

Ethnic Conflict and Gender- Based Violence

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Abstract: It is very difficult to overestimate the negative impact of ethnic conflict on women and girls. It can easily be observed that there is an increase in gender- based violence, gang rape and forced pregnancies. Compared to males, females are worst affected by ethnic conflict because of deliberate gender- based violence. Girls, more than boys, are traumatized and mentally affected. Gender- based violence not only affects women physically but also erodes individual relations and community and family structures and therefore it is used as a tactic in conflict. Alcohol, drug consumption, criminal mindset, anti- social attitude and ego of being masculine are some of the factors that entice the rapists to rape women.

Keywords: Ethnic Conflict, Forced Pregnancies, Gang Rape, Gender- Based Violence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The honour of the whole community is associated with the female body. And therefore in order to crush that honour, to subdue the opposite community, the women are raped. Nationalism is associated with violating the purity of women belonging to opposite side. Through the recent ethnic and religious conflict, it can be seen that gender-based violence is used as a strategic weapon of war.

2. THE REASONS BEHIND GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE

Almost throughout the world the social set up is patriarchal and the preservation of female purity is considered as prime duty of husband, brother or father. These persons are expected to protect their women at any cost. This assumption, expectation, is the prime cause behind gender-based violence because it shows that whose women are sexually abused lack masculinity and are incapable of protecting their women. In this way, the defilement of women's purity is an act of asserting domination, muscle power over the males of other community. It can easily be observed that where ethnic and religious purity is valued more than anything else, rapes and forced pregnancies take place at large scale. Since the ethnic and religious impurity is unthinkable and abhorred, it is used to subdue, insult and intimidate the other community and therefore women are raped repeatedly until they become pregnant.

Basically, in conflict, women are raped for two symbolic reasons: 1. Women are understood as preservers of family honour and often symbolize racial purity and to violate that racial purity women are raped. 2. The abuse and torture of female members of a man's family in front of him is used to convey the message that he has failed in his role as protector [U.N.2002: 16]. A general breakdown in law and order and erosion in the social structures and the mores of the society that control acceptable behaviour in the society are the factors that contribute to the gender- based violence in ethnic conflict. Alcohol,

drug consumption, criminal mindset, anti- social attitude and ego of being masculine are some of the factors that entice the rapist to commit rapes. A strong patriarchal background can also be seen the common factor among the rapists. The society which holds the male superiority is more likely to witness rape compared to egalitarian society. It can be observed that women suffer because of patriarchal values which accord them lower social status. The unequal power relation between male and female leads to rape. Males are considered to be powerful, strong, aggressive, while females are represented as docile, meek and submissive. This categorization encourages the rapists.

3. THE EFFECTS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:

It is very difficult to overestimate the negative impact of conflict on women and girls. It can easily be observed that there is an increase in gender- based violence, gang rape and forced pregnancies. This forced pregnancies leading to the unwanted babies creates a lot of problems, disturbs the family in particular and society in general and leaves a permanent psychological scar on the community.

Compared to males, females are worst affected by communal riots because of deliberate gender- based violence. Girls, more than boys, are traumatized and mentally affected. Gender- based violence not only affects women physically but also erodes individual relations and community and family structures and therefore it is used as a tactic in conflict. Broken families, disintegration in the society, unwanted babies, negative attitude towards the child resulted from the rape are some of the results of gender- based violence. It is very likely that neglected child grows up as a perpetrator or a victim of violence. Incidents of domestic violence, including honour killing, increases as there is breakdown in family and community. In short, gender-based violence causes physical, sexual, psychological and economic harm to women.

4. GENDER BASED VIOLENCE: A UNIVERSAL PROBLEM

Right from independence, India is suffering from gender-based violence in religious conflict. India's partition between India and Pakistan was followed by unprecedented gender-based violence in the name of religion. Soon after that Brahmin community was targeted as Mahatma Gandhi's assassinator turned out to be a Brahmin. This was followed by atrocities committed against Sikh community as a reaction to Indira Gandhi's assassination. After Babri Mosque demolition and serial bomb blasts in Mumbai in 1993, India once again experienced the religious hatred. In 2002, gender-based violence in Gujarat left a permanent scar on Indian citizens. Now-a-days, India is facing the problem of honour killing, particularly in U.P. and Bihar.

Recent ethnic conflicts in Sudan, Rwanda and Kosovo reveal that gang rape, abduction and forced pregnancies are used as strategic weapons to terrify and subdue the opposite community. In 1992, religious conflict between Catholics and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina resulted in mass rape of Muslim women in Bosnia. In 1993, after Babri Mosque demolition, Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh took revenge by abducting

and raping innocent Hindu women. Sri Lankan women also faced gender- based violence due to ethnic differences among themselves.

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