

Domestic Violence in India: A Regional and Cultural Analysis

Sandhya Ahuja*

Sr Public Health Expert, Information Management and Analysis, India

*Corresponding Author

Sandhya Ahuja, Sr Public Health Expert, Information Management and Analysis, India.

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Abstract

Domestic violence in India is a complex and deeply rooted issue, shaped by a web of cultural traditions, economic disparities, and regional variations. While the problem is nationwide, its manifestations differ significantly across states, influenced by local customs, levels of gender equality, and enforcement of laws. Understanding these regional nuances is critical to developing effective interventions that address the unique challenges faced by women in different parts of the country.

1. Introduction

1.1. Northern India: The Epicentre of Patriarchy and Dowry Violence

In the northern states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, and Rajasthan, domestic violence is often intertwined with deep-seated patriarchal norms and the oppressive practice of dowry. Here, the societal preference for sons has led to skewed sex ratios, reinforcing the idea that women are burdens rather than equals. The pressure to provide dowries illegal yet still rampant fuels harassment, with brides facing physical and emotional abuse if their families fail to meet demands.

Bihar and Uttar Pradesh report some of the highest rates of spousal violence in the country, with NFHS-5 data showing that 40% of married women in Bihar and 35% in UP experience abuse.

Cases of bride burning, acid attacks, and "honor killings" are tragically common. In rural Haryana, *khap panchayats* (caste councils) often dictate social norms, discouraging women from reporting abuse to avoid "shaming" the family. Economic dependency exacerbates the issue, as women in these regions have limited access to employment, leaving them trapped in abusive marriages. Efforts to combat this crisis have seen mixed results. Campaigns like *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* aim to shift mindsets, while state initiatives such as UP's *Mission Shakti* provide helplines and legal aid. However, enforcement remains weak, and many women continue to suffer in silence, fearing retaliation or social ostracization.

1.2. Southern India: Progressive Policies and Hidden Suffering

The southern states Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Telangana present a paradox. While Kerala boasts near-universal literacy and progressive gender policies, domestic violence persists behind closed doors, often underreported due to stigma. The state's matrilineal communities, such as the *Nair* caste, grant women property rights, yet emotional and psychological abuse remains prevalent in marital homes. Telangana reports a shockingly high rate of domestic violence (36.9%), driven partly by rapid urbanization in cities like Hyderabad, where economic stress and shifting gender roles trigger conflicts. In Tamil Nadu, caste-based violence adds another layer of oppression, particularly for Dalit women who face both domestic and systemic abuse. Southern India has pioneered some of the most innovative interventions. Kerala's *Kudumbashree* a network of over 4 million women provides economic alternatives through self-help groups, reducing dependency on abusive spouses. Tamil Nadu's *All-Women Police Stations*, established as early as 1992, were ground-breaking, though low conviction rates reveal gaps in legal follow-through [1].

1.3. Eastern India: Tribal Traditions and Economic Exploitation

In West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Assam, domestic violence takes on unique forms shaped by tribal customs and economic instability. In tribal regions of Jharkhand and Odisha, women are often branded as "witches" (*daayan*) to justify their ostracization or even murder, usually as a pretext to seize their land. Assam's

tea garden workers mostly women endure dual exploitation: abuse at home and sexual harassment by male supervisors in the fields. Migration further complicates the issue. In Bihar and Bengal, men who migrate for work leave their wives vulnerable to abuse by in-laws, a phenomenon tied to the *gauna* custom, where brides are sent to their marital homes only after puberty. West Bengal's *Kanyashree Prakalpa*, a cash transfer program to keep girls in school, has shown promise in delaying marriage and reducing vulnerability. Activists like Assam's *Birubala Rabha*, a witch-hunt survivor, have brought national attention to these issues, pushing for laws against witch-hunting. However, implementation remains inconsistent, particularly in remote tribal areas where traditional justice systems often override formal law.

1.4. Western India: Urban Wealth and Rural Brutality

Maharashtra and Gujarat exemplify the stark urban-rural divide in domestic violence. In Mumbai, affluent women may face covert abuse—financial control, emotional manipulation while slum dwellers experience brutal physical violence. Gujarat, despite high literacy rates, reports significant underreporting of abuse, with 28% of married women admitting to spousal violence [2]. Rajasthan, meanwhile, grapples with *khonri* (honor-based violence) and child marriages, where young brides are especially vulnerable. The state's *Nari Gaurav Kendras* (women's dignity centers) offer legal and psychological support, but patriarchal resistance persists. Legal advocacy groups like Mumbai's *Majlis* provide critical aid, yet justice is often delayed. The 2016 film *Pink* and the Marathi movie *Sairat* have sparked conversations about consent and caste violence, but societal change remains slow [3].

1.5. Northeast India: Conflict Zones and Silent Struggles

In Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram, domestic violence is compounded by militarization and ethnic conflict. Manipur's *Meira Paibi* (women torchbearers), known for protesting AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act), also combat domestic abuse within their communities [4]. Yet, the state reports a staggering 40.2% spousal violence rate, linked to alcoholism and posttraumatic stress from prolonged conflict. Matrilineal tribes like the Khasis in Meghalaya offer a contrasting narrative—women control property, yet domestic abuse persists privately. Nagaland's alcohol prohibition has unintended consequences, driving abuse underground. Local solutions, such as Mizoram's *Sakhua* (community mediation), blend tradition with modern justice, but more structured support is needed.

1.6. The Path Forward: Tailored Solutions for a Diverse Nation

India's fight against domestic violence cannot rely on a one-size-fits-all approach. While laws like the PWDVA provide a framework, regional adaptations are crucial [5]:

- **Economic Empowerment:** Expand self-help groups (Kudumbashree model) in the north and east [6].
- **Legal Reforms:** Fast-track courts in high-prevalence states (UP, Bihar), with triballanguage helplines in the northeast.
- **Cultural Shifts:** Use regional media (films, folk arts) to challenge norms, like *Sairat* did in Maharashtra.
- **Community Engagement:** Strengthen grassroots movements

(*Meira Paibi, Nari Adalats*) [4].

The stories of survivors from Roop Kanwar to Birubala Rabha remind us that behind the statistics are lives shattered by violence. A compassionate, regionally nuanced response is India's best hope for change. Would you like to explore specific survivor narratives or successful case studies in greater depth? no its ok. can your I give list of sources at the bottom?

Certainly! Below is a list of sources that were referenced or could be used to substantiate the analysis in the article. These include official reports, academic studies, and reputable news articles [7-12].

Additional Resources

- Women's Helplines: Government of India's 181 and 1091 services.
- One Stop Centre (OSC) Scheme – Ministry of Women & Child Development.
- Majlis Legal Centre (Mumbai) – Reports on legal aid for survivors.

For further reading, academic databases like JSTOR, Sage Journals, and SSRN offer peerreviewed studies on regional trends. Would you like citations in a specific format (APA, MLA, etc.)?

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 12. News Reports & Case Studies – *The Hindu*, *Indian Express*, *BBC*, *Scroll.in* Coverage of high-profile cases (e.g., Roop Kanwar, Nisha Sharma dowry case).

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