



Transgressing the Boundary: The Experience of a Woman



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Abstract

The phenomenon called ‘woman’ is contentious. The Promethean entity, invites tremendous amount of debate and controversial discourse. Every aspect of this vivifying existence is shrouded in contest and confrontation. Her ‘being’ is political, her body is a contested arena, and her survival is a never ending pugnacity. Her ‘being’ is the site etched with culturally and socially determined practices and norms. Individuals are moulded and etched by social institution and culture that override biological edifice. From the very ‘womb’ and thereafter infancy, boys and girls are treated differently and are indoctrinated into the belief system of gender specified role being subsumed by perceptions, beliefs and values that structures and manufactures the adult men and women with their specified gender baggage. Women as ‘the other’ represents

the subordinate being that must be investigated and dissected until her secrets are laid bare open and divulged. Women are still decorated with ornamented surface that entails enormous amount of discipline, implantation, inoculation, grooming under the ever assertive surveillance of patriarchal culture and male gaze. Patriarchy and consequent commoditization are responsible for constructing a social system that ascribes a particular sexual status, role and temperament for each gender resulting in sex/gender hierarchy. The primary motive of the paper is to unravel the analogous cogitation of ‘body’, ‘myth’ and ‘social construction’ related to women. The gender premise cannot be analyzed through the monolithic prognosis. It involves diverse heterogeneity with multiple shades of complex deliberation.

Keywords: patriarchy, authority, power, violence, gender

Introduction

The phenomenon called ‘woman’ is contentious. The Promethean entity, invites tremendous amount of debate and controversial discourse. Every aspect of this vivifying existence is shrouded in contest and confrontation. Her ‘being’ is political, her body is a contested arena, and her survival is a never ending pugnacity. Her ‘being’ is the site etched with culturally and socially determined practices and norms. Individuals are moulded and etched by social institution and culture that override biological edifice. From the very ‘womb’ and thereafter infancy, boys and girls are treated differently and are indoctrinated into the belief system of gender specified role being subsumed by perceptions,

beliefs and values that structures and manufactures the adult men and women with their specified gender baggage. ‘Man’ is the ‘general’; ‘woman’ is the ‘particular’. ‘Man’ is the norm (normal); woman is the ‘perversion’ (deviation). Man is the universal, woman is the local. Precedence reflected that the category woman has been perceived and judged, measured as something of ‘victims of pathological physiology’ or as ‘misgotten male’, or as the ‘other half of the necessary evils of reproduction. ‘Man’ has been the ‘regular’ term that has been used since the evolution of human existence to connote both genders. Man as the ‘creator’ formulated disciplinary modes of thinking, innovated ideologies and ethical and moral doctrine whereby he was able to establish his undaunted authority not only over woman but also over those on whom controlled manipulation can be authenticated and maneuvered for example the ‘shudra’ category. Thus, those ‘constructions’, permutations and modus operandi- all are involved to activate one system of rule- the rule of the patriarch. ‘Woman’ is the derivation of ‘man’, ‘female’ is the derivation of ‘male’. Compartmentalization between ‘mind’ and ‘body’, segregation between the ‘intellectual’ and the ‘crude’ leads to loss of ‘personhood’, loss of control and autonomy over their bodies and of course, eradication of bodily integrity (Mathur 2008). The cultural insistence on a female-male dichotomy reduces the female body in relation to the male that automatically leads to more rigorous policing of women’s (docile) bodies and specific apparatuses of control.

Women as ‘the other’ represents the subordinate being that must be investigated and dissected until her secrets are laid bare open and divulged. Women are still decorated with ornamented

surface that entails enormous amount of discipline, implantation, inoculation, grooming under the ever assertive surveillance of patriarchal culture and male gaze. Patriarchy and consequent commoditization is responsible for constructing a social system that ascribes a particular sexual status, role and temperament for each gender resulting in sex/gender hierarchy.

My discussion here would proceed with a simple question that interrogates the mindset, perspective and the universal parameters that surrounds a ‘woman-human being’. And the question is “Where was I last night?” This simple yet significant question will try to unravel the complex heterogeneity women face in India in particular and all over the world in general.

II “Where was I last night?”

Wish, I was playing in the lap of my father; wish I was being tenderly fed by my mother; wish I was sleeping peacefully inside the protective shelter and warmth of my soul mate’s bosom. Wish! But last night, I was a “body” that was being dragged and raped. No. I was ripped open, diagnosed, operated on, anaesthetized and thrown in a pungent, stagnant, rotten canal¹. At the wee hours of this dreadful night, I laid in a pool of blood, with festering wounds, decaying organs gradually transforming into a carcass. I was stinking, outpouring decomposing smell, being worm eaten. Do not vomit please. This is me. After some hours, I will be just a “case” of “rape”, “torture” and “murder”. I will be an example of sympathy, empathy

¹ A minor girl, a pavement dweller, was kidnapped by the Ola driver when she was asleep. She was gang raped and murdered and dumped in a canal.

and discursive debates. I will be a topic of discussion by intellectuals and activists. If I am really a ‘subject’ to be ‘politically appropriated’, then few candles will definitely be sold at a good price and alighted. But, where am I? I am a dead body now, without a soul, without a purpose, without an identity. Did anybody hear my scream? Did anybody know I wanted to live? Did anybody realize I wanted to live my life to the fullest outside the imprisonment of fear?

The Gargantuan theories, conceptions, ideas-feminism, gender studies, queer theories- all are engaged to analyze, dissent and understand the intricacies of issues and perspectives surrounding women. Norms, customs, mores, practices, tradition, culture, preferences- revolve round the entity called ‘Woman’. She is the bearer, who immunizes the society. She is the carrier of “honour” of the community. She is the “medium” through which traditional mores of the family are kept sacrosanct. My paper throughout will revolve round the issues of women addressing the situational realities and how they confront orthodox and traditional predicament of daily life-experience.

III A Theoretical Understanding

No doubt, Indian tradition respects woman but which woman - woman who remains within the four walls of the house and is obviously a mother of a son. Not that woman, who works late night, comes home at dawn. A woman who is out at night, partying with friends deserves to be shown her “actual” place. The bodily integrity of a sex worker, a laborer, a mod hip-hop teenager, can easily be demolished as they are all outside the ‘sati-savitri’ paradigm. Thus, “rape myth knowledge” clearly states that women

who walk alone at night in deserted places are engaging in risky behavior (See Doherty and Anderson, 1998). Blame is, therefore, very cautiously transferred from the perpetrator to the victim for having placed her in a position of vulnerability. Walby et al (1983) have coined the term ‘spatial provocation’ to refer to the idea that the victim, in fact, provoked her own attack.

Gender-based violence like rape and domestic assault is no more ‘private’, but open in the public sphere. If the ultimate aim of well-being is to be ‘free’, to choose one’s values, the polity can never deny women freedom and thereby her development (Krishnaraj, 2008).

Women also consciously and unconsciously discipline themselves to be the bearers of tradition, harmony and social honour. She is the career of a society’s prestige and aura. Thus, any denigration to her body, self and soul in actuality denigrates not just the women but also the society, community and religion to which she belongs. The archetype “good woman” is one who upholds the honour of the family, maintains the “culture of silence”, is obedient and sacrificing. Woman’s modesty signifies the masculinity of her community. She becomes “the symbol of violence as the shame and subjection of her community is represented in her” (Mathur, 2008). Thus, culture of rape and assault on women is very much political as it not only denies the right to life (dignity and honour) but also at the same time attempts to subvert the entire edifice of communitarian sagacity which is based on social values, culture and religion. Thus, *violation of the microcosmic female body actually violates the macrocosmic ethical and moral realm of sustenance*. Any denigration to her body, self and soul in practical perception

denigrates not just the woman but also the society, community and of course for all practical purposes her religion. Thus, when Bilkis Banu along with her sister and other women of her community is assaulted it is not just the person who is violated of her dignity but her whole community is at stake. The female body turns out to be the edifice on which gender inequality is built, legitimized and intensified. Karen Gabriel, who teaches English in Delhi University, says: “The representation of women as only mothers and daughters or Goddesses by the religious Right is often an important weapon to control women (Mahaprashasta, 2013). Patriarchy, in actual practice, is an endemic historical and cultural practice that indoctrinates the individual mindset to such an extent that assumes the male as the norm and female as the other. This uncontested arena of male dominance is the foundation for innumerable other patriarchal ideologies like “gender roles differentiation” is god-given. This process of legitimizing the preference for the male child and constructing power-mechanism based on this patriarchal ideological dominance upholds male hegemony and the male rights over those of female. As Dagar says

The organization of society through the ‘patri-descent’ lineage provides the uncontested domination to male positioning. The practice of male dominance in traditional public authority structures [like the panchayats in Punjab] is deployed through the attributes of power, patronage and delivery in leadership dynamics and channeled through informal masculine network (Dagar 2014, p.144)

Biological determinism or essentialism perceived men as able to think logically, abstractly and analytically, but women were however, seen as emotional, compassionate and nurturing being. This essentialist mode of thinking prescribed women's private and public lives. In private, the essentialist ideas recommended certain rules of conduct for the woman as wife, mother and daughter. In public, women's participation was strictly restricted and sometimes prohibited and controlled by a masculine representative of authority such as husband, father, law or clergy. Thus, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), in *Emile* claimed women were sentimental and frivolous and that in marriage, they could occupy only a subordinate position as companions to their husbands. In response to Rousseau's work, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) wrote her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). She outrightly challenged the prescribed gender roles and advocated women's education and argued for the right to participate in public life. She maintained that an ideal marriage is one of intellectual companionship and equality- she challenged the contemporary social beliefs by declaring that:

“That divine right of husbands, like the divine rights of kings, may, it is hoped, in this enlightened age, be contested without danger (Janainati & Groves, 2013)”

IV

In a patriarchal set-up, with culturally assigned subordinate status and in a relationship dominated by men, even if women were to perform what men perceive as a “masculine function”, it is bound to be resisted. Feminists strongly, identified an unwavering pattern of male domination in family across societies. If power-relation is

the basic ingredient of politics then domestic or the private is also very much political. Wherever there is authoritative permutation and combination of power subjugation, subversion and dominance, there inevitably exists power and therefore, the sphere is very much political. Thus, ‘political’ is present in the State, parliament, civil society and also in the kitchen, at bed and even at the site called ‘female body’. However, when matters that pertain to the private are brought openly into the public sphere, the general reaction is “familial issues could be solved at home” or “why wash dirty linen in public?” but most horrific reality is that private becomes the main centre-stage of power-play. The “domestic” becomes the arena where extreme power-equation is sorted out through the best ever instrument called violence that may range from physical to mental, psychological to reproductive. Domestic violence is a disease where one individual exercises power over another. The necessity to dominate and to hit and beat the other into submission arises out of the concerned individual’s personal history and experiences. As Brownmiller noted, “man’s discovery that his genitalia would serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries in prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude axe.” Power enforcement and violent enactments over feminine existence is not confined to certain class/sections of people. It may range from high-level bank executives, professors, lawyers, judges to low ranking people as well who are not aware of law or its pros and cons. But the first category of persons, that I mentioned here are fully aware of human rights and the democratic process. They are part of the ruling elite and are highly educated. Like incest and child abuse, conjugal violence and marital rape are subjects that have

remained a taboo and despite government, women movements and strict legislative procedure and provisions against offenders, justice and right remain at a bay. In a report published in the March 2004 issue of *Frontline*, a bloodcurdling issue came to the forefront. In Spain, some 100 women were killed each year by abusive spouses or boyfriends and there are over 30,000 complaints of physical violence. In France, six women die each month at the hands of men who profess to love them. In Switzerland, one of the wealthiest countries in Europe, where “direct democracy” rules primarily, the number of women who suffer physical and psychological abuse tops 20%.

According to feminists, women have been subjected essentially through the medium of their ‘bodies’. Moreover, ideologies centering gender and sexist reasoning emanate from perceived biological differences between the sexes substantiated by dualistic paradigms that have dominated political thought from the philosopher of Greece to the Enlightenment and which are still continuing. Judith Butler (1956), one of the most important contemporary theorists of deconstructive feminism questions the established notion of “femaleness” which is taken for granted in society. The body, according to Foucault ever remains a foci for power and female body or the ‘women’ has been consciously condemned to be inferior and thus need to be contained, controlled and to a great extent subjugated through the use of special disciplinary techniques legitimized by political, social and economic forces. The cultural insistence on a male/female dichotomy reduces the female body in relation to the male to a more rigorous policing of women’s (docile) bodies and specific apparatuses of control.

Violence, against women is extremely constructional. Violence gets naturalized and normalized particularly in those cases where the economic and social status of women is pathetically fragile. More strikingly, violence changes its nature and aperture. Apart from physical violence there is 'structural' form of violence that could range from economic, social and cultural process. Undoubtedly, economic compulsion is the primary reason why women endure inhuman torture. Domestic and marital violence, intimate partner abuse is made more possible particularly when women possess limited options to come out of abusive relationship. Absences of economic security often compel them to remain in a debauched marriage.

Among women, there is no doubt, a tendency to keep marriage intact, keep it going at any cost due to certain traditional sanctions, cultural preferences, dogmatic impositions, social 'license' and most importantly economic compulsion. Women tolerate violence. They are accustomed to it. Cultural prejudice in fact, sanctions violence and social customs ratifies indefatigability, in reality to perpetuate violence.

In Indian society, as elsewhere, it is presumed that home is the safest place for a woman. But home perhaps becomes the living hell for many women. Sometimes assaulted by own biological father and then raped by step-father, incest or marital abuse by husband- home is where violence begins. Even in the modernist discourse, the family is never perceived without a man as its head. The continuance between family and rape must be analyzed. Family and rape are both actually fantasies of control, of doing whatever it takes to keep woman in their appropriate place. It is at the 'safe

home' that women are raped even during pregnancy and childbirth. Apart from violent sex, a woman endures physical violence that fractures skull, breaks her limbs, damages her kidneys, paralyses her and brings her to the brink of suicide.

Patriarchal demands of purity of women's chastity and virginity formulations denote a significant dominating syndrome. Patriarchy actually compels men to attain honour by ensuring chastity and purity of their women. Virginity and chastity are that kind of virtues that are steadfastly implanted through the socialization process in the upbringing of the girls. Founded on the premise of 'virginity' of the bride, girls are married off at the very young age, sometimes beginning at five years. These girls at the age of playing with games, themselves become objects on which amorous games are played out. These girls become traumatized by physical assault on their bodies. The imminence of bravery or "macho" behaviour in men is inculcated through the socialization process and this is accepted as the right to impose violence. Societies and culture render importance to 'masculine' attribute more than 'feminine' and also guarantees that women who do not put themselves into the prescriptive normative mould are to be disciplined to appropriate behaviour by whatever means available. The penetration of the iron rod and the pulling out of the intestine was a "punishment" for the transgression and a means to show the victim her 'real' place in the social order (Kazi, 2013). The brutality and the violence portray the deep-rooted hatred towards women, particularly those women who dare to cross boundaries. They are seen as "free for all" and everyone puts on themselves the responsibility of the custody of women's morality and that they have a right to "teach them a

lesson". Violence is therefore, justified on ground of bringing order of the things to its 'appropriate place.'

Violence

According to Oxford Concise Dictionary of politics, violence is endemic to political life. Violence refers to an act of force exerted to impart physical harm or injury on another person. However, there exists paucity in its definitional scope and underpinning. The definition, pathetically ignores animals and also other inanimate objects. It utterly overlooks the fact that violence also includes not only direct physical abuse but also psychological impairment as well. Thus, the holistic definition of 'violence' is the direct or indirect destruction or damage of property or potential property. However, violence becomes 'political violence' when it involves the actual or the potential violation of someone's basic rights. Acts of political violence are illegitimate when the rights of the victim are unjustly violated. For instance, sexual violence or domestic violence is the violation of a basic right to non-interference, or a right to self-ownership, which is why sexual or domestic violence are political issues (Mclean & McMillan, 2009).

Crime based on gender paradigm, notably sexual violence in Indian scenario has appropriated both national and international attention. The 2011 data of the National Crime Records Bureau has presented a grave concernment on the security issues of women both in the 'private' sphere as well as in the public space. National Crime Records Bureau's report of 2011 reflects that the rate of total crime in 2011 marked a decrease of 7.4 per cent but crimes against women increased by 7.1 per cent over 2010. There are overt and

covert forms of violence against women. For instance, rape and dowry deaths are visible crimes while female foeticide, infanticide, killing by denial of food, slow poisoning, female-genital mutilation, child marriage, honour killing are covert forms of violence. But with time, these hidden forms of violence also come to the visible arena of investigation. Gender-based violence like these restricts women from living a life of dignity without any fear, violates their fundamental human rights and restrains them from attaining their full potential. Amartya Sen (1985) thus stresses protection from violence or crime as one of the capabilities that enhance quality of life.

Violence against women is an incorrigible malady that women have been experiencing since ancient times. However, it is only in the recent past that violence against women has been internationally recognized as a major violation of women's human rights. The United Nations General Assembly, in its 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women observed that violence against women is basically and most pertinently a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women. Feminists have argued that inequality between men and women on the basis of their gender leads to such gendered atrocities (Bograd, 1988; Yodanis, 2004; Ellsberg, 2006).

It was in 1993 itself that the United Nations defined 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 a woman like threatening with coercive measures, denial of basic liberty in both private and public life. In fact, gender-based violence is a broader category than violence against women and

transgender. Though, in this paper, my focus would revolve round the issues of women and infringement of basic rights to them. Gender inequality and gender-based violence against women has a complex relationship. Atrocities, whether physical, sexual or psychological are violence which are not only an expression of gender inequality but also helps sustain an authoritative power imbalance domain. It portrays a vicious loop where women do not even challenge the power imbalance (out of fear) and this unequal status increases their vulnerability to violence which in turn fuels the violence perpetrated against them (Sharma, 2015, pp.48-49).

The health of women in India is inexplicably bound up to their socially and culturally assigned inferior status. They are 'modestly' expected to eat less, leave the best food for the men folk of the family and ignoring their own illness but judiciously and religiously managing the entire household. This very often results in high rate of morbidity and mortality of women. The mechanism of food distribution within the household reflects the gender biases of society. Discrimination, violence and violation of fundamental rights of women/girls begin before birth and continue till death. Crimes against women have witnessed a phenomenal rise in the past two decades. In the publication titled *Women and Men in India*, brought out by Central Statistics Office, National Statistical Organization, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, it is observed that there has been a continuous rise in the overall incidence of crimes committed against women. It has been observed that 'Cruelty by husband and relatives' continues to have the highest share (38%) followed by 'assault on women with intent

to outrage her modesty' (23%). There has been a phenomenal increase (157%) in reporting of 'Indecent Representation of Women' Cases in 2013 over 2012. Five percent of the total cognizable crime falls under the category of crime against women in 2013 against 4% of 2012.

According to feminists, women have been subjected essentially through the medium of their 'bodies'. Moreover, ideologies centering gender and sexist reasoning emanate from perceived biological differences between the sexes substantiated by dualistic paradigms that have dominated political thought from the philosopher of Greece to the Enlightenment and which are still continuing.

The Myth

In India, sexual violence has had its origin in the formulation of this subjugation-domination syndrome. And this authoritative deliberation led to manufacturing of myths and legends about virginity-chastity. Chastity in women was mystified as having Godly attributes. Thus, in Indian context, *Sita*, *Nalayani*, *Savitri*, *Damayanti* are women of virtues whereas *Draupadi*-the revolting princess became an apparition against male subjugation, remained a deviated category- a woman with five husbands. Chastity and virginity in women remained unassailable attribute of women and any deviation from this invites tremendous amount of punitive measures against her. There, violence and assault became the naturalized and normalized mode of action against women which is sanctioned, supported and ratified by custom, tradition and 'morality'.

The myth of *pativrata*, loyal, submissive women remains

a recurrent ideology that characterizes women of India. The myth of *pativrata* continues to enduringly govern Indian womanhood (Chakravarti, 1985, pp. 48-49). It authenticates the “popular sexist attitude that ‘good women’ stay at home. Manu, the law giver maintains that wives have to be controlled through domestic regimentation, rather than violence (Doniger & Smith, 1991). Manu categorized women as one of the things of possession. Yajnavalkya, another lawgiver advised never to entrust three things to the control of others that is riches, books and women, for they are spoiled and defiled by them. In the *Atharva Veda*, the husband claims that his wife has been given to him by God to ‘serve’ him and to secure progeny. He further calls her as his *poshya*, or dependent. The *Upanishads* consider women to have been born for appeasing man’s instinct of pleasure. It is mythologized that man, being alone in the beginning of the universe, did not find any joy in his life and ached for a companion. He got one in the shape of his wife, who satiated all his desires and secured for him all pleasures. In *Manusmriti*, it is stated that through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however carefully they may be guarded in this world.

When creating them, Manu allotted to women (a love of their) bed, (of their) seat and (of) ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice, and bad conduct (Raju, 2016). Pintchman (1993) highlights the tenebrous mythological nuance of chastity (or purity) and pollution to Hindu goddesses who personify the theory of *sakti* and *prakriti* – the prerequisite for reproduction (creation). *Sakti* denotes the power that makes creation possible and also

pervades it whereas *prakriti* is creation itself; and both can have useful and devastating denouement depending upon whether they can be constrained and domesticated. This ambiguity is reflected in the empowerment of *pativrata* who is regulated, in contrast to the disempowered loose woman. Female figures reflect the space between nature and the culture occupied by women. They are disorderly in expressing nature at work and simultaneously orderly in their cultural capacity as units who reproduce social order. Hence, women are also referred to as fertile field (*Khsetra*). The woman as matter has to be ordered so that she does not pollute; this is only possible when her husband own her, any other relation is tantamount to her as pollution (Mahadevan, 2008).

V

Furthermore, issues related to reproductive health of girls/women in the pre-puberty stage or related to menstruation are rarely discussed. Issues of menopause, the void preceding menopause, the psychological vacuity after experiencing it are largely ignored. Physical health and mental health are inextricably linked to each other. Anxiety, stress and depression affect women's reproductive cycle (Chatterjee & Walia, 1998). There occurs serious conditions when the patient becomes a 'psychosomatic'. These issues are pathetically ignored in the policy discourse and health programs. Societal norms induced in women the habit of ignoring the chronic problems like mental stress, reproductive problems, weakness, aches and pains. As the female body is a restricted domain, women are debarred from discussing their health related problems within the family. In fact, women are also unaware about their own body

and anatomy. They possess limited knowledge on antenatal care, contraception, immunization, nutrition during pregnancy. The health centers are also insensitive to the poor women's needs and requirements. The issue of women's health in almost all the health policies undertaken by the Government centers round the issue of women as the career of children. Population policy focuses on fertility control of women and utterly ignores other health related problems of women. Policies and programs should focus on the health and nutrition of women independent of other variables. Women should be taken care of just because she is a human being and not simply the career of future generation. Once this humanistic perspective is undertaken, automatically it will ensure a healthy and stable nation. A unitary dimension of considering women as an instrument of procreation sidelines all other multidimensional aspects related to the development of a healthy human being.

But the trajectory of the life cycle of girl/women follows the path that inhibits her development. The moment a girl child is born, calculations associated with marriage expenses start in right earnest. There is hardly any doubt that dowry has been the driving factor behind many heinous crimes against women and the girl child. Indian marriages have become economic transactions between families. There are in fact, certain communities, where there prevails "open auction". There exists fixed "rates" for prospective grooms depending on the area, family and profession.

The dowry system in India is one of the prime reasons for female infanticide. India discredits herself of being the country with the highest number of dowry related deaths in the world according to the Indian National Crime Records Bureau. In 2012, 8,233 dowry

deaths were reported across India i.e. a bride was burned every 90 minutes. According to a 1996 report by Indian police, every year, it receives over 2,500 reports of bride burning. The Indian National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reports that there were about 8,331 dowry death cases registered in India in 2011. Incidents of dowry deaths during the year 2008 (8,172) have increased by 14.4 per cent over 1998 level (7,146). This is nothing short of *gendercide* that refers to the systematic killing of members of a specific sex. The term coined by Mary Anne Warren in 1985, is an analogy that referred to “the deliberate extermination of persons of a particular sex (or gender)”. In 1995, Time Magazine reported that dowry deaths in India increased from around 400 a year in the early 1980s to around 5800 a year by the middle of the 1990s.

In the system called ‘patriarchy’, definition, rules and policies are male-oriented and male-acclimatized. The proponents of women’s rights are proceeding towards understanding the system and engaging in the relentless effort toward participation and opportunity in all spheres of life, particularly those structures and institutions that mould and set the agenda of women’s lives. Ramya Subramanian states that these institutions range from the family to community, market and the state. The way each of these intervenes to construct and uphold socio-economic and political inequalities between women and men needs to be understood and strategies need to be evolved based on the possibilities for transforming these institutions to make them more equitable and just (Sridharan, 2004). The fear psychosis, the psychological trauma, the convulsive petrified existence in nowhere ensures the absence of violence for women. The explicit indicators of the condition of women can be indicated

through statistics and mathematical syllogistic inference in terms of sex ratio, child infanticide, literacy rates, wage differentials, ownership of land and property.

By the end of the twentieth century, the issues regarding women became diverse, multicultural and postmodern, interrogating and challenging every sort of generalization. It challenged and questioned many foundational assumptions and formulations of mainstream established theories and practice. The discourse on women needs a continuous reformation. What were 'right', 'normal' and 'absolute' is no more desired and applicable. A continuous re-questioning and re-positioning is sought for as far as a woman is concerned.

The Dream

The question I started with provides scope for unlimited imagination and hypothetical characterization of a woman-character. The girl I referred to was a pavement dweller who was sleeping in the open under the sky. She could have been Nirbhaya, who along with her friend boarded a bus after a sweet reminiscent moment not knowing some hungry, lustful and vile men are awaiting to 'torment and feed' her like a beast. She could have been you or me. But the moment I utter 'where is a woman last night' the first and foremost presupposition that comes to our mind is questioning her character. She might have been somewhere where norms restrict a woman to go, where culture prohibits her foot to cross, where the invisible surveillance is proscribing her autonomy. Where I go, what I do is my choice. My intellect, my conscience, my prerogatives will direct me. But will it ever be possible? Will it be possible for women to ever

walk freely, without obnoxious patriarchal gaze and societal dictums? Will it be possible to live a life outside the invisible circumambience of fear? I want to write an article titled “where I was last night?” where I wish to write “last night I was standing alone beside the beautiful Ganges, looking at her beauty, breathing the fresh air and my arms were wide open ready to embrace the air of freedom.”

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