

The Invisible Violence: A Critical Analysis of Male Subjugation in Assam

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Abstract

Gender violence is often synonymous with women's violence. The hegemonic ideology of patriarchal society expects a man to be powerful, influential, and dominating. However, one cannot ignore the instances of violence against men. Instead of focusing on only violence and subjugation against women, importance should also be given on the men and their subjugation in the society. This is impertinent and invisible in society. Any form of abuse is physical, psychological, or sexual affects the rights, freedom, and privileges of men. Instances are also seen globally. Hence, through this study, an attempt is made to explore the experiences of men as victims. It aimed at a critical analysis male subjugation in both domestic settings and the workplace. Tools such as case studies and observations were used to gather data and information.

Keywords: Violence, domestic setting, workplace.

Personal reflexive statement

This paper will be an occasion to understand the invisible aspect of society i.e., subjugation of men in society. Being a patriarchal society, it is always believed that men are never be victimised or subjugated as like women. However, while conducting this research, it has been observed that there are many victimised men who are living their lives miserably. The recognition of such ill practices is equally important in our society as part of developed and egalitarian society. In order to control and reduce any anti-social behaviour, the recognition is utmost important. Thus, this study will help to recognise and understand subjugation of men which is essential act accordingly.

1.Introduction

Gender violence is a global public health and human rights problem (WHO, 2007). The violation comes from the domination of one group over another. It affects the rights, privileges, and freedom of the group or section of society that is being violated. In what-ever way, every form of violence is not visible in society. Similarly, violence against men or male subjugation comes under an invisible form of violence that has been prevailing in society. On one hand, men are always been expected to have such a superior and dominating place in society because of the patriarchal nature that exists in almost every corner of the world. On the other hand, being a patriarchal society, women gained

various privileges and support from legal as well as moral aspect. However, there are many voluntary organizations, civil societies, pressure groups, and non-governmental organizations that work specifically for women, yet, if a man faces discrimination or violence, they lack such support. In this male-dominated society, one cannot believe that men can be a victim of violence (Sawant, 2016). But in reality, the truth is something different as both men and women act violently against one another (Corry, 2002). Moreover, the laws in our country mostly are in favor of women especially laws related to matrimonial disputes (PAS, 2020). Thus, either morally or legally men lack support from formal and informal agencies to stand for them during times of violence.

It is pertinent to say that there is various research on women's violence but very less studies are being made on men's discrimination or men's violence. It is because of the belief that harassment, violence, or any type of discrimination are limited to women only while men are the predator. No matter what, one cannot negate the violence against men. Generally, it is believed that in 100 cases of domestic violence, approximately 40 are against men (MRI, 2007). A survey in 2015 by 'The Economic Times reported that 15% of men faced sexual violence in the workplace in the places like Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai (Sylvine, 2016). Feibert (2017), examined that woman are more aggressive and violent in their relationships with male partners (Kumar, 2012). Save Family Foundation conducted a study on husbands' health and domestic violence in different countries through World Health Organization and found that 32.8% faced economic violence, 22.2% emotional violence, 25.2% physical violence, and 17.7% sexual violence (Sarkar, 2007). Moreover, it has been studied that male also experience manipulative behavior and coercive control like gender stereotype abuse, use of children, and isolation (Morgan and Wells, 2016). These studies reveal men are also exposed to violence and abuse relations either at domestic and/or workplace.

Looking into the historical aspect of men's violence, over the last two decades, the reports of rape and sexual violence against men's civilians, detainees, and combatants have been occurring in over twenty-five conflicts (Goldstein, 2001). Incidents of castration and penile amputation of the male prisoners and enemies have been documented in ancient Greece and Persia as well as by Chinese, Egyptians, Amalekite, and Norse armies. Anal rape of male captives also occurred throughout history (Goldstein, 2007). During World War II, in Bosnia, fathers and sons were forced to rape each other and also their female relatives (Carpenter, 2006).

Human behaviors are affected by societal power relations, gender roles, norms, culture, and values. For centuries, in various literature and mythologies women are depicted as inferior and silent sufferers of every domination or oppression from men as being powerful, oppressor, and aggressive. Such notions are mostly guided by gender norms which determine social positions. Such reasons never assume men as victims. Acceptance of violence from women is often seen as a threat to the men folk and their masculinity and superiority (Kuman, 2012).

Subjugation symbolizes power and domination within a relationship. In an egalitarian society, power is not only confined to men, as women too are empowered with power dynamics, economic independence, and control over the economy and resources (Kumar, 2012). The changing of power relations also brings changes to society at the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, women get equal opportunities as men in every aspect be it economic, political, education, and others. With various legal and moral supports, the position of women in society is not limited to inferior or sub-

ordinate. On the other hand, at the micro-level, such as taking part in family decisions, right to choose a life partner, career selection, and others, the voices of women are also gaining importance. With these reforms in the power structure, the domination and influence of women are also increasing. As a consequence of this, violence against men is also alarming. Sociologically, to study gender relations (gender violence, gendered role, gender discrimination, etc), emphasis should also give to men, women, and transgenders as subjects for gender studies. Hence, this study attempted to understand critically men's violence as a part of gender violence.

2. Violence against men: a legal dilemma

Any violence affects the physical, mental, and psychological health of the victims. It also violates the human rights of the person. The unreported and unnoticed violence against men denial of accepting the family, depression, divorce, and in some extreme cases leads to suicide (Sarkar, 2007). According to WHO (2002), women think more to commit suicide whereas men die more due to suicide. This is called the gender paradox (Deshpande, 2019). The National Family Health Survey throws light on violence against men which leads to more suicides by men in comparison to women. Thus, there should be a legal platform for men in support of their protection (Diwakar, 2016). Despite the available data and studies, the legislation of the Indian Constitution always saw women as victims and men as offenders. Their violence is viewed as of little consequence (Adebayo, 2014). The Indian Constitution failed to see men as victims of sexual violence and other mental and physical assaults. IPC Section 375 deals with rape where victims are considered female and perpetrators are males. Besides, Sections 354 A, 354 B, 354 C, and 354D, under the Legal Panel Code Act (1860), and the new amendments of 2005 deal with sexual harassment, stalking, disrobing, and voyeurism against women where men are the executor. In the case of penile sexual abuse against men, IPC section 375 is the only law. Non-penile sexual abuse does not cover by this law (Diwakar, 2016). Besides, laws related to domestic violence considered women as victims. The antidowry laws, Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, section 498A passed by the Supreme Court of India are often misused by women. In the case of adultery laws are in favor of women. No legal support for men where he can complain to their wives and in-laws. In the case of child custody and divorce also, more sympathy is shown to women (Deshpande, 2019). This institutional sexism ignores abused men.

Nevertheless, recently, the Union Cabinet sent a draft to amend Section 398A under IPC for penalty provisions if a woman made any false allegations against her husband and in-laws under the Protection of Domestic Violence Act 2005. Despite opposition by woman activists, the Supreme Court of India amended it where the police cannot arrest the husband and in-laws immediately after the registration of the complaint (Diwakar, 2016).

3. Application of methods

The study is based on both primary and secondary sources where a qualitative approach has been adopted. The samples of the study have been selected through convenient technique based on different age groups, qualifications, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Through case study and observation methods data have been collected from the respondents in the districts of Assam. The study has been adopted code of ethics by maintaining the privacy and identities of the respondents. The researcher has been convinced the respondents to protect themselves from personal harm and

preserve their confidentiality. The names of the respondents have been hidden as per ethical considerations. The voluntary participation of the respondents has been considered.

4. Analysis of cases

A number of case studies have been made for the study. Some of them are as follows:

Case 1. X, a 23-year-old young man who completed his higher studies has been working in a higher institution as teaching faculty. One day, for some official work he was planning to go to Guwahati. He was traveling from his workplace to Guwahati by bus during the night. Throughout his journey, he had to share his seat with a young lady. According to the respondent, the lady looked like a newlywed 27-year-old. During the journey with the lady, he experienced an unusual situation. As it was winter season the lady took out a thin blanket to cover herself. Sometimes later, she asked X to share the blanket due to the cold climate. But X denied sharing the same. She insisted on him repeatedly as X was denying to share the blanket. After a while, she put the blanket over him. After traveling a few miles, the lady started to touch his private parts. He, strongly opposed her in anger and removed her hands and put off the blanket from his body. Then again, she forwards her hand to touch his private part. He provoked her and asked the lady to stop doing this in anger. But she kept on doing again and again. Meanwhile, out of anger, he asked the lady to change her seat. As the lady did not change her seat, he wanted to do the same. While trying to change the seat, the lady threatens him by making false allegations of misbehaving with her. She told, him that if he did not cooperate with her, she will start shouting that he was doing molestation with her. The lady asked him to sit quietly and let her do whatever she likes. The respondent claimed that though he strongly opposed her, he was being masturbated by her about 5-6 times throughout the journey. X said that at the time when she threatened him about making false allegations, he reminded the system of society where men are always seen as the offender. In our society, no one believes or even thinks that a man can also be abused especially by women. He argued that he did not take any stand for the fear of blaming him for making a false allegation by her and thus started to follow the directions given by the lady. He knew very well that if the lady accused him of misbehaving in front of the other passengers, then the public can do anything like beat him, report the case to the police, etc., which will bring trouble for him.

Case 2. A 36-year-old man named Y was a resident of the small town of Assam, working in a private company with a minimum income that is sufficient to feed his family. His appearance was fair and good-looking. He was an active and hardworking man. The boss of the company was a lady about 40 years old. Very often, the boss used to praise his look, his dressing style, and also his work. As per his response to Y, she often called him in her cabin and tried to come close to him. She also makes him work late with her in the office. Moreover, Y claimed that while talking she used to touch him. One night, when Y and the lady were alone at the office, she offered him wine and asked about his sexual life. She asked: whether he is happy with his wife? Does he want to make a sexual relationship with her? Y informed that from that day onwards, he avoided interaction with her. One day the lady called him into her cabin to do some official work and asked him to touch her breasts. While refusing to do, she threatens him by making him fired from the job. Again, some days later, she sat on his lap and started pulling her shirt in front of him. As he asked him to stop doing such things, she shouted at him. Like this, she repeatedly harassed him. Frequently, she asked him to make sexual contact with her. After a couple of months, when he constantly refused to

make any physical contact with her, she stayed with his promotion. Also, she started shouting at him for his work. The respondent said that he cannot handle this abusive behaviour which was made without any fault. He said that as no one will believe him of being a victim of sexual violence because of his gender he left the company as he did not find any other option. Further, he reported that there is no one to support a male victim as in our society male cannot be a victim of any abusive behaviour. But, as per the response of Y, it is high time to change the perspective of people towards men as this has been hampering the whole male community.

Case 3. A 51-year-old shopkeeper of a village in Assam led his life with his two children and wife. He (Z) has a grocery shop at his home as the source of livelihood. His earnings somehow managed to support his family's needs. He managed to educate the children along with fulfilling their necessities of them. But his wife complained to him of not being able to fulfill her wishes. She often murmured, grumbling that she had made mistake by marrying him. She was cursing him for not giving them a luxurious lifestyle. The respondent said that his wife wished to settle in town but due to a lack of financial resources they are not in a position to pay rent. And this is the main issue of their family disputes. She often fights with him and accused him of their poor living conditions. For her, he is a loser and it is his fault that their living standards have not been raised. Z claimed that such words of her are like mental torture to him. Sometimes, she demanded some expensive things from him. Frequent excessive financial demands also made him angry which sometimes leads to fights between them. He reported that one day she threw a knife at him and sometimes also scratch him on his face and shoulders. Hence, frequent financial demands culminate in fights. He argued that he wished to file for divorce but by thinking of their children stayed and adjusted to married life. He has that it is not only a woman who compromise her life for family (as per the belief of society) but many times a man also has to compromise his feelings and emotions by thinking of their children and family. He has the fear of family breakdown as well as worried about their children's future and thus adjusting to his married life though there is a lack of happiness. He also mentioned that the expectation of society, in terms of fulfilling material or other economic needs, towards a male is much more than a woman which sometimes hampers a relationship if those expectation does not fulfil by him. Moreover, he reported that a wife should not think of her husband as someone who can fulfill every wish of her and the family rather both of them should work for the family.

Case 4. A 30-year-old man, named W, working in a government organization has been the victim of violence by his wife. Both of them lived together in the city of Assam. After 6 months of their wedding, he got a promotion and transferred to his hometown. Both of them belong to the same town. So, they decided to live at his parents' home. But after shifting to his hometown, his wife wanted to live separately. As per the response of W, she wished to live with her parents. She also asked him to shift with her. After some days, she moves out of her in-law's home and started to live with her parents. But he did not want to leave his parents. His wife repeatedly made telephonic conversations with him and try to convince him for the same. This topic became the cause of their divorce. He said that they lived separately for about 8 months and in the meantime, she always tried to make him shift to her home. But she never visited his parents even during the times of his mother's illness. This made him angry. Also, he claimed that such a relationship only gives disturbance and mental illness and thus decided to file a divorce petition. He said that his married life has given him mental trauma and stress rather than happiness because of his wife.

Case 5. V, a daily wage earner was a father of a 3months old baby. After 2 years of his wedding, his wife gave birth to a child. Before birth, both of them lived their lives happily. He said that his wife was very supportive. But suddenly, after they give birth to their baby, her behaviours towards him and the child. She did not want to feed the child. He claimed that his wife tortured their 3-month-old baby by throwing him and laying him in the middle of the road. His wife went to her parent's family when he asked for the reasons behind her doings. When he made come to the police station to file the case, the policeman did not listen to him as well as proclaimed that he is the culprit. V said that as he is the sole breadwinner of the family, he has to go to work. But now, due to his wife's behaviours, he had to look after the baby, and she left them and lives with her parents. He also tried to seek help from the police but according to him, as he is male always has the tagged of being violent in behaviours. Hence the police also did not register the case against his wife. He is now living with his child without his wife. He finds it difficult to manage his work and home as there is no one to look after the baby. So, he took his baby to his work and sometimes keep the baby at one of his relatives' homes while going to work. He said that he cannot ignore his work as he needs money to feed his baby.

5. Discussion

The gender theories and hegemonic masculinities construct men's dominance and violence as necessary to maintain patriarchal culture (Anderson, 1997). Similarly, the feminist perspective argued that in the violence of heterosexual relations, patriarchy, its social structure, and practices resulted in the domination and exploitation of women (Dobash and Dobash, 2017). On the contrary, Patil said patriarchy fails to explore the diversities in masculinities where men's violence and their subjugation can be explained (Patil, 2013). Violence against men is not a recent phenomenon. Though, it has not received the limelight because our social, cultural, and psychological barriers bind us to picturise men as being victims or being subjugated in the hands of women. More particularly, nowadays, women reign their powers an edge over men within the four walls of the house regarding the decision-making about household affairs (Munirkazmi and Mohyuddin, 2012). The gender stereotype status of men as being insensitive and tough hinders them to share such experiences with others (Barber, 2008).

The above-mentioned cases highlighted various forms of violence against men that define the subjugation position of men exist in our society. It has been seen that the respondents experienced physical, and sexual abuse from intimate partners as well as from known and strangers. The cases underlined the imbalance of law for both males and females. Behind every case, the lack of legal favor on the part of male victims is the main cause. Men have to face abuse from women, mostly, because of the fear of false allegations that might be made by the woman as seen in the first case. Knowingly or unknowingly, women-centric gender violence laws in India favours and sympathizes with female and see men as a perpetrator. Hence, this has become a tool for women to abuse men by threatening them with false allegations. Moreover, in our society, it is generally believed that women may hurt or inflict violence on male partners in self-defence. Any other reasons for hitting a man are implausible ideas (Fontes, 1999). Instances are also seen women abuse men if she is in a higher position in comparison to the man. Contrary to the general belief, women harm men not only out of self-defence or retaliation but also to show higher authority, power over men, and a desire to take control over the relationship. Moreover, Krahe, Waizenhofer, and Moller (2003) found that

every 1 in 10 women uses sexually aggressive techniques to obtain sexual contact without consent (Munirkazmi and Mohyuddin, 2012). This has been witnessed in the second case where the boss (lady) forced one of her employees to establish sexual relations with her as a sign of dominating power over him. Without appropriate proof of being a victim of his boss, the employee has to face false allegations and be cut off from his job as he refused the same. Besides, the poor financial condition is again a cause of violence. One of the cases of a middle-aged person depicts his story of violence where he faced abuse from his wife because his income is not enough to satisfy his wife's demands. The frustration and anxiety out of lack of financial privileges (Munirkazmi and Mohyuddin, 2012) lead women to abuse their husbands. Also, Steinmatz (1977) emphasized that the lack of recognition of male victims is another cause of violence against men. This taboo in patriarchal societies leads the male victims to cope without any help, support, or guidance (Kubai, 2012). In the last case, it has been seen that the policeman did not listen to the person who came to complain about his wife's abusive behaviours towards their child which results in the mental torture of the man. Moreover, suspicion is another reason for violence against men, especially by intimate partners. Sometimes men allegedly cheat on women but in some cases, out of suspicion a woman gets angry if her partner interacts more with other girls. This is mainly seen if the male partner runs away from his family responsibilities (Stanko, 1997). Moreover, many women use sex as a bargaining tool. Psychologists called it mental harassment for men but no judiciary support has been given in such cases. It does not come under domestic violence against men (Diwakar, 2016).

In this context, White and Kowalski (1994), forwarded their arguments based on social learning theory. With the similar role expectations of men and women, their aggressive behaviours also became similar. For them, masculinization might be a reason for aggressive women where women take more masculine roles in society. Opportunity-based crime might be another reason why offenders behave like criminals only in certain situations. Thirdly is the frustration due to the lack of opportunity to participate in the male work environment (Felson, 2002). Moreover, men are always shy and ashamed of calling themselves victims of any crime, especially women. They don't want to let their family members and friends know about their situations for the fear of being called as weak or controlled by their wives (Kunbai, 2012). The fear of losing social respect and position in society made them silent bearers of violence. Complaining by men is often regarded as feminine behaviour in a male-dominated society (Despande, 2019). The socially dominant gender construction socially stigmatized and demeaned men who lack masculine ideals such as cruelty, physical strength, and violent behaviour towards partners (Alsawalqa, 2021).

In a society, group interaction is very prevalent to maintain social relations and society at large. But such violence hinders the abused person to build trust with others which is necessary to maintain a social life. Besides, a man does not feel comfortable in any social gathering out of fear. He/she will discard the social life. Gender violence results in establishing a gap between the genders which restricts the path of development of a society. Thus, women's violence against men not only harms physical health but social life too. Besides, various studies have also found that violence leads to stress, depression, psychosomatic syndrome, and psychological distress (Cascardi, Langhinrichsen, & Vivian, 1992). This is because many times, men remain silent to express violent behaviors of them due to fear of not being believed or accused of being violent. As depicted in one of the cases, that man can make compromises and adjustments with violence for the sake of the family. In the fear of losing his children and breaking the family ties, they usually remain silent. Apart from these,

the family life of the victim is also gets affected. From the case studies, it has been known that violence against men affected his involvement in family chores. His disturbed behaviours create a gap between his children and his wife.

6. Conclusion

With the changing in family structure and social values, power relations, gender violence is also changing. With this, the traditional ideologies of society should also change with the pace of time. In our society violence against women is visible and many efforts are also taken for controlling this social problem. But now, we should also think about men's violence. Men are also physically, psychologically, and sexually violated by women which remain invisible in society. As with women's violence, men's violence must also be accepted as a social problem. Men and women are the pillars of society hence focus should be given to protecting both (Despande, 2019) through legal bodies irrespective of their belongingness to any particular gender. To build an ordered society, such gender-based laws should be there for both genders. However, such traditional aspects of society have not gained enough focus in research. Thus, knowledge of such social issues is still hidden. Apart from this, the focus should also give on the process of socialization or social learning.

Men are the victims of violence at various levels though traditional gender roles of men do not allow them to be victims of abuse. Though the numbers of violence against both genders may vary but this hidden reality of society should be made visible to form an egalitarian society. But it is seen that the legal policies are mainly in favor of female victims which also stigmatized men as can overcome such violence. Lack of recognition of male victims within society as well as amongst authorities is common. To break the silence and make visible abused men the authority needs to be able to take a stand. They need to be recognized and aid support, counseling, and other social services (Kubai, 2012). Violence should not be treated as a women's problem rather it is a gender problem.

Moreover, efforts should also be taken to aware public of the realities of male violence by various organizations like governments, religious groups, civil society, non-governmental organizations, etc. Gender activists must create an environment of balance gender discourse regarding power, authority, and privileges (Kubai, 2012). There are many organizations for protecting the rights of women but rarely do there exist any such organizations for men. 80% of violence occurred because of non-tangible (Munirkazmi and Mohyuddin, 2012). The inability of society to make an eye on gender violence is due to its focus on women's violence.

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