

Statement

India, Ten Months after Delhi: Continue fighting the Rape Culture through

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Independent Mobilisations, Resist the Unrelenting Sexual Violence on Women in West Bengal and Everywhere in India.

For the Government of India, only Delhi matters, whether it is the rape of women or the price of onions. So after having sent its managers to handle the negative fall-out of the Delhi case, it has been pretending that all is now well in India. The reality is that its handling has been narrowly political, interested only in what it perceives as immediate gains. In province after province, and indeed even in Delhi, the reality is different.

In West Bengal, the cases of sexual violence are massive indeed. Three women/girls raped within four days. In Madhyamgram a young woman gang-raped twice, the second time after she had lodged a complaint with the police. The police have gone on record, questioning whether a gang-rape had really happened a second time. In the Rajarhat case, the hospital trainee nurse or attendant (reports differ) was attacked inside a shuttle car, rendered unconscious, and taken to a house in the Sonagachhi area, where she has been gang-raped, according to the police FIR. In Burdwan, a young woman who had gone for a tuition was missing, till her disrobed dead body was found several days later. In Malda, a ticket checker was arrested by the police for sexual violence against the wife of an army officer travelling in an air conditioned coach. Just under fifty cases of rape reported, not committed but only those reported, in West Bengal in the last sixty days. And a retired police officer goes on television, asserting that rape is not a preventable crime, since the police cannot be expected to know in advance when a woman is going to be attacked and raped.

The TMC government has been now in power for over two years, and it can no longer try and hide behind the over-used excuse of the years of CPI(M) misrule. So what the continuing violence on women show is of great significance.

In the first place, this shows that the criminally irresponsible stance of the Chief Minister and other Ministers and TMC leaders have emboldened rapists. The Park Street rape survivor, despite her strength and perseverance, is still waiting for justice since February 2012, while the main accused is still absconding.....so are the survivors of Katwa, Barasat, Katwa, Falta, Gurap, Santragachhi, Park Circus and other places throughout the province. In Kamduni, threats, constant pressure, and economic hardship have made the retention of solidarity difficult. And so, as protests die down or as the news channels feel that there is no longer much TRP to be milked out of these cases, and therefore report the continuing protests less and less, rapists are emboldened.

In the second place, the developments show that administrations and rulers have no wish to learn from past experiences. For them, rape remains simply a "law and order" problem. One still gets comments about the times when a woman should and should not go out, the issue of whether a

single woman should move around at certain times, and worse. On the TV channel 24 Ghanta, an ex-cop defended the police, saying that the police face political pressure. He also argued that police do not have adequate infrastructure, and that is why they cannot tackle rape cases.

The third important point to note is, this has, in a way, started putting paid to all those who were arguing that all the elaborate arguments of the Verma Committee were marginal, and the main thing was to hang a few of the rapists. The trial of the Delhi Rape Case of 16 December was pushed through with a swiftness unheard of in the Indian judicial process, and all the adult criminals were not only convicted by the trial court, but given the death penalty. This has done absolutely nothing to prevent further cases of rape.

Rape is preventable. But prevention of rape requires a sustained political battle. No bourgeois party, nor most mainstream left parties, are willing to take on patriarchy, which is the social-cultural-ideological fountainhead of rape. Whether the BJP, or the TMC, or the Congress, have we not heard them describe the woman, ask questions about her morality, her dress, the legitimacy of her actions, in rape case after rape case? [This is of course quite apart from the political rapes on communal and caste grounds, whether in the Delhi riots of 1984, or Gujarat 2002]. Prevention of rape requires forcing the police to take every rape case, every rape complaint seriously. If rape survivors can be assaulted immediately after they dare to protest, or if people can be assaulted and abducted while travelling from or to work, then even the law and order approach has utterly failed. And by casting aspersion on the woman, the police are certainly aiding and abetting rapists who will use the threat of repeat rapes to silence victims.

To prevent rape, to force major changes in police and administrative functioning, we need a sustained battle. This calls for struggles on several levels.

First, we need a stringent implementation of law even more than law reform and the sensitisation of all arms of the state apparatus. To merely have some women's cells of the police, or to create some all-women police stations, will do very little, as long as the bulk of the police force believes that it is legitimate to start by doubting the claim of rape, or as long as the government can think that the response to rape can be to offer compensation or Kanyashree scheme of providing scholarships to poor girl students. In the absence of security and adequate transport facilities the girl students will either face relentless sexual harassment and violence or their family will prevent them from pursuing their studies and marry them off. As long as police, or even sections of the legal profession or the judiciary remain steeped in sexist values or patriarchal beliefs, rape will not be treated by them as a systemic issue.

An ultra-left position would say, there is no point in raising these demands within the bourgeois system at all. We disagree, because it is by fighting for concrete reforms, whether or not all of them are achieved here and now, that we can develop political consciousness, as well as a clearer picture of the kind of society we are fighting for. It is by fighting for the right of all men and women to work, to have the right to go to work without being under threat, that we can put something like the Rajarhat rape case, mentioned above, in the proper context. And while we believe that the police, the judiciary, are all parts of the bourgeois state, revolutionaries also need to understand that unless we integrate the struggle against patriarchy in our everyday struggles, it cannot become a part of the revolutionary programme. At the same time, we need to take special note of the class approach of the police and fight it. In the Malda case, they acted promptly, because the woman involved was the wife of an army officer, and was travelling upper class. In Madhyamgram, the woman is the daughter of a taxi driver, so her claim of being gang raped a second time can be safely derided by the Superintendent of police.

Second, we need therefore to build broad fronts of struggle. All women's rights organisations, all democratic right organisations, trade unions, peasant organisations, student organisations, as well

as political organisations of the radical left need to unite on a non-sectarian basis for wide and sustained mobilisations. The demand for exclusions should be treated carefully here. We agree that there can be no question of giving a clean chit to the previous regime. But the central goal of the struggle should be based on concrete demands, rather than on making lists of who to include and who to exclude from rallies, or other forms of protests.

We demand:

- Immediate implementation of the Verma Committee Report by the Government of India
- Abolition of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and stern action against all cases of rape/sexual violence in custody.
- That the state must provide security to everyone living in India at all times, in all places not just citizens.
- The Government of West Bengal, especially the Home ministry, must ensure that:
- Every rape complaint is immediately followed by a proper FIR
- Rape survivors are given protection as well as the necessary medical and legal assistance
- The police take proper action all the way to filing charge-sheet, starting a case, and getting convictions.
- No to “compensation”. Provide trauma therapy instead.
- Punish the Officer in Charge as well as the Duty Officer of any Police Station that does not follow proper procedure as laid down in several legal documents in handling rape cases.
- Ensure that police are informed and trained in handling cases relating to women with disabilities.
- No to political rapes
- No to rape culture

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