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**THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS**

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# Purity of commitment

Shombit Sengupta  
July 07, 2013

"I gave my beauty and my youth to men. I am going to give my wisdom and experience to animals," said the world's most enigmatic *femme fatale*, Brigitte Bardot, former actress, singer, now an author and spokesperson committed to animal welfare. She walked away from silver screen razzmatazz at age 39, at the height of her fame because, "Animals...are an easy prey, as I have been throughout my career. So we feel the same."

Brigitte Bardot, 78, has withdrawn her threat of exile from France that I had written about last week. The French Government met her and other activists' demand of not killing two unwell elephants at Lyon zoo. Monaco's Princess Stephanie has offered to house them. Clearly, Brigitte's unswerving dedication to the cause she's committed herself to is quite remarkable. Let's take a look.

**Commitment to be herself, a *femme fatale*:** Béb , meaning baby, is how the French articulate BB, that's Brigitte Bardot. Her first husband, director Roger Vadim, projected her na ve, innocent spirit that's resplendent with wanton passion in *And God Created Woman* in 1956. She'd been making obscure films with different directors since 1952, but Vadim was

convinced his wife had inherent talent waiting to explode. Having lived with her, he observed her real character and wove it into a story in association with producer Raoul Levy. The film opened with BB lying naked on her stomach on sand, reading a book. It shook international box offices, triggering her recognition as the most beautiful, provocative actress of all time. The world's first sex symbol was born; it established Vadim as a successful director. "I am not an actress. I can only play me – on and off the screen," BB said later, "My wild and free side unsettled some, and un-wedged others."

Her commitment is absolute, without a fault: "When I love...I give myself entirely. And each time it is the grand love of my life." She's loved 4 husbands. Lovers she's allegedly magnetized all happen to be creative persons, the famous ones being singer-composer Serge Gainsbourg, Mick Jagger, Sacha Distel, Gilbert Becaud, actors Jean-Louis Trintignant, Sami Frey, Marlon Brando, Warren Beatty, Sean Connery, artists Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, sculptor Miroslav Brozek, writer John Gilmore; even matador Luis Miguel Gonzalez Lucas. There's a story about how, during her scorching affair with Gainsbourg, she had to fly to Spain for shooting *Shalako* with Sean Connery. Before her distraught departure, they swore eternal love with a blood pact, writing love words with each other's blood. At first she was hysterically longing for Gainsbourg, but by the end of the film shoot she'd found another lover. Her innocent query: "Do you have to have a reason for loving?" She does

not hesitate to change men, saying, “It is better to be unfaithful, than faithful without wanting to be.” She plays by her own ferocious rules, “I leave before being left. I decide.”

Actually Vadim’s film is reminiscent of the great Marcel Pagnol, the first filmmaker elected to Academie Française in 1946, France’s highest recognition in liberal arts. His films became my route to understanding rural culture in my adopted country, France. His artistic sense was extremely pictorial, embroidering village life and social system of French Provençal people. He chose local rural actors to get their real accent and culture. Using this style, Vadim threw Brigitte Bardot’s sexually liberated personality into Juliette, an orphan among the rich and the poor in the luxurious French Riviera surroundings of St Tropez. This distilled the local flair of French Provence. Juliette’s behavior and body language were true to BB’s character. Her Mambo dancing in the film made it evident that BB was a trained ballerina since childhood. To Vadim’s credit is converting BB’s upfront rural character into paradisiacal amorous scenes, making his film forever memorable.

Vadim’s film revealed that BB’s extraordinary glamour is guiltless. “I am shocking, impertinent and insolent. That’s how it is,” she says. Reputed director Jean Luc Goddard, among others, has admitted that *And God Created Woman* was the beginning of French new-wave films. In fact it very sensitively captured BB’s affection for animals from an early age. When leaving her adopted parent’s home to elope, Juliette sets free her pet rabbit and bird. But when the boy ditched her, she lovingly recoups her pets.

#### **Commitment to animal welfare:**

“I only live in the world of animal protection. I speak only of that. I think only of that. I am

obsessed,” BB admits. Selling her personal property and jewels she’s formed Brigitte Bardot Foundation to campaign for animal rights. Using her fame she promotes animal protection through donations in over 40 countries: in India for street dog sterilizations and training of vets, conservation of Hainan Gibbons in China, care of donkeys in Tanzania, saving turtles in Madagascar, stopping sale of animal furs, animal tested cosmetics, *foie gras*, horsemeat in Europe and slaughter of whales in the Antarctica, among many worthy causes. She even wrote to US President Barack Obama to stop seal hunting permits.

BB is criticized for not maintaining her beauty with age as Sophia Loren, Catherine Deneuve, Gina Lollobrigida and Claudia Cardinale have done. But does she care? No; she has no stylist for her hair or make-up, and just wears black. The media often portrays her ravishing 18-year-old portrait alongside her current 78-year-old image. For me, her beauty is not plastic; it has inner depth. So whether 18 or 78, her personality remains the same; this icon’s commitment is the *vedette* (star).

Emerging just after World War II, sensational “sex bomb” BB had incredible influence over creative people in the Western world. This captured her genuineness, commitment, purity and expression of total creativity. During her artistic career she gambled with men’s love and sex cravings; now she’s raising the clarion call to protect animals, especially from cruel cultural practices. She summarizes herself, “I am really a cat transformed into a woman... I purr. I scratch. And sometimes I bite.”

**—Shombit Sengupta is an international Creative Business Strategy consultant to top managements.**

**Reach him at [www.shiningconsulting.com](http://www.shiningconsulting.com)** ■