

## Is a resistance against “one tight Thappad” so unreasonable?

I was 12 years old when I overheard my neighbourhood aunty cry to my mother and say that her husband had slapped her that day. My mother, with a bland expression of kind sympathy clearly seemed to have an answer prepared in her mind. She said, “*Sunke bahut bura laga par karna bhi aur kya hai bhabiji. Mardo ka to jaise haak hai marna, par hum sirf seh hi lenge. Ladkio ka toh ghar nahi tut sakta. Aap thoda seham jaiye, dekhna sab thik ho jaega.*” (I feel so bad but what more can you do. Men seem to have the right to hit us. But, we cannot allow our homes to break. Calm down for some days, see everything will be alright). Over the years, the slap turned into torture and the torture into insanity. Her husband would punch her, smack her face and kick her hideously, until she would collapse on the ground. And the next morning, everything would be back to normal again.

Today, when I recall the incident, it keeps me wondering whether what my mother said was justified. Was it just a slap? What if she had encouraged her to stand up against her husband’s actions? Would things have been different? Would she have to endure anymore of the pain she felt after that?



Resistance is a strong word in the face of physical violence and gender inequality. It is often 'meaningless' in a commonplace vignette where people try to reason a slap as '*just one slap*' (absolutely nothing), despite the magnitude. Sometimes it is self-explanatory, trying hard to scream sense into us, whining that love gives everyone 'the right' to do so. But resistance is also a weapon, a recognition that intimacy, in no way, values any unforeseen, solitary slap. It is a logical extension of the upsetting power dynamics between two individuals, the voice which has the power to dispel 'one tight slap' with a strong '**a no means a no**'.

However, although a discomfoting truth, "*sirf ek thappad*" has hardly seen any resistance till date. Intimate violence has been so normalised that it continues to thrive through generations. Be it a male slap or a female one, it has tangled up gender norms in a bid to prove who is more empowered. The result is utter chaos; both alter egos's brewing with anger and no love to find at all. One does not even think twice before raising their hands on their partners. **Who gives you the right?**

The World Health Organization clearly states that slapping is a non-justifiable form of intimate partner violence.

([https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO\\_RHR\\_12.36\\_eng.pdf;jsessionid=9127E1C2DDA28367868909B28511A293?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO_RHR_12.36_eng.pdf;jsessionid=9127E1C2DDA28367868909B28511A293?sequence=1))

The National Family Health Survey in India or NFHS also mentions policy-level interventions in the case of domestic violence, which include slapping.

<https://www.oxfamindia.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/WP-Measurement-of-Domestic-Violence-in-National-Family-Health-Survey-surveys-and-Some-Evidence-EN.pdf>



Yet, in the face of all this, the **slap** comes effortlessly, where the onlookers brush it off as an “impulsive action” and the victim is expected to do nothing but show silent suffering.

So, what exactly is the hullabaloo all about?

### *A slap is only the start*

Physical intimidation is a strong ingredient. Symbolic of the status quo, it delves into a deeper exploration of entitlement - one odd slap that grinds your self-esteem to shacksles. You do not realise when it becomes a part of your personal love sequence. Violence sits there, without any need, without any logic and once executed, there is nothing but mourning.

**“It’s just a slap na? Get over it.”**

Resistance has hardly stooped so low, as to refute a minor slap. Seriously, nobody just swings that arm at 80km/hr just to tell you a hi. So what most people fail to understand are its deeper connotations. The romanticising of a ‘thappad’ comes with the yearning to pursue infinite power, a propensity towards subjugation so that your partner never has an opinion above you. One starts believing that hitting is their accidental birthright without noticing that it is plain ‘relationship abuse’. Slowly a slap seems *‘so trivial’* for the world.

The poster of Anubhav Sinha’s latest Bollywood movie ‘Thappad’ becomes a metaphor for just that - **“Bas itni si baat”**. His drama implicitly creeps on us, the cruel power dynamics, existing even in the privileged households of this country. The protagonist's role-playing of the ideal housewife is manifested in her orthodox companionship with her husband (the perfect definition of an arranged marriage). But when her husband slaps her, in the midst of a party crowd full of muted bystanders, the metaphor becomes more literal. The reason? He receives a phone call, which elevates into a professional spat, triggering his anger and consequently, he slapped his wife. As smooth as it is. Drunk and enraged, he leaves the scene along with his other male friends while Amrita (his wife) is left to wilt under the light of shame.

But over the next course of the movie, the director breaks the myth, the stereotype of *“choti-moti baatein”* (small, insignificant things) under the toxic traditionalism of Indian marriages. Amrita makes a turnaround, without succumbing to

matrimonial pressures, undertaking legal repercussions and defending herself by stating - *“Ek thappad tha lekin nahi maar sakta”*.

In India, any hurtful slap tantamount to an assault or offence, voluntarily hurting someone and breaching peace of mind under Section 323 of the Indian Penal Code. The person can be imprisoned for 1 year or fined an amount of one thousand or more. Secondly, if a man returns the favour with another slap on a woman’s cheek, she can register a case against him under Section 354 of the IPC, which states “Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty.” However, this only happens if a certain slap has affected your health in a dangerous way. (<https://indiankanoon.org/doc/203036/> )



A willful slap, out of nowhere, has never looked modest. It is not okay when someone says the slap accidentally landed on your cheeks. The tendency to hammer or dehumanise someone always calls for the rightful taste of resistance, be it a man or a woman. The stream of normalization needs a breakthrough revolution and only we can bring power to that

*Women slapping Men- is it a liberty?*



Yes, we need to talk about the female slaps too. The World Health Organization conducted a multi-country survey over domestic violence, which gave some shocking figures regarding relationship abuse. About 4–49% reported having encountered severe physical violence by their partner; a huge 6–59% reported being sexually violated by a partner; while 20–75% reported facing some emotionally abusive act, from their partner in their lifetime.

([https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO\\_RHR\\_12.36\\_eng.pdf;jsessionid=9127E1C2DDA28367868909B28511A293?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO_RHR_12.36_eng.pdf;jsessionid=9127E1C2DDA28367868909B28511A293?sequence=1))

If you believe that it is only women who are victimised all the time, you are unpleasantly wrong. Men are slapped too, under different garbs. Sometimes it looks and feels cute, like a form of affection. Sometimes it is funny, maybe to earn a few giggles and laughs from here and there. Sometimes women also justify their action by saying **“because they deserve it, right?”**

No. Nobody deserves it. Patronising or slapping a man is as wrong as slapping a woman. It is not what you call female empowerment. It is one of the most apparent forms of violence that is hurtful and has a negative impact on everyone. You cannot say that women have the right to hit because they are weak and need to

protect themselves all the time. Quantifying and qualifying violence (be it slapping) is not bearable at all. When society generalizes this as an acceptable routine, they only reinforce the idea of a weaker sex. And this, in any situation, cannot be permitted.

*Filmmaker Natalia Milano started a social media campaign using the hashtag #NoMoreSlapping because there is no reason good enough to slap anyone.*

<https://metro.co.uk/video/bgt-unseen-clip-sees-10-year-old-wow-judges-2164312/?ito=vjs-link>

So the next time you try to pass a slap as a reasonable Kabir Singh's proof of love, be prepared to receive some lashing. Instead of sitting and judging from a place of privilege, it is high time we change the way people react to violence. Because nothing justifies hitting the person you love. A slap is a slap is a slap.