



We live in times when commercial Mother's Day ads stereotype the role of mothers, even as they do not give value to their work. We live in times when jingoism runs high and we are pushed into a situation where our concern as mothers – literally and figuratively – of the menfolk on the country's borders has to be translated into applauding them for giving up their lives or losing their lives for the 'nation'. We live in times when we are not expected to interrogate the circumstances and political diktats under which the armed force men became vulnerable to these killings.

We live in times when a High Court Judge is called out by Supreme Court for contempt of court and sentenced to imprisonment, despite the Supreme Court's own contention that he is insane. He cannot be both insane and guilty of contempt of court. Evolved jurisprudence cannot be upturned only because the Court that feels contemned or the judges that feel contemned are the Supreme Court of India. It is such approaches that embroil apex court judges in a culture of impunity even when it comes to sexual harassment at the workplace of India's daughters.

The world just observed another Mother's day in these times. It is, therefore, that we need to revert to the Julia Howard Lowe's Mother's Day declaration way back in 1870, imploring "Arise then, women of this day! Arise, all women who have hearts, whether your baptism be of water or tears! Say firmly: 'We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies...Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have taught them of charity, mercy and patience. We women of one country will be too tender of those of another to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs. From the bosom of the devastated earth, a voice goes up with our own. It says, 'Disarm, disarm'. The sword of murder is not the balance of justice. Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor does violence indicate possession...In the name of womanhood and of humanity, I earnestly ask that a general congress of women without limit of nationality may be appointed and held at some place deemed most convenient and at the earliest period consistent with its objects, to promote the alliance of the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international questions and the great and general interests of peace."



Howe transitioned from a proponent of war to an anti-war activist after she witnessed the mutual mass slaughter of the War Between the States (1861 - 1865). We see such transitioning and interrogation in India as well.

Leila Seth, the first woman judge of the Supreme Court of India who passed away twelve days ago (may she rise in peace, simple soul), did not hesitate as a mother of a gay son, to question the wisdom of the Supreme Court through an op-ed in a national newspaper. In that op-ed, she questioned the Apex Court's judgement which sought to restore section 377 treating homosexuality as an unnatural act, and said openly that by those standards her son was now a criminal, and would be further considered criminal if he married following his sexual orientation. She was upfront and made it clear that this critique came from her both as a jurist and as a mother of a gay son.

Just this month itself, Varsha Dogre, Deputy Jailor, Raipur Central Jail, posted on Facebook that she was a witness to the torture of minor tribal girls, at police stations, stripped and tortured, with marks of electric shock on their hands and breasts seen by her. "We need to introspect, because those who are getting killed in either side of this war in Bastar are our own people. The capitalist system is being forced on Bastar, tribals are being pushed out of their lands, their villages are being burnt, women raped — all this to grab land and forests. All this isn't being done to end Naxalism", she is reported to have stated. "Farmers and jawans are brothers, they shouldn't kill each other." Dogre faced the consequences of her posting, was suspended and the post ended up being deleted.

In the months gone by, the double speak about jawans broke apart and Gurmehar Kaur, the daughter of a defence person who had died at Kargil was no longer seen as the daughter of that revered man protecting our borders or the daughter of Kargil's martyr. Why? Only because she called out the goondaism of the workers of the ruling party's student wing the ABVP, following an invite to JNU students Umar Khalid and Shehla Rashid to address a seminar on 'Culture of Protests'. On the contrary, she claims she got threats of rape for calling out such goondaism. Can we have a comfortable Mother's Day with such occurrences all around us?



Fathoming a different Mothers' Day
Mothers as people in their country and as peoples in other countries need to be able to interrogate surgical strikes and war drums in their country as well as in the neighbouring countries and blow the bugle of peace, so mothers will no longer face anguish at the wanton loss of their sons, which could well have been averted, if the war machinery and war corporates and war mongers were not considered all that precious.

What is Mother's Day if mothers don't have the space to express the anguish they face over the injustices being heaped on their children, where even the State is complicit? One of the greatest tributes one can pay to motherhood, is to create the spaces for expressions of anguish and concern, and to showcase mothers who stand up against injustices to their children and the children of the world, and set the road for a truly peaceful democracy.

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