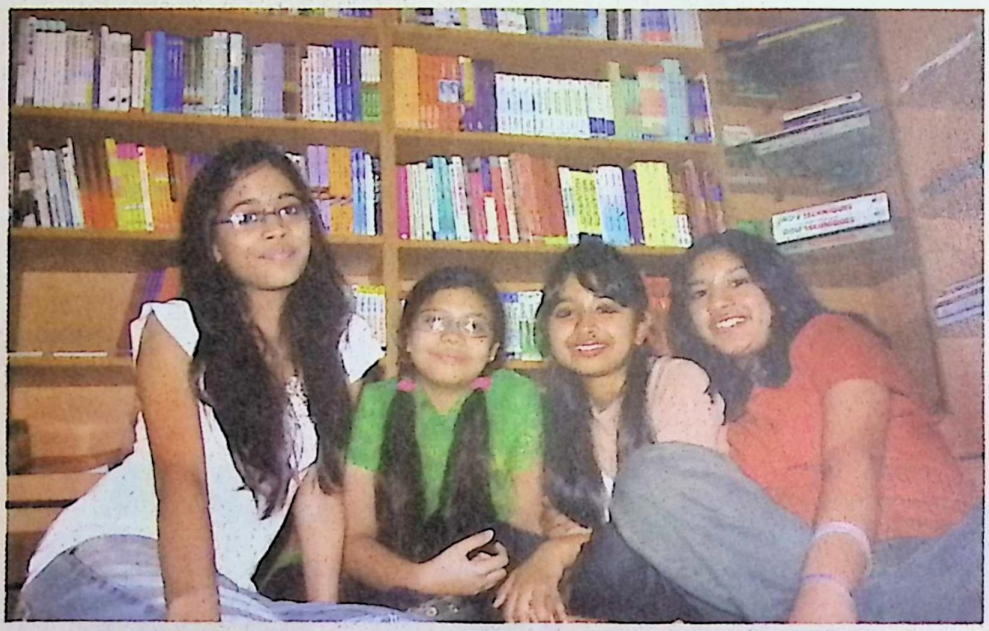
Unfortunately, this scenario does not hold true for the majority. There are still too many young girls being deprived of their basic rights to be educated, to work or have their own thoughts only because they are female.

So can we ever change our own status? As mothers we have a huge responsibility towards our daughters. Our job is to support and protect them in every possible way without smothering them or limiting their horizons. We should not be focussing so much on telling them how to look pretty and ladylike but more on how to be confident and how to develop their intellect. This means we have to develop ourselves and be the strong, intelligent and confident individuals that they will want to emulate. We must stop ourselves from worrying about whether they will find a good husband and work on how to make sure that they have the skills to stand on their own feet and not be dependent on any man.



Let them make their own choices

One of the major reasons why many young women are drawn to men their mothers shudder about is low self esteem. Thanks to the relentless media bombardment of messages and images that scream that a woman must be a certain size and shape and colour, our daughters are growing up with the notion that they have to look like Barbie dolls in order to fit in. Hence the obsession with losing weight even at the cost of their health and the inordinate time and money spent on beauty products and at the beauty parlour. Many young women are either bulimic or anorexic and on the verge of total breakdowns. And this obsession with weight can start at a very early age. I remember a certain thin three year old who would look into the mirror and strain her frock to her body making her ribs stick out and ask "Am I getting fat?" She was equally worried about her mother and kept coaxing her to be 'thin and beautiful' like the models in television ads.

Of course we must make sure our daughters are not overweight but we have to make them understand that at growing stages children must get enough nutrition so that they are healthy. It is ridiculous that even little girls crave to have hour glass figures even before they have reached their teens.

Thus our battle against the Hollywood-Bollywood stereotyped female image must continue. The emphasis should be on staying fit, healthy and generally feeling good about themselves rather than sculpting their bodies to become objects of male desire. Admittedly it's a formidable task to provide such counterarguments against messages that have become so universal and pervasive. But for goodness sake, we are their mothers, their best friends, their most reliable allies (ok fathers are included too). Often mothers are too caught up on expressing their disappointment in their daughters--they are too fat, too thin, too dumb or too obsessed with boys--forgetting completely to compliment their accomplishments or encourage them, to balance the criticism. No matter how old one is the hurt and sense of failure of a daughter of never being good enough for her mother, is very deep-seated and traumatic. It's not that they hate their daughters but more because they are overcautious, paranoid even, that their daughters will suffer because of their failings. Mothers tend to be perfectionists when it comes to their daughters and this may be quite burdensome and debilitating for the daughters. We have to understand that our girls may look a lot like us, even have some of our mannerisms but they are separate individuals with minds of their own. At best we can try to instil good values in them, be good role models and gain their trust so that we can point out their mistakes. But if they stumble and fall we must always be there to catch them and hold them and put them back on their feet. That is the least we can do for these wonderful, delightful and remarkable persons who are our daughters. ■