

A Study of Women's Rights Violation and the Role of Media with Special Reference to N. E. States

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Abstract: "that country and that nation which did not respect women have never become great nor will ever in future" - **Swami Vivekananda**

Every year the 10th December is celebrated as the 'International Human Rights Day' in every nook and corner of the world. The sudden rise in the violation of human rights especially women rights have compelled the people to rethink about the relevancy of the day. The term 'human rights' refers to those rights that are considered universal to humanity, regardless of citizenship, residency status, ethnicity, gender, or other considerations. A person is inherently entitled to these unchallengeable fundamental rights simply because she or he is a human being irrespective of his/her place of birth, sex, nationality, origin, colour, language, religion. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly, 10th December 1948, is regarded as the Magna Carta in the history of mankind. Despite, it seems that there is mad race behind to violate human rights especially women rights in different part of the world. The Northeast India is not an exception to this. The region being victimized through socio-economic turbulence, political issues and insurgent problems also has become a target of racism - the earliest form of discrimination. In spite of the growing international awareness and constitutional recognitions, women rights in the region continue to suffer unreasonably from gender-based violence, witch-hunting, women trafficking etc. The main objective of this paper is to find out the major causes of women's rights violation in NE India and highlighting the role of media in protecting these rights. The data collected are primarily from the secondary sources and a descriptive method has been adopted while analyzing the data.

Keywords: Women' rights, Racial discrimination, Gender discrimination, Witch-hunting, Women trafficking, Medias.

INTRODUCTION

It seems that there is mad race behind to violate human rights especially women rights in different part of the world. The Northeast India is not an exception to this. The region being victimized through socio-economic turbulence, political issues and insurgent problems also has become a target of racism - the earliest form of discrimination. In spite of the growing international awareness and constitutional recognitions, women rights in the region continue to suffer unreasonably from gender-based violence, witch-hunting, women trafficking etc. The main objective of this paper is to find out the major causes of women's rights violation in NE India and highlighting the role of media in protecting these rights. The data collected are from the secondary sources including internet sources and a descriptive method has been adopted while analyzing the data.

Every year the 10th December is celebrated as the International Human Rights Day in every nook and corner of the world. The sudden rise in the violation of human rights especially women rights has compelled a sections of the society to rethink about the relevancy of the day .The term 'Human Rights' refers to those rights that are considered universal to humanity, regardless of citizenship, residency status, ethnicity, gender, or other considerations. A person is inherently entitled to these unchallengeable fundamental rights simply because she or he is a human being. Human rights are the articulation of the need for justice; tolerance, mutual respect, and human dignity in all of our activity [1]. These rights are recognized as fundamental by the United Nations and feature prominently in the Preamble of its Charter. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the UN General Assembly,

10th December 1948, is regarded as the Magna Carta in the history of mankind. It consists of 30 Articles setting forth the human rights and fundamental freedoms to which all men and women, everywhere in the world, are entitled, without any discrimination. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that, "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it is independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty [2]."

Despite, it seems that there is a mad race behind to violate human rights especially women rights in different parts of the world. Around the world at least one woman in every three has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime [3]. In fact, Violence against women is rooted in a global culture of discrimination which denies women equal rights with men and which legitimizes the appropriation of women's bodies for individual gratification or political ends.

The Northeast India is not an exception to this. The region being victimized through socio-economic turbulence, political issues and insurgent problems also has become a target of racism - the earliest form of discrimination. In spite of the growing international awareness of the problem and the declared willingness of states to fight gender-based violence, women and girls continue to suffer unreasonably from violence.

Racism and the Gender Discrimination in North-East India:

In almost all regions of the world women are subjected to violence because of their gender. Despite, different social, cultural and political contexts give rise to different forms of violence against women. Gender has a considerable impact in the form of violence that takes in the society. Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men. Because of violence, women are deprived of the enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms largely. Gender-based violence kills and disables as many women between the ages of 15 and 44 as cancer, and its toll on women's health surpasses that of traffic accidents and malaria combined [4]. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), defines discrimination against women as any "distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which

has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality between men and women, of human rights or fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field." (Article 1) [5].

The Northeastern part of India besides being victimized through socio-economic turbulence, political issues and insurgent problems also has become a target of racism - the earliest form of discrimination. In spite of the growing international awareness of the problem and the declared willingness of states to fight gender-based violence, women and girls continue to suffer unreasonably from violence, both in peacetime and in the context of armed conflict, mainly at the hands of family members, intimate partners, community members and state agents. Consisting of eight states, the Northeastern region is weakly linked to the rest of the country by Siliguri corridor (Chicken's Neck) running 56 kilometers through the foothills of Bhutan and Sikkim to the state of West Bengal. The region has always been advanced in the sense of providing equal freedom to the women of the region. Women's status in this region is much better and they use to enjoy greater mobility and visibility compared to other regions of the country [6]. There have been very less number of cases reported of dowry death or of any kind of exploitation of women. The picture of equity has been prevalent in the society; in fact this region has no element of social marginalization despite having small tribal groups. It would not be exaggerating to say that it is one of the few places in India which can claim to be on the path of an egalitarian society.

The cultural differences between the Northeast India and the mainland of India are reflected in greater mobility and visibility of the women of Northeast as compared to the women of other parts of the country. It was revealed that nearly all the women of the tribal dominated societies of Northeast enjoy much higher status than that of the women of the non-tribal dominated societies of the region. For example, the women of matrilineal Meghalaya are enjoying much higher status and freedom in their social life. This specifies the prevalence of equity between men and women in the region and therefore, has given rise to the presumption that the cases of human rights violation against women were infrequent. However, data collected by the North East Network, (NEN- a women's organization established in 1995) suggests that violence against women, particularly domestic violence, is on the rise in the Northeast. Surprisingly, the rate of domestic violence in Assam is comparatively high than any other states of Northeast India.

The Northeast, comprising eight states, was once a safe place for women. But that no longer holds

true today. An increasing number of crimes against women, especially rape, dowry deaths and other kinds of sexual harassment, are being reported from different states in the region. The high rate of domestic violence in Assam is reflected in a study conducted by the Law Research Institute, Guwahati, covering police stations in the 23 districts in Assam which reported 10,423 registered cases of violence against women (including rape, dowry, molestation and kidnapping) over the past 10 years [7]. The problem comes into picture when the people migrate to the mainland due to a number of pull and push factors. Besides, the region has been subjected to a number of developmental problems [8]. The terrain makes it almost impossible for any infrastructural growth, lack of educational and employment opportunities, insurgency activities made life a living nightmare for the people and the most importantly there is a two-way deficit of understanding between the mainland and the Northeast region, which is considered as the sole reason for the discrimination faced by the Northeastern women when they migrate to other Indian cities.

The violence against women is most often of a sexual nature. A few years back, gang-rape case of a Mizo girl in the country's capital left everyone in a state of shock and embarrassment. Likewise, a few years back the case of mob molestation of a 20-year-old girl in Assam's capital, Beltola, Guwahati, shocked the state and put it to national shame, bringing to light the extent of crimes against women in the region. This is not the first or last of the incidents of racial discrimination meted out to the women from Northeast, in fact their miserable plight is slowly becoming the bitter hidden truth which was never realized. Northeastern women are the prime example of an ethnic minority who in spite of being in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society are the victims of marginalization and alienation from the mainstream [9]. Women everywhere, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, wealth or age, have faced various forms of violence.

As per the reports of the National Crime Record Bureau in 2014, about 14.7% rape cases are registered in cities while 85% rape cases are registered in rural India; there are more than 1 Lakh rape cases pending; and a total of 2, 28,650 women faced violence and abuse during 2011-2014 which includes rape, kidnapping, abduction, dowry death, cruelty by husbands and relatives, molestation, sexual harassment, importation of girls, immoral traffic etc. The National capital Delhi has the highest percentage of crime rates against women. There has been a large scale of migration of people from the North Eastern Hills to metros like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and other big cities in pursuit of higher education, jobs, better living standards as life back in the Hills has never been a simple affair with socio-economic unrest, insurgency,

lack of infrastructure [10]. These women are also prone and most vulnerable in metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore etc. as they become the victims of violence and crimes as frequently reported at the National media.

Research study conducted by North East Support Centre and Helpline (NESCH) reveals that 78 out of every hundred Northeastern people faces racial discrimination, sexual attacks against women, human trafficking and violence in Delhi. The root cause of such discrimination is nothing but 'social or racial profiling'. Racial Profiling is the practice of targeting individuals for police or security interdiction, detention or other treatment primarily based on one's race and ethnicity, in the belief that such minority groups engage in unlawful activities [11]. Northeastern women's colour, facial features are very distinct from rest of the people of other states. In spite of there being a lot of initiatives and legal intervention to curb racial discrimination, it has percolated through the society. In removing the ill-practice of racial discrimination media can play a dominant role in the society.

Crime against Women in North-East:

The latest statistics released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) [12] corroborate the fact that crime against women has risen sharply in the Northeast, with Tripura recording the highest rate of 37 per cent against the national crime rate of 18.9 per cent in 2011. Assam stood second highest with a crime rate of 36.9 per cent in the country. The situation of violation of human rights is rather depressing in Tripura, which earned the bad reputation of recording the highest crime rate against women in the year 2011-12. Chief minister Manik Sarkar expressed concern over the ugly trend, assuring that the government will consider a fast-track court to dispense such cases. In terms of conviction of the accused, Tripura is far below the national average of 40.7 per cent, at only 11.1 per cent [13].

Despite the existence of plenty of women organizations and civil society groups in Manipur, crime against women is quite alarming in the state. According to a report prepared by an NGO, the Women Action for Development (Wad) said 251 cases of violence against women took place in the state between January and October 2012, which included 21 rape cases, four rape-cum-murders, 16 murders, seven molestations, one immolation, 41 brutal physical assaults, four abductions, two intimidations, 56 missing cases, three abandonment cases and 78 trafficking cases [14].

Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, too is becoming increasingly unsafe for women. Mizoram Police said 90 cases of rape were registered at four

police stations within Aizawl alone during last three years. This is a disturbing trend for a predominantly tribal state where women are held in high regard. According to superintendent of police (crime), Aizawl, while 30 and 25 rape cases were registered in 2010 and 2011 respectively, it increased to 35 till November 2012. Similarly, crime against women in Arunachal Pradesh is also on the rise with the law-enforcing agencies failing to curb the growing menace. According to the state government, 190 cases of atrocities against women were reported in the state in 2010, which, however, came down slightly to 171 in 2011. Till

September 2012, the number increased as 122 cases were registered [15].

Of all forms of violence, rape is considered the most cruel and inhuman form of torture. The stigma stems not merely from the horror of physical assault, but from the subsequent social stigmatization and many other inexpressible feelings. Statistics on Gender/Racial-based Violence against Northeast people, prepared by North East Support Center & Helpline in the year 2011 and updated on May 2012 is shown in the table below that depicts the crimes of different types against women of North-East.

Table: Statistic on Racial/Gender-Based Violence Record against North East People

Cases	Total		2005-08	2009	2010	2011	2012	FIR	No FIR
Violence against women									
Molestation	46	35.11%	17	9	8	4	8	24	22
Rape	7	5.34%	2	1	1	2	1	7	0
Beating Girls	9	6.87%	2	3	1	1	2	6	3
Girls Trafficking	12	9.16%	5		4	1	2	4	8
Attempt Rape	3	2.29%	1		1	1		2	1
Total crime against women	77	58.78%	27	13	15	9	13	43	34
Beating Boys	35	26.72%		20	4	5	6	13	22
Murder	7	5.34%	1	3	1	1	1	6	1
Non Payment Salary	7	5.34%	4	2		1		1	6
Rent Non Refund	2	1.53%	1	1				0	2
Media Bias	1	0.76%	1					0	1
Missing Person	2	1.53%			1		1	2	
Total Crime Against NE	131	100.00%	34	39	21	16	21	65	66
Percentage			25.95%	29.77%	16.03%	12.21%	16.03%	49.62%	50.38%

Source: www.Violation of Women, *Statistic on Gender/Racial-based Violence against North East People*, North East Support Center & Helpline, January 5, 2011, updated on May 2, 2012.

Armed Conflict situation in North East

The ongoing armed-conflict situation prevalent in the Northeastern states has provided fuel to the women's rights violation, which takes in the form of sexual, mental or physical abuse. The impact of armed conflict is more on women because of their status in society. In Northeastern states, rapists are frequently found members of the Indian armed forces deployed to curb insurgency. Most of these men hail from the strictly patriarchal societies of mainland India, which are extremely prejudiced against women. They usually carry out rapes during combing operations in residential areas, when they compel the males to come out of their homes and gather them at one place, while women are forced to stay indoors. Anyone who tries to intervene is severely beaten. Generally, the perpetrators go completely free, as they acquire immunity from prosecution under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958, which has been imposed in the whole of Northeastern states for decades.

Most of the rape cases go unreported for obvious reasons, as found in many news papers headlines. The victims typically fear being stigmatized, losing marriage opportunities, revealing lost virginity, or reluctant to talk about a sexual act in public. Under any circumstances, the perpetrators are almost never found guilty, the victims receive no compensation and are liable to be harassed, while their families are also traumatized and at a loss as to what steps to take. Proper steps for treatment and rehabilitation have also not been adopted by the state, in spite of directions to this end by the Supreme Court of India. While the entire region continues to suffer, women living in such conditions are most vulnerable due to the restrictions on their mobility, the limited access to health services and most importantly, the lack of opportunities for education, employment and even leisure. Women have been, in internal war, the targets of sustained and frequently brutal violence committed by both parties of armed

conflict. Both the sides often use violence to punish or dominate women believed to be sympathetic to the opposite side. Women have been threatened, raped and murdered during the armed conflict.

The armed conflicts in the Northeastern states have taken their toll on women, who find themselves subjected to physical and mental abuse and get caught in killings and clashes. The clashes affect whole communities, but women are the hardest hit, a situation that has got a lot to do with their position in society. So, in order to protect the rights of the women sects, the role of media cannot be denied. Electronic media can fight for the cause of justice of the women folk victimised by the armed conflict in the region.

Human Trafficking in North East

Human Trafficking has been recognized as the largest organized crime worldwide. This epidemic has strong foothold even in the Indian context. Most often than not, the victims of such gross human rights violations have been women and children from the socio-economically weak family background. Due to the unrest in the Northeastern region, the young women who are discriminated in the society have become the victims to the false promises of the traffickers [16]. Tackling such human rights violation will be a much more daunting task in addition to racial discrimination and sexual exploitation. Every year, an average of 250 women and 200 girl children are missing in Assam. The actual number of trafficked women and children might be higher as many cases are not reported. The police report reveals that the women and children are sold into sexual slavery or forced into exploitative employment in states such as Haryana, Punjab, Goa and Bihar and in metro cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai. They fear, too, that trafficking of women and children from Assam is going to increase because of factors such as poverty, structural inequalities, unemployment and intricate relations between demand and supply in the sex market. Traffickers find easy prey in camps of internally displaced persons, people uprooted in clashes between Bodos and Adhivasi, immigrant settlers of Char or riverine areas and people affected by flood and erosion. Tribal and non-tribal girls from poor families and from broken homes and widows are easily trapped. Promises of marriage and lucrative jobs are the two main ploys traffickers use to trap their victims [17]. Some of these women have been rescued and rehabilitated in their places of origin or elsewhere with the help of NGOs after tracing them out by the electronic Medias. Hasina Kharbhih, team leader of Shillong – based Impulse NGO Network (INGON), was of the opinion that all the eight Northeastern states were highly vulnerable to the trafficking of children and women within the region in the country and also across the international border. Media can help the police force

in identifying the culprits involved in women and children trafficking.

Witch-hunting in North East India

Recent spurt of witch-hunting cases in different parts of Assam has become a cause of serious concern. Witch-hunting has been increasingly highlighted by electronic media in the last few years in Northeast India. Suspected women and men are branded as witches and are accused of causing harm to communities. These women and men are physically and mentally tortured. There is evidence of some being buried and even burnt alive. Control over resources, personal enmity with powerful members of the community and the prevalence of superstitions are some of the factors responsible for witch hunting. Several print and electronic media have been voicing their concerns and have been mobilizing members of the communities to build public opinion against such superstitions. Practicing witchcraft or black magic in Assam and Northeast dates back hundreds of years too. Mayong in Marigaon district of Assam used to be known as the Indian Capital of Black Magic. Witchcraft was not limited to Mayong in Assam alone; it was prevalent amidst several communities and tribes across the Brahmaputra Valley. The ill-practice of witch-burning has been making headlines of all Medias especially by the daily newspapers and TV channels of Assam for quite some time. Witch-hunting is now one of the social stigmas of Assam and other Northeastern states. The land of black magic is now turned to be a land of bloodshed in the name of black magic. The Medias can play a pivotal role in making aware the people of the region about its ill effects in the society.

Corrective Measures

Thus, despite constitutional recognition, violation of women's right is rampant in Northeast India. Effective steps need urgently be taken before it is too late.

- The Medias, NGOs, Government bodies, as well as local organizations should come forward to make people aware of inhuman act in the region.
- Special focus should be given on socio-economic development in the region. Strategies should be formulated for removal of infrastructure related hindrances, provision of basic minimum services to create conducive environment for women rights.
- The North Eastern Council (NEC) should be provided with sufficient funds for the all-round development of N.E. region.
- The welfare programmes for socio-economic and political empowerment of the women of Northeast, suitable laws should be enacted and existing laws should be enforced determinedly

to deal effectively with the events of violation of human rights in any form against the women of N. E. Region.

- The law and order machinery (police, justice) should be enforced correctly to provide the desired level of security to women sect.

Thus, besides the above, the education and medical care in rural areas should be extended to minimize the crimes against women. Sufficient steps should be taken to make the modern system of and higher and technical education easily available to the women sects equally. The media both electronic as well as print have to work hand-in-hand to make the people educated and aware of their inherent human rights. Besides, media can play a crucial role in organizing the social activists, NGOs and human rights groups to raise their voice and gear up their crusade to call for an end to violence against women and for their justice and gender equality.

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