

thirty years has lived as, say, Sushila Rajan, suddenly on being married, becomes Promila Devshi. Was it not a colonialist strategy to deny the colonised his/her identity in order to more fully enslave them? Is that not why more and more Africans today are shedding the Western so-called Christian names they were baptised with?

For the Kenyan Gujaratis, who are essentially a commercial petit-bourgeoisie, it is not enough to have property, it must be bought and sold. So when a marriage is in the offing you will hear Gujaratis ask "Koni cholkri lidhi?" ("Whose daughter did they buy or take?") The word lidhi is used for taking or buying commodities from a shop.) Others will ask "Chokri kone didhi?" ("Who did they give the girl to?") This is really degrading to the Gujarati woman who is reduced to a mere object.

In commonly spoken Gujarati, the words for woman are stri and bairi. These words are also used to mean wife. The word for girl is chokri which can also mean daughter. There is therefore no specific word to describe a woman who is independent of both parents and husband and is a person in her own right. A widow is addressed as Ganga Swaroop but there is no equivalent title for a widower. For in Gujarati society, when a woman loses her husband, her entire status changes and in fact drops dramatically. But a man whose wife dies does not experience any such upheaval. The most respectful and caring title one can give to a married Gujarati woman is Akhand sobhagyavati—this means "May your husband live forever!"

The status of women is that of commodities to be exchanged and this finds clear expression in the language. In some communities, the value of the commodity is so low that the unfortunate parents of the woman have to provide all sorts of additional value to procure a husband for her.

CAN A WOMAN BE "MAN OF THE YEAR"?

Then we have those words and phrases which clearly refer to the male, but are



Women are told they shouldn't be so sensitive about the issue of a word here and there. Salesman, foreman, manager, chairman, these words men insist, aren't meant to discriminate. But would the man who insists a woman can be a chairman agree to be called "chairwoman"?

supposed to include the female. Some examples are mankind, manpower, foreman, Chairman, businessman, draughtsman, spokesman and man-made. People will insist that the phrases Man of the Year, One man one vote, or one man one job include women and that history is not just HIS story. How are women supposed to relate to the phrase "God created man in His own image?"

Male dominance is implicit in the ambiguity of these words and phrases. Their origins are firmly rooted in the ideology which gives men power over women.

When a Committee meets to elect a chairman, one tends to assume unless it is clarified, that the committee is looking for a man to lead it. If posts for foreman, salesman or manager are advertised, women with the necessary qualifications are left in doubt as to whether the advert is addressed to them or to men only.

"Women shouldn't be so sensitive," we are told. "They should know these words are not meant to discriminate". But would men apply for the post of saleswoman or manageress? And the man who insists that a woman can be a chairman, would he agree to be called a "chairwoman"?

In case all this sounds rather petty, please note that now that large numbers of men are joining the Nursing Profession in Kenya, the term Nursing Sister is being changed to Nursing Officer. No man after all would like to be called a nursing sister!

Not only that. With an even less than 50% intake of men in the profession, we are already hearing the nurse being referred to as male in general terms. That is "the nurse should be sympathetic, he should care for the patient, he should..."

Similarly, 60-70% of our farmers in the country are women. Yet everywhere, including in the Ministry of Agriculture, people use the male pronoun for the farmer and continue to thank the farmer for his contribution to the economy.

This kind of ambiguous language only serves to make women even more