

#MeToo : The Problems with Call-Out Culture

Earlier this week, amongst the Brett Kavanaugh sexual assault allegations, the popular US sketch comedy show, *Saturday Night Live (SNL)*, released a parody of the whole fiasco. The parody was immediately a viral hit, with Matt Damon, who had taken up the role of Kavanaugh lauded for the performance.

However, as a few people pointed out – Damon does not have the best track record when it comes to speaking up for assault. In 2017, amongst the brunt of the #MeToo movement's growth, Damon had been quoted as saying – “you know, there's a difference between, you know, patting someone on the butt and rape or child molestation, right Both of those behaviours need to be confronted and eradicated, without question, but they should not be conflated, right?” – insinuating the common victim blaming tactic of “some abuse is worse than others”. Damon faced immediate backlash for his remarks, which were considered to be in poor taste at a time where women were just starting to come forward with their testimonies.

Damon later apologized. And here, we are less than a year later, with Damon as the face of a very pointed attack against a man in a position of power, accused of sexual assault. This is the sort of emblematic of the problems with the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. The problem of seeing the whole issue as being a case of a “few bad eggs” as opposed to a problem of the unfair power dynamics that exist between men and women.

It is not necessary to discuss all the men that have been accused as part of this movement at this point – from Kavanaugh to Weinstein – since their unforgivable actions have already been discussed enough and made public. What must be discussed today are the Matt Damons of the whole ordeal – the so-called “innocent” bystanders.

By now, it is pretty well known that some (if not all) of the abusers' actions had come up to other members of the industry before. Yet these are the nuances that we refuse to discuss today. Kavanaugh's allegations show us how the #MeToo problem isn't confined to Hollywood. In fact, accusations have also been made closer to home, in Bollywood and South Indian film industries. Social media and the use of #MeToo and more recently, #WhyIDidntReport have made it clear that the problem of men in positions of power being predatory is not confined to a single industry, or to a single part of the world.

The #MeToo movement is emblematic of a sort of “call out” culture that exists in internet discourse. The problem of sexual assault is dealt with by blacklisting people – by deeming them “problematic”. In some cases, the abusers maintain a low profile and are able to re-emerge, having “turned over a new leaf”. #MeToo and #TimesUp have done a good job by providing women a voice – to speak up against the difficulties they have had to face. However, the revelations that #MeToo have put forth have been dealt with at mostly face value, instead of addressing a root cause.

The fact is, there exists an environment – in Hollywood, in all the industries women have mentioned – that leans towards protecting such behaviour. There is a social understanding that has fostered such hostility. The unfair power dynamic I mentioned is not unique to just Hollywood. Women and the societal and historical objectification they faced have led to a point where powerful men were able to get away with such heinous acts. By virtue of the fact they were men.

This is why #MeToo is so important – it is giving a voice to the so-far voiceless. It is platforming those who historically, did not have one. It is a sign of progress. This is also why the common victim blaming rhetoric of “Why didn’t she report it when it happened” is an extremely uncharitable one, coming from a point of extreme privilege, that ignores the complex power dynamics that exist between men and women today.

Of course, there are many of you who will use the example of women in power today to disprove the power dynamics argument made. It is important to note that by isolating and just looking at women today and their role in the workplace we remove the historical context, the struggles that they had to overcome. You reveal your privilege, just like Kavanaugh did when he defined his life being ruined as not being able to serve on the highest court in the country, while disregarding the trauma his accuser, Dr. Ford, went through.

What we need to do is apply the revelations that the #MeToo movement has brought out and carefully analyse the systemic problems that lead to them in the first place. Sexism has long been seen as a problem of a “few bad men”, but that is simply not true. There are certain aspects of how our society and our culture evolved that point towards the trend. What we need today is a critical analysis of the same. We already have the input, thanks to #MeToo, and what we need is to apply it correctly. Simply silencing and blacklisting abusers won’t do. We need to allow growth to some degree – that is the only way to foster positive change.

If all the eggs in your carton have gone bad, the only logical next step is to re-examine the packaging.