

BREAKING THE SILENCE THROUGH LITERATURE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS INTO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, TRAUMA, AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

In an era of unequal development, the interplay of pre-capitalist values and modern forces with the accentuation of the free-market economy and the consumer culture have become part of the complex and contradictory fabric of our present-day society. Domestic violence is a term which finds equal importance in both life and literature. A life experience that will traumatize millions of women worldwide more than once is gender-based violence, which includes child sexual abuse, rape, sexual harassment at the workplace, sexual molestation/assault, and domestic violence. A woman grows up with this reality, which is permanently imprinted on her memory as a continual reminder of how her life will always be governed by a systematic and pervasive reality. The fact that silence is the norm and this pervasive reality is rendered invisible is what makes it so oppressive. The feminist movement has only recently pushed women to speak out against gender violence. Real life circumstances for women were private, personal, and personal sphere. To speak of sexual or domestic violence within the family in India is to open oneself up to shame, embarrassment, and skepticism. The family is a valued and private institution. Speaking of violent events outside of it invites scorn, shame, and moralising commentary from the general population. A new female literary tradition was created as a result of the formation of a female subculture and the development of a new sense of self revealed in their writings. Anita Desai's writings, which are influential in this field, are included in the study to show how the writings of women may be a potent tool for raising awareness and paving the way for the prevention of domestic violence. The study looks on the psychological effects of domestic violence trauma and how it affects women's health.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Literature, Psychological effects, Trauma, Women's Health.

Introduction

Domestic violence is defined as "anything threatening when used by those with power (invariably men) against those without power (mainly women and children)" (Glass ii). It can be defined as a terrifying and fearful experience undergone by an individual from those in power against those who are less powerful and mostly happening within a family. Thus, violence used to control, assert authority and exact obedience. The history of sexual segregation and strict division of labour has a long tradition in India. French critic Michael Zeraffa has said with the novel (literary works), society enters history and history enters into society" (11). It includes not only interspousal violence, but also violence perpetrated by other family members. Generally, an important part of the power relationship between spouses and their families relate to dowry and its ramifications. Harassment, maltreatment,

brutality or cruelty or even the threat of assault intimidation forms part of this. Domestic violence or abuse is defined as a pattern of abusive behaviors by one partner against another in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating, family or cohabitation.

This paper examines how the multifaceted umbrella term 'domestic violence' tends to be important in its application in the violence against women, the nature of this offence, its far-reaching consequences and effects and the ways developed to control this aspect in society. The power of female scripts to break the 'long-observed silence' forms part of this analysis. Gender inequality and stereotyping form key elements which hold women in societal bonds, leading to domestic violence, can be best resolved through creating awareness and building "a literature of their own", a phrase coined by Elaine Showalter. The emergence of a female subculture along with a new self-awareness of it through their writings, led to the establishment of a different female literary tradition. The works of Anita Desai, which is a powerful mode in this arena, is made part of the study to illustrate how works by women writers act as a powerful medium in creating awareness and there by paving a way for controlling domestic violence. The study also probes into the psychological impact of trauma impacted through domestic violence and its impact on women's health.

With the changes in the traditional value systems, the role occupied by women has undergone considerable changes. Various reports point to the fact that illiterate women face more violence within the family in comparison to literate women. In the marital relationship, domestic violence has been defined as all actions by the family against one of its members that threaten the life, body, psychological integrity or liberty of the member. The traditional values of the necessity of marrying a girl for spiritual merit and the modern system of calculation and other considerations of the groom's family in a milieu of inequality and insecurity have brought to the surface a sense of competition and manipulation.

Women's entry into the workforce is a harbinger of her family's prosperity, her own economic independence and above all nation's economic growth. All her happiness in domestic sphere is again jeopardized when she fails to act out her role in the traditional domestic life. She is being subjected to innumerable physical and mental fortunes. While the presence of large number of educated women in work force is quite encouraging and augurs well for the economic growth of the country, her position is precarious in society. In reality, the emerging role of women as an economic worker is yet another full-time responsibility on these domestic workers.

In a survey conducted by Visaria (1999) in Gujarat on between wife beating and education the percentage of literate women in Gujarat is between 20% to 50%. In one district, Babas kantha in Kutch, the total percentage of literature women is even lesser than 20%. In contrast, a study by Ahuja in 1998 shows that there is no significant relationship between beating and educational level of the couple. Educated women are beaten as much by their husbands as those who are illiterate or less educated. About one-fourth of the batterers (24%) in Ahuja's study were those who were moderately educated and about one-fourth (26%) were highly educated. However, he added that men, whose educational attainment is low, are more likely to beat their wife than men who are better educated. According to the survey findings of Visaria (1999), women who experience domestic violence early in their marriage, continue to be subjected to it even with increase in age. His findings point out that family structure, the presence or absence of children, and the size of the family have little relation with wife battering (1735).

Deteriorated position of women in the present society and the increase in the magnitude of the variety of offences against them has a long history dating back to ancient times. The unjust and unsympathetic attitude towards women originating from the Smriti Age in an aggravated form continued in the medieval period. The entire class of women then became the victim of monstrous humiliation. "Women have known hardship in all civilizations but surely nowhere else the inequality in the treatment of women could have surpassed that in India (2).

In course of time, dowry began to be considered as the essential ingredient in the marriage market. Dowry related violence against married women by the families they marry into is a phenomenon that is on the increase in the country. The following table gives an indication of the increase in dowry related violence against women. However, this data is only a tip of the iceberg, as most of these cases do not get reported unless it reaches an extreme case of death.

Table 1-Dowry Reporting Under Crime Heads

<i>Crime Head</i>	<i>Year</i>			<i>% Variation in 1997 over 1996</i>
	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	
Dowry Death	5092	5513	6006	8.9
Dowry Prohibition Act	2814	2647	2685	1.4

Source: *Crime in India 1997 Pg. 162*

While the situation was thus gathering clouds the freedom movement in India proved as a blessing for the women community and provided scope of their unification. Since then, the foundation was laid down to fight discrimination against women. This feeling was ignited intentionally. During 1918, the great leader Lenin reflected in his speech on the existing universal condition of women class and said "No wonder women are called domestic slaves; such is the status of women in all civilized countries, even the most advanced women do not enjoy full equality in any capitalist state, not even in the freest of republics."(62)

Since 19th century, numerous socio-political and legal reforms in society have failed to change women's position and her criminal exploitation both in domestic and public spheres. Mostly to fulfill the economic necessities of family, to raise their status & to maintain their independence, large number of women are entering into the workforce. The violence against the working-class women can be mainly grouped into two headings crimes in domestic sphere like torture, dowry torture, death, suicide and crimes in outer world like eve teasing, molestation, rape, kidnapping and abduction.

Causes and Effects

Women, irrespective of their status as working or non-working are victimized by different crimes in domestic sphere. Domestic crimes largely go unreported and remain unnoticed by the society. The helpless victims of domestic crimes are crippled under the societal pressure with the helpless investigating authorities and judiciary as silent spectator because they get no complaint, to ignite the jurisdiction of investigation. Further in our society the marital tie of spouses is mainly established and strengthened in family on mutual faith and belief.

Psychologists assert that domestic violence results from male frustration, aggression, combined with deviant personality, trait – concept narcotic drugs and alcoholism. Research

Studies prove that non-working women experience more emotional, physical abuse and threats where as the working women are exploited economically and sexually.

The imbalance among the family members, primarily affects the children who sometimes become indirect victims of domestic violence. It affects child's emotional, social behavioral and cognitive developments. Such as increased aggressiveness, anxiety and changes in how a child socializes with friends, family and authorities. Depression and self-esteem issues, which are the immediate effect, arise from traumatic experiences.

Domestic violence may also result in acute and chronic health conditions such as arthritis, chronic pain, pelvic pain, ulcers and migraines. Victims who are pregnant during a domestic violence relationship experience greater risk of miscarriage, pre-term labor, injury to or death of the fetus.

More crucial and long lasting is the psychological impacts of domestic violence such as stress, fear, anxiety, depression and Post Traumatic stress Disorder characterized by flash blacks, intrusive images, nightmares, etc.

Results

Female Scripts for Power

The Indian women definitely carry the pains of their wounded psyche. The manner in which culture, ideology and dogmas engendered many contractions and conflicts in the life of women are portrayed in the literary works. A safe ideal is provided to women in a patriarchal society, to restrict women into subordinate positions. The quality of womanhood in India depends greatly in performing her roles. An individual grows, develops and slowly builds a concept about his or her self. As mentioned earlier domestic violence and its traumatic effects have its impact on the psychological development of an individual and literature acts as a tool to bring about effective changes in social reality. As the individual grows, develops and slowly builds a concept about his or her self. The process of image – making, which takes place on the deepest level of the unconscious, is actually the psychological side of the life process by which the human organism grows towards the form and goal of his individuality. Most works in Indian literature in English are aimed at social reform and the strained family relations and domestic violence constitute an important theme. Most suitable example of this could be found in Anita Desai's works. Desai depicts the story of Indian Woman the various forces that are working against her the unalterable life situations which trap her identity. The dark and foreboding nature of oppression used against women, the traditional value system and culture that deny women her freedom are portrayed by Desai. The frightening possibilities confronted by women are innumerable fears, disillusionment and imminent action. Desai's novels present the dichotomy that exists in the life of Indian Women. The conflict generated within the self results in the fragmentation of the self and wounded psyche. To quote Milan Kundera "Terrible are the wounds / of a murdered dream" (165).

This contributes to many ambiguities in life and causes existential trauma. Nirode in *Voice in the City* echoes the agony in search of one's identity, one's destiny. According to Desai, a woman's self is colonized by these values which lead her to passivity. In Desai's first novel, *Cry the Peacock*, Maya's loveless marriage denotes the stereotyped wife in the Indian family. Monisha in *Voice in the City* silently contemplates and longs for a change. Her silence is powerful enough to shake women out of their complacency. According to Geetha Ramnathan, "perhaps the most empowering aspect of these texts is that they do not

domesticate women's rage. The name of silence is the violence that is "spoken through" ...what we take with us is a cultural script that bears the mark of that violence." (25). Monisha commits suicide, unable to negotiate and reach a compromise with existing value system. She registers her protest by committing suicide. Tavleen Singh reports in *Manushi*, about Kanchan Mala Hardy, who committed suicide in the bathroom in Tagore Garden, New Delhi. Hers was a love marriage. "Both her mother-in-law and her husband maintain that though they were in the house, Sunil sleeping in a room only five feet away from the bathroom, did not know Kanchan was killing herself and arrived too late to save her." It is clear that Desai has depicted the evils that exist in society and the violence that is perpetrated on women by the patriarchal order. Illa Das's rape in *Fire on the Mountain* is a reminder of the use of physical violence as a prerogative of men to oppress women. Desai's novels conceive the psychological and social conflicts produced by the so-called ideal womanhood.

Findings from Psychology

Psychologically, violence against women depends on a range of variables, including the frequency of the abuse, the nature of the connection between the abuser and victim, the length of time the abuse persisted, the victim's age, the views of the community and culture about violence, etc. However, there are some traits that victimised women would typically exhibit such as fear/avoidance, guilt, changes in self-perception and self-efficacy, sexual dysfunction, depression, substance abuse, reliving the experiences through memory, suicidal attempts and ideation, changes in food and sleeping habits, anxiety, fear of running into the same situation again.

Damaged psyche served as a key to understanding the real world of women. The most prevalent phenomenon included victim psyches, in which women found it difficult to emotionally flee the abusive circumstance or the abuser. Even though dependence had many plausible causes, such as financial insecurity, it was more perplexing to us when even financially secure women were unable to leave abusive households. Then, we started to concentrate on what we perceived to be a whole dialectic of trauma that was equally invisible to them as it was to us. They had been so deeply ingrained with violence that they were unable to recognise their responses as being directly caused by the unrelenting abuse. They were so accustomed to taking charge that they mistook their own "loss of control," hopelessness, and sadness for a failure to "adapt." Due to the cultural silence surrounding family life, the presumption that men have more authority over women and husbands have more authority over their wives, the idea that wives should "obey" their husbands, and the idea that a woman's identity only exists in her marital home, domestic violence is a serious underreported crime in this country. All of these elements are engrained in the collective psyche of women and serve as a barrier to either revelation or emancipation.

Counseling had a catalytic impact, causing memories of abuse and helped the pain to surface. During counselling sessions, "disclosure" and "flashbacks", in psychology, were found to be effective strategies for victims. The idea of mourning and remembering became a turning point, was used as a mode that helped in releasing the client from the strain of her previous suffering. This allowed her to perceive her ability to survive in a clearer, more powerful way. troubling memories were frequently stored as strong emotions and vivid visuals and did not always follow a verbal narrative. Studies conducted on trauma victims of different kinds led to the realisation that there are profound similarities between survivors of combat neurosis and sexual/domestic violence victims. It impacted their psychological and emotional health.

Sexual assault was understood as a tactic used to keep all women in a state of dread and intimidation. Burgess and Holmstrom (1974) studied the psychological impacts of rape. A pattern of behaviour referred to as the Rape Trauma Syndrome was analyzed. Walker (1979) made a similar endeavour that resulted in what is called the Battered Woman Syndrome. The Battered Woman Syndrome has varied stages: 1) The phase of tension-building when little assaults may happen, which she tolerates to stop the violence from getting worse. She may appease him and act submissive, but this supports his sense of dominance over her. 2) The violent and perhaps fatal episodes of the acute battering incident are followed by a peaceful, loving (or non-violent) phase where he may swear never to do it again. She might be persuaded that if she goes, he won't be able to survive and that he won't beat her up again. Walker defines a battered woman comes to realise that she cannot predict every circumstance and must thus adapt her behaviour.

And how does one measure psychological degradation, the feelings of humiliation and shame experienced by the battered woman when she senses she will never be able to please the man she loves? To be sure, continual, unpredictable insecurity in the presence of everbuilding violence must dramatically influence the way a human being views the world (Walker, 1979). Rape Trauma Syndrome (Burgess and Holmstrom, 1974) is characterized by following stages: The Immediate/Acute Stage - Physical/Somatic Reactions: disorganisation, sleep and eating pattern disturbances. Emotional Reactions - Expressed: shock, anger, fear, anxiety; fear regarding physical injury, mutilation, and death leading to humiliation, degradation, shame and embarrassment. Controlled: masking feelings to appear calm. Cognitive: blocking thoughts or the assault; replaying the incident to evaluate their own responses to prevent it, and eventually take on responsibility for the entire event leading to self-blame. The responses of significant others, law enforcement agencies, and other factors can have an impact on long-term reactions. Phobias related to the occurrence, like phobias of crowds, travelling alone, or being followed; Repetition of the incident in dreams and nightmares, with the victim appearing to flee the scene or just unsettling violent imagery that the person may have some control over; Sexual behaviour disruption and a lack of interest in or dread of sexual activity; silent response to rape/sexual assault.

The startling parallels between combat neurosis and sexual assault on women were revealed by such ground-breaking research and the brave revelations of the victims, which led to the awful realisation that it was actually one and the same condition. This meant that "the hidden violence of men maintains and enforces the submissive situation of women." Its casualties include rape victims, abusive women, and sexually abused children (Herman, 1992).

Domestic Violence as Psychological Trauma

In order to live with the trauma of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse at the hands from somebody a woman claims loves her and who she in turn claims to love as well, a victim of domestic violence has had to adopt particular ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is viewed as a normal reaction that lasts for a long time after it has served its purpose and a failure to recover from mental trauma.

Women who experience trauma in reaction to intimate partner abuse exhibit different characteristics, such as a predominance of depressed affect, changes in how they view the abuser, increased self-blame, and a loss of identity. Since the link between PTSD and domestic abuse was only recently discovered in the academic literature on violence rather

than in the mainstream mental health publications/research, therapeutic practise worldwide has not been sufficiently integrated with this knowledge.

Herman (1992) argues that this implies that healing is always feasible as long as the subject has the power to access the "normal" recovery process. Eight universal aspects of traumatic stressors that can appear in many traumatic event types are listed by Green (1990). These several levels can be compared to the experiences of victims of sexual and domestic abuse: being in danger for one's life and physical integrity; suffering severe physical hurt or injury; being the victim of purposeful injury or harm; being exposed to the grotesque; witnessing or learning of violence against loved ones; learning that one has been exposed to a poisonous substance and causing serious injury or death to another.

The clinical diagnosis of PTSD is still restricted because it covers only a portion of the experiences of battered women. Women who are currently experiencing continuing assault are not taken into account (Herman, 1992). The term "post-traumatic stress disorder" only refers to the symptoms that persist after the threat or danger has passed. More crucially, PTSD only identifies the symptoms that result from a single traumatic experience or a small number of traumatic events. When we find continuum histories of sexual or physical abuse in childhood and adulthood, it becomes clear that it is insufficient since it does not take ongoing battery or sexual abuse into consideration. This is especially important because the majority of the study's cases involved long-term victims of sexual and physical abuse. The overwhelming majority of chronically abused women exhibit somatization symptoms, which include changes in affect regulation, cognition, and consciousness (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; McCann and Pearlman, 1990; Peterson and Seligman, 1983; Foa Zinbarg and, Rothbaum, 1992: cited from Herman, 1992). PTSD does not describe these symptoms.

Conclusions

Tracing out the causes, effects and far-reaching consequences of domestic violence, it can be concluded that life and literature are two sides of the same coin and what ever happens in real life is blended with fictional sequences in literature. An understanding of the traumatic outcomes through literary works may perhaps help to make reforms in real life. The works of many literary figures act as a stimulating force making women aware of the offences against them, their rights and powers, awakening them from its brutal forces and help them overcome critical situations of life. The psychological tug-of-war undergone by women characters of Anita Desai and many other women writers are instances from real life, experienced by them, serves to provide courage to such victims in real life. The resolution arrived at by the characters provide motivation and inspiration to similar victims in real life. In addition to that the works make them aware of existential trauma suffered by women, bringing an end to silence and solitude. The psychological interventions into the area of domestic violence are important in today's world. PTSD is likely the most helpful approach in mental health diagnostic techniques that accounts for women's psychological reactions to violence, notwithstanding its limitations. Along with understanding the psychological study of trauma of domestic violence, the impact it has on women's health and intercessions into this will empower them to face the injustices they suffered. The greatest object lesson is to investigate into the causes of investigation and to spot out how injustices meted out to them were not made part of one's destiny but as steps of a ladder leading to a greater victory.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Controlling Domestic Violence

The societal control agencies like education system, religion, societal pressure and family system, etc. can explore some way to prevent and control the domestic crime. Section 498 (A) introduced in the IPC states that ‘any form of cruelty, whether it is from a husband or the relative of a husband, to a woman is an offence that is punishable with imprisonment up to three years.

The first part of Chapter XVI of the IPC (Section 299 to 311, which are offences affecting life) can also be invoked in case of dowry death or suicide. Under sections 299, 300, 301 and 304 (A), culpable homicide, murder and death by negligence are crimes. Section 302 lays down punishment for murder: death sentence or imprisonment for life. Sections 113 (A) (presumption as to abetment of suicide of a married woman) and 113 (B) (presumption as to dowry death) were added to the Indian Evidence Act and can be invoked in cases of dowry murder or suicide. The Code of Criminal Procedure (mainly sections 174 and 175) lays down the procedure and principles of investigation into a crime (Menon; 1999).

The feminist movement with its varied branches have increased general awakening among women but still there is crying need to arouse social consciousness. Radical feminism sees patriarchy as the enemy and oppressor of women, whereas liberal feminism strives to create freedom and ‘female space’ within the existing structure. The internalized need to fight against women’s oppression and violence took the guise of reform movement with the emergence of women writers into the Indian literary scene expressing their hopes, fears, experiences, strengths and weakness. This writing gained impetus as a powerful way of expression of the social, political and psychological struggles that women undergo.

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