

The Faces of Domestic Violence: an Overview

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Introduction

In our country women are given the scared place of goddess. Goddess Laskhmi, Saraswati, Parvati are worshipped in temples and household. And in the same household, women as mother, sister, wife, daughter are dominated and abused and are made to face humiliation. The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. In modern India, women have held high positions in India including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Leader of the Opposition. According to scholars, women in ancient India enjoyed equal status with men in all aspects of life. Works by ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana are still praised. Rig vedic verses suggest that women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their own husbands. According to studies, women enjoyed equal status and rights during the early Vedic period. However, in approximately 500 B.C., the status of women began to decline, and with the invasion of Babur and the establishment of Mughal Empire, the status of women deteriorated even more.

Indian women's position in society further deteriorated during the medieval period, when child marriages and a ban on remarriage by widows became part of social life in some communities in India. In order to prevent re-marriage of widows, Sati system was introduced; according to which the widow throws herself on to her husband's funeral pyre. The Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent brought purdah to Indian society. Among the Rajputs of Rajasthan, the Jauhar was practiced. In some parts of India, some of Devadasis were sexually exploited. Polygamy was practiced among Hindu Kshatriya rulers for some political reasons. In many Muslim families, women were restricted to Zenana areas of the house. In spite of these conditions, women often became prominent in the fields of politics, literature, education

and religion. Razia Sultana became the only woman monarch to have ever ruled Delhi. Shivaji's mother, Jijabai, was queen regent because of her ability as a warrior and an administrator. In South India, many women administered villages, towns, and divisions, and ushered in new social and religious institutions.

The general subordination of women assumed a particularly severe form in India through the powerful instrument of religious traditions which have shaped social practices. Traditions such as Sati, Jauhar, and Devadasi among some communities have been banned and are largely defunct in modern India. However, some instances of these practices are still found in remote parts of India. The purdah is still practiced by Indian women in some communities. Child marriage remains common in rural areas, although it is illegal under current Indian law.

The worth of a civilization can be judged from the position that it gives to women. Till date we can see that women are given the position next to man. They are referred as the second gender. In the paper "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development" Ambedkar made a presentation of a social phenomenon that emerged from the strategy of the Brahmins who adopted a strictly endogamous matrimonial regime, leading the other groups to do the same in order to emulate these self-proclaimed elite. He defined the Castes systems as the superposition of endogamy on exogamy. Ambedkar has evaluated that the endogamy (absence of intermarriage) is the only one that can be called the essence of caste and only characteristic that is peculiar to caste. No civilized society of today presents more survivals of primitive times than does the Indian society like the custom of exogamy. The creed of exogamy is not that sapindas (blood-kins) cannot marry, but a marriage between sagotras (gotras or clans of the same class) is regarded as a sacrilege. In spite of the endogamy of the castes within them, exogamy is strictly observed and there are more rigorous penalties for violating exogamy than there are for violating endogamy.

Ambedkar views that sati, enforced widowhood, and girl marriage are customs that were primarily intended to solve the problem of the surplus woman and surplus man (widower) in a caste, and to maintain its endogamy.

According to Ambedkar, the two customs -- Sati (burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband) and enforced widowhood (not allowing a widow to remarry) - intended to solve the problem of surplus women. Whereas man has had the upper hand compared to woman and is a dominant figure with greater prestige in every group. Woman, on the other hand, have been an easy prey to all kinds of iniquitous injunctions, religious, social, or economic. Such being the case, one cannot accord the same kind of treatment to a surplus man as you can to a surplus woman in a caste. So "Girl Marriage" was the only custom intended to solve the problem of surplus a man (widower). So from this essay we can estimate that the women as the second gender are always made to suffer.

Domination of women leads to abuses and violence against women. Many a time this

kind of domination, guises itself in the form of domestic violence. Therefore, with the intention to discuss about the violence that is purely domestic, I have decided to write this paper.

Domestic violence can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure or wound someone. Domestic violence can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion or gender. It can happen to couples who are married, living together or who are dating. In the Indian society, we can see that the victim of domestic violence of any kind is woman.

Malavikar Karlekar in her article "Domestic Violence" says that the ever-present fact of violence, both overt and covert, physical and non-physical has an overwhelming influence on feminine identity formation. Using the life cycle approach this article argues that at every stage there is discrimination and violence, particularly against girl children and later women within the household, either natal or conjugal. With age, problems are compounded with increased dependency, illness and fatigue. Despite the ubiquity of violence against women, both within home and in public spaces, the celebration of individual experiences has led to the emergence of alternative discourses where the 'truth' and validity of established structures, norms and roles are called into question.

In her article she not only give specific focus upon the topic domestic violence, but also to the growing ubiquity of gender-specific violence in public space, which is evident from the statistics and the discourse on rape and sexual harassment at work place. The sexual violation of women in times of political, communal and ethnic strife has led to innovative analyses based on archival research, life stories and narrative techniques encouraging an interrogation of established representation of major events such as partition and more recently, religious strife. There is also some discussion of aberrant events such as sati, witch hunts, stripping and shaming of women-particularly those from lower castes, often as punishment of their's community's transgressions.

An alarming finding of the latest (1993) World Development Report pointed out that globally rape and domestic violence account for about 5 per cent of the total disease burden among women in the age group of 15-44. It need hardly be pointed out that these figures possibly represent only a fraction of actual violence-induced and somatic disorders.

An overview of studies in a communication paper by Anveshi Research centre in Women's Studies in Hyderabad (1995) shows that while there is no gender difference in severe mental disorders such as schizophrenia and manic depression, twice as many women than men are afflicted with common mental disorders such as anxieties, phobias and obsessive-compulsive behaviour. The paper concluded that when mental illness has a biological basis,

the prevalence was the same across genders; however "where mental illness has a psychosocial basis, women are far more frequently ill than men". In other words, there is a strong correlation between women's life situations and their mental and physical health.

There is also limited recognition of the fact that a physical act can result in a range of symptoms known generically as post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD). Evidences prove that the impact of these disorders can often be far greater and last much longer than the immediate act, catastrophic event or violent abuse. A report on mental health worldwide (Desjarlais et al 1995) points out that PTSD is a 'persistent response', and one that can impede the functioning of some those exposed to the particular trauma. Here it may be worth pointing out that in India it is socially and culturally accepted for women to be 'possessed' by malevolent spirits; elaborate procedures for exorcism- which are often violent in nature- bring into focus the women or girl who as a victim of this particular affliction is entitled to behave in ways which violate conventional norms of appropriate conduct. It may be possible to classify this state of possession, often caused by severe familial, social and sexual abuse and trauma, as a part of the PTSD syndrome.

Quite apart from the silence around the non-physical acts of aggression, there is surprisingly little material available in the form of books, academic essays and papers on the entire issue of violence against women in India; despite the fact that a battery of statistics and reports made available by official sources and the media reinforces the view that this form of gendered violence is fast becoming a feature of daily living in contemporary India it has yet to become a priority area of research. Further, of what is available, about half relates to violence within the family (Vyas et al 1996). In Patricia Uberoi's opinion, this silence is explicable by a certain hesitance in subjecting the family and its intimate relationships to scrutiny; at the same time, if there is any data base on the nature and kind of violence that goes on behind locked doors, it is largely due to the activities of NGOs, those in the women's movement and the police.

Uberoi feels that though the "family is also a site of exploitation and violence... sociologists appear to eschew issues of social pathology, at least in regard to the family" [Uberio 1995:36]. This is because the family is, "a cultural ideal and a focus of identity", is inviolability as an institution reaffirmed by an environment which limits interaction and discourse between the professional academic and the activist. The situation is compounded by the fact that familial concern with propriety, honour, and reputation makes it difficult for those researchers interested in investigating violence within the home to gain access to those perceived as victims. Thus it is hardly coincidental that a large percentage of available data on violence against women locates the family as a major cause of oppression and subsequent ill health and loss of identity.

Violence is an act of aggression, usually in interpersonal interaction or relations. It

may also be aggression of an individual woman against herself, such as suicide, self-mutilation, negligence of ailments, sex determination test, and food denial and so on. Basically, then, violence brings into question the concept of boundary maintenance [Nedelsky 1992] and a sense of self as well as perception of another's autonomy and identity. It implies that when the body-and indeed the self- is vulnerable to violation, individuals have a very different notion of "what is one's body and what is done to one's body" [Litke 1992]. Indian scholars in women's studies have emphasized the dynamics of power and powerlessness involved in a violent act. It is a coercive mechanism "to assert one's will over another, to prove or to feel a sense of power" [ibid; 174].

Violence can be perpetuated by those in power against the powerless or by the powerless in retaliation against coercion by others to deny their powerlessness, [Poonacha 1990]. Going further, Govind Kelkar situates violence against women "in the socio-economic and political context of power relations". She feels the view that it is "an act of illegal criminal use of force" is inadequate and should include "exploitation, discrimination, upholding of unequal economic and social structures, the creation of an atmosphere of terror, threat or reprisal and forms of religo-cultural and political violence: [Kelkar 1992:1]

This wide definition of violence finds resonance in a hierarchical society based on exploitative gender relations. It often becomes a tool to socialize family members according to prescribed norms of behavior within an overall perspective of male dominance and control. The family and its operational unit, the household are the sites where oppression and deprivation of individual psyches and physical selves are a part of the structures of acquiescence; often enough, those being 'moulded' into an acceptance of submission and denial are in-marriage women and children. Physical violence, as well as less explicit forms of aggression are used as methods to ensure obedience. At every stage in the life cycle, the female body is both the object of desire and of control. As the focus is on the household, the term 'domestic violence' is preferred to that of family violence; the former helps focus on the physical unit of the home rather than the more amorphous context of the family, even though the underlying world view may be the larger familial and kin group.

The Indian family, its forms, structure, functions and so on has been an important area of study. In most parts of India, women enter as strangers into an already structured world of consanguineally-related men generate its own tensions, and conflicts in loyalties and commitments. The exceptions are castes such as the Tamil Brahmins which practice cross-cousin and maternal uncle niece marriages. In fact, according to M S Gore, the two main causes of strain in the joint family is the evolution of a strong conjugal relationship and "the difficulty of socializing the women members into developing a community outlook and a sense of identity with the family groups". In the present context it is particularly significant for an understanding of the external dynamics of a group united on the basis of blood, and the

living together with those from other families. It raises for instance, the question of whether, for any analysis on women's status, the household or the family is more relevant.

In a study among professionals- paediatricians, general physicians and psychiatrists- dealing with victims of domestic violence as well as a sample of victims themselves, researchers from the Delhi-based Multiple Action Research Group (MARG) found that "by and large, there appeared to be no clear understanding of 'domestic violence'. Each case is treated symptomatically even if it traced to violence in the family". This violence against children were hardly perceived as instances of domestic violence; studies which speak of discrimination against the girl child or the old grandmother in food and nutrition would view this in terms of the physical impact of deprivation; rarely would it be regarded as an act of violence. Using the life cycle approach we argue that at every stage, there is discrimination and violence, particularly against girl children and later women within the household, either natal or conjugal. With age, problems are compounded with increased dependency, illness and fatigue. Finally, it also suggests that despite the ubiquity of violence, micro studies may well point to the emergence of alternative discourses which question in many ways a dominant familial ideology.

Violence in Natal Home

Female Foeticide and Infanticide

A major gain from the women's movement has been the emergence of a rich storehouse of information and data on women at every stage of the life cycle, exposure of foeticide and infanticide being a case in point. While both these methods of dealing with unwanted babies go back in historical time, of recent origin in the misuse of medical test for female foeticide and infanticide in parts of the country where it was unknown. Apart from the medical issues involve, there are important ethical questions being raised; if abortions are legal, why are different standards applied to sex determination test which may or may not be used to influence sex-selective abortions? How can one combat the logic of those who argue that it is better to avoid the suffering imposed on unwanted girl babies by not allowing them to be born? [Padmanabhan 1993]. In a democratic society, why should the state interfere in the right of couples to decide whether they want girls or not?

This is particularly so in India where (Medical Termination of Pregnancy or MTP) is a form of birth control actively encouraged by the medical establishment.

The practice of female foeticide in India, causing the death of the foetus in the womb because of the gender, has resulted in an all-time high birth sex ratio in India, according to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. [1] The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (PCPNDT) of 1994 criminalized prenatal sex screening and female foeticide, making it illegal in India to determine or disclose sex of the foetus to anyone. However, there are concerns that PCPNDT Act has been poorly enforced by authorities.

The natural human sex ratio at birth was estimated, in a 2002 study, to be close to

106 boys to 100 girls. Human sex ratio at birth that is significantly different from 106 is often assumed to be correlated to the prevalence and scale of sex-selective abortion. A birth sex ratio impacts a society's overall sex ratio over time, as well the child sex ratio in near term. India's child sex ratio (defined as the ratio of boys to girls in 0-6 year age group) was 108 according to its 2001 census, and 109 according to its 2011 census. The national average masks the variations in regional numbers according to 2011 census - Haryana's ratio was 120, Punjab's ratio was 118, Jammu & Kashmir was 116, and Gujarat's ratio was 111.

Female infanticide is the deliberate killing of girl babies.

It is also described as gender-selective killing or "gendercide". (Similar words like 'gynocide' and 'femicide' are used to describe the killing of females of any age.)

Female infanticide is more common than male infanticide, and in some countries, particularly India and China, is likely to have serious consequences on the balance of the sexes in the population.

The reasons behind it are almost always cultural, rather than directly religious.

The causes:

Anti-female bias

Societies that practise female infanticide always show many other signs of bias against females.

Women are perceived as subservient because of their role as carers and homemakers, whilst men predominantly ensure the family's social and economic stability.

Family economics

Girl babies are often killed for financial reasons.

Earning power: Men are usually the main income-earners, either because they are more employable or earn higher wages for the same work, or because they are able to do more agricultural work in subsistence economies. Since male babies have a greater income potential, they are less likely to be killed.

Potential pensions: In many societies, parents depend on their children to look after them in old age. But in many of these cultures a girl leaves her parental family and joins her husband's family when she marries. The result is that parents with sons gain extra resources for their old age, when their sons marry, while parents with daughters lose their 'potential pensions' when they marry and move away. This gives parents a strong reason to prefer male children. Some parents (particularly poor ones) who can't afford to support a large family, will kill female babies. Girls are considered a drain on family resources during their childhood without bringing economic benefits later on.

Dowry: Some girl babies are killed so that the family doesn't have to pay a dowry when they get married. In Indian society it is tradition for the parents of the bride to give a dowry to the groom and his family. The dowry consists of large amounts of money and

valuable goods. For families with several daughters this can be a serious financial burden.

Inequality in the Household

The prevalence of a dominant ideology which confines girls and women to define roles and obligations leads to their devaluation and discrimination in a range of areas. The basic assumption is the girls are inferior, physically and mentally weak and above all sexually venerable. In a society which lays so much stress on purity and pollution, various oppressive structures- including early marriage-are encouraged so as to confine girl's and women's physical mobility. A decline sex ratio (929 women to 1000men according to the Census of 1991) would suggest endemic female mortality or morbidity caused by consistent neglect and sustained discrimination, both manifestation of violence and oppression.

There are evidence that indicates that girls and women are usually less privileged than boys in access to share of resources such as nutrition, health care, education and material assets as well as parental attention and interest. It is often the case that excess female child mortality is more common in families which already have a daughter child (Das Gupta 1987,1995). Rural health surveys in north India show that women and girls are ill more often than boys and men.

The fact that forms the discrimination in food exists in upper caste, middle class homes as well indicates that factors other than scarcity are crucial. Further, when ill, the later are more likely to get treated, or if women do get attention, much less is spent on their ailments. The familial views on what should be a girl's expectations take precedence over the right to a greater individual entitlement and on the whole enforce her growing sense of marginalization, powerlessness as well as vulnerability.

Violence in the Conjugal Home

In India, marriages continue to be universally regarded as essential for a girl, irrespective of class, caste, religion and ethnicity. Control of her sexuality and its safe transference into the hands of the husband is of primary importance. Concern over the conduct of the sexually vulnerable girls is an important cause of child marriage. According to the latest official figure, about 30 per cent of women in the ages of 15-19 were married; as the official age for marriage is 18 for girls, it is possible that a large percentage of these marriages were of under-age girls. Though the age of marriage is raising gradually, it is important to note that girls are barely out of their teens when they leave their natal homes for another unknown residence.

The persistence of a dominant family ideology which believes in a strict sexual division of labour and an age and gender hierarchy means that young wives have to invest a considerable amount of time and energy in gorging new relationships not all of which are caring or accommodative. In India we see that girls are indicated as 'paraya dhan' or another's wealth. This very notion establishes the women as belongings as also as wealth (dhan)

which ultimately belongs somewhere else.

An important part of the power relationship between spouses and indeed their families relates to dowry and its ramifications. In the Indian context the preference for structural asymmetry between the two families and the consequent burden of gift-giving on the bride's family strengthens inequality.

In India, there is a tendency to club most marital violence under the overall heads of 'dowry', 'dowry deaths' and 'dowry violence'. This categorization glosses over the other causes of violence which pervade the familial context. However, to argue that dowry is not always the cause behind marital discord is not to ignore the fact that it is one of the major factors responsible for domestic violence. While keeping this fact in mind it is necessary to work towards a fuller understanding of the institution of dowry and its impact on inter-family relationships. Mahu Kishwar feels that oppression of wives for bringing inadequate dowry is only another excuse for using violence against them: in other words- and in fact evidence from another countries had indicated as much- even without the additional 'attraction' of dowry, inter-spousal violence is endemic. She has also pointed out that dowry payments in themselves do not transform girls into burdens but rather "dowry makes daughters 'burdensome' only because daughters are unwanted to begin with." Dowry has become inseparably interlinked with the general status of women in the society. A survey shows that, in a sample of 150 dowry victims, one-fifth were murdered or driven to commit suicide, and more than half, i.e. 61.3 per cent were thrown out of their husband's house after a long period of harassment and torture. There is no satisfactory explanation of why the system of dowry is growing and indeed spreading to communities where it did not exist. Thus wife abuse, a practice shared with many other cultures, acquires a different connotation in Indian society due to the institution of dowry.

Wife-beating -or in more extreme case, wife battering- is the most common form of abuse worldwide irrespective of class, religion and community. In a detailed discussion of wife abuse, Flavia Agnes has rebutted convincingly the popular myths which surround the phenomenon of wife- beating in India such as middle class women do not get beaten, the victim of violence is a small, fragile, helpless women belonging to the working class, the wife-beater is a man who is frustrated in his job, and alcoholic, or a paranoid person, aggressive in his relationships. However the pattern of violence differs from one class to another, with the whole neighborhood being witness when a slum-dweller beats his wife to the extremely private nature of middle class professional's physical oppression of his spouse.

Like child rape within the family, another area about which universally little is known and hardly discussed, is that of marital rape; in India, despite some thinking along these lines by feminists and legal experts, there has as yet been no amendment in law to include rape within marriage.

Widowhood

With a fall of death rate, there is a growing of aging problem in families and households. Increase in domestic workload, loss of self-respect as well as tendency to neuroses was observed in the study of 350 widows in Haryana which also found that most felt that survival and accommodation were major problems [Sandhya 1994]. Mukesh Ahuja (1996) found that of the 190 widows interviewed in Jaipur city, the most common complaint was that of verbal abuse from their in-laws.

Those women who had the courage to resist faced social and familial ostracism as well as "drunken beating and exploitation or worse at the hands of their men" [ibid:65]. Prostitution was encouraged by affine even as the women were trying to piece their lives together. Thus, despite the will to survive, "the stringent codes of conduct of Indian society crush them again into keeping the family's interest and name and fame above their own and their children's hope for better life". Clearly then, widowhood exposes a woman to new forms and networks of violence. At the same time, it would be fairly safe to hypothesize that as a large percentage is widows and the infirm; their overall status is likely to be low and prone to violence, both physical and emotional.

Conclusion

Thus feminine identity and women's position within the family continues to be open to modification, depending on her situation in the life cycle. What is important in this context is that these modifications are often determined by the collectivity: individual self-expression is repressed and subjugated, the anger at being violated internalize. We as a member of the Indian society, should try to change what means to be a women in our society. The women of India should be independent and should possess the courage to take their decisions by their own will without influence of any other's authority

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