

Expressions of Violence: A Critical Social Issue in India

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ABSTRACT

Violence is the use of physical force in order to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy the other. It refers to exercising conscious use of power either in the form of threat or actual action against an individual or a group of people which results in harm, injury, deprivation or even death in an extreme case. Violence can be divided into three broad categories, namely, self-directed, interpersonal and collective violence. In India violence is a serious social issue. We see, hear, and read about instances of social, political, cultural and individual violence every single day of our lives. Violence can be perceived as a targeted path to destroy an independent entity or a collective community of people. The objective of the present paper is to undertake an understanding of the reasons for violence in India which are basically deeply ingrained in the social constructs of the concepts of masculinity and patriarchy. The different forms of violence in the India society will be discussed with some relevant examples. The paper also attempts to discuss the various mediums through violence has been expressed in India. An evaluation of violent methods in the Indian society and their impact on the lives of not just women but also other underprivileged sections of the society will be taken up. The research methodology for this paper primarily involves the collection of references through newspaper articles on major cases of violence in India. The methodology also involves gathering references, study material, research papers and academic essays through visits to libraries and archives. Further, the paper contextualizes these references which have been read, analyzed, thoroughly examined and presented through the course of the discussion. Finally, major results or outcomes have been discussed in the conclusion of the paper by suggesting specific measures which can be adopted through conscious efforts for tackling the problem of violence in India.

Keywords: forms of violence, gender, masculinity, tolerance.

INTRODUCTION

Violence is the result of intolerance towards other communities, cultures, gender or individuals. Violence is exhibited in the society by one individual towards another or a group of people towards another group of people. Whether the manifestations of violence are expressed on individual or mass levels, it is targeted towards people who are weak or not main stream. Therefore, we come across ample examples of violence against women, weaker men, the lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender community (LGBT), people of the lower castes and classes of society.

Violence has various forms of expressions on the domestic as well as the social spheres. Domestic violence, mental and emotional torture, sexual harassment, rape, honor killing, murder, riots and war are some predominant forms of in which violence is expressed. The Arushi murder case which took place in 2008 still remains unsolved. It hints at honor killing of the 13 year old girl who was found murdered along with the domestic servant Hemraj Banjade. The Indian society has been a witness to violence against the Dalit community. This community has been treated as Untouchables and is deprived of privileges that the upper castes enjoy. The Meerut riots in 1982 and the Delhi riots 1984 were communal riots in which some of the most vulnerable segments of the Untouchable community were mobilized. Further, violent riots have resulted in the Indian society through communal violence particularly between the Hindu and Muslim communities. The seed of hatred that was sown by the British between these communities further grew after the independence of India with encouragement of political support. Sexual violence against women, children, weaker men or even sex workers is rampant in our society. The manifestations of sexual harassment can be seen at one's workplace, rape outside or within a marriage, child abuse and sexual assaults on LGBT's. The Nirbhaya rape case in Delhi on 16th December 2012 in which the 23 year old Physiotherapy intern named Jyoti Pandey was brutally beaten and gang raped in a moving bus and sexually assaulted by inserting a rod in her vagina causing serious injuries and eventual death as well as the recent case in which Priyanka Reddy, a young 22 year old Doctor was gang raped in Hyderabad, Talangan and burnt alive are examples of the most heinous sexual violence against women which ultimately resulted in the death of both these women.

VIOLENCE, MASCULINITY AND PATRIARCHY

Violence is closely associated with the ideas of masculinity and patriarchy which have been deeply ingrained on the minds of both, men as well as women in the Indian society. Right from childhood men have been brought up in a certain manner and are made to realize at an early age that the male and not the female members in the family enjoy all the privileges. In order to enjoy these privileges, the male has to assert his power in a certain manner. Therefore, in order to have an upper hand over the women in his family and it is assumed that he can be violent if he does not get what he desires. Thus, violence gets associated with gender. Toxic masculinity leads to men asserting their power over the women and even weaker men in their families. The globalization processes have made patriarchal norms stronger. In this process, women were subject to the dominant and object by state, power, society, medical sciences and advanced technology through sexuality. This domination is based on gender biases and dichotomy of purity and pollution.

GENDER AND VIOLENCE

In India we witness different kinds of violence. Some of the prominent forms of violence include caste violence, communal violence, domestic violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, violence against children etc. Different forms of violent expressions are expressed on social institutions like the family and through social evils like dowry and rape. By indulging in such social malaises, a man asserts his power over women which lead to violence. Consequently, any form of violence is associated more with the ideas of masculinity and patriarchy rather than with violence itself. Violence is not an inherent nature with which a man is born. Therefore, one can say that men are not born violent but they are produced to be so under certain social circumstances and through deliberate patterns of upbringing.

At a young age itself they also learn to hide and deny parts of their selves, aspirations and desires which could be beneath socially accepted concepts of masculinity. Denying aspects of one's personality can be an extremely violent process. Hence, it can be said that men are trained to be violent from childhood itself. Therefore, to vent anger through violence towards people who are weaker than oneself becomes a socially appropriate behavior which is ingrained on the minds of young men right from childhood.

There seems to be a strong association of violence with the discourse of "honor" which is always associated with women. A rape of a woman is not just associated with her personal dishonor but also the dishonor of her family. However, men are raped too. For example, during the Bangladesh war there are evidences of several men who got raped. However, no one talks about it because such an occurrence would dishonor men more than an episode of a woman being raped. However, rape is not about sex but about power. Sex is used to execute power over the other. That's precisely the reason why even infants are raped; although such an act would offer no practically no pleasure to a man. Yet, such acts are committed by men because men who rape have been produced in cultures of violence which are nurtured by the society.

There are ample evidences of violence against men. Men who are physically weak, gays, bisexuals and eunuchs have been soft targets of men who take pride in exhibiting their masculinity over weaker men. However, the reaction of men who have been victims of violence is radically different from those of women who have faced violence. Unlike men, women often do not have the option to direct violence. Women do not vent their anger on men but on themselves. Hence, a man who has faced violence either becomes violent towards other men or women or is silenced, women often responds by inflicting more violence upon herself or in an extreme situation by committing suicide.

Often, economic inequality and poverty is linked to sexual violence and rape. It is believed that poor working-class men are more likely to enact acts of violence than men from upper classes. It is presumed that working-class men are more dangerous because they vent their social and economic frustrations on women. However, there are ample evidences of violent expressions shown by upper class men towards the women in their own families, women from whom they buy sex as well as women whom they casually meet at parties. Since the concepts of masculinity and patriarchy prevail in all classes, violent expressions should not be associated with class; rather they should be correlated with gender.

One has to face serious consequences for transgressing accepted gendered societal norms. Even in modern times, the consequences of transgressing gender norms can lead to facing serious consequences in India. Such norms are culturally delegitimized. Depending on the degree of transgression, one has to face its

consequences which can range from serious forms of violence to losing one's job. Violation of human rights has serious consequences on one's personality and is completely against the constitutional rights that one is entitled to as the citizen on India.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN INDIA

Domestic violence is an extension of the concepts of masculinity and patriarchy which allows a man to be violent towards his wife, sister, mother or even his younger brothers. However, a noticeable change can be observed in the family structures in India over the past one and half decades, particularly in urban areas. Girl's education, opening up of job sectors for women and the media have mainly been instrumental in bringing about radical changes in these family structures. The expectations that women have from marriage as a social institution have also undergone a change. New aspirations and ideas for women are being reflected in the Indian society. Nivedita Menon uses the term "the implosion of marriage" because on one hand marriage is almost compulsory at the same time patriarchal norms have not been effectively internalized by women any more. Therefore, in modern times women are often seen as behaving in non-stereotypical behaviors which are drastically different from expected behaviors from a married woman. Often, they do not meet the expectations of the joint family in fulfilling the roles of ideal wives and daughters-in-law. Menon observes that in modern times girls are educated and do not bow down to the wishes of their families. However, they are trained to think that marriage is a must. This dichotomy in the thinking fashions produces distinct tensions and conflicts in the family which either leads to a complete break up or a disharmony within the family. How so ever educated and independent an urban woman is, she still looks at the man as the person who will take care of her, but at the same time she expresses revolt if her expectations are not met. Menon calls this behavior unreasonable because although women have stopped falling on patterns of self-sufficiency, but at the same time, they adhere to traditional norms of getting married.

Not just the women, but men can also be seen reconceptualizing themselves. They are seen resisting to pressures of getting married or not wanting to be the bread winners for their families. However, a man still has a better position to say that he does not wish to get married or that he can continue his bisexual existence even after getting married. Therefore, men still have greater choices than women.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said that violence in any form or degree is unacceptable. In order to restrict violence, reforms need to be brought about social, emotional, individual as well as legal changes.

Boys will have to be raised differently. Men as well as women will have to be brought up in ways that are completely different from traditional stereotypical formats. This is a difficult task because society been built over years in a certain manner. Therefore, the issue requires great intervention and a radical challenging of the status quo. The attainment of such a project can be attained through deeper societal transformations, government policies as well as implementing strict laws.

There have been contradictory views not just amongst the general public but also women's organizations and feminists about the death penalty for rapists. Strict laws need to be imposed in graded seriousness of the crime. For example, punishment for rape where the penis has been used should be different from instances where a broken beer bottle has been used. Also, the laws of rape should be associated with violence against women rather than as the 'mythical rape' with notions of honor associated with it.

Women are prone to various kinds of atrocities in the society. They have been considered to be easy preys by men in societies across the world. Mere dependence on society and legal systems will not suffice the safety of women. Teaching girls strategies for defense should be made mandatory in schools, colleges and at work places. Women have to strengthen themselves to protect against acts of violence, both, inside and outside the house.

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