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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Violence against women is a serious problem in India. It is no new phenomenon in India. But at present, its magnitude trends to be alarming. According to the latest report of the National Crime Records Bureau, 405861 cases under crimes against women were registered in India in 2019. Various forms of violence against women take place in India, such as dowry deaths, rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, forced or induced abortion, acid attack, trafficking etc. It is a big cause of female morbidity and mortality. In India where almost half of the population are women, they have always been mistreated and deprived of their rights to life and personal liberty as provided under the constitution of India, and lots of steps are taken by the government in the form various policies and programs to promote the status of women and realize women's rights but still violence against women has no end. This article will discuss the overall issues of violence against women especially the definition, types and the latest NCRB report on crimes against women.

Key Words: Violence, Women, Rape, Rights, Liberty, Government.

Introduction

Violence against women has long been a problem in India. In India, Women have always been issues of concern. Though we praise and chant them as goddess, we also abuse her for child marriage, female infanticide, rape, sexual harassment, acid attack, trafficking, dowry and so on. This violence ranges from very mild teasing to rape and murder and it happens everywhere in India. The home, that is considered to be the safest place, is where women are most exposed to violence. The situation in India is alarming in terms of violence against women. According to the latest report of NCRB, the gender-based crime rate in India has increased by 7.29 per cent in 2019 compared to 2018. In India, society is organised around rigid gender roles, which prescribe what women and men can do and can not do. India is a patriarchal society, so oppression and subordination by males over females is a common feature in the society. Violence against women is employed as a tool to strengthen and maintain gender roles and as a weapon to punish women who transgress it. Thus, for example, domestic violence is seen as justified if women do not fulfill their wifely or motherly responsibilities.

Defination of Violence Against Women

The term "violence against women" refers to many types of harmful behavior directed a because of their sex. The United Nations has framed one of the most widely accepted definitions of violence against women. Article I of the declaration on the elimination of violence against women defines it as "Any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life". Article 2 of the UN Declaration clarifies and lists some forms of violence as, "Violence against women should encompass, but not be limited to, act of physical, sexual, and psychological violence in the family and the community. These acts include spousal battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry related violence, rape, including marital rape, and traditional practices harmful to women, such as female genital mutilation. They also include non-spousal violence, sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in educational institutions, trafficking of women, forced prostitution, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, such as rape in war".

Violence against women across the lifespan

Violence against women occurs at every stage of life. Violence starts with her from the day her mother conceives her existence in the womb and since then in every phase of her lifespan she has to fight for her survival in this rude society.

Forms of violence experienced by women throughout their lifespan

PHASE	TYPE OF VIOLENCE PRESENT
Pre-birth	Sex-selective abortion; battering during pregnancy; coerced pregnancy.
Infancy	Female infanticide; emotional and physical abuse; differential access to food and medical care.
Girlhood	Child marriage; genital mutilation; sexual abuse by family members and strangers; differential access to food, medical care and education.
Adolescence	Violence during courtship; economically coerced sex (e.g. for school fees); sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; arranged marriage; trafficking
Reproductive Age	Physical, psychological and sexual abuse by intimate male partners and relatives; forced pregnancies by partner; sexual abuse in the workplace; sexual harassment; rape; abuse of widows, including property grabbing and sexual cleansing practices.
Elderly	Abuse of widows, including property grabbing; accusations of witchcraft; physical and psychological violence by younger family members; differential access to food and medical care.

Crime Against Women**Incidence of Crime Against Women**

Head wise incidence of reported Crime against Women during 2017 to 2019 along with per cent variation are given below:

Sl. No	Crime Heads	2017	2018	2019	Per cent Variation in 2019 Over 2018
1	Dowry Deaths	7466	7166	7115	-0.7
2	Murder with rape/Gang rape	223	294	283	-3.74
3	Abetment to Suicide of Women	5282	5037	5009	-0.55
4	Miscarriage	266	213	221	3.75
5	Acid Attack	148	131	150	14.5
6	Attempt to Acid Attack	35	37	42	13.51
7	Cruelty by Husband or his relatives	104551	103272	125298	21.32
8	Kidnapping & Abduction of Women	66333	72751	72780	0.04
9	Human Trafficking	662	854	966	13.11
10	Selling of Minor Girls	80	40	22	-45
11	Buying of Minor Girls	4	8	8	00
12	Rape	32559	33356	32033	-3.96
13	Attempt to Commit Rape	4154	4097	3944	-3.73
14	Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty	86001	89097	88367	-0.81
15	Insult to the Modesty of women	7451	6992	6939	-0.75
16	Dowry Prohibition Act	10189	12826	13297	3.67
17	Immoral Traffic (P) Act	1536	1459	1185	-18.22
18	Protection of Women from Domestic Offences act	616	579	553	-4.49
19	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act	31668	38802	46005	18.56
20	Cyber crime(Women Centric Crimes only)	600	1244	1621	30.30
21	Indecent Representation of Women(P) Act	25	22	23	4.54
	Total	359849	378277	405861	7.29

Violence against women can be understood through the analysis of crimes against women. According to the report of the National Crime Records bureau (2019), Majority of cases under crime against women were registered under cruelty by husband or his relatives (30.87 per cent) followed by assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty (21.77 per cent), kidnapping & abduction of women (17.93 per cent) and rape (7.89 per cent). Total 405861 cases under crimes against women were registered by NCRB during 2019. NCRB data shows that the gender-based crime rate in India has increased by 7.29 per cent in 2019 compared to 2018. Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of crimes against (59853) accounting for 14.7 per cent of such cases across the country. It was followed by Rajasthan (41550 cases; 10.2 per cent) and Maharashtra (37144 cases; 9.2 per cent). Rajasthan reported the highest number of rapes with 5997 cases, followed by Uttar Pradesh (3065) and Madhya Pradesh (2485). In terms of rate of rape cases, Rajasthan was the highest at 15.9 per lakh female population, followed by Kerala (11.1) and Haryana (10.9). Uttar Pradesh had the highest number of dowry deaths cases (2410), followed by Bihar (1120) and also had the highest number of crimes against girl children under POCSO Act with 7444 cases followed by Madhya Pradesh (6053). The highest rate of these crimes were Sikkim (27.1 per lakh female population) followed by Madhya Pradesh (15.1) and Haryana (14.6). Assam reported the highest rate of crime against women at 177.8 per lakh female population, followed by Rajasthan (110.4) and Haryana (108.5) and the registered crime per lakh female population in India was 62.4 in 2019 and it was 58.8 in 2018. However, it is important to note that official statistics reflect a small per cent of actual amount of violence against women. Women often abuse them for fear of public embarrassment or social stigma. In many cases women fall prey to violence of close relatives. In that case, the family members also suppressed the incident. So, the situation would have been worse if all these things had happened.

Types and forms of Violence against Women in India:

(i) Dowry Death

Dowry remains the main cause for discrimination and injustice towards women in India. When the demands for dowry are not met, it can lead to serious consequences for the young bride. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 marks the primary attempt by the Government of India to accept dowry as a social evil and to prevent its practice. In India, the cases of dowry deaths have decreased by 0.7 per cent during the year 2019 over the previous year (7,166 cases). Uttar Pradesh (2410 cases) has reported the highest number of dowry deaths cases followed by Bihar (1120 cases).

(ii) Rape

Rape is any non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration of another person with any physical part or object. Many rapes are not recorded due to the stigma and trauma related to them and the lack of sympathetic treatment from legal systems. In 2019, an average of 87 rape cases was recorded per day in India. 5997 rape cases were reported in Rajasthan, followed by 3065 cases in Uttar Pradesh in 2019.

(iii) Kidnapping and Abduction

Kidnapping and abduction of women cases have reported an increase of .04 per cent during the year as compared to previous year 2018 (72,751 cases) in India. 11,649 cases were reported in Uttar Pradesh, followed by 9,025 cases in Bihar in 2019. Assam has reported the highest crime rate at 41.4 as compared to the national average of 11.2.

(iv) Female Infanticides And Sex Selective Abortions

India has a highly masculine sex ratio, the main reason for this is that many women die before reaching puberty. Therefore, it has been suggested by many experts, that the highly masculine sex ratio in India are often attributed to female infanticides and sex-selective abortions. The abuse of the dowry system has been one of the leading causes for sex-selective abortions and female infanticides in India. In countries where women men are treated equality, women outlive men as they are biologically the stronger sex. Typically, one can expect to find 103-105 females for every 100 males in population. However in India, according to the 2011 census, there are only 940 females for every 1000 males.

(v) Online or digital violence

Online or digital violence against women refers to any act of violence that is committed, supported or provoked by the use of information and communication technology such as mobile phone, the internet, email, social media, text messaging, etc against a woman because she is a woman. 390 cases were reported in Odisha, followed by 329 cases in Assam in 2019.

(vi) Torture and Cruelty (Domestic Violence)

Domestic violence is physical, sexual, economical, socially, emotionally or psychological abuse directed towards one's spouse, partner or other family member within the household. Domestic violence is violent victimization of women within the boundaries of family, usually by men. Domestic violence is in a majority of cases violence against women by the members of house where she resides. The number of such cases has increased by 21.32 per cent during 2019 over the previous year (1,03,272 cases). 18432 cases were reported in Rajasthan, followed by 18304 cases in Uttar Pradesh in 2019. The highest rate of crime was reported from Assam (70.7) followed by Rajasthan (49) as compared to the national average of 19.3.

(vii) Sexual Harassment

According to United Nations, Sexual harassment is any behavior of a sexual nature that is unwelcome, offensive, or embarrassing to the individuals exposed to the behavior, or that creates a hostile or intimidating work environment. Sexual harassment includes sexual assault, unsolicited appeals for sexual bias, requests for sexual favors linked to implied threats or promises about career prospects, visual displays of degrading sexual images, unwanted physical contact, sexually suggestive conduct, or offensive remarks of a sexual nature. The number of such cases has decreased by 0.75 per cent during 2019, as compared to the same period in 2018. Andhra Pradesh has reported 1892 cases followed by Maharashtra 1074 cases.

(viii) Human trafficking

Human trafficking is the acquisition and exploitation of human beings, through means such as fraud, force, coercion, or deception. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act was passed in 1956. However many cases of trafficking of young girls and women have been reported. These women are either forced into Prostitution, domestic work, or child labour. The number of such cases has increased by 13.11 per cent during 2019 over the previous year (854 cases). 220 cases were reported in Maharashtra, followed by 153 cases in Assam in 2019.

(ix) Eve- Teasing

Eve teasing is an act of terror that violates a woman's body, space and self-respect. It is one among the various ways in which a woman is systematically made to feel inferior, weak and afraid. Whether it is an obscene word whispered into a woman's ear; offensive remarks on her appearance; an intrusive way of touching any part of a woman's body; a gesture which is perceived and intended to be vulgar; all these acts represent a violation of a woman's person, her bodily integrity.

(x) Acid Attacks

Acid violence refers to the premeditated act of throwing corrosive acid on the face and body, with the intent to disfigure, torture, or kill the victim. The acid melts the flesh, sometimes to the bone, and causes lifelong scarring, physical disfigurement, and in some cases, permanent disability including blindness and immobility. Acid violence not only has a significant physical impact, but also causes intense psychological distress, with survivors frequently reporting depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress. 42 cases were reported in Uttar Pradesh, followed by 36 cases in West Bengal in 2019.

(xi) Child Marriage

Child marriage has been traditionally practiced in India and continues to the present day. Child marriage refers to any marriage where bride is below the age of 18. Girls are more likely to be child brides, and as a result drop out of school and experience other sorts of violence.

(xii) Molestation

Another sort of violence against women is molestation, or what is commonly known as 'sexual abuse' or 'sexual assault'. Molestation is the act of subjecting someone to unwanted or improper sexual advances or activity. It emphasizes sexual behaviour on women by men. Molestation is the sexual exploitation of a child or a woman by an adult or a male person for sexual gratification. Incidents of assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty in the country have decreased 0.81 per cent during 2019 over 2018 (89097 cases). Uttar Pradesh has reported the highest incidence (11988 Cases) followed by Odisha (11308 cases). The highest rate of crime was reported from Odisha (50.5) followed by Assam (27.4) as compared to the national average of 13.6.

Conclusion

Violence against women is a serious violation of the human rights of women and is main barrier to women's empowerment and equal participation in society. India has enacted many legislative and constitutional provisions and many progressive plans to improve the position of women. But there is still no end to violence against women. Any society, in which half the population is not assured of safety, needs to reconsider its claim of being civilized. Swami Vivekananda said that the country which does not respect women has never become great now and nor will ever in future. If violence against women in India can be controlled, India would be a much better place to live in.

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