

editor's letter



We make a half-baked cake out of women's liberation. What women need is justice, not the punching bag called victimhood

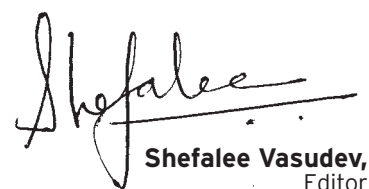
Women cannot fight for equality and yet ask for exclusive rights. If they must stand up against those who wrong them, they must also accept that they will be punished if they wrong others. However, Girija Vyas, chairperson of National Commission for Women (NCW), doesn't seem to think so. Right in the centre of a sensible set of recommendations – make adultery a civil wrong instead of a criminal offence, amend the law and make it gender-neutral – what takes me aback is her comment that women should not be punished for adultery as they are victims and not offenders. How does Vyas expect this law to become 'gender-neutral' if she does not believe that women too can be 'civilly wrong' at times?

As it is, Section 497 of the IPC, which makes adultery an offence (only) for men is pointless because it tries to redress a relationship issue through penalisation. Whether it needs to be amended – or perhaps totally erased – is the big debate. But to support a portion of its irrationality and argue against the rest to suit the 'changes in society' will make it more irrelevant. After all, why shouldn't half the responsibility of emotional and sexual deceit be that of women in the event of 'sexual intercourse with a married woman'? More than that, why should cheating in marriage be resolved by a court?

I think the bigger issue in India is that we make a half-baked cake out of women's liberation. We want them to be 'equal' but continue to assert their victim status. If we keep doing that, I am afraid women's issues will remain just that – women's issues. They will be relegated to NGOs, *abla nari* organisations and legal collectives, while the 'rest' will continue to view them sometimes with scorn, at other times with sympathy. I am not implying that the huge numbers of wronged women in India don't need laws to protect them or that they have never been victimised. But what they need is justice, not the punching bag called victimhood.

I suspect that some of you reading may ask why a women's magazine is going against women. That is why I want to reiterate that my argument is for equality, not against women. It is the only way to give women a free, confident and meaningful identity.

By the way, Ms Vyas, in this issue we have run a Marriage Survey done amongst women respondents from eight Indian cities. Yes, they are educated and urban. But you may be surprised to note that 50 per cent married women say they would forgive their spouse for infidelity. One in three would accept an apology and move on. Only 15 per cent would consider ending the marriage if they caught their husband cheating on them. Three per cent said they would have an affair themselves.


Shefalee Vasudev,
Editor