

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: POWER, SILENCE AND TRAUMA

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Introduction

This article is all about the issue adhered to child sexual abuse; the range or scale of the violence has and its effects left on the abused which is necessary to sense the generosity of it. Trauma and trauma induced memory generated by the violence can also be considered as an agent that intensifies the extent of consequences that helps in realizing the enormity of the violence. Despite of the violence being so pervasive, still it has never been conferred about bluntly; it has always been obscured in secrecy, stigma and silence. To understand the issue of child sexual abuse sincerely, the article has endeavored to unveil silence and the hidden essence of it.

The article has been basically divided into three parts. The first section will deal with the issue of child sexual abuse as physical as well as emotional violence that will be explored through distinguished consequences of the event. The second section will discuss about trauma and trauma related memory caused out of the violence. The third section will stress on the silence and shrouded secrecy around the issue.

Child Sexual Abuse: An Extensive Range of Violence

Child sexual abuse is a form of abuse that includes sexual activities involving penetration, non penetration along with harassment, using children for pornographic purposes particularly as categorized in the Act Protection of Children in Sexual Offences, 2012 (Protection of Children From Sexual Offences Act, 2012). Child sexual abuse is a violence which can be considered as physical as well as emotional since it involves physical as well as non physical contacts both. Child sexual abuse as an emotional violence is way more critical than as a physical violence. Here, it needs to be noted that, to consider child sexual abuse as an emotional abuse does not indicate that the abuse should only be non physical. However, in this case, physical violence itself turns into emotional violence due to the mental pain and trauma attached it. Due to sudden shock caused by the event, a child gets sexually abused

must go through fear, emotional stress or mental disturbances (Melissa Hall, 2011). Shock and trauma gets more intensified when the perpetrator is a known one or any family member to the child whom he/she loves and is dependent on emotionally. Moreover, the situations generated after the event, for instance the behavior or reactions of the people towards the survivor, particularly the behavior of the family members matter the most. In this regard, when the child is not believed or supported by the family causes more emotional trauma and pain to the child rather than the actual event. Hence the issue of child sexual abuse can be recognized as emotional violence too (Michele M. Many, 2012).

Accordingly, child sexual abuse has profound consequences for the children. Child sexual abuse is linked to numerous maladaptive emotional, social and behavior consequences along with poor social, mental and physical health outcomes throughout the lifespan (McCabe, 2003). Furthermore, data shows that adverse event like child sexual abuse increases individual's risk for long term health consequences such as cancer, chronic lung disease, obesity and certain types of heart disease in the adulthood (Cate Fisher, 2017). Additionally, study has found a significant increase in risks for drug abuse, stress, depression and suicidal attempts in the survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Toxic Stress in children caused by sexual abuse has also been linked to difficulties with formal and informal learning as well as poorer school performance (McCabe, 2003).

In a culture like Indian, glorification of sexual violence is very apparent in film, television, music and almost every other form of media but still the issue has never been acknowledged with that much concern it deserves. Child sexual abuse is an intimate wound to both the mind and body that is often enveloped in the trilogy of shame, secrecy and stigma (Crenshaw, 1989). People are not willing to even talk about the issue openly. In Assamese society also these things are considered as '*beya kotha*' (bad things) as mentioned before or as '*popiya kotha*' (sinful talks). The matters relating to sexual abuse particularly concerning children and more precisely in respect with incest, people often avoid talking about it by saying '*aaibilak popiya kotha patibo napai*', which literally means 'these kind of sinful stuffs should not be talked about'. The deeply rooted cultural norms, values, taboos and social stigma that exist in the society restrict the people to acknowledge the issue and to talk about it openly. Due to reason of which, the issue has been concealed in secrecy. Everybody knows its existence but cannot take stand to confront the issue.

Besides that, ‘victim blaming’ is another aspect of the issue relating to instances like sexual abuse that resist survivors to talk about it openly. It is often seen that after occurring such incidents people target the survivors more than the offenders. People constantly start judging why he/she have got sexually abused rather than blaming the offender for committing the crime. Even in the cases of child sexual abuse, child survivors are blamed for getting sexually abused. The notion like ‘seductive children’ is the example of victim blaming. According to the discourse of the ‘seductive child’; sex between adults and children is harmless and sought by children. As per this discourse, children too obtain enjoyment while having sex with adults. Hence, it is seen that even the sexually abused children are blamed for seducing adults. This is how, the blame of the offenders get transferred to the victims (Han Israels, 1993)

Memory Enlivens Trauma

Child sexual abuse is said to be a series of traumatic events, since from grooming a child to abusing him/her involve threat, fear and trauma. In addition to this, after the abuse, the child is again threatened by the perpetrator not to reveal the incident to anybody. Moreover, if the child somehow comes to reveal the incident, then also he/she often gets rejected or again threatened by the parents or family members not to disclose the matter to the public, since it may harm their family honor. At the same time, if the incident gets exposed to the public, then also the child survivor may get traumatized by the negative reactions of the society towards the child. Hence, not only the occurrence of the main event of the abuse traumatizes the child survivor, but also the other factors or circumstances appear after the abuse do the same. That is why, the sexual abuse of children is considered as a series of traumatic events that specifically result in various negative emotional consequences in the child survivors of sexual abuse. The trauma caused by the overwhelming experience of child sexual abuse impacts one’s entire life (Judith A McNew, 1995).

Memory of such incident makes the survivors to go through the trauma again and again and to endure the pain caused by the event. Not only the memory of the main event, but the memory of other events or situations generated by the event which caused secondary wounding or trauma to the survivors such as; the painful medical procedures through which the child had to go through for treatment or medical evidence after the abuse; the harsh procedures of reporting where they had to face interrogation by police; the stressful court procedures; all these appear into the mind of the survivors

while remembering the incident. Moreover, some survivors of childhood sexual abuse have to go through distrust or ignorance by their own parents while revealing about the abuse, which may emotionally break them down. In this regard, this creates a sense of helplessness and worthlessness which can be regarded as the worst experience for the child since being not believed by parents or loved ones can be more painful or traumatic for the survivor than the actual abuse. Hence, the memory of these secondary events developed around the main event also comes along with the memory of the sexual abuse in various phases and circumstances in the lives of the survivors (Jim Grigsby, 1994) & (Spehar, 2015)

The Politics of Silence

The imbalance of power inherent in the relationship between adults and children, adults can easily impose silence on children. Children, from very young age understand that, they are supposed to be silent and listen to the adults without speaking anything against them. If they do not do so, they may face negative consequences. This may eventually help the perpetrators in committing crimes like sexual violence easily without having the fear of getting exposed. Often, the hierarchical nature of the relationship between adults and children reduces the need of direct threat on the part of the perpetrators (Virani, 2000) & (Keith L. Kaufman, Jennifer K. Holmberg, Karen A. Orts, Fara E. McCrady, Andrea L. Rotzien, Eric L. Daleiden, Daniel R. Hilliker, 1998). Hence, in the matter of child sexual abuse, silencing comes from the children’s own understanding. But, it must be noted that, in some cases perpetrators need to threaten the survivors in explicit manner to make them silent about the abuse (Ferguson, 2002).

The issue of child sexual abuse or anything related to sexuality and children is an obscured matter in India and so in Assamese society. It is considered as ‘*bea kotha*’ (bad things) or ‘*dangor manuhor kotha*’ (matter of adults) in Assamese society. Talking about sexuality with children is beyond imagination, where even the lesson on Reproduction or Human Body that is included in the curriculum of Science is often skipped by the teachers at school. There is so much silence around the whole matter. So, the people of Indian society usually do not want to talk about sexual abuse, and that is too relating with children. It is so ridiculous that children are always kept away from anything concerning sexuality by the adult society, though they often fail to keep their children away and keep them safe from getting exposed to sexual abuse in schools, in streets and even within the premise of homes and Temples (Virani, 2000). It is believed that, children should not be allowed to

learn sex education, but here the concern that arises in the mind that; if they should be allowed to serve the sexual gratification of adults. In India, most of the child sexual abuse cases occurred and get continued with the same child again and again for years just because of the children's ignorance about sex or sexuality. They are not aware of any sexual activities. In this regard also, adults use their power to deprive children from getting knowledge about sexuality.

Moreover, children, from its early childhood are trained to be submissive by being silent. The socio-cultural norms of the patriarchal society teach children to listen to the elders and respect them. At the same time, adult society infuses the ideas that adults are always right; they have all the rights to love them, take care of them and punish them when needed and thus 'good children' never say anything bad against elders etc. into the mind of the children. Hence, in such situations, children decide to remain silent even after get abused by adults, since the knowledge provided by the adult society as 'adults do everything for the sake of children's good future' makes abused children confused in differentiating between affection, care, love, lust, punishment and abuse. Therefore, whatever sufferings, humiliation and violence faced by the children in the name of care and concern by the adults, they do not speak up against (Virani, 2000).

The children as a minor group are supposed to be dependent on the adult society. Within the hierarchy of power exists in the adult-child relationship; children are excluded from active participation in the political, socio-economic sphere. Hence, children have to be dependent on adults for different reasons and needs. Child sexual abuse commonly takes place within the family in which the abuse perpetrated by an adult caregiver or by whom the child is supposed to be dependent on. So, the child who is sexually abused prefers to keep silence rather than exposure in order to continue its dependency on them. Moreover, a child is always emotionally dependent upon its care givers for care and protection; due to which it becomes painful for the child to confront the reality. Thus, the child survivor tries to deny the incident for normalize the relationship with the adult perpetrator. Denying the incident can also be identified as silence of the survivors. Children's dependency on the adults makes the child survivors of sexual abuse being silent (Sarah Caprioli, David A. Crenshaw, 2015). In addition to this, the fear of isolation within the family from the caregivers plays a crucial role in making the child to be remained silent in the cases of child sexual abuse. Children are afraid of being isolated within the family. They have the fear that, if they break

their silence against the perpetrator, who is a family member then the family may react negatively and exclude them from the other family members. Hence, the child survivors often remain silent.

Silence can be considered as an imposition on the powerless by the powerful. It is the power, through which one is made to be silent. The power that exists behind silence may be found in either explicit or implicit form. Sometimes, the powerful exert physical or forceful power to silence the powerless. On the other hand, sometimes the powerful need not to exert physical or explicit power. The prior knowledge or internalized image and fear for the powerful make the powerless to be remained silent. Hence, silence is a politicized phenomenon.

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POLITICS OF SEXUAL LABOUR AND SEX WORK

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Abstract

This piece of writing seeks to extend the understanding of the politics associated with sexual labour and sex work. This paper attempts to understand how stigma as a fundamental mechanism along with other mechanisms of patriarchy help to maintain the exploitations of women's reproductive labour as well as on sex workers generations after generations. Although from the last some decades, many started advocating sex work, talking and writing more about sexual labour, yet there exist little focus on the issue of stigma which primarily resist the acceptance and development of the conditions of women and sex workers particularly at the grass root levels. This paper will fill this gap. It will help us to have a more clear understanding of the politics of sexual labour and its inter-connections with sex workers.

Key words: Patriarchy, Sex Work, Sexual Labour and Woman

On 26th May 2022, the Supreme Court of India declared sex work as a profession and provide certain significant directions which upheld that sex workers should also treat equally under the law and has the right to live with dignity (Rajagopal, 2022). This is not for the first time that Indian courts have provided favourable landmark judgement towards sex workers. Back in 2011, the Budhadev Karmaskar vs State of West Bengal case the supreme court ratify the Article 21 of the Indian constitution ensures the right to life and livelihood of sex workers (Supreme Court of India, Budhadev Karmaskar vs State Of West Bengal on 14 February, 2011, n.d.); in 2019 the Calcutta Hight Court stated that prostitution is not prohibited under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (ITPA), 1956 and stated that sex workers or their clients cannot be accused unless there is substantial evidence of financial exploitation or she was a 'co-conspirator' in the crime (Times News Network, 2022); in September 2020, the Bombay High Court again validate that sex work cannot be a criminal offence and women have a right to choose their profession.