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Justice for women a far cry

Maha Record Abysmal As Crime Against Fair Sex Rise But Convictions Fall

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New Delhi: A secure environment for women appears to be a far cry in India. Crime against the fairer sex is steadily increasing, and less and less number of the accused are getting convicted. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data tells this sorry tale prevailing for the last three years.

In 2005, a whopping 1.55 lakh cases of crime against women were registered across India, but convictions were recorded in only 30,826 cases—a mere 19.8%. In 2006, case registration jumped to 1.64 lakh, but convictions declined to 28,998, or 17.5%. Continuing the trend, more than 1.85 lakh cases were registered in 2007, but the trial courts found the charge sustainable only in 27,612 cases, a meagre 14.9%.

In Delhi, where working women's security has been a concern, conviction in these cases remained lower than national average in all three years—10.8% in 2005, 12.4% in 2006 and 13.4% in 2007. Andhra Pradesh remained at the top of the list in terms of number of cases relating to crime against women—20,819 in 2005, 21,484 in 2006 and 24,738 in 2007. And there were convictions in 5,353 cases in 2005 (25.7%), 3,579 in 2006 (16.6%) and 3,911 in 2007 (15.8%).

State	2005		2006		2007	
	CR	CV	CR	CV	CR	CV
Delhi	4,351	473	4,544	565	4,804	646
Maharashtra	13,370	616	14,452	584	14,924	597
West Bengal	11,887	812	12,785	1,001	16,554	467
MP	14,529	3,301	14,321	3,705	15,370	3,737
AP	20,819	5,353	21,484	3,579	24,738	3,911
UP	14,875	6,484	16,375	6,800	20,993	6,918
Rajasthan	11,657	2,383	12,934	2,719	14,270	2,446
All India	1,55,553	30,826	1,64,765	28,998	1,85,312	27,612

Source: National Crime Records Bureau
CR-Cases registered, CV-convicted



Such mismatch between cases registered and conviction surely casts an ominous shadow on the functioning of the justice delivery system at the lower levels, but importantly, it also raises a serious question about the ability of the police to conduct proper investigation and prepare a watertight case. In Maharashtra, the conviction rate remained abysmally low at around 4% in each of these three years—616 of 13,370 cases in 2005, 584 of 14,452 in 2006 and 597 of 14,924 in 2007.

This trend negates the consistent efforts of the Supreme Court to sensitise judges to the heinous crime that

scars the victim for rest of her life. It had in numerous rulings said: "Courts must hear the loud cry for justice by the society in cases of heinous crime of rape of innocent helpless girls of tender age, and respond by imposition of proper sentence."

This passionate appeal of the apex court through its ruling appears to have gone unheeded even in Delhi, where the conviction rate in these three years has remained low despite the city registering an increase in such cases from 10.8% in 2005 to 12.4% in 2006 to 13.4% in 2007.

While 4,351 cases of crime against women were registered in 2005, the

trial courts recorded conviction only in 473 cases. In 2006, as many as 4,544 cases were registered, but conviction was recorded in 565 cases and in 2007, 4,804 cases were registered, while courts found the police case true in 646 cases. West Bengal was another state, like Maharashtra, that recorded very low conviction rate, or as statistics tell us, the accused went scot free. If in 2005 the conviction rate was 6% of the cases registered, it recorded a small increase to 7.8% in 2006 before falling to 2.8% in 2007.

With these statistics are staring at us, another missive of the Supreme Court to the trial courts has fallen on deaf ears. It had said: "Protection of society and deterring the criminal was the avowed the object of the law and that was required to be achieved through appropriate sentencing policy." But, if the police does not prepare a watertight case, there is little that the courts can do to bring the culprits to book.

Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu appear to have somewhat acceptable levels of conviction rate. In Uttar Pradesh, 2005 saw a conviction rate of 43.5%, but it steadily declined to 41.5% in 2006 and 32.9% in 2007. Tamil Nadu, which had recorded a conviction rate of 53.5% in 2005, also showed a downward trend—45% in 2006 and 27% in 2007.