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Row over rape remark rages on social media



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A video of a middle-aged woman having a spat with a few girls from Gurugram went viral online.

Earlier this week, a video of a middle-aged woman in a mall having an argument with a group of girls in Gurugram, went viral. One of the girls, Shivani Gupta, was allegedly verbally abused by the woman, who claimed that girls wearing short dresses should be raped.

What does the video show?

In the video the girls accuse the women of asking men in a restaurant to rape them as a lesson for wearing 'provocative clothes'. The girls, who follow the woman into a shop, demand an explanation. The woman is seen demanding to call the police and further asking, 'How dare they? Idhar aa gaye (They've come here)'.

In the video, the girls assert that will be asking the restaurant for CCTV footage of the incident, and that they will post the ongoing recording on social media unless the lady apologises. She refuses to do so.

While the store official asks the woman to leave the store, another woman in

a black dress interrupts the chaos. She goes on to add how she is fine with her daughter wearing short dresses, and how such words were not appropriate. Despite this, the perpetrator goes on to assert that young girls should dress properly. She then faces the camera and asks parents who are watching to 'control girls' and teach them how to speak respectfully.

Did the video do what it needed to?

While the video, which received more than millions of views, communicates a strong message, it is disturbing that the woman in the black dress bodyshames the other lady by saying she didn't have the body to flaunt such dresses, unlike the young girls.

The video triggered several hashtags and responses online. Many turned into social media warriors and fished for photographs of the middle-aged shopper in short dresses. Others posted clips from the video or added captions to her photographs like 'Get well soon Aunty ji'. Some made cartoons with her face on them.

A day of harassment and trolling followed suit, after which several news reports surfaced on Thursday saying that the woman had apologised.

Right of way?

Social media with its wide reach has enabled many to opine online, but this has its drawbacks.

Suparna Kar, a sociologist, says that social media allows everyone to be an armchair activist now.

"People are quick to comment. There is no evidence to what the lady

actually said to the girls, apart from what the girls are saying in the video. But, what we saw was a huge outpouring of emotions and quick reactions, along the lines of vigilantism. Social media also allows one to disengage from what they post,” she says.

It is also sad to observe how hypocritical people have become, she adds. “People who were reacting to moral policing and body shaming the girls, were in fact shaming the lady too.”

Suparna adds that extreme reactions and incidents of bodyshaming are some of the common comments on such viral posts and videos.

So how does one react? Dr Roshan Jain, senior consultant psychiatrist, Apollo Hospitals says that before social media existed, the channels of communication were open.

“If someone didn’t like what we were doing, we argued with them. What the woman said was uncalled for and punishable, and calls for an FIR. But everybody is an activist now and just need an instigation to react to such things,” he says.

Dr Roshan says that social media is often used to make a spectacle out of differences.

“Criticism doesn’t bring any change in people’s behaviour, in fact it is the contrary. In an incident or argument, a healthy debate needs a calm mindset. If you feel harassed, confrontation should be avoided and approaching the authorities is the best way to go,” he adds.

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