

The recent comments by cricketers Hardik Pandya and KL Rahul on a popular talk show have raised

DEAR MEN, MISOGYNY

REICHA TANWAR

CRICKET is a gentlemen's game yet all cricketers may not be gentlemen. Players like Hardik Pandya and KL Rahul proved otherwise on *Koffee with Karan*, a popular chat show hosted by Karan Johar. The show exhibited male camaraderie among the players as the two unabashedly boasted of their drunken behaviour and female conquests. The show brought to light how, despite all movements for women's emancipation, #MeToo and in-your-face feminism, misogyny continues to be treated as 'cool'.

Being a celebrity does not give one the right to speak about women as objects or to sift them into categories of seeing, dating and relationships. Boasting of hooking up with multiple women and saying, "I like to watch and observe how they (women) move" was crude and crass. This is a glaring example of sexual objectification, which is looking at a person merely for sexual pleasure and treating her as an object of use. For such men, a woman is simply an erotic figure to fulfil the fantasy of the spectator. This 'macho' behaviour is derived from Spanish/Portuguese word 'machismo,' a concept associated with a strong sense of masculine pride. According to author and columnist William Safire, "It refers to the swaggering male; the trappings of manliness used to dominate women and keep them in their place."

Boys and men often go a step further and use violence to demonstrate their masculinity. How else do you describe an acid attack or a gang rape? These acts of crime are driven by masculine norms, social dynamics and 'role models'. And how such behaviour actually reinforces the

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belief about the 'real man'. Many believe that manhood is an achieved status, one that must be earned via action and words.

Hardik Pandya says that he is inspired by West Indian players and their lifestyle.

Perhaps I am from a different generation but my mind is revolted by sexist comments by celebrities. In different parts of the world, we have sportsmen in soccer, basketball, etc. leading flamboyant lifestyles. However, let's not forget the likes of Roger Federer and several Australian cricketers, who are known for their decent behaviour.

India is a young nation. Cricketers, in particular, enjoy an iconic status. A large part of the population, particularly the youth, follows the professional and personal lives of these sports celebrities. What Pandya and Rahul said on Karan Johar's show might have fetched it great TRPs, but see how repulsed the nation is! All behaviour is rooted in a socio-cultural context and what may be normal and routine in a particular culture, seems totally out of place in another. After the show, the players have been suspended by the BCCI. Right or wrong, people pay attention to what celebrities have to say.

Unfortunately for the world's celebrities, this means that they cannot get away with making offensive statements.

It has often been reiterated that engaging boys and men for promoting gender equality is critical. Male engagement is necessary to challenge structures, beliefs, practices that perpetuate such sexist beliefs. And, for this, the first and foremost institution is the family.

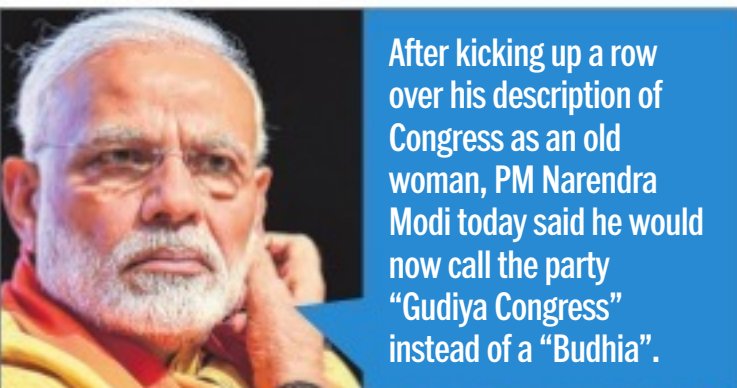
A study on sexual harassment has found that what men see as harmless fun or casual harassment, women tend to consider it sexual harassment. The Criminal Law Amendment Act 2013, which was enacted following the Nirbhaya incident, has recognised certain acts as offences. These include acid attack, sexual harassment, voyeurism and stalking. These offences have been incorporated into the Indian Penal Code with appropriate punishment. However, if a woman tries to lodge a complaint in a police station against voyeurism or stalking, we can imagine the reaction of the officials concerned.

Hardik Pandya said with great pride that he failed in every class and studied till Class IX because of the school's policy of not detaining students. How can one assess this statement? In a Canadian television series, a young student is shown insensitive and rude towards a fellow student. When the teacher got to know about the episode, she asked the whole class to celebrate 'kindness week'. Maybe our youth, too, need such lessons. Being kind, sensitive, compassionate and considerate to others, and women in particular, are virtues to cherish. The likes of Pandya, Rahul and, perhaps even Karan Johar, need to understand this. The show was definitely not entertainment.

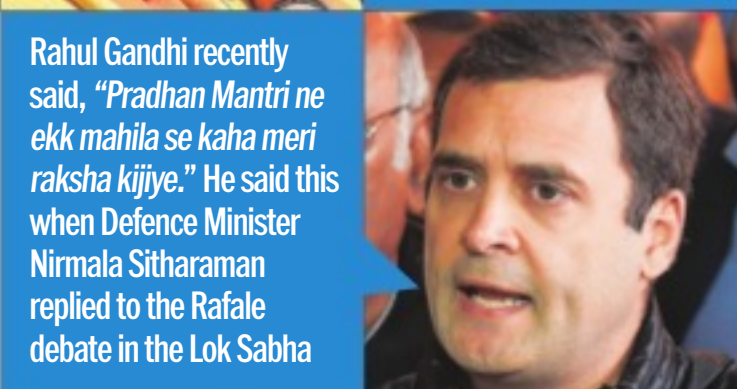
— The writer is former director, Women's Studies Research Centre, Kurukshetra University



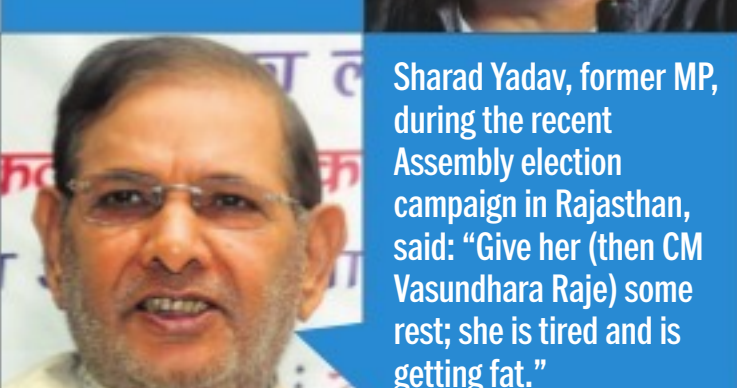
Sexism in Indian politics



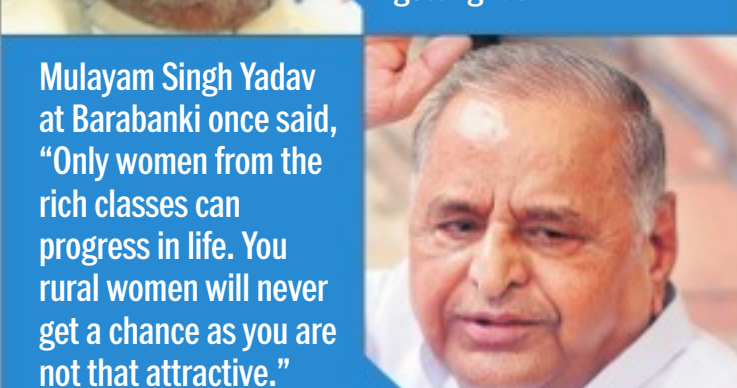
After kicking up a row over his description of Congress as an old woman, PM Narendra Modi today said he would now call the party "Gudiya Congress" instead of a "Budhia".



Rahul Gandhi recently said, "Pradhan Mantri ne ekk mahila se kaha meri raksha kijiye." He said this when Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman replied to the Rafale debate in the Lok Sabha



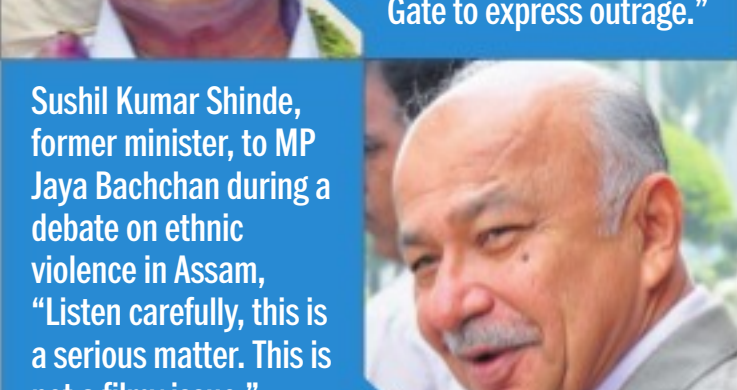
Sharad Yadav, former MP, during the recent Assembly election campaign in Rajasthan, said: "Give her (then CM Vasundhara Raje) some rest; she is tired and is getting fat."



Mulayam Singh Yadav at Barabanki once said, "Only women from the rich classes can progress in life. You rural women will never get a chance as you are not that attractive."



Abhijit Mukherjee, Congress MP, on mass protests over 2012 Delhi gangrape: "Dented-painted women protesters in Delhi went to discotheques and then turned up at India Gate to express outrage."



Sushil Kumar Shinde, former minister, to MP Jaya Bachchan during a debate on ethnic violence in Assam, "Listen carefully, this is a serious matter. This is not a filmy issue."



Sanjay Nirupam, Congress MP to Smriti Irani: "Char din hue hain aur aap rajnitik vishleshak bani firti hain. Aap toh TV pe thumke lagati thi, aaj chunavi vishleshak ban gayi"

Our political system endorses patriarchy. This is evident in the many snide remarks made on women politicians

Prejudice in Parliament

ADITI TANDON IN NEW DELHI

IT's heartening to see top cricket players face action for their failings off the field, what's worrying is the impunity with which sexism and misogyny continue to be practiced and condoned in Indian politics. Recently, Congress president Rahul Gandhi raised eyebrows by asking Prime Minister Narendra Modi why he sent a "woman" (read Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman) to defend him against allegations of corruption in the Rafale deal.

The PM lashed back painting Gandhi anti-women and adding, "This is not the insult of one woman, this is the insult of entire Indian women's power." What followed was another offensive from Gandhi. "In our culture, respect for women begins at home," he said to the PM. His message not lost on anyone since the Congress had made Modi's marital status an issue in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The Gandhi-PM spat would have ended but for a notice, the National Commission for Women's slapped on the Amethi MP asking him to explain his "offensive and sexist" remarks about Sitharaman. That said Gandhi is not alone in Indian politics where sexual innuendos rule, defining deep-rooted patriarchy. Modi himself has been caught making disparaging remarks in the past. His "50 crore ki girlfriend" jibe at Sunanda Pushkar, the late wife of Congressman Shashi Tharoor, comes to mind as does his odd comment of budhiyagudiya Congress.

"Politicians cut across party lines when it comes to practicing misogyny. Sexist tendencies are deep rooted in our culture but they find their fullest expression in Indian politics. That explains why a senior leader like Sharad Yadav gets away with calling Vasundhara Raje, the former Chief Minister of Rajasthan, fat. That also explains why BJP leaders get away with mocking a woman MP from the opposition ranks just because her laughter was too loud for them. We can pretend to be an equal society but we will take long to practice equality," Prof Rizwan Kaiser of Jamia Millia Islamia says.

Kaiser's last reference was to Rajya Sabha chairman M Venkaiah Naidu asking Congress MP Renuka Chowdhury to "go visit a doctor" last year after she laughed too loudly during



Misogyny is real and acquires varied forms in politics. One form is language. The other is the level of political representation parties give to women

Meenakshi Lekhi, BJP MP HEADING LOK SABHA COMMITTEE ON PRIVILEGES

PM Modi's speech in the House. The PM, too, jested about Chowdhury's act, telling Naidu, "Mr Chairman, don't say anything to Renukaji. Ages after the *Ramayana* has one had a chance to hear such laughter."

Everyone recalls how a livid Congress had forced several adjournments of the Rajya Sabha on the issue seeking the PM's apology for equating Chowdhury with 'Saroopnakh'.
 "It's more about each individual's attitudes to sexism. I have never faced vilification in my career. That's because people know they cannot mess with me. But misogyny is real and acquires varied forms in politics. One form is language. The other is the level of political representation parties give to women"

Snide, misogynistic remarks are not new to women politicians. Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was called a 'goongi gudiya' by her rivals. BJP leaders still refer to Sonia Gandhi as "that Italian bar girl". Maharashtra Congress leader Sanjay Nirupam had once offensively called Union Minister Smriti Irani, a former actor, a 'thumke-waali'. Late Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and the icon of Dravidian politics J Jayalalitha was manhandled by a DMK minister inside the state assembly.

"Misogyny is much deeper in politics than in any other profession. That's because politics is harsher than any other calling. A woman politician exercises the same power as a misogynist imagines a male politician alone can exercise. That makes sexism deeper," Mahila Congress president Sushmita Dev says. Experts, meanwhile, wonder why India has not had its Julia Gillard moment yet. Sworn in as the first woman Prime Minister of Australia in 2010, Gillard took the world by storm when she attacked her rival and the then leader of the opposition Tony Abbott for his repeated use of sexist language. No Indian woman parliamentarian has looked misogynistic male rivals in the eye the way Gillard did. This when India got its first woman PM decades before Australia did.

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"This must change. I grew up to be a citizen of India, not a girl or a boy. I used to ride a bullet in college, I drove a tractor in my village and I performed the last rites of my father. I stood up for my convictions and never let social hypocrisies get the better of me" says Renuka Chowdhury, who was mocked at in the Rajya Sabha. But most women politicians privately admit that it's easier to talk against patriarchy than to fight it. One of them cites an example from March 2015 when then JDU MP of Rajya Sabha Sharad Yadav made sexist and racist comments about South Indian women.

"He said women in the South are as beautiful as their bodies and those in the North are not as good. When Minister Smriti Irani urged him to stop making racist comments, he told her — I know who you are. He was clearly referring to Irani's past as a TV actor," recalls a woman MP. Maybe it's time to implement what CPM's Brinda Karat had once suggested in Parliament — a code of conduct for male MPs.

Leading from the front

First Australian woman PM Julia Gillard's powerful 2012 speech on misogyny reverberated across the world. She began by telling her rival and the leader of the opposition at that time Tony Abbott, "I will not be lectured on misogyny and sexism by this man...not now, not ever..."

er is the level of political representation parties give to women. The BJP has done its best to empower women and put them in leadership roles. We have women heading the external affairs and defence ministries. That's a powerful message for a gendered society," says BJP's Lok Sabha MP from New Delhi Meenakshi Lekhi, who heads the Lok Sabha Committee on Privileges. But even a "pro-women" BJP hasn't cared to pass the long-pending Women's Reservation Bill to reserve 33 per cent seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. The NDA did pass another law though — to reserve 10 per cent quota for general category poor in public jobs and non-minority educational institutions, all in a matter of three days this winter session of Parliament.

A cursory glance at parliamentary committees further shows how gender insensitive and misogynistic the Indian political system is. None of the 24 standing committees are headed by a woman. Finance committees have near nil representation of women for reasons not far to seek.

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and important questions about codes of personal conduct that role models must practise in public life

IS NOT COOL

Pandya isn't the only problem



The player said on *Koffee With Karan* that his family lauded him on his sexual exploits, and were happy when he informed them that he was dating multiple women. Would they be similarly proud when discussing the sex life of girls of the family? Seems unlikely.

ROHIT MAHAJAN IN CHANDIGARH

In the great game of cricket, the players are gods. They exist in a bubble in which it's easy to lose touch with reality. Their path is littered with material and corporeal temptations. Everything they desire can be theirs, including young and beautiful women.

A few years ago, I went to an IPL after-party to see for myself what happened there.

The place was swamped by beautiful young women, including models and cheerleaders.

Also present were special invitees, and regular fans, who had paid good money to join the party.

As the big hall filled up, and people got drunk and wild, a special entertainment zone was created by barricading part of the hall. The cricketers — the pride of the night, the commodity that had sucked in the guests and the fans and their money — were guarded in this zone. The loveliest young women were allowed access into this restricted zone. The girls were trying to catch the eyes of the cricketers.

Anonymous accounts from cricketers clearly stated that after such parties, women were happy to join the players for a "bit of fun" in their rooms. One of the superstars of the first IPL, Shane Warne, whose flings, "texting and sexting" have caused controversy even in the permissive West, was a mentor to his team. The youngsters, no doubt, saw him as a great cricketer and a macho man worthy of emulation.

One South African cheerleader, Gabriella Pasqualotto, had stated, "We are practically like walking porn. These cricketers are the most loose and mischievous I have come across. I have a long while still here, so I must remember my tip list: beware of the cricketers!"

Extremely successful sportsmen attract women like rockstars do. In the West, it's less of a scandal. Wilt Chamberlain, the great basketball player, claimed to have slept with 20,000 women. After Earvin Magic Johnson was diagnosed with AIDS, he said: "I confess that after I arrived in LA in 1979, I did my best to accommodate as many women as I could."

These are the trappings of extreme wealth and success in sport. In this environment, it's difficult to figure out exactly who's using whom. The predatory players are piling up numbers — the girls would just be a number to them; for the girls, fleeting intimacy with someone hugely famous and rich is temptation enough — and they know what they're getting into. Hardik Pandya's is a case of a single man bed-hopping with multiple willing partners. He seems to treat women very badly, but it also seems that the women are willing to take it.

A cesspool of impropriety

When Pandya and KL Rahul met Karan Johar on *Koffee With Karan*, disaster was a huge probability. The talk show focuses on relationships, scandal and sex. The questions to be asked during the show are discussed with the guests beforehand, so it was not that leading questions were sprung on Pandya and Rahul when their guard was down. Pandya, especially, dived headlong into a cesspool of impropriety. Pandya is a semi-literate, super-rich man who became a millionaire

when he was barely out of his teens. He lives in an environment in which women are throwing themselves at him for consensual sex. He seems to regard women as mere objects and also possesses an unfortunate father of a man, who considers his son's outrageous comments about women as harmless.

"He is an innocent boy with a very fun-loving nature," said Pandya's father. Pandya said on the talk show that his family lauded him on his sexual exploits, and were happy when he informed them that he was dating multiple women. Would they be similarly proud when discussing the sex life of girls of the family? Seems unlikely. Then again, this is not just about the father-son Pandyas. Deep in our psyche, most Indians nurture horrible notions about gender, race, religion and ethnicity. Several of our representatives — MPs and MLAs — regularly spout hatred or prejudice against women or certain marginalised groups. Mulayam Singh Yadav, for instance, had spoken against the new anti-rape law because "boys make mistakes, why hang them?"

The entitled Indian male

Yadav was criticised for his comments. Pandya has been roasted on the media, was dropped from the team, and faces further penalties. But it's clear that he was merely speaking the language of the super-successful, entitled male; his comments also give an insight into the ever-changing sexual mores in the Indian society, and dating practices that are evolving without the older generation being fully aware of the change. Bawdy, sexist and racist locker room jokes are common in our society. We're not yet sensitised regarding sexism, racism and several other isms.

Pandya is not the problem. He is merely a representative of the toxic masculinity that has no respect for women. And he's not misogynistic — he clearly loves women and their bodies; it's just that he's got no respect for them. And he's not alone. At the IPL parties, teams expected their cricketers to be present — without the players, there would be no party, after all. The players were exposed to temptation, but the cricket board made no effort to mentor the players and sensitise them regarding gender issues.

When icons fail

Pandya was honest, but he deserves punishment for two obvious reasons. One, as a cricketer in a young nation, he's a role model, and he's clearly encouraging his young fans to treat women like shit — as if it's absolutely cool.

Two, his honesty bares obnoxious aspects of his personality. Many of us, in the privacy of our homes, utter words that are disrespectful to women, marginalised groups, different ethnic or religious groups. But people must follow a different norm in public life. In case of celebrities, that norm is enforced by the financial carrot and stick — when Tiger Woods' sexual improprieties were revealed, many of his sponsors immediately got rid of him. Pandya, too, has taken a financial hit, and might get banned, also. Will this be a lesson to young players? They will be more guarded, for sure, but it's unlikely that they'll suddenly become more sensitive on gender issues — that's a societal issue much bigger than them, Pandya or Indian sport.



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NOT A TROPHY: ON THE SHOW, BOTH HARDIK PANDYA AND KL RAHUL TALKED LOOSE ABOUT CHEERLEADERS