

TEARS

A UNTOLD STRUGGLE



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Content Warning:

This story contains discussions and depictions of mental health challenges, stress, and marital issues. Reader discretion is advised. If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health concerns, please consider seeking support from a mental health professional or contacting a crisis helpline.

June 29th, 2024, a date few Indians will never forget. The day India finally won the T20 World Cup after 16 long years. The entire nation erupted in celebration. Streets overflowed with fans, firecrackers burst in the night sky, and people danced with uncontrollable joy. It was a day to remember, filled with happiness and tears of triumph.

But not all tears were of joy.

Amidst the sea of celebration, a man in his late 30s rode his bike through the crowded streets. His eyes brimmed with tears, but they weren't tears of happiness. His face showed an anguish that seemed ready to burst at any moment. Zoned out, he seemed unaware of the bustling celebration around him, as if he was driving down an empty road. Suddenly, he stopped his bike, walked to a quiet corner, and screamed a scream so loud it could shatter glass, but the noise of firecrackers and music swallowed it up. People around him thought he was celebrating and joined in, cheering alongside him.

But he wasn't celebrating. He was breaking.

He cried, uncontrollably, like a newborn baby. And no one cared. Perhaps that's why he chose this time and place to break down, because a man crying is invisible in this world. Society may have progressed in countless ways, but it still isn't ready to see a man cry like that. He gathered himself up, got back on his bike, and continued to drive. But where was he going at 1 a.m., when the world was too busy celebrating to notice his pain?

He finally reached his destination: a police station.

He approached the officer on duty and asked, "I want to file a complaint. Where should I go?"

While the nation celebrated, what drove him to the police station? What complaint did he have to file, and against whom?

When he spoke to the guard, he was told, "Everyone's out on security duty because of the celebrations. You'll have to wait." So he went inside and sat on an empty bench, his head hanging low. Each passing minute seemed to push his tears closer to the surface, and he struggled to keep them at bay. Finally, an officer approached him and asked, "Tell me, what's your problem? What complaint do you have?"

The man didn't respond immediately. He just stared at the officer with tearful eyes. The officer, uncomfortable with the silence, uttered the words that haunt every man, words that stop them from being vulnerable, from showing emotion: "Why the hell are you crying like a helpless woman?" It wasn't about calling him a woman; it was about calling him helpless. This society can't accept a helpless man they don't even have the word in their vocabulary. Why? Isn't a man allowed to be helpless? Is it a crime to cry and plead for help as a man?

We often talk about male ego, and we're right to say it's something men need to outgrow. But whose fault is it? As a society, aren't we the ones fostering that ego? Male ego is a product of the fear of being helpless. As long as society refuses to accept a helpless man, we'll continue to create men filled with this ego, a mask to hide their insecurities and their weaknesses.

Returning to the story, the man finally spoke. "Sir, my name is Ranvijay. I want to file a complaint." The officer replied, "Okay, complaint about what? Against whom?"

Ranvijay hesitated, then said, "Sir, I want to file a complaint, but... I don't know against whom."

The officer, puzzled, asked, "Are you drunk? If you have a problem, tell me, or go out and dance with those buffoons who celebrate winning a T20 World Cup more than their loved ones' successes! Some of them can't even stand to see their spouse or sibling succeed. Why don't you join them and let us be at peace?"

Ranvijay, visibly struggling, replied, "Sorry, Sir. I don't know what to do anymore. I can't share anything with anyone. I can't handle the pressure of marriage. I don't know how to..." The officer interrupted, "Is something wrong with you? Now we have to solve your marriage problems? Just go home and get some sleep, man," and walked away.

Ranvijay started crying again, but no one asked why. Instead, people gave him strange looks. He left the station and stopped near an ice cream shop. Sitting on a chair outside, he wept uncontrollably. Nearby families were enjoying their ice cream, some even taking pictures. They stared at Ranvijay, and one parent made sure no children went near him. The shopkeeper came out and said, "Sir, can you please not sit here? You're scaring the kids and making the families uncomfortable." Ranvijay stood up, apologized, and started driving again.

As he drove, his tears kept flowing, blurring his vision. He wiped them away with his hands, but they kept coming. If only there was someone to wipe them for him, to hold him while he drove. But sadly, no one was there. He continued driving aimlessly, lost not just on the road but in life. Finally, he reached a bridge, and without hesitation, he drove his bike into the river below. He sank into the cold water, struggling to come up for air, but he couldn't. He couldn't.

If only someone had been there to pull him out. But sadly, no one was there.

Ranvijay, his name means "victorious in battle." But what a shame. He couldn't win this battle. If only someone from his family had listened to him. If only a friend had asked the right questions, offered some advice, or just been there. If only the people celebrating had looked a little closer. If only that policeman had listened to his story. If only the shopkeeper had asked him the right question and listened. If only those families had dared to talk to him. If only we were a little more human, just to listen, to see a helpless man.

How strange is it that a helpless man can be so frightening, so uncomfortable to others? Do we get uncomfortable when a woman cries? No. But then why can't we accept a crying man? Why can't we reach out and ask a few questions? Why can't we just listen? Why can't society accept that men can be vulnerable, too, and need someone to listen?

If someone had listened to his story, maybe he would have lived to fight another day. But no one did.

For those who don't see the problem in society's behavior, this is where the story ends. The real story ends here. You can close the book now. No need to feel guilty, because this is who we are as a society, and this is our reality.

But if you like fictional stories, let's go further.

The officer sat in silence, moved by Ranvijay's words. Then, he walked over to him, gave him a hug, and said softly, "Don't worry. Everything will be fine. We're here for you. We believe in you, and you will make it through this."

Ranvijay stopped crying, stood up, and smiled a faint, fragile smile. He left the station to fight the battle of life for another day.

All it took was this much: someone to listen, a hug, and a few supportive words. Is that so hard for us? As someone's friend, someone's partner, someone's parent, as a human being just listen, hug, and support. For you, it's a matter of a few hours and some awkward moments. But for others, it might be the difference between life and death.