



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Indian citizens protest gang rape, gain increased punishment for sexual assault crimes, 2012-2013

Time period notes: *This particular case ended in February of 2013, though protests regarding other rapes in India continued.*

21 December

2012

to: 3 February

2013

Country: India

Location City/State/Province: *New Delhi, Delhi*

Location Description: *Most of the protests occurred in New Delhi, particularly in Jantar Mantar and Raisina Hill*

Goals:

To get the Indian government to change the maximum punishment for sexual assault crimes; more specifically, to have the death penalty for rape crimes.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › Students chanted anti-police slogans during protests against the government's reactions to the gang rape.
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › Protestors put up a banner with signatures in memory of the victim.
- 019. Wearing of symbols › Aam Aadmi Party leaders joined protests and tied their mouths with black cloth
- 020. Prayer and worship › Protestors prayed at a rally in Jantar Mantar.
- 034. Vigils › Protestors held a candlelit vigil in honor of the victim's death.
- 038. Marches › Brinda Karat of the Communist Party of India sated a peace march from Mandi House to Jantar Mantar to demand accountability for the punishment of rape crimes.
- 038. Marches › Thousands held a silent march in Kolkata.
- 038. Marches › Thousands held a silent, peaceful protest upon the discovery of the victim's death.
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › 600 women demonstrated in Bangalore
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Indian citizens continued to protest throughout these first ten days, despite government bans.
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Thousands of protestors gathered at India Gate and Riasinia Hill against the government's treatment of rape cases.
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws › Protestors continued to hold protests, ignoring the government's ban on gatherings larger than 5 people.
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast) › One group of protestors observed a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar for 24 hours.

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions › Students and protestors called for an emergency parliament session to reevaluate the maximum crime for sexual assault crimes.
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › Protestors chanted anti-government slogans due to the police's crackdown on anti-rape demonstrations
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications › Protestors carried anti-rape signs.
- 020. Prayer and worship › Protestors held a group prayer.
- 036. Performances of plays and music › 600 guitarists played John Lennon's "Imagine" in tribute to the victim.
- 038. Marches › 600 women marched in a part of the Women's Dignity March in New Delhi.
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Protestors held demonstrations in Raisina Hills, outraged over the government's attempts to stop protests.
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Thousands took to the streets in a peaceful march in protest of the government's reactions to the rape.
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws › Protestors continued to hold protests, ignoring the government's ban on gatherings larger than 5 people.

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 019. Wearing of symbols › An Indian girl dressed as Lady Justice
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Indian citizens protest out of anger about government's reaction to gang rape case.

Methods in 4th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Indian citizens protest out of anger about government's reaction to gang rape case.

Methods in 5th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Indian citizens protest out of anger about government's reaction to gang rape case.

Methods in 6th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › Indian citizens protest out of anger about government's reaction to gang rape case.

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 006. Group or mass petitions › Protests used online social networking sites like Facebook and WhatsApp to pass around online petitions and change their profile pictures to an image with a black dot symbol.
- 027. New signs and names › Protestors named the unnamed victim "Damini" which means lightning in Hindi

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Women
- students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Not known

Partners:

Students, women

External allies:

Sheil Dikshit (Delhi Chief Minister), Human Rights Watch (an international non-governmental organization)

Involvement of social elites:

Sheil Dikshit (Delhi Chief Minister)

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Human Rights Watch
- Sheil Dikshit
- Students
- women

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: Approximately 10 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

The Indian government, the Indian police

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

During early protests, some citizens responded to police violence by hurling bottles and stones and hitting with clubs. Most were nonviolent, sometimes carrying signs urging peaceful demonstrations.

Repressive Violence:

Police violence (water cannons, tear gas, arrests, and baton charges)

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The Indian government did respond to protests and change the legislation so that the death penalty became a punishment for rape, but rapes and protests continued on after the campaign.

On 16 December 2012, six men raped and nearly beat a 23-year-old woman to death in New Delhi, the capital of the Republic of India. The woman had boarded a local bus with a male companion that night. Once the couple was on the bus, the six men began to taunt the couple. They gagged and beat the woman's friend until he was unconscious. Then, the six men dragged the woman to the back of the bus, beat her with an iron rod, and gang-raped her. Following their attack, the men threw both the woman and her friend out onto the streets.

The woman, unnamed in the media, went to Singapore to get medical treatment. The men had beaten her so badly, though, that she was in critical condition.

The media coverage of this angered the Indian public, for it informed them that yet another rape had occurred. Rape is a common crime in India, particularly in Delhi, which has the highest rate of sex crimes of any Indian city. The discovery of this brutal case sparked protests across the country.

On 21 December 2012, protests began at India Gate, a national monument of India in New Delhi, and Raisina Hill, the location of Parliament and the President of India's official residence. Thousands of protestors took to the streets in these areas of the city, arguing against the high rate of sex crimes in India and the way in which the government treated such crimes.

To stop protestors, police stood in lines on the streets near the President's official residence. These police officers used violent means to hold back protestors, such as tear gas, water cannons, and batons. In response to the violence that the police used against them, protestors began to struggle, throwing bottles at the officers. While this march did turn violent, the police initiated this conflict and only a small percent of the protestors in this campaign did react with violence. The campaign, following this protest, continued with nonviolent action, requesting peaceful protests.

The next day, on 22 December 2012, students continued to lead protests against the government's reaction to rape incidents in India. Many protestors believed that the Indian government failed to act positively or give assurance to protestors that the government would look into harsher laws and punishments against rape. Instead, the government used police force, relying on baton charges (in which police officers charged at crowds with batons to disperse people). In response to these student-led protests in New Delhi, the police closed down metro rail stations to prevent gatherings.

Additionally, on this day, more than 600 women belonging to various organizations demonstrated in Bangalore, another Indian city.

The central government appointed a judicial committee headed by J.S. Verma, a former Chief of Justice of India, to submit a report within 30 days that suggested amendments to criminal law dealing with sexual assault cases.

This government action, however, did not satisfy the protestor's demands. On 23 December 2012 thousands of protestors defied a ban the government had set up against demonstrations in New Delhi. These protestors continued to demand a change in the way that the government handled sexual assault. Police fired tear gas on the protest, and protestors became angered and turned over several cars. In Kolkata, another Indian city, thousands of people held a silent march for the victim of the gang rape.

Following the clashes between police and protestors on the 22 and 23 of December 2012, riot police sealed off roads near the

India Gate monument on 24 December 2012. The police banned all demonstrations except at the Jantar Mantar observatory and Ram Lila grounds, both of which were in New Delhi. In addition, the police closed down ten metro stations to prevent protestors from gathering; news reporters were not allowed to go into the India Gate monument or Raisina Hall and the government imposed a curfew in these areas. The Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, publicly discouraged protests, stating that he would rather see a more constructive course of action. He asked the public to remain calm and pledged safety for women and children.

On 26 December 2012 the committee established by the government had its first meeting. Citizens had sent over 6,000 emails with suggestions on how to amend laws regarding sexual assault. Also on this day, the government created a one-person commission of inquiry headed by Usha Mehra, the former Delhi High Court judge. Mehra was to identify who was responsible for the gang rape. This commission also had to suggest measures to make Delhi and the wider National Capital Region safer for women. Mehra was to submit the report within three months.

On 29 December 2012 the victim of the rape died in the hospital. Her death further enraged the population. Left parties staged a peace march from Mandi House, a metro station, to Jantar Mantar. The Communist Party of India member Brinda Karat led this march, demanding that the government increase accountability for sexual assault. Also at Jantar Mantar, protestors gathered at 10 AM to begin a silent protest. As the day progressed, protestors began to chant slogans and make demands. Notable Aam Aadmi Party (an Indian political party) leaders such as Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, and Kumar Vishwas joined in these protests and tied their mouths with black cloths. At least 3,000 people came out for these peaceful marches.

Despite the violent clashes that protestors had had with police during the previous days, many citizens wanted peaceful protests. Some citizens held signs that read "Peaceful Protest Please."

The police, however, continued to repress protestors. The police fired over 125 tear gas shells. Throughout the day about 35 protestors and 40 police personnel sustained injuries. That night, in honor of the victim, protestors held a candlelit vigil at night in New Delhi. The government, in anticipation of upcoming protests, erected security barriers throughout key government districts.

On 30 December 2012 protestors defied a police ban on demonstrations and held a rally following the cremation of the victim. Protestors held candles at the rally, sat by lit candles, held signs of protest, and prayed. Riot police surrounded downtown streets and sprayed water cannons to disperse the crowds. Some protestors huddled together in a circle to withstand the water pressure. Additionally, one group of protestors observed a one-day hunger strike at Jantar Mantar.

The government, in response to these protests and the victim's death, scaled down New Year's celebrations. Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit requested that Home Minister Shashi Kumar Shinde lift restrictions against holding peaceful demonstrations so that citizens could gather in memory of the victim.

Throughout the second half of the month of December, students and teachers at local colleges, such as Indraprastha College, had camped out at protest venues, marched, and submitted memoranda to the government asking to make the city a safer place for women.

On 31 December 2012, Prime Minister Singh expressed solidarity with the victim on television. Demonstrators performed prayer rituals and put up a banner with signatures in memory of the victim.

The next day, 1 January 2013, police continued to block off key government districts. Demonstrators gathered in Raisina Hills, despite the blockades.

On 2 January 2013 Delhi Chief Dikshit called for a Women's Dignity March and worked with the Delhi Commission for Women to organize the march. Several hundred women joined the march, demanding stricter anti-rape laws. The march ended at the memorial for Mahatma Gandhi.

On 3 January 2013 students took to the streets again, carrying streets demanding an emergency parliament session to change the laws so that rape was a crime punishable with death. They held signs that read, "Commit or quit," "Justice for Women Now," and the phrase "Don't Get Raped" altered to "Don't Rape."

Prior to the march, hundreds of police personnel had gathered in the area in riot gear to prepare for the protests. The police blocked the protestors from moving into downtown New Delhi. In Darjeeling, an Indian town, 600 guitarists gathered to play John Lennon's "Imagine" in tribute to the rape victim. On this day, the government announced plans to "name and shame" convicted rapists by posting their names, images, and addresses on official websites. Still, protests continued.

On 13 January 2013, an Indian girl dressed as Lady Justice at a candlelight vigil in New Delhi.

On 24 January 2013 the Committee submitted its report indicating that the failures on behalf of the government and police were the root cause behind crimes against women. This report suggested that the government change the maximum punishment for rape.

The results of these protests culminated on 3 February 2013, when the President of India, Pranab Mukherjee, declared the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance that provided the death penalty in the case of rape. Although protests continued on regarding other rapes in India, this change in the law was the government's response to the protests sparked by the gang rape of December 2012. The government also established a 24/7 hour helpline in Karnataka for women to use to register sexual abuse complaints.

Research Notes

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