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Sr. Lilly Maria F.C.C., Chairman and President

From the Editors Desk

India, a cradle of ancient civilization, has today a reputation for being one of the most unsafe places in the world for women. According to existing stats, there are 85 reported rape cases every day. How many go unreported, we can imagine. This is every day. A woman is prey, irrespective of age, profession, or behaviour. You can be a child playing with your doll, an engineer going home after work, or a commuter on a train, if you are a woman, you can be attacked day or night.



However, the recent rape and murder of a young doctor has sparked national outrage. A sign that we are still not free!! In the case of Abhaya, she is both a woman and a doctor. Violence against doctors has also been on the rise. This is a profession that was once considered the noblest of all. Today, though most doctors continue to work hard, often under trying conditions to deliver the best possible treatment and to save lives, they have lost the trust of the people. If someone dies, relatives immediately decide it must be negligence and it is their 'right' to assault doctors and vandalize hospitals. The article in this issue takes an incisive look at this disturbing trend that has left doctors across the nation anxious, scared and angry.

The truth in the Abhaya case is yet to emerge. The CBI is still investigating even as the city is witnessing riot after riot. But after it is all over, will the fate of women improve? It is doubtful because aggression against women is instilled at home, and by society at large. As for doctors, hopefully new laws and new hospital practices will offer more protection. But again, unless we learn that violence and assault can never be the answer, unless it is ingrained in us that human life is sacred, there can be no progress.

Sr. Lalitha Teresa FCC, Editor

IS INDIA REALLY FREE? FREE FROM WHAT ?

By Dr. Manjula Krishnaswamy M.S.

It is a day after the Indian National flag was hoisted for the seventy eighth time....marking seventy seven years of Independence... It was the 15th of August 2024. It was hoisted under morally dampening conditions... No joy, only a pall of gloom and sadness enveloping the whole country.....This time no threat from outside, no one to be blamed, except our own selves. No Indian dared look at Bharat Mata and say 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' when Bharat Mata was shedding tears of blood. What else could she do when her girl child has been brutally raped and murdered?

This happened on the 9th of August 2024..... A young doctor, doing her post graduation, was on duty in a Government hospital, in Calcutta ... a 36 hour rigmarole, not unusual for most junior doctors working in medical college hospitals,.... was brutally assaulted, raped and murdered in the wee hours of the morning and the body was found only the next morning. What has sent shock waves throughout the country was the brutality which she was subjected to, as revealed by the postmortem report. It will shock the sensibilities of those who read it, so I will just say it is one of the most horrendous reports that, I, as a surgeon, who has completed about 30 yrs of service in Government Medical College hospitals, have ever seen or heard. It almost makes one suspect whether the perpetrator was a human at all. It appears very demonic and makes one wonder whether there was more than one maniacal psychopath let loose!



The events that followed were even more sinister and scary. Enough to make us suspect the whole system in our country. Though the event should have happened in the wee hours of the morning, the body was found rather late the next morning. She was on duty; would nobody have searched for her if she been missing since midnight? The parents were summoned, but were made to wait for three hours before they were allowed to see their daughter. Initially the authorities tried to pass it off as suicide! The police were called in much later and they did not file an FIR till late night. Meanwhile, postmortem was done and the body cremated the same day! The Principal of the college who was supposed to be at the forefront of the investigation was allowed to resign and given a re-posting as Dean of another Government Medical College within four hours! There is evidence that telltale marks and all that could incriminate some people were hurriedly being erased. As the media was putting out details one by one, the public anger was rising palpably. The colleagues and fellow students of the victim had already started protesting, demanding justice for the victim and her family. A twist occurred when unruly anti social elements stormed the hospital and started vandalizing the premises (obviously to destroy ALL evidence) ... The police were unable to stop them and contrarily started assaulting the peaceful student protesters... This was the proverbial last straw, the protests became PAN India, with the entire medical fraternity joining hands and in response to a call from the Indian Medical Association, resorted to boycotting their duties (except dealing with emergencies) . It was obvious that the powers in the local Government were not in a position or had no will (for reasons known only to themselves) to control the situation.... Then the ultimate happened... The Supreme Court took 'Suo Moto' cognizance of the case....which has infused the public with fresh hope that justice will prevail... the offenders brought to book and given the most stringent of punishments and steps taken to prevent recurrence of such heinous crimes against women. Let us wait and see.



I have often wondered about the psyche of the ordinary Indian Citizen. I'm not sure what we should call it - extreme tolerance, undue patience or just plain apathy? Or is it the 'I, me, mine syndrome?' 'I am not affected as long as these three are not affected. When my neighbor's house is on fire, I will wait till it almost reaches my house before I fetch a bucket of water'.



Every day, we see in the papers, women & girls being raped and murdered, children being abducted and abused.... enough to merit an exclusive page everyday ... but we just click our tongues, say words like horrible, disgusting, atrocious and turn the page. Not until it strikes somebody nearer home.

Then we sit up & start thinking what should be done, even then it's about protecting 'my home, my people'. Something as catastrophic as this incident has to happen to waken the conscience of the nation. Even then it is a knee jerk reaction & some rules and regulations are quickly put into place. Remember Nirbhaya case? It was a brutal gang-rape & murder on a moving bus... It happened in 2012. All the miscreants were caught immediately... there was an eye witness & all evidences to convict six blackguards. Though the Delhi High court condemned all but one to death fairly quickly... the case went for appeal after appeal & finally, after one had committed suicide in prison, 4 of them were hanged in 2020, a full 8 years after the crime was committed. Ironically, one of them categorized as juvenile because he was six months short of eighteen years, though actively involved in the gang rape was sent to the reformatory school for 3 years & then allowed to go scot-free. He is roaming somewhere, anywhere between Kashmir & Kanyakumari waiting for his next prey... who knows, he could be just outside your house! Why are we soft pedaling on punishing these criminals? If we're just following the law, then is the law basically flawed? If only this punishment has been meted out sooner, before people had forgotten about Nirbhaya, if these criminals had been hung to death, on the ramparts of the Red Fort under public eye (after public flogging, my friend is prompting), it's just possible that the young doctor's life would've been saved & many more such incidents prevented in future.

Having given vent to my anger, on calm reflection, however, how much can we blame the establishment for all the ills happening in our country? Our country has a population of more than 1.4 billion and statistics show that more than half are women.

How can any agency, however big it may be, be expected to provide protection to every single woman? 'No man is an island' it is said; also no man can live in a vacuum. Man is a social animal and necessarily has to depend on the society around him. Therefore being safe and keeping your family safe is both an individual's responsibility as well as of the society. No point wailing about the loss of the joint family system, the smallest but the strongest of the micro safety system. Nuclear families have come to stay, which means dependence on external security also increases. We are promoting concrete jungles where nobody knows who lives next door. Time to build a small and strong friendly neighborhood, where neighbors become friends; friends who care and are willing to help each other.

What about the individual himself or... herself in the present context? A woman was born a woman and with it comes gender vulnerability..... We cannot escape this fact and no point in expecting every man she meets to be a Buddha or Sri Rama. Every woman is endowed with a sixth sense or born with an inbuilt 'antenna' so to say. Intuitively she knows whom to trust and whom to distance herself from... but it is obviously not foolproof. We see and hear women being cheated, whoever they are and whatever they are, irrespective of educational qualification or social status. So, my dear woman, at least be aware of the general safety rules.... Do not accept lifts from strangers, be aware of the kind of place you are visiting, if unfamiliar or suspicious, avoid it altogether, if not possible, at least go in a group or with a trustworthy companion.

Learn some self defense procedures... preferably some martial art if possible, be aware of police helplines, if you are forced to travel alone, please keep your family or close friends informed, share the vehicle number with them..... there are many more tips like this, but, 'kam se kam' keep pepper spray or chilli powder in your handbag!



A word to all mothers..... It's not enough to teach your daughter do's and don'ts, simultaneously, teach your son, right from his childhood, how to respect a girl and give her equal status, teaching him that male chauvinism is abhorrent and archaic. Teach him that every girl or woman is somebody's sister, or mother? Would he stand mute and watch his friends teasing his sister or mother? A strong character imbued with morals and ethics, modest in dress and behavior both for girls and boys must be cultivated from childhood and it starts at home!



The other day when I was discussing this particular issue with my doctor friends, all women, I was shocked to hear one of them say "I'm going to ask my daughter to resign her job and take up some vocation that does not involve night duties".... coming from a person who had done night duties all through her career, I could not believe my ears. NO! My dear woman, do not heed to such negative suggestions! It has taken decades, nay, centuries for the woman in India to be where you are now... to be free to choose what you want to do with your life and follow it up with determination and single mindedness. You are born to soar high, don't let anybody clip your wings. Be bold, be brave BUT ... be sensible, get your priorities right....be safe! The whole of India is cheering you 'The Pudumai Penn' that Bharati dreamed of. Pursue your goals and as Swami Vivekananda said 'Stop not till the goal is reached'. A new dawn awaits our country.... India will regain the status of a country that is safest for women, for as someone said 'A country is not judged by its riches, but by the way it treats its women and elders!'

I had asked 'Is India really free? Free from what?' I shall answer it using Mahatma Gandhi's words - 'The day a woman can walk freely on the roads at night, that day we can say that India has achieved its Independence'.





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Scan this QR code on your Smart Phone to view the Jeevodaya Anthem on YouTube

The block contains two QR codes side-by-side, intended for scanning to access the Jeevodaya Anthem on YouTube.

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