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## Geetanjali Misra: "Women are wounded, not their honour"

Newsroom | Meha Desai | 05/02/2013



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**Following the protests in India against sexual violence, concerns about the place of women within Indian society have become the main focus.**

Geetanjali Misra, co-founder of CREA, a feminist human rights organization, speaks to Youphil.com about how the debate on sexual violence in India must be also about redefining it in a bigger meaning than only rape.

### Youphil.com: What is the current debate on sexual violence in India, in light of the recent gang rape?

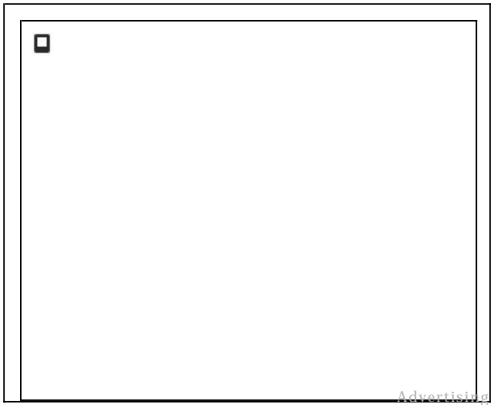
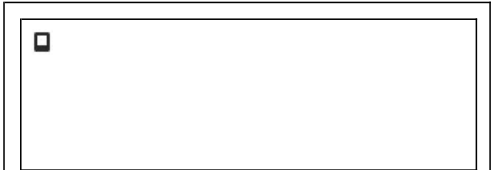


**Geetanjali Misra:** I have heard many people who were interviewed say that this rape case is a big thing in the country because the woman who was involved did not appear to be taking any risk - she was out only at nine o'clock at night and was with a boy. But some of us are asking: why can't women have the ability to actually **engage with risk** just like anybody else?

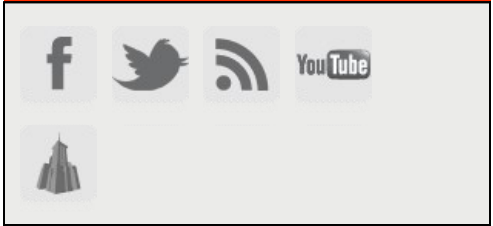
To me, the debate on sexual violence is irritating sometimes because of its over simplification. It's as if only the violence of the vagina mattered. But it does not end there. The need of the hour in India is for people to understand that the norms of masculinity are conditioned by **patriarchy**, and that there is power and control in many aspects of **women's** lives, not just rape.

### Youphil.com: So what is the next step?

**G.M.:** We need a more complicated response to violence. That is what



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we are trying to advocate and build on. It is not about hating men and saving women. Rather, what is your response to this horrible incident? What makes it horrible? What makes it OK for men to do this? The worry is that the right wing and the government look to protect women rather than their rights. We don't want more laws segregating women and keeping them indoors. We want them to be a protection of their rights.

Why haven't we made consent the biggest thing that defines right and wrong? We want violence against **women** to be seen as when there is no consent. If somebody does not consent to an act, it is a human rights violation.

### **Youphil.com: What is the role this one case can play in the larger picture?**

**G.M.:** This case may allow CREA to work on changing the language of society – the idea that she'll never recover from it, the idea that her honour is destroyed, for instance. This is the language that we want to change: **women are wounded, not their honour.**

I think that these young people are out on the streets because it is an expression of frustration about many things – it's about corruption, women's equality and wanting the government to be more responsible. It has galvanized people because it's about things that are **not working** in this country.

### **Youphil.com: Where does CREA fit in within the women's movement in India?**

**G.M.:** The entire women's movement in India was focused only violence against women, and equality between men and women. Somehow the different aspects of sexuality were not woven into this frame of thinking.

So ten years ago, when **CREA** started, we wanted to work on sexuality, gender and rights, and on where they intersect. We wanted people to understand that sexuality is not just about having sex or being gay or being violated sexually, but it is more of a domain through which many structures control women's lives, whether it is law, religion, the state, the community or society.

We advance women's rights and we try to expand sexual and reproductive freedom. We work with younger people to make them understand the rights and justice framework, which link sexuality, gender and rights.

Over the years, we have never wanted to reduce violence against women to only sexual violence, because women were facing all sorts of violence.

### **Youphil.com: CREA does a lot of work with women on the margins.**

**G.M.:** In the last three years, we have begun to shift the focus of our work to look at violence against **marginal women**. When we say marginal, we mean women with disabilities, transgender people and sex workers. We did a three country research that shows these women face a high rate of abuse. There are not that many services for them, nor are there prevention efforts that focus on them. Where does a **sex worker** go when she's raped?

What we have seen is that the attention of the women's movement around violence has been on domestic violence. Even India's bill on women's violence is called the **Domestic Violence Act**, as if women who are not in domestic situations were excluded. So you make some women worthy of protection and the others fall through the cracks.

### **Youphil.com: So ultimately, it is the attitudes that**

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**DanielleG:** This sounds like it is a



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**Norman:** I can see where some may feel



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**Rene:** It sounds like all your team

## need to be changed?

**G.M.:** It is really about **the attitude** – celebrating sons, sending boys to school but not girls. We have so many government schemes in India for girls, but does it change how people think? How they still cry when a girl is born? This is not a common phenomenon all over the world. Why do we have these issues?

Women are vulnerable even in their homes. The law has to do something, but I do not know how much that is going to change the attitudes of people. That takes time. The problem of power and control that is wielded on women's lives needs to be approached in a more holistic manner.

## Youphil.com: What about the demands for death penalty and chemical castration that the protesters have?

**G.M.:** We are neither for the **death penalty** nor chemical castration of men. These are very extreme measures.

*PhotoCredit: Lavanya Jayashankar.*

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