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## Book Review: The Bad Touch by Payal Shah Karwa Published by Penguin Publication (2014)

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### ABSTRACT

*The Bad Touch by Payal Shah Karwa is a hard-hitting book. A compendium of real-life stories from child sex thrivers and victims, the book presents the harsh realities of survivors and their struggle to live with their lost childhood. We hear so many stories from newspapers, about victims who have suffered for years together and like countless others, I too have wondered why these kids never opened up about what was happening to them. I got my answers after reading this book.*

*The first story is that of Harish Iyer's, and I dare you to read through it without shedding a few tears. With hard-hitting raw language, the author chronicles Harish's trauma and abuse. I had to take a break after reading this story and I came back to the book after a few weeks. What happened to this small boy was disgusting beyond words and I felt rage towards that monster that defies words.*

*The book virtually breaks the various myths that surround the child sex abuse issue such as –*

1. *Girls are victims of CSA and not boys*
2. *CSA is something that happens in the slums*
3. *The child will forget what happened*

*As the survivors share their stories, we learn how little we know about this issue. As the author puts forth, "They suffer quietly; they live quietly; they die quietly". A child who suffers through CSA finds themselves losing many things besides their innocence; trust, self-esteem, self-worth. Some shut themselves up in a virtual hell while others express their trauma through creative expression or self-destruction.*

*And I take a bow to people like Harish Iyer, Anurag Kashyap, Lata, Jai, Nidhi, Amrita and Mrunalini who have shared their stories in this book to teach us, parents, the value of innocence and I am happy to see that they have overcome their past to make something meaningful of their lives. But it also brings forth the truth that there are countless others, who are suffering abuse without any hope of redemption.*

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*The Bad Touch is also a handbook that tells you how to recognize signs of abuse, how to tackle it, how to guard your child against it, how to teach them to differentiate between good and bad touch. It also puts forth the changes that India needs to bring in its legal wheels, where CSA is concerned which was an eye-opener for me.*

India is home to 430 million children which is approximate includes one in every five children below the age of 18 years, in the world. They face staggering challenges from the day they are born. Malnutrition, illiteracy, trafficking, forced labour, drug abuse, sexual abuse pornography etc. are not uncommon among children in India. Crime involving sexual offences have risen to a dramatic level since the last two decades not only sexual offences are more brutal and gender-biased but also have become life-threatening. As much as the fact prevails that such shameful crimes see no gender or age the truth still remains that the children are more vulnerable to such crime because of the obvious reason that they can stand for themselves most of the times they are threatened and sometimes they are also unable to understand what havoc has been done to them. The innocent children can only feel the pain of the mishappenings leaving a scar over the soul and body forever.

Our country after its survival of 70 years is now on the verge of becoming a state which cannot protect its women and children. The increasing number of sexual offences against women and children is evidence that our country has an ineffective legal system whether it is framing laws, implementing them or interpreting them. These points altogether make this topic of agitation and sensation.

The problem of child sexual abuse has attracted a great deal of attraction in recent years. Millions of children are victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation each year. It is an undisputed fact that child abuse in India is increasing at an alarming rate. Children from the majority of the country's population are pegged as the future of the country. They carry with them hopes and dreams to achieve greatness while tackling the numerous issues plaguing society the safety and security of children have been grossly sidelined. The legislature has shown extreme nonchalance towards taking any step to protect the most vulnerable section of society. India is the second-most populous country in the world and is a home for around 430 Million children which mean 42% of the total population in India. Out of which, almost 50% are sexually abused and have become the subject of growing concern in India.

As per the WHO, it is "the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he/she does not fully comprehend and is unable to give informed consent to, or for which child is not developmentally prepared or else that violate the laws or social taboos of the society".

Though the activity of sexual offence is seen to occur in all ages, in all socio-economic classes, and nearly in all countries with the difference in magnitude but its impact is worse on children as they are unable to blot out the concussion of any such act. They are the gentlest section of the society and it is regardless if they commit any sort of wrong. They are given the defence of mental disability or it is understood that they are standing on a footing where they cannot understand the nature of the crime. In most cases of child sexual abuse, the offender holds a position of trust and/ or power vis-à-vis the child and is often known to the child victim.

This book is a compilation of true stories of sexual abuse against children. *The Bad Touch* by Payal Shah Karwa attempts to highlight the stories of those people who have refused to consider themselves victims, and have risen above their experience to be survivors – “thrivers” is the term used in the book. The underlying message of the book is that unflinching family support is essential for this and that opening up and sharing stories with others also goes a long way in overcoming the effects of the trauma.

The first and most detailed story in the book is that of Harish Iyer, perhaps the most well-known face among child sexual abuse survivors. Harish overcame years of suffering abuse at the hands of his uncle and became an activist fighting for CSA awareness. His story is numbing, and like the other stories in the book, are best read in a detached way.

Jai’s story is that of a boy from the upper stratum of society, whose loneliness and vulnerability was taken advantage of. Lata’s story is a very well-narrated, shattering story of a child left in the care of an uncle who abused her, and whose story her grandmother refused to believe. The loneliness of this child in the aftermath of her experience is heart-rending.

Nidhi’s story highlights the attitude of society towards a girl who was raped. The school authorities wash their hands off the matters, the police are insensitive, and in spite of supportive parents, Nidhi had to experience anguish even after the deadening incident.

The common factor among all these, and the other stories in the book, is that ultimately, all these people find the courage to pull themselves out of the deep hole in which they’ve been languishing for years. “It is imperative to stop thinking of oneself as a victim,” says one survivor, and another says – “I wanted to live, not survive.” And they went about picking up the pieces of their lives, opening up belatedly to their loved ones, and sharing their stories and counselling others affected by child sexual abuse.

The inadequacy of punishment to the offenders of sexual offences against children was one such instance of legislative oversight which has expressed above. As a result, children become victims of the brutal situation of sexual abuse. The issue of child sexual abuse is intricate and

challenging to society. Recognizing the vulnerability of children and the trauma with which the society has to suffer, provisions of law for the sexual crime against children, parliament initiated the process in 2008, and thereafter POCSO became a very debatable topic among ministries, state govt., civil society and experts.

Apart from these inspiring stories, the book also has a whole lot of useful resources for parents looking for information about CSA. It cites data and statistics about the prevalence of CSA in India, gives information about warning signs that might suggest that your child is being abused, precautions to take, how to deal with CSA, and which organizations to approach for help. This book is basically a guideline to the parents that they need to be much supportive when it comes to their child and they should always stand behind them so that they would not get scared if something bad happens to them.

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