

PAYAL SHAH KARWA'S *THE BAD TOUCH*: IS IT ALSO LIFE?

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Payal Shah Karwa's *The Bad Touch* (2014), is a collection of true stories from the society of some well-known and some not much recognized survivors of incest and child sex abuse (CSA) like Harish Iyer, Anurag Kashyap, Nidhi Bhadwaj, Jai, Amrita, Lata, Mrunalini, and many unnamed, in a narrative fashion. It is about a 'touch' which is uncomfortable, irritating and unwelcoming.

This work of art is the result of a number of personal interviews conducted by Payal. The interviewees courageously shared their traumatic experiences of incest and sexual abuse which they had undergone repeatedly at various stages of their life. It took many years for Payal to compile her thoroughly researched work and give it the shape of a novel. For her, this work is a mission to ebb the trauma of survivors and inspire readers with these real stories.

The purpose is to make children as well as parents aware of the issue of child sex abuse which usually remains untold. She discusses the survivors' narration of real experiences, period of coping with the trauma, myths associated with child sex abuse and the facts pertaining to the subject. She provides the information about some highly active NGOs.

Payal mentions some definitions of child sex abuse. According to WHO, it is 'an inappropriate behavior with a child' and 'involving a child in sexual activity that he or she doesn't fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or that violates the laws and social taboos of society' (72). Further she tells that, "when the perpetrator is a close family member, the abuse takes the definition of 'incest'" (73). It is quite astonishing to know that according to the reports of WHO, India has the largest number of sexually abused children, with a child below 16 years raped every 155th minute, a child below 10 years every 13th hour (74).

This nonfiction also deals with few commonly accepted myths, like only girls are the victims of CSA; children are generally abused by strangers; children lie and make up stories about sexual abuse; only adolescent children get abused; children should be encouraged to forget about the abuse, as there are no harmful effects of child sex abuse; child sex abuse takes place only in the lower strata of society. These myths have been outlined by TEAM Childline 1098, which is a 24/7 emergency, free phone outreach service for children in need of care and protection, linking them to long term rehabilitation and care. Any child/concerned adult can call 1098 to access the CHILDLINE service any time of the day or night (*The Bad Touch* 92-93). But rather the painful reality is even more astonishing and contrary to the myths. Payal narrates the personal experiences and sufferings of victims one after another to present the facts contrary to the myths.

Anurag Kashyap hailed from Benaras and belonged to a middle class family. He too had a chaotic childhood with repeated incidents of sex abuse at the hands of his cousin and later in the school in Gwalior. He grew up as a 'troubled teenager' (BD 79). With passage of time he

started writing poems and then movie scripts, which proved to be cathartic for him. His first commercial success was the film *Satya*. Most of his movies are of the genre of reality cinema, giving glimpses of his past life, especially *That Girl in Yellow Boots* (2011). No doubt his life was a motivating one, and people must take inspiration from him.

Further we explore the lonely life of Jai, a young boy belonging to a family from higher strata of society living in Mumbai. He was sent to boarding and finishing schools since a very young age. His childhood became pretty damaged when he was twelve years old. He met Rohan, his brother's friend, at a family function, who abused him sexually repeatedly. He was traumatized but didn't know whom to speak to. Its after-effect was that 'he grew up with low self-esteem' (86). Jai tells, "I was a mess. Unable to make friends easily. Lonely. Depressed" (87). He also, like Anurag, found solace in writing poem. He further added, "I hate parties..., but I kept away" (88). But over time, Jai came out of the trauma and decided to transform into a 'victor' from a victim. He also said "My advice to every victim: control it yourself" (91).

Till now Payal had been highlighting the lives of boys who became the victims of child sex abuse. But next she lays open the life of Nidhi Bhardwaj, who was abused at an age of twelve by a peon, mercilessly in her school. Payal narrates Nidhi's bitter experiences with absorbing descriptions. It happened when she once got locked up in her school after school hours and was harassed by an old peon. She went through so much pain and trauma that she was unable to repeat the gory incident. So no action was taken up against the culprit. But it was her parent's instant and constant support which brought her back to life. She indulged in creative activities and performed well in studies also later on. She became a confident lady and joined advertising profession. She did counseling for those who had undergone similar trauma: 'According to Nidhi, her life had been shattered; she felt guilty, she felt dirty. But thanks to the support she received from her parents she was able to deal with the issue. But she suffered a lot. However, engaging in creative activities helped divert her mind' (119).

Payal then provides some indicators which will guide one to handle the situation well. She enlists physical, behavioral and psychological indicators which are astonishing but real. The urgent need of the hour is to get awareness about the indicators and then handle the issue very cautiously as it is quite sensitive. There are many NGOs working day and night for this cause. Like: 1098, ARPAN (www.arpan.org.in), FACSE (www.facse.com), Muskaan (www.aalochana.net/muskaan.com), RAHI (www.rahifoundation.com), Elaan (www.elaan.com), etc.

We meet Amrita Purkayastha, a victim of the sex abuse, who at the age of eleven managed to deal with the past and started her anti-CSA drive called Jaagriti. Her story is full of hope and encouragement. She was helped by her dance teacher. Later she had sessions with psychiatrist, which paced her recovery. 'Today Amrita is in Germany, pursuing her Ph.D. in Astro-Physics' (137). Lata, another victim, belongs to a middle class family in Davengere, Karnataka. She was molested by her uncle. Through her story, Payal throws light on the method of the abuser to cultivate the trust of the child, which is known as grooming. It involves a step-by-step approach that reaches out in friendship to the child before any sexual act is attempted (139). Payal calls CSA to be 'a systematic abuse of a relationship'.

While reading the lines the reader becomes shocked, horrified and even numb as if having firsthand experience. The reader feels torn apart to see the inner truth of these incidents. The abuser is, sometimes, an uncle, a peon in the school, a friend of brother or sister or a very close relative. Most important role played to cope with the trauma is played by the parents. Their

right decision at right time is highly effective in managing the affected. They help the victim to come out and live a stable life once again.

Although coping with traumatic past was not so easy, yet these survivors busted the ghost of the chaotic memory and started living the life to the fullest. It is not the fight for justice but the fight for survival that usually caused the struggle. They had to go for counseling sessions, to the psychiatrist, take several kinds of medicines and therapies to come out of the effects of the abuse.

It is not only in literature but in media also that this issue has drawn attention. In a famous film *Monsoon Wedding*, by Mira Nair, she very delicately narrated how a family should be there besides the victim and render justice for the same. One of the victims, Anurag Kashyap's *That Girl in Yellow Boots* is also dealing with the similar theme. Apart from this, a Hindi news channel, *IBN-7*, through its program *Zindagi Live*, discussed such issues. Another most famous path-breaking show of *Satyamev Jayate* became a credible means of discussing crucial issues like child sex abuse.

Highway is a 2014 Indian drama film written and directed by Imtiaz Ali and produced by Sajid Nadiadwala. The film stars Randeep Hooda and Alia Bhatt in the lead roles. The film outlines the story of a young woman who is kidnapped before her wedding and held for ransom wherein she develops Stockholm syndrome towards her kidnapper. It portrays the abnormal mental condition of the Veera Tripathi (role played by Alia Bhatt) because of her childhood experiences of sexual abuse by her uncle when she was just seven. When she tells her mother about it, she is advised to 'keep shut'. In the end, she miserably asks her parents 'Why I was just asked to be careful from strangers outside the boundary of my house? And why not be cautious inside the house as well from the relatives'. It ends with Veera shown working and living on a hill station on her own, with memories of the days she spent with Mahabir.

So it can be said that people are becoming aware. The real incidents provide us with a wider insight into the sufferings of the victims of child sex abuse. We are able to have a closer look into the types of abusers and situations in which one can be abused. Each and every page that we turn in *The Bad Touch*, there is a learning. It prepares us to avoid such happenings in future. Some survivors have gathered enough courage to come forward and tell what actually and how everything happened. They even revealed their identity. Last of all, we must not forget that prevention is better than cure.

Works Cited:

- Karwa, Payal Shah. *The Bad Touch*. New Delhi: Hey House, 2014. Print.
Highway. Dir. Imtiaz Ali. 2014.