**The Rising Rape Culture**

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The corporate chitter-chatter and the lunch break discussion had turned into a much earnest discussion. The participants stood divided. Everyone had an opinion – democracy at its finest, one would assume, but just like the democratic system, only opinions were being thrown at each other mixed with emotional outbursts. All of that to no end! The modern way of ending an argument is to “Agree to Disagree.”

However, the discussion stayed with me, and a part of me wanted to break the spiral we are all stuck in understanding the “Rising Rape Culture” in Pakistan. It is easy to point fingers, but so many of us have failed to understand the rape epidemic truly, which calls for a greater reflection on a personal and societal level.

The numbers on rape in Pakistan are horrifying. According to statistics, 10 rape crimes are recorded every day in Pakistan, with more than 22,000 rape incidents registered to the police in the last six years. Punjab accounted for 85 per cent of the total. However, only 77 of those indicted have been found guilty, accounting for approximately 0.3 per cent of the total.

With each new molestation and rape case, we witness the same media uproar, social upheaval, and public outcry. Every time, the government and the law enforcement agencies are pushed a little to take concrete actions, the latest being the launch of the “Women Safety App” by the Punjab Police.

So what is the answer? The west that promotes women’s rights and gives them freedom has a comprehensive legal structure that still failed to curb the rape culture. On the other side of the spectrum are theocratic states like the Vatican, Saudi Arabia, Iran, etc. – everyone is well aware of the suppressed truth about sexual violence and crimes there. And then there are patriarchal societies like ours confused between gender parity and still caught between the confusion of the east and the west.

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Where are we humans, the social animals, and all intelligent beings failing? Is sexual violence just another psychological disorder that we do not fully understand yet? Or is it the outcome of a deteriorating social construct? Psychological or social, let’s agree that sexual violence, oppression, or rape is a criminal offence and must be dealt with harshest of punishments. But is punishment enough? What is being truly done to control the rape epidemic, or will we keep on treating the symptoms? I have gone through pages after pages of researches, and there doesn’t seem to be a definitive answer. There are just theories, hypotheses, and an endless list of focus groups of victims and perpetrators.

And then it struck me, I was looking in all the wrong places for answers, so I began to have serious discussions on what truly needs to change. I believe there are so many things that need to be transformed on an individual level before we can see a profound comprehensive impact. I pondered upon the discussions and thought of 5 Key C’s that help us take a step in the right direction- Content, Contact, Communication, Consideration, and Confront.

Content: we as a society must ponder upon the content being produced and consumed. It is the moral responsibility of content producers to abstain from verbal and visual profanity. Parents must pay close attention to the content their children watch regardless of age. According to a study in the US, adolescent or young men are more likely to commit rape compared to men at later age groups. The media and news agencies need to control the content they broadcast. Since Pakistan is amongst the highest porn-consuming countries, harsher measures need to be in place against the access to explicit content.

Contact: We are vastly judged by the company we keep. In my opinion, we do become like the people we are primarily in contact with. This is true for children and adults alike; Parents must not only keep a close eye on the people their child comes in contact with, but they must also always speak to young adults about the importance of keeping the right company. Another important aspect is women not warning other women about their company if you believe that your female friend is in a bad company. It is often out of the fear of losing the relationship that we lose the person.

Communication: There seems to be a wall in our society about subjects like sexual violence. Firstly, we need to stop associating rape with one gender only. Recent incidents have proven that perpetrators spare no one! But the real question is that are we communicating this concern on a broader level? Where is the lawyer’s movement? Why are educators quiet? Why aren’t there any mass awareness campaigns about the rape laws and punishments? Everyone seems to be busy in their lives until the next unfortunate event. There needs to be constant ad consistent communication about sexual violence and rape. Statisticians must dig deep, law enforcement agencies must take rapid action, and the media must communicate the reality.

Consideration: It should not be hard to show kindness and give consideration to the victims of rape and assault. However, it seems this is where we have failed as humans globally! Too often, rape victims are blamed for their appearance, choice of company (contact), and mannerism. But think about it does anyone ever asks for being raped and stigmatized for the rest of their lives. Then why is it many of us seem to have less empathy for the victims or their families?

Confront: it is about time we confront the demon in front of us! Most rape crimes are not reported due to the stigma attached to them. The public and civil society must come together in confronting everything that promotes the rising rape culture; every one of us will have to play a much more significant role, go out of our comfort zones and perhaps even dedicate a part of our lives to confronting the challenge that faces us.

I am confident that there is a lot more that can be done. But it is said, Charity begins at home. Let us all take a look around us and start taking baby steps towards spreading awareness and against normalizing rape in our society. If the next time you hear or read about such a crime, don’t shun the thought, ask yourself, “what is it I can do to make the society safer?”

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