

# Problems Related to Safety of Women in Meghalaya with Special Reference to East Khasi Hills District

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**Abstract:** This paper presents an overview on problems related to safety of women in Meghalaya with special reference to east khasi hills district.

**Keywords:** Safety of Women

## 1. Introduction

India is a country famous all over the world for its diverse tradition and culture. Women are given the most respectable places in society from ancient times. They are given the place of Goddesses like Goddess Lakshmi in the Indian society and this generation, women are indeed joining high offices (President, Speaker of Lok Sabha, Union Ministers, Leader of Opposition, Chief Minister, Governor, etc.) however the unprivileged ones are being exploited too. According to the Constitution of India, they have equal rights of dignity, equality, and freedom. In spite of that, Indian women are continuously facing numerous problems such as sexual harassment, violent victimization through rape, acid attack, dowry deaths, forced into sex work, and many more. The same is even true in the indigenous matrilineal Khasi society where women are generally respected a lot, but due to her physical weakness, she is considered as a one by twelve of a man and therefore she should be a little less than a man.

Women in Meghalaya play a very important part and the youngest daughter of the family inherits all the family's ancestral property. In Meghalaya, women are given an important place in the family and the society looks up to her. Nowhere in the Khasi society or any other society ill-treatment of women is encouraged at any point of time. Women of all societies are usually protected by their male counterpart. Somehow numerous segments of our society developed an ever-growing discriminating mindset and women are therefore seen as weaklings and objects for sexual lust thus giving rise to all kinds of gender discrimination, violence and biases against women.

There exists a contrast of views in Indian society concerning the status of women in tribal societies. The Northeastern region of India represents that women enjoy a better status than men in the rest of the country. The Khasi tribe of Meghalaya is known for raising the social status of women it is known as a

matrilineal in which the parental lineage, inheritance, title, residence and authority are passed on to the last daughter in the family.

In Khasi society, the woman has the right to select a man, conjugate with him and marry him on her own choice. The other norm associating Khasi matriliney is that of matrilocal post-marital residence. This is inconceivable in other society. In this society the question of the illegitimate child, child abandoning, dowry and bride burning are unknown. In Khasi society, women also actively participate in trade which otherwise is in the hands of men.

Women are given a higher position in Meghalaya but the recent rise in the violence against women has exposed the insensitiveness of the society towards women. Many organisations in Meghalaya, dealing with crime against women have been asking for stringent and exemplary punishments for the culprits. Some organisations have even shown their intolerance against such crimes through rallies, street plays, lobbying, etc. There is a list of safety laws for women in India to provide safety to women from all type of crimes against women. Some safety laws are Indecent Representation of Women (Prevention) Act 1986, Indian Penal Code 1860, Indian Divorce Act 1969, Code of Criminal Procedure 1973, Married Women's Property Act 1874, Births, Deaths & Marriages Registration Act 1886, National Commission for Women Act 1990, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place Act 2013, and so on.

## 2. Objectives

This paper does not only concentrate on highlighting or criticizing the increasing rate of crimes against women. This paper aims to present the existing measures to safeguard Women in general with special reference to East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya.

However, it is impossible to address all aspects relating to Safety of Women in East Khasi Hills in a limited paper such as this. So the objective of the paper will confine only in the following areas:

- To Canvass and highlight the trend of crime against

women in East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya.

- To analyse the implemented measures to deal with the safety of women in East Khasi Hills.
- To suggest relevant ways to improve the limitations concerning the safety of women in East Khasi Hills.

### 3. Source and Methodology

Paper is based upon assorted facets availed from both primary and secondary sources. The whole study is based on, Field investigation, collaboration and interaction with key-persons of various organisations dealing with issues related to women. It is also based on empirical facts and figures obtained through various secondary sources.

### 4. East Khasi Hills District

Meghalaya is a state in northeastern India. Meghalaya was previously part of Assam, but on 21 January 1972, the districts of Khasi, Garo and Jaintia hills became the new state of Meghalaya. East Khasi Hill district is a topography divided between many connoted tribes availing a kaleidoscope of colourful, unique and rare cultures seen only in this region. The main tribal inhabitants of the district comprise the Khasis, Jaintias and the Garos. Besides these, the district is also the home of other smaller ones such as the Hajongs, Kochs, and the Rabhas (Singh, 1994; Sangma, 1998). According to the 2011 census, East Khasi Hills district has a population of 824,059, [1]. The district has a population density of 292 inhabitants per square kilometre (760/sq mi) [1]. Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 24.68%. East Khasi Hills has a sex ratio of 1008 females for every 1000 males [1]. Comparing to other districts of the state, East Khasi hills are fairly more advance in all aspects in term of the developmental infrastructures. Hence Shillong city is a hometown of a thriving multi-ethnic society portraying a truly cosmopolitan image.

### 5. Approaches towards Women's Safety

*International approach towards safety of women:* analyzing the status of women, in general, have always been the focus of the entire world. Based on the reports of the Commission on the status of women for the twenty-five years since its first session at New York in 1947 and a series of other resolutions, the UN General Assembly in its resolution of 18th December 1972 proclaimed the year 1975 as the International Women's Year. Gender equality and the elimination of Gender Discrimination were the key objectives of the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975. The Second World Conference at Copenhagen in 1980 identified equal access to education, employment opportunities and health care services [2]. The Third World Conference at Nairobi in 1985 highlighted the importance of Women's Participation in decision making. The Fourth World conference in Beijing in 1995 recognised the concept of gender equality as a universal concern. Mere conferment of legal status to various rights of women does not

ensure women's ability to exercise those rights [2]. Issues and problems related to the safety of women need to be re-evaluated.

*National approach towards safety of women:* At the National level, the issue of women's safety was merely incorporated in our political framework. The government has enacted several laws to protect women, some of which are:

1. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.
2. The Protection Against Sexual Harassment of Women Act, 2005.
3. The National Commission for Women Act, 1990.
4. Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1986.
5. The Family Courts act, 1984.
6. Dowry Prohibition act, 1961.
7. Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956

The National Commission for Women and the Department of Women and Child Development and other bodies were set up for the upliftment of women. India also approved distinct Human Rights instruments to ensure safety and equal rights of women.

*State approach towards safety of women:* According to many reports it has been assumed that in Meghalaya the women take pleasure in different degrees. In short, one can anticipate that women's liberty is visible and Meghalaya contains one unique women-centric society. Here a question crops up: How attributing the society to be matrilineal ensures the safety of women? This is a delusion developed by many that inequality and reclusive factors against women are absent in the society and therefore women in Meghalaya are in advantage and truly empowered and do not need any exclusive approach to secure their rights. It cannot be ignored that there is a harsh reality of the increasing crime against women in various aspects, particularly concerning their actual existence under male-cantered authority.

### 6. Types and forms of violence against women in East Khasi Hills

The present analysis is based on the data collected from the statistical information published in secondary forms. The categories of crimes are the same as stated in different sourcebooks.

Domestic violence (Cruelty by Husband or his Relatives): Intimate partner violence, domestic abuse, dating violence, spousal abuse, and intimate partner abuse is any form of maltreatment that takes place in a heterosexual or homosexual relationship between adults or adolescents is called Domestic Violence. Confining or detaining the spouse against one's will or damaging property are also considered as acts of violence.

- *Trafficking:* The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act was passed in 1956. However, many cases of trafficking of young girls and women have been reported. These women are either forced into prostitution, domestic work, or child labour.

Table 1  
Year-Wise trends of cognizable Crimes against Women reported in East-Khasi Hills during the years 2007 to 2016

S.no.	Crime Heads	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
IPC Crimes											
1.	Rape	32	34	34	41	42	58	55	14	15	56
2.	Attempt to Commit Rape										1
3.	Kidnapping & Abduction	22	19	17	16	20	18	40	23	24	51
4.	Dowry Deaths	2	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
5.	Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her Modesty	11	15	26	10	32	21	32	58	43	30
6.	Cruelty by Husband or his Relatives	13	19	9	17	11	13	11	26	24	10
7	Immoral Traffic	1	1	0	1	2	5	3	6	2	2
	<b>Total Cognizable Crimes</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>150</b>

Source: Meghalaya Police

- *Eve-Teasing*: Considered a problem related to delinquency in youth, it is a form of sexual aggression that ranges in severity from sexually suggestive remarks, brushing in public places and catcalls, to groping [3]. Eve teasing is a euphemism which includes teasing the girls, passing comment on them, harassing them, troubling them purposely. Majority of the times, eve-teasing goes unreported.
- *Rape*: Rape is a type of sexual assault usually involving sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration carried out against a person without that person's consent. Crimes such as rape as a form of sexual violence are reported to be on increase. Around the world, one in five women is victims of rape in their lifetime [4]. Many rapes go unreported because of the stigma and trauma associated with them and the lack of sympathetic treatment from legal systems.
- *Dowry*: A dowry is a transfer of parental property, gifts or money at the marriage of a daughter [5]. Disputes related to dowry sometimes result in acts of violence against women, including killings and acid attacks [6].
- *Kidnapping and Abduction*: Kidnapping is the unlawful carrying away and confinement of a person against his or her will. Thus, it is a composite crime. It can also be defined as false imprisonment through abduction, both of which are separate crimes that when committed simultaneously upon the same person merges as the single crime of kidnapping.

The above statistical data only represents the registered cases. It has been observed that the registered case of rape in East Khasi Hills is the highest crime in the district as per the Meghalaya Police record. Many cases of attempt to rape go unreported. Therefore, there is only one case registered as an attempt to commit rape. Kidnapping and abduction see an uneven fluctuation with 22 cases in the year 2007 which increased to 51 cases in the year 2016. Dowry deaths were unknown to Meghalaya because of its matrilineal nature but recently it has been observed that a total number of 7 cases of Dowry deaths were reported in 9 years. There were 58 registered cases of Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty in the year 2014 which is the highest of all the years. Cases related to Domestic Violence (Cruelty by Husband or his Relatives) were highest in the year 2014 with 26 cases registered. Only 23 cases of Immoral Trafficking were

registered in 9 years.

### 7. Measures being taken by the Government and NGOs to safeguard the security of women with special reference to Meghalaya

There are many other National and State level studies and reports which show the seriousness of the alarming demand for convalescing safety measures for women. For this reason, the government and the NGOs have taken some major steps to deal with the issues pertaining to the safety of women in the state.

The Meghalaya State Commission for Women (M.S.C.W.) was constituted in the year 2004 extending its jurisdiction to the whole state of Meghalaya, with an objective to improve the status of women and to carry out the investigation of a violation of safeguards for women. MSCW also conducts inspections to various shelter homes and orphanages. The Commission is responsible for safeguarding the Fundamental Rights and Human Rights with a special concern of women and children. The Commission has the same powers as are vested in a Civil Court while trying a suit under the Code of Civil procedure.

In December 2015, the National Commission for Women (NCW) in collaboration with Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS) started a pilot project - 'Violence-free Home - A Woman's Right' in 22 districts across 7 States, namely, Assam, Meghalaya, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Odhisa- with the aim to empower women and respond to women survivors of violence in both public and private life.

The Special Cell in Meghalaya is located at the Sadar Police Station in the district of East Khasi Hills, Shillong, Meghalaya. The service commenced on the 14th June 2016 and was formally inaugurated on the 27th of January, 2017. Since June 2016 till May 2017, a total of 35 cases have been registered and 89 cases have come to the Special Cell for one-time intervention. The social workers have carried out in-depth intervention in cases of sexual assault, domestic violence, violence in intimate partner relationships, missing cases and immoral trafficking.

The Social Welfare Department, Government of Meghalaya in collaboration with North East Network (NEN) inaugurated the One-Stop Crisis Centre (Iohlynti) on 20 June 2016 at Ganesh Das Hospital, Shillong. NEN is also committed to the opening of more OSCC in different districts of Meghalaya with the help of NEN.

Integrated SAKHI – One Stop Centre and 181 – Women Help Line (SAKHI/181) is a project of the union government designed to help women in distress. Women already traumatized by crime will not be subjected to further trauma by being referred from pillar to post. They will be represented. SAKHI/181 is not a referral service or a Call Centre. It is a friend of women in Distress. SAKHI/181 represents a woman in distress in front of all state service providers like Police, Legal Services Authority, Protection Officers etc. SAKHI – OSC has facilities to provide temporary shelter in situations of crisis. It provides - public interface - of 181 Women Help Line at the district level.

### 8. Suggestions and Conclusion

The responsibility of Safety of Women should be shared by Government organisations, the policymakers, Non-Government organisations and the common people alike. The women need to be aware of their rights and they should be encouraged to report any incidence of violence or related aspects of crimes. The existing policies need to be strengthened to reach out to the women who cannot speak up. There should be strong coordination between the central government and the state government, especially the law governing agencies. Crime

against women does not have any colour or race, hence it does not victimise only one ethnic group or only a selected section of women, it can victimise anyone. As academicians, it is our responsibility to reach out to the youths and educate them about the existing issues related to women's safety. Safety of women is not only the responsibility of women, but the men also play a greater role.

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