

INTERPRETER OF MALADIES

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"She asked for it"

Sexual violence against women is often justified by putting blame on women. If a woman gets sexually assaulted, the whole of society tends to point fingers at the woman. Victims of sexual violence are too often accused of tempting the 'innocent guy,' and instigating the violence by her 'reckless' behaviour. First and foremost, they will look at what she was wearing, who she was hanging out with, where and at what time of the day, etc.

These are important information to understand the position of the assault, but what I find wrong is how this information is used to justify a criminal act and further victimise the victim by the blame game. Minor failure in practicing good judgement by women is often magnified to protect or justify sexual harassments by men.

Women are often asked to cover their body (so that men don't get aroused!), stay indoors unless it is essential to go out (controlling women's freedom of movement, thereby controlling their lives), if someone betrays her trust or takes advantage of her vulnerability — it is still the woman's fault, because 'men will be men.'

This kind of social attitude perpetuates and normalises sexual violence against women.

If a woman gets sexually assaulted — friends, family, and society will tell her to sweep it under the rug and pretend it never happened. This has enormous consequence on the mental health of the victim, which is minimised and deliberately downplayed by society. Crooked men know they can get away with committing sexual abuse because nobody would hold them accountable for their actions, and there will not be any real consequences.

If a woman has the courage to ask for justice, she would be targeted by more perpetrators and shamed for who she is. Sexual violence is always about power and control. So, the less powerful or emancipated (e.g. domestic servants, street women, factory workers etc.) the woman is, the more vulnerable she is. This is the painful reality of women's life.

I believe, women's empowerment and activism might have brought some awareness, but unfortunately, not to a substantial degree yet. The recent #metoo movement in North America was probably able to shake certain political

and glamour world power houses, but left very little impact on the board room executive to factory level culture.

In Bangladesh, I guess some advancement has happened in terms of legislation and its implementation. However, centuries old systemic and cultural sexual oppression is so deeply embedded in the fabric of society that it can't be dealt with laws alone.

Consensual sex between two adults, with or without wedlock, does not fall under sexual abuse. However, consensus taken without full disclosure, where it puts the other person in harm's way, is also unlawful. Extra marital sex, and having affairs while staying in a committed relationship (cheating), are considered as moral failure, sometimes also a sign of impulse control disorder. Non-consensual sex between adults, consensual (which is invalid)/non-consensual sex with a minor or mentally incapacitated person is sexual violence.

Incest is a heinous crime. Each of these have different physical, mental, social, and legal ramifications.

If she says NO, it means NO. Don't try to assume anything beyond that. No doesn't mean Yes, in any circumstance!

Silence doesn't mean Yes either! If she smiles, dresses up, puts on make-up, is friendly, and wants to hang out — it still doesn't mean "she asked for it."

She has a voice, so listen to her voice! Consent must be explicit and voluntary.

It is important to respect everyone's physical boundary, trespassing the boundary is a violation of basic human right.

Touching is a grey and sensitive area. Inappropriate unsolicited touching is a sexual offence. Some people are comfortable with appropriate touching (e.g. holding hands, handshakes, hugs etc.), while others are not. Read the cues and act appropriately in a respectful manner. Social intelligence is the function of forebrain. Some people can read these cues very well, while others would falter.

Learn from mistakes!

"She asked for it" is a psychological defence, and the abuser (and his sympathisers) project it on the victim to justify their actions. There cannot be any debate about it if people can set aside their gender issue and put humanity first. This is about social justice and being just is being closest to God.

Religion has often been used in patriarchal society to dominate women. Women are told that they are the cause for men's downfall from heaven. Culturally, messages like 'wealth, wine, and women are men's downfall' groups women with objects, and dehumanises their value as a person.

Women's body is targeted by media and abusive men to instil insecurities and body shame from an early stage in life. These behaviours must stop if we want to live in a safe and just society. There is a saying, "if I could leave the world as a better place because I was here then that is a successful life."

Photo: Collected



Dr. Jhumu Khan's Laser Medical

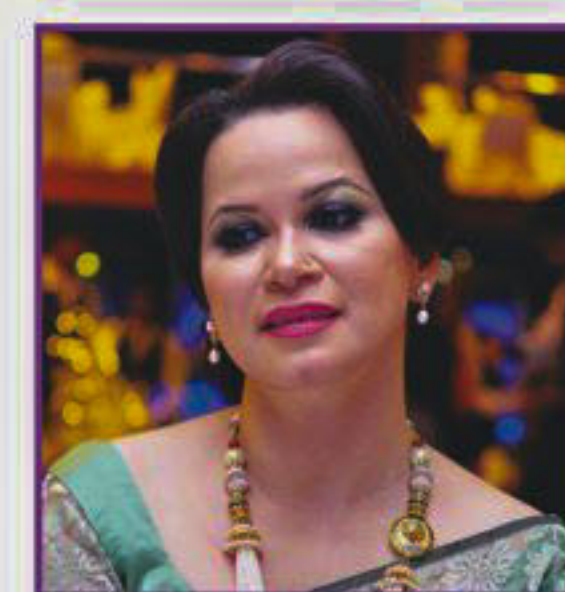
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