

Pornography and the Status of Women

(By Shallu Jaglan)

According to the Oxford dictionary, the most widely circulated dictionary in the country, the term “Pornography” is defined as “books- magazines- films, et cetera, that describe or show sexual acts which cause sexual excitement”, and indeed, acts of pornography incite sexual arousal among groups of satisfied consumers/ viewers. The term “pornography” has been derived from the Greek word, porni, which means “whore or prostitute” and graphein, which stands for “to write”, therefore, in colloquial language, this would sum up to “the writing about prostitutes”. The definition for prostitutes will initiate a whole new level of discussion because a “prostitute” is someone who engages in sexual activities in return of payment- a business venture with a producer and a consumer. However, prostitution and the selling of sexually explicit content for sexual arousal have been mocked, heavily neglected, and largely treated as a taboo better not spoken about for centuries. With the advent of globalization and the introduction of the Internet, these contents have become more readily available to viewers, reducing the respect for the institution of prostitution in society. India is one of the largest Internet consumers in the world, with around 1.38 billion Internet users in the country, which stands for 50% of the population in 2020. So, half of these Indians can easily access pornography sites, majorly pirated, and abuse the content. India also breeds a very gender-biased society, where patriarchy, toxic masculinity, and masochism often abuse the other sexes, particularly women and the minor genders. This attitude often originates in a sense of biased dominance over women and mockery of the minor genders, like, LGBTQ+ community. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 89,097 cases related to violence against women were recorded in 2018, which in comparison to 2017 was 86, 001 cases, and, National Family Health Survey suggests that 30 per cent of women in India in the age group of 15- 49 years have experienced violence since the age of 15. About 31% of married women have experienced physical, sexual, and emotional violence by their partners. According to the National Crimes Records Bureau Report 2018, 33,356 rapes were reported in the country. From these statistical reports, we can have a fair assumption of the status of women in India, where the society follows strict conservative rules. According to various websites and polls, India is ranked among the top ten most unsafe countries for women. But the question lies, how are the availability of the internet, abusive porn, and treatment of women even connected? This is where the study behind the accessibility of pornography and how it affects the behaviour towards women in a country like India comes to the limelight.

India has deeper historical roots of ‘Eroticism’. The temple edicts of Khajuraho and the “Kama sutra”, the masterpiece was written on sexuality and sexual behaviour by Vatsayana, stand as proofs to the statement. Therefore, it can be assumed that sexual eroticism had importance in the society at some point of time, which, has been lagging since the coming of the British, who after the famous “Macaulay’s Minute” in 1885 tried to impose the Victorian etiquette and code of conduct upon the Indians, thus making the discussion around “sex” and “sexual behaviour” more

of a taboo in the society. In recent times, in the wake of globalisation, Indian society has been exposed to various western lifestyles, thereby familiarising the youth with concepts of dating and homosexual relationships, but, “sex & porn” continue as a prohibited topic of discussion. The curious inquisitive minds often find a way to abuse the content - through pirated, illegal websites and indeed, abusing sexually explicit content like virtual porn, where neither the consensus of women nor the sexual pleasure of the same is highlighted or given importance, wrongly educates the youth about sexual arousal and female orgasms – in fact, many of the times the sexual intercourses between individuals are shot in secret without consent and later released in the virtual platforms initiating business. Porn isn’t the source of sex education, but a way of implanting the seed of sexual violence and unhealthy sexual relations within the youth. The content of porn and the layers of choices it serves to its various customers and consumers becomes the breeding ground of sexual violence and non-consensual sex in society. India possesses a sexually violent society with many reported cases of rape; according to research studies, those individuals who are positively active in misusing pornographic content are often motivated/ driven to indulge in sexual activities without consent, like rapes. However, there are other driving factors to commit such heinous crimes, like, psychological disorders, societal norms, feeling of dejection, and inability to cope with changing culture. Psychiatric crippling was studied high among the convicts, many a time, the lack of the feeling of power/ dominance can drive men to force them on women, leading to violence. Pornographic content continues to play a pivotal role in the mindset regarding rape crimes. According to various surveys, porn consuming husbands/partners would often force their wives/partners to role-play despite their dislikes and discomforts, aiding in more violence towards them. What could be the best possible way to avert such actions? Ban porn in the country? Or extend the right education about sexual behaviour?

India and Indian society as a whole possesses a conservative mindset, and schools in India prefer to stay ignorant about and aloof to the discussions related to sexual intercourse and porn. Parents also refuse to impart the knowledge regarding the same, instead treat it as a taboo, only discussed by “grown-ups” behind closed doors. Adolescent individuals discussing sex openly in public are often treated as “outcasted – spoilt” kids attaining premature maturity, and hence are disliked and disowned. Changes in the CBSE education curriculum led few states to implement “Sex Education” in their syllabus but they’re limited to only a few states, where often boys and girls are taught differently. Majorly in other schools, education is only limited to the sexual organs, which are anyways accompanied with giggles and chuckles, and serious discussions related to sexual behaviour are often averted.

Despite the limitless praises related to the New Education Policy 2020, a serious aspect missing from it is the spectrum of ‘Sex Education in schools. And hence, even after revolutionizing the three-decades-old education system, India has failed to overcome the sex taboo. Apart from the general animosity and unnecessary prejudices, lower rates of literacy and higher rates of school

dropouts are other important reasons behind limited knowledge about sex, sexual behaviour, and consequentially sexual violence. Then, the primary source of satisfying sexual curiosity becomes abusing explicit pornographic content, leading to violence, sexual coercion, infidelity among the abusers, with the women and gender minors falling prey to the mistreatment.

Therefore, to conclude, it could be said that though India possesses a progressive society with a young population, limited sex education and the lack of normalised discussion about sex fuels their curiosity leading them to abuse pornographic content, which imparts wrong education about sexual behaviour, leading them to indulge into acts of sexual violence due to the lack of proper knowledge and education which reduces their conscience and disables them from thinking rationally. The youth, both men and women, fall prey to these immoral attitudes even without any mistake of their own, and the only solution to this is to impart proper knowledge about sex and sexual behaviour, from a very early stage of life.