

The Study of Historical Female Geniuses

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Abstract

The idea of historical genius constitutes a task of scientific study. Genius is referred as “a native intellectual power of an exalted type, such as is attributed to those who are esteemed greatest in any department of art, speculation, or practice, instinctive and extraordinary capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, invention, or discovery. The study of female geniuses in history is an important issue. Female geniuses who left a mark that lasts through human history have been studied by two major ways. On the one hand there are the creators, who make significant contributions to science, technology and generally to human culture. These are scientists, philosophers, writers, composers, or artists. On the other hand there are the leaders, who change the world by their deeds rather than by their ideas or artistic expression. Female geniuses of the world gain this label because they are characterized by certain traits. These characteristics have to do with educational or personal norms that influence the productivity and excellence of achievements. The investigation of historical genius includes two main approaches, namely the psychometrics and historiometrics. Research findings and many examples of female geniuses are presented in order to indicate the ways of female geniuses’ study.

Highlighting the leadership roles and relatively broad participation of women in the public and private sectors in many countries today, we easily can see that the majority of the heads of social organizations were women. Many Governments around the globe are also promoting comprehensive measures to eliminate all forms and manifestations of violence against women.

Keywords: Female genius, subjectivity, feminist theology, women writers, resilience, .

1. Introduction

Let’s start our paper in a different way; a few months ago it come as a spotlight at the evening news in USA from CNN and CBS the event of the tragic death of a 16-year-old Pakistani girl who was also a computer genius has cast a spotlight on an industry with

huge potential for the country's youth. Arfa Karim Randhawa, who became the world's youngest Microsoft Certified Professional at the age of nine, died at the weekend after a heart attack following an epileptic fit. After Arfa passed the Microsoft exam in 2004, Bill Gates was so impressed by her that he invited her to the company's US headquarters. When he found out she was ill, he also offered medical help and was in touch with her family. Pakistan has been in the throes of a political crisis but the press and the nation appeared to take a breath and paused for a moment to mourn a young life which gave the country a name in an industry dominated by Silicon Valley and Indian innovation. Arfa's short life mirrors Pakistan's burgeoning engagement with information technology, an industry which holds out hope for youth embittered by unemployment and a lack of opportunities. Her father says she was particularly concerned to use her skills to help the young, those under-served by IT and those from villages. "It is generally understood that computers are for very hi-fi people or rich schools but nowadays one can be purchased for a few thousand rupees by the poorest of poorest," he told the BBC.

Allow us to list a few comments told:

- Arfa was intelligent beyond her years. Her passion and vision were truly amazing for someone so young” Jehan Ara Pakistan Software Houses Association
- "Arfa's centre of gravity wanted to improve human resource development by focusing on education."
- Her loss is also being felt by Pakistan's IT world.
- Shoaib Malik, country manager for games company Mindstorm, said: "It's really sad. What was amazing about her was that she had a clear vision; she literally wanted to set up the industry."
- "One thinks only kids who have studied from abroad would have a vision but it was remarkable. I think whatever God does, does for the better but had she been alive she could have played an important role in the IT industry."
- According to Pakistan Software Houses Association president Jehan Ara, Arfa was "intelligent beyond her years".
- "In addition to achieving a professional certification at the tender age of nine, it is also notable that she set up and ran a computer training institute for a poor community."
- "Her passion for technology, coupled with her vision to use her talent to do something significant for Pakistan and its people, was truly amazing for someone so young."
- Ms Ara feels the IT industry offers a way out of unemployment for young Pakistanis, many of whom she says are starting their own companies. One Karachi firm is even developing software for the stock exchange in the UK.
- But compared to India, Ms Ara thinks firms in Pakistan which she says has an "image problem" may have missed the bus.
- She was role model to "so many other young people - young girls", he says, who referred to her as "Arfa aapi (sister)".
- Malalai Yusuf, a student who spoke out in Swat while it was under Taliban rule, was one of those girls. "We really have lost a diamond," Ms Yusufzai told the BBC. "When I heard about her, I was really moved. I was amazed that we had

someone like her in Pakistan - a genius! I was proud of her and that she's a Pakistani."

- Arfa's list of achievements shames people several times her age. As well as learning to fly when she was just 10, Arfa had been working with NASA after winning a competition last year.

Arfa is really going to be missed. Now, let's put a great number of female names instead of Arfa; during the human history, we had met a lot of other women, with exceptional mind and genius. Despite the fact of their geographical place, their age, their religion they become world famous in many different areas: Ada Lovelace wrote a scientific paper in 1843 that anticipated the development of computer software artificial intelligence and computer music, Barbara McClintock She was one of the most important figures in the history of genetics; discovered mobile "jumping" genes; won Nobel Prize, 1983, Patricia Billings invented an indestructible and fireproof building material called Geobond, Rachel Fuller Brown and Elizabeth Lee Hazen co-invented Nystatin, the world's first useful antifungal antibiotic, Marie Curie discovered radium and furthered x-ray technology, Gertrude Belle Elion invented the leukaemia-fighting drug 6-mercaptopurine, drugs that facilitated kidney transplants and other drugs for the treatment of cancer and leukaemia, Mary Anderson invented the windshield wiper, Edith Flannigan was the inventor of a petroleum refining method and is considered one of the most inventive chemists of all time, Helen Free was the inventor of the home diabetes test.

How many among us are familiar with the names of Dorothy Crowfoot Hodgkin who used x-rays to find the structural layouts of atoms and to discover the overall molecular shape of over 100 molecules including: penicillin, vitamin B-12, vitamin D and insulin, Erna Schneider Hoover invented the computerized telephone switching system, Stephanie Louise Kwolek invented a material five times stronger than steel called Kevlar, Ann Tsukamoto The co-patenter of a process to isolate the human stem cell, Mary Walton invented several anti-pollution devices during the Industrial Revolution, Barbara McClintock She was one of the most important figures in the history of genetics; discovered mobile "jumping" genes; won Nobel Prize, 1983, Rosalyn Sussman Yalow medical physicist. She developed the radioimmunoassay to measure amounts of biological substances in the body; second woman to win the Nobel Prize in medicine in 1977.

2. Women in Academia

Since Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex* in 1949, feminist analysis has tended to assume that the conditions of male normativity – reducing woman to the merely excluded 'Other' of man - holds true in the experience of all women, not the least, women in the context of Christian praxis and theology outside its critical purview. Beauvoir's powerful analysis – showing us how problematic it is to establish a position outside patriarchy's dominance of our conceptual fields - has helped to explain the resilience of sexism and forms of male violence that continue to diminish and destroy women's lives because they cannot be seen as questionable. It has also, we would argue, had the unintended consequence of intensifying the sense of limitation or even erasure within masculinity structures so that it becomes problematic to account for the work and

lives of effective, innovative and responsible women in these contexts. As a result, there is an uncritical tendency today, on the one hand to cite the individual accomplishments of women as ‘proof’ that feminist critique of our shared cultural discourses is now outmoded, unfair and even counterproductive, or on the other, to remain silent about the role of women in bringing about change, not least through their work within feminist theory and activism. In order to address this problematic issue, we use the life and work of novelist Michèle Roberts, as a case study in female genius within an interdisciplinary field, in order to acknowledge the conditions that have limited a singular woman’s literary and theological aspirations but also to claim that she is able to give voice to something creative of her own.

The key concept of female genius within this project is taken from the work of Julia Kristeva and rests on a notion of subjectivity that draws on elements of embodiment and female desire excluded in traditional and normatively masculine theological accounts, or from notions of genius derived from the conceptual repertoire of European Romanticism. We argue that Roberts’ work as a writer qualifies her as female genius in so far as it challenges aspects of traditional Christianity, bringing to birth new relationships between theological themes and scriptural narratives through the mediation of her singular female desires and pleasures as a writer.

UN States needed to promote women’s rights, so they could be “agents of change” for sustained socio-economic development and security around the world, delegates told the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) today, as it continued its three-day discussion on the advancement of women. “Without women’s empowerment and gender equality, societies will not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and their full development potential,” South Africa’s delegate said. She noted women had shown greater resolve in peace building processes, but their needs were overlooked in peace agreements, at donor conferences and in post-conflict legal reform — a situation that needed to be rectified. A number of delegates agreed that ending discrimination against women was central in fulfilling women’s fundamental human rights. It was also, some said, a prerequisite for sustainable development. To that end, Peru’s youth delegate called for greater female political participation, saying that young women in particular must be seen as change agents. Malaysia’s delegate told the Committee that significant progress in recent decades in his own country was made possible by greater participation of women. “As Malaysia evolves from a subsistence agricultural economy to a knowledge-based economy, women will continue to be a primary force in influencing the development of future generations of Malaysians, as well as an important economic resource,” he said. Throughout the day, representatives noted recent progress in the empowerment of women, highlighting how their rights had been brought to the forefront of national and international agendas through changes in States’ legislation to mainstream gender perspectives and the establishment of UN-Women last year.

Many also detailed efforts to ensure greater numbers of women held positions in politics and Government through quotas or affirmative action, thus allowing them to participate more in decision-making processes. The representative of Bolivia said all political parties in his country were obliged to offer one male and one female candidate in order to undo old patterns of discrimination.

Despite those achievements, many representatives acknowledged gender equality remained largely rhetorical for far too many women. Gender discrimination, particularly

among rural women, women migrant workers and women with disabilities, was augmented by other forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity and economic status, they said.

2.1 Today's Status

The international community – including donor aid agencies, intergovernmental bodies, international financial institutes and nongovernmental organizations – has focused its attention on, and dedicated growing resources to women's development. And with the creation of a new senior level position at the State Department, the Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues, National Security Strategy, along with USAID and State Department-funded programs, the administration has given concrete expression to renewed U.S. efforts in this regard.

There is now growing consensus that women's equal rights and opportunity are inexorably linked to peace, prosperity, human development and democracy. How a country taps the talents and capacity of its women will, in large measure, determine its economic, social and political progress. As an Institute dedicated to political development, NDI believes that women's more equitable role in politics will not only ensure that the concerns of women and other marginalized citizens are represented, but will affect many policy options that are debated and the amount of funding that programs receive. A 2008 survey by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which compiled the views of parliamentarians from 110 countries, found that male and female legislators emphasize different priorities. According to the IPU, women tend to prioritize social issues such as childcare, equal pay, parental leave and pensions; physical concerns such as reproductive rights, physical safety and gender-based violence; and development matters such as poverty alleviation and service delivery.

When women are represented in a legislature in significant numbers, they can bring their priorities forward to influence the legislative agenda. In Rwanda, for example, the growing number of female lawmakers was linked to more assertive and effective efforts on behalf of children. In fact, there is evidence that women legislators not only prioritize, but take action on and fund these issues. Using data from 19 OECD countries, researchers found that an increase in women legislators resulted in an increase in total educational expenditure.¹⁴ And in a study of Swedish female legislators at the local level, women showed a strong preference for childcare and elder care over other social issues. These priorities were reflected in local spending patterns, with more money directed towards childcare and the elderly in districts with more female representation.

It is our hope, therefore, that new initiatives that focus on such issues as maternal and child health and women's and girl's literacy and microfinance, particularly in Muslim-majority countries, are joined by comparable efforts to promote women's political participation and leadership. This will ultimately help sustain a local commitment to health, education and economic development. It is not an accident that the countries in which these issues are not part of the national agenda are places where women are denied a genuine political voice. Conversely, empowering women politically will help countries develop those democratic institutions so they can begin to successfully address issues related to security, jobs, human rights, physical wellbeing.

Education of women, particularly those who lived in rural areas, was singled out as a key to breaking the global cycle of poverty. Mongolia's representative said rural women were critical agents for poverty reduction, food security and environmental sustainability, and she welcomed the Commission on the Status of Women's decision to consider, during its next session, the empowerment of rural women and their role in development. A number of representatives also called for more systematic and coordinated efforts within the international community to protect disadvantaged women, particularly migrant workers who faced irregular immigration status and limited access to justice. Efforts at national, regional and international levels must be intensified to implement laws, policies and strategies aimed at improving the situation of women migrant workers, Ethiopia's representative said.

The representative of the Republic of Korea said his country had recently taken action in that regard, launching "Multi-Cultural Family Support Centres", which provided married immigrants with access to basic information, education for social adjustment and vocational training.

3. Female Genius

"Women today are far better off than women in the past. It's time they shut up and stopped making so much fuss!" Many things have changed for the better over the last couple of centuries, but the evidence that women are especially at risk simply because they are women is still available on a daily basis: In 2009-10, for example, about 9 incidents of domestic violence a day were recorded by the Central Scotland Police Force. Of these reported incidents – to say nothing of those that remain unreported – 88% were perpetrated by men against women. A common response to this kind of evidence is to shift the discussion into comparisons. The suggestion is that much worse violence against women exists in "war-torn Africa" or "Islamic communities" or with people in "fundamentalist sects." The thought that sexist structures that can breed violence on this scale, continue to characterize even so called progressive societies is quickly displaced, in this example, by a convenient connection between 'religion' and patriarchal oppression. In other words, progressive societies are seen to be essentially secular. Of course, this represents a genuine dilemma for feminist theologians and critical scholars of religion because the case against Christianity is compelling and as feminists, they generally have no desire absolutely to deny this. And yet, dismissing Christianity simply as something to be thankfully consigned to history, means consigning all the achievements of women who have identified themselves as Christian alongside it; from this perspective, all Christian women are victims if not collaborators. Yet in its effects, this approach hardly differs at all from previous attempts by men to deny the achievements of women because of their gender. To address this dilemma we first have to go back to the relationship between feminisms and the Western Enlightenment. This movement, celebrating the power of human reason to explain and harness the forces of nature, gave a powerful impetus towards feminist thinking by severing the connection between social order and a patriarchal God; without God the Father to give a warrant for the whole hierarchical order of being including women's subservience to men, there was no reason why women should any longer buy into the myth of male supremacy. On the other hand, the key architects of the Enlightenment were far less successful in taking the divinity out of the human male and all things masculine, including a masculine distain for Christianity as a

dangerous and irrational (feminine) superstition. Moving back to the 1970s and 80s, feminist biblical critics, were still struggling to resolve the dilemma even as they worked to apply second wave feminist theory to Christian scripture. They were still caught up in the double bind; struggling to draw attention to biblical women and women readers in a positive way, whilst at the same time trying not to let either patriarchal texts or the guild of (male) biblical scholars that interpreted them off the hook. Thus their readings of the bible recorded the presence of biblical women, yet very often these accounts focused on the Bible's "texts of terror" – its stories of casual violence, its reduction of women to mere objects or to the empty "otherness" that defined a real male presence. In other words they often ended up playing more strongly on the sense in which Christianity was unsympathetic to women than on the sense in which women might justly take their places as its crafters, sustainers and reformers. Yet, looking at the situation more positively, this was exactly what those scholars were doing in trying to address a complicated set of issues that didn't respond easily to one approach. Sometimes in the hard-won pleasures of dialogue with these problematic structures they did manage, as writers and readers, to overcome all the built-in disadvantages with which they began as women in the male normative context of Church and academy. In the last sixty years, there has been a vigorous growth in the kind of work that focuses on the lives of women. And, having so many more narratives about women to draw on, our imaginations are fed and our view of what women can do is dramatically widened. In this way, the scenario with which this piece began is also sharply challenged because we can begin to show that the contrast between the situation of women in the past and in the present is nothing like as polarized or final as this suggests.

Arguably, over the centuries, women have found many ways to negotiate problematic structures such as Christian patriarchy, crafting courageous, creative and at some level, pleasurable forms of engagement without necessarily rejecting it outright. Following the philosopher Julia Kristeva, we would call these women 'female geniuses' and have written about four such female geniuses in a forthcoming book *Because of Beauvoir: Christianity and the Cultivation of Female Genius* to be published this year by Baylor University Press. Today, we live and work as women in a perplexing context. On the one hand or for some of us, it seems excessive to maintain an ideologically feminist position. All we need is the resolve to walk through it. If we choose not to do so, it is nobody's fault but our own and certainly not the fault of men as a group or class. In fact sometimes they seem to be begging us to fill the quotas! On the other hand or for others of us, not a lot appears to have changed and we relish the incisive, discomforting words of Beauvoir that shock us out of our perplexity so that we suddenly see the patterns and structures that continue to deprive women's creative thinking of attention on its own terms; the quotas remain quotas of men's devising. For many women it's not that women are not visible but that we remain uncertain about what those visible women represent. At the same time, if that uncertainty leads us to discount every appearance, every woman's attempt at singular creativity, we surely 'shoot ourselves in the foot'. After all, how could Beauvoir herself have come to formulate this dazzling insight without confidence in her claim as a woman to a voice and – at some level - to significance on her own terms?

4. Conclusion

The concept of female genius represents at least one attempt to resolve the paradox. It certainly does not imply that women have been wrong to contest limitations imposed on them because of their gender. It does not deny Beauvoir's insight that limitations continue because women have found it so difficult, in a world based on the perspective of men, to identify a variant point of view that has any validity. It highlights, however, the sense in which women do not need to remain trapped by the illusion. Even retrospectively, we can begin to see that women have been able to bring something of their own to birth by contesting what they are told to think or write, though many more may have given up or gone mad. In these terms it is possible then to see Roberts' life and work as an illustration of the female subjectivity Beauvoir showed us was so hard to achieve and Kristeva describes as female genius; a writer, valuing her own inspiration sufficiently, finally, to acknowledge its creativity, as Roberts does perhaps, in the account she writes of her female character's creative awakening, with which this piece began.

Contemporary feminist analysis since *The Second Sex* has tended to assume that conditions of male normativity in which woman is reduced to the merely excluded 'Other' of man, hold true in the experience of most if not all women prior to the beginnings or outside of modern western feminisms. By implication women have been deprived of any language with which adequately to identify subjectivity or genius – a shortfall that is perhaps nowhere more comprehensively evident than in the context of Christian theology. Whilst this powerful analysis has helped to explain the resilience of sexist attitudes and systematic failures to detect misogyny and discrimination, it has had the less desirable consequence of seeming sometimes to intensify that sense of women's silence and victimisation since, ideologically speaking, this is its justification. This paper invoked the odd-seeming notion of the novelist Michèle Roberts, as a theological genius in order to address the question of how and in what way women "under erasure" have – surprisingly, anomalously or even routinely - continued to work, write, create and in this way to illustrate the consciousness, in one way or another, of a genuine subjectivity as women. The concept of female genius used in this case study is derived primarily from the work of Julia Kristeva and rests on a notion of subjectivity which draws on elements of embodiment and female desire that are usually excluded in traditional and normatively masculine theological accounts and from notions of genius derived substantially from the conceptual repertoire of European Romanticism. Roberts' work as a writer qualifies her as a female genius in so far as it challenges aspects of traditional Christianity, bringing to birth new relationships between theological themes and scriptural narratives through the mediation of her female desires and pleasures as a writer, in tending to her own and her readers' capacity for thought, concern to invent new kinds of defining relationships and success in bringing such projects to birth.

Finally, it might also return us to the field of feminist theology with a new resolve, if we can establish that some women – female theological geniuses – can exist outside the purview of modern feminist analysis. What we have explored here poses the question of whether, in order to do proper justice to the real and proven limitations imposed on countless women in these fields across global and historical contexts, it is nevertheless necessary to reduce the Christian tradition to something that is always antithetical or for which women can take absolutely no credit or bare no responsibility. Can we not begin

to trace the serviceable pathways women have made and maintained in order to bring us to where we are now?

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