

When I first lived in Iran, before the Islamic Revolution, I never felt threatened in the streets. Upper class women went about their errands in Tehran, dressed in the latest Paris fashions of the day, including miniskirts during the 1960s. Other than being pinched in a crowd, the prospect of rape was nil. Lower class women were dressed in chadors (faces visible) and managed to hang on to these unwieldy veils with their teeth, while managing several tots and netted shopping bags. I felt sorry for their discomfort, but never had to fear for their safety.

During the 1970s, I took several trips to Egypt and there, too, women in modern dress were safe in the streets. Thugs seemed to know that they ran a real risk by messing with a woman from a powerful family, and one never knew.

Seduction was always part of that world, with stalking of schoolgirls. Also, maid-servants in great houses were always vulnerable to predatory menfolk. Rape, however, was just not a common issue.

But everything has changed today throughout much of the Muslim world and India, countries undergoing lightning swift transformation from feudal to modern. In both cases, the transformation is leaving many young men in the dust: they do not have the education to enter the modern sector, nor do they have the right family connections. They are stuck in a world neither feudal nor modern. The consequence is a growing rage that can only be distracted by attacking those who are obviously more ready for the modern world than they, although physically weaker. The horrific abuse of women has nothing in it of sexuality; the desire is obviously hate-driven and murderous.

Starting with suicide bombing, a novel tool of religious fanatics, has anyone noticed that many of these attacks are made at outdoor markets, places full of women with small children? It is not just civilians being attacked, but particularly women. Following the latest such attack in Hyderabad, a rapidly modernizing city in India, one could see mostly women being carried off in blood-soaked stretchers. I have long suspected that market attacks are specifically directed at grannies and children.

Even before the Arab Spring, Cairo was a city that had been gradually becoming notorious for its gauntlets of idle young men harassing any women in the streets with words, touching, and insinuating. Today it has become a city in which women, even covered up women, fear to go to the market. Rape squads appear to be organized, not just random acts of shiftless youth, to punish women from participating in street demonstrations. Unfortunately even some ignorant older women blame the victims for not being "good women." The rapists insist that the women are asking for it, even elderly widows who no longer have menfolk to "keep them in line."

India, however, is taking the lead in women-hatred. The recent public outrage over the gang rape and murder of a young college girl has had little effect. Three suspects are now being sought for raping and murdering (and throwing their bodies down a well) three little girls, sister, ages 5-13. The police did nothing until the village women forced shops to close and blocked the highway in a public protest. This has become an everyday activity throughout India's villages, living in the darkest of dark feudalism.

There is something terribly self-destructive in societies that detest their own women so much that normal sexuality can be so perverted. It seems to have something to do with keen resentment against female emancipation after centuries of feudal oppression. In Iran, for example, the majority of university graduates are now women, to the horror of the Ayatollah. They are remedying this by removing most of the university majors favored by women: English, History, Sociology. They think that religion is endangered by educating women.

In all such cultures trying to put women back in a cage, women are responding by delaying marriage and avoiding childbirth. There are consequences for disrespecting Mother Nature. Poisonous societies must either change or die.

672 words

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