

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

---

Volume 9 | Issue 2

---

2026

© 2026 International Journal of Law Management & Humanities

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlmh.com/>

Under the aegis of VidhiAagaz – Inking Your Brain (<https://www.vidhiaagaz.com/>)

---

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities at VidhiAagaz. It has been accepted for inclusion in the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities after due review.

In case of **any suggestions or complaints**, kindly contact [support@vidhiaagaz.com](mailto:support@vidhiaagaz.com).

---

**To submit your Manuscript** for Publication in the **International Journal of Law Management & Humanities**, kindly email your Manuscript to [submission@ijlmh.com](mailto:submission@ijlmh.com).

---

# Impact of Vitriolage on the Right to Livelihood of Victims in India: A Socio-Legal Analysis

---

DR. PRASANNA S<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*Vitriolage, commonly referred to as acid attack, represents one of the most brutal forms of violence, resulting in severe physical disfigurement and long-term socio-economic marginalisation of victims. Among its most devastating consequences is the deprivation of the right to livelihood, which has been recognised as an integral component of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. This article undertakes a comprehensive socio-legal analysis of the impact of acid attacks on the livelihood of victims in India. It examines constitutional jurisprudence, statutory frameworks, judicial interventions, and empirical data to highlight the structural barriers faced by survivors in accessing employment. The study argues that despite progressive judicial recognition and legislative measures, systemic gaps in implementation, social stigma, and inadequate rehabilitation mechanisms continue to undermine the effective realisation of livelihood rights. The article concludes by advocating for a holistic, rights-based approach that integrates legal remedies with socio-economic empowerment measures.*

**Keywords:** *Vitriolage, Acid Attack, Right to Livelihood, Article 21, Rehabilitation.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Vitriolage, or acid attack, constitutes one of the most heinous forms of violence, characterised by the deliberate use of corrosive substances to inflict severe bodily harm and permanent disfigurement. In India, such attacks are often rooted in gender-based violence, personal vendettas, caste-based tensions, and socio-cultural inequalities. While the immediate consequences of acid attacks such as physical injury and psychological trauma have received considerable attention, their long-term impact on the right to livelihood remains insufficiently explored within legal discourse.

The right to livelihood has been recognised by the judiciary as an essential component of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The deprivation of livelihood not only affects economic stability but also undermines human dignity, autonomy, and social

---

<sup>1</sup> Author is an Assistant Professor at Government Law College, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India.

participation. Acid attack survivors frequently face significant barriers in accessing employment due to physical disabilities, social stigma, and discrimination. These challenges result in long-term economic marginalisation and dependency, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion.

This article seeks to examine the impact of vitriolage on the right to livelihood of victims in India through a socio-legal lens. It analyses constitutional provisions, judicial precedents, statutory frameworks, and empirical trends to evaluate the extent to which existing legal mechanisms address the economic consequences of acid attacks. It further explores the structural and societal barriers that hinder the effective realisation of livelihood rights.

## II. RIGHT TO LIVELIHOOD AS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

The jurisprudential foundation of the right to livelihood in India is firmly rooted in the expansive interpretation of Article 21 by the Supreme Court. In *Olga Tellis v. Bombay<sup>2</sup> Municipal Corporation*, the Court held that the right to livelihood is an integral facet of the right to life, observing that no person can live without the means of living. This judgment marked a significant shift in constitutional jurisprudence by recognising socio-economic rights within the ambit of fundamental rights.

The Court's reasoning emphasised that the deprivation of livelihood would effectively strip individuals of their right to life, as it would deprive them of the means to sustain themselves. This interpretation has been subsequently reinforced in various judgments, where the Court has recognised the right to dignity, health, and economic security as essential components of Article 21.

In the context of acid attack victims, the right to livelihood assumes particular significance. The physical and psychological consequences of such attacks often render victims incapable of engaging in gainful employment. This not only affects their economic independence but also undermines their dignity and self-worth. The denial of livelihood opportunities thus constitutes a violation of their fundamental rights.

Furthermore, the right to livelihood must be understood in conjunction with Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution, which guarantee equality before the law and prohibit discrimination on grounds of sex. Acid attack survivors, particularly women, often face intersectional discrimination based on gender, disability, and socio-economic status. This necessitates a comprehensive legal framework that addresses both the direct and indirect barriers to

---

<sup>2</sup> AIR 1986 SC 180.

livelihood.

### **III. NATURE AND IMPACT OF VITRIOLAGE ON LIVELIHOOD**

Vitriolage, or acid attack, is a uniquely devastating form of violence that is designed not merely to injure but to permanently disfigure and socially exclude the victim. Unlike other forms of violent crime, the intention behind acid attacks is often to destroy the victim's identity, dignity, and capacity to lead a normal life. This distinctive nature of the offence has profound implications for the livelihood of victims, as it disrupts their physical, psychological, social, and economic functioning in a comprehensive and often irreversible manner. The impact on livelihood is therefore not incidental but intrinsic to the nature of the crime itself.

One of the most immediate and visible consequences of vitriolage is the severe physical injury inflicted upon the victim. Acid attacks typically result in extensive burns, disfigurement of the face and body, and, in many cases, permanent disabilities such as loss of vision, hearing impairment, or restricted mobility. These physical impairments directly affect the victim's ability to engage in gainful employment, particularly in sectors that require physical labour or interpersonal interaction. For instance, individuals working in service industries, retail, or public-facing roles may find it extremely difficult to continue their employment due to both functional limitations and societal biases. The loss of physical capacity thus translates into an immediate loss of livelihood, often without any alternative means of income.

The long-term medical consequences of acid attacks further exacerbate the impact on livelihood. Victims typically require multiple surgeries, including reconstructive procedures, skin grafting, and ongoing medical treatment. These procedures are not only physically demanding but also time-consuming, often requiring prolonged periods of hospitalisation and recovery. During this time, victims are unable to work, resulting in sustained loss of income. Moreover, the need for continuous medical care may prevent victims from maintaining regular employment even after initial recovery. The financial burden associated with such treatment is substantial, often depleting the savings of victims and their families, thereby pushing them into economic vulnerability.

In addition to physical injuries, the psychological impact of vitriolage plays a critical role in undermining the victim's livelihood. Survivors frequently experience severe mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and social withdrawal.<sup>3</sup> These psychological conditions can significantly impair cognitive functioning, reduce motivation, and hinder the ability to interact with others, all of which are essential for sustaining employment. The trauma associated with the attack often leads to a loss of self-

confidence and fear of public spaces, making it difficult for victims to reintegrate into the workforce. In many cases, psychological recovery takes far longer than physical healing, further delaying the restoration of livelihood.

Social stigma and discrimination constitute another significant dimension of the impact of vitriolage on livelihood. In many societies, including India, physical appearance plays a crucial role in determining social acceptance and economic opportunities. Acid attack survivors, who often bear visible scars and disfigurement, are frequently subjected to prejudice, exclusion, and discrimination. Employers may be reluctant to hire individuals with visible injuries, perceiving them as less capable or fearing negative reactions from customers. This bias is particularly pronounced in sectors that involve public interaction, such as hospitality, retail, and education. As a result, survivors often face limited employment opportunities, regardless of their qualifications or skills.

The impact of social stigma extends beyond the workplace, affecting the victim's broader social and economic networks. Survivors may be ostracised by their communities, abandoned by family members, or subjected to social isolation. This loss of social capital further restricts their access to employment opportunities, as informal networks often play a crucial role in securing jobs in India. The intersection of social stigma and economic exclusion thus creates a cycle of marginalisation that is difficult to break.

Gender dynamics also play a crucial role in shaping the impact of vitriolage on livelihood. The majority of acid attack victims in India are women, and the attacks are often motivated by gender-based violence, such as rejection of marriage proposals or disputes over dowry. Women in India already face significant barriers to employment due to patriarchal norms, limited access to education, and unequal distribution of resources. Acid attacks exacerbate these challenges, further restricting their ability to participate in the workforce. In many cases, women survivors are forced into economic dependency on their families or charitable organisations, undermining their autonomy and dignity.

Economic consequences of vitriolage are both immediate and long-term. The immediate loss of income following the attack is often accompanied by increased expenditure on medical treatment, legal proceedings, and rehabilitation. For many victims, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, this financial burden is overwhelming. The lack of adequate insurance coverage and limited access to financial assistance further aggravate the situation. Over time, the inability to secure stable employment results in chronic poverty and economic insecurity.

The disruption of education is another factor affecting the livelihood of acid attack victims. Many victims are young individuals who are either pursuing education or in the early stages of their careers. Acid attacks often force them to discontinue their education due to physical and psychological challenges, as well as financial constraints. This interruption in education limits their future employment prospects and reduces their earning potential. The absence of targeted educational support programmes for survivors further compounds this issue.

The informal nature of the Indian labour market also contributes to the vulnerability of acid attack victims. A significant proportion of the workforce is engaged in informal employment, which lacks job security, social protection, and legal safeguards.<sup>9</sup> Victims who were previously employed in the informal sector often lose their jobs without any form of compensation or support. Even when they seek re-employment, they are often confined to low-paying and precarious jobs, which do not provide sufficient income or stability.

Another important dimension of the impact on livelihood is the loss of identity and self-worth. Employment is not merely a means of earning income but also a source of social recognition and personal fulfilment. Acid attacks, by altering the victim's physical appearance and social standing, often lead to a loss of identity and self-esteem.<sup>10</sup> This psychological impact further discourages victims from seeking employment, thereby perpetuating economic dependency.

Despite these challenges, it is important to recognise the resilience and agency of many acid attack survivors. With adequate support and opportunities, survivors can rebuild their lives and achieve economic independence. However, this requires a supportive environment that addresses the structural barriers to livelihood.

Empirical data from the National Crime Records Bureau indicates that while the number of reported acid attacks has shown some fluctuation over the years, the long-term socio-economic impact on victims remains largely unaddressed in official statistics.<sup>3</sup> The lack of comprehensive data on employment outcomes and rehabilitation highlights a significant gap in policy and research, which hinders the development of effective interventions.

The nature of vitriolage is such that it directly targets the livelihood of victims by impairing their physical abilities, psychological well-being, and social standing. The impact is multifaceted and long-lasting, affecting not only the individual victim but also their families and communities. Addressing this impact requires a holistic approach that integrates medical, psychological, social, and economic support, along with strong legal and institutional

---

<sup>3</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India Reports*.

frameworks. Without such an approach, the right to livelihood of acid attack victims will remain largely unrealised.

#### **IV. STATUTORY FRAMEWORK AND POLICY MEASURES**

The statutory framework and policy measures addressing acid attacks in India represent a significant evolution in the country's legal response to gender-based violence and victim protection. While the criminalisation of acid attacks and the provision of punitive measures constitute an essential aspect of this framework, an equally important dimension lies in the development of victim-centric provisions aimed at rehabilitation, compensation, and restoration of livelihood. However, despite notable legislative advancements, the effectiveness of these measures in ensuring the realisation of livelihood rights remains uneven, largely due to gaps in implementation and coordination.

A major turning point in the statutory recognition of acid attacks occurred with the enactment of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, which introduced Sections 326A and 326B into the Indian Penal Code, 1860.<sup>4</sup> Section 326A specifically criminalises acid attacks and provides for stringent punishment, including imprisonment of not less than ten years, which may extend to life imprisonment, along with a fine that is required to be just and reasonable to meet the medical expenses of the victim.<sup>5</sup> This provision is significant in that it explicitly acknowledges the need for financial support to victims as part of the penal framework. Section 326B, on the other hand, criminalises attempts to throw acid, thereby addressing the preventive dimension of the offence.<sup>6</sup> While these provisions primarily focus on deterrence and punishment, their inclusion of compensation elements reflects a growing recognition of the socio-economic consequences of acid violence.

In addition to the penal framework, the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 plays a crucial role in providing remedies to victims through Section 357A, which mandates the establishment of Victim Compensation Schemes (VCS) by state governments.<sup>7</sup> This provision represents a shift towards a victim-centric approach within the criminal justice system, as it enables victims to receive financial assistance irrespective of the outcome of the criminal trial. Under this scheme, acid attack victims are entitled to compensation for medical treatment, rehabilitation, and other related expenses. The Supreme Court has further strengthened this mechanism by directing states to ensure a minimum compensation of ₹3 lakh for acid attack survivors, recognising the

---

<sup>4</sup> Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Indian Penal Code, 1860, § 326A.

<sup>6</sup> Indian Penal Code, 1860, § 326B.

<sup>7</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, § 357A.

high cost of medical care and the need for immediate financial support.<sup>8</sup>

However, despite its progressive intent, the implementation of Section 357A has been fraught with challenges. There is considerable variation in the quantum of compensation provided by different states, leading to disparities in the level of support available to victims. Moreover, delays in disbursement, lack of awareness, and bureaucratic hurdles often prevent victims from accessing the benefits of these schemes in a timely manner. These issues highlight the limitations of relying solely on statutory provisions without ensuring effective administrative mechanisms.

Another significant legislative development is the enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which has important implications for acid attack victims who suffer from permanent disabilities.<sup>9</sup> The Act adopts a rights-based approach to disability, emphasising equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion. Acid attack survivors who are classified as persons with disabilities are entitled to a range of benefits under this legislation, including reservation in employment, access to education, and social security measures. These provisions are particularly relevant for the realisation of livelihood rights, as they create opportunities for economic participation and reduce barriers to employment.

Despite the potential benefits of the disability framework, its applicability to acid attack victims is not always straightforward. The classification of survivors as persons with disabilities depends on the extent of their impairment, and not all victims may meet the statutory criteria. Furthermore, the implementation of reservation policies and other benefits remains inconsistent, limiting their impact on livelihood outcomes. There is therefore a need for greater clarity and inclusivity in the application of disability laws to acid attack survivors.

In addition to statutory provisions, various policy measures have been introduced at both the central and state levels to address the needs of acid attack victims. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has implemented schemes aimed at providing financial assistance, medical support, and rehabilitation services to survivors. These schemes often include provisions for free medical treatment, including reconstructive surgeries, as well as support for education and skill development. Some state governments have also introduced specific policies for acid attack victims, including monthly pensions, housing assistance, and employment opportunities. The role of healthcare policy is particularly important in addressing the needs of acid attack

---

<sup>8</sup> *Laxmi v. Union of India*, (2014) 4 SCC 427.

<sup>9</sup> Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

victims. Following judicial directions, both public and private hospitals are required to provide immediate and free treatment to survivors. This policy measure is critical in reducing the financial burden on victims and ensuring timely medical intervention, which is essential for recovery and rehabilitation. However, the implementation of this directive has been inconsistent, with reports of hospitals refusing treatment or demanding payment, thereby undermining the effectiveness of the policy.

Vocational training and skill development programmes constitute another important aspect of policy measures aimed at restoring livelihood. Various government initiatives seek to equip survivors with skills that enable them to secure employment or engage in self-employment. However, these programmes are often generic and do not adequately address the specific needs and limitations of acid attack victims. The absence of tailored training programmes, coupled with limited outreach and awareness, reduces their effectiveness in promoting economic independence.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society groups also play a crucial role in supplementing state efforts. These organisations provide a range of services, including medical assistance, psychological counselling, legal aid, and livelihood support. They often act as intermediaries between victims and state institutions, helping survivors navigate complex administrative processes. While their contributions are significant, reliance on NGOs highlights the gaps in state capacity and the need for a more robust institutional framework.

Another policy dimension is the regulation of acid sale, which is aimed at preventing acid attacks. Following judicial directions, strict guidelines have been issued regarding the sale and distribution of acid, including the requirement of identity proof and record-keeping by sellers. While these measures are primarily preventive, they also indirectly contribute to protecting livelihood by reducing the incidence of acid attacks. However, enforcement of these regulations remains weak, particularly in rural and informal markets.

A critical assessment of the statutory and policy framework reveals several gaps and challenges. One of the issues is the lack of a comprehensive legislation specifically addressing the rehabilitation and livelihood of acid attack victims. Existing laws and policies are fragmented and often fail to provide a holistic response to the complex needs of survivors. The absence of a unified framework results in inconsistencies and inefficiencies, limiting the overall impact of these measures.

Furthermore, there is a lack of effective coordination among various stakeholders, including government agencies, healthcare providers, and NGOs. This fragmentation leads to duplication

of efforts in some areas and neglect in others, thereby reducing the efficiency of service delivery. Additionally, the absence of monitoring and accountability mechanisms makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of existing programmes and ensure compliance with legal obligations.

The statutory framework and policy measures addressing acid attacks in India represent a significant step towards recognising and protecting the rights of victims, including their right to livelihood. However, the effectiveness of these measures is constrained by gaps in implementation, lack of coordination, and absence of a comprehensive rehabilitation framework. Addressing these challenges requires a more integrated and victim-centric approach that combines legal reforms with effective policy implementation and institutional support. Only through such a holistic strategy can the statutory and policy framework achieve its intended objective of restoring the dignity and livelihood of acid attack survivors.

## V. JUDICIAL RESPONSE AND RECOGNITION OF LIVELIHOOD RIGHTS

The Indian judiciary has played a transformative and proactive role in recognising and enforcing the rights of acid attack victims, particularly in relation to their right to livelihood. In the absence of a comprehensive statutory framework addressing the socio-economic rehabilitation of victims, the higher judiciary especially the Supreme Court has expanded the scope of constitutional protections under Article 21 to include the right to live with dignity, which inherently encompasses the right to livelihood. Through a series of landmark decisions, the courts have not only acknowledged the devastating impact of acid attacks on victims' economic independence but have also attempted to bridge the gap between legal rights and practical realities by issuing binding directions and guidelines.

A foundational aspect of this judicial approach lies in the expansive interpretation of the right to life under Article 21. The jurisprudential basis for recognising livelihood as a fundamental right was firmly established in *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*,<sup>10</sup> where the Supreme Court held that the right to livelihood is an integral part of the right to life. Although this case did not specifically deal with acid attack victims, its doctrinal significance has been instrumental in shaping subsequent judicial responses to cases involving deprivation of livelihood due to violence or state action. By recognising that the denial of livelihood amounts to a violation of the right to life, the Court laid the foundation for extending constitutional protection to victims of acid attacks, whose ability to earn a living is often severely impaired.

---

<sup>10</sup> AIR 1986 SC 180.

The judicial recognition of the specific plight of acid attack victims gained prominence in *Laxmi v. Union of India*,<sup>11</sup> a landmark public interest litigation that fundamentally reshaped the legal landscape concerning acid violence in India. In this case, the Supreme Court acknowledged the gravity of acid attacks and their long-term consequences on victims, including the loss of livelihood. While the primary focus of the judgment was on regulating the sale of acid and ensuring preventive measures, the Court also issued significant directions regarding compensation and medical treatment. It mandated that victims be provided with a minimum compensation of ₹3 lakh, recognising that financial assistance is essential for their rehabilitation and economic recovery. This compensation was not merely conceived as a form of reparation but as a means to enable victims to rebuild their lives and regain a degree of economic independence.

Importantly, the Court also directed that acid attack victims be provided with free medical treatment in both government and private hospitals. This directive has direct implications for livelihood, as access to timely and adequate healthcare is a prerequisite for recovery and reintegration into the workforce. By placing the obligation on the state to bear the cost of medical treatment, the Court sought to alleviate the financial burden on victims, thereby enabling them to focus on rehabilitation and livelihood restoration.

The recognition of livelihood rights was further strengthened in *Parivartan Kendra v. Union of India*,<sup>12</sup> where the Supreme Court explicitly addressed the issue of rehabilitation and economic empowerment of acid attack survivors. In this case, the Court emphasised that compensation alone is insufficient to address the needs of victims and that comprehensive rehabilitation measures are necessary. It directed state governments to take proactive steps to provide employment opportunities, vocational training, and other forms of support to ensure the social and economic reintegration of survivors. This judgment marked a significant shift from a purely compensatory approach to a more holistic, rights-based framework that recognises livelihood as a central component of victim rehabilitation.

The judiciary has also played a crucial role in reinforcing the obligation of the state to implement victim compensation schemes under Section 357A of the Code of Criminal Procedure.<sup>13</sup> In various cases, courts have intervened to ensure that compensation is disbursed in a timely and adequate manner. Judicial monitoring has been instrumental in addressing delays and inefficiencies in the implementation of compensation schemes, thereby enhancing access

---

<sup>11</sup> (2014) 4 SCC 427.

<sup>12</sup> (2016) 3 SCC 571.

<sup>13</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, § 357A.

to financial resources for victims. However, despite these efforts, challenges in implementation persist, highlighting the limitations of judicial intervention in the absence of effective administrative mechanisms.

Another important aspect of judicial response is the recognition of acid attack survivors as persons with disabilities, thereby entitling them to benefits under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.<sup>14</sup> Although not always explicitly stated in judicial pronouncements, courts have increasingly acknowledged the need to integrate disability rights within the framework of victim protection. This recognition has significant implications for livelihood, as it enables survivors to access reservation in employment, social security benefits, and other forms of support aimed at promoting economic inclusion.

The judiciary has also emphasised the importance of dignity and non-discrimination in the context of employment. By interpreting Article 21 in conjunction with Articles 14 and 15, courts have underscored the need to eliminate barriers that prevent acid attack survivors from accessing livelihood opportunities.<sup>15</sup> This includes addressing workplace discrimination, promoting inclusive employment practices, and ensuring that survivors are treated with dignity and respect. While these principles have been articulated in judicial decisions, their practical implementation remains a challenge.

In addition to the Supreme Court, various High Courts have also contributed to the development of jurisprudence on the rights of acid attack victims. High Courts have issued directions to state authorities to provide employment, financial assistance, and rehabilitation support to victims. These decisions reflect a growing recognition of the need for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to addressing the socio-economic impact of acid attacks.

Despite these progressive developments, the judicial response to livelihood rights is not without limitations. One of the major challenges is the reliance on case-by-case adjudication, which results in a lack of uniformity and consistency in the application of principles. While landmark judgments have set important precedents, their implementation varies across states, leading to disparities in the level of support provided to victims.

Furthermore, the judiciary's role is inherently reactive, addressing issues only when they are brought before the courts. This limits its ability to address systemic problems and ensure comprehensive policy reform. The absence of a dedicated legislative framework for the

---

<sup>14</sup> Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Constitution of India, arts. 14, 15 & 21.

rehabilitation and economic empowerment of acid attack victims further exacerbates this issue, placing an undue burden on the judiciary to fill the gaps.

Another limitation is the lack of effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with judicial directives. While courts have issued detailed guidelines and directions, their implementation often depends on the willingness and capacity of state authorities. In many cases, victims continue to face delays in receiving compensation and accessing rehabilitation services, undermining the effectiveness of judicial interventions.

Nevertheless, the judiciary's contribution to the recognition of livelihood rights for acid attack victims cannot be understated. Through its progressive interpretation of constitutional provisions and proactive approach to victim protection, it has significantly advanced the discourse on victim rights in India. By linking livelihood to dignity and the right to life, the courts have laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and rights-based approach to justice.

The judicial response to the impact of vitriolage on livelihood rights reflects both the strengths and limitations of the Indian legal system. While the judiciary has played a crucial role in recognising and enforcing these rights, the realisation of livelihood for acid attack victims ultimately depends on effective implementation, institutional coordination, and comprehensive policy reform. Strengthening these aspects is essential for ensuring that the promise of justice translates into meaningful and sustainable outcomes for survivors.

## **VI. BARRIERS TO REALISATION OF LIVELIHOOD RIGHTS**

The realisation of the right to livelihood for victims of vitriolage in India is impeded by a complex interplay of structural, institutional, socio-cultural, and economic barriers. Despite the existence of constitutional protections, statutory frameworks, and progressive judicial interventions, the translation of these normative guarantees into tangible outcomes remains significantly constrained. These barriers operate at multiple levels, often reinforcing one another and perpetuating the marginalisation of acid attack survivors.

One of the most significant institutional barriers is the inadequate implementation of victim compensation and rehabilitation schemes. Although Section 357A of the Code of Criminal Procedure mandates the establishment of Victim Compensation Schemes, the actual disbursement of funds is often delayed due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, procedural complexities, and lack of coordination among authorities.<sup>16</sup> Victims frequently encounter difficulties in navigating administrative processes, which are often cumbersome and

---

<sup>16</sup> Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, § 357A.

inaccessible, particularly for individuals with limited education or resources. Delayed compensation not only exacerbates the financial burden on victims but also hampers their ability to access timely medical treatment and rehabilitation services. The gap between judicial directives and administrative execution highlights a systemic failure in ensuring accountability and responsiveness within state institutions.

Closely linked to institutional shortcomings is the lack of a comprehensive and integrated rehabilitation framework. While various schemes exist at the central and state levels, they are often fragmented and lack coherence. There is no unified mechanism that addresses the full spectrum of needs of acid attack survivors, including medical care, psychological support, skill development, and employment assistance. This fragmented approach results in duplication of efforts in some areas and neglect in others, thereby limiting the overall effectiveness of rehabilitation measures. Furthermore, the absence of specialised rehabilitation centres and trained personnel further undermines the quality of support provided to victims.

Socio-cultural barriers constitute another major impediment to the realisation of livelihood rights. Acid attack survivors often face intense social stigma and discrimination due to their physical appearance. This stigma is deeply rooted in societal attitudes that equate physical disfigurement with diminished social value. As a result, survivors are frequently excluded from social and economic opportunities, including employment. Employers may be reluctant to hire individuals with visible disfigurements, reflecting both conscious and unconscious biases. This discrimination not only limits access to employment but also reinforces feelings of isolation and low self-esteem among survivors.

Gender-based discrimination further exacerbates these challenges, as the majority of acid attack victims in India are women. Patriarchal norms and gender inequalities often restrict women's access to education, employment, and economic resources, even in the absence of violence. When combined with the effects of acid attacks, these factors create multiple layers of disadvantage that are difficult to overcome. Women survivors may also face additional barriers within their families and communities, including abandonment, domestic violence, and social ostracism.

Economic barriers also play a critical role in limiting livelihood opportunities for acid attack victims. The cost of medical treatment for burn injuries is extraordinarily high, often requiring multiple surgeries, long-term care, and specialised treatment. These expenses can quickly deplete the financial resources of victims and their families, leaving them in a state of economic vulnerability. At the same time, the loss of income due to inability to work further exacerbates

financial instability. This combination of high expenditure and reduced earning capacity creates a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break.

Another significant barrier is the lack of access to education and skill development opportunities. Many acid attack victims are unable to continue their education due to physical and psychological challenges, as well as financial constraints. The absence of targeted vocational training programmes tailored to the needs of survivors further limits their ability to acquire new skills and adapt to alternative forms of employment. Existing skill development initiatives often fail to account for the specific challenges faced by acid attack survivors, such as physical limitations and social stigma.

The role of the labour market in perpetuating exclusion cannot be overlooked. The Indian labour market is largely informal, characterised by lack of job security, absence of social protection, and limited regulatory oversight. Acid attack survivors, who already face significant disadvantages, are often confined to low-paying and precarious employment opportunities. The lack of inclusive workplace policies and anti-discrimination measures further exacerbates their vulnerability. Although the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 provides for reservation in employment, its implementation remains limited, and many acid attack survivors are unable to benefit from its provisions.

Psychological barriers also significantly affect the ability of survivors to engage in livelihood activities. The trauma associated with acid attacks often results in long-term mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. These conditions can impair cognitive functioning, reduce motivation, and hinder social interaction, all of which are essential for maintaining employment. The lack of accessible and affordable mental health services further compounds this problem, leaving many survivors without adequate support.

Institutional apathy and lack of sensitisation among officials also contribute to the challenges faced by victims. Law enforcement agencies, healthcare providers, and administrative authorities often lack the training and awareness necessary to address the specific needs of acid attack survivors. This can result in insensitive treatment, delays in service delivery, and denial of entitlements. The absence of accountability mechanisms further perpetuates these issues, as victims have limited avenues for redress.

Moreover, there is a significant gap in data collection and research on the socio-economic impact of acid attacks. While the National Crime Records Bureau provides data on the incidence of acid attacks, there is limited information on the long-term outcomes of victims, particularly in relation to employment and livelihood. This lack of data hampers evidence-based policy-

making and limits the ability of stakeholders to design effective interventions.

Another critical barrier is the lack of coordination among various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector. Effective rehabilitation and livelihood support require a multi-sectoral approach that integrates legal, medical, social, and economic interventions. However, the absence of a coordinated framework often results in fragmented and inefficient responses. Collaboration between stakeholders is essential for creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for survivors.

In addition, legal awareness among victims remains low, which further restricts their access to remedies. Many survivors are unaware of their rights under existing laws and schemes, including compensation and employment benefits.<sup>17</sup> This lack of awareness is compounded by limited access to legal aid and support services, particularly in rural areas. Strengthening legal literacy and access to justice is therefore crucial for empowering victims.

The barriers to the realisation of livelihood rights for acid attack victims in India are multifaceted and deeply entrenched. They encompass institutional inefficiencies, socio-cultural discrimination, economic constraints, and psychological challenges, all of which interact to perpetuate the marginalisation of survivors. Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that goes beyond legal reforms to include social transformation, economic empowerment, and institutional accountability. Only through such an integrated strategy can the right to livelihood be effectively realised for victims of vitriolage.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Vitriolage has a devastating impact on the right to livelihood of victims in India, resulting in long-term socio-economic marginalisation and deprivation of dignity. While the judiciary has played a proactive role in recognising and protecting the rights of victims, significant challenges remain in the implementation of legal and policy measures. A comprehensive, rights-based approach that integrates legal remedies with socio-economic empowerment measures is essential for addressing these challenges. This includes strengthening compensation schemes, promoting inclusive employment policies, and addressing social stigma through awareness and education. The protection of livelihood rights is not merely a legal obligation but a moral imperative, essential for ensuring the dignity and autonomy of acid attack survivors.

\*\*\*\*\*

---

<sup>17</sup> Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.