

Writers beyond the pale of social norms?



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“One who writes must be better than what he writes.” – Maxim Gorky.

Several youths are continuously flooding the social media with allegations of sexual harassment against writer Konangi. They have also released a joint report on this count.

Their posts say that they were sexually harassed when they were in the drama troupe known as ‘Manalmagudi’ conducted by Konangi’s younger brother S Murugabhoopathy, visited their house and also met him in public.

The victims have alleged that as a consequence of the sexual harassment they suffered at the hands of the writer at the end of their teenage and at the beginning of their 20s, they have long been psychologically affected. This is a violation of their right to privacy, they have alleged.

Indifference

Sexual abuse on women is on the rise in the society. Yet what have come to light are only the tip of the iceberg. The #MeToo campaign got a boost in 2017 when charges of sexual abuse were

laid at the doorstep of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. This drove scores of women in several countries the world over to come out narrating their own experiences of injustice meted out to them, sexually harassed and threatened by men who wielded some power.

There's nothing new about the writers being accused of sexual harassment. But the charge of homosexual harassment against a writer is quite new. Such harassments are said to be happening right from the days of Boys Company drama troupe in Tamil Nadu. But the society has neither approached the problem nor tried to solve it. There is as much indifference in dealing with sexual harassment of women who are in most cases molested by their own close relations and intimate men as there is in tackling cases of sexual harassment men experience at the hands of fellow men.

For a long time, the society at large has not come forward at all to hear and stand by the victims of sexual molestation. Do the society and families have a psychological and scientific approach to the men's allegations of sexual harassment? Had the society been sensitive enough to approach this problem, the issue would not have continued as it did for a long time.

Reason for the increasing crime

When the #MeToo movement was at its zenith, several young women charged Tamil poet Vairamuthu with harassing women. Several writers including Charu Niveditha were accused of indulging in sexual harassment through online chats. There was also a charge afloat on the social media that 'Manal Veedu' Hari Krishnan tried to indulge in sexual harassment,

Now those speaking about the issue involving Konangi are raising the question why the personalities similarly charged have not been talked about much and why no action has been taken against them either. Why Konangi is singled out as he is now is the question doing the rounds.

The society must have a critical approach to the people embroiled in sexual charges. Generally sexual crimes are committed through power, indirect intimidation, influence etc. As the perpetrators go scot-free, the criminal trend goes on unabated.

Konangi, who has denied the charge against him, has said, "It is a conspiracy against the Manalmagudi drama troupe."

There are some who say it is all nothing but an open secret. The basic reason for the continuing trend of sexual crimes is that nobody takes the issue quite seriously and everybody thinks that there is no problem as long as it does not happen to him/her.

Unethical arguments

The people putting out opinions about the Konangi controversy are, in fact, sticking to their stances.

They say that there's nothing wrong with the writers' perverted mindset and when they torture and violate others, their action should not be taken seriously. Writers such as Jeyamohan have opined, "There are possibilities of writers being prone to errors and throwing to the winds the social ethics and norms. That should not be treated as a big crime."

There are still some who argue that the sentiments of writers having different sexual orientations must be respected and they should not be treated as criminals.

Of course, the feelings of the people with alternative sexual orientation need to be understood. But it does not matter what kind of sexual orientation one has when the person continuously goes about committing sexual crime.

A sexual crime in itself and of itself is a crime. Period!

Why should the questions of who does it, why the person does it and what their background is be taken into account?

If a society accommodates such unethical arguments supporting sexual harassment of writers, it means it's mired in backwardness and superstitions. Besides, the arguments do not seem to care about how the victims of sexual molestation are affected.

On the other hand, it is writers pursuing serious and pure literature, who brand and slam the society as insensitive and label the ordinary and the average as dunces. It is their habit to speak and write ill of the general society. But when the charge of sexual harassment is made against a writer, it is these litterateurs who rush in with their defence of the tainted writer, saying that let him not be made a criminal for a petty deviation.

What will change?

However, the Tamil Nadu Progressive Writers' Association and writer S. Ramakrishnan have gone on record, condemning the writer concerned. Inevitably the questions of what will come of it and what will change when you take a stance in support of the victim are arising.

But it must be said that these critical remarks help in transmission of the message to the society those sexual crimes, whether happening or not to one, are per se worth condemnation. The condemnatory reactions may serve as a warning as well to the prospective perpetrators of sexual crime and embolden the victims to speak out openly and get their battered minds set right. Future crimes too may be deterred.

The society has long thus been correcting its course and moving to the next level.

A society is not supposed to attain in a single day all kinds of keen sensibilities. Only gradually the society gets to know the rights and issues after they are elaborated and fought for seamlessly. Changes envisaged in one generation will happen in the next generation only after relentless campaign and struggles. It is only

the succeeding generation which usually enjoys the benefits of the changes brought in through hard toils of the previous generation.

A society must function vigorously aiming at the cultivation of a sensibility that ensures that no one should be unfairly treated and discriminated against. That is the basic necessity of a good society.

Translated by V. Mariappan.