



WOMEN'S SAFETY- A PATH TO EMPOWERMENT

Dr. Prakanshi

Junior Research Consultant

Indian Council of Social Science Research

New Delhi

Abstract: We are in the era where women are getting empowered economically, socially and politically and are able to live their lives on their own, but can a woman really be empowered without Safety and Security? Safety is the first step towards women's empowerment, but we are still far behind in providing safety to women. According to NCRB Report 2021, crime against women has increased by 15.3% from the previous year in 2021. Every girl or woman has to face inappropriate behavior towards her at least once in her life, like lewd comments, bad touching, eve teasing, molestation, etc., and such inappropriate behavior instills a fear in the mind of women that remains with them throughout their life as a woman. This fear puts a question mark on women's empowerment, which has always been a burning issue for Social Development. This Paper is based on Qualitative research and uses secondary data and discusses safety as an essential factor for women's empowerment. This paper highlights the major threats related to the safety of women, the types of security and safety that women need, the current scenario of women's safety and how it is affecting women's empowerment, and the provisions and measures adopted by the government of India.

Index Terms - Women's Safety, Empowerment, Gender-based violence, NCRB

I. INTRODUCTION

As the world is moving ahead, crimes against women are also increasing day by day. According to NCRB (National Crime Report Bureau) Report 2021, the number of crimes against women has increased from 56.5% in 2020 to 64.5% in 2021. Most of these situations fall into the category of cruelty by spouse or relatives (31.8%), followed by assault on women with intent to outrage their modesty (20.8%), kidnapping and abduction (17.6%) and rape (7.4%). These figures of violence against women seem to be increasing year by year and women have to face these violations because of their gender and physical structure. This is the fact that women are at risk of violent crimes just because of their physical identity, in such a situation how can we imagine women's empowerment without women's safety? Women's safety has always been a major concern for our country and in the present scenario, providing safety to women is even more challenging as many types of security threats are emerging day by day in this modern and technological era. To know deeply about women's safety, it is important to first take a look at the definition of the term 'women's safety'. Women's safety refers to the development of strategies, practices and policies aimed at reducing gender-based violence, including women's fear of crime. These strategies and policies are adopted to prevent crime or harassment before violence occurs. Women's safety includes certain aspects such as safe public places, safe access to water and sanitation, as well as access to safe public transportation, economic independence, self-worth, and finally safe and healthy communities. By paying attention to these above aspects the community can be made safer for women. Unsafe public places and transportation reduce women's freedom of movement. After a certain time limit at night, a fear automatically comes into the woman's mind, due to which she is afraid of going out alone. Even if she has to go out, that fear does not

leave her till she reaches the destination. The fear of crime and violence is as important to consider as actual violence itself. This fear shows that as a community we have failed to create a safe world for women. Most of the violence occurs at public places and in public transportation and the Nirbhaya rape case, 2012 is a horrific example of this in front of us. A decade has passed since 2012 but the issue of women's safety still remains the same. Data shows that India registered 31.677 cases of rape in 2021- an average of 86 daily (according to NCRB), this data scares us about our women who are the most important pillar of our family and nation. Violence or crime against women somewhere reduces the rights of women as a citizen like right to liberty, right to live and right to move freely etc. It is the fundamental right of women to live in a safe environment, but they are still deprived of this right. Society should rethink about its structure, fostering methods, cultural patterns as to why it is so harsh for women, just because of their gender. Women are not responsible for violence against them but they still have to endure it. Safety and security should be the first step towards women's empowerment, followed by other measures. By ensuring women's safety, many problems related to women's empowerment will automatically be solved. In this research paper, threats related to the safety of women and government initiatives towards it will be discussed ahead.

II. Objectives of the study-

1. To know about the status of women's safety in India.
2. To study about the major threats to women's safety.
3. To study about the initiatives adopted by the government for the safety of women.
4. To study women's safety as an aspect of women empowerment.

III. Major Threats to women's safety-

In India women are defined as 'Shakti' and in Indian culture we are taught to respect women but in practice women are disrespected in many ways and have to face gender-based violence against them. There are many threats in the life of women that affect their safety, which are described below-

1. Domestic Violence-

Domestic violence involves family violence, it refers to any violence committed by people with close social relationships majorly. 70% of women are victims of domestic violence in India which poses emotional and health risks for women. The main reason behind this domestic violence is our social structure where women are seen as an object and are expected to be controlled by their male relatives before and after marriage. Domestic violence is a serious threat for many women which affects their emotional and psychological state, resulting in suicide. Basically, it is a type of murder that occurs indirectly. Domestic violence is very dangerous for women's safety as it starts from home and it affects the concept of women empowerment as a whole.

2. Sexual Harassment-

Sexual harassment is a manifestation of gender-based violence and discrimination. The most common and serious threat to women's safety is rape and the sexual harassment in public places or workplace. In cases of rape, the limits of age and relationship are also violated, not only young women but also newborn girls and old women become victims of rape. This thinking that rape is committed by an unknown outsider has also been demolished by some cases where even father, brother, uncle etc. relations forget the dignity of relationships. According to NCRB data, an average of 86 rape cases were registered every day in 2021. In most of the cases. Rape victim is asked to remain silent by her family members, if such cases are counted then the number will be even higher than actual cases. According to another data of NCRB 2017, 93.1% of all rape and sexual assault victims were attacked by known persons, including family members, neighbours, friends, employers and partners. A sexual offence leaves women traumatized for the rest of their lives and it is a very serious threat to women safety.

3. **Stalking-**

Stalking is also a type of threat to women's safety, it involves a pattern of behavior directed at a specific person that causes a person to fear for their own safety or the safety of others or suffer substantial emotional distress. Repeatedly calling, following women wherever she is, sending unwanted gifts, letters, monitoring phone calls or computer usage, using technology to track her and threatening to hurt family, friends, pets, and performing other actions that control, track, or intimidate others is considered stalking. Stalking violates women's right to privacy. Cyber-crime against women is also a threat to women's safety which is a kind of stalking and blackmailing. In this technological era, this type of crimes is very common against women these days.

4. **Human Trafficking-**

Human trafficking is a crime that involves compelling a person to provide labor or services or engage in commercial sex acts. According to the report, 'Trafficking in Persons' 2022 by the US Department of State, in 2022 6622 trafficking victims were identified and in addition, there were 694 potential trafficking victims. The report stated that some traffickers abduct children from places including railway stations, drug the girls, and force girls as young as 5 years old to take hormones injections to look older for sex trafficking. According to NCRB data, more than 6500 human trafficking victims were identified in the country during 2022, 60% of them were women and girls. These data show that women, young girls, and children are more vulnerable to this type of crime that destroys their educational, social and family lives.

5. **Delayed Justice and Pendency of cases-**

Delayed justice and pendency of cases related to women's safety is not a direct threat to their safety but it is an indirect and bigger threat to women because delayed justice and pendency of cases somewhere strengthens the criminal minds to commit crimes. Getting the criminals punished in time makes the victims feel relieved and also creates a fear of punishment in the minds of the criminal. If timely justice is not provided to the victims it will lead to injustice. According to the National Judicial Data Grid, as of December 2022, there were about 48 million cases pending in supreme court, high courts and subordinate courts across India. Delayed justice increases the mental trauma of the rape victims and affects their personal and social lives.

IV. Government Initiatives for women's safety in India-

Police is a state subject under the 7th schedule of the constitution of India, therefore ensuring women safety is a state subject. But women safety has always been a burning issue for the country, so some initiatives have been taken by the Government of India to improve the safety and status of women, which are as follows:

1. **Mission Shakti-**

Mission Shakti has been implemented on 27th of March 2019 under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. It is a scheme that aims to strengthen interventions for women's safety and empowerment. It also focuses on proposing strategies to improve convergence at different levels of governance. Mission Shakti has two schemes- 'Sambal' and 'Samarth'. **Sambal** is for safety and security of women, this combines some existing schemes such as 'One Stop Centre', 'women helpline', 'Beti bachao Beti Padhao' and a new scheme 'Nari Adalat'. Samarthya is for empowerment of women this combines some existing schemes such as 'Ujjwala', 'Swadhar Greh' and working women hostel. Mission Shakti scheme provides emergency services and long or short-term care to women and it also includes large scale awareness programs for Gender sensitization.

2. **Women Helplines-**

It is more important to prevent the crime from happening than to punish the criminal after the crime has been committed so that the victim can be protected from violence. In such situations, helpline numbers prove to be very effective. With the help of these helpline numbers, the location of the victim can be tracked in a short time. By using these helpline numbers, a target is set to track the location of the woman in a short time and provide help to her so that the crime can be stopped before it happens. The helpline numbers set up for immediate assistance to women are as follows:

1091- For Women in Distress (all India)

181 - For Domestic Abuse

100 - Police helpline

112 - Pan- India single internationally recognized helpline number

Along with these numbers, many states also have their own helpline numbers which are very useful like 1090 for women in Uttar Pradesh. There are also some mobile apps which can prove helpful in women safety like- My Safetipin, Shake2safety, Himmat Plus, VithU, B safe and also the mobile phone has an SOS feature available for use in emergency situations. There are many helplines and apps that claim to provide safety and emergency assistance in dangerous situations but there is a lack of awareness about these numbers and its applications. Govt and NGO should take up the responsibility of disseminating these helpline numbers among women and citizen especially in rural areas, so that these helpline numbers can be used as much as possible to ensure the safety of women.

3. **Nirbhaya Fund-**

Nirbhaya fund is a dedicated fund for the implementation of initiatives to enhance the safety and security of women in the country and it was created after the horrible Delhi gang rape of December 2012. It is a non-lapsable fund administered by the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance. Women and child development is the nodal ministry to evaluate the proposals and schemes to be funded under this fund. This fund will provide optimum utilization of existing infrastructure innovative use of technology real time intervention installation of CCTVs etc. to ensure women's safety in India. Under this fund Centre gives money to the states, who in turn spent it on programs to ensure women's safety and security in their states.

4. **One Stop Centre-**

One Stop Centre is essentially sponsored scheme under the Nirbhaya Fund. It has been implemented from 1ST April 2015 to provide multiple integrated services under one roof including police facilities, medical aid, legal aid and counselling, psycho-social counselling and temporary shelter to women affected by violence. One stop centre aims to assist women affected by violence in private and public places, family, community and workplace. The centre provides support and redressal facilities to women facing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic exploitation regardless of age, class, caste, education status, marital status, race and culture. There are 733 one stop centres have been established at the district level across the country. Every woman who approaches or is referred to the one stop centres will be provided with specialized services.

5. **Fast Track Courts-**

Fast track courts are set up by the state government in consultation with the respective High Courts. The department of Justice has been implementing these courts since October 2019 which are expected to ensure speedy delivery of justice. These courts have been set up to deal with the cases of heinous crimes and civil cases related to women. They dispose of cases expeditiously and help in removing the huge backlog in the Indian judiciary. As of December 2022, 764 fast track courts have been created to deal with sexual crimes, including 411 special POCSO courts in 28 states and union territories. These courts have disposed of more than 1,44,000 pending cases. A normal court does not work with any target or deadlines whereas, a fast-track court generally has a target number of cases that it has to dispose of in a particular period. Fast track courts do not adjourn hearings or allow adjournments, but this is very common in normal courts. However, fast track courts in India suffer from several issues such as lack of legislative support and proper framework which need to be addressed to ensure speedy justice and better implementation of these courts.

6. **Mahila Police Volunteers (MPVs) Scheme-**

This scheme was launched by the Ministry of women and child development in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs for the participation of Mahila Police Volunteers in the states and union territories. It is a central sector scheme that aims to serve as a public-policy interface to help women in distress. The scheme envisages creating a link between police officers and the local communities to facilitate police outreach on gender related concerns. To take this initiative forward, the government has announced 33% reservation for women to increase their strength in the police department. The MPVs scheme encourages women to come forward with complaints of violence and also provides information on measures to take their cases to police authorities.

V. Conclusion-

Nowadays violence and crimes against women is very common on the street, in public transport and at public places. These crimes or violence question on women's safety and restrict women's right to mobility. The threat of violence not only violates women's human rights but also leads to a power imbalance between women and men. Today in India, Women's safety is a topic of discussion everywhere and to ensure its necessary changes have been made in the existing laws and schemes but still we are failing somewhere in eliminating the menace of violence, as a result, every day we see or hear incidents related to violence against women in newspapers and news channels. This threat prevents women from participating in any social activities. Many laws, schemes, programs are being implemented in India, then why violence against women is not stopping and what is the reason behind this? When we look at the structure of our society, we find that its roots are prevalent in our society itself, where men always try to control women at every level and women are expected to mold their lives according to men. In a patriarchal family, when a male child grows up seeing the oppression of women by men at home and he also adopts the same behavior towards women, the foundation of violence against women begins from there. Most of the cases of violence against women have one thing in common and that is male-ego and our conservative society nurtures this male-ego without any reason. There is a lot of lack of sensitivity towards women in the society. In this modern era, we are talking about gender equality but along with it we also have to pay attention to gender sensitivity. Through gender sensitization, men in the society should be taught to respect women and eliminate gender discrimination, this feeling of sensitivity towards women first starts from the family because family is the primary group for socialization of a person. Every family should teach its male members to adopt behavior that avoids discrimination by understanding and accepting the differences between men and women. Men as well as women should also be taught by families to understand their rights and raise their voice against any violation. In some places of the country especially in rural areas, women are still not aware of their rights and freedom, in such a situation it is very important to spread awareness about gender equality in the society. Many government laws and schemes have been implemented in India to provide security to women but somewhere these laws and schemes are not enough without gender sensitivity, so there is a need to solve the problem from the root from where it has emerged. Along with better implementation of government policies and schemes for women's safety, attention should also be paid to behavioral changes in the society and women also be given self-defense training so that they can be able to protect themselves. Self-defense training should be mandatory for girls at school level because evils have no boundaries, hence they should be prepared for every situation. It is extremely shameful that crimes like rape happen every day and one of the reasons for this is the slow functioning of the Indian judiciary, to deal with this problem fast track courts are being established for speedy justice so that a fear can be created among the persons with criminal mentality. If there should be any fear, it should be in the minds of criminals about committing crimes and not in the minds of women about their safety. To improve women's safety in India, there is a need to increase participation of women in every sector of the society. Making strict laws is not enough, there should be better implementation of these laws at every level of government so that women could feel fearless in the society and avail their freedom of mobility all over the country.

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