

Silent gathering mourning victim's death

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Monday, 31 December 2012 02:19 - Last Updated Thursday, 03 January 2013 03:08

At least three CfP members joined one of several meetings across the country to express outrage over the Delhi gangrape; this one was at Shivaji Park on Saturday December 29th. It attracted perhaps 250 people and was entirely silent. Many who gathered wore black armbands. Others held placards: "Don't Rape", "Disqualify Rapist MLAs/MPs" and more. They formed a line that stretched most of the way across two sides of the park; later, they walked silently to nearby Chaityabhoomi where they sang a song, observed a minute of silence, and then dispersed.

There is plenty of anger and outrage, of course. This was a horrific atrocity and CfP demands that its perpetrators are severely and swiftly punished. Still, it is a reminder of two things.

One, law and order remains something the ordinary Indian feels increasingly unable to count on. The bus drove through several police obstacles ("nakabandi") that night. Why was it not stopped and checked? And after public anger began erupting, why did the police react so hamhandedly and brutally, by attacking those who were protesting this ghastly crime? More sensitive and more responsive policing is not just something this incident demonstrates the need for; it must be seen as the legitimate right of every citizen. This is an essential foundation of a just and peaceful society.

Two, molestation and more remain everyday realities for most Indian women. In understanding that, we at CfP suggest that no better policing or severe punishments or fast-track courts will change those realities. What will change them is a rethinking of a whole spectrum of attitudes towards women: from their place in our homes to their freedom to love and marry to the clothes they wear. This is no easy task, but this gangrape show how urgent it is to begin the process of introspection and rethinking.