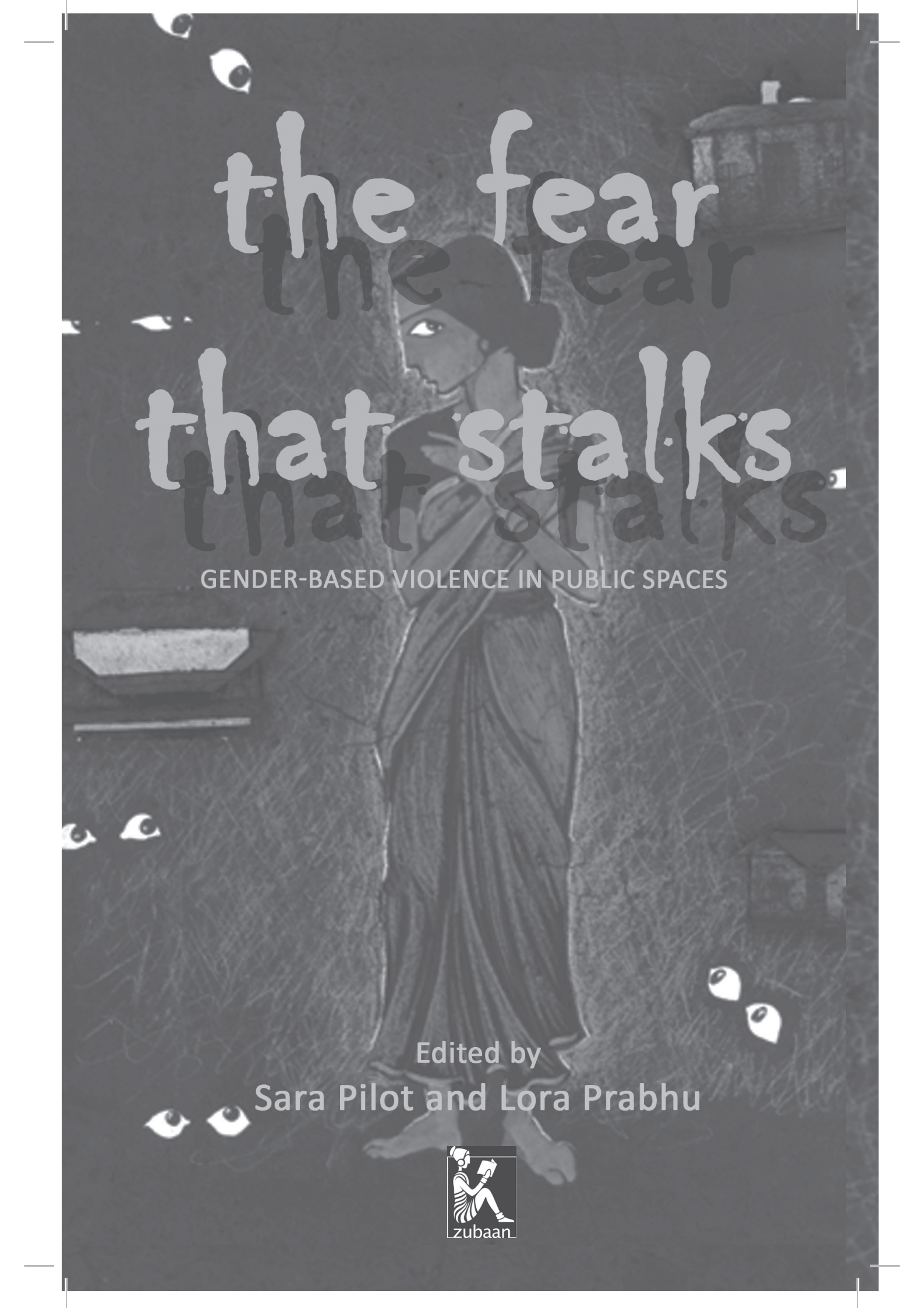


## The Fear That Stalks

Published in collaboration with UNDP and CEQUIN



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GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC SPACES

Edited by

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## Foreword

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Despite the improved indicators in education and workforce participation can we really say that the status of women in India has improved? The declining sex ratio surely has a different story to tell.

In order to understand this story in a holistic manner we need to first understand what women's empowerment is. What does it entail? What are its critical barriers? Is there a final destination, or is it the journey and the process of attainment, that we are engaged with? These are some of the questions we grappled with while we were Programme Officers at UNIFEM (now UN Women). We set up CEQUIN, the Centre for Equity and Inclusion, in 2007 as a social laboratory, to look for answers to these questions.

Indeed, when you work for women's empowerment it is imperative to have a 360 degree approach, one that can address itself to every aspect of women's lives, including education, health and livelihoods. However, despite concerted efforts in all these areas, challenges remain. The most critical one is the continuing cycle of violence women face – physical and mental violence on the one hand and violence in the form of discrimination and exclusion on the other. This scourge of gender-based violence needs to be tackled urgently if empowerment is to happen in a meaningful way.

In India, the Domestic Violence Act 2005 was a landmark legislation, and has provided a framework to look at all forms of violence in the domestic sphere. It is hoped that the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill will fill the legislative gap to protect women in their workplaces. However, while addressing gender-based violence in public spaces, that is, between the domestic space and the workspace, there seems to be no cohesive approach or framework. The significance of this space is in its direct connection with women's mobility, access, and engagement with public life.

In effect, the entire process of building women's capabilities hinges on their ability to access education and skills, healthcare, markets, livelihoods and recreation. With mobility curtailed due to safety concerns, a vicious cycle of low capability is perpetuated, leading to gender discrimination. Women are unable to achieve their full capabilities because of social and cultural constraints which create violent barriers, thus impeding their effective economic and political participation. This stems from the patriarchal understanding that public spaces belong to men.

Examining gender-based violence in the notional public sphere also becomes particularly relevant in situations where such acts are condoned, ignored or actively abetted. Gender-based violence goes beyond sexual harassment. The woman's body in many instances is used as a battleground to settle scores and to assert power. The rape of Dalit women, atrocities committed by the armed forces in conflict zones, instances of 'honour' killings, moral policing, parading women naked, tonsuring, witch hunting, acid throwing and so on, are all alarming trends which urgently need to be addressed.

As we struggled to gain a clearer understanding of these issues, we felt a pressing need to initiate an informed debate; which led us at CEQUIN to approach the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Commission for Women (NCW) to partner with us. In October 2010, CEQUIN organised a two-day conference in New Delhi entitled 'Gender-based Violence in Public Spaces: Challenges and Solutions'. Participants included activists, practitioners and policy makers from across India. Thematic papers were presented by a wide range of contributors, reflecting various concerns and perspectives. The papers commissioned for the conference included: 1) 'Gendered Claims of Citizenship and Notions of Honour and Stigma', by Flavia Agnes; 2) 'Gendered Usage of Public Spaces: A Case Study of Mumbai', by Shilpa Phadke; 3) 'Masculinity and its Role in Gender-based Violence in Public Spaces', by Sanjay Srivastava; 4) '“Neutral” laws or “Moral” Codes Controlling and Recreating Sexualities/Intimacies', by Rukmini Sen; 5) 'Role of Media in Addressing Gender-based Violence in Public Spaces', by Mohuya Chaudhuri; 6) 'Gender-based Violence in Public Spaces: Consequences and Cost', by Nandita Bhatla; 7) 'Women and



Homelessness’, by Shivani Chaudhry, Amita Joseph, and Indu Prakash Singh; 8) ‘Redeeming “Honour” Through Violence: Unravelling the Concept and its Application’, by Prem Chowdhry; 9) ‘Gender-based Violence in Public Places: Acid Throwing’, by Keerthi Bollineni; 10) ‘Gender-based Violence in Conflict Zones: Case Study of Impact of Ongoing Armed Conflict, Small Arms Proliferation and Women’s Response in India’s Northeast’, by Binalakshmi Nepram; 11) ‘Police Response to Gender-based Violence in Public Places’, by Suman Nalwa. (These papers can be accessed at [www.cequinindia.org](http://www.cequinindia.org))

There could have been no better publisher than Zubaan to put this rich collection of papers into a compiled knowledge base for researchers and practitioners. While most of the conference papers find place in this publication, a few could not be included due to technical reasons. We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Suman Nalwa, Binalakshmi Nepram and Keerthi Bollineni. An important aspect which was not addressed during the conference discussions was the issue of trans-genders. This gap has been compensated by the inclusion of the paper – ‘Gender-based Violence faced by Hijras in Public Spaces in Urban India’, by Priti Prabhughate, Ernest Norhona and Alka Narang.

It is our hope that this publication will provide a framework with which to understand the nature and dimensions of gender-based violence in public spaces and that it will contribute to an informed debate on strategies to tackle this issue. It is imperative for women to assert their citizenship rights and claim their space in the public domain, thereby blurring the public-private divide which has confined women to the domestic space.

We take this opportunity to thank Girija Vyas for providing NCW’s support. This project may not have seen the light of day, but for the unstinting support of Meenakshi Kathel of UNDP who constantly provided valuable guidance. We would like to thank Urvashi Butalia for her insights, as well as enthusiastically taking on the task of compiling an eclectic collection into a cohesive book, and for writing the overview chapter. We thank our distinguished writers, for their valuable contributions as well as their patience. We would also like to acknowledge the guidance and participation of Kiran Bedi, Farah Naqvi, Sohaila Kapur and Govind

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