

Social Health and Violence Against Women

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The history of human evolution is peppered with points of aggression where man has been both the aggressor and the aggressed upon. Various theories have been offered to explain these points of destruction. Evolution based it's theories upon Darwin's concept of survival of the fittest. Aggression as understood by developmental theories draws upon the interaction between the genetic program and the social environment. The general principle is that evolution prefers diversity in it's selection. On the one hand it may show a preference for aggressive nature, while one the other it may also select peaceful calm demeanour as adaptive.

The general function of aggression falls into two main categories, reacting to localized danger and resource competition. Applying this to aggression in males creates the obvious connection where the men have to protect their families from danger and compete with other males to obtain scarce resources. In the current times of extreme competitiveness and modern threats to survival, both the categories fall prey to threat and competition that can be simultaneously real and imagined.

In conditions of real threat that exist in situations of extreme religious intolerance or political instability, the levels of aggression help in battling these terrors. Increasing globalization brings together the world under a common threat of nuclear annihilation and mass destruction. At the micro - level, substandard governance and short sighted planning have created ridiculous amounts of variation in the standards of human living. Fuelled by ever-increasing greed, nations are subject to greater depravity of minds and it's unfortunate consequences.

Perceived threat has moved into the arena of real threat allowing for most humans to be suspicious, greedy and self-serving at great cost to others. Those in positions of power; physically, legally, psychologically and emotionally act to flex their muscles with the weaker among them. This is made obvious through life experiences and not just as a social phenomenon.

One aspect of human life that has seen an upsurge in aggression is in violence towards women. In the daily battle that most humans face of living and surviving, the weakest link in the chain for human species appears to be women and children. Social evolution across the centuries has put women in a uniquely vulnerable position. On the one hand, women are finding greater opportunities to educate, train and protect themselves; they also face an increasing amount of prejudice, objectification and vilification. Women are blamed for many ills and punished merely for being a woman.

As more and more women enter corporate boardrooms, wield more political power, carry more financial wealth and push towards greater equality amongst the genders, a far greater number of women are facing degradation as hapless pawns in the human fight for survival. The kidnapping of the school girls at Boko Haram and the inability of the most powerful nation in the world to have a woman leader in spite of 200 years of freedom are two sides of the same coin.

Aggression towards women can thus be understood in two aspects, one being at the receiving end of the frightened, insecure bully who can only raise his status by attacking someone he considers weaker. His low self-esteem has a lot to do with the way he himself has been viewed by those more powerful than him and the limited opportunities he has to battle these forces and come out victorious. The other aspect has to do with the sexual energy being the most potent natural energy that is known to man and in the grasp of which most men are swayed into actions beyond their control.

The combination of being thoroughly beaten by a supposedly legitimate system and the inability to handle a human instinct genetically essential to survival gone wild makes for a violent aggressive spill over of rage and frustration as a sense of entitlement. This sense of entitlement has wreaked havoc in the lives of women. India is one such country where the ever increasing violence against women has exploded to such an extent that the rest of the world refers to India as a rape nation.

The incidents of male Indian students being rejected merely for being Indian, warning sent out by governments to their citizens touring India about safety for their women and even the most recent post on social media about a missing tourist couple are examples of this paranoia about women's safety in India. The rest of the world perceives a day spent offline in India threatening enough to post massive social media searches. It's painful and yet ominous. India appears to be a rape destination for the rest of the western world. This is in spite of statistics showing worse cases of female violence even in the so-called developed nations like the US and the UK.

In light of such an unhealthy reputation that India has developed, one wonders whether there is some inherent cultural phenomenon that drives Indian men to express their frustration in such a vicious manner. India has always been known as the nation of the "*Kama Sutra*" where the power and strength of a woman is worshipped in its myriad *avatars* in the various temples. How is it that in spite of the presence of so many female deities, there is no logical extension of their divinity to the woman who lives in India? The possible explanations could swing from genetic inheritance to social environment. As discussed earlier, the same theories that attempt to explain aggression in males can be used to understand aggression towards women. However, this alone is not enough. One needs to further explore the multi-causal phenomenon today that is female abuse. The various forms of abuse include but are not restricted to the more obviously heinous crimes of female foeticide and infanticide; trafficking, sexual abuse etc. The less obvious but equally fatal practices of considering women second rate citizens prejudice in the work place and at home; suppressing the career growth of women, prioritizing a women's marital status above her educational or career growth are all examples of insidious attacks on women. Sexual freedom is not necessarily the answer as the question is not merely how to satisfy sexual urges. The travesty of this situation is that most women have accepted this as normal and

sometimes even desire it to allow them to experience a sense of faithfully carrying out their duties.

Studying the origins of how women came to be subjugated in this manner in India is a controversial process. In this country where philosophical debate has been subverted by politics into prejudice and intolerance, one cannot even hope to study this topic for fear of backlash from communal forces. Even the great sage Manu is often criticized for his attitude towards women. But mentioning this in scholarly debate is frequently a great risk. This does not mean that only one group of people are responsible for this downfall of women. Most major world religions have been established on the principles of secondary status for women.

When studying the harassment of women, one thing seems clear, the very obviously bullying nature of men. Most situations where women have faced horrifying attacks on their physical and psychological selves, there has been claims of provocation on the part of women leading to them being attacked. Malala was shot in the head merely because she wanted to educate herself. This was perceived by her attackers as the ultimate rebellion because she is a woman who wants to indulge in activities that are meant for men. It is common knowledge that the tendency to attack is in response to danger. In most cases, the female victims were incapable of presenting any physical danger to the attackers. But yet the attackers felt the need to show their power. The question arises as to why do the men feel so threatened?

Threat perception is a function of many indicators – environmental and cognitive are the primary ones. In the case of attacks on females, there is no visible attack on the male, so the threat is primarily played out in the attackers mind. There is a need to assert oneself, one's authority and maleness and this assertion is mostly a requirement for the weak. A confident self-assured individual does not feel the need to make a statement of power and strength. This tendency to feel threatened needs to be understood. Extending the argument that the threat is more in the attackers head than anywhere else, the next logical thought arises that there is a sense of fear already existing in the man. Men can be afraid of many things and yet refuse to accept it.

In a society ravaged by poverty, inequality, injustice and various other social ills, it is easy to understand that most people live with a sense of insecurity and fear. The fear is most easily exposed when one studies the willingness of most people to accept and even maintain unhealthy social systems. Maintaining the *status quo* is the name of the game and any person, event or situation that threatens to shake the precarious balance on which this society is placed becomes an instant threat. Women demanding their share of humanity are one such threat. Compounded with the natural physical weakness in women, it seems certain that the only way men will deal with their insecurities and fears is by preying upon the weak, the women.

This cannot be generalized to all men or all societies. Nations which have managed to strike the fine balance between wealth and happiness, equality and justice, and all other conflicts appear to have nurtured their citizenry into a healthy productive life. Although it may appear that developed nations have equivalent or greater levels of violence against women, it is also possible that the reporting of such cases is higher in developed nations as compared to developing nations. Cultural beliefs about the woman's reputation and the impact such reporting may have on her future is

higher in certain cultures. The fact that women can report cases in a non-threatening atmosphere without being subject to slander and prejudice is also a reflection of a healthy society.

Disentangling fact from fiction and reality from statistical figures requires effort, resources and a lot of administrative and public will. Reading figures from statistical tables may not give an accurate picture of ground reality. A thorough overhauling of the legal system is required. But of far greater importance is the need to provide citizens adequate and equal opportunities to grow financially and emotionally. The disparities which sting one's nation view need to be done away with. The ridiculous variation in the distribution of resources pries on the conscience of many. Beauty in the external and internal environment has to be nurtured for citizens to flourish. Life has to move away from questions of surviving to answers on thriving.

The social sciences have a lot to contribute in this effort. Research relating to society, culture and economy should take priority as against the current emphasis on physical sciences. Psychology can bring about phenomenal changes if given the stature it deserves. It is not merely a science of human behaviour and most definitely should move away its focus from the current obsession with maladjusted maladaptive behaviour. Rather the mind-body dyad should be replaced with the mind-body-spirit triad. Increase in consciousness studies will fit the hitherto missing piece of the jig-saw puzzle in the study of humanity and its evolution. As NLP states, following the same route will lead to the same destination. Creating new paths will lead to different, healthier destinations. Psychology and other social sciences hold the key to a more humane flourishing society.