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Homicides Of Women In Public Spaces Of Tamil Nadu: Is Threat To Women's Freedom?

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Abstract

In patriarchal Indian society women and girls are facing different forms oppressions and violence both in public and private spheres irrespective of their caste, class, gender, religion, region and creed. This has been in increasing trend and evidentially reported by various print and electronic media. The patriarchal social-cultural factors that predominantly playing the role to make the women and girls feels insecure. Cutting across caste, class, region and religion, women are facing continuous and different forms of violence in public spaces, including public transport, railway station, bus stand, markets, roads, parks, educational institutions, and worshiping places etc., unlike men, women experience the public spaces differently. Although a city belongs to those men and women who live there, women's access is limited due to the unsuitability of public places. This means most women restrict their movements or activities because they feel unsafe. This feeling acts as a way of socially controlling women's freedom of choice. Recently occurred homicides in Chennai, Thoothukudi, Karur, Coimbatore of Tamil Nadu state has created fear of psychosis among women and parents about public safety of women and girls. Also, these incidences reflect the society's misogyny and double standardness in women's empowerment in one hand; the other hand questioning/controlling the women's rights and freedom of choice, expressions, mobility, decision making and autonomy which are crucial for gender equality. With this background this paper explores the causes and consequences of violence against women in public place, role state and its public safety policies particularly four major homicides by using content analysis of popular mainstream dailies published in Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: Homicides, Women, Public Spaces, Tamilnadu

1. Introduction

In patriarchal Indian society women and girls are facing different forms oppressions and violence both in public and private spheres irrespective of their caste, class, gender, religion, region and creed. This has been in increasing trend and evidentially reported by various print and electronic media. The patriarchal social-cultural factors that predominantly playing the role to make the women and girls feels insecure. Cutting across caste, class, region and religion, women are facing continuous and different forms of violence in public spaces, including public transport, railway station, bus stand, markets, roads,

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parks, educational institutions, and worshiping places etc., unlike men, women experience the public spaces differently. Although a city belongs to those men and women who live there, women's access is limited due to the unsuitability of public places. This means most women restrict their movements or activities because they feel unsafe. This feeling acts as a way of socially controlling women's freedom of choice. Recently occurred homicides in Chennai, Thoothukudi, Karur of Tamil Nadu state has created fear of psychosis among women and parents about public safety of women and girls. Also these incidences reflect the society's misogyny and double standardness in women's empowerment in one hand; the other hand questioning/controlling the women's rights and freedom of choice, expressions, mobility, decision making and autonomy which are crucial for gender equality. With this background this paper explores the causes and consequences of violence against women in public place, role state and its public safety policies particularly three major homicides. The source of data regarding the abovementioned cases has been collected from popular mainstream dailies *The Tamil Hindu*, *Dinamani*, *Dinathanthi* published in Tamil Nadu. The content analysis and case study methods are used to analyse the data.

2. Case Studies – Case 1: Swathi

Swathi, is 24years old computer engineering professional. She was worked in IT Company, Chennai. She hailed from the upper class and caste background and lived with her family in Chennai. Usually she used train as her mode of transportation to go to her work. One day early in the morning she was murdered brutally by the 27year old Ramkumar at very crowded Nungampakkam railway station while Swathi has waiting for train. The murderer was escaped from the spot immediately after killed her. Within an hour these incidents was reported in media and social networking sites.

The people of entire city and the state were shocked and started to discuss about the swathi's murder in different dimensions. Simultaneously the Tamil Police special taskforce formed to find the murderer. Within two days the police arrested the murderer in his native village with help of CCTV video footage recorded in a household of nearby street. Then the police transferred him to Chennai central prison. The police officials said the Ramkumar was accepted the crime. Moreover, police published the statements given by Ramkumar during enquiry. According to the police, he stated that 'Swathi was introduced to him when he studied engineering in Thirunelveli through face book. He belonged to poor socio-economic background family from Meenakshipuram of Tirunelveli. He had good friendly relationship her. With help of his friend Ramkumar met her in person in Chennai. He continued her relationships as friend with her smoothly. After three months when he was proposed his love to swathi, she immediately reacted to him indifferent manner and scolded and insulted him by indicating his personality outlook, sense of dressing and family background. The way she dealt him was humiliated to Ramkumar in deeper sense. Due the rejection of his love and humiliation he has decided to kill her. He added, to execute his plan he had followed her continuously, killed her in the railway station one morning very inhuman way to retaliate her'. In the due process of investigation Ramkumar was subsided himself in the prison. In this case presently both the victims and perpetrator are died.

3. Case 2: Sonali

Twenty years old Sonali was studied her second-year engineering course in an engineering college of Karur. She belonged from the very poor socio-economic background family. She was the first person who comes for engineering education. After her father's death her mother only shoulders the entire family burden including her educational expenditure. Moreover, her mother was worked in Chennai which is far away from their native to meet out the educational expenditure. Sonali had good relationship with 22year old Udhayakumar who is her senior in the same engineering college. Meanwhile Udhayakumar's irregular attendance, disobedience and various misbehaviors the college administration had taken disciplinary action against him. After this action Sonali avoided him to meet and talk to him in person as well as over phone. Udhayakumar compelled her to speak with him insisted her to continue relationship with him. But Sonali had refused his words and completely shut the all kind of relationships. Just because of Sonali's decision to close his relationship she was attacked by strong hard wood on her head by the Udhayakumar in her class room during the class hours. He had also attacked a professor

severely who tried to prevent and protect her in class room. Sonali was died in the class room due to barbaric attack made by udhayakumar. Immediately after the attack he escaped from the classroom and hided in the campus. Then informed to police, they arrested him immediately. At the time of inquiry regarding snail's murder the Udhyakumar stated that 'I unable to tolerate her rejection and avoiding me to meet and speak so thought to teach a lesson to her so I killed her within the classroom'.

4. Case 3: Francina

Francina, 24year old teacher was stabbed and killed in Church, Thoothukudi during prayer by the 26year old crane operator Gehan Jose. Fracina was worked in a private school as teacher. Usually she had the habit to go to church before going to school. Jose followed regularly Fracina every day morning and evening. Later after certain period he proposed his love to Francina. She refused his love and replied she never love him also her parents fixed her marriage very shortly marriage is going to be happened. But he didn't convince and continued to follow her. One day she scolded him and strongly conveyed her decision. Then he planned to kill her. On the day of her murder, as usual he followed her, when she entered into the church for regular prayer he stabbed and killed her. After that he escaped from church and went into his sister's house there, he hanged himself.

5. Case Analysis

While analyzing the above discussed cases whenever women resisted the love against their will, they are killed by men violently without understanding women's rights on their life. Further their feelings and choices are denied in the name of socially constructed macho behavior i.e., acting violent and brutal manner. In addition to that the patriarchal control over on women's rights to taking decision regarding their choice directly threatened the women's autonomy and freedom of choice through such violent behavior. Besides these kind murders indirectly suppressed the progressive attitudes of women, curtail to them access to emerging opportunities for women. Violence against women occurred in more prominent public space like railway station, classroom and church has created and increasing the fear of violence and mobility in general more particular to women and girls. Moreover, these incidences are increasing the vulnerability women in public spaces. Construction of masculine and feminine values through gender socialization associated with gender identity, reinforcing the patriarchal ideas and ideologies through structuring of social institution as male centered perspectives are the primary responsible factors for this kind of irresponsible act of males like Ramkumar, Udhyakumar and Jose.

6. Conclusion

Gender insensitive urban polices, monitoring mechanisms like surveillance in public spaces, lack of safety auditing of public spaces are the additional factors responsible to prevent such violence against women in public places. Gender construction particularly the socialization of an idealized hegemonic masculinization is motivated men to perpetuate violence against women in public space simultaneously the passive feminine idealization discouraged the women to use and access the public space. Construction and demarcation of gendered spaces restricting the women to participate in holistic development process of society also increasing the fear of violence in public realm. Violence against women in public spaces grounded in the gendered construction of space through building society in androcentric perspectives with lineage male culture. This paved ways to occur violent behaviors, reactions and reflections in public place and questioning the safety of women in public spaces.

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