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Addressing the Historical Roots of Gender-Based Violence in Twenty-First-Century India

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About the Series

Gender-based violence (GBV) affects one in three women worldwide, making it an urgent and important policy challenge. Many countries around the world have passed laws intended to protect women from violence, yet violence persists. Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has raised awareness of the perils women face from gender-based violence—what has come to be known as the “shadow pandemic”—but it has also aggravated risk factors while increasing barriers to protection, support, and justice.

This publication aims to focus on the intersection of gender-based violence and the rule of law by examining how legal frameworks, judicial system responses, and public policy contribute to the ways in which gender-based violence is—and is not—addressed around the world. Each piece addresses the complicated challenge of gender-based violence and the successes and failures of various public policy responses globally, and offers recommendations for a path forward.

Prehistorian Marylène Patou-Mathis, one of a select few who study the origin of violence in humans, has found that collective violence appeared with the “sedentarization of communities” around 15,000 years ago, and more important, that “Violence is not inscribed in our genes. Its appearance has historical and social causes.”¹

The Seville Statement on Violence adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also affirms that “there is nothing in our neurophysiology that compels us to react violently,” and consequently, “how we act is shaped by how we have been conditioned and socialized.”²

If violence among humans is not innate and has sociohistorical origins, other subsets of violence, such as gender-based violence (GBV), must also have similar roots. The underlying sociocultural origins of GBV are well recorded in the book *Archaeologies of Gender and Violence*, which includes a Greek-Ptolemaic text from 2,200 years ago that eerily mirrors society today: “Do not disregard an insult from your wife. Beat her!”³

Greek mythology too is rife with stories of sexual violence against women and girls. Susanne Moraw, a classical archaeologist, draws striking comparisons between Ancient Greece and the present day, through motifs of sexualized murder, penetration by objects such as a symbolic phallus, and sexualized torture and rape. She also observes that in most cases “the perpetrator is ascribed an explicitly higher status than is his victim, apart from the fact that he is male and she is not.”⁴ This motif of hierarchy is often used as justification for GBV, especially when directed at minorities or in times of conflict, from the Roman Empire 2,000 years ago and the colonization of the Americas 500 years ago to the partition of India and the present day.

The system of patriarchy too has ancient origins: “Patriarchy is a historic creation formed by men and women in a process which took nearly 2,500 years to its completion,” says historian Gerda Lerner, as she traces its origin to early Mesopotamia (“the cradle of civilization”) in 3,100 BC.⁵

These historical texts provide evidence of three central elements of violence against women, which remain relevant today:

1. **Historical:** Violence against women, be it through sexual violence, physical assault, rape or femicide, goes back several millennia, appearing as early as the sedentarization of humans in small communities.
2. **Sociocultural roots:** Since violence is not “inscribed in our genes,” we should be cognizant of its deep sociocultural causes that have been fostered over the years. Violence directed at women is visibly apparent, justified, and even encouraged in mythological texts, religion, and literature.
3. **Global:** Nearly every civilization with a recorded history has left evidence of violence against women. UN Women estimates that one in three women globally face some form of sexual violence,⁶ cutting across race, ethnicity, class, and nationality.

Thus the question must be asked: Why has violence against women, which began several millennia ago, remained nearly immutable to this day? In other words, why is a dictum from the Ptolemaic period 2,200 years ago to beat one’s wife still strikingly apposite today?

Rajni Bakshi, an author and rights activist, offers an important caveat that may help us understand this

issue, cautioning that “we must locate GBV as one element in the larger context of violence and war.”

THE ROOTS OF GBV IN INDIA

In India’s case, the roots of GBV can be traced to innumerable sociocultural elements, including but not limited to the *Manusmriti* in the second century BC (allocating to women “the habit of lying, sitting around and an indiscriminate love of ornaments, anger, meanness, treachery, and bad conduct”),⁷ literary works like the *Ramayana* (which repeatedly denounces the “fickleness” of women, not to mention Draupadi’s public *vastraharana* [disrobing] and Sita’s fire test to prove her “purity”), numerous historical texts (the *Dharmashastra*, *Atharvaveda*, and *Tolkappiyam*)⁸ that advocate the marriage of girls just as they attain puberty (or even earlier), in the historical practice of dowry (where the bride’s family bestows costly gifts to the groom’s as a prerequisite to marriage; dowry cuts across religion, class, and caste in India), and sati, where a widow sacrifices herself atop her deceased husband’s funeral pyre. Historian Uma Chakravarti concludes in her article on the origins of patriarchy in India that “the design of the patriarchal caste-class structure was mapped out by the Brahmanas; pativrata, the specific dharma of the Hindu wife, then became the ideology by which women accepted and even aspired to chastity and wifely fidelity as the highest expression of their selfhood.”⁹

These sociocultural notions and customs paved the way for India’s profoundly patriarchal society, as well as for the patrilineal system that ensures property rights and inheritance remain with men. In addition to the sexual violence and domestic abuse women face globally, women in India face two additional challenges:

1. Marriage-related violence, including dowry deaths, honor killings, forced marriages, and child marriages.
2. Violence related to caste or religion, especially with regards to Dalits, lower castes, and religious minorities.

In addition to these sociocultural causes, the advent of colonialism added a new layer of complexity that set back the cause of women’s rights. Neelam Deo, a former Indian ambassador and former board member of Breakthrough India, which works to prevent violence against girls and women, declared that “British colonialism froze our social structures and delayed any change we could expect with regards to women’s rights. It took the Bengal Renaissance for the practice of Sati to be banned and even widow remarriage was allowed only after repeated campaigning in Maharashtra and Bengal.”¹⁰

THE LAWS EXIST, BUT IMPLEMENTATION IS LAX

The Constitution of India, the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and the Indian Evidence Act (IEA) all offer protection for women in the eyes of the law, and include concepts of equality and nondiscrimination. Although the IPC remains the main legal instrument to address crimes against women, India has also enacted legislation that specifically addresses GBV, including:

- The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956,¹¹ meant to restrict prostitution and abolish human trafficking.



Photo credit: Sati handprints at Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India: Artem Mishukov, Shutterstock

- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961,¹² which made the act of taking or giving dowry a criminal offense punishable up to five years in prison.
- The Indecent Representation of Women Act, 1986,¹³ which seeks to “prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner.”
- The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987,¹⁴ following the ban of sati more than a century prior, this act sought to more effectively prevent the commission of sati and its glorification.
- Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005,¹⁵ which defined the term “domestic violence” for the first time under Indian law, including physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse.
- The Information Technology (Amendment) Act, 2008,¹⁶ included provisions to address cyber stalking, cyber defamation, online harassment, child pornography, and bullying, all of which became rampant in the twenty-first century.
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013,¹⁷ which seeks to provide “a right to a safe environment free from sexual harassment.”
- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, popularly known as the Nirbhaya Act, it incorporated offences like acid attacks, sexual harassment, voyeurism, and stalking into the IPC. It also made it mandatory for medical personnel to administer and treat victims of sexual assault.

Yet, as the Bhartiya Stree Shakti report, funded by India’s Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), outlines, “despite constitutional protection and several legislations, gender discrimination and injustices continue to occur. This is mainly because those who enforce the laws or interpret them do

not always fully share the philosophy of gender justice.”¹⁸

“Despite the passing of numerous laws protecting women in India, GBV is nearly universal, cutting across socioeconomic and religious strata.”

The lax enforcement of these laws is unequivocal: After reviewing 1,635 rape judgments between 2013 and 2018, legal scholar Preeti Pratishruti Dash found that the conviction rate for crimes against women stood at only 19 percent, far less than the 47 percent conviction rate for all other crimes. This data point is perhaps the most damning indication yet that India’s legal system is ill-equipped to address the issue of GBV.¹⁹

Despite the passing of numerous laws protecting women in India, GBV is nearly universal, cutting across socioeconomic and religious strata. Deo underscores that “the problem with the implementation of laws meant to protect women is that the judiciary’s default position is in favour of the man. The social attitude of the judge is to blame the complainant [the woman].” A recent verdict in one of India’s most high-profile cases of sexual assault, involving journalist Tarun Tejpal, seems to confirm Deo’s comments. Responding to Tejpal’s acquittal for rape charges, the Bombay High Court exclaimed that “the judgment appears to provide a manual on how rape victims should behave.”²⁰ The distressing consequence of this biased legal system is that 99.1 percent of women in India prefer not to report cases of GBV to the authorities.²¹

GENDER INEQUALITY IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY INDIA

If the law is unable to protect Indian women from acts of violence, nor administer justice after the act, it is because deep sociocultural beliefs continue to justify GBV in India. As the MWCD report confirms, gender equality is not a concept shared by those in judicial, political, or law enforcement institutions. Three widely prevalent tropes continue to permeate across India:

1. **Violence against women is acceptable:** As many as two-thirds of men in India believe “there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten,” and even more think this violence should be tolerated “in order to keep her family together.”²² This notion runs so deep that IPC Section 375 specifically states that marital rape is not a criminal offense.²³ This exception should be removed as swiftly as possible. The justification for violence within marriages extends even beyond the husband, since brides are often considered part of the husband’s family after marriage. As a result, “cruelty by husband or his relatives” is the most reported of all crimes against women.²⁴

2. **The “immoral” or “promiscuous” prosecutrix:** Until 2002, the so-called “immoral character” of complainants (women), admissible as evidence under Section 155(4) of the IEA, often determined judgments of rape cases.²⁵ That it took independent India 55 years to remove this clause is just another sign of the misogynistic attitudes that shape the legal system. Yet, despite the removal of Section 155(4), the “immoral character” of women continues to influence rape judgments; Bhabna Das, an Advocate-on-Record in the Supreme Court of India (SCI), writes that the “promiscuous prosecutrix, a ravished woman with a misplaced moral compass, is a long-running trope in rape discourse. Complain-



Photo credit: Indian women gather at a rally in Kolkata, India, in remembrance of Jyoti Singh's brutal murder in 2012: Arindam Banerjee, Shutterstock, December 2014

ants, despite their obvious reluctance, are often cast in this role by the accused.”²⁶

3. Caste and religious justifications: It would be remiss not to mention the disproportionately highly burden faced by women from India’s lower castes and minorities. As Dalit rights activist Thenmozhi Soundararajan explains, “Just as there is no way to understand sexual violence in the history of the US without understanding racism and slavery, there is no way to understand the frequency and lack of punishment of violence against women in India right now without understanding caste.”²⁷ For most women from India’s minorities, the law remains out of reach. The Bhanwari Devi case is most illustrative: Due to her opposition to the child marriage of a 9-month-old girl in her village, Bhanwari (a Dalit woman) was gang-raped by five men of the more affluent Gujjar caste. The case took a political turn, with judges changing five times, until one acquitted the men of rape charges, condoning the act with

one reason more bizarre than the next, including that “a member of the higher caste cannot rape a lower caste woman because of reasons of purity.”²⁸ Another element is honor killings—when girls or women are killed because of their courtship with someone from another caste or religion. Given the gruesome nature of the crime and the high rate of occurrence, particularly in North India, the SCI directed India’s central and state governments in 2018 to submit plans of action to specifically “combat honour crimes.”²⁹ A more recent subject is “love jihad,” a conspiracy theory that purports forceful religious conversions (specifically of Hindu or Christian women to Islam), which has received so much credence that multiple Indian states have passed laws to prevent it. Ultimately, the context of caste discrimination falls within deeper, religious justifications (that cuts across religions in India); as Deo notes, “acculturation through religion is so deep that a high percentage of Indian women also

think it's all right to be beaten for the most minor infractions."³⁰

These recurring sociocultural themes—that women deserve violence, are of “immoral character,” or are simply subordinate—make it a grueling task to successfully navigate the legal system. To begin with, many women are unlikely to report acts of violence, especially from their own partners; their own families will likely discourage them from lodging a complaint. Those who make official complaints face moralistic questioning by the police. The investigations that follow are often weak or absent; in cases where a political, religious, or influential person is involved, the complainant's family and friends are also at risk. If the case goes public, the woman risks ostracism for being a victim of sexual assault.

These obstacles present themselves even before entering the legal system. The cost to the complainant is therefore extremely high. These factors are multiplied if the victim is from a lower caste, a minority religion, is transgender or LGBTQ+, or lives in rural India, where attitudes of male chauvinism run even deeper. It is not surprising that only 0.9 percent of Indian women who face GBV report it to the authorities.³¹ According to Bishakha Datta, an activist and founder of Point of View, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that works on gender, sexuality, and women's rights, this rather agonizing “process is the punishment.”³²

GBV POLICIES IN INDIA: LIMITED BUT VALUABLE PROGRESS

Despite this gloomy state of affairs, two seminal rape cases acted as turning points in India's fight

against GBV: the 1972 Mathura rape case, and the 2012 Delhi gang rape, popularly called the Nirbhaya case.

In 1972, a tribal girl named Mathura was raped by two policemen inside the police station; in 1979, the SCI acquitted the policemen and instead blamed Mathura: “because she was used to sex, she might have incited the cops (they were drunk on duty) to have intercourse with her.”³³ This marked a watershed moment for India's feminist movement: widespread protests and advocacy led to legal amendments that made custodial rape (including a woman under the custody of police, public servants, armed forces personnel, or medical institutions) a criminal offense in Section 376 of the IPC,³⁴ placed rebuttable presumption for custodial rape in favor of the woman, and led to a new law on cruelty against women in 1984 and against dowry death in 1986.³⁵

The more recent Nirbhaya case, where Jyoti Singh Pandey was gang raped and tortured to death on a private bus, led to nationwide protests, social media campaigns, and increased awareness of GBV in India. It remains one of few cases where the rapists were promptly convicted and even sentenced to death. It had an even greater impact on the legal system: It led to the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance in 2013, the establishment of fast-track courts for rape cases, and the Justice Verma Committee recommendations.

Although much remains to be done, some progress in addressing GBV is worth noting:

1. **Policies and implementation of laws:** One of the immediate consequences of the Nirbhaya case was the appointment of the Justice Verma Committee, which submitted a 644-page report³⁶ after considering 80,000 suggestions from the public.



Photo credit: Students at a voting awareness event arranged by the local administration in Chittorgarh, India: Pradeep Gaurs, Shutterstock, November 2013

Several recommendations were soon drafted into law, including the expansion of the definition of rape beyond vaginal penetration, the inclusion of verbal sexual assault, sexual harassment in the workplace, tougher sentences for human trafficking and child sexual abuse, medical support for victims, and police reforms.

2. **Police reform:** As the Justice Verma Committee notes, “the members of the police force themselves often come from a society where patriarchal superiority is established,” and consequently, “male police officers do not take complaints of rape seriously.”³⁷ A handful of police reforms have been passed, but they have had limited impact so far:

a. **First Information Report (FIR):** Indian law mandates that police officers register complaints of sexual assault. Failure to do so can result in two years of imprisonment for police officers; yet, many still resist filing FIRs “especially if the victim is from an

economically or socially marginalized community.”³⁸

b. **Special Cell for Women and Children:** In 1984, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai collaborated with the Bombay Police to create a special cell for women and children within police stations. This essentially became “a service provided to women survivors by trained social workers, strategically located in the police system with a clear understanding that VAW [violence against women] is a crime and that it is the responsibility of the State to prevent and counter it.” The project had such a positive social impact that it was adopted by the state government of Maharashtra and expanded to numerous cities.

c. **Police helpline:** Most states across India have help lines that specifically cater to GBV.³⁹ While these helplines have had a discernible impact, many remain unaware of them. The Mumbai Police’s collaboration with women’s rights organizations that

train and coordinate the running of GBV help lines is a best-case practice that can be replicated in other parts of India.

d. **Sex offenders database:** In September 2018, India launched its National Database on Sexual Offenders, to help law enforcement agencies monitor and investigate sex offenders; India became only the ninth country in the world with such a database.

e. **Domestic violence as a civil offense:** Given the difficulties of filing a criminal complaint with the police, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 introduced the option of filing a civil complaint with a magistrate. Under the act, state governments must provide protection officers, medical aid, and counseling for complainants.

f. **Gender sensitivity training:** Organizations like Majlis Law work closely with legal and law enforcement institutions to train them on handling GBV cases. In 2017 alone, Majlis trained 535 judges, 100 protection officers, 85 legal aid lawyers, 200 women probationary police officers, and 150 medical practitioners, and it also organized awareness campaigns for more than 2,500 students—all in the state of Maharashtra.⁴⁰ The work of Majlis and other organizations should be replicated nationally and stands as an example of the impact that NGOs can have.

3. **Educational and awareness campaigns:** As the Justice Verma Committee report notes, legal reforms should be “accompanied by widespread measures raising awareness of women’s rights to autonomy and physical integrity.”⁴¹ Many organizations have attempted to increase awareness of gender equality through multimedia campaigns, training sessions, and educational content, including Breakthrough’s Bell Bajao campaign, Vogue India’s Start with the Boys short film, the BBC and UNICEF’s

Aadha Full television series, Jagriti Youth’s training workshops for young male students, the Gender Equity Movement in Schools program, and the Centre for Health and Social Justice’s MITRA and Parichiti initiatives.⁴² Others like Akshara, Majlis, and countless women’s rights organizations contribute more than their fair share to increasing awareness of GBV. Yet, for such initiatives to have nationwide impact, they need to target the mainstream, taking advantage of India’s culture of hero worship, particularly in cinema, sports, and politics.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A MORE GENDER-EQUAL INDIA

The moral justification for gender equality is unquestionable; nevertheless, there remains another important motive for India—the economy. Women remain conspicuously absent in India’s economic growth story. The few women who earn a living in India remain in “labor-intensive, home-based, and informal work, concentrated in low-productivity sectors.”⁴³ The result? Only 18 percent of India’s gross domestic product (GDP) comes from women.

“Despite all the progress toward a more gender-equal India, millions continue to reinforce sociocultural tropes that hinder and even reverse the cause of gender equality.”

Due to India’s obstinate roots in patriarchy, the list of recommendations for addressing GBV is long, obvious, and arduous. It is not difficult to map what needs to be done, but it remains notoriously



Photo credit: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee addresses protesters after calling off her sit-in protest in Kolkata, India: Saikat Paul, Shutterstock, February 2019

challenging to actually get it done. Despite all the progress toward a more gender-equal India, millions continue to reinforce sociocultural tropes that hinder and even reverse the cause of gender equality. A host of organizations and individuals have already made sound, enforceable recommendations for this cause:

1. Ministry of Women and Child Development:

India's MWCD published 20 detailed recommendations for addressing GBV in its *Bhartiya Stree Shakti* report. These include the right to legal representation and assistance, setting up a criminal injuries' compensation board and a victim compensatory fund, better coordination between investigating officers and public prosecutors, more modern investigative and forensic techniques, gender sensitivity training programs (for political institutions, the judicial system, police, media, and medical professionals), the promotion of women judges in GBV cases, recruitment of more women police officers, the

setting up of One Stop Crisis Centers, and increasing the autonomy of NGOs working on GBV.⁴⁴

2. Womanifesto:

In 2014, a collection of individuals and women's organizations published a six-point plan for gender equality called the "Womanifesto."⁴⁵ Specifically, it called for the launch of well-funded and long-term public education programs; accountability of government agencies to implement GBV laws; passing of the Women's Reservation Bill; the implementation of police reforms and sensitization; the establishment of fast-track courts; and adequate support for GBV survivors.

3. Partners for Law in Development (PLD):

A study of rape prosecutions in Delhi between 2014 and 2015 by PLD had some noteworthy findings and recommendations. These included shifting the emphasis from gender-sensitization programs to more comprehensive training programs for the police, medical personnel, and public prosecutors;

the establishment of specialized agencies to provide single-window support to GBV victims; the provision of medical care and counseling for GBV victims without a prerequisite that they register formal complaints; focus on more realistic timelines for rape trials, since the current two-month stipulation results in hasty conclusions; mandate an end to direct, hostile cross-examinations during trial, instead routing questions through a presiding officer; and extending witness protection beyond court premises.⁴⁶

“The sociocultural causes of GBV in India need to be uprooted for any lasting, long-term change.”

The police and the judiciary may be responsible for law and order, but neither strike at the underlying causes of violence against women. The sociocultural causes of GBV in India need to be uprooted for any lasting, long-term change. The following is a list of sociocultural recommendations to promote gender equality:

1. **Women in politics:** Of the 543 seats in India’s Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament), only 79 are currently held by women. Yet, this is the highest percentage in the Lok Sabha’s history.⁴⁷ India must urgently pass the Women’s Reservation Bill, which seeks to reserve one-third of Lok Sabha seats for women, and it can also learn from Latin American countries—many of which face similar issues of gender inequality—that have successfully implemented quotas for women in political parties, electoral lists, and as candidates in general elections.

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2. **Women in the workplace:** A full 70 years after independence, India’s female labor force participation rate reached its lowest point at 17.5 percent in 2017.⁴⁸ Estimates suggest that an increase in women’s economic participation could boost GDP by 27 percent.⁴⁹ The Companies Act of 2013 mandated that companies with a capital of 100 crore rupees (\$14 million) or revenues of 300 crore rupees (\$42 million) appoint at least one woman on the board of directors.⁵⁰ While this is a welcome move, India should also enact quotas for women in the public sector, while actively promoting women’s participation in the private sector and enacting legal measures to guarantee equal pay.

3. **Portrayal of women in visual and literary content:** India is a cinema-loving nation and the largest producer of films globally. Unfortunately, Indian cinema often reinforces gender stereotypes. A study of Indian films in the twenty-first century by employing the Bechdel test⁵¹ found that female characters, especially in top-grossing films, are “mere accessories to the plot” and “serve as eye-candy.”⁵² A newer generation of women filmmakers are bringing about gradual changes in how women are portrayed in visual content, especially by eliminating tropes like “item numbers” (provocative dance numbers that objectify women), giving women a sense of agency, and addressing women’s issues. These content creators must be promoted and supported financially so that women can be viewed differently by future generations of Indians. The government can also

consider expanding the Indecent Representation of Women Act to include crass gender stereotypes that objectify women and portray them as completely devoid of agency.

4. Transgender and LGBTQ+ protections: Transgender and LGBTQ+ people, who form part of the wider gender umbrella, face even more challenges than straight, cisgender women in India do. To begin with, they are excluded from India's rape law, which defines men as perpetrators of rape and women as victims. Even the Transgender Persons Act of 2019 limits punishment for sexual offenses against transgender people to between six months and two years of imprisonment. The law must include transgender and LGBTQ+ people within the framework of the IPC and offer them adequate protection; more awareness campaigns are also required to reduce the stigma they face.

“Increasing the access to education for girls and women in India would be a prerequisite for better women's representation in the labor force, politics, the judicial system, law enforcement agencies, and any significant institution with a national impact.”

5. Education: A number of government initiatives, such as the Mahila Samakhya programme, the Right to Education Act, the National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme, and the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme have advanced the cause of girls' education.⁵³ Consequently, far more

girls today go to school and stay in school.⁵⁴ Yet some states with patently low female literacy and school enrollment lag behind; less than 0.5 percent of GBV cases were reported by women in these states.⁵⁵ A 2018 report by women's rights activist Urvashi Sahnii recommends the introduction of gender education as part of school curriculum and the inclusion of gender-sensitive modules in teacher trainings.⁵⁶ Increasing the access to education for girls and women in India would be a prerequisite for better women's representation in the labor force, politics, the judicial system, law enforcement agencies, and any significant institution with a national impact. Education will also play a vital role in changing existing gender norms that motivate GBV.

CONCLUSION

In India, as in much of the rest of the world, achieving the goal of gender equality is impossible within the present framework of patriarchy. Despite all the progress in addressing GBV through the enactment of new laws, training of police and judges, awareness campaigns, and the promotion of equal participation of women in society, lasting change is unlikely unless we uproot historical notions of patriarchy; this, by far, remains our most daunting challenge.

The fight for gender equality is a historical one. It began millennia ago and is likely (unfortunately) to last many years longer. Bakshi believes that “human attitudes shaped over millennia are unlikely to change over the course of a few years. Lasting change will take time and diverse forms of effort. Even if we manage to achieve some sense of equality, ending the system of patriarchy will require a much larger transformation in how power is defined and operates in society at all levels.”⁵⁷ Given the his-

torical injustice meted out by generations of men, it is fundamental that men also join this movement. Women alone cannot be expected to carry the burden of the morally bankrupt system of gender inequality. As Lana Wells, a Canadian professor, articulated at a discussion at the UN Human Rights Council, “in order to truly end violence and discrimination against women and girls, men and boys must be seen as more than part of the problem; they have to be seen as integral to the solution.”⁵⁸

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India must continue to employ every possible method to reduce the deleterious impacts of GBV on women and society as a whole, be it through the better implementation of laws, police reform, increasing the participation of women in politics and in the workplace, better portrayal of women in visual and literary content, and educating more girls and women. Nonetheless, as Deo cogently explains, “any positive change is to be welcomed, but no change is to be thought of as enough.”

India’s fight against GBV is part and parcel of the world’s struggle with this issue. It would require a global effort to accelerate the pace of gender equality, something akin to the second and third waves of democracy in the latter half of the twenty-first century. The South African Constitution has already drawn a parallel between colonialism and patriarchy, noting in its Preamble that “the consolidation of democracy in our country requires eradication of social and economic inequalities, especially those that are systemic in nature, which were generated in our

history by colonialism, apartheid and patriarchy.”⁵⁹ As in the case of colonialism, perhaps we will reach a point in the future when GBV is considered morally unacceptable, after which there will (hopefully) be no turning back.

As Lerner examined in her decades-long career as one of the founders of the field of women’s history, the system of patriarchy has endured for more than 5,100 years. Yet her work shows reason for optimism. In her treatise *The Creation of Patriarchy*, she concludes, “the system of patriarchy is a historic construct; it has a beginning; it will have an end. Its time seems to have nearly run its course—it no longer serves the needs of men or women and in its inextricable linkage to militarism, hierarchy, and racism it threatens the very existence of life on earth.”⁶⁰

NOTES

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