



Crime Against Women

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“Today another woman dies, and not on a foreign field and not with a rifle strapped to her back, and not with a large defence of tanks rumbling and rolling behind her... She was the same girl her mother used to kiss; the same child you dreamed beside in school. The same baby her parents walked in the night with and listened and listened for her cries even while they slept. And someone has confused his rage with the woman’s only life.”

Five letters in the word woman- W for wise, O for observant, M for majestic, A for attentive and N for noble and nice- refer to the qualities God has attributed to woman. In ancient India women held a high place, in fact a place superior to men. Ours is a culture where Goddesses Bhawani, Durga and Kali signify strength, power and destruction. Our religious scriptures prove this fact that kings and towns were destroyed because a single woman was wronged by the state. For example, in the Ramayana we find that Ravana and his entire clan were wiped out because he abducted Sita; In Mahabharata all the kauravas were killed because they humiliated Draupadi in public.

Now in 21st century, in an age of globalization and liberalization the country has grown from leaps and bounds in every field. However, the status of women, especially in India, remains secondary to men. They are the victims of social injustice, inequality, suppression and cruelty of all kinds. Trends come and go but violence against women, a fiendish trend, refuses to fade away. It is like the dinosaur which refuses to go extinct. The fangs of this beast have stung the ‘Eves’ right from Jurassic Park days to the present. It is omnipresent all over the world- it can occur in all kind of situations (within the family, at the work place, in public

places, in the community and even when in the custody of the state) and at all stages of woman's life. It is in this context that the present paper attempts to trace measures to tackle the worsening situation.

The semantic meaning of "crime against women" is direct or indirect physical or mental cruelty to women. Criminal acts which are directed specifically against women and in which only women are victims are characterized as crime against women. It is equally important to clarify the concept of violence against women. Violence is also known as abuse and includes any sort of physical aggression or misbehaviour. When violence is committed at home it becomes domestic violence and involves family members such as children, spouse, parents or servants. Domestic violence may involve different means such as hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, throwing objects, etc. In broad terms, it includes threats, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, controlling or domineering, intimidation, stalking, economic deprivation, rape, abduction, kidnapping, murder (all cases of criminal violence) and eve teasing, forcing wife/daughter-in-law to go for female foeticide, forcing a young widow to commit sati, etc. (all cases of social violence) are issues which affect a large section of society.

Often we read in the newspapers, a new born baby girl found abandoned in the garbage or killed by her parents or about the declining the sex ratio. It is something shocking and inhuman behaviour of the people which reflect the low status of women in the society. How hypocritical are we? On one hand we worship little girls as 'KANJAKS' on the day of Ashtami and Navmi but on the other hand we indulge in such a heinous crime. Although daughters like Kiran Bedi, Kalpana Chawla, Indira Gandhi etc. are bringing laurels to their families and the country, even then people don't like the birth of a daughter.

The alarming rise in cases of female foeticide, dowry deaths and honour killings show the increasing number of violent acts against women. Geeta Hariharan, an Indo-Anglian writer, reveals that one out of every ten murders is an honour killing. Such an honour killing is a code formulated by the male elite to victimise a young boy or a young girl for marrying outside their caste or community or against the wishes of those who matter most in such cases. The couple marrying outside their caste is subject to punishments like public lynching, murder, murder camouflaged as suicide, or a rape with the woman by her own elders. John Webster, a British playwright, in his play *The Duchess of Malfi*, shows how the two brothers Ferdinand and Cardinal executed their own widow sister. Her only crime was that she remarried her steward Antonio. Even in modern day Britain, a king can have sexual escapades but if his wife does it her male counterpart is punished with execution. The symbols, which transmit the

woman's image in any culture and religion, are that of self-sacrificing mother, an obedient daughter, a slave, a goddess or prostitute. There is hardly any space given to woman as a human being. In any society, where 'honour' is the keyword for men, it is women who pay the price for maintaining both family and class 'honour'. They continue to suffer silently or bearing violence for the sake of this so-called 'honour'.

The recent cases in the news have left us aghast, more so because the crimes are being committed by the people who are supposed to be the protectors. Nirbhaya, the innocent passenger who got into a bus, was raped and killed brutally by the very people, who were supposed to help her reach her destination safely. Around 20 years back in Chandigarh, a young promising player, Ruchika, committed suicide because of the sexual harassment by a senior police officer, YPS Rathore (who was promoted to higher position in police by almost all the successive governments belonging to all the political parties and finally he reached the highest position without any shame). Similarly religious or spiritual gurus promise relief to those who seek them out for advice and comfort. What can be more disgusting than an aged guru raping the young daughters of his own devotee?

The television show *Satyamev Jayate* brought to the fore the unbelievable sexual crimes committed by family members on the unsuspecting young children in their family, threatening them into silence and scaring for life. Incidents of Aasa Ram Babu, Ram Rahim, Tarun Tejpal, Rajasthan ex. Minister Maderna are highlighted but nobody thinks about those women from oppressed sections of the society. Do we ever think or ask:

What is going on with poor SC women in villages?

What is going on with tribal women in industries or construction sector?

What is going on with women from North East in Cosmopolitan India?

What is going on with women at work places throughout the country?

All this crime is supposedly against women because this does not usually happen with men.

Even in our courts it is very easy to call a woman, "A Woman of Easy Virtue" but no court in India call a man, "A Man of Easy Virtue" even if he acknowledges his such activities in the court. Theoretically speaking the husband can be a drunkard or lunatic, impotent or dissipated, a tramp or inclined to another women, but the wife is expected to be absolutely chaste and devoted to the care of the husband. The crimes are perpetrated with complete awareness of their being immoral and inhuman, yet they are committed. This is possible when there is no fear of law. And there is definitely a lack of fear. The perpetrators are

confident that they will not be caught, or nobody dares to challenge them or know that they can find ways to escape the law. This also implies poor governance or connivance of government machinery in such crimes.

Media in various forms, be it print, video, movies, etc. has always played a negative role in depicting women. One famous show “AankhonDekhi“dailygives at least one news of rape to maketheir news more sensational . Women have always been treated as an object of pleasure, a thing to be enjoyed.Media has always been biased against women, where she is exploited by people with ulterior motives. Be it the mad advertisements or the movies, it is the women’s body which is the centre of attractionall the time. Internet is easily accessible these days. There is too much of exposure to the western media and culturewhich is slowly creeping into the Indian culture too and playing havoc to the women all around.

Wife beating is another such crime which exists in many homes. The illiterate drunkard husbands establish their supremacy by physical violence. Shockingly this brutal practice can be found even among the so called liberated and educated men.It sounds ironical that a man who treats womenfolk in his household as nothing but instruments of his physical comforts, a means for the gratification of his human desires and urges, the same man steps out of the house and goes before a divine image of woman and invokes her blessings in some form or the other. Thus, women are treated either below or above than the perceived human level.

We should not forget that history is a witness to the women who have in the past demonstrated unique leadership capabilities.Rajia Sultana, Lakshmi Bai- The Rani of Jhansi, Sarojini Naidu, Lata Mangeshkar are motivational examples of women empowerment. Earlier, most women were able to demonstrate their leadership qualities only on their home fronts; as in Indian society, man has always acted as the master of the scene and the decision regarding the issue of empowering women has always been taken by him. God has gifted women with compassion, tender heartedness, caring nature, concern for others. These are very positive signs which imply that women can be leaders.

Women should remember that they are also rational, intelligent and thinking human beings. Dependent women are not empowered women. If modern women think that they are empowered it is a myth for them. Empowerment means to inspire women with the courage to break free from the change of limiting beliefs, patterns and societal or religious conditions that they have traditionally kept in as suppressed. Women are unable to realise their true beauty and power. Measure should be adopted to improve their economic conditions and social organisations should make sincere efforts to educate men to treat women with respect.

Besides this, women must be made aware of their rights and be taught to respect their own self by caring about their own health and needs along with that of the family.

Violence against women is not an issue that a woman faces personally. The impact is felt by the family, the community, the society and the nation at large. So, a sustained and holistic approach needs to be undertaken in order to enable women to lead their lives with freedom, dignity and purposefulness. This involves joint action by the colleges, universities, police and law enforcement agencies, doctors, lawyers, NGOs, political elite, officials dealing with committees of local self govt. bodies who are specifically charged with the responsibility of bringing about women's development in their area.

Law which is considered an arm of the state power is a powerful means for bringing social changes in the society. Such laws should be made to protect working women from being exploited by their employers and provide them with human conditions of work. All such laws should be imposed strictly. Violence against women should be taken seriously by law and govt. across states. These agencies should be mandated to work not only towards punishing the perpetrators promptly, but also ensure counselling and help to avoid repeat crimes. I would like to sum up in words of Lord Denning, "A woman feels as keenly, thinks as clearly as a man. She in her sphere does work as useful as a man does in his. She has as much right to her freedom to develop her personality to the full- as a man."

References-

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