

COMMENT

There are Limits...

MANY WOULD LIKE TO LOOK BACK at 2011 as a watershed in modern times. Only another Charlie Chaplin is not there to chronicle the volcanic eruptions in that indomitable spirit. From Yemen to Syria, Libya to Egypt, to the US and elsewhere men and women rose up in solidarity against the status quo in their respective countries, demanding justice, equality, economic parity and abolition of social and patriarchal oppression of women.

That “Occupy Wall Street” movement and its various branches around the world were a serendipitous spontaneity potentially creating a new beginning. The moot question, however, is whether the Arab Spring and Summer of 2011 and the Occupy Wall Street Movement could sustain themselves. Sporadic acts of civil disobedience are one thing but to transform those acts into continuous movement for a radical change is quite another.

The women played a significant role in every mass upsurge everywhere is a fact of life. But they do hardly get the credit they deserve. In fact in many countries they continue to be enslaved and degraded the way they used to be before the regime change. And Egypt is a case in point.

Even after a year of former president Hosni Mubarak’s ouster in Egypt, women continue to be dependent on men, and symbolise the military government’s repression. Egyptian women had played an active role, side by side with men, to bring down a dictator. Egyptian soldiers have been detaining women demonstrators in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, later stripping them of clothes, and forcibly subjecting them to ‘virginity tests’. Recently an administrative court has challenged the authority of the military council and banned such “tests”. Protected by military courts, Egyptian soldiers have been sexually assaulting female demonstrators for long. The crackdown on demonstrators over the last four months has taken about eighty lives. When women march in central Cairo, they are encircled and protected by men. Even among feminist groups there are few all women organisations in Egypt. Elections to the Egyptian parliament have made conservative Islamist parties ascendant. The Muslim brotherhood encourages traditional roles for women. While the more extreme Salafis oppose allowing women to play leadership roles. Women have almost no leadership roles in the various activist groups, formed out of the original protests against Mr Mubarak.

Equality eludes women, regime change or no change. And March 8 is just knocking at the doors. Progressive groups around the world are preparing to mark International Women’s Day in their respective countries. But message emanating from the land of “opportunity and liberty”—America—is simply horrific. Every 15 seconds a woman is beaten. Everyday three to four women are killed by their partners. One in four female college students will be raped or

sexually assaulted while in college. Millions of women are trafficked as literal chattel in the international sex industry. 'Arab Spring' or 'Wall Street' these momentous events are likely to lose their shine unless women get full equality in every realm! □□□