

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Growing Number of Sexual Violence against Women in Kerala

Vidya S

PhD Research Scholar,
University of Kerala,
Thiruvananthapuram.

Article History: Submitted-24/01/2018, Revised-31/01/2018, Accepted-03/02/2018, Published-28/02/2018.

Abstract:

Kerala has the highest literacy rate among Indian states and it is one of the leading states in the standard of living and women empowerment. But, in spite of these progressive indexes, the number of sexual crimes increase steadily in the state. Kerala witnessed over 1800 rape cases in 2017. This article examines this baffling dichotomy between social indicators and the increasing rate of sexual violence against women in Kerala and it analyses the various reasons behind it. Violence has been a significant tool for patriarchal sexual suppression. These recurring incidents of violence in Kerala society point at the existence of deep-rooted patriarchal superstitions in the society. The article addresses these issues and attempts to provide some solutions.

Keywords: Violence against women, Rape, Women's rights, Feminism, Women in Kerala, Coercive Control

For centuries, patriarchy has used violence to subjugate women. Rape is a significant form of patriarchal violence. It questions the physical integrity of a woman, and thus exhibits the male attacker's authority and control over the female victim. Susan Brownmiller writes, "From prehistoric times to the present, I believe, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men keep all women* in a state of fear" (15). This article analyses the growing number of rape and other sexual crimes against women in Kerala. It draws attention to various aspects of the increasing crime rate and attempts to provide some solutions to tackle it.

Kerala is not the only state where women endure rape and other forms of violence but with its highest literacy rate, favourable sex ratio, matrilineal past and progressive political stances, the soaring crime rate against women in Kerala society is quite ignoble and discomfiting. Moreover, society's spiralling indifference towards violence against women is terrifying. Numerous types of violence against women from domestic violence to rape are recurrent in the state. Violent sexual attacks, from harassment to rape, against women and children are reported frequently in various parts of the state. The infamous cases of Saumya, who was raped and murdered during a train journey and Jisha, a Dalit girl's brutal rape and murder in her own house on April 28th, 2016, are two instances. A 90-year-old woman is allegedly subjected to sexual assault in Kerala on September 14, 2016.¹ The recent abduction and assault of a popular actress is another incident of this type. Statistics shows that the last ten years view an irrefutable growth in the rate of violence against women in the state.

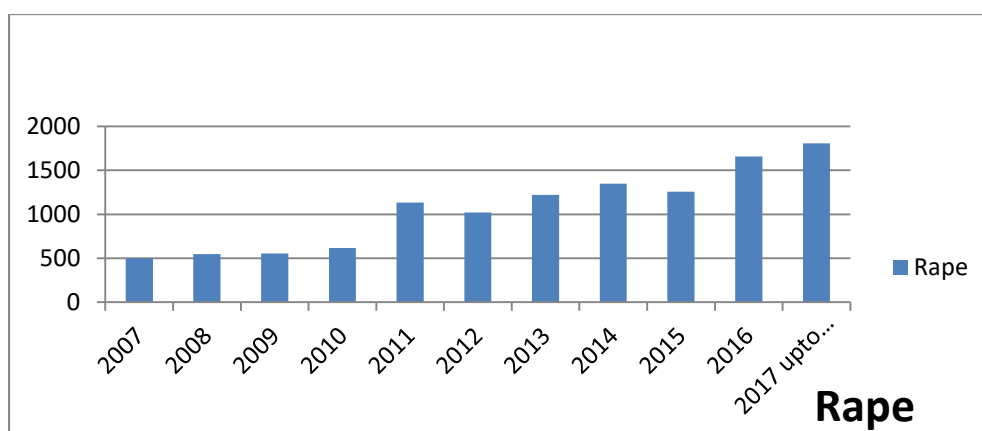
Table 1: Crime against women in Kerala from 2007 to 2017 November

| Year | Rape | Total Crimes |
|--------------------|------|--------------|
| 2007 | 500 | 9381 |
| 2008 | 548 | 9706 |
| 2009 | 554 | 9354 |
| 2010 | 617 | 10781 |
| 2011 | 1132 | 13279 |
| 2012 | 1019 | 13002 |
| 2013 | 1221 | 13738 |
| 2014 | 1347 | 14524 |
| 2015 | 1256 | 12485 |
| 2016 | 1656 | 15114 |
| 2017 upto November | 1807 | 13211 |

Source: Crimes against women. State Crime Records Bureau. Kerala police official website

Table 1 presents an overall view of the crimes registered from 2007 to 2017. The number of rape cases registered in a year has tripled over the decade. In 2007, 500 rapes are registered, but in 2017, the number of rape cases has increased at an alarming rate to 1807. There is a steady rise in the crime rates except for the years 2012 and 2015. These two years show a slight decrease in numbers but on the whole, the crime rate is increasing. According to Kerala police’s crime records, in 2017, up to November, a total of 13211 cases of crimes against women were reported across the state. These reported figures are likely showing only the tip of the iceberg, many women are forced not to report the assaults they face. In Kerala, where women literacy rate is high when compared to other states of India, why this types of incidents recur continuously? It is important to find out how these problems materialize in a relatively progressive society.

Figure 1: Rape against women from 2007 to 2017



The grounds of the crime

Feminist writer, Jane Caputi argues that “rape is a direct expression of sexual politics, a ritual enactment of male domination, a form of terror that functions to maintain the status quo” (121). Significantly, patriarchal elements entrenched in traditional Kerala culture is the prime reason for these types of violence. The contemporary socio-political scenario of Kerala reflects a misogynistic medieval mindset. Contrary to the growth of modern education, a conformist attitude towards patriarchal values also heightened in the society. Women empowerment is considered to be an effective measure to control gender-based violence, but in Kerala, a large number of women are economically independent, they have good academic background and have access and control over ancestral properties. Still, they are acclimatized to be the second sex in the gender patterns of the society. The abominable patriarchal attitudes and the behavioural patterns inherent in the general mindset of the society is one of the main reasons for the increasing number of violence against women. In a well-informed society like this, cultural tenets transmit vehemently through art, literature, cinema and other media. Mainstream cinema is an important cultural apparatus that asserts the patriarchal gender roles and objectification of women. Unfortunately, social and popular media, from Facebook to television advertisements also offer rambling ideas that perpetuate such gender roles and sexual rules. Thus, untying the patriarchal knots remains to be a major hurdle to be crossed.

Lack of sex education and awareness at school level and the pseudo-morality flaunted in traditional Kerala society form another reason. Many awareness seminars and classes are happening around the state but they are not enough to tackle the growing atrocities against women. A sudden economic growth and resultant social transformation loaded the youth with sexual infirmities and emotional insecurities. Instilling misunderstanding about sex through pornographic sites, the virtual world has also boosted the calamity. Easily accessible pornographic sites those provide unbridled and untimely sexual knowledge has distanced the kids from reality. Caught between the traditional notions on sex and between the impulsive exposures, boys became confused about sex and its role in social life. Freedom of expression enjoyed in the virtual world is misused for monetary benefits and the most dangerous effect of this is the ensuing sexual misleading of the younger generation. This hoodwinking is another reason for the growth of sordid sexual fantasies in the mind of the youngsters.

The intricate relationship between drugs and crimes perpetuates and even amplifies the criminal activity rate in a society. The role of alcohol and drugs in transforming Kerala to one of the most crime-prone states during the last two decades is not negligible. Recent economic and social developments initiated a comparatively liberal attitude towards alcohol consumption in Kerala. Resultantly, use of liquor and other drugs among the teenagers increased. This can be read in connection with the fearsome fact that it is teenagers who commit most of the crimes.

Meanwhile, the lingering patriarchal elements are evident in the society’s attitude towards the crimes. Society initiates corrective measures to regulate women and to neutralize

her sexuality by employing traditional moral codes upon her than condemning the crimes and castigating the criminals. Indeed, this reversal of circumstances is a key reason for the increasing number of crimes. Bearers of this attitude use social media to abuse the outspoken and the daring women who go beyond male control and they even emphasize assault as a necessary punishment for those who do so. The anonymity offered by virtual world warrants them with unrestrained freedom. Religious and political interventions in facilitating patriarchal needs have also to be noticed.

The tardy judicial system is another major reason behind the recurring incidents of rape. Though the number of cases reported is very high, the conviction rate is very low. Usually, the legal procedures are dragged for years and after committing the rape the culprits come out on bail and very often the victims are forced to end the case because of this delay. Victims from poor background or lower social status suffer the most. Sometimes, they are forced to settle their complaints outside the court. The general public and media often call for harassers to be hanged to death, but in many instances, the highly influential rapists are protected by politicians and other influential people. Many of the accused are released after years long trials without facing any punishment. This gives society a bad message and amplifies the crime rate.

Growing indifference of the society towards crimes is another cause of the increasing rates of crimes against women. Women are forced not to react to issues like rape and sexual abuses. They are being desisted from lodging complaints. The threadbare systems and growing political interventions help out to punish the victims again and the culprits escape effortlessly through the equivocation of laws. Lack of proper punishments and malleable laws multiply the frequency of the crimes.

Redoubling consumerism and the resultant commodification of female body also supplemented to the deterioration of women's status in the society. Advertisements, cinema and social media reduced her integrity into an object to attract public gaze. The growing number of jewellery showrooms all over Kerala is an example for this commercial culture that facilitates social institutions such as marriage to be an inevitable trade that weighs the dignity of women in terms of investments in gold. In Kerala, regardless of their financial background, parents are forced to spend too much money for a girls' marriage and she becomes an object in patriarchal transactions. Thus the growing commercialism turns to be a factor that strengthens the sexual exploitation faced by women in Kerala society.

Table 2: Crimes against women- district wise statistics (January 2017 to November 2017)

| Sl No | Districts | Rape | Total crimes |
|-------|------------------|------|--------------|
| 1 | Trivandrum City | 71 | 476 |
| 2 | Trivandrum Rural | 190 | 1146 |
| 3 | Pathanamthitta | 89 | 500 |
| 4 | Kollam City | 105 | 571 |

| | | | |
|----|-----------------|-----|------|
| 5 | Kollam Rural | 76 | 861 |
| 6 | Alappuzha | 83 | 784 |
| 7 | Idukki | 96 | 497 |
| 8 | Kottayam | 104 | 519 |
| 9 | Ernakulam City | 76 | 990 |
| 10 | Ernakulam Rural | 106 | 848 |
| 11 | Thrissur City | 49 | 366 |
| 12 | Thrissur Rural | 116 | 858 |
| 13 | Palakkad | 129 | 589 |
| 14 | Malappuram | 162 | 1250 |
| 15 | Kozhikode City | 43 | 516 |
| 16 | Kozhikode Rural | 81 | 795 |
| 17 | Wyanad | 85 | 367 |
| 18 | Kannur | 68 | 617 |
| 19 | Kasaragod | 78 | 547 |

Source: State crime records bureau. Kerala police official website.

Table 2 proves that there is no much disparity in district-wise crime rate except for the unusual escalation of an already worrying rate of crimes in Malappuram district. According to the statistics, the total number of cases reported from Malappuram district up to November is 1250.

The need for a change in the outlook

In Kerala, women can attain the highest education, the highest political and administrative positions but a redefining of her social status is not encouraged. The encumbrance of patriarchal values inherent in Kerala culture acclimatizes girls to be compliant and to be slothful against male supremacy. At the same time, these values correspondingly instill ideas into the minds of boys those later develop into gender imbalance and male supremacy. Proper sex education from schools and more importantly from the home is necessary to solve these issues. Educated Malayali women can facilitate this task easily if they succeed to unload the burden of patriarchal values from their mind. Mothers have to treat their children equally without any gender bias and the boys should be taught to accept gender equivalence. Girls have to be framed to be self-dignified, to be outspoken and they have to be trained to speak out devoid of the imposed burden of morals.

The government should move tactically to deal with sexual abuses. They should take measures to prevent these crimes to happen in society. Awareness classes, remodeling of basic educational system and women empowerment are some strategies for this. Secondly, the government must protect the victims and their dignity. The scheme of Nirbhaya shelter homes is a good initiative for this. The government should provide the victims medical aid, education and job training. Thirdly, the government should set up special courts for the

speedier prosecution of the accused. The delay in legal proceedings gives plenty of time for the culprits to escape through the loopholes of the law. So fast track courts and speedy trials should be conducted for rape cases. The government must act tough in the cases of violence against women and children. Local bodies and community groups also have a significant role in preventing these types of crimes.

Providing space for women in society and ensuring their security can be taken as a temporary measure but the patriarchal scenario has to be changed. Law enforcing agents, the public and the women themselves can control and limit violence against women. A change in gender perspectives of Kerala society is needed for the enforcement of these principles. Use of drugs and alcohol in the society must be reduced. The extent of the problem should be evaluated and a proper counseling has to be done to control the use of drugs. Media has a vital role in re-establishing the gender equality and the rights of women. Likewise, social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Whatsapp should be used as platforms for healthy discussions and debates about gender and sexuality.

Innovative ways of resistance are also have a major role in correcting the attitude of the society. Movements like 'meetoo' campaign gave people a sense of the magnitude of the problem of sexual harassment. The 'avalkoppam' campaign in Kerala in solidarity with the assaulted actress also helped to spread awareness and it stressed the need for a collective resistance against sexual violence. Because of these campaigns, people have ended their embarrassing silence and they have started to discuss loudly about sexual harassments. This acknowledgment itself is a step towards stopping the crimes.

Women should refuse to be silent and should react and report the crimes against them. It is often the aftermath of reporting a crime is haunting women than facing the crimes. There are reports that women are secluded, denied food, denied education, denied family share and they were even considered as bad omens by families once they reacted against assaults. Such attitude and measures undertaken by the family and the society against the victims resulted in the reluctance to report crimes against them. It becomes a tightrope walk for the victims to pursue with the case. So, society should avoid looking down and expatriating them. Safeguarding the dignity and safety of the victims should be taken as the government's responsibility.

Moreover, women should take initiative to re-mould these value systems of society. It has to be clear that a women's honour cannot be that easily tarnished by society's judgments. They have to subvert the existing patriarchal social order and have to reconstitute it encompassing with their ideological participation. Women have to raise their voice to protect themselves in a system where corruption and nepotism rule. Ultimately, women have to understand that there is no honour which is more valuable than their dignity and freedom. The forte of women in society should be refurbished by restructuring the systemic patriarchal edifices.

Works Cited:

Brownmiller, Susan. *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1975. Print.

Caputi, Jane. *Goddesses and Monsters: Women, Myth, Power and Popular Culture*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004. Print.

ⁱ*TheHindu*. September 22, 2016. Thiruvananthapuram Edition