



Domestic Violence as an expression of Gender Politics: An Analyses

Gender Politics and Domestic Violence

*Namrata Pathania ** Dr. Bhumander Singh Jaswal

*Assistant Professor in English Govt. Post Graduate College, Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh

** Assistant Professor in Commerce Govt. Post Graduate College, Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh

Abstract

The difference between sex and gender has been pivotal to the long-established efforts to debunk the stereotypical assertion that anatomy is destiny. All gender is then, by careful investigation and interpretation, unnatural. Gender is actually taught to all from the moment they are born. In fact, gender is a social construct- the set of activities, expectations behaviors and roles, assigned to the females and males by a society. Our culture recognizes two basic gender roles: Masculine (having the qualities attributed to males) and feminine (having the qualities attributed to females). The relationship between the masculine and feminine gender is basically political in nature as it is based on the idea of power – the one being powerful and the other being powerless. This is called ‘gender politics’. It leads to discrimination based on gender. Violence against women is the most prevalent expression of gender-based discrimination and ‘Domestic Violence’ is the most dominant form of such an expression. It affects women across the life span from sex selective abortions to forced suicides and abuse.

Keywords: Gender, Discrimination, Gender Politics, Domestic Violence

Introduction

The difference between sex and gender has been pivotal to the long-established efforts to debunk the stereotypical assertion that anatomy is destiny, “Sex is understood to be the invariant, anatomically distinct, and static aspects of the female body, whereas gender is the cultural meaning and form that that body acquires, the variable modes of that body's acculturation”¹. All gender is then, by careful investigation and interpretation, unnatural, “Gender refers to socio-cultural definitions of man and woman, the way societies distinguish between them and assign different roles to them”². Gender is actually taught to all from the moment they are born. In fact, gender is a social construct- the set of activities, expectations behaviors and roles, assigned to the females and males by a society, “If being a woman is one cultural interpretation of being female, and if that interpretation is in no way necessitated by being female, then it appears that the female body is the arbitrary locus of the gender

'woman', and there is no reason to preclude the possibility of that body becoming the locus of other constructions of gender"³. In a patriarchal society, a woman is perceived as "other", secondary to man, which leads to her subjugation.

Objective

The foremost objective of this research paper is to explore and analyse the reasons for gendered violence, especially domestic violence and also to find possible solutions to curb or eradicate the same.

Research Methodology

The research is analytical and qualitative in nature. The research work has taken into account the secondary sources—relevant books, critical articles, research papers and web-sites.

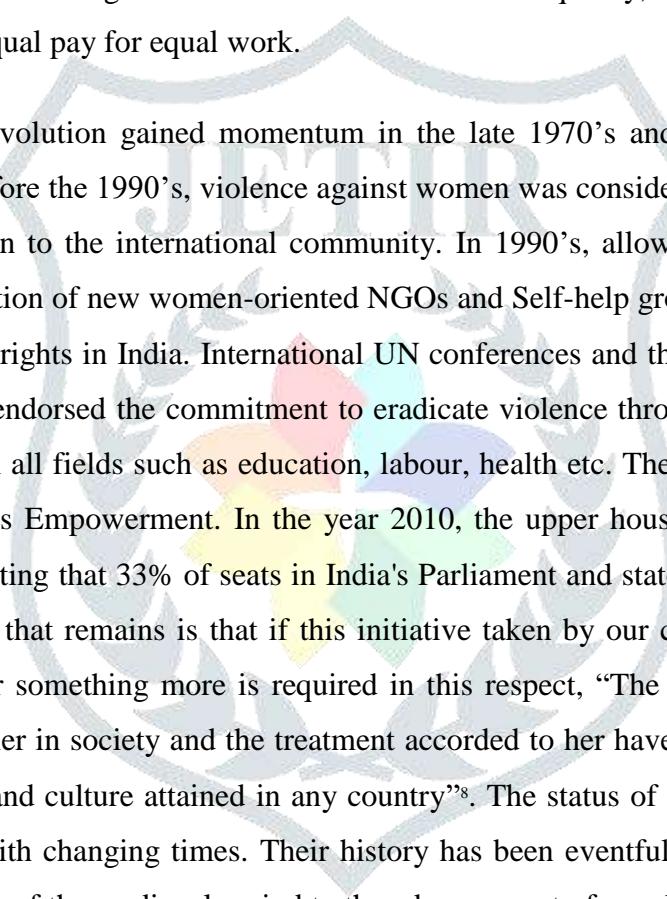
Gender Politics

Like air or water surrounding creatures, gender is all around us though we are often unaware of its all-pervasive nature. Gender is actually taught to us from the moment we are born. Gender stereotypes and expectations bombard us constantly. Culture, upbringing, institutions, peers, community, religion and media, are some of the many factors that shape our understanding of this core aspect. What and how we learned and interacted with gender as a child directly influences how we view the world later on. Gendered interactions between parents and children begin as soon as the sex of the baby is known, "Parents provide children with their first lessons about gender. Possible ways that parents might influence children's gender development include role modeling and encouraging different behaviors and activities in sons and daughters"⁴. As a matter of fact, most of the aspects of gender are socially constructed, particularly with regard to gender expression, "Gender inequality does not inherit from one's biology but culture"⁵. Just like other social constructs, gender is closely monitored and reinforced by society. Practically everything in society is assigned a gender - toys, colours, clothes and behaviors are some of the more apparent examples. Accepted social gender roles and expectations are so well established in our culture that most people cannot imagine any other way. As a result, individuals fitting neatly into these roles or expectations, rarely, if ever question what gender really means. Our culture recognizes two basic gender roles: Masculine (having the qualities attributed to males) and feminine (having the qualities attributed to females). The relationship between the two is basically political in nature as it is based on the idea of power – the one being powerful and the other being powerless.

Violence against Women

Violence against women is the most prevalent expression of gender-based discrimination, "Gender-based discrimination intersects with other factors of discrimination, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, gender identity and sexual orientation, among others"⁶. Violence against women refers to "Any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological

harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private”⁷. The brutal gang rape of a 23 year old woman on a bus in New Delhi in December 2012 generated a global turmoil and protests asking for better policing of gendered crimes in India. Although ‘Nirbhaya’ rape case was one of the most heinous cases of cruelty against women, it is ironical that such incidents are a common occurrence in our country. There are several such cases happening everyday where females are subjected to horrendous torture by men who are, in most cases, known to them. One cannot generalize the victims or those guilty of gendered crimes in India; they come from all strata of society and from every nook and corner of the country and belong to all age groups. According to a global poll conducted by Thomson Reuters, India is the “fourth most dangerous country” in the world for women, in spite of the principle of gender equality being enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles that guarantees to all Indian women equality, no discrimination by the State, equality of opportunity and equal pay for equal work.



In India, feminist revolution gained momentum in the late 1970's and national level issues brought women's groups together. Before the 1990's, violence against women was considered a personal matter and not a human rights issue of concern to the international community. In 1990's, allowances and grants from foreign agencies facilitated the formation of new women-oriented NGOs and Self-help groups that played a major role in the advancement of women's rights in India. International UN conferences and the Commission on the Status of Women in the country have endorsed the commitment to eradicate violence through the promotion of women's empowerment and equality in all fields such as education, labour, health etc. The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment. In the year 2010, the upper house of the parliament passed the Women's Reservation Bill stating that 33% of seats in India's Parliament and state legislative bodies be reserved for women. But the question that remains is that if this initiative taken by our country are sufficient enough to uplift the status of women or something more is required in this respect, “The estimation in which woman is held, the status occupied by her in society and the treatment accorded to her have been justly regarded as marks of the degree of civilization and culture attained in any country”⁸. The status of women in India has undergone tremendous transformation with changing times. Their history has been eventful- from equal rank with men in ancient times to the low status of the medieval period to the advancement of equal rights in the modern times. In current scenario, women have held high offices and ranks of considerable repute. However, they continue to face violence such as rape, acid attacks and dowry killings while young girls are trafficked and forced into flesh trade in the so-called civilised society.

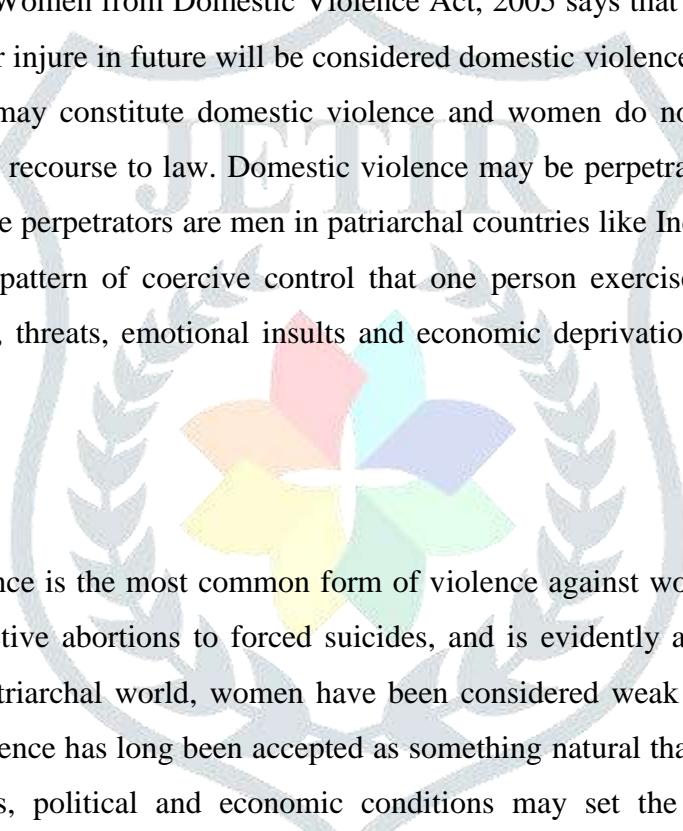
Domestic Violence

According to the data compiled by the National Crime Records Bureau, domestic violence against women in India figures as the topmost category of violence against women. The data shows that a total of 89,047 cases related to crimes against women were registered across India in 2018. The majority of them were registered under the “cruelty by husband or his relatives”. Domestic violence is a serious threat to the society in general, “Domestic violence is a burden on numerous sectors of the social system and quietly, yet dramatically, affects

the development of a nation... batterers cost nations fortunes in terms of law enforcement, health care, lost labour and general progress in development. These costs do not only affect the present generation; what begins as an assault by one person on another reverberates through the family and the community into the future”⁹.

Domestic violence is also a serious global issue reaching across national boundaries as well as socio-economic, racial, cultural and class distinctions, “This problem is not only widely dispersed geographically, but its incidence is also extensive, making it a typical and accepted behaviour. Domestic violence is wide spread, deeply ingrained and has serious impacts on women's health and well-being”¹⁰. It can be appropriately described as the power misused by one person in a relationship to control another. It is the establishment of fear and control through the exercise of violence. This violence can be in the form of physical assault, psychological abuse, financial abuse, social abuse, or sexual assault. The reiteration of the violence can be off and on, occasional or persistent. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 says that any act or conduct that harms or has the potential to harm or injure in future will be considered domestic violence by the law. Even a single act of omission or commission may constitute domestic violence and women do not have to suffer a prolonged period of abuse before taking recourse to law. Domestic violence may be perpetrated by both men and women. However, most commonly, the perpetrators are men in patriarchal countries like India, “Domestic violence is not simply an argument. It is a pattern of coercive control that one person exercises over another. Abusers use physical and sexual violence, threats, emotional insults and economic deprivation as a way to dominate their victims and get their way”¹¹.

Chief Causes



Undoubtedly, domestic violence is the most common form of violence against women. It affects women across the life span. From sex selective abortions to forced suicides, and is evidently a grim reality in almost every society in the world. In a patriarchal world, women have been considered weak and vulnerable and thus in a capacity to be exploited. Violence has long been accepted as something natural that happens to women. Cultural values, religious conventions, political and economic conditions may set the precedence for perpetuating domestic violence, but ultimately committing an act of violence is a choice that an individual makes out of a variety of options. Notwithstanding the importance of macro system-level forces such as cultural and social norms in the examination of gender-based violence within any country, individual-level variables such as witnessing violence between one's parents, absent father or errant peer associations also play important roles in the development of such violence. The gender imbalance in domestic violence is related to differences in physical strength and size to some extent. Husbands who thrash their wives feel that they are exercising a birth right, maintaining good order in the family and punishing their wives' delinquency, their failure to keep their proper place.

Toleration of Violence

The main reason that has been found to be behind women tolerating violence within the four walls of their homes is economic dependence. Without the ability to sustain themselves independently, women are forced to stay in violent and abusive relationships. "Due to deep-rooted values and culture, women do not prefer to adopt the option of separation or divorce. They also fear the consequences of reporting violence and declare an unwillingness to subject themselves to the shame of being identified as battered women"¹². Lack of knowledge about alternatives or other options also forces women to suffer silently within the boundaries of their homes. Some women even believe or are made to believe that they deserve the beatings or emotional abuse because of some shortcoming on their part such is the extent of their social conditioning. Other women abstain from speaking about the abuse because of the fear of further harm from their partners for letting the family secrets out. In any case, theirs is a no win situation and hence they go on tolerating the violence.

Recommendations to Curb Violence against Women

Violence against women is deeply rooted in social norms and gender stereotypes leading to gender-based discrimination. The best possible solutions to curb or end violence against women would be by:

- Preventing it from happening in the first place by addressing its root cause. Prevention should start early in life, by educating and working with young boys and girls promoting respectful relationships and gender equality, "Whatever the real differences between the sexes may be, we are not likely to know them until the sexes are treated differently, that is alike"¹³.
- Supporting the implementation of the agreed conclusions of the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) that placed a strong focus on prevention through the promotion of gender equality, women's empowerment and their enjoyment of human rights. It also means making the home and public spaces safer for women, ensuring women's economic autonomy and security, and increasing women's participation and decision-making powers in the home and relationships, as well as in public life and politics.
- Adopting "Voices against Violence", a co-educational curriculum developed by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and UN Women, with inputs from young people. Designed for various age groups ranging from 5 to 25 years, it provides young people with tools and expertise to understand the root causes of violence in their communities, to educate and involve their peers and communities to prevent such violence, and to learn about where to access support if violence is experienced.
- Addressing the immediate practical needs of women suffering abuse, providing long-term assistance and follow up, and concentrating on challenging those cultural norms, view points and legal provisions that promote the acceptance of and even encourage violence against women, and undermine women's exercise of their freedom in the real sense of the term.

- Realising the potential of the health sector to deal with violence against women through reproductive health services, which most women can access at some point in their lives. The health sector can play an indispensable role by providing victims with the necessary treatment and appropriate care.

Conclusion

While a historic number of laws and policies to check and counter violence against women have been framed, implementation is still lagging behind. Measures to strengthen effective implementation may include proper training of officials who handle cases of violence against women along with the establishment of mechanisms for monitoring and impacting evaluation as well as accountability and better coordination. Committing adequate human and financial resources is also required at the same time. When brought into alignment with international human rights standards, such as those contained in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), laws and policies can undoubtedly play a positive role, especially when they are accompanied by complementary strategies to eliminate violence such as awareness-raising through education. Thus, proper enforcement of stringent laws coupled with a change of feudal mindset that regards women as mere sexual objects, is the need of the hour which will send a strong message in the society that violence against women is not tolerated at all and that it is the right of every woman to live life free of violence. The society needs not to look at woman as a subordinate being who requires protection but as an individual having control over her life. It is high time to challenge the deep-rooted norms of patriarchy and to state boldly that woman is no more the weaker sex but one of the two equal sexes, “To carry off this supreme victory, men and women must, among other things and beyond their natural differentiations, unequivocally affirm their brotherhood”¹⁴.

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