

Who Can Decorate Your Mind?

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Kenny Rogers's song "And you decorated my life/ Created a world" was thought meant for a single person, probably a lady-love; the lines can make you think that one's life is decorated by others. When people fall in love, they make such overstatement by giving all credits to their lovers but if you are not in that situation you should consider the fact that your life is decorated not only by a single person but many others who are directly or indirectly involved with you. At any rate, the song expresses how the mind becomes pure and effulgent, how it brings joy in life and how a man after being love-stricken could realize that his life has been decorated (shaped) by his lady-love. It is the mind machine that exerts the man to claim his life to be worthwhile, a decorated one. But I am not interested about how one's life is decorated or when one can claim one's life to be worthwhile or an idealistic one rather I enquire about the architects of your minds, the people who actually help you decorate your minds. Having a penetration in thought, I took an impromptu decision to write on it. I am not a psychologist, not even a neurobiologist; I hardly dare to read your mind but I can call your attention to think about the question which I have raised in the title of this essay.

The word 'decorate' is used as a signifier to express different 'workings' of mind. Indeed, this term can be applied to communicate with certain emotions and feelings that seem incomprehensible. However, in an attempt to give answer to the question which I drew up in the title, you would start naming people like your parents, teachers; great people or eminent personalities as the architects of your mind. No doubt that these people have great contribution to develop your mind but have you ever thought that the people whom you often mention are

also allowed by you to decorate your mind because you like them for certain reasons. So, the question is whom do you allow to decorate your mind?

You hardly admit the fact that your mind is also decorated for who you should ignore or even dislike. The phrase 'decoration of mind' is not necessarily conceived with a positive connotation; it rather exhibits the whole interior of your mind, both the positive and negative emotions. Many people who you think are ignorable because they cannot earn popularity, respect or recognition by others. In this context I can refer Sigmund Freud "It is impossible to escape the impression that people commonly use false standards of measurement – that they seek power, success and wealth for themselves and admire them in others, and that they underestimate what is of true value in life." If you are preoccupied with an oligarchic mind set, then how fairly your mind is decorated?

Being Indian you must be familiar with the hijras, the indigenous alternative sexual people of India but you do not pay attention to them because they are not socially empowered. The lives of the hijras came to our knowledge only after the publication of a few autobiographies written by them but how many of you read those books to decorate (educate) your mind. Without even reading those books, you devalue them because you have no empathy for these people. In the field of humanities especially students of English literature are privileged to be introduced with different people/ characters of different societies. The English Department of Jadavpur University has recently decided to make a case study on Suchitra, a transgender teacher working in a private school of Kolkata. The purpose is for students to develop the ability to understand the sentiments and feelings of the marginalized and get them aware of unequal distribution of gender and power. Suchitra was given a chance to narrate some of the stories of her life describing her struggles, sexual assaults, exploitation and injustice. Her lecture could decorate (effect on) the minds of the students so powerfully that many had tears in their eyes after listening to her. Nilanjana Deb, a faculty member says "Most of our students

in the English department are of the elite category, who have very little idea of the lives of the marginalised, like transgender persons...We were woken up from our slumber with a jolt by Suchitra.” From her statement it can be said that the minds of students are class-fixed and therefore they could not imagine that a marginalized person or someone of relatively lower class can also decorate their mind. They could hardly acknowledge these people until their teachers get them acquainted with Suchitra. But the students who are so called elitists are born and brought up in India and they must have seen the transgender people on streets and in many other places but why did they ignore them so long. How fairly can their minds be decorated (enlightened) unless they develop empathy for the ‘others’? The students pay attention to these people only when these people are made engaged into the educational programme which the students are bound to respect. The minds of the students are so constrained that even if something like the issues of transgender introduced for the first time in academics can immediately change their mindset because the students always remain loyal to academics.

Hijras of India have always been categorized as ‘other’ for their alternative sexual identity. They could hardly eradicate the hatred that you bear for them. But you cannot be fully blamed for your intolerance towards them because your mind is programmed to respond differently to the people of different ranks, classes and identities. The first notable research on hijras was made by Serena Nanda and her research was partially aided by a grant from University of New York PSC-CUNY Research Award Programme in 1985, 1986, and 1989. Serena was born and brought up in US; her first encounter with the hijras was in 1971 while walking with an Indian friend on a main street of Bombay. She found that two people in female clothing stood in front of them blocking their way. They clapped their hands in a particular manner and then spread out their hands as a request for alms. Her friend hurriedly gave them a few Pennines and then dragged her along at quick pace. Serena asked her friend who these people were and why did she react so strongly at their presence. Her friend just nodded her head and without replying

she changed the subject. Serena sensed her discomfort and let the matter go but she later discussed the incident with other Indian friends. She learned a little about the hijras from them and also realized the fact that their lives “appeared shrouded in great secrecy and around whom there appeared to be a conspiracy of silence”. Indeed, Serena also maintained the secrecy in her book by using pseudonyms for all the individuals and places except only the major cities of India. She expresses “ In this book, I hope to send "through the thickets of our separateness " the very human voice s of individuals who seem, at first glance, very different from most people, exotic, perhaps even bizarre, but who share in our common humanity.” From her previous visits to India she knew that most of the Indians are middle class and they are acquainted with the hijras only through their public rituals that is performances on auspicious rituals in marriage and child birth. Only few male acquaintances informed her that hijras works as male prostitute. Besides this little information, she could not know anything about them. Then she decides to meet the hijras because without meeting them she could not “distinguish fact from fiction, myth from reality”. In 1981, having a sabbatical leave from her university, Serena came to live in Bastipur located in Bombay, a place where a large number of hijras live. She later came to be in a long term relationship with her research subjects. Indeed, she visited India several times to meet the hijras whom with she developed mental bonding. She expresses “We develop attachments that are a very important part of not only our fieldwork, but also of our lives. These attachments are subject to the same vulnerabilities of loss that characterize our most important relationships at home.” Serena sets an example about how adventurous one’s mind should be and how independently one can feed one’s mind to be truly decorated.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak founded the Pares Chandra and Sivani Chakravorty Memorial Literacy Project, which operates some rural schools in West Bengal. These schools are founded in dirt-poor villages where most of the people belong to lower castes. Though, Spivak teaches in Columbia University on doctorate level, a rich private university of US, she

never forgets to work with the people of her country especially who are subaltern, marginalized and who have no access to mobility. She never fears to take challenge of upgrading their lives; she visits her schools several times in a year and teaches the underprivileged students with utmost care. She does not bother to live there without regular amenities and even with no flushing toilets. Being invited by The Akademie der Verlernens, she gave a lecture at Vienna City Hall where she expresses how she could become intimate with the people of the villages. Before even trying to exercise her altruistic act she tells them “I am your enemy because I was born a caste Hindu. I do not believe in anything, not did my parents. I am good. My parents were fantastic...But two generations do not undo thousands of years of denying you the right to intellectual labour.” Her honest confession actually reflects her deep insight of increasing involvement with the lower caste/class people for their social inclusion. She suggests learning from everyone irrespective of class, caste and also asks “to learn how to work with mind machine that have been destroyed by your own ancestors.” So, you have to rearrange your mind by keeping yourself away from the mental attitude that they (the ‘others’) are not as good as you are. Spivak is against class-parted education and she thinks real academy is in great trouble. So, at the end of the lecture she wishes, “Let the academy be what the first academy was which is to say walking about. There is a walk about... They walked as they learnt. I think it would be a great idea to move around and not have wonderful rooms (she indicated the city hall) and corporate existence.” Serena and Spivak actually show you how to decorate minds from real life experiences. Both of them work in US universities, but they constantly collect information from the people who are disenfranchised, marginalized and even unidentified. They decorate their minds as best as possible by continuous searching of lives that seem unrevealed. Hence, you should train your mind in a way that you can learn from anyone irrespective of class, caste, gender, race, location as to have your minds truly decorated.

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