

Book Review

KARISHMA KHADIWALA

Assistant Professor
Department of Commerce
R. A. Podar College of Commerce & Economics
Matunga, Mumbai 400 019
Tel.: 98331 09699
karishma.khadiwala@gmail.com

Name of the Book	: Behind Closed Doors - Domestic Violence in India
Author	: Edited by Rinki Bhattacharya
Contributors	: Anwasha Arya, Sobha Venkatesh Ghosh, Kalindi Muzumdar, Chhaya dey and Mamta.G.Sagar
Date of Publication	: 2004
Paper Back	: 231 pages
Language	: English
Publisher	: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd.
Cost	: Rs. 420/-

This book is mainly centred on the plight of married women in India. It has primary focused on the aspect of Domestic Violence, that is on “Battered Women”. The book is divided into five main chapters. The first chapter “Devi: The dis-empowered Goddess” basically speaks about the fact that India being a predominantly Hindu Society worships goddesses like Durga, Kali, etc. on one hand and on the other hand, women are battered and ill-treated behind the closed doors of their houses. It also says that archaeological evidences of Hindu goddesses show that they were powerful independent deities, who dominated the male deities and yet India depicts a patriarchal society. The second chapter talks about how late India was in realizing the fact that a law needs to be framed for women who have faced domestic violence. It also says the Hindu women must revalidate Hindu superiority by leaving out the “Hindu Domestic ideologies of sacrifice, chastity and dutifulness.” The third chapter deals with narratives of seventeen women from different parts of cultural, economic, regional areas of India, right from the remote villages of Dapoli in Ratnagiri district (Maharashtra) to a southern coffee plantation (Karnataka). All these women from different class, caste, community faced severe experiences of being physically and sexually abused, ill-human treatment given to them and they showed tremendous courage to fight against this injustice. Some of them were lucky enough to get rescued from this torture while some were not. The next chapter talks about the changing attitude of the police towards the victims of domestic violence. It highlights the way in which the police used to treat these victims in the past and what they do now, especially after the training provided to them. It also speaks about the college students engaged in social work who helped policemen in knowing the victims better, the ways to handle them and the right attitude needed to handle them. Lastly it talks about the way forward for these women and has mentioned how to deal with situations of domestic violence. The author has made a special mention on how in our society daughters are regarded as PARAYA DHAN or UNWANTED from the moment they are born. One of the

interesting facts mentioned is that Indian daughters have to bear in mind that her bridal departure is a final exit point from the natal home. Later the author has spoken about the various organizations who are there for help to the victims of domestic violence. The book also provides the readers with some statistics of domestic violence in India and measures to overcome them.

Being a former victim of domestic violence, the author decided to do something for women who suffered from this problem. In the 1980's, author used to work at a women's centre and in 1987, she laid down the foundation of 'HELP', an NGO for support to "battered women." It took her almost seven years to interview the women about whom she has made a mention in her book and faced undeniable difficulties in finding victims of abuse, not because there were not too many of them out there, but mainly because not too many were ready to talk about their experiences. She considers this book as a tribute to the courage and determination of those women who decided to break their silence. She was sure that this book would inspire other victims of this "hidden crime" to speak out, share their plight and change their fate. At the end, she has concluded that this book will be of immense importance for students and scholars of social work, gender studies, lawyers and groups working for women. Apart from this book, she has a documentary film called 'Char Diwari' on domestic violence for which she received international acclaim as well.

I definitely agree with this concept chosen by the writer, since this is one of the major social problem that needs to be dealt with as fast as possible. Women who face this physical and mental trauma need to come forward and raise their voice against this evil deed. It is these women who shall be important in bringing a change in the people's attitude towards women. Another thing which I'd like to agree with the author is the prevailing gender bias in our country, since we still stay in a male-dominated society. Also regarding the change in attitude of police is seen to a large extent but there are loopholes found when the policeman don't follow up in these cases.

But there's one point that the author mentions about woman's family not supporting their very own daughter, on which I agree only partially, since this mindset seems to have changed to a large extent now. I strongly believe that the book should go for an edited version once again; since a lot has changed between when it was last edited and where we stand now.

Regarding the evaluation part then I must say that the title surely matches with the content of the book, however the language is a bit heavy in terms of the literature and the vocabulary used herein. A slightly lighter vocabulary would probably have helped the message to reach out to a much larger audience. Also, a somewhat catchier title would have encouraged more readers to pocket this book. Depiction of a few pictures in the book would have made it a bit more interesting. Capturing real-life stories is always a very good idea while addressing such issues, since the readers will start to feel the connect as soon as they start imagining the mental state of the person who would have gone through such a mental and physical trauma ranging from the husband's beating in case of the story of Gangubai, Ulka, Jamuna to the mother-in-law's control over Bina's husband. A husband's physical torture during pregnancy for Neela, Hansa and many more were all stories which shock us. All of these stories talk about how cruel a man can be and the extent to which domestic violence is prevalent in India. The beauty of the author is that after discussing about the stories the roadmap what she has given is so very helpful. Any reader can easily now know the names of institution which he or she can approach in case of domestic violence. Some of the very important points which she has rightly pointed out for consideration of women who suffered domestic violence are safety of victims, rebuilding women's economic resources and long term counselling to the victim.

As a woman, many stories in this book left me with a bundle of questions. I always used to think that when the term 'Domestic Violence' comes, it pertains to only the lower strata of the society, but after reading the instances mentioned in this book, it made me think that it is not only limited to the lower strata, but its spread throughout the country, irrespective of any class, custom, caste, etc. It is also that the educated people who undergo such trauma but stay silent due to the false societal status and family restrictions which lay upon us.

This book has inspired me to be courageous and spread the message to the student community, friends, relatives and to every women to say 'NO' to domestic violence. Many of them don't know that mere abuses by their husband and blows which they give are also treated as domestic violence. It has somewhere prompted me that we as teachers can do a lot in this area by creating awareness about women's rights and powers, the NGO's who work in this field of domestic violence and the institutions that have established for the help of such women. We can also heightened the awareness through public education campaigns, adult education in conjunction to gender sensitization etc. The training of every agent of change must focus on the fact that violence against women is a shocking aberration rather than an invisible norm. It's high time now that a women comes out from the so-called societal restrictions, family pressures, emotional web, etc. so that she can fight against such evil happening in the society.

