



Violation of Human Rights behind Closed Doors

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is one of the most important issues of gender discrimination. Being a bitter truth in the present society, one of the major causes of domestic violence is the orthodox mentality of the patriarchal society. The patriarchal societies, as is the case of India, generally treat women as inferior to men. Men are given more power in a household and women are expected to blindly follow their husband or father's decisions and commands. Behind Closed Doors is a book edited by Rinki Bhattacharya and focuses on the issue of domestic violence in India. India is a patriarchal society and women of this country have been assigned a secondary status since ancient times. They face various forms of discrimination, abuse and injustice throughout their lives. Domestic violence is one of them. Domestic violence has become so common now-a-days that its cases can be seen in each and every strata of our society. People in a patriarchal setup consider women as physically, emotionally, economically, mentally and socially weaker than men. And this mentality of the society gives the men opportunity to abuse and ill-treat the women. Through this book Rinki is trying to put up a fight against the in human crime of domestic violence and create awareness among women regarding their rights as humans.

Key words: Domestic Violence, women, Human rights, Violation, Patriarchy, Closed doors

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality has been a burning topic since a long time. With the ever increasing rate of crimes against women gender equality has always been in the debates. Everyday news contains cases of eve teasing, rapes, dowry cases, cases of domestic violence, sexual harassment at work place among others. Domestic violence is one of the most important issues of gender discrimination.

Being a bitter truth in the present society, one of the major causes of domestic violence is the orthodox mentality of the patriarchal society. The patriarchal societies, as is the case of India, generally treat women as inferior to men. Men are given more power in a household and women are expected to blindly follow their husband or father's decisions and commands.

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Though the people of our country celebrate Navratri for nine days worshipping Goddess Durga – the female form of Shakti, many of them ill-treat the women of their family, mostly their wives. Marriage is considered a very sacred institution in our society and from the very beginning women are taught to consider their husbands as Gods. They are expected to follow the stereotypical norms like stay within the four walls of their houses, obey their husbands, fulfil all their demands, serve them faithfully and give them pleasure. Dowry system is also a cause for women's plight of domestic violence. Society generally forces a woman to maintain the marriage and the responsibility of broken marriages are generally heaped upon the women. These are some of the reasons that force a woman to suffer silently in a marriage. Rebecca J. Burns states, "When I am asked why a woman doesn't leave abuser I say: Women stay because the fear of leaving is greater than the fear of staying. They will leave when the fear of staying is greater than the fear of leaving." Gender-based violence was earlier considered a private thing and was not brought under the scanning lens of judiciary and law. But today it is considered a violation of the human rights of women. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines "violence against women" as "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 life" (Violence against Women).

"To be assaulted, abused and raped by someone as intimate as a husband, or lover, is the most degrading experience for a woman. Not recognised as 'real' violence, abuse of this nature is experienced daily by countless women in every culture. Behind closed doors of family, custom, values, traditions that are taken for granted and never questioned -are muffled voices of terror and trauma, which do not reach beyond the threshold nor attract the attention of lawmakers or redress agents"-says the synopsis (given at the back cover of the

book) of the book *Behind Closed Doors*. This book is edited by Rinki Bhattacharya and focuses on the issue of domestic violence in India. India is a patriarchal society and women of this country have been assigned a secondary status since ancient times. They face various forms of discrimination, abuse and injustice throughout their lives. Domestic violence is one of them. Domestic violence has become so common now-a-days that its cases can be seen in each and every strata of our society. People in a patriarchal setup consider women as physically, emotionally, economically, mentally and socially weaker than men. And this mentality of the society gives the men opportunity to abuse and ill-treat the women. "According to a latest report prepared by India's National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a crime has been recorded against women in every three minutes in India. Every 60 minutes, two women are raped in this country. Every six hours, a young married woman is found beaten to death, burnt or driven to suicide"². It clearly shows the frequency of abuse against women and the most convenient form of abuse is the domestic violence. This form of violence is generally not given much attention as whatever happens to a woman remains within the four walls and closed doors of her house and hence remains neglected.

Rinki Bhattacharya has herself been a victim of this heinous crime called domestic violence. And now she is trying to open the doors to expose this crime and lift the veil of injustice face by women all over India since a long time. A newspaper article wrote: "After more than 20 years of listening to women share their experiences of domestic violence, after collecting many 'powerful moving stories' from victims who needed to share and find belief, and after making her own way out of an abusive relationship, Rinki Bhattacharya decided that a book needed to be written to break the myths about the 'silent crime' of domestic violence"³. And the result is the book *Behind Closed Doors*. The book contains some effective articles written by eminent writers and a collection of narratives of women who

had been victims of this crime but with time started a battle against it, some won the battle while some lost. Won or lost, what really matters is the fight that they fought as it shows how strong and courageous they have become facing these difficult situations.

In the Introduction to the book, Rinki writes, “these life stories, on one hand, are about loss and betrayal. On the other, they are sagas of immense courage that challenge accepted cultural ideals of womanhood and question conforming to female destiny. Each tragic testimonial reveals both overt and covert violence against women”¹. She feels that assigning a lower status to women is the reason behind gender crimes. She goes on to list various reasons of increasing crimes against women like “yearning for male children” and how girls are considered “unwanted or treated as burdens by their parents” due to dowry system¹. She describes about various myths and stereotypes that women are expected to conform to. She describes how women deny the presence of ill-treatment by their husbands and try to adjust and fit in even after tolerating various tortures due to the pressures of family and society. A woman who walks out from her marriage is blamed by the society and she faces resistance against her decision not just from the society but also from her own family most of the times.

The first chapter of this book starts by throwing light on the hypocritical nature of Indian society where on one hand women are worshipped in the form of Goddesses and on the other hand women in the family are tortured and abused. The writer clearly writes, “Although a strong Goddess principle persists in the Hindu religious tradition, women at the ground level share no such glorified status”¹. The second chapter analyses how family functions as the main site of violence. It elaborates on the familial violence and how the main victims of this issue are children, women and old people and when probed further into the matter, it becomes clear that women are the most discriminated group as they suffer it since childhood in their parental

home, then in young age in their husband’s home and also during old age. “To this extent, all violence within the family is gendered”¹.

The third chapter begins with the narrative of Akash Kaur, who said in her interview that violence was deeply rooted in her own family which led to her own oppression in her life. Her father used to beat her mother mercilessly. She, being the eleventh child of the family, was neglected to such an extent that she did not even have her formal education properly. However she was excellent in painting. After her marriage her husband exploited her and made her life a living hell. Finally she tried to have an independent existence. She bought a flat from her savings and lived independently. Next is the narrative about Aruna. Aruna was just sixteen when she was married off to a man who was much older to her. And suddenly that child was forced to conform to the rules of that wealthy household to fit in as their ‘bahu’. Her husband was very violent. He slapped her, humiliated her and even left burn marks on her body using cigarette. Even her children were products of his violence as he raped her every night. She even tried to suicide but that also went in vain. Finally she left him and went to US and completed her studies there. After a lot of struggle she took her children to US to live an independent and dignified life. Similar was the fate of Bina who struggled to free herself from her violent husband Ravi and fought to get the custody of her daughters from Ravi and his family.

Next is the story of Deepa who fell in love with a batch mate Krishna and eloped with him at the age of 22. After some years she gave birth to a baby boy and was very happy. But her myths of happy marriage shattered when she came to know about the numerous affairs her husband had even after marriage. Many times during arguments he used to hit her to prove his male supremacy. She used to think earlier that a relationship with love, compatibility and progressive outlook guarantees equality between a man and a woman but her experiences made her think that “no matter how progressive,

sympathetic or ideologically motivated men were, they never grant women full equality. This is true even today”¹. She became a founder member of a small local women’s group to help women who were facing similar fate and to caution other women about such crimes. Next is Hansa who fell in love with Ketan but later came to know that he was a married man and had kids. But she was so much emotionally involved with him that she agreed to convert to Islam to marry him without a divorce. When she was pregnant, he forced her for abortion not once but twice. One day her friend told her that Ketan was cheating on her. She also found out that she was pregnant for the third time but this time she wanted the baby so she decided not to tell Ketan about the child. But when she was five months pregnant, Ketan found out and he became violent. He pushed her, sat on her stomach and hit her with hangers. Her condition was critical and the foetus was destroyed. Her family took her to her home and they stood with her as a support. She asked Ketan to give her ‘talaq’ and leave the flat they were leaving in. Ketan agreed. She lived independently and happily without sacrificing her freedom further for any man.

Jamuna married Gopal in a arranged marriage setup and moved with him to Bahrain. Soon she found out that Gopal used all the money in gambling and his father asked Jamuna to look for a job. When Jamuna started earning, Gopal forced her to give him money for gambling and when she denied, he assaulted her physically. His father also tried to show sexual advances towards her which left her in state of shock. She had saved some money for her delivery but Gopal used that too for gambling the day she was admitted to hospital. When she lost her work permit, she returned to her parent’s home with her son. She said them of her sufferings and her brother supported her but her father was very cautious about his reputation and she had to return back to Gopal. The tortures continued until she got

a job in Bombay and she left with her son. When Gopal traced her in Bombay, owing to social and her father’s pressure, she gave her marriage one more chance. But the torture increased day by day. It left deep impact on the mind of both her sons. One day when her elder son took a hockey stick to kill his father, she decided to file for a divorce. With a great difficulty she got back her freedom and lived with her two sons and she felt getting a divorce was the best thing that happened to them.

Through these narratives Rinki Bhattacharya wants to spread awareness about the rights of woman and invoke courage among women suffering from this crime silently due to fear of society or other reasons. She is trying to reach them through this book and inspire them to come out of these closed doors and expose the monsters in the garb of husbands, fathers or sons who are torturing the women of their family. To stop this violation of human rights of women, changes needs to be done at all levels and most importantly, women need to gather courage to oppose such heinous acts and support each other to stop such crimes. If reduced, this can be seen as a major step in empowering women in the true sense.

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