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Indian women won't be safe until society changes, says gang-rape victim's father

By Dean Nelson, New Delhi

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Indian women travel in the 'women only' coach on the metro in New Delhi Photo: AFP

On the anniversary of the Delhi gang-rape and murder which shamed India, the victim's father says nothing has changed and his family is still searching for justice

¹ Women in India will never be safe until society changes its attitudes, the father of the Delhi gang-rape victim said on the anniversary of the assault which killed her.

His daughter, who became known as 'Nirbhaya' or 'the fearless one', was gang-raped, beaten with rods and left for dead after she boarded a bus home from the cinema with a male friend on December 16th last year.

⁵ She died from her injuries 13 days later.

The savagery of the attack and the determination of the victim, a 23-year-old physiotherapy student, to survive and bring her rapists to justice provoked protests throughout India and national soul-searching.

But one year after the incident, the victim's family is still deep in grief and fearful for India's women who they say remain in danger.

¹⁰ "As long as the mindset of the society will not change, women can never be safe out on the roads. Every other day cases of rape and sexual harassment are getting reported, where is the change? I don't see any change," said Badrinath Singh, her father.

¹³The number of women tourists to India slumped in the wake of the horrific attack, as the scale of rapes and sexual assaults in the country began to emerge.

¹⁵Six men were arrested, four of whom were sentenced to death in September. One of the accused was found dead in his cell in March and the sixth, a juvenile, was sentenced to three years in a rehabilitation home.

The case led to a reform of rape and sexual assault laws and tougher penalties for those convicted.

But the disappointment of the victim's family is shared by human rights groups and women's equality campaigners, who said reported rape cases have nevertheless increased and new fast-track court trials for ²⁰sexual assaults have yet to act as a deterrent.

The anniversary of her assault will be marked in London and Delhi on Monday where protestors will walk the route of the 'rogue' bus on which 'Nirbhaya' was gang-raped and mutilated with iron rods. The actor Meera Syal will address a memorial out side India's High Commission in London.

The campaign group Action Aid revealed new figures which revealed rapes had doubled in the capital since ²⁵the attack and the number of sexual assaults had quadrupled. Rapes had increased from 706 last year to 1,330 in the first nine and a half months of 2013.

Sehjo Singh of ActionAid India, said the group hoped the increase reflects greater confidence in reporting assaults, but feared it could mean more rapes. "We have to remember that reported cases do not reflect the true number of cases of rape and sexual assault, which are widespread in Delhi and throughout India."

³⁰Divya Iyer of Amnesty International said she shared the concern. "Last year's horrific gang rape should have shocked Indian authorities into action to tackle endemic violence against women more effectively. But while we have seen some positive developments over the last year, they have been far from enough," she said.

For the victim's family, the three-year sentence given to the juvenile who murdered their daughter, and the fact that he will be free in two years means they cannot overcome their grief.

³⁵"Our tears have not dried. With each passing day her memories get more intense. Someone is always crying at home," Mr Singh told the Press Trust of India. "We will never recover ever and she is very much alive within us."

"Every time we sit to eat our meals, my wife says... 'this is her favourite food and we are eating it without her'. She loved good food. My wife remembers the last time when our daughter left home saying that she ⁴⁰will be back home in three - four hours...but our wait never ended as the hours turned into months and then into years," he said.

"We have not yet got justice. We want all the culprits including the one who was a juvenile at the time of the incident to be hanged and only perhaps then our minds will get some rest and we will be able to sleep in peace," he added.