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**Orange the world**

Violence against women is rampant not only in Pakistan but around the world in various forms, be it domestic violence and abuse, sexual abuse and harassment, forced marriage, child marriage, human trafficking, cyber-bullying, acid attacks, female genital mutilation, etc. In fact, women face physical, psychological, and sexual violence in every sphere of life, whether they are at the workplace or on the street or in the market.

The ‘In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women: Report of the Secretary-General, 2006’, mandated by General Assembly resolution 58/185, states that “Violence against women is one of the most pervasive human rights violations. It devastates lives, fractures communities, and stalls development. At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime – with the abuser usually someone known to her.”

It is a sad fact that gender-based violence whether in the home or the community is rooted in the global culture of gender inequality and discrimination, which not only violates the fundamental human rights of women and girls but also allows violence to occur with impunity. It is used as a tool to keep them under control.

Acceptance of violence as a social norm is also responsible for increasing incidents of violence against women. It is said that men who grow up seeing violence being perpetrated accept it as the norm and often resort to violence. But women now are not ready to accept it and are beginning to speak up. A scene in a Pakistani drama Kankar, aired some years back attempted to explain this possible root cause of marital abuse, where the young wife who is physically abused by her husband openly tells her mother-in-law that it is her fault as she silently accepted violence at the hands of her husband.

However, we need to understand that violence against women is not inevitable, but preventable. To end this cycle of violence, it is essential to change the attitudes that perpetuate, rationalise, and normalise violence, and deny women their right to safe living. Since men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of gender-based violence, their attitude needs to be changed.

It is heartening to know that the world has not accepted the situation and a lot is being done to raise awareness about violence against women and to mobilise efforts to end such practices. Women’s rights organisations have been, for long, raising their voices against women’s rights abuses. Though countries are taking measures to prevent such crimes, it is a global problem and requires global action.

And action is indeed being taken. On the one hand, there are legislations and UN conventions that call for action to curb violence against women, and on the other, there are awareness campaigns such as 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence that seeks to inspire action to end all forms of violence against women. The Campaign was launched in 1991 by the Centre for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL) at its first Women’s Global Leadership Institute in 1991 and is used as an organising strategy by individuals and organisations around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence (GBV).

The campaign runs between Nov 25 and Dec 10 every year; the dates chosen are significant as the starting day is the International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women, and the concluding day is the International Human Rights Day. The dates symbolically link violence against women and human rights and emphasises that such violence is a violation of human rights.

Campaigns such as this one highlight the issue, and create public awareness about the need to bring about changes to prevent it from happening at the local, national, regional, and global levels.

While Pakistan has made some progress in the right direction as several women-friendly laws have been passed by parliament that deal with various forms of gender-based violence including honour killing, rape, sexual harassment, acid attacks, forced marriage, etc a lot more needs to be done as the laws are not properly implemented and women are still subjected to discrimination and violence. The lower status of women in our society is also contributing to gender-based violence.

In light of the increasing cases of sexual abuse in the country, and public demand for legislation, the Cabinet Committee on Disposal of Legislative Cases has approved two anti-rape ordinances aimed at setting up special courts for sexual offences against women and children and introducing harsher punishments for convicts. According to reports, the two ordinances – the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Ordinance, 2020 and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 – provide mechanisms in the investigation and punishment of rape and sexual abuse against women and children. After final approval from the cabinet, they will be sent to the president to be promulgated and must be submitted to parliament for ratification within 90 days after being promulgated.

We have hope that something is being done to curb crimes of the worst nature against women and children. At the same time, care should be taken that the legislation does not remain on paper but is implemented in letter and spirit. At the same time, tighter implementation of other pro-women bills is the need of the hour to enable women the space they deserve in society. However, for results to show, awareness and a change in attitude is essential.

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