



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**WOMEN'S SAFETY IN INDIA:
GAP BETWEEN INTENTION & POLICY**

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WOMEN'S SAFETY IN INDIA: GAP BETWEEN INTENTION & POLICY

Context

- More than a decade later, incidents such as those reported from **Jamui in Bihar** and **Aastha Kunj in Delhi** raise several fundamental questions i.e. why has expanded expenditure, legislation and infrastructure not translated into a comparable sense of safety for women.

About Women in India & Their Vulnerability

- Women constitute **nearly half of India's population**, but their freedom to study, work, travel and use public spaces is often shaped by concerns about safety.
- It is particularly visible in cities, where poorly lit streets, unsafe public transport, isolated spaces and inadequate last-mile connectivity can restrict women's mobility.
- According to **NCRB's Crime in India 2024 Report**:
 - ♦ India recorded 4,41,534 cases of crimes against women in 2024.
 - ♦ **National Crime Rate**: 64.6 cases per lakh female population; a 1.5% decrease compared to 4,48,211 registered cases in 2023.
 - ♦ **Top Categories of Crimes Against Women**: Cruelty by Husband or Relatives; Kidnapping and Abduction of Women; POCSO Act Offences (against girl children); Assault with Intent to Outrage Modesty; Rape; and Dowry Deaths.
- The **NFHS-5 (2019–21)** documents the persistence of domestic and gender-based violence.
- Therefore, **women's safety** is not simply a law-and-order concern; it is closely linked with **gender equality, economic participation and inclusive development**.

Need for Women's Safety in India

- **Constitutional Equality**: Articles 14, 15 and 21 guarantee equality, non-discrimination and protection of life and personal liberty.
- **Women's Workforce Participation**: Unsafe mobility can limit access to jobs and economic opportunities.
- **Urban Development**: Safe streets and transport are essential for inclusive cities.
- **Women-led Development**: Greater participation of women in public and economic life requires public spaces where they can move freely.

Issues Related to Safety of Women

- **Implementation and Accountability Deficit**: The **Nirbhaya Fund**, established after the 2012 incident, was intended to support initiatives for women's safety.
 - ♦ Between **2015 and 2025**, **₹5,846.08 crore was utilised against ₹7,712.85 crore allocated** that has supported initiatives such as **Women Help Desks in police stations and Fast Track Special Courts**, among others.
 - ♦ But expenditure alone cannot establish whether women actually feel safer. A safety audit that identifies a **dark road, a poorly designed bus stop or an unsafe passage** is only the beginning.
- **Infrastructure–Policy Mismatch**: Several states provide **free bus travel to women**, improving affordability and mobility. But affordability alone does not ensure safety if buses have unpredictable waiting times, overcrowding or unsafe walking routes.
 - ♦ **Research on gender and urban mobility** shows that safety concerns influence women's transport choices and their use of public spaces.
- **Limited Female Presence in Public Spaces**: Women's under-representation among public-facing workers can reinforce the perception that public spaces are predominantly male domains.
 - ♦ **Small regulatory changes** can therefore expand women's presence and employment.

- ♦ For example, Delhi's relaxation of the minimum height requirement for bus drivers from **159 cm to 153 cm in 2022**, after which **34 women bus drivers were inducted by the following year**.
- **Gender Gap in Policing:** Women constitute only about **10% of India's police force**, against the broader policy objective of increasing their representation to **33%**.
 - ♦ Greater representation can improve accessibility of police institutions, particularly for survivors reporting gender-based crimes, while strengthening diversity within policing.

Efforts & Initiatives Related to Women's Safety

- India has developed a substantial institutional framework:
 - ♦ **Nirbhaya Fund** for women's safety projects.
 - ♦ **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013**, providing a statutory framework for prevention and redressal.
 - ♦ **Women Help Desks** at police stations.
 - ♦ **Fast Track Special Courts** for specified sexual offences.
 - ♦ **One Stop Centres** providing integrated support to women affected by violence.
 - ♦ **Emergency Response Support System (112)** for emergency assistance.
 - ♦ **Safe City projects** focusing on technology, infrastructure and policing.
 - ♦ Gender-sensitive urban planning and public-space initiatives, including those promoted globally through **UN Women's Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces** approach.
- The challenge is therefore increasingly one of **effective implementation, convergence and measurable outcomes**.

Global Parallel: Safe Public Spaces

- **UN Women's approach** emphasises that women's safety requires more than policing.
- Urban design, transport, lighting, community participation, institutional accountability and behavioural change must work together.
- It offers an important lesson for India: safety should be designed into cities rather than treated merely as a response after violence occurs.

Way Forward: Strengthening Measures

- **From Audit to Accountability:** Every safety audit should produce a **time-bound action plan**, publicly accessible progress dashboard and designated agency responsible for rectification.
- **Outcome-Based Nirbhaya Fund:** Fund utilisation should be assessed through indicators such as response time, infrastructure gaps addressed, conviction-related outcomes, functioning help desks and survivor satisfaction, rather than expenditure alone.
- **Gender-Sensitive Urban Planning:** Cities should adopt lighting audits, safe walking routes, reliable public transport, last-mile connectivity and participatory planning with women.
- **Increase Women's Workforce Participation:** Remove unnecessary physical or regulatory barriers and establish targets for women in transport, policing, sanitation, parks and other public-facing services.
- **Strengthen Policing and Justice:** Recruitment of women police personnel should be accelerated alongside better investigation capacity, victim-support mechanisms, forensic infrastructure and time-bound trials.

Conclusion

- Women's safety is not merely a law-and-order issue; it is a question of **governance, urban planning, mobility, employment, justice and constitutional equality**.
- The post-2012 period shows that India has created significant laws, funds and institutions.
 - ♦ The next challenge is ensuring that these translate into **safe streets, responsive institutions and equal access to public spaces**.

- The principle of **‘women-led development’** can become meaningful only when women are not merely beneficiaries of safety policies but active participants in designing, implementing and monitoring them.

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Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Despite a robust legal and institutional framework, women’s safety in India continues to suffer from a significant gap between policy intention and ground-level implementation. Discuss.

Source: IE

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