

Sarah Everard & *Nirbhaya*: Comparisons and Commonalities

Dr Rituparna Bhattacharyya[†]

Abstract

This brief communication in the form of the editorial attempts to draw out the parallels between two grisly incidents in two parts of the world. The vertiginous ferocity of the incidents jostled outrage across the nations— Sarah Everard's kidnap and murder on 03 March 2021 and barbarity on *Nirbhaya* through gang-rape and subsequent murder in December 2012. Both the cases unveil an underlying culture of misogyny. The question remains how do we tackle misogyny. Perhaps, deployment of Ubuntu through community engagement is a way forward to magnify respect for women via-à-vis respect for humanity.

Keywords: Sarah Everard; *Nirbhaya*; Kidnap; Gang-rape; Murder; Misogyny; Ubuntu; United Kingdom; India

[†]Editor-in-Chief (joint), Space and Culture, India & Research Consultant, Email: rituparna.bhattacharyya@accb.org.uk
© 2021 Bhattacharyya. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Introduction

The horrific case of Sarah Everard has unleashed a wave of feeling about women not feeling safe at night (Prime Minister, UK, Mr Boris Johnson).¹

Many women have shared their stories and concerns online since Sarah's disappearance last week. Every woman should feel safe to walk on our streets without fear of harassment or violence (Home Secretary, UK, Priti Patel).²

If you're a woman or a girl, your experiences of our city, in any public space, whether it's in the workplace, on the streets, on public transport is very different to if you are a man or a boy....And it's really important that people like me in positions of power and influence understand that and take steps to address that (London Mayor, Mr Sadiq Khan) (Dalton, 2021).

These are some of the powerful statements made by leaders in positions of power in the wake of the kidnap and murder of Sarah Everard, the 33-year-old marketing executive, on 03 March 2021 when she was returning from a friend's house on Leathwaite Road, Clapham, at 9 pm to her Brixton home, which is an approximately 50-minute walk (Ng et al., 2021). This gruesome incident can be compared to the

heinous gang-rape of *Nirbhaya* in a moving bus by six-men on 12 December 2012 (Bhattacharyya, 2015; 2016) when she was returning home with her boyfriend at 9 pm after watching the film *Life of Pi* in Saket, South Delhi and boarded an off-duty chartered bus at Munirka for Dwarka (Hollingsworth et al., 2020). The bestiality of these incidents undoubtedly shook resentment among the mass (Bhattacharyya, 2015; 2016), leaving a horrid impression on the countries' leadership strategies (Pulla, 2020). Closer scrutiny of both cases unearths a more profound culture of misogyny, which is indeed pervasive across nations.

The ongoing COVID-19 has witnessed an overall escalation of violence against women. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women labelled this violence against women and girls as the shadow pandemic.³ This editorial is an attempt to make a comparison between the two cases to draw parallels of the same. One might question, are we trying to compare apples with oranges? Not at all. Misogyny in the forms of androcentrism, patriarchal structure, hostility, male privilege, discrimination against sex, social exclusion is a universal phenomenon, which often triggers all forms of violence against women and girls (Lorraine, 2000). The following section displays the comparison between the two cases.

¹ Government moves to provide reassurance to women and girls: 15 March 2021 (2021, 15 March). *Press Release, Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-moves-to-provide-reassurance-to-women-and-girls-15-march-2021>

² Priti Patel@pritipatel·Mar 11 A statement on the Sarah Everard investigation. *Twitter*. <https://twitter.com/pritipatel/status/1369958730209632259>

³ Violence against women and girls: the shadow pandemic. Statement by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women (2020, 6 April). UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

Comparison between Sarah Everard's and *Nirbhaya's* case

Close parallels between the two incidents are painted in the following Table 1.

| Sarah Everard case | <i>Nirbhaya</i> case |
|--|---|
| Kidnapped and probably murdered on the same day, that is on 03 March 2021 | On 16 December 2012, <i>Nirbhaya</i> was brutally gang-raped by six men on a moving bus leaving her in a vegetative state. Her boyfriend was physically assaulted too. <i>Nirbhaya</i> later died in a Singapore hospital on 29 December 2012. |
| Wayne Couzens, a serving Police Officer at Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection unit, Metropolitan Police, UK has been arrested, charged with kidnapping and murder. | Six convicted men included a bus driver—Ram Singh and his associates— Vinay Sharma (fitness trainer and a gym assistant), Akshay Thakur (helper of the bus), Mukesh Singh (brother of Ram Singh who worked as an occasional driver and bus cleaner), Pawan Gupta (a fruit-seller) and a juvenile (cleaner of the bus). |
| Wayne Couzens, a highly educated man whose responsibility was to guard the Parliamentary estate (including Downing Street, Westminster Palace and embassies located in London). | All the six men were mired in multi-dimensional poverty (with little or no education, low income, the abysmal standard of living in shanties in the Ravi Dass slum). |
| Wayne Couzens, himself a keeper of law and a citizen of the world's fifth largest economy, was expected to be highly gender-sensitive. | From the six men's profiles, it is not hard to fathom that they would be ignorant and insensitive to gender issues. |
| On 16 March 2021, PC Wayne Couzens appeared at the Old Bailey via a video link from Belmarsh prison. His trial begins in October 2021. | Ram Singh committed suicide in Tihar jail on 11 March 2013. The Juvenile Justice Board convicted the juvenile keeping him in a remand home for a maximum term of three years and released him on 18 December 2015. The rest four convicts— Akshay Kumar Singh, Pawan Gupta, Vinay Sharma and Mukesh Singh faced execution at Tihar jail almost a year ago, that is, Friday, the 20 March 2020. |
| Sources: BBC News (2020a; 2020b); Dodd (2021); Hollingsworth et al. (2020); Ellis-Petersen (2020); Ng et al. (2021) | |

In the aftermath of the Sarah Everard incident, the UK Government has decided to augment women and girls' safety in public and private

spaces by heightening stringency through amendments of the existing legislations— Police Crime and Sentencing Bill^{4,5} and Domestic Abuse

⁴ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-01/0268/200268.pdf>

⁵ However, on 21 March 2021, violent protests erupted in the Bristol city of the UK for bestowing more powers to

Bill.⁶ The Government has doubled the ‘Safer Street Fund’ to about £45 million to increase street lighting, CCTVs (including alleyways, parks, routes from nightclubs, bars, and restaurants) to reclaim street confidence. Besides, the Government aims to roll out Project Vigilant across the country to amplify police patrolling (both in uniformed and civil outfits) to identify suspicious and predatory offenders.⁷ Similarly, post *Nirbhaya* incident, the Government of India has amended and enacted legislations—Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013;⁸ and Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015,^{9,10} The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019.¹¹ Yet, violence against women and girls continues to be unbridled— Nagaon, Kathua, Jharkhand, Guntur, and Hathras (Apparasu, 2018; Bhattacharyya and Prasad, 2020; Eltagouri, 2018).^{12,13} In the UK too, violence against women and girls and hate-crime is widespread.

As a result of the rampant rise of violence against women and girls, in October 2020, a 14-year-old led a group of 100 girls and applied for permission to seek licences at Rajkot Collector’s office, Gujarat, to use firearms as a measure of self-defence when out in public.¹⁴ In 1990, Umoja Uaso— an all-female matriarchal village was established in northern Kenya under Rebecca Lolosoli’s leadership, a Samburu woman herself, and 15 female victims of rape (perpetrated by local British soldiers) where men are literally banned. This village is located near

Archers Post’s town in Samburu County, 240 mi (380 km) from Kenya’s capital, Nairobi (Bindel, 2015; Maitra, 2020). This village serves as a haven for all female victims of Samburu who have survived violence, including forced marriage, domestic violence and female genital mutilations (Bindel, 2015; Maitra, 2020). As of 2015, there were 47 women and 200 children in the village (Bindel, 2015; Maitra, 2020). Arguably, these are some of the collateral consequences of misogyny promoting misandry. The question that emerges is how do we champion for structural change to tackle misogyny and achieve egalitarianism? Is it even possible? Perhaps, the philosophy of Ubuntu has the answer.

Ubuntu

On 18 March 2021, World Social Work Day at the United Nations was celebrated using the concept of Ubuntu, meaning “I am because we are”, or “humanity towards others” marking that the notion is embedded in humanity (Desmond, 2013). The word Ubuntu originates in the Zulu and Xhosa languages rooted in Afrocentric philosophy. According to Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are

the police force (for details, please see, Cascian, 2021; Mullany, 2021).

⁶ Domestic Abuse Bill.

<https://bills.parliament.uk/Publications/40951/Documents/92/5801184.pdf>

⁷ Please refer to footnote 1

⁸The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, The Gazette of India. No 13 of 2013.<https://www.iitk.ac.in/wc/data/TheCriminalLaw.pdf>

⁹ Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India. <https://wcd.nic.in/acts/juvenile-justice-care-and-protection-children-act-2015>

¹⁰ This act was amended to try adolescents under the age of 18 and between 14 to 17 years as adults should they commit ghastly and horrid crimes under the Indian Penal Code.

¹¹ The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019. Ministry of Law and Justice. *The Gazette of India*.

<https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/Protection%20of%20Children%20From%20Sexual%20Offences%20%28Amendment%29%20Act%2C%202019.pdf>

¹² India girl, 16, burnt alive after Jharkhand rape (2018, 5 May). *BBC News*. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-44016176>

¹³ Hathras case: A woman repeatedly reported rape. Why are police denying it? (2020, 10 October). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-54444939>

¹⁴ Gujarat: 100 girls led by 14-year-old seek licence to use firearms in self defence (2020, 13 October). *India Today*. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/gujarat-100-girls-led-by-14-year-old-see-licence-to-use-firearms-in-self-defence-1731162-2020-10-13>

- Lorraine, Code(2000). *Encyclopaedia of Feminist Theories* (1st ed.). London: Routledge.
- Maitra, Labanya (2020,16 November). Did You Know About This Village Where Men Are Banned? Some might argue they have the right idea, let's explore it first. *Outlook Traveller*. <https://tinyurl.com/3yvz44we>
- Mullany, Gerry (2021, 21 March). U.K. Police Bill Protesters Turn Violent at Bristol Rally. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/21/world/europe/uk-police-bill-bristol-protest.html>
- Ng, Kate, Hancock, Sam, and Osborne, Samuel (2021, 18 March). Sarah Everard disappearance: What we know so far. *Independent*. <https://tinyurl.com/pkk5b8s>
- Pulla, Venkat, Carter, Elizabeth, and Bhattacharyya, Rituparna (2020). Recognising, Understanding and Responding to Racism in India. In Pulla, Venkat Rao., Bhattacharyya Rituparna, & Bhatt Sanjai (2020). *Discrimination, Challenge and Response: People of North East India*, Palgrave Macmillan, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-46251-2_10, 177-195
- Pulla, Venkat (2020a, 03 October). Mass Upliftment Mechanisms _ Vaibhav India 2020 Dr Venkat Pulla Australia. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyUObk6sx9w>
- Pulla, Venkat (2020b, 19 August). The Intersections of Domestic Violence and Child Protection. *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOLaeNEtZSY>
- Pulla, Venkat (2020c). SWK316 Domestic and Family Violence Week 1 Pulla V 2020. *You Tube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsblcawEY2E>
- Sewpaul, Vishanthie (2021, 16 March). United Nations WSWD. Association for Schools of Social Work in Africa. https://m.facebook.com/pg/ASSWA2020/posts/?ref=page_internal&mt_nav=0