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A Fighter by Choice

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ABSTRACT

The concept of marital rape has been overlooked for aeons because of the ideology that promotes men have the right to treat their wives as they wish and the wife must provide her husband with all his needs especially physical needs. The idea rests on the fact that she is subordinate to the man as “marriage” means handing over women’s sexuality to her spouse and her right to self-determination over her own body is taken away from her.

The foremost step is acknowledging the issue and giving every woman the right to speak and be heard. The lawful framework must be compelled to recognise assault inside marriage as wrongdoing with stringent punishment.

This article highlights the gloomy reality of a married women and the pitfall that has arisen in India. Such women are a part of our society but are neglected and suppressed by the male chauvinism. Hence, they are forced to endure harassment to keep their jobs given their sheer desperation for employment or remain silent for the sake of her family pride. The article is backed by my research and is based on a true incident encountered during an intervention.

Keywords: *system of patriarchy, gender preference for children, rape culture, toxic masculinity, sexual coercion, societal norms, mental health, family prestige, voice for the voiceless, social worker.*

“And here I stand surrounded by my own tears knee deep down in my demons reaching for the same hands who pushed me over the edge, in front of society.”

Do I have a choice?

Marital rape, hidden behind the iron curtains of marriage. The idea of sacrosanct institution marriage has been dished out for women and is one of the most pungent forms of masochism in this patriarchal society.

Roshni (Name changed - Principle of confidentiality), the twenty-six years old woman who married an army brat 6 years ago, shared her dark secret with the social worker during her field visit. She looked like heaven but there were a lot of things that still kills her from the inside. She began talking about her family and how they encouraged her to study. However, her grandparents never wanted her to pursue her studies because of the fact “Not to waste their money on girl child education as she soon will be married rather invest their hard-earned money

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on their son's education as males bring home the bacon.”

Despite the hiccups, she completed her studies and cleared all her examinations with flying colours. She managed to have a Double master's degree in the discipline of Sociology and Social work.

Soon she was married without her consent by her parents just by looking at the financial condition of the man as her father's health started to deteriorate with each passing day. His family played them by showing the wrong house and calling it their own.

I would cry in my sleep hugging my pillow that was what my family got me into. I tried to explain to them the whole scenario but they said that he is officially your husband now and probably you were destined to have a life like this. I had no one to talk to and no shoulder to cry on. Being the youngest, I was always pampered by my family, cousins, and relatives but now when I needed them the most no one stepped forward and took me out of this mess.

Have you ever tried to make love to him?, asked the social worker.

Making love? She laughs, Since the day we got married I am being treated like a sex object.

After 5 days of our marriage, we had forceful sexual intercourse and I ended up sobbing the whole night; it was not only the pain but our white bed sheet had patches of blood on it.

From that ever incident it got in my head that after you get married to someone this is mandatory (yeh Ek niyam hai Aur yeh toh krna hi hai)

I'm certain that he married me just to fulfill his sexual desires and pleasures. There were times when I was tired of spending my nights as this and I would often say a NO for the intercourse. Taking my answer on his ego he would be rougher with me and after that leave me on one side of the bed to sleep. So I let him do all that he wanted to do with me.

SEXUAL COERCION IS A RAPE WHICH NO ONE WANTS TO BRING TO LIGHT AS KHAANDAN KI IZZAT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN BETI KI IZZAT.

Often he would forget to buy a contraceptive and he wanted to get involved with me later because of his carelessness he would feel guilty and hand me over a small-sized pill. A pill? What was the name of it? I am clueless about it. All I know is that it cost us 500 bucks. I was in pain, unbearable pain and due to this, my periods got delayed.

“Don't be petulant. You'll be fine”, is all he would say.

During my menses, he would often try to come closer to me and try to kiss me. I would just push him away. To this, he would say, “kab khatm hoyengye? Ab toh teesra din hogya hai Tera.

Aaj toh karne de” (When will it end? Let me come close to you it’s your third day of menses today.)

Sometimes I feel I’m culturally bound as in our culture once you get married to someone and you’ve circled around the sacred fire 7 times no matter how brutally your husband treats you, your husband is equitant to god. We can’t talk to our husbands in front of our in-laws and the purdah system still prevails. I feel relieved that I don’t have to talk to him till it’s dark and he can’t touch me or come near me. Whenever he’d come home from his job, he’d come to be like how a hungry, wild dog would act after smelling the meat, she said in a sullen tone.

Later on, they happen to be blessed with an unplanned baby boy. It was the worst 9 months of my life as he wasn’t there for me. After I had delivered my baby, he came to see me after 2 weeks. I never knew that god had decided such a fate for me.

She chooses to remain silent on it.

Nothing kills you like a life that you’ve always dreamt of but haven’t lived it ever.

Suddenly, her husband enters and gives her the eye to come inside. She quickly covered her head with her red dupatta and say, Ji, Ayi (Yes, coming)

Now, my son Ansh keeps me busy. There is innocence in his eyes and he gives me a reason to look forward to the days in my life.

I’ve survived so many fires, I can no longer tell if I’m still alive or if I’m burning.

No one could understand her inner torment neither her mom who gave birth to her nor does her brothers who used to keep her a princess in her castle who promised every year on the auspicious day of Raksha Bandhan to protect her and shower her with enamors love. Broken vows & hollow promises appear like deep cracks in the mirror. They leave those who held to them bleeding and starting themselves at a fractured image of themselves for eons. How can we forget, after all promises are just forgotten words in the end.

She narrates, often our relatives would come over and give him sweets and chocolates. Whenever he gets more he’d give one to me saying Amaa (Mother) this is for you. I’d keep it aside so that whenever he asks for more after eating, I never have to say No to him because of my financial condition as 90 % of my husband’s salary is taken by my in-laws, you may call it a family ritual.

These eyes don’t hold tears anymore. They hold dreams! Dreams for my son. And that was the thing about her, she kept on surviving with bullet holes in her lungs and knife marks itched on her back. Now she never lets anything get her way for her son, not a victim but a fighter with

scars that few can understand. Turning her scars into stars, *a fighter by choice*.

Everyone wants a strong woman until she actually stands up, flexes her muscles, and projects her voice and suddenly she is too much for everyone. The harsh reality is that we all love those women as ideas, as fantasies not as breathing, living humans threatening to be better than males. I don't know who needs light, warmth, or raging courage to tell their stories of survival but as a social worker, it is my duty to inform our readers to join hands in the name of humanity and raise their voices to support a dignified life for all. The reality is that law alone cannot transform society. It takes a collective social responsibility to teach every boy and every man on how to honour and respect girls and women at home and outside. Many go by saying that the entire Indian society is built on the system of patriarchy, rape culture, toxic masculinity, and male chauvinism and that there is so much unlearning to do. Therefore, the foremost step is acknowledging this issue and highlighting the plight of vulnerable women who remain invisible to most so that no woman is compelled to endure harassment to keep their job given their sheer desperation for employment, or remain silent for the sake of her family pride.
