

'Save Girl Child'-Gujarat Style

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It is not the saga of gang rape like Bilkis Bano in the 2002 Carnage in Gujarat. It is the story of a poor girl student studying in Patan PTC College who became a victim of gang rape by her six teachers of the same college. The lecturers of PTC college of Patan were empowered with internal marking, took advantage of her poverty, and raped her 14 times in four and a half months inside the college and in the village during internship. As other incidents, this incident too could have been dumped inside the four walls of Patan PTC college if she had not fainted during the prayer on 31st January and the bold step taken by only lady lecturer Bhartiben Patel followed by 97 courageous girl students and their guardians. This incident has shaken the whole state and students and people are coming out spontaneously to express their anguish. The people of Patan are very angry and want exemplary punishment to be given to those teachers.

Ironically, Ms Anandiben Patel, the present Revenue Minister in the cabinet hailed from this constituency, was the Education Minister of Gujarat for last 10 years, which are the years of sexual exploitation of the girl students.

The Patan PTC College is situated in the outskirts of the city with 8 foot high boundary walls and is controlled by District Institute of Educational Technology (DIET).

The victim comes from a very poor background from Jetalvasana village of Visnagar Taluka of Mehsana district. She scored 89% in 10th std. and 70% in 12th std. without tuitions. As she proved her intelligence, the family with five children decided to drop their son from the school to continue her education. The father of the victim is a daily labourer. The victim wanted to be a doctor. But the poor economic condition of the family made her opt for the PTC course such that she can become the teacher and become self-employed. She was admitted to Patan PTC College on 24/7/07.

After just 50 days of her admission in the college, on the eventful day 11-9-2007, she was summoned by Mr Ashvin Kumar Parmar to the Educational Technology room after recess. She did not know what was going to happen to her, went to meet him in the ET room. There she found two other teachers along with Prof Ashvin Parmar. As she entered the room, the door was closed by Ashvin Kumar. She was dumb founded and shocked when Ashvin Kumar disrobed her forcibly and raped her followed by the other two- Prof Manish Parmar and Prof Mahendra Prajapati. Now, the girl was in their clutches, with her nude photographs taken on their mobile and they threatened her of dire consequences if she told anyone. After 15 days of this incident, Prof Manish Parmar called her to the laboratory, where Prof Kiran Patel and Prof Suresh Patel were already present. They raped her and Prof Kiran Patel allegedly sexually abused her as he was sexually impotent. As a part of internship, the students were taken to Khumbhwa village from 31-12-07 to 11-1-08. Accompanied by Prof Suresh Patel, Prof Kiran Patel and Prof Manish Parmar, they celebrated the New Year by raping her at 8 pm and before they departed from the Village on the 11th after a cultural programme during the dead of night at 3:30 am they again raped her. After the gang rape by the 5 teachers, it was the turn of Prof Atul Patel, a most

influential man, close to Anandiben Patel, who raped her just before Republic Day on 25-1-08 in the computer room. He threatened to kill her if she exposed the matter.

During the period of gang rapes the victim was traumatized and fainted most of the times. The lecturers took her to a witch doctor on 13th September and asked the witch doctor to exorcise the evil Spirit. They took other girls with the victim to ensure the belief that she was overpowered by an evil spirit.

On 30th January the victim told her friend about the gang rapes by the teachers. On 31st January, the victim fainted in the prayer hall, which led to a lot of doubts and speculation. She was taken to a psy-chiatrist and then to a gynecologist, by Prof Bhartiben Patel and other students, where it was confirmed that she was subjected to rape. The girl was traumatized, fainted time and again and was scared at the sight of any lecturers. The news of this gang rape was enough to make other inmates in the hostel angry, they had also been molested and abused by those teachers at different times in the name of internal marks. The 97 students filed a complaint in a signed memorandum to the Principal on 31st January. The Principal went to Gandhinagar to place this complaint before the authorities on 1st February. He was assured of Investigation on 5th February, Tuesday. The students were doubtful about administrative measures ever being taken against the teachers from Gandhi-nagar as earlier cases were either suppressed or withdrawn.

The students took the advice of Prof Bhartiben Patel and informed their guardians without wasting time. The guardians rushed to the college and were shocked and angry hearing the heinous acts of the teachers. On 4th February morning the PTC students assaulted the accused lecturers with sticks, bricks, and damaged their bikes. Had not the police intervened, they would have lynched those teachers, the guardians and the local people did not spare them.

25,000 people of Patan joined in a protest rally. Patan town remained closed for two days. The people of Patan could not believe that such a gruesome incident can happen in the ancient capital of Gujarat. The anger was so high that, they asked police to handover those six teachers. If they were not punished, they would themselves punish them. Now the six teachers are in remand. And their semen tests have confirmed their involvement.

The guardians demanded police protection to all students and all accused to be handed over to the people. Investigation should start against non co-operation of education minister Ramanlal Vora. All accused to be dismissed, not suspended. Security of all girls to be taken care of. The examination centre be shifted from Patan. The internal examination system to be scrapped.

The desperate students along with their guardians went to Gandhinagar on 7th February and they were not allowed to meet either the Chief Minister or the Education Minister. The PA to Education Minister reportedly said, it is a very normal thing and 'it goes on'.

The guardians are of the opinion that this has been happening since the days of Anandiben Patel. In reply, Anandiben said, those who cannot tolerate victory of the BJP are against her. She said that the then education minister Ms Patel had said that no complaint of sexual harassment had ever reached her. Everyone believes she is just lying.

28 students filed complaints of being molested by lecturers over internal marks in Patan PTC college.

The sexual harassment of the girls is not new in Patan PTC College. In 2004, one Draksha Parmar filed a complaint against Manish Parmar. But the case was sealed by the then Principal J N Chaudhary.

The victim was shifted to Civil Hospital, Ahmedabad where she had to wait for 3 hours in casualty and 3 more hours to be attended to by Doctors. Though the incident of Patan Gang Rape got wide media coverage, and apparent Govt. attention, but she was shabbily treated. She got more curious attention than real medical attention.

The National Commission of Women visited Patan. NCW believes that more girls were raped and made the following recommendations :

There should not be any male teacher on the campus including the peons and sweepers.

The victim's statement should be recorded before the judicial magistrate under section 164 CrPc to avoid distortion under any political or social pressure

The state Govt. should provide security to the victim and support her till she is rehabilitated.

She should be supported till the case is on, Rs 1 lakh compensation is not enough. DIET PTC hostel at Patan should not be vacated as this will affect girls' education

Adequate police security on the college campus to ensure that classes are conducted without any hitch.

The State Govt should submit to NCW copies of 98 girls' accounts submitted to the college and the education dept officials.

The state Govt should submit to it a report on the case within seven days and expedite the deliverance of justice.

NCW was surprised at the police inaction.

'Education dept is the worst in responding to complaints. It deputed male officers to do a perfunctory inquiry and dispose of the case citing lack of evidence. When we protest, they tell us they do not have enough lady officers'. Said, a senior official of the committee. (*Times of India*, 8-2-08)

Most victims prefer to suffer silently or swim with the tide, rather than report sexual harassment at work. (*Times of India*, 8-2-08)

The dept of women and Children development is under Ms Anandiben Patel and out of 65 cases of sexual harassment one third is from education dept.

It is believed that Education Department of Gujarat did not bother about sexual abuse in this College. Education Department has received 18 complaints out of which 11 are disposed of and 7 cases are pending as on 31st January '08.

The statement of the girl was taken in the presence of DSP Raghvendra, RDC MD Modia, senior lecturer Bhartiben Patel, one doctor and a few students. As per IPC 376 and 506, six lecturers were arrested on the same day of the incident. In Patan Judicial Court on 7th February, the statement of victim was taken under Sec 164 and sealed.

Of course in Gujarat the way the PTC colleges have mushroomed there are already 65,000 PTC teachers unemployed in the state and this year more than 30000 will join the wagon of unemployed teachers.

The girls in Gujarat are thinking of economic independence and taking admissions in various professional courses. There are 16000 girls studying in PTC in Gujarat in 134 girls PTC colleges. In most of these colleges, there are no lady lecturers or even women wardens. There it is compulsory for girls to stay in hostels. They have to pay all the fees including hostel fees, mess fees for the whole year and are given food for 7 months only. The costs in Self Financed Colleges are very high compared to government colleges. There is no economic help or scholarships for poor students to pursue their higher studies, except on paper. The much publicised *Beti Bachao* (Save Girl Child) and *Kanya Kelvani* (education of girls) in Jago Gujarat campaign, by the Chief Minister Narendra Modi has become a mockery.

To run a PTC College is becoming a big business. There are management seats also amounting to 3000 in Gujarat. The teachers are empowered with internal marking to the tune of 40%. And this very empowerment by internal marking has given them freedom to abuse the girls. Many believe that there are many more Patans in the state, which are taking place for so many years. The girls are asked to get used to it. When reported, the reports are ignored. The girls are afraid, to come out openly and invite the wrath of lecturers and they may not get degrees and finally jobs. The perverted minds of teachers empowered with internal marking has allowed them to prey on the girl students. Education associated with Degrees, jobs, insecurity, poverty has created such a situation. National Council of Teachers' Education [NCTE] introduced the policy of Self Finance in PTC. The Self-Financed institutes have mushroomed in the state. There are 431 PTC colleges, most of them self-financed. Most sexual harassments were so shameful that 3 Self-Financed colleges in Kheda, Sabar-kantha, Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar districts were to be closed. That is a matter of great concern that male lecturers were teaching in girls PTC colleges. When questioned they said, there are not enough female lecturers. If so how were six women lecturers sent to Patan PTC College after the arrest of six lecturers? And how were Girls' Colleges with male lecturers allowed to run not only in Self Financed colleges, but also in government colleges? □□□