

# The Role of Women in Hindutva

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**Abstract:** An analysis of the current Indian religious situation reveals that India is plagued with religious fundamentalism and communalism. Religion is politicized and is experienced as a diabolic force, rather than a symbolic revelation. The patriarchal paradigm propagated by Hindutva cannot be dismantled without collaboration and dialogue. We need both '*sexually awakened*' men and women of all religious traditions to join hands in this common war against the enemies of humanity. Together, we people of good will in India, could search for a "new anthropology" – a new way of understanding what it means to be human in an age which is bent on creating a myth of dehumanization.

**Keywords:** Violence against women, Hindutva, gender insensitivity, reservation bill,

## 1. Introduction

The oppression of women in India needs to be scrutinized in the context of religion. This is because religion has a complete sway on Indian life, especially on women's life. None can deny that Indian religious traditions uphold deep spiritual values of peace, tolerance, respect for life, nonviolence etc. They speak of respect for *all beings* and of taking ecstatic delight in the *welfare of all beings* (*Sarvabhutahitehrataha*). But just a glance at the situation of women in India reveals how these religions betray their own original teachings.

Violence against women in India is by and large 'institutionalized'. In general their lot is not different from that of the dalits of today. They are considered inferior in every respect: they are religiously *polluted*, socially *ostracized*, culturally *stigmatized*, legally *side-lined*, physically *violated* and psychologically *demoralized*. In a society diseased by "macho-patriarchal insanity" (Rayan 1987: editorial), as Samuel Rayan puts it, discrimination of a girl child often

begins in her own mother's womb and is continued right through life, until she is consumed in the funeral pyre.

To comprehend the position of women in *Hindutva* one needs to have a glimpse of what *Hindutva* is. India is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. It is a religiously pluralistic community, for apart from the primal religions of the indigenous peoples, it houses many major religious systems of the world. For centuries, these diverse religious traditions though distinct in their forms, beliefs and structures, have enjoyed freedom and peace and held on to their basic and specific social and religious identities. They have influenced one another positively and shared in the common secular interests of the nation.

But today these same values are fast becoming bygone myths. Currently, they are replaced by a new-found *mantra* called *Hindutva*, which in many ways is rich religious heritage of India. An analysis of the current Indian religious situation reveals that India is plagued with religious fundamentalism and communalism. Religion is politicized and is experienced as a diabolic force, rather than a symbolic revelation.

## 1.1 What Is Hindutva?

Hinduism is not a unified and uniform religion. It is basically universal and plural in its existence (Suresh 1998: 154-160, 157). But in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a section of Hindus began to claim homogeneity in Hinduism with the intention of forming a Hindu nationality. According to S. Kumar:

*Hindutva* is a late 19th century and early 20th century ideological construct with obvious political overtones. The amorphous religious category of Hindus is transformed into a political community. In this construction, people of Semitic religions who are part of this land are treated as a hostile 'other', outside the purview of Hindu Rashtra. The ideology of *Hindutva* negates both inter-religious pluralism and intra-religious pluralism. It challenges the very concept of a composite culture, Indian nationalism and secular humanism, transcending the narrow boundary of caste and creed, faith and denominations, language and region (Suresh 1998: 158).<sup>1</sup>

*Hindutva*, then, is a movement by the Hindu militancy (a coalition of many Hindu militant organizations), that rejects the secularism guaranteed by the Indian Constitution and wants the Hindus to enjoy special status as a Hindu Nation in India. Accordingly, only Hinduism should enjoy all rights and privileges exclusively, which should not be granted to other religions. The killing of Mahatma Gandhi, who was pro pluralism, was the outcome of such a *Hindutva* ideology. Hindu fundamentalism and communalism was born out of this ideology. Being politically motivated, *Hindutva* is today propagating fundamentalism and communalism.

To sum up, *Hindutva* is an ideology that propounds one race, one culture and one nation policy. It disseminates the racist ideology of Aryan supremacy! In V. D. Savarkar's words "*Hindutva* is not a word but a history. Not only the spiritual or religious history of our people...but a history in full" (Savarkar 1949: 3). Again, a Hindu is the one who is a citizen of Hindustan either by himself or through his forefathers, bound by the bond of common blood (race) that could be traced back to Vedic *Saptasindhu*, who "claims as his own the culture of that race, as expressed chiefly in their common classic language the *Sanskrit* and represented by a common history, a common literature, art and architecture, law and jurisprudence, rites and rituals, ceremonies and sacraments, fairs and festivals; and who above all addresses this land, this *Sindusthan*, as his *puncha bhumi*, as his Holy land – the land of his prophets and seers, of his god-men and gurus, the land of piety and pilgrimage" (Savarkar 1949: 94). Clearly the principal objective of *Hindutva* is to establish a Hindu *Rashtra* whose inhabitants are Hindus by race, culture, civilization and religion. All those who do not come under these prerequisites are outsiders.

For our purpose what is important is to see how this one race, one civilization, one religion, and one nation policy of *Hindutva* is affecting the lives of women in India.

## **2. Patriarchal Constructs of Womanhood in Hindutva**

Women's development is a threat to *Hindutva*. Women's Movements since the late 1970s had been quick to expose the ugly face of patriarchal system that spells the death-knell of women. Numerous

women's organizations have taken up the gigantic task of uplifting women and all those who are marginalized. Women are gradually becoming aware of their human dignity; to some extent they can now claim their legal rights, they have better educational and job facilities and as a result, they are beginning to be economically independent. Such women are a danger to a patriarchal system. That is why *Hindutva* is bent on steadying the shaky patriarchal hegemony. In diverse ways it is trying to bring back patriarchy using modern techniques. But the motivation behind this is clearly political and racial.

In her thought provoking article "The Gender Predicament of the Hindu Right", Tanika Sarkar exposes *Hindutva's* gender ideology: "The Hindu Right today stands at a transitional moment in its history when it still tries to hold on to the possibilities generated by both kinds of discourses that are fundamentally incompatible—equal rights and cultural authenticity. It attempts a resolution by stitching up the two. It talks incessantly of Hindu rights, the rights of the majority community and the rights of a threatened culture and nation. Hindus are signs of both weakness and strength – as the majority community, and as threatened culture. In either capacity, they are to be granted superior rights that preclude notions of equality" (Sarkar 1999: 138).

Sarkar's analysis is a great help in unraveling the hidden agenda of *Hindutva* concerning women. According to her, *Hindutva* is profoundly and fundamentally a "patriarchal force". Its objective is Hindu revivalism or cultural nationalism and it hands over the sole responsibility of training the future citizens of a Hindu *Rashtra* to its women folk (Sarkar 1999: 146). She schematically points out how Pundits of modern history have discounted the entire women's history as unimportant, forgetting that "...a history of Indian women in modern times is also a specifically Indian history of rights – at the level of concept, of political movements and political language. It is also a history of resistance to the discourse of equal rights" (Sarkar 1999: 134).

## 2.1 Revival of Women's Traditional Role as Ideal Wives and Mothers

Hindutva's fright is sensible, for if the patriarchy collapses, then their political power too weakens. Hence patriarchy needs to be safeguarded at all cost and the best way to promote it is through the traditional institutions of *religion and family*. The best way to protect patriarchy is to safeguard male hegemony in the family. If women are restricted to their families then there is hope for the survival of Brahmanical supremacy. Noble reasons are given by the Hindutva to keep women homebound. Again, how are women to be restricted to their families? Here comes once again the role of religion. Patriarchy, through indubitable religious sanctions, has the power to negatively influence and shape the psyche of women and bring them back to their 'original' family status.

We can understand the role of women in *Hindutva* better when we have a glimpse of how the women's wing in the Sangh parivar functions. The "all-male organization" RSS was founded in 1925 by Hedgewar. The women's wing, the *Rashtrasevika Samiti* was founded at the request of Lakshmibai Kelkar in 1936. The Samiti, through its *Shakhas*, provided opportunities for women of upper castes and class for physical and military training, as well as ideological or *boudhik* training. But it had nothing to do with women's rights or their struggles. M.S. Golwalkar, the second supreme Guru of the RSS, laid enormous strictures on the women's wing (the *Samiti*) and gave them the distinctive responsibility of running their homes and to raising their children on the authentic Sangh values. In 1989-90 the Sangh parivar was very active in bringing to prominence many women's organizations and women leaders like BJP *Mahila Morcha*, the VHP *Matri Mandal* and *Durga Vahini* with their various other regional branches (Sarkar 1999: 139).<sup>2</sup>

The Samiti functions, according to Sarkar's research, as the 'transmission belt for the RSS' passing on the stories of 'atrocities' committed by the minority communities (Muslims and Christians) among Hindu women (Sarkar 1999: 148). Indeed it is the "nucleus of the new Hindu domesticity. Its women will be the living pattern for the Hindu Rashtra of the future" (Sarkar 1999: 157). In its attitude and function the *Samiti* is the reflection of the Sangh in the real

sense. Its major political function is dissemination of communalism. Its anti-emancipatory agenda is evident in its stand against the Women's Reservation policy in parliament. Instead it upholds social hierarchy on the basis of merit. So also Women MPs and MLAs of BJP cannot be part of the decision-making body of the Sangh (Sarkar 1999: 155-56).

The Samiti's icon is the eight-armed *Durga* carrying weapons, and its *mantra* is to exhort women to lay down their lives in the service of the nation. It is literal war against Muslims and Christians – the enemies within (Sarkar 1999: 147). Instead of women's emancipation the Samiti works for women's pure domesticity. The connection between communal violence and women is obvious: communalized female subject hood instead of "male-inflicted violence and female victimhood" (Sarkar 1999: 142). Women consider themselves the 'soul' of the Hindu Rashtra. They are the guardians of the essential Sangh values, and the propagators of its authentic ideology. They are the defenders of tradition against the West. They are "partners in an internal colonization over the Muslim and the Christian" (Sarkar 1999: 157).

Some sort of accommodation with globalization is quite evident along with an ardent struggle to revive and preserve old values. Certain concessions of modernization are granted to girls and women such as beauty parlours, wearing of jeans (not mini-skirts that expose the body), and cultivation of a good figure, cosmetics and household gadgets as they contribute to the nation's economy (Sarkar 1999: 150).

The Samiti, through its Shakhas, upholds and inculcates in young girls conservative values: arranged marriages, good housekeeping, modesty in dress and behaviour, diligent service to men and elders, and physical training so valuable today to discipline one's body which is highly valued as empowerment. Simultaneously they are indoctrinated in "ideological instructions about services to a militaristic, aggressive Hindu nation, of vengeance against its enemies, about heroic qualities of legendary men and women who resisted 'enemies' of the nation, fulfill aspirations for a life above pure self-interest, release frustrations built up as a result of having been marginalized members of orthodox families. Moreover, they are not told anything

that offends mainstream patriarchal, Hindu nationalistic values and myths very deeply” (Sarkar 1999: 149). Another important function of women propagated by Hindutva, is that women are builders of the nation. According to Golwalkar, women’s most important role is to be mothers of sons, and as mothers, their special responsibility is to form the character of future generations. This does not refer merely to their physical upbringing but most importantly, to imprint in their sons Indian culture and to instill in them the “right type of *sanskars*: devotion to duty, spirit of personal endeavour, love of the motherland, service of the society” (Golwalkar 1980).

Hindutva is thus creating a new negative social order that silences women’s voices and blinds future generations to truth. Women are again relegated to an inferior position. Traditionally, as a wife a woman was expected to fulfill certain roles in the family: as her husband’s servant in duty, as a mother to his children, long suffering and patient in all circumstances, chaste and obedient and faithful unto death (ideal of *sati*) etc. This is what the Hindutva is trying to inculcate through its education policy today. But the traditional role of women, however glorified by Hindutva, is oppressive and would lead to the reversal of women’s empowerment (Singh 2002).

## 2.2 Gender Equality, a Threat to Hindu Rashtra

What cannot be tolerated in the Samiti is *gender equality* since according to the *Sangh*’s ideology it destroys the traditional value system (Sarkar 1999: 150). Accordingly, for the Samiti the very “notion of rights is an inducement to rape, to domestic unhappiness. It is the sole cause of male oppression of women” (Sarkar 1999: 152-153). The notion of equal rights is a menace brought in by the present education policy. Consequently, the education policy of India is seen as a “colonial, foreign education” which is solely responsible for teaching Indian women to fight for their rights, to fight males. British education policy is blamed for ignoring the questions of culture, nationality, patriotism and motherhood. Hence there is an urgent need today to develop a ‘*Hindu educational system*’ to retrieve the traditional values of ideal wives and sacrificing mothers. It is wrong for women to fight for their rights or fight their men; instead they should sacrifice their lives to keep the family together.

This is because Hindu women are made in the image and likeness of the Motherland herself. If Hindu women hanker after rights to gender equality they will ruin themselves along with Hindu Rashtra (Sarkar 1999: 150-154).

To put it briefly, instead of working towards “self-determination as a right of the female individual or the people”, Hindutva aims at the “uniqueness of the culture of the Hindu *volk*” (Sarkar 1999: 136). From a female, it demands the distinctive responsibility of preparing the male children for the future nationhood and unchanging obedience to community prescriptions. A woman should be so trained as to hand over to her children those unique values that build up the Hindu nation. “She is the source of authenticity, nation-making, freedom” (Sarkar 1999: 136). But all these values she is supposed to inculcate in her sons are at the cost of her own self-determination. The question Sarkar raises is basic: “Is the woman a rights-bearing individual or a culture-bearing one?” (Sarkar 1999: 136-137).

Sarkar’s analysis proves to be right, for one cannot fail to observe a sharp decline in the status of Indian women in the BJP regime, despite the hard work of women’s movements to uplift their position in various fields.

### **3. Decline on the Status of Women Despite Women’s Movement**

Women’s decades-old struggle to break away from the traditional shackles that kept them imprisoned for centuries to their homes, appears to be futile in the face of the rising *Hindutva* ideology. The *Sangh Parivar* is trying hard to revive the traditional value system that keeps women in their ‘proper place’. For example, even after decades of effort from various women’s organizations, gender justice seems still a very distant dream in India. The present government’s utter lack of concern for human dignity is reflected not only in the Gujarat carnage but also in the *rise of violence* against women all over India. That *Hindutva* nurtures the concept of patriarchy and ignores the human dignity of women is obvious from the following examples:



### 3.1 Hindutva's Absolute Apathy to Human Dignity

*Hindutva's* absolute apathy to human dignity is reflected in the Gujarat carnage. Women's ordeal in the Gujarat massacre offers us an especially important clue to *Hindutva's* concept of women. The way Muslim women – young girls, married women, pregnant women and even old widows – were handled by organized bands of armed young men of the *Sangh Parivar* cannot be forgotten by generations to come. The *modus operandi* was repulsive. The attitudes were of revenge and hatred. They were raped, gang raped in public and then either burnt alive or smashed to death.

Rape was used as a political weapon to avenge historical wrongs according to Purushottam Agarwal. Commenting on the violence against Muslim women in Surat in December 1992, he tries to analyze the reasons behind the approval of rape in a communalistic context. He succinctly points out that in all patriarchal world-views, female *symbolizes the honor of the family*. Consequently her legitimate 'owner' has an exclusive control over her sexuality. Accordingly, the traditionally ideal woman has to be ready and willing to give up her life to safeguard her chastity (idea of *Sati*) and in safeguarding her chastity, she safeguards the honor of her family and community (Agarwal 2002: 34). Here rape, "even in an individual context, is not just a matter of sexual lust. Sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, it is an affirmation of women as objects of pleasure and an underlining of the power of men. In a collective context, rape becomes an explicitly political act and in the context of an organized aggression, it becomes a spectacular ritual, a ritual of victory – the defilement of the autonomous symbol of honour of the enemy community" (Agarwal 2002: 29).

*Hindutva* propagates the legend of *Padmini and Alauddin* to evoke stereotypical image of the Muslim "as a voluptuously lustful rapist" and Hindus as "passive, docile, hopelessly virtuous" persons. Stereotypes of the "Self" and the "Other" are clearly evident at the root of this politico-religious agenda (Agarwal 2002: 32-34). Agarwal refers to the revengeful attitude of V. D. Savarkar who ridicules Hindu rulers including Chatrapathi Shivaji for their benign attitudes towards Muslim women who were at their mercy. Centuries ago Hindu women had suffered molestation at the hands of the Muslims.

But when the time came for the Hindus to retaliate, they did not pay them back in the same coin – they did not chastise Muslim women-folk (Agarwal 2002: 42). What the Hindutva is trying to communicate in glaring terms, is how little it values human dignity and in particular the dignity of women.

### 3.2 Gender Insensitivity

In a fast changing gender-sensitive world, *Hindutva* is trying to redefine the role of females in the traditional institution of family. Through various means, and especially through the media, it is communicating and upholding a *Sita-Savitri-Padmini* imagery (some of the present T.V serials on women's issues have clearly a debilitating effect on the status of women). In addition, there are instances of demeaning anti-women statements made by pro *Hindutva* political leaders at various times. *Hindutva's* gender insensitivity is seen in the following examples:

*Revival of Sati*: In October 1987, the former BJP Vice President Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia, leading a pro-Sati march after the Roop Kanwar' incident in Deorala in Rajasthan, had said that *Sati* was part and parcel of Hindu tradition. Besides, Swami Muktananda, encouraged *Sati* and the dowry system, calling them "traditional Hindu practices." So also, according to a report in *Deccan Herald* (February 8, 1999) the VHP is reviving *Sati*. Furthermore, the international vice-president of the VHP, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, has defended *Sati* by saying "there is nothing wrong if any woman who cannot bear the separation from her husband opts to join him in his funeral pyre" (Hodlya 1999).

*Religious Restrictions*: In January 1994, Swami Nishchalananda, the Shankaracharya of Puri, protested the recital of sacred texts by women saying: "I respect women too much to allow them to go and beg for alms in one garment, which is a prerequisite for the donning of the sacred thread." The Sacred thread is a prerequisite for chanting the Vedas (Shankar 1999: 1; see also [http://www.dalitstan.org/journal/politics/hindutva/wom\\_hp.html](http://www.dalitstan.org/journal/politics/hindutva/wom_hp.html) 1999).

*Censored History*: The revision and updating of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education by the National Coun-

cil of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is obviously gender insensitive. Women have no place in the entire syllabus of history (*Communalism Combat* 2000: 47-48). In the proposed syllabus 'value education' is given prime importance but this is under the pretext of bringing in the patriarchal ideology and patriarchal notion of education for girls. A Central place is given to religion (Hindu religion) and its 'positive influence' but in reality this is to perpetuate the traditional victimization of women. Family education is given importance (reference to women's education) to perpetuate the stereotypes such as nutrition, health etc (Singh 2002).

*Domestic Violence:* The attitude of the present government to the widespread domestic violence is also worth noting. The issue of domestic violence still remains a private affair. Laws concerning domestic violence are not given full attention, even in the recent Committee on the Reforms of the Criminal Justice System submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs in March 2003. The Committee hardly acknowledges the inhuman treatment of victims of domestic violence; instead it makes too many assumptions founded on the "traditional, patriarchal notion that the Indian woman would rather suffer harassment at home – and forgive it – than opt out of the marriage" (*Human Rights Features*, see also <http://www.countercurrents.org/gender-hrf171103.htm> 2003). The Committee has failed thoroughly in its duty to protect the dignity of women, a fundamental duty under article 51A(e) of the Indian Constitution.

### 3.3 Gender-Just Code still a Distant Dream

While vested interests of *Sangh parivar* clamour for a Common Civil Code for the Nation, the women's movement is determined to call for a Gender Just Code. According to Ram Puniyani there is a vital difference in these two concepts. "A *uniform code* need not be *gender just* while a *gender-just code* can be *uniform* for the whole Nation. As such the civil code relates more to the laws of inheritance of property, divorce and custody of children. And in these matters, most of the prevalent laws are biased in favour of men" (Puniyani 2003; emphasis is mine).

There is very little hope for a gender-just code to be realized in the near future as the *Hindutva* movement is clearly gender biased and is propagating *Manusmriti* in subtle ways (Puniyani 2003).

### **3.4 Renaming ‘Women’s Studies Centre’ at the University of Pune**

The hazards of *Hindutva* philosophy are spreading far and wide in the academic field too. The reason behind this is to maintain the traditional ideal of the Indian womanhood as one who is restricted within the confines of a family. As the process of communalization of education is well on its way, a jolt has also been given to the Women’s Studies Centre at the University of Pune. Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi, the Union Minister for Human Resource Development, has renamed the ‘Women’s Studies Centre’ as the “Women’s and Family Studies Centre.” The strong protest from feminist academics all over India to reverse the decision is justified, as the move is clearly to restrict the scope of women’s studies to the family unit (Muzumdar 2003 in <http://www.countercurrents.org/gender-majumdar060903>).

### **3.5 Women’s Reservation Bill**

Women’s organizations are deeply concerned at the continuing marginalization of women by the present Government in all spheres. In the political field they have been persistently toiling for years to pass 33% reservation for women in the Parliament. But the relentless refusal of the Government to put the Women’s Reservation Bill to vote in Parliament is yet another sign of the BJP’s anti-feminist tactics. The representative of the ruling Party made a counter proposal to the Bill on July 15, 2003, which was vehemently opposed by women’s organizations. Strangely the proposal was to increase the number of seats by 180 and make them double-member constituencies. Women’s organizations were quick to raise their objections on two discriminatory grounds: first of all, the *Lok Sabha* has already passed a resolution to freeze the present number of seats and to postpone delimitation till after the next elections. This would mean that women will have to wait for their chance for another six years. Secondly, the idea behind the double constituencies is that women somehow cannot manage seats on their own. This again is a direct

blow to gender equality. Women's organizations have made a joint statement protesting against this new proposal (*Joint Statement from Women's Organizations on BJP Proposal on Women's Reservation Bill*).

### 3.6 Decline in the Child Sex Ratio

According to a *Financial Times* analysis, India falls short of 40 million women (*Zenith.org*, February 15, 2003). Amartya Sen puts the number at 35 million (Editorial, *The Times of India* 2003: 8). Whatever be the calculation, the crude fact remains that our society still suffers from *male child mania*.

To begin with, India has fewer females than males for at least the past century. At the turn of the last century (twentieth century), the sex-ratio in India according to the official figures was 972 (females):1000 (males); in 1981 it had declined to 935:1000; and at the close of the century it is 927: 1000. It is reported that in the states of Punjab and Haryana, the sex-ratios have declined to 900:1000. In some districts in Rajasthan and Bihar, it has further dwindled to 600:1000 (Bidwaai 1998: 20; Saha 1997: 7; *The Times of India* 1999: 6). Selective abortions of female foetuses following sex determination tests, female infanticide and dowry deaths could be the main reasons for this low ratio. Surveys reveal that out of 12, 000,000 females born annually, about 3,000,000 (per year) are done to death either by doctors or untrained nurses.

Today there is a slight rise in the female sex ratio i.e., 933:1000. But it is the sharp decline in the child sex ratio that is of great concern for all today. It has come down from 976 (females for 1000 males) in 1961 to 927:1000 in 2001. It is said that the lowest Child Sex Ratio is recorded in Punjab and Haryana. Parts of Haryana even record as low a ratio as 770 females to 1000 males! According to a Times Editorial, Delhi (south-west Delhi) is "the most girl-child-unfriendly district" (Editorial, *The Times of India* 2003: 8). Gender prejudice is still rampant in the Indian Psyche, despite countless efforts on the part of women's organizations.

### 3.7 Statistical Reversal in the Status of Women Today

Here are some of the details of a survey by a Times Special Report, a clear evidence of decline in the status of women in our society:

28% of India's work force are women, up from 13% in 1987

3% of senior management posts in corporate India are held by women

1 million women have been elected to panchayats since 1993

48 women MPs in the 13<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha

9 women head Delhi's state government

16,496 rapes in 2000, up from 15,468 in 1999. Every 54 minutes, a woman is raped

374 rapes in 2000 make Delhi the most unsafe metro, followed by Mumbai (124), Kolkata (35) and Chennai (24)

1,651 rape cases pending trial in Delhi courts. 350 cases are added every year. All India conviction rate 29.8%

488 molestation cases in Delhi. At 23.6% it's the highest in India

512 dowry deaths in 23 cities in 2000, Delhi's share 19.9%

80% women say sexual harassment exists in the work place, according to a Sakshi survey

53% say women don't get equal opportunities and are treated unfairly by supervisors, employers and co-workers

70% respondents in the survey said women in general face inappropriate behaviour. Verbal abuse is the most commonly reported form of sexual abuse (*Sunday Times of India* 2002: 6).

### 4. Conclusion

By strengthening patriarchy, Hindutva is creating a new terrorism in India. It is a threat to democracy, secularism and above all, to humanity. Patriarchy has upheld a glaring inequality for centuries.

Without dismantling this patriarchal paradigm we cannot go forward, cannot open ourselves to a new holistic vision. Justice and peace are never possible, as long as we remain in the clutches of male hegemony.

Women *are* trying to bring about an all-round revolution in the Indian society. Indeed there are evidences of change in our social, cultural, religious, gender, legal and political spheres. No one can deny the selfless toil of women's movements in India. Today, in India, everywhere women of all classes and castes, educated and uneducated, are founding a new direction of wholeness by working for the development of not only women, but also the whole human family, inclusive of Mother Earth. They are setting new patterns of wholeness through their unique commitment to the poor and the needy. They have begun to challenge the authenticity of the set patterns of religious traditions that are oppressive. Women are challenging the power structures by prioritizing issues such as freedom of expression for all. But this is not enough.

The paradigm of patriarchy is incapable of bringing about gender equality or women's liberation. We need to think of other alternatives, a new paradigm, and a new vision that gives hope for the future. For this we need both communitarian thinking and collective efforts. According to George Menezes "Fundamentalism is spreading not because the fundamentalist themselves are powerful, but because the progressive people being sectarian and disunited are not powerful enough" (2001: 123). Purushottam Agarwal points out that the collapse of authoritarian ideology can only take place when women in our society affirm themselves and are recognized in society as 'sexually awakened' women, for such women are a threat to patriarchal hegemony (2002: 28).

The patriarchal paradigm cannot be dismantled without collaboration and dialogue. We need both '*sexually awakened*' men and women of all religious traditions to join hands in this common war against the enemies of humanity. Together, we people of good will in India, could search for a "new anthropology" – a new way of understanding what it means to be human in an age which is bent on creating a myth of dehumanization.

## Notes

1. According to Kumar Suresh, the term Hindutva was first used by V. D. Savarkar, the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha. A new dimension was given to Hinduism, that of homogeneity – Hindus considered themselves as a single community.
2. “Thousands of karsevikas participated in the attacks on the Babri Masjid and in its demolition and their role was highlighted in the Sangh media products... Women were active and prominent in the bloody riots that swept across India in the course of Ramjanambhoomi movement i.e., in Bhagalpur, at Ahmedabad, in Bombay.”

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