

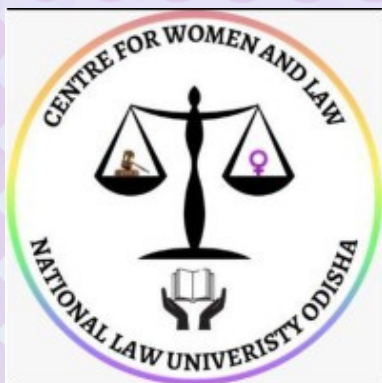


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NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY ODISHA CENTRE FOR WOMEN AND LAW

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UKRAINE - THREE YEARS OF WAR REVERSES PROGRESS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

It has been three years since Russia's attack on Ukraine which has resulted in destructive effects on the economy, due to decrease in productive capacity, infrastructural damage, and reduction in private consumption. In addition to this, the impact that the conflict had on women and girls is not to be overlooked. The total population of Ukraine stands at around 38.5 million, a sharp decline from the numbers in 2022 due to the mass displacement and refugee crisis. 90% out of the 7.9 million people who are forced to take refuge in other countries and about 60% of the adults who have been displaced internally are women.

The effect that the invasion has had on women has been disproportionate compared to their male counterparts. Many women and children have lost their means of livelihood, their homes, and access to protection. Of the total displaced women, only 25% have stable incomes, with pregnant and breastfeeding women bearing the brunt of the effects of the displacement. Separation of men and women in the families due to mandatory military conscription has led to financial instability, putting the women in a vulnerable social and financial position. The war has led to an increase in gender-based violence and war-related sexual crimes.

Any war or conflict affects the vulnerable population of a country, such as women more, exacerbating challenges to those already at risk. The United Nations ("UN") Women has played a major role in the rehabilitation of this section of the population, working with organizations on the frontlines to provide active assistance to the affected. They collaborated with the Skipalska foundation's SafeWomenHUB project, and its social workers, psychologists, and legal specialists have provided aid to support survivors of gender-based and conflict-related sexual and domestic violence. Another collaboration with JurFem, a local group of women lawyers in Ukraine, has helped to provide legal aid to survivors of sexual violence. To deal with the loss of jobs, Women for the Future project has helped 74,000 women through programs to find well-paying jobs with the goal of restoring financial stability.



Although women have suffered the greatest impact from the war, they have displayed resilience and endured violence and displacement. Several women are working on the frontlines for survivors and their children and are active advocates for equality and rehabilitation. Many women-led projects and initiatives such as [Volunteer-68](#) have worked their best to aid in providing food supplies, medical supplies, and warm clothing in the harsh winter months. Given the government's and society's inability to address the mounting needs of the people affected by the humanitarian crisis, the fieldwork done by volunteers and organizations has proved to be invaluable.

Another issue is the imprisonment of women in debilitating conditions, in notorious prisons such as Izolytsia. This leads to psychological issues due to the mental stress and trauma faced in these prisons, creating a need for counselling and reintegration programs. Several organizations such as Combatting Violence against Women in Ukraine (COVAW) have made attempts to introduce systemic reforms in how Ukraine addresses sexual violence through trying to ensure that justice is accessible to all.

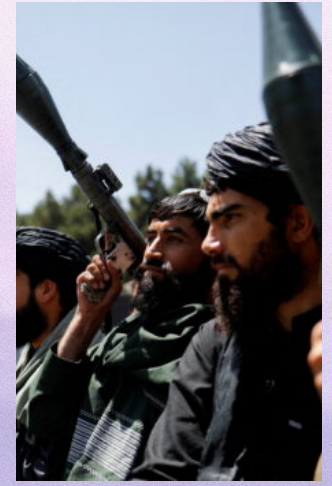
To conclude, the three-year war in Ukraine has reversed the progress made in the sphere of gender equality, due to inefficiency and incapability of the government due to the conflict. The women in Ukraine have consistently shown great courage and resilience in times of instability and violence. Organizations and volunteers are temporary solutions that provide short-term reliefs, but more permanent systemic and legal reforms are needed to enable a quick recovery from the effects of the war. The assistance of international organizations and other nations will be invaluable in ensuring the rehabilitation efforts.



GENDER APARTHEID IN AFGHANISTAN: A CRISIS IGNORED

Since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, the country has experienced perhaps one of the most extreme forms of gender apartheid in modern history. Women and girls have undergone systematic erasure from public life, with access to education, employment and basic freedoms stripped away. The Taliban's restrictions — including bans on secondary and university education, restrictions on travel without a male guardian and the barring of women from most workplaces — have turned Afghanistan into the only nation in the world in which girls do not receive formal instruction beyond sixth grade.

The measures enforced by the Taliban are not merely repressive; this is gender apartheid, a term the United Nations (UN) has used to describe institutionalized oppression of women. This is akin to laws that sustained racial apartheid in South Africa, a system that enforced systemic segregation and exclusion. “Afghan women have been deprived of opportunities, leaving them economically dependent and socially marginalized.



International organizations, including the UN, have denounced these actions, but the global response has been mostly formal. Human rights organizations are calling on governments to explicitly classify gender apartheid as one of the crimes under international law, which comes with built-in tools for accountability. Afghan women continue to fight back with resilience and courage through underground schools, secret businesses and online activism.

The world should not only talk the talk but also walk the walk. Governments and organizations must ensure their words mean something, followed by targeted actions — such as imposing sanctions on Taliban leaders, aiding Afghan women's rights activists and boosting humanitarian aid to ensure education and care for women.



THE DIGITAL GENDER DIVIDE: FACEBOOK'S POLICY CHANGES AND LEGAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ONLINE SAFETY

Social media serves as an indispensable platform for women to connect with global communities while also giving them space to express their perspectives. However, the online environment exposes them to threats of mistreatment and intimidation.

The importance of female digital safety has grown increasingly critical following Meta's move to reduce controls on hateful messages on Facebook operating in the U.S. These U.S. specific changes raise unanswered questions about the future of online user protection worldwide.

Meta implemented changes in its hate speech policies during January 2025, which could potentially result in the continued display of derogatory material on gender-related issues and verbal abuse. While META claims the ban on extreme hate speech remains enforced, yet this policy change gives abusers more power to continue their attacks making it more difficult for affected women to pursue justice. META's transition from third-party fact checking to Community Notes implementation raises eyebrows regarding both accountability and accuracy of information. These shifts in policy may generate worldwide repercussions because they might control how digital laws are framed in nations with inadequate cybersecurity practices.

For instance, in India, victims of online harassment often face delays due to poor reporting systems as illustrated by the events surrounding the Bully Bai and Sulli Deals issues. Under the UK's Online Safety Act, operators must remove content promptly but follow different enforcement standards.

The worldwide protection of women online will deteriorate substantially if Meta continues to adopt relaxed internet regulations following the newly implemented US Model. The challenge lies in the proper implementation of cyber harassment laws, which causes differences in regulations worldwide. Despite IT Rules, 2021 mandating the removal of offensive content within 36 hours, widespread non-compliance is evident, as most platforms fail to adhere to this regulation. The European Union strives to regulate big tech by strengthening its Digital Services Act, while Australia and Canada take initiatives to develop improved online safety rules. International coordination is critical to close the gaps within enforcement of digital safety rules across the world. Decisive action at both local and global levels is crucial in order to ensure safety in the evolving digital landscape. New age threats such as AI-harassment and deepfake exploitation can only be addressed through strengthening legal protections, ensuring policies remain relevant against emerging dangers. Tech companies must be held accountable, with content moderation policies being enforced strictly in order to prevent online harm. Collaboration on an international scale is essential to ensure uniform standards for digital safety, especially for marginalized communities.

Additionally, women must be empowered with knowledge of their rights, digital literacy and the avenues and reporting mechanisms available in order to navigate online spaces more safely and assert control over their digital presence.

MRS.: A FEMINIST LENS ON DOMESTIC OPPRESSION

Arati Kadav's *Mrs.* is a deeply necessary and in-depth cinematic experience. An adaptation of the movie "*The Great Indian Kitchen*", *Mrs.* brings to the forefront the silent and ingrained struggles of the countless women whose lives appear limitless through the kaleidoscope of modernity and media, but who remain confined to the walls of domesticity

The arrival of the protagonist, Richa into marriage is marked with her ambition as a dancer and her commanding self-confidence. As the movie and the marriage progress, witness the gradual erosion of her identity into becoming nothing but machinery —her self-worth determined solely by the perfection of her domestic work. The movie reveals the gendered division of labour and how essential domestic work is relegated to being trivial; gradually seeping into the women's desires, agency, and even bodily autonomy, a mirror to how unremunerated and devalued domestic work is utilized as a tool of systemic oppression.

Mrs. examines how patriarchy operates as an insidious poison in progressive circles. Diwakar, Richa's husband, is a well-respected gynaecologist, a representation of women's autonomy and independence, yet he reinforces gender norms that dehumanize his wife. His evolution from a supportive partner to a tradition-oriented man evaluating her value by her ability in the kitchen is a harrowing reminder of how patriarchal values are embedded, not only in overtly oppressive regimes, but also within seemingly modern homes. The movie is in line with Simone de Beauvoir's theory of the "Other", where women are confined to servitude roles.

By highlighting microaggressions—dismissive comments, imposed expectations, and the casual devaluation of women's needs— the film highlights how the oppression is not necessarily explosive or dramatic, it's quiet, slow and very real and how easily it can be brushed under the carpet and overlooked. The nourishing and enriching space of a kitchen becomes a prison for Richa, a place of perpetual war for her worth.

One of its most effective narrative devices is the use of poignant silence. Where dramatic monologues have their uses, the film trusts in unspoken stares and gestures to evoke oppression. Richa's increasing isolation and erasure are made all the more terrifying by the lack of voiced protest, an unthinkable reality that is endured by many women when their pain becomes normalized. Without any melodramatic climaxes or violent confrontations, the film compels the viewer to confront the reality that a woman's life is often one of service, not of her accomplishments .



DEATH PENALTY FOR POCSO CONVICT: LEGAL AND JUDICIAL IMPLICATIONS

A POCSO court in Kolkata, West Bengal sentenced a 34-year-old man to death for raping a seven-month-old infant, leaving the child in critical condition. The court also ordered Rs 10 lakh in compensation for the victim's family. The incident occurred in November 2024. Upon completion of the investigation, the police filed a chargesheet against the accused, Rajib Ghosh. The state counsel sought death penalty, citing the crime's severity. "This is the rarest of rare cases...I cannot think of any other punishment," Sessions Judge Indrila Mukhopadhyay stated while delivering the verdict. The ruling falls under Section 6 of the POCSO Act, which deals with aggravated penetrative sexual assault.

The case reflects a growing trend in West Bengal, where courts have increasingly awarded the death penalty in similar cases. Since the widely discussed RG Kar rape and murder case, at least half a dozen individuals have been sentenced to death for crimes involving minors.

While the judgment underscores the judiciary's strict stance on child sexual offenses, it also brings into focus the evolving legal landscape surrounding capital punishment in India. The POCSO Act, along with sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the newly enacted Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), has been instrumental in securing harsher punishments for sexual offenses against minors. In six of the seven cases reported in the past six months, courts have sentenced convicts to death by hanging. However, legal experts remain divided on the effectiveness of such harsh punishments in deterring crimes against children.

Moreover, Ghosh's conviction raises concerns about consistency in judicial sentencing. For instance, Sanjay Roy, convicted for the rape and murder of a trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical College, received a life sentence of capital punishment. This discrepancy has sparked debates on whether the "rarest of rare" doctrine is applied uniformly. At the same time, concerns arise over the pace of justice delivery.

The swift sentencing of Ghosh—less than three months after the crime—sets a precedent, demonstrating the efficiency of fast-track courts in handling POCSO cases. However, the question remains: will such fast-tracked cases uphold due process and fairness for all accused individuals?

The rising use of capital punishment in POCSO cases reflects a stricter stance on crimes against children. However, the effectiveness of the death penalty as a deterrent remains debatable. While legal experts advocate for stronger enforcement of child protection laws, some argue that rehabilitation and stricter surveillance mechanisms could be more impactful in preventing such crimes. Additionally, inconsistencies in sentencing raise the need for clearer guidelines on when the "rarest of rare" doctrine should apply. Uniformity in judicial decisions would help ensure fairness while maintaining the law's deterrent effect. There is also a pressing need to examine whether the judicial system provides adequate safeguards against wrongful convictions in fast-tracked cases.

The broader question is whether legislative reforms should prioritize capital punishment or focus on systemic changes that address the root causes of sexual offenses against children. Enhanced victim support mechanisms, education on child safety, and improved law enforcement training could play crucial roles in reducing such crimes.

As India continues to grapple with crimes against children, a balanced approach—one that combines stringent legal measures with preventive strategies—may offer a more sustainable solution to ensuring justice and protection for minors.

DEFINING WOMANHOOD IN LAW: EXAMINING ALABAMA'S 'WHAT IS A WOMAN?' BILL

Alabama Governor Kay Ivey recently signed the 'What is a Woman?' bill into law, igniting legal and social discourse on "how gender is defined in legal and administrative policies." The legislation seeks to establish a statutory definition of "woman," primarily based on biological sex, and restricts the recognition of gender identity in state policies.

The legislation explicitly defines "woman" and "man" based on biological sex as determined at birth. Section 4 of the Act provides that "there are only two sexes, and every individual is either male or female. The term 'sex' is objective and fixed. Individuals with differences in sex development, also known as "DSDs" or "intersex conditions," are not a third sex. Individuals with a congenital or medically verifiable DSD diagnosis must be accommodated consistent with state and federal law."



Section 5 requires state agencies, educational institutions, and government entities to adopt this definition in official records, policies, and programs. The bill limits legal recognition of gender identity outside this binary framework, affecting areas such as education, healthcare, and public accommodations.

The bill is expected to face challenges under the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, which prohibits states from enacting laws that deny individuals equal protection under the law. By restricting the legal recognition of gender identity, the bill arguably discriminates against transgender individuals. The bill also directly contradicts federal protections under statutes such as Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits sex-based discrimination in federally funded education programs.

A significant legal issue with the bill is federal preemption, which occurs when federal law overrides the conflicting state laws. If federal courts determine that existing civil rights protections encompass gender identity, Alabama's law could be overturned for conflicting with federal anti-discrimination protections.

Alabama's 'What is a Woman?' the bill marks a significant legal and political intervention in the ongoing debate over gender definitions in law. On one hand, the supporters of the bill argue that the bill is a positive move towards providing clear and consistent legal definitions. While the opponents, on the other hand, view it as discriminatory and vulnerable to constitutional challenges.

VIDHI UTSAV 2025

The *Vidhi Utsav 2025* was the inaugural event hosted by OakBridge Publishing, a festival that celebrates law, legal literature, and luminaries. It was a two-day festival held on February 21 and 22, 2025, at the Constitution Club of India in New Delhi. The festival commenced with an inaugural ceremony featuring esteemed speakers such as Dr. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, the former Chief Justice of India; Dr. Manoj Kumar, Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Law and Justice; and Dr. Lalit Bhasin, President of the Society of Indian Law Firms (SILF).

Dr DY Chandrachud was invited to give a keynote address wherein he highlighted that literature humanises law and can be used to derive that which the law may lack. He also emphasised that literature was a mediator between the law and society, and a corrective tool for the law.

The festival featured a diverse agenda, featuring panel discussions, workshops, and keynote speeches. Topics ranged from “75 Years of the Constitution,” reflecting on India’s constitutional journey, to “Redefining Law Schools: Legal Executive Education & Viksit Bharat 2047,” which explored the future of legal education in India. The workshops included sessions on mediation and video-making. The mediation workshop aimed to equip participants with alternative dispute resolution skills, while the video-making workshop provided insights into creating impactful visual content.

The Vidhi Utsav 2025 served as a platform that fosters dialogue on the evolving role of law and its interaction with society.

By integrating literature and creative arts into legal discussions, the festival aimed to cultivate a more empathetic and holistic approach to legal practice and education. The event successfully brought together a diverse group of participants, including judges, legal practitioners, academicians, and students, all contributing to a vibrant exchange of ideas and perspectives.



68TH ANNUAL COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW68)

The 68th Annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68); the UN's largest annual gathering on gender equality and women's empowerment, will take place this year from 11 - 22 March under the priority theme, "Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective".

The current theme focuses on the aspects of addressing poverty, strengthening institutions to achieve the long-standing goal of gender equality and women's empowerment. The world today stands at a critical juncture for gender equality.



Today, 10.3% of women globally live in extreme poverty, and women continue to face greater financial hardship than men. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, progress in poverty reduction must accelerate at a rate 26 times faster than the current pace. Achieving this transformation requires substantial investment. In 48 developing economies alone, an additional \$360 billion per year is needed to advance gender equality and empower women, particularly in addressing poverty and hunger.

As 2.6 billion people prepare to vote this year, they have a unique opportunity to advocate for greater investment in gender equality. The solutions are well-established: implementing policies and programs that dismantle gender disparities while strengthening women's leadership and agency.

These investments yield significant benefits—over 100 million women and girls could be lifted out of poverty if governments prioritize education, family planning, fair wages, and expanded social protections. Investing in care services alone could generate nearly 300 million jobs by 2035, and closing gender employment gaps could increase global GDP per capita by 20%.

Even in COP 29 (Conference of the Parties) held this year, the supporters of gender equality made their voices heard, calling for a gender-responsive transition to a sustainable global economy, and deepening the integration of gender equality and feminist principles in all climate actions. At CSW68, governments, civil society organizations, experts, and activists will come together to shape concrete actions and commitments that can drive meaningful progress in eliminating women's poverty and advancing gender equality worldwide.

CANCER CRISIS IN INDIA: WOMEN DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED

India has had long-standing national programmes, one of which is the National Cancer Control Programme, which was launched in 1975. Despite this, the result of 'The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia' has revealed a shocking reality, wherein three out of five people die after cancer diagnosis and women bear the larger brunt.

A study by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), involving 36 types of cancer across all age groups and genders over the past twenty years has brought to light the fact that India ranks third highest in terms of cancer incidence.

A yearly increase of 2% in cancer-related cases in India will be a significant challenge for the country. 36 types of cancer across all age groups and genders over the past twenty years were used for the study. The findings show a grim image, highlighting the urgency for targeted intervention in the escalating cancer burden of India. While cancer affects both genders, women bear the disproportionate burden with breast and cervical cancer being the most prevalent.

Breast cancer is now the leading type of cancer in India, surpassing cervical cancer. In metropolitan areas such as Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Kolkata, Chennai, and Ahmedabad, breast cancer constitutes 25% to 32% of all female cancer cases, making up over a quarter of all cancers affecting women. India accounted for about one-fifth of new cases of cervical cancer and nearly one-fourth of deaths, making it a major contributor to the global burden. Efforts to eliminate cervical cancer in India by 2030 focus on HPV vaccination, screening, and treatment, but progress in reducing cancer-related premature mortality falls short of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Continuity in cancer care ensures women receive prompt, affordable treatment via a robust referral system. Interruptions in treatment lead to subpar follow-up for screen-positive individuals. In a positive light, there has been a Cancer-Free India policy that focuses on early detection and screening of cancer in India through various schemes such as the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS), Ayush Bharat Yojana and CAR-T Cell Therapy.



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