

How the Mumbai Gang Rape Affects Us

(A Discussion Paper for Parish groups and families)

*Prepared for the Women's Commission by Satyashodhak
(Mumbai based, Catholic feminist collective)*

Sexual violence affects both women and men, though women bear the brunt of it in our society. In this session we look at a more extreme form of such violence, one that is increasingly being reported and debated in the media.

Rape affects us all. Both the raped and the rapist are products of our society which we shape with our attitudes, cultures and actions. Thus all of us, in some way, contribute to this social evil.

The recent gang rape in Mumbai has brought the issue into our homes, and has the potential to affect our movement, our dress, our peace of mind and our parenting.

This discussion paper helps us to deal with rape and its fall out. It focuses on what rape means, the deep scars it leaves on the victims and society, and the need to find ways to combat and deal with it.

Share the newspaper report given below of the recent Mumbai rape with your SCC group, family, youth group, association/organisation, or workshop group. Discuss each point proceeding from the report, making sure that each member of the group has a chance to respond. Remember, everyone's point of view is just as important.

Material has been provided for the facilitator to go through beforehand so as to be able to present the paper and direct the discussion effectively.

Since the issue is a sensitive one this paper contains disturbing information. However, we cannot brush these issues under the carpet; our children are at risk.

Case Study:

On 22nd August, between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m., a 22-year-old photojournalist accompanied by a male colleague went to the Shakti Mills Compound on an assignment for a print publication. They were approached by some men, one of whom claimed to be a railway employee and said his boss wanted to see them because they were taking photographs. He refused to let the woman speak to his boss and took her and her colleague further into the mill complex. The two offered their camera and phone and begged to be let go. Instead the two helpless colleagues were separated and one of the assailants called more accomplices to the spot over the phone. When all five had arrived, they overpowered the woman's male colleague and one of them proceeded to tie him up with a belt. The others dragged her 15-20 feet away and proceeded to brutalise her.

The woman's mother called her phone several times before one of the rapists switched it off. She was threatened with, among other things, sharp pieces of a broken beer bottle.

One of the men raped her twice. The accused clicked the woman's photograph on their cell phones and threatened that if she spoke about the incident to anyone, they would defame her by revealing her identity. They ordered her to clean up the place of any evidence. To ensure that she went straight home and not to the police station, the accused took her and her colleague to the railway tracks and asked them to board a train.

The young woman and her colleague however, promptly called their seniors, and were told to go to nearby Jaslok Hospital. Bleeding profusely when she walked into the hospital the woman made sure she did not collapse before she had narrated the entire incident to the hospital staff, who immediately informed the police and ensured that a case of rape was registered. The woman not only gave details of her ordeal to the cops, she also managed to recall the names of two of her assailants.

The accused subsequently admitted to attacking at least four women in Shakti Mills complex in the last six months, including raping a ragpicker and a sex worker besides molesting a girl after she came to the complex with her male companion. Details of the fourth attack are unclear. None of these victims lodged any complaint.

1. <http://www.mid-day.com/news/2013/aug/240813-mumbai-photojournalist-gang-raped-traumatised-but-brave-victim-heads-to-hospital-help-cops.htm>
2. http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-08-28/mumbai/41537415_1_crime-branch-central-forensic-science-laboratory-ragpicker
3. <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/25/world/asia/india-gang-rape-arrest>

Questions for Discussion

In the questions below you can choose one or more answers.

1. What was your initial reaction when you read about this incident?

- Fear. It is coming closer home.
- Disgust. Has the media nothing better to report.
- Indifference. Again the same news.
- Any other.

2. Why do you think men rape?

- They cannot control their sexual urges.
- Women dress provocatively and ask for it.
- They like to show their power over women especially those women who are empowered and refuse to keep their "place".
- They like violence.
- Because of criminality due to the socio-economic condition they find themselves in.
- They believe they are fulfilling women's secret fantasy.
- It's a male bonding thing.
- Any other.

3. Why do you think the 5 youth thought they could get away with rape?

- Women do not like to register a complaint because of the negative publicity.
- They had got away with it before since no one had complained.
- The woman's family would prevent her from complaining since it would be a blot on the family name.
- Because reporting rape causes greater stigma to the victim.
- Very few rapists are convicted and the cases drag on for years.
- Any other.

4. If this happened to someone close to you, what would you say to her?

- Why did you accept an assignment at this lonely spot?
- Do not tell anyone about this. You know how people look upon a rape victim.
- Let us pray and ask for healing to help you get over it.
- You should have carried a weapon with you for self-defence.
- We will support you; go right ahead and seek justice.

5. If your son comes home one day and tells you he is going to marry a rape survivor, would you say:

- Oh, no! How can you even think of marrying this girl? She is carrying the stigma of rape. I would be so ashamed to introduce her as my daughter-in-law.
- Do you know the circumstances of the rape? Was she really raped or is it a tall story to cover up something else?
- If this happened to her, she must be followed by bad luck. She will be unlucky for your marriage.
- You have my blessings. I think she must be a really strong woman, to have survived such an experience. I am glad she has put it behind her and am proud of your decision.

6. A] Rape robs a woman of her virginity, and her purity.

Disagree or Agree. Give a reason for your answer.

B] She must protect these at all costs even if it means losing her life at the hands of the rapist.

Disagree or Agree. Give a reason for your answer.

7. When a rape occurs why do we focus so much on the morality of the girl and not talk about the morality of men who rape? Because:

- The woman is the one who is 'ruined' or affected by the rape.
- The man remains unaffected.
- Men cannot control their sexuality, so women have to be careful to protect themselves.
- If a girl loses her virginity it will be difficult to get her married.
- There will be trouble later when the survivor's husband finds out.

8. Following two highly publicised gangrape cases in India we will now... (tick the actions you would want to take)

- put strong restrictions on our daughter's timing to be home, her dress, her interactions with boys.
- never even think of allowing them to stay in a hostel or alone in another city.
- force her to change her job if she is transferred or has to travel a lot or work late.
- teach our sons by word and example to respect girls/women.
- ensure that we pass on value systems to our sons that will help them to express their sexuality responsibly;
- caution our girls about the real dangers they are likely to face, discuss ways they could keep themselves safe and trust them to be in charge of their lives.
- assure our daughters the family will always be there for them if anything should go wrong.
- Any other.

NOTES FOR THE FACILITATOR

Rape is an act of violence. It is forced sexual intercourse that takes place without a woman's consent or against her will.

The Shakti Mill case is like many other newspaper reports that have appeared in our country in the last few years. More and more women, from the very young to the old have been sexually assaulted, often times brutally. While the majority of the offenders are adults, sometimes they are as young as 11 years. This shocking fact has disturbed the nation and has forced all of us to reflect on why rape happens so frequently and what can be done to prevent it.

Statistics tell us that

- Rape is the most serious form of sexual violence against women.
- One rape is reported every 21 minutes.
- In reality very few cases are registered therefore the actual number of rapes may be much higher.
- The rapist is punished in only 26% of the cases.

1. Why do men rape?

- The one thing that people who commit acts of violence have in common is that they are all more powerful, physically or socially, than those they have ill treated. In all cases it is a way in which a man exerts his power over a woman.
- One often hears that men refuse to take 'NO' from a woman and this leads to violence towards all women especially wives/partners.
- In our society, women are still considered to be possessions of, or to 'belong' to fathers or husbands. Thus rape can be used to teach her husband/father/brother a lesson. We see this in wars and communal conflicts.
- Some men cannot tolerate women's empowerment. They believe women are inferior and must keep their "place". As women grow in stature and freedom, such men grow in insecurity. They feel threatened by the loss of their power and control over women. This frequently manifests itself in violence. Rape as an expression of power makes the assailant feel powerful in the face of his own inferiority. Often the violence is directed not just against women, but also against men who accept and support the New Woman. This can happen in well-to-do families as well as when men from the lower economic strata see educated women moving about freely.
- Powerful men in police, military, politics and industry sometimes use their official power to sexually assault women. Police and soldiers who are there to protect citizens, misuse their power. Powerful men also use their official power to force sexual favours from men.
- One myth about rape that needs to be challenged is that it happens because men are unable to control their sexual urges. BUT the fact is that many, many more men can and do control their sexual urges. So what is it that gives offenders the license to inflict such violence?
- Another myth is that a woman's dress or behaviour provokes a man to commit rape. BUT many cases show that this is not true – after all how can a four-year-old provoke anyone? In almost all cases, rape has nothing to do with the woman's age, clothes, appearance or behaviour.

2. Why do men get away with rape?

Although the law against rape is very strict, very few women have the courage to come forward and report rape, which is one of the reasons very few rapists get convicted.

- The impact of rape causes tremendous physical, mental and emotional trauma to a woman, and victims often do not know what to do.
- Victims feel too scared to complain as they are not usually taken seriously.
- They may never have been to a police station and may be too traumatised to speak to the police of their experience especially since it is sexual in nature.
- They have to go through further humiliation by being forced to answer questions about their character and sexual history.
- They are worried about the publicity and how it would affect their future.
- They are afraid of being blamed for the rape.
- They are aware of the social stigma attached to rape.

3. Why are so few rapists punished?

Rapists often escape punishment because.....

- offenders are usually powerful people, too powerful to be punished.
- the police and the judiciary are males who are products of a society that blames the woman and makes excuses for men's sexual transgressions; are often sympathetic towards the male rapist.
- if they are god-men/priests their religious adherents are blind to their sexual offences and may sometimes even defend them.
- vital evidence is lost after a rape because victims do not know what to do.

4. How does society look on rape victims?

Rape is an act that deserves to be condemned by society and the law. The victim needs support and a chance to get back to her life without fear and trauma. But society finds it hard to acknowledge the unpleasant facts and prefers to ignore or hide them.

There is a social stigma surrounding the victim's suffering:

- There is shame attached to rape – besides being emotionally broken, the victim feels humiliated and insulted by those around.
- In addition to this, society often blames the woman for the rape. This means that there is a triple burden for her – the trauma of the rape, the shame, and the blame.
- She is usually asked to keep silent and uphold the 'family honour'. She is not perceived as a human person with rights and dignity of her own and the rape is not identified as a crime against her physical and mental integrity. Instead her body and sexuality are seen merely as expressions of male honour. A review of 800 Supreme Court judgements found that "when the woman was sexually active, the rapist got a lighter sentence. When a virgin was raped, the sentence was relatively higher, (and) if a victim gets married during the trial, the accused get a lower sentence as the rape did not have an adverse effect on her marriageability". The priority is thus not the crime against the woman but how much her value has diminished for men.

Sometimes money is seen as an adequate compensation since it is seen to take care of her diminished prospects of marriage.

- Worse still, such abuse is often overlooked and ignored.

5. How can we change this shameful situation?

Today thanks to greater awareness of the issues involved there is some change in the way society looks at violence against women and rape. There is a shift in thinking – the culture of silence is slowly breaking down and sexual violence is beginning to be addressed. Women and men everywhere are speaking up. Some of the stigma of rape has been brushed off. There is a growing realization that this type of abuse is linked to the attitudes prevalent in a patriarchal society, and as long as girls/women are not valued, their abuse will continue. Thus increasingly, boys and men are taking objection to how girls and women are treated in their families, school and even amongst friends. Many girls are standing up for themselves and supporting others in need.

There is however, much more that needs to be done.

- **We have to condemn rape publicly and unconditionally.** We have to be clear that rape is about power, about humiliating and hurting a woman.
- **We must seek justice for the victim / survivor.** We must recognize that a rapist is a criminal who deserves to be punished in the severest manner. He is fully responsible for the rape.
- **We must stop blaming women for rape.** No woman can be said to ‘invite’ or ‘provoke’ rape. She is the one on whom violence has been committed. It is therefore unjust and unfair to blame her for what has been done to her.
- **We must support rape victims/survivors in every way we can.** The reason for our coming together in our small groups is to understand the different dimensions of rape and make a commitment to action and change of attitude. No more attaching stigma to victims or survivors!
- **We must avoid differentiating between our sons and daughters.** Too often we have double standards giving the message that boys are free to express their sexuality in any and every way whereas girls must exercise restraint. We also propagate the myth that girls are weaker and inferior to boys. These messages influence us deeply and have a lasting impact.
- **We must join hands with individuals and groups that fight for change.** Support from men and women within the family and from society at large, increases confidence and encourages women to fight violence.

Let us remember that rape is not a “woman’s issue”. It violates the human person and therefore affects all of humanity. It is an issue that should concern all of us.