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## **FROM FREEDOM TO FEAR: The Surge of Rape Cases in Independent India**

### **Introduction:**

Ma Tujhe Salaam...! was sung on the night of 29th June 2024. A small girl asked her brother why the whole nation was celebrating the victory over a cricket match. Her brother explained that the nation's pride was carried by those players in their shoulders and today by winning the final they've made everyone's dreams come true. She was convinced that those players really carried the nation's pride and went back to continue her work.

India was to celebrate its 78th Independence Day on August 15. But a day before Independence Day on the 14th there was a nation-wide protest and agitation among people of various backgrounds. It was an outburst condemning the gruesome act of man power against women. The small girl who prepared to disguise herself as Jhansi ki Rani for the Independence Day celebration in her school had no idea why people protested in roads day and night. She asked her brother about why people were against celebrating independence. The little girl's inquisitiveness and her innocence away from this cruel world made her brother tear up. How will he describe the death of a doctor who served 36 hours before her death to save others life, how will he say that she was raped inside her institution. Does the small girl know what rape is...No! How will he describe his fear of protecting his little sister from evils such as this prevalent around...

Nirbhaya was believed to be the last, then came Asifa, then the veterinary doctor from Hyderabad and today Kolkata doctor. What is freedom after 78 years of glorified independence when a woman can't be safe? Is demanding to be safe a really high standard against a democratic country which is the so called fastest growing economy in the world?

Even deadly Coronavirus that shut doors and locked down the entire nation for 3 whole years had an end. Vaccines were invented and today the virus is gone. But acts such as this depriving the life of female race has had no end. Women aren't chattels. Women aren't commodity for anyone to force and exercise their control on. Since ages, women were subjected to dominance, they were made to be submissive. When a king won against other king, the soldiers and the so-called males of the winning side enjoyed raping women who belonged to the losing side. When war is fought by them why does women bear the consequences of it to which she's remotely connected. It's always been like victory for the men and injustice to the women be it whichever side won the wars.

### **Is freedom only for men?**

The Indian Constitution showers with various fundamental rights to garner with the so-called equality between the two genders. Article-14: Equality before law and Equal protection of law. Article-15: Prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Specifically, Article-15(3): Allows the state to create special provisions to protect the interests of women and children. Article-19: Confers various freedoms such as to move freely within the country, Article-21: Guarantees the fundamental rights of privacy, self-identity, autonomy, and personal integrity to all people including transgender community.

But all these rights are futile when hearts are filled with fear. Alas, in worst cases women aren't safe within their own households too. Women are harassed and are subjected to so many challenges on every single day they step out of the house. No girl can assure that she'll return home safely and that's the status of these defunct fundamental rights of the World's Lengthiest Written Constitution.

### **Real Manhood:**

Manhood literally means, the state of being a man rather than a boy. The society has set some bizarre standards for men which are mostly not practical. Tall, Muscular, bearded and someone who don't cry easily are perceived to be desirous men. Since childhood, when a boy cries Indian parents say the common verse "Why are you crying like a girl?" So, for ages men were mythically subjected to a benchmark that they should be tough rather than being soft and tender. Because only girls can be soft and caressing. Indian households are common to the practice where fathers shout at mothers and the mothers remain silent. Children absorb this and believe that a man can raise his voice and shut down a woman.

But nobody at no instance teaches these children that the real manhood is to embrace the soft and caring nature of a man. A boy becomes a man when he makes a girl feel safe and secured around him. Manhood is embraced when he goes against another man and protects a woman in distress.

Men do not have the power to crush down a woman, her dreams, her wishes, her loved ones and her everything to debris. She can't become prey to the greed of the wrongdoers. Nobody has the right to touch her without her consent. Be it her friend, husband, brother or even her father.

### **What's really matters in India?**

Chandrayan 3 of India made the greatest achievement by landing on the south pole of the moon which no other nation accomplished. Indian Men's Cricket Team won the T20 internationals final and brought home the trophy after 11 years. Asia's richest man hosted his son's wedding like never before on this planet earth. Celebrities round the world took part in it, from MS Dhoni to Justin Bieber, from

Kim Kardashian to Mark Zuckerberg everybody were on the guest list. And a whopping 5000 crores INR was the budget of the entire wedding gaga.

With all these, comes the news of a doctor who was raped inside the seminar hall of her college. Its even more pathetic that we hear about these horrors caused to women and forget them very easily due to the dynamic life structure of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our minds are occupied by those like matters mentioned aforesaid. Rape happens, women die, nation voices out, delay in proceedings, people move on, issue forgotten, accused is free. Again, another rape happens, women dies and the nation voices out and continues. This has been the routine for ages.

There is no fear in the minds of wrongdoers. The loopholes in the legal system are abused by the offenders. Justice Delayed is Justice Denied. Nirbhaya case took more than 7 years to reach a verdict and execution. India is a country where a common rule prevails, that the people in power can do anything as they wish. People do wrongs and simply get away with it by using their influence or by scapegoating someone else into it.

The investigative mechanisms in India don't favour justice rather aid the criminals, just like how the Kolkata police took 14hrs to file FIR after the death of the Doctor. The college management tried to frame the whole issue as a suicide. The challan to her post mortem report is missing which escalates more doubts over the investigating procedures.

### **Real development in India:**

In 2024, India is ranked fifth in the world by GDP, with an estimated GDP of \$3.94 trillion. India is also ranked fifth among spacefaring nations for its end-to-end capabilities in space research and development. India Ranks 4th Globally on Research Hub After China, US, UK.

With all these developments in a corner, India is ranked 128th out of 177 countries in terms of women's safety. India ranked 126th out of 143 countries in the 2024 World Happiness Report. In 2023, over 31,000 rapes were reported in India. Most cases in India goes unreported. There is also a huge backlog of rape cases in India, where the number of new cases is higher than the number of cases that are disposed of each year.

Is it development only when satellites are launched, new medicines are invented by extensive research and development techniques? Will India cherish its real achievements when women sit at home as they are safe when they don't step outside the kitchen premises. But what if a woman is not safe around the four corners of her very own house. Where would they go? Where does the nation want them to go?

So, only in a nation with no women, rapes and other offences against woman won't happen. What does it cost to be safe in India? Who is safe? Not a student, not a teacher, not a doctor, not a nurse, not small girl, not an old lady, not a rich, not a poor. Then whom does the law protect.

### **What is Freedom?**

On 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2024 we celebrated 78 years of independence from the British, but the actual question is what sort of freedom are we celebrating?

- Freedom to rape a woman at work?
- Freedom to frame a rape as a suicide?
- Freedom to silence voices speaking out against injustice?
- Freedom to remain silent until someone close to you is raped?
- Freedom to not care and become a silent spectator while woman around face crisis?

Here is a detailed enumeration as to how sexual harassment against women can be prevented:

**1. Clothing and curfews:** There must be a rule that men should wear eye masks compulsorily after 6pm so they won't look at women at all. Men shouldn't leave the home after 6pm to keep roads safe.

**2. Physical distancing:** Men shouldn't be allowed within a distance of 10m near a woman unless verbally instructed otherwise. Written permission is better.

**3. Groups:** Strictly men should not be allowed to roam in groups of more than 2 after 6pm.

Doesn't this sound too ridiculous. Instead of all these, how about teaching men, to treat a woman just rightly. Not to cause any harm to her but to only protect her at any cost. Physiologically men and women aren't equal, if men show their manhood by protecting women, then the world shall also settle with peace.

### **Recommendations:**

The major causes for increasing rapes in India are patriarchal mindset, lack of education and awareness. Consequences are that women end up with physical and emotional trauma. There is social stigma attached to rape victims.

However way forward demands comprehensive sex education, strengthening laws and enforcement mechanisms. Various recommendations include:

- Establish a dedicated ministry for women's safety and welfare.
- Increase funding for support services and awareness programs.



Implement gender-sensitive policing and judiciary reforms.

- Encourage corporate social responsibility initiatives for women's safety.
- Foster international collaborations to address the global issue of sexual violence.

### **Conclusion:**

Rape free India is not something unattainable. Change in one person contributes to the change of a community. Rape to their loved ones is a fear of most brothers, fathers and husbands today. From regarding India as Mother by singing Ma Tujhe Salaam to worshipping goddesses, India has always been a land of cultural heritage with preponderance of significance to the female gender. Let's leave back a land where our male children and grandchildren are raised in a way to protect and treat woman with respect and our female children and grandchildren feel safe and are supported to accomplish all their dreams and desires. And until tell, India is not independent. The day woman feels safe, at anywhere at any time wearing anything she prefers, is the day India is deemed to have attained the real independence.