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LOCATING PATRIARCHY IN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA: SOCIAL, LEGAL AND ALTERNATIVE RESPONSES

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Abstract

From womb to tomb, women in India are subjected to different forms of violence. Contemporarily, persistent violence against women is leading to its normalization but what lacks is an interrogation of its causes. In this paper, I outline how patriarchy is a promising concept to explain instances of male violence, and how conscious use of violence bolsters the mechanism of subordination. This paper aligns with feminist analyses which evoke gender-power relations, male dominance and female subordination which serve to maintain patriarchy and perpetuate systematic violence against women. Secondly, this paper discusses the legal framework of the criminal justice system in India, asserting that it is not meaningfully reformed, and endures a patriarchal narrative. Women's courts as alternative approaches which evade formal legal structures are discussed and their empowerment framework is critically analyzed. Furthermore, the public outcry to multiple forms of violence against women is compared to highlight that there are marginalized forms of violence against women, and marginalized women whose experiences of violence have been underrepresented.

Keywords

Violence Against Women, Patriarchy, Mahila Panchayats, Honour (*Izzat*), Shame (*Sharam*), Delhi Gangrape

1. Introduction

According to the National Crime Records Bureau of India, in 2016, 95 women were raped in India every day, and the number is estimated to significantly increase in coming years (NCRB, 2016). Rape, along with intimate partner violence, honour killings, forced marriages, dowry deaths, sexual harassment at workplace are different languages of violence which women endure persistently. This paper asserts that systematic patriarchy, either within or outside the family structure, standardizes violence against women (Namy et al., 2017; Bhattacharyya, 2016). First, a comprehensive understanding is provided leading to theory development of how patriarchy is an effective tool to explain violence against women. The discussion around rape and domestic violence as the two avidly discussed forms of male violence against women is reiterated to corroborate arguments. Violence against women is also an underrepresented theme because the patriarchal forces victimize women, who are forced to make a conscious decision to 'not make private matters public'. However, in many cases, women are considerably claiming the public space to safeguard their rights at the community-level. It is interesting to note the presence of women's courts in a rural setting, where women have taken it upon themselves to hold perpetrators accountable. This paper sets out the patriarchal tone underpinning legal responses to violence against women. The gruesome rape of a 23-year-old woman in New Delhi is referred to formulate an understanding of where the legal wheels of justice stand in acknowledging the matrix of structural inequalities around women, and how, whether consciously or unconsciously, a patriarchal order is upheld. It is identified that formal laws to address violence against women are not meaningfully reformed in a contextual way, and pose as a barrier in seeking redressal (Herklotz, 2018, p. 256-8). Lastly, the paper briefly delves into caste-based violence against women among other forms which are not routinely discussed, in order to offer scope for further research.

2. Theoretical Framework: Patriarchy

The United Nations identifies violence against women as gender-based violence which results in physical, sexual or psychological harm to women (UN, 1993). By acknowledging violence against women to encompass different forms- intimate partner violence, domestic abuse, dowry deaths, rapes, honour killings, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment and so on, it is widely agreed that the use of the phrase 'violence against women' is not a straightforward concept (Watts and Zimmerman, 2002). Theoretical explanations of violence against women reiterate the sociocultural notion of patriarchy which legitimizes, normalizes and justifies violence or even threat of violence to uphold male dominance. Under a patriarchal order,

gender-power relations have a direct impact on women's subordinate role in the society. Socially determined norms allow men to invoke female control, command and respect by using brute force. In fact, there is ample evidence in the literature where violence against women has occurred because of women's perceived transgressions. For example- physical chastisement of an erring wife who refuses to indulge in sexual intercourse, household chores and childcare (Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller, 1999, p. 6; Flood and Pease, 2009, p. 128). Watts and Zimmerman (2002, p. 1232) say, "a man who rapes a woman whom he judges to be sexually proactive might justify his act as being an appropriate punishment for her transgression of socially determined rules of female behaviour". In tracing the history of patriarchy, Gangoli (2017, p. 129) outlines that women's sexuality is continually used as a tool for their subordination. A compelling evidence is provided by one of the prime accused of the Delhi rape case where a 23-year old woman was brutally raped and eviscerated in a moving bus in 2012. Filmmaker Leslie Udwin in her documentary 'India's Daughters' has robustly captured the indifference of the accused men, where one goes on record to say, "A decent girl doesn't roam around at night with boys. A girl is more responsible for rape than a boy" (Roberts, 2015). The undercurrent of patriarchal jingoism in the above quotes, appropriately called 'patriarchal fears and anxieties about women's bodies' (Gangoli and Rew, 2018, p. 115), and in other acts of male control over women's sexual conduct- actual, suspected or potential (Welchman and Hossain, 2005, p. 6), makes it pertinent to interrogate and challenge patriarchy using feminist explanations and interventions.

For the purpose of this paper, I would like to borrow from feminist ideology to define patriarchy as a system of women's subordination and male domination. Sharma (2005, p. 388), asserts that "deep-rooted ideas about male superiority enable men to freely exercise unlimited power over women's lives and effectively legitimize it too". Early feminist scholars have provided copious evidence that women experience varying forms of violence when they don't subscribe to gender-based norms (Baron and Straus, 1987, p. 467; Brownmiller, 1975). I am in favour of using patriarchy as a theoretical tool as it theorizes violence against women from a gender perspective. Even the contemporary usage of the term 'gender-based violence' is justified because these crimes occur due to a concrete ideology where women should be treated as subordinates, much like a 'gendered arrangement' (Heise, Ellsberg, Gottemoeller, 1999; Hunnicutt, 2009, p. 557). It is not wrong to say that even if theory-based patriarchal explanations suffered stagnation or criticism, the gender- power angle has often appeared in disguised forms (Hunnicutt, 2009, p. 553). Jasinski (2001, p. 6) presents an analysis where male violence against women accentuates because of early exposure to such violence, and women's acceptance of violence increases due to unavailability of redressal resources. However, this micro-oriented theoretical framework is weak

as it fails to account for socio-cultural explanations by situating patriarchy which constitutes women's subordinate role as a 'cultural legacy' which ought to be upheld (Jasinski, 2001, p. 12). Meanwhile, critics of patriarchy dissuade its usage as a theoretical explanation by arguing that it is seen in a.) A monolithic format, b.) It desensitizes differences between men, and c.) There is a grey area between patriarchy and individual male ideology (Dutton, 1994, p. 170). However, I agree with Hunnicutt (2009, p. 566) in that patriarchy as a theoretical concept shouldn't be abandoned but instead, it should be theorized so as to capture the varieties of patriarchy and its different conceptual properties. Explanations of violence against women are rife with terms like 'women's subordination', 'male dominance' and 'maintaining family honour', so it becomes equally important to understand how patriarchy is perceived and implemented in multiple contexts. Notwithstanding the complex contestations of patriarchy as a theoretical framework, the consequences are fairly uniform. Social control of women exists, either as a cause or consequence of patriarchy, and the correlation between male dominance and violence against women is increasing steadily.

An absence of show of control towards women, is, what I'd like to argue, a perceived 'patriarchal violation'. Further, a typical patriarchal household comprises of a woman who is obedient and submissive to her husband's demands, a husband who is the breadwinner of the family, a household where women stepping out at night is seen as a shameful act. In fact, a patriarchal household considers the birth of a girl child to be unfortunate. Son preference propels the ideology of patriarchy (Live, 2015). Thus, implying that violence against women starts from birth by means of sex-selective abortions is not a baseless claim (Chartoff, 2015).

While the four confined corners of the household can present themselves as haven, they are generally the recurring breeding grounds for violence. Often, men's inability to perform their role of breadwinners results in wife-beating. "In a survey by International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 40% of men who reported facing economic stress admitted to perpetuating domestic violence, contrasting the 27% of men who had not faced this stress" (Chartoff, 2015). Marital rape and sexual violence are significant 'disciplining activities' occurring within the institution of marriage. Patriarchy has posed itself as a rigid structure where it maintains a firm grip on women's means of redressal because, generally, encounters of violence in the private sphere are not revealed in the public fora. The 'honour-shame' ideology is hard to miss here as 'loss of family honour' has direct linkages with violence against women (Welden, 2010, p. 382; Agarwal, 2008). The expected female behaviour displayed in public spaces is a demonstration of a family's honour (*izzat*), and it is perceived to be shameful when women don't subscribe to these social expectations, or more precisely, socially determined

gender roles. Forms of gendered norms often go undetected, unquestioned and unchallenged by women because they are often *made to learn to be comfortable* in institutionalizing family's honour (Abraham, 2001). A pattern of classical patriarchy also notes that women prefer to internalize patriarchy and succumb to its constituents, because of the cyclical power structures they later acquire, as mother-in-laws (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 278-9). Additionally, it is also argued that women practice distinct 'silencing' mechanisms where they themselves minimize, trivialize and ultimately invalidate the male violence experienced by them, thereby resurrecting patriarchy (Kelly and Radford, 1990). Resonance of patriarchal dominance can be felt when women act as male proxies and are complicit in the subordination of other women (Gangoli, 2017, p. 130-2). Mothers-in-law, for example, play a key role in instigating violence against daughters-in-law as they are conditioned to assume an evaluated role in controlling daughters-in-law, pressuring them for producing sons, and even inflicting dowry abuse (Mirza, 2017; Rew, Gangoli and Gill, 2013).

3. Legal Responses to Violence against Women

The socio-cultural force of honour instilled upon women's shoulders does not allow them to take issue with encounters of violence. Dissent displayed by women is synonymous to them being presumptuous, which is not a trait of the submissive Indian woman. While reporting instances of honour-based violence, there is a gap in victim/police engagement as there are social predispositions which influence police responses to the victims' experiences (MacQueen and Norris, 2016). Thus, this section highlights the critical ruptures which have the potential to suppress any sense of autonomy thriving in women, thereby hampering the health of a democracy because half of the population encounters exclusion and inequality.

The legal responses to violence against women institutionalised by vehicles of justice are known to exacerbate the situation. While many women showcase a reluctance to seek legal justice because they lack courage, some fall into the practice of internalising patriarchy or accepting violence. The most widely discussed forms of violence against women are domestic abuse and rape (Menon, 2004; Brownmiller, 1975; Baron and Straus, 1987; Hudson, Bowen and Nielsen, 2011). In cases of domestic violence, women tolerate violence because they have to live with the violator under the same roof and be submissive to continued violence (Kumar, Haque Nizamie and Srivastava, 2013). Economic dependence and social isolation manifest financial entrapment within abusive marriages, thus leading to the often 'invisible' of format economic abuse as a constituent of domestic violence (Postmus et al., 2018). Thus, the politics of violence against women is complex where the victim has no meaningful outlet to seek redressal, protection, resources, and courage. This paper argues that the legal system is not meaningfully reformed to challenge the

social structures that perpetuate violence against women. In particular, the judicial narratives to violence against women assert subversive patriarchy. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, varieties of patriarchy exist and can be seen in the legal structure as well.

Before delving into the socio-legal responses, it is important to examine the Indian 'honour-shame' ideology concomitant with the axis of patriarchy. "At the centre of these patriarchal codes, stands the female, control of whose sexuality, and bestowal of this sexuality, especially in marriage, is crucial to patriarchal forces and their concern with purity, status, power and hierarchy" (Chowdhry, 1997, p. 1019). There lies an interesting paradox here, which maybe indigestible to patriarchy. Ironically, these are the same females who undergo nascent forms of violence (yet grave), i.e. sex-selective abortions, in one context, and are later entrusted to be the determinants of a family's honour in another context. This 'honour' entrenched by patriarchal norms doesn't allow women to be defiant to the demands of the husband, for instance. In the case of sexual assault, Priya Kale notes that "for far too long, patriarchal impunity in India has been entrenched by placing the burden of family 'honour' on women- in cases of rape, the woman is doubly victimised for 'giving up' her 'honour'" (Kale, 2013).

After tremendous amount of procrastination and ultimate gleaning of courage, when a woman knocks the door of legal justice in hope for protection, she faces severe adversity. Faith in the impotence of judicial narratives is restored when a woman is denied documentation of crime. Agnes (1992) observes that when a woman goes to file a complaint against her own husband, she is thought of to be brazen and defiant. She is further counselled about her role as a wife (her role of a subordinate), and thus, sent back without even registering the complaint. Investigation thus becomes a far-fetched dream. The institutions of justice conveniently dodge documentation and victim protection with this form of patriarchal intervention.

In other cases, they may act as passive observers of violence (Suneetha and Nagaraj, 2005). Domestic violence is considered to be 'domestic' and thus permissible. "In matters such as these, they (police) are known to watch from the sideline. In their opinion, these issues must not be resolved by the law of the land" (Chowdhry, 1997, p. 1020).

Borrowing the conceptual framework of Menon (2004, p. 13), it is interesting to note a frustrating lack of understanding demonstrated by the legal reforms, even today, between two very important terms- **intervention** and **interference**. In cases of rape, for example the Delhi gangrape, a culture of expectancy and immediacy can be constructed by the general public through public protests and demonstrations that the police are obliged to deliver by 'intervening'. However, there is a tendency of the police to not 'interfere' in family matters, and allow or assist the family in

maintaining its honour. “The division of personal law from criminal/civil law in India lays bare the patriarchal preoccupation with maintaining the sanctity of the family” (Lodhia, 2009, p. 106).

By swearing its allegiance to patriarchal solidarity, the discourse of the legal system lacks an intersectionality analysis of gender with the perceived social norms. This ‘internalised denial of the vulnerable sector’ (Dewan, 1999, p. 426) is indicative of the inability of the legal justice system to reconfigure the social norms that engender violence against women in the first place.

In addition, the promising protectionist narrative of the legal criminal justice system ignores the emotional and mental violence a woman undergoes during or post the act of violence has been committed. In the chronology of violence against women, mental and emotional health of the woman bear the indelible mark of violence and are persistent in nature. The emphasis while addressing violence against women is mostly on the rigid monologue of physical violence. Feelings of powerlessness and helplessness can cloud her conscience, also resulting in withdrawal symptoms or the lowest value of self-worth. “The impairment of a woman’s self-esteem places her at risk for several mental health problems” (Magar, 2003, p. 512). Furthermore, the lamentable honour-shame ideology made to install into a woman's conscience adds to the emotional violence. The interlaced social ostracism can amplify the mental abuse. “Violence against women is a complex phenomenon, thus, any strategy to reduce the mental health consequences should aim to address the underlying cultural beliefs and social structures that perpetuate it” (Kumar, Haque Nizamie and Srivastava, 2013, p. 7). Mulvihill et al. (2018, p. 14) have devised a framework to influence timely delivery of interactional justice, particularly for victims of honour-based violence, based on the following factors-

- i.) Responding officer’s prior understanding of ‘honour’ and their ability to predict the nature of perpetrators and willingness of victims.
- ii.) Juxtaposition of procedural systems and victims’ expectations.

4. Alternative Approaches: Women’s Courts

DaLeat (2013, p. 116) argues that formal law may not be an effective tool to tackle violence against women, and anticipates bottom-up community-led approaches to generate more sustainable action. In a situation plagued by perceived traditional understandings of attitudes towards women, there are instances where women are seeking reformist responses through alternative means. There are operational frameworks as part of a community-based intervention in rural slums where women’s courts (*mahila panchayats*) act as an immediate vehicle of response for the victims of violence. These women’s courts administered by women, mostly in rural areas, point to an empowerment approach where women take matters in their own hands to tackle issues

of violence in the community. The answer to ‘why women resort to these alternative approaches’ is well captured by Magar (2001, p. 41) where rural women formulated local-level courts because of their loss of faith in formal law enforcements. Mahila Panchayats are indicative of an abhorrence from male-dominated mechanisms of conflict resolution, and forms an alternative dispute-settling body which don’t enforce patriarchal norms and are women centric (Vatuk, 2013). These contemporary rural interventions not only challenge women’s subordinate role in a patriarchal society, but also warrant that mental and emotional abuse against women is unacceptable.

The ease of engaging with the women’s courts gives victims a nascent agency in terms of documentation of violence. Most importantly, these community interventionist reforms differ from the institutional vehicles of legal justice in three ways. Firstly, the mahila panchayat members are able to provide resources to the abused victims. In terms of providing legal counsel to rural women, “the mahila panchayat staff’s knowledge of Indian personal law and skill on handling the judicio-legal and police systems enhances their authority in community and strengthens their ability to assert themselves against traditional norms” (Magar, 2003, p.517). Secondly, in the local setting of a mahila panchayat, a woman feels safer due to the protection and social support offered (Vatuk, 2013). During her participatory study of the local setting of a mahila panchayat, Magar (2003) observed a general opinion among the staff regarding protection offered to victims. “Once a woman has made her case public through the women’s court, her abusers won’t risk harming the woman for fear of being caught” (Magar, 2003, p. 522). And lastly, such a grassroots intervention allows women to muster courage to face perpetrators. Through the social support provided by women’s courts, it also helps to de-emphasize the ‘honour-shame’ ideology. Thus, it is an unconventional intervention by women, for women, which ultimately seeks the retrieval of a woman’s self-autonomy, self-sufficiency and critical consciousness.

However, the empowerment framework of mahila panchayats are prone to some bottlenecks. It becomes important to direct the lens to address what it means for the victims to bypass the formalized legal system and seek action through these local platforms. These female-driven social interventions may prove to be more meaningful for rural women as opposed to the institutional legal reforms vis-a-vis accomplishing protection and social support. However, for the abusers, the absence of tangible legal interventions (for instance, furnishing arrest warrants) can act as a reason to not take these interventions seriously. After all, for the patriarchal mindset, it is a group of women, acquiring agency, to hold a man (perpetuator) accountable. Thus, the paucity of ‘legalities’ in the community intervention fora allows men to evade both the institutional vehicles of criminal justice and community-driven interventions.

After their lamentable acts are made public, the accused might be more cautious to contain the violence, in case of domestic violence, for instance.

“A typical warning letter to accused often reads-

Dear [husband’s name],

Your wife came to us and told us your problems. She said you beat her all the time. Why do you do this? What is your problem? Come to our office and tell us so that we can help solve your problem” (Magar, 2003, p. 516).

The structure and format of this letter casts doubt on its ability to significantly break patriarchal notions. It raises questions about the accused’s acceptance of an attempt made at changing the patriarchal status quo. Instilling a fear of grave action becomes ambiguous without the presence of tangible legal elements. Thus, the mechanism of women's courts may seem to be efficient, but they undergo a tunnel of ambiguities in terms of accountability.

5. The Delhi Gangrape- Have The Legal Scenario And Social Response Mechanism Changed?

Having discussed the indigenous circumvention of legal reforms practiced in a few rural parts of India, the metropolitan urban landscapes have in fact placed formal legal procedures under widespread scrutiny. Lodhia (2009) provides a detailed analysis of how the Indian law of Prevention of Women from Domestic Violence is limited in its formulation and implementation by deconstructing the embedded patriarchal nature of the criminal justice system. Legal legitimacy is also challenged when victims of rape continue to suffer due to entrenched social prejudices (Kabeer, 2014; Himabindu, Arora and Prashanth, 2014).

The dormant laws were faced with severe public outrage when a 23-year-old girl in Delhi was horrendously gangraped on a moving bus. She later died after 10 days of the assault, as her physical condition had deteriorated to a significant extent. The feisty, enraged, and frustrated public demanded immediate responses to the ghastly acts of violence. They demanded the sluggish attitude of the legal systems to change drastically and instantaneously. The arrest of the assaulters within 24 hours was an attempt to demonstrate immediate response by the legal forces. However, fortunately, this didn’t satiate the public outcry. There is abundant scholarship underpinning the chronology of the assault, detailed information about the assaulters, the family background of the victim, the relentless protests carried out after the attack and the feminist critique of how the State treated this acute case of violence (Burke, 2013).

As Priya Kale (2013) notes, the Justice Verma Committee (JVC, hereinafter) is deemed as a paradigm shift in terms of treatment of violence against women. “The JVC effectively states that

the ‘community’ is not a stakeholder in a woman’s sense of self-worth and the violation of her physical autonomy alone is a serious enough crime” (Kale, 2013). The JVC had managed to banish the ‘honour-shame ideology’ that impairs comprehensive legal reforms as well as social practices. “By not including death penalty for rape, JVC aligned itself with feminists on the ground who reasoned that doing so risked patriarchally reinscribing the crime of rape as one so destructive to a woman’s honour as to be incommensurate with a punishment less than death” (Lodhia, 2015, p. 98-9). By acquiescing the rape stigma, and turning the ‘honour-shame’ tables onto the perpetrators, the JVC can be seen as an attempt to challenge the gender hierarchies in the Indian society. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2012 sought to include the committee's recommendation to not use abstract language to define violence. The Bill, through this recommendation recognises both unsolicited touches as well as physical assault equitable to ‘outraging the modesty of a person’ (Parliament of India, 2013, p. 20).

However, it becomes difficult to ignore that the vicarious trauma infuriating the public (which ultimately prompted the formation of JVC) is indicative of a substantial note. The aspirational “middle class identity and values” (Lodhia, 2015, p. 91) of the victim were immediately well-received by the *aam aadmi* (common man). This middle-class soul searching is what keeps the population thriving and the perceived threat to safety and security of women was hampering this aim. Thus, this correspondence catalysed mass protests throughout the country and translated it into a spectacle of violence against women.

Notwithstanding the ghastly acts which prompted the government to take meaningful action, the legal reform overlooks how caste intersects with violence against women. Dutta and Sircar ask a powerful question in regard to the Delhi gangrape- “Would the public ire be similar if the violence was not sexual in nature?” (Dutta and Sircar, 2013, p. 298-300). This neglect is testimonial to the fact that violence against women from a privileged background is deemed worthy of action, while violence against lower caste women doesn’t deserve consideration. As noted by Amelia Hodge during her conversation with anti-violence activists, “crime against middle class women mobilise the middle class in a way that violence against lower caste women cannot” (Hodge, 2013). The neglect of this caste overlap skews the occurrences of violence among lower-caste women and stimulates subordination. It is noteworthy that the perceived male prerogative to command respect through violence transcends caste hierarchies. Perhaps this is how patriarchy intersects with ‘other forms of hierarchy’ and manifests itself as a variation, a theory developed by Hunnicutt (2009, p. 555). For instance, in the Delhi rape case, the perpetrators were of a lower class (Burke, 2013) but their privileged gender allowed them to transgress and thus transcend the class boundaries and claim their perceived prerogative.

Women from the lower caste undergo a double burden because essentially they are women born in lower caste communities. Drawing from the research evidence amassed by Chowdhry during his field work in Haryana, “the sexual abuse of low caste women by high caste men extending from rape to sexual exploitation and liaison remains an ever growing phenomenon” (Chowdhry, 1997, p. 1023). The caste of these women becomes fodder to violence. He notes that lower caste women are proclaimed to be ‘sexually promiscuous’ by upper caste groups and thus they bring the sexual exploitation in agricultural farmlands upon themselves. “It is not as if the lower caste women lose their ‘honour’ by mating sexually, willingly or unwillingly, but the fact that in the eyes of the upper castes, they have no ‘honour’ to begin with” (Chowdhry, 1997, p. 1023).

“In worst cases, lower caste women have not only been raped but also mutilated, burned, paraded naked through villages and forced to eat human faeces (Hodge, 2013). To summarize, this normalisation of ‘no-affirmative action’ for the marginalised communities is synonymous to the standardisation of violence as a tool of oppression. Lack of expressed outrage against caste-based gender violence leads to normalisation of violence, and thus bolsters patriarchy and the caste hierarchy.

6. Conclusion

This paper attempts to form a linkage between patriarchy and violence against women, and in doing so, unpacks how the historical roots of patriarchy and the consequent perverse social conditioning to reinstate it, has a disproportionate impact on women. This feminist analysis challenges the view that women’s subordination is a cultural legacy and stresses that no form of violence should be considered inevitable. Family honour (*izzat*) and the thought of bringing shame (*sharam*) form the two ends of the continuum that is forced upon women. Women also undergo violence in the form of honour killings and forced marriages if they try to flout the governing system of honour. Additionally, this paper also sheds light on women’s role in abetment of patriarchy, and how their routine practice of power and control towards female members of the household results in violence.

On the legal front, while cases of violence against women may be burgeoning, their identification, acknowledgement and investigation is abysmal. Oftentimes, the police is not sensitized towards the complaints, concerns and fears raised by victim and undermines cases, particularly those relating to domestic violence. Thus, this paper outlines the patriarchal interests of the legal reform system and analyzes a new social approach for women’s fight for injustice. The phenomenon of women’s courts, the community-led interventionist reform which dissects from the

mainstream criminal justice system, is discussed and a critical analysis from a gender lens reveals that its framework, while safe and immediate, is not entirely accountable in bringing men to justice.

In the backdrop of the horrific Delhi gangrape case, this paper, without undermining the intensity of this case, shifts the readers' attention towards the lack of social outcry when women from lower castes are sexually abused. Suggested way forward would be to contemporize the narratives of violence faced by Dalit women in India, and unravelling agency and activism within these.

A limitation posed by this paper is that it predominantly sees men as perpetrators and patriarchs, and hence offers scope for further research to investigate the role men can play in mitigating violence against women, which would subsequently demonstrate a conceptual shift in understanding masculinities. There is a growing need to deconstruct patriarchy and meaningfully reconfigure the existing social structures to be gender-sensitive, because violence against women poses itself as a human rights concern.

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