

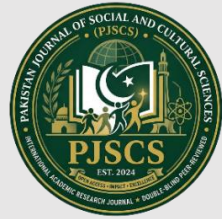


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Hammering Out Power Within Patriarchy: The Transformation of Women's Role Across Generations in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Conceived in the past as a system whereby men rule over women, today's feminist scholarship points out that women are also instrumental in maintaining such patriarchal norms. This paper examines how middle-aged women of Pakistan transition from being submissive daughters-in-law to becoming dominant mothers-in-law. This research examines the sociocultural mechanisms that perpetuate patriarchal values in line with familial structures across generations. A qualitative research design is used and in-depth semi-structured interviews are conducted with 20 middle-aged women, who are living in Rawalpindi Pakistan. A phenomenological approach is used to understand what participants' lived experiences were. Thematic analysis was used for the data which were analyzed with reliability commonly through inter-coder validation and member checking. The data reveal that women are socially and re-socialized at first as young brides whose experiences with the system are oppressive, and then, later, as mothers-in-law, enforcing the system to which they themselves were subjected. These experiences are largely influenced by socio-economic status, with lower-income women primarily relying on direct control mechanisms while upper-income women use more subtle forms of influence like curbing finances and emotionally manipulating. Urban women adjust their strategies for influence in an evolving society where rural women are obligated to traditional expectations. Even educated women can rationalize their enforcement of patriarchy, even though it does affect women's perspectives, as a way to obtain power in the households. It also highlights a growing trend of some women, sliding away from patriarchal enforcement, and advocating for a more equal arrangement in the household. This research highlights the paradoxical role of women both as victims of patriarchal norms and as enforcers of those norms. Targeted interventions are needed because neo-patriarchy endures, wherein contemporary women are operating within traditional gender hierarchies. Economic empowerment, intergenerational dialogue, legal awareness, and community-based initiatives can help to dismantle these addictions to long-held cycles. Implications of the study's insights for feminist theory, gender policy reforms, and social programs for improving the status of women in family structures are important.



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Introduction

Patriarchy has always been a central term in feminist discourse, and it refers to the situation in which power is mostly used by men to the detriment of women inside the social, economic, and political structures. Until very recently, patriarchy has been characterized by a system of male dominance where authority is concentrated in the hands of men, arbitrarily subordinating women (Rakow, 2022). Recent research has demonstrated that while men do indeed perpetuate patriarchal structures, women also

actively contribute to the continuation of these very norms in the home and society. While this study specifically analyzes how middle-aged women internalize and reproduce patriarchal norms in the household, as a daughter-in-law they are subjugated and as a mother-in-law, they become enforcers of the same rule (Ustunel et al., 2023).

The power of family dynamics shifts with the families' own ideas of masculinity and femininity; and these ideas are not so much imposed but actively maintained by the process of intergenerational socialization, re-socialization, and the ideas themselves (Roy & Allen, 2023). The importance of the research is also relevant in the context of Pakistan as it does not so much have a 'civil society' as families are still the primary unit of social organization, and gender roles are embedded in cultural traditions. Women sit in complex locations between subjugation and power at various stages of life as they are primary caregivers and heads of the household. The study tackles how women negotiate patriarchy both falling in with and challenging it as these changes according to their positions of power and economy (Rafique et al., 2024).

A qualitative research approach was utilized to explore this phenomenon, and in-depth interviews were conducted with middle-aged women who have occupied both positions in the familial hierarchy. It finds power exercised in non-overt ways like emotional control, social expectations, and economic dependency. This research contributes to a broader understanding of how gendered power dynamics persist and change through critical analysis of these dynamics.

The theories that are discussed include but are not limited to Michel Foucault's idea of disciplinary power and Bandura's social learning theory in their explanation regarding the mechanisms by which patriarchal norms are internalized and transmitted. By comparing how varying social groups (economic, educational, and urban/rural) unique living experiences impact women's roles in upholding patriarchal structures or not, the research offers a comparative lens. By addressing this question, the research contributes to feminist theory and provides policy and community-based initiative insight into promoting gender equity within family structures.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical origins for this study are based on several theoretical perspectives to comprehend the reproduction and internalization of patriarchal norms amongst middle aged women. Disciplinary power (Foucault, 1995) is the primary theoretical lens as it implies that power is not about the 'virtuality' of imposed violence or coercion per se but is rooted in social norms and practices. In patriarchal societies, these norms are learned by the women and are later used to enforce these same norms within the family structures. Foucault does however establish a base for the understanding that power is embedded in social structures, and this power is indeed gendered, but more theories are needed.

Disciplinary Power by Michel Foucault

The operation of social control within the family unit can be understood by Foucault's (1995) concept of disciplinary power. There is no overtly coercive aspect of power in what refers to patriarchal systems, power is reinforced through norms, rules, and self-surveillance. More generally, broader societal mechanisms of discipline are repeated in women's internalization of patriarchal expectations, and in their later imposition on younger women. This explains why even when these women went through oppression in their younger days, they will become the enforcers of these same structures in their middle age.

Feminist Institutionalism

Whereas feminist institutionalism looks at how power over gendered lines can be maintained, from the families, marriage, and broader institutions in power (Mackay & Krook 2011). In patriarchal homes, older women (mothers in law) assume 'institutional' role similar to male patriarchs contributing to gendered hierarchy. A family unit is an institution or an institution that controls rules, tradition, and behavior according to expected behavior while maintaining patriarchal norms. The institutional norms of such traditions are internalized into the women who become gate keepers of traditional roles and power structures.

Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura

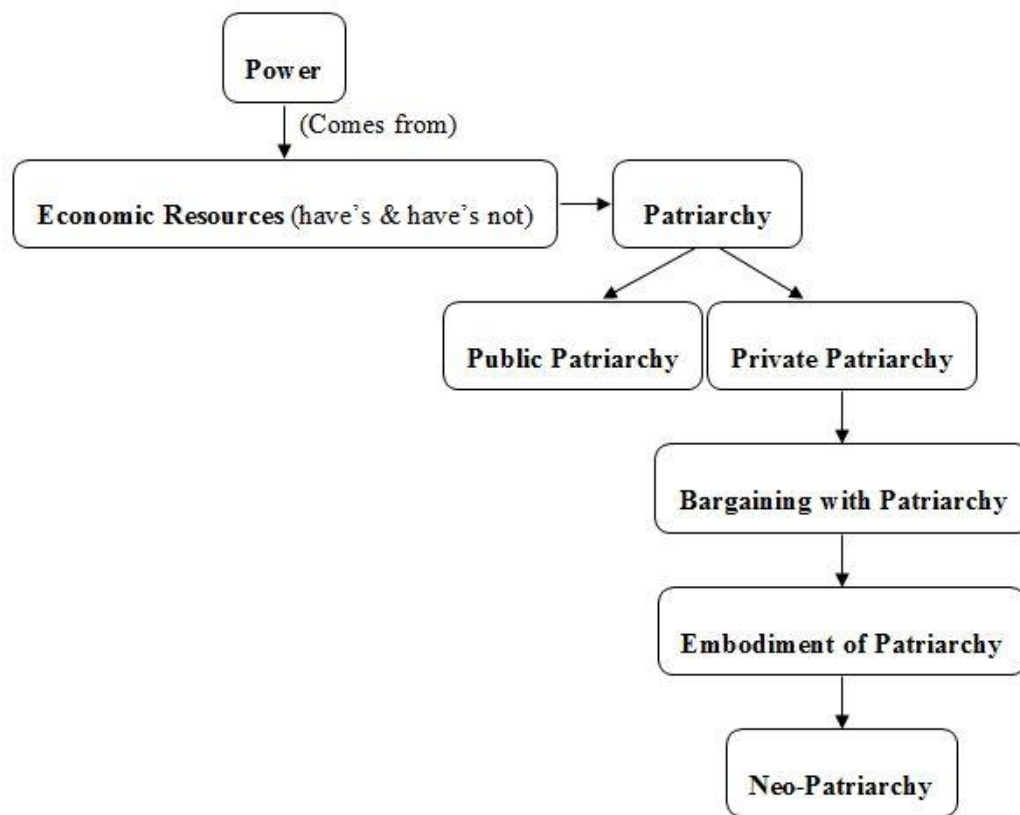
Bandura's (1977) social learning theory can be used to explain how patriarchal behaviors are passed on from generation to generation. This theory says that people learn by observing others and then following their behaviors which are rewarded or punished by social inducements. Daughters-in-law learn by observing their mothers-in-law's behavior and reinforcement of the practice directly and indirectly. When they move into positions of authority, they tend to repeat this behavior, thereby affixing patriarchal norms. Social conditioning to reinforce patriarchal values is this cyclical transmission of such values.

Conceptual Framework

In terms of the conceptual framework of this study, Sylvia Walby's (1990) distinction between private and public patriarchy is utilized but neo patriarchy is employed in order to define how older women maintain control of patriarchal control in private family domain. According to Walby (1990), there exist both public and private patriarchy on the basis of which both intersect to continue making males superior. In the household level the private patriarchy holds the power to have control in financial and decision making while public patriarchy works at workplace and public institutions. While the men still dominate these two spheres, the women play a part in keeping them in place.

Older women act as enforcers of social norms that regulate younger women in the case of private patriarchy, while in public patriarchy gendered norms inform women's mobility and career as a whole. The findings of this study are explainable by the concept of neo-patriarchy as outlined by Moghadam (2004). This is neo-patriarchy, a patriarchal system with elements of modernity also present. Middle aged women today in the contemporary family system suffer under the traditional patriarchal norms, but in due course become enforcers of the same. The richness of patriarchy lies in these three mechanisms by which women re-inforce patriarchy. Socialization and re socialization are extremely important, women internalize patriarchal views while they are daughters in law and enforce them as mothers in law. Second, as women age, take authority in the family, and then use power over younger women we can say that the transition is happening.

Third, emotional as well as economic control is exerted, using the sons' emotional control over them and financial restraints on daughters in law to further reinforce the position of old women. It provides a useful theoretical and conceptual framework for analyzing how women maintain patriarchal structures by means of power and control. This paper goes beyond a simple understanding of patriarchy as predominantly male dominated and instead confronts patriarchy as a dynamic system in which women are central. Integration of Foucault's disciplinary power, inter sectionalist theory, feminist institutionalism, and social learning theory is used to create a more sophisticated understanding of patriarchy. An analysis of neo-patriarchy is added to refine the analysis, showing it through the way in which patriarchy changes to adapt to the times.



Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

Historical and Contextual Overview

The Patriarchy had historical roots from early human civilizations back to patriarchal systems of male dominance, a social, economic, and political one. Patriarchy is 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, exploit women' (Walby, 1990). Enshrining in legal, religious and cultural institutions patriarchal systems historically have thus reinforced the power of men. In the ancient Greece and Rome, there already existed early patriarchal structures in Western societies where women's legal rights were limited and their roles were largely confined to the domestic (Lerner, 1986). Thus, gendered power hierarchies were further institutionalized based on the influence of religious doctrines like Christian and Islamic teachings (Ahmed, 1992). With the Industrial Revolution, the public and private sphere was separated again, women were relegated to the sphere of domesticity and men controlled economic and political realms. Patriarchy is differently manifested in non-Western societies due to cultural, religious and socio-economic reasons. In many African and Asian societies, traditional customs of gender roles are often in place and older women, in many cases, have a traditional role of enforcing norms (Kandiyoti, 1988). Even in contemporary contexts, we have witnessed legal progress in gender equality, but patriarchy is implicit in wages gaps, political underrepresentation and how when it comes to making our choices surrounding the family, we allow society to dictate who cares and by what means (Chowdhury, 2021).

The Role of Women in Reinforcing Patriarchy

Though patriarchy has been argued to be male dominated in nature, research indicates that women perform an important role in its reproduction through socialization mechanisms. In example, Foucault's (1995) theory of disciplinary power explains how social norms control behavior without the use of coercion in the sense of overs. From an early age women internalize patriarchal expectations and internalize them in family and community structures. Daughters study submissiveness and gendered assumptions from their mothers and grandmothers, creating a cycle of norm reproduction (Bhana, 2020). For example, middle aged women from traditional societies often act as enforcers of patriarchal rules of compliance on women young women through mechanisms as arranged marriage, gendered labor division and social expectation of modesty and also of obedience (Kabeer 2018).

In Patel (2022) study on South Asian families, older women contributed significantly to sustaining gender norms on marriage and doing domestic responsibilities. The role of women in positions of authority within their households regulates the behavior of younger women, further reinforcing patriarchal structures (Adjei 2021).

Different Socio-Economic Context and Power Dynamics

The sanction of patriarchy by women, however, differs in different socio-economic context. Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) can help to understand the ways in which gender education, class and location intersect to produce a reality where patriarchal forces have a dominating grip on reproduction as well as the roles women are supposed to play. Even in urban settings, when women have higher education and economic independence, they might be challenging tradition gender norm, but the society still limits their effort (Lewis, 2020). Research into corporate workplaces indicates that senior female executives tend to uphold rigid gender norms and dissuade young women from trying to ascend in less men's dominated industries (Smith, 2021) whereas women in rural and economically deprived areas are more likely to adhere to traditional roles because of, financial dependency and cultural expectations (Mukherjee, 2023). Other comparative studies reveal that while it is the case that women at higher socio-economic positions enforce patriarchy differently sometimes through workplace discrimination and not by using control over women in the family (Williams, 2022), lower income women enforce patriarchal norms through peer pressure found in their family structures and the community (Alam, 2021).

Patterns of Change over Tim: Evidence of Change over Time

Women do not exercise patriarchy but only members leverage patriarchal structures in the changing legal frameworks and social movements as well as the digital activism. In terms of feminist movements, specifically in the digital era, it offers platforms for women to question and resist patriarchal norms (Gill & Orgad, 2022). Even #MeToo has disrupted the patterns set in place by gendered power relations by revealing and challenging abusive practices (Banet-Weiser, 2020). Studies over a long time suggest that in societies with progressive gender policy, women's enforcement of patriarchal power decreases gradually. To give an example, in Scandinavian countries (Johansson, 2021) study asserted that as policies for gender equality grew older women used less to enforce traditional gender roles. Lastly, research in developing economies demonstrates that although older women contribute to the maintenance of gender norms, younger generations are rejecting gender norms because of their expanding opportunities to receive education and to pursue economic activities (Nair, 2023). Research in conservative countries demonstrates that while economic enhancements have diminished patriarchal structures, deep rooted cultural expectation reinforce them (Hassan2022), and rise of neo-patriarchy that

combines the traditional gender norms with modernity (Moghadam, 2021) spells out that societal change is not a straightforward affair.

Research Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative research design is employed by this study to investigate how middle aged women assimilate and perpetuate cultural norms of patriarchy within the setting of a family. For the purpose of capturing participants' subjective experiences through a phenomenological approach, the focus of the study was on understanding the participant's views about power dynamics and gender relationships. The process of using this methodology introduces into in depth understanding of how patriarchal values are replicated throughout generations.

Sample Size and Selection

It is a study of 20 participants, middle-aged women who had experienced subordination and later authority within patriarchal households. A sample size that is sufficiently large to support the credibility of the findings whereas diverse experiences are represented. Snowball sampling was used to select subjects through initial respondents who referred other potential subjects. Such an approach can lead to homogeneity however, efforts were made to increase representative by including women from various educational, economic as well as social backgrounds.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical guidelines were very strict here preventing any exploitation of participant's right and well-being. Relevant institutional review board approved the use of ethical approval. All participants gave informed consent, understanding the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures and ability to withdraw at any stage. Names were either pseudonymous or off the record and data was kept under lock and key to maintain privacy.

Data Collection Methods

Semi structured in depth interviews were conducted to collect data from which participants could narrate in details how they experience. The hours of interviews were usually between 45 and 60 minutes and were in person or face-to-face for participants that were accessible or online for those that were not. Their discussions in this case involved open ended questions on their experiences of patriarchal control, how they fit into enforcing norms and their perceptions of power transitions in the household.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through a thematic analysis approach. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and open coded (initially). Thus, codes were grouped into broader themes extracted from the data based on recurring ways of expressing patriarchal power reinforcement and power transition. To improve the reliability, the coded data was reviewed by a second researcher and discrepancies were discussed in order to guarantee consistency.

Limitations of the Study

Some of the limitations of this study should be noted. However, we were not able to sample participants who were very different from one another (partially due to referrals coming from similarly social

circles). The study also occurs in a particular cultural and geographical setting and may not be generalizable to all contexts. It will be interesting for future research to collect a more diverse sample and to explore a greater range of experiences and behaviors. Even though these limitations, the study provides an important understanding of how middle-aged women continually reinforce patriarchal norms as presented by previous gendered power dynamics scholarship pertaining to family structure.

Findings and Discussion

Introduction

The problem of change in the power roles of middle aged women within patriarchal family structures is examined. It is found that patriarchy is internalized through the process of socialization and re-socialization and such an internalizing of patriarchy continues to perpetuate gender difference power hierarchies. First, these women are marginalized as daughters-in-law but then become enforcers of patriarchal norms as mothers-in-law. These findings are analyzed in light of socio-economic inequalities, urban–rural contrasts, influences of education, and mechanisms to break this cycle, while taking place within the context of global research which has been done on family power dynamics.

Socio-Economic Status and Experiences of Women

Patriarchy is very much deeply embedded in the agenda of women and it is determined by socio - economic status of the women. Women of impoverished backgrounds seemed to be subject to stricter control, with financial subjugation having taken on a new extent of control. This helped ensure that lots were unable to work outside the home, dependency on male providers was reinforced, and vulnerability to family power structures increased. A woman from a rural low income household said ‘I was never allowed to earn, my husbands and in laws thought that a woman’s place is in the house’. They said, even when I wanted to work, it will bring dishonor to the family.'

Contrarily, women of higher income backgrounds exhibited high degree of autonomy in decision making, however, were still subjected to the patriarchal norms in family spheres. Symbolically displaying power in corporate environments, affluent women would often control household finances and set strict rules about the domestic life of younger women. As one participant from an urban upper class household explained: ‘I have control over all domestic decisions, but that does not mean I allow my daughter in law to have equal say.’ ### I worked very hard to earn my place in this household."

Urban vs. Rural Contrasts in Patriarchal Reinforcement

It demonstrates huge differences between how urban and rural women enforce patriarchal norms. In the rural areas, traditional strictness had persisted, with elderly women actively policing the younger women’s behavior, mobility and reproductive options. Women who weren’t ‘normal’ would be ostracized or called disobedient. One rural participant stated that he has 'no say' in anything 'as a young man and now guarantee that his daughter in law follows the same traditions.' That’s why, if I had to endure it, why shouldn’t she?" Though on the surface more progressive, urban women controlled younger women more by emotional manipulation and dependence on the economic system. The transition from physical discipline to psychological control implies that urbanization does not dismantle patriarchal structures, but rather modify them. One of the urban participants said, I do not govern my daughter in law very strictly, but when she twists out of line I recall her to her duties. I will devote myself to the memory that she does not forget her role in the family.'

Impact of Education on Women's Perspectives

Education set itself up as a core issue in developing women's views of power. Many women with less education justified patriarchal norms for preserving family honor and keeping their families stable. An illiterate man said, 'I just took everything my mother in law told me, a good woman does what her mother in law says.' I would have been thrown out if I questioned her." On the contrary though, given women with higher education levels were aware of gendered inequalities but they would frequently rationalize their participation in patriarchal enforcement as a way of gaining respect and authority in their families. 'A university educated participant said: 'Well, I understood women should have the right to something but when I was a daughter in law I was obliged to obey.' Now I, as a mother in law, ensure to honor my daughter in law just as I was honored by my elders." Despite the formal education, social expectation had been deeply ingrained and continued to influence their behavior similarly to what studies in India and Bangladesh have found: the educated women continue to echo traditional norms under social and cultural exigency.

Breaking the Cycle: Strategies for Change

The study also suggests potential disruptors of the cycle between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. Egalitarian attitudes toward the daughters-in-law were especially pronounced among some of the participants, who had only one son or high economic independence. But within these overarching patriarchal norms, which these women had mastered to perform the role of a house wife, they also emphasized mutual respect of control, knowing it would only undermine the cohesion of the family. "It is good when my daughter-in-law is happy, my son will be happy and if he is happy, that means a happy family," said one participant. "I am not making the same her mother in law's mistakes." Breaking the cage of patriarchal enforcement has always been built on economic empowerment. Such patriarchal structures are less important for security for women who have an independent income. One of the participants who ran a small business said: 'Money earned from my own sweat, if somebody wants to impose control on my daughter in law, it's up to them what kind of business they wish to open.' So, never does she feel dependent on us." Challenging entrenched norms also means there are other critical factors like intergenerational dialogue.

There are open conversations among mothers in law and daughters in law which lessens the conflict and mutual understanding is developed. Personally, one woman was unafraid to talk to her daughter-in-law about everything. I talk about why things were done the way they were in my time and why she can freely and make her own choices now. It has served as a strong bond between us." Women's ability to break through patriarchy is also aided by their legal awareness. Fighting internalized oppression of patriarchal oppression is thus helped by the process of educating women about these rights. One participant said, 'I had no idea that I still had legal rights until my daughter educated me.' I now tell other women in my family that do not have to suffer in silence." Community based work that encourages women to lead and support each other frames traditional stories of power differently. More women were likely to reject the enforcement of patriarchal norms if they had been exposed to social support groups and social awareness campaigns. One of the participants belonging to a local women's rights group said, 'Being a part of the support group made me change my perspective about the matter.' I had now realized that we, as women, ought to be raising each other up rather than tearing each other down.'

Global Comparisons: Family Power Dynamics beyond Pakistan

The findings of this study correlate with this global research on matriarchal enforcement of patriarchy. In sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, such replication is suggested by studies that show that elder women use gendered tradition to consolidate their social status and preserve intergenerational loyalty. A study on Ghanaian elder women found that they use traditional gender roles to keep their presence within family structures in order to stay relevant. As in this study, research in Brazil showed that middle aged women used emotional manipulation and financial dependence to control younger women as well. On the other hand, in comparison, women are found to alienate women with patriarchal norms over generations, as gender equality policies are stronger in Scandinavian countries. Longitudinal work in Sweden indicating that as these economic and social policies evolve women impose less of the traditional gender roles on younger generations. This cross cultural insight suggests that policy interventions as well as economic opportunities for women have the ability to narrow perspectives on power structures.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study is based on the patriarchal notion of the society where men and women both strengthen the norm of patriarchy especially in the institution of family. It is concluded that although every woman has faced many problems and hardships in the initial stage after marriage, but they have a major role in the imposition of same patriarchal values on younger women at middle-age when they are in the position of power and authority. Every woman who came to the social adjustment, she has to face challenges, so it is not like that the tag of imperfection is only tagged with women who are now daughters-in-law but women who are now mothers-in-law also faced the same situation in the initial phase of their marriage. When mothers-in-law were in their previous role, they were also considered imperfect. Women were conflicting with their own perception at the middle-age. And they try to justify the actions and behaviors of their own mother-in-law that they were right.

In contemporary times, women are not recognizing that now they are also working on the position of power and imposing the same patriarchal values about which they were complaining in their initial life. But they do so, rather becoming a supportive mechanism for their daughters-in-law they are imposing the same household responsibilities and burden on women which they have experienced as a young bride. They are expecting their sons to have the same loyalty and obedience which their mothers-in-law were expecting from their sons. After reaching the same age, they tried to justify the acts of their mother-in-law in a very positive manner about which they were complaining at initial times.

Most of the times it is claimed that men are behind the structural issues in the society because men are having the power to dominate a society. They have visible powers in the society while women have invisible powers in their domains which are also as destructive as the visible powers. Men are blamed most of the times for social issues as the focus is always on the men but there are always two sides of the story. Inequality always resides in the mindsets so it can come from anywhere, and it cannot be labelled as patriarchy or matriarchy. These are the characteristics which anyone can opt. The study reveals that women throughout their life, bargains with patriarchy by facing hardships and sufferings to achieve the position of power and control and to exhibit their power on other family members which is now labelled as neo-patriarchy. Women, who are now mothers-in-law, also experienced the same issues which today their daughters-in-law are facing due to their behavior. So, the people who are the custodian of values should create spaces for others to create a smooth functioning of the society rather than creating hurdles for them. Gender equality is an important aspect for the achievement of sustainable development goals. It shouldn't be achieved only in the male and female relationships but should be achieved within the same sex relationships as well. There should be a concept of universal womanhood where all the women

should be on the same page. It is difficult to achieve that position, but if it is done, it will become a foundation for the achievement of gender equality within different sex groups as well.

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