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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FEMINIZATION OF VIOLENCE: A DOMESTIC PERSPECTIVE.

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Abstract

This paper shows the predicaments of women in our society due to our patriarchal social system. One of the major hurdles in the path of development for women and girls in our society is violence and one of the most crucial prerequisites is empowerment. Only when women are empowered can social evils and discriminations against them will diminish thereby eradicating violence from their lives. Empowerment cannot be cohesive with violence hence negating any empowered status of women if she faces violence even in the slightest form. Many women have a concept of empowerment but achieving it is not an easy task in any given society especially at grass root level and tribal societies. In tribal societies women are in some aspects more empowered than their urban or rural counterparts but many times and in many crucial issues empowerment eludes them. This era of development faces a major crux in form the mythical empowered status of women, as women cannot be empowered when so many women are facing major human rights violations in forms of Rape to Dowry. This paper tries to touch the core issues of violence against women, those issues that are hidden and are considered taboo in most societies. Issues like incest and unwed mother hood that drop a woman especially at grass root level in state of helplessness that further deteriorates her status thus intensifying the victimization of the victim.

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Introduction:-

The problem of crimes against women is not new but in this era of development and change, it may not be fashionable to talk about victimization & oppression of women as a class. This victimization of women is taken in a stride in the changing cultural identities of India where smaller states take the burden of globalization in various shades of oppression especially on women. It is almost half a century since most countries unequivocally granted to the women a place in the society equal to that of men by giving them equal rights at work, wages & vote. In spite of this women have always been an active object of gross & severe violence in the hands of men. The biological weakness of a woman makes her an easy prey particularly to physical domination. She is often a victim of physical violation not only outside her home but also in her home. Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights.¹ This type of human rights violation is felt by every female at some point or the other in her life no matter the nationality, ethnicity, class, caste or creed. Thus, empowerment of women is many

¹ Dr.Niroi Sinha. Women and Violence. Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1989.

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times only a concept that looks good on paper but practically women are too much under the shadow of patriarchy that mainly manifests in the power play between men and women. This power play is mostly visible in forms of violence against women, as violence is a major weapon to exercise control over women.

When pertinent problems like violence against women is on the rise the concept of empowerment becomes more pronounced and essential, as in order to combat violence women need to be empowered in its true sense in every aspect of their lives. When we look at violence against women in contemporary times we see a rise in domestic sphere in various forms from Domestic violence to incest and even unwed motherhood. And many times these violence that stems from domestic areas leads to bigger forms of exploitation and violence against women. When a woman is not safe within the four walls of her home how she can be safe in the world outside.

Thus, before exploring on different aspects of empowerment we must first comprehend whether women can fully enjoy the benefits that an empowered status confers on them. For this purpose certain forms of violence against women is empirically studied and presented in this paper.

Domestic Violence is a contemporary problem that is creating chaos in every society be it traditional or modern and its stronghold in Odisha is a matter of grave concern. This paper provides a rural insight into this problem as it tries to understand the prevalence of domestic violence from a rural perspective while analyzing factors such as law and order as well as any other assistance available to the victims. For this purpose Baruna Village of Kendrapada district of Odisha is studied to find out the prevalence of domestic violence in rural odisha. It was found that out of 18 respondents taken from this village 15 number of respondents face domestic violence, and that 12 number of respondents face domestic violence in the hands of their husbands. When asked regarding the reason for domestic violence within their families 06 respondents mentioned alcoholism to be the cause where as 04 respondents mentioned dowry as the reason. Supremacy of in-laws and dependent status were mentioned by 08 respondents respectively and one respondent out of the 18 respondents also gave extra marital affair as the reason behind domestic violence in her family. The plight of these women is far greater than that of urban women as there is no immediate relief for these victims in terms of legal mechanisms or shelters for destitute women. They have to face domestic violence day in and day out due to reasons like no place to go, lack of economic independence, fear of the society, lack of awareness about laws and policies and above all shame for facing violence.

Violence used as a secret weapon especially to the innocent who lacks the understanding that she is facing violence or abuse and one such violence is **Incest**. The female child is not safe even amidst her family members as cases of incest are seen in India as well as foreign countries. Even though India is a traditional country where family is sacred but India is also a patriarchal country hence power play over the weaker gender is also observed. The problem of incest has been seen in India from a very long time, but these cases are not reported as they are too shameful. This form of violence is felt within the security of one's home. The abuse of girl children is seen in incestuous relationships by close family members like uncles, brother and many times even father. As per women's organizations and activists nearly 95% of the abused are girls and more than 95% abusers are male. Surveys carried out in schools and informal charts reveal that around 40% girls experience abuse or sexual abuse in one form or the other in India. In a report by BBC a decade ago opined citing researched that close-knit family life in India marks an alarming rate of sexual abuse of children and teenage girls by family members.²

In India there is no specific law that deals with child abuse, and there is no clear definition of sexual abuse in the Indian Penal Code. Indian laws consider only "assault to outrage the modesty of women", rape by penile penetration, and "unwanted sexual intercourse" like sodomy as punishable sexual crimes.³

In the light of such cases where the female child is not safe with the four walls of her home how can women overcome violence? There are other forms of violence that is being used to suppress the female race, one such form of violence against women that has been observed in International waters as well as Indian shores is **Unwed Motherhood**. This phenomenon is particularly observed in smaller States and tribal and rural areas. The cases of unwed mothers are a facet of violence that is distressingly on the rise in the State of Odisha; one of India's smaller States and has become a challenge in contemporary times. The cases of unwed mothers are creating havoc in the traditional society of Odisha. It has been seen that Odisha had an unprecedented number of young unwed mothers between the ages of 14 to 20. Shunned by society and rejected by their families they were allegedly falling into the

² <http://groundreport.com/lifestyle/incest-India>

³ *ibid*

hands of traffickers and an estimated 300 girls are missing. Frequent natural disasters in this area have made a large number of people destitute, making them easy targets of sexual exploitation. There seems to be no legal mechanism to curb or control this problem. The staggering number of unwed mothers in Odisha is estimated to be around 10,000 between 13 – 50 years of age, 70% belonging to 11 tribal dominated districts. Nearly 53% of surveyed unwed mothers in tribal Odisha are below the age of 18. The case of unwed mothers in our state is alarmingly on the rise and these cases are usually the outcome of some disastrous circumstances a woman encounters, like at times she falls prey to a false promise to marry by a man she obviously trusts, and at times she becomes an unwed mother as a result of rape in some communal violence or religious or cast based conflict or destitute from the frequently occurring natural disasters in Odisha. This problem holds more prominence in lower socio-economic and illiterate background. Due to lack of information and poor financial conditions and lack of security for women in times of conflict, a woman is left with a child in her womb and no one to support her. As an unwed mother is treated as an outcast even her family refuses to acknowledge her and the person responsible for her situation leads a blameless life

. “Poverty” coupled with ignorance and innocence give rise to this problem of unwed mothers in rural and tribal Odisha. Another reputed short stay home “Basundhara” at Cuttack city from the time of its inception has given shelter to 1692 unmarried mothers so far.⁴ The number of unwed mothers in one short stay home of the state is staggering. The easy availability of sex stimulant drugs and blue movies in these areas is adding fuel to the fire. The problem further magnifies as these cases are rarely registered with the police officials as rural and tribal people never come forward to report such illegal cases. Disturbing cases of Incest in rural and tribal Odisha was a shocking outcome of the study during my PhD so was the exploitation of the mentally challenged as well as the exploitation of the women daily wagers who are exploited many times by thekedars, male workers even security personals at plants and industrial areas.

The above facts compel further investigation into the rise of various forms of violence against women. The above discussed forms and manifestations of violence provide a bird’s eye view of the magnum’s problem faced by women in any given social order. Tremendous efforts need to be initiated at International, National and Regional levels to ensure the safety of women and also providing the much needed support both legally and within the society for the welfare of the destitute women. As these victims can be empowered if they are reinstated with dignity within the society and for that the society needs to be accepting towards these victims and not treat them like sinners or criminals. The lacunas in policy prescription and documented reports have to be examined extensively as well. Thus, the above data compels us as members of a society, state, community to rescue these women who are in the clutch of this terrible problem and help sensitize the society towards them. And above all come up with solutions and remedies so that these problems don’t take a strong hold of our future and become a major threat in contemporary times thereby negating any hope of absolute empowerment to women.

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⁴ Sailu Behera, “cases of unwed mothers-A study of Basundhara”, paper presented in a seminar held on 23.3.2006.