

“The Unlocked Violence amid Lockdown”

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Kaithalwad is a small town in the state of Jharkhand. The town's economy is mostly based on Dirdhara Mines which is located at a distance of 20 kilometres from the main town. Sudha, is a resident of this town. She works as a helper in a beauty parlour and after completing her work there, she also takes training under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana. Her husband, Ajay is a worker in the Dirdhara coal mines. The couple was married in the year 2012. Soon after the marriage Sudha was subject to torture and physical abuse by her husband for the demand of dowry. For two years she was subject to cruelty by her husband and in-laws until she finally brought this matter to an NGO which was working for the women empowerment. This NGO helped in mediating between her and her in-laws. It also helped her in getting the job and getting herself enrolled in Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana. The members of NGO used to visit her house in few months to ensure that she was fine and wasn't subject to violence or cruelty. In the year 2016, Sudha gave birth to a boy child which proved to be a boon for her disturbed marital life. The Indian society which is still entangled with the roots of Patriarchy was happy as she gave birth to a "boy" child. Her Husband, in-laws everyone were happy and full of joy. Soon after this, Sudha started to work again. Everything was going perfect in her life. Both, husband and wife were earning ample amount of money which was sufficient enough to fulfil the needs of the family.

It was a morning on the 21st of March 2020 and as usual, Sudha after preparing the breakfast and dropping her son off to school goes to the beauty parlour at around 10:00 am. There was a sudden anxiousness in her behavior like the other people as the PM of India has announced a Janta Curfew on 22nd of March. She returned to her home and everything went normal. The family followed the Janta Curfew by restraining themselves from going out. Finally, a nationwide lockdown for 21 days was announced amid the Covid 19 pandemic in India by the Union Government. It started from 25th of March and led to the closure of everything excluding essential commodities shops in the whole country. This came as a shock to the whole family as it was a situation of uncertainty. But, they adhered to the orders and restrained them from going out for 21 days. It was a tough situation for the family but still they had no other option but to stay indoors. Since both Sudha and Ajay were in their home for 21 days so it also led to sudden quarrel and altercations between them. Their economic condition was also deteriorating day by day as they did not get paid for the month of April. Every other day, the fights between the couple also started getting grave. Now, it was as if the whole tension and frustration of Ajay was

burst over Sudha. She was subject to continuous torture and mental harassment by her husband. Later, as the lockdown started getting extended this mental torture converted into physical abuse like hurting, hitting and beating by Ajay. One day, Ajay hit her with his belt causing severe injuries like bruises and hurts on the back and shoulder of Sudha. The situation is such, that Sudha has no one to help her. Her parents, relatives all aware of these circumstances aren't able to help her due to the Lockdown. She even dialed on the emergency number 100 and brought it into the cognizance of Police but it hasn't taken the matter seriously and no steps have been taken till date.

So what should she do now? Before going to the solution of this problem we should first try and understand the problem of Domestic Violence in our society and the measures taken to improve such a social evil.

Domestic Violence is a very problematic situation which is faced by a large number of women in our country. According to National Family Health Survey released by the Union Health Ministry, every third woman since the age of 15 has faced domestic violence of various forms in the country. The survey also found that 31% of married woman have faced physical,sexual or emotional violence by their spouses.

Now, there is a pattern to this cycle of Domestic Violence which is common in almost all cases. The pattern goes on in following manner: Abuse,Guilt, Excuses, Normal Behavior, Fantasy ,Set up and then again Abuse. It differs from case to case as to the time period of this cycle. We can see this in our story also that there came a normal phase between Ajay and Sudha which is again followed by the Abuse Phase in Lockdown.

An abuse in a Domestic Violence can be of different forms. It can be:

1. Physical Abuse:- This is caused by hitting, hurting, slapping, or causing physical hurt in any sort.
2. Emotional Abuse:- It is caused by lowering the self-esteem and self-respect of the victim.
3. Sexual Abuse:- Here the Abuser compels victim to make sexual contact with him without her consent.
4. Economic Abuse:- Here the Abuser tries to make the victim dependent on him economically.
5. Psychological Abuse:- Here the Abuser threatens the victim to physically hurt children, property, parents, etc.

The factors which lead to such abuses are also of multiple kinds. In Indian society, Dowry has been a prominent factor behind most of the cases of Domestic Violence. Although, dowry

practice has been prohibited and there are stringent penal provisions but still this system is quite evident in our country. In recent years, the dowry culture has been on decline but it hasn't affected the cases of Domestic Violence. Other factors include Extreme Obsession, Alcoholism by the Abuser, etc. But we need to understand that what's the factor which is triggering Domestic Violence during Lockdown.

Lockdown is a phase which is not only creating an economic depression across the world but it's also disturbing the mental balance of people. There is a sense of fear and anxiety in the minds of everyone due to this pandemic. No wages and salaries is causing tension in the minds of a few. This tension, anxiety, negative emotion is a primary reason for the emotional outbursts of people which is at times leading them towards Domestic Violence. A victim who was once subject to Domestic Violence by an abuser is getting abused again by that abuser in this phase because it's an easy target for that abuser. Since, people are unable to move from one place to another it's also igniting such behavior and there is no way out for the victim to escape.

Let's now find the solution to this problem. In general, a victim has legal paths to attain justice. There are penal provisions which punishes the abuser. There are various NGO's as well which are operating to minimize such incidents. NGO's have been quite successful in mediating between the victim and abuser to bring peaceful situation between them. Anyone who is facing such problem can seek help through them. During the lockdown, the NCW (National Commission for Women) which receives the complaints of Domestic Violence said that during the lockdown phase, the complaints got doubled. The NCW has now launched a WhatsApp number 7217735372 too, so that the victim can seek help through this. There are other helpline numbers which are being circulated by various NGO's as well.

So, if we return back to our story of Sudha and Ajay, the best solution which Sudha has at this time is to register a complaint in the National Commission for Women, which in turn will get the help of the Local Police to look into the seriousness of this matter. If Ajay is liable as an offender under the Indian Penal Code or Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act,2005 he shall be punished for the same. Sudha can get justice and get out of this vicious circle through the help of NCW.

In this story although, Sudha may get justice and live happily ever after but the area of concern in front of us is to avoid any other Sudha getting abused in future. This cannot be only done through legal norms. Laws shall be there as a punitive measure but what should be the preventive measure to do away with this social evil. I think we need to shackle the roots of patriarchy which is a so called norm of the society. The society needs to redefine marriage as an institution and the purpose of it. The unequal treatment of the women, making them as a piece of object strengthens

the motives of the torchbearers of Patriarchy. We can remove this social evil by regular counselling of students from a very tender age so that they develop a sense of equality among them. Also, the teachers and parents need to get regular counselling from the Government Authorities and NGO's so that they can inculcate such values in them. This program needs to be started from the Village level and even the remotest places should get the benefit of it. The government can also bring awareness among people through the help of e-ads and technology. Finally, I would say that through this social evil exists in our society, we or our family members may not have personally came across this situation but as a social being it's our moral and ethical duty to be aware and report such incidents if we see in our neighborhood, acquaintance's place,etc. Also,we need to introspect ourselves and redefine our traditional idea about Women and Marriage.