



Public Speaking

Sample Speech:

Beauty Contests: Degrading or Dignifying?

Mirror mirror on the wall

Who is the fairest of them all?

Thus asked the evil queen of the fairy tale.

Esteemed judges, fellow participants, teachers and my dear friends,

The real world is not the world of fairy tales, and we don't believe in branding anyone evil anymore. But it is a small pointer to us that it was not Snow White who wanted to know who the most beautiful woman was, it was her evil step mother!

In the real world, my dear friends, 'who is the fairest of them all' is the billion dollar question. Unfortunately, we don't have a mirror that provides a readymade and true answer. Instead we have beauty contests. A beauty contest, or beauty



pageant, is a competition between people, based largely, though not always entirely, on their physical appearance. And what happens in a beauty contest such as the Miss World or the Miss Universe? A lot of beautiful women are paraded in the skimpiest of costumes, representing different parts of the world. They come in all colors - black and white and all the shades in between, standing tall in high heels and full of smiles plastered on their faces. The ostensible purpose of the contest is to select the most beautiful woman in the world, but in actual practice it is nothing more than who has got better 'vital statistics'.

Is this degrading or dignifying? In fact the question is ridiculous. Anybody could see that reducing a human being to a few numbers – the vital statistics- and high cheek bones and perfect teeth, is degrading her to a mere object. Or an animal. If you want to buy a horse in the market, what do you look at? Is it healthy? What is her pedigree? Does she have enough meat on her body? My dear friends, if we begin to apply the same standards to a human being, isn't it time to hang our heads in shame? Even the proponents of these beauty pageants realize the truth of this. That is why they try to lend some dignity to the contest by including such rounds as the interview round where the participant is supposed to answer a few questions. And they make appropriate noises about charity and doing good to the world. But dear friends, it is just old wine in new bottles. No amount of whitewashing can disguise the fact that the contest is still about the flesh on a woman's body. For no matter how intelligent you are, or poised and graceful, if



your body does not conform to the ‘vital statistics’ you simply are not going to be in the contest, forget about winning!

The supporters of beauty contests often draw a comparison of the contestant in the swimsuit with the swimmer in the swimming pool or a gymnast. But dear friends, such a comparison is fallacious. A swimmer or gymnast is displaying a skill, and the outfit they wear is scanty only because it is suitable to what they do. But a beauty contestant is wearing what she is wearing to showcase herself to the judging eyes in front of her. She is actively drawing attention to her body, both what is shown and what is hidden. If this is not degradation, what is?

That is the plain, glaring truth, so glaring that even Julia Morley, the president of the Miss World Inc. could not turn a blind eye to it anymore. She had to say in her interview to the Observer, I quote ‘It did seem very unnatural to me as a woman that girls should turn, turn, turn on the stage, for a start. And I didn't feel comfortable with swimsuits on stage.’ She went on to say that she wanted to make changes to the contest. So far no change has been seen. How will there be changes? There are multi-billion dollar cosmetic advertising businesses based on this. Beauty is money, dear friends. The dollar sign is very powerful, it can make us forget all about dignity.

What happens to the winner? The so-called ambassadors of peace and charity? She gets to wear a crown and to ‘reign’ for a year. The ‘reign’ is actually a cheap



promotion for the companies that sponsor her and cash in on her 'assets'. And if a woman is made into a billboard for commercial interests, that is degradation. She will travel around the world. The impressionable teenagers all around the world will take her for their role model and aspire to be just like her.

Let me ask all the fathers and mothers present here. Would you want your daughter to join a beauty contest and parade herself in front of the whole world? Do you think it would add to her dignity to be judged on the basis of her physical assets? Is that what you would want for your daughter?

Let me affirm that beauty contests are indeed degrading to women.

Thank you.