

Safety of Women in India??? With Reference to Ambai's "Journey-17"

A. Jayanthi and DR.N.S. Vishnu Priya

Abstract--- *The main aim of this paper is to study the vulnerable life of women in Indian cities especially in the big city of Delhi. The two young women's life, in "Journey-17" published in the collection, A Night with a Black Spider written by C.S. Lakshmi is taken up for study. Most of the Ambai's works explore struggle, tradition, transition, women's body, sexuality, identity, rape, patriarchy, transformation of feelings and so on that affect women's life. This paper focusses on the in-depth conversation of two young women called Mythili and Neerja who meet in a train going to Delhi. Through the story Ambai has clearly depicted how a woman cannot help another woman in times of need due to her dependence on her family members. Through the story of Ambai tries to portray different examples of sexual abuse and molestation. The story indirectly cautions women against embarking on a journey of solitude. It indirectly emphasizes education and marriage as the means of empowerment of women. The story also highlights how women are looked down as mere objects of sex in the society and how there is no guarantee for the safety of both chastity and life of a woman in a big city like Delhi. The lives of both the women are good examples of male chauvinist society. This paper discusses the vulnerability of women both in the family and the society as portrayed by Ambai and tries to emphasise the importance of liberation of women from patriarchy, sexuality, rape, violence, marriage and the other tangles that ensnare them and their empowerment through education and job.*

Keywords--- *Vulnerable, Women, Patriarchy, Delhi, Rape, Violence.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Feminism derived from western countries confers equal rights and equal opportunities for women along with men in matters of adult suffrage, education, identity, political and social values in the society. Most of the Indian women writers focus on feminism in their works. Because feminism values women's inner feelings and thoughts in patriarchal society. Most of Ambai's short stories are from feminist perspective depicting the life of both traditional and modern women. "Journey-17" is the story of two women who face problems in society and who try to escape and liberate themselves from the clutches of male chauvinist society. The story also portrays the sexual abuse meted out to women in big cities like Delhi.

Ambai is the pen name of Indian Tamil writer C.S. Lakshmi whose most stories are translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom. The short story collection *A Night with a Black Spider* is translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan. Some of her other popular works are *In a Forest, a Deer* (2006), *Fish in a Dwindling Lake* (2012), *A Purple Sea* (1992), *A Night with a Black Spider* (2017), *Meeting on the Andheri Over Bridge* (2016). The protagonists of her stories are mostly women.

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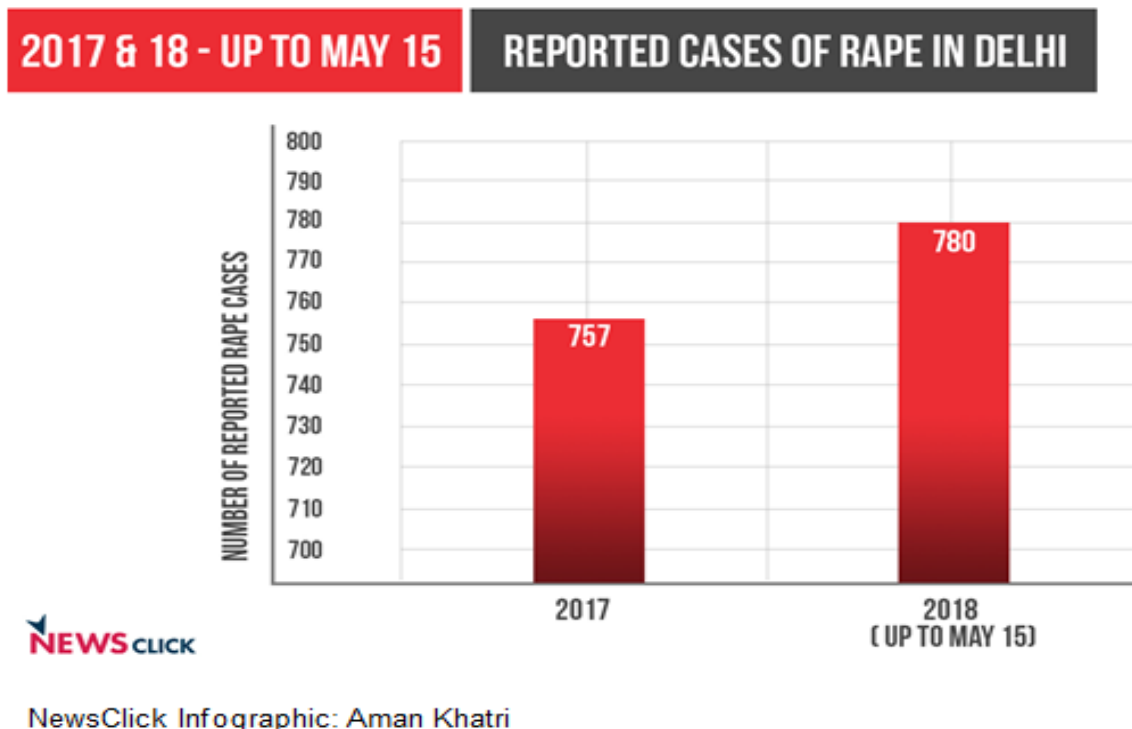
A Case Study of Delhi Rape

The word Rape is coined from the Latin term 'Rapio'. Which means to steal, Rape is the fourth common crime against women in India. Rich Singh from Alighra Muslim University has published a detailed case study of Nirbhaya Rape case.

The Conviction of rape in India:

| Rate% | Year |
|-------|------|
| 44.3 | 1973 |
| 37.7 | 1983 |
| 26.9 | 2009 |
| 26.6 | 2010 |
| 26.4 | 2011 |
| 24.2 | 2012 |
| 27.1 | 2013 |

According to the study a 23 year physiotherapist Nirbhaya was gang raped by 6 men out of whom one was a minor. This incident happened in Munirka in the suburbs of Delhi on 16th December 2012. But since it was a fatal assault she died 13 days later on 29th December. Statistics show that on an average 5 women are raped every day in Delhi. Apart from this in Pollatchi sexual Assault case, 55 women were lured by four men out of whom only one victim filed a case. Recently on 29th November, 2019 Priyanka Reddy a veterinary doctor was gang raped and murdered in Shadnagar of Hyderabad. With all these incidents coming to light, the question of women's safety in India is still a doubt. According to a government survey the victims of rape cases are increasing day by day all over India in each and every city.



These issues very well portrayed by Ambai “Journey- 17”. Mythili is the protagonist of the short story “Journey- 17” who tries to warn her co-traveller Neerja against the dangers of Delhi. The story begins in a train where Mythili meets Neerja in her journey to Delhi. She was going to Delhi for her higher studies. Something about Neerja cautioned Mythili. Hence she started her conversation in the usual style of small talk. Neerja’s parents had fixed up her marriage against her wishes with a bad looking short guy. They wanted to finalise the marriage for two reasons he runs his own supermarket and he doesn’t expect any dowry from the bride’s parents. Since Neerja couldn’t convince her parents against her marriage, she decided to run away from her home. In this trial, she boarded the train moving to Delhi.

“A women in harmony with her spirit is like a river flowing. She goes where she will without pretence and arrives at her destination prepared to be herself and only herself”. (Maya Angelou)

In the train Neeraja was questioned by her co-passenger Mythili why she didn’t bring luggage with her. This shows that women are questioned everywhere for whatever they do. Neerja can only show her resentment in answering Mythili’s questions by throwing a way the earthen tea cup with a loud noise. The shattering of the tea cup is also symbolic of the shattering of Neerja’s life.

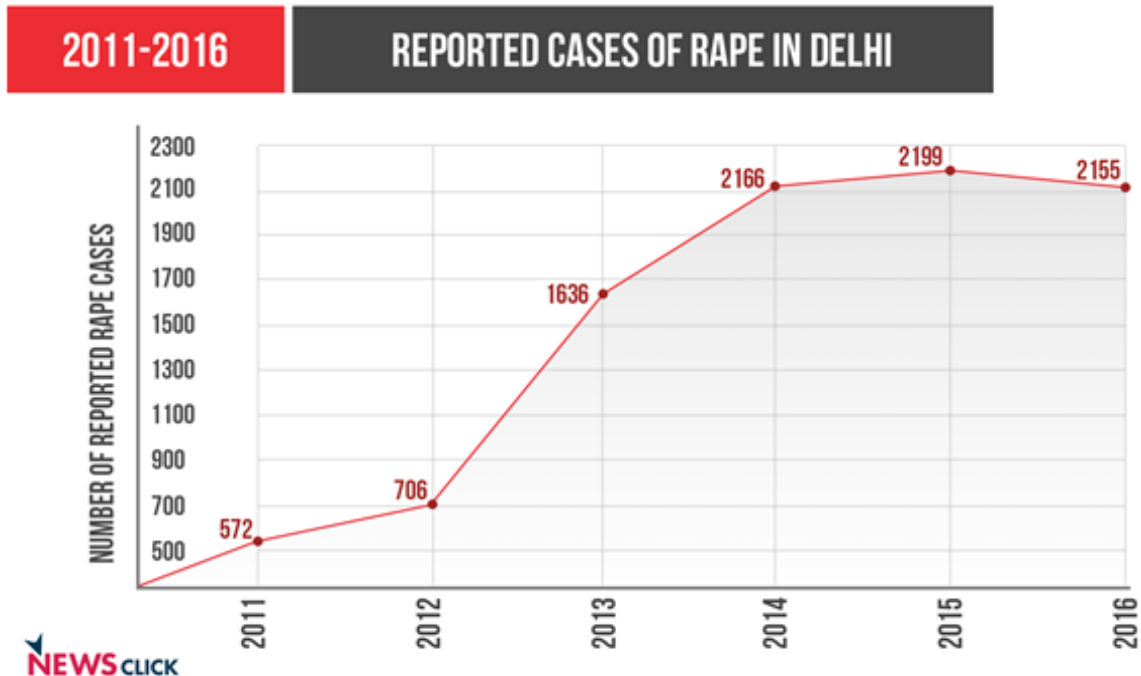
Mythili was taken aback when she heard that Neerja had run away from her home and going to Delhi to start her future. Though she too had dreamt of running away from home in the past, she dared not to do so. Her thinking of using education as an exit to run away from home shows her traditional mind-set and maturity in understanding that women are not safe outside the threshold of their homes.

“She knew very clearly by then that only two kinds of running away were possible. One way was to do it like her sister: get married and leave in the traditional way. The order way was to use higher education as an excuse, argue, offer explanations, make promises, and get away” (P-170).

Experience of Mythili in Delhi had taught her that Delhi was not a safe place for women to live alone, once when she was returning from outing with in her family friends at 10.30pm she was chased by two men. Though she manage to escape she lost her pinks scarf which was symbolic of losing a caurage.

“It was 10.30 at night. She could see two men walking in the opposite direction. She started running towards her hostel. By the time she reached the hostel, sweating in panic, and before the watchman could open the gate, one of those men had grabbed hold of her dupatta. She lost her pink scarf that day” (P-172).

In another instance when Mythili had gone for outing with her boyfriend, she was chased by two men they struggled a lot to get out of their clutches. These two incidents had taught Mythili a very valid lesson that women should not go out alone. There was another incident which scared Mythili to the core. One day when she was returning with her family friend, she witnessed a half-naked women who was molested, and killed and taken in to the forest. This is similar to the case of Priyanka Reddy who was gang raped and killed in the suburbs of Hyderabad. Mythili had noticed that there was no news of that women in the newspapers even after several days. This has been commonly going on in Indian society. Only a few of the rape cases are coming to light while many are going unnoticed. But the statistics of those that are reported itself is alarming.



NewsClick Infographic: Aman Khatri

Another Malayali Nurse was teased by a conductor and a bus driver of the private mini bus service which she used regularly. In order to save herself from them, she jumped off the running bus and died. All these incidents had scared Mythili that Delhi was not a safe place for single women. And she conveyed the same to Neerja.

“She knew the Delhi that did not offer any protection to women. That is what she told Neerja” (P-174).

Because of these incidents all the hostels in Delhi deny to take in a girl as a hosteller unless she was a student or a working women. After hearing all the threatening stories of Delhi. Neerja was caught between the devil and deep blue sea she cannot go home as she was sure that her parents would kill her for having run away from home. At the same time she cannot step into Delhi with assurance. In spite of her request to Mythili to help her, so Mythili expressed her helpless condition she had no other option than to step into the deadly city of Delhi. This condition of Neerja makes it very clear that women have no protection both at home and in the society.

II. CONCLUSION

Hence it can be conclude that though India is a land known for adoring women, the condition of women is not good. They don't have safety in the society. Many women endure all the sufferings mated out to them in silence fearing to get out of their homes. This pitiable condition of Indian women is beautifully captured in “Journey- 17”. Which warns women against the dangers in the outside world and cautions them “Think twice before you step out of the threshold of your home”. This pitiable condition of Indian women is beautifully captured in “Journey- 17” which warns women against the dangers in the outside world and cautions them “Think twice before you step out of the threshold of your home”. On the whole, “Though her writings, she takes up women's issues and questions the status of women and the challenges they face due to gender discrimination”. (Vishnu Priya 198).

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