Celebrating Our Daughters

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The day I got an ultrasonogram done and the doctor mumbled 'it might be a girl' I realised that a childhood fantasy was about to come true. Even as a little girl obsessed with dolls all I ever wanted was a real baby girl to love and make a fuss of. Of course at that stage babies seemed to me just live dolls that you could dress up and cuddle and feed. The travails of motherhood perpetual diaper changing, excruciating hours of nursing, sleepless nights, agonising illnesses _such trivia were not part of the dreams of a six year old. Thus the fantasy continued and miraculously didn't get squashed even when I realised that this cute bundle of joy would take up almost every waking (and sleeping) moment of my life. I had finally received my live doll.

I sometimes wonder how people can be so stupid as to be disappointed when a girl is born. Why the birth of a daughter is received with lukewarm welcomes while baby boys are treated like celebrities from day one. Of course culture has a lot to do with it. In all of Asia no matter how developed the country is there is always a preference for boy children. Even today female fetuses are aborted and female infants killed or abandoned. Girls if they survive mostly grow up to be second favourites if they have male siblings. They are taught to speak softly, be docile, obedient, look pretty and generally exist for the pleasure of some obscure man who will take them away from their patriarchal nests to another home where they will be second class citizens all over again.

Girls on average are not encouraged as much to study compared to boys yet usually they do better in schools. Young women are not supported enough to build careers but many employers have admitted that they are the best and most reliable workers. Even parents of daughters agree that more than the pampered son it is the daughter who is more attached to them.

So why this nonsense of a daughter being a burden who must be married off before she is an old maid or before her reputation is soiled? Such medieval notions can be justified in the case of illiterate, poor people who have never seen any other way. But when educated, privileged parents pawn their daughter off before they can even decide what they want to be as individuals just so they can sleep at night without worrying about who she is seeing or whether she will get a good catch, it is unforgivable.

Monica (not her real name, a young woman from a privileged background was a straight A student in high school, and had entered into one of the most prestigious architecture schools in the US. Here too she excelled and her dreams of becoming a great architect were only a few semesters away. Tall, attractive, with beautiful long hair, she dew quite a bit of attention but was hardly affected by it.

Being a serious student of such a demanding discipline, Monica was very conscientious about assignments and tests. She often had classmates come over to her small rented room to study or work on group projects. Sometimes this would go on till late at night and the classmates included one or two young men. The house where she stayed belonged to a Bangladeshi man and it did not take long for him to report to Monica's father that her behaviour had become 'inappropriate'. Thus Monica's future was determined by a single phone call. Her father whisked her off home and soon got her married. Monica is happily married and has two lovely daughters. But she has almost completely given up on

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