Violence Against Women in Public Places in India: An In-Depth Study into the Social Repercussions Faced by the Victims

Miss. Archita Singh

Research Scholar

Dept. of Political Science & Public Administration,

Dr. Harisingh Gour University, Sagar, M.P.

Abstract

Violence against women in public places in recent times has emerged as one of the most serious issues faced by the governments all over the world, especially in developing countries like India and underdeveloped countries. In simple words public places are meant for all and sundry irrespective of their gender but in India public place means an 'exclusive men zone' only where women and girls are second class citizens whose safety is at the mercy of men. Crimes like eve teasing, molestation, sexual harassment have become so common that every girl or woman models her daily routine on her safety considerations. In fact public has become a no-access zone and   brutally   violent crimes against women are part of a range of violent acts against women in public space. These particularly stem from women's lack of claim to public space and step from women's lack of claim to public space. These acts of violence further contribute to reducing women's access to public space and women are forced to live in fear of public place and take every simple decision, like, where to go or not go, how to dress, night travel, etc. This research paper attempts to deeply analyze various acts of violence against women in public place and the societal perspective and social repercussions.

Keywords

Violence, women, social perspective, discrimination, eve-teasing, molestation, rape, stalking, public place.

Violence against women is one of the biggest and the most severe issues plaguing the world today. Domestic violence has made life difficult for millions of women who are living with supposedly safe confines of the house while violence against women who have ventured out in the public arena has assumed dangerously alarming proportions in the form of eve-teasing, molestation, rape, acid attacks, physical, sexual and mental harassment, chain-snatching , and this gruesome list goes on and on. In fact, the women is neither safe within the boundary walls of the house and outside the house. In recent decades lot of focus and attention from media, social workers, NGO's, etc, has been centered on domestic violence but due attention has not been paid on violence against women in public place as in most of the societies crimes like eve teasing, molestation, unwanted advances, groping, etc have been treated in a very light hearted and

insincere manner. This has in fact, become a norm and the lackadaisical attitude of society has futher intensified the problem and the criminal acts have become even more brutal in the form of rape, gang rape, acid attacks, torture(physical, sexual, mental), murder,etc. This research paper primarily focuses on violence against women in public places and its social repercussions, but, before we delve into it ,it is of utmost importance to understand the meaning of public space.

What 'Public Place'actually refers to?

'A public space is a social space that is generally open and accessible to people. Roads (including the pavement), public squares, parks and beaches are typically considered public space.'(Public space, 2017) 'Public Place' is defined as any place to which the public has access whether as of right or not and includes all places visited by general public namely auditorium, hospital building, railway waiting room, amusement centers, public offices, court buildings, educational institutions, libraries, coffee houses, canteens, banks, clubs and also open spaces surrounding hotels/restaurants etc. (Prohibition……,2017). This is a widely accepted definition but in reality public place in India has become an 'exclusive male zone' and women have been considered outsiders who cannot enjoy of avail the services present in public space to the same degree.

Violence against women in Public places have been discussed in detail in the following paragraphs:

Eve-teasing and Molestation- The term eve teasing is a euphemism for verbal sexual assault or sexual harassment of women in public places, like, making catcalls, passing lewd marks, hurling obscenities or sex-coloured expletives. It is not just verbal in nature but can also extend to inappropriate behavior such as making vulgar and obscene gestures, winking, ogling and making unwanted passes. It must be noted that eve teasing is basically restricted to the Indian subcontinent where it enjoys a certain kind of social sanction as most of the people consider it to be light hearted fun for boys and Indian cinema and entertainment media by glamourizing and glorifying eve teasing in almost every movie and T.V. show have further reinforced the notion that it is just harmless fun and anyone by doing this can get the attention of the girls and ultimately even win a date with them. In reality these misconceptions have made lives of millions of girls hell and the very thought of stepping out of their homes fills them with dread due to the fear of getting eve-teased. Molestation is much more severe form of eve teasing and is quite physical and sexual in nature. Unlike eve-teasing, which to some extent, is verbal in nature, molestation includes unwelcome sexual advances, groping, unwanted touching, feeling up private parts, and attempting to outrage the modesty of women and girls like snatching her 'dupatta', skirt, or trying to disrobe her.

Social perspective- From social perspective eve teasing and molestation are regarded as harmless fun which wayward and capricious young men do in order to humour themselves. It must also be noted that media in general and entertainment media in particular have played a humongous role in glorifying these criminal acts. For instance every other movie or song in India shows that a boy can easily win a date with girl

through eve-teasing. Furthermore in recent decades violence against women is often glorified and multiple scenes of molestation of women are shown in such a manner as if to crudely showcase the triumph of male ego over the fairer sex. These frivolous reasons are enough to make any man commit it without giving a second thought as to the havoc that his actions wreak on the lives of many girls and women. This practice has become so pernicious and dangerous in recent years that many girls are under constant fear whenever they are venturing to a public place and have imposed a number of restrictions upon themselves such as avoiding going out in night or always taking a male companion to escort them and always remaining vigilant of their surroundings. This renders any public place a 'man zone' where women can have at best a very insecure presence. The social attitude in India borders on victim blaming and often there tirade is aimed at independent girls and women.

Sexual Harassment at Workplace- Thousands of working women in India suffer sexual harassment at the hands of their male bosses, colleagues, employees, etc. It is not that men do not suffer sexual harassment but the number of women far exceeds that of the male employees. It must be noted that while some very high profile cases of sexual harassment have raised the issue of rampant sexual harassment in the public as well as the private sector in India, it is the working women of the lower classes that are the worst sufferers of this violence as they neither have proper awareness regarding the matter nor do they have an authentic mechanism to redress their grievances. Most of the times they are unable to find any kind of support from the society as well as the police when they try to complain about the matter and they are often labeled as dirty petty women who would say or do anything for a few bucks.

Social Perspective- In some professions especially in glamour based worlds like movie, television and film industries, sexual harassment is actually considered a given in such industries. In other professions too it is considered a taboo to discuss it freely. It is witnessed in majority of the cases that women employees often do not report sexual harassment due to fear of retaliation, lack of confidence in the organisation including redress mechanism, low awareness about law and procedures, threat of professional victimisation and fear of social and professional repercussions.

Invasion of the Right to Privacy of Women- Women in India can never let go the fear of safety when they access any public place in India and invasion of privacy is something that is completely taken for granted. There have been many cases where women using the changing rooms in malls, show rooms, boutiques, parlors have been secretly watched or filmed. In fact even public toilets, bathrooms, washrooms, in railway and bus stations, markets, highways, parks, gardens, discos, clubs, hotels, restaurants, etc have become places where the question of privacy is daily compromised. There have also been many instances where women who are feeding their babies are watched or secretly captured in camera. Such incidents make it very difficult for women to even breathe freely in public space.

Social perspective- Indian society is not much responsive to these blatant acts of voyeurism and invasion of privacy of women in public space. There is some sort of an unsaid rule in India that public place is just not meant for women and it is the duty of women to go unscathed by being cautious all the time. There have been many cases where women who have been unknowingly filmed have been rebuked by their own family members on the grounds that they themselves were too callous in their attitude and such problems could have been avoided if they would have been extremely cautious of their surroundings.

Stalking – It is unwanted or obsessive attention by an individual or group towards another person. Stalking behaviors are related to harassment and intimidation and may include following the victim in person or monitoring them. (Stalking, 2019)

Social Perspective- Stalking is generally regarded as benign crime and not taken seriously but in reality it puts the women under deep mental strain and tension. They are always in a dilemmas whether to disclose to the family or not as they fear that instead of providing a concrete solution to the problem they would further curtail their freedom and mobility because this is what generally happens when a family hears of such problem. Instead of filing a report against the stalker they restrict the movement of the woman thus further emboldening the stalker which sometimes result in even more brutal form of violence against the woman in question.

Trafficking of Women- Trafficking in women and girls has become a highly organized, inter-state and even international business. Kidnapped or abducted women are usually sold for prostitution or forced marriages. Most of the times young girls and women are lured into the trap in the name of a better life and once they found themselves entrapped they are unable to find the way out. These sex-trafficking rings are such a pitch black world in which right from the criminals to politicians and even police itself are shareholders. A classic case reported from Delhi, in which an inspector of police was running a brothel in Jahangiripuri.(Ghosh,1993,129)

 Acid-attacks- Acid throwing, also called an acid attack, a vitriol attack or vitriolage, is a form of violent assault defined as the act of throwing acid or a similarly corrosive substance onto the body of another "with the intention to disfigure, maim, torture, or kill" and while this attack is not gender specific, it is chiefly aimed at women and girls where the perpetrators of these attacks throw corrosive liquids at their victims, usually at their faces, burning them, and damaging skin tissue, often exposing and sometimes dissolving the bones.(Acid Throwing, 2019) These attacks are the worst form of assault on women and are even considered to be worse than death because the victim has to live that nightmare every moment of their lives.

Social Perspective- In recent years the term acid attack victims has been replaced by acid attack survivors but the attitude of society has not changed much. People are still not considerate towards the plight of the victims. While most of the women do not want sympathy from people but just a fair chance in all aspects of

life, be it, social, economic, cultural. Unfortunately our society is still not ready to give them their lawful place in the society and treat them like equal citizens. They are not only socially ostracized and isolated but also called names by some people. They are also forced to bear the brunt of cruel jokes aimed at them by our largely insensitive society.

Rape- Rape is the most serious form of sexual violence against women. If one goes by the latest statistics of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), "every day 93 women are being raped in the country and according to NCRB data, there is a gradual increase in the number of rapes reported in India - from 24,923 in 2012 to 33,707 in 2013 and despite of several protests after Nirbhaya incident in New Delhi, the national capital continuous to be the unsafe city in the country and the number of rapes in Delhi has almost doubled from 585 in 2012 to 1,441 in 2013, followed by Mumbai (391), Jaipur (192) and Pune (171) among the top unsafe cities in the country." (93 women are being raped in India every day, NCRB data show,TOI,2014). In fact Delhi has earned the unfortunate epithet of 'Rape capital of the World' and there has been a significant drop in the number of tourists visiting the country ever since as many countries have raised concerns over the safety of their citizens visiting India. Rape has been frequently used as a tool to exact revenge or settle scores and also intimidate the person into giving up

In an article published in The Hindustan Times, it analyses the deeper causes of rape-

'The incidence of rapes is determined by interplay of several factors: Economic, demographic, social, efficiency of the police and judicial systems, and exposure to mass media. Our analysis shows the following: The more affluent a state is, the lower is the incidence of rapes but the effect is small; the greater the sex imbalance (or the lower the number of women to men), the higher is the incidence of rapes; the higher the ratio of female workers to male workers, the lower is the occurence of rapes; somewhat surprisingly, the higher the media exposure (measured as readership/ literate population), the higher is the incidence of rapes; the effect of alcoholism is contributory and signficant; open defecation is associated with higher occurrence of rapes - especially in rural areas; and, finally, the higher the conviction rate (number of persons convicted/number of persons registered for committing a rape), the lower is the incidence of rape."(What are the reasons for increasing rape cases in India?,2019)

Social Perspective- The societal attitude toward rape is very prejudiced. There is a strong apathy to the plight of the victim, whether in the society, public forums, police and judiciary. Most of the time it is like causing further assault to the injury by being blatantly insensitive towards the victim. It must be noted that as per the report published by NCRB, in 99.3%, accused is known to the survivor.(In 99.3% rape cases, accused known to survivor: NCRB,2016). This also plays a role in diluting the situation as most of the times women are unsure whether to report or not, resulting in very delayed reporting or no reporting at all. They are also scared that fingers might be pointed at them as is the case with many rape cases where the character of the victim is questioned and frivolous questions which have nothing to do with the sexual violence are raised as

what the women was doing alone with a man, why was she friendly with them, why was she wearing revealing or inappropriate clothes and why was she out of the house during night time. There have been many instances where the family members have tried to hush up the matter or forced the victim to be silent about it due the fear of backlash from society. They are scared of the fact that society would isolate them and their daughter would always remain unmarried. They are also suppressed by the intimidation techniques used by the perpetrators of the crime.These factors often result in further emboldening the criminal-minded persons and perpetrators of such heinous crime. They feel that they can easily get away by twisting the law to serve their own ends or arm twisting the family members of the victim.

It is also seen that while rape can happen to any girl or woman in India, age, caste, economic and marital status are important factors in determining the risk zone for women-

•   Girls age between 16-24 years are particularly vulnerable.

•   Lower caste women are more vulnerable than upper class women.

•   The risk for lower class women is many times greater than that for upper class women.

•   Students (presumably because of their age and acquaintance)

(Ahuja,2003)

Chain snatching- This is often considered as a petty crime but it has in recent years become one of the most frequent crimes against women. Women are often seen as easy targets because they are generally considered to be weaker sex. It is believed by the perpetrators of this crime that they women would take too much time to respond back or would be fearful of responding back. In reality this is not the case but the fact is this as most women often accompany their children or spouses, they do not want their loved ones in danger so they do not act on that very moment when their chain is being snatched for fear of their safety. There have also been many instances where the perpetrators after realizing that they cannot get the gold chain resort to violent tactics leading to serious injuries sustained by the women as well as their family members. These acts have made the daily lives thousands of women very difficult and full of struggles. As jewelry is an integral and inseparable part of Indian women's identity, it is very difficult for women to either remove it every time they step out of the house .

Honour Killings- In the recent decades, honour killings have become one of the most brutal form of violence against women and also have a certain degree of social sanction. The proliferation of Khap panchayats have gone a further step in not only justifying these criminal acts but are also responsible for its rampant promotion. In fact in few states of India like Punjab and Haryana, they are flourishing and are gaining more and more social recognition. Honour killings occur when a woman decides to marry against the wishes of the family or develops a relationship which is not agreeable to her family. They are held

responsible for bringing shame to their family and hurting their honour and most of the time the punishment is brutal public humiliation, beatings in full public view, physical and mental harassment and torture, blackening of faces, making them sit on donkeys, parading them naked and in most severe cases even death. Many of the senior members of the family or the heads of the panchayats believe that mere death is not sufficient so it must be done in full public view to deter any such acts in future and force women into complete submission. here have been many instances where even after a murder case is filed against the family members, the police is unable to find a single witness. This shows the indifferent attitude of the society towards the women in India.

Cyber Crimes Against Women- In this age of technology and internet, women like men should have full access to cyberspace but in recent times there has been a tremendous spate in cyber crime against women in India. Cybercrimes include- cyber stalking, cyber defamation, cyber harassment, cyber defamation and cyber bullying. These crimes generally target women, especially the ones, who are vulnerable and gullible in nature. In most of the cases they are threatening, scary, defamatory, derogatory and bullying in nature. There have also been many cases where the cyber criminals get access to the personal information of the women like her phone number, office or residential address and use it to further terrify or harass the women. This kind of behavior takes a very dangerous turn and can result in various heinous crimes like forcing physical relations and even threat of rape or bodily harm.

Conclusion

It must be noted that ther is ample legal protection against these crimes in India but if the society would not take steps to reform itself, law alone cannot solve this humongous problem. If the entire structure of the present day society is not overhauled, the social repercussions that the victims face will become even more severe than the crime itself. The society is at fault for being so ingrained in their parochial norms and outdated customs and no less than complete restructuring is required to solve this deep rooted issue.

References

Ahuja, R. (2003) Violence Against Women, Jaipur: Rawat.

Acid Throwing (2019), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acid_throwing, Accessed on 04.1.2019.

Ghosh,S.K. (1993) Women and Crime, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House.

'In 99.3% rape cases, accused known to survivor: NCRB' (2016) The Hindustan Times, https://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai-news/in-99-3-rape-cases-accused-known-to-survivor-ncrb/story-ClWstA7wLJvYyigeV4sj1K.html, Accessed on 10.2.2019

'93 women are being raped in India every day, NCRB data show'(2014) The Times of India, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/93-women-are-being-raped-in-India-every-day-NCRB-data-show/articleshow/37566815.cms, Accessed on 12.2.2019.

Prohibition of Smoking in Public Places (2019) http://www.cancerfoundationofindia.org/activities/tobacco-control/resource-material/pdf/sec-4-prohibition-of-smoking-in-public-places.pdf, Accessed on 12.1.2019.

Public Space (2019), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_space, Accessed on 15.1.2019.

Stalking (2019), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalking, Accessed on 04.1. 2019.

'What are the reasons for increasing rape cases in India?'(2018) BBC News, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43782471, Accessed on 13.2.2019.