

## **Violence against Women in India**

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**Abstract:** *Women in India have always been issues of concern. The folks and society at large consider women as second class citizens. Though we admire and preach them in the name of Durga, Saraswati, Parvati and Kali, we also abuse her in the form of Child-marriage, Female infanticide, Sati, Sexual harassment, Dowry and so on. The status of women in India has been subject to many great alterations over the past few millenniums. From a largely unknown status in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been lively. The status of women has varied in different time periods. Violence against women is partly a result of gender relations that assumes men to be superior to women. Given the subordinate status of women, much of gender violence is considered normal and enjoys social sanction. Manifestations of violence include physical aggression, such as blows of varying intensity, burns, attempted hanging, sexual abuse and rape, psychological violence through insults, humiliation, coercion, blackmail, economic or emotional threats, and control over speech and actions. In extreme, but not unknown cases, death is the result. These expressions of violence take place in a man-woman relationship within the family, state and society. Usually, domestic aggression towards women and girls, due to various reasons remain hidden. Cultural and social factors are interlinked with the development and propagation of violent behaviour.*

**Keywords:** *Sexual Harassment, Rape, Female Infanticide, Dowry, Eve-Teasing, Sexual Harassment, Acid Attack Kidnapping, and Molestation.*

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### **I. Introduction**

Women in India have always been issues of concern. The folks and society at large consider women as second class citizens. Though we admire and preach them in the name of Durga, Saraswati, Parvati and Kali, we also abuse her in the form of Child-marriage, Female infanticide, Sati, Sexual harassment, Dowry and so on. The status of women in India has been subject to many great alterations over the past few millenniums. From a largely unknown status in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been lively. The status of women has varied in different time periods. Violence against women is partly a result of gender relations that assumes men to be superior to women. Given the subordinate status of women, much of gender violence is considered normal and enjoys social sanction. Manifestations of violence include physical aggression, such as blows of varying intensity, burns, attempted hanging, sexual abuse and rape, psychological violence through insults, humiliation, coercion, blackmail, economic or emotional threats, and control over speech and actions

### **Women In India**

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From a largely unknown status in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reforms, the history of women in India has been eventful.

The current status of women cannot be properly understood without reference to the predecessor form of womanhood from which it evolved and the process by which it grew. So the status of women has been traced by dividing into historical phase's Ancient society, Medieval society, and Modern society.

### **Women In Ancient Society:**

In ancient India, the women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life. Later 500 B.C, the status of women began to decline with the Smritis and with the Islamic invasion of Babur and the Mugal empire and later Christianity curtailing women's freedom and rights. The women enjoyed freedom, Status and prestige in the society but did not last long and women finally settled down to an indoor life.

### **Women In Medieval Society:**

The Indian woman's position in the society further deteriorated during the medieval period when sati among some communities, child marriages and a ban on widow remarriages became part of social life among some communities in India. In some parts of India, the Devadasi or the temple women were sexually exploited.

Polygamy was widely practiced especially among Hindu Kshatriya rulers. The women lost their entity in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and till the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century women were totally and forcefully sublimated male superiority, physically and intellectually.

**Women In Modern Society:**

Women’s participation in the workforce as well as in other activities increased during the 19<sup>th</sup> and from the early period of 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the upliftment of women started by the influence of social reforms. As far as India is concerned, the social structure, cultural norms and value systems are important determinants of women’s role and their position in society India has one of the most impressive sets of laws for women. The state to practice protective discrimination in favour of women.

**Crime Against Women**

Comparative Statement between Tamil Nadu and All India on head –wise incidence of reported Crime against women during 2011 are given below:

S.No	Crime Heads	2011		% to All India
		Tamil Nadu	All India	
1	Rape	677	24202	2.80
2	Sexual Harassment	464	8570	5.41
3	Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act	10	453	2.21
4	Dowry Death	152	8618	
5	Immoral Traffic (P) Act	420	2435	17.25
6	Dowry Prohibition Act	195	6619	2.95
7	Molestation	1467	42968	3.41
8	Kidnapping & Abduction	1743	35565	4.90
9	Cruelty by Husband and his Relatives	1812	99135	1.83
	Total	6940	228569	3.04

In recent years there has been an alarming increase in atrocities and violence against women in the country. It is estimated that the growth rate of crime against women would be higher than the population growth rate by 2010, which implies that progressively a greater number of women are becoming victims of violence. Throughout history women in various continents of the world have been considered as the physically weaker sex. The gender differences and bias existing globally places women all over the world at various disadvantageous positions. Crimes against women are assertion of dominance over them and come from the baser instincts of society. As a matter of fact the problem of violence against women is not something new. Moreover violence against women is often not considered as violence because of general acceptance of man’s superiority in the society. Women themselves also do not consider it as violence because of their misconstrued religious values and resulting socio cultural attitudes.

Gender violence is a common problem prevailing in almost all the developing countries. Even in India the issue continues unabated creating many hassle and challenges for the social growth. The age old cultural beliefs and tradition have identified various issues of gender – based violence that over the period of time has become a major cause of harassment faced by the women.

In India where almost half of the populations are women, they have always been ill-treated and deprived of their right to life and personal liberty as provided under the constitution of India. Women are always considered as a physically and emotionally weaker than the males, whereas at present women have proved themselves in almost every field of life affirming that they are no less than men due to their hard work whether at home or working places. Behind closed doors of homes all across our country, people are being tortured, beaten and killed. It is happening in rural areas, towns, cities and in metropolitans as well. It is crossing all social classes, genders, racial lines and age groups. It is becoming a legacy being passed on from one generation to another. But offences against women which reflects the pathetic reality that women are just not safe and secure anywhere. According to a latest report prepared by India’s **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)**, a crime has been recorded against women in every three minutes in India. Every 60 minutes, two women are raped in this country. Every six hours, a young married woman is found beaten to death, burnt or driven to suicide.

Violence against women is not a new phenomenon. Women have to bear the burns of domestic, public, physical as well as emotional and mental violence against them, which affects her status in the society at the larger extent. The statistics of increasing crimes against women is shocking, where women are subjected to

violence attacks i.e. foeticide, infanticide, medical neglect, child marriages, bride burning, sexual abuse of girl child, forced marriages, rapes, prostitution, sexual harassment at home as well as work places etc. In all the above cases women is considered as aggrieved person.

As women gain influence and consciousness, they will make stronger claims to their entitlements - gaining further training, better access to credit and higher incomes - and command attention of police and courts when attacked. As women's economic power grows, it will be easier to overcome the tradition of "son preference" and thus put an end to the evil of dowry.

Violence against women can fit into several broad categories. These include violence carried out by 'individuals' as well as 'states.' Some of the forms of violence perpetrated by individuals are coercive use of contraceptives; female infanticide; prenatal sex selection; obstetric violence and mob violence; as well as harmful customary or traditional practices such as honor killings, dowry violence, female genital mutilation, marriage by abduction and forced marriage.

The World Health Organization (WHO), in its research on Violence against women, categorized it as occurring through five stages of the life cycle: "1) pre-birth, 2) infancy, 3) girlhood, 4) adolescence and adulthood and 5) elderly"

**Forms of violence experienced by women throughout their lifespan (5)**

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.

**Incidence of Crime Against Women**

Head – wise incidence of reported Crime against Women during 2008 to 2012 along with percentage variation are given below:

S.No	CRIME HEADS	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	% VARIATION IN 2012 OVER 2011
1	Dowry Death	207	194	165	152	110	-27.6
2	Sexual Harassment	974	501	638	464	382	-17.7
3	Rape	573	596	686	677	737	8.8
4	Molestation	1705	1242	1405	1467	1494	1.8
5	Dowry Prohibition Act	262	207	199	195	277	42.1
6	Cruelty by Husband and His Relatives	1648	1460	1570	1812	1965	8.4
7	Kidnapping & Abduction	1160	1133	1464	1743	1693	-2.9
8	Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act	4	2	14	10	34	240.0
9	Immoral Traffic (P) Act	687	716	567	420	500	19.0
	Total	7811	7220	6051	6940	7192	3.6

**Types and Forms of Violence against Women in India:**

**(i) Sexual Harassment:**

Half of the total number of crime against women reported in 1990 related to molestation and harassment at the workplace. Eve teasing is a euphemism used for sexual harassment or molestation of women by men many activists blame the rising incidents of sexual harassment against women on the influence of "Western culture".

**(ii) Dowry:**

In 1961, the government of India passed the Dowry prohibition Act, making the dowry demands in wedding arrangements illegal. However, many cases of dowry –related domestic violence, suicides and murders have been reported. The term for this is "bride burning" and its criticized within India itself.

**(iii) Child Marriage:**

Child marriage has been traditionally prevalent in India and continues to this day. Historically, young girls would live with their parents till they reached puberty. In the past, the child widows were condemned to a life of great agony, shaving heads, living in isolation, and shunned by the society. Although child marriage was outlawed in 1860, it is still a common practice.

**(iv) Female Infanticides And Sex Selective Abortions:**

India has a highly masculine sex ratio, the chief reason being that many women die before reaching adulthood. It is therefore suggested by many experts, that the highly masculine sex ratio in India can be attributed to female infanticides and sex-selective abortions. The abuse of the dowry tradition has been one of the main reasons for sex-selective abortions and female infanticides in India.

**(v) Domestic Violence:**

The incidents of domestic violence are higher among the lower socio- economic classes. There are various instances of an inebriated husband beating up the wife often leading to severe injuries. Domestic violence is also seen in the form of physical abuse. Domestic violence includes, harassment, maltreatment, brutality or cruelty and even the threat of assault-intimidation. It includes physical injury, as well as “willfully or knowingly placing or attempting to place a spouse in fear of injury and compelling the spouse by force or threat to engage in any conduct or act, sexual or otherwise, from which the spouse has a right to abstain”. Confining or detaining the spouse against one’s will or damaging property are also considered as acts of violence.

**(vi) Trafficking:**

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.

**(vii) Eve- Teasing:**

Eve teasing is an act of terror that violates a woman’s body, space and self-respect. It is one of the many ways through 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.

**(viii) Rape :**

One-quarter of the reported rapes involve girls under the age of 16 but the vast majority are never reported. Although the penalty is severe, convictions are rare.

Crimes such as rape as a form of sexual violence are reported to be on the increase. Around the world, one in five women have been found to be victims of rape in their lifetime . Many rapes go unreported because of the stigma and trauma associated with them and the lack of sympathetic treatment from legal systems.

The insecurity outside the household is today the greatest obstacle in the path of women. Conscious that, compared to the atrocities outside the house, atrocities within the house are endurable, women not only continued to accept their inferiority in the house and society, but even called it sweet.

In recent years, there has been an alarming rise in atrocities against women in India. Every 26 minutes a woman is molested. Every 34 minutes a rape takes place. Every 42 minutes a sexual harassment incident occurs. Every 43 minutes a woman is kidnapped. And every 93 minutes a woman is burnt to death over dowry.

**(ix) Acid attacks:**

At times, acids such as sulphuric acid has been used to disfigure or kill women and girls for reasons such as family feuds, inability to meet dowry demands and for rejection of marriage proposals.

The Government of India should come out with some more stringent laws to protect the rights of women who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family, so that it will work as the preventive measure to eradicate the crime. A strict law to be passed to punish those women who are filing a false complaint against husband or relatives by misusing of Domestic Violence Act so that there will be fair justice to all.

In our society, violence is bursting. It is present almost everywhere and nowhere is this eruption more intense than right behind the doors of our homes. Behind closed doors of homes all across our country, people are being tortured, beaten and killed. It is happening in rural areas, towns, cities and in metropolitans as well. It

is crossing all social classes, genders, racial lines and age groups. It is becoming a legacy being passed on from one generation to another.

That, sadly, is the theme around which women in a free country, in the 21st century, live. It also defines the current, past and future governments' abiding social challenge: Providing a secure environment for women without – and this is important – shackling them. To give the devil its due, the Indian government has been trying to show its support towards women. The Union Budget provides for financial assistance, dedicated banks and more. These are necessary and laudable steps. But no matter how economically independent the educated, urban woman becomes or how hard rural outreach programs work at improving feminine hygiene and maternal care, the narrative always meanders back to safety or the lack of it. If these factors can be controlled then more than one form of violence can be prevented from harming an individual or our society and India would be a much better place to live in.

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