

# WOMEN CRIMINALS : IMPACT OF LITERACY, POPULATION AND SEX RATIO

—S.P. SINGH\*

*The aim of the present paper is to analyze and ascertain whether factors like Female Literacy Rate, Population or Sex Ratio has any bearing on the involvement of women into crime. Personal and conviction details of 200 subjects, only those convicted by the Court of Law, have been studied. No suspects or accused have been taken into consideration in present research. Maximum number of convicts was found to be from Tamil Nadu, the total number was 59. Punjab stood second with 34 convicts, and third position went to Delhi with 24 women offenders. An analysis has done to draw a relationship between crucial social factors like literacy, population, and sex ratio with the women criminality, to find out whether they can be used to act as indicators for determining about of women criminality of the region or the States of our country. The paper also suggests for qualitative improvement in the education system, from primary to adult level, with special emphasis on the incorporation of value or moral teachings kit, so as to minimize the involvement of youth particularly females into crime.*

## INTRODUCTION

**D**R. Freda Adler, Professor of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University studied female criminality in depth; she termed the dramatic social change as "liberation hypothesis". Incentive hypothesis can also be applied while studying female criminality. It is now a known fact that men are intrinsically more violent, but women can also be as violent if provided with suitable reward or incentive. A study by Blackburn (1974) found that women criminals have higher level of hostility, tension and psychopathic deviance. Frederikson (1976) studied 170 females with three levels of assault acts and found that high assault group scored higher than the other two groups. But we should

carefully understand that there exist conflicting findings regarding extent of aggression in criminals, and studies conducted in the field are certainly not sufficient to make a firm opinion about women offenders.

It is also important to establish whether what is more important in deciding a person's social behaviour, nature or nurture, I would like to quote an interesting incident in this regard in which two rescued girls, who were reared by wolfs in jungle, could not adjust themselves with newer environment even after years of teaching. I think we can comfortably say that it was early depravation of training or appropriate education, which hindered them from becoming socially relevant humans. In 1970s, Robert K. Graham,

\*Fingerprint Expert, Central Fingerprint Bureau of National Crime Records Bureau, New Delhi.

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started 'The Repository for Germinal Choice' (RGC) in California. RGC sought to store reproductive cells from some of the most intelligent men on earth, including several Nobel Laureates. Women volunteers could use these cells to conceive, what Graham hoped would be "creative, intelligent individuals, who otherwise would not be born". In essence, RGC's premise was the importance of nature over nurture. During the 20 years of RGC's existence, 229 children were born using genetic material from the repository. In 2001, a determined journalist succeeded in contacting nearly 30 of these children. His findings were interesting, just like a group of randomly selected children, the RGC's span the range from mediocrity to excellence. Contrary to expectations, they were not all geniuses (Pawan Sinha, 'Nature and nurture of human brain', August 22, 2004, Sunday *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi Edition).

This shows that genes or the nature cannot be decisive in making an individual a good smarten or a criminal. In other ways, the type of training or teaching, can play an important role in making an individual productive for the society and country. We have tried to draw a relationship between crucial social factors like literacy, population, and sex ratio with the women criminality, to find out whether they can be used to act as indicators, for determining about the level of women criminality of the region or the States of our country.

### RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The area of criminality of women is still not a zone of priority concern, probably because of the fact that their number is very small. But to have deeper and greater insight into the problem of female criminality, intensive study in the field is the need of the hour. All the aspects concerning women, including their criminality, require a thorough review, so that the overall development becomes a reality.

Our Government has been giving priority concern to the literacy amongst our citizens. National Literacy Mission of the Human Resource Development Ministry is determined for total literacy, special emphasis is on women literacy or education, whether literacy or the type of education we extend to our women or girls is helping them become better citizens or not? That is what should concern us.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of the present study :—

- To understand and highlight the crime pattern amongst women criminals, to find out whether social factors like population, sex ratio, and most importantly literacy rates of a State or region can be used as a barometer to ascertain the involvement of women in crime.
- The Police, NGOs, Women Organisations, Government Agencies and all those involved in the process of development of policies, programme or strategies for reform and rehabilitation of female criminals, may utilize the findings of the study as a handy tool.

### PERIOD OF STUDY

The study was conducted during January–March 2005.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### (1) Techniques of Data Collection

Following tools were used for collection and analysis of data :—

- Review and analysis of relative literature (books, research papers, newspaper articles and reports, etc.).
- 10-digit fingerprint slips of female convicts filed in the Record Section of the Central

Fingerprint Bureau of the National Crime Records Bureau, carrying personal and conviction details on the back side provided a source for collection of raw data. The face of the fingerprint slip also contains a unique Personal Identification Number or PIN. These slips should be considered as most authentic source of details of conviction details, as in India these slips are sent to the CFPB, by the courts, Senior Superintendent of Police's office or State Fingerprint Bureau (CFPB Manual--2001). All these slips are also stored in computer-based system, and can be accessed to, through the unique PIN. Only record slips were taken into account for the research. Record slips of foreign nationals too were eliminated, as the study concentrates on Indian women offenders.

- 200 subjects were randomly selected and studied. In cases where convictions were more than two, only first and the last conviction details were taken into consideration.

## (2) Operational Definitions

- *Women criminals* : A woman, who has been found guilty of criminal behaviour convicted under Indian Penal Code and sentenced to imprisonment.
- *Convict* : A person found guilty of crime and serving sentence for its commission.
- *Population* : The number of people living in any defined area.
- *Literacy* : Ability to read and write.
- *Female sex ratio* : The number of women for every 1000 men.

## RESULTS

After the analysis of data, which consisted of 200 records of female convicts, interesting findings were recorded.

Maximum number of convicts was found to be from Tamil Nadu, the total was 59. Punjab stood second with 34 women criminals, and third position went to Delhi with 24 offenders. They represented 15 States of India. The Table given below distributes them in descending order. On the serial No. 1 is Tamil Nadu with maximum number of convicts, and on serial No. 15 is West Bengal with least number of convicts.

TABLE 1—State-wise distribution of women convicts

Sl. No	State of Residence	Number of Convicts	Female Literacy Rate (%) 1991-2001	Population in numbers (2001 Census)	Female Sex Ratio (2001)
1.	TN	59	64.55	30,842,185	986
2.	PB	34	63.55	11,325,934	784
3.	DL	24	75.55	6,212,086	821
4.	MP	23	50.28	28,928,245	920
5.	UP	19	42.98	78,586,558	898
6.	RJ	11	44.34	27,051,465	922
7.	GJ	8	58.60	24,252,939	921
8.	MH	8	67.51	46,417,977	922
9.	AP	3	51.17	37,440,730	978
10.	HR	3	56.31	9,755,331	861
11.	OR	3	50.97	18,094,580	972
12.	HP	2	68.08	2,991,992	970
13.	GA	1	75.51	658,381	960
14.	KR	1	87.86	16,369,995	1058
15.	WB	1	60.22	38,733,477	934

Source : Selected Educational Statistics, 2001-2002, New Delhi).

## DISCUSSION

Tamil Nadu State had maximum number of women to have been found involved in crime, their number was 59, out of total number of 200 subjects studied, which is calculated as 29.5%. Punjab stood second in terms of female criminals with 17.0% participation. Delhi had 12.0% stake in crime by the weaker sex. Madhya Pradesh trailed a little behind with 11.5% participation. Another prominent State of the Indian Republic Uttar Pradesh had 9.5% share in criminal activities by women.

Let us now try and analyze whether literacy rates of the State of Residence has any bearing on women criminality. Kerala State had highest Decadal Female Literacy Rate (DFLR), which was 87.86%, and least number of women involved in crime; there was just 1.0 women out of 200 included for study, that is 0.5% involvement. On the other hand, Delhi too had significant number of literate women, here the Decadal Literacy Rate was 75.77, but it seems to have imparted negative impact on females, 12.0% was their participation rate in crime. Whereas Goa also had high literacy with 75.51, here there was just one female found to have been involved in crime that is equal to Kerala's participation. Himachal Pradesh had 68.08% DFLR, but only two women took part in criminal activities, whereas in Tamil Nadu with 64.55 DFLR, had 59 women participating in criminal activities. Punjab too had high literacy rate at 63.55, but it does not seem to have any positive impact, as it scored second highest in terms of involvement of women in criminal activities. Surprisingly, these figures do not indicate a trend of women criminality in relation to literacy rates of their respective States of Residence.

Population also did not have direct correlation with the involvement of women in criminal activities. U.P. State had highest population, but the number of women convicts

was highest for Tamil Nadu. There were great differences between the populations of Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Orissa, but they all had 3-3 women convicts representing these States. Goa was least populated State and also had least number of women involved in crimes. On the other hand, Kerala and West Bengal with substantially high population in comparison to Goa, equalled in number of involvement of women in crime, with only 1.0 convict representing these States. Population too does not seem to be a decisive factor for participation of women in crimes.

Female Sex Ratio also did not show a remarkable trend in terms of female criminality.

Then how do we justify the involvement of women in crimes? Somasundaram & Polnaya (1980) and Somasundaram & Ponnudurai (1980) in their twin studies found female delinquents to be significantly aggressive. It has already been observed and proved in a number of studies in the past that maladjustment can lead to criminal behaviour. Higher level of aggression, as it has been revealed (Myers, 1983), increases impulsivity and emotional outbursts.

In a very recent study on achievement motivation and aggression (Singh, Pandey & Singh, 2003), both male and female criminals obtained highest score on irritability. Higher level of irritability generally implies lack of emotional control. Further, there are studies to indicate that these are the preconditions for the development of serious or violent crimes (Sharma, Gunthey & Singh, 1982; Singh, 1980, 1981; Somasundaram & Polnaya, 1980; Somasundaram & Ponnudurai, 1980).

In the past too, experts have concluded that the increasing incidence of violence by women show that they also have the natural capacity as violent as their masculine counterparts. A study by Blackburn (1974) found that women criminals

have higher level of hostility, tension and psychopathic deviance. Frederikson (1976) studied 170 females with three levels of assault acts and found that high assault group scored higher than the other two groups.

The findings of the study may prove to be an eye-opener, as they present precise picture of contemporary issue of women criminality, more emphatically matter of crimes by Indian

women. Certainly, there are limitations to this study; I have not been able to collect information on the circumstances under which our women took law in their own hands, whether it was to avoid crime against themselves or due to 'incentives' associated with the commissioning of crime. Moreover, study is based on random analysis involving limited number of subjects, the findings should be treated with caution. ■

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