



CPLR Webinar Series on Asian Perspectives on Human Rights (II)

Sexual Harassment Against Women in Asia: A Dialogue on Gender Based Violence in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan

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Women in South Asia have long been suppressed due to severe gender-based discrimination rooted in the region's culture and religious norms. The 2012 Delhi gang rape and murder case, together with the 2017 MeToo movement ignited the fourth wave of feminism which aims to condemn the egregious sexual harassment, mistreatment and violence against women. Over the years women in South Asia have been waging movements to push their government to recognize global women's human rights at a local level. These call into question to what extent has south Asia women's status been improved after the social movements. It is also important to explore effective ways to narrow the gender inequality gap.

To discuss these issues, on 02 December 2021, the Public Law and Human Rights Forum (CPLR) of the School of Law of City University of Hong Kong (CityU) hosted its second webinar as part of the series on Asian perspective on Human Right to discuss gender-based violence in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Further to address how the culture and bureaucracy in South Asia hinders women from realizing their civil and political rights as provided under international human rights.

The webinar was moderated by **Dr. Fozia LONE**, Associate Professor and Associate Director of the CPLR at the CityU School of Law. She started the conference by introducing the panelists which included: **Dr. Saira Rahman Khan**, Prof. of Law at BRAC University, in socio legal studies, a member of the Supreme Court Bar Association; **Ms. Vrinda Grover**, an experienced lawyer and researcher in prominent human right, founder member of Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN (WGHR); **Dr. Syed Wasif Azim**, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the department of Political Science, University of Innsbruck.



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Dr. Fozia LONE added that the purposes of today's event was not only to critically analyses the SGBV against women but also to provide a platform to discuss this serious issue and to stand in solidarity with the survivors as well as those academics and organizations working towards advocacy of women rights protection despite the great personal risks. She thanked all panelists and participants for joining the conference.

Dr. Saira Rahman Khan focused on the situation in Bangladesh. Individuals in sexual violence crisis are seldom be able to access justice. Due to the culture of honor, most victims will keep the incident to themselves as sexual activity outside of marriage was seen as dishonor and it is legal for men to kill their wives or married daughters that shamed the family. Therefore, it is very difficult for victims to get financial and mental support to bring a lawsuit against the perpetrator.

On the other hand, technology nowadays allows perpetrators to harass and monitor individuals online. Law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh, however, lack the awareness to hold cyber stalking offenders accountable as there is no physical confront towards the victim. She highlighted the importance to have adequate statutory authority concerning internet crime. It is also indicated that a majority of victim don't know what are the remedies available to them. The international human rights act application is largely confined to academic discussion in Bangladesh.

Ms. Vrinda Grover discussed how India state agency has dealt with the large amount of sexual violence cases in the country. The state responded by adding death penalty to rape cases. However, feminist scholars and activists oppose to this reform as in most cases the death sentence are being commuted. This will also increase the chance of victims being murdered. She reckoned that the reform is only an excuse for the state to claim that they have already response to the demand. Although the victim's rights are listed in statue, the government are not investing resources in enforcing the protection guaranteed. For instance, the policies to provide shelters, one stop crisis centers, and counselling service to sexual violence victims, are poorly executed.

She emphasized that the country's prejudice against women and the dominant ideology of patriarchy is the main obstacle to attain gender equality. Punitive action alone will not improve the difficult situation women are in. Most Indians are not treating women with respect that they think women's body integrity can be trespassed without any consequences. Only the most severe harm would be sufficed for the judiciary in



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India to hold the perpetrator liable. She concluded her speech by stating that in modern world women in South Asia should no longer be succumbed to gender inequalities.

Dr. Syed Wasif Azim discussed gender-based violence in Pakistan. He highlighted that only victims suffered from serious injuries seek justice from legal system. Most victims are reluctant to disclose the details of the incident to police and in court. They tend to seek help from activist and feminist organizations. Speaking of international human rights implication, most of them remain unavailable to women in Pakistan. For example, women are excluded from political aspect, seldom do women have the opportunity to be elected. He indicated that women living in the margin struggles to meet their physiological needs, not to mention pursuing other human rights regarding choice and freedom.

On behalf of the CPLR, **Dr. Fozia LONE** thanked all panelists and participants for contributing to the webinar.



First row from left: Dr Fozia LONE; Dr. Saira Rahman Khan

Second row from left: Ms. Vrinda Grover; Dr. Syed Wasif Azim