

Psycho-Somatic Disorder And Women Atrocities : The Dualism And Proportionality

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From the dawn of civilization, women have been victims of abuse, exploitation, discrimination, harassment, intimidation, oppression and ill-treatment in every sphere of life. Women atrocities are rooted in gender-based discrimination, social norms, patriarchal mind-set, manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, gender stereotypes and notions of masculinity that perpetuate such violence. Work can be a prime place where perpetrators can harass and abuse women. Researches show that women who suffer from sexual abuse and trauma are more likely to report medically unexplainable somatic symptoms associated with chronic pelvic pain, irritable bowel syndrome, self-injurious behavior, musculoskeletal disorders, functional gastrointestinal disorder and genitor-urinary disorders. Psychosomatic disorder means a physical disease that is provoked by mental factors like emotional stress, anxiety, depression and experienced trauma. This disorder can severely affect one's quality of life, cardiovascular, respiratory and gastrointestinal system. It can lead to physical or mental disability, hypertension, emotional instability, personality dysfunction, psoriasis disease and degradation in productivity.

An effective legislative and justice response is the foundation stone of preventing violence. There must be an implementation of zero-tolerance violence and an effective sexual harassment policy at workplace. The failure to report harassment cases is a major roadblock for the endeavor to shape a safe atmosphere at work. Women must be encouraged to report such incidents in time. Article 51A(e) of the Indian constitution imposes duty on citizens to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. A value-education regarding women safety is an utmost requirement of the day. Workshops, gender-sensitization training programs, awareness campaigns, committee members skill building must be conducted, across all levels of organization. An "environment of equality" must be provided to both men and women. A work environment where women feel more safe, secure, respected and protected can create a healthy working culture and can reduce risks of atrocities.

I. PSYCHOSOMATIC: ORIGIN AND MEANING

German psychiatrist Heinroth was the first to use the term "psychosomatic" in 1818. The term "psychosomatic" is derived from Greek word "psyche" (mind) and "soma" (body). In ancient times, "psyche" meant 'soul' and 'mind' and recently it has been referred to as behavior. Soma implies the body of organism. Psychosomatic disorders are consequences of harmful effects that result from psychic influences on the organic control of tissues. Mental stress impacts body organs through amalgamation of three interrelated components i.e. neural, hormonal and immunologic. Psychosomatic disorders are physicochemical, anatomical, or physiological disorders of living organisms.¹

II. ANCIENT IDEAS :THE IMPACT OF MIND ON THE BODY

Psychosomatic disorder is all about the mind affecting the body and henceforth leading to disorder. However, this idea is not new. During ancient times, Socrates had pointed out that many Greek physicians are unable to arrive at solutions of many diseases. The prime factor being that it is not proper to cure the body without the soul. According to Hippocrates, psychosomatic disorders are abnormal physical reactions to stressful emotions, incidents, and situations. He noticed the fact that emotional experiences could affect bodily functions. A. Galen mentioned that mental processes are produced by interaction between the cortical and subcortical matter. Fear, anger, grief are other emotions are "diseases of the soul."²

III. MODERN IDEAS: UNITY OF MIND AND THE BODY

Descartes drew a distinction between mind, "the thinking entity" and body "the non-thinking entity." According to Benjamin Rush, humans are indivisible beings, united in the mind and the body. Mental actions influence the functions of the body, and they can be the cause of many

IV. PSYCHOSOMATIC DISORDER AND WOMEN ATROCITIES: THE PROPORTIONALITY

The Norwegian Research council conducted a survey so as to access the proportionality of violence and psychosomatic disorder. Eighteen percent of the women surveyed reported exposure to physical violence. Three percent of the women had been exposed to physical violence as an adult. All psychosomatic symptoms were more common in women exposed to sexual violence than non-exposed women. The more a woman is exposed to violence, the higher is her chances of encountering psychosomatic symptoms and diseases. There is a step-wise relationship between the frequency of violence exposure and the number of somatic symptoms and diseases.⁵

According to Deutsch, a fusion and interaction of psychic and somatic phenomenon begins at a very early age, becomes solidified and persists throughout life.⁶ Researches show that even an experienced childhood trauma can lead to psychosomatic disorder.

V. IMPACT OF PSYCHOSOMATIC DISORDER

Anxiety, Depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic physical health disorder and somatic symptoms are reported in women who suffer from sexual and physical violence. A history of sexual abuse is significantly associated with chronic pelvic pain, laparoscopic surgery, psychosomatic symptom and self-estimated poor health.⁷ Acute chronic stress has been linked to increased vulnerability to disease and illness.⁸ Intimate partner violence can negatively affect the health and can degrade the quality of life.⁹ Serious violence can have higher impact on health than less serious violence. There is a dose-response relation between the severity of violence and the degree of physical and psychological violence.¹⁰

VI. GENDER EQUALITY: A LOGICAL CONCOMITANT OF CONSTITUTIONAL SCHEME

The constitution of India guarantees to every citizen "equality before law" and "Equal Protection of Law."¹¹ No person shall be deprived of his life and personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law.¹² It shall be the duty of state to provide for just and humane condition of work.¹³ It shall be the duty of every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.¹⁴ Every incident of sexual harassment at workplace is a clear violation of Article 14, 15 and 21 of the constitution of India. It also leads to violation of right under Article 19(1) (g) of the constitution.¹⁵ Violation of fundamental right under article 14, 15, 21, 19 is a recurring phenomenon. The fundamental right to carry on any trade and profession depends on the availability of safe working environment. Right to life means life with dignity.¹⁶ Gender equality includes the right to work with dignity and protection from sexual harassment, which is universally recognized basic human right.¹⁷

VII. A STEP TOWARDS BETTER AND FAIR ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN AT WORKPLACE

Globalization has brought a change worldwide. Gone are the days when men used to be the sole bread-earners of the family. There is an influx of women in the mainstream workforce. Workplace sexual harassment is a major obstacle towards achieving productivity and prosperity in work. It can degrade the morale and self-esteem of a woman. Workplace harassment creates a hostile and insecure working environment for women. It impedes her ability to deliver in today's competitive world. Apart from interfering with their performance at work, it adversely affects their social and economic growth and puts them through physical and emotional suffering.¹⁸ A major change was seen when the supreme court framed guidelines in the case of Vishaka v State of Rajasthan relying on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination. There are other laws pertaining to workplace sexual harassment. The Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946. Under this act sexual harassment is not limited to women alone. Provisions under the Indian Penal Code as 354, 354-A, 354-B, 354-C, 354-D, 509, also deal with sexual harassment.

VIII. HARASSMENT CONTINUES! IMPLEMENTATION IN QUESTION

"A stitch in time saves nine" – Thomas Fuller

Although the law preventing sexual harassment has been in force for several years but studies reveal that almost three out of every five working women have faced some form of sexual harassment in their lives. There still remains lack of clarity on the objective of the statute, acts that constitute sexual harassment, obligations of the employer, remedies available to the victims, process of investigation. Many are also not fully aware of the criminal consequences of sexual harassment.¹⁹ According to National Crime Report Bureau, between 2014 and 2015, the reporting of sexual harassment cases has increased significantly.²⁰ Statistics show that

65.2% have reported that their employers do not follow the procedure laid down under the sexual harassment act and 46.7% of the companies have admitted that their ICCs are not aware of the legal provisions pertaining to sexual harassment.²¹

IX. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Psychosomatic medicine has often been criticized for not providing apt solutions to the questions as to how social experiences, psychological conflicts and induced emotions could be translated into bodily physiology leading to illness.²² It is unable to answer the question as to how non-material anxiety or depression cause material physiological phenomenon.²³ In the survey conducted by Norwegian Research Council it was found that even a remote history of violence was associated with somatization and the combination of physical and sexual violence was particularly more harmful. Physicians need to ask to their female patients about the violence while addressing issues relating to psycho-somatic disorder.²⁴ More research is required in this field. In spite of the enactment of the anti-harassment act, the WCD, is still receiving the complaints. This clearly indicates that ICC is not fully functional or that awareness is lacking among female employees. Though the sexual harassment act is in force but its implementation is not very effective. Therefore, the Union Women And Child Development launched the "SHe-box."²⁵ The sexual harassment electronic box is an initiative of Government of India to provide a single window access to every woman, irrespective of her work status, whether working in organized or unorganized, private or public sector, to facilitate the registration of complaint related to sexual harassment. Any woman facing sexual harassment at workplace can register their complaint through this portal. Once a complaint is submitted to the 'SHe-Box', it will be directly sent to the concerned authority having jurisdiction to take action into the matter.²⁶ Governments should also use this platform by providing necessary tools to help employers comply with the anti-harassment law. She-box could be used by employers to address such