

The mother and the daughter: that dynamic though

They say, times have changed; maybe they have, but as shocking as it seems mothers possibly still favour their sons over daughters.

There have been societal changes, yet the gender battle is far from being over. Perhaps mothers, the builders of a society, still continue to impart the wrong lessons to their children. And as these children become mothers, sinful gender oppression is being handed over from one generation after another, as part of 'family legacy.'

Girls are taught to be the weaker sex and to remain submissive; even if they are not forced, these messages are quite clear to every girl — a toddler to the octogenarian.

Mothers, like you and I; mothers from all spheres of society — our maids, our bank managers, the mother who provides fresh vegetables at my doorsteps every day, almost every one of us is still making the basic mistake and simply not doing our part in bringing gender parity.

The drill of instilling values that a girl is the sole custodian of her family's collective respect, status and dignity in society still remains. And this pattern of social behaviour is the root cause of all gender discrimination, and it starts more often from mothers.

'Izzat' is now an archaic value, but not for the girl, as she still is the custodian of her family's honour. If a woman cannot protect herself from physical or sexual threats that are rampant in society, her family is at the risk of losing face in the society.

As much as we cherish the batua that was handed over from our maternal grandmother, I disdainfully look upon the gender bias that was also passed down from one generation to the next. And as much as I hate to say it, maybe I have already passed it on to my child!

In our society, every girl undergoes constant hammering for the need to protect herself; not only is she burdened by the

pressure to protect her body for safety, but also because god forbid, a woman's body becomes unholy by a mere male/sexual touch before she ties the nuptial bonds.

Consequently, a girl's boundary becomes limited and her freedom, jeopardised. Gradually, she moves only within her own borders, and we mothers want it to be exactly that, and only that!

We were not allowed to play with my friends at the playground wearing a frock, let alone pants; today, our daughters are not allowed to play a game of football at the community playground in comfy shorts and jersey of the team she religiously follows on ESPN. By such practices, just like our mothers did through their glaring look, the bigotry is passed down.

In the name of culture, tradition, and religion, attitudes and practices that support such petty principles have been institutionalised at all levels. We, mothers, are psychologically damaging our very own daughters' self-esteem, and rather than attempting to boost their confidence and prepare them for the struggles that lie ahead, we are clipping their wings, amputating their morale, even before they know what it means.

Women's security issues can be explained at four levels — within her personal domain, inside her family space, in society, and in the state machine that is her workplace.

Similarly, violence against women also has defined aspects to it such as sexual, physical, mental, and economic insecurity. And all these are intertwined.

The violence done against her makes us vulnerable and insecure as human beings, and also as citizens of our own society. And from the fear or need to protect her, we are restricting our daughters instead of preparing them to confront the challenges.

Engaging men and boys in the society is of utmost importance to bring

about visible change in it and that also begins at home, by us mothers, that too right from the first hour of birth, when, as Muslims, we give Adhan to thank Allah and welcome the new baby.

God does not look down upon any of His creations, and neither should we.

The fact that a girl is a human being and she has the right to live fearlessly should be constantly hammered into our patriarchal society's mindset. The family mechanism, or social and cultural norms to keep our daughters in subordinate positions, to discriminate and dominate; to see her as a family property rather than a member, should be changed once and for all.

And for this fight to continue, our mothers need to get involved and change their own mindsets; as mothers ourselves, we must recondition our biased minds and treat all our children equally, offering every privilege we can afford to. One must not exclude

the girls who are the mothers of tomorrow. There is the proverbial generation gap as it is, and hence it becomes more important for our mother-daughter relationships to get over it.

If their confidence level is up and they have a supportive family and the right social environment, some of our daughters do go on to become acclaimed in their chosen fields — bankers, engineers, dancers, athletes, leaders. Once socially empowered, they can establish themselves financially. They can choose to be anything their mind allows them to be. And if they see themselves as future homemakers... then so be it!

However, at ground zero, the real challenge for us women still remains in changing our own mother's psyche to set us free. And unfortunately, I am still fighting for this basic change to happen, and still nowhere near to achieving it.

At the threshold of the proverbial 'mid-life,' I am dog-tired of my struggles to establish my rights as a woman. Nothing has changed, or I could not change anything regarding women's rights. At this time and age, women's rights are still an issue that need to be addressed. My juniors are still fighting for women's basic privileges as I did and my predecessors did before me. I hope this is one torch that will pass down in flames and no mother will ever pause for ease.

Friday, 8 March is International Women's Day; and this year I wish we are at least called women properly instead of 'omen' and not be treated like one either. And here at Star Lifestyle, we are bringing out some brilliant reads about a yogi, few entrepreneurs, a vibrant group of ladies' take on empowerment, and more.

Enjoy!

- RBR

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