



January 11, 2022

To,
Shri Hemant Nagrale, IPS
Commissioner of Police, Mumbai
Dr Dadabhai Naoroji Rd, Police Colony,
Mumbai- 400001
cp.mumbai@mahapolice.gov.in

Subject: Request for comprehensive action in “Bulli Bai” case

Respected Sir,

We, concerned citizens and organizations of Mumbai, are writing to you amidst rising concerns over the shocking case of the ‘Bulli Bai’ app where Muslim women’s doctored photos were used to auction them off on an app hosted by Git-Hub by miscreants.

We applaud the prompt and swift action taken by the Mumbai Police under your leadership, that has led to the capture of three of the culprits so far. The speed at which the police acted in the case is reflective of the professional capabilities of Mumbai Police in uncovering crime. While we appreciate these actions of the Mumbai Police, there are certain concerns that we wish to flag at the outset.

We are well aware that in your public briefings to the media, you have indicated that while three persons have been arrested, some more people were likely to be involved in the wider conspiracy or crime. There are also reports that you are probing why some of the Twitter handles which promoted the app used Sikh-sounding names.

Our concern is also about the many other facets of the case that one has not been able to fathom yet. There is a growing concern about auction apps such as ‘Bulli Bai’ which surfaced on January 1, 2022, and its predecessor ‘Sulli deals’ that came to light in July 2021, that are being used to target women from the minority community.

Back in July 2021, too, an FIR was filed with Mumbai police by a lawyer named Fatima Zohra Khan. She was quoted when speaking to the international channel, Al Jazeera, “We got no response from Twitter, GitHub and Go-Daddy [web hosting company] despite the Mumbai Police themselves requesting them to reveal data. These websites refuse to share information unless a court warrant is produced”.

Hence, there is a possibility that the main perpetrators behind both the apps are the same, or at least closely connected, and have conspired to target women in such a manner all over again despite the police being apprised of the matter since July 2021.



Sir, more often than not, when it comes to such cases of generating systemic and societal hatred against a section of our people, especially women from marginalized sections, the persons who set things in motion are often found to be pawns of people who have power and clout, both political, social and economic. It seems clear, these young people who are now accused in the case, had some ‘influential persons’ and ‘forces’ who may have been directing them to act. Investigating these would possibly reveal the larger, grave and sinister motives behind these ‘auctions’.

Sir, as close and concerned observers of how the forces of hate generation and technology work however, we are trying to emphasise that there is much more than meets the eye. Our concerns are the dignity of scores of women who have been targeted by this app, and who could potentially be targeted through physical violence and online abuse by a similar design in the future. Only a strong and meaningful investigation could even begin to ensure that justice is done in the case of the “Bulli Bai” app unlike in the previous such instance of the “Sulli Deals” app in July 2021.

Growing online hostility towards women

We would also like to highlight that while the case at hand has brought forth one particular incident of how women are targeted online, such sexist or misogynistic abuse and threats have become rather common online. The violence and abuse many women experience online has a detrimental effect on their right to express themselves equally, freely and without fear.

A December 2021 survey commissioned by Amnesty International also shows that women who are more active on the platform were more likely to report experiencing online abuse, compared to those less active – 40 per cent of women who use the platform more than once a day report experiencing abuse, compared to thirteen per cent who use the platform less than once a week.

Even in the case at hand, the app was being openly propagated on Twitter and must have reached lakhs of users in that manner. The ease and speed with which content can proliferate on Twitter means that women’s experiences of violence and abuse on the platform require an urgent and adequate response from the company, which is lacking. It is this opportune moment when the Company ought to be held accountable for its lack of action in this case. Its algorithms failed to detect such content and unless any user manually reports a particular tweet, it does not get taken down and in many cases even after it is reported, it takes much longer for it to be taken down which means that until then it has already reached its desired audience.

Our earnest request is that companies like Twitter and Git-Hub, which have made possible for such illegal content to be hosted and shared in the first place, should also be held accountable. Action should also be taken against Twitter as may be permissible under the Criminal Law and Information Technology Act.

We are also sure you are aware that today an independent news portal, The Wire has investigated and unearthed an App called Tek Fog that has been created by a prominent political party in power to manipulate trends and foment hatred (<https://thewire.in/tekfog/en/1.html>)



Prayer

We hence urge you to investigate hard and dig deeper into this matter to get to the root of which individuals or organizations are the real conspirators behind the 'Bulli Bai App' and the 'Sulli Deals App.' We also earnestly request you, in the interest of justice for these women and for women at large, that this investigation be transparent and full-fledged, one that serves as a deterrent for future offenders and becomes a beacon of hope for women. Regular public briefings to the press and public, taking candid questions would restore some measure of confidence and dignity among those affected.

Signatories:

Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP)

Sandhya Gokhale, Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW)

Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, Mumbai

Justice Coalition of Religious, West India

People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Maharashtra

Haseena Khan, Bebaak Collective

Haq Hai

Parcham Collective

Chitra Palekar

Brinelle D'Souza

Geeta Seshu

Chayanika Shah

Teesta Setalvad

Javed Anand

Ahmed

Albert Dsouza

Amit Erandole

Arumugam S P

Ayush Srivastava

Bandish Bhoir



Begum Shaherbanoo Husain Lagad

Chiranjeevi Veturi

Elma Goldwyn

Gunjal Jain

Hamza Shaikh

Jaydeep Doshi

Jennifer Fernandes

JVR Murty

Kamal

Kanupriya

Kumud Shankar

Lakshmi Sreenivasan

Larissa Fernand

M R Singh

Manoj Jha

Marcia DCunha

Meenakshi Dossa

Meha Khanduri

Mushtaq Khan

Nadeem Sayed

Nandtara

Nasreen Ebrahim

Radhasrinivasan

Randhir Deore

Rohan Baban Sonawane

Rupa Gulab

Sakshi A



Sarah Deo

Sarojeni Rengam

Shiraz Bulsara Prabhu

Shivani Vakil Savant

Shivanjay Wagh

Shruti Lokre

Sukla Sen

Suresh Bhusari

Valenie

Vinita Verma

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Zakaul Inam Shahzad

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