

## [Opinion](#) » [Op-Ed](#)

Published: December 19, 2012 01:39 IST | Updated: December 26, 2012 17:20 IST

### **Rape and the crisis of Indian masculinity**

Ratna Kapur

*As women assert their identity and enter his bastions of power, the traditional Indian male is reacting with violence*

Even as the world remains shocked and horrified by the gunning down of 20 little children in Newtown, Connecticut, we need to turn some of that shock and horror toward our own selves. The gang rape in the capital of a paramedical student, who lies in critical condition in hospital, should more than just outrage us. Rape is not simply about law and order, or about deranged individuals. Nor is the problem going to be solved by more laws, more police on our streets, more CCTV cameras on our buses or stiffer sentences for rapists. The gang rapes that are occurring with alarming regularity must compel us to reflect upon who we are as a society.

Just like the killing of young innocents is forcing Americans to address the societal reasons for such violence and not just blame one individual, Indians need to understand that gang rape is not just an aberration committed by inhuman men. We need to address how we as a society are implicated in producing such appalling levels of violence against women, which is increasingly being tolerated and even normalised. As women enter the work place and the public arena, their boldness and confidence seem to trigger a sense of insecurity in a society where men are used to being in charge. While it is impossible to reduce the issue of violence to one sole cause, that is men, the fact remains that young men are the ones committing these crimes. These include the 2003 gang rape of a 17-year-old Delhi University student in Buddha Jayanti Park; the Dhaula Kuan gang rape in 2005 in a moving car of a student from Mizoram; and the 2010 gang rape of a young BPO employee from the north-east.

### **Sense of displacement**

We need to inquire why young Indian men are routinely committing gang rapes in metropolitan cities against women who are just going about their daily lives. What is the anger that motivates this level of violence? Is the sight of a young smartly-dressed educated female professional generating a sense of displacement in men? Over the past several decades, women's rights have proliferated and they are claiming their subjectivity, asserting their identity as women as opposed to being someone's wife, daughter or sister. And with the opening up of the market, women are more visible in the workplace. That they are entering male bastions of power has challenged the sense of superiority and entitlement of the traditional Indian male.

This idea of a woman as a fully formed human subject remains a difficult concept to embrace.

Even those who are ostensibly in favour of women's rights such as the National Commission of Women and the Department of Women and Child Development, continue to refer to women as vulnerable objects and discuss the issue of violence against women in highly protectionist language.

### **Built for bias**

What is required at this stage is not more protection and security, but education. The grooming of young men to have a feeling of entitlement by Indian parents breeds a sense of masculinity and male privilege. Son preference simultaneously erodes the possibility of respect for women, as girls are seen as unwanted or burdensome. Such inequalities produce the very hatred against women in the public arena that we are witnessing throughout the country. When women do not cower or display their vulnerability — thereby inviting the protection of the virile Indian male — what follows is a sense of emasculation and aggrievement on the part of these men.

More law — or calls for the death sentence — are not the answer to what is a deeply ingrained societal problem.

More law will only serve to give a sense of something being done, when in fact very little is being done. To confront the hatred that is now manifesting itself in the most egregious ways is to move forward as a society. We need to think about how we can handle women's equality in ways that are not perceived as threatening. That demands greater responsibility on the part of parents as well as society not to raise sons in a way in which they are indoctrinated with a sense of superiority and privilege. There is also a need on the part of young men to be actively involved in their schools and communities in advocating women's equality rights.

While these seem like long-term solutions that will do little to help the young woman who lies in a coma in Safdarjung hospital, law reform or hanging the perpetrators will not solve the problem. Law reforms in the area of rape have been taking place over three decades but they do not appear to have arrested the appalling levels of violence to which

Indian women are subjected. It is time for us to recognise how we as a society are implicated in producing the very individuals who are perpetrating such heinous crimes against women, and to start taking responsibility for bringing it to an end.

*(Ratna Kapur is Global Professor of Law, Jindal Global Law School, NCR)*

Keywords: [Delhi gang-rape](#), [violence against women](#), [women in the workplace](#), [gender-based violence](#)

#### RELATED NEWS

[Get in sync with reality, Congress tells RSS](#) [Time to be ashamed](#) [Delhi rape victim's condition deteriorates, say doctors](#) [Four arrested, two still at large](#) [Fast track court to be set up to try bus gang-rape case: Sheila](#) [Gang-raped in moving bus, girl fights for life in Delhi hospital](#) [Executing the neighbour](#) ['By fielding rape accused, parties are abetting crime'](#) [Policing and legal processes are hardly unimportant in tackling rape](#)

More In: [Op-Ed](#) | [Opinion](#)

[Comments\(58\)](#) [Recommended\(7\)](#) [Post a comment](#)

---

Printable version | Jan 9, 2013 1:07:59 PM | <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/rape-and-the-crisis-of-indian-masculinity/article4214267.ece>

© The Hindu

**The Hindu:** [Home](#) | [News](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Sport](#) | [Business](#) | [Arts](#) | [Life & Style](#) | [S & T](#) | [Education](#) | [Health](#) | [Homes & Gardens](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Topics](#) |

**The Site:** | [About Us](#) | [Contacts](#) | [Archives](#) | [Subscriptions](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [Site Map](#)

**Group Sites:** [The Hindu](#) | [Business Line](#) | [Sportstar](#) | [Frontline](#) | [Publications](#) | [eBooks](#) | [Images](#) |

Disclaimer: *The Hindu* is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.

Republication or dissemination of the contents of this screen are expressly prohibited without the written consent of *The Hindu*.

Comments to: [web.thehindu@thehindu.co.in](mailto:web.thehindu@thehindu.co.in) Copyright© 2013, The Hindu