Tamarind Dilemma

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According to unreliable sources the sale of tamarind is experiencing unprecedented drops leaving tamarind wholesalers in a terrible dilemma. In some markets the demand for tamarind has dropped to zero as self-respecting women have decided to boycott the fruit until further notice. Women, it may be mentioned used to be the highest consumers of this fruit which has been used in condiments, curries and traditional snacks. *Chotpoti*, *phuchka*, *achaar* and *dohi bara* – all hot favourites, especially amongst the womenfolk, have lost their charm as they are being served without that sweet and sour garnish. Apparently tamarinds smell rotten to women these days, they reek of humiliation and dishonour. Even diehard fans of this fruit feel like throwing up every time they come near it.

Ever since a ranting misogynist equated women with the tamarind for being so delicious that no full-blooded man could resist salivating at the sight of them, women just can't bear to even hear the word 'tetul' (tamarind).

Tetul, moreover, is being associated with the Dark Ages when women were treated like cattle. According to that obscene sermon, women, at best, are only good for looking after the children and furniture (and of course one other thing). They should stay at home, not work outside where they will inevitably engage in lascivious behaviour. Women working in garments especially, are harmful to society because they run off and have 'love marriage' or 'court marriage' – two more words in the 'Misogynist's Dictionary'. Thus the 2.8 million or so women working in a 20.5 billion dollar industry should be laid off and made to stay at home. The revered spiritual leader who has become infamous for his debauched sermon has not specified how these women (and all other working women) will feed their families or pay the rent. Perhaps he will part with some of his fortune to give huge stipends to half the population so that they can sit at home, dust the furniture and live in the lap of luxury. They will not have to worry about husbands abandoning them, leaving them penniless on the streets, forcing them to give up all their earnings or torturing them for dowry.

Funnily enough, a woman Member of Parliament has sided with the sermonizer, saying that the media has distorted his words and carried out some kind of coup d'tat in collusion with the ruling party 'to tarnish the image' of this holy man. Obviously she is ready to relinquish her privileged job that allows her a luxury car free of tax, a flat; a salary and other fringe benefits, including the right to talk nonsense in the most respected public venue of the land. She must also be happy about going into the *andarmohol*, never again to be seen on BTV or the streets of Dhaka that magically clear up whenever her car passes through, even in the worst possible gridlock. In fact she can even look forward to a life without having to do any shopping for saris, shoes or bags- her huzur has said that women should not go to the markets at all and the men can buy whatever their wives and daughters need.

The Prime Minister, a woman, has condemned the *tetul* sermon and seemed quite forthright in her criticism of the spiritual leader who said things that were anything but spiritual. Until of course she remembered her most hated rival and made a comment that seemed to match the vulgarity of the sermon she was criticising. Sigh. Just when we were getting our hopes up that rational, progressive thinking had returned...

The alarming part of this strange saga, however, is that in certain parts of the country the demand for the maligned fruit has remained the same or gone up, according to the grapevine. The reasons are unclear. Some say it's because the number of depraved men has significantly increased over the years. Others say that these comments are not that different from the usual dose of distorted sermons given during religious ceremonies and prayers at the mosque, hence people do not find it all that shocking. And why not, pray tell? As long as it is under the guise of religion and as long as it is about putting women in their own lowly place, vulgarity, depravity and misogynistic sermons are as tolerable as a bit of bad weather. Perhaps it is just a phase, this tamarind abhorrence. Perhaps sane people should not listen to the ranting of the insane.