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Violence against women in social context

Dr. (Smt.) Neeraj

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Govt. Girls Degree College, Kurawali, Mainpuri, Uttar Pradesh, India

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Corresponding Author: Dr. (Smt.) Neeraj

Abstract

Violence against women is violent and deliberate behavior directed at women and takes many forms, whether moral or physical and according to the United Nations definition, violence against women and motivated by sexual neurosis, resulting in suffering and harm to women in the physical, Psychological and sexual aspects. The Threat in any form, deprivation and limitation of women's freedom in their private or public life is a practice of violence against Women.

Keywords: Violence, Women, Against, Domestic, Psychological

Introduction

Violence against women is not a new or recent phenomenon. Women have been the victims of violence all through the ages, in all societies, cultures, regions or religious communities in the world. It is, indeed, ironic that in India, which has given rise to apostles of peace and non-violence, women have to bear the brunt of violence-domestic as well as public, physical as well 'is emotional and mental. Violence against women can be viewed in the historical perspective, for it is, to a large extent, linked to her 'status' in society.

History of Women Violence

In the Vedic period, Indian women enjoyed a relatively comfortable position. Gradually, violence against them began to be practised; the doors of educational, economic, social, political and cultural opportunities were gradually closed for them. Even their personal freedom in respect of movement, diet, dress, marriage, etc. came to be curtailed. Every effort was made to make them meek and docile. Women also began to be enslaved and prostituted. All this brought them to the level of chattel or cattle. They became commodities which could be sold and purchased, which could be tailored to perform different functions. Various obligations, restrictions and regulations were imposed on

them, and different penalties and punishments were prescribed if a woman violated them. Thus violence against them came to have a societal sanction.

Around the beginning of the Christian era, Manu laid down the Hindu code. His laws insist that a woman must consider her husband as a god; she should be kept in dependency by her husband; the ideal woman is one who does not strive to break these bonds of control; the salvation and happiness of a woman revolve around her virtue and chastity as a daughter, a wife and a widow. Worse still, a widow's right to life began to be denied from around the sixth century AD when the practice of sati was introduced. Wife-beating got religious and social sanction with the Matsya Purana authorizing the husband to beat his 'erring' wife (though not on the head or the breasts) with rope or a split bamboo. Violence against women further increased when the young girls began to be forced to serve as the Devadasis in the temples. This also made prostitution a part of religious life. In the medieval period, when two major cultures Islam and Hinduism encountered and interacted with each other, violence against women increased manifold. It included new elements. Even the Purdah system, which isolated the woman from the rest of the world, was, after all, violence against woman. Girls began to be married off at a tender age, and in certain communities the new-born baby girls

began to be killed by the parents themselves. Polygamy took strong roots in the society, and a woman's right to the unshared love of her husband started vanishing. Rapes for vengeance and forced marriages became common. The Ramcharitamanas, though in a different context, mentions

**Dhol Ganwar Shudra Pashu Nari,
Ye Sab Taran Ke Adhikari**

The drum, the uncultured, the untouchables, animals and women should be beaten:

Today, violence against women in India has assumed an alarming proportion. According to one estimate, there are about thirty specific forms of violence being committed against women from the pre-natal stage to their death. Such forms include feticide, infanticide, deliberate check on the supply of sufficient or land nutritious food, medical neglect, deprivation of educational opportunities, child marriages, sexual abuse of the girl child, forced marriages, rapes, prostitution, sexual harassment, pregnancies at small intervals, wife-battering, bride-burning, cursing the widows, witch-hunting, neglect of the old women, etc. One can see these forms of violence in his or her own surroundings. These are also reported in newspapers and other media very frequently.

Honor Killing

Most of the violence against women is related to and grows out of their position in society. If a female foetus is destroyed it is because a girl child is unwanted as she is seen as a burden. If a wife is beaten, at least partly it is because women are seen as property to be treated as the husband, her owner, desires. On a broader level it is also because a woman is perceived as the "weaker" sex, dependent on man, so he can bully her. It is a human tendency to take out one's frustrations on anyone willing to put up with it or too weak to resist it. Expected to submit to every whim of the man, the least sign of resistance on her part invites use of violence to make her comply. If she is uneducated, unskilled and economically dependent, a woman seldom has any choice but to bear all the atrocities heaped on her. And a man, fully cognizant of this weakness, shows his power through more violence.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence apart, women are victims of public violence more often and more humiliatingly than men. Rape is not just the act of an individual man against an individual woman, a manifestation of psychological aberration. It is increasingly becoming an instrument, a weapon, to prevent women from raising their voice against atrocities. In personal or family feuds or in wars, rape of the women folk has always been a form of humiliating the adversary, clearly signifying the position of woman as property: Now, women, in their own right, are threatened with rape if they dare to speak out against injustice or crime. The activist who, for instance, stopped a child marriage in Rajasthan was gang-raped by men from the child's family.

The violence continues unabated because no social action has been forthcoming. Legislation exists, but is seldom implemented with care or readiness: Indeed, those very persons in charge of protecting a woman assault her and

humiliate her.

It is not just actual physical violence that is used to intimidate women. Even the threat of it is enough cause for mental agony, and that too is a form of violence. The fear of being beaten, having to bear the pain, the humiliation and trauma of rape helps to keep women in a state of subjugation. Furthermore, there is a peculiar attitude in society and, worse, in our judiciary that rape in the case of a woman of 'loose' character is not quite so heinous a crime. By a queer inverted logic, all raped women come to be looked upon as 'loose' women. Can there be a greater violence against a human being?

Sexual Violence

Violence against women is further complicated by other factors in society. Caste, religious, communal and class factors also play a role in the violence against women. Caste wars result in rape or molestation of women. So do communal riots. Religious fundamentalism imposes restrictions first on women, and they are the ones penalized for trying to break out of blatantly unfair and unrealistic codes of behaviour that have no relevance in the life of today.

Sporadically, individual women react, returning violence for violence. But on the whole, they suffer in silence. The effect of violence on women, unfortunately not getting the attention it deserves, is not confined to the women victims. It affects, directly and indirectly, the immediate family and ultimately the society itself. A child growing in a family in which the mother is violently treated either develops violent reactions against the father or is himself inured to violence and gets brutalized. This quality spreads in society as a whole if it is indifferent to the violence perpetuated on women.

Cause of Violence against Women in India

Violence against women is also to be seen as an aspect of the increasing violence in society, as a whole. In that context the causes of violence are rooted in the psyche of human beings- their temperament and the desires they nourish. There are three basic factors accumulation of wealth, egocentricity, and basic animal instincts which have caused violence, either against women or any group/section of society. As the race for owning and accumulating wealth increases, violence increases. Today, most of world's wealth has been exploited, but material hunger is terrible, and there has been a proportional decline in wealth. The competition for wealth is excessive, and so is the violence. Egocentricity has tempted men to dominate others, including women, on the strength of economic, political and social powers. One of the major components of animal instincts is the use of force without bothering about its pros and cons, advantages or disadvantages for immediate benefits.

Hence, the remedy for violence is not very far to seek. It is within ourselves. What we have to do is to entirely leave the animal kingdom, be human, and to give humane treatment to others. This will be the greatest fight ever fought. But this fight is not between men and women, between men and men; this a fight between good and evil, a fight between human and inhuman. If men, women, or we are not ready to participate in this fight, we will be doomed.

Women must help themselves and each other in the fight

against violence. But it is, in fact, a social issue that affects many others and the system as a whole. In a democratic polity and society violence against any section cannot be condoned. Right thinking men, too, have to be drawn into the movement against violence. Attitudinal change in society is required if women are to live in the world as free human beings without fear.

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