

POLICE INACTION HAS EMBOLDENED GOONS, SAY WOMEN WHO WERE 'AUCTIONED' ONLINE

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The “Bulli Bai” mobile app presented women as “deals of the day”.

Commercial pilot Hana Khan is now hesitant to share where she is posted. A day after another online app targeted Muslim women by posting their publicly available pictures in an abusive context, Ms. Khan told *The Hindu* that she was worried that such online abuse would not end, and eventually, those behind auctioning of Muslim women online would threaten physically too.

Ms. Khan was among the first women to bring the website ‘Sulli Deals’ to light in July last year after the first instance of the online abuse and among the first victims to file an FIR at a Noida police station. But some six months later, after innumerable calls and visits to officials and the police station, she has only heard that there has been no progress in the case, she said.

Ms. Khan recalled that every time she has approached police officials, they have been kind and cordial to her but “having said that, they haven’t done anything. They themselves would always say that what has happened to us is wrong and horrible but still would do nothing”.

After registration of the FIR, she would call for updates every day and eventually, it became once a week, then once a month, she said. “I was hospitalised for typhoid in October and after that, my family wanted me to let it go and move on. It became toxic for me,” she said.

Ms. Khan said, “Looking at the environment in the country, it isn’t far-fetched to say that there can’t be bodily harm or they can’t reach us in the real world. Now, for instance, I am posted in another city and not many people know. I am not comfortable sharing any more.”

The “Bulli Bai” mobile app on GitHub hosted pictures of several prominent Muslim women including actor Shabana Azmi and RJ Sayema and “auctioned” them as domestic help.

Radio jockey Sayema, who works for Radio Mirchi, says social media attacks against her are very common, but perpetrators are getting bolder in the absence of any police action.

“Every single person will have to realise that they are next. I have been facing this for the last four to five years since the time I have been active on social media. I have been called names, and my pictures photoshopped. This is not new, but nothing happens to these goons and they are getting more muscle every time. There is so much impunity. What happens on social media today, spills onto the streets soon after,” the RJ said.

She also said that despite the Information Technology Minister’s tweet on the matter no police officer had contacted those targeted for an investigation.

“Why do they need an FIR when it is all happening in front of their eyes?” Sayema asked.

Congress party convener Hasiba Amin, who has also been targeted multiple times, says this is the fifth time since May 2021.

“It started with an auction in YouTube where men used lewd language to describe various Pakistani and Indian Muslim women and held an auction. Since then there were auctions held

on Twitter, Sulli Deals app, Clubhouse and now Bulli Bai app,” Ms. Amin said.

The Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA) called the online auction a result of hatemongering against Muslims.

‘Implement cyber laws’

“This filthy mindset is a result of years of hatemongering against the community ably assisted or ignored by various governments, so much so that today they have no fear of law... The full force of the cyber laws must be brought to use to identify the app makers and users. We also demand action from the PMO’s office as well as the Home Ministry. The various State Women’s Commissions must also take cognisance and deal with this menace on a war footing,” the BMMA said in a statement.

Five women’s organisations, including the National Federation of Indian Women and the All India Democratic Women’s Association also sent a joint memorandum to the President demanding that he “intervene and ensure that those responsible for this vile and criminal behaviour are punished with the severity that they deserve”.

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