Changing Values along with Clothing Styles – The Indian Youth

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Abstract:- **Indian youth undergoes a major transformation in their lives when they pursue higher education. This transformation like many other factors is visible clearly in their clothing styles. Whether this change is visible in their mindset also is a what is explored in this article. Marriage is an important milestone in the traditional Indian culture. Previous studies have shown that criteria of choosing partners have been religion, caste, physical looks, skin colour, money, and education. Is this criteria changing in its sequence of importance just like the clothing styles are changing has been evaluated in this article through a survey amongst students who migrate from nearby districts to pursue higher education at Prayagraj.**

Keywords:- Changing Clothing Styles, Culture, Indian , Indian Youth, Social Values.

I. INTRODUCTION

A well-documented fact is that India has the largest youth population in the world. More than 50% of its population is under 25 years of age. This is a considerable number to influence all aspects of the society. A large number of this youth aspires for higher education and moves away from their homes in search for better educational and job opportunities. With these geographical reallocations come a lot of change in the social, economic and political atmosphere, including availability of resources and above all a cultural contrariety. These youths move from a feudal outlook to a market oriented outlook. They travel from a closed conservative environment to an open, progressive climate. It is said that the physical body when dressed, reflects the social body. Clothing being a visual element and an effective means of nonverbal communication, therefore must reflect the changing social norm within the Indian society.

➤ *Objective and Aim:*
This study aims to find out if along with the transformation of the exterior garb of the Indian youth is the interior thought also undergoing a similar change towards modernisation.

➤ *Locale of the Study:*
Uttar Pradesh is the most densely populated state in India and represents deep rooted Indian cultural and social traditions. The city of Prayagraj, an important seat of higher education in the eastern part of the state of Uttar Pradesh, India, was chosen as the locale of the study.

II. METHODOLOGY

To assess the validity of the objective a random survey was conducted amongst college going students who were pursuing their higher education. The participants were asked to fill a Google form and submit online. 1321 students 966 females and 355 males) responded to the survey questions. To assess the level of modernisation in their thinking and their clothing styles, the following question were put forth and answers sought on a 3-5-point Likert scale: -
1. The importance of Education, Money, Religion, Caste, Physical looks, and Skin color, as a criterion for marriage in their lives.
2. Whether their clothing style changed while pursuing graduation.
3. Was their style acceptable to their families, was it fashionable, and was it traditional.

III. RESEARCH REVIEW

During the past few years India has experienced enormous transformation in all domains of life including economic, social and cultural spheres. Global desirability has influenced and rapidly changed traditional Indian principles and attitudes. This change in lifestyle has affected every class and generation; especially the youth who form a major part of the human resource[15]. Dreams cannot be translated into reality without the proper utilization of its youth's potential. Any change within this group has its impact on the whole society. The Indian youth has extremely high expectations. They press for the lifestyle of a modern western couple, openly challenging the basic Indian traditional values, customs and beliefs [13]. Change is nature's basic law. For a society to progress, social transformation is a must. Moreover, today's Indian youth wants to change, progress and to achieve materialistic goals, even though they basically remain overwhelmingly conservative in their thoughts.

Few decades ago most Indians saved their income and rarely indulged. Today, the whole lifestyle has undergone a tremendous change with higher incomes, easily available credit cards, exposure to the western style mall shopping culture and a desire to improve living standards. They have undergone a remarkable transformation [10].

The youth in India endeavours to express their feelings through their clothing styles. They adopt clothes which suit their values and traits [21]. The Indian society has emerged from a pre-capitalist feudal social structure and stepped into post-modern fabric which is characterised by a behaviour

dominated by self-image and self-expression, which in turn has paved the way for distinctiveness and social adaptation.

History reveals that Indian textiles and garments have been preferred worldwide which has helped establish personal identity within the society and also all over the world [7]. Clothes are seen as translators of non-verbal communication and have attained a status of symbolism [19].

So on one hand a visual transformation is seen in the dressing styles. What needs to be confirmed is whether the same changes are seen in the social and cultural thoughts or not. It's easy to discard clothes and wear and adopt new styles but to do so with deep ingrained cultural traditions values and social thinking it is not so easy.

Wedlock is considered extremely sacred in a woman's life in India. It is an important social event which transmits traditional values across generations. Unmarried women living alone and seeking jobs after marriage is unthinkable. Traditional myths like fair skinned is being beautiful, government jobs are secure jobs, are heavily ingrained [1]. The birth of a baby girl is with the beginning of savings for her wedding. This is a common feature throughout all sections of the Indian society. The underlying belief is that the more lavish the wedding, the better placed groom they will be able to find for their daughter [4]. Having a caste based social structure the Indian society [9] prefers maintaining the purity of the caste by not allowing marriages between different castes and religions [12]. Caste and religion are extremely important factors in the social, political and economic Indian scenario [2]. The conviction of respect and traditional values is closely linked with education, caste, religion, professional status, physical looks and skin tones [18].

Indian marriages are an occasion of paramount importance in a person's life [11]. It is looked upon as a milestone which legalises the union of two people, [17] and is celebrated with a whole lot of rituals [5]. Scholars have quoted it to be as one of the few rituals which exists in the culture as the "oldest ritual of humanity," [3] as it marks a transformation in the lives of two people from being "a social individual to a part of a new social group, a couple" [14].

"Historically, Indian education has been elitist" [6]. Although, during the last fifty years, due to the emphasis on education given by the government, many practices, customs and traditions are undergoing a gradual change [8]. For example, the percentage of educated female population is increasing, [15] love marriages and arranged love marriages are also getting acceptability [16]

These evolving trends have been substantiated in a write-up written by Trivedi in New York Times that in India the main factors gradually determining compatibility in marriage are economics and education. Trivedi (2013) writes, "A growing pool of young women with unprecedented levels of education are seeking and making matches with educated men from higher socioeconomic groups." [20].

IV. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

To assess the changing social and cultural values along with clothing styles, the questions put forward were related to criteria of things that they considered were important for marriage. Marriage in India has always been regarded as an important event in ones life and is also a status symbol. Same caste, same religion, good looks, fair skin, professional job and money have been regarded to be of high consideration while selecting a match.

The data collected has been reviewed by comparing the answers received by the male and female population for the two questions proposed.

QUESTION 1.
The importance of the following criteria for marriage (Male and Female responses were sought)
a. Money and Education
b. Religion and Caste
c. Physical looks and Skin Color

The answers sought were on a Likert Scale of 1 = Not important; 2 = Slightly important; 3 = Moderately Important; 4 = Important and 5 = Very Important.

Money: (Table 1-a)
- Both genders rated money evenly from not important to very important with a tilt towards very important, revealing that gender wise the importance of money is almost equal.
- The very slight differences in the percentages of both genders confirm the intuitions of genders in the Indian society.
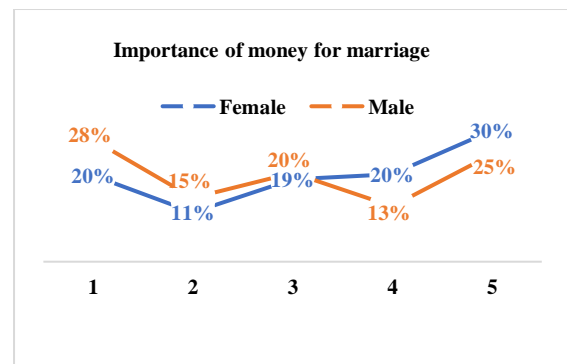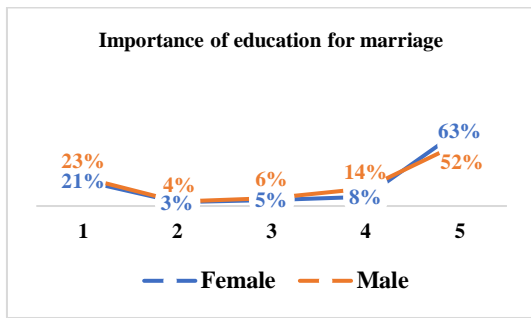

Table 1-a : Money

Education: (Table 1-b)
- Education and money criteria have shown similar patterns with almost same percentages of importance by male and female responses.
- Compared to money, more that 50% responses give importance to education for marriage.
- Comparing gender responses, females more than males, regarded education an important factor.
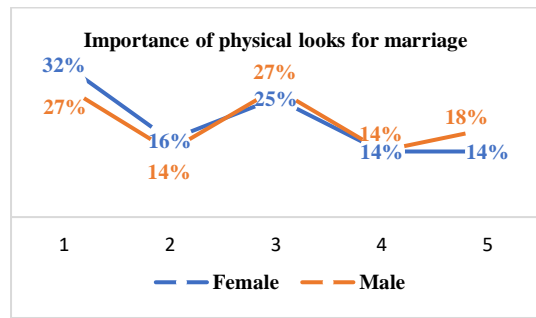
(Table 1-b) : Education

Caste: Table 1-c
- The first look at the caste response reveals that more responses held it as 'not important'.
- A closer look does reveal that more than 40% people rate it from 3 to 5 i.e., moderately important to very important, revealing that caste is still a factor which cannot be ignored.
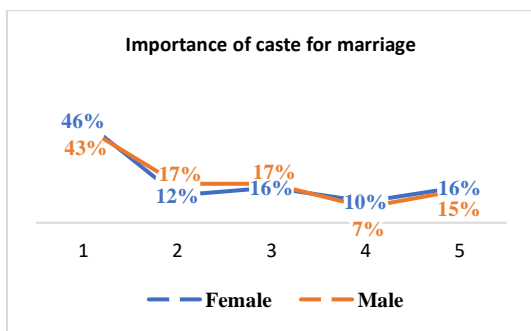

Table 1-c : Caste

Religion: (Table 1-d)
- Like the caste factor, religion had a similar response. More than 50% people held religion as not important and slightly important.
- 50% of the population still considered religion as a factor for marriage
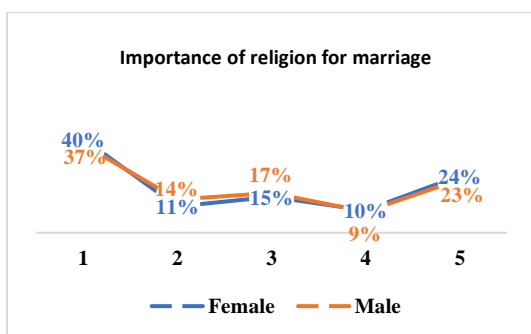- 24% regarded religion as a very important factor.

Table 1-d : Religion

Table 1 (e) Physical Looks
- 45% of both genders, thought that physical looks did not matter at all.
- 55% of the population does consider it as a factor whether moderately, slightly, or as a very important feature.
- This makes physical looks a factor which many people still consider a lifetime marriage union.

Table 1-e : Physical Looks

Skin Color : 1-e
- Skin color was a criterion which got the lowest percentage in importance as compared to all other factors. It was rated the lowest.
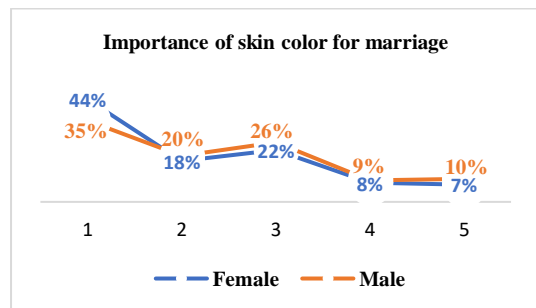- 40% of the population considered it to be not important at all.

Table 1-f : Skin Color

Criteria Important for marriage: Female Responses

Majority of the Female population **(Table 2-a)** rated
- **Education** is the most important factor, followed by money, religion, caste, physical looks, and skin color.
- The responses also revealed that maximum people rated caste as not important followed by skin color, religion, money, education, and physical looks. This shows that each one of these criteria are still prevalent in the society.
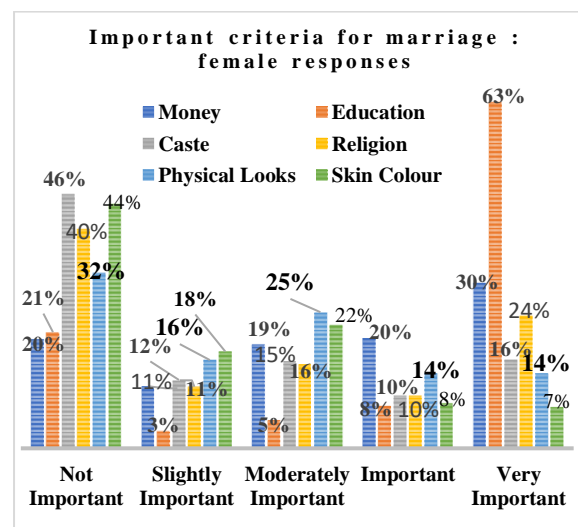

Table 2 - a: Criteria Important for marriage: Female
Criteria Important for marriage: Male Responses

Male population data (**Table 2-b**) reveals that

- The male responses showed the order of preference for most important criteria as education, money, religion, physical looks, caste, and skin color.
- The not important criteria were caste, religion, physical looks, money, physical looks, and skin color. Most of the male population gives caste the highest percent for not important whereas skin color gets the lowest for important criteria.
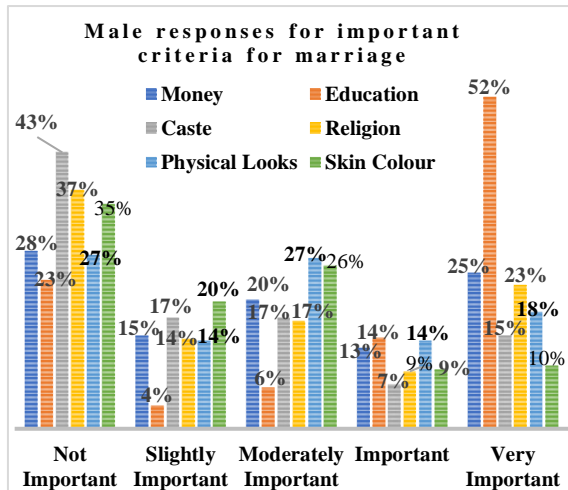

Table 2 - b: Criteria Important for marriage: Male

CONCLUSION

- Females tend to give money more importance as compared to males, maybe because of the widespread social inequality.
- Money and education are important for both.
- Caste, religion, physical looks, and skin color were regarded as unimportant.
- A changing trend in the society is seen where more people have started considering money and education as more important, over, and above caste, religion, physical looks, and skin color.
- The data also reveals that physical looks, and skin color are factors which are still prevalent in the mindset of the youth and have not become obscure issues in the society.
- 'Wanted fair, beautiful and attractive girl' are words which are commonly seen in matrimonial columns. Very few advertisements for marriage alliances asked for an 'educated, professional and working girl'. The consolidated responses reveal that age old beliefs that the woman having to give marriage more importance over education, are changing but are issues which are still prevalent in the society. The neutral, slightly important, and unimportant options do total up to about 60 – 45% of the population.
- Though caste and religion are factors which have not got in the most important criteria, they are neither in the lowest criteria. They are still present in the society. Both caste and religion have more than 40% of the population which does consider it as a factor for marriage. This shows that these factors have not been eradicated from the society totally and that education needs to do more than what it already has to change the mindset of the people.
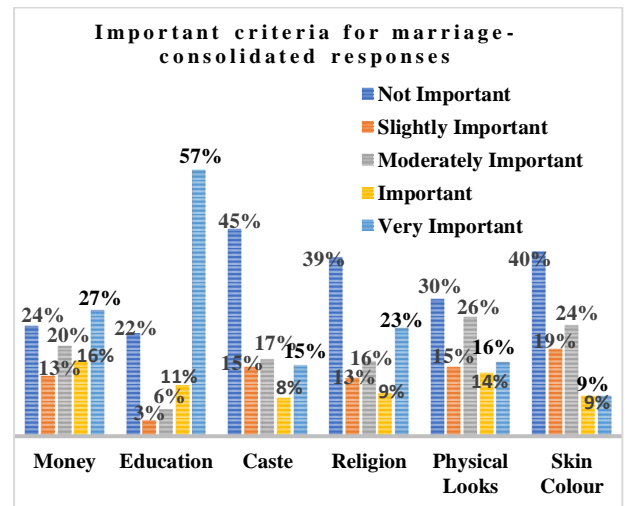

Table 3: Consolidated responses for important criteria for marriage

QUESTION 2:

In an attempt to find out if the exterior image the youth projected had changed they were asked whether their style of clothing had undergone a change while they were pursuing higher education. Answers were sought on a 3-point Likert scale.

The survey responses revealed that most of the youth felt that their clothing style had changed.
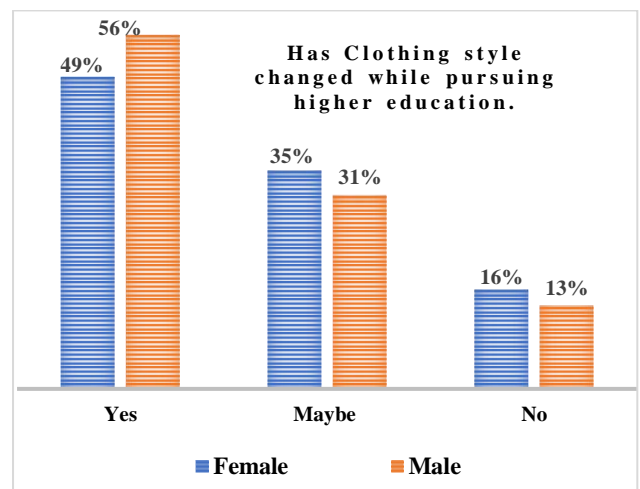

Table 4 : Change in Clothing style while pursuing higher education.

Question 3:

To assess the extent of change in their clothing style, the youth were asked whether their clothing style was

- Acceptable to family
- Fashionable
- Traditional

Answers were sought on a 5 point Likert scale of Yes, Maybe Yes, Maybe, Maybe No and No.

Majority of the female population [**Table 5-a**] said that their clothing style

- Was acceptable to the family

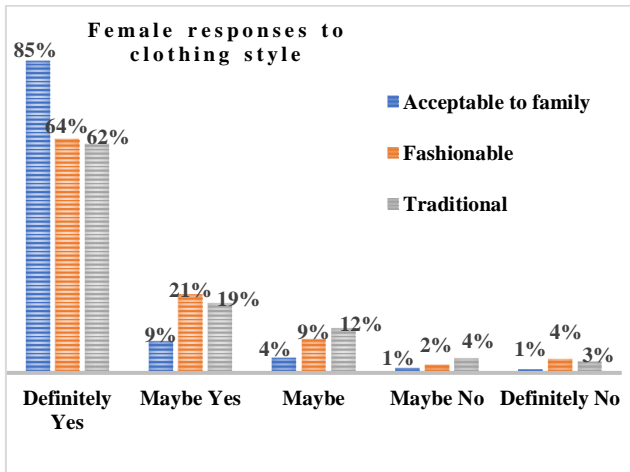- And it was both traditional and fashionable

Table 5-a : Male Responses to Clothing Styles

Majority of the male population [**Table 5-b**] said that their clothing style
- was acceptable to the family
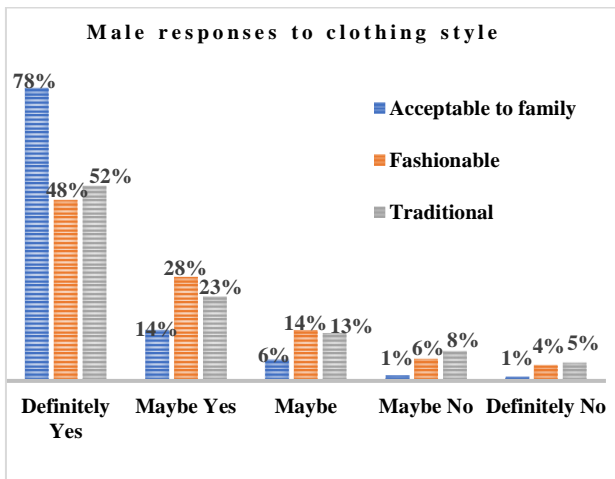- And it was both traditional and fashionable.

Table 5-b : Male Responses to Clothing Styles

CONCLUSION

- The youth are aware of their outward appearance and have a fashionable clothing style and prefers wearing traditional Indian garment **[Table 6].**
- They value the opinion of their families in what they wear and like to see that their clothing style is acceptable to their families.
- The responses of the female population were roughly 10% higher in the 'yes' option for all the three questions depicting that female population were surer and more conscious of their clothing styles
- The high percent response for traditional and fashionable clothes in both male and female responses reflects their awareness about clothing.
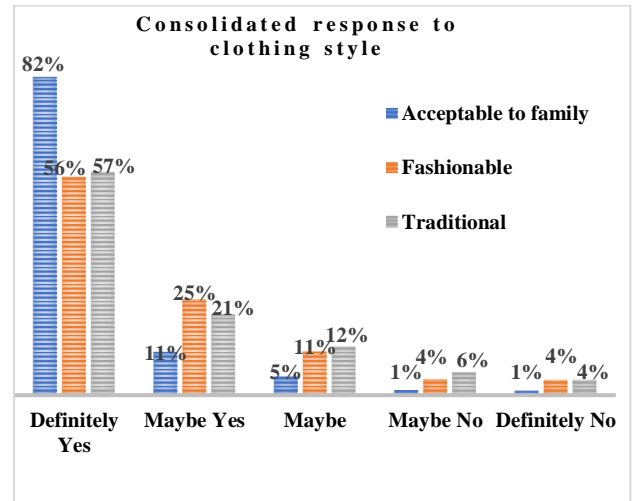

Table 6: Consolidated response to clothing style

V.   FINDINGS

- Averaging the responses and plotting with inter-quartile range of the Likert scale for the first question **[Table 7-a],** the graph reveals that money and education matter to a larger section of the population and caste, religion, physical looks, and skin color and of least importance to most.
- Having concluded that, it would not be wrong to infer that these factors still exist as a criterion of consideration for marriage.
- Averaging the responses and plotting with inter-quartile range of the Likert scale for the second question **[Table 7-b],** the graph reveals that the position of the population is clear that their clothing style is fashionable yet traditional and what they wear is acceptable to their families.
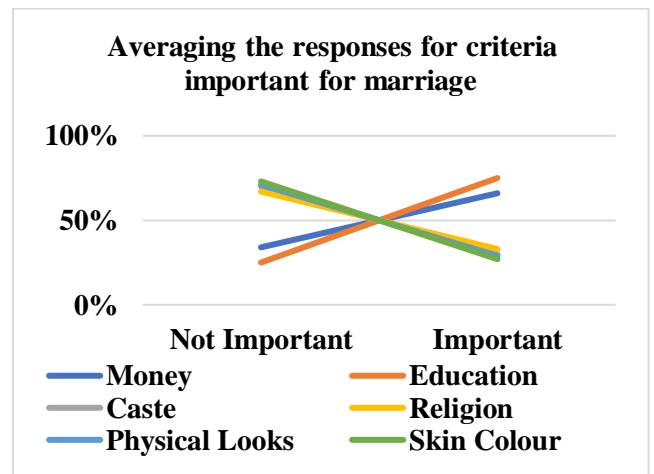

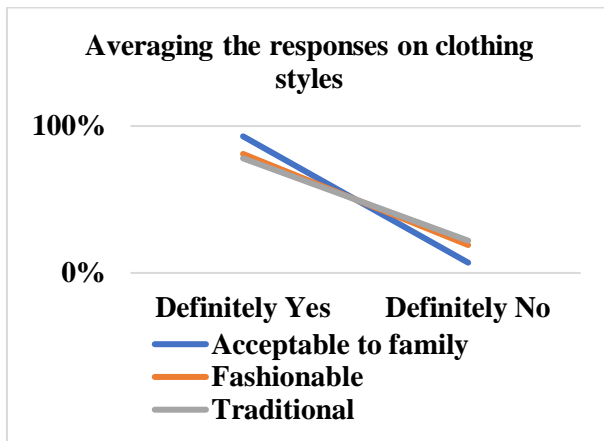Table 7-a : Averaging Responses to Question 1

Table 7-b : Averaging Responses to Question32

VI.   SUGGESTIONS

The Indian youth is in the transformation stage where most of them have started thinking differently from the age old traditional thinking. But there needs to be more secular and non-polarised change in the mindset for the Indian society to be one where caste religion, skin color and physical features don't matter at all.

VII.   FINAL CONCLUSION

The Indian youth prefers to keep their clothing styles traditional yet fashionable. Acceptance of their dressing style by their family is important. Their social and cultural thinking is evolving and for them education is the most important factor for marriage, followed by money. Caste, religion and factors which come second in the ranking of choice, while physical features and skin colour are of least importance for the majority. This shows that education has made a difference in their thinking and along with fashionable traditional clothing their thinking process is also undergoing a change towards modernity. But still a lot needs to be done to eradicate factors like caste, religion, physical looks, skin colour, etc.

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