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RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE IN MULTICULTURAL INDIA: THE GULABI GANG

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ABSTRACT

The Gulabi Gang is a vigilante organization in India that tries to prevent violence and abuse against women with its unique methods. Although there is no direct connection between multiculturalism and violence in India, in multicultural societies where violence and abuse occur in different forms, especially within the family, it is more difficult to detect and evaluate compared to other societies. Considering the concept of multiculturalism as a legitimizing or normalizing outlet for the increasing intensity of violence in the eyes of states, instead of internalization of the notion, does not find solutions to violence and abuses. On the contrary, it puts the legislator in an idle position. Even if the policymaker is not malicious in this regard, the incompatibility between theory and practice can push women into an unequal position in a multicultural society. At this point, the concept of feminism takes on a fragile structure in such a society. The study seeks answers to some questions like whether violence and abuse in a multicultural society are due to the nature of multiculturalism or the state authorities are inadequate in the face of culture. In this study, the emergence of the Gulabi Gang and its moral basis will be analyzed, and a determination will be made on how the organization expresses itself. Furthermore, it will be examined whether the Gulabi Gang is an inevitable result of a multicultural society or a wrongful interpretation of feminism.

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Introduction

Gulabi Gang, founded under the leadership of Sampat Pal Devi, is an organization that tries to respond to violence against women with its special methods (Gupta, 2021, p.49). Members react to violence with violence, forcing perpetrators to develop some form of empathy for their victims. The organization, which means Pink Gang, has been trying to secure justice by beating men who abuse women with a stick they call *lathi* since its establishment in 2006. The fact that most of the members of this organization are illiterate people from places such as Uttar Pradesh and Bundelkhand, who live far below the hunger line and struggle with drought and hard work, is a matter of sociological clues rather than a coincidence. They claim that the justice system and its authorities are not fair and functional in an environment that neither has gender equality nor freedom (Desai, 2014).

In this study, it will be discussed which factors led to the establishment of the Gulabi Gang and whether those factors are justified their actions. The moral side of violence and the legitimacy of responding to violence with violence will be explored. Moreover, the study has the importance of playing a complementary role with other studies in understanding the starting point, legitimacy, and reasons of women's movements.

The circumstances of the Gulabi Gang, environmental and traditional factors, and the reaction of women to abuse and violence will be discussed. One may argue the main reasons for the moral aspect of violence and the use of violence against violence. The reason why this is handled specifically for the Gulabi Gang is to determine whether their unique methods harm their main goals.

Although the organization is identified with the element of violence, it has goals and missions stated on their official website, such as to stand by the weak, to stand against corruption, to ensure that people in rural areas have basic rights, to end some traditions such as child marriages, and to ensure women's self-confidence while ensuring their economic self-confidence (Gulabi Gang, 2021).

Women suffer from poverty and prejudice in Banda's caste-based, feudalistic, and masculine culture. Domestic violence and abuse, as well as wedding-related pressure, are all too common. People in the region claim that such a formation is natural to emerge from poverty and discrimination, and the organization's head, Sampat Pal, claims that the gang she founded is not a gang in the classic sense, but

a gang working for justice (Biswas, 2007). Women in India are forced to resort to violence because they do not have a chance to defend their rights in court. Although this does not justify violence, it does highlight the fact that the fundamental issue is social injustice.

Does Gulabi Gang Really Need Sticks?

There is an understanding of despising women and claiming all kinds of rights over them throughout India. An example of those events may be that a wealthy man dates a poor woman, the woman becomes pregnant, and the man disappears. The rich family takes her home and forces her to take abortion pills and drugs, then releases her after miscarriage. This woman cannot seek justice in court, and eventually joins the Gulabi Gang (RT Documentary, 2021).

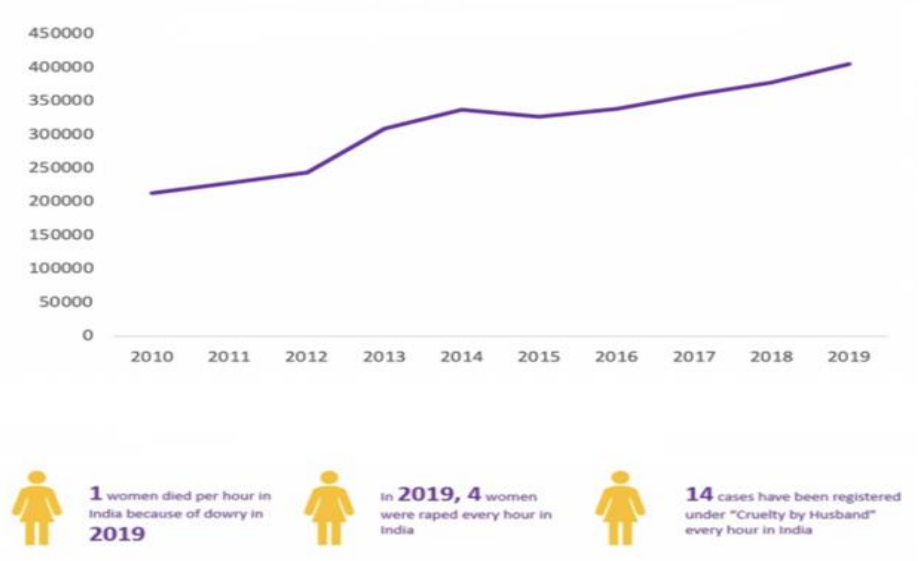
One may claim that women learning to use *lathi* and using it against corrupted state officials and abusive husbands is the recognizable face of the group (Seelhoff et al, 2007, p. 4). But a distinction must be made between vision and action so that every justice seeker does not see violence as a cover because this has the potential to tarnish the original vision of the women's movement.

There are thousands of similar stories. What they all have in common is injustice. The Gulabi Gang helps such women to deal with their problems. The education rate is low in the region, and there are widespread beliefs that women should not be educated. There are traditions that interfere with what women eat. Even the gang leader still has a side that has not broken with some old customs. Having a perspective and tradition that criticize a woman who gets on the bus with her boyfriend in the middle of the night and goes through bad things because she gets on the bus with her boyfriend instead of her family at that hour (in her own words, RT Documentary, 2021) puts her in a contradictory position. Because what we expect here are justice and equality. In a system where those who have been wronged can seek their rights and the wrongdoer is punished, there will be no time to criticize the victim.

The problem is to what extent is this unique method of the Gulabi Gang legitimate, and who will decide the rate of violence? At this point, we need to look at the works of scholars who have studied the nature of violence and the Gulabi Gang and also similar women's initiatives whose members are demonstrating their moral and defending their community's identity by retaliating against criminals. There are significant parallels and contrasts between the communities that deserve

additional investigation. Brutal retributive acts do not alter basic systems of dominance in society over time. On the other hand, despite the risks it carries, some illegal behaviors of organizations such as the Gulabi Gang, in addition to the institutional strategies of feminist groups and their official applications to governments, can sometimes be beneficial in terms of self-determination in a patriarchal order (White and Shagun, 2009, p. 322-325).

Figure 1: Crime Against Women: 2010-2019 & Violence Against Women reported in India in 2019 (NCRB 2020)



Source: Das, K. & Bijeta, M., 2020.

In Figure 1, a graphic of the cases of violence against women in India between 2010 and 2019 is given. As can be seen from the graph, there is a continuous increase in cases of violence against women over the years.

This increased violence ignited the Gulabi Gang movement. The organization's commitment to confrontation, and publicly disgraced abusers is connected to the organization's reputation, overshadowing its peaceful activities.

In India's history, gender has been an important ideological indicator. The interpretation of gender in the context of political and social processes has been used to protect and sustain colonialism, concepts of society, and Indian culture, both

directly and indirectly. Men, higher caste people, institutions, and political actors employ abusive gender violence against women. Since not every member of these communities is violent, gender violence is frequently perpetrated by individuals in positions of power (Richards, 2016, p. 2-3, 5).

The study also emphasizes that the decisions of the Gulabi Gang were taken by a single person, namely the leader, Sampat Pal, which is a point one can agree with. This situation tarnishes the image of the Gulabi Gang as a collective, democratic, and fair organization. The Gulabi Gang brings inequalities to the center of attention when violence is handled in this manner. The organization altered the view of action in a specific setting by disrupting normal power deployment, exposing inequalities as the cause of violent reactions (Richards, 2016, p. 12).

Figure 2: Comparing the physical safety of women in India with other randomly selected countries in the world (The Womanstats Project 2019)

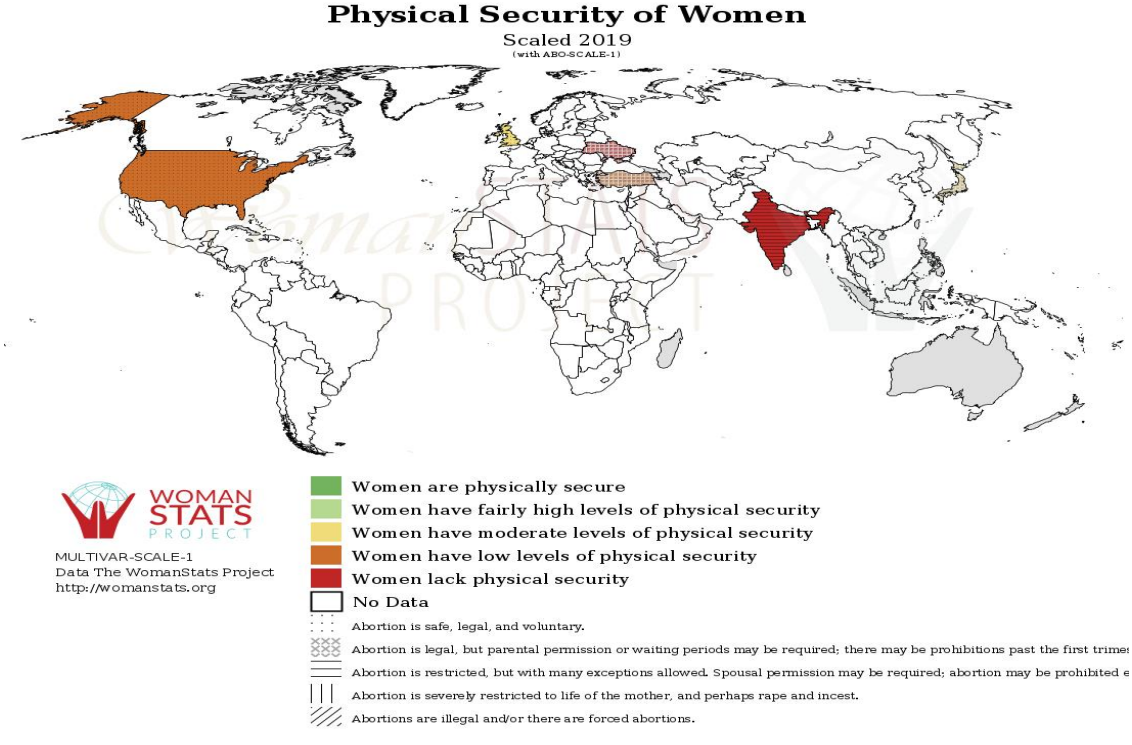


Figure 3: Comparing the practice of child marriage for girls in India with other randomly selected countries in the world (The Womanstats Project 2020)

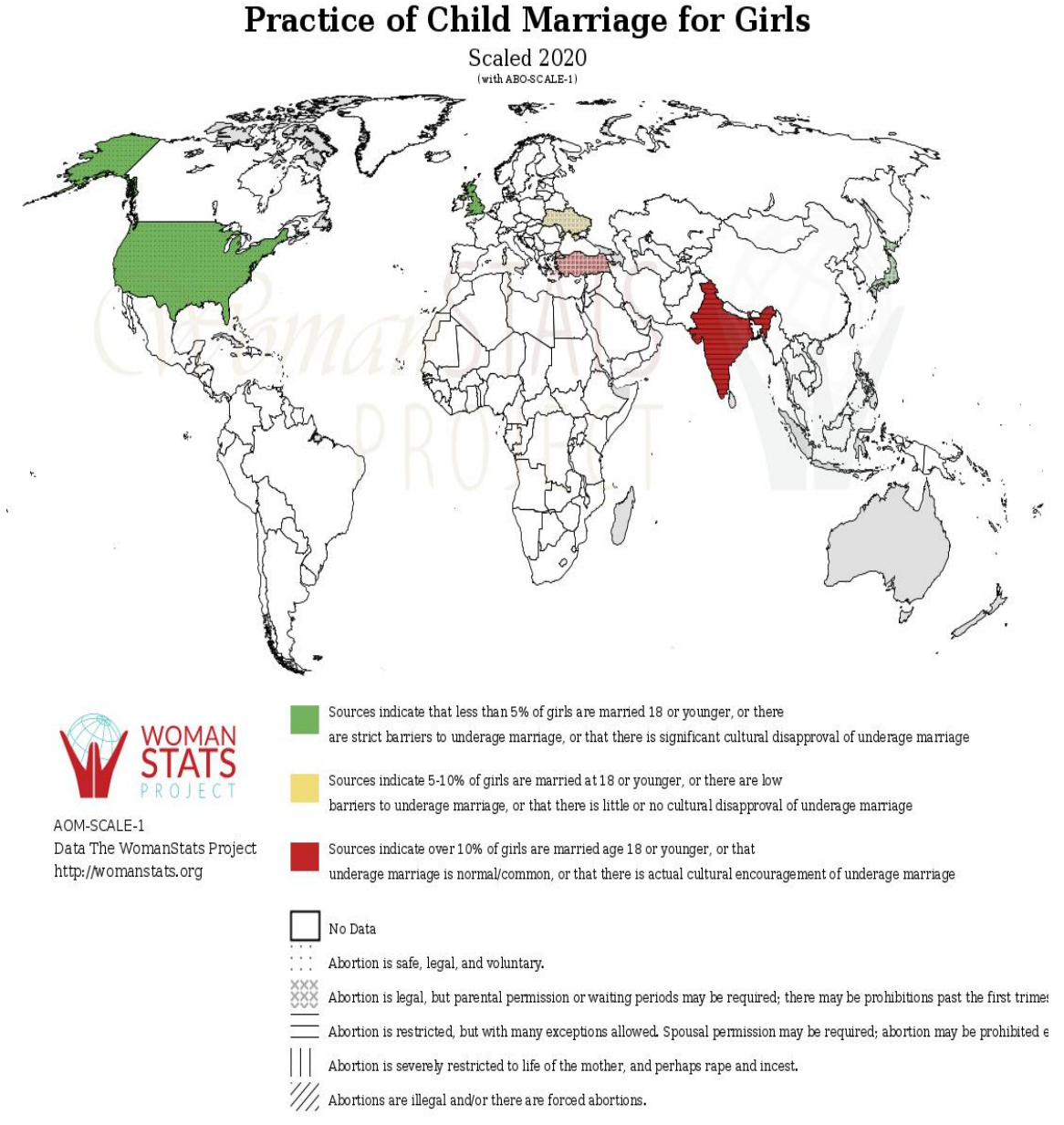
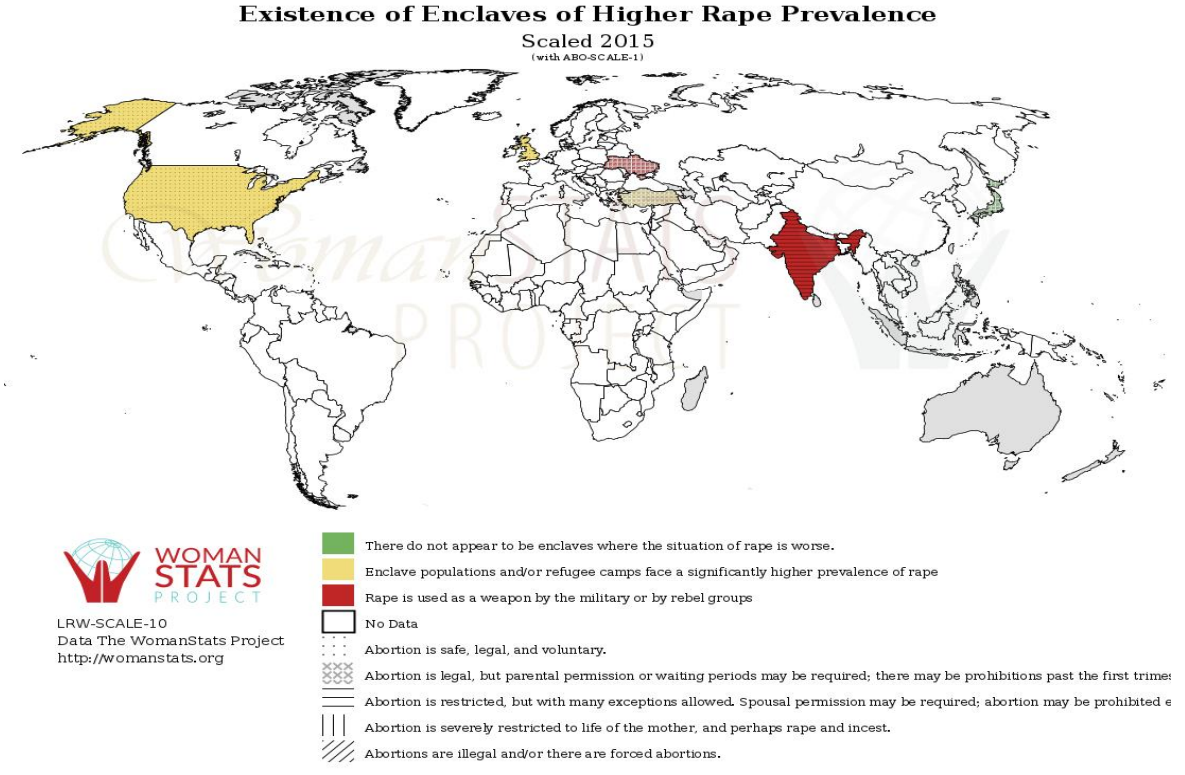


Figure 4: Comparing the existence of enclaves of higher rape prevalence in India with other randomly selected countries in the world (The Womanstats Project 2015)



Based on these three graphics, when we compare the density of regions where child marriages, the low physical safety of women, and rape occur with a few randomly selected countries, we see that India is a place where abuses are experienced at high rates, unlike the others. The determination of this difference is important at this point because anything other than the values and characteristics that it shares in common with other countries can be an explanation of the violence and abuse that women in India are subjected to.

Vivian (2013, p. 212, 215-216) believes that violence is a widely known occurrence that significantly motivates modern liberal-democratic political discourse and judgment. The author also states that the new types of violence have become too different from historical barbarism to be visible. This invisibility leaves thousands of cases of harassment and rape "unnamed." The remark of Vivian explains clearly why many tragedies are hidden behind the silence in many countries, including India.

Furthermore, Whitehead (2009, p. 5) argues that violence is more than just an abstract reality; it is significant in terms of experiencing the quality of interaction from a sociocultural perspective and how to deal with it if it happens. Whitehead also contends that the prevalence of violence among civilizations that most highly valued the Western concept of the "human" and advocates the belief that violence is indeed "inhuman," implying that this contradiction may still necessitate further reconsideration of the sociological mission and ethnographic approach. This is the current conundrum of our involvement in other people's lives (Whitehead, 2009, p. 7).

The differences in the perception of violence create difficulties in justifying the perpetrators and victims of violence. Therefore, though the language is theoretically positioned after the violence, the claimed logical function of signs raises issues about the violence's apparent existence (Stormer, 2013, p. 182-183). The language, which was invented to soften or replace the violence that has existed since primitive times, gains a dimension that evolves into violence again, creating dilemmas about whether the need for violence is a necessity. Stormer (2013, p. 185) adds: "*Just as we need language to think about language, we need violence to think about violence*" and the emergence of new types of violence is inevitable since violence is always in our lives.

Simister (2010, p. 1594) states that even though conditions have worsened for women in India in recent years, this may be temporary and can be considered as a sign of transition to more modern society. Simister (2010, p. 1609) also underlines the need for groups of scientists, economists, sociologists, psychologists, and behavioral scientists to work together as well as researchers.

Rand (2009, p. 461), on the other hand, argues that visible violent acts are unquestionably terrifying, also they tend to divert our gaze away from the core forms of violence that fuel both violent actions and our battle to protect the peace. As far as he is concerned, one can even use violence to end violence. Additionally, it might be seen in this situation in humanitarian aid examples. In India, tradition seems to take precedence over individual rights and justice.

Although domestic violence occurs in all kinds of social classes, education levels, and family structures in India, most of it takes place in regions where factors such as low education level, poverty, and low-income level are intense (Martin et al., 1999, p. 424). In the same way, the authors reveal that the path to violence is directly related to the social structure.

Kumar argues that in the last ten years, "women's awareness" has increased across India, particularly in rural areas. For example, a women's liberation conference in Patna in early 1988 drew over a thousand women, and the links between feminist, environmental, health, radical scientific, anti-communal, and anti-caste organizations appear to be growing and spreading across the country (Kumar, 1989, p. 29). Even though women are becoming more aware, the rates do not appear to be decreasing. The main obstacles are the government's indifference as well as norms founded on the oppression of women.

This study claims that patriarchal domination refers to male supremacy through unequal rights, privileges, control, and power that there cannot be beneficial effects behind increases in women's employment rates. Men socialize within numerous gender stereotypes in this system, which often results in powerlessness for women (Kimuna et al., 2013, pp. 1-2, 5). Male dominance, on the other hand, is one of the most powerful examples of how India's influential traditions are entwined with society, as she puts it: "*India feels that a man might be justified in hitting his wife in certain circumstances*." Women in India have lost faith in patriarchal society (Kimuna et al, 2013, p. 8, 30).

The figures below give an idea about the social structure in India:

Figure 5: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Selected Characteristics, India, (NFHS-III 2005-2006)

	Number	Percent/Average
Age at first marriage		
I<18	34,946	50.3
18 to 20	19,133	27.5
21+	15,405	22.2
Duration of marriage		
0 to 4	11,197	16.1
5 to 9	14,461	20.8
10 to 14	14,221	20.5
15 to 19	12,107	17.4
20 to 24	8,769	12.6
25 to 29	6,003	8.6
30+	2,726	3.9
Education		
No education	27,555	39.7
Primary	10,741	15.5
Secondary	25,148	36.2
Higher	6,035	8.7
Occupation		
Not working	40,076	57.7
Sales, clerical	2,637	3.8
Professional, technical, managerial	2,374	3.4
Domestic, services	2,797	4.0
Agro-self employed	15,047	21.7
Skilled, unskilled manual	6,501	9.4
Wife-beating justified		
Goes out without telling husband	20,444	29.6
Neglects children	25,504	36.9
Argues	20,280	29.5
Refuses sex	9,502	14.0
Burns food	13,105	19.0
Husband's characteristics		
Age (Mean)	65,406	37.4
Education		
No education	15,895	23.1
Primary education	10,773	15.6
Secondary	32,494	47.2
Higher	9,700	14.1

Figure 6: Percentage of Respondents Who Experienced Physical and Sexual Abuse, India, (NFHS-III 2005-2006)

	Physical Violence	Chi-Square/F	Sexual Violence	Chi-Square/F
Household variables				
Place of residence				
Urban	27.6	288.736	6.6	215.479
Rural	33.7		9.7	
Household size[b]				
No violence experience	5.21	15.452	5.22	18.418
Experienced violence	5.28		5.36	
Wealth index				
Poorest	45.5	3,867.010	13.6	1,126.331
Poor	41.5		11.7	
Middle	35.6		9.6	
Richer	29.8		7.1	
Richest	15.3		3.7	
Region				
South	30.2	1,225.747	4.1	1,623.721
North	23.6		7.5	
Central	40.4		9.0	
East	37.6		17.0	
Northeast	28.7		9.2	
West	25.0		3.7	
Religion				
Hindu	31.5	324.243	8.5	212.047
Muslim	35.1		10.9	
Christian	21.4		4.4	
Other	29.1		6.4	
Number of living children				
No children	21.7	1,331.175	7.6	146.740
1 to 2	26.8		7.2	
3 to 4	36.4		9.3	
5+	43.5		11.0	

Feminism, Multiculturalism, and Moral Bases of Gulabi Gang's Response to Violence

People are tagged with attributes such as culture, belief, skin color, social level, and education in the inclusion/exclusion debate. Gender is also included in this classification (McKerl, 2007, p. 188). This kind of discrimination is particularly more powerful in a country like India, which is both cosmopolitan and has a history of the caste system. As it is seen in Figure 6, the level of physical or sexual violence experienced by women diminishes as their well-being and economic status rise.

When feminism squares up against multiculturalism, the following outcomes are possible: It hides the mechanisms that shape cultural traditions, the factors that influence women's lives outside of society, and how women assert authority within the patriarchal system (Volpp, 2001, p. 1181). In some ways, a multicultural society that has not been effectively understood and encouraged by government activities, dissimulates the issues rather than eradicating them.

Gronow and Hilppö, on the other hand, suggest that both ethics and politics are preoccupied with the concept of violence. It, like many other theories in the social sciences, carries a great deal of weight. Almost everyone in our social structure thinks that violence should be condemned, yet there is a disagreement on what generates aggressive behavior (Gronow and Hillpö, 1970, p. 311). The ethical ideals and sociocultural notions of a person are intricately intertwined. The concept of violence or unfairness appears to be tied to sociological theory. Rather than pure empirical investigation, the essential idea of society and ethics is centered on our daily life, attitudes, biases, desires, and so on (Gronow and Hillpö, 1970, p. 317-318).

Furthermore, they argue that assessing the resistance of immoral views to moral attitudes can be fascinating and informative and that the effect of moral belief on behaviors, as well as the link between interpersonal behaviors, should be examined (Skitka, Bauman and Sargis, 2005, p. 914).

Personal identification problems influence people's willingness to help or object in other formal trials, as well as their perceptions of fair treatment and moral outrage. Skitka looked into how these concerns influence people's willingness to agree or disagree with generally fair trials, as well as their perceptions of real result fair treatment and righteous outrage (Skitka, 2002, p. 595-596). It's an ongoing work of people who look for a remedy to violence.

On the one hand, Sen (2006, p. 30) notes that even when women are involved in violence, their social circles disregard their involvement. This story reveals a lot about women's invisibility and their significance in society. Miller believes that by researching how different cultures view justice, we might gain insight into how they view it. Understanding the psychology of justice is critical to understanding human psychology and social life (Miller, 2001, p. 545).

According to Hutchings (2007, p. 95), modern feminism, just as war theory, aims to limit the kind of violence used by defining standards of conduct that distinguish between legal and immoral goals and ensure the percentage of violence utilized. Modern feminism must be dedicated to undermining men's monopoly over community violence. Stubbs and Daly (2006, p. 15) investigate if it's possible to strike a balance between the interests of victims and criminals at some point. They investigate whether individuals seek revenge or forgiveness in the aftermath of war crimes such as the Holocaust.

Violence necessitates the use of force, and when that power becomes destructive and hurtful, it becomes an act of violence. Violence is seen as a premeditated, serious act from a minimalist perspective, but it is also seen as a violation of the comprehensive method (Bufacchi, 2005, p. 195, 199). The disparity between the two techniques also causes some quandaries when it comes to justifying and grounding violence.

Scholars seek after the relationship between justice and identity, arguing that social identity, a component of self-concept generated by a social group, affects not only one's self-image but also individuals who support common features, allowing them to describe themselves and be identified as belonging to a certain community by anyone. Justice, according to the authors, is both conceptual and empirical. It's tough to grasp the concept of identity. As a result of identification, disagreements become emotional. Change can be viewed through the prism of identity (Susan and Opotow, 2003, p. 299, 307-308).

Conclusion

In India, prejudice against women is shaped by their social class (caste), ethnic origin, and religious beliefs, as well as the country. The most major reasons for the rise in injustice and violence against women in India are the dysfunction of the court system and the country's heritage of oppressing women. This argument is supported by a substantial number of studies.

Gulabi Gang's one-of-a-kind defense way has little chance of affecting society's overall structure and dramatically altering it in the long run. Rather, it possesses the characteristics of a community capable of providing assistance to as many individuals as it can directly contact in the short and medium-term. It is important to highlight that their activities do not provide a long-term answer for society.

One may argue that ideology and the concept of justice are inextricably linked and that ideology is created by the society in which it exists. In low-income nations, patriarchal communities, some traditions that disdain women, and a corrupt court system, violence against women is far more widespread. The instance of India, the Gulabi Gang, and this study, will add to the literature on the validity of women's movements such as the Gulabi Gang, as well as the discussion of their moral base.

When multiculturalism is not well understood and absorbed, it can be exploited to hide injustices. Although multiculturalism cannot be blamed for the violence in India, it is clear that more particular steps should be done to protect the rights of women who are classified in mixed societies.

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