

# WOMEN'S CENTRE, BOMBAY

VIOLANCE IN THE FAMILY

WIFE BEATING

by

F L E V I A

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## VIOLENCE IN THE FAMILY - WIFE BEATING

by Flavia

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\* This paper is based on a study of wife beating \*  
\* in Bombay conducted in 1980 by some of us before \*  
\* the Centre came into existence. In a way, this \*  
\* study, as well as our activities within the \*  
\* Forum Against Oppression of Women, were the two \*  
\* main factors which contributed towards starting \*  
\* a Women's Centre in Bombay. This study helped \*  
\* us to understand the nature of domestic violence \*  
\* and to counsel the women who approach us at the \*  
\* Centre. \*  
\* \*  
\* Although this study was done in '80, the findings \*  
\* of this study are reconfirmed by our day-to-day \*  
\* experience in dealing with the problem of wife- \*  
\* beating which is as relevant today as it was \*  
\* in 1980. \*  
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The recent murder of a housewife by her husband and mother-in-law has focused public attention on the gravity of wife beating. Gomati Shah, a Gujarati Jain girl was married at the age of sixteen. She lived with her husband for only six months and then went back to her parents' house in Gujarat, unable to bear the cruelty of her husband and in-laws. She came back in May this year (1980) because her husband and in-laws wanted her back. She was reluctant to return and told her mother, "If I go back they will kill me." Yet she was sent back by her parents and the village Panchayat. A mutual friend living in Gujarat stood guarantee that she would not be beaten after her return. But the in-laws laid down a condition that her six uncles in Bombay should not come and 'interfere'. So the uncles stayed away. Every night, Gomati would be beaten brutally, at times burnt with a hot iron. It was a lower middle-class industrial area. Unable to bear the disturbance each night, the neighbours complained to the police at Kalachowki. But the police did not take any action as they felt it was a 'domestic matter'. The neighbours then informed the uncles in Walkeshwar. The uncles came over on 28th September. Gomati Shah and her husband were called to the police station at the request of the uncles. Gomati was interrogated in the presence of her husband. By then she was in bad shape.

Her body was swollen, and some of her wounds were infected. When Gomati was asked whether she was facing any problems at home, she replied she was not. The uncles went back home and so did Gomati and her husband. The uncles then sent for the mother. But before the mother could arrive Gomati died - on 2nd October, 1980. /that

The women's liberation movement in India rallied around the issue of violence against women - the question of rape. Many women's groups from different cities came together and agitated for changes in the outdated rape laws and for reopening the Mathura case. Another aspect of violence against women - that of wife beating - seems to get camouflaged under the title 'Dowry deaths'. The deaths which occur within the homes is the ultimate manifestation of the violence suffered by most Indian women in varying degrees. The term 'dowry deaths' is an over-simplification of a far more complex social phenomenon of power relationships within the family. We prefer to call them plain 'wife-murders'. And most of these women are harassed for a long time before she is murdered or driven to suicide and for every woman who dies in her home, there must be a million more who are beaten and harassed, economically deprived and mentally humiliated.

Wife-beating is perhaps the most prevalent form of violence against women. Statistics show that 50% of all American women are battered at some point in their lives. Such statistics are not available in India, but there is little doubt that they would far exceed the American statistics.

There seems to be a reluctance on the part of most groups working towards social change to take up the issue of domestic violence. The problem is viewed as a general problem of domestic discord. The counselling which takes place sees the couple as a 'unit' for counselling, although the way the problem affects the partners within the marriage is very different. Social workers and counsellors are afraid to take up the issue of power relationships within the family. It is socially acceptable that within the family the man is 'Master' 'Superior' and 'Dominant' and the woman is an inferior and subordinate person. Social pressures force women to maintain this status quo. A woman who does not accept the traditional role of submissiveness and subordination needs to be 'advised' or 'tamed' into accepting this position, and any means including violence is justified in achieving this goal. Counsellors and social workers also contribute implicitly towards this ideology when they question a woman who gets beaten: 'What do you do to provoke him?'

There have been very few attempts to deal with and understand the problem of violence against women in the family. Usually, violence is seen as a natural occurrence and social workers seek to save the marriage by making the women more understanding and more adaptable. It is essential to understand the complexity of this phenomenon before we begin to struggle against it and provide support structures for those who seek to break out of these oppressive marriages.

Very little is actually known about these instances, the problems, the situation, and what needs to be done regarding wife beating. Thus we often rely on myths and cliches. To study the nature and the extent of wife beating in our society, we decided to undertake a survey in order that we might be able to provide insights into the dynamics and help to understand the situation of marital violence and why the victims are often deprived of a reasonable solution to opt for, in trying to solve the problem of violence in their marriage. It was with the hope that bringing these problems into the open would perhaps assist in starting an active struggle against this form of oppression - which touches every woman in India - either in physical or mental form bringing it into the fore front of the Women's Movement.

This is a study of a very small number of battered women - 25 from middle class and 25 from working class backgrounds. The most startling factor that emerged at the onset of the survey was that we did not have to establish contact with battered women through marriage counsellors or at homes for battered women. Many of the women we personally knew gave us contacts of friends or relatives who were being constantly beaten. This survey has been possible only because these women assisted us and talked openly about themselves. Whether these women are crushed, whether these women die, commit suicide, whether they can fulfil their desire to live out an independent life away from male dominance depends partly on us, on whether we can respond to their needs and create the conditions whereby they don't have to live with this emotional and physical torture.

At the end of the first month we published some case studies in papers and women's magazines and received a tremendous response from women from all over the country. For the purpose of discussion we present some of our findings and analysis below. The study is ongoing and we sincerely ask for your assistance in making it more meaningful by sharing with us your experiences and analyses.

SURVEY RESULTS:

1. The age of women who reported being beaten was from 16 to 65.
2. The educational background of the women: illiterate to Post Graduates.
3. The women living in nuclear families : 60%.  
The women living in joint families : 40% .  
The family structure did not have much effect on marital violence.
4. 50% of the women were beaten within the first 6 months of marriage.
5. 60% of the women had children. Thus the presence of children does not lead to a decrease in violence.
6. The monthly income of the family ranged from Rs.150 to Rs.5000.
7. 60% of the men from middle class did not touch alcohol while in the working class a large percentage were habitual drinkers. But not all of them beat their wives when they were drunk.
8. The women from the middle class backgrounds had husbands who were lawyers, journalists, public prosecutors, executives and successful businessmen.
9. The immediate cause of violence as reported by the women:
  - a) Arguments over money
  - b) Jealousy and suspicion of the woman's character
  - c) Instigation by in-laws.
  - d) Housework.
  - e) Alcohol.
  - f) Woman's desire to work outside the home, or woman's high self-esteem (she thinks too much of herself).
  - g) Disputes over children.
  - h) Extra marital affairs on the part of the husband.
10. The <sup>forms of</sup> violence we encountered included:
  - a) Beating with hand and fist blows.
  - b) Beating with sticks or iron rod.
  - c) Kicking the abdomen/sitting on the stomach while the women were pregnant.
  - d) Beating with utensils or knives and ladles.
  - e) Throwing women against objects or bashing their heads against the wall.
  - f) Burning the breasts, vagina etc.
  - g) Excessive sexual demands and sexual perversions.

11. The injuries suffered were:
  - a) Deep cuts requiring stitches.
  - b) Broken bones.
  - c) Miscarriages.
  - d) Nervous breakdown.
  
12. Most women had tried to find some assistance at some time. These included:
  - a) Going home to the family.
  - b) Staying with friends.
  - c) Staying alone.
  - d) Seeking advice of counsellors.
  - e) Seeking advice of religious heads.
  - f) Complaining to the police.
  - g) Going to rescue homes.
  
13. About 50% of the women had jobs.

In our study the dowry factor did not emerge as the major factor contributing to wife beating. At best it served as an excuse among others.

#### MYTHS & REALITY:

Before we go on to analyse the findings of our survey and shatter the prevailing myths regarding wife beating we would like to go into the social and cultural causes of wife beating.

After marriage the woman becomes the property of the husband. The definition of the rape law says 'forced intercourse with a woman other than his wife. This statement implies that a husband can rape his own wife or have intercourse without her consent. Even though the society doesn't actually say that a man has a right to beat his wife no one denies that he has a right to tame the woman he marries, or make her bow to his will. So when a man cannot tame his wife in any other way he uses force. Aggression and violence are considered to be positive male qualities. The man who is not assertive in his marriage becomes an object of ridicule. He is called 'henpecked'. Women themselves accept the subordinate role within marriage unquestioningly. Time and again we see in movies how a modern liberated girl is transformed into a traditional woman (who covers her head and touches the feet of her husband and mother-in-law) by her husband by putting her through an 'Agni Pariksha'. Is it then a wonder that the common, average man applies the same principle to his marriage and tries to tame his wife by beating her? The

society either pretends that wife beating does not exist or treats it as a very light matter. During our survey when we went to police stations to collect information they actually laughed outright! Since we all know the social and cultural causes of wife beating and see it everyday we will not elaborate on it but go on to the myths regarding wife beating in our society.

1. The first myth is that MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN DO NOT GET BEATEN. The women came from all sections of the society, belonged to different religions, all educational levels and from all socio-economic classes. About 20% of the women from the middle classes were working. So wife beating cuts across all class barriers, affecting all women. If we hear more about wife beating in slums or in chawls, it is because these women have less privacy. The middle and upper class women are beaten behind closed doors. They live in total isolation and are oppressed further under the necessity to keep up the pretence of a successful marriage. These women were more hesitant to talk about it; more embarrassed. However, once they began to talk about it, it was evident that the violence had greatly scarred them psychologically, making them withdrawn, less confident etc. On the other hand, working class women talked quite openly about the violence that they experienced in their homes, and generally it seemed to affect them psychologically less. This could be because working class women accept the violence, and thus do not see it as being something related to them as individuals. The middleclass woman begins to question and doubt herself.
2. Another myth is that THE VICTIM OF VIOLENCE IS A SMALL FRAGILE, HELPLESS WOMAN BELONGING TO THE WORKING CLASS. But in actual fact women holding responsible jobs as doctors, lecturers, journalists and models get beaten by their husbands. Many of the women we interviewed were big made and quite capable of managing their lives. So there isn't a stereotype portrait of a battered woman.
3. When we talk about the man who beats his wife we think about A MAN FROM THE LOWER STRATA OF SOCIETY, A MAN WHO IS FRUSTRATED IN HIS JOB, AN ALCOHOLIC, OR A PARANOID PERSON, AGGRESSIVE IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD AT LARGE AND HIS WIFE IS JUST ONE OF THE VICTIMS. We found professionals like lawyers and doctors who beat their wives. 60% of the middle class women who were interviewed said that their husbands do not touch alcohol. Among the rest only 20% of the men beat their wives after the consumption of alcohol, the rest while they were completely sober. Among the working class although 80% of



the men consumed alcohol, in most cases they beat their wives while they were sober and wanted money to buy their drink, and the wives refused to give the husband their wages. There were some cases both in the middle classes & the working classes-when the husband was very angry with the wife, went out to get drunk and came back to give her a good thrashing.

In the wives' description of their husbands it was evident that these men are not over aggressive in their day to day transactions with people- men or women. If three quarters of all Indian women get beaten by their husbands, are we to assume that 75% of our male population is paranoid and needs to be in mental asylums?

4. Another myth is that 'SHE MUST HAVE PROVOKED HIM' 'SHE MUST HAVE DESERVED IT' 'SHE MUST HAVE ASKED FOR IT OR LIKED IT' or 'GOOD WIVES DO NOT GET BEATEN'. This myth victimises the woman further. The burden of guilt falls on the woman and increases her shame and degradation. This myth also convey the message that women who get beaten are masochistic. However in a later section we have tried to show why this myth is incorrect and how we understand the various stages in the wife beating syndrome!

Another oft exploited myth is that LONG STANDING BATTERING RELATIONSHIPS CAN CHANGE FOR THE BETTER. We found in our survey that at best with the passage of time the violent assaults are reduced in severity and frequency. But the women continue to live in a state of fear and uncertainty because they can never predict when, where and under what circumstances the violence may suddenly erupt. And many times the violent situation escalates to homicide and suicide.

5. The myth that THE HUSBAND WHO BEATS IS NOT A LOVING HUSBAND is also false. People imagine the batterer to be an aggressive monster, who is psychologically deranged. We found, however, that the husband can be extremely kind and loving specially after a violent assault.
6. Another myth is that SINCE THE WOMEN DON'T LEAVE THEY MUST NOT MIND THE BEATINGS OR THAT THEY ACTUALLY LIKE IT. Many a times people ask 'Why do women continue to live in a situation where they are eventually murdered or are driven to suicide? Why don't they seek a way out?' The theory of learned helplessness gives an insight into the mental state of passive resignation experienced by these women.

THE THEORY OF LEARNED HELPLESSNESS:

Most women interviewed, as the statistics show, attempted to break away from their beating husbands during the first year of their marriage. The fortunate ones were heard, the wives often went to stay with their mothers. But in most cases the women were told to try harder, that it wouldn't happen again; that she should have a child. But the woman we interviewed said:

"There was nowhere that I could go, nothing that I could do. I had tried to escape - it had no effect. So the only way left was to learn how to survive within the house. Getting out of this house and breaking the marriage was out - so I learnt to grin, laugh, bear with it. I laughed a lot. Why? If I cried or talked about my problems I had few friends i fact few people believe I am beaten, and that also severely, because I don't look sad,tearful and unhappy all the time. Funny, isn't it?"

In an experiment conducted by psychologist Martin Seligran dogs were trapped in a cage and were given electric shocks. Initially the dogs reacted violently and tried to break free. But when they realised that there was no way out, no matter what their response, that they ceased voluntary movement. They became submissive, listless and passive. Even when the shocks became more intense there was no reaction. Eventually when the cage door was opened the dogs refused to leave and did not avoid the shocks. They had to be repeatedly dragged to the exit to teach them again the process of voluntary response. The dogs had 'Learnt to be Helpless and Passive.'

When the middle class women were beaten for the first time they were numb with shock. Every woman interviewed said 'I did not know that educated men beat their wives'. They had not seen wife beating in their parents' home (except in one case). Their initial reaction was to deny it even to themselves. They say the shame and humiliation of the first beating has left a permanent scar on their psyche. They became silent and withdrawn. They did not tell anyone. This reluctance to confide ranged from a few weeks to five years. After the initial shock they began to question their worth. They began to wonder whether there was something wrong with their behaviour, their upbringing, their education. They tried to change their behaviour, their actions and their made of dressing in order to please the husband and in-laws. But soon they began to realise the fact that they got beaten, no matter wheat their response. The repeated assaults threaten their physical safety and survival becomes a major issue.

It is at this stage the women seek help. But wherever they go they are sent back. We report the case histories of two women from the middle classes & two from the working classes.

'I was desperate, but I could not return to my mother's house because I had two younger sisters and my mother felt that if I came back it would be difficult to get them married. So I stayed on. Once I was so desperate I poured kerosene over myself, but my husband entered the room and stopped me before I could light the match. I was expecting my first child. When I went to my mother's house for my delivery I stayed for three years. But finally my mother grew frantic because my younger sisters were not getting proposals. So she took me, my daughter, 10 tolas of gold and Rs.2000 and left me in my husband's home. Today I have three children & I live as a prisoner in my own home.'

'The battering started within a fortnight of the wedding. I was shocked and felt very humiliated. I did not tell anyone for three years. He said he wanted me to die, so that he could marry my younger sister. After the delivery of my second child he beat me mercilessly because it was a boy again (He wanted a girl). My body swollen In many places the skin was broken and was bleeding. I ran out to jump down from the balcony, but he came and pulled me by my hand, took me inside and locked me in a room. When I conceived again he sold my gold to pay for the abortion because he did not want another child. Twice I left the house with my children and went to my sister's place and asked her to take me to 'Bapnu Ghar'. But she and some other relatives brought me back. They say the name of the family will be spoilt if I leave my husband. So once my children grow up I do not want to live any longer. Since I cannot leave this house, I will commit suicide, when I feel I am not able to bear this torture any more'.

This woman is a Maharshtrian. She is 28 years old. Her husband is a motor mechanic, drawing Rs.1500/- per month. She has studied upto VII Std. She was married seven years ago and has 3 sons.

Nilima the wife of a mill worker says:

'No one wants to interfere in a case of wife beating. The neighbours say that it is a family matter. They think that I have done something bad and that is why my husband hits me. If I try to hit back everyone thinks that I am a wicked woman. The police don't help. Once when I was beaten very badly I went to the police station to complain. They came after two hours. The owner of the liquor joint from where he

buys his drinks told the police that he is a good man and that I am very quarrelsome. That night I got the worst beating.'

'It is not easy to live alone without a husband' said Prema, a woman who works in a textile mill. 'I left mine and took my three children with me to stay with a woman I know. After a few days the walls of the factory were plastered with sheets of paper announcing that I was a slut who had run away to live with another man. Nobody would talk to me. I would sit alone in a corner and cry. My husband came to call me many times but I did not go. But after two years I went back. My friends house was getting overcrowded and there was no place. Also my eldest daughter had reached puberty. Everyone said unless I went back nobody would marry my daughter.'

But the women who come back get totally disillusioned. Most often they come back on the husbands terms and conditions. They lose their freedom, their individuality, their self esteem. Dreams and hopes are shattered. Life becomes a mere existence often for the sake of the children. The family and friends rejoice because the 'couple is reunited' or because the woman has 'Learnt to adjust'. In our survey we found that the beatings continued. But the women had learnt to accept the violence as something inevitable, a part of their life, a fact to live with and die with. But years later the women begin to think of leaving the house once again, this time when they feel that the lives of their children are being threatened. When the women see the bodies and psyches of their innocent children getting scarred due to the violence in the family they begin their search for alternatives all over again. Thus we find that women leave their home either during the first five years of marriage and again after a lapse of 10-15 years when the children are grown up a little.

So it becomes obvious that women themselves in spite of childhood conditioning that 'marriage is the ultimate goal of a woman' did not choose to remain beaten. They had no hesitation to break the 'sacred knot of marriage'. But it is only when they realised that there is no way out, that they were trapped within the marriage because of :

1. Lack of education
2. Economic dependency
3. Lack of support structures
4. The difficulties in obtaining divorce/job/house
5. The burden of child care.

that they became passive, resigned and negative in their approach. They had numbed themselves. The beatings and the negative response of society to their needs had succeeded in making the women 'Helpless, Passive and Negative.'

THE CYCLE THEORY OF VIOLENCE

The women we interviewed spoke of their experiences as follows:-

'He isn't always like that. It's almost as if he gets into a fit, a rage, and begins to batter me as if he is possessed. After this big beating, he calms down. He feels bad, promises that he'll never do it again. He becomes very considerate to me. This lasts for some time, then suddenly fights begin. Small ones at first, then the frequency increases. He becomes angry all the time, stops talking to me, and sulks all the time. Then I know that the time for a big beating has come. The beating is sure to come some time. I begin to get scared, sometimes I get angry with the children for irritating him and I beat the children. When the children start crying he becomes more angry and all of a sudden he begins to batter me mercilessly.'

↳soon

Most women had similar stories to recall. The husbands were very considerate after a beating. After sometime the tension begins to mount, small fights leading to a big bang and then the calm loving husband. Another woman said:

'I know when a big fight is coming. It's preceded by small fights over nothing. I get really tense then. I try to stay out of his way and try to do the right things. But despite that the fights, the small beatings occur. I know, I just know that a big beating is going to come - if not today, then tomorrow. I know because this has been the pattern for the past 15 years. And often rather than live under the tension of will the beating come tomorrow I think 'it is best to let him beat me now. At least the tension will ease after the beating and it will be calm and peaceful.'

These experiences, recounted by most of the women interviewed are remarkably similar to the 3 Phase Theory of Battering as put forward by LENORE WALKER in her book the 'BATTERED WOMEN'. She says that the battering does not occur at random, but that it is this 3rd phase together with the theory of learned helplessness which keeps the woman trapped in this relationship.

The three stage: 1. The tension building period.  
2. The explosion - acute battering.  
3. The calm loving respite.

Phase 1 : During this phase the woman can sense the husband becoming edgy. Minor frustrations build up tensions. Verbal abuse and minor battering incidents occur. But the woman tries to control the external elements, believing that she has control over his actions. She thinks that if she pleases

him, stays out of his way, doesn't get angry with him etc. then the acute beating will not occur. She tries not to get annoyed with him, rationalise his rude behaviour, covers up for him. If he throws the dinner, she quietly cleans up, knowing very well that it could have been worse, or justifying that perhaps the dinner, indeed, wasn't good. By these justifications she accepts guilt for his behaviour. She internalises her frustrations, with the result tension mounts with both the partners. Each time a minor battering incident occurs it has residual tension building effect. He becomes more oppressive, jealous and possessive. Sexual humiliation, economic deprivation and verbal abuse becomes more hostile. The psychological torture at the end of phase one is reported to be far more serious to deal with than the physical pain of the actual battering of phase two. She tries to withdraw, fearing any action of hers may trigger off an explosion, while he moves more oppressively towards her. He looks for expressions of anger misinterpreting her every move and gesture. As both partners sense the escalating tension, it becomes more difficult for their coping mechanism to continue working and both become frantic. The trigger for moving to phase 2 is mostly an external event or the internal state of the man and rarely the behaviour of the woman.

Sometimes, unable to stand the tension any longer and knowing no matter what she does the explosion is inevitable she may provoke the husband. Women do so because they know they will be abused no matter what they do. So they prefer to get the incident over with, rather than live in continued fear, and anxiety. She also knows from past experiences that once the stage of acute battering is over, the husband will move into the third phase of the calm contrite husband. It is this move of the wife which society condemns as 'she asked for it' or 'she provoked him' viewing the move in isolation and not in the total context of the whole battering cycle.

Some of the factors that serve as triggers are:

1. Instigation by his mother, brother, sister etc.
2. Alcohol (specially if the man has the tendency to become aggressive after drinking. Some men get drunk at the end of phase one to give them a sense of power or as an excuse for the beating. Men and women both use a man's alcohol consumption as a way of explaining his behaviour

Wife: He only did it because he was drunk

Husband: I didn't know what I was doing, I was drunk!)

3. Frustrations relating to work,
4. Economic problems - lack of money
5. Interpersonal relationships outside of the home
6. Parenting pressures (tensions due to childcare)

The moves by the wife which serve as triggers are:

1. Visiting her parents or relations.
2. Nagging (This includes asking the husband to help

in domestic work, request for money for household expenses, and in case of working wives- when they point out their contributions to the domestic economy etc.)

3. Not paying due to respect to the in-laws.
4. Lax in household chores.
5. Meals not prepared in time or of substandard quality.
6. Dressing in a manner that the husband disapproves.
7. Talking to friends - Men or Women.

The duration of this phase varies in every relationship and in every cycle. Sometimes it is brief lasting for a week and at othertimes it can be long stretching for about six months.

Phase 2: This is a brief period of acute battering lasting for a couple of hours. The total lack of control and destructiveness distinguishes this phase from the minor battering incidents in phase One. He starts with wanting to teach the woman a lesson and stops when he feels she has learnt one. Every move of the woman, if she cries, if she screams, if she is silent, if she tries to escape from the beatings or remains still - excites him further. One woman reports: "Initially I used to be ashamed to cry out and he used to beat me saying 'I will beat you until you cry out in pain'. Then later on, I started screaming as the battering started and he used to beat me saying 'I'll hit you till you stop screaming'".

Most woman build up a psychological barrier, they try to disassociate their minds from their bodies. They do not feel the physical pain as much as the psychological helplessness and the feeling of being trapped. It is the most violent point of the cycle. In their blind rage men seem out of control both physically as well as emotionally.

Phase 3: The ending of Phase 2 and moving into phase 3 is welcomed by both parties. Just as Phase 2 is associated with brutalities, phase 3 is associated with kindness and love. It is during this stage that a woman's victimisation becomes complete. The man knows he has gone too far. He believes that he will never again touch her. He also believes that he has taught her such a lesson that she will never again do anything which will annoy him. The woman at this stage believes that her husband is basically a good man and will never hurt her again. She identifies this behaviour with the man she has married. She blames outside elements like drink, tension at work an instigation by in-laws to be the root cause of his brutality. The woman wants to believe that she will no longer suffer abuse. His reasonableness and loving behaviour supports her wish that he really

can change. She convinces herself that he can do what he says he wants to do. This is a phase of idealization based on romanticism rather than mature kinds of loving behaviour. Both the partners believe that the external elements which they think are responsible for the beating can be removed from their lives, the man will no longer beat his wife. Most couples - from Rajesh Khanna and Dimple to Asha - a peon in a school - visit shrines and temples and husbands promise in the presence of God never to beat the wife again. Some men buy expensive gifts and flowers 'make up'.  $\angle$  to

If the woman has left the house he engages others in his battle to hold on to her. It is at this stage friends and relations come to act as mediators. They tell the woman how much her husband needs her. 'He is basically a good man. He needs you, he really loves you. Everyone loses their temper once in a way, so what? These things happen in every marriage. (!) It was a mistake. He needs you. He loves the children. What would happen to the children if you took their father away from them. Children need a father. Give him one more chance, 'During the intense campaign to reunite the couple, everyone, including the couple, believes these rationalisations.

Another ploy used at this stage is some friend or mutual relation stands guarantee for the woman's safety, and this gives the woman a false sense of security. But in every case, when the woman needs help and when her life is in danger, this person is never around. During this stage the woman usually drops charges, backs out of divorce or separation proceedings. Another device is to remove the source of immediate outrage eg. the woman should not meet relatives etc. again. Since this is not the root cause of the beating, despite these changes the violence continues, often now with the woman more alone and isolated.

But the women who have gone through many such cycles know the pattern well. These women - the ones who are put out of their houses, hospitalized or seek the aid of institutions are the ones who are further victimized. The woman leaves the house when the man is in phase 2. The social workers and counsellors find it very difficult to accept the women's version of the battering. When they meet the husband he has moved into phase 3. The loving, affectionate and contrite man they meet is quite a different person from the aggressive, dominant brute the woman had portrayed earlier. Every case history, like a worn out old record, carries the same old remarks, 'Husband seems loving and kind. He loves his wife and children' and 'She was rude to her husband. She needs counselling.' 'Which man will tolerate such behaviour?'

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There is yet one more trend among the modern social workers and psychotherapists. They accept the fact that the man is at fault. But they attribute this fact to the man's mental condition. They tell the woman that he is a sick man and that he needs help. The woman is given the responsibility of nursing and doctoring him. The message implied is that only



she can give the medical and psychological help that he needs. If she leaves him, he will fall apart. She is his only hope as he refuses to seek help outside.

Thus the women are physically and psychologically abused by their husbands and then kept in their place by a society that is indifferent to their plight. They are blamed for getting beaten and then blamed for not ending their beatings. They are blamed for not seeking help, yet when they do they are advised to go home and stop the inappropriate behaviour. Not only are they held responsible for their own beatings, they must also assume responsibility for their husband's mental health. If only they were better persons, the litany goes on, they would find a way to prevent their own victimization.

The exact length of phase 3 cannot be determined. It is longer than phase 2, but much shorter than phase 1. In some cases it lasts only briefly. You cannot see when it ends. Before the woman realises, the calm, loving behaviour gives way to a few batterings and verbal abuse and the cycle begins once again. When the cycle is repeated many times, the woman's suppressed rage leads to loss of control, and some times women stab or lash back with lethal weapons causing serious injury. The men do not seem to benefit in any way by their violent behaviour. While trying to possess the woman psychologically, and physically dominating them, in actual fact they lose the love and respect of the woman. They may gain their fear and obedience. But the wives resent the husbands because they do not possess this power. The resentment builds up into anger and the woman tries to retaliate in other ways - sexual deprivation or verbal assault - which further deteriorates the situation.

#### WHY WIFE BEATING OCCURS

Frustrations build up in a man's life at 3 levels:

1. SOCIETY
2. MARRIAGE - male female relationships.
3. INDIVIDUAL - internal.

1. SOCIETY: It may result from the present social structure which puts a lot of strain on the individual, tension and oppression at work or interpersonal social relationships.

2. MARRIAGE: The stereotype male female sex roles, within marriage, failure of the spouses to live up to each others' expectations, tension and stress of bringing up children, lack of finance to fulfill expectations.

3. INDIVIDUAL: Man's expectations of himself and the reality of his life. The inability to face the reality of his life with its problems and failures, his sense of insecurity.

It is generally assumed that frustrations in a man's life leads to violence. But why does the wife become the target of his violent explosion even when in many cases the cause of the frustration is totally unrelated to her and beyond her control? Frustrations build up in a woman's life as well. But why don't women's frustration lead to spouse abuse? The reasons that we can put forward are:-

- a. The unquestionable authority of a man in his home/marriage.
- b. She alone of all grown people will show the least physical resistance to his violent aggression.
- c. Wife's total dependency upon her husband due to which she can neither rebel nor escape from his brutality.
- d. The existing power relationships in marriage- the subservient role of women as need servers. When the needs are not fulfilled, men and society think that wife beating is justified.
- e. The social sanction to discipline the wife. The right to judge the woman's code of conduct and morality.
- f. The male arrogance that once he has worked out his frustration he can make her forget the whole episode with his kindness, love and gifts. His confident assumption that he will not have to face the consequences of his brutality.
- g. The stereotype male female sex roles. Society equates masculinity with aggression and dominance. If the man feels threatened by his wife's education/income/popularity - he tries to restore his self esteem by beating her. Further, when a man is not able to meet his own expectations of the stereotype masculine sex role in society, he feels he can raise his self-concept by beating his wife.
- h. If a man has witnessed wife beating in his childhood in his parents' marriage, or has been abused as a child, he assumes that physical violence is an acceptable way of resolving differences in marriage. Violence becomes a learned response to his frustrations. Further child abuse leads to the assumption that one who loves also has the right to beat.

#### EXISTING ALTERNATIVES

In our search for homes for battered women, we contacted all homes in the city which give shelter for women in distress. The Shradhanand Mahilashram at Matunga said that they give shelter to

all women in distress but added that they do not have any battered women in their home. When we asked the reason for this, their reply was that perhaps women do not know that the home is open to battered women. Government Rescue Home at Deonar and Ashadan at Dongri, were homes basically for unmarried girls. When we asked police officers during the various stages of our survey, they said that if a women has nowhere to go they are sent to Bapnu Ghar. So that left us with only one home which caters to the needs of battered women.

At one level, Bapnu Ghar offers the woman an alternative to getting-beaten in her home daily. She can at least seek temporary shelter and get away from the immediate threat to her life by admitting herself into Bapnu Ghar. The whole emphasis of Bapnu Ghar seems to be on reuniting the family. They call the husband and wife for counselling and try to understand the viewpoint of both sides. When asking the husband why he beats his wife, there seems to be a tendency to assume that wife beating is justified in some cases. It is like saying that there are some legitimate reasons for wife beating. However, can we say that a man has the right to beat his wife for some valid reason eg. if she does not do the house work well, or if she is negligent of home and children, or if she is engaged in a love affair? In cases of wife beating it is the woman who is always the victim - there is no question of faults, and any counselling should be carried out in a way which does not at any level imply that if she is at fault then the beating is alright. And so any institution that deals with this problem should always be kind and sympathetic to the women and see the problem from their point of view. We see wife beating as a crime of sexual violence against women, just as rape practised by one half of humanity - the MEN - against the other half - WOMEN.

at Apart from the attitude in their counselling methods, the two major obstacles were that the women who had job could not come to Bapnu Ghar because they were not allowed to go out and also the home does not accommodate children above the age of 6. The women can go out only once a week. Some of the women we talked to indicated that this lack of freedom was one reason why they left and went back to their husbands. They also complained of boredom since there was no activity they could get involved in. Another major drawback was that there isn't a constant follow up of old cases and women who are discharged are back again and again. Many times the women were sent back on the husbands' terms with conditions like eg. her mother or relatives should not be able to visit her. This makes the position of the women still weaker in her own home once she goes back and becomes more vulnerable.

### SUGGESTED CHANGES

Our ideas and understanding about the causes of wife beating influence the steps we take to prevent it. A fundamental aspect of our social structure which must be understood and confronted if there is any hope of dealing with marital violence is the existence of the cultural norm which makes the marriage licence also a hitting license. Perhaps the most fundamental set of factors bringing about wife beating are those connected with the sexist structure of the family and society. In fact, to a considerable extent, the cultural norms and values permitting and encouraging violence towards the wife reflect the hierarchical and male dominant society which characterize the Indian culture, and also exists on a world scale. The right to use force exists to provide the ultimate support for the existing power structure of the family, if those who are lower in the hierarchical scale refuse to accept their place and roles. Although the role of the woman in marriage is changing, and man and his wife enjoy equality in the Constitution, the idea of the husband as head of the family remains firmly rooted in our culture. So as long as the husband remains the 'Head of the Family' in the eyes of law, in administrative procedure and as a taken-for-granted aspect of family life, wife beating will be perpetuated in our society.

Another major factor that contributes to wife battering is the total economic dependency of the woman upon the man. Lack of education and job skills, and the low paid jobs open to women, are the important factors due to which most middle class women remain married to the man who constantly beats her. This, along with the burden of child care and the sexual stereotyping of parental responsibility coerce women into remaining married even though they are victims of violence. Under the present conditions, a husband does not need to fear that if he beats his wife, the wife will leave and he will be responsible for both carrying for the children & earning sufficient income to maintain them. So a husband can hit and oppress his wife with relative impunity from this possibility. He can be reasonably confident that: a) She will not leave because she is not economically independent. b) She has no place to go and c) She has the burden of bringing up the children because society feels that child care is exclusively a mother's job and women who leave the children behind become social outcasts.

Any institution which tries to deal with the problem of wife beating has to take a preventive rather than a curative approach. So, outlined above are some of the fundamental causes of marital violence. Unless we try to change the structure of the family, the help given to battered women will just prove to be band aid on a festering wound. But a focus on changing some of the structural causes of wife beating does not mean that we should ignore the desperate and immediate situation in which millions of women find themselves, and live their lives in constant fear of violence and death in their own homes. Their need is urgent.

To expect lone women to fight individually against institutionalised family violence is both cruel and unrealistic, despite occasional successes. We desperately need more homes for battered women where the women can flee to when their lives are threatened. But we need homes which will look at the problem of wife beating from a pro-woman point of view, and which will help the women to rebuild their shattered lives and induce faith and confidence in themselves. Moreover, these homes can serve as an important educational and consciousness-raising function. The time spent in these homes can be utilised in teaching the women useful skills which can eventually make them self-sufficient. In cases where the women choose to go back to the husband, the Home should lay down rules that the husband should allow her to continue her job training instead of sending the women back on their husbands' terms and conditions. In most cases the husband is most anxious to get the wife back once she leaves, and this is the only time you can lay down terms and conditions for the man. This can be very useful in maintaining contacts with the women, so that when the beatings recur, prompt action can be taken in pressing charges against the husband.

Community action and social boycott like having a morcha or a dharna outside a wife beater's house will go a long way in acting as a deterrent to marital violence. Men and society at large should recognise once and for all that women are no longer going to take the beatings lying down.

The women who decide to break away need FREE LEGAL AID. A PLACE TO STAY AND A JOB. The homes for battered women should be, linked up with organisations which help women with self employment. We need more committed lawyers who are sympathetic and understanding and would help to provide legal protection and relief to the women who are beaten. The Government should be made to realise the urgency of the problem and battered women should be ALLOTTED A CERTAIN PERCENTAGE IN GOVERNMENT HOUSING SCHEMES. Thousands of women die in their houses because it is impossible for single women to get housing in Bombay. But between home for battered women and an independent house, the women need a half way house. HOSTELS FOR WOMEN WITH CHILDREN with common kitchens are urgently needed where the battered women can start living an independent life but at the same time be close to other women who have faced affliction and derive strength, sustenance and support from each other.

We need to create a new awareness in society so that the attitude of doctors, counsellors, institutions, social workers and the police is sympathetic towards victims of marital violence, so that more women have the courage

to come out of their loneliness and isolation and seek support and help to end the oppression in their lives. The attitude and approach of the institutions and counsellors should be TO MAKE THE PARTNERS IN A MARRIAGE MORE COMPLETE HUMAN BEINGS RATHER THAN TO PRESERVE THE MARRIAGE AT ANY COST.

Most of the time the women are told that if they change their ways, if they look after their house and children better, dress to please their husband etc., they will not be beaten. At the other level, we have social workers who say that only psychopaths and alcoholics beat their wives. Asking the woman to change her life style in order to prevent getting beaten indirectly implies a social sanction for wife beating. The counsellors and social workers also need to recognise the '3 Phase' cycle theory of wife beating, so that they will not be taken in by his behaviour in phase 2 and blame the woman for getting beaten, as the husband, after having given vent to his anger and frustration is kind and loving towards his wife.

In case where the woman shows a desire for reconciliation, she should be given some advice as to the precautions she should take in case of an attack on her. Getting help from her neighbours, locking herself in a room, running away from the house, throwing objects or chili powder at the husband, kicking him in the loins are some of the simple things most women can do when a husband turns violent. They may seem scandalous to a religious mind which is conditioned to accept the husband as 'lord and master', but unless women can stand up to the beatings and fight back and do not accept it as their fate, the power relationship within the family will not change.

Getting help from the neighbours and involving them will make the women less isolated and help to create a social awareness that there is no stigma to being a victim of marital violence in fact it is the aggressor that should be chastised. It will also challenge the assumption that the man is the 'master' of the house and no one has the right to interfere in his personal life.

Unless workers organise, they cannot fight Capitalism; unless Colonies organise, they cannot fight Imperialism; and unless women organise we cannot fight male domination. So we need to organise and start a Mahila Atma Suraksha Sangh in every area to fight this aspect of women's oppression.

#### THE LAW AND WIFE BEATING

A woman is being beaten by her husband. Can the police help?

There is no special law to cover wife beating. It is covered under the general law for assault. These are section 319-326 of the Indian Penal code.

Section 319 and 321 are non-cognizable offences - i.e. cases in which the police can take no action against the assaulter.

Sections 320/322 covers 'grievous hurt' - which is defined as:

- a. Emasculation
- b. Permanent privation of the sight of eye.
- c. Permanent privation of the hearing of either ear
- d. Privation of any member or joint.
- e. Destruction or permanent impairing of the power of any member or joint.
- f. Permanent disfiguration of the head or face.
- g. Fracture or dislocation of a bone or tooth.
- h. Any hurt which endangers life or which causes the sufferer to be during the space of twenty days in severe bodily pain, or unable to follow his ordinary pursuits.

Section 324/326 cover those cases where the assaulter uses 'dangerous weapons or means'.

Wife beating is the most under reported crime in the country. Going through the crime registers of two police stations in the heart of the city we could find only ONE in each police station, for 1979 out of a total of 56 cases of assault in one police station and 42 at the other. Of the two cases in one case the wife was not staying with the husband. Both were registered under Sec. 324 of the IPC.

The first point to be noted is that these laws are ineffective for protection of a woman. A woman who fears that a severe beating is eminent can find little protection from the police under the general law of assault.

If there is a 'grievous hurt' involved, the police take little immediate action. Very few of the wife beating cases actually reach the police station and the police take action on only a few of these. The usual form of action is to call the offender, the husband to the police station and to 'give him advice or counselling'. Sometimes the man may be kept in the station to 'sober him down'. The police officers themselves say of this treatment 'the poorer men listen to us; the middle class men openly tell us that we have no right to interfere in their private family life'. At least for the working class cases the police seem to feel that this treatment is effective. However the experience of the women was different:

"The children ran to call the police because they were really scared for me. The police came only 4 hours later after all the beatings were over. I might have been dead".

Another woman said:

"I went to the police when my hand was broken. They arrested my husband but released him after a few hours. That night he beat me like he had never before - he kept saying 'see even the police can't do anything to me'.

In other case, tragic because the girl lost her life, the uncle told us:

"We were told that Gomati was being beaten badly. The neighbours phoned and told us. Since her husband refused to let us see her we filed a report at the police station. The police brought the husband and wife to the station. Her entire body was swollen with bruises. They asked her in the presence of her husband 'Does he beat you' She replied 'No'. The girl dies four days later.

The police response to the problem of wife beating is obviously hopelessly inadequate. And it is essential to make changes in these practices to make them more beneficial to women.

A woman, in distress, in fear, in tears, confused, unhappy goes to the police station. There she confronts a totally cold, impersonal male atmosphere. She is told to sit in a corner, and perhaps after half an hour a male constable appears to take her complaint. All this time she is alone. The male police are either indifferent to her, or at times after taking her complaint down he makes tearing comments like "What sort of a wife are you to make complaint against your husband" or "I bet you did something to provoke him. In view of these problems, we maintain that it is essential to argue for the following changes in the Law/Police set up as it currently exists:-

1. There should be a woman police officer who meets a beaten woman when she comes to the police station for assistance.
2. In the absence of woman police official being unavailable at the police station the woman should be taken to the nearest women's home.
3. In every case the police should have the power to take preventive action - i.e. when the woman comes to the police because she fears an assault she must be given the option of staying at a home for women.
4. A woman should never be interviewed in the presence of her husband.
5. Since the practice of talking to the man without a stern action leads to a situation where a woman is beaten further, every action of the police must be followed by stern punishment.



6. Since the situation of assault of a husband on a wife is quite specific, in that the wife is economically dependent on the husband, in that the assault occurs in the house in which both reside, it is essential that the police operate under different laws than those which cover general assault. Such law "DOMESTIC VIOLENT ACT" should cover the points made above and several others.

7. The police should be educated on the nature and problem of wife beating so that they are better equipped to handle the problem.

Can a woman who is being beaten get a divorce?

Under all the marriage laws except the Christian Marriage Act, this is possible. For the purpose of this paper it is not necessary to cover the Divorce Act in detail. Therefore, in this section we will put forward certain suggestions:-

1. If a woman is a victim of wife beating and is she goes to court for a divorce she should be given free legal aid prior to and during the entire stage of her case.
2. Though divorce is available on the grounds of 'cruelty' this term is left undefined. Thus how it is interpreted depends largely on the views of individual judges. We feel that it is necessary to concretely define for what 'cruelty' divorce is possible and this should include 'any threat of violence' to the woman.
3. If a woman has been married under a religious ceremony she should have the right on the basis of a signed statement to have the laws of the Special Marriage Act applied to her marriage, since as of today we do not have a uniform civil code.

In conclusion, since wife beating is perhaps the most prevalent form of violence against women in this society - it is essential for us to understand the complexity of the phenomenon and begin to struggle against it in many ways. Only then will we be able to break the cycle of violence generation after generation - which is perpetuated against women, against wives and mothers of this society.

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