

Is Mumbai really safe for its women? Data suggests otherwise

October 4, 2021 Saachi D'Souza



Representative Image | Marva M, Feminism In India

In the early hours of 10th September, a tempo driver named Mohan Chauhan killed a 32-year-old Dalit woman in Sakinaka.

The woman was found severely injured, bleeding in a tempo and was immediately hospitalised, after a First Information Report (FIR) was registered. CCTV footage recovered by the police found that the accused had raped and assaulted the woman with an unknown object. He was then booked for rape, and after she succumbed to her injuries, a murder charge was added to the FIR.

The police allegedly **recovered** evidence that the two knew each other prior to the incident.

Additionally, on 13th September, information on the woman's caste moved the police to add the Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 to the case. "Victim was from a particular community" police commissioner Hemant Nagrale was **quoted** as saying.

The woman (name hidden under Section 228A of the IPC) was living on the streets after she left her mother's home in Andheri East. The accused was living on the same lane as her. A financial dispute between the two caused her death, the police **said**.

This incident has brought the focus back to safety of women in Mumbai.

A **2020 report** by NGO Praja, revealed that Mumbai **recorded** some of the highest numbers in rape cases, sexual assault cases in public transport and sexual crimes against minors, Delhi ranked second after.

After the Delhi gang rape of 2012, the **conviction rate** of rape in the country is only 27.2%, despite amendments in rape laws, enforcement of the death penalty, and an increase in surveillance.

Sexual and caste-based violence are systemic, and cannot be looked at through the lens of punitive action by the criminal justice system. That has not stopped the political parties from using the incident for their gains though.

Political tensions

Maharashtra was neck-deep in a political conflict surrounding the accused, who belongs to Uttar Pradesh. Shiv Sena, which is a part of the ruling alliance, has historically discriminated against migrants from the northern states. Moreover, UP is governed by the rival BJP and has upcoming state elections.

The incident was met with immediate outrage from the BJP, who took to protesting against the ruling party, demanding quick action and stricter punishment, alleging that the death was entirely the **government's fault**.

The unfortunate death of a woman turned into political ammo for both parties. The BJP's response compelled the Shiv Sena government to issue a statement, offering compensation of 20 lakhs to the family of the woman and promising speedy justice to the deceased. **Comparisons** to the Hathras case in UP were met with more **defense by the ruling party** who accused the UP government of withdrawing evidence in the case and denying rape.

A series of controversial remarks like police commissioner Hemant Nagrale stating that, '**police cannot be everywhere**', contributed to distracting the masses from a deeply gendered and casteist society.

Caste-based sexual violence

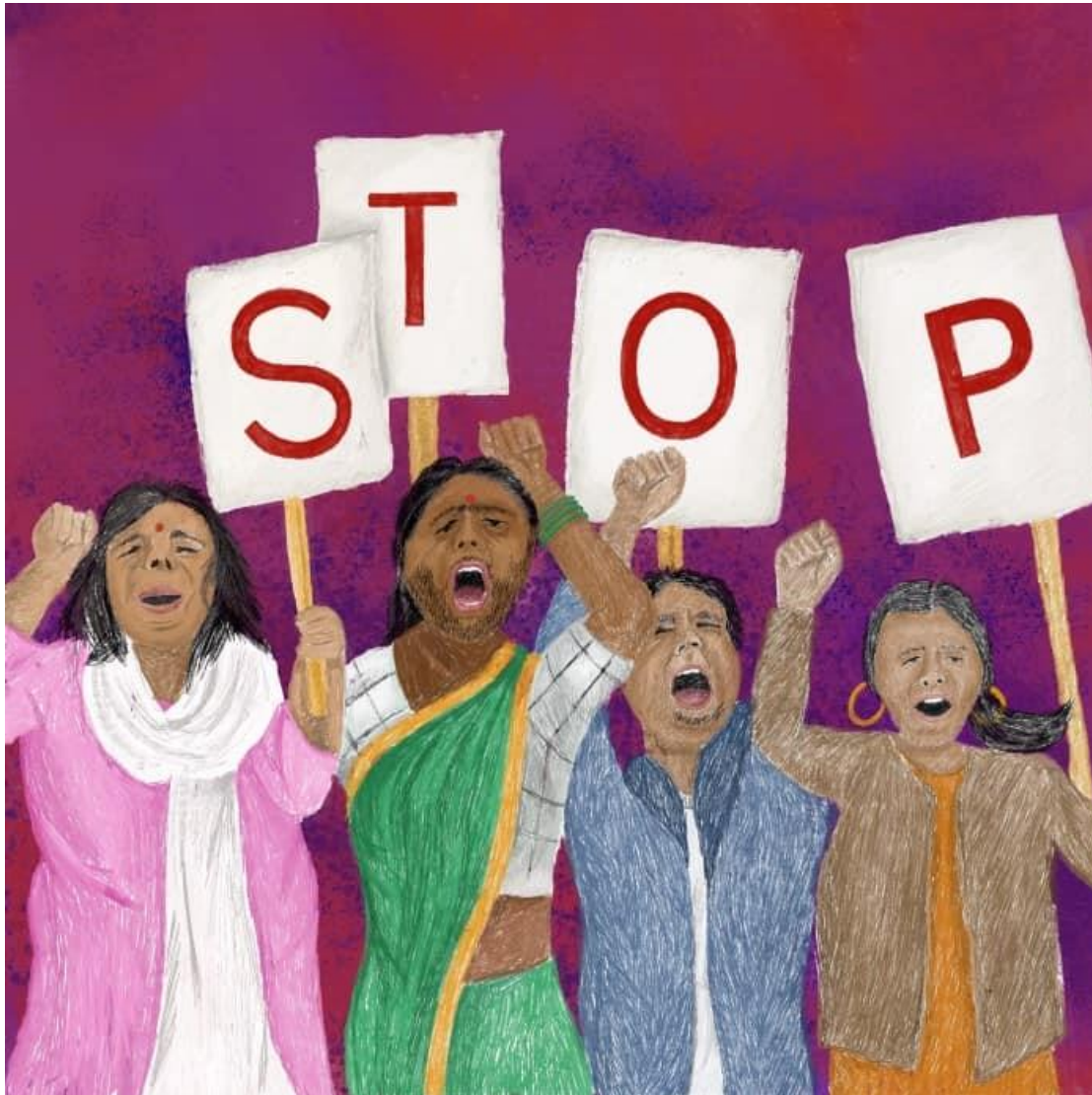
The need to name violence against Dalits as caste-based is a conversation that was widespread after the death of the young girl in Hathras. Many **activists** took to social media to engage the masses with the caste angle in the crime, maintaining that the violence was beyond a gender-based one.

In the Sakinaka case, while the Shiv Sena and Mumbai police were quick to book the accused under the SC/ST Act, there was little to no conversation on how and why the incident was caste-based. Like many other incidents of violence against Dalit women, even after this incident, the focus was solely on finding justice for the family.

It is not news to us that rape is a weapon used against those already marginalised by systems of gender, class, caste and politics. A **report** compiled in collaboration

between organisations Equality Now – a women’s rights group – and Swabhiman Society – a grassroots organisation led by Dalit women – revealed that, according to government data, around ten Dalit women and girls are raped daily across India.

The report, released in November 2020, analysed 40 cases of sexual violence in Haryana and found that in 90% of those cases, at least one of the accused belonged to a dominant caste.



Aasawari Kulkarni, Credit: Feminism In India

What is a ‘safe city’?

Defending its governance and police personnel against attacks by the opposition, the Maharashtra government called Mumbai “the safest city in the world.”

Reports suggest that this is an illusion.

The [Economist Intelligence Unit \(EIU\) Safe Cities Index 2021](#) ranked Mumbai 50th on accounts of personal security, infrastructure, health, digital and environmental security. A [study](#) by NGO Praja Foundation found that Mumbai was

seeing a rise of 22 per cent in rape cases and 51 per cent in instances of sexual assault from 2014-15 to 2018-19. Founder Nitai Mehta elaborated that out of 540, in over 527 cases offenders were known to the minor victims, while only 54 offenders were unknown.

These numbers contradict the idea that Mumbai is a safe city, but perhaps a more important question to ask is, what makes a city 'safe'?

Since the Delhi gang rape in 2012, more voices have come forward asking governments to re-examine structures that fail those affected by sexual violence. More pressure is placed on the police to control and surveil citizens, but since the death of the girl in Delhi, sexual violence has only increased. This could entirely mean that more survivors are coming forward and reporting cases, but it also means that no law – like the death penalty – is preventing violence.

Towards accountability

One of the measures that the government took after the Sakinaka case is to deploy a 'Nirbhaya Squad' to increase surveillance on the streets of Mumbai.

The idea that the safety of a city can be defined by policing activities on the streets additionally ignores the number of crimes that happen behind closed doors, moreover, surveillance causes alarm for those who depend on the streets – like sex workers – and further makes vulnerable bodies that are not upper-caste, cis-gendered, or able-bodied. The notion of safety is entirely granted to people who fall under these categories.

Ultimately, what is missing from every discourse around sexual violence, especially right now, is accountability. Calls for death penalties and political battles are distractions from structures of abuse and impunity.

It is not news that survivors are put through an ordeal of recounting and performing their trauma to justify themselves, particularly in cases where they belong to marginalised communities, there exists rampant intimidation.

It is dangerous that the state's lack of acknowledgement of sexual violence as a system that includes – but is not limited to – the judiciary, the police, and the media.

Survivors are living evidence of broken promises, of hope, and resilience. They survive the very real possibility of death. If we don't make space for their grief, how can we mourn those who couldn't record their testimonies?

Link:- <https://mumbai.citizenmatters.in/is-mumbai-really-safe-for-its-women-data-suggests-otherwise-26162>