

## **Women's Right to Zero Tolerance**

### **Delhi Gang Rape**

The horrific gang rape in Delhi of twenty three year old Nirbhaya a healthcare student has shamed us all. Delhi, the political capital of India is also its rape capital claiming seventeen per cent of all rape crimes reported across the country. The callous attitude to crimes against women was epitomised by the reaction of Mrs Sheila Dixit, Chief Minister of Delhi, when she commented on an earlier murder of a young journalist in early hours of the morning, asking what the journalist was doing at 3 a.m. alone on the streets of the city !

Despite there currently being three women Chief Ministers in India, they have done little to improve the life of those that share their gender. Cities like Mumbai have one toilet to every 300 people and often women have to wait for hours in the early dawn, before they can use the facilities. Shamefully, today India is considered the worst country in the world to be a woman. Economists Siwan Anderson and Debraj Ray estimate that in India, more than 2 million women are missing in any given year. The economists found that roughly 12% of the missing women disappear at birth, 25% die in childhood, 18% at the reproductive ages, and 45% in later years.

### **Gender Imbalance**

This situation stems from the mindset of men and their attitude towards women. We only need to look at how we view women; female infanticide, unequal education, dowry deaths, unequal inheritance rights, imbalances in pay etc. Women are more often than not, only seen as sexual objects, both within and outside their home. Our attitude towards girls has also led to skewed demographics of male/female ratio.

According to the 2011 census figures there is an appalling female sex ratio (number of girls for 1,000 boys) with only five states only registering a small improvement from the previous decade; these states are i.e. Chattisgarh 991, Andhra Pradesh 92, Tamil Nadu 995, Pondicherry 1,038 and Kerala 1,084. The worst states are Haryana and Punjab with less than 900 female to 1000 male. Where have the baby girls gone and why do we not want to have baby girls? The answer is clear – girls are regarded as a burden even in “educated” states such as Punjab.

From the time of Ramayana and Mahabharata to the present day things have not changed much for women in India. In the former case, Sita was made to prove her innocence twice for the same abduction and in the end sought refuge by asking the mother earth to open up so that she could escape from the cruel world created by men; the modern equivalent of this act would be classed as suicide. In the latter epic, an attempt was made to disrobe Draupadi in presence of her five husbands, uncles and all those who were considered upright.

### **India's shame**

As Persons of Indian Origin, we feel ashamed about how India is seen by the world in failing its girls and women and why should PIO women visit India

As Persons of Indian Origin. We feel ashamed about how India is seen by the world in failing its girls and women and why should PIO women visit India in these circumstances. In India every twenty minutes a woman is raped, most of them in their homes by people known to them. The culprits are fathers, brothers, uncles and boyfriends with most assaults not being reported. There is a stigma in reporting rape and if a victim is lucky, her case is registered for investigation. The situation is only slightly better in the West when it comes to reporting rape. Often they have to deal with the charge that "she was asking for it by choosing to wear 'inappropriate clothing' or being out at the wrong hour of the day".

We need to make sure that girl and boys are treated equally both at home and school and that boys are not given preferential treatment in our families. Further we need to ensure that respect is paid to all the female members of our families i.e. wives, sisters, daughters and daughters-in-laws. The ban on prenatal screening to determine the sex needs to be enforced with full force of law. When it comes to division of property, we also need to make sure that all siblings are given equal shares irrespective of their gender. Families should stop emotional blackmail when it comes to property share; we need to respect the current property rights of daughters. Fundamentally, this is about empowering women which demands considerable changes in the political, social and economic structure of India. For India to fulfil its potential, it requires the full contribution of all its citizens including women.

### **Need for political action**

As a start, Political parties in India need to give an undertaking that they will not field candidates in next election who have rape charges against them. Also religious and other leaders need to demand that women are given the rights and protection due to

them. The death of Nirbhaya must be a defining moment in the struggle of women for zero tolerance for any kind of male abuse of power.

Twenty five million NRI/PIOs must join together in our fight for our women to have safer place in India and through out the world. I would suggest that GOPIO International should make 29th December as a “Women’s Right to Zero Tolerance” day and we should have special seminars on each of our chapters throughout the world. The campaign for change has begun and we at Gopio must ensure that momentum continues.

**Chanchal S Chowdhry**  
**Secretary General Gopio International London**  
**chan@farrellengineering.com**

**30 DEC 2012**