

## No Country For Women

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### Background

In December 2012, India shook. Statistics previously met with inattentive dismissal were rapidly gaining tangibility. Of the G20 nations, India has been ranked the worst for women<sup>1</sup>. 96% of the women in Delhi do not feel safe<sup>2</sup>. The Delhi Rape incident was not an isolated example of brutality, it was a manifestation of deep-rooted misogynistic beliefs that pervade Indian culture and society. Evidence for these beliefs is apparent in the views of authority figures on rape. An Indian police inspector claimed that *"If girls don't wear appropriate clothes, then naturally there is attraction, which makes men aggressive prompting them to just do it"*, while another claimed that *"In these places you'll find girls who want to do 'it' for Rs 1,000. They will drink and also have sex with you. The day somebody uses force, it becomes rape."*<sup>3</sup> The chief of the Central Bureau of Investigation declared *"if you cannot prevent rape, enjoy it."*<sup>4</sup>

The problem of rape in India goes beyond mere structural issues such as poverty and unsafe neighborhoods, it must be contextualized within the specific Indian sociocultural frameworks that repeatedly perpetuate, sanction and pardon it. Despite this, most efforts to tackle the issue of rape in India fail to take into account Indian rape culture. For example, a recent anti-rape campaign launched by the Times of India claims that *"The true test of your manhood is how you treat a woman. If you do not respect a woman, you are only half a man."*<sup>5</sup> Rather than aiming to question and eliminate rigid gender roles, it feebly attempts to redefine manhood and masculinity; in doing so it strengthens the very forces that it is trying to fight against. Anti-rape measures in India are ineffective in their lack of total understanding; they may provide short-term relief at best, but they fail in the long-term due to their ignorance of (and therefore inability to deal with) the roots of misogynistic mindsets. What India needs is an anti-rape movement that amends the problem of rape by understanding and seeking to amend Indian rape culture.

### Solution

For the nation to effectively combat the issue of rape, it must first fully understand the reasons behind its prevalence and recent surge. It may then use this understanding to develop effective solutions that tackle the very roots of rape and rape culture. We hope to contribute to this by (i) initiating discourse about the various institutions and environments that perpetuate such unhealthy mindsets and (ii) kickstarting the execution of anti-rape movements that use this knowledge to fight rape culture. We wish to focus our effort on education and the youth: as students still in high school, they are impressionable and have tremendous time in front of them to effect change. We aim to raise awareness about issues such as hypersexualization and the portrayal of women in Bollywood<sup>6</sup>, gendered divisions in the classroom, gendered expectations in the household, gender roles in religion and mythology, discrimination in the workplace, etc. We hope to create agents and activists - agents that are empowered and recognize that they need not necessarily conform to societal roles and expectations, activists that will spread what they learned from us to their peers and use their deep understanding of the issues to kickstart effective long-term solutions. Thus we hope to create a ripple effect.

### Aims

1. To raise general awareness among 700 high school students about Indian rape culture, its causes and manifestations.
2. To educate 150 high school students through a conference, featuring in-depth debates and open discussions about Indian rape culture.
3. To discuss tangible ways and develop detailed plans according to which these students may actively effect change within their communities.
4. To use discourse and education to create a ripple effect that leads to peer education and student activism.
5. To provide access to tools and resources (financial, local contacts, etc) that help facilitate their activism.

<sup>1</sup> "Canada Best G20 Country to Be a Woman, India Worst - TrustLaw Poll." Thomson Reuters Foundation. <http://www.trust.org/itcn/?map=poll-canada-best-g20-country-to-be-a-woman-india-worst/>

<sup>2</sup> "96% Women Feel Unsafe after Sunset in Delhi: Survey." The Times Of India. [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-03-08/delhi/37560815\\_1\\_delhi-face-unsafe-city-new-delhi](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-03-08/delhi/37560815_1_delhi-face-unsafe-city-new-delhi)

<sup>3</sup> "[Investigation] The Rapes Will Go on." *Teheika*. <http://www.teheika.com/the-rapes-will-go-on/>

<sup>4</sup> "If You Can't Stop Rape, Enjoy It, Says CBI Director Ranjit Sinha; Remark Sparks Outrage" *Hindustan Times*. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/if-you-cant-stop-rape-enjoy-it-says-cbi-director-ranjit-sinha-remark-sparks-outrage/article1-1150471.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> "Times Of India's 'Definition Of Manhood' Ad Tells Men To Respect Women." *The Huffington Post*. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/30/times-of-india-mahood-definition-ad-respect-women\\_n\\_2583588.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/30/times-of-india-mahood-definition-ad-respect-women_n_2583588.html)

<sup>6</sup> "No Country For Women." *The Transhuman Collective*. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rt1Rhd\\_sRhg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rt1Rhd_sRhg)

## **Project Structure:**

### **Pre-Project:**

- Recruit 3-4 volunteers: Indian college students that will be trained by us. The recruitment will occur over spring semester through a series of applications and one-on-one Skype interviews.
- Recruit participating schools in India: Done over spring semester with the help of on-site volunteers

### **Project (part 1):**

- Hold workshops in 15 schools across Bangalore, held during school assemblies.
  - Provide overview of rape situation in India and specific Indian sociocultural elements that perpetuate, sanction and pardon rape.
  - Provide introduction to focal topics (Bollywood, family values, religion, workplace)
  - Distribute applications for Genderfest. They will also be distributed through local and social media to keep it open to all interested students. We will accept 6-10 students per school.
- Genderfest – a weekend-long conference for 100-150 students
  - A safe space for the open discussion of ideas on empowerment of women in India and how to tackle rape culture
  - Featuring guest lectures, debates, activities
  - Broader range of topics to include women and race/caste, the role of class power dynamics

### **Project (part 2):**

- Distribute applications for students to submit concrete proposals on topics related to tackling rape culture
  - Examples include implementation of a gender sensitization curriculum in their schools, developing a mobile phone app that sends an automated text to the police upon the press of a button, etc.
  - Applications must include budget plan, logistical details and personal qualifications.
  - We will provide help and guidance during the application process and refer students to relevant local resources such as NGOs. We will fund the best ideas.

### **Post-Project:**

- We will write a piece for the local newspaper and give the winning proposals formal acknowledgment in order to help them gain community recognition and spread knowledge of the solutions.

## **Expected Outcomes and Sustainability**

- 700 students will become familiar with rape culture and begin to see rape incidents in India as part of a wider problem. They will also be conscious of and question gender roles.
- 100 students will develop in-depth knowledge of rape culture and discuss ideas about how to combat it. They will also have the chance to meet powerful inspiring women in India and other prominent figures.
- Eager students will be mentored through a proposal-writing process, given access to local NGOs and other tools that may help facilitate their activism
- 4-5 student proposals will be funded, thus encouraging student activism, extending the ripple effect and ensuring our project leaves behind a tangible legacy.

## **Qualifications**

We can relate to these students. We were just like them two years ago - scared, subscribing to the same norms, eager to help. We hope to teach by example - our eyes were opened by strong individuals around us and we wish to be able to do the same. The Projects For Peace Fellowship will help us create a ripple effect in the Indian education system that will kickstart the development of effective long-term solutions to combat Indian rape culture.

Ria has organized 2 major events in Bangalore and has reached out to 30+ schools in the area before. These events were: a) a benefit concert that raised \$16,000 for Child Rights and You and b) a national model UN conference. She was part of the TWTP program at Brown, where she met Shreena. She has also had experience teaching high school students at Hope High School in Providence by being associated with the program Algebra in Motion, and has volunteered to teach underprivileged elementary school students in the Indus International Community School in Bangalore.

Shreena spent last summer teaching English to elementary, middle and high school students in Biograd Na Moru, Croatia for which she received a fellowship from the mayor. She is a Teaching Assistant for the department of Computer Science at Brown, where she designs course curricula and leads sections. She has organized and run a 6-week Computer Science camp for rising 9th grade girls to help combat the gender gap in Computer Science. She is involved with various gender-based events on campus; she was a cast member for the Vagina Monologues and is an editor for Bluestockings Magazine - a gender-aware publication.