More than 200 students from St. Joseph's University hold a silent protest and candlelight vigil to honour the Kolkata doctor who was sexually assaulted and murdered.

DH PHOTO/V PUSHKAR

Students, activists rally against rising sexual violence

BENGALURU, DHNS: Student associations and activists gathered at Freedom Park on Monday to protest against increasing cases of gender-based and sexual violence being reported in the country.

Over 200 students belonging to various student groups and associations from St Joseph's University held a silent protest and candlelight vigil in honour of the Kolkata doctor who was sexually assaulted and murdered on August 9. They also held up placards, sang songs and enacted skits themed on raising awareness about sexual violence and women's safety. The students were also joined by the management of the university, including the Vice Chancellor Rev Victoria Lobo and the registrar Melwin Colaco.

Another protest was held simultaneously by various activist groups, including Bahutva Karnataka, Fridays for Future, Naveddu Nilladidare, and the Coalition for Sex Workers, Sexuality and Sexual Minority Rights.

"Rape has been used as a political tool in different parts of the country and different sections of society, not just against women but against all minority communities as well. Rape culture is used by the ruling class to maintain supremacy as well," said a member of All India Students Association (AISA), one of the organisations participating in the protest.

The protest also addressed sexual violence against members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Additionally, they noted that outrage for sexual violence was often more amplified for people from a privileged caste or class versus sexual and gender-based violence against oppressed groups.

"We seek survivor centric accountability systems in place and solutions beyond knee-jerk reactions and mob mentality. We seek systemic change and want to see a world where survivors are believed, where women's bodies aren't your battleground, and men commit to being fierce allies to our movement," a statement from the collective of organisations noted.

The protest called for sensitisation programs from the government in public spaces and across multimedia formats, besides including gender sensitive sex education in school curriculums, introducing and strengthening measures to protect sexual minorities from police harassment and criminalising sexual violence against men.