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ISSN: 2278-9529



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Pinki Virani's *Aruna's Story*: Recreating the Real Life

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“Aruna Shanbaug is not blessed. She is partially brain dead. She is blind. She has atrophying bones, wasting muscles. The joints at her fingers, her including **carelessly** cleaned flecks of drying faeces. She is wasting away, but her spirit is not allowing this process to be rapid enough to invite an early death (Virani 194).” Wrists, the knees, her ankles are bending inwards. To try and straighten these is to cause her pain. She gets excruciatingly painful periods. She also has the beginning of several bed sores, lice in her hair and filth on her body

In our Vedas and Puranas woman is considered the incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi, Durga. She is more powerful and stronger than man. In the modern time, women are on the path of progress and have been exposing their mettle as well as spirit in every field and have developed her true identity in every walk of life. Although she is progressing globalization has led to economic changes that have raised more social and economical challenges for women, particularly for working class. As enshrined in the Article 21 of our Indian Constitution- Right to live with dignity, but Pinki Virani's non-fiction *Aruna's Story :The True Account of a Rape and its Aftermath*, is a counter narrative of the 'dignity' that Aruna Shanbaug, a nurse in The King Edward VII Memorial Hospital (KEM), Bombay has been denied from the last four decades. The paper is a study of the way the Indian English writer and Journalist Pinki Virani has recreated the real life tragedy of Aruna Shanbaug, who was attacked and brutally raped in the very hospital where she was a nurse. Brain-dead of sight, speech and movement yet alive to pain, hunger and terror she now 'lives' barely alive, in the hospital where she once treated patients back to health.

Feminism, Feminist theory, feminist movements, Feminist activists - It campaign for women's rights . They seek gender equality- equality in education, marriage, careers and legal rights. Feminist campaigns have changed societies, particularly in the West, by achieving women's suffrage, gender neutrality in English, equal pay for women, reproductive rights for women and the right to enter into contracts and own property. Feminists have worked to protect women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. Women in the Indian society have been victims of humiliation, torture and exploitation for as long as we have written records of social organisation and family life. Today women are being gradually recognised as important, powerful, and meaningful contributors to the life of men; but till a few decades back, their condition was pitiable. Ideologies, institutional practices and the existing norms in society have contributed much to their harassment. Some of these behavioural practices thrive even today. In spite of the legislative measures adopted in favour of women in our society after Independence, the spread of education and women's gradual economic independence, countless women still continue to be victims of violence. They are beaten, kidnapped, raped, burnt and murdered.

India is a patriarchal society, which, by definition, describes cultures in which males as fathers or husbands are assumed to be in charge and the official heads of households. These traditions and ways of Indian life have been in effect for so long that this type of lifestyle is what women have become accustomed to and expect. Feminism in India is a set of

movements aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights and equal opportunities for Indian women. It is the pursuit of women's rights within the society of India. Like their feminist counterparts all over the world, feminists in India seek gender equality: the right to work for equal wages, the right to equal access to health and education, and equal political rights. Indian feminists also have fought against culture-specific issues within India's patriarchal society, such as inheritance laws and the practice of widow immolation known as Sati. Despite the progress made by Indian feminist movements, women living in modern India still face many issues of discrimination. Indian women often do not take full advantage of their constitutional rights because they are not properly aware or informed of them. The Indian woman is caught between tradition and modernity, between family and profession, between freedom and loneliness, between self-aggrandizement and self-realization.

A great writing is charismatic and influential; can create a lot of positive change in peoples thinking, can inject people with modern messages and thus change India. In Indian English literature Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee and Manju Kapur and many more female writers have left their indelible imprint on the Indian readers. Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City* (2005), Sonia Faleiro's *Beautiful Thing* (2010), Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* are the windows that projects the Indian women highly flourishing but unfortunately behind the bright shine, they are deprived of necessities of life, exploited and oppressed, and discriminated. Pinki Virani's work – seamlessly blending her journalistic and writing skills – places her among the few international authors whose writing results in rendering direct service towards Indian citizens.

Pinki Virani was born in Mumbai, India, to Gujarati Muslim parents. Her father owned a shop, and her mother was a housewife. She attended school in Mumbai, Pune and Mussoorie. She went to the US to study for a Masters in Journalism, from Columbia University, on the Aga Khan Foundation scholarship. She did an internship at *The Sunday Times*, where she reported extensively on the race riots in Britain. She returned to Mumbai and joined MID DAY as an editor. She rose from working as a typist at seventeen to become the editor of a Mumbai publication. She was recently recognised by the Indian government for her work in the field of women's empowerment and social development. She has won critical acclaim for her four bestselling books "Once was Bombay"; "Aruna's Story: The True Account of a Rape and its Aftermath,"; A victim of Incest herself she has written the first and only book on child sex abuse in the Indian subcontinent. "*Bitter Chocolate: Child Sexual Abuse in India*" (which won the National Award) and "*Deaf Heaven*". *Deaf Heaven* is her fourth book and first work of fiction.

Pinki Virani, is among India's best-selling authors whose single-handed work gives voice to individuals who have none. Her tireless campaigning for human dignity has led to landmark laws for two of the most vulnerable times of a human being's life—in the beginning as a child, and at the end as a terminally ill patient. Pinki Virani's sustained crusading since 2000 has resulted in India's Parliament passing a law against sexual abuse of children (The Protection of Children against Sexual Offences) in May 2012. The law includes four of her suggestions to the Standing Committee, it also encompasses several suggestions from her book '*Bitter Chocolate: Child Sexual Abuse in India*'. The book and a part of its contents have also been quoted in a Madras High Court judgement. In March 2011, the Supreme Court of India passed a historic judgement permitting passive euthanasia in the country. This followed Pinki Virani's plea to the highest court in December 2009. The

corollary of this same landmark judgement is that there could be a boost in organ donations, once again positively helping millions of Indians.

Aruna Shanbaug from Haldipur town of Uttar Kannada in Karnataka was a nurse, at the King Edward Memorial Hospital in Mumbai. Her mother never wanted her daughter to move out and work,

“You are fair and beautiful. Why won’t you marry like your two sisters? You have never been outside Haldipur and now you want to go directly to Bombay. No woman from this village has ever stepped outside for a job...gets married and get around into domesticity. Like Sitabai and her nine children.”(91)

Aruna, twenty five years old, ambitious and sprightly with a fulfilling profession was planning to get married to a medic Dr Sundeep Sardesai. On the night of 27 November 1973, Shanbaug was sexually assaulted by Sohanlal Bhartha Walmiki, a sweeper on contract at the KEM Hospital. Sohanlal attacked her while she was changing clothes in the hospital basement. He choked her with a dog chain and sodomized her. The asphyxiation cut off oxygen supply to her brain, resulting in brain stem contusion injury and cervical cord injury apart from leaving her cortically blind. She has been treated at KEM since the incident and is kept alive by feeding tube. The deprivation of oxygen has left her in a vegetative state ever since. Following the attack, no one was willing to be the complainant in the case. The “shame” syndrome took over. The Bhoiwada police had to put on record a sub-inspector’s name as complainant. The police case was registered as a case of robbery and attempted murder on account of the concealment of anal rape by the doctors under the instructions of the Dean of KEM, Dr. Deshpande, perhaps to avoid the social rejection of the victim, and her impending marriage.

Following the attack, nurses in Mumbai went on strike demanding improved conditions for Shanbaug and better working conditions for themselves... In the 1980s the BMC made two attempts to move Shanbaug outside the KEM Hospital to free the bed she has been occupying for seven years. No relatives are willing to take her home. Her brother and sister clearly refused to take her, “It is your responsibility to look after her because this happened to her during her duty-time in your hospital because of one of your other employ”(61) The case touched off India’s first nurses strike demanding protection and proper treatment for Aruna, and better working conditions in Bombay’s municipal hospitals. KEM nurses launched a protest, and the BMC abandoned the plan.

Speechlessness following a rape can go deeper. Aruna’s continuing silence is not the outcome of fear or shame; she cannot speak at all. “Because she could not testify, he got away with a light sentence, and she lives unhappily ever after”. On behalf of Aruna, Pinki Virani filed a petition in the Supreme Court arguing that the "continued existence of Aruna is in violation of her right to live in dignity". The Supreme Court made its decision on 7 March 2011. The Court rejected the plea to discontinue Aruna's life support but issued a set of broad guidelines legalising passive euthanasia in India. However, the Supreme Court judges held Pinki Pinki Virani as the next friend of Ms. Aruna Shanbaug, a description she had used to file the petition. The Court observed in paragraph 14 of the judgment,

"Ms. Pinki Virani who claims to be the next friend of Aruna Shanbaug and has filed this petition on her behalf is not a relative of Aruna Shanbaug nor can she claim to have such close emotional bonding with her as the KEM hospital staff. Hence, we are treating the KEM hospital staff as the next friend of Aruna Shanbaug and we decline to recognize Ms. Pinki Virani as her next friend. No doubt Ms. Pinki Virani has written a book about Aruna

Shanbaug and has visited her a few times, and we have great respect for her for the social causes she has espoused, but she cannot claim to have the extent of attachment or bonding with Aruna which the KEM hospital staff, which has been looking after her for years, claims to have. We also wish to express our appreciation of Ms. Pinki Virani who filed this petition. Although we have dismissed the petition for the reasons given above, we regard her as a public spirited person who filed the petition for a cause she bona fide regarded as correct and ethical. We hold her in high esteem.”

National award-winning writer and social campaigner, Pinki Virani's *Aruna's Story* urge today's women to liberate themselves from such conventions of patriarchal agenda that function in complicity to exploit them and also leave them mute forever. Mindful of the personal dangers faced by any young working women who wants to make her mark, Pinki Virani has written a cautionary tale, reconstructed with logical extensions and extrapolations and resuscitated with intuition and imagination. In India, women like Aruna Shanbaug represents an invisible population and their condition is deplorable, hence such study becomes pertinent in today's context and needs to be taken up by not only writers but also by the feminist and the human right activists. The subject matter of *Aruna's Story* which draws its inspiration from the real life situations bring into focus those aspects of women's life which were hitherto ignored to a wider hearing and thus become instrumental in bringing a transformation in the social condition of the women.

Works Cited:

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