
India and its Obsession with Heterosexuality: Understanding Corrective Rape

Lead Author- Ms. Vani Dhaka¹ & Co- Authors- Mr. Dhanasekar M² , Ms. Sanya Ahuja³, Dr. Abhijay Chakraborty⁴ , Dr. Ayesha Mukherjee⁵ , Dr. Kavita Sharma⁶ , Ms. Rashmi Sehgal⁷

¹Research Scholar, University of Delhi

²Assistant Professor, Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr. Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Avadi, Chennai, India

³ Research Scholar, University of Delhi

⁴Assistant Professor, Amity Law School, Jaipur, Rajasthan

⁵Assistant Professor, Amity University, Gwalior

⁶Assistant Professor, Symbiosis Law School, Nagpur, constituent of International Symbiosis (Deemed) University, Pune

⁷Research Fellow- National University of Malaysia

Abstract:

“I was not at fault; I didn’t deserve this. But it’s so hard to believe when I am alone”

The above mentioned, is a statement given by a victim of corrective rape in South Africa. On 28th April 2008, the bloody and lifeless body of a woman was found- naked, in a drainage ditch in South Africa. She was gang raped, savagely beaten and stabbed about nine times. Her name, was Eudy Simelane. The famous player in South Africa’s national soccer team and one of the first openly lesbian women in the region. The term “corrective rape” was coined after this case. The brutal rape and murder of Eudy Simelane, brought attention to other horrendous cases of corrective rape around the world. It was in mid-2008 that people realized that ‘corrective rape’ was a thing; but attention was not and is still not paid towards the severity of this crime.

Although this is an issue that affects people globally, our paper focuses on the issue of corrective rape in India. Not only is there a massive lack of information on the part of the citizens, the government too, hasn’t taken any major steps towards dealing with this social evil.

Introduction

Corrective rape, also known as Curative or Homophobic rape, is a hate crime in which one or more people are raped because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The common intention behind this rape, as seen by the perpetrator is to turn the person belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community, into heterosexual or to enforce conformity with gender stereotypes . Simply put, corrective rape is a deterrent for being gay and infringing traditional gender infringement. The attackers believe that if they rape lesbian women or gay men, they would learn to be straight or “normal” again . These rapes are often committed by gangs, which involve in savage beatings and tortures of the people, they feel need to be “corrected”. Many victims contract AIDS and other debilitating Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). Physical injuries aside, the victims of Corrective rape are often faced with psychological disorders like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Depression and severe anxiety among others. Corrective rape pretends to fix what is not broken . Irreversible trauma is often compounded by family members by not only being unsupportive but by claiming that the assault was deserved. What makes this hate crime even more heinous and troubling for the victims, is that mostly it’s the family members of the victim, who arrange such an abuse in order to “cure” the “suffering homosexual” . The United Nations UNAIDS 2015 Terminology Guidelines suggest that the term “corrective rape”, should no longer be used as it leads to the creation of a perception that something needs to be fixed. The guideline proposes that the term “Homophobic rape” should be used instead. A 2013 global study on HIV/AIDS, suggested the term ‘lesphobic’ rape to emphasize the fact that lesbians constitute a majority of victims of this hate crime . In accordance with the UNAIDS 2015 Terminology Guidelines, we would be using the term “homophobic rape”, instead of “corrective rape” .

Who faces the most threat?**1. Lesbians**

Lesbians in general and “butch lesbians” in particular are the most vulnerable group to “corrective rape” across the globe. It is often used as a tool by men to teach lesbians how to be a “real” woman ; an attempt to bring them under the control of heterosexual rules of society. Corrective rape is a punishment for a lesbian’s perceived violation of both heteronormative masculinity and femininity in an institutionally heterosexual society. Corrective rape against lesbians is not perpetrated solely because of the homophobic attitudes but attitude of sexual- orientation based discrimination and violence is also majorly based on

policing of gender, for violating the traditional gender presentation . Homosexual females are perceived as posing a tripartite threat: to heterosexuality (through their relationships with women), to gender norms (through their expressions of masculinities and disregard for femininities), and to sex (through challenging expectations surrounding somatically female bodies and refusing men's advances and proposals). The perpetrator of corrective rape dispenses all culpability by perceiving the victim to be the one at fault for behaving in violation to the patriarchal framework of naturalized men and women and has a psychological stance that the rape is in victim's interest.

Since lesbians are less likely than heterosexual women to be using birth control methods, they are more likely to become pregnant when raped. Thus, many lesbians face the trauma of dealing with a pregnancy that is the result of rape, in addition to the trauma of being a victim of rape and a victim of a hate crime.

2. Asexual women

Another group that is vulnerable to corrective rape is asexual . Research and dialogue on asexuality is often overshadowed by the more prominent and more common sexual orientations—heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality. An unfortunate consequence of this inattention is ignorance about the harm and threats that an asexual person faces. They are often characterized as “least visible sexual minority”.

Because sex is so much a part of non-asexual peoples' lives, and because of the pervasive sexualization of our society, those who reject sex are viewed as less than or not even human. The most extreme form of acephobic is sexual assault/curative rape in order to eradicate asexuality or “fix” the person's orientation. The person who carries out corrective rape does so with a psyche and belief that they are helping the other person by removing their inhibitions about sex and are “setting them free” or “curing them” .

3. Transgender men & transgender women

Persistent inequalities in various aspects of life, including lack of legal recognition and protection of human rights, combined with pervasive prejudice, leaves transgender people vulnerable to discrimination and sexual violence. Under the gender binary, trans bodies are often seen as alien and undeserving of respect. Even sexual violence against trans people is gendered. Violence against transgender women is motivated by the perpetrator's need to reassert their own heterosexuality and masculinity to others. In contrast, violence against transgender men can be attributed to the perpetrator's desire to punish the trans man

for failing to label himself as sexually receptive. Some countries' anti-rape laws don't cover trans men and women which makes them even more vulnerable to such atrocities. As per National Sexual Violence Resource Centre's 2019 report, 47% of transgender people have been sexually assaulted at some point in their lives, and these rates are even higher for trans people of color and those who have done sex work, been homeless, or have (or had) a disability.

4. Bisexuals

Bisexual women experience significantly higher lifetime prevalence of rape and other sexual violence by an intimate partner when compared to heterosexual women . Bisexual women are often depicted in popular media and pornography as objects of titillation for straight men, rather than as unique, autonomous people, they're thought to be perpetually down for sex. This false belief increases the likelihood of bi women becoming the target of sexual assault. Sixty one percent of bisexual women have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime, according to a CDC report on its 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey . Meanwhile, 35 percent of straight women and 44 percent of lesbians have had the same experiences, the report found. The statistics for men are similar: 37 percent of bisexual men have faced these violent acts in relationships, while 29 percent of straight men and 26 percent of gay men have. Hypertextualization can lead people to perceive that their bi partners are more likely to cheat in a relationship. Men may assume their bi female partners to be hypersexual. Bisexuals may also face difficulty negotiating consent because they believe they need to "prove" their bisexuality.

5. Others

Lesbians, asexual women, transgender men & women and bisexuals are not an exclusive list of populations facing the threat of corrective rape. Corrective rape could presumably apply to any individual who does not conform to traditional expressions of gender or to heterosexuality. It is difficult to accurately identify which populations are targeted by corrective rape or to quantify the number of corrective rapes that occur each year as most of the cases go unreported. It is clearly established, however, that corrective rape does not pertain to the rape of a heterosexual, cisgender person.

Impact of corrective rape on the victim

Rape is often used to intimidate, control, humiliate, degrade, and destruct a person. Just like rape is used as a weapon of war to terrorize and subjugate a population, corrective rape, is used as a tool to subordinate non-heterosexual and gender nonconforming individuals. Corrective rape at its core is a violent manifestation of discrimination. The aim of rape in general is to disempower the victim who is reminded of being weak and disparate. Corrective rape pretends to fix what is not broken and irreversible trauma is often compounded by family members not only being unsupportive but also claiming that the assault was deserved. The aftermath of rape involves a cluster of acute and chronic physical and psychological effects .

– **Impact on physical health**

Corrective rape is used to control and violate the victim's bodily autonomy and sexual identity. Since lesbians are less likely to use birth control measures as compared to the heterosexual females, they have higher chances of becoming victims of unwanted pregnancy. Transgender men have a high risk of HIV . Stigma and discrimination against transgender people frequently cause them to be rejected by their families and denied healthcare services, including access to HIV testing, counselling and treatment. Some young transgender people have overlapping vulnerabilities with other young key populations, such as injecting drugs and selling sex, which can put them at higher risk of acquiring HIV and also lead to increased stigmatization. Often, lesbians and transgender men are afraid to seek medical and legal help and counseling for fear of secondary victimization because of their sexual orientation and/or gender expression.

– **Impact on mental health**

Corrective rape assaults the very core of personhood and caused a great amount of moral damage. The crucial element of corrective rape—the perpetrator's intention to “cure” the victim—implies that there is something wrong with a person, which has the effect of pathologizing all members of these groups. Every survivor responds to traumatic events in their own way. The effects of the trauma can be short-term or last long after the sexual assault or rape.

The victims are often seen facing psychological disorders like PTSD including nightmares and severe anxiety. Depression among rape victims is quite common which in some cases may be accompanied by suicidal thoughts and dissociation. One's emotional

well-being is damaged. Among the most common emotional responses displayed by victims of sexual violence are: fear, anxiety, anguish, depression, shame, guilt, anger, euphoria, and apathy. A significant number of people who've been sexually assaulted feel embarrassed or shameful about what has happened. Feeling guilty when you've been raped is common. Rape violates fundamental human rights including: the right to life, liberty, security, equal treatment, human dignity, privacy and physical & social integrity.

Indian dream of complete heterosexuality and homophobic rapes

India, a country known for accommodating rich and varied cultures, religions, communities and practices, has from centuries, failed to accept the most colorful community of all. India's obsession with heterosexuality has taken a toll on the homosexuals in the country. On one hand, our country stands firm on demanding justice for the rape victims; it however on the other hand, encourage the crimes that aim at "curing" or "correcting" the homosexuals of the country. Being gay in a country with beliefs as traditional as India can be hard enough, but to live in fear of having something as traumatic as corrective rape forced upon you if your orientation is revealed is a whole other battle. As many states in the US are working on actively fighting for the rights of LGBTQ+ people, certain families in India seem to be taking steps to avoid the fight at all, rather sticking to their original values. Whether it be willingly or not, young girls and boys are being outed and many of their parents believe that "fixing" them is better than accepting them. This view is often pushed by the fact that families can be shunned for having a gay son or daughter.

According to findings by the Crisis Intervention Team of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender collective in Telangana (India), there have been 15 instances of homophobic rape, reported in the past 5 years. "We are sure there are many more cases, but they go unreported", says Vyjayanti Mogli, a member of the crisis intervention team. "We came across such cases not because they reported the rape, but because they sought help to flee their homes. Victims find it traumatizing to speak of their brothers/cousins' turning rapists and prefer to delete the incident from their memories and cut off ties with their families. This is why such cases never get reported.", says Vyjayanti Mogli. It's usually the family of the victim that arranges the act and they mostly rope in a person they are in know of. The consistent presence of this hate crime is a representation of how education and awareness about the LGBTQIA+ community is still negligible. People away from pride parades, social media discussions and any other educational source, have a very cruel and heartless way of 'dealing with' and confronting the members of the community. The less educated or even

educated Indian citizens for that matter, do not have an open mind when it comes to accepting sexual orientations, different from the pre-existing ones.

In a country like that of India, where people shy away from talking about the concept of sexual intercourse, seeing someone talk about it and express it in a non-conventional or unorthodox manner, triggers their 'Indian-ness'.

This hopeless and obsessive effort to make India into a completely heterosexual country has led to uncountable number of adversities for the homosexuals.

Understanding the Stigma around the Issue

While undertaking our research, we found out that corrective rape is not a new phenomenon but has its roots throughout history. The reason why it is not being talked about is the fact that it's happening in our backyards. The crimes, majorly are being carried out by families on their own children, in order to "correct" them. Deepthi Tadanki, who is in the process of making a film on this taboo topic reveals some horror stories she came across while researching for her film. Tadanki is quoted by The Times of India as saying, "When I was researching on this subject for my film, I came across two gut wrenching stories of corrective rape — one, where a gay girl was raped by her cousin so that she could be "cured" of homosexuality; and another, where family members forced a gay boy to have sex with his mother, in a bid to turn him 'straight'. I tried reaching out to these victims, but they refused to talk."

The trauma from such incidents often makes victims want to cut off ties with their families or even run away from home. The stigma is a result of the discomfort around this issue. As the criminals involved are family members and the issue is super sensitive, the victims are often not able to talk about it, let alone reporting it to the authorities.

Analyzing our Online Survey

To gain an in depth understanding about awareness regarding Corrective Rapes, we undertook an online survey. Online questionnaires and polls were circulated among the students of the University of Delhi. One simple question was asked in the questionnaire- "Are you aware of the concept of Corrective Rape?"

Our aim was to understand whether our future leaders and policy makers are aware of such a sensitive term. This would provide a peek as to what the future regarding such important issues looks like. The results of our survey were truly shocking. We took a sample

of 179 students above the age of 18. The question asked was close ended. The response could either be a YES or a NO. Putting together the data from all our response sources, we received the final numbers. Out of 179 students, 138 answered as “NO”. And only 41 students answered in affirmation. A whopping 77% of the students are unaware about the term.

This is extremely shocking and disheartening as there have been many studies that show that there’s a direct relationship between awareness on any issue and the steps taken by the government. This means that the less people are aware, the lesser are the chances of any legal steps being taken towards the issue.

There’s an extremely urgent need to take steps in the direction of informing people about the term. It’s highly necessary that people are sensitive and informed when it comes to rapes, be it any kind, be it to anyone.

Way Forward

Police Services- Enforce monitoring and disciplinary measures to ensure that timely steps are taken against police personnel who harass, intimidate, or abuse complainants, with specific focus on members of the LGBT community. Disaggregate data on physical and sexual violence by motive and the sexual and gender characteristics of survivor and victim to track the number of incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence. Establish systems for monitoring individual police stations on their capacity to handle matters relating to sexual violence in a non-judgmental and efficient manner.

Health Departments- Ensure that all hospitals and clinics have on duty at all times at least one person who is equipped to understand and treat cases of sexual violence, including on the grounds of gender expression and sexual orientation, in a non-judgmental manner. Ensure that survivors of sexual violence have privacy in all hospitals and clinics.

Education department- Include material on sexual orientation and gender expression and identity in teacher training material. Establish monitoring systems to ensure effective implementation of nondiscrimination policies, such as a toll-free helpline for reporting verbal, physical, and sexual abuse of learners by teachers and other school authorities.

NGOS/ Civil Society Organizations- Raise the issue of violence and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender expression in international forums in collaboration with domestic organizations.

General Public- A sense of acceptance and tolerance for LGBT community is needed. It cannot be done in one day and needs gradual but sure changes and advancement. The perpetrators should stop trying to fix something that is already not broken. Support from

family and near ones is needed so that the victims can visit hospitals, police stations or legal courts without fear and hesitation. Redefining masculinity is also necessary and broadening its meaning and aspects. The way the social construct of “gender” is perceived also needs to change making it more inclusive and accepting. The spread of homophobia is largely driven by a neo-conservatism that in effect works to create and foster patriarchy, this needs to be effectively worked upon by us together.

Conclusion

Corrective rape, a grotesque manifestation of deep-rooted homophobia and gender-based discrimination, continues to devastate the lives of countless individuals in India and around the world. Despite the constitutional guarantees of dignity, equality, and freedom, LGBTQIA+ individuals remain vulnerable to heinous crimes that attempt to "normalize" their existence within a rigid, heterosexual framework. Our research reveals a critical gap in awareness, legal protection, and societal acceptance, underscoring the urgency for immediate and multi-pronged interventions. The stigma surrounding homophobic rape is compounded by the complicity of families, the silence of victims, and the apathy of institutions, creating an environment where justice is elusive, and healing is hindered.

It is imperative that India moves beyond token gestures of inclusivity and undertakes systemic reforms to protect the bodily autonomy, dignity, and human rights of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Corrective rape is not merely a crime against individuals; it is an assault on the very principles of equality, diversity, and human dignity. Combating this requires not just legal reforms but also a profound societal transformation—rooted in education, empathy, and unwavering commitment to human rights. Only through collective efforts across the legal system, education, healthcare, and civil society can we dismantle the structures that perpetuate such violence and create a future where every individual can live without fear of being punished for who they are.