

## DAUGHTERS OF MOTHER INDIA – A RED-LETTER TRAMP FOR WOMEN

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### **Abstract**

*Documentaries surround real people and tell stories about what happens in the real world. A daughter is a gift of love. Rape is that unique crime where the victim lives in shame, often not daring to seek justice. Daughters of Mother India is an incredible documentary by Indian filmmaker Vibha Bakshi's which focuses on the civil unease and calls for action in the aftermath of the Delhi gang rape. This documentary film offered a solution, where Bakshi's greatest hope for a change lies. This documentary won National Film Award for Best Film on Social Issues at the 62nd National Film Award from the President of India, Pranab Mukherjee.*

*Every Indian knows what happened that night, but the documentary Daughters of Mother India is about what happened after the incident - when the country raised its voice for justice and change. The idea of the documentary was not to sensationalise but to sensitise the audience on the subject. Key words: India, rape, documentaries, gang-rape, women, crime, rape cases, law.*

### **Introduction**

Crimes against women and regressive mindsets are systematic problems. The government must act wisely now or perish. A daughter is a gift of love. India, however, seems to have little love left for her daughters. According to the statistics, about 60 women are raped in India every day. In India, a woman is raped every 22 minutes. In 2011, Delhi saw 572 rape cases. Madhya Pradesh topped the list with 3406 incidents. These figures could be an understatement, as many rapes hadn't reported, for reasons ranging from the police refusing to register a complain to powerful men intimidating victims and shame on the victim's part. Rape is that unique crime where the victim lives in humiliation, often not daring to seek justice.

Every rape is brutal. Every single rape is violent. Each one is horrifying. The Delhi gang rape is a heinous and unpardonable crime and tragedy. On December 16, 2012, a paramedical student was gang-raped in Delhi on a moving bus by six men in the national capital, shocked the nation for the unadulterated brutality and torture inflicted on the unfortunate girl. The plight of the 23-year-old girl who was gang-raped and brutally assaulted on a moving bus and left on the road for two hours hurts me as a human being and shames me as an Indian.

### **Documenting Narratives**

The girl, Jyoti Singh Pandey, a physiotherapy intern with her male friend, went for a movie at a plush south Delhi mall. Heading home around eight at night,

they took an auto to a nearby locality and waited for a bus to take them where the girl lived in west Delhi. Then they boarded a private bus with a little suspicious of the nightmare. The men on the bus passed obscene comments, to which the girl's friend objected. And that became the basis for a 40-minute ordeal in which the girl had been barbarically raped, and her friend had been beaten up. There were six men, including the driver. A rusted iron rod had been inserted inside her so mercilessly that it tore up her internal organs. After the incident, the young couples were thrown out of the bus in a bloodied and naked condition.

When she was brought to the hospital, the doctors were stunned at the extent of her brutalisation. The hard-hearted and courageous crime outraged the world. Indians took this issue to the streets to protest against systemic violence against women. After this case, for the next 30 days, men and women demonstrated and called for gender equality and powerful laws for rape across India. They were brutally beaten and had been arrested by the police, but the protestors continued and raised their voice against rape and the culture of impunity. This protest led to the reforming of anti-rape laws in India by the Justice Verma Committee. After eleven days of the incident, she had been transferred to a hospital in Singapore for emergency treatment, but due to her terrible injuries, after twelve days, she died. Her gentiles had been destroyed; her stomach hollowed out and had been infected by septicemia. And at last, on December 28, 2012, she died of multiple organ failure. The incident extensively went across the world. Her death has made the agitators even more determined to get justice for all rape victims through more stringent laws. The name of the victim hadn't published since it was against the law. And the girl was named and widely known as 'Nirbhaya', meaning "fearless". This name 'Nirbhaya' manifest the indomitable spirit of the girl who did not mentally give in to her injuries as she wanted to live her life and to see the culprits behind bars.

The loud cry for justice for the rape victim did not die down a week after her body had been brought back from Singapore. The maximum punishment for rape is a life sentence. Within 24 hours of the crime, police have found some of the suspects. From the CCTV footage, the bus has been found out. From there, they found its driver, Ram Singh. With the help of the male victim and the mobile stolen from the two victims made the police sketch out them effortlessly. Six men had been arrested, which include the driver, Ram Singh, his brother Mukesh Singh, a fruit seller Pawan Gupta, an assistant gym instructor Vinay Sharma, Akshay Thakur, who had come to Delhi seeking employment and the seventeen-year-old juvenile.

On January 3, 2013, three days after the death of the victim, police filed charges against the five men for rape, murder, kidnapping, destruction of evidence, and the attempted murder of the woman's male companion. The name of the juvenile defendant is Mohammad Afroz, and according to some reports, he is also

known as Raju. The juvenile was declared as 17 years and six months old by the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) on the crime day. Thus, the minor had been transferred to a juvenile court. Under the Juvenile Justice Act, the juvenile was given the maximum sentence of three years imprisonment on 31 August 2015. On 20 December 2015 he was released. The other four adult defendants were found guilty of rape, murder, unnatural offences and destruction of evidence on 10 September 2013. The fifth one hanged himself when he was in police custody.

*Daughters of Mother India*, a 45-minute Indian documentary film, is a work based on the aftermath of the 2012 Delhi gang rape directed by Vibha Bakshi a National Award had been published in 2014. This documentary won National Film Award for Best Film on Social Issues at the 62nd National Film Award from the President of India, Pranab Mukherjee. This award had been awarded for turning the spotlight on the burning issue of rape and gender violence in the country. According to Global Creative Index, 2017, her film *Daughters of Mother India* was the most Awarded Social PR campaign globally.

The film has become an aid for social change. It has had an unprecedented impact transforming attitudes on women's rights in India. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis felicitated Vibha for creating the women safety campaign with the police. Her documentary film had been screened as a gender-sensitization and training tool for over 150,000 members of the Indian Police Force. It had also been incorporated into the curriculum of 200 schools. This documentary film, *Daughters of Mother India*, portraiture the changes that took place in Delhi as well as the changes made by the Delhi police and the Delhi government. It questions how Indian society is changing after the 2012 events.

After the horrific rape-murder, the Delhi police and the government have brought so many changes in-laws as well as in the protection of women. Through this documentary, the director is taxying to question the Indian society about the impact created by the incident in December 2012. From the documentary, we can see that so many anti-rape laws had been passed, and radical changes had been made within the police force and the judiciary. At the same time, it changed the attitudes on women's rights in India. The police were one of the most crucial components of the storyline. At the time of shooting for the first time in the history of the Delhi Police, cameras were allowed inside the Delhi Police control and command room. The command centre of the Delhi police receives close to 25000 calls in a day, and police officers of various cadres proclaim that more and more women are registering complaints every day.

At the beginning of the film, recreation of Jyoti's assail in December 2012, and the dark fuzzy shots inside a bus and the Delhi highways had been narrated. Then the waves of protests by the students and other people in Delhi and that shook the

country the day after the rape had been shown. And it starts with interviewing Ms Suman Nalwa, the Head of Delhi Police Unit for Women and Children, continuing with Dr Dipankar Gupta, a Sociologist, then a social analyst, Dr Syed Mubin Zehra. Ms Indira Jaising, the Additional Solicitor General Supreme Court, was one among others who talked in favour of the victim.

The interview was followed by Mr Neeraj Kumar, the Delhi Commissioner of Police, Mr Deepak Mishra, the Delhi Commissioner of Police Law and Order, Late Justice Leila Seth, the Member of the Anti Rape Recommendation Committee, Dr Kiran Bedi, retired IPS officer and an Activist, Dr Abha Sahgal, the Principal of Sanskriti School, and Mr Arvind Gaur, an Activist and Founder of Asmita Theatre Group. In the documentary film, the local judges, police officers, teachers, activists and even street performers are introduced before us who are fighting against gender violence and simultaneously showing the decisive role each Indian must play to bring actual changes in India.

This documentary, *Daughters of Mother India*, doesn't get stuck on the Delhi gang-rape; instead, it highlights the case of Gudiya, a young child who had been brutally raped by two men and her interviews with NGO workers who help survivors of sexual abuse. Bakshi, through this documentary, highlights child sexual abuse- a topic that hadn't widely discussed. She also interviews Gudiya's parents. Through this documentary we can depict the situation and the condition of the victim at the time when she had been hospitalised. Then it moves towards the Delhi police control room, where we can find the changes that were brought by the police after this incident. The police in the control room helped a lot in bringing out this documentary by sharing the details and the measures they took to protect women. From the interview, it is clear that after December 2012, police can't sit ideal now, and they have to do something. And there was no hesitation in relieving the other cases that had been reporting to the police.

The documentary shows how to educate our coming generation and make them aware of their body and about the good touch and bad touch. And the young girls have been given self protection workshop to make them courageous to protect themselves and to report and even to prevent boys from being taught more responsible in India. According to Dr Kiran Bedi, retired IPS officer and an Activist, there is a formula to protect women, and it is a six 'P' formula which stands for People, Police, Prosecution, Politicians, Prisons, and the Press. It is known as the women's security wheel. And all these 'P' should work together. This documentary has got so much appreciation for bringing out the changes made by the Delhi Police and showing what importance had been given to each woman.

*Daughters of Mother India* is about hope, says Vibha Bakshi. When everyone is talking about the increase in crime against women, filmmaker Vibha Bakshi says her

documentary *Daughters of Mother India* sensitises the issue. According to Vibha Bakshi, rape is a global issue and not just India's problem. The documentary *Daughters of Mother India* took one year in the making, and for Bakshi, the reason she decided to take up the project was the movement that flourished after the incident.

The documentary focused on the people who are working to bring in the change and not to horror. The documentary *Daughters of Mother India* had been screened on various national and international platforms and also telecasted by the Viacom 18 network on its several channel. The network translated the documentary into five more languages to increase the viewership. Indian journalist Bakshi recounts the horrific details of the attack before interviewing the activists, educators, students, Delhi police and people on the street to gauge the impact of the outraged protests across India that ensued Nirbhaya's death.

Three months later, anti-rape law recommendations that had been pending for years finally passed: fast-track courts had been set up to rapidly prosecute cases of sexual violence and police who failed to record complaints of gender-based crimes were held criminally responsible. Sociologist Dipankar Gupta offers insightful background commentary on deep-rooted cultural attitudes towards women, virginity and rape in Indian society. Bakshi also reports on efforts to educate school children about 'good touch, bad touch', and sensitise police forces to gender issues. She visits a Delhi street theatre troupe whose performances raises alertness of sexual violence.

This documentary is a quest for searching for answers to so many questions. In the documentary *Daughters of Mother India*, Bakshi gives us uncensored access into the Delhi Police control room, where all emergency calls has been taken, and we learn that women police officers are now taking calls, especially from victims of rape, sexual assault and domestic violence because of the wake of the Nirbhaya tragedy. Another dominant thing to be marked in the documentary is the performance of the Asmita Theatre Group. The actress screams from the top of her lungs at a public performance in a busy Delhi market that "Change cannot happen in a day, when will Delhi no longer be referred to as the Rape Capital of the World? That is yet to be determined". *Daughters of Mother India* has opened many people's eyes and which now glisten with hope. Bakshi realised that the issue was not those vs us, cops vs families or us like this or that. And she became non - judgmental. She vehemently uploads the idea that it is a 'fight in which we all are responsible and that it is up to everyone in the society 'to harbour change'. Essentially, Bakshi's film is hopeful. It asks questions and, through its narrative, tries to answer some of the questions, but what it does is open a dialogue that is much needed. Bakshi was sure that she did not want people to associate disgust or disillusionment with this documentary film. She wanted it to have a hopeful tone. She adds that there are activities to prevent these crimes rather than give in to a feeling of helplessness.

Involving the police in the documentary offered a solution, where Bakshi's greatest hope for a change lies. When Bakshi started the film, she was transparent that she would make this a responsible film. Bakshi explained that "Once you're in with the police, a lot happens. But she was fused that if she lit the country on fire, it would not help. So that woman went with a lucid lens. She went with the thought that the police are also human beings. It is where she started from". Another moving part of the film is the encapsulating of the activism that took over in those months since the incident. In particular, Bakshi shadows the Asmita Theatre Group, a group of street theatre artists led by Arvind Gaur, who are using their platform of performing skits in open, public areas as a means of activism. In showing this aspect of the response to the gang-rape, Bakshi instils hope in the viewer that things can change, but also infuses the vigour and effort of young activists, both men and women, who are dedicated to changing the mindset of gender inequality, even if it's one person at a time.

Instead of highlighting the incident that sparked the protests, Bakshi instead focuses on how India's own came out and spoke out, thus creating real change. This documentary is a vision of the director of an India that will treat women better, and in some ways, it is on the track doing that, over spread the entire film. Throughout, Bakshi offers varying perspectives about solutions and begins dialogues with everyone from sociologists to lawyers to activists about what has changed and still had to be done.

## Conclusion

Every community has a reality in which it lives. Sometimes in the society, the dreams of a better reality exist. The future of any community had been read in these dreams. Imaginations lead to plans, and it is then that conflict develops between the special interest groups, such as land developers and citizens - most often represented by neighbourhood organisations. Pointing through the frenzy, Vibha Bakshi's *Daughters of Mother India* tells us what we are and can become. The film captures the hysteria that engulfed the city after December 16 but quietly punctured it by moving on to Gudiya's case, which was no less inhuman. But before you become numb, she provides voices that make us believe that all is not lost. A powerful discussion is still possible. Nothing is going to change overnight, but through the imperfections we live with, we have to find our way. And towards the end, when an ordinary young man says this society can't become free till its women are free. We clung on to hope and in any fight, the day you lose hope, you lose the struggle. This way, there will be a multiplication of positive change. The film provides no solutions. It just leaves the audience grappling with realities. It has the voice and echoes of the streets. Gender violence is an extreme manifestation of how a person feels at a particular time, but vices are deep-rooted.

The documentary *Daughters of Mother India* had been included in police gender sensitisation training across the country. The people featured in the film ranging from Supreme Court Justice to educators to a sociologist to perhaps most significantly, the Delhi police. The documentary offers a humanised portrayal of the Delhi police force. The conspiracy of silence had been broken through in the documentary *Daughters of Mother India*. Every Indian knows what happened that night, but the documentary Daughters of Mother India is about what happened after the incident - when the country raised its voice for justice and change. The idea of the documentary was not to sensationalise but to sensitise the audience on the subject. One undergoes through emotional turmoil while dealing with the rape survivor and her family.

The only long-term solution to bringing down instances of rape in India is to change our attitudes to women and sensitise people to human sexual behaviour and gender issues through education. As Indians, we need to know about the actual incident that took place and, in the same way, what we can do to prevent these crimes rather than give in to feelings of helplessness. To conclude, the documentary presents the polyphony of an emerging India – not an exemplary India – but one earnestly trying to be an ideal India.

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