**A slam dunk**

BY M U N A K H A N 2021-02-14

EV ERY man may not be a misogynist but every man benefits from a misogynist society, says Pauline Harmange, author of IHate Men, a book which created a lot of stir when it was published in France last year. The book came into the spotlight when France`s adviser to the ministry of gender equality Ralph Zurmely called for it to be banned because its title could incite hatred for a gender which is a crime. His comments boosted an interest in the book which went for a bigger reprint, sold to another publisher before its English-language edition sold for £25,000.

Harmange says she wrote the book `to imagine a new way of being, to take less account of the often unsupported opinions of men, to consider the adage `it is better to be alone than in bad company` seriously, and to rediscover the strength of female relationships full of reciprocity, gentleness and strength`. The focus, however, has centred on her advocating misandry but being married to a man herself.

She`s not the first to take a beating for `anti-men` views. In June 2018, professor of sociology at Northeastern University, Suzanna Walters, wrote an op-ed `Why can`t we hate men?` in the Washington Post. She asked whether it was so illogical to hate men when there was overwhelming data to show `women`s economic, political, social and sexual vulnerabilities` but very little prosecutions, fewer taken to task and no recognition of wrongdoing.

`We`re supposed to feel more empathy for your fear of being called a harasser than we are for the women harassed,` she wrote.

`We are told he`s with us and #NotHim. But, truly, if he were with us, wouldn`t this all have ended a long time ago? If he really were with us, wouldn`t he reckon that one good way to change structural violence and inequity would be to refuse the power that comes with it?` I was reminded of the two women`s positions while reading actor-producer Fahad Mustafa`s defence of his decision to produce Dunk, a T V drama about a man who is falsely accused of harassment. In an interview in December, he said that `95 per cent cases of sexual harassment are genuine but in some cases, people are falsely accused, so we have to tell every kind of story`.

There is much data by, for example, the US Bureau of Justice Statistics, to show the number of rapes not reported or prosecuted `far outweighs` the number of men convicted of rape because of fake accusations.

There`s research in Europe to show that false allegations of rape rarely name a person, that it`s usually a stranger; other research demonstrates false allegations arespotted right in the beginning of the investigation. However, women who allege harassment are immediately viewed with suspicion. Criminals or terrorists are immune from that suspicion and there`s data to show that false allegations about rape are lower than false allegations of other crimes like robbery yet the first thought about a woman alleging harassment is `liar` followed by the knee-jerk `not all men are predators`.

When can we expect to see stories that represent the 95pc of cases Mustafa talked about? Perhaps when men and the women at the helm of the industry, decide they will no longer allow misogyny to be used for profit purposes. When the justice system sees women as reliable narrators.

To the writers and producers who create these stories I ask: why is there more empathy for the victimiser than for the victim? Do you realise, when you produce these storiesfor audiences,you are aiding in the victimiser`s redemption? Why do you worry about his future more than the victim`s whose life has likely been dam-aged?Redemption cannot come at the cost of victims.

I`d be foolish to blame just the entertainment industry whose primary concern is proht and notthe problematic themes they reinforce with their messaging. Why should they care if their drama discourages women from coming forward or that it strengthens the `Not All Men` mantra. There is nothing more infuriating than being disallowed from having an honest conversation about the long history of the derision and shame assault survivors have had to deal with.

There is a problem with the justice system which needs urgent redressal. It continues to side with the aggressor and it of ten seems to side with rapists. We`ve read judgements from the US with phrases like young men should not have their careers derailed for stupid mistakes made in college. The same regard is not given to a woman whose life is upended after an assault. The courts, wherever they are, place more importance on a man`s future than a woman`s. Justice must be victimbased. And until that system stops beating women down at every step, I won`t be surprised if the `hate men` brigade grows in numbers and volume.  The writer teaches journalism at IBA in Karachi.