

Kolkata's protests and the culture of rape: A call for societal change

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The tragic incident at RG Kar Medical College, Kolkata underscores the urgent need for a profound societal shift in attitudes toward women

The recent public outcry in Kolkata, sparked by the tragic incident at RG Kar Medical College, has transformed into a significant and sustained protest. Junior doctors gathering in front of the Health Department, alongside widespread public engagement, underscores a profound frustration with the pervasive violence against women in India. Reflecting on the August 9 incident, it's evident that the protest is not merely about the individual responsible. Despite the apprehension of the perpetrator, the continuing movement raises crucial questions about why such intense outrage persists.

The root problem, as I see it, lies in the cultural context that enables such violence. It's not just about one person's actions but about a broader cultural environment. The protests highlight a growing recognition that the issue is embedded within a culture that normalizes and perpetuates violence against women.

The Kolkata demonstrations have brought to light a critical aspect of this cultural problem: the normalization of rape and the way women are perceived and treated. In Indian culture, women are often valued primarily for their reproductive roles, linking respect to their capacity as mothers. This perspective reduces women to their biological functions, overlooking their full humanity.

The "culture of rape" is evident in societal behaviors and attitudes that tolerate and perpetuate violence against women. This deeply ingrained culture is reflected in everyday interactions and institutional practices, indicating that the issue goes beyond individual acts.

The ongoing protests signify a crucial desire for a profound cultural shift. The movement in Bengal represents a broader call for cultural transformation. To address the problem effectively, we need to fundamentally change societal norms and practices that contribute to a pervasive culture of violence and exploitation. As long as these cultural attitudes persist, incidents of rape will continue.

The troubling normalization of sexual violence in Indian society is evident in various ways. For instance, the fact that the name of the doctor murdered and raped in Bengal was trending on porn websites for an extended period reflects a serious cultural issue. It shows how sexual violence is often

sensationalized and dehumanized rather than addressed with the seriousness it deserves.

This critique extends to societal behaviors and attitudes, illustrated by the public reaction to the Ujjain incident. The fact that such a violent act occurred in a busy area, with onlookers observing and recording it, underscores the disturbing normalization of sexual violence. Such incidents are met with alarming indifference.

Examining the cultural foundations of this issue reveals how cultural norms perpetuate gender inequality and violence. There are many subtle signs of rape culture that are often overlooked, such as the objectification of women and the normalization of harmful attitudes and practices.

Addressing this issue requires a profound cultural transformation. It's not just about legal measures or punishing offenders; it's about transforming the norms and values instilled from a young age. Culture is nurtured in our homes, and changing how we educate and raise our children is crucial to addressing rape culture.

In conclusion, the protests in Kolkata and similar movements across India are not just reactions to individual cases of violence but a critical response to a deep-seated cultural issue that normalizes and perpetuates sexual violence. This situation underscores the urgent need for a fundamental cultural shift. Until we address the broader culture of rape, incidents of sexual violence will continue to plague our society.

(Acharya Prashant is a Vedanta teacher and an advocate of women rights; views expressed are personal)