

CONTEMPORARY MANIFESTATIONS OF PATRIARCHY AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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1. ABSTRACT

This study delves into the contemporary workings of patriarchy, and exposes how dynamic and resilient it continues to be as it navigates through social and cultural contexts today. Patriarchy has diversified into countless social structures, cultural environments, and individual encounters. The patriarchal order not only perpetuates a division between the genders based on claimed superiority and hierarchy, fostering inequality in our private and public lives but is also constantly reinvented through everyday actions, cultural norms and institutional practices which allow it to remain prominent within our modern lives. It explores how patriarchal notions are entrenched, subtly reproduced, and negotiated on an everyday basis within society. We contest that the traditional yardstick to measure patriarchy has become archaic.

Within this larger context, the study will also explore the manifestation of this system via social media as a contemporary space where patriarchal notions are reproduced and simultaneously challenged. While such platforms do provide avenues for feminist conversations, organizing, and representation of minority narratives, it is also true that dissemination of gender stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes and harassment continue to be facilitated on the internet through algorithms and digital practices. Using established theoretical frameworks we analyse data and provide critical insights. Ultimately, the need for digital literacy and a greater degree of accountability on the part of the institutions will be discussed in order to effectively confront the complex workings of patriarchy.

2. INTRODUCTION

Indira Gandhi was once called “The only man in the Indian cabinet”, to compliment her decisive and assertive leadership style. Which she considered an insult, replying– “Why should I be considered a man when I am not”. This exposes something deeper. Women have had to prove that their power is equal to that of a man instead of being seen as power in their own right.

The contemporary manifestations of patriarchy are evolved and are woven into the fabrics of society so deep that it is now indistinguishable from 'normal'. Now patriarchy is not directly imposed, it works covertly, shaping social norms and institutions. All this creates an illusion of progress. This should push us to reevaluate the metric of gender equality in the 21st century.

Recently however, despite the visibility of feminist activism especially on social media, the question remains the same about its impact on the system of patriarchy. (*BBC Media Action*, 2022) In India, where most social media users are men, the situation is worsened by cultural and caste differences. When further exacerbated by algorithmic and engagement methods that support patriarchal institutions, women fall prey to online anonymity fueled sexism. Social media is used as a broad contemporary case study to show an evolving patriarchy. Considering social media as a new sphere of society, we analyse traditional patriarchy's effect on it and vice-versa.

This is how, even when technology gets better, males still retain the power that comes with it. This study asks: Has patriarchy really vanished in contemporary India or has it just changed its form?

Using a theoretical framework of feminist theory, intersectionality and theory of patriarchal bargain, we try to interpret the data at hand. A gap in metrics of judgement of patriarchy is identified and the need for development of an evolving metric is argued for.

We aim to question this new 'normal' to understand modern patriarchy. And in an era of social media fueled pseudo-feminism, such a study holds great relevance in furthering the cause of gender equality. Understanding the modern dynamics is crucial for assessing gender equality, the effectiveness of activism and developing policies to lead to an inclusive society.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Emile Durkheim in his work "The elementary forms of religious life", brings about the concept of the 'Sacred' and the 'Profane'. The sacred includes things that are set apart, are holy, and

deserving of reverence. These are protected by customs and rituals. While the profane includes everything in the mundane day-to-day life. These just stay in public life due to practices. This dichotomy can also help us understand social structures in a structured manner. To understand and classify the reasons for the sustenance of the institution of patriarchy, we shall use this classification. Both sacred and profane guard patriarchy. Existing religious literature, cultural practices, sexist taboos, etc., fall under the 'Sacred'. They are prevalent even today majorly by the virtue of historical persistence. Questioning anything 'sacred' is forbidden. The 'Profane' also however, by virtue of being mundane activities becomes a matter of habit. It gets conditioned into our psyche as 'normal'. This normalcy that is brought about by both matters of 'Sacred' and 'Profane', is what desensitises us to patriarchy.

Feminism, as it has been iterated before, is an ideology that talks about equality of all genders, and feminist theory is a theory under feminism that analyses the effects of gender inequality and patriarchy. The difference between an ideology and a theory is that; an ideology comprises thinking characteristics of a group, holding a particular set of beliefs, and theory is a hypothetical structure built on facts offered to explain a phenomenon. Therefore, feminism (ideology) is to do with a broader thinking pattern, and feminist theory (theory) is application of this ideology (feminism) across all fields for a holistic understanding of society.

(Cox & Wilds, 2019) Feminist theory in sociology is an analytical framework that emerged from the political and social movements of the 1960s and 70s. It is the extension of feminism into theoretical, philosophical, and social discourse. Due to its methods of critically viewing and engaging with the world, it holds great relevance in contemporary feminism.

What makes this theory distinctive is that its focus is not just limited to understanding women's issues, but it also actively challenges or changes this female derogatory social system. On a broader scale however, it is not limited to just women, it includes betterment of everybody.

(Grosz, 2010) The ultimate aim of feminist theory is to understand the nature of gender inequality, and examine the oppressive manifestations of systems like power, patriarchy. It focuses on the lived experience of people, across various fields.

This aspect of incorporating experiences from various fields happens through an academic tool called ‘intersectionality’. (Ferguson, 2017) Intersectionality facilitates “a matrix orientation (wherein lived identities are treated as interlaced and systems of oppression as enmeshed and mutually reinforcing)”. By the virtue of its very nature intersectionality gives orientation towards inquiry. And feminist theory is fundamentally built on inquiry and reason. Therefore intersectionality and feminist theory are inseparable for a holistic understanding of society.

Another claim of feminist theory is that, ‘gender relations are not fixed but are socially constructed and changeable and therefore social norms should be reevaluated’. This prompts us towards the doctrine flux, that says that “Change is the only constant”.

American philosopher Judith Butler on similar lines talks about gender identity fundamentally being unstable, in her theory of ‘Gender Performativity’. She claims that gender (and therefore a gender identity) is continuously formed by repetitively performing gendered acts. As a result of it being performed repetitively due to social norms of expected behaviour for a particular sex, gender (identity) comes into existence. Therefore ‘Gender is what you do, not who you are’. This performed gender over time for women and society starts to appear to be ‘normal’, this creates social expectations and norms, reinforcing itself through conditioning and punishment.

Feminism has developed through different waves, and each one responded to the gender inequalities of its time. The First Wave emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and mainly fought for legal rights like women’s suffrage, property rights, and education. The Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 is often seen as the start of organized feminist activism. The Second Wave came in the 1960s and 1970s and focused on issues like workplace discrimination, reproductive rights, domestic labour, and patriarchy as a wider social system. Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) was an important text in this wave.

The third-wave began in the 1990s and focused on diversity, individuality, and the fact that women’s experiences are different based on race, class, culture, and sexuality. This later led to the idea of intersectionality. The fourth-wave emerged in the 2010s with the rise of social media

and digital technology. It is known for online activism and campaigns like #MeToo, which gave more space to marginalized voices and highlighted everyday forms of patriarchy.

Another key aspect of the paper is the angle of social media. And this precisely is understood in the context of digital feminism. The use of internet platforms, social media, and digital tools to advocate for gender equality is today known as 'Digital feminism' or 'Networked feminism'. In the 21st century with rapid advancements in technology, a 4th wave of feminism emerges where digital media becomes a tool for liberation and a space for resistance.

It is different from traditional feminism in terms of its immense global reach, speed and diverse access; which is quite unlike traditional feminism that was more localized. Therefore, it solves a lot of problems that traditional feminism faces.

Nonetheless, it also comes with its challenges, like cyberbullying, trolling, and unequal access to technology. A digital divide is created between different groups, say, cultural, regional or developmental. Another threat we face is the phenomenon of 'hashtag activism' gaining some importance for a while, and dying down soon enough to not translate into any concrete reforms. We have to highlight the double-edged nature of digital spaces. On one hand, they empower women and amplify marginalized voices; on the other hand, they expose them to digital violence, trolling, and misogyny, which can silence activism. Thus, digital feminism can be seen as both an opportunity and a challenge—a powerful tool for empowerment and awareness, yet one that needs stronger support systems, digital literacy, and inclusive access to ensure that all voices are heard.

With these theoretical foundations in place, the following section applies them to trace the contemporary manifestations of patriarchy in Indian society and digital spaces.

A narrative and critical analysis of the history of patriarchy made me arrive at these findings. (Mace, 2022) Many scholars now believe that agriculture was the starting point of patriarchy. Settled agriculture led to growth of material wealth, living as a society, growth of social norms for kin, etc. All of which led to the increasing importance of reproduction for 'betterment of

society'. This rigidified the gender roles for the purpose of efficiency. (Saini, 2023) Meanwhile there is another faction that argues that the timelines of commencement of agriculture and patriarchy do not add up. And that while the system of change may have started from the commencement of agriculture, the oppression came much later. And cannot be associated with the natural progression of human civilization to an agrarian society.

Not only is there a debate on the starting point of patriarchy, there is also a major debate on whether this patriarchy is the natural order of society or something that is acquired by an originally egalitarian society.

What is common in all these theories and literature is the utilitarian lens of analysing the progression of society. They argue that gender roles became defined because females involved in procreation and males in physical labour, just made development more efficient. Males being biologically 'superior' to females, it logically makes sense for them to take on the protective roles and for females to nurture.

Is it further embedded patriarchy that has normalised gender inequality so much that it now seems rational? We use anything and everything at our disposal to justify a conditioned belief, to just not shake the status quo of the society we live in. Even exploring an idea like this appears too radical today and is frowned upon.

Patriarchy has not disappeared in contemporary society but has reshaped. The previous yardsticks for measuring gender inequality are increasingly becoming obsolete. Early waves of feminism argued for overt equality and rights. Today while those exist in India to govern the public sphere of rights, the private sphere has remained vulnerable. A woman may theoretically have equality, but behind closed doors, falling prey to social norms, if this equality disappears, how truly empowering is it? It is just blatant mockery of women in the face of patriarchy.

The question of the hour is if we truly can laude these laws for eliminating gender inequality, if they remain absent in the private sphere.

The roles and responsibilities of women in Indian society have changed. In traditional society

women majorly worked domestically. In the contemporary world however, women are actively engaged in a wide range of fields beyond home. Society claims that women are getting equal opportunities but they still face challenges resultant of patriarchy being infused into normalcy.

Another component of the contemporary world that must be spoken about is social media. Today with the emergence of digital media, women are increasingly trying to break traditional gender roles. Despite the plethora of access and opportunities available to women online, challenges such as increasing digital inequality and online bullying have practically still left them impaired.

In a time when social media platforms have over 5 billion users globally, the idea of digital empowerment hides a troubling fact; 68% of women say they experience gender-based harassment online. This shows that these spaces often reinforce, rather than dismantle, male dominance. The "illusion of progress," where technology improves but entrenched male power adjusts, should challenge our view on gender equality in the 21st century.

Women still bear a larger share of unpaid domestic work, a situation worsened by the digital commercialization of femininity. Femininity becomes a tool exploited by capitalism, and is sold to people as the ideal. In places like India, where the majority of social media users are male, these issues are compounded by cultural and caste factors. This normalizes objectification and allows for the continuation of harmful ideologies, like "red pill" beliefs and online 'rape academy'.

While activism led by users can create opportunities for change, we cannot ignore how algorithms and user engagement metrics deepen gender hierarchies by promoting toxic content and cyber-harassment. It includes a theoretical review, empirical findings, implications, and suggestions for reforming platform policies.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a mixed study. We have used pre-existing data points (including historical records) along with our observations to come to an understanding of the contemporary manifestations of patriarchy. This is coupled with some archival research to understand existing theories. We have essentially attempted to examine the interplay between them and bring to light a nuanced understanding of the patriarchy society around us.

As we have not collected any primary data, one hurdle we faced was in scaling the reliability of our source. As we are challenging an existing structure that comes along with its prejudices, choosing unbiased and accurate data was a challenge. However, we have ensured reliability of data by connecting and crossverifying them with theories explaining patriarchy and feminism. Academic writing on the theoretical framework of patriarchy was read, and these sources were selected based on relevance to our research question. Based on this, spheres of society that we want to analyse were shortlisted, and data was collected. The data was collected from reliable primary and secondary sources (including official record). Finally, this data was interpreted using this framework and using academic tools like intersectionality.

5. KEY FINDINGS

First: Patriarchy originated through state and social institutions, which later shaped family structures and gender roles. Because it became embedded in laws, customs, religion, and social norms, both men and women unknowingly continue to sustain it, even though men benefit more from the system.

Second: (Mace, 2022) Evidence from early human societies suggests that where material wealth and private property were minimal, gender relations were relatively more equity-oriented. The absence of transferable wealth limited control over women's mobility and reproductive choices, thereby restricting the emergence of rigid patriarchal structures.

Third: (Saini, 2023) The rise of early states institutionalized patriarchy. In order to sustain population growth, labour supply, and military capacity, these states promoted rigid gender roles. Women were increasingly confined to reproductive and domestic functions, while men occupied

positions in warfare, governance, and resource control. These expectations gradually became normalized through practices such as patrilineal inheritance and patrilocal marriage.

Fourth: Patriarchy is a historically constructed system shaped by changes in economic organisation, property relations, and political power. Over time, repeated gendered expectations and social practices have reinforced these roles across generations, making socially constructed inequalities appear natural.

Judith Butler's theory of 'Gender performativity' argues that gender is a performance and is continuously shaped through repeated gender acts and expectations. These acts create gender. Therefore socially constructed gender roles, due to repeated performance appear natural over time.

Fifth: (Saini, 2023) Patriarchy became deeply embedded within the family, not in its origin, but as one of its strongest mechanisms of persistence. The exclusion of women from property inheritance, patrilocal nature of marriage, unequal domestic responsibilities, and gendered socialization reinforce economic dependence, limit autonomy, and enable the intergenerational transmission of patriarchal values.

Sixth: Patriarchy today is less visible in laws than in everyday practices—such as unequal domestic responsibilities, the secondary importance given to girls' education, workplace expectations, and online harassment. Women may have legal equality in the public sphere, but in private, cultural, and now increasingly digital norms continue to enforce patriarchal notions.

This reflects Deniz Kandiyoti's concept of the patriarchal bargain, where women adjust to unequal expectations within the family while gaining greater opportunities in education, work, and public life. These compromises allow patriarchy to continue in more subtle forms despite legal equality.

Seventh: Patriarchy has adapted rather than disappeared. Social media has become both a space for digital feminist resistance and a platform that reproduces gender inequality through online harassment, algorithmic amplification of misogynistic content, commercialization of femininity, and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes, creating an illusion of progress rather than substantive equality.

Digital feminism is the use of social media and digital platforms to promote gender equality and women's rights. It is relevant to this study because digital spaces have become places for both feminist movements and the continuation of patriarchal ideas.

Nonetheless, digital spaces also bring challenges such as cyberbullying, trolling, unequal access to technology, and online activism that often fails to create meaningful social change. This makes digital feminism a double-edged phenomenon, where social media simultaneously empowers women while also reproducing contemporary forms of patriarchy, making it highly relevant to this study.

6. DISCUSSION

Patriarchy in its origin was very different from the very meaning of the word patriarchy. Indicating our flawed understanding of it. (Saini, 2023) Patriarchy means “rule of the father”. Indicating that oppression/inequality began at home. However, rather than beginning within the family, history points instead to patriarchy emerging from those in power in the first states. (Saini, 2023) Demands from the top filtered down into the family, forcing ruptures in the most basic human relationships. No longer were people living for themselves and those closest to them. Now, they were living in the interests of the patriarchal state.

This basic understanding of patriarchy's origin is very important, to understand why it still exists today. It is crucial to recognize that patriarchy is a system that begets sexism and misogyny and is not about the individuals. This system is a broader umbrella under which ideologies like sexism and misogyny are fostered. An ideology here is defined as the thinking characteristics of a particular group by virtue of them aligning to a set of beliefs; and the system due to the nature of its workings facilitates it. That system over time is institutionalized; it is represented in the very structures of society. And as a result of which social actors (we) get conditioned into ideologies like sexism and misogyny. Patriarchy by the nature of its existence today is a social institution, as described in Sylvia Walby's *'Theorising Patriarchy'*.

A drift from this understanding, as it has been for centuries, is what causes people to trivialize patriarchy. Patriarchy is hence considered to be 'normal'. And once we consider it to be normal, we attach justifications to it. We call it the rule of nature, evolution, etc.

Patriarchy has evolved, the 'normalized' system that it is today is very different. Therefore lauding ourselves for eliminating aspects of patriarchy that had plagued society over a millennium ago and thinking we have solved the issue of gender discrimination is futile. Patriarchy now, is not denying voting rights or job opportunities. It has become more covert. Being around for centuries, it has perpetuated deep into the fabrics of society making distinguishing it from normal arduous.

The question we ask is how does patriarchy manifest itself in the contemporary world? We have established that historically there have been many patriarchal evils in society (including in political, economical, social, and domestic spheres). Presently however, due to efforts of previous waves of feminism, those issues, in their particular form, grossly have been solved. But does this mean that the problem of patriarchy is completely resolved? No.

This paper tries to argue that the traditional metrics to measure patriarchy have become obsolete. Because with patriarchy being such a dynamic social institution, if the metrics do not change, social reform will not happen. We argue that existing literature by and large has not adapted to contemporary manifestations of patriarchy. By highlighting systemic faultlines using existing data and our observations, and complimenting them with existing theories, we challenge these traditional metrics.

To substantiate our arguments, we take help of existing theoretical frameworks like feminist theory and intersectionality. Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical, political and social discourse. The theory analyses various aspects of gender dynamics that are in practice. It uniquely also challenges and calls for reforms in disadvantaged areas.

In this research too, various areas of society are drawn upon to critically analyse the contemporary manifestations of patriarchy and call for adoption of better metrics for judgement of patriarchy. This however requires the incorporation of intersectionality— an academic tool. This tool is used to study different entities as an integrated web, where all are mutually moulding each other. By virtue of its nature, feminist theory can be accurate only when it is holistic; and

intersectionality is the backbone of this theory by ensuring a holistic study. Therefore feminist theory combined with intersectionality forms a major theoretical base of this paper.

Why this study is relevant today, is to understand the contemporary manifestations of patriarchy.

In the modern democracy, laws are in place, sophisticated authorities process complaints.

Women seem to be protected in the system. But how truly pragmatic are these laws in terms of tackling gender inequality when they remain absent in the private sphere?

This is where the patriarchy lies today. In the normals, the workarounds, in practices that seem too comfortable to question.

Right to Education Act, mandates free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 14. The law is followed but with a workaround. Middle class families who can afford to educate their children, send their sons to a private school and their daughters to a government school.

The mentality behind this is that they do not want to spend on a girl's education believing it will be of no use to her once she is married. A married woman working is a big no no irrespective of her education. Pursuing a higher education for girls is not even a conversation. Getting married and then caring for their husband is seen as the ultimate goal and therefore any 'extra' spending on education is considered a waste of money. This mindset affects the quality of a girl's education, most not even making it till graduation. Less than 50% of girls in rural India complete 10th standard.

(I do not intend to demean studying in a government school but it is unfortunately true that the facilities and quality one gets in a private school by enlarge is better than those in government ones.)

(*Ministry of Women and Child Development*, 2022) Schemes, for example, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, are rolled out but their effectiveness is questionable. Its objectives revolved around improvement of sex ratio, girl child education participation, prevention of female foeticide and changing negative mindsets about female children. In reality, only 25% of the allocated funds

were ever spent by states, among which ~79% was spent only on media/advertisements. Secondary school enrollment of girl children increased by just 2.49% over 9 years. The lack of significant 'real' change brought by it, is another example of the 'illusion of progress'.

However it is also true that there have been reforms in the legal system to account for gender discrimination. The constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, providing women the right to work (Article 15). Affirmative action and special provisions for the upliftment of women is also constitutionally recognized (Article 15(3)). There are numerous laws for women at the workplace, safeguarding them against workplace sexual harassment (even mandating a committee to address complaints), guaranteeing paid maternity leaves, equal pay, and non-discrimination in promotions, among others.

(The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013); (The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961) ; (Ministry of Law and Justice, 1976)

The public sphere seems to be well protected. It seems like a level playing ground, but how truly level is it? For a woman, to even reach the workplace is a challenge. A traditional housewife is expected to engage in domestic chores, but when she starts working outside for a pay, it does not replace the chores in her workload, it becomes an addition to it. Gender expectations and societal norms allocate caregiving and domestic duties primarily to women, irrespective of their employment level.

The primary metric of judgement of character of a woman socially is how well she manages her household. When she works outside, the metric remains the same.

(Shockley et al., 2021) While both partners are professionally active, women continue to bear a disproportionate share of household and caregiving responsibilities, leading to higher role conflict, emotional exhaustion, and reduced professional identity compared to men.

'Working women' are at times praised to be 'superwomen'. Is this really a compliment? This tag places unreasonable expectations on them to excel both at home and at her job, while there remain no such expectations on a man.

The ability of women to manage these competing responsibilities is not evidence of equality, it just demonstrates the ways in which they continue to negotiate and survive within patriarchal structures.

Deniz Kandiyoti, in her theory of Patriarchal Bargain, talks about this. The existence of set rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate, yet which may nonetheless be contested and renegotiated. She argues that when a system as rigid as this (ie, patriarchy) is in place, minorities (here, women) actively try to work around it to grow in life. Women have learnt to grow around it, to find ways to manage all these responsibilities, but just because this happens, we can not claim that patriarchy is no longer prevalent. It is the women who cope with it, not the patriarchy that allows them equal opportunity to.

As it is already established, patriarchy is a system that bigets sexism and misogyny. Therefore both men and women are victims of it, therefore both bargain with it. But within the system nonetheless, it is women that bargain more because patriarchy benefits men more than it does women.

Even if a man and a woman have the same monetary resource and talent to start with, a woman encounters more barriers to reach the same potential due to her woman identity. They carry this gender baggage that slows them down.

Capitalism expects you to work unconditionally in order to sustain and grow. Men have historically been provided the ecosystem to do so, women have to struggle to create one for themselves. Therefore the likelihood of them succeeding is lesser.

Only 10% of the world's billionaires are women, not due to lack of skill, but due to lack of a support system.

Living in such private spheres, it becomes practically impossible for women by and large to step outside without becoming subjects of condemnation. This is where the patriarchy lies today, newer expectations coupling with traditional ones, where their co-existing is just monstrous.

There definitely has been progress. A woman's role has evolved, a man's has not, and this is where the problem today lies.

Social media– foe or friend?

Over 500 million people (Roughly 34% of the population) in India use social media. Among these women users amount to only a maximum of 34%. This indicates that even with reasonable financial growth, even women are able to afford smart phones, but their presence on social media is still limited.

Women are technically allowed to use social media, but socio-cultural factors push them back. This is where patriarchy lies today. These social-cultural factors that impede women from accessing media are manifestations of patriarchal expectations of gender norms and roles.

We further try to understand this aspect through the lens of digital feminism. This 4th wave of feminism in the 21st century is quite distinct from the earlier waves. And this has its merits and demerits. It has seen unprecedented reach due to the accessibility of its medium. However conversely, there is also online hate, and amplification of demographic divide. Therefore analysing its various aspects through intersectionality and digital patriarchy is crucial.

(Saha et al., 2024) Women in India spend nearly five hours additionally everyday on unpaid domestic work, leaving them with significantly less "leisure time" to explore social media in comparison to men. Women on social media, for many, raises moral concerns. Because access to the internet and content oversteps patriarchal restrictions on a woman's autonomy and identity. They are feared to get corrupted with new ideas. Some panchayats in Uttar Pradesh have even imposed fines on women using social media outside their homes.

(Karusala et al., 2019) For those who make it to social media, staying there is another mammoth task. Women online face the pressure of maintaining a 'respectable' online profile. Yet, more than 80% of urban women on social media have faced online harassment. Around 50% of female content creators in journalism, technology and gaming experience harassment. Apart from harassment they are subjected to trolling more often than their male counterparts.

The reasons they are trolled for are also concerning. While male creators are often trolled for their opinions, positions etc, women are mostly trolled for their appearance and gender. This indicates the level of acceptance for women on social media. Not only is visibility of women from physical spaces pushed back, it continues even on digital ones.

(Zhang, n.d.) These incidents of harassment must be examined from the lens of feminist theory and intersectionality. Such an analysis indicates that these incidents are not isolated acts but are manifestations of structural faults. And repeated acts like this, start to make it a performative ritual through which patriarchy renews itself on digital spaces. It also functions as a means of establishment of control and dominance. Here digital media serves as an extension of physical realities.

Theoretically platforms like social media should help reduce discrimination and stereotypes, by increasing awareness through more accessible exposure. In reality however, this theory overlooks the basic principle of the functioning of social media- the algorithm. It functions on principles of Algorithmic sorting and Algorithmic targeting. Users are recommended content based on their preferences (this includes their views, prejudices, etc). Over time targeted content about, say, members of certain groups, serve as confirmatory evidence for one's preexisting biases, which algorithms have been able to detect on the basis of 'like' patterns and content-viewing histories. Gradually seeing only their worldviews disproportionately reflected in the content presented to them creates a lack of exposure to other ideologies and perspectives.

(Lambrecht & Tucker, 2019) Another phenomenon that happens is algorithmic bias and not just sorting. Algorithmic bias happens for multiple reasons, such as- from learning discriminatory behavior from actual customer behavior, from learning from biased data sources, or on the basis of market dynamics/economic incentive which argues that there is no such learnt bias as such. The argument of economic incentive in particular, indicates that transparency or neutrality alone do not suffice. When the system is designed in a particular way, mere actors of it can not be blamed.

Eventually individuals create a stronger sense of social identity and have a very positive attitude towards their own group. Ingroups and Outgroups are created and the algorithm boosts negative attitudes towards outgroups. These reinforce pre-existing stereotypes and prejudices.

It is also argued that it is not only the society that is mirrored on the digital space, but also the digital space that actively shapes physical society. Biased architecture of the space further hampers equal participation of marginalized communities. Additionally, technology being invisible, makes it harder to contest such claims of patriarchal hierarchies.

On the contrary however, social media does act as a space for women to explore and build their identity. Social media hashtags, campaigns, and digital literacy programmes have promoted self-reliance. 80% of rural women entrepreneurs use social media for business. This coupled with monetization of content creation has opened up a new avenue of earning for women. Through content on social media women build their own social capital, and a means to enter the public sphere. They are reported to have found belongingness and companionship through online groups of shared interests. What is paradoxical is the level of toxicity they encounter on the very platform that enables this access.

Traditional patriarchy encompasses long-standing systems that center male authority across different facets of society. It operates through laws, norms and institutions that naturalize male dominance. The key mechanisms of traditional patriarchy include, exerting control over women through legal and social regulation (say of marriage, reproduction, and respectability), gendered division of labour (and gendered job market). And consequent of which economic dependence is created that forms a vicious cycle of helplessness.

However, digital patriarchy (contemporary patriarchy), is very different from this. It is patriarchy embedded in and mediated by digital platforms, algorithms, data infrastructures, and online cultures. It finds expression through online harassment, gendered hate, algorithmic bias, economic incentives, etc, that reproduce misogyny and governance structures controlled by male-dominated technology governance actors.

Digital patriarchy extends and transforms traditional patriarchy rather than replacing it. It uses algorithms, platforms, and data to reproduce old gender hierarchies. And as traditional feminism was used to counter traditional patriarchy, digital feminism is being used to counter digital patriarchy.

The main difference lies in the organizational methods and level of reach. Physical meetings/conferences, print media, street protests, and institutional campaigns are complemented, or oftentimes replaced by online spaces such as social media, blogs, podcasts, digital art, online campaigns, etc, to mobilize action. Digital feminism increases visibility of sensitive issues, that would otherwise remain insufficiently addressed through traditional mediums of advocacy (such as, marital rape and sexual assault). The veil of anonymity is advantageous here to allow expression of minority voices and opinions, without societal pressures.

While traditional patriarchy fosters more solidarity and collective care, many organizations have been exclusionary towards certain communities due to personal biases. Dependence on mainstream media made mass reach harder.

Today however, digital campaigns circulate rapidly and mobilize support almost instantly. Online spaces provide a platform for minority voices to be heard, increasing avenues for activism. Parallely however, digital activism can encourage low-commitment participation and raise questions about the extent to which such engagement produces tangible results.

In a nutshell, a patriarchal society remains patriarchal even on social media. While there is more access for women online today, that still comes with heavy baggage. An important question to ask, is to what extent this access is truly liberating?

Profane acts of patriarchy are maintained by a subconscious or conditioned belief in the Sacred acts of patriarchy (mutually adding on to one another). While there has come technical change, the mindsets remain unchanged. Without changing the latter, the former alone risks becoming counterproductive.

7. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that patriarchy has not disappeared from contemporary Indian society; rather, it has transformed into more subtle, adaptive, and normalized forms. While legal reforms, constitutional guarantees, and feminist movements have significantly expanded women's access to education, employment, political participation, and public life, these achievements have not been matched by an equivalent transformation in social attitudes. As a result, patriarchy today operates less through explicit exclusion and more through everyday practices, cultural expectations, institutional biases, and digital spaces. The findings suggest that equality in the public sphere often coexists with inequality in the private sphere, where women continue to bear a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities, face restrictions on their autonomy, and experience gendered expectations that remain deeply embedded in society. Equality that disappears behind closed doors cannot be considered complete empowerment.

The study further demonstrates that social media has emerged as a double-edged phenomenon in the struggle for gender equality. On one hand, digital platforms have created unprecedented opportunities for women's voices to be heard, facilitated feminist activism, and enabled greater access to education, entrepreneurship, and public discourse. On the other hand, these very platforms have become spaces where patriarchy adapts to new realities through cyber-harassment, misogynistic online communities, targeted trolling, objectification, and algorithmic amplification of harmful content. The findings therefore indicate that technology alone cannot dismantle patriarchy; rather, existing social inequalities are often reproduced and intensified within digital environments.

The theoretical frameworks employed in this study reinforce these findings by demonstrating that gender relations are socially constructed, continuously reproduced, and capable of transformation. Patriarchy survives because it becomes normalized through repeated social practices, cultural conditioning, and institutional arrangements that often remain unquestioned. At the same time, feminist theory reminds us that these structures are neither natural nor permanent, making social change both possible and necessary.

The study therefore argues that achieving substantive gender equality requires moving beyond legal recognition towards transforming the social norms that continue to sustain patriarchal power. Existing gender laws must be implemented more effectively, particularly in addressing discrimination and violence within the private sphere. Social media platforms should be made more accountable for the content their algorithms promote so that digital spaces do not become environments where misogyny and gender stereotypes are rewarded through engagement. Greater investment in gender-sensitive digital literacy and education is equally essential to enable safe and inclusive online participation while challenging patriarchal attitudes from an early age. Finally, meaningful progress requires collaboration among governments, educational institutions, civil society, technology companies, and citizens to ensure that technological advancement is accompanied by social transformation.

Ultimately, the persistence of patriarchy in contemporary society demonstrates that progress cannot be measured solely by the existence of rights or technological development. The true measure of equality lies in whether women can exercise those rights freely, safely, and with dignity in their homes, workplaces, communities, and digital spaces. Patriarchy has changed its form, but not its purpose; therefore, the struggle for gender equality must evolve alongside it.

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