen years) neurological findings about psychological effects, on men, of parenthood or prospective parenthood (in marriage). According to one study, “Fathers who spend more daily time with their children show lower levels of testosterone.” The report mentions that MRI studies “have shown that fathers, similarly to mothers, activate regions of the [brain which have been shown to be] ... involved in empathy and prosocial behaviors not only in parents but also in the general population”, and it says

that “the more weekly hours a father spent alone with his infant, the higher the functional connectivity.” Another report – of a study of 27 couples having their first baby – assesses “whether prenatal hormone changes” were associated with “self- and partner-reported parenting outcomes at three months post-partum”. It found that “Expectant fathers showed pre-natal declines in testos-

terone” *and* that women “whose partners showed larger testosterone declines also reported receiving more support and more help with household tasks” – “evidence that prenatal hormone changes may indeed be functional and that the implications of these changes may be detectable by co-parents.”*

*See www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8152902 and <https://academic.oup.com/cercorcomms/article/1/1/tgaa082/5955504>.

(Those last two phrases are in the subjunctive mode since the study was of only 27 couples. But the point is clear, and a neurological study of 2700 couples is unlikely to become feasible.)

I have cited these technical studies because I sense a psychological linkup, in men as well as in women, between devoted parenting at home and wishing for peace in national and international affairs.

It may be suitable to mention here that during the part of Gandhi's career in Africa when he evolved from excellent and utterly ethical lawyer to mahatma, he would cite with unstinting admiration a Hindu philosophical precept – devised (in English) by Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland in collaboration with each other – that “In order to be made in the image of God, the individual [soul] must be spiritually both man and woman.”

Let me conclude with a citation from an offbeat mid-20th century Harvard University Professor of Human Development, Erik Erikson, who didn't know much about neurology but was expert in Freudian psychiatry. He wrote a great book entitled *Childhood and Society* and an insightful psychobiology of Gandhi. In 1960, the year he was appointed to his Harvard professorship, he published the following remarks about women:

“Lest their men discard and abandon them in the periodical pursuits [which men like to go in for] in [international] competition, conquest, and war, women are apt to refrain from questioning these pursuits, which, again and again, lead to the disruption of the home and to the slaughter of sons. They pretend that they really believe in war ... [but] actually they have merely learned to accept as inevitable a martial excitement which is

essentially outside their comprehension. It may well be that war cannot be banned until women, for the sake of a worthwhile survival, dare to recognize and to support the as yet undeveloped power of unarmed resistance. But here women must first learn to understand their fear of being abandoned and [hence] their unwillingness to question judiciously man's cultivation of war for war's sake."