



*Bala is an Amitabh Bachchan fan often imagining himself as “Shahenshah” who single handedly fights all his evils (like his idol). He is also a toastmaster who loves speaking and interacting with different people and if this is not enough, he is an avid cricket fan and a “Harsha Bhogle” fan. He believes that “FEAR” should not be “Forget everything and run” but “Face everything and Roar”.*

To start with, I would like to congratulate Maitri for this wonderful initiative! Every day in newspapers and news channels, we come across various cases of domestic violence and sexual assault and for one reported case of domestic violence, there are 50 others which go unreported and this sets a very disturbing precedent. If we talk about India, there is a huge rural base as well as a huge urban population and if you think that domestic violence and sexual assault are confined to the rural

base, you are wrong, it is deeply entrenched in the urban mindset as well.

What is our typical reaction when we come across these types of news articles? A sense of anger and frustration grips us and we start blaming the administration for all of this. But have we ever taken a pause, a step back and done some introspection as to why this happens and how we can “nip it in the bud”. Sadly No!! If it happens to others, it is worth condemning but if we are the perpetrators, then we rationalize to make ourselves feel better. Before I go any further, I would like to emphasize that I am not localizing this problem as India-specific, it is a malaise that has gripped the entire world across various sections of society.

Violence in any form is condemnable, whether it is domestic violence or sexual assault or molestation. It does not matter if the victim is an adult or a child. It is not a women’s issue alone even though it must be admitted that a majority of the cases are related to women’s abuse. What is very surprising and alarming is that most of the perpetrators and victims are well educated and aware of social and cultural norms.

### **How can we change the culture that supports domestic violence, sexual assault and violence against women?**

While trying to answer this question, my mind went back to Dec 2012 and the horrific Nirbhaya rape incident. There was a hue and cry all around and people were clamoring for the rapists to be hanged. Few months passed and those rapists were interviewed and asked if they felt any remorse and they said they felt none. They said that the girl was going out with another boy late in the evening and deserved this punishment.

In 2016, I came across a piece of news in Australia where a guy was stalking a girl and when she refused his advances, he killed her. What was surprising was that it was mentioned as a hate crime initially and later on, after detailed investigation, the real story unfolded.

In both cases, the victim was a “woman”, for no fault of her own. If you thought education made people think otherwise, think again.

They say charity begins at home. The same way, if we have to accept and change this culture, we should look ourselves in the mirror and realize that it is important to educate the boys and men in our lives about women not being commodities. Everyone has every right to live life the way they want. The world has seen

many changes and both men and women are equal shareholders in society now. Let us not view them through our prism of old thoughts.

Sexual assault and domestic violence sadly, is not just confined to couples, it has found its way in relationships which used to be revered before (Like Uncle-Niece, Uncle-Nephew to say a few).

So when your child comes to you next time and says something, don't ignore them and don't sweep it under the carpet. Listen to him or her (Yes I mentioned the word him also) and face and the bully head on. The psychological impact of an abusive relationship in any form is catastrophic.

In most cases of domestic violence and sexual assault, the perpetrator gets emboldened when the victim does not react and instead, tolerates it each day for reasons best known to them. We should not allow this to happen.

We need to be proactive and not reactive.

Always remember *“Never forget that walking away from something unhealthy is brave even if you stumble a little on your way out the door”*.