



India anger as judge frees man accused of raping wife who then died



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India is among a few dozen countries that do not recognise marital rape. **Warning: This report contains some disturbing details**

An Indian court's ruling that a man's forced "unnatural sex" with his wife is not an offence has led to huge outrage and sparked renewed calls for better protections for married women. The controversial order has also brought back into the spotlight the issue of marital rape in a country which has stubbornly refused to criminalise it.

Earlier this week, a high court judge in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh set free a 40-year-old man who was convicted by a trial court in 2019 of rape and unnatural sex with his wife, who died within hours of the alleged assault. The lower court had also found the man guilty of "culpable homicide not amounting to murder". He was sentenced to "rigorous imprisonment for 10 years" on each count, with all the sentences to run concurrently.

But on Monday, the High Court's Justice Narendra Kumar Vyas acquitted the man of all charges, saying that since India did not recognise marital rape, the husband could not be considered guilty of non-consensual sex or any non-consensual unnatural sexual act. The judgement has been met with anger, as activists, lawyers and campaigners renew their calls to criminalise marital rape in India.

"To watch this man walk away is unacceptable. This judgement may be correct legally, but it is ethically and morally abhorrent," said lawyer and gender rights activist Sukriti Chauhan. "An order that absolves a man of such a crime, to say it's not a crime, is the darkest hour in our legal system," "It has shaken us to the core. This needs to change and change quickly