

# WOMEN, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE ROLE OF THE INDIAN ELECTRONIC MEDIA

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## Abstract

Men and women have got equal status in India which is very much reflected in the Constitution of India. Especially women are considered as the wealth of our country who are leading the country and making all of us proud. However, there is still systematic discrimination prevailing in our society which leads to some kind of disregards such as lack of nutrition, low literacy rate, property rights, women trafficking, child labour and domestic violence etc. There are many fears which entangle the freedom of women too. Sexual violence is one of the most ruthless distress that encompasses fear in women. The hypothetical question is whether this condition is predominant due to any unequal distribution of powers among sexes? Media is the fourth pillar of our democracy hence, its coverage and reports are imperative for democracy. Media plays a significantly vital role to influence the masses. The new intrusion of digital media revolution further adds more clout to media. Regrettably, it has been witnessed that the role of media is decisively wavering from showing the real news and conveniently presenting biased and one-sided information in the name of news. The Unequal portrayal of women in media is irony. The sensitization of gender issues is the need of the hour as it is an inevitable factor in women empowerment. This paper broadly focuses on these above aspects highlighting the contemporary issues on women and the role of media.

**Key Words:** Mass media, systematic discrimination, digital media, gender bias

## Introduction:

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century India is fast rising as a worldwide force however its womenfolk are still fighting the battle to live with honour. Women are confronted with challenges in every phase of their lives whether to be regarding their career or their personal life, the gravity of the problem is still to be reckoned with. Emancipation of women in the true sense is still an illusion as there exists a huge gap between the ideologies enunciated by the Constitution of India and the various

legislations and governmental programs and the realities of their applications in the lives of common women. The declining female sex ratio sufficiently depicts the true picture of discrimination that women in India start to face since their birth. The rate at which India is growing in the global village, so is the rate at which violence against women is growing and becoming more heinous by the day and women of almost all strata of the society are falling constant victims to offences of harassment, molestation, eve-teasing, rape, kidnapping, dowry crimes and domestic abuses.

The home has become the most unsafe place for our women who are continuously falling prey to offences of sexual abuse or domestic violence. Domestic abuse takes place in the privacy of the home where a hierarchical relationship exists between the husband and the wife in a patriarchal society like ours. This superior and subordinate relationship wherein the husband is the decision-maker in the family and the wife being the mute compliant, places the wife at the lower pedestal both in the family setup as well as in the community and this as a consequence breeds intimate partner violence in that society. In recent times, the media's role in portraying violence against women as 'romantic' is quite disconcerting, thus normalizing such misbehaviours, and by dictating who is to be blamed and how such problems can be resolved through fictitious daily soaps, targeting at a public entertainment, it, at times, trivializes the seriousness of the issue. With each passing day, offences against women are increasing at an alarming rate and the more disturbing fact is that these offences are becoming more heinous with each passing day. All women, irrespective of their social and educational standing, are being subjected to violence whether in the open road or their offices or the so-called safety of their homes and the defective reporting system along with delayed justice delivery mechanism are giving impetus to the commission of more offences against women.<sup>i</sup>

The resurgence of woman issues came to the focus with the United Nation declaring 1975 as the year for women and 1975 to 1985 as the decade for women due to the realization that women, all over the world are facing a various existential crisis and it was due to this acknowledgement by the international forum that India appointed the National Committee on the Status of Women in 1972<sup>ii</sup> to publish its report which brought to light the fact that despite constitutional guarantees, the status of women in the Indian society was still, deplorable as their lives were entangled in the patriarchal customs, illiteracy and ignorance about their rights and the habit of suffering in anguish. A consistent decrease was noticed in the male-female sex ratio in the last century as for 972 females there were 1000 male in 1901 to 927 per thousand in 1991 and 921:1000 (921 females for 1000 males) as per the census of 2001<sup>iii</sup> and the situation is even worst in the north Indian states. Education, health care, nourishment are all but sparingly given to India's daughters and the male child syndrome has but reduced our daughters to second class citizens, a little better placed than domesticated animals. It would be apt to say that women in India face oppression and discrimination from her birth to her death

**Woman Empowerment in India:**

Empowerment means to become more strong and confident and when it applies to individuals, it implies the power to be in control of their lives and when we apply this interpretation to women of our country, we have to acknowledge that they need to be empowered to improve their socio-economic conditions in the society.

The socio-political and economic condition of women in any given society reveals the degree of modernization in that society. Indian women, especially rural women have minimal control over these resources hence remain dependent and here the question arises as to who is to empower them and to achieve it? In a perfect world talking ideally, there ought to be no requirement for anyone to empower another and everyone ought to receive equal opportunities to be self-reliant, yet the reality is just the opposite. The legislative mechanisms have taken varied measures through legal guarantees and developmental policies and 5-year plans, extending its assistance especially towards women for her to take an active participative role in the national building but it is up to our women, now, to break the shackles and initiate their journeys in playing active agents towards self-empowerment.

**Constitutional Provisions in India:**

The Constitution of India has guaranteed equality to all which includes the female population of the country and it has also provided few beneficial provisions which are available only to women so that women of our country can get an impetus to progress from their backward socio-economic conditions in which they had been since time immemorial. Other than mentioning the ideal of gender equality in the Preamble to the Constitution, several Articles' under the Constitution, protect the rights of women concerning to the rights of not being oppressed on several grounds including that of sex, obligating the State to provide equal employment opportunities ensuring humane work conditions along with the same remuneration for same work performed, to provide free legal assistance and assistance in raising the standard of life of a poorer section of the society and also reservation for women in the political sphere too has been provided to give women an all-rounded space for growth and development.

**Legislative provisions in India:**

The Parliamentarians have in the passing years contributed to the making of several laws addressing offences against women which includes among other, amendment in the definition of rape, broadening it and also bringing stringent punishments for it, recognizing the plight of married women facing dowry harassment and even death due to it and thus criminalizing the same, criminalizing the acts of stalking a woman and watching her secretly in her private space, severely punishing and also providing for compensation for coming to the offence of acid attacks, to name a few. Along with these legislative changes, several special statutes were also enacted for addressing other offences against women in a detailed manner as the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956; The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995); Dowry Prohibition

Act, 1961; The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971; The Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 1979; The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983; Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 and so on.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Policies of the Government of India:**

The year 2001 was declared in India as the 'Women's Empowerment Year' and the main focus was to achieve equal status for women as a reality and for fulfilling this aim, the government brought out several progressive policies and plans to create an environment of positive change in the society and especially in the lives of Indian women.

The main objectives of these steps have been to ultimately strengthen the social temperament and attitudes by removing all types of bigotry against women and to usher in a time for equal and effective participation by both the sexes in the work of nation-building.

- **Five Year Plans:** For the first Five Year Plan, the government aimed to uplift the social status of women in the country and Fifth and Sixth plans focused on developmental aspects for women. The focal point of the Seventh Plan was to provide for several beneficial programs for women to promote their overall development. The Ninth Plan aimed to provide financial assistance to women from various departments of the government, thus resulting in several positive impacts in the lives of women by improving the female literacy rate, their life expectancy rate and a fall in the total fertility rate indicating popularity for family planning programs in the country and finally an increase in the representation of women political leaders from the grassroots to the national level.<sup>v</sup> It is true that since independence, the government of the country has invested tremendously trying to remove the various hindrances in the path of achieving the upliftment of the position of our womenfolk and to recompense for past injustices.

- **Health:**

The Plan's also aimed at improving women's health by offering subsidies on nutrition and making healthcare more affordable especially for the impoverished. As the reduction of infant mortality and maternal mortality was the priority, being indicators of human development, the governmental policies had reiterated the national demographic goals for Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) as set out in the National Population Policy 2000.<sup>vi</sup>

These policies had helped women in being aware of their rights and hence make informed decisions while exercising their reproductive rights and also in addressing their health-related problems. For implementing these policies, the government programs and camps to spread awareness regarding such health-related issues, the importance of compulsory registration of marriage and the benefits of delayed marital age had been undertaken in various districts and villages all over the country.

➤ **Economic:**

In India, women comprise a major segment of the population to fall below the poverty line and hence the governmental policies had initiated various women-oriented programs to try to address the various challenges faced by our women for their basic survival. To make our women, self-reliant, the government had enhanced women's access to credit by strengthening the micro-credit mechanisms and micro-finance institutions which had helped several women both in the urban and rural setup, start their entrepreneurship and this, in turn, had not only benefited these women individually but had given employment to other women similarly placed.

➤ **Indian Government Special Initiatives for Women:** Since independence, both the Central government and State governments have started various schemes and action plans to inculcate the feeling of self-reliance among women in our society and few among them are mentioned below:

- The National Commission for Women was established in 1992 to keep an eye on all issues regarding the rights of women and also to conduct periodic reviews regarding the implementations of laws for women and to suggest amendments whenever so required.
- The Constitutional 73rd Amendment was made in 1992 to provide for one-third of the total seats for women at the Panchayat & Municipalities.
- The National Plan of Action (NPA) was drawn up by the Government of India in 1998 to counter sexual abuse of women and children for commercial purposes to bring the victims of such violence back to the mainstream society through rehabilitation.
- The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000) aimed to prevent gender discrimination and for that their initial target was to stop female foeticide in the country which was rampantly being practised. The Action Plan also safe drinking water near homes to prevent young girls from venturing far to get water and fodder and thus to protect them from falling prey to various sexual assaults and other offences.
- National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) was mainly focused on protecting our women from all types of violence that they are facing both inside and outside their homes. As this policy was centred on offences against women and interestingly it recognized domestic abuse as one of them, thus this policy can be seen as a propagator to the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which was passed subsequently.
- The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, was passed by the Parliament, in recognition of the fact that other than marital violence women in other relationships inside the family to face various abuses and the incidences of such occurrences are increasing. Given the fact and that the Indian Penal Code, 1860,

criminalizing only matrimonial cruelty and dowry harassment, the need was there to protect all women in the family from the various abuses they face and to them an array of civil remedies which will be adequately comprehensive in taking care of the needs of these women victims.

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) was created in 2006 which became the central Ministry to look after all the issues relating to the advancement of women and children.
- The Government of India implemented the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)<sup>vii</sup> project on India's National Action Plan to Improve Gender Statistics<sup>viii</sup> to identify the data gaps regarding gender statistics and to stress on the role of statistical data on them, initiating several schemes for women and young girls, evaluating the governmental implementational machinery working on those schemes and proposing national workshops to evaluate the works undertaken and made plans through recommendations on the existing ones.

#### ❖ **Role and Importance of Media**

Social media has become a catalyst in not only dissemination of information but also in shaping the reactions from its audience. It not only reaches the masses at a rapid pace but also plays the dual role of both a motivator of change as well as an instigator for chaos. It decides which topic deserves its attention and for how long and how to present the chosen topic to create the most impact. Media depiction of any social issues often tends to portray the acceptable perspectives, because it sells, while other perspectives which 'ought' to be focused on, if often neglected. As a result, people seeking alternative perspectives, often get a poor view of such. The impact of media is paramount in today's digital age; it builds and controls our responses, and as a result is pivotal in constructing an audience's outlook on any given socio-economic and political issue, even when the media only attempts to mimic reality through the use of entertainment. One unique feature of mass media is its modus operandi of presenting both as a mirror and a source of content, popular culture. This varied setting provides a realm where the audience can receive and interpret messages and assign meaning to it by associating their own experiences with them and that of others within their society. In this context, it can be said that mass media wields heavy influence in moulding of socio-cultural beliefs and attitudes.

As the media holds huge sway over the way people think, act and react, it's handling of sensitive issues like marital violence can impact the way people hold and accept spousal relations. In recent times, the media's role in portraying violence against women as 'romantic' is quite disconcerting, thus normalizing such misbehaviours, and by dictating who is to be blamed and how such problems can be resolved through fictitious daily soaps, targeting at a public entertainment, it, at times, trivializes the seriousness of the issue.

Mass media is a profit-seeking enterprise, and this motivation influences the media houses not only to choose the content of the material to be presented but also the way of presenting such. This often results in providing the audience with a shallow or more acceptable interpretation of

socially-relevant issues and not going into the depth of the problem, thus giving a simple picture to a complicated subject; the most common way it is done is through movies and television whereby a single formula is overused to portray the same story of creating a victim in a predictable story and finally reaching a magically justified happy ending, thus downplaying a complicated issue and hiding the reality from the mind of the audience.

#### ➤ **Mass media and victim-blaming**

The media not only depict the phenomenon of domestic violence as an individual problem but also depict it as the victim's problem, which the latter is responsible to solve (Wheeler, 2009). By 'gendering the blame' (Berns, 2001), there occurs a total shift in discussions in the society; it starts by evading from gender-politics discourse present in the society, which enables men from perpetrating this violence, it makes the victim women liable for being a victim, making it her responsibility to stop the abuse and tasking her to bring about societal change. Endless media articles are found to help women identify signs of violent streak in men making her responsible to avoid dating or marrying them; articles carrying advise on ways to prevent marital abuse and restore marital bliss; interviews of victim women encouraging victims to leave the violent home atmosphere are splashed over the electronic media along with stories on how the legal system works and where do the victims find help, are all made available through various television programs. This shallow way the media handles the problem of domestic violence leaves the victim doubly pressured to not only face societal backlash if she refuses to leave her home but if she does, face financial crisis and most importantly deal with a total upheaval from her settled life to an unsettling one, as she needs to not only leave her home and neighborhood but detach from all known ties and flee to protect her life, as it is often seen, leaving the violent partner to incur the risk of more violence and even death. Moreover, adding to the pressure of ensuring her safety, victim women are also held liable to protect her children from such violence, and if she fails, the society turns against her by placing the blame on either her inability to stop the violence in the first place or to ensure the security of her children, which seems to be the paramount duty of only the mother, chastising her for failing to leave before the violence escalated or when she did leave, blaming her for inviting trouble on herself and her children. A domestic violence victims place in society seems to be a double-edged sword for her, cutting her from all corners, ridiculing her for playing the victim card, making her in charge of ending the violence at home, critiquing her for the choices she makes, while all the while, totalling ignoring the role and responsibilities of the perpetrator men who batter and abuse.

#### ➤ **The feminist critique of films**

As the issue of gender and violence is been discussed all over today, it has been integral to media studies because of the latter's unparalleled popularity being the main source of mass entertainment and the immense sway it holds in constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing ideas in the society and generating debates on it (Jain & Rai, 2009). With globalization and the advent of multinational companies owning media houses, the media structure has undergone a

huge change, transcending borders and approaching at issues like gender politics and abuse of women, more holistically giving it more global coverage. Films have now become opium for the masses, surpassing national boundaries, as the global populace relies on films as a gateway to fantasy land (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998). Popular films have, explicitly, helped shape the cultural, social and political values of every society and this establishes a link between the interests the feminist take about the misrepresentation of women in cinema. As both the genders are passionate patrons of cinema, thus the way women particularly are represented therein is a major area for the discipline of gender studies. The feminist critique of films has helped expose the role the entertainment media in aiding patriarchy and gender violence to prevail in society by popularizing male machismo and female docility. By bringing to surface the stereotyping of female characters, the entertainment media business has forgotten its role of being an educator of society, creating an environment of spreading information and awareness regarding domestic violence, promoting introspection and helping in the eradication of this social evil; a role in which it has major failed.

➤ **Crimes against Women:**

For the paper, the authors will discuss only two offences against women, i.e. the offence of domestic violence and it's co-relating i.e. the offence of dowry demand:

▪ **Domestic Violence:**

Since the dawn of human society woman was in a state of bondage to some man, because she was of value to him and she had less muscular strength than he did.<sup>ix</sup> Marriage is the destination of every woman's dream; a destination is shown to her by her society from her nascent age, the objective behind this destination is her life-long promise of obedience to the husband, then it is but apt to say that no slave is a slave to the same extent and in a full sense of the word as a wife is.<sup>x</sup> Violence occurs within an interactional framework of superordinate and subordinate relationships that husbands and wives into a domestic establishment called the home. This interactional order involves a taken for a granted set of rules which places the husband in a position of dominant authority transforming him into a guest who is to be served, his spouse into a servant-mistress and the house into a residential hotel, and it is when this interactional order is broken, violence is produced.<sup>xi</sup> A patriarchal societal structure that maintains a hierarchy in the family wherein the males are posited at the top and females below them, wherein all the decisions are taken by the male members of the family and females remain the mute executors of the wishes and desires of their male counterparts, such a society ought not to be shocked with the occurrences of family violence within it. Thus power is important, domestic violence is rooted in gender and power and maintains the notion that men and women are different and reinforces men's dominance in both real and symbolic terms. This negative symbolic interaction promotes the use of force in a failed attempt to regain what has been lost in the first place due to violence, where although he has the body of the other in his grip, but has lost hold of the soul of the other from his grasp.



The cycle of violence that revolves inside the family structure does do through the cycle of violence which are<sup>xii</sup>:

- Denial of the violence,
- Pleasure derived from violence,
- The building of mutual hostility between spouses,
- Development of misunderstanding,
- Jealousy, especially sexual,
- Increased violence and either,
- The Collapse of the system, or
- Resolution of violence into an unsteady yet somewhat stable state of recurring violence

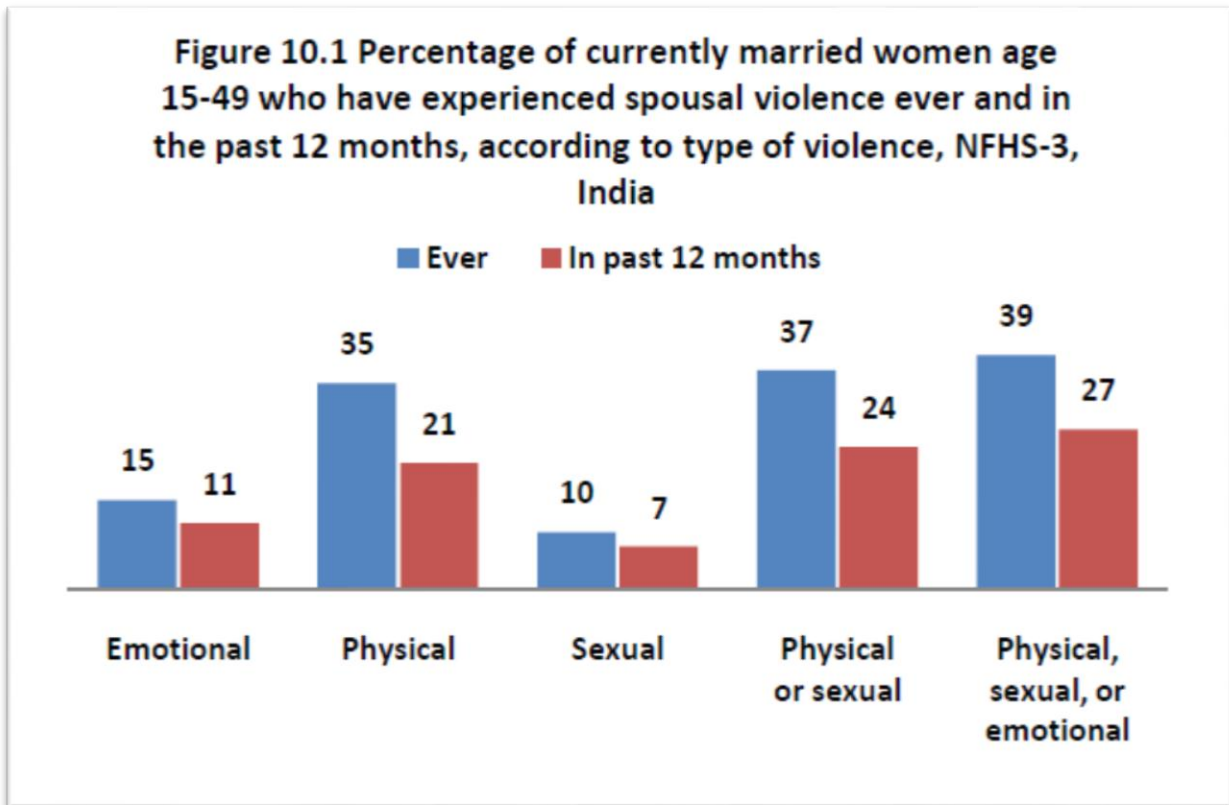
The most significant development in the international arena towards women's rights came about with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979. Although domestic violence against women was not the main point of the Convention, yet in recognizing equal rights for women was a giant leap in helping to eradicate the notion of treating women as second class citizens especially in developing countries. The United Nations General Assembly organized the First World Conference on Women, Mexico, 1975, to spread awareness on:

- Equality between the genders and removal of discriminations
- Creation of opportunities for women's participation in the developmental process of society
- To increase the contribution of women from all over the globe towards promoting world peace<sup>xiii</sup>

The World Health Organization has defined partner violence as any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm, including:

- Acts of physical aggression, such as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating;
- Psychological abuse such as intimidation, constant belittling and humiliation;
- Forced intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion;
- Controlling behaviors such as isolating a person from their family and friends, and
- Monitoring their movements and restricting their access to information and assistance.<sup>xiv</sup>

Prevalence of Spousal Violence against Wives in India - In India, a significant proportion of currently married women between the age group of 15-49 have experienced either emotional, physical and/or sexual violence in the hands of their husbands. Figure 1 reveals high occurrences of various types of intimate partner abuses and also reveals data that such incidences have become acceptable and normal parts in the lives of married women.<sup>xv</sup>



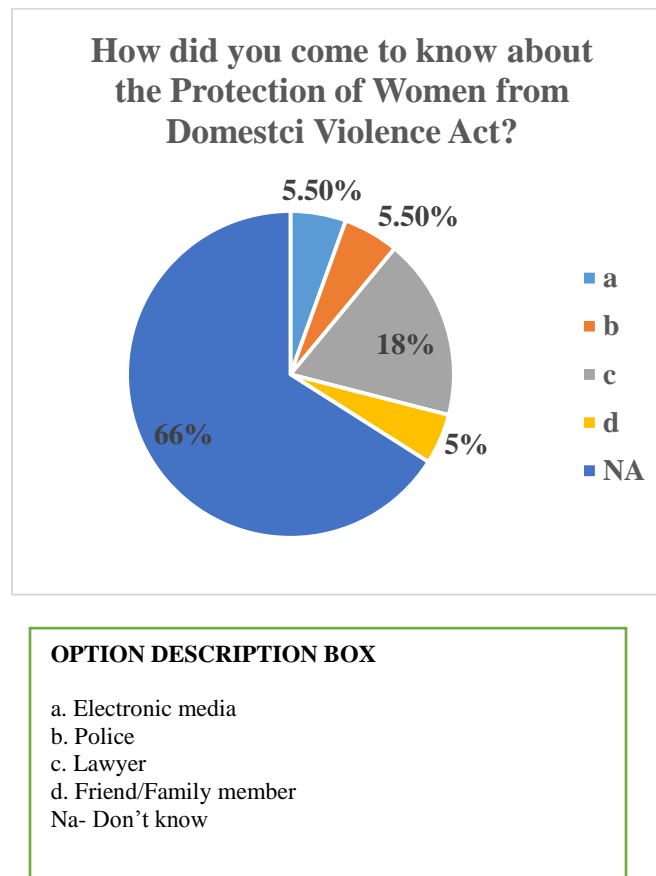
#### ▪ Dowry:

The practice of giving and taking dowry is to be a major reason for most of the injustices that women face in our society. Interestingly, even after meeting the dowry demands by the parents of the brides, they continue to face harassment for more as such greed never ends and if such demands are not met then all hell breaks loose on those unfortunate young brides who then may face social ostracism as the marriage alliance may either break midway or she can even face a continuous spate of violence from her husband and in-laws which often ends up in unnatural deaths of such girls or a divorce. On recognizing the prevalence of such degrading practice, the Parliament enacted the Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961 and later amended it in 1986 and the role of the women's organizations from all over the country was tremendous. Although the Act has criminalized the exchange of dowry yet it is appalling to see even today that the educated and cultured strata of the society still indulges in such practices with élan. As a consequence, matrimonial offences are increasing by the day in India. It is the need of the time to call for real empowerment of women and inculcate among them the need to value them; in the absence of which we as a society are bound to fall in the abyss of eternal darkness.

#### ❖ Data Analysis

The present paper is focused on the contribution of the media in creating awareness among the people regarding the law on domestic violence, the types of violence that married women face

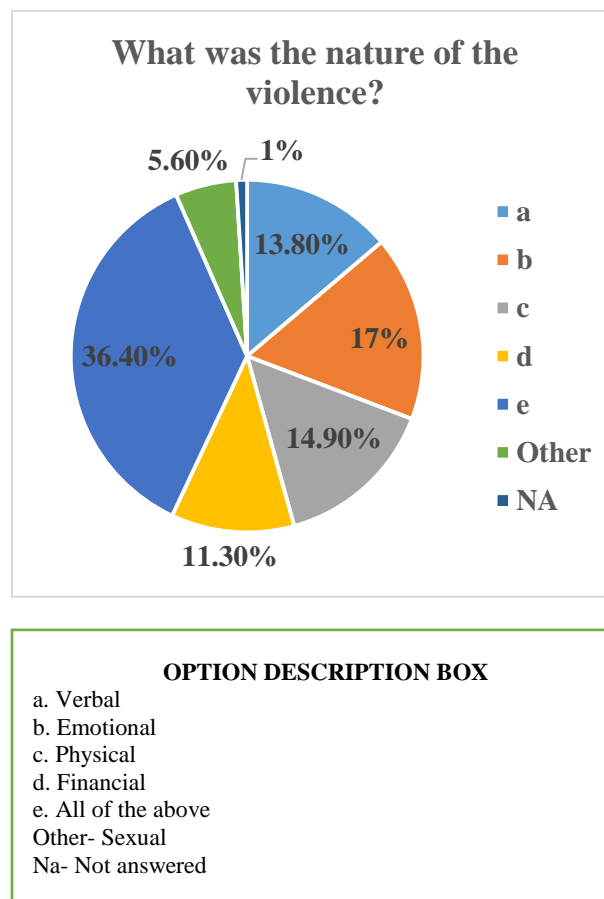
and the relation between the practice of dowry and matrimonial violence, hence from the data collected from the survey conducted by the authors, only these aspects have been discussed in this paper.



**Fig. 2**

From **Fig 2**, we can see that almost majority of victims i.e., 66% are not even aware of the existence of the PWVA, 2005, and as a consequence, they are failing to reap the benefits of it. The Act has come into force in 2005 and after more than a decade, this research was carried on. Regarding those victims who were aware of the Act, only about 5.50% credited the source to be from the electronic media. This only shows how the media has been negligent in carrying out the most essential of its functions i.e., to disperse information and raise consciousness among the masses. While failing to inform the public about the law on domestic violence, a law which by being civil, primarily through counselling, aims to make the parties realize their culpabilities regarding the violence and teaches them alternative ways of solving their problems, instead of resorting to violence. By doing this, the Act helps bring about conciliation between the parties, thus preventing the breaking up of families. Apart from conciliation, the Act contains a variety of reliefs for the victims which can be resorted to as per their specific needs. The criminal law on domestic abuse under Sec. 498A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, is not only narrow in the interpretation of violence but also does not contain such unique features like the PWDVA. As the majority of victims, being unaware of this later statute, seeking redressal from domestic violence,

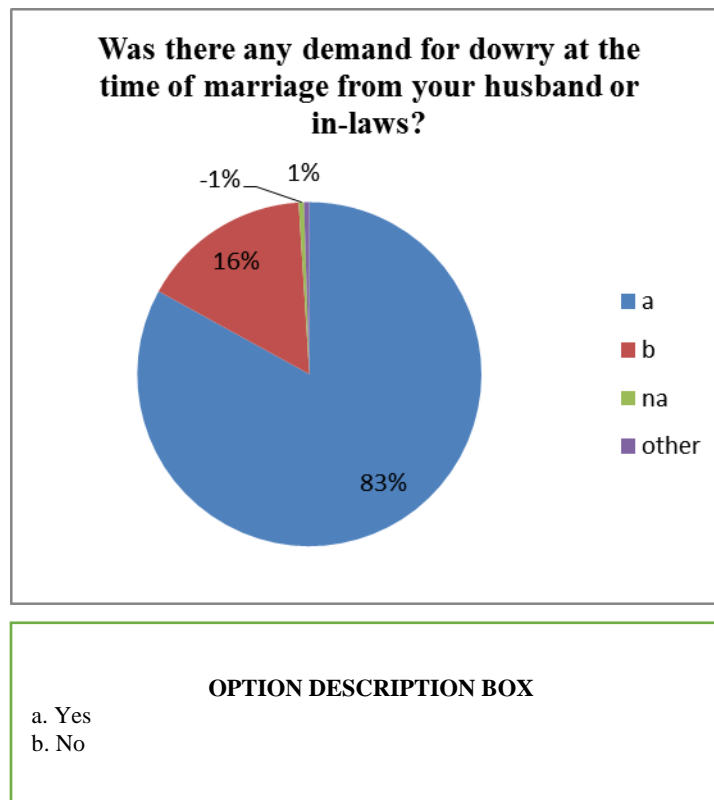
ends up at the disposal of lawyers who instead of filing a complaint under the Act of 2005, files a criminal case under Sec. 498A IPC, 1860, thus not only entraps the parties and especially the victims in a lengthy court battle but also makes the marriage end up in a divorce, ruining all hopes of a healthy reconciliation. The media houses while shirking from their responsibilities of creating awareness about the PWDVA, fails to comprehend the domino effect it leaves behind in the society. Many marriages which could have been saved only if people knew about this Act, many victims who could have been benefitted from the various reliefs prescribed under the Act many cases which could have been resolved through speedy resolution as prescribed by the Act, could have been achieved, only if the electronic media would have done their job right, instead of creating a counter-narrative indulging in promoting patriarchy.



**Fig. 3**

From Fig. 3, we can understand that family violence when perpetrated do not restrict itself to straight jacket compartments, i.e. when such violence takes place it is mostly an accumulation of all types of violence that can be perpetrated or that has been defined under the Act. So most of our victims i.e. around 36.40% stated that when the violence was taking place it was both verbal and physical abuse and they were even denied any kind of financial assistance by the

abuser and all these abuses were resulting in extreme emotional distress, which is also an abuse. Around 17% of victims stated that they suffered from just emotional abuse which is quite interesting as mostly emotional abuse occurs because of some other kind of abuse but if the husband does not perpetrate any other kind of abuse but refrains from performing the natural duties of a husband, it can lead to emotional violence to the wife, even in the absence of other violence. Verbal and physical violence are the most common forms of abuse and around 14% of victims have stated that they suffer from either of such abuse; financial abuse is also very common as most of the women are still majorly dependent on their husbands and cutting off the finance is an easy way to bully the victim. Lastly, few victims have also stated that they suffer from sexual abuse, i.e. their husbands coerce them into sexual activities against their will to participate in such.



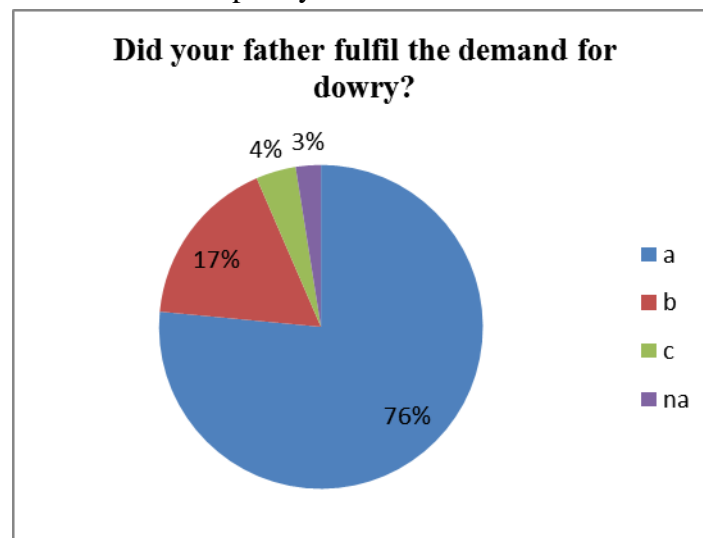
**Fig. 4**

Dowry has been defined as any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly:

- by one party to a marriage to the other party to the marriage; or
- by the parents of either party to a marriage or by any other person, to either party to the marriage or any other person; at or before or any time after the marriage in connection with the marriage of said parties but does not include Dower or *Mehr* in the case of persons to whom the Muslim Personal Law (Sharia) applies.<sup>xvi</sup>

Explanation II- The expression ‘valuable security’ has the same meaning as in Sec. 30 of the Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860).

It is alarming to find from Fig. 4, that around 83% of married women had faced dowry demands at the time of marriage. It is important to state that the researcher had conducted an interview on over two hundred victims from nine districts where women from both Hindu and Muslim were apart, and the interesting part is that although in Islam there is no provision for giving dowry by the bride’s family, yet all the Muslim women who had participated in the research, had unanimously stated that their family had to pay dowry at the time of marriage and they received a very little amount of *Mehr*, from the groom’s family. It appears that the evil of dowry has percolated into religions where it didn’t exist before, and although it is posing as a threat to the personals laws, it is continued with impunity.



**OPTION DESCRIPTION BOX**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Partially

**Fig. 5**

From Fig. 5, it appears that the majority of the parents of the brides, on facing dowry demands, had complied and fulfilled the demand. Although Sec. 3 of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, penalizes both the person who gives and well as those who take dowry, it such provision at times becomes a double-edged sword for the bride’s family as on facing a demand for dowry, an evil phenomenon that has deep roots in the Indian culture, if they refuse they face the threat of either ostracism from the community or lose the hope of marrying their daughters. In such a situation, it is but natural for the bride’s family to fulfil such demand in the hope of seeing their daughter happily settled down; but here lies the problem, demand for dowry never ceases, it continues till no more exploitation of the girl’s family can be done, and the end is quite predictable of either

- the girl being thrown out of her matrimonial home and returns to her parents, or
- she continues to suffer violence throughout her life in her matrimonial home, or

- she commits suicide
- she is killed by the perpetrators

Practices of dowry tend to subordinate women in society. Educational and economic empowerment of women is the need of the hour which will not only teach her that offences against women are not the fault of women and they don't deserve this mistreatment but shall also give her the inner courage to seek the assistance of law when need be. Empowerment of women, imparting gender-sensitive education, counselling of boys from the school level, speedy trial in cases relating to offences against women especially those which taken place inside the home, a regular holding of awareness camps especially in the rural areas to spread socio-legal consciousness among people especially on issues relating to women and most importantly, a responsible electronic media, which alone has the tremendous power to bring positive change in the society, which the government and the society should aim to accomplish so that a society where domestic cruelty does not remain 'normal' part of a woman's life, where women feel as secure at home as her male counterparts do, where the next generation learns that discrimination against women were times of the past, and thus usher in a new dawn.

### **Conclusion:**

In an era of information overflow, is it asking for too much from mass media to help act responsibly in raising social consciousness? It is understandable that to rake in profits, the media houses portray the power structures in the society as it is and not as it ought to be, failing to hold women in the right esteem impart. The inclination to show women in gender roles, through films and advertisements, stems from our socio-cultural context in which we live. Yet times are changing which is evidenced from the various criticisms that today's films face when they go overboard with their male chauvinism. Then, is it too radical to expect the mass media to help the audience engage in critical thinking, knowing the huge international market it dominates and the tremendous power it wields on the minds of the audience? The contribution of the media to contribute to the cause of women empowerment and gender issues seems to be long overdue and it is high time they own up to their true role.

Though women were held in high reverence in the Vedic times yet with the gradual change in the yugas, so she fell from societal grace as morality started degrading in our society and today we stand where she is regularly raped and burned and molested and murdered! The Constitutional guarantees of equality and special provisions for women and the schemes and policies of the governments fall short when harsh realities of the society hit us when we come across a heinous way of executing various offences against women that are trending now. Calming and protesting for giving women their due respect in the society itself exposes the injustice that is permeated in such society yet such acts needs to be undertaken from all corners repeatedly till the purpose is achieved. Creating awareness in the society among men and women and young people is a pressing priority to be conducted with utmost diligence.

In the era of globalization and technological revolution, the role of the media is of utmost importance in the process of true empowerment of our women. The creation of women-oriented contents in their programs which attempts to reflect progressive ideologies instead of showing stereotypical patriarchal shows, designing interesting advertisements to create legal awareness on women's issues and running them repeatedly as sponsored advertisements are run, doing away with shows or contents which tend to demean women in any way should be reinforced and regarding this both the government and the non-governmental organizations should aid and assist the media in achieving this goal. The journey today might seem tough but with the concerted effort from all corners, safe and just society for women lie very near for us to reach.

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<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history>, accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2020

<sup>iii</sup> Purnima Ojha, "Women's Issues In India: Role And Importance of Media, The Indian Journal of Political Science, Jan-March, 2011, Vol. 72, No. 1 (Jan-March, 2011), pp. 87-102

<sup>iv</sup> Rameshwari Pandya, Women Welfare and Empowerment in India: Vision for 21<sup>st</sup> Century, New Delhi: New Century Publications, 2008, pp. 606

<sup>v</sup> Ibid, note ii, pp. 90

<sup>vi</sup> [https://www.nhp.gov.in/national-population-policy-2000\\_pg](https://www.nhp.gov.in/national-population-policy-2000_pg), accessed on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2020

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.unescap.org/resources/session-2-c-indias-national-action-plan-improve-gender-statistics>, accessed on 31st August, 2020

<sup>viii</sup> <https://www.unescap.org/resources/session-2-c-indias-national-action-plan-improve-gender-statistics>, accessed on 31st August, 2020

<sup>ix</sup> John Stuart Mill, the subjection of women, 3 (London, Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869)

<sup>x</sup> John Stuart Mill, the subjection of women, 17 (London, Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869)

<sup>xi</sup> Denzin norman k, towards a phenomenology of domestic violence, family violence, American journal of sociology, vol. 90, no. 3 (nov., 1984), pp. 483-513, 486

<sup>xii</sup> Kathleen J. Ferraro and john M. Johnson, how women experience battering: the process of victimization, social problems, vol.30, no.3, thematic issues: technique and the conduct of life, society for the study of social problems, 325-339 (feb., 1983)

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<sup>xiv</sup> World Health Organization, (2002) World Report on Violence and Health, p. 89,

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<sup>xv</sup> International Institute for Population Science, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (2005-06) Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in India, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) India, 96, [rchiips.org/nfhs/a\\_subject\\_report\\_gender\\_for\\_website.pdf](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/a_subject_report_gender_for_website.pdf), Last visited on 10th June, 2020

<sup>xv</sup> Sec. 2 of The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961



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