

Deconstructing Patriarchy at Center for Higher Tibetan Studies

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Venue: Center for Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarah, Dharamshala

Objective: Gender sensitization training for 50 students of Centre for Higher Tibetan Studies at Sarah, Dharamshala.

Process Documentation: The two day programme started with introducing the concepts of gender and sex to the participants. Based on the pre-workshop questionnaire, a majority of the students thought gender meant only those who are transgender. The workshop built their perspectives on issues of gender and sex.

The first day of the workshop was focused on doing activities that helped the participants understand the differences between assigned gender identity by society and the sexual identity that they are born with. The activities done were: drawing a farmer, word relay, tracing personal history, gender and sex statements. Post every activity, the facilitator debriefed on the assigned gender identities and sexual identities and why it is important to understand this difference. The participants actively engaged in all the activities; discussed, debated and questioned their own understandings of gender and sex.

The second day of the training was focused on understanding how power and patriarchy works in our society and how this manifests into varied forms of violence against women. It started off by recapitulating the previous day's sessions in brief followed by watching a two-part series named 'A Man's World' that throws light into how the world would have been if gender roles are flipped. The first part was shown where the normal day-to-day activity of a man was shown along with instances of everyday discrimination and gendering in our homes that take place. The participants were asked to share their observations in groups. The second part was the gender flip where a different world was shown where women take over all men's role. The participants were asked to present their observation on this video as well. The facilitator then debriefed on which world is better or a world that respects both man and woman. This was followed by another activity on power and patriarchy where the participants were divided into 2 groups. One group was given a set of balloons and the other group was given pins. Instructions were given separately to both the groups, the group who had the pins were supposed to pop the balloons and the other group was supposed to protect their balloons. The facilitator debriefed on how a small section of population had access to resources and privileges and how power and vulnerability as a result of this works in our society.

Through the course of the workshop discussions, a lot of insights from Buddhist scriptures were quoted, the validation of which rests on the person quoting it. For e.g. according to a participant, in Buddhism, women are supposed to be naturally compassionate and hence take major share of household responsibilities. According to some of them, men in Tibetan societies sacrifice more than women since men have more nationalistic feelings than women.

The participants were also shown a video on harassment faced by women. The video had an incident of a women being stared at in a bus stand by all men. This was brought up in one of the groups as how staring need not necessarily mean harassing a woman. An interesting series of discussions followed where participants talked about how uncomfortable the woman was when

men were staring at them. The issue of consent and harassment was detailed by the facilitator, post the discussions.

The concluding section of the workshop brought up insights drawn from the participant's observation on the invisibility of discrimination and violence against women in Tibetan societies. Questions were raised on how to tackle this issue at an individual and community level. The action plans drawn up thereafter had both self-reflective actions on changing existing norms and notions about gender and also institutional changes that can be garnered through community driven efforts.

Reflection and analysis: Through the course of the workshop an interesting analysis came out on how patriarchy is deep rooted in our society. The manifestation and institutionalisation of it extends beyond the domestic sphere in Tibetan society where community ownership, nationalism intersects with power and hegemony.

It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or deprived of rights, influence and resources but in general this appears to be a historical genesis of men having influence over primary domains of domestic and public space. The shifts and changes in its structure and function, and the adaptations it makes to female pressure and demands even in Tibetan societies.

