

Society, Patriarchy and Women: An overview of the gender scenario in India

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Abstract

There can be no two views about the fact that gender equity is a necessary precondition for development and progress of any society. The gender scenario in India presents a mixed picture of disappointment and hope. On the one hand we see a number of constitutional, legal, programme and policy measures to improve the status of women, but on the other hand we also see a deep rooted patriarchal mindset that invariably creates barriers in the path of gender equity and women empowerment. While women have made the most out of the opportunities that have come their way, the attitude of the society towards women has not altered significantly. As a matter of fact, it often appears that a very resilient patriarchy is reasserting itself in myriad new ways. As the ideal of a gender equal society still remains unrealized, it is upon young women and men to take the lead in the struggle against patriarchy. The struggle is no doubt going to be long drawn as gender bias is deep rooted in the society but every little step in the right direction would count.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Society, Patriarchy, Constitution.

Introduction

Gender Equality Is More Than A Goal In Itself. It Is A Precondition For Meeting The Challenges of Reducing Poverty, Promoting Sustainable Development And Building Good Governance.

Kofi Annan

Development in any society, is generally measured in economic terms. It is measured in terms of such indicators as standard of living, absolute figures of per capita income, economic growth rates and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, besides the economic parameters, an even more important measure of development of any society is the way it treats its women. Thus, the status of women in any given society is also a very important indicator of the development of that society.

If we apply this parameter to Indian society, the data present a very grim picture. Take for instance data related to sex ratio, literacy rates, gross enrolment ratio (GER), school and college dropout rate, malnutrition, child mortality rate, mental health, foeticide, labour participation rate, pay parity, representation in democratic institutions, domestic violence, dowry related harassment, sexual violence, molestation, rapes and so on and so forth, we see that on all parameters the situation of women is miserable as compared to men.

The table below shows the comparative data for male and female in India with regard to some very important demographic, social and economic parameters.

Table 1

S.No.	Parameter	1991		2001		2011		2020	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1)	Sex Ratio	1000	927	1000	933	1000	943	1000	940
2)	0-5 Mortality Rate	8.1%	8.0%	6.4%	6.8%	4.3%	4.6%	3.4%	3.5%
3)	Literacy Rate	64.13%	39.29%	75.84%	54.16%	78.80%	59.30%	84.7%	70.3%
4)	Labour Participation Rate	51.6%	22.3%	51.9%	25.7%	53.26%	25.51%	57.5%	24.8%

Source: Census of India, SRS and NFHS data

The data presented in the above table clearly indicate the pathetic situation of women on key indicators. With respect to other parameters too, the situation is no different. As far as school dropout rates are concerned, gender disparities have been found in various studies. It has been observed that while boys register a higher dropout rate in early school, by late adolescence, a greater proportion of girls as compared to boys drop out of school.¹

Similarly, according to a report of NITI Aayog, higher levels of maternal and child under nutrition in India have persisted despite strong constitutional, legislative policy, plan and programme commitments. The girl child goes on to become an undernourished and anaemic adolescent girl, often deprived of adequate health care and nutritional support.² In addition to physical well being, the mental

health issues of women too present a grim picture. They are a result of various gender based risk factors like violence, low income, income disparity, care giving responsibility, role stereotyping etc. The various atrocities faced by women like sexual violence, domestic violence, issues of multiple roles, overwork etc, fairly contribute to poor mental health. A positive correlation has been established between the scales of these social variables and the occurrence of mental disorders in women.³

In matters of representation again women are not being given their due. Despite this clear-cut constitutional mandate for providing equality to women in the public domain, including electoral politics, prejudice and discrimination against women in India continue even after almost 74 years of independence.⁴

**Table 2 Representation of Women in Lok Sabha
1952-2019 Lok Sabha Total No. of Seats Women Members Who Won % of Total**

SNo.	Lok Sabha	Total seats	Women members	%of women members to total seats
1	First (1952)	489	22	4.4
2	Second(1957)	494	27	5.4
3	Third(1962)	494	34	6.7
4	Fourth(1967)	523	31	5.9
5	Fifth(1971)	521	22	4.2
6	Sixth(1977)	544	19	3.4
7	Seventh(1980)	544	28	5.1
8	Eighth(1984)	544	44	8.1
9	Ninth(1989)	529	28	5.3
10	Tenth (1991)	509	36	7.1
11	Eleventh(1996)	541	40	7.4
12	Twelfth(1998)	545	44	8.0
13	Thirteenth(1999)	543	48	8.8
14	Fourteenth(2004)	543	45	8.1
15	Fifteenth(2009)	543	59	10.9
16	Sixteenth(2014)	543	61	11.2
17	Seventeenth(2019)	543	78	14.3

Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi data

It is amply clear from the above table that while the representation of women in lok sabha has shown a gradual increase especially over the last two decades still its way behind 50% or even the minimum 33% mark.

In the matter of female representation, the state assemblies have not fared better either. As per the ADR report on ' Women's Political Participation and Representation in India' that was released in March 2021,'among the state assemblies Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand have the highest percentage of women MLAs which is around 14.44% while West Bengal comes a close second with 13.99 %'.

Women constitute half the population of India. As a matter of fact according to the latest figures, 49% of India's population is female. If half the population of the country shall be treated unequally, be relegated to second class citizenship and shall not be given their due, then all the claims of development, of progress and of women empowerment would become doubtful.

Objectives of the Study

1. To present an overview of the gender scenario in India.
2. To present data/facts with regard to key indicators of the status of women.
3. To present a brief account of the steps taken to improve the status of women in society
4. To look into the role of patriarchy as a barrier in the path of gender equity.
5. To establish the detrimental effect of patriarchy on men
6. To take account of the link between patriarchy and the market in the new economic order.
7. To suggest the way forward towards the ideal of a gender equal society.

Measures taken to Improve the lot of Women in Society**Pre Independence Measures**

It would be incorrect to state that nothing has been done in all these years to change the situation. As a matter of fact, even before independence, during the social and religious reform movements of the nineteenth century, through the efforts of enlightened social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Radha Govind Ranade, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and a host of others such evil practices like Sati Pratha, Child marriage, Purdah Pratha and restrictions on widow remarriage were attacked. The child marriage restraint act was passed in as early as 1929. Later on Mahatma Gandhi also encouraged women to come out of the four walls of their homes and participate in large numbers in the freedom movement. He not only persuaded women to participate but also inspired them to take up leadership positions in the freedom movement. Gandhi opined "women are gifted with equal mental capacities and therefore they have equal rights. However, due to the force of custom, ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying superiority over women".⁵ It was Gandhiji's inspiration that resulted in women not only participating in the freedom movement but also leading many notable movements. The QUIT INDIA Movement of 1942 that was perhaps the last big civil disobedience movement before independence was mostly led by female activists such as Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and many more as all the big leaders of the National movement including Mahatma Gandhi had been arrested and put into prison by the British. Emphasising the equality of the sexes, Gandhi wrote in young India "Women must not suffer any legal disability which is not suffered by men. Both are perfectly equal".⁶

Thus we see that the women's question, their status and role in society had already become a cause of concern in pre independence India. First, the social and religious reformers of the nineteenth century and later Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, sought to bring about a revolutionary change in the status of women in the first half of the twentieth century.

Post Independence Measures

Post independence, the process of women emancipation and empowerment gained further

impetus. The direction of state policy with regard to women was reflected in the words of Ambedkar who said, 'I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress women have achieved'. As the first law minister of independent India and Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, Dr. BR Ambedkar held critical positions which influenced the legislative framework of the country. Even before independence he ensured that a progressive vision for the emancipation of women made its way into the constitution. No wonder, Article 16 of the Indian constitution guarantees gender equality and declares any discrimination on the basis of sex as a crime punishable under law. The Universal Adult Franchise guarantees right to vote to adult women and men alike, several laws have been enacted from time to time to safeguard the interests of women. Thus there is the Hindu marriage Act (1955) that gives any adult woman the right to choose her life partner, the Hindu Succession Act (2005) that gives the daughters their right in father's property, the Equal Remuneration Act (1976) that guarantees equal pay for equal work and so on. There are no dearth of laws and policies around various aspects of gender based violence that ranges from the traditional Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), Amendments to the Indian Penal Code, 1862 (1986), Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (1986), – Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986), The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition Of Sex Selection) Act (1994), – Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), Prohibition of Child Marriage Act(2006) to the new acts in last decade addressing the evolving form of crime which includes Information and Technology Act (2008), – The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (2012), Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (2013), Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention Prohibition and Redressal) Act (2013), Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act (2016), Decriminalization of Gay Sex (Section 377-2018), Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (Death. penalty for raping a minor- 2018)

Besides, these laws there are a number of schemes, policies and programmes of the government that are aimed at improving the overall status of women by providing support systems and facilitating their participation in the work force. Thus there is the provision for six and a half month long paid maternity leave for pregnant women, there is Child Care Leave for working women wherein a working woman, having not more than two kids can avail paid leave for a maximum period of two years during her entire service period for looking after her children upto the age of eighteen years, Beti bachao beti padhao campaign to stop female foeticide, to provide better health facilities and adequate nourishment to female infants and children and to increase enrollment of girls in primary and higher education. The following is a brief description of some of the numerous and wide ranging schemes and programmes of the government of India that would throw some light on the recent efforts at women empowerment.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao

This is a campaign aimed at eradication of female foeticide and raising awareness on welfare services for young Indian girls. Launched on January 2015, it is a joint initiative run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The scheme was launched with a gigantic initial funding of One hundred crores. Several programmes to 'Save Girl Child' and to 'Educate Girl Child' have since been organized.

One Stop Centre Scheme

Popularly known as SAKHI, this was implemented on April 1, 2015 with the 'Nirbhaya' fund. The one stop centres are established at various locations in India for providing shelter, police desk, legal, medical and counselling services to victims of violence under one roof integrated with a 24 hour helpline.

Working Women Hostels

The objective of the scheme is to promote the availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women with day care facility for their children, wherever possible in urban, semi urban or even rural areas where employment opportunities for women exist.

Swadhar Grah

The Swadhar scheme was launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2002 for rehabilitation of women in difficult circumstances. The beneficiaries include widows deserted by their families, women prisoners released from jail and without family support, women survivors of natural disasters, women victims of terrorist/extremist violence etc.

Step

The Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) for women aims to provide skills that give employability to women to become self employed entrepreneurs. Sectors include agriculture, horticulture, food processing, handlooms, tailoring, stitching, embroidery, handicrafts, computer and IT, soft skills, spoken English, gems and jewellery, travel and tourism, hospitality etc.

Mahila-E-Haat

This is a direct online marketing platform launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to support women entrepreneurs, self help groups and nongovernmental organizations to showcase products made and services rendered by them. This is a part of the 'Digital India' initiative.

Nari Shakti Puruskars

The Nari Shakti Puruskars are national level awards recognizing the efforts made by women and institutions in rendering distinguished services for the cause of women, especially vulnerable and marginalized women. The awards are presented by the President of India every year on 8th March, International Women's Day at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi.

As discussed above, it is quite evident that constitutional, legal and programme and policy measures coupled with the conscious efforts to spread education among women have been the hall

mark of the women empowerment initiatives post independence. The assumption or rather the belief of our policy makers was that the status of women in society would improve if women are empowered and capacitated through education and information and opportunities for economic self reliance. A strong body of gender sensitive legislation would provide added support and instill a sense of security and confidence among women. Women too have made the most of the opportunities offered and there is sufficient evidence to show that women have proved themselves in all fields of endeavour. However, despite all the good intentions and all the concerted efforts of the government, the position with regard to all the key indicators of the status of women in society still leaves a lot to be desired.

Patriarchy and Society

It is here, that the role of patriarchy in our society assumes significance. It would be worthwhile at the very outset to understand what exactly is 'patriarchy'. Generally speaking, patriarchy is an ideology or a system that believes that men are by nature, physically as well as mentally and intellectually more superior to women and therefore women should remain subordinate to and under the control of men. Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power, predominate in the roles of political leadership, moral authority, special privilege and control of the property. They also hold power in the domain of the family as heads of the family. Noted feminist and women's rights activist Kamla Bhasin writes that 'patriarchy literally means the rule of the father or the patriarch and was originally used to describe a specific type of male dominated society. Thus patriarchy is a system in which males have complete power in the economic, social and political domains and has designated gender roles that are appropriate to these arrangements'.⁷ There is a reference in the Manu Smriti- in childhood women should be controlled by their fathers, during adulthood by their husbands and during old age by their sons. Women in India operate within the socio-cultural milieu of patriarchy which is depowering for women. The reasons for this depowering effect of patriarchy on women are threefold. First, patriarchy is internalized as an ideology and expressed as stridharma or pativrata dharma (duties and obligation of a woman). Second, patriarchy through the laws, customs, and rituals (prescribed by the Brahmanical social code) reinforce the concept of chastity and wife fidelity as the highest duty of women. Third, the state supports the patriarchal control over women and thus establishes patriarchy firmly not only as an ideology but as an actuality.⁸

As is evident from the above discussion, Patriarchy characteristically defines what is feminine and what is masculine. These ideas of masculinity and femininity are deep rooted in our society and are reinforced through the process of socialisation, thereby becoming a more or less permanent part of individual consciousness. These patriarchal notions of masculinity and femininity then determine most of our individual and social behaviour patterns and even our aspirations and desires in life.

The assumption or belief of the policy makers was that with the spread of modern, formal education among both men and women, the traditional discriminatory notions about masculinity and femininity would be rendered dormant and a society based on gender equity would gradually emerge. However, in reality, the situation is far from what was anticipated. While women have, no doubt made the most out of the opportunities offered to them, the attitude of society towards women has not changed much. On the contrary, patriarchy is reasserting itself in new ways and forms. Thus on the one hand we see that girls are outperforming boys in Board and University examinations year after year, women are doing well in professions even in those that were earlier considered to be male dominated such as journalism, management, corporate world, space research and so on and female sports persons are outperforming their male counterparts in winning olympic medals but on the other hand we also see that there has been a steady rise in cases of female foeticide, of crime against women which includes heinous crimes such as gang rape and murder, acid attacks and dowry related violence. The representation of women in parliament and state assemblies is not up to the mark, domestic violence continues to be a menace, gender gap in health and education particularly in the rural areas continues, GER for girls still leaves a lot to be desired, school and college dropout rate among girls is still high as compared to boys, female child mortality and malnutrition among girls and women is still a cause of concern and mental health scenario for women is alarming. In short, all parameters that measure the status of women in our society present a pathetic and dismal picture.

Some Notable Cases of the Patriarchal Onslaught and the Response of Women in recent Times

It is unfortunate that despite all out efforts and multi pronged strategy by the government to address the issues and problems of women, patriarchy has in some form or the other held the women back and has hampered their development and progress. It would be worthwhile to take a look at some of the notable cases of patriarchal onslaught in order to understand that women irrespective of their caste, class, educational and occupational standing, have had to face the wrath of the patriarchal menace alike and in this sense women can be seen as a class in themselves.

Thus, we have the example of Rupan Deol Bajaj, senior IAS Officer of the Punjab cadre who was the victim of bullying and sexual misbehavior by a senior colleague. Ms. Bajaj refused to take this lying down and reported the matter to the concerned authorities who in turn loaded with the patriarchal mindset of male entitlement considered it to be a trivial issue and typically tried to avoid taking the complaint seriously. Ms. Bajaj however didn't give up and took the matter to court where only after 17 years of painstaking and prolonged struggle, she could get the officer convicted for his act.

There is also the case of government social worker, Bhanwari Devi from a small village near

Jaipur in Rajasthan. As a social worker, her job was to create awareness regarding prohibition of child marriage among the villagers and to report cases of child marriage to the local police in order to stop such marriages from solemnizing. Bhanwari Devi, tried to stop child marriage in one of the very powerful and influential families of the village and as a consequence, was brutally assaulted and allegedly gang raped by the members of that family. Bhanwari Devi, in her quest for justice had to put up against a very hostile system as she had to struggle even to get her FIR registered. Then when the matter eventually reached the court, owing to shabby investigation and prosecution, the rape charges were dropped and the perpetrators were charged with minor offences and were let free after nine months of simple imprisonment. This resulted in a furore and many NGOs and social workers came out in protest against the judgement. The government of the day was forced to file an appeal and 29 years have since passed, but with hardly one or two hearings in the case, Bhanwari Devi is still awaiting justice. Kudos to her fighting spirit, she has not given up till date and is relentlessly continuing her struggle against patriarchy in court.

Then, there is the case of Delhi girl Nirbhaya, who was brutally gang raped and thrown out of a moving bus in an attempt to kill her after she singlehandedly put up a brave resistance against her rapists. She later succumbed to her injuries in the hospital. However, before dying, she identified her rapists who were hanged after a seven year long trial and several mercy petitions.

The ME Too movement that originated in the west, inspired many Indian women professionals to come out with their stories of mental and sexual harassment that they had to face during the course of their career. Many famous, highly educated, powerful and influential men were called out by the victims and harrowing tales of sexual harassment came out in public. What was even worse was the fact that questions were raised on the timing and motives of the victim women but unruffled by all the criticism and ridicule, these women went ahead with their disclosures.

These are but a few of the numerous known and unknown cases of sexual harassment that women of all castes, classes and social standing face on a daily basis at the hands of men of all castes, classes and social standings. The fact of the matter is that patriarchal mindset and gender biases are widely prevalent among professions and this has been vindicated by several studies. Parismita Bhagwati found in her study that 'police officials held a high degree of patriarchal belief and inequitable perceptions regarding the gender roles of women. Multiple linear regression analysis, controlling for key socio demographic variables, demonstrated a statistically significant association between the police officers' patriarchal beliefs and their perceptions of gender equity'.⁹ This explains the delay in the filing of FIRs and the dispensation of justice for victims of sexual misconduct. LinkedIn commissioned an independent market research firm GfK to conduct research in January 2021. The online survey was

conducted among 1 to 65 year olds. There were more than 10,000 respondents across the Asia Pacific region, from Australia, China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Phillipines and Singapore. The survey covered 2,285 respondents in India, 1222 of whom were males and 1053 were females. More than 4 in 5 (85%) working women in India claim to have missed out on a raise, promotion or work offer because of their gender, compared to the regional average of 60%. There are umpteen numbers of studies that invariably confirm the prevalence of gender biases in professions.

As mentioned earlier too, while gender biases and gender discrimination are deep rooted in the Indian psyche, the only change that has been witnessed in recent years is that women are now showing courage and coming out and reporting their experiences, registering their protest and are fighting for justice. That they have a very strong body of gender sensitive legislations to support them has proved to be an added benefit.

The Patriarchy -- Market-Power Nexus

An important development that has been witnessed is the coming together of patriarchy and capitalism. Patriarchy, like the traditional caste system in India, has shown tremendous resilience and has managed to survive despite spread of education and the growing influence of the processes of modernization, urbanization, industrialization and globalization. It has joined hands with the forces of market and at times in the name of tradition and at other times in the garb of modernity managed to reassert itself. Thus, on the one hand through popular films, TV serials, advertisements and music videos, role relations based on the traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity are being propagated and reinforced and on the other hand in the garb of modernity, the entire discourse is very cleverly being focussed on the women's body and again through popular films, TV serials, advertisements, music videos and item numbers, women are being projected as sex objects, as objects of display and desire. Thus, we see a whole market of beauty and slimming products being endorsed by celebrity men and women. For an average dusky and curvy Indian woman, the most desirable and accepted attributes of beauty are to be considered slim, fair and tall. And adhering to these attributes is now being equated to discipline, self-control, elegance, youthfulness and social attractiveness.¹⁰ An average Indian woman unconsciously internalises this oppressive discourse by being its audience and her tumultuous journey towards replicating these defined dynamic ideals is often welcomed and appreciated by her own family and peers, resulting in a diabolical relationship between her and her body. And in this process, her body becomes a discursive course to the beauty power structure wielded by the patriarch of her society.¹¹ The coming together of capitalism and patriarchy has established the connection of body image and skin tone to the ideology of power and status and it has become a need for the Indian women to achieve those desirable attributes of beauty that enable them to be celebrated and to wield cultural and economic power in their fields. Even though

women today are better educated and informed and hence presumably better in control of their lives, yet, the fact remains that they are still defined by and in the context of men. Thus, beauty becomes non negotiable and in order to gain social and professional success, women go to any extent of embracing unhealthy eating habits and exposing themselves to harmful cosmetics and bleaching creams that have become the largest selling beauty products in India.¹² No wonder advertisements linking fair skin and slim physique to success in life have thus become a common sight.

The impact of the market patriarchy power nexus has been such that Indian women have internalized the different oppressive norms, the primary focus of which is to manage, direct and rule women according to the will of men. The women's situation has thus become very ambivalent. While they are applauded for their capabilities, they are shunned for their natural biology. They are celebrated and worshipped but are at the same time demoralized and subjugated.

Patriarchy and Men

It is generally believed that patriarchy is detrimental only to women's progress. But, it has to be recognized that patriarchy is harmful for men too in more ways than one. First the traditional notion of masculinity suggests that men are supposed to be physically and emotionally strong and any overt display of emotion or sentiment or insecurity or fear is considered to be weakness and therefore undesirable for men. Consequently, men are devoid of the intrinsic human quality of being emotional. This inability to give vent to one's feelings more often than not results in stress, depression, and other psycho physiological disorders.

The traditional patriarchal notion of masculinity warrants that men should go out and earn while women should take care of the household chores. Hence, a man who is sensitive towards his wife and helps his wife in the household chores is ridiculed and looked down upon.

The traditional idea of masculinity dictates that earning for the family is the man's job. Hence, if a man's wife is earning more than him, he is ridiculed which leads to inferiority complex and low self esteem among the man. Alternatively, even if a man is not comfortable in his job or if his working conditions are unfavorable and suffocating, he cannot give up his job and depend on his wife's earnings owing to societal pressure, thus making life difficult and frustrating for him.

However, the most terrible blow that patriarchy inflicts on men is that it tends to dehumanize and demonize them. This tendency manifests itself in myriad ways. Wife beating, drunken misbehaviour, domestic and sexual violence, dowry killing, acid attack, molestation, rapes and gang rapes and infant and child sexual abuse are examples of this effect. Unfortunately, such tendencies have shown an alarming rise in recent times. Patriarchy is causing this dehumanizing and demonizing effect on men.

It is therefore to be understood that patriarchy hurts women and men alike and hampers the progress of any society. Thus, men and women both need to come together to fight this menace.

Conclusion

Standing on the threshold of the second quarter of the 21st century, the Indian society still has a long way to go as far as the ideal of a gender equal society is concerned. However, with various constitutional and legal provisions to support them and numerous programmes and policy initiatives of the government to empower and capacitate them, women can look forward to a more gender friendly social environment in the foreseeable future.

It is however to be realized that women themselves have a very important role to play in this transformation. As mothers, they are the single largest influence in their children's lives especially in their formative years. The traditional sex based role relations have now become obsolete and the socialization of kids should be geared to the needs of the day. Gender sensitization has to start from the family and since the mother is the most instrumental socializing agent for the child, the role of mother thus assumes significance. The culture and patterns of behaviour prevalent in any society which include general notions of femininity and masculinity that form the basis of all gender biases and gender discrimination are learned and acquired through the process of socialization. Socialization alone can help unlearn gender discrimination and relearn the ideas of the equality of the sexes. Thus, a process of desocialization of gender biases and resocialization of gender equity is a must. Women need to play a very active role in bringing about this transformation.

Since gender sensitization is all about changing prevailing mindsets, rigorous and continuous gender sensitization programmes need to be conducted in Schools, Colleges and Universities to alter the prevailing mindset. These sensitization programmes should be designed to eliminate the biases and discrimination based on gender and to create a more gender friendly and gender equal society.

Fighting patriarchy with young women and men who believe in independence, equality, mutual respect and human dignity is important. No doubt, its going to be a long drawn struggle but every little success, no matter how small would need to be celebrated and consolidated. Multi pronged efforts that include change in socialization patterns, continuous and rigorous sensitization programmes,

media campaigns designed to question mindsets, popular films and advertisements to alter the prevailing mindsets and an assertive 'NO' to fair skin cream endorsements would go a long way in bringing about the desired change.

Women need to understand and acknowledge the fact that 'to be a free woman is to shrug off the dubious cloak of "protection" that patriarchy offers, which is its unique selling point for many women.

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