

# Violence Against Women & Girls in South Asia

Thursday 7 December 2006, by [PATEL Vibhuti](#) (Date first published: 2005).

## Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Social Paradigms](#)
- [Conclusion](#)

## Introduction

Violence against women (VAW) has become a central issue in the discourse of the international women's movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Women's networks in the South Asia have taken up wide range of issues concerning violence against women (VAW) in their personal lives as well as against the systems perpetuating it. **"Personal is political", a slogan popularised by two decades of women's movement in the last century** signifies consistent campaigns against all forms of violence in women's intimate/personal and public/societal lives. Social construction of masculinity in the region is defined by cultural nationalism, jingoism and militarisation of the economy as well as ethnic/caste/religious chauvinism in the context of worsening economic crisis due to liberalisation, privatisation, globalisation(LPG). Escalating fundamentalist backlash in the South Asian countries takes the most barbaric form in terms of wide range of violence against women at different stages of their lives, from womb to tomb. Moreover, as a result of modernisation and commercialisation of subsistence economies, family-ties have become less supportive. Increasing intra-state, inter-state and cross country migration as well as trafficking of women and girls has a sole purpose of SEXPLOITATION-ferocious and complete control over their sexuality, fertility and labour. Cut throat competition among the nation states have increased work-burden drastically due to shift from just-in-case approach to just-in-time approach to meet the targets of production at the cheapest possible cost.

During the eighties, women's rights organisations mushroomed in the South Asia in response to varied manifestations of VAWG by the state apparatus and in the civil society in the form of anti-women family laws and customary laws, communal carnage, sexual harassment at workplace and assaults on individual women in the family and in the society. They organised rallies and demonstrations, sit-ins and conventions, seminars and conferences, which culminated into politics of protest movements and petitioning. In the 1990s, the women's groups consolidated their base by finding their allies in the state apparatus and created their institutional base and shelter homes of women and children victims of violence.

***This paper aims to examine:*** Social Paradigms-VAW from womb to tomb- Female infanticide & Female foeticide- Abortion-Economic Development and VAW-Sexual harassment at workplace- Globalisation and VAW- New Forms-Jingoism, Militarisation and VAW-Domestic Violence-How to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse? Prostitution-HIV AIDS as a worst Form of VAW-Culture Specific VAW- Role of Manu, Mulla and Confucian Ideologies- proactive roles of the state and civil society

**It is important to understand, analyse and combat octopusy clutches of VAW to ensure right to dignified life to women-folk of our country.**

## **Social Paradigms**

Now, let us examine social paradigm. Women's status in the family is determined by **PANCHMAHABHOOTA** (five omnipresent factors) of **Patriarchy** (PP), namely the caste/ kinship network, religion, economic status, media and the state. PP draw their strength from male dominance and female subordination. Lifecycle of a woman is governed by value system, which promotes preferential treatment for men and neglect of women. Ante natal sex-determination tests, female infanticide, neglect of daughter in terms of food, health care and educational facilities and personality development result into stunted growth of women. Nearly 40 % of marriages in South Asia are child marriages. Teenage pregnancy takes place both within marriage and among unmarried girls due to rape, seduction, incest, child prostitution (Roy, 2003). Discrimination and violence faced by women, from womb to tomb make women suffer from the sense of low self- esteem and psychological dependence.

### **Female Infanticide & Female Foeticide in India Create Adverse Juvenile Sex Ratio:**

Historical legacy of strong son-preference and neglect of daughters has taken a dangerous turn where scientific technologies for sex-determination such as amniocentesis, chorion-villi-biopsy, foetoscopy, sonography are abused for selective abortion of female fetuses by money-minded medical professionals (Patel, 2002, 03, 04). Sex-selective abortion of female foetuses accounted for 17.6 % of 1492 induced abortions in a sample survey in India (Ganatar, Hirve and Rao, 2001). New reproductive technologies of pre-selection of unborn babies prevent birth of girl child. Several Asian countries have declining sex-ratio i.e. number of women as compared to 1000 men is less than 1000. Noble laureate, Prof. Amartya Kuman Sen calls this phenomenon "missing Women" (Sen, 1992). This is a manifestation of discrimination and stigmatization of women delivering daughters. "Sex selection in society occurs in the context of entrenched values, interests and cultural beliefs and practices. Their eradication requires investment in long-term strategies and economic and social development and educational and cultural empowerment" (Chee, 2002). It is a matter of deep regret that even the states in Asia perceive this phenomenon as an indicator of population stabilization, logic being less number of women means less reproduction. The women's movement has emphasized that

- "Eliminate Inequality, not Women", "Destroy Dowry, not Daughters",
- Say "No" to Sex-determination, Say "Yes" to Empowerment of Women,
- Say "No" to Sex Discrimination, Say "Yes" to Gender Justice.
- "Daughters are not for slaughter".

### **Abortion in South Asia**

Criminalisation of abortion in Nepal renders 1000s of girls and women into prisons. "Both, the woman who undergoes the procedure and the service provider can be imprisoned." (Shrestha, Tamang and Sharma, 2001). Abortion laws in the Asian countries victimise the victims, especially innocent adolescent girls who have no control over their sexuality and fertility. Teenage pregnancy is a major issue for the civil societies in the rural areas of South Asia, still no attention is paid by the states to safeguard the interests of girls. Chances of a woman dying from complications of pregnancy or childbirth during her lifetime are 1 in 65 in Asia (WHO, 1996). Majority of abortions in S. Asia are unsafe and are performed by un-authorised practitioners. Recently completed multi-

centric study involving seven states of India by CEHAT, Mumbai also proves the point.

### **Economic Development and VAW**

Women from South Asia are supposed to be relatively timid, obedient, disciplined and meticulous to handle skilled, monotonous jobs and easy to control. New International Division of Labour intensified by globalisation depends on super-exploitation of poor Asian Women, especially young unmarried girls who are recruited in the Free Trade Zones (FEZ), Export Processing Zones (EPZ) and the latest, Special Economic Zones (SEZ). During the last two decades, in the absence of any democratic rights in these labour concentration camps, these young girls had only one way of expressing their anger, fatigue and alienation i.e. mass hysteria. Now, the heads of ASEAN countries are negotiating to create more and more EPZs, SEZs, FTZs. Human and women's rights groups need to ensure that the horrible past of back-breaking, hazardous, highly labour intensive workload for women workers in the region, is not repeated.

Industrial pollution and occupational health risks also take heavy toll of Asian women's reproductive health. Carcinogenic and mutagenic effects of industrial pollution, incidents like Bhopal Union Carbide gas tragedy and radio-active nuclear waste have raised danger signals. Commercialisation of forest and natural resources have enhanced rural women's plight, as they are responsible for collection of fuel, fodder and water.

### **Population Control Policy:**

Paradigm shift in the discourse on population stabilisation in the South Asia is connected with racist & sexist biases of population control policies that dumps burden of population control on women. Targeting of poor Bangladeshi or Indian women for forced sterilisation and unsafe-hormone based contraceptives and pro-natalist policy for educated Asian women in a bid "to enhance the quality of population" are two sides of the same coin. "Severe side effects of Net-O-en and Depo Provera include menstrual disorders, cessation monthly cycle or irregular bleeding, general weakness, migraine, headaches and severe abdominal cramps." (SAMA, 2000). In South Asia, a large % of women in reproductive age group suffer from anaemia, irregular and heavy bleeding. Long acting hormone-based contraceptives can have catastrophically damaging consequences. (Sarojini & Murthy, 2005). We must highlight sexist implications of Eugenics. All these efforts violate bodily integrity of women and rest on the presumption that penetrative sex is be all and end all of women's existence. After introduction Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), states in the region have reduced social sector budget for women's development that comprise health and nutrition, education, employment, empowerment. Two categories for which the states are pumping in massive amount of funds is population control programmes and military expenditure.

### **Globalisation and New Forms of VAWG**

In the absence of any safety-net provided by the multinational and transnational Corporations or the governments, globalisation has enhanced control over sexuality, fertility and labour of women migrants in the region. Innocent rural girls as well as high-school educated adolescent girls are inducted into the workforce. Cross country migration of girls and women for domestic work, industrial and professional work and services like nursing, secretarial practice, tele-working and business process outsourcing (BPO) has increased.

Mail-order brides from Asian countries are in demand in Europe so that aging patriarchs can be looked after by 'docile' Asian women. Organ trade of destitute women, children and fetuses from the poor Asian communities has gained demonic proportion. Soft porn as well as hard-core pornography and cyber sexual violence are used for terrorisation, humiliation and intimidation of women and

girls. Cyber stalking in the computer labs of offices, colleges, universities and commercially run cyber-cafes has invited attention of the decision makers who are divided in their opinions. Some scholars believe that it reduces actual violence against women as people derive psychological satisfaction through voyeurism. Others see it as an extension of verbal and physical violence. Policy interventions are needed to deal with online sexual violence. Use of SMS to send scary messages to girls, is another important area that demands urgent attention. Only the East Asian countries have addressed cyber violence with gendered perspective. In cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Chandigarh and Hyderabad; increasing number of women are reporting harassment by online sexual violence through spam mail, cyber porn and SMS messages.

Smut parties for executives of TNCs, MNCs and indigenous corporate barons have become routine affairs, so much so that the states in the region do not take any action in spite of prima-facie evidences provided by the newspaper coverage (Shyam, 2002).

### **Jingoism, Militarisation and VAW in Asia**

Implications of jingoism- psychology of war mongering are dire on Asian women. Politics of rape used against women in Kashmir conflict, in the North East frontier, the tragedy of Tamil women in conflict, insurgency in Nepal, refugee camps in conflicts zones have evoked extreme indignation from the human rights organisations all over the world (Manchanda, 2001). In Myanmar and Nepal, the military rulers use rape as a means of social control and use torture for women deemed dangerous to the regime. Jingoism in South Asia has enhanced insecurity for women in the border regions of the sun-continent. Women's groups of SAARC countries have demanded peace and have launched several programmes and campaigns for public awareness.

"Comfort women" of military-men from World War II to the recent times have approached the UN system for justice. Drugs, sex-shops & crimes connected with militarisation in the border areas are reminders of medieval barbarism. Women as carriers for smuggling, women in border regions and women in the refugee camps of conflict-ridden areas need civilian interventions for safety and security. In region constituting "Killing fields" in the North East women constitute 2/3 of population. Development programmes supported by the UN are inadequate. International NGOs need to take lead in this direction. Mass rape of women in Manipur where soldiers are also owners of brothels needs to be condemned by the international community. Institutionalisation of sex-slavery in the region demands collective efforts of women's networks in the region. .

### **Domestic Violence**

"There are several endocentric explanations that justify wife-beating. Violence is related to power disparity." (Athlye, 2004). Out of all cases of violence against women registered in the Emergency Police Register in India, 1996, 22.4 % cases were of domestic violence.

Mapping of domestic violence in the region reveals universality of its occurrence still, "Health data collected routinely by governments and WHO do not yet report on the incidence of violence against women. For the South Asian region, country prevalence studies show that the prevalence of violence by an intimate partner ranges between 16 and 40 percent" (ICRW, 2002). Domestic abuse is everywhere still there are hardly any shelter-homes for women. In most Asian countries, there is no legal or state provision against marital rape.

A team of Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) doctors, women activists and researchers visited Crisis Centres in hospitals in Philippines and Malaysia in 1999. Inspired by this study tour, they facilitated the process of replicating the hospital-based crisis intervention centre and invited Centre for Enquiry Into Health and Allied Themes (CEHAT) to set up one stop crisis center for women,

called Dilaasa, in collaboration with BMC-run Bhabha Hospital, Bandra, Mumbai (Jesani, 2002).

### **How to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse?**

Increasing incidences of child sexual abuse are reported in the region, mostly by street children and child labourers. In this situation, counseling of children only in school is not adequate. There is need for community and neighbourhood-centered approach. We also need public discussion, TV coverage, radio-talks to legitimize experiences of the victims and empower them. Code of conduct concerning adult-child relationship, dos & don'ts and unsafe touch/intimacy should be discussed openly, not in a hush-hush tone. We should teach our children that "It is O.K. to say 'No'", instead of unconditional obedience. We should organise assertiveness training sessions and create a non-threatening atmosphere for children to emphasize, "Speak out, don't suffer in silence." Docudrama and role-play for class room teaching should highlight all potential situations of child sexual abuse. Custodial situations-hostels, jails, mental hospitals, orphanages, shelter homes and family need special mention. Accountability, transparency, responsible media coverage are imperative on part of the criminal justice system. Visually effective posters showing safe alternatives to abusive conditions should be addressed to school-going and non-school going children. Ban on use of children for child pornography should be made effective in the region. Sleazy remixes of old songs are making obscene use of women's bodies.

### **Prostitution**

Sex tourism in South & South East Asia perpetuates and promotes child-prostitution. In Burma, every year 10000 women and girls are trafficked into sex-slavery in Thai Brothels. Same is the profile of rural girls in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka in South Asia; Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia and in Indo-China. Both worsening economic situation and cultural practices condoning multiple sex-partners are responsible for proliferation of prostitution. HIV-AIDs scare has had no effect in curbing sex-trade in the absence of economically viable alternatives for sex-workers.

Act concerning prevention and suppression of trafficking in women and children should ensure decriminalisation of victims of prostitution targeting 4 Ps- procurers, pimps, police, politicians. Dealing with blackmailers needs support of the community groups and civil society initiatives. State funding for rehabilitation of prostitutes and salary of frontline workers should be increased so that better quality of custodial care and developmental needs of ex-prostitutes in terms of education, skills, employment, healthy recreational activities can be provided. Close collaboration between GOs and NGOs can be most effective (Fernandes and Ray, 2002). They should encourage analytical, not sensational writings or media-coverage on prostitution.

### **HIV AIDs as a Worst Form of VAW:**

This is a very important issue faced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both sex-workers with multiple sex-partners and housewives with single sex-partner (i.e. her husband) are at risk of getting HIV-AIDs. Counselling for dealing with social stigma and creating an alternate support network are the most important aspects of providing emotional support to the HIV-AIDs patients. The Lawyers Collective HIV/AIDS Unit holds monthly drop-in meetings, with an objective of sharing information, experiences and resolving mind-boggling issues affecting the lives of HIV/AIDS patients. It also provides legal aid and allied services to the needy. "The main objective of the Unit is to protect and promote the fundamental rights of persons living with HIV/AIDS who have been denied their rights in areas such as healthcare, employment, terminal dues like gratuity, pension, marital rights relating to maintenance, custody of children and housing" (Lawyers' Collective, 2000).

### **Culture Specific VAW- Role of Manu, Mulla and Confucian Ideologies**

Culture specific violence against women in different Asian countries should be approached sensitively, without making any racist or chauvinist remarks against the concerned community. We need universal applicability of human rights and acceptance of the fact that women's rights are human rights. This approach should be kept in mind while dealing with dowry harassment and bride burning among Hindu, Muslim and Christian women of the Indian origin, widow-burning- Suttee (Sati) in India, throwing of acid-bulbs against women in Bangladesh, Hadood Ordinance-women as witnesses in cases of rape, battering, assault, molestation and Islamic punishment for "Adulteress", son preference and neglect of girl child in Asia.

### **Valorisation of Barbaric Behaviour with Women of Minority communities:**

In the riots after breaking of Babri Mosq, the use of video cameras to capture the gory details of the rape of Muslim women in Surat in the presence of military and paramilitary forces, revealed the most horrific dimensions of brutalisation of the psyche of the civil society. Showing of these video-films in front of jeering crowd left permanent scar in the minds of women and children of minority women. Their sense of shame was complete. Even in Somalia, the fundamentalist forces used the videotapes capturing weeping and wailing naked violated women rape victims to terrorise, humiliate and intimidate women and to show them their place of restricted existence. Cleansing Operations in Bhopal (1992) and Gujarat Riots (28-2-2002 onwards) have created nightmarish situation for the Muslim women who experienced worst forms of sexual violence- rape, torture and tearing of uterus of pregnant women. (Engineer, 2003). While rape is a crime perpetrated during communal conflicts, the use of media to record, duplicate and even sell videos of rape is unprecedented and speaks of the dangerous use of media. Apart from this, the insular feelings created after each riot results into confinement and restriction of mobility of women and girls.

The nation states in all parts of the globe have proved to be ruthlessly against the minorities. In England when temples and mosques are demolished by all types of chauvinist forces: Hindu, Muslim and Skinheads, state machinery chooses not to address these issues on the grounds of non-interference with minorities. The policy of [multi-culturalism' in Britain and respect for all religion'](#) in India should be seen in this light. Patriarchal bias of the state always compromises women's interests so that the ruling party can fetch block votes by pleasing the patriarchs of the minority/ migrant communities. 'Non-interference' by the state when adult "girls" are confined by their family members so that they don't run away with their boy-friends and can be hurriedly forced into arranged marriage, is part of this game.

### **Fundamentalism, Communalism and Violence Against Women:**

Denial of human rights and fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of India by the fundamentalists by imposition of dress code, not granting right to work and attacks on female headed households have been objected by women's rights groups through out the world. Extreme form of punishment meted to women by the fundamentalists is in the form of stoning to death of "an adulterous woman" by the assembled community. During the last decade innumerable women in several countries have lost their lives in painful and undignified manner at the hands of self-appointed 'custodians of morality'. 'Honour killing' has become most widespread among all types of fundamentalists and communalists throughout Asia, Africa and the Middle- East not only among the tribals, but among so called civilized sections of the nation states. Recently, the law court of Shariat in Nigeria has passed a judgement of stoning to death to a mother of an infant, Ms. Amina Lowal for adultery. There has been an international uproar against the judgement. As a result, for the first time, the state has not executed the decision of the Shariat.

**Sex Segregation:** The fundamentalists forces have prevailed upon the state to enforce sex-segregation in Iran, Albania, Sahel in West Africa, Pakhtun, Malaysia and Turkey. (Hjarpe, 1983).

"Women in Saudi Arabia live complex existence which mingles strict traditions and codes of conduct with modern demands of education and freedom." (Megalli, 2002). Non-entry of women in the stadium and sports complexes are practiced in several theocratic states. On 22-1-2003, the chief justice of Afghanistan ordered nationwide ban on cable television and coeducation. (WLUML, 2003). Al Badr Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Jabbar, an offshoot of Lashkar-e-Toiba pasted a poster outside the government Higher Secondary School, asking girls to discontinue their studies on December 19, 2002.

**Dress Code:** Kashmir conflict has created a situation of great fear and insecurity in women's lives. (Dewan, 2002). Those who opposed the imposition of burqa by Kashmiri militant had to face dire consequences. Under Taliban rule, Afghanistan went to absurd lengths to implement Islamic laws that made women's life a never-ending punishment. It imposed ban on drivers of all types of vehicles from carrying women not wearing chador or chadri. It also prevented women from washing their linen in rivers and deserts. (Pevrin, 1997). A senior Shiv Sena leader, Mr. Nanak Ram Thavani has urged the federal and state governments to formulate and implement a dress code for girls in all schools, colleges and other teaching institutes. (WLUML, 2003).

Within hours of the expiry of their deadline for muslim women and girls to wear burqa, the Kashmiri fundamentalist militants killed three women, including 2 students and a teacher on the morning of 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2002 at Hasiyot in Thanamandi tehsil of Rajouri district. (The Indian Express, 27-12-2002)

**Right to Work:** Women were the first targets of theocratic states in the neo-colonial phase and the post liberation phases in the Middle Eastern, the Mediterranean and the North-West Frontier countries. In all these countries, women bravely fought along with their male comrades against the imperialist forces. But once, the "revolution" or "the national liberation" was attained, the fundamentalist forces dumped women into the four walls of domesticity. Arab News, the Saudi English language daily has revealed that Saudi women are more concerned about finding good work in tough jobs than being veiled.

The Kashmiri militant group, Lashkar-e-Jabbar has asked muslim women to quit their jobs and stay home, or face punishment, including death. (*The Times of India*, 21-1-2003).

In spite of the threats by the fundamentalists women are entering male bastions such as foreign services, diplomatic missions, judiciary, military, police force, sports such as soccer, political bodies, academic institutions, industrial chambers even in the theocratic states.

**Female Headed Households:** Fundamentalists of all hues perceive female headed households as eye-sore and make all efforts to persecute, stigmatise, isolate, marginalize and terrorise deserted, divorced, single and separated women leading an independent, economically self-sufficient life with dependent children or senior citizens. They don't accept, women as heads of the household. Wherever, the fundamentalist forces have become powerful, the female-headed households face persecution and witch-hunting.

**Communalised education:** In the X National Conference of The Indian Association of Women's Studies the issue of communalisation of school and college textbooks was discussed at length as representatives of different states reported that there was "a systematic attempt by the Sangh Parivar to 'educate' young and old through schools, shakhas, temple networks, satsangs, etc. Through such education which encompasses a whole range of institutions, the Sangh Parivar has managed to draw into its fold large number of women, who in turn seem to transmit this hatred to their children." (IAWS, 2003)

Changes in the curriculum that is being pushed through the National Curriculum Framework and the new NCERT text-books portray women only in highly regressive patriarchal terms within the framework of the family. They have targeted women's movement as being responsible for the break-up of the family. Many women's studies scholars have interpreted Gujarat tragedy as a failure of education that created brutalised masculinity.

Kashmir situation has jeopardised education of women. The same happened in the ULFA affected areas in Assam and LTTE prone areas in Jaffna (Sri Lanka). The Christian fundamentalists in Latin America are no different. All of them use young women in suicide squads and as cannon fodder for their barbaric agenda. In the camps of Vishva Hindu Parishad, young girls are brain-washed first with an ideological investment of communal education ("Muslims will outnumber Hindus", "Muslim men are lustful and Muslim women are breeders", "Muslims are born criminals", "Caste system is crucial for racial purity", "Shudras and ati-shudras are pollutants") and at the same time given training to use weapons (lathis, swords and daggers). ( Vaz, 2003)

Communal mindset created by Hindutva forces is so powerful that young college students of, the enlightened Wilson College got a humorous article based on stereotypes about "MUSLIM" as a murderer, drug seller, a cheater in cricket, kidnapper, terrorist, published. Its title is PAKISTANI MATH QUESTION PAPER. The very first question signifies man-woman relationship among the Muslims. It goes like this:

*"Abdul was sent to jail for murder. He has seven wives in his house. Abdul distributed money to his wives in such a proportion that the youngest and the most recent wife receives maximum and oldest wife gets minimum, and each wife gets double of her former competitor. Abdul has 1700 Rupees left in his house. Abdul's oldest wife needs at least 25 Rupees per month. Find out the time when Abdul will have to break jail to come out and come out so that his wives don't have to starve."* There are innumerable websites with similar constructions that demonise Muslim men.

The most widely circulated cassettes of the speeches and slogans by Sathvi Ritambhara, the crudest version of Hindutva ideology provides Ram centered and RSS-led perspective that has nothing in store for women but "Agni pariksha" (i.e. enter the fire to prove chastity and purity). Sathvi Ritambhara's speeches and pet slogan "If there has to be bloodshed, let it happen once and for all" during Ram Janmabhoomi campaigns organised by Hindutva forces between 1986-1990 played crucial role in massacre of Muslims in the 1992 riots. (Sarkar, 2001)

Ban on Inter-caste, Inter-religious and Inter-racial Marriages: Obsession about racial, caste and religious purity are so deep in the psyche of fundamentalists that have strong aversion against inter-mixing and inter-marriages among citizens of different caste groups, religious communities and racial backgrounds. Newspapers are full of incidences of torture, abduction, forced abortion, lynching, murder of newly married couples with different caste, religious, ethnic or racial backgrounds. Even the state and criminal justice system miserably fails to provide adequate protection to such love marriages. Such couples have to face social boycott, can't easily get jobs, accommodation and school admissions for their children.

Conversion of husband or wife as a conditionality for "allowing" couples to get married is a logical extension inward looking mentality generated by the fundamentalist mindset.

### **Communalised Violence Against Women:**

The communalised violence women have experienced recently in Gujarat is unprecedented in terms of the degree of state complicity, the unashamed valorisation of these acts of depravity, the horrific participation of women in the violence and the creation of an implacable wall of hatred that provides



the reason and then the justification for its spiral effect. It took us fifty years to document excesses against women during the Partition. One wonders how much longer it will take now.

The following poem by Ms. Lara Jesani vividly captures the pain and pathos of women victims of fundamentalist wrath and communal carnage whether they were women victims in 1992-93 Mumbai riots or women in refugee camps of Gujarat ten years later, in 2002-2003.

Eyes raining, without mere control,

Scruples hurt, thus dew drops roll.

Lightened, piercing, still with grief,

Forever, staring in disbelief.

Hearts melting, defences down,

Afflicted feelings, all around.

Timeless moments, of unending sorrow,

Darkened scars, that none can borrow.

Deep in hurdles, full with distress,

Pleasures replaced, by pure sadness.

Love's demise, of responsive pain,

A day's repose, then it starts again.

Areas of ethnic tension and caste/communal riots need special intervention in terms of workshops to unlearn chauvinistic values through role-play, role reversal, psychotherapy and group counseling. Refugee camps of the victims of riots should provide security and development inputs for women and children. Gujarat riots have proved the devastating influence of high tech 21<sup>st</sup> century VAW instigated by the fundamentalist and communal forces.

### **Violence and Health Issues of Women Over the Life Cycle**

As unborn children, women face covert violence in terms of sex-selection and overt violence in terms of female foeticide after the use of amniocentesis, chorion villai biopsy, sonography, ultrasound and imaging techniques.[1] IVF (In Vitro Fertilization) clinics for assisted reproduction are approached by infertile couples to produce sons. Doctors are advertising aggressively, "Invest Rs. 500 now, save Rs.50000 later" i.e. "If you get rid of your daughter now, you will not have to spend money on dowry".

As girls under 5 years of age, women in India face neglect in terms of medical care and education, sexual abuse and physical violence. As adolescent and adult women in the reproductive age group, they face early marriage, early pregnancy, sexual violence, domestic violence, dowry harassment, torture in case of infertility; if they fail to produce son, then face desertion/ witch hunt. The end result is a high maternal mortality. Causes of maternal deaths in our country are haemorrhage, abortion, infection, obstructed labour, eclampsia (blood pressure during pregnancy), sepsis, and anaemia. Proliferation of New Reproductive Technologies should be analysed in this context.

## **Sexual Violence and Mental Health:**

Sexual assault, molestation, rape, sexual harassment at workplace, child sexual abuse, nuisance calls cause psychological disturbances among girls and women generate trauma that sparks off tension and anxiety at a dangerous level. Their mental health problems are manifested in anxiety, fear, avoidance, guilt, loss of efficiency, lack of coordination, depression, sexual dysfunction, substance abuse, relieving the traumatic incidents through memory, suicidal attempts, eating disorders, disturbed sleep patterns, fear of encountering such situation once again. It is found that “women who undergo extreme sexual violence experience a loss of self and self-esteem following the shock inflicted on them. When there is a continuous period of traumatic stress, it becomes chronic, lessening the individual’s ability to do any kind of constructive work.” (Nair & Nair, 2002). Hence, this forms of male violence towards women is an important issue that demands public attention. Women’s organisations have taken up this issue at a local, national and global level.

## **The United Nations and VAW**

As per Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), “All States are obliged to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.” Beijing Declaration, Platform for Action, The UN World Conference on Women, China, 1995 gave mandate to all member countries of the UN to devise action plan against VOW. Most of the countries in the region have ratified CEDAW. All SAARC member countries have ratified CEDAW still they are continuing with the colonial criminal justice system and are resistant to reform antiquated family laws and stop violence against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders (LGBT). The Bollywood film industry and electronic and print media does not miss a single opportunity to trivialize and marginalize their concerns. LGBTs are defined only as over-sexed and pervert human beings who can never be faithful to their sex-partners.

The SAARC Declaration has three main areas for strategic interventions:

- Survival and protection of girl child and safe motherhood
- Overall development of the girl child
- Special protection for vulnerable girl children in difficult circumstances

**World Social Forum and VAW: Global concern against VAW is witnessed in the number of workshops, conferences and women’s courts during World Social Forums. All social movements are concerned about VAWG.**

## **Laws Concerning VAWG**

India was the 1<sup>st</sup> to enact the Family Courts Act (1984). Domestic Violence Bill (2002) to be tabled soon for deliberations in the Parliament of India. Women’s movement has pushed for legislation to provide protection for abused women. After 10 years of lobbying, Malaysia was the 1<sup>st</sup> to enact Domestic Violence Act, 1994. It has been studied by Islamic countries. There is a need for broadening the definition of domestic violence to include violence against women senior citizens (abuse of “mentally unfit” certificate), incest & rape by family members and relatives forcing women & girls into prostitution (International Commission of Jurist, 1995)

**- *Legal Awareness about VAW is extremely important.***

Country-specific campaigns for legal reforms by human/women rights organizations have been around the Pre Natal Diagnostic Technique Act (India), Hudood Ordinance (Pakistan), Family laws and customary practices need global solidarity. Public Interest Litigations to deal with sexual harassment at workplace should be filed by the NGOs. Women in India need a comprehensive

Women's Protection Act that can take care of both civil and criminal matters because even if women fight in civil courts for their rights concerning marriage, divorce, custody of children, alimony, maintenance, property, access to matrimonial or ancestral home, they have to face violence from their near and dear ones. We need common legislation for the region to deal with cross-country trafficking of women and girls for sex-trade and organ transplant.

VAWG is a cognisable offence against the state. If you face VAWG or see it happening in the neighbourhood, public place or at the workplace, you can immediately contact police demanding police inquiry and get the First Investigation Report filed. You should make three copies-one for the victim, one should be submitted to the police station and don't forget to take an official stamp and signature of the police officer in-charge on the third copy. These documentary proofs are extremely important in the court of law.

Court Proceedings: Provide moral support to the victim and brief her to provide accurate details in chronological order about violence. She must stick to the same version; changing position during cross-examination may go against her.

Many cases of VAW also get resolved in the neighbourhood committee, community organisations and lok adalats (People's Court). We must remember that VAW is a manifestation of unequal power-relation between men and women. If women are empowered by the community and official support, we can tilt the balance in favour of "VAWG free society".

### **Media and VAW**

Action programme for media to prevent violence against women should be as follows:

- Monitoring of covert & overt VAWG in print and audio-visual media and encouragement for public debate for mass education on construction of men-woman relationship, sex-stereotypes, glorification of angry, aggressive HE-man and masochist woman.
- Media Alternatives for non-violent relationship between men and women. "Suffering in silence is not a virtue." Can be an appeal of male protagonists.
- Demand for Portrayal of women's agency as an active contributor for social/ human development.
- Positive projection of female headed households (FHH) and special problems faced by FHH-jobs, housing, schooling of their children, property right.

### **Self Defence and Assertiveness Training**

Ideal solution for prevention of VAWG is a multi-pronged approach involving female autonomy, economic empowerment and improved status of girl-child. Counseling for personality development and assertiveness training should teach women various techniques of handling acts of violence and aggressive behaviour. E.g. use of loud voice to prevent violence, need for physical power to handle violence. Self-defense courses-Karate and country-specific martial arts should be made available for women and girls. Dealing with anorexia nervosa and bulimia-eating disorders due to violence or anticipation of violence should be treated as an important issue and included in the module on self-defense training programmes.

### **State and Civil Society Initiatives**

*National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001* of Government of India declares: "All forms of violence against women, physical and mental, whether at domestic or societal levels, including those

arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices shall be dealt with effectively with a view to eliminate its incidence. Institutions and mechanisms/schemes for assistance will be created and strengthened for prevention of such violence, including sexual harassment at workplace and customs like dowry; for rehabilitation of the victims of violence and for taking effective action against perpetrators of such violence. A special emphasis will also be laid on programmes and measures to deal with trafficking in women and girls”.

“Because Personal is political” – a document published by Tata Institute of Social Sciences, TISS Mumbai provides valuable insight into collaborative venture between social workers and the Mumbai Police during 1984-1994. Documentation of 10 years of work against VAW also provides important understanding about legal provision for redressal of domestic disputes through establishment of Family Court (as per The Family Court Act, 1984). Women’s Cell in the Police Commissioner’s office was established in 1984. Civil matters were handled by professional social workers appointed by TISS and police intervened to deal with criminal matters that included domestic violence, sexual violence, physical and psychological cruelty and murder.

Two prominent items in the agenda for action to combat VAW are:

- Training for the police force, judiciary, doctors and hospital staff, lawyers, media, politicians, administration and the members of Women’s Commissions.
- Resource kit for workers in caring professions that teaches various techniques of handling acts of violent and aggressive behaviour.

Empowering influence of feminist counseling (Baaco-Pascual, 2001) is a result of 4-pronged approach and was implemented by the Arugaan Ng Kalakasan in Philippines:

1. Creative strategies for mobilisation of resources against VAW in terms of consciousness raising and action.
2. Telephone counselling as a feminist alternative for abused women in intimate relationship.
3. FACTS against MYTHS exercise for public education on VAW.
4. Defining policewomen’s role for empowerment of women victims of violence.

### **Practical Ways of Tackling the Issue of Violence Against Women**

If we firmly believe that women’s rights are human rights, we have to devise practical ways of tackling the issue of violence against women (VAW). We have to be proactive to stop violence by direct intervention and prevent violence through public education of the civil society and affirmative action by the criminal justice system.

As individuals we must understand that to perpetrate violence and to be mute witness to violence against women, both are crimes. Hence we should combat VAW in personal life through prompt action and in public life through demonstrations, rallies, sit-ins, writing and speaking against VAW from public platforms. To counter myths about VAW that lead to victim blaming (“Women ask for it”, “Women provoke it”, “Women enjoy it as sado- masochist relationship with her tormentor”) is extremely important to legitimise women’s experience of VAW and penalise the tormentor. Women victims of VAW should be encouraged to speak out and not suffer in silence. Tormentors’ misdeeds should be publicized in the neighbourhood so that the victim gets timely support in case of physical

and psychological violence. Phone numbers of the nearest police station and one-stop crisis centres in the nearest government or municipal hospital should be found out from the telephone directory or "Help line" column of daily newspapers.

Training workshops for Self-defence techniques and assertiveness among women should be organised because physical fitness is as important as self-confidence, presence of mind and voice-training (lung- power and tongue power) to disarm the tormentor.

Public education can be done through exhibition, film screening followed by discussion, poster campaign, slide-shows, power-point presentation, street play, songs and ballets, role reversal techniques on the theme of VAW. Sometimes, creative expressions are more powerful than dead statistics or lecture on VAW.

### **Conclusion:**

Women's self-organisations in the last two decades have brought the issue of growing VAWG on the public agenda. We have also realized that encouraging men's involvement as partners for just and humane society to create VAW free life is extremely important.. Research has shown that violence is learned, not innate behaviour. Sensitizing of men and boys on gender stereotypes, concept of masculinity that subordinates women should be done by educational institutions, media and citizens groups such as YMCA and Men Against Violence and Abuse. Helping men to challenge and unlearn those norms that condone violence is an uphill task. Setting up Complementary rehabilitative programmes for abusers need an interdisciplinary approach and collaboration of state, civil society and human rights groups. Majority of social workers in Asia recommend a balance of punitive and rehabilitative measures to change violent behaviour of men. (Satia and Hoi, 2001)

We should invite creative expressions on VAW from children and discuss them to make the next generation gender sensitive and free from internalisation of violent behaviour with girls and women. Sensitive use of communication media, proactive role of the state, decriminalisation of politics, public education in the community and workplace as well as an active intervention of civil society can prevent VAW in our society. It is important to promote multicultural ethos, secular humanism, respect for diversity and peaceful resolution of conflicting opinions to stop societal violence in general and VAW in particular.

### **References:**

Athlye, Naina Rao (2004) "Overcoming Violence Against Women-Let's Make the world Safer for Women, Centre for Women's Development, All India Institute for Christian Higher Education, July-Sept.

Citizen's Initiative (2002) How has the Gujarat Massacre Affected Minority Women? The Survivor Speak- Fact Finding by A women's Panel, April, 16.

Fernandes, G and Ray, C.S.(2002) "Raids, Rescue, Rehabilitation", Research Unit, College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai.

Ganataru, B., Hirve, S. and Rao V. N. (2001) "Sex Selective Abortion: Evidence From a Community-based Study in Western India", Asia Pacific Population Journal, UN ESCAP, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand, Vol.16, No.2, June.

Goonsekera, Savitri (2004) Violence Law and Women's Rights in South Asia, UNIFEM, Sage

Publications, Delhi.

Herring, S.C. "Cyber Violence and Gender: Suggestions Through Analysis of Cases", Asian Women, Research Institute of Asian Women, Sookmyung Women's University, Korea, pp. 187-212.

Hitchcock, Jayne (2002) "The Wild Wild Web- Cyber Stalking", Asian Women, Research Institute of Asian Women, Sookmyung Women's University, Korea, pp.175-155.

International Commission of Jurists (1995) Women and the Law in the Pacific, Geneva.

Jesani, A (2002) "Violence Against Women: Health and Health Care Issues- A Review of Selected Indian Works", Samyukta- A Journal of Women's Studies, Vol.II, No. 2, July, p.57.  
Website: [www.samyukta.org](http://www.samyukta.org).

Karkal, M (1991) "Abortion Laws and the abortion Situation in India", Issues in Reproductive and Genetic Engineering, Vol. 4, No.3, pp. 223-30.

Kramarae, C. and Spender, D. (ed) (2000) International Encyclopedia of Women- Global Women's Issues and Knowledge, Routledge, New York and London. Pp.2014-5.

Lawyers Collective (2000 ) Positive Dialogue, HIV/AIDs unit, Mumbai, Newsletter 6, August, p.4.

Lee, K. H. (2002) "Cyber Violence and Gender", Asian Women, Research Institute of Asian Women, Sookmyung Women's University, Korea, pp.217-233.

Nair, J & Nair H. (2002) "Gendering Health", Samyukta, Vol. 2, No. 1, January, p.44.

Manchanda, R. (ed) (2001) Women, War and Peace in South Asia- Beyond Victimhood to Agency, Sage Publications, Delhi, 2001.

Patel, V. (2002) Women's Challenges of the New Millennium, Gyan Publishing House, Delhi, pp.116-127. website: <http://www.gyanbooks.com>

Patel, V (2002) "Women's Right to Mental Health", Vikalpa, Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, Vol.X, No. 3, pp. 5- 18. Also published in the Web Journal- India Together, January, 2004.

Patel, V (2003) "The Girl Child-Health Status in the Post Independence Period", The National Medical Journal of India, vol. 16, p.42.

Patel, V (2003) "Sons Are Rising, Daughters are Setting", Humanscape, Vol, 10, No. IX, Sept, 2003. Also on the web: [www.humanscapeindia.net](http://www.humanscapeindia.net).

Patel, V (2004) "Globalisation and Declining Sex Ratio", Workshop at World Social Forum, January 18, 2004. Also published in the web journal The Quarterly Journal of Opinion, <http://www.thequarterly.net>, July, 2003.

SAMA(2000) " Unveiled Reality- A Study on Women's Experience With Depo Provera- An Injectable Contraceptives", Delhi.

Sarojini, N.B. and Laxmi Murthy (2005) "Why Women's Groups Oppose Injectibles?", Indian Journal of Medical Ethics, Vol. II, No.1, January-March, p.8.

Sen, A.K. (1992) "Missing Women", British Medical Journal, No.304, March.

Shrestha, A.K., Tamang, Meera and Sharma, Kabita (2002) "Determinants of Induced Abortion and Subsequent Reproductive Behaviour Among Women in Three Urban districts of Nepal" in Mundigo, A. and Indriso, C. (ed.s) Abortion in Developing World, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi. p. 167.

Shyam, K (2002) "Smut Parties in a New Pack", Indian Express- Mumbai Newslines, November 3, 2002.

WHO (1996), World Health Organisation, Geneva.

---

[1] Patel, Vibhuti (1992) "Girl Child: An Endangered Species?" in Viney Kripal (ed) The Girl Child in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Indian Literature, Sterling Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, P.9.

---

### **P.S.**

\* Contribution presented at Workshop titled as "Looking Afresh at VAWG Through an Exploration of the Political Economy of VAWG and Masculinity" organized by SANGAT , 2005.

\* Dr. Vibhuti Patel is Director, PGSR & Professor & Head, Department of Economics, SNDT Women's University, Churchgate, Mumbai-400020.  
E-mail- vibhuti.np@gmail.com Phone-91-022-26770227, mobile-9321040048