**It's Uber, it's the Indian government, and ultimately, it's education**

There is uproar over Uber in Delhi. One of their drivers is alleged to have raped a young woman who took his cab to go home late at night. Uber claimed that every driver passed a government background check before being hired. They had not foreseen this problem in their India operations. The Indian government used this incident to blame a foreign company for piling another issue into the bucket of social woes. Sadly, I think both parties are at fault. Our country, our companies, and our systems need to make changes to fundamental processes if we want citizens to feel safe.

Let's start with Uber. A multinational company, now valued at $30+ billion (mostly for the [data they collect on consumers and drivers](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-switch/wp/2014/11/18/data-is-ubers-business-but-protecting-it-may-be-its-largest-weakness/)), needs to do its research before entering a developing country. Never have the rules of rules of developed nations applied by default. For instance, trusting background checks that were approved by the government? Maybe that works in the West, but in India you are naive if you trust *all* of them. Most certifications are handed out like free candy by officials who need to show a completed quota for the month. Sometimes a bribe is involved. Either way, I can bet you that a lot of middleman companies that conducted the checks probably didn't do much checking at all.

So on Uber's part, the lack of background research on the ground is evident. It is their responsibility to conduct user research, political research, and process research if they want to run a business in the sharing economy of a new country. To contribute to society, they must understand cultural and political norms.

Now let's take a look at the Indian government.

Number 1: It is not in their job description to play the blame game. Don't turn this debacle solely on Uber. Damaging them as an irresponsible foreign company is not the point. Till this incident, parts of the Delhi government didn't know what Uber was or how it operated.

Number 2: I recommend they understand Uber and the competitive cab environment to figure out where things went wrong. Uber, with GPS tracking and control over drivers with a smartphone that always stays in the car, is one of the safest services in the car-sharing market. Don't blankly criticize the company for failing to do their job. They messed up, yes, but take a minute to understand *why*. What fell apart here? There is no coincidence that the issue of rape has already blown up in India over the past year.

Number 3: As stated earlier, rape has become a contentious issue in India. Women and men are angry that their daughters, wives, and mothers are not safe in big city streets. How did it get to this point? Why is a woman who calls a taxi from an app in harm's way? Where in the political and societal structure did the tribal, village, town, city, state, and national governments allow this to slip? I don't think many people have questioned the root of this disgusting social crime. Where are some men getting *the idea that it is okay to sexually violate and harm a woman without her consent*? Why has this become a widespread disease in our society? **Is anyone asking these questions?**

We need some fundamental changes in society. How we think, what conversations we have, and how our children manage expectations.

Growing up in America, I was made to take a class in health and sexual education in 4th and 5th grade. The teacher explained what happens when boys and girls reach puberty, how women and men make children, and the consent and consequences of having sex. We had an hour per week dedicated to health class. I've noticed that American schools have taken on the responsibility of educating kids on issues that many families might find taboo. In order to produce more understanding and culturally-aware kids for the future, the educational system has shouldered this responsibility. Teachers are sensitive to the backgrounds of students but ensure that they are made aware of the responsibilities and consequences of their choices.

Today, America is facing issues around rape as well. However, people are speaking up because they understand the boundary between consensual sex and sexual harassment. It is made clear through education and it enables peoples to speak up when they are violated.

We don't have such systems in most Indian schools. Kids are brought up in an environment where sex is not discussed in the household. In cases of more open-minded parents, it is most likely brushed over. Facts are stated, questions are unanswered. Kids leave these conversations with confusion and rely on media/entertainment to learn more. This is beside the fact that we are neglecting millions of children who don't get the privilege of this conversation. How do we expect *them* to find answers?

I have a hypothesis for why health and sex education isn't in the Indian curriculum. I believe it has to do with our history. For hundreds of years, arranged marriages were the norm between young men and women. They were married early, oftentimes in the ages of puberty, and had to figure it out for themselves. The early marriages meant that there was little time to educate students on sex and health. With the onset of early marriage, people discovered things for themselves. (You may ask if this led to the onset of marital rape? That's a story for another day).

Today, times are changing. Women are earning money and are delaying their marriage. They take the time to be with friends, to date, to experiment with their romantic lives, and to make room for finding love. Western culture has shown Indian youth that there is more to life outside of "arranged marriages." Today, arranged marriages are more just a series of dates and "love marriages" are more common. People are exploring their sexuality at an earlier age. While some do it responsibly, not everyone has been taught how to stay safe and ask for consent. As you can imagine, that part of Western culture and education isn't really exposed. Instead they see the face of pop culture and pick up surface-level values from it.

As Indian women feel more empowered, I think they are finding the courage to step forward and speak up if they are harassed. They earn the same money as men, do similar work, earn a living, and also expect to be treated as equal, respectable citizens by the law. Slowly, the taboo around rape is lowering its walls and it's becoming more socially acceptable to discuss in India. I believe this is the perfect opportunity for governments to incorporate health and sex education in schools, convince parents that children must be taught how to act responsibly and safely, and start opening up sensitive issues.

We may have been part of a patriarchal Indian culture but times are changing. If not for now, when will boys and girls be taught together to respect one another, consent with each other about having sex, and make their own decisions? Education is one part of the solution that can educate our citizens early and help them recognize that the misuse of sex is not okay. It is at that point, the value of background checks becomes meaningful. People getting background checks can understand why, and the people they are catering to can trust in some kind of moral system. Everyone is on the same page and they understand the value of communicating what they want.

I understand that sex is a taboo subject in our culture. Pre-marital sex is unspoken in the household. But how long will we keep hiding? The truth is coming out, one horrifying story after another. It is not helping our youth. Women feel unsafe on the streets today and men don't know how to respond. If we want to help the women in our country feel safe, and we want our men to be respected and welcome in society, we must start communicating. Dialogue has to begin in the school, college, and workplace environment. It will be tough and uncomfortable and difficult to swallow. But in the long run, we will be spreading the meaning of love and pleasure – that it can be safe and enjoyable. Love and sex shouldn't be scary; it's time to start believing that again.