Patriarchy is the least noticed yet the most significant structure of social inequality.

Lalitha Rai, a 35 year old, mother of 2 and a senior tech consultant quit her job last sunday when she was asked to return to office post-pandemic. 'Party's over' said the email which asked employees to re-join with immediate effect. But Lalitha had already moved to Udupi, her home town as there was no one else to take care of her kids. Shifting back during the ongoing session of her children at school was not an option for her, hence, she quit.

This revealing story from a

Sunday Daily shed light on some interesting facts. It claimed that in th last two months, the number of women quitting jobs in IT sector has shot up vigorously and there is a ready pool of workforce – almost double than before.

Amongst other factors, the article claimed that preference for 'flexibility', work-life balance are things these women aspire for, yet the article gives scant regard to the increased care work and burden of household which are one of the most causative factors involved.

   This excerpt is an introduction to the lives of women, seemingly independent, modern, yet bound by

the <u>shackles of patriarchy</u>. Patriarchy is the term often used to denote the <u>dominance of heteronormative narrative</u> where men are considered superior to their fellow beings. Throughout centuries, across time and space, men have reclaimed their position as superior, infallible while women have been <u>relegated to being submissive beings</u>.

    In this essay, I would first try to paint the <u>ubiquity of patriarchy</u>, how it exists in almost every walk of life. Second, I would <u>discuss its evolution</u>, from being the most visible difference to its <u>journey of invisibilization</u>. Third, we would understand the reasons why it still persists. Finally, the

essay looks at how far we have come, yet are miles away from our goal.

(A) PATRIARCHY IS LIKE AIR, ITS EVERYWHERE

Lalitha's story is a reminder of how, one of the most modern cities and one of the most comptent employees with adequate skill set, still fall into the traps of patriarchy. Thus, <u>technological advancement does not guarantee equality.</u>

But, let us step back. The manifestation of patriarchy begins when an individual is born. From different colours, to different toys to differe rules, children are taught to live differently. They are <u>born as a clean slate</u>, yet when the enter school, they already have notions and some level

of consciousness of what they can do and what they can not. When, she is not exposed, let alone encouraged to the wide varieties to robotics games that exist, how will she develop an inclination towards coding, robotics and other fields of advanced fields.

The children are told by families how they are expected to behave at rituals, that certain acts only boys will perform - the sense of alienation starts to inculcate in the minds of young ones. While ostensibly, they might get same education, access to resources, there are invisible barriers of unsaid customs, circumstances draped as 'choices.'

When in schools, colleges - a survey is ~~made~~, conducted, it is often

seen that women are more proactive in art, dance, music clubs while men are great at sports, computer, science. In a survey at NLSIU, a majority of men responded that this is because girls are 'inherently interested' in those areas, yet nobody sees or notices the background of these inherent choices.

These differences from early life are then carried on to every walk of adult life – social, political, legal, economic, cultural, national and even international. ~~the diff~~ Every area is replete with examples of patriarchy continuing to shape social relations.

Amongst other things, laws are the most prominent and visible form of change and progress. A women friendly

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legislation is hailed to be the panacea of
all inequality. On the face of it laws such
as minimum Wages Act, Maternity Benefit
Act, Equal Renumeration Act create a
level playing field among men and
women — yet they still don't consider
unpaid domestic labour as 'work?' Women
taking maternity benefit is a concern for
employers, which automatically leads to
less hiring of women — though no formal
discrimination. Under the garb of efficiency,
women are hired less, paid less and
even promoted less compared to male
counterparts. That fabric could sometime
change to morality, as happened in
USA when Roe v/s Wade was overturned
denying women the right to life and
choice.

In the next part of essay, I would show how patriarchy traversed from the journey of visibilization to invisibilization.

Ⓑ FROM MANUSMRITI TO MOON EXPLORATION: OLD WINE IN A NEW BOTTLE

Temporally speaking, Indian society has evolved from ancient times to modern day with humongous changes in position of women. While the examples of Gargi and Aditi of ancient times as women gods and well-read ladies have been famous, the times that follow saw a rapid decline in position of women.

In 2ⁿᵈ C BC, Manu wrote in Manusmriti "Dhol, gavar, shudra, pashu, naari; sakal pratadna ke adhikari" which roughly translates to men of lower status and intelligence, lower caste, animals and women – deserve high punishment

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This set the tone for years to come and such quotes and writings became more predominant. Their effect was also visible in society - the fall in familial, social and economic ~~selo~~ position of women vis - a - ves - men.

While technology, colonialism and spirit of nationalism then started to uplift conditions of women in 19th century, there were still undertones of patriarchy. Colonial masters made laws such as sati prohibition, widow remarriage, age of consent because it suited their interests. It was their way of justifying the civilization mission, without actually considering the needs or impact of their acts. The nationalists, on the other hand, used imagery of Bharat Mata - the purified

Indian women who was pure and cannot be polluted by outsiders. They claimed their moral supremacy in this distinction of ghar and baire [Rabindra Nath Tagore] where their ghar (home) which had women was epitome of purity. Without actually enforcing any dominance, women were confined to the four walls of their house and could not be impured by elements of baire (outside).

Thus, colonial notion of victorian morality and Indian nationalists' counter imagery of Indian women — deteriorated their position beyond repair. The expected behaviour and notion of each gender were constructed and religiously followed. Even formal equality provided through laws, could not bridge the gap that arose on account of invisible

limitations in society. Even though after amendment to Hindu succession Act in 2005, women are made co-parceners in Hindu Undivided Family, less than 25% women actualey claim their share or seemingly give up on own volition - because they are convinced or coerced of family relations.

       Even after Digital India, only 1/3rd women use internet as per India Justice Report, 2019. Moreover, seemingly neutral areas of impact such as climate change adversely impact women because they are married off early (to reduce burden) or are sold like cattle. It is lamentable that as India sends LVM mark 3 to moon, no women from India or anywhere in the world has been to moon. Thus, equating formal equality in terms of

access to actual equality based on statistics, gives a glim picture. Even though we have made significant advances, patriarchy remains integral to our society.

(C) WHAT ARE THE FAULT LINES? AND IS THERE A SILVER LINING?

The problem remains 'unnoticed' or rather 'ignored' because we fail to acknowledge the truth of the times we live in. Super-structures can not rectify the problem if the base remains rotten. In fact, it perpetuates it. Big Data, AI, machine learning - seemingly neutral technologies also carry these biases and amplify them because their input data is already skewed. In a selection of an employee by AI, it was fed with resume of all top candidates, till date - who are all

male, white and belong to a particular background. Thus, the hirings it would make would naturally favour these candidates.

These patriarchal notions are so engrained that we invariably consider them to be 'gospel truth'. 'Women could not do politics, there exists sarpanch Pati; women could not marry outside caste, there exist love-jihad laws; women can't engage in relationship outside of heteronormative construct, homosexuality was made a crime?' These notions not only impact their day-to-day lives, it also indicates deprivation of human and constitutional rights.

It cannot be gainsaid that significant strides have been made to uncover these hidden assumptions.

empowerment from legal, political, social and other spheres indicate step in right direction. Even the demand for a <u>Uniform Civil Code</u> is a step in that direction to

<u>Ambedkar</u> has rightly stated that development of a ~~soc~~ nation is measured by development of its women. In order to truly progress, it is essential that in 21st century, India does not turn a blind eye to this under-cutting phenomenon of patriarchy. The change needs to begin at home, only then any law, or technology will make sense.