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*SOAP BOX*

WHY SHOULDN'T MEN HAVE BABIES?

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I read somewhere that it is now physically possible for a foetus to be transplanted into a man's body and successfully grown to full term. If this is indeed true, we can at last hope for a more equal world. And if this procedure is not yet medically feasible, let's direct all our resources to turning this fantasy into reality!

Just think of the benefits that would accrue to all mankind with this one 'design change'. Let's start at the beginning. Since there would be equal chances for both girls and boys to get pregnant, girls would not be pushed into purdah (whether literal or metaphorical) and would be allowed as much freedom as their brothers. Then since males would be as likely to get confined to the house during pregnancies as females, the automatic division of male and female jobs would cease. Boys would be encouraged to learn how to cook and clean, knit and sew just as girls are today.

There already are women in the fields of science, engineering, finance and law, that were at one time considered male dominated professions. Once both men and women are forced to juggle the many roles of being a housewife/house husband; full-time mother/father, professional, perhaps there would be many men who would opt for being primary school teachers, nurses, secretaries. Both men and women would be truly free to choose the career they have the aptitude and inclination to pursue.

We get the 'nagging wives' syndrome when naturally assertive and aggressive women are forced into the subservient role of meek housewife, while the 'violent men' who wreak havoc on the domestic front are usually weak men who are strait-jacketed into careers where they are required to be decisive and dominating. Once it is realised that either husband or wife can get pregnant, there would be less pressure on both partners to adopt stereotypes that are so personally destructive.

The power structure of a male dominant society rests on many factors. One is the fact that through the man is the provider for the family, since he does not physically bear the child and is less involved with its nurturing, it's been easy for him to walk away. The wife who fears abandonment, since she knows her market value both as an employee as well as a marriage partner is low because she is fettered with 'encumbrances', (children are indeed encumbrances in our society, as any page of matrimonial advertisements will tell you!) does anything to keep a relationship going. Such a state of affairs is beneficial actually neither to man nor women. Surely everyone would be happier in more equal, more open relationships

I think the travails of a pregnancy and the pain of labour will go a long way in stopping the obsession for male children that exists in most Indian men today. Ask the men you know whether they'd like to be pregnant. I have asked at least a hundred and have yet to find one who is keen on the idea!

But the real advantage of men bearing children will be the way the world will change to make life so much more comfortable for everyone –men, women and young children. You only have to see how men have organised life for themselves as bureaucrats, executives, judges and doctors to see what is possible even in a country as poor and underprivileged as ours. If men got pregnant too, you can be pretty sure we'd soon enough have 'siesta rooms' for pregnant people (even noticed male siesta rooms in elite clubs?), in offices, airport lounges and railway rest rooms; ditto for nursing rooms. Offices, planes, trains perhaps even shopping centres would hand out free disposable nappies, throwaway milk bottles and cereal containers. We'd probably see trained nurses and baby sitters at theatres and cinema halls, flower shows, trade exhibitions and glitzy parties. Children, finally would be part and parcel of our lives. And why not? If you ask me that's the way it should be.

If scientists can engineer high yielding seeds, flowers of a certain colour, calves of a predetermined sex, why can't they work on a way to make men pregnant? Can you think of a better way to a happier world?

HOME

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