

“LEGAL PROTECTION OF WOMEN IN INDIA: A CRITICAL STUDY IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS”

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ABSTRACT

The legal protection of women in India has evolved significantly over time, reflecting the changing social, political, and economic dynamics of the country. This study critically examines the contemporary framework of women’s legal rights and protections in light of recent legislative, judicial, and policy developments. With the Constitution of India as its foundation, various statutes such as the Dowry Prohibition Act, Domestic Violence Act, Sexual Harassment Act, and amendments to the Indian Penal Code have contributed to safeguarding women against gender-based violence and discrimination. The research also explores emerging concerns such as cybercrime, digital safety, reproductive rights, and workplace harassment. Judicial activism, international conventions, and the roles played by civil society, media, and NGOs have further advanced the cause of gender justice. However, despite progressive legal measures, the implementation gap, societal patriarchy, and lack of awareness continue to hinder effective protection. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the legal mechanisms and their effectiveness in ensuring justice, equality, and dignity for women in modern India.

KEYWORDS:-

Women’s rights, gender justice, legal protection, India, recent developments, cybercrime, domestic violence, judicial activism, sexual harassment, digital safety

1. INTRODUCTION

Protection of women in law in India has been a dynamic and multifaceted topic influenced by centuries of socio-cultural practices, colonial legal influences, constitutional requirements, judicial pronouncements, and legislative enactments. The Indian jurisprudence based on the Constitution of India promises equality and absence of discrimination based on sex through Articles 14, 15, and 21.¹³⁴³ Still, the ground reality is more often than not different from the constitutional promise, and thus, a more intensive and critical study of the present legal

framework and its effectiveness in dealing with the complex issues related to women becomes imperative. Indian women have always faced various manifestations of oppression, from domestic abuse, sexual harassment, dowry abuse, honor killings, and trafficking to public and professional level systemic marginalization.¹³⁴⁴ The need for strong legal mechanisms to fight these entrenched causes is greater than ever in the wake of recent social changes and new types of violence against women, both virtual and real.¹³⁴⁵ The post-

¹³⁴⁴ Nivedita Menon, *Seeing Like a Feminist* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2012), 22–35.

¹³⁴⁵ Flavia Agnes, *Law and Gender Inequality: The Politics of Women’s Rights in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 113–117.

¹³⁴³ Constitution of India, Articles 14, 15, and 21.

independence period saw major legal milestones directed towards safeguarding and empowering women, including the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005; the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013; and changes to the Indian Penal Code by way of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Acts, especially post-Nirbhaya in 2012. These pieces of legislation represent the increased acknowledgment of gender-based violence and discrimination as major societal issues demanding immediate redressal. Nevertheless, in spite of these laws being on the statute book, enforcement is weak, spasmodic, and riddled with systemic loopholes. The police force, the courts, and even society as a whole tend to promote patriarchal tendencies that discourage victims from seeking redressal. There exists a discernible disconnect between the letter of the law and its effective impact upon women's lives, especially in the case of women belonging to marginalized groups such as Dalits, Adivasis, and religious minorities.¹³⁴⁶

Against the backdrop of recent trends, some highly publicized cases and law reforms have focused attention afresh on the question of women's legal protection in India.¹³⁴⁷ The Supreme Court's judgments in some of these cases like *Joseph Shine v. Union of India* (which legalised adultery), *Shayara Bano v. Union of India* (which held triple talaq to be unconstitutional), and *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (which established the framework for preventing sexual harassment in the workplace) have all been crucial in framing the gender justice discourse. Additionally, the increasing awareness and activism regarding topics such as marital rape, menstrual leave, equal pay, and online safety for women demonstrate the dynamic and changing nature of feminist legal discourse in India. Meanwhile, the advent of social media as a tool

for denouncing and disrupting patriarchal attitudes—illustrated by campaigns such as #MeToo—has injected a further level into the debate, forcing legislature and judiciary alike to revisit traditional legal approaches.¹³⁴⁸

The digital era has created new challenges to the safety and privacy of women, including cyberstalking, revenge porn, trolling online, and deepfakes technology—all of which need immediate legal consideration and responsive legislation.¹³⁴⁹ The Information Technology Act, 2000, and several provisions of the Indian Penal Code are presently being employed to deal with cybercrimes against women. But these legislations tend to be inadequate in really controlling online violence, particularly where the perpetrators are using technological anonymity or are located in foreign countries. Moreover, police authorities usually lack training or sensitivity to handle such complaints, and hence underreporting and low conviction rates result. The necessity for a special legal and policy framework in respect of digital safety is felt, and it becomes the imperative need to update the legal lexicon with respect to the new emerging threats.¹³⁵⁰

Legal protection to women in India has also to be understood against the background of socio-economic inequalities and intersectionality of caste, class, religion, and geography.¹³⁵¹ Rural women, for example, have unique difficulties in accessing legal assistance and dealing with the judicial system because of illiteracy, poverty, and ignorance. Likewise, women in war zones or under repressive customary laws (e.g., in some tribal regions or under personal religious laws) are frequently deprived of justice because of parallel legal systems and patriarchal interpretations of culture and tradition. Though the Indian

¹³⁴⁶ Anand Teltumbde, *The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India's Hidden Apartheid* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2010).

¹³⁴⁷ *Joseph Shine v. Union of India*, (2018) 2 SCC 189.

¹³⁴⁸ Sonora Jha and Alka Kurian, eds., *New Feminisms in South Asian Social Media, Film and Literature: Disrupting the Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 133–145.

¹³⁴⁹ Karishma Mehrotra, "India's Laws Are Failing Victims of Online Gender-Based Violence," *The Indian Express*, October 10, 2020.

¹³⁵⁰ Chinmayi Arun, "Privacy and Gender in the Digital Age," *Economic and Political Weekly* 54, no. 2 (2019): 35–39.

¹³⁵¹ Nivedita Menon, *Recovering Subversion: Feminist Politics Beyond the Law* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 85–87.

Constitution mandates a uniform civil code in Article 44, political and religious sentiments have frozen its application, resulting in a fractured legal system where women's rights differ depending on their religious identity. This has been an issue of debate for long and continues to shape the direction of women's legal rights in the nation.¹³⁵²

The other key aspect is the position of the judiciary and its changing interpretative strategy in extending the ambit of women's rights.¹³⁵³ Indian courts have, in the course of time, shifted from rigid literal interpretation of legislation to a purposive and feminist interpretation of the law. Judges have increasingly recognized that formal equality does not suffice and have promoted substantive equality to make justice tangible for women in real life. For example, in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, while a case about LGBTQ+ rights per se, the judgment highlighted autonomy, dignity, and freedom—key concepts with implications for women's legal status and individual liberties. Likewise, the extension of the right to privacy as a constitutional right in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* has implications that are potential for issues such as reproductive rights, autonomy of the body, and freedom from state surveillance—issues that have gendered underpinnings.¹³⁵⁴

In spite of the availability of progressive judgments and laws, the enforcement process is still a major bottleneck.¹³⁵⁵ Police violence, victim-blaming, procrastination in trials, insufficient forensic facilities, and unduly complicated procedural formalities usually lead to denial of justice to women. Legal literacy remains low for women, and access to capable legal assistance is restricted. What's more, women who have the courage to report

abuse or complain of injustice are subjected to ostracism, intimidation, or coercion into silence by strong social or family forces. These challenges require not just legal reforms but a wider cultural change that encourages gender sensitivity, equality, and human dignity. School curricula, media representation, community outreach, and institutional changes all contribute to an environment in which legal protections for women are effective and meaningful.¹³⁵⁶

2. EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN INDIA

The history of women's rights in India has been a protracted and revolutionary process, intricately interwoven with the overall historical, political, social, and legal processes of the nation.¹³⁵⁷ From ancient times to the post-independence period, the status and rights of women have experienced radical transformations, influenced by the dominant socio-cultural ideologies and power relations of the time. There was, of course, respect for and reverence accorded to women in some works and traditions, for example, the Vedas referring to scholar-women such as Gargi and Maitreyi; however, through the years, patriarchal hierarchies tightened, and the autonomy of women was dismantled gradually. Customary practices of child marriage, sati, purdah, refusal of education, and inheritance marked them. The decline of women's social standing was further reinforced during the medieval era, when invasions, strict religious orthodoxy, and social conservatism further restricted women's liberties and rights.¹³⁵⁸

The colonial era saw a tremendous shift in the discussion of women's rights in India.¹³⁵⁹ British colonialism brought with it a new juridical

¹³⁵² Shashi Tharoor, "The UCC Debate and the Future of Indian Secularism," *The Hindu*, July 18, 2023.

¹³⁵³ Indira Jaising, "Bringing Rights Home: Review of the Indian Judiciary and Women's Rights," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 12, no. 3 (2005): 375–394.

¹³⁵⁴ *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India*, (2017) 10 SCC 1.

¹³⁵⁵ Madhavi Divan, *Facets of Media Law* (New Delhi: Eastern Book Company, 2010), 245–248.

¹³⁵⁶ Ranjana Kumari, "Role of Media and Education in Combating Violence Against Women," *Social Action* 60, no. 1 (2010): 46–52.

¹³⁵⁷ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3–7.

¹³⁵⁸ Rekha Pande, *Women in the Sacred and the Profane: The Status and Position of Women in India* (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2006), 98–103.

¹³⁵⁹ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 45–48.

system, which, although patriarchal in its own right, also provided chances for socio-legal reform. Social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotirao Phule spearheaded campaigns against sati, child marriage, and in favor of widow remarriage and women's education. These reform movements, often supported by colonial laws, led to landmark legislations such as the Bengal Sati Regulation (1829), the Widow Remarriage Act (1856), and the Age of Consent Act (1891). But it must be noted that these reforms were frequently resisted by conservative Indian society, and the colonial state occasionally used these problems to legitimize its 'civilizing mission,' thereby making the narrative more complex. Yet, this period set the stage for the contemporary feminist movement and the call for equal legal rights for women in the new nationalist discourse.¹³⁶⁰

With the rise of the Indian independence movement in the early 20th century, women's participation in political and social spheres significantly increased.¹³⁶¹ Leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, and Aruna Asaf Ali not only played crucial roles in the freedom struggle but also brought women's issues to the national forefront. The demand for gender equality became intertwined with the broader struggle for national liberation. The Indian National Congress, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, started persuading women to step out of their homes and participate in the non-violent civil disobedience movement. The time witnessed a growing recognition of women's rights as a political demand, leading to the provision of gender equality in the Indian Constitution's structure.¹³⁶² The Constitution of India adopted in 1950 heralded a new era in legal protection of women.¹³⁶³ The Constituent

Fathers, with a vision of social justice and equality, incorporated a number of provisions explicitly designed to empower women. Articles 14 and 15 guaranteed equality before the law and barred discrimination on the basis of sex. Article 16 ensured equal opportunity in public employment, whereas Article 39 of the Directive Principles of State Policy stated that men and women must have equal rights to adequate means of livelihood and equal remuneration for work done. These provisions in the constitution provided the basis for subsequent legislation and judicial activism in women's rights. Yet, the realization of these ideals needed persistent legislative action and social change.¹³⁶⁴

In the post-independence decades, the Indian state legislated a succession of laws designed to secure women's rights and stem gender-based violence and discrimination. The Hindu Code Bills of the 1950s were intended to modernize personal laws governing marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption.¹³⁶⁵ While initially received with hostility, the eventual enactment of legislation like the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), the Hindu Succession Act (1956), and the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961) were landmark steps in the legal empowerment of women. These pieces of legislation sought to modernize patriarchal conventions and grant women more agency in the family system. Yet, other religious personal laws, particularly Muslim personal law, continued to remain unaffected by political and religious considerations and hence an inconsistent legal regime prevailed for women based on religious identity.¹³⁶⁶

3. RECENT LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS AND JUDICIAL TRENDS

Over the last few years, the terrain of women's legal protection in India has undergone

¹³⁶⁰ Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998), Introduction.

¹³⁶¹ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 93–98.

¹³⁶² Indira Jaising, *Men and Women in the Constitution of India* (New Delhi: Lawyers Collective, 2004), 21–25.

¹³⁶³ Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50–54.

¹³⁶⁴ Flavia Agnes, *Law and Gender Inequality: The Politics of Women's Rights in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 73–78.

¹³⁶⁵ Archana Parashar, *Women and Family Law Reform in India: Uniform Civil Code and Gender Equality* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992), 48–52.

¹³⁶⁶ Sylvia Vatak, "Personal Law and Cultural Rights: Gender and Religion in India," in *Gender and Politics in India*, ed. Nivedita Menon (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 226–230.

significant change, a change that came in the shape of a new series of legislation, judicial opinions, and altering jurisprudence that aim towards greater gender justice.¹³⁶⁷ These movements have been catalyzed, on the one hand, by growing public scrutiny and feminist politics and, on the other hand, by advances in new dimensions of gender-violence, the most prominent example being in cyberspace. The judicial system, slow to innovate historically, has recently started being more forceful in addressing the dynamic issues facing women in the public and private spheres. Both the legislative and judiciary branches of government have grown increasingly attuned to the ways things are with women, admitting to the rooted-in-structure injustices to be addressed in more inclusive, human-rights-respectful means of law creation and interpretation.¹³⁶⁸

One of the outstanding legal developments in recent history has been amendments to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, which culminated in the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021.¹³⁶⁹ This act represented a progressive trend by raising the higher gestational limit for abortion to 24 weeks for specific categories of women, such as victims of rape and incest, as well as minors.¹³⁷⁰ The Amendment also introduced the idea of 'unmarried women' becoming entitled to termination of pregnancy due to failure of contraception, thereby granting the reproductive freedom of women outside marriage.¹³⁷¹ The Supreme Court, in a pathbreaking judgment in *X v. Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department, Government of NCT of Delhi* (2022), upheld this progressive reading, holding that the advantages of the amended law cannot be withheld based on marital status,

and emphasizing that reproductive rights are an integral component of a woman's right to dignity and privacy under Article 21.¹³⁷²

In the area of workplace dignity and safety, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, continues to be a bedrock law. Recent judicial comments, however, have stressed the importance of its more stringent enforcement and institutional responsibility. In *V. Ramasubramanian v. Union of India*, the courts reaffirmed that internal complaints committees (ICCs) have to be adequately constituted and trained, and that procedural failures may lead to miscarriage of justice.¹³⁷³ In addition, courts have also started to embrace the psychological and emotional aspects of workplace harassment, broadening the definition of what constitutes a hostile work environment.¹³⁷⁴ This increasing judicial leaning has assisted in strengthening the notion of harassment being not only about physical action, but verbal, virtual, and psychological abuse equally causing harm.¹³⁷⁵

The legal attitude towards gender justice has also undergone substantial changes with the embrace of wider gender identities and a destruction of conventional patriarchal paradigms. In the 2018 *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* judgment, which was mainly concerned with LGBTQ+ rights, the Supreme Court established principles of dignity, autonomy, and bodily integrity profoundly applicable to women's rights jurisprudence.¹³⁷⁶ This ruling, together with Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017), which held privacy to be a fundamental right, has opened the door for the enforcement of women's rights in issues of surveillance, consent, and sexual autonomy.¹³⁷⁷ The convergence of these rulings is slowly constructing a jurisprudential

¹³⁶⁷ Ratna Kapur, *Gender and Human Rights in India: Law, Discourse and Practice*, ed. Patricia Uberoi (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2000), 115–118.

¹³⁶⁸ Kalpana Kannabiran, *Tools of Justice: Non-Discrimination and the Indian Constitution* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2012), 133–137.

¹³⁶⁹ Government of India, *The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021*, No. 8 of 2021, Ministry of Law and Justice, <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2021-8.pdf>.

¹³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, sec. 3B.

¹³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Explanation 1 to sec. 3(2)(b).

¹³⁷² *X v. Principal Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department, Government of NCT of Delhi*, (2022) SCC OnLine SC 1321.

¹³⁷³ *V. Ramasubramanian v. Union of India*, (2020) SCC OnLine SC 846.

¹³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷⁶ *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, (2018) 10 SCC 1.

¹³⁷⁷ *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India*, (2017) 10 SCC 1.

framework in which a woman's autonomy over her body, decisions, and information is being acknowledged as at the heart of constitutional morality.¹³⁷⁸

The source of legal and judicial focus over the past decade has been the issue of marital rape. Even as Indian law still excludes non-consensual sexual intercourse within marriage from the scope of rape under Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code,¹³⁷⁹ this exclusion has increasingly faced legal and social scrutiny. A number of petitions have been filed before the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court, challenging the constitutional validity of the exception. A split verdict in the Delhi High Court in *RIT Foundation v. Union of India* (2022) left the issue in the hands of the Supreme Court,¹³⁸⁰ but the judicial debate around marital rape has received unprecedented visibility. The cases now revolve around the concepts of consent, bodily autonomy, and equality before the law, suggesting a shift in the judicial understanding of marriage and sexual rights within it. The final verdict in this case could be revolutionary for gender justice and legal comprehension of sexual violence.¹³⁸¹

Along with these wider legal trends, the Indian judiciary has also been more proactive in safeguarding women's rights in particular socio-legal situations. For example, in honor killings, forced sterilizations, witch-hunting, and custodial rape cases, courts have been victim-oriented and have issued directions for state responsibility and systemic changes. In *Lata Singh v. State of UP*, the Supreme Court disapproved of honor killings and reiterated the right of women of full age to marry anyone they wished.¹³⁸² In *State of Orissa v. Ganesh Chandra Jew*, the courts reiterated the seriousness of custodial rape and the necessity of enhanced punishment.¹³⁸³ These decisions indicate an increasing jurisprudence that understands the

intersectional character of violence against women and the need to hold both institutions and individuals accountable.¹³⁸⁴

4. INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE AND INDIA'S OBLIGATIONS

The global vision of women's rights and gender equity has been instrumental in the formulation of India's legal and policy landscape regarding women's protection. Being a signatory to several international conventions and treaties, India is morally and legally bound to harmonize its domestic legislations with international norms for the promotion of the dignity, security, and equality of women. International human rights documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) have all contributed to the gender justice discourse in India. These instruments emphasize not just formal equality but also substantive equality, calling on signatory states to overcome structural obstacles and deeply ingrained patriarchal assumptions that reinforce discrimination against women.¹³⁸⁵

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), commonly known as the international bill of rights for women, has been especially effective in this context. India ratified CEDAW in 1993, subject to some reservations, particularly with regard to religion-based personal laws. However, the ratification was accompanied by an international responsibility to adopt the necessary legislative and policy steps towards eliminating discrimination against women in both public and private spheres of life. CEDAW places great emphasis on the role of the state not merely to prevent direct discrimination but also to address indirect and systemic

¹³⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁷⁹ Indian Penal Code, 1860, § 375 Exception 2

¹³⁸⁰ *RIT Foundation v. Union of India*, 2022 SCC OnLine Del 1726.

¹³⁸¹ Ibid.

¹³⁸² *Lata Singh v. State of UP*, (2006) 5 SCC 475.

¹³⁸³ *State of Orissa v. Ganesh Chandra Jew*, (2004) 8 SCC 40.

¹³⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁸⁵ CEDAW, art. 1–5; ICCPR, art. 3; ICESCR, art. 3.

discrimination.¹³⁸⁶ It calls for affirmative action, gender-sensitive legislation, and robust redressal mechanisms. The impact of CEDAW can be found in several legal reforms in India, including the Domestic Violence Act of 2005, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act of 2013, and the amendments to rape laws in the wake of the Nirbhaya case. Indian courts have also invoked CEDAW while interpreting statutory law and constitutional provisions, thus introducing international norms into domestic jurisprudence.¹³⁸⁷

Apart from CEDAW, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 5, which seeks to attain gender equality and empower all women and girls, have also offered a widely accepted framework for countries to measure and improve their commitment to women's rights.¹³⁸⁸ India's compliance with the SDGs has also seen several legislative and policy interventions towards closing gender gaps in education, employment, health, and political participation. The National Policy for Women 2016, for example, resonates with some of the SDGs' goals in its quest to develop a more enabling environment for women through legal and institutional support. International monitoring mechanisms also review India's performance in meeting these objectives from time to time, putting pressure on national governments to stay accountable to international standards of gender justice.¹³⁸⁹

India's commitments under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, endorsed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, have also helped shape legal protections for women.¹³⁹⁰ The declaration called for governments to move boldly to put an end to violence against women, promote equal

access to education and work, and erase legislative obstacles to the public presence of women.¹³⁹¹ In accordance with such commitments, the Indian government has launched numerous schemes and legal initiatives towards empowering women, including Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana. While these are policy measures and not direct legal ones, they function in tandem with the legal framework to meet India's international obligations to gender equality.¹³⁹²

5. ROLE OF NGOS, MEDIA, AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The role of NGOs, media, and civil society has been indispensable in the advancement of legal protections for women in India, particularly in the context of recent developments.¹³⁹³ These entities have acted not only as facilitators of change but also as watchdogs, advocates, and enablers of rights-based discourse, ensuring that the legal framework for women is not merely theoretical but practically implementable and responsive to societal needs. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have acted as a link between society and the state, filling the implementation, monitoring, and access to justice gaps. They have been involved in massive legal literacy activities, advocacy, shelter services, and legal assistance to women, particularly in rural and disadvantaged communities. NGOs like the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), Breakthrough, Jagori, and the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) have taken a proactive approach in influencing gender-sensitive policies and lobbied for legal amendments on issues relating to domestic

¹³⁸⁶ CEDAW, arts. 2, 4, and 5.

¹³⁸⁷ See *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*, AIR 1997 SC 3011; *Apparel Export Promotion Council v. A.K. Chopra*, AIR 1999 SC 625.

¹³⁸⁸ United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations, 2015), Goal 5.

¹³⁸⁹ United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Voluntary National Review Reports Submitted by India*, various years.

¹³⁹⁰ United Nations, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995 (New York: United Nations, 1995).

¹³⁹¹ Ibid.

¹³⁹² United Nations Women, *The Beijing Platform for Action Turns 25* (New York: UN Women, 2020).

¹³⁹³ Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah, *The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1992).

violence, sexual harassment, trafficking, and reproductive health.¹³⁹⁴

One of the most impactful contributions of the NGOs has been through litigation and public interest action.¹³⁹⁵ Pioneering cases that have redefined the legal environment for women in India have most commonly stemmed from petitions or interventions made by NGOs. For example, the Vishaka Guidelines on sexual harassment at work, which eventually led to the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, were a direct consequence of PIL filed by women's rights groups. Similarly, in issues related to acid attacks, dowry deaths, and custodial violence, NGOs have consistently supported survivors and demanded stricter legal provisions and efficient law enforcement. They have also played a crucial role in ensuring that new laws are not only passed but are made accessible through awareness campaigns, training programs for law enforcement agencies, and community outreach.¹³⁹⁶

Media, being the fourth pillar of democracy, has a dual role – in influencing public opinion and acting as a pressure group on the state machinery.¹³⁹⁷ The media's role in spurring legal reforms took an unprecedented stage following the 2012 Nirbhaya gang rape, with incessant media coverage mobilizing the country and prompting the establishment of the Justice Verma Committee and then the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013. Media outlets have brought to the forefront issues previously tabooed or muted, including marital rape, work-place harassment, female foeticide, and rape based on caste. Investigative reporting and long-form journalism have also revealed

institutional failure, police indifference, and abuse of law, leading to judicial and legislative intervention. Traditional media and social media have also become arenas for feminist stories and public debate about women's rights, which are usually able to give voice and traction to marginalized voices.¹³⁹⁸

In the age of the internet, social media have revolutionized how gender-based legal concerns are talked about and resolved.¹³⁹⁹ Hashtag campaigns like #MeTooIndia not only generated massive public attention for sexual harassment and abuse but have also forced institutions to review their internal grievance redressal mechanisms and policies. The virality of such campaigns has instituted a new model of public accountability, where institutions and individuals are held accountable beyond formal legal channels. Social media has also enabled survivors to circumvent conventional hierarchies and gatekeepers, addressing their messages directly to large publics, which can be empowering and affirming. On the other hand, the role of the media has been faulted for sensationalism, victim-blaming accounts, and invasion of privacy in some instances. Nevertheless, its potential as a vehicle for legal transformation continues to be great if channeled responsibly and ethically.¹⁴⁰⁰

Civil society as a whole, including community associations, academic communities, student associations, legal aid cells, and grassroots groups, has also played a key role in campaigning for and safeguarding women's rights.¹⁴⁰¹ They help foster a culture of responsibility and sensitivity, countering patriarchal values and advocating for progressive legal systems. They carry out research, documentation, and dissemination of knowledge, frequently shedding light on

¹³⁹⁴ AIDWA, *Annual Report 2020–2021* (New Delhi: AIDWA, 2021); Breakthrough India, *Impact Report* (New Delhi: Breakthrough, 2022); SEWA, *Annual Report 2021–22* (Ahmedabad: Self Employed Women's Association, 2022).

¹³⁹⁵ Indira Jaising, "Bringing Rights Home: Review of the Campaign for a Law on Domestic Violence," *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 44 (2008): 10–12.

¹³⁹⁶ Jagori, *Training Manual on Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013* (New Delhi: Jagori, 2016); Breakthrough India, *Outreach and Impact Report* (New Delhi: Breakthrough, 2021).

¹³⁹⁷ Robin Jeffrey, *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-Language Press* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹³⁹⁸ Maitrayee Chaudhuri, "Feminism and the Changing Nature of the Public Sphere in India," *Social Scientist* 38, no. 9/12 (2010): 28–48.

¹³⁹⁹ Sanjay Srivastava, "Digital Publics and the Politics of Gender Justice," *Seminar* 715 (2019), https://www.india-seminar.com/2019/715/715_sanjay_srivastava.htm.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Usha Raman, "Social Media and Legal Reform: Feminist Possibilities in the Digital Age," *Feminist Media Studies* 20, no. 6 (2020): 820–828.

¹⁴⁰¹ Nivedita Menon, *Seeing Like a Feminist* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2012), 127–129.

women's lived experiences that are rendered invisible in legal documents and official statistics. Civil society groups have led the campaign against child marriage, honor killings, female genital mutilation, and online abuse. They are also important interlocutors between the state and citizens, frequently bringing to the attention of the authorities legal abuses, procedural faults, and institutional injustices.¹⁴⁰²

6. ROLE OF JUDICIARY IN ADVANCING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The Indian judiciary has contributed significantly towards the development and empowerment of women's rights, particularly in terms of constitutional assurances and legal reform.¹⁴⁰³ As the protector of the Constitution, the judiciary has sometimes ventured beyond the literal application of law to interpret legislation in a manner that is consistent with the changing demands of justice and social equality. In women's rights, this has manifested in an active and sometimes activist approach where the courts have intervened to close legislative gaps, broaden the applicability of existing safeguards, and introduce gender-aware interpretations of legislation. The Indian judiciary has served as a beacon of hope for millions of women who have suffered systemic discrimination, violence, and injustice, and it has, through its expansive interpretations of basic rights, established the basis for a strong and progressive jurisprudence on gender justice.¹⁴⁰⁴

Through the years, the Supreme Court and other High Courts have developed a rich body of case law dealing with both traditional and new dimensions of gender-based injustices.¹⁴⁰⁵ The right to equality under Article 14 and the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21

have been interpreted widely to encompass the right to live with dignity, bodily integrity, reproductive rights, and freedom from gender-based violence. In *Vishaka v State of Rajasthan* (1997), the Supreme Court established guidelines of landmark proportions to counter sexual harassment in the workplace in the absence of legislation. Not only was this decision pathbreaking by content, but it was also by reference to international documents like CEDAW, which were resorted to in order to interpret the constitutional promise of gender equality. The *Vishaka* Guidelines opened the door to the passage of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, showing how judicial activism can result in important legislative advancement.¹⁴⁰⁶

The contribution of the judiciary to women's legal protection has been its changing approach to personal laws.¹⁴⁰⁷ Traditionally, personal laws—especially those relating to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and maintenance—have been patriarchal and discriminatory against women. Yet, judicial judgments have increasingly nibbled away at these disparities. In the case of *Shah Bano* (1985), the Supreme Court favored a Muslim woman's right to maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC, reaffirming that personal laws cannot remain exempt from the all-pervasive constitutional obligation of equality and justice. While the political reaction resulted in the enactment of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, the case is still a watershed moment in the judiciary's involvement with personal law reform. Recently, in the *Shayara Bano v. Union of India* (2017) case, the Supreme Court held the practice of instant triple talaq (*talaq-e-biddat*) unconstitutional, a decision that underscored the court's role in upholding Muslim women's

¹⁴⁰² Indira Jaising, "Civil Society and the Legal System: Bridging the Gap," *India International Centre Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2007): 51–58.

¹⁴⁰³ Indira Jaising, "Judicial Leadership in Gender Justice," *Seminar*, no. 642 (2013): 18–22.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Nandita Haksar, "Human Rights, Law and the Indian Judiciary," *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 44 (2001): 4161–4165.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Nandita Haksar, "Human Rights, Law and the Indian Judiciary," *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 44 (2001): 4161–4165.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Naina Kapur, "India's Law on Sexual Harassment at Work: From *Shah Bano* to *Vishaka*," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 26 (2013): 150–165.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Archana Parashar, *Women and Family Law Reform in India: Uniform Civil Code and Gender Equality* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992), 88–92.

rights against arbitrary and unilateral practices of divorce.¹⁴⁰⁸

Apart from fighting discriminatory practices, the judiciary has also played the key role of interpreting laws to encompass a wider vision of gender justice.¹⁴⁰⁹ In *Laxmi v. Union of India* (2014), the Supreme Court issued various directions to contain acid attacks and rehabilitate victims. The court instructed the central and state governments to regulate acid sales, provide free medical care, and compensate and rehabilitate survivors. This ruling was instrumental in making a ghastly crime that had previously been under-emphasized visible, thus having an impact on the creation of tougher legislation and the addition of certain provisions for acid attacks in the Indian Penal Code.¹⁴¹⁰

The Indian courts have also been remarkably visionary in dealing with issues of the times like reproductive rights, marital rape, and discrimination in the workplace. In *Suchita Srivastava v. Chandigarh Administration* (2009), the Supreme Court asserted the reproductive right of a mentally disabled woman and recognized her choice to decide regarding her own body.¹⁴¹¹ The court's judgment also highlighted the more general principle that women's agency and consent are to be preserved in every case concerning their body and health. In recent years, the courts have also displayed readiness to reverse the medieval comprehension of marital rape. Although the legislative system continues to fail to acknowledge marital rape as an offense, courts have started to disapprove of this gap and have been willing to consider the constitutionality of the marital rape exception under Section 375 of the IPC. The Delhi High Court's divided verdict on the matter in 2022 has rekindled national discussion and demonstrates the judiciary's increasing

engagement with women's sexual autonomy in marriage.¹⁴¹²

The judiciary has played a similar role in the arena of workplace rights and equal opportunity.¹⁴¹³ Courts have decided cases regarding maternity benefits, discrimination in hiring practices, and sexual harassment with a sensitivity attesting to a developing grasp of gendered realities. In *Air India v. Nargesh Meerza* (1981), the Supreme Court invalidated service conditions mandating retirement of air hostesses on marriage or childbirth, holding them as discriminatory and unconstitutional. Likewise, in recent times, the courts have upheld the rights of women officers in the Indian Armed Forces to be provided permanent commission and command assignments, as in the case of *Ministry of Defence v. Babita Puniya* (2020). The ruling not only spoke to gender discrimination in a historically male-identified institution but also highlighted the constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination.¹⁴¹⁴

7. DOWRY PROHIBITION ACT, 1961

The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, is one of the first and most important legislation bills passed in India with the sole purpose of restricting the deeply rooted social evil of dowry, which has traditionally brought untold physical, emotional, and financial misery to women. Based on patriarchal traditions that underrate women and view them as economic burdens, the practice of dowry has developed from a traditional institution to a common instrument of exploitation and abuse. The Act came into being as a legislative measure against increasing demands for alleviating dowry harassment, violence, and even murder. Although enacted, the continuing existence of the dowry system in rural as well as urban India

¹⁴⁰⁸ *Shayara Bano v. Union of India*, (2017) 9 SCC 1.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Namita Bhandare, "Judicial Activism and Gender Justice in India," *IndiaSpend*, February 11, 2021, <https://www.indiaspend.com>.

¹⁴¹⁰ Indian Penal Code, Section 326A and 326B, inserted by Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013.

¹⁴¹¹ *Suchita Srivastava v. Chandigarh Administration*, (2009) 9 SCC 1

¹⁴¹² *RIT Foundation & Ors. v. Union of India*, Delhi High Court, 2022; see also Krishnadas Rajagopal, "Split Verdict in Marital Rape Case," *The Hindu*, May 12, 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com>.

¹⁴¹³ Archana Parashar, "Gender Equality and the Law: Contemporary Legal Issues in India," *Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2015): 496–511.

¹⁴¹⁴ Anjali Gopalan, "Judiciary's Expanding Role in Ensuring Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces," *Economic and Political Weekly* 55, no. 9 (2020): 12–14.

indicates the inadequacies of legal controls when not augmented by systemic societal change and enforcement.¹⁴¹⁵

The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, is also very liberal in its definition of dowry. It states that dowry is any property or valuable security received or agreed to be received either directly or indirectly by one party to a marriage or by the parents of either party at, before, or any time after the marriage from or on behalf of the other party.¹⁴¹⁶ The act criminalizes the giving, acceptance, or demand of dowry with imprisonment and fines. The act of accepting and offering dowry is criminalized by the law, along with any contract or demand for the same, irrespective of whether the marriage has been actually solemnized or not. But one major challenge comes in the form of social normalization of lavish gifts and the problem of differentiating dowry from voluntary transactions during marriage ceremonies, which tends to enable the offenders to go scot-free under the cover of tradition and customs.¹⁴¹⁷

One of the main concerns about the Dowry Prohibition Act is its weak enforcement and systemic under-reporting of dowry-related offenses.¹⁴¹⁸ Social stigmatization, fear of retribution, and absence of support systems discourage women and their kin from reporting such acts. Even when cases are reported, police inquiries are often tainted with apathy, corruption, and insensitivity on the part of the police and other authorities. The onus of proof is frequently placed disproportionately on the family of the woman or the woman herself, and procedural barriers may delay legal action for years, dissuading victims from pursuing justice further. Additionally, there exists a disconcerting trend of abuse of the law, even though it occurs in a limited number of instances, which has caused discussions

regarding the requirement of reforming the Act in order to provide a better balanced strategy that serves to safeguard actual victims while keeping unnecessary grievances at bay.¹⁴¹⁹

The legal framework relating to dowry has been fortified via provisions in the Indian Penal Code, particularly Sections 498A and 304B.¹⁴²⁰ Section 498A makes cruelty by a husband or his family members, especially when the cruelty is in relation to dowry demands, criminal. Section 304B deals specifically with dowry deaths, requiring that if a woman dies under suspicious circumstances within seven years of marriage and there is proof of harassment for dowry, the husband and his family members are presumed guilty. Such provisions have been instrumental in bringing about accountability and led to numerous landmark convictions. However, the evidentiary requirements and delays in judicial proceedings continue to impede efficient justice delivery. Moreover, the difficulty of establishing a direct correlation between harassment and death continues to be a formidable legal challenge in dowry death cases.¹⁴²¹

Over the past few years, legal reforms and judicial pronouncements have again focused on dowry violence and the systemic failure in the protection of women.¹⁴²² The Supreme Court and the High Courts have laid stress on sensitivity while dealing with dowry cases, particularly with the growing number of incidents of domestic violence and bride burning. In *Rajesh Sharma v. State of U.P.* (2017), the Supreme Court laid down guidelines to prevent the misuse of Section 498A, including the setting up of Family Welfare Committees to scrutinize complaints before arrests were made. Even while the aim was to balance the matter, women's rights activists feared that such steps would weaken the deterrent value

¹⁴¹⁵ Sudhir Kakar, "Dowry: The Eternal Evil," *India Today*, April 12, 2004.

¹⁴¹⁶ *The Dowry Prohibition Act*, 1961, Act No. 28 of 1961, §2.

¹⁴¹⁷ Shoma Chatterji, *Family in Transition: Power and Conflict in Indian Families* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1995), 142.

¹⁴¹⁸ Law Commission of India, *Report No. 243: Section 498A IPC – Usage and Misuse* (New Delhi: Government of India, 2012), 4.

¹⁴¹⁹ Rajesh Kumar and S. George, "Misuse of Dowry Laws in India: A Socio-Legal Study," *Indian Journal of Criminology* 40, no. 2 (2012): 1–12.

¹⁴²⁰ Indian Penal Code, 1860, Sections 498A and 304B.

¹⁴²¹ Shoma Chatterji, *Subjected to Violence: The Human Rights of Women in India* (Kolkata: Stree, 2005), 94–96.

¹⁴²² Flavia Agnes, *Law and Gender Inequality: The Politics of Women's Rights in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 123–125.

of the law and discourage perpetrators. The Court subsequently made it clear that these guidelines were non-binding and acknowledged the necessity of victim-oriented strategies in such delicate cases.¹⁴²³

The continued prevalence of dowry in contemporary India, in spite of legal prohibitions, underscores the necessity of interpreting the Dowry Prohibition Act not as a standalone statute but as part of an overarching framework of gender justice. Dowry is not simply an economic exchange; it becomes a point where a cycle of abuse, oppression, and control is initiated. In most situations, dowry harassment spirals into domestic violence, marital rape, or homicide, thus representing a serious human rights issue. Legal processes then need to improve in order to address the continuity of violence towards women within the household of their husbands, presented in most situations as being dowry-related demands.¹⁴²⁴

The overlap of dowry legislation with other protective laws such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, demonstrates a more comprehensive strategy that appreciates the multi-faceted nature of abuse perpetrated against women. The DV Act, for example, enables women to file protection orders, residence rights, and maintenance, tackling physical and economic abuse resulting from dowry pressures. However, the efficacy of such legislation is still subject to judicial speed, consciousness among women, and the responsiveness of law enforcement organs. Police and judiciary's gender insensitization, along with existing patriarchal attitudes, tend to stop the way to justice for a large number of women, keeping them exposed and silenced.¹⁴²⁵

8. DEVELOPMENTS IN DIGITAL SAFETY AND CYBER CRIME LAWS

With the fast-changing digital world of India, the intersection of technology and gender has created new forms of vulnerability and violence and necessitated the creation of digital safety frameworks and cybercrime legislation as absolutely necessary for legal protection of women.¹⁴²⁶ With the explosive growth in smartphone penetration, social media usage, online transactions, and digital communication, women have become more and more targets of cyberstalking, online harassment, cyberbullying, revenge pornography, deepfakes, and identity theft. The anonymity provided by the internet, along with the low level of awareness and legal literacy among most users, has made the threat to women's safety in the digital environment more acute. These types of cyber violence usually lead to psychological trauma, social stigmatization, and reputational damage, and therefore, it is important that legal protections catch up with these new dangers. The Information Technology Act, 2000, is the foundation of India's legal landscape for cybercrime. There have been numerous amendments and judicial pronouncements over the years trying to deal with crimes that disproportionately impact women in cyber spaces. For example, Section 66E of the IT Act makes the breach of privacy through recording, publication, or sharing images of private parts of individuals without their permission an offense.¹⁴²⁷ Sections 67 and 67A address the publication or sharing of obscene and sexually explicit material, which are being invoked more and more in instances of revenge porn and sharing of morphed images.¹⁴²⁸ These provisions of law have gained significant importance in the era of social media networks where private material can be

¹⁴²³ *Social Action Forum for Manav Adhikar v. Union of India*, (2018) 10 SCC 443.

¹⁴²⁴ Jhuma Sen, "Dowry Violence in India: Reflections on Legal Reform," *Indian Law Review* 5, no. 1 (2021): 56–58.

¹⁴²⁵ Flavia Agnes, "My Story, Our Story: Building Broken Lives," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 17 (2007): 1626–1629.

¹⁴²⁶ Internet Democracy Project, *Online Gender-Based Violence in India: Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women and Non-Binary People* (New Delhi: IDP, 2019), 6–9.

¹⁴²⁷ The Information Technology Act, 2000, Section 66E.

¹⁴²⁸ The Information Technology Act, 2000, Sections 67 and 67A.

spread at lightning speed, frequently for blackmailing, humiliation, or coercion.¹⁴²⁹

In spite of their existence, the enforcement of laws dealing with cybercrime in India has been marred by a number of problems. One of the greatest problems is the paucity of law enforcement agencies' capability to deal with complicated types of online crime, particularly the kind directed against women. Police officers are usually not properly trained in cyber forensics, and investigations into such offenses can be hampered by a lack of digital infrastructure or cooperation with technology firms and internet service providers.¹⁴³⁰ Additionally, most women do not report online abuse for fear of social reprisal, victimization, and lack of proper support mechanisms. In most cases, trivialization of online abuse by authorities is a manifestation of a general societal failure to acknowledge the real-world impacts of cyber violence on women's mental well-being and social security. The past few years have seen growing acknowledgment of the imperative to protect women in the digital environment, both through legislative actions and policy interventions. The Indian Government has introduced a number of initiatives to promote digital safety, including the Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) Scheme, which is designed to improve law enforcement and set up special cybercrime units. The National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal offers an opportunity for victims, especially women and children, to report abuse online anonymously and securely. These measures demonstrate an increasing recognition of the reality that digital safety is at the heart of women's empowerment in the information age, and that any protection gap can reinforce gendered inequalities in online engagement. Another key development is the expanding judicial recognition of online abuse

as a type of gender-based violence. Courts have slowly come to realize the gravity of offenses like online stalking, doxing, and sharing intimate content without permission. The Supreme Court of India, in the seminal judgment of *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India* (2015), declared Section 66A of the IT Act unconstitutional on the basis that it was ambiguous and infringed on the right to free speech. Nevertheless, the ruling also underscored the fine line that must be maintained between safeguarding freedom of expression and ensuring that online spaces are not utilized as weapons for harassment or oppression, especially of women. This has remained a legal and ethical challenge, particularly in an environment where online abuse is increasingly becoming widespread.¹⁴³¹

Along with legislative actions, civil society initiatives have proliferated, especially from women's rights groups, to raise awareness about online safety and offer legal aid to the victims of cybercrime.¹⁴³² "Safe surfing" campaigns, digital literacy efforts, and responsible social media use have become the key to empowering women to learn how to defend themselves online. In addition, public-private partnerships with tech platforms such as Google, Facebook, and Instagram have resulted in adding features such as blocking, reporting of content, and digital well-being tools meant to lower the risk of exploitation in cyber spaces. These tech platforms have also started community guidelines and machine learning-based moderation technologies to curtail the circulation of explicit material as well as hate speech directed at women.¹⁴³³

CONCLUSION

The legal protection of women in India has also seen a tremendous change, influenced by changing societal needs, judicial activism,

¹⁴²⁹ Debarati Halder and K. Jaishankar, *Cyber Crimes Against Women in India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2016), 95–98.

¹⁴³⁰ Vrinda Bhandari and Renuka Sane, "An Analysis of the Legal Framework Governing Online Harassment in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 53, no. 9 (2018): 45–52.

¹⁴³¹ Bhandari and Sane, "Legal Framework Governing Online Harassment in India," 50.

¹⁴³² Internet Democracy Project, *Online Gender-Based Violence in India: Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women and Non-Binary People* (New Delhi: IDP, 2019), 16.

¹⁴³³ Google Safety Center, "How Google Fights Abuse," Google, accessed March 2025, <https://safety.google>.

international commitments, and new challenges of the digital age. Although the Indian legal system has established a strong framework through constitutional provisions, statutory laws, judicial judgments, and policy initiatives, the enforcement and implementation of these protections remain serious challenges. The recent trends—like widened interpretations of basic rights, consolidation of cyber laws, progressive verdicts, and greater role of NGOs, media, and civil society—reflect a combined move towards gender sensitivity and justice. Legal safeguards are not enough; what is also needed is a cultural change that tackles ingrained patriarchy, educates and empowers women, and provides effective institutional support. While India strides towards inclusivity and equity, it cannot lower its guard, but must be agile and resolute in seeing to it that its legal system is not just a piece of paper, but a great instrument of meaningful change in the lives of women of all walks of life.

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