**What Happens when you Justify the Unjustifiable?**

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The recent Minar-e-Pakistan incident sent the entire nation into shock. A girl was attacked and harassed by a mob of men in broad daylight on Pakistan’s Independence Day in front of a national monument. While people were still recovering from the traumatic impact of the heinous Minar-e-Pakistan incident, another video has surfaced on the internet. This video showed two girls travelling in a qingqi with a minor when a man jumped on the qingqi to harass them. As the girls sat there traumatised, other men who were following the qingqi on their bikes passed uncultured remarks.

As shaken as the whole nation was by these incidents, a group of people have begun justifying all these unjustifiable happenings. Certain people tried to attribute the Minar-e-Pakistan incident to the fact that the victim was a Tiktoker and she had allegedly organised a meet-and-greet with her fans that went wrong. Others victim-blamed the girls for being out and about on August 14 as according to them, it’s a widely-held belief that women shouldn’t go outside on nationally festive events. The way the girls were dressed was also deemed, by a few people, a reason for the incident. Numerous other causes were also allotted to these occurrences. However, a closer look would reveal that all these excuses had one harrowing commonality. They somehow justified the brutal incidents. Sadly, this is not the first time that a large section of our society has sided with the perpetrators instead of with the victim. Every single time such a case comes to light, people are questioning victims instead of culprits. Apart from this, hashtags like “Not All Men” and “so and so exposed” starts trending on social media.

However, I believe that now is high time for us as a society to understand what exactly happens when the blame for such events is placed solely on the victim. The analysis of the impacts of such a victim-blaming attitude can be broken down into several perspectives. From a psychological perspective, a victim of abuse or harassment is left in a state of shock and confusion. They are trying to cope with what happened to them. At such a time, a supportive attitude from the people around them and the society at large can help them cope. At no point do baseless allegations, character assassinations, and trending insensitive hashtags lead to anything positive or helpful. In fact, it can further cause difficulties in the victims’ journey towards healing. From a political perspective, there has been a rise in people who are glorifying hiding women away in homes and excessive practice of “parda.” Same people can be seen blaming victims for their dressing every time an event of abuse or harassment occurs. The problem here lies firstly in the fact that the national dress of Pakistan is shalwar kameez, not shuttlecock burqa. And secondly, history stands witness to the fact that no nation has ever achieved success by keeping its women restricted at homes. The plight of Bangladesh changed once the women started contributing in occupational settings. Furthermore, holding personal ideologies above the state compromises the state’s sovereignty. From a legal point of view, such victim-blaming narratives discourage the victims from coming forward and reporting their cases to the law enforcement authorities. Such discouragement leads victims to feel isolated and even more vulnerable to abuse and harassment. It also strengthens the hand of criminals who believe they can get away with committing such heinous acts. So an individual who victim-blames, whether they like to admit it or not, ends up standing with the perpetrator.

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Even though so many people in Pakistan try to brush such events under the rug behind the guise of blind patriotism. The fact remains that ignoring issues does not lead to them being resolved. What the state can do to curb this prevalent habit of victim-blaming. Firstly, as emphasised many times before by many prominent figures, classes of ethics, human rights, and mental health should be made mandatory at the school level. Such classes would create a sense of tolerance to diversity, empathy, and mental health awareness among children who are the future of Pakistan. Furthermore, awareness should be raised regarding the right to free speech, more precisely at what point free speech cross over into the domain of harassment, hate speech, or incitement to violence. Although the active role of law enforcement authorities against the culprit in such incidents is commendable, they should also play an active role in countering such intense victim-blaming narrative and violent incitements on social media as well as on mainstream media. Furthermore, to make public spaces safer for women and children, it would have been wiser to restrict single men or groups of men from entering parks.

As a society, we must understand that there are no ifs, ands or buts when it comes to standing with the victim. Although a lot of people consider themselves in a position of neutrality, the truth of the matter is that there is no neutral ground in stories of abuse. As Imam Hussain A.S. said, “Those who are silent when others are oppressed are guilty of oppression themselves.”

We must correct our narratives when it comes to the vulnerable segments of our society. After all, in the words of Bacha Khan, “If you want to know how civilized a culture is, look at how they treat its women.”

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