editor's letter

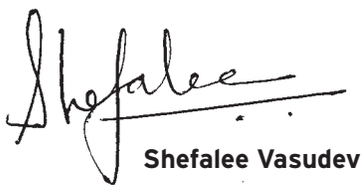
Above: The Estee Lauder men: William Lauder, CEO (on my left) and John Demsey, chairman of M.A.C Aids Fund (right) in New York; below: Roberto Cavalli after the Just Cavali A/W '08 show at Milan Fashion Week

Yet another platitude to celebrate – in letter – the International Women's Day on the 8th of this month? Not really. Instead, my inspiration comes from the spirit of masculinity in modern times. It is an observation on how men are adapting to so-called women's jobs and attributes to adjust to the new needs of the service economy across the world. Men *are* the new service industry, I'd say. New Delhi or New York, in the air, behind the ramp, in beauty manufacturing or in hospital wards, their bedside manner has become more important than their manner in bed. This is not some facile remark. It's reinforced by my many travels this month. Whomever I met, including those at the helm of beauty and fashion brands in the US and Milan, set me thinking on the new strategies of masculinity. It urged me to reflect on how men are transforming without making a big deal about it.

How many of us, for instance, can think of our grandfathers as polite-to-a-fault flight stewards or hand-holding male nurses? Men have had to give up their natural crustiness for more caring and sensitive qualities. Just when the female airline pilot announces that she will be flying us across the continents, a male steward offers to dress my table for dinner. Back in Delhi, a male nurse is all attention as a doctor instructs him in the emergency ward.

On the other hand, in the radical shift that make-up and hair colour has brought to women's personal and public images, it is mostly men who predict and create the new shades we use on our lips and hair; it's they who define the looks we acquire as our own. Behind the ramp, as designers and stylists, some of them mount the most influential ideas in contemporary fashion. I thought a lot about the Just Cavalli A/W '08 collection at Milan Fashion Week. It revolved around youth and vintage – wow, such a feminine paradox. In beauty manufacturing, there are male scientists at work, researching the revolutionary age-defying creams we can't do without. The point to ponder over is how well some men have given up their commanding demeanour to evolve into the new demands of the age we live in – rethinking hierarchy, thoughtfulness, good timing and amiability. It makes good business sense to make gender secondary.

Don't just look at the top jobs – there is money to be made at the bottom of the pyramid too and men are making it. Male pedicurists, for instance. That's because men understand the politics of hierarchy better, and now are realigning themselves to respond to the new age. What I particularly admire now is that they do not mistake an opportunity for an ideology. Tomorrow, if war breaks out, a flight steward will become a missile launcher and will assume the martial superiority that comes with the job. History has made that evident. And we can learn from it. Watch out. Men may become better than us in being us!



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