

## Cursed Bodies, Silenced Lives: Women, Moral Policing and Human Rights in India

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### **Abstract**

*The demand for equal rights and a liberal space to women is under the strenuous attack of Moral and cultural Policing. Democratic law fails to protect the women from the onslaught of culture and tradition. Self-proclaimed defenders of culture and tradition in many parts of the country have sought to outline a woman's 'place' in the society. These so called 'custodians of Indian culture' have no understanding of the constitution and the law. Their concept of morality is prone to extremist religious beliefs. This paper explores the connection between women's body and morality seen through the lenses of culture specifically in Indian context. This paper focuses on the use of culture for violation of women's rights, issues of sexuality and women's equality in a gendered power relation.*

*Key Words: Women, Culture, Morality, Violence, Human Rights.*

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### **Introduction**

In India, issues pertaining to different domains of women's life became a public discourse since colonial encounter and got an impetus from the nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements. This point in history marked the formal beginning of women's movement in India. The movement achieved the most important right i.e. the constitutional guarantees of equal rights for women in India through a process of negotiation between tradition and modernity after independence. The Indian Constitution recognizes it under Article 19 (1) (a). The primary objective of this article is the promise it offers, i.e. equality and justice within the nation's democratic constitutional framework to all its citizens. However, a right in paper or theory cannot be equated to a right in actuality or practice and this promise in India is

undermined by the masculinity of nationalist ideology, the fiction of citizenship and the malleability of law.<sup>1</sup> These guarantees did little to bring about social and material changes in the lives of women. A new women's movement articulate to mass and popular politics emerged in the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> During this period women's issues entered in the fields of culture, religion, law, family, community structures etc. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan remarks on this development that in all these discourses, disciplines and sites of action, gender began to figure as an 'issue' as well as a 'category of analyses.'<sup>3</sup> The recognition of gender as an issue powered the post-colonial women's movement supported by feminist critiques and women studies in academia. Women have come to the forefront to fight against violence, legal- political discrimination, representing a wide range of castes, classes, communities, rural and urban.<sup>4</sup> In post-independent India, large number of women's autonomous group have sprung up challenging patriarchy and taking up a variety of issues such as violence against women at different spheres of their life, greater share for women in political decision making etc.

Despite the long standing women's movement, patriarchy remains deeply entrenched in India, influencing its political structure, social institutions and determining the opportunities to women and men. Rigid cultures and patriarchal attitudes which devalue the role of women, result in the wide spread occurrence of violence against women. Violence against women is on rise and widely reported from across the country. Indian society witnesses numerous instances of violence based on culture such as honour killing, issues of dowry death, rape, Sexual harassment at workplace, female infanticide and foeticide etc. The starting point of this violence is the family in which the man is the undisputed ruler, and the women are subject to his authority. This violence culminates at large violence by the community and the society to which the women belongs taking various forms. It is again burdened by the threat of moral policing; a threat that is ever growing and being strengthened by the patriarchal and conservative mind-sets reinforced by the political and legal structures in India. It is a culturally and religiously motivated attack on women to have control on their mobility and individuality. Cultures with Violence against women in South Asian countries a "macho" concept of masculinity associated with dominance, toughness or male honour also were found to have higher overall levels of violence against women<sup>5</sup>. Today, women and girls around the world (including those living in "the West") are subject to appalling violence

justified in the name of religion, culture, and tradition. They are told that such practices — imprisonment, maiming, torture, even death — are culturally authentic, required by religion, or sanctioned by time-honoured tradition. When a woman objects, calling these practices unacceptable violence against women arises, she is often labelled a heretic, a traitor to her heritage, a Western pawn, a cultural imperialist, or worse. Violence against women in the name of ‘culture’ is pandemic. India is in the throes of a violent spasm of moral angst about the rights of women and ‘decadent’ western culture.<sup>6</sup>

## **Contesting ‘Morality’**

The current debate on “**moral policing**” symbolises a country in flux, struggling to hold on to tradition while embracing modernity and coping with lifestyles and social conduct that were unthinkable a generation ago. Morality is not a static concept, and with changing economies, polity and society, morality too shifts or is influenced to suit the times. Morality is also constantly contested, resisted and re-framed. At one point in history, dancing, acting, women wearing trousers or riding bicycles was considered deeply immoral but today considered a normal thing. The scope of morality has also cross-cultural and transnational appeal. A thing which is considered moral in one culture or nation is considered deeply immoral in another cultural and national set up. This shows that the boundaries of morality are fickle and are socially constructed and subjective. There are always two sides to a *moral/ethical debate* and to enter into it would be futile. But the larger perspective simply must focus on the question of human rights which are constitutionally guaranteed and validated by law in democratic societies. The present paper focuses on how this concept of morality which is purely abstract is actually used as an instrument to control women and their sexuality by resorting to violence.

The supremacy of morality begins and ends with the female, control of whose sexuality is crucial to patriarchal forces. Those who infringe upon these moral codes are dealt with extreme violence. The process of democratisation and opening of economic opportunities has altered the power dynamics in the relation between man and woman. In an age which is socially and legally changing drastically, women are vocal about exercising their rights, confident of their mobility thus challenging the patriarchal values. These infringements into the patriarchal abode are sought to be controlled by invoking tradition, culture and honour and enforced through the use of power i.e. violence. The emerging

upwardly mobile groups as a result of socio-economic opportunities, education and apparent modernisation show a fractured response to these codes and show strong defiance to these cultural codes. As a result the patriarchal stalwarts are out with strict hand to punish this defiance. A successfully forged alliance between cultural codes, honour and patriarchy justifies violence against women and sometimes coerce women by the collective pressure of the community exercised by the caste and village Panchayat. This pressure is aided by people manning the state agencies who extend support to this leadership as a result of which the perpetrators of violence go scot free. This pattern sets in motion a chain of ideological belief and practices validating the action, reinforcing the cultural codes and making its infringement less acceptable, more difficult and leads to violent reaction.<sup>7</sup> Indeed there is complicity between the perpetrators of violence and the police about the 'justice' done for the sake of 'honour'.<sup>8</sup>

Men have rarely been targeted for visiting pubs, smoking, interacting with the opposite sex, wearing Western clothes or even violence, rape, assault. The discourse of morality engrosses on and targeted at women, particularly related to their sexuality, and most often used against minorities or the 'other' as the dominant group may be. The basis of these declarations of 'morality' is often prejudices, which are often used as an argument to justify the inferiority of one group or person. Historically, moral declarations have served to mark and maintain the boundaries and limits within which women and communities can operate, and have been fundamental to preserving the sanctity and legitimacy of patriarchal institutions of religion, family, nation, race, caste and community.

Any challenges to these institutions have been met with outraged moral affront. There was a moral outcry, even by those who were the propagators of women's right to education and widow remarriage, at the entry of women onto the stage in Bengali theatre. Portrayals of women in historical religious and ancient texts also carry a subtext of morality. The portrayals of the monogamy of Sita, the polygamy of Draupadi, the devotion of Sati, and so on assert the continuing notions of ideal womanhood. Whenever these notions are challenged, there has been controversy. Even in literature, the creative and intellectual medium of expression, whenever women and men have written of oppression, female sexuality, or exposed certain aspects of religion, patriarchy or culture, there has been a violent backlash. Writers like Ismat Chughtai, Taslima Nasreen, Salman Rushdie, Amrita Pritam have faced

severe ostracism and even court cases, arrest and religious indictments for challenging the status quo through their writing.

## **Historically determined**

There is massive resurgence of the moral police in recent times, particularly targeting women who the custodians of Indian tradition and culture accuse of eroding the concept of morality from Indian civilisation by simply following western culture. While many argue that this move by some is simply a cultural defence from western cultural incursion, the concept of moral policing is a visible phenomenon going by the long and complex history of India. 'Morality' has historically been a powerful tool of social and political control, and now there is a fear that women are going out of control, and must be confined. This makes it all the more necessary for us to understand the roots of this anxiety and the way morality has historically become a powerful tool of social and political control<sup>9</sup>. What is this many-headed monster, and why does it have a sustained presence and relevance in our lives?

The feudal system and patriarchal structures accord a secondary role to women. Religion based violence like 'Sati, female infanticides are historical customs justifying violence against women. In Hindu Culture, patriarchal values support female inferiority<sup>10</sup>. In the Indian subcontinent, the "theory of perpetual tutelage for women" was formulated by Manu, the Hindu lawgiver. He preached that education for girls should be stopped; they should be prohibited from public life and must restrict themselves to their homes. His dictum that a wife ought to respect her husband as God and serve him faithfully, even if he were vicious and void of any merit, was accepted as applicable to all women. The identity of women in Indian context is determined through a subordinate relation to man. The origin of Indian idea of appropriate female behaviour can be traced to the rules laid down by Manu in 200 B.C.

*Pita rakshatikaumare, bhratarakshatಿಯುವane*  
*Rakshantistavireputra, nastreeswatantrayamarhati<sup>11</sup>*

The typical image of a 'good woman' is still one who upholds the honour of the family and maintains the 'culture of silence'. These patriarchal cultural values were transmitted from generation to generation to keep women subservient to the men.

## **Revisiting Culture and Religion**

Defining the term ‘culture’ is not an easy task. It is an abstract and ever evolving concept. Yakin Erturk, former United Nations Special Rapporteur stated that “culture can be defined as the set of shared spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of human experience that is created and constructed with social praxis. As such culture is intimately connected with the diverse ways in which social groups produce their daily existence economically, socially and politically. It therefore embraces both the commonly held meanings that allow for the continuation of everyday practices as well as the competing meaning that galvanize change over time”.<sup>12</sup> This definition makes it clear that ‘culture’ is deeply intertwined with experience and modes of operation. It is not a fixed entity but fluid and context specific based on variables such as space and time. Even within one cultural context there exist many competing cultural perceptions. Therefore what is often seen as a singular culture is, in fact, the dominant or hegemonic expression of that culture.<sup>13</sup>

But culture often appears as relatively static and homogenous system, bounded and isolated. Culture as a historical product constantly being made and remade and rife with internal conflicts and differences.<sup>14</sup> Therefore claims to culture do not justify deviation from the culture of transnational modernity. Cultural differences are respected but within limits and it does not justify assaults on the bodily integrity of vulnerable people. In fact a modern understanding of culture as a process of continually creating new meanings and practices those are products of power relationships and open to contestation. Many who write about women’s rights to protection see culture as a problem rather than as a resource.<sup>15</sup> The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) obliges states to condemn violence against women and not to invoke custom, religion or culture to limit their obligations. Two key consensually produced human rights documents, the Vienna Declaration and Program for Action (U.N. 1993) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (U.N. 1995) require states to eliminate traditional, customary and cultural practices harmful to women.

Many traditional social attitudes based on culture towards women persist amongst the people across the globe. Even increased access to education and information has often failed to wipe out deeply engrained concepts about women. One such idea is that a girl child is only a “visitor” in the house where she is born and that, eventually she has to go to her “real” or

married home. That is why she has no rights and is considered to be the most unimportant part of the household. Certain theories explain the prevalence and occurrence of violence based on culture against women in South Asian societies. First is the perception of males as macho beings. Men consider themselves strong and show off their strength by being aggressive to women. Second is the theory of male chauvinism. It explains that, in South Asian society, life is considered indispensable without males. The third concept is that of loss of control. According to this concept, when a male member of society finds that the woman is somehow getting stronger either by her educational qualifications or economic independence, he tries to regain control by battering or other forms of violent acts until she surrenders. The purpose of this evil act is to limit the personal growth and progress of women. Lastly, is the concept of displacement of affect? Men find an easy outlet for it by carrying out domestic violent acts against women, which is, obviously less threatening for him. Therefore, carrying out the violent acts against weak and dependent females serves to displace the aggression of the dominant and powerful male without putting him at personal risk.<sup>16</sup> This ideology of patriarchy is culturally constructed and needs to be culturally legitimised by enforcing it on the women's body to retain the sanctity of patriarchy. Thus culture is used as an instrument to retain control over women's body and mind.

## **What is moral policing?**

Today we can see that a lot of things are changing around us. Women across classes and cultures are now eager to contest the male domains and earn equality in public spaces, more confident of their bodies, fearless in wearing clothes that they want to wear and exhibiting behaviour that the dominant morality would classify as that of a 'bad woman'. Man negotiates lives of women in reference to the representations of "good" and "bad" women which are reproduced through everyday talk, stories, songs, on television serials, in movies, etc. Their movements, their work, their dress and adornment, their mode of speaking are monitored closely, for the categorisation of 'bad' women and 'good' women. All these lead women into negotiating her identity of an individual human being having equal rights in a democratic set up. Numerous symbolic and material violences are also inflicted to women who are categorised as 'women living outside the norm'.

This patriarchal construction of 'good' and 'bad' woman seems to be blurring and widening day by day and is being exploited by opportunistic conservative mind as they perceive it a threat to their male prerogative. New expressions of moral anxieties are a response to these developments and arise out of a fear that women are going out of control, and must be contained. In recent years scholars have argued that divisions are emerging in many countries between tendencies toward fundamentalism and modernism. Moral policing is the direct result of this ideological clash and belongs to the former group that is the fundamentalists. These conflicting tendencies comprise a variety of moral, social and political issues and have devastating effects on the issue of gender equality and women's rights. This ideological clash finds its expression through the women's body and their behaviour which needs to be constantly policed so that their ideologies get strengthened. As always it is the women who fall as an object as well as a victim of this clash.

Many argued that this resurgence is also a response to a perceived threat to 'Indian culture' and the fear that the nation is undergoing a phase of 'Westernisation'. As always, women are seen as the bearers of culture and tradition, and it is their conduct and control which is sought to be reined and tightened, the boundaries redrawn, reminders of the punishment of transgression announced... in reaction to this threat. In response, the conservative mind groups itself into organised bodies to contain this development before it goes out of hand. These groups police more the body of woman which is according to them a public affair. It monitors what it dresses in, where the body goes, what company the body is seen in, and when the body can appear in public places.

Moral policing arises in relation to a perceived social problem which they define as an unqualified evil. Participants see their mission as a righteous enterprise whose goals are both symbolic (attempting to draw or reinforce normative boundaries) and practical (aiming to crackdown the evildoers). This groups has strong connection with political elites and their crusades result in some kind of institutionalization- in policy, law or enforcement . The scale of menace of threat threatens the basic human values and the human rights of women. Moral crusaders typically make universalistic and often unverifiable claims about the nature and extent of a particular evil. Such claims are bad both symbolically (giving the state's blessing to a vile institution and legitimating the patriarchal exploitation of women) and practically

(only magnifying all the problems associated with women's behaviour). These claims are based in part on an ideological framework that simply decrees that women's mobility of her equal stand with men is sinful, immoral and harmful to the family.

Moral pronouncements and fears have over time been institutionalised also in law, in popular discourse. Often these create situations of tragic injustice. A judge who pronounces that the rapist may marry his victim is exercising his perceptions of morality, rather than the call for justice. The State also practices double standards of morality. They are willing to overlook the use of women's bodies in the marketing of almost anything, and yet will 'censor' a film that demonstrates the sexual violence against women in a communal massacre. The discourse of morality touches our lives in every sphere – whether it is in the home or in the choice or area of work, or through the law, the State, the police, the judiciary.

### **Modernity vs. traditions: implications for individual freedom**

I would like to bring in the concept of modernisation which is argued by critics as the major factor driving moral policing. More than any other notions modernisation clarifies the western influence on our Indian culture. Modernisation can be viewed as the adoption of new life and values. And this brings in changes in the whole system of social relationship and instils new ideologies in lieu of the traditional ones. This eventually leads to changes taking place in the social institutions like family, marriage, religion, morality etc. What really happens in the name of protecting the individual is the curbing of individual liberty. In the Indian context also the same logic is used to make laws that go against individual freedom. The government overlooks the aspects of curbing individual freedom only in the sense of protecting public morality.

Every civilised nations consent an individual's personal freedom and right to conduct without being intruded. There is always a disconnect on the aspect on the "accepted" notions of societal behaviour and what the laws guarantees an individual . The whole issue of moral policing is basically that of cultural conflict – one group in society begins to move towards a culture (or a set of morals) with which the other group is uncomfortable, and therefore the latter tries to force the former to comply with their own values and morals. If it fails to

comply with the dominant values and morals, then they are attacked and subjected to physical as well as psychological forms of violence.

## **Types of Moral boundaries**

The phenomenon of creating moral boundaries for women has taken on both new and familiar ways. The familiar ways continue – surveillance over where women go, what they wear, how they speak, who they speak to, and so on. Newer forms have also emerged: legislative force (such as the closure of dance bars in Mumbai) or coercive violence (like the Shiv Sena on a rampage separating men and women sitting together on Valentines' Day), or institutional alarm (dress codes for girls in colleges and universities in Delhi), or a nebulous and unwritten moral social force – which condones harmful traditional and cultural practices like sati and the marginalisation of widows, sometimes in the name of protecting our traditions against Westernisation or in the name of 'culture', 'Indian tradition' or 'sabhyaata'. The result of this is the loss of secular spaces, end of dialogue, a threat to rights, democracy, freedom and the slow, dangerous rise of a new kind of fascism and fundamentalism that threatens to erode the many small victories of progressive movements or Women's rights movements. Morality is not linked to an intrinsic sense of justice, equality and democracy but is used as a tool for surveillance, subjugation and oppression.

Many Indian men, including judges, legislators, and even members of government commissions constituted to protect women's rights go as far as to blame 'provocative clothing' worn by women as inciting violence and sexual harassment. Furthermore, women who smoke, drink, go to bars, or are out late at night are generally seen as having 'lose morals,' and rape is 'more justified' against these women in the eyes of many Indian men. A 1996 study amongst judges in India shows that 68 percent believes that 'provocative clothing' is an invitation to rape (Khazan& Lakshmi).

The patriarchal history of India is the first culprit in perpetuating violence. Gender inequality and the continuation of a "culture of silence" are foremost reasons that violence in India has continued. As more women become educated, they are beginning to accept positions with higher pay and higher power, which can be perceived as a threat to some men. Women are becoming more vocal on the issue of violence following an increase in awareness

and understanding regarding their rights. Organizations such as 1 billion strong and local NGOs are examples of such movements gaining momentum in India. At the same time the moral crusade against women has arisen in India.

## **Women's Body: the main culprit**

Conceptualisation of sexuality as an aspect of one's identity and self-hood shaped by social and cultural contexts has begun to emerge in research studies only recently.<sup>17</sup> It has also been argued that, it was only with the growing feminist concern with the rights of women to their lives and bodies that sexuality has gained a more enduring prominence.<sup>18</sup> However ideologies about sexuality continue to be deeply entrenched within structures of patriarchy. Sex is seen primarily as an instrument for reproduction negating all aspects of pleasure and desire intrinsic to it. If sexual needs are at all acknowledged beyond procreation, it is only for men. Women's bodies thus still remain a contested arena where new and changing power relationships are played out.

The identification of women with their physical bodies is the root cause of their oppression in a patriarchal culture and society like India.<sup>19</sup> A woman is identified primarily with her bodily functions seen essentially as a vehicle for male sexual satisfaction and reproduction and its natural corollary child bearing, rearing and nurturing. The female is constantly moulded into prescribed social and cultural roles by the family as well as by the society. Women's identification with their bodies and its physical manifestation results in suppression and denial of rights. Societal control and regulation over the women's body brings a strong impact in the mind resulting in loss of 'personhood'. Her role and status in the family and at large in the society are defined primarily by her bodily function. In Indian context, the definition of desirable women is beyond caste, class, religion and communities. The women's body is considered the space where the culture and norms of a particular society gets reflected. The female body becomes the edifice on which gender inequality is built and legitimised.

Womens' body has also become an obstacle to perform religious practices in the famous Sabarimala temple case in Kerala. The age old practice of the people prohibits women of 10-50 (the menstruating years) age group's entry into the temple due to their menstruation status as it will impure the purity of temple. It violates the constitutional rights under Article 25 and 26. The fundamental right of freedom to practice religion is provided to

“all persons” by the Constitution and women have the right to enter and pray like men at the shrine. All the customary or religious practices like banning entry of women in the age group of 10-50 years into the famous Sabarimala temple, will have to conform to constitutional principles. Under articles 25 and 26 (Freedom to practice religion) of the Constitution a person can only be restrained on the grounds of “public health, public order and morality”. The UN Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women recommends that conflicts between customary and formal laws should be resolved in a manner that respects the survivor’s human rights and principles of gender equality. This means that the customary law is invalid to the extent it violates Constitutional and human rights principles. However, the crux of the issue is the blatant attempt to defend its aged old customs and practices. Similarly another issue where customary morality was questioned is the case of Triple Talaq. This custom is being practiced for thousands of years in the name of religion only without taking care of rights of women.

There is another issue which contradicts a popular perception of gender equality in the Naga society. The political violence erupted prior to municipal elections, when women’s organisations, under the leadership of the Naga Mother’s Association (NMA), demanded the application of Indian law 243(T) of India’s Constitution, which states that 33% of seats should be reserved for women within local political bodies. Their demand was vehemently rejected, and male politicians invoked “tribal traditions” as their main argument. It can be noted that the election to the urban local bodies including the Kohima Municipal Council has not been held since Article 243(T) of the Constitution came into force in 1993, with constant opposition and threat from the Naga Hoho and other tribal bodies. Various organizations in the state including the Naga Hoho have called for a boycott to oppose 33 per cent reservation for women arguing that reservation for women would infringe on Naga customary laws and tradition as protected under Article 371(A) of the Constitution of India. The traditional law of the Naga society clearly distinguishes gender roles and gendered responsibilities. For instance, women are in charge of domestic issues, such as family and its related issues, while man deals with society, including village administration and councils. Women have therefore been excluded from the political realm. Women saw some hope in 2006, as the Nagaland Municipal (First Amendment) Act granted “33% reservations to Naga women in local bodies”. Since then, the NMA and others have been fighting to implement the law.

Shame, stigma and misinformation surrounding menstruation are contributing to serious human rights concerns for women and girls. Menstruation taboos can keep women and girls from touching water or cooking, attending religious ceremonies, or engaging in community activities. These taboos reinforce gender-based discrimination, perpetuating the idea that the menstruating women and girls are unclean. The social and religious stigma around menstruation has been prevailing in Indian society for long. In some regions, the isolated huts are located outside the villages. Global studies show a link between menstruation and lost wages. Women around the world experience limited access to sanitation facilities in the workplace. Lack of availability and affordability of menstrual products means that women and girls become more vulnerable to exploitation and HIV. The girls even miss school as they are forced to be inside the huts during menstruation. In many communities, the onset of menstruation is associated with readiness for marriage. Child marriage increases the risk of adolescent pregnancy and other outcomes that undermine girls' human rights. But even without overt taboos, women and girls face stigma that contribute to their exclusion from school and opportunities.

Thus menstrual isolation is a human rights violation. In many cultures, menstruating women are considered impure and are systematically excluded from participating in everyday activities, such as education, employment, and cultural and religious practices. Moreover, the taboos and stigmas attached to menstruation lead to an overall culture of silence around the topic, resulting in limited information on menstruation and menstrual hygiene. Such misinformation can have ramifications on the health and dignity of girls and women. Thus menstruation acts as a barrier for social inclusion of women and fences women to the domestic sphere.

The female genital mutilation is practiced in India by the Dawoodi Bohramuslims. The cruel practice is performed illegally upon girls before attaining puberty. FGM is the partial or total cutting or removal of the external female genital organs supposedly to curb a woman's sexual drive. The members of Bohra community have a fallacious belief that FGM makes women lead a life of chastity, and that the clitoral head makes them infidels. It is typically carried out by traditional circumcisers in unhygienic conditions. Since FGM is usually carried out by non-medical practitioners, the victims often suffer severe pain, bleeding and are at high risk of infection. In other countries the procedures can differ, with some believing FGM ensures

the virginity of women before marriage and fidelity afterwards, ignorant to the harmful consequences. Those who believe female circumcision is a religious duty fail to realise that FGM is a form of violence against women and girls that affects their health and leaves them forever traumatised. Thus the female body is targeted to control her sexuality as well as to establish patriarchal domination in the society.

There is a need to bring an attitudinal and behavioural change among the people including the educated middle class as well as the bureaucracy let alone the leaders of different faiths and religions. The gap between the policy formulation and policy implementation is absolutely necessary for protecting women's rights. There is a need to deconstruct the hegemonic masculinity of the state and the state established structures that play a lion's share role in looking matters related to women's rights. A significant transformation in the perceptions and images of women's body and sexuality and notions like women's bodies are for procreation, women's bodies are for men's enjoyment, women's bodies are for repositories of men's honour needs to be overhauled to stop culture based violence and violation of women's rights in India.

## **Conclusion**

Moral policing is often justified in the name of protecting our culture from western influence. The perception of emphasizing on individuality of culture and resistance to modernity perceived as western cultural hegemony is being rooted more in the recent times. This sentimentality is often articulated in terms of 'our culture against their culture' or cultural determination. Indian culture has been embracing aspects of foreign cultures over the years. To quote, Amartya Sen in his book, 'The Argumentative Indian' says, "*The growing tendency in contemporary India to champion the need for an indigenous culture that has 'resisted' external influences lacks credibility and cogency.*"

When taken into account the concept of Individual liberty is given preference in Western cultural thought while Indian culture is based up on communitarian values. India is home to diverse cultural traditions. There is no homogeneous Indian culture. There are categories like religion, caste, class, region and various other aspects. Each can yield different results. Thus those who talk of preserving Indian culture capitalise on a few of these and ignore others. Indian society has evolved into a mixed breed of Western and Indian culture.

Globalisation effectively brings in the opportunity to imbibe the best from all cultures without losing the aspects of our culture. The Indian culture and traditions are not getting degraded by the western influence. Rather more things are getting adopted, accommodated and adapted.

There is no doubt that women have made progress in the matter of education and career. But the truth is that India is currently in a transitional age, the transition being from a feudal, agricultural society to a modern, industrial society. We are neither totally backward, nor totally modern. Therefore our society is largely male-dominated, and still has remnants of feudal thinking. Even though our constitution provides equality to both men and women, honour killings, female foeticide and dowry deaths happen. Equality before law is not enough. True equality is only possible by means of a complete revolution in our thinking and attitude towards women. This can be achieved but it requires time, and perhaps a cultural revolution.<sup>20</sup>

Moral policing is a threat to individual liberty. As well as it also threatens cultural diversity wherein the Indian culture is reduced to dominant values. Individual conduct is being judged up on generalised behaviour ideals. It has successfully used state coercion to its advantage. Moral policing is the result of the State's failure to implement law and protect the basic rights of women that are provided by the constitution. It is a threat to the women's rights movements and a publicly organised and institutionalised violence against women. Moral Policing will tarnish our democracy and is a potential threat to the very survival of democratic societies. It's a democratic country and everyone's choice should also be democratic. Such people and groups are threatening one's choice which affects the sense of security among girls. Questions such as these need to be raised, answered and sensitized to the populace. Only then are we realizing our ideal of political participation in the world's largest democracy.<sup>21</sup>

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