



The Menace of Sexual Bullying in India

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ABSTRACT:- Sexual bullying in India is such that for woman folk it has become a natural phenomenon, and it is no more questioned even by the victims. For the perpetrators it is like birthright to go on doing all this rubbish as it is almost accepted. No social, cultural or political will seems to be there to fight it out, security agencies many times because of political pressure do not act and sometimes they themselves become a party. This paper basically is an overview of the situation of sexual bullying at different places, and tries to establish the fact that at least in India there is nothing like a secure place for a woman.

Keywords:- Sexual bullying, Eve Teasing, Sexual Harassment, Political Will, Passive, Patriarchy.

In the beginning it is important to understand that Sexual harassment and bullying are very similar — they both involve unwelcome or unwanted sexual comments, attention, or physical contact. Sometimes bullying, as it appears more sophisticated is used by some institutions and organizations. This menace is present in almost every country right from the richest to the poorest, but this paper will focus basically about the situation in India. Eve Teasing is one of the common forms of sexual bullying prevalent in India and according to Oxford Dictionary it means “The making of unwanted sexual remarks or advances by a man to a woman in a public place.” But everything that happens has to have a reason and the reason behind this according to E Haribabu, a sociology professor is the way children are brought up:

In family, socialisation for both, boys and girls is very different. Even though siblings live together, their exchanges might be very limited. This makes the boy look at the opposite sex as something 'distant'. Also the fact that they're considered superior to the opposite sex makes the matter worse.

Violence does not need to be in physical form always, sometimes verbal violence is more painful and hurting than the physical which leaves one emotionally wrecked and psychologically disturbed. And there is where a person feels emotionally and psychologically so disturbed that one can even choose to do something as serious as suicide. Colleges and Schools in India are a common sight to witness such incidents all the time and need serious gender sensitization, as patriarchal society raises children with a serious bias where boys are treated as superior gender and girls as inferior or are taught to be passive. In such situation everything a male child does is right even if it is as serious as bulldozing or eve teasing. In one article on violencepreventionworks.org bullying is defined as:

Bullying is aggressive behaviour that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power. Most often, it is repeated over time. Bullying can take many forms: physical bullying (hitting or punching), verbal bullying (name-calling, teasing), social or emotional bullying (exclusion, hurtful gestures), or cyber-bullying (negative messages via e-mail or text messaging). (Youth Who Are Bullied Based upon Perceptions About Their Sexual Orientation.

Psychologists and sociologists feel that this behaviour stems from deeper, gender stereotypes that we all grow up with. Boys try to intimidate girls by different techniques in college or school like standing in their way while walking, passing comments, staring constantly because of the stereotype image in their mind. And girls choose to remain silent because of the training and try to avoid it. Because the girls choose not to answer or question things, the confidence of the perpetrators increases to such an extent where they continue with it even out of the school or college campus. In one article on dnaindia.com a police officer who just took the charge

says “Mostly the girl students who are staying in the hostel, or on a rental bases complained that many boys stand near their buildings, especially near their windows. They either touch their own private parts or pass comments.”

Public transport is one of the major sights of sexual bullying in India where while travelling every girl must have experienced it and the common forms are touching, pinching or brushing up against them. A quote from the bullying.com expresses it in a better way, “Touching, grabbing or pinching someone in a deliberately sexual way, Grabbing someone’s clothing or brushing up against them in a purposefully sexual way.”

Whenever, a girl or a lady, anywhere in India travels by any public transport, experiences sexual bullying of every kind and to an extent which we can’t even imagine. How crowded the public transport is everyone knows most of the times. It is not a secret, most of the times buses are so full that there is hardly any space to move, majority of men, boys even the old age men folk take advantage of the situation and make full use of it do all kinds of rubbish things. In one article posted on the dnaindia.com a just appointed police officer says, “College girls who travel in public transport claimed that the school girls face issues of manhandling and molestation. Learning from this tip-off, I pay a visit to the school, twice a week, and interact with girls about good touch and bad touch.” The situation of local trains in India is not hidden. The most astonishing thing is that all these things are now like accepted as no one reports or retaliates because of lack of support. A report published in Times of India shows a picture which is horrifying, the report says: “The one experience that is common among all women in the city related to public transport — accessing public transport is seen as fraught with discomfort and danger...buses in particular are listed among the most unsafe places...Many women pointed out that the Metro system, which used to be safer earlier, now has similar crowding and sexual harassment problems.”

Walking in busy or crowded Streets or roads is also not devoid of sexual bullying, every now and then there will be people ready to attack either with verbal bombs if not they will stare at a girl in a manner which is equally abusive as the real abuse. A quote from Wikipedia defines it in a better way:

Eve-teasing is a euphemism used in India (and sometimes other parts of South Asia, including Nepal and Bangladesh) for public sexual harassment or molestation (often known as "street harassment") of women by men, where Eve alludes to the very first woman, according to the Biblical creation story. Considered a problem related to delinquency in youth, it is a form of sexual aggression that ranges in severity from sexually suggestive remarks, brushing in public places and catcalls to groping. Sometimes it is referred to with a coy suggestion of innocent fun, making it appear innocuous with no resulting liability on the part of the perpetrator. Some non-governmental organisations have suggested that the expression be replaced by a more appropriate term. According to them, considering the semantic roots of the term in Indian English, Eve teasing refers to the temptress nature of Eve, placing responsibility on the woman as a tease.(Wiki.)

Sexual bullying cannot be limited only to the Physical harm or assault but everything which makes a person scared or uncomfortable and in India it is a common sight to witness and people feel more man after doing all such rubbish. An article on amnesty.org makes it clear:

Sexual bullying is not just about sexual assault, but also includes sexual name-calling, crude comments, vulgar gestures, uninvited touching, sexual propositioning and even commenting on someone’s appearance, attractiveness, sexual development or sexual activity. In extreme cases, it is also about sexual assault.(Amnesty) It is very strange that a country which boasts of its culture so much gives licence in the name of gender to do all kinds of rubbish and it is of many kinds like it starts with staring, one cannot even imagine the way girls are looked at by boys or man or even old age people it’s so disgusting that any cultured society would condemn it, but in India it’s normal and natural, the report in Times of India further states:

Markets turned out to be the most unsafe with 84.9% women facing harassment there, followed by 83% at Metro stations, 82.4% in areas around schools and 79% in industrial areas. According to a report published in Hindustan Times 78% women in Delhi have experienced sexual harassment in the past year 2012. (TOI)

Moreover even parents under social or cultural pressure do not stand by their children who need parental support the most at such a time, but reverse of it happens and even the parents make sure that their child does not speak anything about it, and that it doesn’t get public as it might ruin the reputation and social prestige, for social prestige is more precious than the life and happiness of the children and in addition to this they don’t even realize that how much harm are they doing to the society and humanity.

Secondly, internal security forces like Police in India do not even exist for the common man as their only purpose is the security of the politicians and to do the arrangement for political campaigns. They sometimes become even more dangerous than the common folks because they make use of the power vested in their uniforms.

The NSPCC has defined sexual bullying as "any bullying behaviour, whether physical or non-physical, that is based on a person's sexuality or gender. It is when sexuality or gender is used as a weapon by boys or girls towards other boys or girls - although it is more commonly directed at girls. It can be carried out to a person's face, behind their back or through the use of technology."(NSPCC)

This is not something which is limited to a particular space or time but everywhere, in the office women become even more vulnerable, as in modern day jobs one needs to prove oneself all the time and one's performance will be judged by the person sitting as boss in form of appraisals and once these people realise that a female is facing tough situation i.e. financial, try to take advantage in every form and sometimes it goes on to sexual exploitation also. The timings of the office hours are also such, where the female has to be dependent on others for support, which leads to a situation where the perpetrators look for an opportunity to take advantage of the situation. According to an article named Sexual Harassment at Work in idiatogether.com, if one subjects another person to an unwelcome act of physical intimacy, like grabbing, brushing, touching, pinching etc. or makes an unwelcome demand or request (whether directly or by implication) for sexual favours from another person, and further makes it a condition for employment/payment of wages/increment/promotion etc. or makes an unwelcome remark with sexual connotations, like sexually explicit compliments/cracking loud jokes with sexual connotations/ making sexist remarks etc. or shows a person any sexually explicit visual material, in the form of pictures/cartoons/pin-ups/calendars/screen savers on computers/any offensive written material/pornographic e-mails, etc. or engages in any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which could be verbal, or even non-verbal, like staring to make the other person uncomfortable, making offensive gestures, kissing sounds, etc. ,accounts for sexual harassment and calls for action against the offender. But all the above mentioned things are very common at any work place in India and most of these go unreported for one reason or the other. One reason is cultural sanctions and second is the poor condition of our law enforcement agencies which are ineffective and no one even bothers about them or most of the times they are found in collusion with the perpetrators to further harass the victim.

One thing that we need to notice is the body language and tone while talking to a female in official situation. Whenever male staff members talk to female colleagues, the body language is always a sort of intimidating as there is no sensitization, as what things need to be kept in mind while female staff is around. The situation is very grim and taking advantage of the situation, people working on the lower levels also try to behave in the same manner maintaining same body language towards female staff, which is nothing sort of intimidation and by doing it they prove their masculinity.

According to Cambridge Dictionary eve teasing is, "the act of annoying a woman or women in a public place, for example, by making sexual comments" (Cambridge). The definition in the dictionary aptly defines the situation on Indian streets especially in urban areas. Lonely streets are the most scariest places for females in India where one can easily find males be it boys, middle aged or old age people in a group, gossiping and who are always ready to take advantage of the situation and it's a situation which every girl has to face, on day to day basis and for a female who is alone crossing the street without witnessing any remarks or bullying is like winning a battle. Most of the times, cases of molestation take place on these lonely streets which go unreported most of the times, and it leads to increasing the confidence of the people involved and finally it takes the shape of habit.

Watching a movie is for recreation, one goes to the movie hall to relax and feel better but the story does not end here it goes on and the experience is different all together for females. There are lots of instances of sexual bullying, during the watching of a movie and it goes on to sexual molestation sometimes, if one does not resist and as soon as there is a sexual explicit scene which are in plenty in Indian movies, there will be all sorts of hooting and all sorts of obscene remarks. All this rubbish is taken as manifestation of masculinity in a patriarchal society like India and after doing such silly things one feels proud.

One would imagine that market places where there is so much hustle and bustle all the time would be very safe and nothing of this sort can happen but even these places are equally scary and prone to these things, "Making sexual jokes or comments about someone, Making sexual gestures to someone, Making comments about someone's sexual preference or sexual activity, Calling someone sexually explicit and derogatory names (WISB)." A place which is a little crowded becomes the most conducive place for sexual bullying, one can

observe people on every step standing for just time pass and staring at girls sometime for intimidating and sometimes in an obscene manner.

For a woman, a simple thing like waiting on the road for a bus is made traumatic when sick comments are made by eve teasers. While having *chaat* on the roadside a woman hears some snickering that makes her feel wretched about herself. In a bus, people accidentally bump into them, at times even the conductor attempts to act fresh; they consciously avoid getting mauled while getting out of a cinema hall. They have to definitely be on their guard all the time when in the market or a shopping mall, ever watchful of common people taking complex routes to display their lack of culture. One can observe so many men there to take advantage of the situation, who wait for an opportunity to rub their bodies with a female or to touch her.

Marriage in India or societies like India is more of a compromise than a situation where one wilfully and happily enters the nuptial bond. Marriage basically means security and nothing more if we analyse it closely, and one would imagine that a woman is safest at home but is the situation really so, is something to be enquired.

One of the articles in daily paper The Hindu talks about the sexual bullying and violence at length, and which makes it clear as how one gender is given the right over the other gender as property to be exploited, regardless of how much the other partner suffers, “You must also presume that a man is granted the legally sanctified right to access over his wife’s body, regardless of whether she finds sex unwelcome, frightening, painful, violent or simply doesn’t feel like it that day.(The Hindu)” This does not end with the husband or the partner only, but culture and legal system make it even more complicated as in India there is no law to prevent it and there is no agency to report.

All these things accumulatively become a no way out situation for the victim where there is no one to look up to and no one to depend on. “The silence around marital rape is strengthened when the Indian social and legal system refuses even to acknowledge that it exists; for an abuser, and for a rapist, these silences are frighteningly empowering.” (The Hindu).

India as a country is so very proud of one thing and that is its culture. Now the question to be answered is what is culture? According to an article on livescience.com, “Culture is the characteristics of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts (Latescence)”

So if we go by this definition then culture is an umbrella term which covers almost everything but here we will concentrate on one of these and that is social habits, especially on sexual behaviour. If one goes by the standard cultural norms in India then, the position of a female in the society or in the bedroom is like where she has no sense of to be or not to be. The same article in The Hindu reads:

This diminishes both genders, in its assumption that men are little more than lustful beasts, unable to restrain their libidos, that women are passive receptacles without desires of their own, forced to submit to demands for sex regardless of what they want. This is a medieval view of marriage and sex, and it is dismaying that Parliament appears to subscribe to it.(The Hindu)

So if women have no say in this or if there is no question of consent in any sexual contact for a married woman then there arises another pertinent question as how to differentiate a rape and this kind of sexual intercourse as in both woman is just the receiver and in one i.e. rape, the woman struggles more because of the cultural sanction and of the sense, that it is her body and no one has the right to touch her without consent, but in the other i.e. culture has sanctioned rape itself, where a lady is robbed of even the right over her body, “What is missing is the key question of consent — the consent of the woman, of any person in a sexual contract. All people — children, women, men — have a right to their own bodies.”(The Hindu).

There is a common thing for which all the living human beings strive for and that is respect, nothing makes one feel better than respect from others and nothing makes one feel worse than disrespect from others. This might not be applicable to all but to most of us. Keeping this in mind let us try to understand the nature of matrimony in India which is defined in a very explicit manner in the same article in The Hindu:

In any equal partnership, the only possible basis for sex is on the mutual understanding that consent is an active process — to be offered freely and gladly, to be withdrawn just as freely. Underlying the principle of consent is the equally strong principle of respect; respect for one’s self, as much as for one’s partner. No one should be forced to share their bodies against their will.

If we go back to history we will find this difference and evil, rooted in our scriptures starting with Manu Smriti. Fundamentally our culture states that everything that exists need to be respected and revered, as everything is created by God. It has guidelines for everything like for one's eating habits, behaviour and then goes on to say that one has no right to kill or hurt any other being, because everything that exists has equal right to live including animals and insects. In addition girls are treated as goddesses and sometimes prayers are offered to little girls as goddesses. Right now we are living in 21st century but even today if you ask any young boy about his perception about his wife in future, he would tell you that he needs less a partner and more a slave. This thinking makes the male believe that even the body of the wife is a part of his property and can be exploited in any way. "You own your own body. Everyone has the right to live without their bodies being violated. Everyone has the right to demand that you ask for permission before you touch their bodies. (The Hindu)"

Now there a need to figure out the reason for this kind of thinking and one would find that parents teach the boys right from birth that girls are only commodities to be consumed and they are without any emotions and sense of self respect, on the contrary in India if one goes to majority of houses will find the portraits or idols of goddesses either on the walls or the designated place to worship, on top of that millions of people every year visit holy shrines of goddesses to pay their respect, and there Festivals like Durga Pooja one of the biggest celebrations in India. We have festivals like Raksha Bandhan to show our respect to the woman folk.

According to Article 5 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." But on the contrary in India even the judiciary favours the in human treatment or abuse in matrimonial relationship In *Bodhisattwa Gautam v. Subhra Chakra borty* the Supreme Court said that "rape is a crime against basic human rights and a violation of the victim's" most cherished of fundamental rights, namely, the right to life enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution. But on the contrary at the same judiciary says, "The husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract, the wife hath given herself in kind unto the husband, which she cannot retract."

One must think that, what is the relevance of such things in a paper which is based on sexual bullying, so the reason is because the roots of all kinds of bullying lie in these things, this is exactly where it starts and then takes the other forms.

So now coming to the main point that is sexual bullying at home starts with the husband who has all the rights to treat his wife in any manner. In majority of marriages even today the sexual activity is not a matter of consent or choice but a matter of power i.e. the choice of husband and in majority of cases a female cannot express her pleasure in sexual activity otherwise it will be a question mark on her conduct. Taking advantage of the situation other family members also do the same and the poor girl is left alone with no alternative but to live it as her destiny. So the last hope remains with the judiciary and law makers but there too the light is too dim as all these are male dominated. One of the articles in the Daily Newspaper Times of India has quoted one judge: Legislatures are yet to take serious note of rampant marital sexual abuse which women suffer silently ... but that does not mean that a battered wife who has been sexually abused and has invoked the legal system of our country is not entitled to any state assistance just as help is available to other victims of sexual abuse. (TOI).

The problem is with law makers also, female participation in law making is too less and even if it is considerable they hardly make their presence felt. Because even the parliament is dominated by males, they hardly show any interest or the amount of sensitivity which is required. The tag line for every politician and a very easy escape is that it's a very unfortunate incident, we condemn it and this kind of things should not happen, and the matter closes then and there. One of the articles in the Daily news paper, The Hindu throws some light on it:

Perhaps in time, Parliament and the government might understand this. Justice Verma Committee and thousands of women trapped in marriages where they do not have the right to refuse sex certainly do understand. (For those who believe that marriage in India is a perfect, unsullied institution, read the statistics: over 40 per cent of women in marriages have reported domestic violence. That's reported, not experienced. In addition, we rarely discuss the experiences of men who have gone through childhood sexual abuse — currently, the percentage is slightly higher for boys than girls, but men are doubly silenced, by shame and the demands of masculinity.)

Majority of times people working for these Major political parties can be spotted as being involved in such activities, and it becomes even tougher to stop these as they have got political backing and even the police is helpless. So after all this to expect something from the political leaders is like searching water on moon.

Finally it's a menace which every one of us experiences every now and then and is something very serious which needs to be addressed. Perhaps following are the possible steps which could be taken to curb it, the families need to train their children in a manner where they have respect even for the other gender.

Students in schools or colleges need sensitization sessions to make them realize their duties as responsible students and to make them realize that it is also something essential to prove them good students plus strict punishment has to be there to deter it, for public places like markets public transport security agencies should be super sensitive and quick to respond, and have to instil faith in the woman folks so that they trust the security people as whenever they need them they will be there for the protection. Girls need to be trained to retaliate to everything so that nothing goes unnoticed and anyone and everyone are brought to the notice. etc.

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