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Public Reaction on Women Abuse in India

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Abstract : *Since the dawn of civilization human beings (men and woman) have crossed many obstacles in their paths to evolve from nomads to civilized beings. Thus we see a kaleidoscopic change in human behaviour. These behavioral changes can be seen since ages. Due to their physical weakness women are considered weaker than men although they, contribute in bringing up children who are future citizens of society. She is upheld as creator of universe and is revered as mother, janani and adishakti.*

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But it is also true that reverence towards women remains in theory only, as women are subjected to abuse in all civilizations. Some sections of society have protested but failed to make an impact on society. Opinions on abuse against women is viewed on twofold basis. In wider view the roots of abuse are coming from changes in society in education, communication, entertainment and changing moral and traditional values of family and society. In narrow view people accuse western influence which contradicts with moral ethos of Indian society. The western culture has attributed to increase in abuse of women. Such conclusion is adduced from relevant details received during surveys.

Modern women are now categorized more according to her outer appearance and character, and people in general form their opinion accordingly. Thus in order to combat women abuse, in longer run, the opinion of people needs a positive change.

Key words: *Kaleidoscopic, Civilization, Obstacles, Indian ethos, Abuse.*

Introduction :

In the present scenario, we Indians are not behind any superpower in terms of success. But it is a paradoxical situation because crimes against women continues an unhindered and unobstructed journey and India is only behind three other countries where women are not safe.

High voltage discussions are held that have thrown vital suggestions but people who witness such crimes do not help in such situations for the fear of infamy. This is the reality of our society, our country where fear of fake reputation seems more important than lives of innocent victims.

When a girl was being molested on the busiest streets of Guwahati, she was abused for 45 minutes before police arrived. The people watching could have easily called police, many of them had phones but they were using it to film the scenes. People were horrified watching this event in news channels. The blame was put on the girl who was accused of being drunk. Does being drunk justify a humiliating treatment she got ? When police came they took the woman away, but what about men whose faces could be seen jeering in camera? (Guwahati Incident, 21.08.2014 ; www.India-culture.com and Featured in NDTV News Channel).

This is the failing morality among Indians and disintegrating public governance when it comes to women. The most hard hitting example of this public ignorance would be the Nirbhaya episode. The outrage that followed did highlight the crimes against women. But wasn't it very late? Candle marches, demonstrations and protests followed but one act that would have avoided this was extending a helping hand at the time of crisis.

Recently there is lot of outrage in the country spurred by the statements of significant politicians or chairpersons of a government body. In a

patriarchal society like ours it is not just men who condemn basic rights of women; even women themselves turn out to be their own enemy.

Objectives :

The main objectives of this research were

- to highlight the mentality or perception of society;
- to highlight the actual lack of reverence for women;
- to make people more vigilant so that women's voice is heard in a male centric society;

The juxtaposition between reverence and sexual violence against women needs to be clarified for bringing an improvement in the condition of women and creating an enabling environment for the development of the full potential of women.

Hypotheses :

When women are in trouble people come to their help.

When women face stalking, eve-teasing people react.

Methodology :

- This project study is a research work based on quantitative approach.
- This research is based on both primary and secondary data collection.
- Information was collected using schedules, print media, journals, personal interviews and internet sources.

What is Woman Abuse ?

The term Woman Abuse refers to various forms of violence, abuse, illtreatment and neglect that women experience from their intimate kin and dependent relations. Women regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, education, cultural identity,

socio-economic status, occupation, religion, and sexual orientation experience abuse.

There are only three countries Afghanistan, Congo and Pakistan where women are more unsafe than in India according to a recent survey conducted (Times of India, 04.08.2014). One of the key factors that determined this was sexual violence against women. Going across the country it may not be long that India occupies first position in the hall of shame. It is however ironic that despite media blitzkrieg and all round anger unleashed from various quarters against rapists and offenders, the crime continues its journey unhindered and unobstructed. The more we vent our ire against attack on women, it appears that the abusers are becoming bolder and perpetrate more heinous crimes.

Those who preach from pulpit the sacredness of womanhood are themselves accused of assaulting the very same goddess. Most Indians know fully well how tough life can be in the world's largest democracy. We have had a women president and prime minister yet in 2014, one of the greatest tragedies of the country is that women are left on their own when it comes to their own safety.

Two types of Woman Abuse – Physical and Emotional

Women who are being abused experience more than one type of aggression. These abuses pose harm to women's physical and emotional well being. Her social life, sexuality, financial situation or spiritual life are gravely affected. Women experience

- Physical Abuse
- Verbal Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Financial Abuse
- Emotional / Psychological Abuse
- Spiritual Abuse

Position of Women in History :

Any study of civilization is incomplete without study of status and position of women in it. Women have constituted the key stone in the arch of the Indian civilization. Historical studies and scriptures indicate that women enjoyed comparatively high status during early Vedic period, surpassing contemporary civilizations in Greece and Rome. Women enjoyed freedom and participation in public life which shows the sense of justice and fair play in a community. They had freedom to choose their partners in life. She was given recognition in proprietary rights.

But during later Vedic and epic periods, the status of women fell. Women started being discriminated against since later Vedic period in matters of education and other rights which they had enjoyed earlier. The epics and Puranas equated women with property and a few of them with beasts. Women were looked down upon as creatures worse than depraved men (Poonam Chaudhari et. al., 1979). Though Mauryan kings often employed female body guards and spies, their status was quite bad. *Arthashastra* imposed more stigmas on women as Kautilya dismissed women's liberation and they were not free even to move without husband's permission (Srivastav, 2014).

Purdah became part of Indian social life by the 15th century. Child marriages and a ban on remarriage by widows became part of social life of some communities in India. The Muslim conquest in the Indian subcontinent increased the prevalence of purdah system in Indian society. However, despite these difficult conditions, women often gained prominence in the fields of politics, literature, education and religion. In South India, many women administered villages, towns, and divisions, and ushered in new social and religious institutions.

By the time the British rule came, the position of women had deteriorated to the lowest level. A distinct change came when Indian society bore the impact of British rule. Many new ideas developed, arousing the desire in Indian society for liberation and reform for women. The early years of 20th century witnessed rapid progress and women began breaking down age long prejudices. National council for women was founded in 1925. The first All India Women's Educational and Social Congress was held in 1926 with Government of India Act of 1935 which introduced provincial autonomy in which many women became ministers in the Congress government.

Women in India now participate fully in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, which were earlier male dominated areas. India elected a woman Prime Minister to lead the country. Indira Gandhi, served for an aggregate period of fifteen years. In 2010 March 9, one day after International Women's day, Rajya Sabha passed the Women's Reservation Bill in which 33% of seats in India's Parliament and state legislative bodies were reserved for women. But this bill still lies pending, undermining the political representation of women.

Though the status of today's women in India is high, the overall picture of women's position in India is not satisfactory.

Legal Provisions against Woman Abuse :

All forms of abuse deprive women of right to life, liberty and security of person, the right to be free from torture or cruel degrading inhuman behaviour, right to equality and right to highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. India is under obligation as a state to ensure that all discrimination against women is eliminated.

Crimes against women are considered serious crimes under Indian penal code. It also violates articles 14, 15(1) & (3), 19, 21 and 33(f) of Constitution of India. It is against various

international commitments that government of India has made in "United Nations Conventions on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW) of which India is a signatory and has also ratified the Convention. It is also against the spirit of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Civil and Political Rights.

Despite economic gains and development, India's performance is low compared to other countries in matter of giving protection to women and equality. As, such it has been deemed "one of the worst countries for women", by Times of India (Times of India, 12.09.2014).

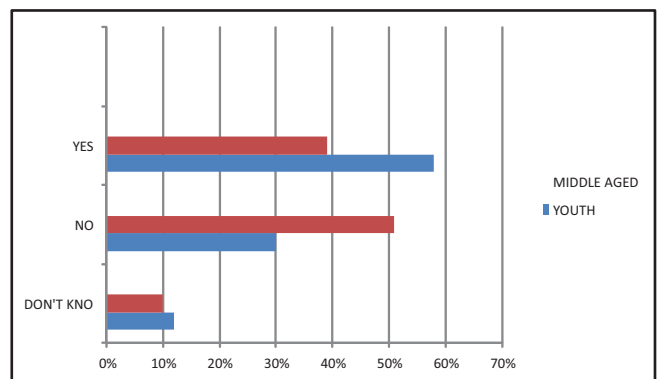
Empirical Study :

We visited Patna High Court, WDC, few colleges, SBI, police stations, etc. for the empirical study.

We asked few questions from both age groups i.e., youth and middle aged persons so as to note their reaction on this topic. Questions were asked from students, working ladies, judge and lawyers of Patna High Court, NGO and police officers.

Graph-1

Q. Have you ever helped women facing abuse in public ?



The reaction was divided among two groups, on one hand most of youth, i.e. 58% of them said yes while 30% said no and 12% did not know. The answer of middle aged group differed; 39% of them

said yes, 51% of them said they did not know. This graph is enough to describe the reaction of people in terms of helping a woman facing abuse while 58% of youth came out to help, a large section was left behind. We should not think about those 58% and be happy but should be concerned about the 30% who did not help in the situation, and the 12% who were in an obvious dilemma.

Areas of India where Abuse is on a Higher Rate:

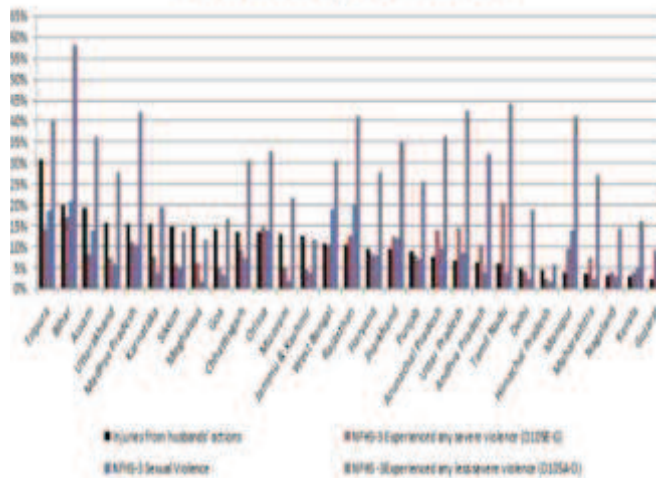
As reported earlier (www.google.com, 22nd August 2014) in Graph-A, it is stated that Tripura tops the list with 31% of women being injured by their husband's actions then comes Bihar with 20% followed by Assam with 19%.

In case of sexual violence, both Bihar and Rajasthan share top position with 20% followed by West Bengal 19% and Tripura 18%.

In case of women experiencing severe violence, Tamil Nadu has 20% and Bihar has 17% of the share in the country.

Graph-A

Prevalence of violence and battery in Indian States Source: NFHS-3



Public Relation :

Many of us have witnessed woman abuse and eve teasing but how many of us have given a serious thought to it. We should be honest to introspect whether we have actually helped women in times of such crisis.

The most common answer is no, none of us have actually helped.

The main reason of the present problem is the shroud of silence that hangs over uncomfortable and unspoken truths. Are we not running away from the enemy within?

It is high time now that people should question their inner conscience as to what would they do if they are placed in a similar situation. We should remember that people are part of the problem. Therefore we should be responsible Indians and act when it matters, so,

“Be the change you want to see”.

Factors that have aggravated the problem :

- Steep decline in quality of governance,
- proportionate rise in public inertia,
- self-centered attitudes and indifference of public.

At the ground level women occupy high positions as heads of states, leaders of opposition or in the administrative system of the country. But this has not made any material difference in the abysmal condition of the same gender.

On the other hand society in general reacts to women abuse in different ways so after a bit of survey the reactions of different individuals were recorded to know their views.

When interviewed, Hon'ble Justice Mihir Kr. Jha of Patna High Court said that a girl may wear any kind of dress and no one holds any right to comment upon her character. The real problem is with the mindset of society which sees women as an object. Hon'ble Justice of Patna High Court probably belongs to those few categories of persons who are concerned about this growing social problem.

However, two male advocates of same court solely blamed women for their condition. According to them when a woman steps out of her house she invites trouble for herself therefore women should refrain from stepping into public domain. They strictly held growing westernization responsible but failed to see the enemy within. Though these people talk about liberation of women they do not

want to be the first to initiate it.

However, the opinion of senior female advocate Mrs. Indiar Singh was clear that both men and women are equally responsible for such crimes.

The college youth were interviewed. They included students from Art and Craft College and B.N. College who held the opinion that women should be respected in every way though they felt that women should be held responsible for such crimes.

Students of Magadh Mahila College expressed the opinion that women should try to overcome the social stigma of society. They said that today there is not a single field of work left where she has not left her mark.

The clerical staff of S.B.I, Rajendarnagar branch gave education key importances in case they felt that it would remove all barriers and transform society's mindset and remove the stigma attached to any kind of sexual assault.

The councillor of W.D.C Bihar Mrs. Sadhana Singh held that families are against reporting crimes against women and in a way they leave culprits free to commit more crimes.

Experiment :

To substantiate the conclusion drawn from the interviews, a social experiment was conducted.

A van was placed (as depicted in picture-1) with an audio of a girl shouting for help. She was begging someone to let her go.....

Picture-1



A young man while passing by heard the cries of girl, noticed something was wrong and continued on his merry way. (as in 2nd picture)

Picture-2



The reaction of man was disappointing. That the victim in the van was also a girl, was ignored by two other girls who were of same age and would have understood her suffering. (as in picture-3)

Picture-3



The reaction of 60 year old man whose reaction while far from anything pleasant brought a smile to faces. He heard, approached the van and tried to help the girl who may have been the age of his granddaughter (in picture-4).

Picture-4



The experiment revealed as to what the future might hold for women in India.

Picture-5



The purpose of this experiment was to state that people are scared of helping others because they think they will get into trouble with the police. There is always a big turnout for candle marches but no support when people actually need help.

Findings :

- Violence against women in India is an issue rooted in societal norms and economic dependence.
- The challenges women face are a result of an often misogynistic society with outdated and sometimes repressive governance, ineffective legal judicial system and weak social and political structures that are heavily male centric.
- Rape and domestic violence remain most unreported crimes because of social stigma attached to them.
- Generally found, people hold low opinion of women as they are held responsible for such crimes. Moreover, these opinions are based on the character of victims.

Suggestions :

- Men are disrespectful towards women but change will occur only when women themselves stop committing injustice, and stop ignoring cases of injustice.

- Lip service has gone far too long. Women need to prove it by their actions in every field of life.
- People, on the other hand, should try to be more liberal in their idea of an ideal society.
- Education should be promoted fairly among people so that their narrow-mindedness can be overcome.

Conclusion :

Of all the rich G-20 nations of the world India has been labelled as the worst place for a woman to be. Most of the women already know how tough life can be in the world's largest democracy. It is often noticed that people rather than helping women prefer to stay aloof. Public opinion divides women as good and bad from type of clothes they wear or whether they often go out after dark.

After the brutal rape of the young woman in Delhi most women have found courage to report sexual violence but many are still hesitant. It is really pathetic to see this kind of reaction from educated people of India. The valuable suggestions of Justice Verma Committees should be implemented and security measures for women be further increased. At last we would like to conclude by a couplet.

“Many ‘Dusshera’s have gone by but ‘Ravana’ of violence still lives on, let us try to burn him down”.-Times of India (October 2nd 2014)

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