I agree with you darling, but...

Regarding works of art, there is a field in which women have the sole proprietary right, said the wife and the husband was floored.... ■ **by D. P. Sabharwal**

"HEY, LOOK what is written here," she virtually yelled while reading the paper.

"What's it?"

"It is bad; it is outrageous," she said in an agitated, perturbed tone.

"But what is it and what does it say?" I asked.

It was an article published in the special section on women and arts. She waved the paper at me. "Well, it says that, in fact, it is men who are the masters in the field of arts. There may be more ladies with "Master of Arts" degrees, but in practice it is the men who are the real masters.

"It further says that whenever we think of great artists, writers, painters, dramatists, chefs, tailors, fashion designers, philosophers, *et al*, the names that first come to mind are those of men."

I heard her and kept quiet, for, what could I say? Frankly speaking, I agreed with the author of the article. But then saying so would have been both improper and disastrous. Improper because it would have meant adding salt to the wounds of my deeply hurt dearest wife. Disastrous because it would mean hitting her at the most vulnerable point, thus resulting in the obvious—a wordy duel in which, going by the experience of 15 years, I had no chance of winning.

"Why are you silent, why don't you say something?" she asked. "Is it because you are in agreement with him but are afraid to say so? Or is it because you are in disagreement with one of your own tribe, a fellow writer, and won't like to admit it?"

"No, it is not that."

"Then why don't you say something?"

"Look, darling," I said meekly, "whatever is written there is the writer's personal opinion. Now whether you like it or not, it is entirely up to you. Why do you want to drag me into it?"

"For 2 reasons. First, you are a woman-baiter, and any attack on them would please you. Thus your comments and..."

"Wait a minute," I interrupted her, "I am no woman-baiter. In all my utterances and writings, I have tried to project the better side of women. That I do so with a bit of wit and humour is merely coincidental, because it is all provided by women themselves.

"Now, what is the second reason for me to offer my comments?"

"Forget about it," she said, displaying a feeling of hurt.

"No, you must come out with it. You should not keep such things to your heart."

"Well, you are my husband. And at the time of our marriage, you had vowed before the sacred fire to protect my prestige. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I do. But the author has not attacked you. He has made a general remark which he is free to make because ours is a democratic society and one has the freedom to say what one likes."

"You mean one can even abuse others?"

"Yes, you are right."

"And nothing can be done about it?"

"There is a way out. The person can be taken to court on defamation charges."

"Then why don't you do so?"

There was no logical answer to her question. How could I tell her that what she was asking me to do was beyond my purview? Well, there are various agencies and human rights cells to handle such issues. But had I told her so, she would have virtually dragged me to their office.

Seeing me silent, she said, "I am getting convinced that you don't care for me any more. Nowadays you don't even bother to reply."

"It is not that, darling. I was only thinking what to say." After a pause, I added, "You see, I don't say what the author has written is not true, but I must say that what he has said is only a part of the truth, only one side of the coin. The whole truth is that behind every great man there is a woman."

"Oh! That worn-out saying! I am sick of hearing it. You are just trying to please me."

"Not at all, darling. I am stating a fact of life, telling you the truth. Almost all great men had the hand of a woman to push them forward. And behind every great name, there has been someone to coax, cajole, wheedle or encourage him to produce something creative and great.

"And while he was trying to be creative and struggling to become great, she was behind the scenes, holding the domestic front in addition to meeting his untimely demands like putting fire in his hookah or preparing cups of tea or coffee at unearthly hours."

"It means even great men kept their women tied to domestic and mundane chores."

HER sentence struck me like lightning. It was full of power and left me speechless. It took me some time to digest the impact of her statement. I struggled to find proper words so as not to land myself again in a jam.

"Well, you are free to look at it like that, but I definitely didn't mean that," I clarified.

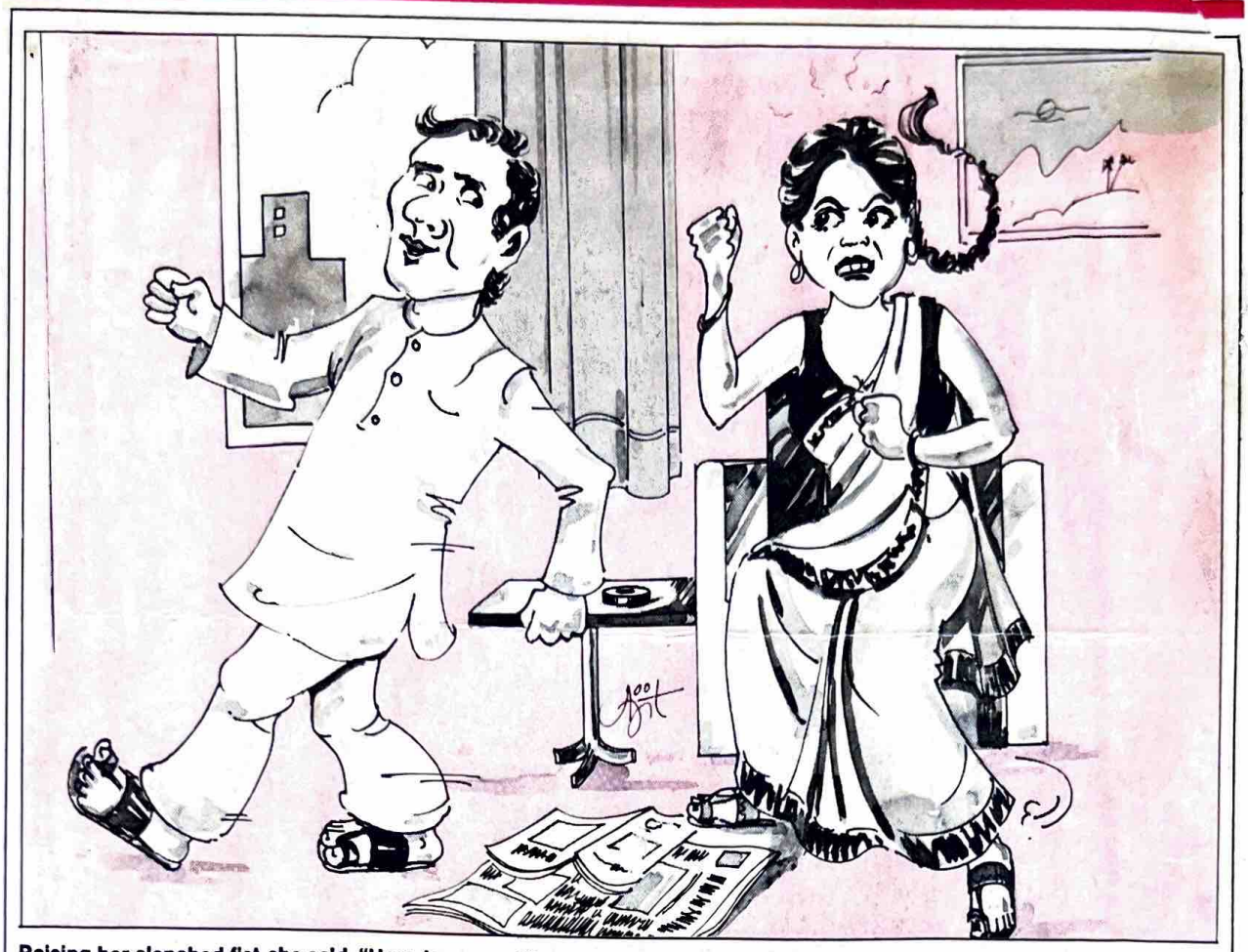
"What I said simply implied that in holding the home-front so effectively and by looking after their personal requirements, the women allowed men to strive for greatness. In fact, it is she who is really creative, but it is a sad fact that she does not get the name or fame."

"Now, that is pure flattery."

"No, it is not, darling. Being a post-graduate in History, you must know that down the ages, women have inspired men to produce great works of art, the Taj Mahal and Mona Lisa being just two examples."

She gave me a suspicious look. However, she didn't say anything which made me feel that whatever I said had made some impact on her. Now it was up to me to drive home the point.

Thus, I said, "There are other occasions when women have done much more than just inspiring men. There are many cases down the ages when women have heartlessly rejected or spurned their lovers thus forcing them to bring out their creative best. Kalidas is the greatest



Raising her clenched fist she said, "How dare you...?" And I bolted out of the room.

among such greats."

"All right, I agree that women have been responsible for bringing out the best in men. But I still can't digest the contention of the author that on their own, women are nothing," she said a bit agitated, flashing the magazine at me.

"Don't get worked up. Relax. And think of Golda Meir of Israel, Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka, Mrs Thatcher, Benazir Bhutto and our own Indira Gandhi. They all achieved greatness. They all ruled their respective countries."

"What you say is right but irrelevant because we are talking about achieving greatness in arts and not in politics. And in any case, woman's dominance in such fields is well known and quite natural. You see, poor husbands give them adequate time and opportunities to govern, dominate and rule," she said winking at me.

"You mean that even in those fields where women have achieved greatness, it is not entirely due to their own efforts?"

"Don't change the track, stick to the topic," she admonished me. "If you look at history, you will realise that all through the ages, women have simply not been permitted to express their creative talents because they have been enslaved by men."

"But women like Juliet, Heer, Sohini or Sassi were not enslaved. They had the freedom to create legendary love tales," I teased her. "Nor were Joan of Arc or Rani Laxmibai enslaved. They showed their skills on the battlefield. How come, no footprints of women are etched in the field of creative arts?"

"I REPEAT that it is just a matter of opportunities. Given that, women can surpass men.

"Take a simple example. Men normally think they are physically superior to women. They can run faster, throw farther and the like. And yet even from a conservative society like ours and given a little encouragement, the only athletes to emerge worth any international standing are women."

"Now, aren't you changing tracks? Surely games and athletics can't be arts."

"Why not? Any practical skill is an art," she countered. And after a moment she added, "All right. If you are only interested in works of art, there is a field in which women have the sole proprietary rights. No man has ever produced, nor will any man ever produce, such a masterpiece of art—the greatest of great works."

"What's that?" I asked curiously.

"It is that original piece which is copied in their paintings even by the greatest painters. And it is that work of art about which masterpieces have been written by worthy writers and scholars."

"But what's that?"

"A human life," she said softly.

"What!" was all that I could utter.

"I have heard that truth is bitter and is hard to swallow, but it is only now that I am seeing proof of it," she said laughing.

After a moment she went on, "I hope you are now convinced that women too can produce a piece of art—and a masterpiece at that."

"Men too contribute to it," I wanted to say, but kept quiet. Not for fear of having another discussion, but out of reverence, for, whatever she had said was true. And I believed in the saying that truth must be accepted and respected."

"You have not replied," she said.

"Simply because if I accept what you have said then you will have to agree that the piece of art produced by my mother is better than the one produced by your mother," I said laughing.

Raising her clenched fist she said, "How dare you...?"

I could not hear her remaining words because I had bolted out of the room. □□