



THE UNPLUG STORY OF ARUNA SHANBAG IN WORDS OF PINKY VIRANI

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Abstract:

Rape is an intricate phenomenon with many dimensions and is one of the controversial issues of the day. It is a kind of sexual assault experienced by women. One process may be by carrying out the physical force, extortion, misuse of authority or with someone who is incompetent of valid approval. Severe traumatization is the result of rape or any other sexual assault to the victims. After being raped, it is a common issue for the victim to experience acute stress disorder. It is not the case of a single woman of today but it has been a tradition of Indian society to harass women for centuries together. It is a cruel act of a male chauvinist against the vulnerable.

Keywords: Rape, Trauma, Passive Euthanasia, Isolation

Introduction:

The novel *Aruna's Story* (1998) by Pinki Virani is a true account of rape and its aftermath that comes across many injustices happened to Aruna the protagonist as well as at broader sense for the safety of women in India. Pinki Virani recreated and rewritten the real life tragedy of Aruna Shanbaug, a young lady nurse of King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEM). This is on whose real story, Virani has written a novel, the woman who is being forced to live her life stripped of basic dignity. The work *Aruna's Story*, is more a veracity than a mere literary work. The novel tries to show the dynamics and perceptions of that time as also all the minds of the major protagonists.

Aruna's Story is a true account of a twenty four years young lady nurse who came from Haldipur, Karnataka, working in KEM, Mumbai. On finding that she was menstruated instead rape, she was sodomized brutally, strangled with dog chains and yanked back and left for death in the hospital premises itself by a sweeper called Sohanlal of the very same hospital for complaining against him for neglecting his duties on November 27th of 1973. The next day by the time the cleaner found her, she was lying on the floor with blood all over her in an unconscious state.

Aruna Shanbaug is an active fair beautiful modern young woman of seventies. Though she had born and brought up in a small village of Karnataka, Haldipur, she is not affected by the meek and narrow norms prescribed by society for the women. She is against of the notion that a woman should confine herself to the four walls and look after her family members throughout her life by marrying a person. Despite her mother's thought to marry her, Aruna is been interested in studies and as well as to earn on her own to have a respected life. She applies and attends exams besides her family member's unresponsiveness and earns a job in the King Edward Memorial hospital (KEM) maintained by Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) as a nurse. She could not satisfy with the job alone; she even plans to fly to England to pursue further studies.



She engages herself with a fellow doctor Sundeep Sardesai of the same hospital and they supposed to get marry just within a week of this brutal incident. She is very bold and courageous and though naughty even responsible, which made her to warn Sohanlal Bartha Walmiki for stealing mutton and milk meant for innocent dogs out of concern.

The sweeper Sohanlal Bartha Walmiki of KEM hospital is extremely malicious person and he is also in charge of dogs that brought to hospital for experiments. He does not talk much, does not even maintain good relation with anyone in the hospital. Sister Aruna Shanbaug hates arrogant behaviour of Sohanlal. She could not even bear his looks that often filled with superciliousness. He often steals dog's food and he does not bother the hunger of the dogs though they howl like anything for food. Aruna could not bear this at all and warns him many times regarding this. Sometime he requests her for not to inform this to higher authorities. But one day Aruna decides to give a written complaint against him after listening a long hunger cries of the innocent dogs and warns him again. Just a simple warning insulted him a lot and made him to involve himself into such a brutal attack on Aruna Shanbaug, which taken away the complete life of a woman.

It is obvious that Sohanlal has a nothing to do with Aruna except rage that filled his heart to attack her brutally that little fare woman agony during the harassment, could not bother him at all. He wants her to be under him, he would be comfort by watching fear in her eyes. Rape is an instrument of male domination, and an embodiment to induce fear in women and reinforce their inferiority to men through the means of brutality. Nowhere no one finds that he is sexually attracted towards her, instead one recognises that he perceives sexual molestation is the biggest punishment to her and to women as a whole.

Rape is a conscious and intentional male chauvinistic act of power and patriarchy. It is a unique crime which impacts both physically and psychologically. The tremendous amount of energy and strength with which the rape victim use to fight for the survival during the sexual violence results in a shock, dissociation and many other involuntary reactions. It leads to traumatising and makes one a living dead. This shock lives on like this for sometime in mind, body and spirit as a whole in many other ways. This permeates the daily life of survivors as a kind of depression, which makes their lives a burden for themselves as in the case of Aruna Shanbaugh.

Aruna is one of the victims of male chauvinism. The attack on Aruna is so brutal that left her with almost death. The dog chain he uses to clutch Aruna while assaulting her, it grips so tight, the asphyxiation discontinues the oxygen supply to her brain that allows her brain dead within a fraction of seconds.

She has fallen on her knees and the back of her hands. The dog chain is around her neck, he tightens it. She chokes, he twists the chain, she gags, fluids flow from her mouth and nose, her head lolls. He pushes crumple fabric, pulls down her panties, she is menstruating... he holds the ends of the chain in one hand, keeps up the pressure... feels for her other opening. (7)

As a result, Aruna has become cortically blind her eyes can see but her brain could not record the images. She is also identified with cervical cord injury and brain stem contusion injury. She cannot talk, emote, cannot use her limbs or direct her muscles He leaves her on the bare floor, the poor Aruna has been lay on the in a pool of blood till morning in an unconscious



state. The assessment of Aruna, when they found her the next morning, was done with what is called the finger test into vagina to ensure virginity.

She is completely bed ridden. The medical treatment and police investigation are moving simultaneously as brilliantly as they can. The doctors are involved themselves wholly as it is the case that happened in the hospital itself. They are not ready to take any charge for their inaction. Though there is quick improvement in the condition of Aruna in the initial stages, it stops abruptly after six months. By that time she has to feed by someone, she could not respond through looks or speech or move. She shouts weeps and laughs, sometimes all together at once. But only for one thing she is able to respond is the sound. It is interesting to see that sometimes she used to listen carefully if some nurses' gossip of someone among themselves while they treating Aruna, though she often irritates to loud noises. It seems she soothes herself with the nice melodious music. The state that left her finally is half-life, half-death. Her condition cannot be regenerated ever. Just a simple notion that women are no where superior to men made her to be an eternal victim of his sadistic act.

It has been four years since the Aruna's pitiable incident. In between these four years, there appeared many issues regarding Aruna's stay in the hospital. The hospital staff approached her family members and relatives to take her to their home, when it is confirmed that she cannot be recovered anymore. But Aruna's family does not seem to have that much familial bondage among the family members. She is left by them long ago. Right from the beginning since she is the youngest of all her siblings, they get marry by the time she came to know them. It appears that the little affection what they have vanished after she met with this incident. This might have led them to leave her for her fate in the hospital even after the promise for compensation and payment of monthly salary with additional bonus. Besides that the societal taboo about the rape, poor financial conditions can also be the reasons behind their action.

The Bhoiwada police had to put a sub-inspector's name in record as complainant. There can be reason for every one's action, they might have been frightened about the circumstances arise with the case that hampers their personal lives, but in one way it is dehumanization of a person as well. The social stigma attached to the rape, would not have been allowed them to come up with the truth.

They are saying it happened in the hospital so KEM must take all responsibility. The hospital is saying it is run by the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) so permission will have to be got from the municipal commissioner which will take time. Basically nobody wants to come to court or get involved even though it is such a serious case. (29)

Although there was no particular complainant officially, Sohanlal was arrested on the 29th Nov of the same year of the brutal incident. The case was filed as "attack on nurse with intention to rob" (39) because no one comes forward to file a complaint "not one doctor, nurse or relative- to add attempt to rape or outraging of modesty" (39). He has been arrested for attempting murder and robs.

Since she was raped in an unusual way (Sodomized), Even the court did not consider her case as sexually abused (Rape) though it is so brutal than any, where it has definite definition to what rape is exactly. The saddest part of Aruna's story reveals the ambiguity that lays between her never ending punishments for the mistake she undone and six years of retribution to the perpetrator for robbery for stealing her gold chain and attempting murder but not for sodomize or for raping her in brutal way. It is said that the accused was released a



year earlier for his good behavior during his punishment. It is because no one was ready to give awritten complaint against the crime, though knowing that she was sodomized at that time. No wonder it is, the perpetrator was punished very less because in any ways Indian government is not ready to consider sodomy or any other sexual assault as severe as rape and deserves less punishment. Medical reports showed that Aruna's hymen was intact; therefore it does not need to be considered as rape.

The real life tragedy of Aruna Shanbaug who is deprived of her 'Live with Dignity' made Pinki Virani to go for Passive Euthanasia for Aruna Shanbaug. Though Virani had written a book based on the real story, the content has reached the people from beyond a mere literary genre. She has chosen this genre to reach more people, where she can deal this in more appropriate sense as an activist than a writer. She rewrote the reality, which was forgotten long ago in one of the rooms of the KEM along with the semi comatosed condition of Aruna, the protagonist of her major work *ArunaStory*.

As the petition filed by Pinki Virani on behalf of Aruna shanbaug as her next friend, to allow Passive Euthanasia for Aruna as she is forced to live her life stripped of basic dignity. She has been fighting a valiant battle for Aruna's right to live with dignity; continued existence of Aruna is in violation of her right to live with dignity. On March 7th 2011, following this petition the supreme court had announced an outstanding law allowing Passive Euthanasia for patients who decide to leave their life support, but unfortunately it was not in favour Aruna Shanbaug, since KEM, her custodian did not allow for it. But can anyone understand the mental agony of her half alive healthy brain? Can she think or remember? If it is so what she wants exactly? Is she happy with her situation now? If it is not so, is she really need to stay in the hospital as a dead person? In fact no one in this world expects to be a burden to others, it humiliates them a lot, which also mentioned by one of the nurses of the hospital long ago,

Aruna Shanbaug is in her sixties now, has been paralyzed and considered brain dead, she is in a persistent vegetative state and is virtually a dead person. Brain stem contusion injuries with associated cervical cord injury have reduced her to almost a vegetable. Brain cells do not even regenerate. She is not able to talk, hear, and see anything, totally devoid of any element of human life. She is in a pitiable condition, her bones are fragile, feather weight, and teeth are putrefied that hurts her severely. Her skin is just stretched all over her skeleton, her wrists are twisted inward and her brittle bones can easily fracture even beneath her lighter body weight. Aruna is fed mashed food by the nurses forcefully but the only thing is she can is that she can sense the touch and can feel which became problem she faces when an unfamiliar person touches her, she shouts and trembles. She utterly tossed between neither life nor death.

The supreme court on march 9 2018 ruled that individuals had a right to die with dignity, allowing Aruna passive euthanasia, noted that a person must be given the right to die with dignity as Aruna cannot be allowed to continue her suffering in a comatose state .

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