
GULABI GANG: A FIGHT AGAINST THE INERT LAW SYSTEM IN UTTAR PRADESH

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Abstract: India has seen a rapid increase in the crime against women (CAW). The Indian law system has failed to curb the increase in CAW. The police force in Uttar Pradesh (UP) being corrupt has failed to deliver justice for women. The law system in UP is so passive that it has created fear in the minds of the victims rather than in the minds of the criminals. Gulabi gang, under the leadership of Sampat Pal works for women empowerment. The Gulabi Gang's main overarching objectives are to "protect the powerless from abuse and fight corruption to ensure basic rights of the poor in rural areas and discourage traditions like child-marriages". They carry on a practical mission of empowering women, through support and training. This research tries to locate the reasons for an increase in CAW at Uttar Pradesh. This research also tries to analyze the strategies and tactics used by Gulabi Gang and the impact it has on the passive law system in Uttar Pradesh.

Key Words: Crime Against Women, Gulabi Gang, Women Empowerment, Justice, Women Inequality

Introduction: According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) "World Report 2014", "The Indian government's inability to protect women and children from rape and sexual violence undermines its commitment to uphold the rights of all Indians". Although the Indian constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex, and India has strong legislation to protect rights, entrenched corruption and lack of accountability foster human rights violations, and the position of women remains unequal.

According to the Indian Council on Global Relations, most women in India have stories of sexual harassment and abuse on public transportation or on the streets (Armstrong, 2013). In between 1971 and 2011, the number of reported rapes has increased dramatically in India, from 2,487 to 24,206, and these are only the official figures. The actual number of rape cases must be much higher, since India is one of those countries "where a cultural stigma keeps many victims from reporting the crime" (Ibid.), so that many rape cases remain unreported. A common claim now is that there is one rape every twenty-two minutes in India (BBC, 2014a). There remains a "wide gap between laws on the books and their implementation" (Ibid.) in India.

Background: The unofficial headquarters of the Gulabi Gang is located in the arid agricultural town of Badausa, centered within the poverty-stricken Banda district of one of India's poorest and most populated states, Uttar Pradesh (Sen, 2012). Of the 1.6 million people, dispersed throughout Banda's 600 villages, over 20% are members of the lowest caste, Dalits (Sen, 2012). The laws and policies implemented on behalf of Dalits and other lower castes have done little to correct the social practices, which maintain caste discrimination, and as a result, Dalit communities continue to be oppressed and segregated from society by higher caste members, especially in rural areas (Sen, 2012).

Women are also subjugated under patriarchal Indian society; especially in rural areas, such as Uttar Pradesh, which has been found to have one of the highest rates of dowry related deaths (Sen 2012). Uttar Pradesh also boasts one of the highest rates of domestic and sexual violence against women, regardless of caste association (Sen, 2012).

The Gulabi Gang was officially formed in 2006, under the leadership of Sampat Pal Devi. As a low caste woman herself, she had not completed schooling and suffered many hardships throughout her life. Pal Devi had a long history of helping victims of injustice, and as the number of people asking for her help grew, she formed the Gulabi Gang, under which she could continue to help those most in need. After five years, the Gulabi Gang had more than 20,000 members, all fighting for an end to corruption and discrimination; they were also equally focused on female empowerment (Sen 2012).

Objectives

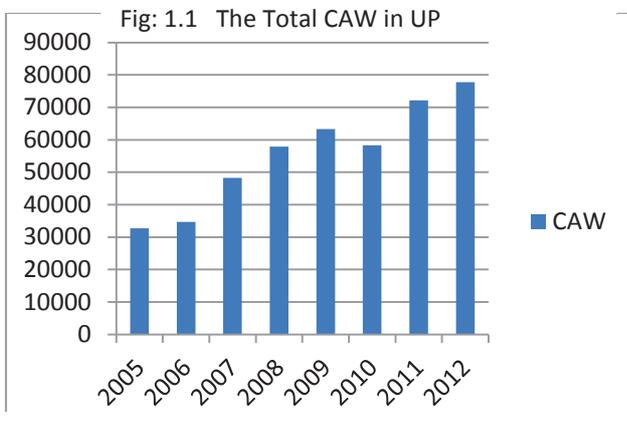
1. To find out the reasons for an increasing trend in Crime Against Women (CAW) in Uttar Pradesh.
2. To analyze the strategies and tactics used by Gulabi Gang and the impact it has on the passive law system in Uttar Pradesh.

Research Methodology: This research is restricted to only secondary data. Secondary data has been used to conduct a case study on Gulabi Gang. Data from the National Crime Record Bureau of India, Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India, Ministry of Home Affairs India are also used to understand the CAW in Uttar Pradesh. Data is obtained from newsletters, journals and the official Gulabi Gang website.

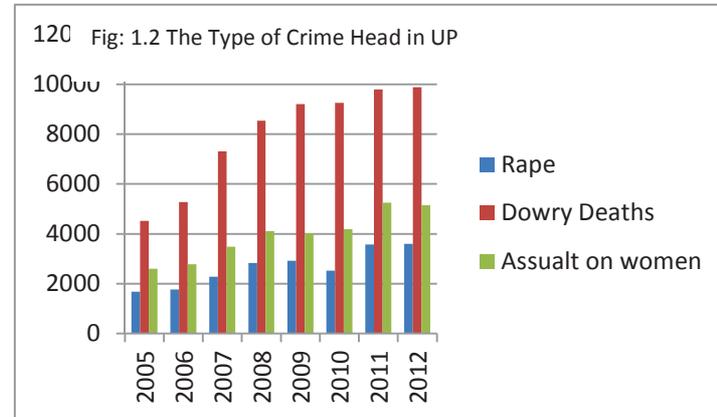
Crime Against Women In Uttar Pradesh: The total number of CAW in Uttar Pradesh has always shown an increasing trend. Fig 1.1, shows an increase in CAW in UP a slight decline in 2010. The number of rape cases registered in UP have also increased. Crimes under the dowry protection act had decreased in the

year 2011 with just 505 cases registered. However, the number of crimes drastically increased from 505 to 2244 cases. Crimes such as rapes, dowry deaths, cruelty by husband or his relatives, kidnapping and abduction of women have drastically increased in UP. The number of rape cases registered in UP are

possibly underestimated because of the stigmatized society. The law system has been unable to curb down women inequality in UP. Steps need to be taken to afford a greater measure of protection to the women in particular to prevent incidence of crime against them in UP.



Source: NCRB



Source: NCRB

Wife beating is frequently viewed as physical chastisement: the husband's right to "correct" an erring wife (Jejeeboy, 1998b; Straus, 1976). Women in Uttar Pradesh are not allowed to raise their voices against inequality because of the gender norms prevailing in the society. They suffer from domestic violence and have little support from the police. The police system being corrupt and passive have not been able to control the growing rise in domestic violence in Uttar Pradesh. Because of the prevailing discrimination and corruption, Gulabi Gang emerged as an option to fight for justice. The Gulabi gang takes law into their hands. The mutual support of the members of the gang helps women to achieve justice. The pressure created by the gang members on the police force in turn helps women to achieve justice. However, the process of achieving justice is not as easy as it seems. Women are sometimes unable to achieve justice due to the corrupt system and tend to suffer. Sampat Pal Devi has also been attacked many times.

Gulabi Gang's Strategies To Fight For Women Empowerment: The Gulabi Gang works for women empowerment and as a result has created a negative outlook in the minds of the Indian men in Uttar Pradesh. The police have hated the Gulabi Gang instead of appreciating their work. The Gulabi Gang had made many enemies along the way and hired assassins have even held Pal Devi at gunpoint. A woman, who walks around alone in her pink sari, is at risk of becoming a victim. The police might use violent tactics against her, in order to set an example for the rest of the gang. It is not just the police who are a threat but there are men from all castes who oppose the Gulabi Gang. They see membership as a

threat to the 'natural' patriarchal and caste order. Gulabi Gang is a fight against a stigmatized society that has always considered women, especially of the lower caste as subordinate.

The main component of the Gulabi Gang organization is *mutual support*. Pal Devi tells women they must fight against the injustices done to them, and while the Gulabi Gang supports this fight, they won't fight for you, only with you. Pal Devi has never handed over any of her responsibilities. She still works seven days a week, morning till night, constantly advising women, counseling victims, organizing sit-ins and demonstrations, and heading rallies, protests, and campaigns (Sen, 2012). Pal Devi held many training seminars on how to use a lathi effectively, and continues to devote ten minutes of every meeting to teaching women how to defend themselves with one (Berthod, 2008/2012). The Gulabi Gang is known just as well for their pink saris as they are for carrying their lathis for protection.

The Gulabi gang takes matters in their own hand to achieve justice because they have lost hope in the Indian law. They also consider the Indian police force to be corrupt. There remains a wide gap between laws on the books and their implementation in India. Because of the continuing failure of the Indian state to ensure basic women's rights, along with India's vibrant civil society, India is particularly prone to the emergence of self-help and vigilante groups such as the Gulabi Gang.

Conclusions: The CAW in UP has always seen an increase in the number of cases recorded. The law being too corrupt is unable to strive for equality in the society. Women of the lower caste group are more prone to domestic violence in Uttar Pradesh. A

male dominated society makes it even more difficult for women to achieve justice. The law being corrupt, women empowerment groups such as Gulabi Gang have strived to bring about equality in a male dominated society. Women in Uttar Pradesh look up to the Gulabi Gang as it is their only hope. It provides

counseling for victims, organizes sit-ins and demonstrations, and heading rallies, protests, and campaigns. They have used the lathis to defend themselves. The Gulabi Gang has proved to be a better source for fighting women equality rather than the passive law system in UP.

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