

A message of Sartre for Nirbhaya

It was year 2010, when visited “Crimes Against Women” Cell of Delhi Police near Connaught Place. Long queues are a common sight in India but queues here were surprisingly long. Starting from police officer’s room on first floor to corridor onto stairs downwards. Fathers, Mothers, Brothers were all standing in line, each with a folder in hands. A folder of evidence, of photographs and medical records that their daughters, sisters were brutally beaten in domestic violence and that she needs police intervention. I didn’t say “sisters” standing in queues because they were not there!

Standing in queue, I noticed that in one corner, little away from stairs, an elderly man was scolding a newly married girl. The girl was crying and at the same time quickly and repeatedly wiping her tears with her handkerchief. She didn’t seem to be of more than 18 years of age. Father went, and a young man came there, he was her husband. There was lot of noise in corridor. Neither was their conversation audible, nor was I interested in these strangers more than the reason of my visit, so like others, I overlooked and ignored the crying girl.

The voice of the boy was becoming bolder and angrier, stronger and audible; which attracted attention of all of us in the queue. I looked at the boy, he was also very young, short heighted, a thin person. Very angrily he shouted and instructed to the girl “Sajda kar... Saali Kutiya!”, while pointing his finger to the floor. Crying girl obediently sat down on the floor, eagerly bended, touched her forehead on the ground, at the very feet of her husband for some seconds. I was appalled. Disgusting! Unbelievable! Man was still not satisfied; he said few things and went away. I left my queue and walked towards the place of event. I don’t know why... perhaps, I wanted to be a hero?

Next came the mother came and she was also not kind to the girl. “We already told you not to marry this boy. I told you, your father is against this boy. You made this decision; you will have to live with it now”, said her mother. “Hmm...abandoned by the family for love marriage”, I thought as I walked towards the boy. I wanted to look into his eyes, I don’t know why...

Boy was talking to a middle-aged person. They were talking in Hindi and I heard, “She is a better girl than this one. Her father has an electrician’s shop. They will give you good money, they have their own house. This one has trapped you, don’t be a fool, don’t spoil your life, leave this girl!”. The boy was agreeing without hesitation, with convinced head nods. Boy’s visiting family group appeared to be aggressive. “This is a personal family matter...” I thought, regaining my consciousness as returned to place my queue.

Standing at the corner, girl was still crying helplessly. Begging for pardon with tears and juggling with several discussions at same time. In her short talks with her husband, I heard her reminding him a promise. Immediately next few minutes she was begging her mother, then a round with forceful father, followed by her husband again, and then the lady police officer. She kept crying, begging, with joined hands for pity and sympathy. Entire event was making her feel miserable, helpless and more and more tearful.

“Lunch time! Please disperse”, A police man come this announcement. A few from the queue, ran up to him, with some personal requests. Policeman angrily replied “No, come later after the lunch!”. One man was adamant, he was trying to cajole his way into office. Policeman looked at him, raised his leg and gave him a gentle front kick, straight to his groin; and angrily shouted, “Did we asked you to get your daughter married to him? Come after lunch, I said”. Man did not fell down but he

returned to stairs with his head down. Policeman arranged the chairs and desks of corridor like a traffic barrier at door, for “No Entry”, and returned inside his office for lunch. I went to washroom.

Coming out of the washroom I saw that people have disappeared. Only few from the queue, were sitting in the corridor. Public knows that lunch time is of long duration in government offices. Crying girl was still there at the corner. She was standing alone Her husband and families were not there.

I gathered my courage went to that girl and said, “Didi, that boy is not good, he is not good for you”. With her tears falling, she replied “Brother, you men can speak, we cannot...”. Wiping her tears with her handkerchief, she walked away, to washroom. Not understanding what she meant, I continued walking down the stairs. There were lots of ‘Paan-Tobacco’ spits at the corners of stair case.

After lunch I did not saw that girl or boy or their families.

Helplessness, sulking of that crying girl are in my memory, even after a decade. I wish I could do something to help her but what could I have done? I had no words, no ideas. Can any inspirational or motivational speech or a whatsapp quote resolve this? Is it the problem of an individual? Or of family? Or of legal system or of society? Or all together? How we can solve this? I had no idea, no words, no clue. Nor do I know the name of that crying girl but let’s call her Nirbhaya!

You remember, “Nirbhaya” of Delhi, she was physically beaten and murdered after a gang rape by unknown man during the night in a public transport. I am calling this girl Nirbhaya because her life, her privacy, her choices, her hopes, her dreams, her individuality, her freedom is also gang raped. That too un the middle of public place, like in a pornography of societal humiliation, a theatre drama of society’s cruelty, a festival of abuse, harassment and insult. And this entire gang rape is not by unknown people, it is a rape by people she knows and she loves, her family, her husband; it’s a rape by people she trusts the police offices, the legal system. And this betrayal was within the premises where guards of legal rights, guards of justice system work, a police station!

Nirbhaya of Delhi died, fighting courageously against her criminals, like courageous queen of Jhansi. This Nirbhaya, I hope survived like revolutionary queen of Velu Nachiyar. Physical pain, wounds to private parts may be healed but scars on the souls never do, that is why Phoolan Devi became a dacoit! From ideals of Sita, Draupadi, Meera, to common women like Monica Lewinsky, Rhea Chakravarty or Disha Ravi, all have suffered in the culture of violence, shame, guilt and humiliation. Repetition of ancient poetry cannot correct ancient culture just like offering pure milk to a sewage system will not make it holy river. In words of Shashi Tharoor, it is a culture that is in its advanced stage of decay? Societal apathy makes wounds of victims more malignant and cancerous. It kills their desire to live, their liberty, their ability to hope, evolve and dream.

We cannot solve old problems with old mindsets, we need new knowledge reminded Albert Einstein. While everyone else in the world is busy reaping benefits of aggression, violence and toxic masculinity, there is evergreen French literature and there are francophone communities that are offering innovative and remedial support to feminist movements against inequality and crimes against women. Philosophy of Existentialism is not just a solution to problems; it is a cultural revolution. Jean Paul Sartre, a great revolutionary intellectual of France (21.06.1905 – 15.04.1980), was an existentialist. His existentialists views of life can be a good remedy to problems of every human society. It brings new hope, new perspective and encourages us to take responsibility of our new life, to be our own light!

If Jean Paul Sartre was alive today, following would have been his message, to Nirbhaya:

Chere Nirbhaya,

There are weddings that are funerals. Even most loving relations may grow into unbearable cage because we try to find meaning of our life through the life of another person. Real love, companionship does not require a public announcement. For example, me and Simone de Beauvoir decided that our love does not require marriage for its consummation.

Something weird happens when we realise that someone whom we desire is looking at us. This awareness does not really know why and what another person is seeing in us, but because we also want to be with the other person, we try to become what we think he or she desires. During this process, we reduce ourselves into persons that we are not, that is against our being. Don't reduce your existence to a just a wife of someone. Don't let others decide your destiny. Don't worry about God and society. Hell is depending for happiness on other people. Like all dreamers I also mistook disenchantment for truth. Life begins on the other side of despair.

Our existence is result of a chance, an accident; we are not born for any predefined cosmic plan or divine purpose or to serve another man. There is no divine CCTV or a super computer system that is watching or judging our actions. We are our choices. Things may seem absurd and meaningless now but you have the liberty to make any meaning of life out from this situation.

We are condemned to be free. Each of us has free will, given space and limited time to live. Life is a challenge. Life is a and also a creative opportunity to live experiences we want to live. Be yourself, make your own choices, and live by ideas that are authentic to your existence!

Once I met a restaurant waiter, who in spite of his dislike and unhappiness with his work/job, worked like a perfect efficient machine. A perfect employee with well-behaved body language, good orator with well-rehearsed lines and expressions, good acting skills, but with unhappiness and sadness inside; with complete obedience and surrender. He clearly as set limitations to his human possibilities. He is a caged person. From a distance he appeared be happy because of their useful social function but is his life journey meaningful? Is he happy? Is his life well lived and happy? This is your opportunity to live meaningful life.

I suggest, learn a new language, why not French? Language is a tool for self-liberation as well as social revolution. Learning language is like learning to fly, it will heal your soul, it will give you wings for new journey. Read new books. I have found my religion; nothing is more important to me than a book. Library is my temple!

I hate victims who respect their executioners Never pardon the criminals, never cooperate with butchers that destroyed your life. Make them regret by making your life a well lived life, a live lived on your authentic choices. Your life is your responsibility. Develop your Individuality and live life with full freedom!

With my salutations

Today 21st of June, 2022, is birthday of Sartre. Please pass this message to any Nirbhaya you know.
Thank you, Nitin Mendiratta