

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEGAL STUDIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES [IJLSSS]

ISSN: 2584-1513 (Online)

Volume 3 | Issue 4 [2025] | Page 715 - 721

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BEING INDEPENDENT OR GETTING INDEPENDENCE? THE SILENT STRUGGLE OF A WOMAN WHO DOESN'T REPORT MARITAL ABUSE

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INTRODUCTION

I have boldly chosen today 15th Aug 2025 79th Independence Day in India to write about a most important freedom to women in all respect. Independence is often celebrated as a triumph—of spirit, of choice, of freedom. But for many women, especially within the confines of marriage, independence is not a given. It is a distant dream, a whispered hope, or a dangerous pursuit.

This article tells the story of Anvitha, a woman who lives through marital abuse but chooses not to report it. Her silence is not weakness—it is layered with fear, duty, cultural expectations, and a longing for dignity and upcoming responsibilities are concerned. Through Anvitha's journey, we explore the tension between being independent and getting independence, and the societal structures that shape this choice.

Anvitha is a huge bundle of talent, knowledge, beauty, kind, bold, and what not. She was born in a small town in Karnataka, into a middle-class family that valued education and pursued to its highest possible and the urge to study and learn more was never the limit for her. She was bright, articulate, and full of dreams. With lots of happy days going further, the wedding was grand, the smiles were genuine, and the future seemed promising.

But within few months, the cracks began to show along with a bundle of her own joy had joined with tinny little toes to keep her busy as always. Husband was egoistic, controlling, dismissive, aspirant for all the benefits he would get from her end and increasingly violent as well. He would shout at Anvitha for minor mistakes, isolate her from friends, and occasionally hit her during

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arguments was busier in finding faults with her than he would earn his own money for the household is concerned. The abuse was constant tried all sought of emotions, permutation combinations to solve and keep things all fit & fine on oneself like a super woman. Nothing seemed to be working out to stay as a normal happy family.

Anvitha's silence is not an anomaly. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), over 30% of Indian women have experienced spousal violence, yet only a fraction reports it.

WHY?

1. Fear of Retaliation

- Reporting abuse could escalate violence.
- Anvitha's husband had threatened to harm her or take away their child if she ever spoke out.
- Loss of reputation

2. Economic Dependence

- Anvitha quit her job after marriage.
- Without financial independence, leaving seemed impossible.

3. Social Stigma

- Divorce or police complaints are seen as shameful in many communities.
- Anvitha feared being labeled a "failed wife" or "home-breaker." Or as Divorcee
- Development of a Child in the same society would impact negatively on his own in all respect.

4. Emotional Complexity

- Abuse is often interspersed with affection.
- Anvitha still loved her husband at times, or at least the version of him she once knew.

- As a Father, she always wanted him to be in her child's life.

5. Lack of Awareness

- Anvitha didn't know her legal rights under laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

- She believed abuse was a "private matter."

In many Indian households, women are taught to endure. Patience, sacrifice, and silence are glorified virtues. The society where Anvitha lived always told her, "Every marriage has problems. Adjust, my dear." Religious texts, family elders, and even pop culture reinforce the idea that a woman's duty is to preserve the sanctity of marriage—even at the cost of her own well-being.

This cultural conditioning creates a psychological cage. Anvitha began to question herself: "Maybe I provoke him," "Maybe I'm not a good wife," "Maybe this is normal." The abuse became internalized.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK VS. LIVED REALITY

India has progressive laws to protect women:

- Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- Civil remedies like protection orders, residence rights, monetary relief
- Section 498A of IPC
- Criminalizes cruelty by husband or relatives
- Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- Penalizes dowry demands and related abuse

But laws are only as effective as their implementation. Anvitha feared police apathy, courtroom delays, and societal backlash. She had heard of women being harassed for "false complaints." The legal system felt intimidating, not empowering. She always felt she was walking on a rope, with lots of hope to seek everything right.



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TOLL

Living with abuse without reporting it takes a deep psychological toll:

- Anxiety and Depression: Anvitha often felt numb, cried alone, and had trouble sleeping.
- Loss of Identity: She stopped painting, writing, or engaging in hobbies she once loved.
- Hypervigilance: She constantly monitored Raghav's moods to avoid triggering him.
- Guilt and Shame: She blamed herself for the abuse, believing she was inadequate.

Yet, Anvitha wore a mask. To neighbors, she was the perfect wife. To her child, she was loving and cheerful. Her pain was invisible.

SEEDS OF CHANGE

Change didn't come dramatically. It began with small acts:

- ✓ Anvitha started accepting things as it comes
- ✓ She started reacting back to her husband fearlessly
- ✓ She reaches down to his standards to make him understand things in a better manner
- ✓ She joined an online support group anonymously.
- ✓ She started freelancing to earn a modest income.
- ✓ She read about domestic violence laws and women's rights.
- ✓ She confided in her parents and brother who validated her experience.

These steps didn't end the abuse—but they planted seeds of independence. Anvitha began to reclaim her voice.

Being Independent vs. Getting Independence

There's a subtle but profound difference between being independent and getting independence.

- Being Independent is a state of mind—a belief in one's worth, agency, and choices.

- *Getting Independence is the process of breaking free from control, abuse, or oppression.*

Anvitha was on the path to both. She hadn't reported the abuse yet, but she was building the emotional, financial, and social scaffolding to do so. Her silence was not surrender—it was strategy.

WHAT CAN SOCIETY DO?

Anvitha's story is not just personal—it's political. To support women like her, we must:

NORMALIZE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ABUSE

- Schools, workplaces, and media must talk openly about domestic violence.
- Silence breeds stigma.

STRENGTHEN SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- Helplines, shelters, and counseling must be accessible and empathetic.
- Legal aid should be simplified and sensitized.

EMPOWER FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

- Encourage women's employment, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy.
- Economic freedom is a shield against abuse.

REFORM LEGAL PROCESSES

- Fast-track domestic violence cases.
- Train police and judiciary in gender sensitivity.

CHALLENGE CULTURAL NORMS

- Redefine marriage as a partnership, not a prison.
- Celebrate women's autonomy, not just their endurance.

ANVITHA'S VOICE

“I am not weak because I stayed. I am not strong only if I leave. I am navigating a storm with no map. But I am learning to steer. I may not have reported the abuse yet—but I have begun to report to myself. And that is the first step to freedom.”

Her words reflect the nuanced reality of millions of women. Independence is not always loud. Sometimes, it begins in silence.

CONCLUSION

Anvitha's story is a mirror to society. It asks uncomfortable questions: Why do we expect women to endure? Why do we shame them for speaking out? Why do we equate silence with consent?

Anvitha's story is not just a tale of suffering—it is a testament to quiet courage. In a world that often demands loud declarations of strength, Anvitha teaches us that resilience can be silent, strategic, and deeply personal. Her refusal to report the abuse is not an endorsement of it reflects the complex web of love, fear, duty, and survival that many women navigate daily.

She is not waiting to be rescued. She is slowly rescuing herself.

Each step she takes toward financial independence, emotional healing, and self-awareness is a rebellion against the chains that bind her. She may not have walked out of her marriage yet, but she has begun walking toward herself. And that journey, though invisible to many, is sacred. Her belief in law and order never goes unrewarded. Proper utilization of position and power counts a lot and helps in obtaining timely legal remedy.

To every woman like Anvitha: “Your pain is valid, your silence is understood, and your strength is profound. You are not alone. You are not powerless. You are not defined by what you endure but by how you rise.”

Let us build a world where independence is not something women must fight for in secret, but something they are born to live with dignity. Let Anvitha's story be a whisper that grows into a roar call to compassion, justice, and change.

Because sometimes, the most powerful revolution begins in the quietest heart. Dear Society, let's not illtreat such souls around us, lets empower them to the fullest, let them fight inn here to be the best warrior of their life and keep winning the battle they face in life as always.