

India's Forgotten Women

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Every 34 minutes in India a woman is raped, but for the handful of cases that ever make it to court, only 5% are ever prosecuted.

This month a shocking new documentary, directed by **Michael Lawson**, sheds light on the **exploitation** and **oppression** faced by **India's Dalit women** due to their **gender, class and position** at the bottom of the cruel **caste system**-a centuries-old hierarchy of social **class** in to which individuals are born.

Filmed in the towns and villages of Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Belgaum and Mumbai, **Anjali Guptara**, presenter of the documentary, takes us in to the homes and communities of these **women**, outlining the issues they face on a daily basis due to **India's** ancient yet regimental **caste system**, which decides their fate before they have even been born.

Through interviews and astonishing footage, **Anjali** uncovers the hidden lives of the **Dalit women** subject to brutal **domestic violence, dowry crime, rape, sex selective abortion, female infanticide, bonded labour, temple prostitution and human trafficking.**

She explains, 'One of the main problems with the issues that we cover is that people think they are historical problems, perhaps even legends and myths.' The film explores issues of **sexual violence** with stories of **rape** by **men** of higher **caste**, of police turning a blind eye and the legacy of **depression** and **suicide** that follows.

Kishwar Desai, a **campaigner for women's rights** in **India** and author of **'Witness the Night'** said, 'There is a complicity of **corruption** between the police, judicial system, politicians, media and the uncivil society.'



Pipe Village Trust

Presenter Anjali with just a handful of the millions of young girls doomed by their class, caste and gender

Perhaps most disturbing are the scenes of **temple prostitution**, officially outlawed in 1988, where **girls** as young as four are sold to **priests** by **desperate** parents for **financial** exchange. By the time these **girls** are twelve they are used as **prostitutes**.

Lawson, the film's producer, director, composer and cameraman added, 'For growing, **economically successful India**, in public the **Dalits** are an **embarrassment**. In private, the **exploitation** continues as it has for centuries.'

In the world's largest **democracy**, this treatment of **women** is a contradiction in its highest form. By uncovering the truth, **Pipe Village Trust**, a small UK film making **human rights charity**, gives these **Dalit women of India** a voice, but insists that it is how viewers choose to respond that will determine how long the terrible **suffering** continues.

The DVD is now available to buy online from the Pipe Village Trust website.

How does this make you feel as a woman? Do you think it is our responsibility to fight for women's rights in India?

Whatever your thoughts, let Marie Claire know by posting a comment below.

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Wednesday 7 July 2010

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