

## THE GENDER DIVISION AT HOME

“Amen ... Amen ... A...m...e...n”, that was my mother’s response to express her strong agreement to whatever my aunt was conveying on the other side of the phone. My mother could hardly cover up her happiness as she said those words repeatedly; her wide smile and wide eyes danced with glee. Hoping to get some clarification about my mom’s peculiar demeanor, I asked about her conversation as soon as she ended her chat. Then, my mother launched into her response by disclosing that my aunt was giving her blessing as a token of her appreciation for something she did. Though I received the answer I was hoping for, I noticed something odd in their conversation. In her blessings, my aunt specifically wished for my brothers to finish their school, get a good job, and become financially stable. As for me, the only girl in the family, instead of hoping for the same things as my brothers, my aunt wished me a good husband and healthy kids.

Indeed, our measurement of success lays the groundwork for our blessings and wishes. Sadly we can easily observe in my aunt’s blessing that when we talk about success and its definition, it differs for men and women, which tend to fall along stereotypical gender lines. Women’s success is evaluated by their marital status and child-rearing. On the other hand, men are assessed by their educational echelon and financial security. I have no doubt that my aunt also has this flawed manner of estimating success differently for men and women, and that is the reason why her blessing differed between my brothers and me. This kind of faulty thinking is also the reason why women and men take different roles at the family setting.

Unfortunately, these gender roles did not start nor end with my mom’s and aunt’s conversation. They have existed for thousands of years in various parts of the world in different shapes and forms, limiting women’s activities to the household. Women in ancient Greece were seen as a liability and their only value to society was their ability to give birth, preferably to boys [1]. In the 13th and 14th Centuries, numerous societies across the globe considered

women to be weak and as unable to do anything other than cook and clean [2]. The social structure in the 16th century in European countries women were expected to focus on practical domestic pursuits and activities that encouraged the betterment of their families, and more particularly, their husbands [3].

Certainly, there are reasons to celebrate how far we've come since those times. The societal force that compelled women to aspire to only marriage and raising kids has abated over time. Similarly, the cultures that coerce men to fight for financial status, and castigate him for involving himself in his own child parenting more than the "usual" has decreased. However, besides my aunt's blessings, there are traces of imposed gender roles that give me the audacity to claim that gender norms at the family setting are not entirely eliminated.

The new Labour proclamation which has been approved by the House of People's Representatives on July 5th, 2019 is an epitome to show the existence of gender roles in our community. As an issue of legal updates, key changes on the labor proclamation have been introduced to the public. Thus, if you get the opportunity to read it, you can see that maternity leave has been extended from 90 consecutive days to 120 consecutive days. Additionally, the law includes paternity leave for three consecutive days [4].

The new edict should receive admiration for recognizing the necessity of extended maternity leave and including paternal leave for the first time. Understanding that new mothers require more time at home because they stand in need of the both the physical recovery and caring for/bonding with the child is a laudable act. In addition, the decision to include paternity leave in the labor proclamation is a praiseworthy deed. However, this proclamation does not exactly include an adequate time needed for "care and bonding" to new fathers. It also assumes that the mother is the primary caregiver, and the role of bonding with the child is not sex neutral.

I believe this supposition can be linked to the notion that the main responsibility of women in the family setting is giving birth and taking care of the children all on her own. Equivalently, the pressure of earning money and providing for the family lies entirely on the man. As a consequence, when a baby is born, women automatically assume the responsibility of taking care of the baby without any question or hesitation. On the other hand, forming a bond with the child and taking care of him/her is not seen as a priority for new fathers.

Though our society doesn't seem to recognize the repercussions that come along with this culture, it is true that gender roles at the family setting causes multifaceted problems. These rigid constraints not only disadvantage both parents and newborn babies and children, but they also cripple our country's economy. In this traditional family setting, the mother often becomes financially dependent on her husband, which often gives the upper hand in the decision making process to him. This also makes it difficult for mothers and wives to get out of a physically abusive marriage. We should also emphasize the economic consequence of this culture in our country. The customs we hold so dearly to our hearts take away the choice of learning, working, and earning money from women, who are half of the population count in Ethiopia. Their faith is sealed. As a result, their contributions to the measured economic activity, growth, and well-being are near to the ground. Instead of taking advantage of their raw potential for the development of our country, we force women to be taken care of and become a burden. If we wish to economically grow and overcome our indigence, we should be able to remove impediments to the participation of women including our culture that wishes them to stay at home and hatch children. The recent report, "Women, Work and the economy" published by the International Monetary Fund supports this claim. It testifies that closing gender gaps in the labor market would raise GDP in the United States by 5 percent, the United Arab Emirates by 12 percent, and Egypt by 34 percent. Thus, we all should be aware that we are passing up a potential social and economic country growth because of our norm [5].

Men are often exempted from allocating time to bond with and provide care to their own children. As a result, they do not get the opportunity to form a healthy relationship with their daughters and sons. Furthermore, the newborn baby will be at a disadvantage because he/she will never get the chance to see two different perspectives and personalities, which might cause him to lose the opportunity to have a well-rounded emotional and intellectual experience.

In conclusion, our society and culture have shaped and reshaped all of us to fall into rigid categories based on our gender and expect us to act in accordance with our grouping. Thus, when one decides to take the initial steps of forming a family by marrying and bringing a child into his/her world, they are forced more than ever to take specific roles in the households that confirm society standards. You see, in this demarcated society, there is little to no room for women who would choose their career over having a family, or who would like to advance their career or education after giving birth. Similarly, the act of changing diapers or cooking by fathers is still seen as a taboo. This not only robs our right to have our own personalities but also forces half of the Ethiopian population to become part of the problem rather than the solution. Thus, I urge everyone to avoid falling into the pit society has restored for us. A woman's success should not only be evaluated solely based on her family, and a man should not be judged by his financial status. The family and money criterion can be and should be gender-neutral, and the next time my aunt calls she should wish us all a good marriage, great children, a satisfactory job, and a decent earning.

By Kalkidan Asmamaw

## References

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