

## INROADS INTO BODY/ ASSERTION OF POWER: A STUDY ON THE NATURE OF RAPE

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**Abstract:** Rape has become an epidemic in India. Rape becomes a repressive weapon, which is used to make women silent or used sometimes as a mode of punishment. Even for marrying above their status or for caste violation through a marriage of their choice, women are sentenced for mass rape and the retribution is done in the presence of her family and villagers. Dalit or lower class women are brutally raped in a process of chastisement carried out by upper class to keep the former always under their feet. Even in police stations, women are raped so that, their wretched condition will compel them to blurt out the truth. In a patriarchal society, for every trespass of woman, she is retaliated with a trespass into her body, which they think is the finest fine she can pay, as they are still driven by Victorian morality and believe once 'the jewel' is stolen, it is stolen forever. Even when the reports of brutal rapes comes out, those who are in responsible position also take the girls to task for going out in inappropriate time. As it is elsewhere in the world, in India too rape is a destructive weapon used to destroy men folk morally and psychologically, as they deem their honor rest in their protecting the purity of their women. During the communal skirmishes, as it is evident from Gujarat and Muzzafar Nagar recently, women are subjected to mass rape so that they can terrorize their men. Even women writers are threatened with rape for criticizing the maneuvers and manipulations of political parties. This becomes possible because of the undue weight given to the chastity of women. This study intends to analyze the nature of rapes occurring in India, including its use as a tool to establish and perpetuate the dominant position of men in social power structures. The study reveals how society, media and literature have imbibed and spread the notion of this sacred glass bowl which is the proud possession of men, the breaking of which steals them of their honor.

**Keywords:** Chastity, Patriarchy, Power, Rape, Virginity.

**Introduction:** "Rape is a crime not of lust, but of violence and power".

Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, rape is the fourth most common crime against women in India. According to its report in 2013, 24,923 rape cases were reported across India in 2012. An analysis on the nature of rapes reported shows that all rapes are not provoked by lust but at least in some cases they are done as an attempt to assert power on the victim.

Feminist research studies have brought changes in the way rape is explicated. Former to the movement's development in the 1960s and 70s rape was well thought-out to be chiefly about sex. Feminist erudition projected instead that rape was about the affirmation of male power over female. The event that brought out this paradigm shift was the publication, of Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will*, in 1975. In this work, Brownmiller tried to redefine rape as a political question: the quintessence, and enforcement apparatus, of patriarchal misogyny.

Here some instances are taken from Indian context to show that all rapes were not about sex alone but about power too.

Aruna Shanbaug, while working as a junior nurse at Edward Memorial Hospital was sexually assaulted by a ward boy, Sohanlal Bhartha Walmiki, and following

the assault, she remained in a vegetative state in 42 years. She was subjected to the cruel sodomy for the guilt of rebuking her subordinate and for threatening to expose the theft he committed. For that 'sin' she was given the maximum punishment, unnatural rape, that too choking her with a dog chain. Soni Sori is an adivasi school teacher turned political leader in Chhattisgarh. She was arrested by the police on charges of acting as a conduit for Maoists. During her imprisonment, she was tortured and sexually assaulted by Chattisgarh state police as she refused to betray her Maoist friends to the police. They harmed her even more by inserting stones to her vagina and rectum. Phoolan Devi, popularly known as 'Bandit Queen', was a victim of brutal gang rape by the rival faction of her lover. She was convicted and after eleven years pending trial, the state government headed by Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party withdrew all charges against her, and Phoolan was released. She then stood for election to parliament as a candidate of the Samajwadi and was twice elected to the Lok Sabha as the member for Mirzapur. In 2001, she was shot dead at the gates of her official bungalow. Bhanwari Devi, a dalit social-worker from Bhatari, Rajasthan, was gang raped in 1992 by five higher-caste men who were angered by her efforts to prevent a child marriage in their family. Priyadarsini Mattoo, a twenty five year old law student was raped and killed as a revenge for her

complaint against her senior that he was harassing and stalking her. In the controversial rape case of Anjana Misra too, she was gang raped as retaliation for the complaint she had given against the then chief minister of Orissa, J.B Patnayik. In Khandamal rape case of nun, she was gang raped by the religious fanatics as a way to teach her a lesson for her work in conversion. In July 2014 in Jharkhand a man sexually assaulted a woman and as a punishment for him the Khap Panchayat head asked the husband of that lady to rape the 14 year old sister of that rapist in front of all. In West Bengal a girl was sentenced for mass rape as a penalty for falling in love with a person of different caste. In Bengal itself another girl was gang raped for the immoral activities of her brother. In UP Jat leaders sentenced two Dalit sisters for gang rape as their brother eloped with a married woman of higher caste. In 2016, the Kannada writer Chetana Theerthahalli was threatened with rape for questioning the outdated beliefs and superstitions of Hindu religion. In Mumbai, four college girls took revenge on another girl by employing their male friends to rape her. Gurmehar Kaur, daughter of Kargil martyr was threatened with rape. When her media campaign against ABVP became viral. In UP a 16-year-old girl, whose mother had just won the local election was gang raped by her mother's rivals. When she tried to file a complaint with the police, she was turned away. Soon after, the 16-year-old committed suicide. On March 16, 2017, news outlets reported that two minor girls were kidnapped by 13 men and gang raped in front of their father in Gujarat. This was allegedly an act of revenge against the victims' brother who had named one of the indicted in a bootlegging scam.

'Are you for the first time?'

'No, you are the fourth man in my life.'

He could not believe his ears. He had raped her thinking the severest punishment which can be given to a woman is to break her virginity.

(T.D Ramakrishnan, *Sugandhi Enna Andal Nayaki*)

The patriarchal society has conceived a notion that sexual abuse or transgression into her body is the severest punishment that can be given to a woman. And the severest punishment that can be given to a man is not lynching, not execution, not even castration but the sexual assault on the women under his protection. Phallus becomes a symbol of power with which patriarchy establish and perpetuate their power. Every rape is not merely the enforcement of power. But they are the imposition of power too.

This is not the peculiar condition that exists in India alone. Rape is used as a weapon for chastisement in prison. Rape of captive soldiers in war was common amongst Arabs, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. The tradition apparently continues, with a recent report of the International Commission of Jurists in Geneva

documenting the rape of numerous teenage Palestinian children in Israeli military detention centers, as part of both punishment and interrogation routines. In North America, among the Shay tribe, Gang rape was used as a means to reprimand women who were considered fallen. The Mundurucu tribes of South America, Mpumalanga tribe of South Africa and tribes in other countries including Argentina, Pakistan and India have implemented rape as a way of maintaining authority over people.

It is deep-seated in our sub-conscious that woman is the pride possession of her family and the society. Sexual violations to her body become the violation of the honor of the family and the society. During Israel-Palestine skirmish, Israel minister had made an exhortation for the rape of Palestine woman so that they can shatter the confidence of Palestinian Army. Dr. Mordechai Kedar, specialist in Arab political discourse, opined that "The threat of raping the wife or mother of the terrorist is the only threat that could prevent him from a suicide attack".

Amnesty International observes that rape is not a byproduct of war, but it is a systematically envisaged strategy of war. It was used during Second World War, Vietnam war, and internal riots in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cyprus, Haiti, Liberia, Somalia, Uganda etc. Rape as machinery in ethnical cleansing-from 1992, in Bosnia, about 20000 women was subjected to sexual assault. Teenage girls have been a particular target in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, according to The State of the World's Children 1996 report. The report also says that impregnated girls have been forced to bear 'the enemy's' child. In 1971 during Pakistan- Bangladesh war, Pakistan soldiers made a challenge to the Bangladesh soldiers that we will make your women give birth to our children. State sponsored rapes and military rapes in Gujarat, Kashmir, Manipur and Gujarat. The Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front has been accused of ethnic cleansing of using murder, arson, and rape as a weapon of war to drive out hundreds of thousands of Hindu Kashmiri Pandits from the region.

This redundant weight given to the virginity and purity of the woman becomes a pivotal reason for the encroachment on the body of woman, though it is not the only cause. When the war is over, women become the most claimed property or women and land become equally important to men. A man, whether husband, father or brother, he keeps a false pride that woman in his family is his property under his protection. Roman soldiers used to put a chastity lock for their women when they went for the battle for a long time. At the same time a group of whores accompanied them. We teach women about chastity, but we don't teach the same to men. In the novel *Sugandhi Enna Andal Devanayaki*, by T.D Ramakrishnan, there is a king who made another

form of chastity lock called Arathali for his eight wives. The magic lantern of *Arabian nights* is lighting our imagination for centuries. The flame of that story is from the shock received by the King Shehariyar on knowing his wife's illicit relation, while he had umpteen numbers of beauties in his harem. The Rajas of bygone days had hundreds of concubines yet once they were defeated in battle, their queens must jump into pyre so that they can preserve their purity, and otherwise they will become the property of winners. The practice of Jauhar, the Hindu custom of self mass immolation by women in North Western part of India especially among Rajputs, when faced certain defeat during war shows the same proprietary interest over women. Crushed rose petals, broken bangles, trampled dolls under feet become the symbol of lost innocence of girls. But there are no symbols to show the loss of man's purity. The defense lawyer in Nirbhaya case said, 'he is ready to burn his wife or daughter if they are found to be with a man.' He is not to be blamed. The patriarchal society which instilled such a double standard should be blamed.

Movies and literature play an essential role in perpetuating the notion that purity/virginity is something to be treasured by women only even at the cost of her and the loss of it, is a dreadful punishment for her than death. They still hold fast to the Victorian morality which kept double standard for men and women. Innocent heroines should commit suicide if her so called 'treasure box' is stolen. The extra marital affairs of men are neglected while those of women are unpardonable sin. Movies show heroines whose bravery comes to nothing once threatened with rape. They show helpless heroes who wails like anything and comes to compromise once his lady is threatened with rape. Movies show women who succumb to heroes once he hold them forcibly. Movies show men whose masculinity is proved by satisfying the woman physically.

My chastity's the jewel of our house,

Bequeathed down from many ancestors.

William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*

No myth is there to protect the chastity of men, only female sexuality is 'sheltered' by these virginity/chastity myths, definitely a construction of andocentric culture, and often powerless women become a prey to so called protectionism. Women are trained to internalize the double standard of morality for men and women by the constant interference of media, family, society, religious organizations and other all that are driven craze by this virginity fetish. *Chemmeen* tells the story of fishermen community and a myth that is much prevalent among them, according to which the life of husband is dependent on the chastity of his woman sitting at home. O. V Vijayan's *Khasakinte Ithihasam* tells the tale of

tamarind tree from which men falls if his wife is not pure. Padma Rajan's *Rathi Nirvedam* also depends on a snake to judge a woman's guilt and to mete out deserving punishment for her. Rathi is bitten by the snake at the moment of consummation itself as a punishment for her transgression while Pappu is spared. While Rathi's body is taken to burial ground, Pappu is shown going to pursue higher studies. The novel implicitly adjudicate the retribution for a fallen woman, whereas men are not even considered fallen.

"A decent girl won't roam around at nine o'clock at night. A girl is far more responsible for rape than a boy. Housework and housekeeping is for girls, not roaming in discos and bars at night doing wrong things, wearing wrong clothes. About 20% of girls are good. People had a right to teach them a lesson."

--Mukesh Singh, the culprit in Nirbhaya case. This is the attitude of the male chauvinist society.

There was Sita in our great literature who had to undergo fire ordeal in order to convince Rama and his countrymen of her purity. We revere Tara, Mandodari and Savitri who were embodiments of wifely qualities, the most important one being the devotion, devotion even to the extent of carrying one's husband to a concubine's house or to the extent of approving the abduction by her husband of another's wife. Indian society still admires Kannagi like figures who will woo sufferings even for her infidel husband.

Rape is not a crime of irrational, impulsive, uncontrollable lust, but is a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession on the part of a would be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear.

Susan Brownmiller. in *Against our Will*.

Rape has its roots in the cultural problems of gender inequality and gender aggression. Viewing rape as a methodical cultural conquest rather than sheer individual infringement was in accordance with the feminist doctrine that 'the personal is political' and served to underscore the insightful social repercussions of rape and the burning cultural issues of gender discrimination and gender antagonism. Rape has been used as a weapon during every war, every riot, every uprising in the world. The Partition in 1947, the Gujarat riots in 2002, Muzaffar Nagar riots in 2013, Jat protests in 2016, are some such instances, where women have been battered and raped as the decisive assault on the enemy's pride, as if there can be no better offense. The wreckage that such molestation is supposed to prompt does not come from any sort of love or poignant affection towards the victim of rape. It comes from the wounded ego of a man whose pride and honor – the honor rooted in a woman's vagina – is snatched away from him.

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