



Readers' Forum



Sexual Terrorism

Sexual terrorism is likely to be the oldest form of terrorism. Some women have become so accustomed to it that they tend to turn a blind eye to it.

A typical example is contained in a photo in a leading magazine; young women were shown sloganeering against the Mandal commission. While they were protesting two men were trying to pinch their breasts. The whole world saw this photo but there were no outraged comments. Contrast this with Rodney King being beat up by whites which led to widespread riots in America. Once I was travelling in the Alleppy Express and was sleeping on a lower berth. A man grabbed my breast and then tried to flee. But I caught hold of him. Instead of taking any action against him, my fellow passengers told me never to take lower side berth again.

Harassing gropers, grabbers and flashers passing off under the infuriatingly harmless label of "eve-teaser" should be considered a part of sexual terrorism. The issue is trivialised by the media although the problem is acute. I have read that in Japan molesters have their own monthly magazine, aptly titled *Fingerpress*, which has a circulation of 50,000, and bookshops even sell a so called manual for gropers. The extent of the problem was recognised in the aftermath of the Kobe earthquake in 1995, when it was found

that complaints of molestation far outnumbered those about looting or other crimes. Mostly, these offenders are let off with a stern warning. According to the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) in 1995 the number of so called even teasing cases registered with the Indian Police were 703 in Maharashtra, 1192 in MP and 3140 in UP. The dowry issue, rape cases, etc., occupy more attention of the police, media and women's groups in our country. But "eve-teasing" cannot be let off lightly. Though labeled a women's issue, it is as much a human rights concern, which questions the rights of a woman over her own body and private space.

While the whole world is trying to find ways to combat terrorism in the wake of September 11, 2001, no one is thinking of the ways to tackle sexual terrorism.



Sexual terrorism helps patriarchy to have women dance to its tune. Society raise the bogey of sexual harassment every time a woman wants to walk her own chosen path. Sexual terrorism makes every woman dependent on men for social protection. As a consequence men keep women completely under their thumb. Women are in danger if they try to protect themselves through resistance. One woman, who slapped an eve-teaser, had acid thrown in her face. On the infamous bottom slapping Bajaj case, one editor of a leading English daily said that women should learn to 'take it'.

Sexual terrorism is in meant to help men dominate women. There are instances galore, from Phoolan Devi to Bhanwari Devi. Women cannot expect the legal, social or religious authorities to do anything about it, as sexual terrorism is the strongest pillar of patriarchy and rape is the oldest weapon that man devised against women. We have to think of ways to blunt this weapon.

Fear of sexual terrorism makes women socially dependent. Once I asked a nun, why is it that a woman cannot become a priest? She said that a priest can be summoned even at midnight for confession, but how can a woman do that? This is a classic example of sexual terrorism coming in the way of women's empowerment. Women are made to seek protection from father, brother, husband or

boyfriend. Men willingly give protection provided women act according to their whims and fancy.

Bina Ray, Bokaro City, Bihar

Indian Women and Fashion

Beauty contests sprout like common weeds today. Every small organisation and college wants to organise one and of course everybody wants to participate in it. From an ordinary looking girl to a "crowned ideal woman"- it's a long long process. The body beautiful is carefully crafted in the beauty factory, to be sold at a beauty *mela*. A successful sale helps it lure millions of other bodies back to the beauty industry. Except for a woman's height (non-negotiable), everything else can be altered.

And do we really know what the price of a beauty crown is? Sushmita Sen had to have her breasts

augmented - artificially shaped to please the judges! Women today are using silicon breast implants so men can drool over their perfect contours. Silicon injections produce the precise lip-chin correction, which gives women the 'sexy pout' that sells soft porn glossies. There's more: lipo-suction for fat removal, nose jobs, facelifts, and every possible surgical trick. In a way we can say that a girl passing through different surgeries is carved into a 'new masterpiece'.

Whenever any association opposes the beauty pageants or fashion shows, our "miss Indias and crown girls" do talk about feminism and women's rights but has any celebrity model expressed any anguish at the higher rate of infant mortality among girls in rural areas? Did anyone mention the sharp declining male-female ratio, existing

female infanticide and increased selective abortion of the female foetus through sex determination? Did these models even know that every hour a woman is raped and every 10 minutes a crime is committed on a women?

Hard earned money that could have been spent on nourishing food to bring on a natural healthy look is used for buying artificial blushes and skin nourishers. These artificial aids only worsen the condition if a woman's general health is bad.

We must learn to accept women in all their diversity - tall, short, thin, fat, white or black.... Let's try to understand that "Beauty lies not in the body but in the mind." Let's try to improve women's real living conditions and sympathise with the harsh realities they are up against.

Puneet, New Delhi

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