

Gender-based Violence against Women and Governance: The Case of Kolkata

Abstract

Gender-based crime, particularly sexual assault in India has captured national and international attention. The Park Street rape in Kolkata, Nirbhaya gang rape in New Delhi and Shakti Mills gang rape in Mumbai are some of the incidences which have created headlines in the last few years and are still afresh in public memory. It was the brutal gang rape and death of a college student in Delhi (rechristened Nirbhaya by the media) which generated nationwide protest and called for reforms in rape laws. It also brought the issue of sexual violence into the public discourse which had largely remained confined to the women's movement in India. It situated gender-based violence as a governance issue highlighting the provision of a safe environment for women as the obligation of the government. Responsive governance towards victims of gender-based violence reflects the constitutional commitment to gender equality. In post-liberalized India, with rising literacy levels, emphasis on women's empowerment and governance, crimes against women are also on the rise. The normalization of everyday violence against women in India (particularly domestic violence), with Nirbhaya like incidents of exception (as brutal gang rape and murder), in the fabric of everyday life inspired me to take a relook at violence against women as an area of contemporary social and public policy-oriented research. Literature suggests that governance response to violence against women is an important but understudied area of public policy.

Considering these aspects, I seek to understand governance response to gender-based crime against women in an Indian city. With transformations in Indian culture and society, the role of multiple actors in preventing gender-based violence cannot be ignored. Towards this objective, a governance paradigm is applied in this research as it recognizes the role of multiple agencies in organizing and undertaking women's safety and security. Recognizing the complexity of studying violence against women and governance,

