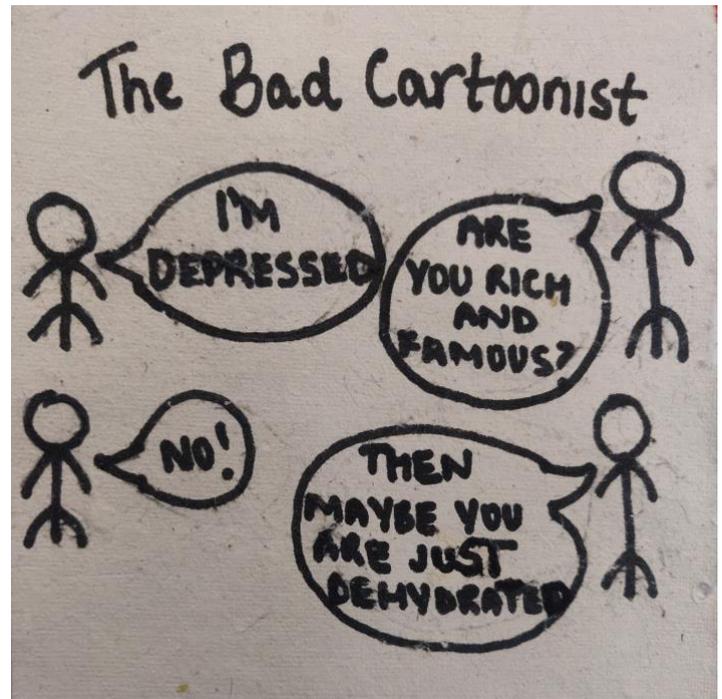


THE PAMPHLETEER

And We Thought We Could Never Die.

I used to think when I was little,
that life wasn't so brittle,
that it couldn't just slip away,
without my consent on just any day.
I believed I had some power,
I couldn't just slip in the shower,
and there would never be a sudden end,
to any person I called my friend.
I watched death like a sport on the news,
suffering only a few emotional cues,
as I heard of the soldiers at the border,
and the fires we use as news fodder.
We talked of impending world war,
and a disease that would have us done for,
with the ease of leading to the their death,
wooden chess pieces that couldn't take a breath.
We forgot we could vanish,
that it wasn't in our hand who we banish.
We forgot to try,
because we forgot we could die.
And now the world chooses to remind us,
that we could be just as unwanted as pus.
We watch the death toll rise like a magnificent tree,
and we can no longer tell ourselves it won't be me.
An indiscriminating enemy is the hardest to fight,
especially when nothing wins, not money nor
might.
We do what we know to hide in a comfortable pit,
the "new normal" we'll be calling it.
But what is so new about hiding from one another
in fear?
What is so new about shifting houses so our hate
we can more safely steer?
It would be new if I stepped six-feet away and still
helped you,
not six-feet under as someone you never knew.
Science tells us to cover our mouths and step away,
It doesn't tell us to shun all that you may.
It tells us to be vigilant and cautious,
not hate on one another on a platform more
noxious.
If all we bring into this world from behind closed
doors,
is this hate that no animal exhibits on all fours,
then we might as well go outside,
and end this animosity-fueled ride.
If ads make us so angry,
and even in death all we see is conspiracy,
if we believe the world is but a jail,
and the human race is destined to fail,
then why are we sitting inside scared of a viral
disease,
when to our world fear has already signed the
lease?



How can you be more sensitive to issues of caste?

1. Accept that caste-based discrimination continues to be an issue in India that cannot be wished away and needs to be discussed even when there hasn't been a brutal rape and murder.
2. Stop bringing up reservations every single time an issue of caste is discussed. Reservations are an allied-issue, not the heart of what caste does and signifies in this country.
3. Stop insisting that people tell you their last name.
4. If people do tell you their last name, don't classify them by caste out loud.
5. If people come to your home to work, show them the same respect you would anyone else who comes to your home. As them to rest on the furniture, not the floor. Offer them drinks in glasses you use yourself. Question yourself as to why these things don't come naturally.
6. Don't be defensive if someone shares that they have suffered due to their caste, it is not an attack on you.
7. Don't say "I don't see caste" because that doesn't mean you don't discriminate on the basis of caste, it means you have had the privilege of an existence where caste has not impacted your life.
8. Don't dismiss the life-experience of another person because it does not agree with your idea of your country. Things can be good and bad in one place. Everything is not a fight.
9. Be willing to have discussions and allow them to alter your beliefs and behaviours. We've all held beliefs that have changed over the years as we learnt more, don't stop learning.
10. Be kind.

Why Do We Insist on Viewing Women's Income as Pocket Money?

It's not the same," he explained to me with a haughty expression on his face, "Women don't have the same pressure on their salaries as men do, we have to use ours for rent and yours are for buying fun things..."

It wasn't the first time I had heard something like that, it's a commonly repeated trope that depending on the source comes out in different ways. My mother used to tell me that women have to be financially independent for safety whereas men had to do it to run their households. My former partner used to say that my income was unreliable because career-based stability was a rarity for women what with marriage and children, and he said this with confidence even though I paid our rent with my salary that I got from my stable job. An aunt once told me it's good that I have a hobby that brings in some pocket money for me to get myself things. I'm sure all employed women have heard that. It's common to equivocate a woman's salary to an allowance given to them by authority figures as opposed to employers.

Despite myself I try to understand where these ideas are coming from, I understand that historically men have been dominant in the role of making money. Even early female writers and artists who gained fame made only a fraction of the money their male counterparts did. In many Indian households, even today, the women step out to make money because the man is unable to make enough to support the family which is why female employment rates are higher among lower-income sections of society. It has been traditional to view a woman's income as supplementary because for a large part, it has been. In many families, a woman who does have an income may not have control over the income or have only partial control over it because of which women are less likely to have real disposable income. In low-income households where the men may be afflicted with gambling habits or alcoholism, a woman's income has even lesser potential of being disposable because the supplementary income may in-effect be considered primary even though women are less likely to be paid at par with men especially in jobs relying on unskilled labour or requiring no educational qualifications.

On the other end of this spectrum are qualified women who sometimes as a function of our privilege and sometimes as a function of hard work and education are able to compete with men in fields that have been male-driven for centuries. There is tendency for us to marry into middle-income families where one salary is usually enough to run a household and the second, usually the woman's salary, comprises the entirety of the disposable income of the household. In the absence of this disposable income the standard of living of these families would decline substantially but because we rarely regard personal finances with the same nuance that is afforded economy, we fail to see this disposable income as a valuable part of our household economy because it is used to buy granola bars and trips to the mountains as opposed to air-conditioning and grains. My friend who tried to explain to me the distinction between a man's salary and a woman's failed to see this. He failed to see the income as a function of financial management and not the nature of the expense incurred by it, to him the deciding factor as to what money is worthwhile was based on who made more and where it was spent and I could not convince him otherwise.

I could not explain to him that not only does the culmination of this attitude towards women's income lead to the disparity in pay-scale that afflicts women in every professional spectrum either by way of lower wages or fewer time-scale promotions or lesser asset-accumulation but this attitude also discounts those who are most afflicted by it. There are single women in this country who may or may not intend to remain that way. There are widowed women who single-handedly support their families. There are women with infirm husbands or parents who may have debt. When we don't pay these women enough because we let cultural bias dominate financial decisions as employers and view their incomes as supplementary, we unfairly reduce their chances of attaining financial self-sufficiency. Any woman can tell you, independence has to be bought. Freedom has to be bought. The right to make your own decisions has to be pried out of the cold hands of the patriarchy with enough money to end dependency on authority figures or elements of community-based control. Having a job isn't enough if you cannot fully support yourself on it. Being from a rich family isn't enough if you can't control what you do with money that is rightfully yours. Being educated isn't enough if you are not allowed to work if married.

We deny the systems that exist to control women, but culturally we try to ensure that women never have enough money or control over it to be able to opt to remain single. There are various cultural forces that push women to conformity but the financial ones are the most effective. This is the truth. However if a woman were to recognise this truth and marry for money, then she's a gold-digger. If a woman expresses her desire to make money the way a man might, she's too ambitious and ambition on women is cute when we are nineteen but they time we are twenty-five it's like a hairy mole on our noses. It must be removed with an expensive and painful ceremony that reaffirms our role as the beautiful ones. There is no right way for a woman to want money and own it.

At the heart of it, I suspect, it's because we cannot handle a woman with an ego. Like much else, ego has been the prerogative of men for millennia. A woman is supposed to be kind, gentle and grateful whereas men must be strong, accomplished and ambitious. Men are allowed to be egoistic without consequence and often with reward, whereas girls are told right from the beginning to not be arrogant or over-confident. Men are encouraged to take opportunities and women are encouraged to be grateful for the ones we get. Even today it is harder for me to demand or deduce my worth in monetary terms than it is for any man my age because I, like thousands of other women, have offended men before by demanding more than they were willing to pay for a woman's worth. If we showed women in exact monetary terms just how much their skills are worth, surely that would inflate our heads and give us a massive ego. And as a society we hold the female ego responsible for all social ills that befall us.

Women are egoistic now that is why there are more failed marriages. That is why there are more rapes. That is why we dress in tiny clothes and go out at all hours of the night. As a society we have decided to blame all of that on female liberation but better than blame is to stall it, and that is what they are doing when they tell you your salary is pocket money. They're making us smaller so we can't be seen if we stand on our own.

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