



Manavi's Statement Regarding "India's Daughter"

The storm that has been raised in the wake of India Government's banning of BBC's Storyville series documentary, "India's Daughter," has garnered more viewers than the film could have otherwise hoped. Written and directed by Leslee Udwin, the film focuses on the now (in)famous gang-rape and murder of "Nirbhaya" or Jyoti Singh in December 2012. Like any other documentary made on such horrific incidents, the film has its shortcomings and strengths. However, all informed critique of the film has become lost in the opposing cacophony raised by its supporters and detractors. At the same time, India Government's repressive decision to ban the film has many serious critics of the film come out to support its right to be screened.

'India's Daughter,' like many documentaries made on India's 'legendary' patriarchy and resultant gender based violence, is reductionist and individualistic. In this sense, it is most similar to Ross Kaufman and Zana Briski's 2004 documentary, 'Born into Brothels.' Both films virtually invisibilize the many years of untiring work by activists on ground to end violence against girls and women. Neither do these films underscore the misogyny embedded in the country's institutions and structures. While 'India's Daughter' showcases the vile comments of the convicted rapist Mukesh Singh and his defense lawyers, it does not take time to analyze what made the working class parents of Jyoti so immensely supportive of their nontraditional daughter. The film's portrayal of the nation as a nest of rampant misogyny and rape culture ignores the fact that most nations across the world are exactly that and India, like all those cultures, tolerates deep contradictions in this area. A case in point is Jyoti's parents, who are part of the same Indian culture. India's Daughter falls short of taking an important step to understand this contradiction.

As an organization working to end all forms of violence against girls and women, although Manavi criticizes India's Daughter for all its inadequacies, it also recognizes that the film has opened up opportunities for raising conversations on sexual violence in the community. However, we want to emphasize that sexual violence is committed not only by strangers on a bus or on the streets, but by spouses, acquaintances, and family members in the home. According to National Crime Records Bureau of India, of the 38,144 rape cases pending investigation in 2012, only 1.8 percent were committed by people unknown to the victims,[1] attesting to the fact that the overwhelming majority of sexual assaults on women and girls are perpetrated by men they know and trust – victims' acquaintances and relatives. These numbers make up only the tip of the iceberg of sexual abuse.

While we recognize that no film can singlehandedly challenge and dismantle the institutions, cultures, and individual beliefs that nourish sexual violence, we hope that India's Daughter will encourage communities to examine sexual as well as all forms of violence against girls and women more openly. At the same time, we are cognizant that real change will come only with consistent activism and all of our concerted work to end violence against women.

[1] Shakil, Albeena. "Rape and Honour Crimes: The NCRB Report 2012." *Economic & Political Weekly XLVIII*, August 3, 2013. Available at: <http://www.epw.in/web-exclusives/rape-and-honour-crimes-ncrb-report-2012.html>