

## India's Daughter: Since the Delhi rape things have got worse\*

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The day after the [Indian government banned the BBC documentary India's Daughter](#), on the horrific gang rape and killing of a student in Delhi, a 10,000-strong mob broke into a jail in a town in Assam, [dragged out an alleged rapist, beat him to death](#) and hung his body up for public view.

Does this mean that people in India are now so outraged by violence against women that they are seeking rough justice of their own? Sadly, no: the patriarchy and abuse of power that created the conditions for that appalling act in Delhi are alive and flourishing, and indeed are expressed in both this lynching and in some of the more aggressive reactions to the film. Indeed, the notion of rape as particularly bad because it affects the "honour" of women, rather than their basic personhood and physical security, is a leading cause of such reactions.

The documentary, made by a [woman who is herself a rape survivor](#), has surprisingly been criticised by the government and women's activists, including some who were at the forefront of the widespread public protests after the rape and murder of Jyoti Singh in December 2012. The banning of the film (because of shocking interviews with one of the rapists and his lawyer, who in effect argued that the woman had asked for it by resisting and being in public places at 9pm) has been justified on the grounds that it provides a platform for the most appalling and regressive views, and amounts to an incitement of violence against women.

The Indian government's real concerns are less about the safety of women than the international image of the country. They worry that the documentary will continue to present India in a bad light rather than showcase its achievements and new government. (The fact that such achievements – especially for women – are few and hard to find is not really considered.)

Shoving unpleasant truths under the carpet to display a shining facade to foreigners is an old habit of many governments. But some of the arguments against the film are more thoughtful and must be taken seriously. Kavita Krishnan – one of India's strongest progressive feminist voices, who was also interviewed for this documentary – has pointed out that [there should be restraint in airing the film while the legal appeal is pending](#), so it does not affect the case.

She also suggests [there could be a "white saviour" mentality](#) implicitly at work in the very conception of the film that could depict brutality against women as a specific socio-cultural problem of India; and she objects to the title, which describes women as daughters rather than people in their own right. In the Guardian, the author Nilanjana Roy has said that providing such publicity to a rapist and his obnoxious views [risks making him into a celebrity](#), drowning out the voices of all those who spoke up in the aftermath of the attack on Jyoti Singh.

It is certainly true that India is not the only country where women are routinely denigrated and their rights to personal safety are implicitly taken as contingent upon their ("good") behaviour. The case of the former IMF chief [Dominique Strauss-Kahn](#) and (within India) the [allegations against RK Pachauri](#), who headed the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, suggest the tendency to blame the

victim is rampant among the international elite. The culture of patriarchy is inextricably linked with global capitalism.

Even so, there is a point in exposing the depths of our societal depravity. We cannot escape the reality in India that the huge popular movement against that particular atrocity and the subsequent moves to change the laws to ensure more protection for women have, so far borne little fruit. If anything, things have probably got worse. And official lip service to the cause of women has often added more insult to injury.

In a kneejerk reaction after the public outcry, a “[Nirbhaya fund](#)” (Nirbhaya– “fearless”– was the name used initially to conceal Jyoti Singh’s real identity) was set up by the government last April to improve security for women. That fund, paltry though it was, has barely been used. The current government has been blatant in its complete disregard for implementing safety measures for women and girls. And the rapes and physical attacks continue.

At least part of this is because the attitudes displayed on film by the rapist and his lawyer are not unusual– they are widespread across India (and many countries) in all sections of society.

Trying to hide this, or prevent others from knowing about it, is not a solution. Instead, we have to confront this head on, precisely because this extreme form of patriarchy is so pervasive. Knowing our enemy– within and without– means facing all this, no matter how repulsive it may appear, because only then can we ever hope to change it.

\* This article was originally published in [The Guardian](#).