

## **CHAPTER- 4**

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN INDIAN SOCIETY**

#### **➤ History of Domestic Violence**

Violence against wives is a right men exercised with impunity for centuries. This prerogative of men has been articulated in the precepts of religion, philosophy and law throughout the World. Physical violence against wives was deemed necessary for the "well-being" of women. It was coached in terms of corrective discipline and chastisement of erring wives (Davis, 1972). A Medieval Christian scholar propagated *Rules of Marriage* in the late 15th Century. These specified: When you see your wife commit an offence, don't rush at her with insults and violent blows. First scold her sharply, bully and terrify her and if this doesn't work, take up a stick and beat her. Soundly, for it is better to punish the body and correct the soul than to damage the soul and spare the body. Then readily beat her, not in rage but out of charity and concern for her soul, so that the beating will redound to your merit and her good. (Davidson, 1978, at p. 99)

In traditional times and also till today domestic violence has so many myths like

1. No one should interfere in the domestic violence affairs of man and wife.
2. Domestic violence only happens in working class/poorly educated/disadvantaged families.
3. It's only drunkards who beat their wives.
4. Abusive men must come from violent families.
5. Domestic violence is confined to mentally disturbed or sick people.
6. Battered wives 'like' being hit and are responsible for the violence otherwise they would leave the man.

But the facts or realities are different like

1. Large percentage of crime which is reported is domestic violence, why should women be unprotected by criminal laws in their own homes.
2. Domestic violence occurs in families of every class, race, caste and culture. It occurs in all families with or without children, in first marriages, second marriages, and arranged

marriages or in love marriages. It happens to slum dwellers, owner-occupiers, businessmen and private tenants. It can happen to anyone.

3. Many men who are violent towards their partner come from families with no history of violence. Many families in which violence occurs do not produce violent men. The family is not the only formative influence on behavior. The myth is also served as a convenient excuse for abusers not to take responsibility for their behavior.
4. Domestic violence cannot be blamed on alcohol. Some men may have been drinking can provide an easy excuse. Some men who do not drink at all are also violent. There is no one type of man who beats women.
5. Battered women find that when they are publicly revealed their victimization, rather than sympathy they receive blaming for not leaving the batterers. In fact they are socially, legally and materially forced and trapped in marriage.
6. Many studies show that fewer than 5% of all instances of domestic violence are caused by mental illness or psychiatric.

Position of women in old Indian society was also the same as it is today or in other words, we can say that domestic violence was also there in past. Indian society the inception is that womanhood is respected. There is a widespread misconception regarding the true status of women in ancient Indian society. It is mainly because of deplorable ignorance of texts of *Upanishads*, *Vedas* and *Smriti* in which are to be found the laws, customs and traditions which defines the true status of women in early times. The Rig-Veda suggest and indicated a more authoritative text that contains the seeds and sources from which whole Hindu thought the ages has been derived and flew in so many streams. In Hindu *Puranas* women power was also treated as very important form of “*Sakti*” which also destroyed the invincible “*Mahisasura*” who was “*Demon*”. *Manu* the Hindu law-giver, also suggested that where women are honored there gods are pleased where they are not all, work becomes worthless and fruitless. In ancient India women were respected like for example in *Upadhyayas*. The women in the Vedic period and in Upanishad age enjoyed equal status and also equal opportunities with man in all vistas of society. They were eligible for initiation and *Brahmacharya* or study of the Brahma knowledge. After that period the women’s education was neglected badly and it lead to illiteracy of women and superstitions. It was also noticed that the discontinuation in *Upanayana* and its equation with the marriages, rituals related to marriage had the most disturbing effect upon the social and family

status or position of women. The Non-Aryans also denied the privilege of **Upanayana** and when it was fully withdrawn from women their status, position and condition was automatically reduced to that of the **Sudras**. Many studies show that the Indian history and also **Puranas** play very important and significant part in deciding the position of the women in society. If we look at the long history of India hundreds of examples we can get that women are sacrificing everything for men and also tolerance and high qualities of women like for example *Sita*, *Savitri*, *Kunti*, *Draupadi* etc. In the Vedic times women on the whole occupied a status and position of honor, respect and equality with men.

The **Rig Veda** is also an important phase because of the excellent projection of the highest religious truth of thoughts, which dawned on the saints and seers as a result of their contemplation in a life of complete asceticism and penance and it also shows evidences pointing to the facts that women are fully the equals of men as regards access to and capacity for the highest knowledge of Brahma. The position of Indian women and status we need to have a look in Vedic age which was much higher than in any other ancient society like that of **Greece and Rome**.

The general position of women or wife was of high dignity and a special place was given to them with all kinds of respect and they enjoyed a peaceful life with all kind of happiness and prosperity in the family along with all the other family members. The status of woman in family being the same as that of man many women proved themselves as famous scholars and authors and also took an effective part in industrial life, no *purdah* system existed. In the epics and also in the *Puranas* though no woman figured as ruling queen but the women were like *Kaikeyi*, *Kunti* etc. who were having high positions and exercised considerable influences in the family. In that age there was also many instances of marriage of Aryans with Non-Aryans. Instead of due respect was given to women in some of the ages violence was always there.

In Indian society the ideal picture is such that the woman should sacrifice each and everything for their husbands and should devote full their life in severing them. In history another thing which was there to lower the status of women was Polygamy or in other words one of the discordant factors in the married life of women was existence of Polygamy which has been prevailing since long. In ancient times in married life wife was not only regarded as her husband's life long companion in weal and woe but also mistress of his household and a real

partner in all his activities, including religious sacrifices. In traditional times it was thought that women have evil inclinations and because of these evil inclinations and birth, they should be kept under the control of men at all stages of their lives. The ideal women are those who do not strive to break these bonds of control. However, the salvation and happiness of women revolve around their virtue and chastity as daughters, wives and widows. These are some of the themes which were regulated merely to laws in ancient Sanskrit texts.

The women also continually reappeared in later Sanskrit and vernacular writings as well as in the oral traditions. One of the very famous and still popular religious texts in India is the “*Ramayana*” found in Sanskrit. This is a well known text and it tells the story of *Rama*, an incarnation of *Vishnu*, sent to earth to destroy the menacing demon *Ravana* as he was on the verge of upsetting the right moral order of the earth. In the *Ramayana*, *Rama*’s wife *Sita* exemplifies the behavior of the proper Hindu wife, devotedly following her husband into forest exile for 14 years, and even after being kidnapped for a time by the demon *Ravana*, whom her husband *Rama* finally destroys, proving her wifely virtue by placing herself on a lighted pyre. When she remained unscathed by the flames, the gods above pour flowers down upon her. In a happy ending her husband accepts her back into his household.

The story of *Rama* and *Sita* is well known to most Hindus and is enacted yearly with greater or lesser splendor, in cities and many villages all over India. The message of *Sita* and *Rama* story is very clear that a wife should be like *Sita*, following whatever her husband’s do and say, therefore this is another cause for this condition of women in India. *Sita* was and is the most perfect wife in India and Hindu women the most epitome of the proper wife. In the Vedic texts and *Dharmashastras* which is the codes of sacred and social duties are mentioned to constitute the norms for Brahmanism and the religion or religious practices for the upper castes and when we take woman or the question of women’s position in India and what was the position of women in ancient Indian society then it also considers the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya and *Manusmriti*, broadly covering the period between 400 B.C. to 500 A.D. are sources for getting insights into the normative structure which determines the behavioral patterns for women.

One of the very well known sociologist *Neera Desai* points out that it was thought since time immemorial that women should be kept in dependency by her husband because by nature they are passionate and disloyal. The ideal women are those who do not strive to break these bonds of

control. The salvation and happiness of women revolve around their virtue and chastity as daughters, wives and widows. Man was always known as provider of the seed or man provides the seed and the essence for the creation of the offspring or the seed determines the kind and the child's identity was also derived from the father for the group placement.

Family violence or domestic violence is not a new concept or phenomenon which is emerging with more modernization, westernization and globalization. It is something which is there in all the periods. For women family is very important in her life or in other words marriage is the gate to family. Marriage is more essential for a woman than a man because if a man is unmarried then no stigmas are attached to it but when a woman is not married then lots of stigmas are attached to her not being married. The socialization of Indian females are such that girls internalize the concept of dependency and that itself gives rise to violence in the family, therefore the husband feels that wives are subordinates and they start dominating them. Such type of socialization is directly responsible of this miserable condition of women. It is always said to a girl that she should have control on her emotions, she should be calm, quiet, and patient so on that is again a major cause of domestic violence. A woman in her whole life never becomes a permanent member both whether it's her natal home or her husband's home. It will be always said to the woman before marriage that you are a *Paraya Dhan* which means property of someone else and after marriage is always remains a stranger because she is an outsider.

## ➤ Conclusion

Some historians believe that the history of violence against women is tied to the history of women being viewed as property and a gender role assigned to be subservient to men and also other women.

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) states that "violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the

crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men”.

In the 1870s, courts in the United States stopped recognizing the common-law principle that a husband had the right to “physically chastise an errant wife”. In the UK the traditional right of a husband to inflict moderate corporal punishment on his wife in order to keep her "within the bounds of duty" was removed in 1891.

This concludes that domestic violence is not something new or not something which is emerging with modernization or it is not like a new technology coming in society. This is there in all the periods, in all the ages etc. The thing is that as we are developing, it is also developing and coming out with new forms, types, magnitudes etc. Domestic violence is a word which disturbs the peace of the family caused by misunderstanding between the family members. It is a conflict between couples in which women lose their dignity or in other word she is losing it from time immemorial.