

SOMETHING ROTTEN:

ON SUSHANT SINGH RAJPUT DEATH AND THE MEDIA MOB

The death of Sushant appears to have laid bare deeply entrenched social prejudices

A young talented Bollywood actor tragically ended his life on June 14. But the events that followed Sushant Singh Rajput's death by suicide have been even more shocking. On full display in the subsequent weeks were some of the worst regressive traits of Indian society, from misogyny, invasion of privacy, voyeuristic glee to a collective loss of clarity. All hell broke loose soon after his family accused the 34-year-old actor's girlfriend Rhea Chakraborty, 28, of foul play; the grief-stricken father said she had poisoned his son and filed an FIR charging Rhea with 'abetment to suicide', a crime punishable by up to 10 years in prison. A section of the media pounced on Rhea, terming her a gold digger, and handed out instant verdicts in the newsroom. Anchors appeared to have little time to discuss India's crossing four million COVID-19 cases, the 23.9% GDP contraction or the heightened border tensions. That Sushant hailed from poll-bound Bihar added a political dimension impossible to ignore. The actor, reported to have been suffering from depression, lived in Mumbai, which is now ruled by estranged Bharatiya Janata Party partner, the Shiv Sena, together with the Nationalist Congress Party and Congress, and his demise has become political fodder crossing limits of decency, drawing in other Bollywood celebrities.

Three top government agencies, the Enforcement Directorate, the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Narcotics Control Bureau grilled Rhea for days. The NCB finally arrested her on September 8 linking her to a drugs case in Sushant's death probe. Rhea has denied any wrongdoing, telling the media that she didn't speak after Sushant's passing away out of grief and respect for him. Whether Rhea has committed a crime the law will decide, but as she and her family fight this battle, the spotlight is firmly on Indian society and its deeply entrenched prejudices. Women's rights activists have spoken up against the demonisation of Rhea, and how gender, the clothes she wore, the undefined relationship she had with the actor, all played a role. What is perhaps more disturbing is that many women, far from empathising with a girl who lost her boyfriend in such circumstances, have been quick to pronounce Rhea guilty of any number of wrongdoings. That people could erupt with joy at her arrest on charges not directly related to the death is an indication that vague demands of justice for Sushant have played out as a blood sport. A mob that seems to find its voice through TV anchors and social media appears to have overruled ideas of justice, fairness and even the law. It is important that India's criminal justice system delivers justice in this case.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ❖ rotten (adjective) – bad, unpleasant, unprincipled, immoral. | ❖ prejudice (noun) – discrimination, partiality, intolerance, bigotry. |
| ❖ mob (noun) – a large, disorganized, and often violent crowd of people. | ❖ on display (phrase) – to show something for people to see. |
| ❖ lay bare (phrasal verb) – reveal, uncover, expose. | ❖ subsequent (adjective) – following, ensuing, successive. |
| ❖ deeply (adverb) – strongly, profoundly, intensely, completely, entirely. | ❖ regressive (adjective) – retrograde, retrogressive, unprogressive/negative. |
| ❖ entrenched (adjective) – ingrained, established, embedded. | ❖ trait (noun) – quality, characteristic, attribute, feature. |

- ❖ **misogyny** (noun) – prejudice, dislike, hatred (of women).
- ❖ **invasion** (noun) – attack, assault; violation, infringement, breach.
- ❖ **voyeuristic** (adjective) – relating to pleasure from seeing other's pain/distress.
- ❖ **glee** (noun) – delight or pleasure.
- ❖ **all hell breaks loose** (phrase) – the situation suddenly becomes confused or disorganized with a lot of people arguing (or fighting) angrily.
- ❖ **foul play** (phrase) – crime/violence; unfair or dishonest actions.
- ❖ **grief-stricken** (adjective) – devastated, heartbroken, upset, sorrowful.
- ❖ **first information report (FIR)** (noun) – a written document prepared by the police when they receive information about the commission of a cognizable offence.
- ❖ **charge** (verb) – accuse formally.
- ❖ **abetment** (noun) – the act of encouraging/assisting someone to commit (an illegal thing/wrong thing/crime).
- ❖ **pounce** (verb) – attack suddenly, take advantage of something (weakness/mistake).
- ❖ **gold digger** (noun) – a person, typically a woman, who engages in a type of transactional relationship for money rather than love.
- ❖ **hand out** (phrasal verb) – give out, issue, provide; impose/inflict (a misfortune/penalty).
- ❖ **Gross domestic product (GDP)** (noun) – a measure of economic activity in a country. It is the total value of a country's annual output of goods and service.
- ❖ **contraction** (noun) – In economics, it refers to a decline in national output as measured by gross domestic product.
- ❖ **heightened** (adjective) – increased, intensified, worsen, aggravated.
- ❖ **hail from** (verb) – come from, be from, be a native of.
- ❖ **dimension** (noun) – aspect, feature, side, element.
- ❖ **poll-bound** (adjective) – destined/guaranteed to have election (which is imminent/approaching).
- ❖ **estranged** (adjective) – alienated, hostile, disaffected/antagonized.
- ❖ **demise** (noun) – death, passing away.
- ❖ **fodder** (noun) – something considered useful only for a particular purpose; (fodder generally means food, particularly dried hay or straw, for cattle and other livestock).
- ❖ **decency** (noun) – correctness, morality, dignity, propriety.
- ❖ **draw** (verb) – pull, drag.
- ❖ **grill** (verb) – question, cross-examine, probe.
- ❖ **wrongdoing** (noun) – immorality, misbehaviour, misconduct, mischief.
- ❖ **grief** (noun) – sorrow, sadness, pain, heartbreak.
- ❖ the **spotlight** (noun) – the public attention, the focus of public/media; the public eye.
- ❖ **activist** (noun) – a person who supports a political or societal change/cause.
- ❖ **speak up** (phrase) – to express one's opinion (in support/against something) openly.
- ❖ **demonisation** (noun) – the depiction or portrayal of someone/something as bad/threatening.
- ❖ **play a part/role** (phrase) – contribute to, be instrumental in, be a factor in.
- ❖ **perhaps** (adverb) – maybe, possibly.
- ❖ **far from** (phrase) – not, not at all, nowhere near.
- ❖ **empathise** (verb) – identify, sympathize, have insight into (others feelings).
- ❖ **circumstances** (noun) – situation, conditions, state of affairs.
- ❖ **guilty** (adjective) – culpable, at fault, responsible for misconduct.
- ❖ **erupt** (verb) – appear, emerge, break out, flare up.
- ❖ **pronounce** (verb) – announce, state, articulate, express.
- ❖ **blood sport** (noun) – a contest involving bloodshed (killing or wounding of animals/people).

- ❖ **erupt** (verb) – break out, start suddenly, flare up.
- ❖ **vague** (adjective) – imprecise, inexact, unclear/uncertain.
- ❖ **play out** (phrasal verb) – happen, occur, take place.
- ❖ **voice** (noun) – opinion, view, comment.
- ❖ **overrule** (verb) – reject, disallow, override, cancel.
- ❖ **fairness** (noun) – impartiality, justness, neutrality, equal treatment.

DRAWDOWN IN IRAQ: ON U.S. TROOP REDUCTION

Jihadist groups should not be allowed to fill security vacuum after American troops leave

The U.S.'s decision to cut troops in Iraq is both a relief and a challenge to the Iraqi government. It is a relief because public opinion in Iraq is increasingly against the continuing presence of U.S. troops in the country, particularly after the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad in January. Iraqi lawmakers passed a non-binding resolution after the assassination, asking the government to oust the Americans. The new government of Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi has stated that it does not want U.S. troops in combat operations. But he has asked for training services and other assistance. Now that the U.S. is cutting troops from 5,200 to 3,000, Mr. Kadhimi could argue that his government is committed to seeing the full withdrawal of the U.S. troops. It is a challenge because the U.S. troops had played a key role in the war against the Islamic State (IS), and with the drawdown, the Iraqi forces would have to share a greater burden in the fight against jihadists. The American political leadership has long wanted to pull troops out of Iraq. President Barack Obama had set a timetable for the pull back and withdrew most troops by 2011, but he had to send thousands of soldiers back to Iraq after the rise of the IS. President Trump promised to end the "endless wars" during his campaign. Now that the IS has been driven out of the major population centres of Iraq, he could claim victory and draw down troops.

While the U.S.'s decision is part of the Trump administration's larger policy of bringing back American troops home, the local factors cannot be overlooked. The U.S. found it increasingly difficult to station a large number of troops in Iraq. At the height of the war, the U.S. had over 1,50,000 troops in Iraq. But in recent years, it found stationing even 10,000 troops risky. This is partly because of the hostile political environment and partly due to the growing influence of Iran and Shia militias in Iraq. In January, the U.S. killed Soleimani after Shia militias attacked American troops. Iran retaliated by launching ballistic missile attacks on a U.S. air base in Iraq, injuring some 100 American soldiers, while the Shia militias continued attacking U.S. troops. In March, three of the coalition troops, two of them Americans, were killed in such an attack. Since then, the U.S. has repositioned troops, and the drawdown will reduce risks of such confrontations in the future. While the Americans leave, the Iraqi government should be careful of not letting any security vacuum being filled by jihadist groups. Though the IS has been driven underground, at least 10,000 IS fighters are still active in Iraq, according to UN assessments. The sectarian policies of the Nouri Al-Maliki government, coupled with the security vacuum left by the U.S. withdrawal in 2011, allowed Al-Qaeda in Iraq, with battle experience from the civil war-stricken Syria, to exploit Sunni resentment in northern Iraq and build the IS. The Iraqi government should not allow history to repeat itself.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **drawdown** (noun) – reduction, decrease (in the size of an armed force).
- ❖ **vacuum** (noun) – gap, space, absence, lack/deficiency of something.
- ❖ **assassination** (noun) – murder, killing.
- ❖ **non-binding** (adjective) – non-mandatory, unnecessary, non-compulsory.
- ❖ **resolution** (noun) – motion, proposal, plan.
- ❖ **non binding resolution (NBR)** (noun) – non-binding resolution does not carry the force of law and are primarily used for parties or legislators’ position taking and the request of government actions.
- ❖ **oust** (verb) – remove, dislodge, overthrow.
- ❖ **combat** (noun) – battle, fighting, war.
- ❖ **ask for** (verb) – request, demand, appeal to, call on.
- ❖ **(be) committed to** (verb) – firm, steadfast, resolute.
- ❖ **play a part/role** (phrase) – contribute to, be instrumental in, be a factor in.
- ❖ **pull out** (phrasal verb) – withdraw, leave, get/move out.
- ❖ **(the) pull back** (noun) – disengagement, retreat, withdraw.
- ❖ **drive out** (verb) – expel, remove, oust.
- ❖ **bring back** (home) (phrasal verb) – cause someone to return (to one’s residence).
- ❖ **overlook** (verb) – miss, fail to notice; disregard, neglect/ignore.
- ❖ **station** (verb) – deploy, base.
- ❖ **at the height of** (phrase) – at the most extreme part/point of something.
- ❖ **partly** (adverb) – to a certain degree, to a certain extent, relatively, somewhat.
- ❖ **hostile** (adjective) – opposed, inimical, averse, ill-disposed.
- ❖ **environment** (noun) – situation, context, scenario.
- ❖ **growing** (adjective) – increasing, intensifying, amplifying.
- ❖ **influence** (noun) – power, authority, sway, leverage.
- ❖ **Shia** (adjective) – relating to Shia branch/sect of Islam.
- ❖ **militia** (noun) – armed forces, military unit, soldiery (from the civil population to support main forces).
- ❖ **retaliate** (verb) – hit back, counterattack, take revenge.
- ❖ **ballistic missile** (noun) – a missile, which is shot from the ground, takes a long distance to travel well outside the atmosphere and falls to the earth to explode on its target (due to the gravity).
- ❖ **air base** (noun) – a base/place used by a military force for the operation of military aircraft.
- ❖ **confrontation** (noun) – conflict, scuffle, face-off.
- ❖ **let** (verb) – allow, permit, warrant.
- ❖ **underground** (adverb) – into hiding, into seclusion, undercover, behind closed doors, out of sight.
- ❖ **sectarian** (adjective) – denoting a sect (a group of people); factional, partisan.
- ❖ **(be) couple with** (verb) – combine, integrate, connect, incorporate, link.
- ❖ **civil war-stricken** (adjective) – seriously affected/inflicted (by civil war).
- ❖ **exploit** (verb) – take advantage of, make use of, utilize.
- ❖ **Sunni** (adjective) – relating to Sunni branch/sect of Islam.
- ❖ **resentment** (noun) – bitterness, indignation, enmity, hatred/hate.
- ❖ **history repeat itself** (phrase) – things that have happened in the past will or tend to happen again in one way or another.