

# Blame Game : When Will It End?

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Eighteen days of a relentless, lethal battle; carcasses and blood strewn all over; the wiping out of an entire clan.

A young girl being brutally raped in the year 2012.

Do you know the similarity between these two incidents? Well, it is the "blame game". Even though there is a huge gap in the occurrences of these two incidents, this "ritual" or practice has been running down through ages.

Myths are the most powerful tools used by patriarchy to subordinate women. Myth is the patriarchy's language that reflects the culture and ideology of patriarchy. Male view of culture and women's role in it are imposed as if the male perception is the only truth. From the feminist perspective, "Mahabharata" depicts women as non-entity, totally subservient to man. As it is seen in the epic "Mahabharata" the blame of the catastrophic "Kurukshetra" war is imputed on Draupadi- the wife of Pandavas. Though in reality, the battle was the result of a disagreement between the two clans regarding the areas of their kingdom. History reveals that great wars were fought by different male rulers giving an indication that men tend to indulge in terror more than women. But, the fact that the blame of a war or conflict comes upon a woman is rather amusing. Many point fingers on Draupadi for being the cause of war but what about the Duryodhana and Dushashana who dragged Draupadi by her hair to the court and tried to strip off her clothes in front of the courtiers and family members? Nobody talks of this gory incident. Nobody questions the "value system" then. Why? Is it because the doers were men? Or, is it because the creators of value system can create their own laws to crush women under their feet?

The incidents of rape in our country have been magnifying by leaps and bounds, making the country unsafe for women. According to National Crime Records Bureau 2014 Report, there were 33,764 victims of rape out of which 33,704 reported rape cases. The actual figures are higher as many of the rape cases are never reported. This crime is on the

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rise due to the loopholes in our law and justice system. The following data reveals a pathetic picture of the law and justice system of our country. In the year 2010, there were a total of 89,707 cases of rape in India for trial, out of which only 14,263 cases were completed during the year. The rest i.e. 75,925 cases were pending for trial. In the year 2012, the rape cases for trial increased to 1,01,041, out of which only 14,717 were solved and 86,032 cases still pending. This data brings into light that there are more than 86,032 rapists roaming about freely without any punishment. This setback of the law and justice system empowers the rapists to carry out their brutal acts without any fear of punishment. The laws regarding this act should be stringent but in our country these laws are merely in "black and white" without any proper implementation.

Many of the rape cases are characterized by blaming the victim of having low character or wearing provocative clothes. A report from *The Washington Post*, by Olga Khazan and Rama Lakshmi, state the reasons of sexual violence in India. And one of the reasons is "stigmatizing the victim". Despite of knowing causes the society accuses the victim. But, what about a three year old girl being raped? Does she have a low character? And, talking of provocative clothing, what about a woman dressed in burkha or a nun of a school being raped? What would be the society's response to these questions? These crimes take place due to the filthy mentality of the rapists and not because of the dress or character of a woman.

Leave alone the scenes of crimes and conflicts; even in our daily lives we see instances where people do not hesitate to accuse a woman. For example- if any family member or relative of a newlywed couple dies, the groom's family and the society will condemn the bride as if it was as an omen for which the relative or family member died. Marriage and death are merely co-incidental. The presence of someone does not affect the birth or death of a person. It is all unto fate. But, society puts a blindfold to these truths and continues the game of blaming. Another instance where blame comes upon a woman is when a child gets spoilt. The husbands of such woman criticize them for not taking care of the child but when the same child brings good marks in examinations or does some good deed, they proudly say that "the child is mine". What kind of mentality is it when a person claims the child to be his when the child does something good and casts the blame on the mother when the child does something wrong?

A major share of the "blame game" is prevalent in the daily soaps being aired. These soaps depict women as being the roots of all conflicts. Some of such soaps that are presently aired are- *Thapki Pyaar Ki* (Colors), *Saath Nibhana Saathiya* (Star Plus), *Suhaani Si Ek Ladki* (Star Plus), etc. where women are portrayed as the "roots of all evil". Each soap has an evil character who tries to disrupt the peace of the house and such character is played by a woman.

It is clearly seen that the society has created another caste- WOMEN, who is deprived of her rights and after bearing both mental and physical pain, all she is rewarded with is "blame". Women, irrespective of the relationship she holds as a wife, daughter, sister, mother, etc. she is reduced to a maid or a mere tool of reproduction. As seen in Sylvia Plath's poem "The Applicant" where the wife is just "a living doll" reduced to an inanimate "it":

It can sew, it can cook  
It can talk, talk and talk  
It works; there is nothing wrong with it.  
You have a hole, it's a poultice  
You have an eye, its an image  
My boy, its your last resort  
Will you marry it, marry it, marry it.

Blaming a woman is easy as women are regarded as the "weaker sex". And despite the many laws like- the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, etc. being formulated for their protection and upliftment, women are still not considered at par with men. For this reason, many women have become habituated in gulping down every bit of accusations made against them without even uttering a word. The rest who have tried to speak up against the society that blames women, has been crushed by the society resulting in their deaths, ruining of careers and so on.

To add to the woes, a large section of women, instead of offering a helping hand to the victim woman of false accusations, indulge in "gossips" or "back bite" the accused.

Another factor that aids the "blame game" is the deep rooted jealousy amongst women. They envy others' good looks, wealth, booming careers, loving kids and husbands and many more. And this jealousy proves to be an impediment in helping out the women criticized.

Myths are, yet another, enduring determinant in the blame game. Myths are constructed in such a way that they legitimize certain perspectives of culture, history and society. Mythmakers categorize women in terms of their subservience to the patriarchal values. According to the desires of men, a woman may be portrayed as Virgin Mary or as a witch. Myths and tales camouflage reality and create a cultural mindscape that shuts out all the possibilities of self-assertion and growth for women. Fairytales and myths produce, conserve and transmit a female identity that is interpreted as natural. In this context, fairytales such as "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", "Cindrella", "Hansel and Gretel", "Rapunzel", etc. are used as a measure of degrading women. Each tale does amuse its reader but each of them holds a woman character who is either shown as a witch disguised as queen or mother

or an evil stepmother. These fairytales have an influence in the minds of children of a tender age and such stories would provide a negative impact about a woman to them.

Media is another factor that contributes to the blame game. The sole motive of media is to increase their TRPs and in doing so it degrades the character of women. By displaying the news of a rape incident over and over again all it does is create a bad impression in the minds of people about the victim. One of its latest weapons of blame game is Moral Policing. Media shows women wearing latest trends of clothes and in doing so it encourages persons with filthy mentality to victimize women. If men can sport whatever clothes they want then why is there a restriction in clothing for women? Due to the cheap mentality of some media persons women are being deprived of their independence and honour.

Time has come to stop this "blame game", and give women her rights and respect in the society. It is easier said than done. To change this ongoing "ritual" of the society, a renaissance has to be undergone. One such step would be re-telling myths. Revision of the myths is a reappropriation of male space for female ends. According to Adrienne Rich, "Re-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction is for women more than a chapter in cultural history. It is an act of survival". Reading myths and fairytales from a female perspective reveals how much women are victimized by the cultural texts. Some exemplary works that have challenged the age old tradition of myth are Sharath Komarraju's *The Winds of Hastinapur*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Palace of Illusions*, Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* and Mahashweta Devi's short stories like "Draupadi", "Breast Giver", "Kunti and the Nishadin", etc. Out of the above mentioned works, Mahashweta Devi's "Draupadi" exhibit the tribalised version of the episode of Dushashana's forcible and public stripping of Draupadi from the epic *Mahabharata*. Devi's literary works exposes the legacy of violence that has been passed on into the lives of generations of women. She narrates horrific tale of women forcibly strait-jacketed into the mythical assumptions of 'womanhood' perpetuated through patriarchal ideology; she also documents women's reprisals against subjugation, which become the means to their potential emancipation. Devi transforms the act of disrobing or stripping of the honour of women into a symbol of female power. The story "Draupadi" focuses on a tribal insurgent Draupadi Mehjen who along with her husband Dulna are some of the most wanted criminals in West Bengal. After the death of her husband Draupadi is caught by the police while trying to mislead them so that the fugitive's campsite remains a secret. She is brutally raped and tortured several times in order to extract information from her. She is then summoned to Senanayak's office. Senanayak is the officer who has been given the charge to catch Draupadi. He prides himself on his sharp mind, aesthetic inclinations and strategical skills. A baffled Senanayak makes an appearance to find a naked Draupadi, with her battered body walking with her head held high daring him to look at the

consequence of his orders. The story ends on a powerful note as a naked Draupadi with her courage and stubborn refusal to cover her naked body renders several guards and the arrogant officers helpless, scared and unsure of the course of action they should take to subdue an unarmed woman. Unlike *Mahabharata's* Draupadi, Draupadi Mehjen does not seek any benign Krishna to come and clothe her and save her honour. Instead she wages war upon the tormentors by refusing to cover her naked body.

Another initiative in ending the blame game is to produce films having women centric roles rather than the traditional roles as a wife or lover. Films impact the society a lot and producing films that show honour and respect to women would be fruitful. Some examples in this regard would be *Matribhumi*, *Maleficent*, *Lajja*, *NH 10*, etc. Media should also take part in ensuring that the honour of women is not degraded while publishing news. Instead of giving false accusations to create TRPs and giving the ultimate decision, they should give the true facts and let the society do the decision making.

One must remember that a person nurturing a baby for nine long months within her and bearing a hundred decibels of pain can never be weak. It is only her patience, meek nature and ability to bear each odd that conceals her "strong side". As Mahatma Gandhi had said :

To call woman the weaker sex is a libel, it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, woman is less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her men could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?

It is an urge to everyone that next time before pointing a finger on a woman, think! Do not let her be the innocent yet accused "Draupadi" of *Mahabharata* but encourage her to be "Draupadi Mehjen" who uses her weakness as her power to strive for survival and honour.

## References

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