

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Prof. M. Neeraja¹

¹Department of English Language and Literature Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh

Abstract

This article examines the issue of violence against women in ancient and contemporary times, focusing on the historical contexts and manifestations of violence in ancient civilizations like Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, and Ancient India. The study aims to understand the evolution of societal attitudes, contributing factors, and the impact of interventions over time. The findings highlight the enduring nature of violence against women, rooted in cultural, social, and economic factors. The article highlights the stark contrast between ancient and contemporary societies in terms of visibility and response to such violence. The paper emphasizes the importance of studying violence against women in a historical context to inform contemporary interventions and policy initiatives. It offers insights into factors influencing change, such as women's movements and legislative reforms, and identifies ongoing challenges that require continued attention. By juxtaposing ancient and modern perspectives, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of violence against women and inform efforts towards its prevention and elimination in the present day.

Key words: Violence against women, historical context, ancient civilizations, contemporary society, women's rights

The issue of violence against women is one that is deeply ingrained and ubiquitous, and it is one that transcends both the limits of time and space. It is a problem that has plagued society at all points in history and continues to do so in contemporary societies all over the world. The purpose of this research article is to look into the historical foundations of this complex concern in ancient civilizations as well as its continued presence in contemporary society. This paper aims to shed awareness on its development over time, the variables that contribute to it, as well as the impact that outcome of the conditions have had on it. It does so by examining violence against women in both ancient and contemporary situations. The study will investigate a number of different types of violence against women, including physical, sexual, and psychological assault. In addition to this, it will investigate the ways in which gender disparity, cultural norms, and society views have had a role in the ongoing existence of this problem in various time periods. This study intends to develop effective solutions for the prevention and intervention of violence against women. The paper emphasizes the interconnectedness of past and present violence against women.

The history and archaeology of ancient violence against women are rich. Studies on violence against women in Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, and Ancient India have illuminated this topic. Cuneiform inscriptions and legal writings from Mesopotamia show that some familial and societal circumstances sanctioned violence against women (Jacobsen, 1943). Women were subordinated in Ancient Greece's family and culture, and physical and sexual violence against women was normalized (Pomeroy, 1995). Historical texts like the Manusmriti Show how social and religious conventions curtailed women's rights and autonomy in Ancient India (Zimmer, 2002).

Many recent studies have examined violence against women, offering vital statistics and insights into its incidence and manifestations. The World Health Organization's multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence found that one in three women globally experience intimate partner violence (Garcia- Moreno et al., 2005). Such research have demonstrated physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence and its devastating effects on women's physical and emotional health.

Contemporary study emphasizes how race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, and sexual orientation can exacerbate vulnerabilities in violence against women (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality emphasizes the necessity for specific interventions and assistance.

Understanding modern concerns of violence against women requires historical background. Studies have revealed that social norms, cultural beliefs, and historical legacies shape present attitudes and behaviors towards women (Sen, 2001). The historical oppression of women and normalization of violence against them have lasting effects.

For the contemporary aspect of the study, empirical data was collected from existing studies and reports. This included a review of contemporary studies, surveys, and statistics related to violence against women. Sources from international organizations, government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and academic research were analyzed to compile data on the prevalence and forms of violence against women in modern society.

The study focuses on the historical significance and diversity of ancient civilizations, specifically Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, and Ancient India, in examining gender dynamics and violence against women. The selection of these civilizations allows for a comprehensive analysis of how historical, cultural, and geographical factors influenced women's treatment.

Violence against women in selected ancient civilizations, including Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, and Ancient India, was regrettably pervasive and deeply rooted in the societal norms and structures of their respective eras.

In Mesopotamia, one of the earliest recorded civilizations, a complex legal system existed, which included laws pertaining to familial relationships. While some legal texts prescribed punishments for violence against women, others upheld the authority of men within the household, providing them with significant power over their female family members (Jacobsen, 1943). Instances of physical and sexual violence against women were documented, often within the confines of familial relationships.

In Ancient Greece, a patriarchal society prevailed, where women were subordinate to men in both the domestic and public spheres. Violence against women, particularly within the family, was disturbingly normalized (Pomeroy, 1995). Women's roles were primarily confined to the household, and their social status was inherently tied to their male relatives. The patriarchy's dominance manifested in various forms of violence, including physical and sexual abuse, further perpetuating gender inequalities.

Ancient India, as depicted in texts such as the Manusmriti, exhibited a complex interplay of societal norms and religious doctrines that significantly restricted women's autonomy (Zimmer, 2002). While there were variances across regions and time periods, women's rights were often limited, and their social roles were largely defined by their relationship with men. The texts themselves contained prescriptions that perpetuated gender disparities and, at times, justified violence against women.

Cultural norms, social structures, and economic factors all contributed to the prevalence of violence against women in ancient civilizations. Patriarchal ideologies reinforced male authority and female subservience, making women vulnerable to abuse. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations limited women's agency and autonomy, further exacerbating their vulnerability. Social structures, such as familial hierarchies and power dynamics, often governed by male heads, created conditions conducive to violence. Limited legal protections further exacerbated women's vulnerability. Economic factors, such as women's economic dependency on men, further perpetuated violence, as they had limited access to resources and were economically dependent on male family members.

Historical interventions to address violence against women in these ancient

civilizations were sporadic and often insufficient. Legal codes in Mesopotamia, for example, did provide some measures for addressing violence within familial contexts, but the effectiveness of these interventions was limited (Jacobsen, 1943). In Ancient Greece and Ancient India, interventions were less formalized, and societal attitudes often hindered efforts to protect women from violence.

Ancient civilizations experienced deeply ingrained violence against women. Understanding these historical contexts is crucial for comprehending the enduring impact of violence against women and informing contemporary efforts to combat this pervasive issue.

Violence against women is a global issue, with statistics as per WHO showing that one in three women worldwide has experienced intimate partner violence or sexual violence from a non-partner (Garcia- Moreno et al., 2005). This issue affects women across different regions, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds. Physical violence, including assault, beating, and homicide, affects millions of women worldwide. Sexual violence, including rape, assaults, harassment, and sex trafficking, causes physical trauma and emotional distress. Psychological violence, including emotional abuse, threats, intimidation, and controlling behaviour, can also be damaging, erode women's self-esteem, mental health, and overall quality of life. Economic violence, which limits a woman's financial independence and security, can perpetuate vulnerability and dependence on abusive partners.

Contemporary violence against women is influenced by societal norms, gender roles, and patriarchal structures. Cultural norms often approve violence against women, leading to victim-blaming and reluctance to intervene. Traditional gender roles reinforce male dominance and female submissiveness, facilitating violence against women. Patriarchy grants men disproportionate power, perpetuating a sense of entitlement among some men and silences women who fear reprisal or lack support to report abuse. The issue is widespread, affecting women globally, and forms of violence significantly impact their physical and mental well-being.

The Nirbhaya gang rape case in 2012 shocked the world and brought attention to the issue of sexual violence against women in contemporary society. A young woman, referred to as Nirbhaya, was brutally gang-raped and assaulted on a bus in Delhi. This case highlighted the prevalence of sexual violence against women in India and the broader issue of women's safety in public spaces. The public outcry and subsequent legal reforms, including changes in rape laws and enhanced punishment for perpetrators, reflects both growing awareness and the need for policy changes to address contemporary violence against women.

The paper highlights the persistent nature of violence against women, influenced by societal norms and structures. Women's rights were often subordinated to male authority, and legal protections were often insufficient. Public awareness and advocacy played a crucial role in raising awareness and driving policy changes. Despite positive developments in contemporary society, the underlying causes of violence, including deeply ingrained gender norms and power imbalances, persist and require ongoing efforts for change.

The perception and treatment of violence against women have evolved over time, influenced by a multitude of factors. Cultural shifts, increased awareness, legal reforms, and advocacy have significantly impacted the perception of violence against women.

Cultural shifts have led to a growing recognition of the unacceptable nature of violence and the right of women to live free from fear and harm. Education and information dissemination have facilitated public attitudes towards violence, fostering empathy and support for survivors. Legal reforms have criminalized and penalized violence against women, providing survivors with legal recourse and influencing societal attitudes. Women's rights movements and advocacy groups have also played a crucial role in changing perceptions and treatment, mobilizing communities and pressuring governments to take action.

Women's movements, including suffrage and feminist activism, have been instrumental in promoting gender equality and eradicating violence against women. These movements have influenced public discourse and pushed policymakers to prioritize women's safety. Legislation, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment laws, has provided a legal framework for addressing violence and protecting women's rights. International organizations like the United Nations and NGOs have coordinated efforts to combat violence against women globally.

However, challenges persist, and ongoing collaboration and advocacy are crucial for achieving gender equality and eliminating violence against women. Despite progress in addressing violence against women, there are still significant challenges in society. Underreporting of violence is a major issue, often due to fear, stigma, economic dependence, or lack of awareness about support services and legal remedies. The digital age has also led to new forms of violence against women, such as online harassment and cyberbullying, which can have severe psychological and emotional consequences.

Addressing violence against women in contemporary society is a complex task that requires a multifaceted approach. It is crucial to recognize that women's experiences of violence are influenced by various factors such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and disability. Violence in conflict zones is a significant concern, with sexual violence often used as a weapon of war. Technology and privacy concerns have become more significant, necessitating safeguards against technology-facilitated abuse. Health consequences of violence against women are profound, requiring access to healthcare, support services, and trauma-informed care. Economic empowerment programs can help mitigate economic dependence, ensuring equal access to opportunities for women. Education and prevention programs that challenge gender norms and promote healthy relationships are essential for breaking the cycle of violence. Despite progress, persistent challenges and emerging trends demand ongoing efforts, collaboration among stakeholders, and a commitment to a world where women can live free from fear and violence.

This article has provided valuable insights into the multifaceted issue of violence against women by examining its manifestations in both ancient and contemporary contexts.

To conclude the study of violence against women in ancient and contemporary contexts is crucial for understanding its roots, long-term impact, and the persistence of gender-based discrimination. Comparative analysis reveals progress and challenges, emphasizing the enduring influence of cultural norms, gender roles, and power structures on responses to violence against women. This historical perspective helps us understand the persistence of violence against women.

Implementing prevention and education programs to challenge harmful gender norms and promote healthy relationships from an early age is also recommended. Legal reforms should be advocated to harmonize and enforce legal frameworks that protect women's rights and hold perpetrators accountable. Support services should be strengthened to aid survivors in recovery and independence. International collaboration should be fostered to combat violence against women globally, particularly in conflict and post-conflict zones. Public awareness should be raised about the prevalence and consequences of violence against women to challenge societal acceptance. By recognizing the enduring impact of gender-based discrimination and violence, a future free from fear and harm can be achieved.

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