

# The Conquest of King Khan

*The grey shades of right...*

*The verdict is out. It is a landmark sentence. He is going to be locked away. The mighty has fallen. It is difficult to stay neutral. The battle lines are drawn. Either we belong in the delighted camp or the crestfallen camp. Both lobbies have a point. Who is right?*

Delighted: Salman Khan was a spoilt brat. The accident was destined. His defense lied through the trial. Let the harsh verdict be a lesson for the powerful. If King Khan can be crushed for ill deeds, so can anyone. No one is above law. The justice has been served. It's a victory for the aam aadmi. A small step by our judiciary. A giant leap towards a fair India.

Crestfallen: It was an accident. There was no intent. A terrible mistake, no doubt. But then, who is Mr. Clean in our society? Justice is supposed to be blind. Thousands of fatal accidents happen each day; how many land up behind bars? Salman's bigger crime was clearly his celebrity status. Our judiciary has stumbled. A massive fall towards an unfair India.

*It's a captivating fair vs unfair debate. Unfortunately, however, we are debating a wrong topic!*

It was a road accident. The episode was not about building a "fair" India, it was about building a "safe" India! So before we choose sides, let's first begin by asking the right question: Is the verdict going to reduce the occurrence of road accidents in our country? Only time will tell, but it appears that the impact on mindsets is going to be marginal with a short shelf life. For the simple reason: people have short memories. The drivers are going to forget about the Salman Khan tryst sooner than later. Drunkards know that the probability of killing someone in an inebriated driving state is quite small. And our country is pretty cool about almost all other kinds of goof ups on the roads.

The truth is that more people die in our country every day because of the potholes, unplanned construction, poor street lights, broken signals, traffic congestion etc. than drunken drivers. Why look far? A few Cybagians have lost their lives since our inception due to corrupt or incompetent authorities responsible for road safety. But have we heard of a contractor or a bureaucrat

being prosecuted for these willful wrongdoings? No. Why?

Because our developing country has a bigger mess to sort out first: corruption, woman safety, farmer suicides, and thousand other evils. Road safety ranks too low in the priority to capture mass attention. Salman Khan's case, as unfortunate as it was, presented our media and countrymen one terrific opening to trigger a national debate on road safety. Unfortunately, that opportunity was not capitalized. All of us got dragged into a star vs commoner debate, rather than addressing the core issue.

If our traffic cops were playing clean, the drunken drivers would be fewer. If the road contractors were held accountable, there would be lesser pot holes. If sleeping on pavements was made unlawful, there would be fewer hit and runs. If the traffic emergency taskforce worked efficiently, timely response would save more lives. And the list goes on.

But here is the trick. If the traffic cops have to play clean, their stomach needs to be filled a bit more. If road contractors have to deliver, they need stronger service level agreements and compliances. If pavements have to be uncrowded, the homeless need to be given designated permit areas to sleep. If the traffic emergency has to respond efficiently, the task force needs the infrastructure and manpower support. Finally, we need systems to monitor and audit all of the above. And above all, we need smart teams to design, implement, and execute these systems.

And what is common among all of these solutions? They cost money, a lot of it. Unfortunately, our country's treasures are reserved for bigger priorities. So is there an innovative way to generate some funding to reduce the loss of lives on our roads? Yes, there is provided the fund generated is used appropriately. We have been staring at one such innovative way over the last two days without even realizing it!



Source: Bollywood Humgama

Salman Khan is the richest celebrity on Forbes India list. In all probability, he would have been willing to trade his entire present wealth to avoid the 5-year jail term. He can regenerate his money if he is free. But once behind bars, his prime years will be over by the time he comes out. His freedom tag of a few thousand crores can go a long way in saving lives than his five year term in a prison cell. Of course, exercising such innovation has meaning only where the crime has been unintentional.

Unfortunately, this money-for-freedom concept would also be a slap on the face of justice. Then the question arises, for a developing country—what is more important: Idealism or Pragmatism? What is more right? A wrong action for a greater good; or a right action for a lesser good?

*It would be interesting to see the take of our captive audience here on Salman's verdict: a) The sentence should have been harsher; b) The present sentence is just appropriate; c) The sentence should have been lenient with a larger penalty. It has been a while since I had the pleasure of hosting an interactive dining experience with innovative commenter 🍷*