

# **Sexual attacks in India: 'Freedom without fear is what we need to protect, to guard and respect'**

Thursday 27 December 2012, by [KRISHNAN Kavita](#) (Date first published: 21 December 2012).

**Following the bestial sexual attack on a 23-year-old paramedical student in Delhi, the capital, along with other cities across the country, has seen numerous protests demanding justice not just for the survivor, but better laws and stringent action against sexual offenders per se. When on Wednesday 19 December students and protesters marched towards the Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit's house, the police tried to ward them off with water cannons. Kavita Krishnan, secretary, All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA), said why Sheila Dikshit and the political establishment are responsible for women's deplorable social status in India.**

Today, we demonstrated outside (CM) Sheila Dikshit's house. Why are we demanding her resignation? We need people to understand why — it's true that Ms Dikshit made a statement saying the incident (gangrape) occurred on a private bus, not a DTC (Delhi Tourism Corporation) bus, so how could it be her responsibility. This is what we are here to tell her — if a bus containing iron rods and rapists is plying openly in the city with no rules and regulations, if it can pick up passengers at any time, anywhere — then madam, you are responsible for it, it is no one else's responsibility — it is yours. If that girl is fighting for her life today, you are responsible for it. Why was that iron rod in that bus that day — is something that only you can answer, no one else can. You cannot blame anyone else for it.

But there is a more pressing matter than even this — something that we have been talking about, that we are here to talk about today - when that journalist Soumya (Vishwanathan) was murdered, Sheila Dikshit had issued another statement saying "If she (Soumya) was out at 3 am in the morning, she was being too adventurous," — we are here to tell her that women have every right to be adventurous. We will be adventurous. We will be reckless. We will be rash. We will do nothing for our safety. Don't you dare tell us how to dress, when to go out at night, in the day, or how to walk or how many escorts we need!

When Neeraj Kumar was newly appointed as a police commissioner, he held a press conference where he said — look, how can the police do anything about incidents of rape? The statistic that he presented was that most number of rapes are committed by people known to the woman. This is an authentic statistic — but shouldn't that only make it easier to apprehend the rapist? Our question for the police is not 'why didn't you prevent this from happening?'. But the conviction rate has gone from 46% in 1971 to 26% in 2012 — who is responsible for this? The fact is that there is a huge gap in the police's investigation, there is an inconsistency — they have no procedure in place for how to deal with a victim of rape. All the women here know that the Delhi Police has only one way of dealing with such a situation — if you were to walk into a police station today and complain that you have been a victim of sexual violence, the first thing they will tell you is not to file a complaint. Strange people will begin to assemble at the station out of nowhere to "explain" to you - "beta, don't

file a complaint". Until you don't speak to the DCP and say that you are from a student body, or a women's organisation - nothing will be done. I think this is a fairly routine matter - I doubt that there is a single woman in Delhi who has gone to the Delhi Police and found otherwise. I don't know which rule book they have adopted this procedure from, but it exists.

Another statement that Neeraj Kumar made at a press conference was that women shouldn't roam around alone, they should have escorts — and that if you walk around the streets at two in the morning then how can you expect us to come and save you?

This most recent incident is of course the most obvious contradiction — it did not occur late at night, the girl was, in fact, with a male friend — but that is not my argument. I believe even if women walk out on the streets alone, even if it is late at night, why should justifications need to be provided for this, like 'she has to work late hours' or 'she was coming home from a BPO job or a media job'? If she simply wants to go out at night, if she wants to go out and buy a cigarette or go for a walk on the road — is this a crime for women? We do not want to hear this defensive argument that women only leave their homes for work, poor things, what can they do, they are compelled to go out. We believe that regardless of whether she is indoors or outside, whether it is day or night, for whatever reason, however, she may be dressed — women have a right to freedom. And that freedom without fear is what we need to protect, to guard and respect.

I am saying this because I feel that the word 'safety' with regard to women has been used far too much — all us women know what this 'safety' refers to, we have heard our parents use it, we have heard our communities, our principals, our wardens use it. Women know what 'safety' refers to. It means - You behave yourself. You get back into the house. You don't dress in a particular way. Do not live by your freedom, and this means that you are safe. A whole range of patriarchal laws and institutions tell us what to do in the guise of keeping us 'safe'. We reject this entire notion. We don't want it.

**Kavita Krishnan**

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**P.S.**

\* Tehelka Bureau, December 21, 2012:

<http://tehelka.com/freedom-without-fear-is-what-we-need-to-protect-to-guard-and-respect/>