

## **Atrocities against Scheduled Castes in a Comparative Perspective**

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Atrocities against Scheduled Castes have quite understandably caused considerable anger among them and a lot of unease in the governments – both the state level and central. Heinous crimes like murder, rape and arson are most deplorable whether perpetrated against SCs or others. But hate crimes, apart from hurting the victims and their dignity and security, arouse passions and lead to violence involving considerable loss of life and property. They vitiate harmony and breed hatred. Whenever and wherever they occur, they should be investigated promptly and perpetrators be brought to justice.

The attention given to atrocities particularly against SCs by media has given rise to a feeling that SCs are specially the focus of heinous crimes, and that they are singled out for them. This may very well be so when we consider individual instances. No doubt several developments after India's independence have contributed to the rise of tensions between SCs and some higher castes in villages. This has often resulted in violence, and mostly SCs are at the receiving end, resulting not only in beatings but even heinous crimes against them like murders, rapes and arson. The main weapon used by SCs in defence consists of strong and well publicised protests. The publicity given to such hate crimes and Dalit protests should not, however, hide the fact that crimes against SCs are a part of the general crime scene in India, and that the crime rate against SCs, including even the rate of heinous crimes, is actually much lower than the general crime rate. Surely there should be no complacency about crimes against Dalits on this ground, but there should also be a factual understanding of their extent in a comparative perspective. Hate crimes, however, are much more emotionally disturbing, and rightly get more attention. My only hope is that a factual understanding may somewhat soothe the extremely agitated state of the Dalit mind, and while they should not reduce their protest against the atrocities to which they are subjected, they should reduce at the same time any attitude of hatred against non-Dalits. It is not as if Dalits are subjected to more crimes than the population in general.

The facts are evident from the three tables presented here, based on the data for respective years in the *Crime in India Reports* published by the National Crime Research Bureau, GOI. Table 1 presents the rate of total crimes and also of three important forms of violence against SCs per million of SC population – murders, rape and arson. There are other forms of crimes also to which SCs are subjected, like physical assaults which are included in the incidence of total crimes. Table 2 presents similar statistics for the general population. The crime rates in the two tables can be compared with each other. They show that crime rate is much lower against SCs than in the population as a whole. By how much lower, can be seen in Table 3 which presents ratios of the crime rate against SC population over the crime rate against the total population. These ratios can also be taken as coefficients of concentration of crimes against SCs. The coefficients were calculated in two ways as a double

check, and both tallied. One way is dividing the crime rate against SC population by the crime rate against total population. The second way is dividing the percentage of crimes against SCs to total crimes by the percentage of SC population in the total population. A coefficient above the value of one suggests concentration of crime against the group concerned. But it is significantly less than one in all types of crime against SCs. It means that though the SCs are definitely subjected to crimes which should not be ignored, the population as a whole is subjected to an even greater rate of crimes. This is so with respect to all crimes together, as also for murders, rape and arson.

A few more points also emerge from the tables. One is that among the three main types of heinous crimes against SCs focused upon here, rape has the highest rate, though the rate of rape is even higher in the general population. Rape is a particularly humiliating weapon among hate crimes. Since the rate of rape is higher even in the general population, it reflects the presence of a deplorable attitude of contempt or even hatred against women as a whole, rather than SCs alone.

Secondly, as between 2001 and 2015, the crime rate has increased both against SCs and total population, in respect of all crimes together, and also rapes. It shows an increasing degree of violence and worsening of the law and order situation in the last 15 years. It has been particularly bad for women – both generally and among SCs. Interestingly, there was a temporary dip in all crimes in 2005, and also particularly in murders and arson, both against SCs and in the general population. In the case of rapes, there was a decline in 2005 in the case of SCs, but there is a steady increase in their rate in the general population throughout.

Though the rate of hate crimes against SCs is lower than the general crime rate, hate crimes are far more serious in their emotional impact and impact on national integrity and even on the economy. All crimes have to be no doubt dealt with seriously, but hate crimes particularly require urgent deterrent action against perpetrators. If a group as a whole is involved in a hate crime, the concerned group/village has to be penalised as a whole.

**Table 1: Crime Rate against Scheduled Castes**

Years	2001	2005	2011	2015
Rate of all Crimes	201.04	144.99	167.44	223.47
Rate of Murders	4.57	3.71	3.34	3.51
Rate of Rapes	7.89	6.50	7.73	11.55
Arson	2.12	1.17	0.84	0.89

Note: Crime rate is calculated per million of SC population.

Source: Based on *Crime in India Reports* for respective years published by the National Crime Research Bureau (NCRB), GOI, New Delhi.

**Table 2 : Crime Rate against All Population**

Years	2001	2005	2011	2015
Rate of all Crimes	1722.76	1652.72	1921.66	2342.44
Rate of Murders	35.25	29.67	28.35	25.52

Rate of Rapes	15.65	16.65	20.00	27.52
Rate of Arson	10.26	7.66	7.49	7.71

Note: Crime rate is calculated per million of total population . Source: As in table 1

**Table 3 : Coefficients of Concentration of Crime against SCs**

Years	2001	2005	2011	2015
All Crimes	0.117	0.088	0.087	0.095
Murders	0.130	0.125	0.118	0.137
Rape	0.504	0.390	0.386	0.419
Arson	0.207	0.152	0.112	0.115

Note: The Coefficients were calculated in two ways; both tally. One way is dividing the crime rate against SC population by the crime rate against total population. The second way is dividing the percentage of crimes against SCs to total crimes by the percentage of SC population in the total population. A coefficient above the value of one suggests concentration of crime against the group concerned.

Source: Calculated by the author from the statistics in respective *Crime in India Reports* of NCRB.

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 \*A drastically curtailed version of this article without the supporting tables appeared in *The Economic Times* dated 20 January, 2018 on the edit page (8). The original is given here.