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NJAC Viewpoint

Women Must Redefine self

Since the Trinidad and Tobago Revolution of 1970 many people who have obtained economic advantages have relaxed their vigilance and deny that deep social problems still exist. In fact, we behave as if we have arrived. And this climate of denial, internalised, racism manifested by self hate and low self esteem have intensified. To use the words of one of our poets and artistes, we would do well to realize that ‘The journey NOW START!’

We need to examine our social attitudes to our young women. Does our culture affirm our young women? Young men have been seen to ‘use’ girls to enhance their prestige with the consent and admiration of both men and women whilst the broken hearted girl is regarded as stupid, cheap and lacking in self worth. Many young girls before they can even begin to think, are encouraged to become sexually active. This later gives rise to very low self esteem as these same girls are later asked to value themselves by their virginity. These types of attitudes still pervade our culture and are definitely some of the ways in which women are continually devalued and subordinated.

Men remain the holders of women’s identity. There must be an acknowledgement that children need to have their value, their beauty reflected back to them. How can our young women sustain self respect, the feeling that she is loved when all around, her femaleness is objectified and subordinated. Girls today still struggle to emancipate themselves from this overwhelming influence.

This search for love outside of self is one of the greatest illusions of our time. Not understanding our value or our beauty, we continually feel that we have to do something to WIN LOVE. The inner trial is an endless battle of the mind that keeps us locked into self hate? It gives others the ability to use as a dumping ground for stress. We look to the wrong people for affirmation and remain trapped and stressed by it all.

OPAL ODISA states that stress is hemmed into women’s dresses, braided into their hair, painted on their fingers. Stress from Deferred Dreams, Dreams not voiced, broken promises and blatant lies.

Within our collective wisdom we will create NEW answers. The black woman has had to face both systems of domination of Sexism and Racism. But whether the problem is political or personal, there is need to bring creative and spiritual energy to provide solutions. In the struggle with sexism and relationship with men, women may learn the truth that love must be the basis in all relationships.

Reference to love here is not to romantic notions, but to that spiritual energy that allows you to make contact and embrace fully yourself, others and the world at large. In respect of others, it manifests as service and sacrifice; in term of self it manifests as healthy

choices, inner confidence and gentleness; in respect of life, it manifests as a general sense of well being and joy.

When we embrace all of ourselves, the good, the bad and the ugly, with compassion; when we can hold each other with gentleness and encourage each other to accept our experiences; when healthier choices can be made, then that first step to self recovery would have been taken.

We must learn to articulate our pain. But even more important we must also learn to listen with all our being all of ourselves so that we could perceive the essence and flavour of what is being said. In this way our collective wisdom will emerge. In the National Joint Action Committee, Chief Servant Makandal Daaga constantly reminds the women of the organisation of the African proverb which states that “when a man is born a universe is born, but when a woman is born GOD THE CREATOR comes to earth”. Within the collective wisdom of the BLACK WOMAN, the spirit of THE CREATOR will speak, as she learns to face and defeat the twin evils of sexism and racism. Thus the challenge of the 21st Century Black Women is to learn to redefine themselves and establish a reality that we’ve helped to create, but to do so with Love. Not only because it will heal us, but the inward journey to Emancipation demands that we travel on the road of Love.

At this point of the journey, you hear the men speak in terms of ‘respect and elevate the woman’. But for men to truly observe this principle, they must make their own inward journey and deal with their internalised RACISM and SEXISM. Women must realize that men can only respect and elevate them to the extent of their own inward journey of emancipation. If men do not transcend their prejudices, they will remain at a level of consciousness where they are unable to perceive the true value and beauty of the black woman. Such respect and elevation can only be superficial.

Thus true respect is a manifestation of the inner journey of EMANCIPATION. At that Destination no one will have to say RESPECT and ELEVATE the woman, for as he walks the Road of Love, he will of his own accord discard FOREVER the tight dirty garment of Domination and Control.