

## The Hum Podcast

### Episode 3: "Rape Culture. It's Everywhere."

*[Theme music fades in]*

Rama: Okay, rape culture. It's everywhere, we just don't know it and that's why it's called culture.

*[Music increases in volume]*

Speaker: You're listening to The Hum.

*[Music fades out]*

Gilad: Let's go back. I want to go back a bit, so Rama Rau, filmmaker of *No Place to Hide*. The Rehtaeh Parsons story pops up in the news and you're reading about it, what gets you from someone who's interested in the story, all of a sudden in Nova Scotia dealing with the family and finding yourself as the filmmaker of this story? What was the process there?

Rama: Yeah, I came across the story I think in the news because I'm a news addict, I read news like other people would read ... would watch porn I guess.

Amar: That's an interesting quote. I think we'll start the show with that quote and then we'll go from there.

Rama: Yes.

Amar: Okay.

Gilad: Maybe we name the podcast to ... anyway, moving on.

Rama: I started reading this story about Rehtaeh Parsons and it was unbelievable, the facts. The fact that they were kids who got drunk, the fact that there was a gang rape, the fact that a photograph was taken during that gang rape, from the back, which means she did not know it was happening. Then that photograph went viral, the school refused to stop the photograph from being distributed and she went to the RCMP. RCMP wouldn't believe her that she was raped.

Gilad: It's like failure one, the school.

Rama: That was failure one.

Gilad: Failure two, the RCMP.

Rama: Yes, and then it snowballed. I think it's ... and that's why I truly feel that in this film, we are all indicted. I think it's not like ... I don't want to say it's just the RCMP or it's just the school. I think when a girl is raped everyone says, "Oh, what was she wearing? What was she doing there at that time?" Because I have been asked by CBC Halifax, when they interviewed me for the film, "Where were the parents on the night it happened, parents of Rehtaeh? Was she drunk?" No one till today has asked me, where were the parents of the boys? Were they drunk? Till today no one has asked me and that to me is rape culture. It makes me so angry.

Amar: Let's talk a bit more about that.

Rama: Yeah.

Amar: I mean what ... the film premiered at Hot Docs this year. The overwhelming reviews that I've read are very, very positive, but you have had some difficult conversations with people in the media who feel this need to question either the victim themselves or question you as a filmmaker. What's that like? What are some of the craziest questions you get asked? I can imagine that that's pretty frustrating, but what is it like to actually have to sit there and defend your right to make a film about this issue?

Gilad: I want to start with, what's the craziest question you were asked? Let's start there.

Rama: The craziest question I was asked is, "Why did you make this film? It's an open and shut case. The RCMP has decided it's not a rape. Why the hell would you want to make a film about this?" That's to me crazy. I know it doesn't sound crazy, but I've received a lot of flack from Halifax media, CBC, CTV, like you name it. They cannot stand that this film has been made. They believe it makes them look bad, and this is not a new situation for me. I've made films about India and Indians hate me. I get heckled all the time, most of them being my mother.

Amar: We can go into the conversation about Indian moms and their documentary filmmaker children at another time. That's a whole therapy session just waiting to happen between me and you.

Rama: Yes, yeah.

Gilad: It's probably close to me being a Jew and working in not-for-profit and how confusing that is for my mom.

Rama: Yes, yes.

Amar: Yes, absolutely.

Rama: Being heckled or being asked tough questions is not new for me, but being heckled by a Canadian media is kind of new, and then I was shocked at first, I was mad. I remember it was a radio interview, so I was on the phone, and this person kept accusing me like I was part of the whole thing, like I was ... now I'm a third person if you really look at it. I'm merely a filmmaker just documenting these things. Can you imagine how the parents must have felt every time they faced press, every time they faced RCMP. Where was your daughter? What was she wearing? Why was she drunk? How old was she? Blah, blah, blah, blah. Not a single question about the boys. I remember finishing that interview, because that was one question they asked me, where were the parents at the time of the rape, was she drunk, and why did they not do more, why did they not keep her at home. I remember finishing that interview, I was mad. I was furious and shaking with anger, and I realized at that time how it must have felt to be the parent of a girl and how powerless they must have felt. And that's why they keep going to every screening and they keep talking and they've become activists themselves, because ... and this is perfectly ... okay, so that's the press, but there have been normal everyday people in the audience who have said, "You know, it may not be a rape. It's behind closed doors, who knows what happened. Who know ..." I said, "I'm sorry? She was unconscious, the boy confessed that she was unconscious and in Canada if you don't give consent, it is rape." That really is to me rape culture and that makes me mad.

Amar: I think the media's reaction to your film is almost more telling than the reaction of the public and the parents, because we've actually heard those stories from other victims before, from victim's families before.

Rama: Yes.

Amar: We know that victim blaming is a huge problem when it comes to sexual assault cases, that it's almost often treated like a he said, she said situation and we generally, within the criminal justice system, don't start by believing the woman, right?

Rama: Yes.

Amar: That's a huge problem, but what's even worse in a way, is hearing the media ask those questions, not hearing the RCMP's side or the cop's side or the way the

cops investigated it, and the way they investigated it was mind blowing in terms of their lack of sophistication in dealing with social media and how to deal with these issues. That's something that was really startling in your film, is the RCMP ... you say this in the movie, a lot of them don't have internet access on their desks, so how the hell are they going to investigate a crime like this?

Rama: Exactly.

Amar: It's mind blowing!

Rama: I think that ... two things in making the film shocked me and till today I carry it around with me. One is that the RCMP have no internet access. What kind of police force do we have? No wonder they're not able to handle this, how would they see it as a crime if they don't know the backdrop to the whole thing? The second thing that shocked me is that girls bullying girls. For me personally, I was shocked. I don't know why. I suppose I should expect it, but girls apparently bully more. Yeah, starting with the RCMP, they don't have internet. I don't know how far behind they are in technology, and the way they handled 10 hours of questioning the girl as soon as she was raped, like the trauma, and then saying, "Oh yeah, you gave the report to the wrong person," and then having her do it again for 10 hours.

Amar: Yeah, so the story behind that is Rehtaeh went in there with her mom, finally gave a statement, which was probably extremely difficult for her to do as a 15 year old girl, and then RCMP calls her or the local police call her and say, "Unfortunately, the person you gave the statement to was not qualified to take the statement," or something like that.

Rama: Yes.

Amar: She had to go back in and relive that entire thing all over again and then they used the inconsistencies between the two statements against her.

Rama: Yes.

Amar: That to me almost sounded like a police tactic you would use against a criminal, against someone that you're trying to get to confess to a crime. To me, it felt like they treated her like she was the criminal.

Rama: Exactly, and that's exactly what the father says too in the film. She was always treated like she was a criminal. None of the boys' phones were seized. Her phone was seized. They asked her, "Where were you? What happened?" 10 hour report and that's what boggles my mind, because you know, doing this kind of film it really makes you-

Gilad: Hang on. Go back a bit.

Rama: Sure.

Gilad: The boys' phones were never-

Rama: No.

Gilad: -never seized?

Rama: Never seized.

Gilad: Even though the photo that was spread around everywhere came from one of these boys' phones?

Rama: Yes.

Gilad: What were they expecting to find on her phone?

Rama: They were expecting to find text messages saying, "Yes, please rape me," I guess.

Gilad: Right, right. Ugh.

Rama: I don't know. That's the thing, I think ...

Gilad: Because we text those things before they happen.

Rama: No, I think the whole attitude was a boys will be boys thing. I think, "Ah kids getting together, they got drunk, something happened. Why the heck are you coming to us to report these things?" To me, it really reeks of that and Halifax really there's not much, the coal harbor, there's not much to do, and kids, what do they do? They get on social media, they're bullying each other or they're passing on text messages. I don't know, so this is I think an RCMP attitude towards the whole thing. "Kids will be kids, whatever. Why are you coming to us? Solve your own problems."

*[Theme music fades in]*

Anonymous: Greetings, we are Anonymous. Recently, there has been an update in the Rehtaeh Parsons case. Since we have made the RCMP and Nova Scotia police aware of who the boys are, the case has been reopened and has been given an independent view by the Premier of Nova Scotia. While we are happy with this decision, we are going to keep fighting and standing until the proper justice is served.

*[Music increases in volume then fades out]*

Gilad: One element that I loved in your film was the RCMP couldn't solve things and so Anonymous all of a sudden got involved.

Rama: Yes.

Gilad: Today when I was walking around and I was thinking, where are my keys, I feel like someone took my keys. It would be so great if I could get a group like Anonymous to solve some of my problems.

Amar: I think they've got bigger fish to fry, but it was a ... it begs the question, what would have happened if Anonymous didn't get involved, because it seemed like the case was going to be closed and that-

Rama: Yeah and especially in press, if you remember, like I said I was following the case right, and I think it's when Anonymous got on that I said, fuck, this is a film. This has to be told and I want to be the one telling this film. For me, the very fact that Anonymous got into it made it just ... it blew it up. It made the RCMP look like idiots and it made Canada look moronic and slow.

Amar: That's a huge moment in any filmmaker's life by the way, the fuck, this is a film moment.

Rama: Yes.

Amar: When we have those moments. Yeah.

Rama: Yes, so that's when I realized, okay I've got to do this. I wrote to the father, Glen Canning, and if you remember, Anonymous got on only after she died. It took her death to galvanize this case unfortunately, and it's not Anonymous' fault obviously, because RCMP did nothing. When she died, I think the world, it shook a lot of us to our roots, because a 17 year old died for nothing.

Gilad: Well the world was along for the ride, right?

Rama: Yeah.

Gilad: We knew about this before she had killed herself.

Rama: Yeah, we did, and that's when ... once she killed herself is when Anonymous said, "We will expose the perpetrators. We know their names, if the RCMP doesn't reopen the case," so that's when I was following it and I said, I need to get on this story. Then I contacted her father, Glen Canning, and I said, "I know this is

not the right time. Your daughter has just died and I know exactly how you feel, but I just want you to know I'm a documentary filmmaker and I really feel your loss and I would like to help you in any way I can." It took a year for me to, not earn his trust, but for me to feel that maybe he would be okay with me making a documentary, because you can't just go to someone and say, hey can I make, can you be in a film, but it also took me that long to raise funds for it. So, by the time I was ready he was ready to talk and that's how the film really took off. Once we were there it all fell into place, because they actually gave me the connections to Anonymous and friends and ... that's how it just built, because of the film.

Gilad: There's a connection to Anonymous?

Rama: Yes.

Gilad: Is it like an email address?

Rama: Well, they know people. Anonymous, who helped expose the case, are very much their friends and it was a strange moment for me because I said, "I would love to interview someone from Anonymous for the film." Leah, the mother, says, "Yes, we can put you onto Anonymous." I was like, woah, woah, woah, I'm going to get someone from Anonymous for my film? They were like, "Yes. Yes, we'll give you the contact." This person refuses to email.

Gilad: What is ... would it be like [anonymous.glenn@gmail.com](mailto:anonymous.glenn@gmail.com)?

Rama: He's called John Anonymous.

Gilad: John Anonymous.

Rama: He's a person living in ...

Amar: Does everyone just have a first name and a last name of Anonymous?

Rama: Yes.

Amar: Is that ... and you feel like John was his first name or is that made up too?

Rama: Yes. That may not be the real ... but this person refused to email, get in touch with me on email. He said, "Nope. No email. Do not email me," so I had a phone number and I called him.

Gilad: Classic Anonymous.

Rama: Yeah. It really makes you-

Amar: Those Anonymous guys, they're so shady.

Rama: -it makes you nervous as hell because what ... you're paying stuff online, you've got bank accounts online, but these guys, they refuse to do things online because they know what goes on. For me, that was kind of weird and bizarre and scary, but as a filmmaker you are exposed to all sorts of things, so I took it as part of the thing and we went to his ...

Amar: That's part of the thing that pisses me off so much about this story is that there's so much talk about our privacy issues online and whether the government should be able to do this, and here's a person who's a child who's had their privacy violated in the most deplorable way possible, out in the open, and the cops aren't able to do anything about it.

Rama: Yes.

Amar: The cops aren't able to ...

Gilad: In the most obvious way, there are photos, there are people admitting to it.

Rama: Yes.

Amar: It took ... the craziest part about the Anonymous getting involved in this story is that one of the boys actually wrote a confessional because he was worried he was going to be outed, he was worried that they were going to out his name, and so he reached out to the mom of Rehtaeh Parsons and wrote her a confession letter. That just doesn't happen.

Rama: And still the RCMP did nothing.

Amar: And still the RCMP ... and it still ends. We should say that the case still ended with no one getting a sexual assault charge at all, right?

Rama: Yes.

Amar: In fact, the charges that were laid against the boy who was in the photograph came from a completely different incident. Can you talk about that at all?

Rama: Yeah, because Rehtaeh was underage, first of all, they could not tell her name or the perpetrators name because they were all underage, but I think finally because the RCMP was shamed by Anonymous into reopening the case, they said oh, okay we are going to reopen the case, but it's going to be about child pornography, it's not going to be about rape. I still today, I don't know why they did not lay rape charges.



Amar: Is it considered child pornography if the people making it are also children?

Rama: I guess.

Amar: That seems like such a weird loop around-

Rama: Yes, I agree.

Amar: -like a stop gap measure.

Rama: But I guess it is because he was also charged with distribution of child pornography. The person who took the photo was charged with making of child pornography, and the person who, one person, one boy, was accused of distributing it. Those are the only two charges ever laid.

Amar: Geez.

Gilad: I'm looking here in the aftermath, we've got a young girl who's committed suicide, you've got a bunch of systems and services that have failed this poor girl. I'm furious just listening to this, and I was there in the screening in Hot Docs, and I'm sure you can agree people are probably walking out pretty pissed off. What do we do?

Rama: I'm actually glad you brought it up, because when I read about the story and when I was making the film and when I was editing the film, I was so angry and I want people to be angry. I want ... I don't want to soften the blow, you know, and yes you can make happy films, but I think documentaries serve us best when they push you into action. But I don't want it to be a futile anger, I don't want people to feel frustrated, I really think we should go out, talk more. If after seeing this film you're more aware of rape culture that's one thing, but I think people should be doing more about, in schools, about talking to young kids about bullying or just being more aware, and I think there should be this whole movement towards making the world a safer place for kids. I think it's just ... and just being kinder. I know it sounds silly and idealistic and rose-tinted glasses, but I really think the internet has brought out the worst in some ways in a lot of human beings, because they think it's okay to say anything and it's not. It's as simple as telling that to our school kids and that's why I want this film to go into schools, because that's really my primary audience, school kids who can be kinder to each other. When we had our Docs For Schools screenings, kids were getting up and saying, "We're so sorry for your loss," to the parents and saying, "How can we make this world a better ... " You know, and it really touches kids, and I think for that to happen, that's all you ... you just need to talk to the right people and just be kinder and be aware of cyber bullying and bullying and if you see a kid being bullied, report it. Many parents have come to me saying, "My kid

is facing this. What do I do?" It's definitely something we should talk about instead of burying it, and suicide and mental health issues. The film has so many ... like she, one person went through so many of these things. It's hard to believe that a young 15 year old, and 17 when she lost the will to live, it's just hard to believe one person faced these things. It's overwhelming when you just watch the film, so imagine living it.

Gilad: It just seemed like there were so many opportunities to intervene and help and avoid all this and it's infuriating. I want to ask a question. Both of you are Indian and we're talking about rape and film, and so there's ... you guys know the film *India's Daughter*?

Rama: Yeah.

Amar: Yeah.

Gilad: It deals with the rape culture in India and I know the film was made by a British woman with the, correct me if I'm wrong, the help of the BBC.

Amar: I think it was a BBC project, yeah.

Rama: Yeah, yeah.

Gilad: What are your thoughts on that film being made, but then India, from what I understand, going ahead and banning the film in the country?

Rama: I think it was a stupid thing to ban the film. First of all, I think the film was made under false pretenses, in the sense I know the associate producer who was involved, she's Indian. Now in India there's certain rules that unless you work with an Indian producer you can't produce this ... there's a lot of gray area there, but for me what really bothers me is not ... I don't care about ... it's not about showing a certain side of India at all, it's more about do you give a platform for these men to say the things and therefore it gets more of a validation. You know what I mean? It's very ... I'm still trying to collect my thoughts about it. I'm not saying the film should not have been made. I think definitely we should talk about it and I think India has a huge problem. It's growing, it's not going anywhere, and it's always gang rapes, because girls are not being born in India.

Amar: Yeah, I think with that film in particular, I think that there's two very separate issues. One is the way the film was made and the alleged treatment of the Indian producer, which if those stories are true is absolutely unethical and wrong. As an Indian Canadian kid I gotta be honest, I get nervous when I hear about white filmmakers going to India to make a movie, right, because I've grown up watching these documentaries about my country that are made with this almost

colonial eye to them, which really, really bugs me over time. That's not to say there aren't beautiful and important films made about India by Westerners and people from other parts of the world, there absolutely are. But the other side to that issue is India's reaction to the case, India's reaction to the rest of the world giving it scrutiny. That reaction is typically Indian in that India's, in a small way like Canada, not very good at looking itself in the eye, and there's a power structure in India that does not want things to change and does not want the West to look down on it. India oftentimes has this mistaken portrayal as sort of the beacon of democracy in the East and it's the country where everyone does yoga and speaks Sanskrit and everyone's really nice to each other, but there are deep, deep seeded problems in India-

Rama: Absolutely.

Amar: -and the treatment of women is probably at the top of that list. I think it was very important that that film got made, but again, I don't know where I stand on giving these guys a voice, but I do think it's important to understand that there are genuinely people that think these things about women, that there are men who genuinely believe that women are lower than men. In Canada, there are men who believe that, but they don't say it out loud because they don't want to be vilified for saying it out loud, but they genuinely believe it. There's value in hearing an asshole talk like an asshole, right? I do think that there's some value in that.

Gilad: I don't think we as Canadians really say anything out loud.

Amar: I think that Canada has a real ... it's important that Canada start to look itself in the eye. I think you've faced a little bit of this with-

Rama: Yes.

Amar: -*No Place To Hide*, in that people from Nova Scotia, but generally people from Canada don't believe these problems exist here.

Rama: That's the thing, right, it's easy to make a film about India and say, oh yeah it's happening there, but ...

Amar: Absolutely.

Rama: That's not why I made the film, to show Canadians, oh look it's happening here. Never, but having made it people come to me and say, "Holy shit, this is happening in Canada." Damn right it's happening in Canada. It's happening in the States, it's happening everywhere and it's about time we started looking in the eye and saying yes, it happens to us too, right?

Amar: Yeah. I mean I can say that the reason I made *The Secret Trial 5* was because I wanted people to know that it was happening in Canada.

Rama: Yes.

Amar: Because I was sick and tired of Canadians talking about how crazy the Americans ...

Rama: Yes.

Gilad: Amar, we agreed that you'd only plug your film once per episode.

Amar: Listen, okay, I've only made the one movie.

Gilad: I haven't even talked about how I am the founder and executive-

Amar: I don't have much else going on in my life.

Gilad: I haven't even mentioned how I'm the founder and executive director of JAYU.

Amar: Okay fine, let's get ... it's a film festival at the Lightbox every year, blah, blah, blah. We get it, okay. The only reason you have a film festival is because of people like me and Rama.

Rama: People like us. Yeah.

Amar: We make the films.

Rama: I agree.

Gilad: You guys are the only two filmmakers I know. I want to move this on a bit. Question for Rama and also Amar, partly for you, but we'll start with Rama. What's it like for you, not only as a female filmmaker, but a female filmmaker of color working here in Canada in a largely white male dominated industry, being film?

Rama: I've been asked that question many times and I honestly have never had a problem, in the sense I'm not saying everything's all jolly and nice, it's just that it's all about the story and it always is and if you believe in your story and if you believe you have a good story, I think it can be made. But yes, obviously when I started, yes of course I had problems, but not because I was female, I think it's more because I'm brown. When people say that, oh you know, female filmmakers, I'm like, I don't go in pitching saying I'm a woman filmmaker, you don't do that, it's just not in your ... at least not in my head saying that ... and at

the same time sometimes when I'm filming in really remote places, like recently I was in Bihar in India, which is the fucking asshole of India I would say. It's a terrible place.

Amar: Wow, wow, wow. We have a huge audience in Bihar and they're not going to appreciate you saying that.

Rama: Okay, the armpit. Sorry, polite way.

Amar: That's much better.

Rama: The armpit of India. It was very dangerous, it was very dangerous. A woman had been killed and raped three weeks ago. Anyway, and that's when it hit me, I'm a woman, I'm a woman filmmaker making a film in these parts you know, so I don't normally go around saying I'm a woman filmmaker and I'm pitching, but it does hit me many, many times that I'm a brown filmmaker. I once pitched a film to a certain broadcaster, whom we won't name, about a ghost and ... they were looking for stories about ghosts. I said, "I have an idea. I have a family home in India that's haunted by a female goddess, like a female spirit, and we believe that when the monsoons are coming she shuts every door, window. We put food outside for her. She does little things, she protects the family." They're like, "If you have a white male ghost story, get back to us."

Amar: Nice.

Gilad: We like our ghosts to look more like Casper, the white friendly ghost.

Amar: Even ghosts aren't allowed to be brown. Okay, I get that. That's interesting. I think that there's ... I'm very happy to see a lot of female representation, particularly in the Toronto documentary scene. Almost every producer that I hang out with and talk to on a regular basis is a woman, and I think that's because you have to be a self-starter in the documentary industry. The diversity issue is ... the ethnic diversity issue is different. I remember last year at Hot Docs when I premiered my film there and I was a finalist for some award, the only other person of color that I think hit that stage was Jian Ghomeshi who was hosting, and he's not hosting anymore for reasons that we won't discuss.

Gilad: I'm so sorry.

Amar: Right, but there's definitely an issue when it comes to people of color, you know, seeing themselves on these documentary screens and then wanting to believe that their stories, stories of people of color, deserve the documentary treatment, that there's an audience for them in Canada. That's definitely a conversation we need to have.

*[Theme music fades in]*

Rama:           You know what really bugs me, when people call women diverse. Like fuck off, we are half the population of the planet. How are you calling it diverse?

Gilad:           I'm the reason ... you're the reason I'm here.

Rama:           I'm sorry, you told me I could swear, right?

Gilad:           Yeah, please.

*[Music increases in volume then fades out]*