

# Women's Day: A call for true liberation

By **Acharya Prashant** - March 2, 2025



*Many women internalize societal conditioning, prioritizing appearance to secure marriage over individuality.*

Women's Day is approaching, and soon discussions will emerge across various platforms. New slogans will be coined, and policy tweaks will be grandly announced. What should truly lie at the heart of women's empowerment? How should we understand women's liberation in light of the challenges they face? These are the questions we must ask ourselves.

At their core, irrespective of their physical differences, both men and women are first and foremost creatures of consciousness. They have an equal right and responsibility to pursue their liberation and prioritize their inner and outer elevation.

In popular culture, in the dimension of consciousness, women often find themselves reduced to a secondary being. Think about all the different clothing styles, accessories, jewelry, and beauty standards directly or indirectly foisted on women—bindi, anklets, bangles, pierced noses, and ears. Women account for over eighty percent of global cosmetics sales. Moreover, many of these adornments become central to a woman's identity. But what do any of these things have to do with consciousness, intelligence, or individuality? It's all about the body—treating the female form as an object of consumption.

How can a society's well-being be truly measured if half its population remains bound by the shackles of body identification?

Some employers in specific industries often prefer women candidates with 'good looks.' This indignified requirement is openly stated, often in writing, yet meets with little resistance. Many women have internalized the oppressive social conditioning that turns them into objects of decor. The same applies to arranged marriages—girls in certain societies are encouraged to be dainty and pretty with the explicit purpose of securing a good husband.

Society, especially in the Orient, conditions women to see their bodies as their greatest asset. It is evident that many modestly educated yet attractive women secure marriages with well-off professionals, gaining status and comfort without questioning the basis and repercussions of their selection. In contrast, talented and diligent women often face greater struggles when striving to carve out a dignified professional niche for themselves.

Society has a way of sending quiet and subliminal messages, shaping the way women see themselves and their roles. Decades ago, sexism was overt—printed in textbooks, spoken without hesitation. Just thirty years ago, kitchen illustrations depicted women rolling dough, reinforcing the idea that a girl's purpose was limited to cooking. In science textbooks, men dominated the images—experimenting, discovering, innovating—while women existed in kitchens, not laboratories. Today, explicit discrimination has diminished, but underlying messages persist in more nuanced forms, subtly influencing expectations and limiting true equality. That is why, despite more women stepping into PhD programs, parliament, and corporate boardrooms, their presence has grown at a slow and inadequate pace.

Undoubtedly, countless women have faced oppression and exploitation throughout history, and it continues even today. Yet, even if it sounds harsh, the challenge and responsibility to break free should be placed more on the oppressed. Ours is not exactly a compassionate world, and it's too utopian to dream of chivalrous knights who valiantly fight for the right causes. Her freedom is ultimately her responsibility. Others may inspire or help, but in the end, she must stand up for herself. It's about reclaiming her dignity. Lovers of freedom have gone to the extent of embracing death for the sake of liberty. However, most women don't fear death as much as they fear ending up on the streets. To them, one may ask: what's worse—your body being battered outside the house or someone violating your conscience every day inside a secure and respectable building? Step out into the world. Face the sun. Embrace the dust. If freedom demands solitude, so be it. Those who choose freedom find the sky. Even if they fly alone, they fly.

Together they suffer, and together they will celebrate

Women and men are both oppressed, albeit in different ways. There is no such thing as women's liberation in isolation. Women's liberation is men's liberation. Man and woman are two ends of duality, and both will meet the same fate. One end cannot fly away in isolation, just as one leg cannot reach the destination while the other remains chained. They are together, and in their togetherness lies their joy.

Women's liberation movements and men's movements are merely a continuation of age-old self-centered and isolationist beliefs that focus exclusively on one gender's welfare while ignoring their organic link to the other. Self-knowledge and wisdom literature now come to our rescue. Vedanta says, "Oh, come on, learn to keep the body aside. You are not the body." The body is, at most, a resource to be used to attain a legitimate objective. And that objective can only be known through self-knowledge. When you know yourself, you understand your true goals.

The body includes everything—intellect, the power to argue, creativity, and all subtle faculties. It also includes the gross physical form. When you truly know yourself, you use the body for the right purpose. You will not use your body merely to seek security or relate to the other gender—such pursuits will appear childish. You will realize that the purpose of life is liberation, illumination, and understanding. At that level, gender does not matter. One is simply consciousness seeking to be liberated.

The modification and reform of external institutions—family, religion, society, law, education, and media—must be addressed. But more importantly, men and women must develop self-knowledge. To that end, wisdom literature must become part of standard curricula. We need a society that values self-understanding. In understanding lies liberation.

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