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## A PAINFUL SECRET OF INDIA-FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION!

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### INTRODUCTION

*“Blood spatters on a sharp knife*

*A cut so deep that lasts a life*

*Abandoned in a painful ocean*

*A slice of her taken away in the name of tradition!”*



Women are subjected to enormous discrimination in different forms. Although in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century era women are upholding extraordinary positions in all the areas of life, they are often side-lined on account of prejudicial interpretations to various socio-cultural norms which have perpetuated their exploitation. There is a never-ending list of inequalities and violence against women. One such horrendous issue faced by them is the illicit practice of **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**.

### MEANING-

*“When men are oppressed it’s a tragedy,  
when women are oppressed it’s a tradition!”*

*-Letty Cottin Pogrebin*

The human body has been regarded as one of the finest pieces of art. Every individual has the rightful freedom to own and control his or her body. However, millions of girls and women worldwide are deprived of this right under the garb of traditions and rituals. FGM is the non-medical conduct of intentionally cutting the female genital organs. Also known as [Female Circumcision or Infibulation](#), it comprises all procedures of partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or injures the genital

organs for cultural or non-therapeutic reasons. These are generally of four [types](#).

1. Partial or Total removal of Clitoris<sup>1</sup> and/or the Prepuce.<sup>2</sup>
2. Partial or Total removal of Clitoris and/or Labia Minora.<sup>3</sup>
3. Narrowing the Vagina<sup>4</sup> by cutting the Labia Minora or Labia Majora.<sup>5</sup>
4. All other procedures through pricking, piercing, incising, scraping, cauterization

<sup>1</sup>The Clitoris is a small sensitive, erectile part of the female genitals at the anterior end of the Vulva.

<sup>2</sup> The Prepuce is a fold of skin surrounding the Clitoris.

<sup>3</sup> The Labia Minora is the smaller inner folds of the Vulva.

<sup>4</sup> A Woman’s Vagina is the passage connecting her outer sex organs to her womb.

<sup>5</sup> The Labia Majora is the larger outer folds of the Vulva.



and, introducing corrosive substances into the vagina.

It is usually done by traditional cutters or midwives confidentially without any scientific basis. Girls are pinned down on the floor and are made to go through an unimaginable deadly experience.

### **DECODING THE ORIGINS-**

The precise origin of it remains ambiguous due to no evidence. Many [scholars](#) have claimed ancient Egypt (present-day Sudan and Egypt) to be its site of inception. Others believe that it was mainly executed on female slaves in ancient Rome to stop them from having sex and deter future conceptions.<sup>6</sup> It is also proposed that FGMs have been heavily practiced in the western world too, merged with the pre-existing rituals. Lately, the Gender Reassignment Surgeries performed on intersex newborn babies, have also been contemplated as Genital Mutilations.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the mystery encircling its origin, FGM is executed universally on a very large scale today.

### **POSITION IN INDIA-**

It is shocking to know that tender girls are habitually been cut right here in our very own India, particularly amongst the [Dawoodi Bohra Community](#) commonly found in Mumbai. Here it is termed as “Khatna” or “Khafz”/ “Khafd” and the clitoral hood is called “Haraam ki Boti” or “Immoral lump of flesh”. Lured and deceived by their mothers/grandmothers hundreds of girls scream in pain every day.

### **STATISTICAL OVERVIEW-**

Due to its secrecy, there is insufficient data available about its prevalence. However, according to the United Nations, over 200 million girls, less than 15 years of age have undergone FGM and an estimated 3 million girls are at risk of undergoing the same every year. The practice is most common in thirty countries

with larger impact in places like Ethiopia (74%), Sierra Leone (69%), Somalia (65%), Egypt (54%), Nigeria (25%) and, Kenya (21%).<sup>8</sup> Globally, after every 11 seconds, one girl undergoes FGM.

### **ALL SEWED UP: WHY?**

The underlined cause of FGM is the mindless belief that it is a tool to curb a woman’s sexuality. It is usually correlated with the conservative concept of femininity and is done to ensure the virginity and fidelity of the girl before and after her marriage respectively. It is a method used to purify and protect the girl’s thoughts and sexual desires. This exemplifies the obedience required by the girl to hold up the institution of marriage. Girls are also cut under the notion of enhancing their charisma with a potentially long-grown clitoris. Parents often believe that, if not cut their daughters would not be accepted in society as brides. The perpetrators often believe that it is a religious and social requirement, however, no such religious manuscripts have mentioned the same.

### **BLOOD GUSHING BETWEEN HER LEGS: CONSEQUENCES-**

Girls are cut in unsanitary conditions with unsterilized blades which can lead to the transmission of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus and can cause deaths. They shriek in pain as it is done without anesthesia. It can cause swelling of the genital area due to infections leading to urinating problems which can cause multiple organ failures. Due to the occlusion of the vagina, girls undergo painful menstruations with excessive bleeding. Irregular menses or restricted menstrual flow can cause accumulation of blood in the uterus leading to a fatal condition called ‘Haematocolpos’. The irony is that most women are not even taken to doctors for their treatment. Many women face intense pain while having sexual intercourse with their husbands. A lot of them lose their capacity of experiencing orgasms. Complications like prolonged labor and

<sup>6</sup>Jewel Llamas, *Female Circumcision: The history, the current perspective and the approach to a patient*, 1, 2 (2017).

<sup>7</sup>Armelle Andro & Marie Lesclingand, *FGM: Overview and Current Knowledge*, Volume 71, Issue 2, CARIN INFO, 217-296, 219 (2016).

<sup>8</sup>UNFPA, *Implementation of the International and Regional Human Rights Framework for the Elimination of FGM*, 1, 16 (2014).



cesarean deliveries can occur during pregnancies. Babies usually die at birth. FGM also attacks women psychologically with post-traumatic stress, anxiety and, depression. In short, they are scarred with destructions for life.

**FRIGHTFUL STORIES FROM THE DARK ROOMS-**

There is a lengthy list of women who have endured this horrible pain. These narrations make us question humanity.

***“My grandmother held me tightly; an old woman pulled my pants down and put a black powder there. I cried in a pool of blood!”*** says Masooma Ranalvi, (Founder: @SpeakOutonFGM) who was cut at seven.

***“I was dragged in a dark dormitory where other girls were bleeding and weeping in pain. I could see drops of blood dripping down the sharp knife held by the old lady!”*** says Alisha who was cut at six.

***“Sex is painful and I hate it the most, I hate being touched. My husband would kill me if I speak against FGM!”*** says Lasha who underwent type 3 FGM and was reopened after her marriage.

***“I can’t blame my mother alone because she too has been a victim of it. I have realized that this is an unbroken chain!”*** says Aarefa (Co-founder: Sahiyo-United against FGM) who was cut at seven.

**LEGAL AND JUDICIAL FRAMEWORK-**

The United Nations has declared FGM as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. In 2016 the WHO in collaboration with UNFPA-UNICEF laid guidelines to eliminate this practice. FGM has been a taboo rarely talked about in India. The issue first came out when an Islamic community leader was convicted by the Supreme Court of Australia in 2016 for covering the FGM of two sisters aged six and seven. The mother and the midwife were also convicted. There is no specific law on the same in India, therefore it is dealt with under certain provisions

of the existing laws.<sup>9</sup> India is not able to conclude because there is a lot of opposition from the community. In 2017, the Women and Child Development Minister, Maneka Gandhi declared that the government will ban FGM if it is not stopped voluntarily. Later in 2019, the Supreme Court of India decided to refer the petition seeking its ban, to a larger bench. The final judgment is awaited.

**AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.....**

The COVID-19 Pandemic has also significantly contributed to the alarming rise of FGM cases. Lockdowns and shutting down of schools have held many girls at home, endangered, and exposed to genital cuttings. As per a [report by UNICEF](#), if no action is taken an additional 2 million cases are likely to occur over the next decade due to COVID-19.

**CONCLUSION-**

***“A culture of silence exists, where along with the vagina, the mouths are also sewed. Threatened by their parents or husbands many women refrain from sharing their stories while we conduct our studies”***

**-Jaha Dukureh, Campaigner.**

The saddest part of FGM is that it is women who do this to other women. Most people are unaware of the existence of such a practice, and this is fuelling its occurrence. If it is done to retrench promiscuity in women, the greatest questions are: What about men? Why are only women targeted? Why do you have to cut women to ensure their purity? These questions are prompting all the exclusions faced by women in the world. Whatever the gender may be; male, female, or others, no person should be made to undergo such a horrific experience. It is a crime against humanity in the name of custom and tradition where mostly women fall prey. ***The knife takes all away, what was cut will never grow again!***

<sup>9</sup>The Indian Penal Code,1860, §319-326, No.45, Imperial Legislative Council,1860(India) & The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, §3, No.32, Acts of Parliament,2012(India).



No doubt the battle against FGM is lifting gradually, but a lot still needs to be done. State authorities and modern judicial systems can be essential weapons to defeat such discriminations. Strict laws have to be made and effectively implemented to curb this menace. We need to spread awareness about the risk involved in FGM. An effort can be made to abolish such illogical and harmful traditions with the support of our older generation. Last but not the least, girls and women have to be educated on their right to own and control their bodies without anyone's intervention. They have to be carved in a position to refuse and reject such happenings.

It is high time women are treated right because  
***“The scale to measure a nation's walk towards progress and peace is the degree of status women own in it!”***

***It's a New Dawn!***

***No More Fear, No More Pain***

***Together We Need to Speak***

***Together We Need to Rise***

***End FGM, Let's be Wise!***