



### **Women and Patriarchy- Do Women Really want Empowerment?**

What are Patriarchal Societies? Interestingly I asked this question to a roomful of Women at a Women Leadership Summit in a 5 Star Hotel in Mumbai recently- and not one could articulate clearly, what belonging to a Patriarchy really means.

Especially for the urban English speaking woman, privileged with an education, a job, an identity, financial independence and the opportunity to be nominated by their Organizations to attend the Conference that day, Patriarchy is something the Women from previous Generations struggled with- vaguely this constitutes not getting an education, being relegated to housework, having little or no say in decision-making and limited access to resources mostly through a significant Male, needing permission for everything- especially to go out of the house- overall a secondary status at home and in the Society.

What you got in barter was protection, not having to take on primary responsibility for earning a living and an identity in Society as the daughter of or the wife of a significant male member -whether Father or Husband.

This piece is not about the origin of Patriarchies which persisted primarily in Agricultural Societies like ours, as much as it is about Generations of conditioning and confused mind sets that manifest a world around us as Women that perpetuate the secondary status we espouse to abhor.

Let's explore workplace Equality- where a minuscule minority qualifies to compete with the Men for Professional jobs. I know the number of qualified women is increasing and

more privileged Parents want to give their daughters the advantage of education. Having said that, the real social validation even today for Professionally qualified women comes with the Mrs tag- Parents themselves believe there is no real accomplishment until the daughter has 'moved to the next stage of life 'as it were. Women whether qualified or otherwise still seek the second- real identity and hook their self worth on finding this 'real' identity. Married women feel socially accomplished and Single girls don't!

The Motherhood cycle is the other cycle for social approval much as most of us urban women would say we chose Motherhood- it could well be Motherhood chose us as it was done, expected, needed- in OUR expectations of Ourselves -so the picture looks complete!

Coming to the workplace- as we see Men compete, network, learn, put in long hours to accomplish company goals, many Women don't want to invest what it takes. We can question Why it takes what it takes- but that is not changing in a hurry.

When we don't compete, don't want the tough jobs or can't disrupt our personal lives for the job, many of us believe the Men deserve their success better. Many women through my vast career in Corporates have admitted they see Men at work like Men at home as significantly superior- having the courage, confidence to Speak up, Assert and Make decisions like they can't!!

The dilemma of often submitting to the decisions and power of a significant Male personally makes it easier for Women to Gender role -play at work and submit/ obey/ agree with Male Supervisors. This is another reason there is great comfort to work with Male Bosses- they perpetuate the Patriarchy subconsciously. They begin playing Father or any other significant Male in our own minds who cannot be refuted with/ disagreed with and are always Right!

I once had a senior female colleague who would remain silent in Board meetings. She said she did not want to interrupt when so many men were speaking- not her etiquette or the way she was raised! . As a result she went from Meeting to meeting never contributing as the only privileged Woman in the room!

Another time a female colleague getting off the stage on a Womens' day function told me how she has told her two newly wed daughters to not take the 'Empowerment ' story too seriously else they were sure to have bad marriages?!!

Another friend told me how his talented and qualified daughter did not pursue an opportunity in the US, when she landed a job abroad ahead of her husband who was also seeking to go abroad. She was advised by the in laws to always play second fiddle if she

wanted to succeed in her marriage. Now I know some of you may want to argue these are exceptions or that your lives maybe different..

The truth is these are current stories not from the ancient past - of generations of conditioning- of a Patriarchy that still palpably exists for most Women in India including the educated and employed!

The protection that a Patriarchy offers is undeniable comfort that can deceptively erode the opportunity for actualisation and a fulfilling life that allows Women to thrive as Equals.

Chivalry and Chauvisim are greatly confusing behaviours and it's important for Women to decipher between the two in their quest for real Empowerment.

Men are significant both Personally and Professionally in how the Socieity has evolved - they can make great Mentors, Friends, Bosses, Husbands, Fathers and must become allies to Women on these journey of self discovery and unravelling decades of confusion.

For Women the intrinsic, self imposed limitations are the only things they can truly work on to Manifest the world they want to see around them. Even as we believe the world, the husband, the Boss, the Organization owes us something- think again!

To all Women- The only person who Owes YOU anything significant is YOU! Gift yourself a Happy Womens' Day!

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