

SPEECH OF HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE VIJENDER JAIN, CHIEF JUSTICE, PUNJAB AND HARYANA HIGH COURT, CHANDIGARH ON 1.5.2008 IN A SEMINAR ON *"INCREASING TRENDS OF SUICIDES AND UNNATURAL DEATHS"* IN PUNJAB UNIVERSITY, CHANDIGARH.

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I indeed feel honoured on being invited to preside over this conference of students, teachers and parents on one of the most burning topics of the day i.e. "increasing trends of suicides and unnatural deaths". With newspapers and electronic media everyday reporting growing incidents of suicides and unnatural deaths, our attention has once again been focused on these two important topics. The fact that the incidents of suicides and unnatural deaths are increasing among youth is again the reason for us to sit and deliberate on these matters. However, I wish to add that since the topic you have chosen for the day has got many dimensions, considering the time constraints, I feel it would not be possible to do it complete justice..

Since time immorial we have been taught to respect human life. Killing oneself has never been eulogized in any civilised society.

Human life is indeed invaluable. The powers of human mind and physical strength cannot be measured in any terms. The void created by ending a life cannot be filled by any process. God has made us such that one of us cannot substitute for the other. It is, therefore, necessary for us that all the human efforts should be directed towards protecting life.

Since suicides and unnatural deaths are increasing among our youth, it is necessary that we deliberate on this problem. Some of the reasons that I have been able to identify from my experience in respect of growing incidents of suicides among our youth are failure to cope up with the stress on account of exams; unrequited love; financial loss; loss of reputation and failing to appreciate and respect the worth of human life and human birth. In respect of marks and division, the students may

have secured, let me quote what noted historian Arnold Toynbee once said: “ *It is both absurd and unjust to classify a person, once for all, as being first class or third class when he is only twenty two years old. There are slow-growers who blossom late in life and conversely there are brilliant starters who fail to fulfil their early promise.*” It is the law of nature that every one who is born in this world will die one day. To die a natural death is certain but to die an unnatural and untimely death is not proper. A comprehensive study of suicides by different people over a period of time can be quite useful. We have students committing suicides for failing in exams; we have married men and women committing suicides for failing to pull on with married life; we have cases of young men immolating themselves on account of Government policies and legislation. There are cases of army and para military jawans committing suicides for failing to cope up with the loneliness and stress of job. We find newspapers reporting cases of suicides by our farmers for failing to repay the usurious loans.

These are some of the illustrative cases. We cannot say that a particular community or section of the society is more prone to the act of suicide than the other. In fact, the problem varies from person to person. However, it is a fact that in the ultimate analysis it is an individual's failure to cope with a situation, which is responsible for the suicide. It is, therefore, necessary for us that we guide our young men along proper lines so that they may be able to cope up with the stress. Physical activity such as playing games, listening to music, yoga and pranayama can play a vital role in de-stressing our young men. Games make our attitude competitive and help us to have 'Never say die' approach. It is admitted by all that Yoga and Paranayama sooth our nervous system and make us stress free. I would recommend all the young men present here to go for a long brisk walk whenever they are under stress. Walk briskly to your capacity till you start sweating. As a human being, do not remain self-centered but take genuine interest in others. Let me tell you very frankly that health clinics; professional

counselors; medical practitioners and NGOs cannot do all that what you can do for your friends and neighbours.

I have already mentioned that the problems of suicides and unnatural deaths have many dimensions. As a Judge, I cannot resist my inclination to dispel a confusion among laymen. There is a confusion that the judiciary is divided as far as justification or non justification of suicides is concerned. We have got Section 309 in the IPC which punishes attempted suicide. In the year 1994, in *P.Rathinam v. Union of India* (1994) 3 SCC 394, a Bench of the Supreme Court held Section 309 unconstitutional being violative of Article 21 of the Constitution. However, in *Gian Kaur v. State of Punjab* (1996) 2 SCC648, the Apex Court overruled its earlier decision in *P.Rathinam's* case and held Section 309 constitutional. The constitutionality or unconstitutionality of a provision is a different matter; its justification or non-justification quite another. Hon'ble Supreme Court never justified suicide.

This brings me to the second aspect of the topic i.e. unnatural deaths. Materialism and its offshoot in the form of consumerism has thrown fresh challenges for us in the twenty first century. I do not want to delve into the various causes of unnatural deaths. However, what is of concern to me is the organized manner in which we are exterminating our girl child. Though we have enactment to punish for this crime, but where is the complainant? The would-be mother; her husband; mother-in-law and father-in-law do not want the girl child. A doctor is available readily with the latest gadgets and highly specialized professional skill to help them to get rid of the problem. In the villages, we have got quacks and in the cities we have got highly specialized doctors whom you can find out easily by making an online search on the internet. Oblivious of our unethical, immoral and illegal acts, we are persisting in our quest to have a male child, wholly unmindful of the consequences of our acts and its repercussions on our future generations, forgetting that the

imbalance created by us in the gender ratio would spell disastrous consequences for us. I am afraid in case we continue with the present trend of killing our girl child; we will criminalise our society and also bring about a lopsided mental change in our men. In case the present trend of killing the girl child continues, apart from other problems, which we are going to face, are the problems of law and order and the mental health of our young men. We men are forgetting that women created us. We are forgetting that we cannot create ourselves. This society requires women as much as men. One without the other is wholly unthinkable. But I am not a pessimist. Every dark cloud has a silver lining. I may have started treading this path with a few, but today I have many with me. The conference on this problem, the other day at Delhi, presided over by our Prime Minister, is enough testimony of the fact that we are waking up to the alarming proportions of the problem. I am not only quite hopeful but confident that the day is not far off when

our girl child will get back her rightful place in our society and enjoy pristine glory.