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# ACID ATTACKS IN INDIA: UNVEILING LAYERS OF INJUSTICE AND THE PATH TO REHABILITATION

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## ABSTRACT

The victims of acid assaults suffer permanent physical and psychological damage, making acid attacks one of the most horrific types of abuse. Attacks like these have become a major social problem in India, impacting people from all walks of life. In India, acid attacks are common; this abstract seeks to give a general summary of their causes, incidence, and effects.

Acid attacks are still a serious hazard, especially to women and girls, in spite of legislative actions and public awareness initiatives. The continuation of this kind of violence is facilitated by cultural norms, gender inequality, and socioeconomic gaps. Along with serious physical wounds, victims frequently experience persistent psychological trauma and social rejection.

This also looks at the fallout from acid attacks, including difficulties getting access to healthcare, getting back on track, and pursuing justice through the judicial system. In addition, the shame that society places on survivors makes their difficulties even worse and prevents them from reintegrating into society at large.

India's efforts to combat acid attacks require a multipronged strategy that includes comprehensive support systems for survivors, law enforcement activities, and legal changes. To stop such tragedies in the future, it is also crucial to promote gender equality, education, and the rejection of deeply ingrained cultural beliefs. In order to prevent acid attacks, communities, civil society, and the government must work together to build a more secure and accepting society where everyone can live without fear of violence or prejudice.

In India, acid assaults are a serious instance of gender-based violence that have a significant effect on both individuals and communities. This abstract examines pathways for assistance and intervention while diving into the complex network of variables that lead to the ubiquity of acid violence in India. This article analyzes the socio-cultural, economic, and legal conditions that support the continuation of acid assaults by drawing on academic

research and empirical data. The complexities of this topic are highlighted by patriarchal attitudes, gender inequity, and the use of acid as a weapon for control or retaliation. Furthermore, the interplay between caste, class, and religion intensifies susceptibilities, so disproportionately impacting vulnerable communities.

This article assesses the effectiveness of present policies and legal frameworks in avoiding acid violence and providing justice for survivors by critically analyzing them. Systemic flaws are highlighted by difficulties with enforcement, limited access to medical and psychological assistance, and inadequate rehabilitation options.

In spite of these difficulties, this abstract emphasizes community-led and grassroots programs that provide resilience and optimism. Advocacy groups for survivors, networks of support, and programs for vocational training enable survivors and promote their social and economic integration.

India's acid violence problem necessitates a multifaceted strategy that includes community engagement, social interventions, and legislative changes. Through elevating the voices of survivors, fighting for their rights, and tackling the underlying causes, India can take a revolutionary step toward a day when no one has to live in fear of acid attacks. Acid attacks, which cause severe bodily and psychological harm to victims and their families, are a terrible example of gender-based violence in India. This abstract provides a thorough examination of the complex dynamics surrounding acid violence in India, illuminating its root causes, effects, and possible paths for solution.

This also emphasizes how crucial it is to launch thorough education and awareness programs in order to combat societal norms and attitudes that support violence against women. India can lead the way in creating a society free from acid violence by promoting a culture of empathy, respect, and gender equality.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Acid assaults are a malevolent manifestation of gender-based violence that causes victims' bodily and mental health to suffer irreversibly. Even while this disgusting crime happens all around the world, its increasing regularity and terrible effects on people as individuals, families, and communities have drawn a lot of attention to its prevalence in India. Acid assaults have been a more popular topic of conversation in recent years, leading to demands for

immediate action to address the underlying causes of the attacks and offer survivors all-encompassing support.

Acid violence is encouraged by India's socio-cultural environment, which is marked by deeply ingrained gender inequality, patriarchal traditions, and intricate socioeconomic relationships. The weight of this violence falls on women and girls in particular, who are frequently the targets of acts of intimidation and retaliation, romantic rejection, and family conflicts. In addition, the easy access and low cost of acid adds a terrifying element to gender-based violence, leaving victims with scarred faces, blindness, and long-lasting trauma.<sup>1</sup>

Even while laws and legal frameworks have been put in place to handle acid assaults, their enforcement is still insufficient, and those who commit them frequently escape punishment. In addition, survivors face numerous obstacles when trying to get access to legal resources, psychosocial support, medical care, and opportunities for economic empowerment. The widespread stigma associated with those who have survived acid attacks exacerbates their suffering, resulting in discrimination and social exclusion. With an emphasis on the historical background, socio-cultural factors, legislative responses, and victim stories, this introduction lays the groundwork for a thorough examination of the problem of acid assaults in India. By bringing to light this horrifying reality, it emphasizes how important it is for the government, civil society, and communities to work together in order to fight acid violence, remove structural obstacles, and create a future in which no one will have to live in fear of such crimes.

Acid assaults are a horrible form of gender-based violence that leave victims physically and psychologically devastated. They have a long and dark history of affecting India's social fabric. The frequency of acid assaults in India in recent years has caused much outrage and worry, highlighting the urgent need for all-encompassing action and social reform.

This introduction provides a poignant reflection on the occurrence of acid attacks in India by placing it in the larger context of socio-cultural dynamics, gender inequity, and patriarchal standards. Acid assaults continue to be a terrible reality, disproportionately harming women and girls, despite positive advances in a number of areas, such as legislation and programs promoting women's empowerment. The use of acid as a weapon highlights the depths of human depravity, as those who commit these acts are frequently driven by a poisonous combination

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<sup>1</sup> “Government introduces tough new measure to prevent acid attacks”, 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-introduces-tough-new-measure-to-prevent-acid-attacks>

of retaliation, envy, and the need to establish dominance and control. Such attacks cause significant psychological traumas that can last a lifetime in addition to catastrophic physical damage including deformity and blindness.<sup>2</sup>

### **INDIA'S HISTORY OF ACID ATTACKS-**

In India, acid attacks, sometimes referred to as acid violence, are among the most severe types of gender-based violence and have been a tragic reality for many years. Although there are several historical and cultural contexts where acid attacks first appeared, the complexity of the interactions between sociocultural, economic, and legal elements in modern India accounts for the frequency of these attacks.

In India's past, women and girls have been the target of the majority of acid assaults, which have frequently resulted from marital problems, rejections of love approaches, disagreements involving dowries, or acts of intimidation and vengeance. To cause their victims as much injury as possible, the offenders use acid as a weapon. Their motivations are a toxic combination of misogyny, envy, and a desire to assert authority and control.

The ease with which offenders can obtain acid is one of the concerning features of acid assaults in India. Acid is frequently used in the manufacturing, agricultural, and cleaning industries. It is inexpensive and easily obtained over-the-counter, making it a handy weapon for planned attacks. Even though there are laws governing the sale and purchase of acid, their misuse has been made easier by weak enforcement and gaps in the system.

Victims of acid assaults suffer severe and long-lasting effects. Acid assault survivors frequently sustain severe physical impairments, such as permanent paralysis, blindness, and facial disfigurement. In addition to the physical wounds, individuals experience psychological distress, social exclusion, and financial deprivation since their capacity to work and engage fully in society is severely hindered. With an emphasis on both prevention and support for survivors, the Indian government's and civil society's reaction to acid attacks has changed over time. To deter offenders and improve legal remedies for survivors, legislative measures have been introduced, including as modifications to the Indian Penal Code that specifically address acid violence and restrictions on the sale of acid. In addition, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and survivor advocacy groups spearhead awareness campaigns, rehabilitation

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<sup>2</sup> NICOLA BAILEY, "ACID ATTACKS", 2022, <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/our-work/vawg/acid-attacks>

programs, and projects that seek to address the needs of survivors and question social perceptions on gender-based violence.<sup>3</sup>

Acid assaults, however, still happen in India much too frequently in spite of these attempts, underscoring the ongoing difficulties in stopping this kind of violence. It takes persistent activity and cooperation from several societal sectors to address the underlying causes of acid assaults, which include gender inequity, the impunity of offenders, and the accessibility of acid.

The context of acid assaults in India is a troubling reality created by ingrained cultural values, economic inequality, and weaknesses in the legal system. In order to effectively address this problem, coordinated measures are required to stop attacks, provide care to survivors, and establish a culture in which any kind of violence against women is unacceptable.

The history of acid assaults in India is woven together with a convoluted web of sociocultural elements, historical precursors, and institutional shortcomings. Indian society has a long history of recording acts of violence against women, including the use of caustic poisons. But in the present era, acid assaults have become a particularly heinous manifestation of gender-based violence, a result of the convergence of socioeconomic divides, gaps in the judicial system, and conventional patriarchal attitudes.

The continuance of deeply rooted gender inequality is a crucial contributing reason to the high frequency of acid assaults in India. Patriarchal attitudes and behaviors continue to define society standards, frequently relegating women to subservient roles and sustaining cycles of violence, despite improvements in women's rights and empowerment. In this situation, women who dared to question conventional gender norms or demand their autonomy were subjected to acid attacks as a means of maintaining control and power over them.

Furthermore, more general socioeconomic problems including caste-based discrimination, family strife, and arguments over dowries worsen the frequency of acid attacks in India. Acid attacks are frequently used as a form of punishment against women who decline marriage proposals, file for divorce, or show their independence. This practice reflects larger power relations in communities and families. In addition, the ease of access to acid and the absence of strict laws and enforcement protocols have made acid assaults more common in India. Acid,

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<sup>3</sup> DIPU RAI, "Scars of life: Thousand acid attacks in India in 5 years, yet very few survivors got justice", 2022, <https://www.indiatoday.in/diu/story/acid-attacks-in-india-over-thousand-in-5-years-yet-very-few-got-justice-2309627-2022-12-15>

which is widely utilized in many industrial and agricultural operations, is frequently marketed without the necessary regulations in place, making it easy for criminals to obtain.<sup>4</sup>

### **INDIAN JUDICIARY APPROACH TOWARDS THE ACID ATTACKS-**

Acknowledging the seriousness of acid assaults and the need for strong judicial remedies, the Indian judiciary has taken major action to address the issue and give survivors justice. Over the years, the judiciary has been essential in both campaigning for legislative revisions to strengthen survivor rights and increase accountability for offenders, as well as in the interpretation and application of existing laws.

Interpreting and implementing Sections 326A and 326B of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) is one of the main legal strategies used by the Indian judiciary to combat acid attacks. These clauses address acid attacks expressly and impose severe punishments on those who commit them. Section 326A deals with the deliberate use of acid to intentionally cause great harm. Section 326B addresses efforts to throw or inject acid that causes serious injury. If found guilty under these sections, offenders risk penalties and a 10-year to life sentence in jail.

The judiciary has also stressed how crucial it is to give acid attack survivors proper support and compensation. The courts have ordered the state governments to give survivors financial support for medical care, rehabilitation, and support for their livelihood in a number of historic rulings. This acknowledgment of survivors' entitlement to recompense highlights the judiciary's dedication to tackling the enduring socio-economic consequences of acid attacks. In addition, the Indian judiciary has taken the initiative to tackle systemic problems associated with acid assaults, like controlling the sale of acid and putting preventative measures in place.

The Supreme Court of India ordered state governments to control the sale of acid, limit its availability over-the-counter, and levy fines for noncompliance in the case of *Laxmi v. Union of India*. These steps are intended to keep acid out of the hands of easy access and discourage would-be attackers.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, in handling cases involving acid attacks, the judiciary has realized the need of victim-centric strategies, guaranteeing that survivors have a secure and encouraging space to

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<sup>4</sup> AMRIT DHILLON, “‘Worse than murder’: Why are acid attacks still common in India after 2013 ban?”, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/people/article/3195251/worse-murder-why-are-acid-attacks-still-common-india-after-2013>

<sup>5</sup> *Laxmi vs. Union Of India and Ors.* [2014 SCC (4) 427]

pursue justice. To reduce the stress that survivors endure throughout legal proceedings and to speed trials, specialized courts and fast-track procedures have been established. In order to guarantee that survivors, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, have access to justice, legal aid services are also provided.<sup>6</sup>

Even with these encouraging advancements, there are still obstacles in the way of using the legal system to efficiently handle acid attacks. These include the need for more sensitivity and understanding among legal experts handling such cases, insufficient enforcement of current legislation, and trial process delays. Judicial activism is also still necessary in order to advance new reforms and fortify the legal protections afforded to survivors.

To sum up, the Indian judiciary has shown initiative in tackling acid attacks, acknowledging the seriousness of this type of aggression and the entitlements of victims to assistance and justice. By means of significant rulings, guidelines, and victim-focused strategies, the legal system has been instrumental in ensuring that those responsible for acid attacks are held responsible and in defending the honor and rights of those who have survived.

The way the Indian judiciary handles acid attack cases demonstrates a growing understanding of the seriousness of this crime and the demand for all-encompassing legal solutions to handle its complexity. In order to provide justice for survivors and hold offenders accountable, the judiciary has changed its strategy over time through significant rulings, legislative changes, and procedural advancements.

The interpretation and implementation of current legislation to combat acid attacks is a key component of the judiciary's strategy. The Indian Penal Code's (IPC) Sections 326A and 326B have been instrumental in prosecuting offenders and enforcing severe penalties for their crimes.

These sections only deal with acid assaults; they classify them as serious crimes and impose heavy fines and jail sentences. Acid attack cases now have a solid legal foundation thanks to the judiciary's consistent interpretation and enforcement of these rules. In addition, the Indian judiciary has proven to be proactive in attending to the socio-economic requirements of victims of acid attacks. Courts have stressed in a number of historic rulings how crucial it is to give survivors access to sufficient recompense, healthcare, and rehabilitation programs. These orders have forced state governments to provide funding for programs that support survivors

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<sup>6</sup> DEEPTIMAN TIWARY, "Acid attacks: The crime, the law, regulation, and compensation", 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/delhi-acid-attack-case-laws-on-sale-8327577/>

and guarantee that they have access to necessary services, such as vocational training, psychological counseling, and reconstructive surgery.<sup>7</sup>

### **INDIAN GOVERNMENT SCHEMES FOR ACID ATTACK VICTIMS-**

The Indian government has put in place a number of programs and initiatives to help victims of acid attacks get support, rehabilitation, and assistance. These programs are designed to meet the various requirements of survivors, such as access to social integration, financial support, legal counsel, and medical care. Among the noteworthy government initiatives in India for victims of acid attacks are:

1. **The Central Fund for Victim Compensation (CVCF):** The Ministry of Home Affairs manages the Central Victim Compensation Fund, which offers monetary support to those who have been victims of all types of crimes, including acid attacks. Acid attack survivors may be eligible for reimbursement under this program to help with additional rehabilitation expenditures, lost wages, and medical expenses.
2. **Fund Nirbhaya:** The Indian government established the Nirbhaya Fund to provide funding for projects that improve women's safety and security. Programs that expressly target victims of acid attacks, such as counseling, vocational training, and rehabilitation, receive funding from the Nirbhaya Fund.
3. **Scheme Ujjawala:** The Ministry of Women and Child Development's Ujjawala Scheme is designed to rescue, rehabilitate, and reintegrate victims of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. The resources and assistance offered under this program may be helpful to acid attack survivors who have been trafficked or exploited.
4. **The PMSBY, or Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana:** Policyholders can obtain accidental death and disability insurance coverage through the government-backed Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana. In order to get insurance payments in the event of an acid attack-related accidental death or permanent disability, survivors of acid attacks may choose to enlist in the PMSBY.
5. **Assistance and Legal Aid:** For those who have survived an acid attack, several state governments offer free legal aid and support to guide them through the legal system and pursue justice against those responsible. State legal services authorities have

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<sup>7</sup> KRITIKA SINGH, "A Landmark Judgment On Guidelines Laid Down By SC For Acid Attack Survivors And For Regulation Of Rules Regarding Availability Of Acid For Sale.", 2015, <https://www.alec.co.in/judgement-page/a-landmark-judgment-on-guidelines-laid-down-by-sc-for-acid-attack-survivors-and-for-regulation-of-rules-regarding-availability-of-acid-for-sale>



established legal aid cells and clinics that provide assistance in filing complaints, pursuing criminal cases, and obtaining compensation under applicable legislation.<sup>8</sup>

6. Initiatives unique to each state: Numerous Indian states have put in place their own programs and efforts to help victims of acid attacks, offering them financial support, medical care, and rehabilitation services. For instance, survivors of acid attacks can receive financial aid, free medical care, and vocational training under the Delhi government's program.<sup>9</sup>
7. Swavalamban Program: The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment launched the Swavalamban Scheme, which aims to empower PwDs by offering cash support, job training, and other forms of help. This program is designed to help survivors of acid attacks who have been disabled as a result of the attack. Its goal is to increase their social and economic engagement.
8. Assistance for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities and Mental Retardees (schemes under the National Trust Act): The National Trust Act offers a number of plans and initiatives to promote the welfare and rehabilitation of people with disabilities, especially those impacted by acid attacks.
9. Jobs Availability: Through a number of programs, such as reservation quotas for government positions and incentives for private sector firms to hire people with disabilities, the government supports employment prospects for survivors of acid attacks. Programs for entrepreneurship and skill development are also provided in order to enable survivors to explore employment prospects and achieve financial independence.
10. Shelters and Rehab Facilities: The government backs the creation and running of shelters and rehabilitation facilities for victims of acid attacks, giving them a secure and encouraging space to recover and start again. These facilities help victims heal from the trauma of the attack and reintegrate into society by providing them with medical attention, therapy, job training, and social support services.<sup>10</sup>

Under these programs, acid attack survivors with impairments can get financial aid, training in skill development, and support in starting their own businesses. These government programs

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<sup>8</sup> "NALSA (Legal Services to Victims of Acid Attacks) Scheme, 2016", <https://nalsa.gov.in/acts-rules/preventive-strategic-legal-services-schemes/nalsa-legal-services-to-victims-of-acid-attacks-scheme-2016>

<sup>9</sup> "Financial Assistance To Women And Girl Acid Attack Victims", <https://www.myscheme.gov.in/schemes/fawgav>

<sup>10</sup> "ACID ATTACK", <https://www.mha.gov.in/en/commoncontent/acid-attack>

and initiatives are essential in helping acid attack survivors reconstruct their lives and reintegrate into society by offering them the support and assistance they so desperately need. To guarantee that survivors receive prompt and thorough support, government agencies and stakeholders must, nevertheless, increase awareness, put the plan into action, and coordinate their efforts.

## **CONCLUSION-**

In conclusion, acid assaults in India are a horrifying example of gender-based violence that leave victims with lifelong physical, psychological, and financial scars. Acid assaults continue to destroy lives and erode the foundation of society because of ingrained gender inequality, patriarchal views, and structural flaws. There are still issues with stopping attacks, delivering prompt justice, and offering complete support to survivors even with the government, the judiciary, and civil society's best efforts to combat this scourge.

Acid attacks are becoming more common, which highlights the critical need for a multifaceted strategy that tackles the underlying causes of violence, advances gender equality, and fortifies the legal and social safeguards that protect women and marginalized people. As a result, coordinated actions are required to control the sale of acid, improve the capabilities of law enforcement, and increase public awareness of the terrible effects of acid violence. Furthermore, in order to help survivors reconstruct their lives with dignity and resiliency, survivor-centric programs that place a high priority on medical care, rehabilitation, and economic empowerment are crucial.

All parties involved in addressing the problem of acid attacks must work together skillfully and protect the rights and dignity of survivors, including communities, government institutions, law enforcement, and civil society organizations. India may endeavor to achieve a future in which all people, irrespective of gender, can live without fear of violence and prejudice by cultivating a culture of empathy, solidarity, and accountability. We can only achieve this goal and produce with persistent group effort. When one considers the terrible reality of acid assaults in India, it is clear that these horrific acts of violence not only cause bodily harm but also permanently alter the social fabric of the country. The continued occurrence of acid assaults highlights ingrained societal issues that require immediate attention and coordinated action, even in the face of legislative actions, awareness campaigns, and judicial interventions.

The frequency of acid attacks is a clear indication of the persistent patriarchal attitudes and gender inequality that characterize Indian society. These assaults are frequently carried out in an effort to maintain dominance, power, and control over women, which feeds the cycle of abuse and enslavement. It is imperative to tackle the fundamental mindsets and convictions that justify such instances of cruelty in order to promote a respectful, equitable, and nonviolent society.

Moreover, the aftermath of acid attacks exposes structural shortcomings in the provision of proper assistance and rehabilitation to victims. Numerous survivors struggle with psychological trauma, physical impairments, and social shame, which increases their susceptibility and impedes their ability to heal. Prioritizing survivor-centric strategies that include comprehensive medical treatment, psychosocial support, and economic empowerment programs is crucial for both the government and civil society.

The sale and distribution of acid must be controlled, law enforcement must be strengthened, and community awareness and education must be promoted in order to avoid acid attacks. India can work toward a day when each person is treated with justice, compassion, and dignity by tackling the underlying causes of violence and creating a safe haven for survivors.

Conclusively, a comprehensive and multifaceted strategy that addresses ingrained societal norms, fortifies legal protections, and establishes strong support networks for victims is needed to effectively combat acid assaults in India. Government, civic society, communities, and individuals all have a shared obligation to unite against gender-based violence and strive toward creating a society that is safer and more inclusive for everyone. We cannot expect to end the scourge of acid assaults and build a future in which no one may fear or suffer injury unless we make consistent efforts and steadfast dedication.