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**Cultural stereotypes – the “Holy Vessel”,  
the “Porcelain doll”, the “Caramel candy” and the “Bitch”**

Let's imagine that someone representing the completely foreign culture, let us say an alien from another planet, arrives to Georgia. If one day this alien visits couple of Georgian fest tables or funeral repast, it might have a few logical conclusions (let's suppose that the alien gifted with analytical skills visits Georgia). Supposedly, one of the conclusions would be about the Georgian women as follows:

The “Georgian woman” is a qualitatively different kind of human being. The “Georgian women” are serially produced by the “Georgian families” and the whole process is monitored by mystical and at the same time concerned powers.

The “Georgian woman” is a joint product of the earth and the heaven and this makes her unique compared to any other woman in the world. To be more precise, this uniqueness is in the phenomenon of the “Georgian woman” being a moral project different from any other existing biological-psychological projects.

Although the “Georgian woman” possesses the biological body, she still cannot be considered as a biological creature because unlike the men and the women of other nationalities and unlike the human beings in general, she is not subject to the biological needs. Besides, her aliveness is limited to the reproduction which defines an essence of the “Georgian woman” – she is the “Holy Vessel” obliged to protect its clearness and to comply with its obligations. A woman's lifelong aim should be to comply with her obligations to the motherland, God and the family by being a mother, and to dedicate her whole life to her husband and children.

There are several characteristics that disturb the function of a pure “Holy vessel”: independence, stubbornness, braveness, intellect, individualism, etc. But considering the supremacy of the “Holy vessel”, the mentioned characteristics become the bases for the marginalization of women – according to the dominant cultural discourse these characteristics disturb women and mislead them from the “true purpose” of their life.

The mentioned discourse is rarely noticeable and identifiable in everyday life but the so-called “Georgian table” makes it quite visible. The “Georgian table” and the Georgian toasts are one of the best methods for identifying the cultural values as the toasts present the idealized and most desirable model of the objects and manifest the recognized cultural values.

The toasts to women are an integral part of the modern “Georgian table” no matter whether women are present at the table or not. The toast to the housewife is raised separately expressing the gratitude for hospitality; the particular toast to women in general is raised for sisters, mothers, and daughters; and this is exactly when we can distinguish the idealized model – image of the “Georgian woman”.

This very toast presents the etalon of woman as being shy, virtuous, noble, charitable, delicate and obedient wife, good housewife, good mother, patient, caring and diligent person.

Interestingly, the characteristics as braveness, independence, intellectualness, education, self-esteem and self-will are not contained in this etalon... This fact seems strange if we consider that the “Georgian table” is a venue for presenting the traditions and history of the country with the aim to sustain “ancient Georgian identity”. If it’s true then the etalon of a woman should be determined by the distinguished women-actors of the Georgian history i.e. St. Nino, Queen Shushanik, Queen Tamar, Maia Tskneteli or Martyr Ketevan. Evaluating these women from the current perspective, they are more masculine than feminine; none of them is obedient, shy, permanently busy with housekeeping, weak, hiding behind the man, non-individual or passive person. On the contrary, they are active, brave and uncompromising – the features that are considered to be masculine. On the one hand these women’s importance is recognized in our culture – their first names are most favorable for Georgians naming their daughters after them, but on the other hand these daughters facing the existing cultural demands have to become completely different persons with completely different priorities in life compared to their namesakes.

In fact, we are dealing with the historical break – what is declared to be the historical-heritage standard and is demanded to be universally accepted, in the reality is not an historic standard at all and even more, it has nothing in common with it (indeed, this statement might be considered as exaggerated, especially when it's difficult to identify what was the real cultural standard at different periods of time; the additional research is required, but based on the available sources this conclusion is logical). For example, on one hand it is absurd to imagine Queen Shushanik as an obedient and modest wife; on contrary, she was the woman of principles defending her position who had to reject her own husband and children for the sake of her individual views, her own faith and the idea. On the other hand it is hard to imagine a toast for the ideal of such a woman at the so-called “Georgian table”. Although the Queen Shushanik's life story was for decades taught at schools, the whole content of the story was considered specifically focusing on her devotion for faith and homeland whereas her personal features as inner freedom, individualism, braveness and independence were ignored.

A very influential social institute – the Orthodox Church nowadays recognizes and underlines the women's passive and weak role. Position of the church that women are responsible for Eva's Sin obliges the women to pay for this sin against humanity by her pain and difficult childbirth, by upbringing children and devoting own life for others. Despite of all these, a woman is a sinful being and she is denied to enter the altar and the divine service (no orthodox woman-priests do exist), to touch the sacred things (candle, icon, chrism; although recently Patriarch has partially allowed women to pray and enter the church when they are “unclean”) during the menstruation period and after the childbirth. At the same time the church considers a man as a “head” and a chief of a woman and admits this during the religious wedding ceremony.

In the reality, this religious discourse is neither ancient nor the only one. In the early period of Christianity women alike men were followers of Christ (majority of the followers were women at that time) and were in worship; they were not considered as more sinful than men who were considered to be closer to God. According to the Christian logic men and women as individuals were considered as equal. Marginalization of women and their denial to worship declaring them as sinful has occurred later when the Christian church became dominant and Christ's teaching was mixed with the pre-Christian religions believes. IV-V century theologian and philosopher Blissful Augustine wrote: “If God wanted a woman to be the chief of a man, He would have created her from his head; if God wanted a woman to be a man's

slave, He would have created her from his leg; but as God wanted a woman to be man's friend and wife, the woman was created from the rib of the man".

Let us return to the modern Georgian stereotypes about femininity – from the dominant culture's perspective we can distinguish four types of women:

- the "Holy Vessel"
- the "Porcelain doll"
- the "Caramel candy"
- the "Bitch"

Georgian social market is open only for these four categories. A woman should belong to one of the above mentioned categories in order to obtain social status and role. Mobility is possible among these categories, but the status "bitch" can be never changed into other statuses (although any other status can be replaced by the "bitch").

As mentioned already the "Holy Vessel" is a tandem of sacredness and modest life – woman the mother. In addition we can say that a Georgian mother loves her child more than any other mother in the world and therefore she deserves the most respect in the world. This very social position is the most respectable and supreme that a woman can obtain.

The "porcelain doll" is a pretty, attractive female (it is not necessary for the "holy vessel" to be pretty) who just needs to be pretty and nothing else in order to give a man the esthetic pleasure. She is also an expression of the man's prestige and is considered as a "good jewelry" in the society. The "porcelain doll" has the potential to become the "holy vessel" (but can also become the "bitch").

As for the "caramel candy" – this category also means being pretty but unlike the "porcelain doll" with a fine beauty, the "caramel candy" is vulgarly sexual. The "caramel candy" is more honest and joyful than the "porcelain doll", and after all she is a candy and can be very tasty. The "caramel candy" has a chance to become the "holy vessel" but it's more likely that she changes into the "bitch".

The “bitch” is not a prostitute who sells own body for money, neither is she a traitor that betrays her husband – it is the “bitch” and that’s it. This is a woman to satisfy sexual desires of men. Women of this category are hated by men but at the same time men need them.

In the long run the number of cultural alternatives shrinks to two for the women: the “caramel candy” and the “porcelain doll” are more or less the stages during a certain period of age and at the end a woman belongs either to the first or to the last category.

Based on the cultural model of perception, men also require the following four functions to be performed by women:

- sister, mother or mother of his children – respectable woman
- object of the esthetic pleasure
- object for the sexual passion and fascination
- object for the satisfaction of sexual desires

The very natural and human need for friendship with a woman is missing from the above listed requirements of men. This fact can be explained logically if we remember that the cultural stereotypes do not allow accepting woman and man to be alike and equal individuals; and the friendship is possible only between the actors having equal powers. Recognition of the substantive and other differences between men and women makes the friendship among them absurd and therefore leaves the possibility for only those four types of relationships mentioned above.

It is interesting fact that these functions are unnaturally set and distant from one another; they do not intersect one another what would have been normal as well. According to the cultural norms a mother of children cannot be a passionate lover; a woman is forced to make a choice among the contradictory choices.

These theoretical constructs are indeed rough and cannot reflect the empirical reality; and the existence of any other positions and categories is not excluded. This is just my attempt to describe the prevailing tendency among the majority of the population in the country.