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Book Review: No Nation for Women: Reportage on Rape from India, the World's Largest Democracy¹

Gorky Sinha² and Pushpinder Singh³

In recent decades, India has been highlighted specific to the increasing incidence of sexual violence against women. A few cases in metropolitan cities in India have received significant media coverage with vivid descriptions of the brutal nature of the assaults. These events are not isolated but rather provide examples of a deeper problem of sexual violence from which no socio-economic strata is excluded. Characterized with an increasing rate but correspondingly limited formal documentation, rape has become normalized due to stigmas like “impurity,” “shame,” “dishonor,” and other socio-religious perceptions.

No Nation for Women: Reportage on Rape in India, the World's Largest Democracy offers a poignant, factual, and thought-provoking account of the rape of women from different sections of society, living in different geographical regions of India. The book consists of reportage of first-hand interactions with rape victims and their families. It sheds light on how pervasive and deep-rooted rape culture is in different parts of the country, the impact of the prevalent caste system and inequality, and how the society and the legal system are currently failing to bring justice to the victims and their families.

The author, Priyanka Dubey, is a renowned journalist based in North India. She has a body of work in investigative reporting on social justice and human rights and has won multiple international and national accolades. Traveling across the country for over six years, Dubey documents varied dimensions and facets of this heinous crime prevailing in the diverse and complex Indian society that is already facing regional imbalances: caste hierarchy, power play, male chauvinism, stigmas stemming from a religious and traditional mindset, and flawed institutional functioning of the police, media, investigating agencies, and of course the judicial system. In *No Nation for Women*, which is also Dubey's first book, she provides a nuanced reality of rape—the most condensed form of all the exploitation, atrocities, and violence against women—and underlines the nexus of state, caste, religion, and politics that works together to support patriarchal biases.

Dubey discusses rape crime in juxtaposition with the multi-layered context of motivations such as patriarchal ego, the attitude of revenge, child trafficking, political crime, sexism, misogyny, the role of the media, the vulnerability of religious and caste minorities, and unemployment. One specific taboo of caste hierarchy can be considered to be a common thread across the chapters of this book. Caste hierarchy in India originates from the very ancient religious Varnashrama System that has expanded over centuries and has now become a well-structured socio-political tool and the strongest vehicle of patriarchy.

¹ Dubey, P. (2018). *No Nation for Women: Reportage on Rape from India, the World's Largest Democracy*. New Delhi, India: Simon & Schuster India.

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With each of the book's thirteen chapters, Dubey aims to dissect different aspects of rape and bring a face to the experiences of rape victims. The chapters include not merely the description of the crimes, but detailed experiences of struggle for justice by the victims. The richness of the accounts will help develop an understanding of sociological, psychological, and political influences behind sexual violence against women. The most distinctive part of Dubey's book is that she doesn't over-dramatize, exoticize, or mystify the lives of victims in her book. She presents an elaborative narrative of each victim's life to delineate each and every aspect of oppression faced by rape victims in all its forms. With the assistance of friends and strangers, Dubey took six years to write *No Nation for Women*.

Dubey begins the book with a few chapters devoted to describing how rape is multi-layered and how it manifests itself differently in different socio-economic contexts. For example, she describes "corrective rape" where girls have to face extreme consequences for not conforming to the patriarchal social norms and for rejecting men's sexual advances. She also discusses the use of rape as a political weapon for political parties that have males in power and who have little tolerance for women in powerful positions. These masculine political parties often use rape as a reflection of the desire to "put a woman in her place." Even in the police force, no matter what position women hold from constable to an IPS officer, they have to face misogynistic attitudes and sexual violence inside and outside the police department. Dubey also describes the vulnerabilities of the lowest castes in the cast hierarchy, who are usually poor and have been historically and collectively wronged for generations. Rape in the context of a caste system is a depiction of abuse of power by the higher caste against the vulnerable lower-caste women. Sexual violence, rape, and even murder are the blatant manifestations of the patriarchal ego of upper-caste men.

Further, in the book Dubey shares more stories that are successful in providing its readers with a multipronged approach to understanding the depth of the topic. Dubey states that the chapters in the book add up to a collective understanding of the crisis of rape in India (p. 6). Chapter by chapter, she highlights that the reasons behind sexual violence against women have different dimensions and facets, but patriarchy is the attributed root cause of all other factors. A slow judiciary and lack of awareness of the nuances of sexual crime makes things even worse and lead to a lot of victim blaming. In addition to understanding what causes lead to rape, Dubey also discusses rehabilitation of rape victims and general human rights issue regarding the vulnerable women.

A limitation of Dubey's book may be in the lack of discussion of the role of the state. Dubey does not present an adequate assessment of the responsibility of the state in protecting human and civil rights in the cases of sexual violence against women. Similarly, she fails to address the topics of hegemonic masculinity and the psychological role of power.

Generally, *No Nation for Women* invokes empathy and understanding of the societal impact of rape. Written for common readers and academic researchers, the book may be especially interesting to policy makers, human rights activists, and NGOs working with rape victims, given its holistic assessment and documentation of rape. Further, the book paves the way for researchers and students from the fields of law, sociology, psychology, social work, and gender and women's studies who are interested in understanding sexual violence in a complex Indian society.