

Editorial

Long-term approach to the menace of rape in India

Thongkhohal Haokip

The gang rape of a photo journalist in Mumbai once again bewilder and outrage India. The media fraternity even takes it as an attack on the media. This is not the first time that such incident shakes the nation's conscience. The gang rape of a young woman at Munirka in Delhi on 16 December 2012, who later succumbed to death, resulted in widespread public protests and condemnation leading to the passage of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, commonly known as the anti-rape bill, in April 2013 which amended various laws related to sexual offences. The 22 August Mumbai gang rape incident reopens the discourse on rape and reforms of laws related to sexual offences in India.

From women's rights activists to legal and social activists the blame goes to the law and law enforcing agencies. More stringent laws for crime against women, and from moral policing to a helpful police were the common suggestions for women to be safer in public places. While some entreat a mass national campaign against rape and sensitisation in educational institutes to bring about awareness, others even consider that the systems in India have failed. The contemplation of every right thinking citizens posit a question whether the new anti-rape law is too weak to be a deterrent.

There have been, to a certain extent, various mass protests in certain rape cases which caught the national attention through audio-visual and the print media. The educational sensitisation programme, if any, will also have little impact as rapists are mostly uneducated persons who are drop-outs in school. As such there needs to be a new long-term policy to this issue as the police cannot be omnipresent to protect every citizen anytime and anywhere.

In a country where rape happens every 20 minutes, the National Crime Records Bureau has a horrifying record that crime against women has increased nationwide by 7.1 percent since 2010, and child rape cases have increased by 336 percent in the last ten years. The idealistic notion of stopping rape, which is in the psyche many Indians, is a herculean task which must be fought at war footing with whatever costs it involves. Instead of a reactive and exclusive exploration and analysis of the reasons for increasing incidence of rape, a holistic and proactive approach needs to be developed to reduce it.

Dr. Thongkhohal Haokip is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, Presidency University, Kolkata, India.

The fair and practical long term solution to this problem lies on the improvement in the quality of Indian lives. This can be brought about through population stabilisation and more emphasis on education and increasing the spending in this sector. When population is stabilised much more financial resources can be devoted on education; with good education people lives will be better. And with better lives even stalking and eve teasing will be reduced to a great extent.

However, population stabilisation has not been successful in India. The central government has been campaigning family planning for the past few decades, even as representation in the Indian Parliament is based on population. Mizoram Presbyterian, one denominational sect of Christianity which has about 70 percent of the total population of Mizoram, opposed family planning since 2012. To the Mizo Presbyterians, small population will have lesser Member of Parliament (MP) at the Union Parliament, and with few MPs their grievances will never be heard. The paradox of representation based on population in the Indian federalism needs to be changed so that marginal states, and if possible groups, are represented equally regardless of their population. This system of representation can be introduced at least in the Rajya Sabha or Council of States. In the overall scheme of things, in representative democracy like India, population stabilisation with an equal representation of states in the Rajya Sabha, and expanding general education and thereby improving the quality of lives can reduce the incidence of rape in India.