

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

C.A. No. 639, of 2000 (Arising out of SLP(C) No. 16439 of 1998)

Decided On: 28.01.2000

Appellants: **The Chairman, Railway Board & Ors.**

Vs.

Respondent: **Mrs. Chandrima Das & Ors.**

Chandrima Das Summary

CONSTITUTION OF INDIA - ARTICLE 21 - Right to live with human dignity - Articles 21 and 51--Right to life includes right to live with human dignity--This right has to be read in consonance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Act, 1948 and Declaration on Elimination of Violence Against Woman--However, this right has to be subjected to restrictions in the interest of nation and security of State--Rape itself violates such fundamental rights of women.

In the instant case a lady who wanted to board a train was taken some employees of the railway to Railway Ratri Yatri Nivas in which a room was booked in the name of one of the employees railway card pass and there she was raped by four employees and then she was taken to another rented house and raped by another employees and was taken then to another house and was again raped by another railway employees. It was contended that it was individual act and railway was not liable to pay compensation, the contention that Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon should have approached the civil court for damages and the matter should not have been considered in a petition under Article 226 of the Constitution, cannot be accepted. Where public functionaries are involved and the matter relates to the violation of fundamental rights or the enforcement of public duties, the remedy would still be available under the public law notwithstanding that a suit could be filed for damages under private law. In the instant case, it is not a mere matter of violation of an ordinary right of a person but the violation of fundamental rights which is involved. Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon was a victim of rape. The Court in Bodhisattwa Gautam v. Subhra Chakrabony, 1996(1) SCC 490: 1996 SCC (Cri) 133, has held "rape" as an offence which is violative of the fundamental right of a person guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution. The Court observed as under:

Rape is a crime not only against the person of a woman, it is a crime against the entire society. It destroys the entire psychology of a woman and pushes her into deep emotional crisis. Rape is, therefore, the most hatred crime. It is a crime against basic human rights and is violative of the victim's most cherished right, namely, right to life which includes right to live with human dignity contained in Article 21.

CONSTITUTION OF INDIA - Right to life - Article 51--Right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution includes right to live with human dignity--However this right

is subject to restrictions which could be imposed in the interest of nation and security of the State--Therefore, where rape was committed by several employees of the Railway, in Railway Yatri Niwas and other places, it cannot be said that Railways or Union of India was not liable to pay compensation to the victim.

Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon, who was not the citizen of this country but came here as a citizen of Bangladesh was, nevertheless, entitled to all the Constitutional rights available to a citizen so far as right to life was concerned. She was entitled to be treated with dignity and was also entitled to the protection of her person as guaranteed under article 21 of the Constitution. As a national of another country, she could not be subjected to a treatment which was below dignity nor could she be subjected to physical violence at the hands of Government employees who outraged her modesty. The right available to her under Article 21 was thus violated. Consequently judgment passed by the Calcutta High Court, therefore, allowing compensation to her for having been gang-raped, cannot be said to suffer from any infirmity.

Hon'ble Judges:

S.Saghir Ahmed and R.P. Sethi, JJ.

ORDER

S. Saghir Ahmad, J.

1. Leave granted.
2. Mrs. Chandrima Das, a practising advocate of the Calcutta High Court, filed a petition under Article 226 of the Constitution against the Chairman. Railway Board; General Manager, Eastern Railway; Divisional Railway Manager, Howrah Division; Chief Commercial Manager, Eastern Railway State of West Bengal through the Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, Government of West Bengal Superintendent of Police (Railways), Howrah; Superintendent of Police, Howrah; Director General of Police, West Bengal and many other Officers including the Deputy High Commissioner, Republic of Bangladesh; claiming compensation for the victim, Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon, a Bangladeshi national who was gang-raped by many including employees of the Railways in a room at Yatri Niwas at Howrah Station of the Eastern Railway regarding which G.R.P.S. Case No. 19/98 was registered on 27th February, 1998. Mrs. Chandrima Das also claimed several other reliefs including a direction to the respondents to eradicate anti-social and criminal activities at Howrah Railway Station.
3. The facts as noticed by the High Court in the impugned judgment are as follows:-

"Respondents Railways and the Union of India have admitted that amongst the main accused you are employees of the railways and if the prosecution version is proved in accordance with law, they are perpetrators of the heinous crime of gang rape repeatedly committed upon the hapless victim Hanufa Khatun. It is not in dispute that Hanufa came from Bangladesh. She at the relevant time was the elected representative. She at the relevant time was the elected representative of the Union Board. She arrived at Howrah Railway Station on 26th February, 1998 at about 14.00 hours to avail Jodhpur Express at 23.00 Hours for paying a visit to Ajmer Sharif, with that intent in mind, she arrived at Calcutta on 24th February, 1998 and stayed at a hotel at 10, Sudder Street, Police Station Taltola and came to Howrah Station on the date and time aforementioned. She had, however, a wait listed ticket and so she approached a Train Ticket Examiner at the Station for confirmation of berth against her ticket. The Train Ticket Examiner asked her to wait in the Ladies Waiting room. She accordingly came to the ladies waiting room and rested there. At about 17.00 hours on 26th February, 1998 two unknown persons (later identified as one Ashoke Singh, a tout who posed himself as a very influential person of the Railway and Siya Ram Singh a railway ticket broker having good acquaintance with some of the Railway Staff of Howrah Station) approached her, took her ticket and returned the same after confirming reservation in Coach No. S-3 (Berth No.17) of Jodhpur Express. At about 20.00 hours Siya Ram Singh came again to her with a boy named Kashi and told her to accompany the boy to a restaurant if she wanted to have food for the night. Accordingly at about 21.00 hours she went to a nearby eating house with Kashi and had her meal there. Soon after she had taken her meal, she vomitted and came back to the Ladies Waiting room. At about 21.00 hours Ashoke Singh along with Rafi Ahmed a Parcel Supervisor at Howrah Station came to the Ladies Niwas before boarding the train. She appeared to have some doubt initially but on being certified by the lady attendants engaged on duty at the Ladies Waiting Room about their credentials she accompanied them to Yatri Niwas. Sitaram Singh, a khalasi of electric Department of Howrah Station joined them on way to Yatri Niwas. She was taken to room No. 102 on the first floor of Yatri Niwas. The room was booked in the name of Ashoke Singh against Railway Card pass No. 3638 since 25th February, 1998. In room No. 102 two other persons viz, one Lalan Singh, Parcel Clerk of Howrah Railway Station and Awdesch Singh, Parcel Clearing Agent were waiting. Hanufa Khatun suspected something amiss when Ashoke Singh forced her into the room. Awdesch Singh bolted the room from outside and stood on guard outside the room. The remaining four persons viz. Ashoke, Lalan, Rafi and Sitaram took liquor inside the room and also forcibly compelled her to consume liquor. All the four persons who were present inside the room brutally violated, Hanufa Khatun, it is said, was in a state of shock and daze. When she could recover she managed to escape from the room of Yatri Niwas and came back to the platform where again she met Siya Ram Singh and found him talking to Ashoke Singh. Seeing her plight Siya Ram Singh pretended to be her saviour and also abused and slapped Ashoke Singh. Since it was well past midnight and Jodhpur Express had already departed, Siya Ram requested Hanufa Khatun to accompany him to his residence to rest for the night with his wife and children. He assured her to help entrain Poorva Express on the following morning. Thereafter Siyaram accompanied by Ram Samiram Sharma, a friend of Siyaram took her to the rented flat of Ram Samiram Sharma at 66, Pathuriaghata Street, Police Station Jorabagan, Calcutta. There Siyaram raped Hanufa and when she protested and

resisted violently Siyaram and Ram Samiram Sharma gagged her mouth and nostrils intending to kill her as a result Hanufa bled profusely. On being informed by the landlord of the building following the hue and cry raised by Hanufa Khatun, she was rescued by Jorabagan Police."

4. It was on the basis of the above facts that the High Court had awarded a sum of Rs. 10 lacs as compensation for Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon as the High Court was of the opinion that the rape was committed at the building (Rail Yatri Niwas) belonging to the Railways and was perpetrated by the Railway employees.

5. In the present appeal, we are not concerned with many directions issued by the High Court. The only question argued before us was that the Railways would not be liable to pay compensation to Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon who was a foreigner and was not an Indian national. It is also contended that commission of the offence by the person concerned would not make the Railway or the Union of India liable to pay compensation to the victim of the offence. It is contended that since it was the individual act of those persons, they alone would be prosecuted and on being found guilty would be punished and may also be liable to pay fine or compensation, but having regard to the facts of this case, the Railways, or, for that matter, the Union of India would not even be vicariously liable. It is also contended that for claiming damages for the offence perpetrated on Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon, the remedy lay in the domain of Private Law and not under Public Law and, therefore, no compensation could have been legally awarded by the High Court in a proceeding under Article 226 of the Constitution and, that too, at the instance of a practising advocate who, in no way, was concerned or connected with the victim.

6. We may first dispose of the contention raised on behalf of the appellants that proceedings under Article 226 of the Constitution could not have been legally initiated for claiming damages from the Railways for the offence of rape committed on Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon and that Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon herself should have approached the Court in the realm of Private Law so that all the questions of fact could have been considered on the basis of the evidence adduced by the parties to record a finding whether all the ingredients of the commission of "tort" against the person of Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon were made out, so as to be entitled to the relief of damages. We may also consider the question of locus standi as it is contended on behalf of the appellants that Mrs. Chandrima Das, who is a practicing Advocate of the High Court of Calcutta, could not have legally instituted these proceedings.

7. The distinction between "Public Law" and "Private Law" was considered by a Three-Judge Bench of this Court in Common Cause, A Regd. Society vs. Union of India & Ors. (1999) 6 SCC 667 = AIR 1999 SC 2979 = (1999) 5 JT 237, in which it was, inter alia, observed as under :

"Under Article 226 of the Constitution, the High Court has been given the power and jurisdiction to issues appropriate Writs in the nature of Mandamus, Certiorari, Prohibition, Quo-Warranto and Habeas Corpus for the enforcement of Fundamental Rights or for any other purpose. Thus, the High Court has jurisdiction not only to grant

relief for the enforcement of Fundamental Rights but also for "any other purpose" which would include the enforcement of public duties by public bodies. So also, the Supreme Court under Article 32 has the jurisdiction to issue prerogative Writs for the enforcement of Fundamental Rights guaranteed to a citizen under the Constitution.

Essentially, under public law, it is the dispute between the citizen or a group of citizens on the one hand and the State or other public bodies on the other, which is resolved. This is done to maintain the rule of law and to prevent the State or the public bodies from acting in an arbitrary manner or in violation of that rule. The exercise of constitutional powers by the High Court and the Supreme Court under Article 226 or 32 has been categorised as power of "judicial review". Every executive or administrative action of the State or other statutory or public bodies is open to judicial scrutiny and the High Court or the Supreme Court can, in exercise of the power of judicial review under the Constitution, quash the executive action or decision which is contrary to law or is violative of Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution. With the expanding horizon of Article 14 read with other Articles dealing with Fundamental Rights, every executive action of the Govt. or other public bodies, including Instrumentalities of the Govt., or those which can be legally treated as "Authority" within the meaning of Article 12, if arbitrary, unreasonable or contrary to law, is now amenable to the writ jurisdiction of this Court under Article 32 or the High Courts under Article 226 and can be validly scrutinised on the touchstone of the Constitutional mandates."

8. The earlier decision, namely, [Life Insurance Corporation of India vs. Escorts Limited & Ors. 1985 Supp. \(3\) SCR 909 = \(1986\) 1 SCC 264 = AIR 1986 SC 1370](#), in which it was observed as under:

"Broadly speaking, the Court will examine actions of State if they pertain to the public law domain and refrain from examining them if they pertain to the private law field. The difficulty will lie in demarcating the frontier between the public law domain and the private law field. It is impossible to draw the line with precision and we do not want to attempt it. The question must be decided in each case with reference to the particular action, the activity in which the State or the instrumentality of the State is engaged when performing the action, the public law or private law character of the action and a host of other relevant circumstances."

was relied upon.

9. Various aspects of the Public Law field were considered. It was found that though initially a petition under Article 226 of the Constitution relating to contractual matters was held not to lie, the law underwent a change by subsequent decisions and it was noticed that even though the petition may relate essentially to a contractual matter, it would still be amenable to the writ jurisdiction of the High Court under Article 226. The Public Law remedies have also been extended to the realm of tort. This Court, in its various decisions, has entertained petitions under Article 32 of the Constitution on a number of occasions and has awarded compensation to the petitioners who had suffered personal injuries at the hands of the officers of the Govt. The causing of injuries, which

amounted to tortious act, was compensated by this Court in many of its decisions beginning from Rudul Sah vs. State of Bihar 1983 (3) SCR 508 = (1983) 4 SCC 141 = AIR 1983 SC 1086. [See also : Bhim Singh vs. State of Jammu & Kashmir (1985) 4 SCC 577 = AIR 1986 SC 494 ; People's Union for Democratic Rights vs. State of Bihar, 1987 (1) SCR 631 = (1987) 1 SCC 265 = AIR 1987 SC 355; People's Union for Democratic Rights Thru. Its Secy. vs. Police Commissioner, Delhi Police Headquarters, (1989) 4 SCC 730 = 1989 (1) SCALE 599; SAHELI, A Woman's Resources Centre vs. Commissioner of Police, Delhi (1990) 1 SCC 422 = 1989 (Supp.) SCR 488 = 488 = AIR 1990 SC 513; Arvinder Singh Bagga vs. State of U.P. (1994) 6 SCC 565 = AIR 1995 SC 117 ; P. Rathinam vs. Union of India (1989) Supp. 2 SCC 716; In Re: Death of Sawinder Singh Grower (1995) Supp. (4) SCC 450 = JT (1992) 6 SC 271 = 1992 (3) SCALE 34; Inder Singh vs. State of Punjab (1995) 3 SCC 702 = AIR 1995 SC 1949; D.K. Basu vs. State of West Bengal (1997) 1 SCC 416 = AIR 1997 SC 610].

10. In cases relating to custodial deaths and those relating to medical negligence, this Court awarded compensation under Public Law domain in Nilabati Behera vs. State of Orissa (1993) 2 SCC 746 = 1993 (2) SCR 581 = AIR 1993 SC 1960 ; State of M.P. vs. Shyam Sunder Trivedi (1995) 4 SCC 262 = 1995 (3) SCALE 343 ; People's Union for Civil Liberties vs. Union of India (1997) 3 SCC 433 = AIR 1997 SC 1203 and Kaushalya vs. State of Punjab (1996) 7 SCALE (SP) 13; Supreme Court Legal Aid Committee vs. State of Bihar (1991) 3 SCC 482 ; Dr. Jacob George vs. State of Kerala (1994) 3 SCC 430 = 1994 (2) SCALE 563 ; Paschim Bangal Khet Mazdoor Samity vs. State of West Bengal & Ors. (1996) 4 SCC 37 = AIR 1996 SC 2426 ; and Mrs. Manju Bhatia vs. N.D.M.C. (1997) 6 SCC 370 = AIR 1998 SC 223 = (1997) 4 SCALE 350.

11. Having regard to what has been stated above, the contention that Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon should have approached the civil court for damages and the matter should not have been considered in a petition under Article 226 of the Constitution, cannot be accepted. Where public functionaries are involved and the matter relates to the violation of Fundamental Rights or the enforcement of public duties, the remedy would still be available under the Public Law notwithstanding that a suit could be filed for damages under Private Law.

12. In the instant case, it is not a mere matter of violation of an ordinary right of a person but the violation of Fundamental Rights which is involved. Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon was a victim of rape. This Court in Bodhisatwa vs. Ms. Subdhra Chakroborty (1996) 1 SCC 490 has held "rape" as an offence which is violative of the Fundamental Right of a person guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution. The Court observed as under :

"Rape is a crime not only against the person of a woman, it is a crime against the entire society. It destroys the entire psychology of a woman and pushes her into deep emotional crisis. Rape is therefore the most hated crime. It is a crime against basic human rights and is violative of the victims most cherished right, namely, right to life which includes right to live with human dignity contained in Article 21."

13. Rejecting, therefore, the contention of the learned counsel for the appellants that the petition under Public Law was not maintainable, we now proceed to his next contention relating to the locus standi of respondent, Mrs. Chandrima Das, in filing the petition.

14. The main contention of the learned counsel for the appellants is that Mrs. Chandrima Das was only a practising advocate of the Calcutta High Court and was, in no way, connected or related to the victim, Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon and, therefore, she could not have filed a petition under Article 226 for damages or compensation being awarded to Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon on account of the rape committed on her. This contention is based on a misconception. Learned counsel for the appellants is under the impression that the petition filed before the Calcutta High Court was only a petition for damages or compensation for Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon. As a matter of fact, the reliefs which were claimed in the petition included the relief for compensation. But many other reliefs as, for example, relief for eradicating anti-social and criminal activities of various kinds at Howrah Railway Station were also claimed. The true nature of the petition, therefore, was that of a petition filed in public interest.

15. The existence of a legal right, no doubt, is the foundation for a petition under Article 226 and a bare interest, may be of a minimum nature, may give locus standi to a person to file a Writ Petition, but the concept of "Locus Standi" has undergone a sea change, as we shall presently notice. In [Dr. Satyanarayana Sinha vs. S. Lal & Co. Pvt. Ltd., AIR 1973 SC 2720 = \(1973\) 2 SCC 696](#), it was held that the foundation for exercising jurisdiction under Article 32 or Article 226 is ordinarily the personal or individual right of the petitioner himself. In writs like Habeas Corpus and Quo Warranto, the rule has been relaxed and modified.

16. In [S.P. Gupta & Ors. vs. Union of India & Ors., AIR 1982 SC 149 = \(1981\) Supp. SCC 87](#), the law relating to locus standi was explained so as to give a wider meaning to the phrase. This Court laid down that "practising lawyers have undoubtedly a vital interest in the independence of the judiciary; they would certainly be interested in challenging the validity or constitutionality of an action taken by the State or any public authority which has the effect of impairing the independence of the judiciary." It was further observed that "lawyer's profession was an essential and integral part of the judicial system; they could figuratively be described as priests in the temple of justice. They have, therefore, a special interest in preserving the integrity and independence of the judicial system; they are equal partners with the Judges in the administration of justice. The lawyers, either in their individual capacity or as representing some Lawyers' Associations have the locus standi to challenge the circular letter addressed by the Union Law Minister to the Governors and Chief Ministers directing that one third of the Judges of the High Court should, as far as possible, be from outside the State."

17. In the context of Public Interest Litigation, however, the Court in its various Judgments has given widest amplitude and meaning to the concept of locus standi. In [People's Union for Democratic Rights and Ors. vs. Union of India & Ors., AIR 1982 SC 1473 = \(1982\) 3 SCC 235](#), it was laid down that Public Interest Litigation could be initiated not only by filing formal petitions in the High Court but even by sending letters

and telegrams so as to provide easy access to Court. (See also: Bandhua Mukti Morcha vs. Union of India & Ors., AIR 1984 SC 802 = 1984 (2) SCR 67 = (1984) 3 SCC 161 and State of Himachal Pradesh vs. Student's Parent Medical College, Shimla & Ors., AIR 1985 SC 910 = (1985) 3 SCC 169 on the right to approach the Court in the realm of Public Interest Litigation). In Bangalore Medical Trust vs. B.S. Muddappa and Ors., AIR 1991 SC 1902 = 1991 (3) SCR 102 = (1991) 4 SCC 54, the Court held that the restricted meaning of aggrieved person and narrow outlook of specific injury has yielded in favour of a broad and wide construction in the wake of Public Interest Litigation. The Court further observed that public-spirited citizens having faith in the rule of law are rendering great social and legal service by espousing causes of public nature. They cannot be ignored or overlooked on technical or conservative yardstick of the rule of locus standi or absence of personal loss or injury. There has, thus, been a spectacular expansion of the concept of locus standi. The concept is much wider and it takes in its stride anyone who is not a mere "busy-body".

18. Having regard to the nature of the petition filed by respondent Mrs. Chandrima Das and the relief claimed therein it cannot be doubted that this petition was filed in public interest which could legally be filed by the respondent and the argument that she could not file that petition as there was nothing personal to her involved in that petition must be rejected.

19. It was next contended by the learned counsel appearing on behalf of the appellants, that Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon was a foreign national and, therefore, no relief under Public Law could be granted to her as there was no violation of the Fundamental Rights available under the Constitution. It was contended that the Fundamental Rights in Part III of the Constitution are available only to citizens of this country and since Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon was a Bangladeshi national, she cannot complain of the violation of Fundamental Rights and on that basis she cannot be granted any relief. This argument must also fail for two reasons; first, on the ground of Domestic Jurisprudence based on Constitutional provisions and secondly, on the ground of Human Rights Jurisprudence based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, which has the international recognition as the "Moral Code of Conduct" having been adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

20. We will come to the question of Domestic Jurisprudence a little later as we intend to first consider the principles and objects behind Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, as adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution of 10th December, 1948. The preamble, inter alia, sets out as under:

"Whereas recognition of the INHERENT DIGNITY and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been

proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people. Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations.

Whereas the people of the United Nations have in the Charter affirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, IN THE DIGNITY AND WORTH OF THE HUMAN PERSON AND IN THE EQUAL RIGHTS OF MEN AND WOMEN and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge."

21. Thereafter, the Declaration sets out, inter alia, in various Articles, the following:

"Article 1 -- All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2 -- Every one is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, NATIONAL OR SOCIAL ORIGIN, PROPERTY, BIRTH OR OTHER STATUS.

Furthermore, NO DISTINCTION SHALL BE MADE ON THE BASIS OF THE POLITICAL, JURISDICTIONAL OR INTERNATIONAL STATUS OF THE COUNTRY OR TERRITORY to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3 -- Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 5 -- No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 7 -- All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 9 -- No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile."

22. Apart from the above, the General Assembly, also while adopting the Declaration on the Elimination of violence against Women, by its Resolution dated 20th December, 1993, observed in Article I that, "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary

deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" In Article 2, it was specified that, "Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to :

(a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;

(b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

(c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs."

23. In Article 3, it was specified that "women are entitled to the equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights, which would include, inter alia. ;

(a) the right to life,

(b) the right to equality, and

(c) the right to liberty and security of person.

24. The International Covenants and Declarations as adopted by the United Nations have to be respected by all signatory States and the meaning given to the above words in those Declarations and Covenants have to be such as would help in effective implementation of those Rights. The applicability of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and principles thereof may have to be read, if need be, into the domestic jurisprudence.

25. Lord Diplock in *Salomon v. Commissioners of Customs and Excise* [1996] 3 All ER 871 said that there is a, prima facie, presumption that Parliament does not intend to act in breach of international law, including specific treaty obligations. So also, Lord Bridge in *Brind v. Secretary of State for the Home Department* [1991] 1 All ER 720, observed that it was well settled that, in construing any provisions in domestic legislation which was ambiguous in the sense that it was capable of a meaning which either conforms to or conflicts with the International Convention, the courts would presume that Parliament intended to legislate in conformity with the Convention and not in conflict with it.

26. The domestic application of international human rights and norms was considered by the Judicial Colloquia (Judges and Lawyers) at Bangalore in 1988. It was later affirmed by the Colloquia that it was the vital duty of an independent judiciary to interpret and apply national constitutions in the light of those principles. Further Colloquia were convened in 1994 at Zimbabwe, in 1996 at Hong Kong and in 1997 at Guyana and in all those Colloquia, the question of domestic application of international and regional human rights specially in relation to women, was considered. The Zimbabwe Declaration 1994, inter alia, stated :

"Judges and Lawyers have duty to familiarise themselves with the growing international jurisprudence of human rights and particularly with the expanding material on the protection and promotion of the human rights of women."

27. But this situation may not really arise in our country.

28. Our Constitution guarantees all the basic and fundamental human rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, to its citizens and other persons. The chapter dealing with the Fundamental Rights is contained in Part III of the Constitution. The purpose of this Part is to safeguard the basic human rights from the vicissitudes of political controversy and to place them beyond the reach of the political parties who, by virtue of their majority, may come to form the Govt. at the Centre or in the State.

29. The Fundamental Rights are available to all the "citizens" of the country but a few of them are also available to "persons". While Article 14, which guarantees equality before law or the equal protection of laws within the territory of India, is applicable to "person" which would also include the "citizen" of the country and "non-citizen" both, Article 15 speaks only of "citizen" and it is specifically provided therein that there shall be no discrimination against any "citizen" on the ground only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them nor shall any citizen be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment, or the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort on the aforesaid grounds. Fundamental Right guaranteed under Article 15 is, therefore, restricted to "citizens". So also, Article 16 which guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment is applicable only to "citizens". The Fundamental Rights contained in Article 19, which contains the right to "Basic Freedoms", namely, freedom of speech and expression, freedom to assemble peaceably and without arms; freedom to form associations or unions; freedom to move freely throughout the territory of India; freedom to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India and freedom to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business, are available only to "citizens" of the country.

30. The word "citizen" in Article 19 has not been used in a sense different from that in which it has been used in Part II of the Constitution dealing with "citizenship". [See: State Trading Corporation of India Ltd. vs. The Commercial Tax Officer and Others, AIR 1963 SC 1811 = 1964 (4) SCR 99]. It has also been held in this case that the words "all citizens" have been deliberately used to keep out all "non-citizens" which would include "aliens". It was laid down in Hans Mutter of Nurenburg vs. Superintendent Presidency Jail Calcutta, AIR 1955 SC 367 (374) = 1955 (1) SCR 1284, that this Article applies only to "citizens". In another decision in Anwar vs. State of J & K, AIR 1971 SC 337 = 1971 (1) SCR 637 = (1971) 3 SCC 104, it was held that non-citizen could not claim Fundamental Rights under Article 19. In Naziranbai vs. State, AIR 1957 M.B. 1 and Lakshmi Prasad & Anr. vs. Shiv Pal & Others, AIR 1974 Allahabad 313, it was held that Article 19 does not apply to a "foreigner". The Calcutta High Court in Sk. Md. Soleman vs. State of West Bengal and Another AIR 1965 Calcutta 312, held that Article 19 does not apply to a Commonwealth citizen.

31. In [Anwar vs. State of J & K, AIR 1971 SC 337 = 1971 \(1\) SCR 637 = \(1971\) 3 SCC 104](#) (already referred to above), it was held that the rights under Articles 20, 21 and 22 are available not only to "citizens" but also to "persons" which would include "non-citizens".

32. Article 20 guarantees right to protection in respect of conviction for offences. Article 21 guarantees right to life and personal liberty while Article 22 guarantees right to protection against arbitrary arrest and detention. These are wholly in consonance with Article 3, Article 7 and Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

33. The word "LIFE" has also been used prominently in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. [See: Article 3 quoted above]. The Fundamental Rights under the Constitution are almost in consonance with the Rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as also the Declaration and the Covenants of Civil and Political Rights and the Covenants of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which India is a party having ratified them, as set out by this Court in [Kubic Darusz vs. Union of India & Ors. \(1990\) 1 SCC 568 = AIR 1990 SC 605](#). That being so, since "LIFE" is also recognised as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, it has to have the same meaning and interpretation as has been placed on that word by this Court in its various decisions relating to Article 21 of the Constitution. The meaning of the word "life" cannot be narrowed down. According to the tenor of the language used in Article 21, it will be available not only to every citizen of this country, but also to a "person" who may not be a citizen of the country.

34. Let us now consider the meaning of the word "LIFE" interpreted by this Court from time to time. In [Kharak Singh vs. State of U.P., AIR 1963 SC 1295 = 1964 \(1\) SCR 332](#), it was held that the term "life" indicates something more than mere animal existence. [See also : *State of Maharashtra vs. Chandrabhan Tale*, AIR 1983 SC 803 = 1983 (3) SCR 337 = (1983) 3 SCC 387]. The inhibitions contained in Article 21 against its deprivation extends even to those faculties by which life is enjoyed. In [Bandhua Mukti Morcha vs. U.O.I., AIR 1984 SC 802 = 1984 \(2\) SCR 67 = \(1984\) 3 SCC 161](#), it was held that the right to life under Article 21 means the right to live with dignity, free from exploitation. [See also : *Maneka Gandhi vs. U.O.I.*, AIR 1978 SC 597 = 1978 (2) SCR 621 = (1978) 1 SCC 248 and *Board of Trustees of the Port of Bombay vs. Dilip Kumar Raghavendranath Nadkarni*, AIR 1983 SC 109 = 1983 (1) SCR 828 = (1983) 1 SCC 124].

35. On this principle, even those who are not citizens of this country and come here merely as tourists or in any other capacity will be entitled to the protection of their lives in accordance with the Constitutional provisions. They also have a right to "Life" in this country. Thus, they also have the right to live, so long as they are here, with human dignity. Just as the State is under an obligation to protect the life of every citizen in this country, so also the State is under an obligation to protect the life of the persons who are not citizens.

36. The Rights guaranteed under Part III of the Constitution are not absolute in terms. They are subject to reasonable restrictions and, therefore, in case of non-citizen also,

those Rights will be available subject to such restrictions as may be imposed in the interest of the security of the State or other important considerations. Interest of the Nation and security of the State is supreme. Since 1948 when the Universal Declaration was adopted till this day, there have been many changes -political, social and economic while terrorism has disturbed the global scenario. Primacy of the interest of Nation and the security of State will have to be read into the Universal Declaration as also in every Article dealing with Fundamental Rights including Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.

37. It has already been pointed out above that this Court in Bodhisatwa's case (supra) has already held that "rape" amounts to violation of the Fundamental Right guaranteed to a woman under Article 21 of the Constitution.

38. Now, Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon, who was not the citizen of this country put came here as a citizen of Bangladesh was, nevertheless, entitled to all the constitutional rights available to a citizen so far as "Right to Life" was concerned. She was entitled to be treated with dignity and was also entitled to the protection of her person as guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution. As a national of another country, she could not be subjected to a treatment which was below dignity nor could she be subjected to physical violence at the hands of Govt. employees who outraged her modesty. The Right available to her under Article 21 was thus violated. Consequently, the State was under the Constitutional liability to pay compensation to her. The judgment passed by the Calcutta High Court, therefore, allowing compensation to her for having been gang-raped, cannot be said to suffer from any infirmity.

39. Learned counsel for the appellants then contended that the Central Govt. cannot be held vicariously liable for the offence of rape committed by the employees of the Railways. It was contended that the liability under the Law of Torts would arise only when the act complained of was performed in the course of official duty and since rape cannot be said to be an official act, the Central Govt. would not be liable even under the Law of Torts. The argument is wholly bad and is contrary to the law settled by this Court on the question of vicarious liability in its various decisions.

40. In [State of Rajasthan vs. Mst. Vidhyawati AIR 1962 SC 933](#), it was held that the Govt. will be vicariously liable for the tortious act of its employees. This was a case where a claim for damages was made by the heirs of a person who died in an accident caused by the negligence of the driver of a Govt. vehicle. Reference may also be made to the decisions of this Court in [State of Gujarat vs. Memon Mahomed Haji Hasan AIR 1967 SC 1885](#) and Smt. Basava Kom Dymogouda Patil vs. State of Mysore AIR 1977 SC 1749. These principles were reiterated in [N. Nagendra Rao & Co. vs. State of A.P. AIR 1994 SC 2663 = \(1994\) 6 SCC 205](#) and again in State of Maharashtra vs. Kanchanmala Vijaysing Shirke, 1995 ACJ 1021 (SC) = (1995) 5 SCC 659 = JT 1995 (6) SC 155.

41. Reliance placed by the counsel for the appellants on the decision of this Court in Kasturi Lal Ralia Ram Jain vs. State of U.P. AIR 1965 SC 1039 = 1965 (1) SCR 375 cannot help him as this decision has not been followed by this Court in the subsequent

decisions, including the decisions in State of Gujarat vs. Memon Mahomed Haji Hasan and Smt. Basava Kom Dyamogouda Patil vs. State of Mysore (supra). The decision in Kasturi Lal's case was also severely criticised by Mr. Seervai in his prestigious book - Constitutional Law of India. A Three-Judge Bench of this Court in Common Cause, A Regd. Society vs. Union of India (1999) 6 SCC 667 also did not follow the decision in Kasturi Lal's case (supra) and observed that the efficacy of this decision as a binding precedent has been eroded.

42. The theory of Sovereign power which was propounded in Kasturi Lal's case has yielded to new theories and is no longer available in a welfare State. It may be pointed out that functions of the Govt. in a welfare State are manifold, all of which cannot be said to be the activities relating to exercise of Sovereign powers. The functions of the State not only relate to the defence of the country or the administration of justice, but they extend to many other spheres as, for example, education, commercial, social, economic, political and even marital. These activities cannot be said to be related to Sovereign power.

43. Running of Railways is a commercial activity. Establishing Yatri Niwas at various Railway Stations to provide lodging and boarding facilities to passengers on payment of charges is a part of the commercial activity of the Union of India and this activity cannot be equated with the exercise of Sovereign power. The employees of the Union of India who are deputed to run the Railways and to manage the establishment, including the Railway Stations and Yatri Niwas, are essential components of the Govt. machinery which carries on the commercial activity. If any of such employees commits an act of tort, the Union Govt., of which they are the employees, can, subject to other legal requirements being satisfied, be held vicariously liable in damages to the person wronged by those employees. Kasturi Lal's decision, therefore, cannot be pressed in aid. Moreover, we are dealing with this case under Public Law domain and not in a suit instituted under Private Law domain against persons who, utilising their official position, got a room in the Yatri Niwas booked in their own name where the act complained of was committed.

44. No other point was raised before us. The appeal having no merit is dismissed with the observation that the amount of compensation shall be made over to the High Commissioner for Bangladesh in India for payment to the victim, Smt. Hanuffa Khatoon. The payment to the High Commissioner shall be made within three months. There will be no order as to costs.