

WOMEN FIRST

By James Collins

The gentleman from India with the unpronounceable name was called Mr. A. His annual visit to India, completed a month ago, and Mr. A brought all his pictures into the office to show snaps of his family to the staff.

Our secretary was a young Jamaican lady, Lulu by name, who had to know everybody's business. However, she was very good natured in her interrogations, so her reaction to the pictures took everyone aback. She took out a single snap shot and laid it out on the desk in a disdainful manner and everyone bent over to view her display.

"Why is it that in all the pictures of your family and friends walking on the roads you have all the women walking behind the men by a large distance?"

This was evident from the picture which contained a few families walking on a dirt road with a group of men at the fore and a contingent of women of all ages following about ten to twenty yards behind. All the women were dressed in ankle length saris of vibrant colors; red, blue, green, yellow and orange. It looked like an oriental harem on parade.

"That's our custom," Mr. A answered.

"What's it for? Why is it that way?"

"In India the men are dominant so the women always follow ten yards behind to show their place in our society"

"In this day and age that's barbaric. That is discrimination. This is the twenty- first century. Women have rights and are equal to men. They should all walk together. You go back and tell them that. In

this country women vote, own property and walk with the men. You tell those women to rise up.

They can overcome. American women will support them. Next time you go back, you tell them that.”

Mr. A said nothing in reply but from his body language and the fact that he quietly left the office, you could tell he had no intention of passing on this challenge to his family members.

The following year Mr. A was unable to visit India because of tension and sporadic fighting with Pakistan on the border near his home. But the year after that, a sense of calm came over the area so he went again to visit India.

Upon his return, the office members again wanted to see the pictures of this exotic land and Mr. A obliged. Lulu practically knocked people over to be the first to view the photographs. She thumbed through the pile separating certain snaps; placed them in a separate pile, and placed one triumphantly on the desk for all to see. It was similar to the one seen two years earlier but now the women, still arrayed in the beautiful saris, were out in front and the men followed up the cortege a little further back than the women were previously.

“You told them what I said. They listened to you and did what I said. The women are now walking in the front of the group and the men are several yards behind. Lord have mercy. They did overcome. What was the key argument? What made the difference? What was it you said? What finally changed the custom so the women now walk in front?”

“The land mines!” replied Mr. A.

The answer was terse, chilling, and brutal but epitomized the Indian attitude toward women after several thousand years of their culture.

THE END