

THE NIGHT SHIFT

RANJANA, THE BOUNCER

Voice Over

Ranjana: If I beat someone up and call [my husband] from a police station, asking him to come, he will surely know that I have assaulted that person and not the other way round! My husband knows I am not the one to take a beating. If someone slaps me once, I will slap them back at least twice.

Kunal: Has this happened?

Ranjana: "Yes!" (Laughs)

Voice Over

Ranjana: I have been in the security and bouncer industry for 18 years. It is only after 2010 that I became a bouncer. Before that, I was in the Home Guard and worked at private security firms.

Voice Over

Ranjana: As soon as the customer walks in from the gate, Govind and I immediately have an understanding on whether to allow that person in or not. We ask them if they are ready to pay a cover charge or not. If not, then we don't allow them in. If their 'profile' is not good, then we decline entry, even if they pay us a cover charge. Often, some men just don't understand and they insist on entering the club. We waste so much time every weekend just arguing with such customers, but they refuse to understand.

Voice Over

Ranjana: Everyone sees me as being 'Khadoos' (rude/snobbish). No one dares to speak to me in the wrong way. When I refuse entry, they call the manager. Even if the manager agrees and tells me to let them in, I let them go but I warn them anyway, that if I don't like them, I'll throw them out. I just need permission from my manager to throw them out, and that's it.

Voice Over

Ranjana: When I started doing night shifts, I, of course, liked the work, colleagues, the working conditions... Everything. But when I'd finish work and left for home at 3:30 am, I felt a bit scared. What if someone tried to do something? What will I do in that case? That same night, I went home and woke my husband up. He's like a friend to me, so I had a discussion with my husband right away. I asked him, should I do this job? My husband asked me, what do you feel like? I said, I feel I will be able to do it.

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Voice Over

Ranjana: I now go home, on my own, at 3:30 am. I don't wait for anyone anymore. Earlier, I used to ask my male colleagues to accompany me. But, now, I go on my own. In fact, there is a slum next to this pub. My male colleagues don't dare to go there. But I don't care. I go on my own, crossing that slum area every night. My manager also tells me to not go there but I keep going. He asks me if I go alone and I lie and say 'no' (laughs), but I go nonetheless.

Voice Over

Ranjana: This walk is easy; I feel like there are always some eyes on the streets. But the walk in Diva is very dangerous for me, even though it's just a 10-minute walk. Anyone could easily kill me and dump my body in the woods and no one would ever know because I have to walk through the woods alone. But now, even that walk doesn't feel very difficult. It feels very familiar. It almost feels like the woods recognise me and are waiting for me to wake them up, each morning.

Voice Over

Ranjana: I was sitting there, waiting for my train. One man walked up to me and sat down in the seat beside mine. Bandra station is, in any case, a very dangerous station. I didn't really pay attention to him when he came over. Suddenly, he asked me, do you want to go? I gently asked him, "Where will you take me?" He named some hotel, I don't remember. I said, yes, sure, let's go. That's when he asked me how much I would charge. As soon as he said that, I hit him! Then, all my night staff came and beat him up too. He ran away before we could turn him over to the cops. (Laughs)

Voice Over

Ranjana: No one knows about my job. So, when I would leave for work in the night, people would look at me and say that I must have a bad character. When they realised what the work was, they slowly started respecting me.

As soon as I would get a night shift, my mum's face would drop. She would ask me, why is it that only you get night shifts? But my father supported me completely and would tell my mom that they shouldn't stop me since I was just doing my duty.

Even when I was in the Home Guard, my mother wasn't happy. She would keep telling me that there was no point going to work, that I had to ultimately get married and become a housewife. She would tell me that I should, instead, learn how to cook, how to knead the dough, how to make *rotis*. All that would help me, my job wouldn't, she would say.

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Ranjana: As soon as I got married, my in-laws told me that they won't let me work after marriage. I said okay. I sat at home for two years but couldn't bear it beyond that. I became a total housewife. It was the most difficult job that I had ever done, those two years of being a housewife and living in a joint family. I had to ask the family elders two days in advance if I wanted to go out somewhere. I had never experienced this before. I had to tell my mother-in-law that I wanted to step out, who had to then ask the other elders in the family. I felt very stifled, like a bird who was caged. I asked my father, what have you pushed me into? (Laughs). But it takes time to understand each other. One must give it time. If I had not given those two years to my relationship with my husband, he would not be supporting me as much today.

Voice Over

Ranjana: In my view, we consider ourselves equals. Going ahead, too, I will be able to do these jobs only because my husband has supported me. If you want to live in Mumbai, then you need to be equal to your husband and deal with them. My husband takes Rs 15,000 home each month as his pay. I tell my husband, I earn more than you, so you dare not talk to me the wrong way (Laughs). Do you get it? (Laughs)

Voice Over

Ranjana: Today, no husbands are willing to even enter the kitchen. They say: we are giving you our salaries, you need to cook for us. At least in the social and professional circles that my husband is a part of, owing to his job as a loader in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), this is the trend there.

I only have to make chappatis. He will cut all the vegetables, keep everything ready. No other husband does this much. Most would just demand that the food be kept ready when they come home. Sometimes, when the kids dirty the house, he just clears it. He doesn't wait for me. He just cleans it up because he knows that I am working. But many in the community still taunt him and question his manhood -- What kind of a man does women's duties?

In fact, as soon as we shifted to Diva, the neighbours didn't understand my lifestyle and started raising doubts about my character. They said, what kind of a woman goes to work at night and comes back in the morning? If even people in Mumbai were saying such things, people in Diva, which is still just a village, would obviously also say this.

Voice Over

Ranjana: My husband salutes Kalpana Chawla. I can't be like her but he says that for him, I am his role model. He tells people, "I couldn't achieve what I wanted to, but

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my wife is fulfilling my ambitions." My husband and I have managed to change people's perceptions.

Voice Over

Ranjana: When I first got married, I was expected to wear sarees even at home. It was weird for me! The first day, I managed. But the second day, I couldn't. I wore it the wrong way. When I stepped out, the whole family was staring at me, like what the hell was I doing it? I told my sister-in-law, whatever it is, I am what I am!

They expect that the daughter-in-law must come home in a saree when she visits us. So, I have stopped going. My husband goes. I can't pretend. If someone tells you that I left home in a dress but then I visit you in a saree, I don't want to do that. I told them, what I don't agree with, I won't do. I absolutely won't.

Voice Over

Ranjana: I keep telling my daughter that you should go into the military and try and do what I could not. I want her to learn martial arts and karate so that she can lead her life independently, even if it is tougher than mine. She might look to me for inspiration, but she will have to lead her life on her own.

Voice Over

(Conversation with Ranjana in the background)

Ranjana: I want there to be a ladies' special train even at midnight, which is packed and salutes men as it passes, right before their eyes. This will happen, it surely will, but in 10 years. Ladies will start leaving homes in the nights by then.

Voice Over: And just as she says that, her train arrives.

This transcript has been edited lightly for clarity.