

A RESEARCH STUDY ON

GENDER SENSITIVITY AND THE COVERAGE OF RAPE IN THE INDIAN NEWS MEDIA:

TEN YEARS AFTER THE NIRBHAYA CASE

Project Lead and Author: Dr. Sweta Singh
Project Consultant: Sameera Khan

2022



Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First

Supported by



United Nations Population Fund



Norwegian Embassy
New Delhi

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Foreword

The Nirbhaya rape case is a significant turning point in the way rape and sexual assault are defined, perceived, reported, and dealt with in India. Broad basing the definition of sexual assault, and making it a serious offence that deserves appropriate punishment, the Nirbhaya Act 2013 has changed the way this heinous crime is perceived and understood.

The public furore over the reportage on the Nirbhaya case led to media bodies like NBSA, and the specific acts reiterating and reinforcing the guidelines to be followed in reporting on such cases. The need for media sensitivity was focused upon in many conferences, and many workshops were conducted to sensitize the media to the guidelines, and written guidelines were distributed widely by organizations like Population First.

It has been a decade since the guidelines came into force. Did the media coverage change after the Nirbhaya case in 2012? If so, how did it change? Are the guidelines being followed? Is there more in-depth and nuanced reporting on rape? Are we able to frame the stories in the larger perspective? These are the questions we wanted to be answered. A research study was commissioned with academician Dr. Sweta Singh, Assistant Professor, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi. Titled 'Gender Sensitivity and Coverage of Rape in Indian Media: Ten Years after the Nirbhaya Case' the report analyses media coverage of rape cases from across the country. A total of eight cases between 2012- 2021 in six languages were analyzed, using qualitative research techniques.

I express my appreciation for Dr. Sweta Singh and Ms. Sameera Khan for the meticulousness with which the stories are analysed and the insights provided. I thank project assistant Gauri Vij, the team of researchers: Athila Hussain,

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This report would definitely help various feminist groups, NGOs, media groups and bodies to engage in evidence-based advocacy to promote greater sensitivity in media reporting on rape cases.

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Dr. A. L. Sharada

Director,

Population First

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Executive Summary

Almost ten years ago, Jyoti Singh's brutal gangrape and murder in the heart of New Delhi in December 2012 received an inordinate amount of media attention and coverage. Famous as the 'Delhi gang rape' or the 'Nirbhaya' case, the news story did not end with the victim's rape and death but continued as the media followed not just the legal case that ensued but also the huge nation-wide public protests by ordinary citizens and the setting up of a judicial committee that eventually re-wrote India's rape laws.

In the years that have followed, there has been a concerted effort by media across the country to report more on sexual assault and rape. The aim of this research study titled 'Gender Sensitivity and the Coverage of Rape in the Indian News Media: Ten Years After the Nirbhaya Case' is to look beyond the quantity of rape reportage and instead assess the quality, in particular how gender sensitive the Indian media's coverage of rape has been in the past decade. The research study has been supported by Population First, UNFPA and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi.

This study analyses gender sensitivity in the news coverage of eight rape cases from different linguistic regions of the country— focussing on five of them in detail – that took place in the ten years since the Nirbhaya case. The stories were sampled from various media publications (print and digital) from different regions of India in six languages. The five cases that were studied in detail included the Shakti Mills case (2013), the Jisha case (2016), the Kushmandi case (2018), the Hathras case (2020) and the IIT-G case (2021). For these five cases, at least two major news organisations were selected, one each for English and a corresponding regional language. Three additional cases – Kokrajhar (2015), Sakinaka (2021) and Kopardi (2016) – were also studied for added perspectives on the coverage of rape.

A total of 200 stories were monitored from 41 news organisation, of these 117 were in English and 83 were in regional languages.

In order to assess the gender sensitivity of the news stories, each news story was analysed on the basis of eight parameters – language, sources, legal/medical/forensic information, privacy, morality, sensationalism, intersectionality and gender justice.

Important Findings of the Report

In the immediate aftermath of the Jyoti Singh gang rape (2012), media coverage of rape, often in a nuanced sensitive manner, substantially increased in many news publications. However, in the years that have followed one witnesses the tendency of the media to use the Nirbhaya case as a benchmark against which other reported rapes are judged. Not only does this treatment de-contextualise the specific details of other cases, it also tends to homogenise the narratives of rape. Additionally, post-Nirbhaya, it seems as if the most brutal cases of rape with the most visible physical injuries get the widest coverage.

Many news stories analysed in this study were found to be fairly gender-sensitive in the use of language in terms of tone, keywords, stereotypes and other elements. This was particularly so in the Shakti Mills (2013), Sakinaka (2021) and Kopardi (2016) cases. However, qualitative interpretations of the data show that in all the cases studied, there were also stories that reflected language bias especially in the use of certain stereotypes, a lack of diversity in sourcing, breaches of privacy and inadequate references to intersectional elements. In the IIT-G case, for example, certain published headlines used the identity of ‘student’ only in association with the male accused while referring to the women survivors only as ‘girls’, even though all of them were students and one of the key survivors was in fact also a student of IIT-G. The use of the term ‘girls’ tends to infantilize women and not

using the term ‘student’ for the survivors showed that professional and career identity is more associated with men than women.

The study found that most of the sources used in rape news stories are official sources and these are usually male. Female sources constitute only 23% of the total (Appendix II, Chart 1, Pg no 61). Also, most stories are based on only one source, that too official. There are very few stories that use more than one source. For instance, in the Jisha case, out of the sixteen stories, only three stories had the victim's family and acquaintances as sources. The rest of the stories had official sources like the police, news agencies, advocates, diplomats, judges, hospital authority etc. Overall, very few gender experts and activists from academic institutions and non-profit organizations are quoted in rape news stories.

It also found that news reporters were not sufficiently aware of the newer legal, medical or forensic evidence laws as applicable to rape cases and thus, unable to adequately cross-question or critique police sources. This was particularly visible in the coverage of the Hathras rape case where many journalists did not contest the police version of denying rape based on the medical forensic report despite the fact that the medical examination of the victim was carried out several days after the rape, when forensic evidence becomes difficult to gather. More importantly, most media reportage did not point out that under the new rape laws, it was not necessary to corroborate a rape using medical/forensic evidence.

Out of the 200 stories, only 33.5% had some presence of intersectional attribute while 66.5% of the stories were marked for their absence. The intersectionalities, especially in the context of caste, exhibit how power dynamics get narrated particularly when the survivor/victim is from a lower caste. In the Hathras case for instance, less than half of the news stories monitored, i.e., only 20 out of 48 stories, had any mention of the intersectional attributes related to caste. More critically, while some news stories did highlight the fact that the victim belonged

to a Dalit community, the caste status of the perpetrators as upper caste Thakurs received minimal mention.

Similarly, in the Kushmandi rape case which involved a tribal disabled woman, the victim's intellectual disability found little coverage in the news stories despite the fact that it made her more vulnerable to assault.

Beyond the three cases of Shakti Mills, Kopardi and Sakinaka, this study found that most media coverage missed out on weaving elements of gender justice in their coverage. In these three Maharashtra cases, there were references to many aspects of gender justice such as the demand for speedy trials and protests and the stories also highlighted how hackneyed, patriarchal mindsets were still major obstacles in gender justice. However, in the Shakti Mills case, even though the coverage of the photojournalist's rape was fairly gender sensitive, a more sensationalist/voyeuristic tone was noted in some stories related to the rape of the woman telephone operator, who was also raped at the same location by the same perpetrators (both cases came to light at the same time).

The study found that when a gender-sensitive stance was taken by the news media, this was not just limited to the English-media. In Maharashtra, for example, where a sufficient number of English and Marathi news stories related to rape were studied, a gender sensitive perspective was noted in the media of both languages. It is noticed that regional news media coverage often reflects entrenched patriarchal and upper caste biases prevalent in the geographies and locations that they function in. Thus, the absence of legal, medical information is not unusual in the regional papers of the North, both in English and Hindi. The morality lens was less visible in the reportage of the rape cases in Maharashtra but evidently more visible in the Jisha (Kerala) and Hathras (Uttar Pradesh) cases.

Though it is evident that the Indian news media has come a long way in its coverage of rape and sexual assault, this study recommends that in order to further

improve reportage, news media organizations need to continually invest in training and skill upgradation of journalists and editors involved in the coverage of gender-based violence. What could be useful for that training is a ‘good practices’ guide to help journalists navigate the complexities of covering rape and sexual assault. Some aspects that need to find mention in such a guide include the following:

Being mindful of language and tone; using a diversity of sources, both in terms of gender as well as official/non-official including gender experts; not casting moral aspersions on survivors/victims or invading their privacy; understanding correctly the legal/medical/forensic aspects of rape cases; recognizing the importance of gender constantly intersecting with class, caste, sexuality, disability etc., and the possibility of that increasing the vulnerabilities of some women to sexual violence and rape.

1. Introduction

If there is one area of news media coverage where women are central and which always gets an enormous amount of attention, it is that of rape and sexual assault. However, this attention is not always comprehensive and diligent. Studies have shown that the media is usually selective in what rape cases it chooses to cover in more detail – and often a rape survivor’s (or perpetrator’s) class, caste, location decide not just which rape stories are reported but also how they are reported. Other factors that play a role include local politics, controversies, the type of media platform (print, digital, broadcast) and even the language in which that media story is being told.

The concerns related to media coverage of a sensitive issue like rape are often with regard to the media misreporting details while pandering to sensationalism and voyeurism. This is usually apparent in the way language and images are used, which sources are sought, and how matters of legal, medical and forensic importance are reported. One of the most common violations by the media is in relation to the privacy of rape survivors and their families and in arbitrarily applying a patriarchal moral lens to closely scrutinize the behaviour of rape survivors rather than perpetrators.

Ten years ago, Jyoti Singh’s brutal gangrape and murder in December 2012 in the heart of New Delhi received an inordinate amount of media attention and coverage. This was not just limited to the Delhi media or national press but made a splash in media across the country. Famous as the ‘Delhi gang rape’ case or the ‘Nirbhaya’ case, the story did not end with the victim’s rape and death but continued as it followed the huge nation-wide public protests by ordinary citizens and the setting up of a judicial committee to re-write India’s rape laws.

The Justice Verma Committee, set up to suggest amendments to India’s criminal law after the Delhi gang-rape incident, specifically argued that state and civil

society needed to deconstruct and change the ‘shame-honour paradigm’ with relation to rape and treat it as an offence against the body. It also widened the definition of rape and said that rape and sexual assault were not merely crimes of passion but an expression of power. Importantly, it expanded the existing peno-vaginal definition of rape.

These suggested changes soon became part of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) through the passing of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act which came into effect on April 2, 2013. Besides accepting the new definition of rape, it added on new offences such as using criminal force on a woman with the intent to disrobe, acid-throwing, stalking and voyeurism. The punishment for rape and sexual assault became more stringent; the punishment for gang rape was increased from the earlier 10 years of life imprisonment to 20 years of life imprisonment.

After the extensive reporting on the ‘Nirbhaya’ case and the changes in the law, one certainly observes a change in the quantity of rape coverage across most media and languages in most parts of the country. Did the quality also change substantially? That is the concern with which we started off this study and decided to monitor and analyse gender sensitivity in the coverage of rape cases in order to explain the patterns of rape coverage. The purpose of this report, sponsored by Population First, UNFPA and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi, is to assess how gender sensitive Indian media coverage of rape has been after the Jyoti Singh case of 2012.

In the last few years, the idea of promoting gender justice in media reportage of rape cases has become more pronounced and visible. It is argued that unless the media reports on such sensitive matters by keeping in mind the factors of gender equality – social, economic, political, cultural – the achievement of the rights and needs of women may get further delayed. In order to attain more balanced social

structures and behaviours, bring an end to violence, provide equal distribution of social necessities, it is important that the news media pro-actively weaves these values in their news coverage, especially that relating to rape given that there is a huge and unequal gender power play in society involving rape incidents. A case in point is the Guwahati High Court order in 2021 calling the IIT-G rape accused an ‘asset to the state’ and much of the news media unquestioningly reporting the order without sufficiently critiquing it.

This study analyses gender sensitivity in the news coverage of eight rape cases – focussing on five of them for detailed analyses – that took place in the ten years after the Jyoti Singh rape case. The stories were sampled from various media publications (print and digital) and from different regions of India in six languages.

2. Scope and Sample

In this research study, the news contents of **eight** rape cases in print and digital publications of six languages were analysed. These were rape cases that took place in the last decade after the 2012 Jyoti Singh gangrape. Out of eight, the study focussed in-depth on **five** cases - **Shakti Mills (2013)**, **Jisha (2016)**, **Kushmandi (2018)**, **Hathras (2020)** and **IIT-G (2021)**. For these five cases, at least two major news organisations were selected, one each for English and a corresponding regional language.

The story count of the five cases=140

News Organisations: Five Key Cases

Shakti Mills: The Times of India (English) and Maharashtra Times (Marathi)

Jisha: The News Minute (English) and Malayalam Manorama (Malayalam)

Kushmandi: Business Standard (English) and Anandabazar Patrika (Bengali)

Hathras: The Times of India (English) and Amar Ujala (Hindi)

IIT-G: East Mojo (English) and Asomiya Pratidin (Assamese)

News Organisations: Three Additional Cases

Kokrajhar: Business Standard, The Times of India, The Quint, India Today, Oneindia.com, Outlook, The Assam Tribune

Sakinaka: Mid-Day (English), Loksatta (Marathi)

Kopardi: The Indian Express (English), Loksatta (Marathi)

The **three** additional cases - **Kokrajhar (2015), Sakinaka (2021) and Kopardi (2016)** were also studied for added perspectives on the coverage of rape.

The story count of three additional cases = 53

A few more (**7 stories**) about other cases from Assam were included for quantitative information and they were not used for qualitative interpretations. This was also done to make up for the very limited stories that could be found in Assamese.

The study aimed at the detailed quantitative and qualitative analyses of at least one case from five different regions of India – North (Hathras), East (Kushmandi), West (Shakti Mills), South (Jisha) and the North-East (IIT-G). A total of **200 stories were monitored, of these 117 were in English and 83 were in regional languages**. A team of six researchers including journalists, academics and student volunteers collected the data in the months of November and December 2021 from 41 news organisations.

As this research aims to broadly find out whether the stories were gender sensitive or not, we analysed the stories for each case based on eight parameters: language,

sources, legal/medical/forensic information, privacy, morality, sensationalism, intersectionality and gender justice.

Eight Parameters for measuring Gender Sensitivity

1. **Language:** It has been noted that most stories on rape carry statements from official sources like the police, judges, politicians etc. The dependency on official sources for the bulk of the stories tends to give a one-sided story with huge official source bias. In rape cases, it is equally important to cite gender experts, witnesses, relatives, neighbours, family members of the survivor/s and the accused for a more balanced understanding of the developments. In this research we look at the gender and the type of the source cited in the stories as diversity of sources is a vital component of gender sensitivity.
2. **Sources:** It is the most significant determinant of gender sensitivity in news stories. There can be various approaches to study use of language in news stories, this research primarily looks at the tone, keywords and stereotypes to understand markers of sensitivity. Tone is the word choice used to indicate levels of sensitivity. Keywords are the important words used in the story that are central to the interpretation of meanings. Stereotypes are cliched or predictable words, phrases and other depictions.
3. **Legal/Medical/Forensic information:** Media often relies heavily on legal, medical and forensic information shared by police and government officials. Since the laws relating to the definition of rape as well as to medical and forensic evidence have substantially changed in the last decade making them more survivor-friendly, it is critical that media persons are well-versed with them to counter misinformation as well as to help them probe rape cases more sensitively and accurately.

4. **Privacy:** Privacy is a victim when rape cases are taken to the court. The law (Section 228-A of the Indian Penal Code) as well as Press Council of India guidelines caution against identification while reporting crimes involving rape and sexual assault. Rape survivors, victims, the accused and their family members too have privacy rights. There have been instances where the courts have stated that certain medical tests and their interpretation violate the right of the rape survivor's privacy. Privacy and confidentiality are key concerns in the assessment of gender sensitivity.
5. **Morality:** Often rape coverage inadvertently falls prey to patriarchal ideas of shame and dishonour attached to women survivors and victims. It is important that this is understood and dismantled by journalists. For example, one of the most common moral assumptions is that a women's clothing is responsible for rape. News media intervenes by questioning and investigating these assumptions so that facts remain the focus of the news story.
6. **Sensationalism/Voyeurism:** News media in India has been thoughtless in coverage of rape stories by foregrounding elements that may incite or even titillate audiences. These stories have a definite male gaze on the survivor, de-contextualized from the larger concerns of unsafe homes, public spaces, power equations and patriarchy and failure of institutions. The call for public shooting of the perpetrators, disturbing and graphic details of the incident, using verbatim statements from FIR, for instance, often have elements of sensationalism and voyeurism.
7. **Intersectionality:** The intersectional elements of caste, class, religion, disability and others tend to give a more socially relevant context to a story. Along with gender, the media needs to also look at these other intersectional elements while covering rape as these often have a key bearing to the crime.

8. **Gender Justice:** Patriarchal prejudices and misogyny are not just prevalent in our social structures, they also get evident when institutions, contrary to legal provisions for the crime of rape, engage with ideas and actions that may go against gender justice. For instance, survivors and perpetrators have often been asked by the highest courts if they would want to marry each other. This goes against the idea of gender justice. Judiciary is not free of such biases and hence stories need to be looked at from the gender justice lens for purposes of gender sensitivity. Rape laws are also not devoid of these larger societal biases rooted in patriarchy and gender inequality. In this research, stories with information related to demand for justice for the survivor, security for women, speedy trials, strict punishments and similar ideas have been marked for the presence of gender justice.

3. Main Findings

1. The most noticeable news trend post the Jyoti Singh gang rape (2012) was that rape coverage went up substantially in most media publications. This was seen across all media and languages. On the positive side, one saw a **good amount of gender sensitivity in terms of allowing space to report beyond the usual**, several follow-up stories that were not just disseminating the facts of the case but also reflecting the anger of civil society. There was a **definite shift in the language used by much of the news media that was more gender-sensitive as it brought in nuanced coverage involving issues of gender justice**.
2. At the same time, an appropriation of many rape cases with the Nirbhaya case as ‘Nirbhaya 1’ and ‘Nirbhaya 3’ gets visible. This treatment de-contextualises the specific details of each case and has the tendency to homogenise narratives of rape. Importantly, post-Nirbhaya case, it seems that **only the most brutal cases with the most injuries get wider visibility**, perhaps the reason for such frequent appropriations and comparisons.
3. The analysis of this study shows that there is a continuity of those patterns of coverage, whereby **the stories are by and large gender-sensitive in the use of tone, keywords, stereotypes and other elements. The data shows that 91% stories indicated sensitivity in the use of keywords. (151 out of 165 stories)**. This is particularly in the Shakti Mills (2013), Sakinaka (2021) and Kopardi (2016) cases. The language used by the media in the coverage of the Shakti Mills rape case is sensitive to the survivor and the nature of the crime. This is visible in both English and the Marathi press, across the parameters of tone, keywords, stereotypes and other elements. **In the Shakti Mills case, only 5 out of 47 stories were marked insensitive for the tone of language**.

4. While quantitative data shows that there is a marked shift towards gender sensitive coverage of rape cases, **the qualitative interpretations show that in each of these cases, there are many stories that reflect language bias especially in the use of stereotypes, lack of diversity in sources, breach of privacy and inadequate reference to intersectional elements.**
5. In the IIT-G case, two publications - Deccan Chronicle and The New Indian Express report on the same developments on the same dates. The headlines of both the stories seemed to be playing with the numbers for no good reason and hence come across as indifferent headlines.

'2 IIT students allegedly rape 3 girls' (Feb 8, TDC)

'Two IIT-Guwahati students arrested for allegedly raping three university girls' (Feb 8, TNIE)

In these headlines, **the identity of 'the student' is associated only with the male accused while the survivors have been called 'girls', even though one of the key survivors was also a student of IIT-G. The use of 'girls' tends to infantilize women. Also, it shows that professional and career identity is associated with men and not women. Most of the stories and headlines in this case seem to treat the accused as the main subject.**

6. Another headline in Kokrajhar case **puts the word rape in single quotation marks** in the headline "Assam shocker: Pregnant woman 'raped' by army men", thus **conveying doubt about the complainant.** This is the only story monitored with this kind of a headline.
7. This study finds that **most of the sources used in rape news stories are official sources and these are usually male (36%). Female sources constitute only 23% of the total.** Also, most stories are based on only one source, that too official. There are **very few stories that use more than one**

source. For instance, in Jisha’s case, out of the sixteen stories, only three stories had the victim's family and acquaintances as sources. The rest of the stories had official sources like the police, news agencies, advocates, diplomats, judges, hospital authority etc. In the Kushmandi case as well, out of the fourteen sources cited in ten stories, only three are female and the rest are male. Most of these sources are not related to the victim but are involved in the progress of the case as more of a political development. **We find very few gender experts and activists from academic institutions and non-profit organizations are quoted.**

8. The Legal/Medical/Forensic details are substantially present in the Shakti Mills case whereas they are largely missing from the Hathras case. **Even when the medical and forensic information is mentioned, it is usually carried verbatim as official statements, without any critique or questioning and sometimes totally used for deflecting the central focus of the story.** One of the headlines, ‘Hathras girl was not raped’ (Oct 2, TOI) cites a senior police official’s statement denying rape based on the forensic report that apparently did not find any conclusive information. The story does not contest the fact that the medical examination of the victim was carried out several days after the rape, when forensic evidence becomes difficult to gather. More importantly, **it does not point out that under the new rape laws, it is not necessary to corroborate a rape using medical/forensic evidence.**

Thus, the Hathras case showed that the journalists are not really aware of medical or forensic evidence laws in rape cases – as a result they cannot adequately cross-question police sources even when patently false information is provided to them.

9. Out of 200 stories, only 33.5% had some presence of intersectional attribute while 66.5% of the stories were marked for their absence. **The intersectionalities, especially in the context of caste, exhibit how power dynamics get narrated particularly when the survivor/victim is from a**

lower caste. In the Hathras case for instance, less than half of the news stories monitored, i.e. only 20 out of 48 stories, had any mention of the intersectional attributes related to caste. **More critically, while some news stories did highlight the fact that the victim belonged to a Dalit community, the caste status of the perpetrators as upper caste Thakurs received minimal mention.** The headlines mostly reflect official developments and official sources. In Jisha's case as well, even if the case required intersectional treatment, the essential information related to the identity of the victim – that she was from a Dalit background – remained inadequately addressed.

10. Beyond the three cases of Shakti Mills, Kopardi and Sakinaka, this study found that **most media coverage missed out on weaving elements of gender justice in their coverage.** In the **three Maharashtra cases (Shakti Mills, Kopardi and Sakinaka), there were references to many aspects of gender justice** such as the demand for speedy trials and protests. The stories also highlighted how hackneyed, patriarchal mindsets were still major obstacles in gender justice.
11. In the Shakti Mills case, even though the coverage of the photojournalist's rape was fairly gender sensitive, a more **sensationalist/voyeuristic tone** was noted in some stories related to the rape of the woman telephone operator, who was also raped at the same location by the same perpetrators (both cases came to light at the same time). For example, one news story about it carried the headline 'It happened in two hours!' **It appears as if the media were more mindful when covering the apparently middle-class 'person like us' survivor (the photojournalist) than when reporting on the apparently working-class survivor (the telephone operator).**

There are other instances where in the IIT-G case, a part of the FIR account of the survivor has been produced verbatim by The New Indian Express. This makes the story appear sensationalistic as publishing the first-person account might be traumatizing for the survivor as **some of the detailing of**

information like ‘looking for rented accommodation’, ‘spend the night’, ‘offered drinks’ and ‘got into the act’ may be relevant information for investigation purposes but also opens up the space for moral judgements to be made about the survivors.

Sensationalism is also visible in the Hathras case, when not only the rape is denied, but instead it is stated that the incident is being deliberately whipped up to incite caste-based tension in the locality.

12. The study found that a **gender-sensitive stand was not just limited to the English-media**. In Maharashtra, for example, where we studied a sufficient number of English and Marathi news stories related to rape, a gender sensitive perspective was noted in the media of both languages. This was seen in all three cases in Maharashtra – Shakti Mills, Kopardi and Sakinaka. The legal/medical/forensic are substantially present in the Shakti Mills case whereas they are largely missing or misunderstood in the Hathras case. It is noticed that regional news media coverage often reflects entrenched patriarchal and upper caste biases prevalent in the geographies and locations that they function in. Thus, the absence of legal, medical information is not unusual in the regional papers of the North, both in English and Hindi. The morality lens was less visible in the reportage of the Maharashtra cases but evidently more visible in the Jisha (Kerala) and Hathras (Uttar Pradesh) cases.

4. Rape Cases: Gender Sensitivity Analysis

Key Cases

Shakti Mills (2013, English and Marathi)

Eight months after the Jyoti Singh gang rape case, better known as the ‘Delhi gang rape’ or ‘Nirbhaya’ case, rocked the nation, a woman photo journalist, out on assignment with a colleague, was sexually assaulted by a group of men on August 22, 2013 in a dilapidated mill located close to a busy railway station in Mumbai. While investigating the photo journalist’s gangrape, the police managed to gather evidence of other gang rapes carried on by the same group of men in the same location. One of these cases involving a woman described as a telephone operator also went on trial at the same time as the photojournalist’s case. These cases shook the political establishment in Maharashtra as it raised serious questions about women’s safety in Mumbai, usually touted as the safest city for women in India. The Shakti Mills case was also a landmark case for another reason, as it was one of the first to be tried under the new rape laws that were implemented, following the Justice Verma committee’s recommendations, on March 21, 2013. The new tougher anti-rape law – Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 – redefined rape and made punishments more stringent, including death for repeat rape offenders. On March 20, 2014, a trial court sentenced to death the three accused in the gang rape of the woman photojournalist. As the same accused were also convicted at the same time for the gang rape of the woman telephone operator, they were treated as repeat offenders. The fourth accused was given a life term and the minor accused was sent to a correctional facility. In October 2021, the Bombay High Court began the death confirmation hearing as well as a plea against the trial court’s verdict. On November 25, 2021, the Bombay High Court commuted to life the death sentence of the three accused.

Gender Sensitivity Analysis

The language used by the media in the coverage of the Shakti Mills rape case is by and large very sensitive to the survivor and to the nature of the crime and this is both in the Marathi and in the English press, across the parameters of tone, keywords, stereotypes and other elements.

Marked shift towards sensitive reportage

Just as the Jyoti Singh rape case of 2012 came to be also known as the ‘Delhi Rape case’ in news media, the Shakti Mills case was at the time often referred to as the ‘Mumbai Rape case’. This could be because the two crimes, committed in a gap of less than a year, were equally horrendous gang rapes and shook the conscience not just of the metropolitan publics of Delhi and Mumbai but the nation at large.

Most of the stories covered were very sensitive with only a very few being insensitive. In a headline, the expression ‘those perpetrators’ is put in single quotes. It is how the survivor calls them. This is also the way the accused will be referred to in several news reports. The readers are told the specific assignment she was on, that is shooting pictures of the chawls. The story also tells us about the male colleague who had minor abrasions (Aug 23, MT). Sensitive stories bring out the trauma as the survivor was under treatment and stable, she was unable to speak in the initial phase of being admitted (Aug 23, MT). Concerns about survivor’s trauma and other medical conditions also reflect sensitive coverage.

The poor conviction and high acquittal rate have been highlighted in one of the sensitive stories (Aug 28, TOI). Such stories often give voice to the survivor’s feelings and opinion, objectively report on the investigation process, stories list the kind of help and resources available to survivors, what actions will be taken

next to ensure swift justice, convey the extent of physical injuries, highlight how defunct public spaces easily become havens for drunkards, addicts and criminals, making them unsafe for women.

However, stereotypes complicate the stories that got reported on the side-lines of the Shakti Mills crime as the story has reference to drug addicts lurking in remote places and rich kids racing their cars. In stories of sexual harassment, the expression ‘*chhedkhani*’ (teasing) may not sufficiently represent the nature and intensity of harassment (Aug 28, MT). The harassers are often referred to as ‘mischief mongering youth’ or ‘roadside Romeos.’

A story has been narrated from the point of view of women and their impressions of the idea of safety (Aug 31, MT). Such stories connect rape with everyday realities of misogyny and patriarchy, some of which have cultural sanctions. This story has a woman playwright, artist and photographer as sources. One woman says Mumbai was never hundred percent safe. She cites the example of the festival of *Govinda (Janamashtami)*, where rowdy boys move around in the city in trucks. There are women too at the *Govinda* festival. This may not be all fearful for women, but it is troublesome. Despite the Shakti Mills case, the crowd in the local train women’s compartment and in the streets have not decreased. Thus, Mumbai is multi-faceted. Though the city is shocked, the idea of Mumbai as a safe and resilient city is questioned, its spirit is still intact. Even as the stories depict Mumbai as a resilient city, they also raise concerns on women’s safety in Mumbai. In this story, the city is ascribed to be ‘possessing certain ethos’ and the headline calls for cherishing them.

Demonizing of the accused

When talking of the juveniles accused in the crime, the general tone in one of the stories was uncharitable (Aug 25, TOI). The stories overall had a gender sensitive tone but were not sensitive towards the accused juveniles. Even in otherwise

sensitive stories, there is a tendency of demonizing the accused. One of the stories mentioned him as ‘a demon’ (*naradham*). The researcher points out that this kind of demonization is a tendency to look at rapists as a separate category of deranged men and not as regular men operating in a culture of patriarchy and male dominance which gives all men the power and impunity to commit violence on women (Aug 25, MT). Emotive expressions like ‘horrific’, ‘*bhishan*’ are used and the woman is called ‘*peedit*’ or a victim. There is also a story that warns against demonizing migrants as it happens every time a major crime shocks the state.

Solutions, or are they? With every case more and more freedoms are lost

As a story that takes an overall view of the dismal law and order situation to present an ecosystem in which crime against women takes place, the tone of the language conveys concern for the situation; it sees strict policing as a solution (Aug 29, MT). As the researcher points out, it presents an old school view of a tightly governed society which fears the police.

When incidents of public rape and sexual violence take place, news stories often hint that being with a man keeps women safe. But a published editorial questions this assumption (Aug 24, MT) mentioning that there have been crimes against women that have taken place even when women have been with male companions – alluding to the Shakti Mills case – thus disproving the idea that women need to be accompanied by males for their safety. The editorial muses about the distress in the minds of women. It lists many rape cases in which the woman was accompanied by a man.

Another story mentions the poor women, ragpickers and destitute women who lack the confidence to approach any authority (Aug 28, TOI). This is in reference to the fact that the same group of men accused in the Shakti Mills case were also accused of raping several poor ragpicker women, prior to the incident. Also, the

use of an android app is talked about as a safety tool for women where the researcher points out that it can only be used by those who can afford android phones (Aug 27, Rediff.com). It is also very problematically headlined as ‘Now a free mobile app to ‘*bachao*’ women.’ This takes away the agency of the woman as capable of protecting herself, and also distracts from the larger accountability of governing institutions in making public spaces safe. Mobile applications may be additions but they are not substitutes to the changes required on the ground.

Stereotypes, Sensationalism and Voyeurism

In a story that demonstrates concern over another rape incident (the telephone operator case), involving the same gang members who raped the photo-journalist, there is stereotypical mention of the fact that the woman had run away from the house with her lover because her mother objected to their union (Sept 5, MT). The headline is sensational as well as it reads ‘It happened in two hours!’ No sub-head is given to add the context. Another headline read ‘Inside Mumbai’s mill of horror’, creating a sense of suspense and thrill.

A headline reads ‘This is what happened’ and organizes the timeline of the incident (Aug 24, MT). The researcher points out that the sub-head is neutral, the headline is quite attention-grabbing as it is closer to voyeuristic appeal. Other headlines also had crass wordings and didn't come across as being sensitive to the survivor or expressing concern over the incident.

Legal and medical positions of the survivor and the juvenile

There are mentions of laws as the survivor demands life term for the accused. The demand for life term is nuanced as generally survivors seek death penalty. The story shows the survivor in a positive light for wanting to go back to finish her project.

There are stories that captured the reactions of the legal professionals and countered the victim-blaming statements. Stories with very sensitive entries included information on the rise in cases of sexual violence, easy acquittals of rape accused, data to put the story in perspective, highlight the dismal response of the law enforcement agencies and government towards rape cases.

Section 376 D of the amended Indian Penal Code (IPC) is invoked which entails a minimum punishment of 20 years and maximum life. This is a post-Nirbhaya case development as proposed by the Justice Verma committee. The story also mentions intimate medical information about internal bleeding due to the ‘unnatural sex’ that possibly refers to anal sex, an act that has been included in the new rape law (Aug 24, TOI, ‘Photographer gang-raped in old Mahalaxmi mill in Mumbai, cops release sketches of 5 suspects’).

There are several stories assessing the legal positions with respect to age of the juvenile (Aug 2, MT, ‘Juveniles have committed serious crimes’). The story navigates the legal position on juveniles and states the Supreme Court order on raising the age of adult criminals from sixteen years to eighteen years. Other stories have medical details like one of the accused to undergo the Bone Ossification Test (BOT) to establish his age. As per the Supreme Court order, BOT is done only when the birth certificate or age proof is not available. In other stories legal procedures are mentioned.

It is observed that since the confusion over the age of one of the accused is a slippery terrain for reporters, it only gets complicated by the many versions of age coming from different sources. The police who gave the information of the investigation revealed his name saying he is a major. But his family said he is a minor. By then his name is already published based on the official information provided by the police. The story also portrays the accused as a fiend (Aug 25, ‘Accused who raped woman twice, under arrest’).

The trial of the accused in camera, the Test Identification Parade (TIP) of the minor accused conducted under magisterial supervision and police supervisions are some other legal information that come to the fore from other stories.

About forensics, a report on the DNA from the clothes of the accused is discussed, it adds that the DNA samples taken from the victim have matched with those of the accused. One story mentions how a stole, not that of the survivor's, but the one that the accused persons wiped themselves with, was sent for forensic examination for DNA matching. The police said they would record a supplementary statement of the survivor to plug in any gaps. Another story has a reference to a forensic expert who visited the crime scene to build evidence about confirmation of the crime site. The stories also talk about the evidence found to be sent for forensic examination.

Survivor not blamed

The sensitive stories mostly have no indicators of moral judgements. As stated in a story, it is important in crimes against women, one should shun the question 'why did she go there?' (Aug 31, MT). The headline of a story, although editorialized, minces no words and conveys the outrage felt at the incident (Aug 24, MT, 'Shame Shame!'). The story mentions that she went to the mill compound with a male colleague for work, there is no morality lens applied. The story focuses on unpacking the incident without getting into undesired details of descriptions of the survivor's body and injuries. For instance, it adds: 'the fact that perpetrators even had plans to kill the duo, the victim received calls from her mother twice but the perpetrators threatened her against saying anything. Then they snatched away her phone.'

The stories call out the rape apologists and victim blamers, as the researcher adds, the old trend of questioning the character of the survivor is more or less not

visible. It is the attitudes of the so-called public intellectuals towards sexual crimes which is called into question and termed as lacking in humanity.

Even issues about women getting harassed are raised, there are fewer comments on the attire or manners. The story sticks to the mannerisms of the youth who harass. ‘I am a *bindaas Mumbaikar*, who slips into whatever she is comfortable in, wears whatever she lays her hands on without wondering if it is appropriate’, critiques the notion of appropriate dress for women and policing of women’s bodies (Aug 26, Rediff.com).

The culture of silence created by patriarchal attitudes is critiqued in another story. The survivor’s choice to walk out of the hospital without covering her face has been stated as an empowering act. Even as stories indicate where and when the survivor went, and with whom, these details are not treated with a moral lens. There are no judgements on her dress or manner.

There are other stories that capture the insensitive reaction of the people around the mill but do not endorse their views. It documents that the reactions of people around the mill area are disconcerting as they subscribe to the predictable patterns of survivor-blaming and shaming, also accusing women for stepping out to work and also for their attire. In a story seen as insensitive in the use of language, the headline is ambiguously constructed as a single word ‘Fear!’. The article is about the lack of fear of the police, which is needed. The piece blames women in some ways.

Less visibility of intersectionality and morality

In analysis of the news stories relating to the Shakti Mills case, 31 out of 48 stories had either no intersectional elements or minimal intersectional elements. Reference to caste, class or other markers of intersectionality were largely not visible. The profession of the survivor (photojournalism) and her perceived

middle-class background attracted immediate attention from the media, for whom she was also one of their own.

An article talks about perpetrators – rich and poor, for e.g., drug addicts at railway stations and platforms and rich kids racing their cars. The correlations between crime and the growing income inequality gap, erosion of the middle-class and the struggle for survival, all of which has eaten away at the city's fabric is stated.

A story about the accused gives a headline in first-person when the accused had not spoken to the media himself. In this story, while there are no explicit markers of the socio-economic backgrounds of the accused persons, the reader gets a sense that they come from poor localities in Mumbai. It mentions that the mother has come alone, with no other family member. She is a widow and stays with three other sons in Agripada. The report also states the situation at the house of another accused Chand Sheikh is no different. This also reveals that he comes from a minority community.

Other stories discuss criminalisation of a class of people. In a witness documentation story, the people quoted are from the lower income group such as a tea vendor, cab driver etc. Another story has the middle-class point of view as it excludes the experiences of the poor Mumbai women, it conflates the experience of one class of woman to that of every woman in the city. It also criminalizes men from the service/blue collared jobs as e.g., the pizza delivery boy. A story states that one of the accused Salim was gambling in a shanty when he called three other aides on the phone and asked them to come to Shakti Mills compound. The fact that they are arrested from Dhobi Ghat slums also shows that they were from poor backgrounds. The researcher points out that the police dismissed the claim of the family of the accused that he is a minor and his name is outed. If the accused had been from an affluent section, printing his name would have created a furore.

There is a hint of moral judgment when a story says that the woman's male colleague tried to offer resistance but he proved to be weak. The description feeds into the idea that the man should be strong and protect the woman with him from assault. The headline of the story reads ‘Shame Shame!’

Jisha (2016, English and Malayalam)

The Jisha case is a rape and murder crime that shook state of Kerala in April 2016. It became the most publicized crime case during the Kerala Legislative elections in May 2016. Jisha, a 29-year-old Dalit woman hailing from Perumbavoor in Ernakulam district, was a law student at Ernakulam’s Government Law College. She was raped and murdered at her house in Kuruppampadi on the night of 28 April 2016. Her mutilated body was discovered by her mother. Several of her body parts, including the genitals, bore multiple stab wounds. A 24-year-old Assamese migrant labourer who had barged into her house with the aim of rape was found to be the culprit and was arrested. He admitted committing the gruesome crime and was awarded the death penalty by the Ernakulam Chief Judicial Magistrate’s court.

Gender Sensitivity Analysis

Jisha rape case was not reported widely in the media for several days. As soon as the report began, there were quick comparisons with the Jyoti Singh case of 2012, Her Dalit identity is missed out in most of the stories. Out of the sixteen stories, only three stories had the victim's family and acquaintances as sources. The rest of the stories had official sources like the police, news agencies, advocates, diplomats, judges, hospital authority and the general public.

Kerala's Nirbhaya, but a lot lesser

Jisha rape and murder case has also been called as the Perumbavoor murder case or Kerala's Nirbhaya as in the headlines 'Kerala's Nirbhaya: Is Jisha not worthy of our attention if not compared to Jyoti?' (May 4, The News Minute) and 'Perumbavoor murder case: A policeman provided crucial information' (Dec 17, 2017, MM). The case was compared with Nirbhaya initially as it was as brutal and shook the conscience of the general public in Kerala. The post-mortem report mentioned in a news story states there were thirty-eight wounds on her body due to brutal assault and torture. Much has been discussed about how not every rape case gets the same attention. The News Minute story asks: Is our outrage governed by the degree of violence a rape victim is subjected to? Would so many people have been outraged over her rape if it wasn't accompanied by the violence?

The story points out that the incident was not reported widely in the media for several days. As soon as the report began, there were quick comparisons with the Jyoti Singh case of 2012. It adds:

"...what happens when we compare two cases of such sensitive nature. We face the risk of losing the specificities of one case to the one that has been put on the pedestal."

The News Minute also engages on whether or not to reveal the name of the survivors and victims as some of the ideas related to not identifying them are entrenched in patriarchy as pointed out in the story 'Media, law and patriarchy: Why Jisha's real name is more powerful than any pseudonym' (May 7).

In a rather disconcerting way there is another similarity, just as Jyoti Singh incident happened a little more than a year before the general elections, and some have argued that it could be one of the several reasons why the case fetched so much media attention and public outcry, Jisha's rape case seemed to have gained

a lot of traction gradually as the state assembly elections were due in less than a month's time. Therefore, a headline like 'Implement Saudi model punishment in rape cases: Kerala MP Suresh Gopi' (May 5, TNM) is not surprising.

The stories were monitored as having a somewhat sensitive tone and only two stories out of sixteen had a very insensitive tone. Jisha has been described as 'a woman of perseverance'.

Class and caste shadow

Some stories give the geographical indication of the victim's residence in a stereotypical way by revealing identity and privacy details like the description of her single-room home 'near the canal', in a wasteland-sort of area. There is an indifference in the reportage as though there is nothing new about people dying from such marginalized classes, castes and locations. A story that does not reveal Jisha's caste identity, and hence the related vulnerabilities, gives the location of her home as 'a colony-like area where the scheduled caste people live' (Dec 13, 2017, MM). The researcher points out that a few of the stories clearly invoke the notion that these kinds of atrocities are normal with them taking away the seriousness of attention that this case deserved. One story marked as very insensitive for the tone concluded that there have might been provocations from the victim which may have led the culprit to commit the crime. Out of the sixteen stories, only three stories had the victim's family and acquaintances as sources. The rest of the stories had police, news agencies, advocates, diplomats, judges, hospital authority and the general public.

The boyfriend myth and morality lens

The initial news coverage was quick to point the moral compass towards Jisha's boyfriend and state that she was 'man-friendly'. However, an investigative story by Mathrubhumi headlined as 'Boyfriend Myth; Only 93 numbers in Jisha's phone' (Jun 21), counters the widely narrated story of the alleged boyfriend as

the killer. This story examined if there was any connection between victim and the culprit, regardless of the fact that the victim was not associated with him in any way. The opening sentences of the story reads:

Jisha killed by boyfriend, boyfriend arrested ...'These are the stories that filled the media in a way that did not even arouse suspicion when the investigation was stalled. However, Jisha's phone had only 93 contact numbers. Phone calls not exceeding 90 seconds. Most of the calls were to laborers.

This story is sympathetic towards Jisha, more like a brief memoir trying to address the questions raised over her character. This story has three sources, one male and two female. They are Jisha's mother, neighbour and colleague. But the rest of the stories are overwhelmingly sourced from the officials. Even as the story investigates the facts to counter the narratives of the involvement of a boyfriend, the researcher adds that the tone of the story is essentially told through a male gaze, depicting the innocence of Jisha.

The story points out that the rumours about Jisha being murdered by her boyfriend diverted the attention from the horrific crime as they nullify the crime into quarrels and consequences of a purported relationship. The story is sympathetic in depicting the 'miserable financial condition of Jisha'. The story does not mention her vulnerable Dalit identity. The story also points out that a large section of the media raised the suspicion that the victim was 'abusive and man-friendly'.

By mentioning aspects like the victim had a boyfriend and he avenged her, the focus moves to the victim's character and not that of her perpetrator, questioning her relationship with the culprit and the questions about what did she eat in the

morning, where did she go and who did she meet on the day of the crime, these all convey an insensitive treatment of the brutal crime in the news stories.

Invisibilization of Dalit identity

Out of sixteen stories, fourteen of them did not engage with intersectional elements of the case. Some observations include near anticivilization of Jisha's caste identity, when details like her age, educational background and other personal information are given in the stories. In a story where some family related information is provided, her identity as a Dalit is not revealed but has been identified as a 'woman of perseverance', whatever that means. It is quite revealing that most of the stories do not engage with her identity as a Dalit, and also that she came from a marginalized class. There is a story that has an 'accusatory tone' towards the affected family as in the story with the headline 'Exclusive on Jisha Murder: Post-mortem Report contradicts family's version' (May 8, TNIE). The headline is not only questioning the credibility of the family and the information the members shared, it also sounds sensational and misleading. A gender sensitive story reported by The Times of India was based on Jisha's mother's response. The headline had a human touch as it read 'Jisha mother: People can say whatever they want about me, only I know the pain I am enduring' (Aug 26, 2018). The story quotes her saying:

"My daughter was my joy and when she left, my happiness too faded. She was everything to me; she used to take care of me, cook food and wash my clothes. I was bedridden after an accident and she was there beside me all the time. Happiness will return only if she comes back."

Kushmandi (2018, English and Bengali)

On February 20, 2018 a case was reported from Kushmandi, South Dinajpur district of West Bengal, that a deaf-mute and intellectually-challenged young woman of 27 years was gang raped. She didn't have parents and reportedly was

thrown out from her marital home. In Kushmandi she stayed with her extended family. Two persons abducted her and raped her in a nearby agricultural plot of land. The torture was gruesome and reminded many of the Nirbhaya incident. Here also the accused persons inserted a rod in the private parts of the victim. The accused were later arrested and with the government intervention she was admitted in a district government hospital where the Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visited her. She referred to her as her own sister. It was reported that the government deposited an amount of Rs 4.12 lacs in the victim's bank account. There were many loopholes in the whole government intervention story. It was not clear how it was possible to deposit the compensation to a bank account; many doubted whether it existed or not. There were major protests from the disability rights groups against this incident, fact-finding teams went to the victim's village. The government seemed to have created a barrier for the activists to reach the woman and after a few days the woman just disappeared, no one has got a trace of her to date and her case saw no follow up. This remains one of the most under-reported rape cases of the state despite early publicity.

Gender Sensitivity Analysis

Out of the fourteen sources cited in the ten stories, only three are female and the rest are male. Most of these sources are not related to the victim but are engaged in the progress of the case as more of a political development.

Even if the case requires intersectional treatment, the essential information related to the identity of the victim are inadequately addressed.

Intellectual challenge of the victim not adequately addressed

This case was initially compared with that of Nirbhaya as reflected in ‘Nirbhaya Again: 28-year-old tribal woman gangraped in West Bengal’s South Dinajpur’ (Feb 20, news18.com). Out of the ten stories, seven stories were of less than 250

words. This explains the reason why intersectional elements like the tribal identity of the victim, her intellectual challenge and her abandoned identity were not significantly touched upon in the stories. These stories engage with the chief minister, the police, the villagers, the protesters, government and opposition, shifting blame as their thrust areas.

Though the stories were sensitive in choice of tone and words, the victim's identity is invisible as she has been mentioned only occasionally when the background of the incident was needed in the stories. That she belonged to the tribal community was also not mentioned in most stories. The description of the perpetrators hinted as though they were also from the tribal community.

The stories do not have details related to gender perspectives. Other stories reflect the insensitivity of the political regime. A story that deals with the reaction of an angry mob cites government sources as proactively taking up the responsibilities of the victim. These government sources therefore question the outrage in an indifferent manner. The intellectual challenges of the victim were completely ignored in the stories.

Graphic details of the victim's injury

The headline 'Tribal women gangraped in Bengal's South Dinajpur, found with her insides spilling out of her privates' (Feb 20, IT), gives graphic details of her injury while missing out on important information that she was disabled. Other headlines seemed to miss out on factual details as evident in 'Huge agitation in front of police, houses are set on fire' (Feb 24, ABP Online), wherein the headline does not specify the crucial details about the houses set on fire and if they belonged to the rape accused. The story does not discuss the rape victim.

Hints of moral assumptions

It has been mentioned that the woman went to a village fair on the evening of the incident. It was not mentioned if she went alone or with others. One may infer that since she was an intellectually-challenged woman, it was not right for her to go out in a fair where she might get exposed to threats. This could be unintentional and may not be looking through a morality lens but does leave questions unanswered.

Disconnected information related to intersectionality

The intersectional elements are missing in the coverage of Kushmandi case. A story which has been marked for absence of intersectional elements discusses the tribal identity of the victim but ignored the information about her being intellectually-challenged. A story that mentions the chief minister does not factor the intersectionality of caste and disability. Another story appeared to be negative and vague as it does not mention anything about the perpetrator or the victim. Even in the body text, it was not mentioned that the woman was disabled and tribal. As some stories carried information about the victim's tribal context, her rural background and intellectually-challenged status, they do not add up to convey sensitivity in the coverage as they are treated episodically without much of the larger connection between the intersectional elements or their larger contexts. The intersectional factors presented as disconnected information were important causes that led to her victimisation. These intersectional elements called for a more sensitive and nuanced treatment of the stories. So, in effect, despite the mention of some intersectional details, the disconnect between their significance to the stories render them minimally intersectional.

Even as a story did not mention the identity details about victim belonging to a tribal community, did add that the woman did not have a family, was living in a village and was thrown out of the marital home (Sept 13, MD, 'He had threatened

to rape my daughter a few years back'). A story monitored as having high presence of intersectional elements mentioned the components related to her intellectual challenge and explored the reasons behind it (Feb 20, BS, 'Mentally challenged woman gangraped, two arrested'). The expression 'mentally challenged', 'mentally disabled' are frequently used to describe the victim. The tribal identity of the victim has also been addressed. The protesters have been identified as those who burnt the houses of the accused. The closest identity of protesters is visible in the story with the headline 'The tribal community becomes vocal on social media regarding Kushmandi rape case' (Feb 26, ABP Online). The lead paragraph gives a negative impression of the community as intolerant and disrespectful towards law and order as they announce not allowing the tribal MLAs to their area. It reads:

The highest social organization of the Santhal community 'Bharat Jakat Majhi Pargana Mahal' now has given a call to protest against the Kushmandi rape case, across the state. After taking decision at the organizational level the tribal organization has announced via social media and postering in the area that, if the tribal MLAs do not protest against this rape case in the assembly they will not be allowed in the tribal areas.

The inadequate space given to the case in the coverage raises questions as to why the case did not fetch even a fraction of attention that Nirbhaya's case received. Could this be because of her tribal identity? Or because of her being intellectually challenged? Or was it because she was a poor abandoned woman? Or because the sexual assault did not take place in the city but in a rural/tribal location? These questions are not engaged with in the coverage of this case.

The victim remains faceless as there are no sources known to the victim that have been used in the stories. Out of the fourteen sources used, only three are female, rest are male. The sources include police, doctors, villagers, chief minister,

chairperson of state election commission, TMC district president, hospital administration, spokesperson of tribal community, local politician and neighbours. The choice of the sources indicates the story was more about the politics of the rape case rather than about the victim and her plight. Out of the ten stories, only one addresses her intellectual challenge in the headline, that too rather regressively as ‘Mentally challenged woman gangraped, two arrested’ (Feb 20, BS).

Hathras (2020, English and Hindi)

On 14th September, 2020, a 19-year-old Dalit girl was gang-raped and brutalized in Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh (UP) allegedly by a group of upper caste men. Her story drew international condemnation after the authorities forcibly cremated her body in the darkness of the night without her family's consent. On the basis of the victim's dying declaration, Uttar Pradesh police booked all four accused under charges of gang-rape and attempt to murder. On the morning of September 29, she succumbed to her injuries and on September 30, her body was cremated forcibly in the middle of the night by police personnel. The midnight cremation sparked nationwide outrage and global criticism.

Gender Sensitivity Analysis

In the Hathras case, which was particularly analysed to check for intersectional aspects of news coverage, especially caste, given that the victim was of a lower caste status and the accused men were from the upper caste backgrounds, less than half of the news stories examined, i.e. only 20 out of 48 stories, had any mention of the intersectional attributes related to caste. Though the victims Dalit background was highlighted in some stories, the caste status of the perpetrators, upper caste Thakurs, found minimal mention. Headlines reflect emphasis on official developments and official sources.

It is important to note that the analyses of headlines showed an overwhelming emphasis on official developments and official sources as reflected in examples like ‘Sought SC monitored probe in Hathras for total transparency’ (Oct 12, TOI); ‘5 suspended including SP-DSP’ (Oct 3, AU) and ‘CBI inquiry recommended in Hathras case’ (April 10, AU).

Caste and Intersectionality, minimally present

Stories with minimal presence of intersection information mention the caste of both the victim and accused. For instance, ‘Four upper-caste Thakur men had tortured and raped the Dalit woman,’ Dalit woman as a caste reference has been frequently used for victim and the accused. But only very few stories mention upper-caste or *Thakur* as caste reference for male perpetrators. One story reads:

A 19-year-old Dalit woman from Uttar Pradesh who was battling for her life at a Delhi Hospital after being allegedly gang-raped by four men has succumbed to her injuries (Sept 29, India Today).

Here, the upper caste reference for the perpetrators is missing. Another story mentions the victim and her caste but does not mention the perpetrators in the key sentence that reads ‘A 19-year-old Dalit girl was allegedly gang-raped on September 14 in a village under Chandpa police station area of Hathras district (Sept 29, RB).’ A sentence in another story states:

“The Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court has issued a notice to the government of Uttar Pradesh, taking suo-motto cognizance of the alleged gangrape and death of Dalit girl in Hathras” (October 1, BBC News).

This also does not mention the perpetrators and their caste intersectionality. So, we see several stories in which only the caste reference of the victim is mentioned.

Denials and Co-opted narratives

It is important to note that stories with dominant intersectional elements of caste often are given treatments of denial and are sometimes co-opted in unrelated narratives especially those that come from official sources, often singular, as visible in the headlines ‘Police cite FSL report, says Hathras girl was not raped’ (Oct 2, TOI) and ‘Hathras case: Allahabad high court takes suo-moto cognizance, police denies rape’ (Oct 1, BBCN). These headlines were based on stories that depended heavily on official sources. The story adds co-opted dimensions to the stories as one such story mentioned that the Hathras developments were deliberate attempts to cause caste tension. The sub-head read: ‘Conspiracy to push state into caste turmoil’. The story quotes ADG (Law and Order) as saying *“no sperm has been found and it was clear that the matter was being twisted to cause caste-based tensions.”* He is the only source cited in the story.

While Dalit is used as caste reference for the victim in most of the stories, upper or dominant caste has been used as the descriptive status for the accused in fewer stories. A story that was marked very sensitive adds:

“Aaj Tak finally woke up, the channel tried to muddy the waters with a report on how the four Thakur accused should be exonerated if they were not guilty” (Oct 12, NewsLaundry) suggesting that no rape had taken place.

Another co-opted narrative is visible in ‘Social media platforms were used to spread hatred: Cops’ (Oct 6, TOI). The story adds:

“some specific groups used social media platforms to spread hatred, and also incited people for creating caste-based conflict and unlawful gathering in times of the Covid 19 pandemic”

This story mentions that some of these groups even offered 50 lakhs to the victim’s family to speak in their favour. In this case we found that though a lot of

official sources are quoted, there is hardly any story where medical, legal or forensic details are mentioned.

Morality

Stories that were found to be insensitive give out descriptive details of the victim and her bodily appearances and injuries as mentioned in the TOI story that reads “*the 19-year-old was found by her mother in the field naked, bleeding, with multiple fractures and a gash in her tongue*” (Oct 1, TQ)

The story mentions the place where the victim had gone along with her mother on the day of the incident. For example, “*the woman had gone to the fields along with her mother on the day of the incident.*”

The insensitive stories often carry descriptions of what the victim wore or the places where she went.

Sensitive Depictions

The language used for Hathras stories, as reflected in the tone, keywords and the stereotypes used in the coverage of the Hathras case, have mostly been sensitive as they carried very basic facts and details of the case.

A somewhat sensitive story mentions, “*On the last day of September, India woke up to the disturbing news that authorities had forcibly cremated the body of a 19-year-old Dalit (formerly untouchable) woman who was allegedly gangraped and died a day earlier*” (Oct 8, BBC News).

This story uses a photograph which shows the family members of the victim, twelve of them – six women, four men and two children. The photograph gives a peep into the class background of the victim and also stands out as all but the children’s faces are covered.

Indian Institute of Technology-Guwahati/IIT-G (2021, English and Assamese)

This case involves an incident of sexual violence that took place in March 2021 when three girls were raped by two students after attending IIT-G festival, Alcheringa. One of the survivors, a second-year student at IIT-G was found in an unconscious state outside her hostel. She had been there for nearly two hours before she was seen by other students. Investigations revealed the perpetrator was a 21-year-old male IIT student, Utsav Kadam, who was arrested on April 3 by the North Guwahati police. He was suspended from IIT-G on April 4.

Gender Sensitivity Analysis

Frequently the accused in the IIT-G case is referred to as an ‘IIT-G student’ whereas the survivors, also students of IIT-G and Guwahati University, are simply referred to as girls.

Two headlines, one story and sensationalism

It is worth noting that two similar sounding headlines were covered on the same date and based on similar sources by The Deccan Chronicle and The New Indian Express seemed to be playing with the numbers which do not sound sensible or sensitive.

2 IIT students allegedly rape 3 girls (Feb 8, TDC)

Two IIT-Guwahati students arrested for allegedly raping three university girls (Feb 8, TNIE)

From the headline of The Deccan Herald, it is not clear whether the survivors were from IIT or not. Indian Express however mentions them as ‘university girls’ giving additional information that the survivors were not IIT-G students. The lead

paragraph adds that the survivors were from Guwahati University. It is also known that one of the survivors was a fellow IIT student. The New Indian Express adds a first-person account of one of the survivors and it stands out as sensational for the details of the descriptions.

“As it was late, we were looking for a rented accommodation in the IIT campus to spend the night. It was then that we were accosted by the duo who offered to help us. They offered us a soft drink that was laced with sedatives and after having a sip, I felt dizzy. Then they got into the act. I tried to resist but lost my consciousness soon”, she told reporters.

Deccan Herald has stated the same information by selecting the relevant words and avoiding those that were not needed.

“The girls who were shifted to a hospital after mid-night by the security guards of IIT-G in an inebriated condition accused the boys of drugging them by lacing their drinks with sedatives. They said they were raped when they went to the campus to see the festival.”

The publishing of first-person account may be traumatizing for the survivor as some of the detailing of information like ‘looking for rented accommodation’, ‘spend the night’, ‘offered drinks’ and ‘got into the act’ may be relevant information for investigation purposes but also opens up the space for moral judgements in the patriarchal space that dominates rape narratives when made public in news media.

A story draws attention to how the IIT-G festival Alcheringa was attended by a large group of people which made it difficult for the institution to monitor every student. This reflects the ad-hoc approach of women safety during such huge gatherings as it does not mention what is being done towards gender-sensitization.

Positive and strong choice of words from IIT-G administration

The case came to be commonly known as the ‘IIT Rape’ case. The stories were treated in a somewhat sensitive manner with only two stories monitored for insensitive treatment. The sensitivity comes across in the use of firm statements of the IIT-G administration and their choice of words and expressions by the news stories. Statements like *“the institution will not be lenient on an issue like rape; hence it has suspended the student and it also isolated the co-accused living on campus until further investigation”* and expressions such as *“condemns heinous acts”*, *“act is a serious violation of the disciplinary rules...comprising the safety and security...”* exemplify use of tone and keywords that are enabling. The stories add that the institute has ensured the ‘victim’s safety and prevention of harassment in any form.’ There are negligible instances of examining the character or the integrity of the survivor. Below is an instance of sensitive depiction of details:

“An alleged suspect in the case then lured the victim to a different location under the pretext of discussing ‘responsibilities’. According to sources, the alleged suspect then offered the victim alcohol, which she refused. But the suspect then allegedly forced the drink down her throat.”

The court eulogizes the accused

For the insensitive elements, the news stories derive from the Guwahati High Court order and emphasise on the accused’s brilliant career. The story also mentions the boy losing a brilliant academic career.

There are references to the survivor being intoxicated and filing of late complaints as in ‘however, one of the girls lodged a complaint with police only on Tuesday’. In some stories it appeared as if the survivor was being victimized and the lead seemed to be pitying the students as someone who came all the way to study

instead gets molested as if ‘fate had a role to play’ as in ‘IIT accused student arrested’ (Apr 4, AP). The headline does not mention rape or sexual assault. The lead seemed to put the survivor in a position of being a victim and ‘worthy of sympathy.’

A story with the headline that reads ‘Gauhati HC calls IIT student accused of rape ‘state’s future asset’ (Aug 23, TP), grants him bail is primarily focused on the accused. The sub-head reads ‘Court noted that there was clear prima facie case against the accused, who allegedly raped a fellow IIT student in March’, but the court later adds that custody was unnecessary as investigation was complete. The story in The Print added:

The court order mentioned:

“...here is a clear prima facie case as alleged against the accused petitioner. However, as the investigation in the case is completed and Page No.# 5/6 both the informant/victim girl and the accused are the state’s future assets...this Court finds no possibility of the accused tampering with their evidence or influencing them directly or indirectly, if released on bail.” (Aug 22)

The story in no way questions the courts assumption that this kind of order goes against the victim, normalizes sexual assault and rape and sends a wrong message to the larger society. It reconfirms the idea that one can get away with rape but the story fails to intervene on the order from gender justice perspective.

The other IPC and CrPC related sections mentioned in different stories include sections 376, 328, 307, 120B of the IPC and sections 161 and 164 of CrPC. These stories however do not explain what these sections specifically refer to and what are the consequences of the applications of these sections.

Delays, suppressions and lapses

‘Did IIT Guwahati try to suppress the matter of sexual assault on campus?’ is asked in an East Mojo story headline (Apr 10). The sub-head adds that the Guwahati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) doctors complained to the police about the incident on March 29. But the IIT administration reported it to the police only on April 3.

The story has been weaved based on the statements of the sources, the facts have been presented in a neutral manner. If anything, the story is raising questions on the delayed process of the filing of the complaint from the institution and why the patient was discharged against the doctor’s advice.

In an earlier statement, IIT-Guwahati had claimed how the media misreported the incident:

“Some sections of the media have been filing unverified reports about the incident and about the Institute discharging the girl student from GMCH without following doctor’s advice...all due procedures were followed as per hospital guidance for discharge of the girl student.”

However, a GMCH official disputed the IIT-Guwahati’s claim.

“It is not true. They should produce the discharge slip. We conveyed it to the police also as to how the patient was discharged against doctor’s advice,” the official said.

“The student and her guardians were informed that they could file an FIR, which they have refused presently as they want the institute to take up the case.” (GMCH: Gauhati Medical College and Hospital).

Another story adds that the delay was because a fact-finding committee was army constituted and their report was awaited. GMCH (Gauhati Medical College and

Hospital) officials, police officials, IIT-G statement, its fact-finding Committee (FFC) report and the statement of the survivor are the major sources of information.

A story highlighted the lapse in the investigation as it asks ‘Why the others have been let loose in the light of the findings in the FFC report’ (which is part of the IIT FIR). The accused were present at the crime scene, is a pointer towards inaction of the police.

Sometimes the stories are perplexing and misleading due to statements presented as facts and not getting questioned. One instance is pointed out when the IIT-G spokesperson denied that any arrests were made when one accused had been arrested on April 3.

In a story where the intersectional element is visible, the initial investigation cited refers to the place that the accused belonged to. The researcher notes that this may give the reader a space to develop confirmation bias.

“Exclusive: IIT-Guwahati rape survivor speaks up, says ‘I want justice’” – the heading woven around demanding justice for the survivor (Jun 3, EM). This is an instance of a story written from the survivor’s perspective hence has the elements of gender justice.

Additional Cases

Kokrajhar (2015, English and Assamese)

A 19-year-old pregnant woman from Assam's Kokrajhar district was allegedly gangraped by two army men in August 2015. The incident was reported from Thaiseguri village under Kachugaon police station. According to the woman, a team of army men accompanied by policemen came to her house looking for her husband who is alleged to have links to a militant outfit, NDFB(S).

Gender Sensitivity Analysis

Most of the headlines mention that the survivor was pregnant. The stories called her wife of an insurgent.

Stories about Kokrajhar rape case show that when the pregnant woman – reported by the news media ‘as wife of an insurgent’ – was raped it was reported as “Assam shocker: Pregnant woman ‘raped’ by army men in Kokrajhar” (Dec 8, oneindia.com). In her FIR, it mentions that she was eight months pregnant. The word ‘shocker’ conveys that such incidents are one-off and hence shocking. The word ‘raped’ has been put in single quotes in repeated headlines, making them gender insensitive as crimes like theft and murder are never disbelieved or doubted when reported and put in single quotes. We do see a lot of passive constructs in almost all the headlines as ‘Pregnant Woman in Assam Alleges Rape by Army Men.’ When the inquiry is ordered, the headlines do not mention who ordered it as in ‘Inquiry Ordered in Kokrajhar Rape Case’ (Aug 12, AP).

Facts about the survivor’s pregnancy and her relationship as a wife of an NDFB(S) worker get attention, the latter appear to be reason enough to be raped

as if to level scores, points out the researcher. The woman's rape in a public space like school gets repeated.

The sensitive information in this case are the mentions of medical examination of the victim and that the state has constituted an enquiry committee to look into the case. Such details show how news media can play an important role in quelling public anger by showing how the government is trying to resolve the issue of protest by the Bodo community. Bodo tribal identity and rural context in a conflict affected location of Assam is mentioned but much of this information comes from official sources and hence extends the official versions of the developments in the story.

Demand for a 'Sharia-like law' by a politician in the state has been covered by the news media in a rather unquestioning manner as how this law will resolve the problem is not attempted in the story.

Kopardi (2016, English and Marathi)

A 14-year-old girl was brutally gangraped and murdered by three men at Kopardi village in Karjat taluka of Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra on July 13, 2016. The incident took place when the girl was returning home. Her body bore marks of torture. The girl belonged to the Maratha community and the accused persons were from the Dalit community. The case sparked protests across Maharashtra and in the subsequent months galvanized the Maratha community into launching a widespread movement.

Gender Sensitivity Analysis

For the Kopardi case, the phrase ‘third Nirbhaya’ is used. By and large there are no moral judgements of the victim and they have largely been sensitive on the scale of morality. A headline that stood out as insensitive read ‘Sharia like law needed to check serious crimes against women: Raj Thackeray’.

A similar demand was made by a Kerala MP in Jisha’s case. The sub-head read that the incident is a blot on society, and demands death sentence for culprits. The first few sentences of the ‘sharia like...’ read:

“Slamming the BJP led state government over the gangrape and murder of a minor girl here, MNS chief Raj Thackeray on July 25 said there was a need for a law like the Sharia law to check serious crimes against women and children. He said the hands and legs of those who rape and kill minors and women should be cut off.”

This points to the politicalizing of rape crimes and as also articulated by a local actress, to take the debate in a ‘wrong direction’. Also, the demand for the death sentence by politicians has been noticed in the headline ‘Ahmednagar rape-murder: MLA’s want perpetrators killed like rabid dogs, live telecast of public hanging’.

In stories featuring politicians, it often is a blame game between the ruling party and the opposition. Fast-track court, death penalty, enhancement of punishment for illicit liquor operators so their cases would be tried in the sessions court are some of the facts mentioned in the stories. The chief minister demands a law for repeat offenders selling illicit liquor under Maharashtra Prevention of Dangerous Activities Act.

Sakinaka (2021, English and Marathi)

A 32-year-old poor Dalit woman living on the footpath was raped and brutalized with an iron rod inside a parked tempo at Mumbai's Andheri's Sakinaka area early on September 10, 2021. She died of her injuries the next day at Mumbai's Rajawadi hospital. The post-mortem report said her private parts had significant injuries which reached her abdomen due to the insertion of a sharp object. With the help of CCTV footage, the police arrested a part-time driver Mohan Chauhan (45), resident of Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh, who also lived on the pavement in Andheri. The victim is survived by two minor daughters who lived with her mother in a slum.

Gender Sensitivity Analysis

Out of the total of eighteen sources cited, only three are female. The stories are not so much about the victim as much as they are about the politics around rapes, safeguarding of Mumbai's image as the city is shocked, yet again, increase in rape cases and blame game between the ruling party and the opposition.

The first story got reported on Sept 12 as there was no edition on Sept 11 due to a public holiday. A headline reads 'Safeguard Mumbai's image: Uddhav Thackeray', conveying the crime is about Mumbai's image rather than the issue of violence on women. Another headline read 'Once again war of letters' is not about the victim or the case but about the politics around the case. Such headlines are common. The Atrocity Act is said to have been invoked in the Sakinaka case which emphasises the caste angle of the story.

The placement of the story on page two instead of page one is noticed. The researcher adds that it is concerning that post-Nirbhaya, brutality of rapes, especially when the victim is from a marginalized group, does not shock the

collective conscience. The story says the man accosted the woman but does not suggest consent in any way. A blurb on page one says that the accused brutalized her with an iron weapon. The blurb on page six explains that her condition was so critical that the police could not wait for the ambulance and drove the tempo itself to the hospital.

As it always happens, after this incident too, a few announcements were made that conveyed that the police are taking stringent action. One such announcement was that every police station will have a 'Nirbhaya squad'. Mumbai police and the chief minister of the state are the most frequently cited news sources. Out of a total of eighteen sources cited, only three are female.

There is a story that quotes experts who make a case for the latest forensic technology in Sakinaka-type crime as they say new-age technology will drastically cut down DNA profiling time of potential suspects in sexual assaults. There is also a mention of the Shakti Law.

An editorial with the headline 'Advice or Patience' makes a case for looking at sexual assaults as not just a law-and-order problem. It adds:

Sexual assault is not a law-and-order problem. Even if law and order is greatly improved in the country, it will not reduce rapes committed in places that are out of sight or molestations in public places. Because it is the patriarchal system entrenched in our society for generations and misconceptions of supremacy resulting from that which is responsible for these crimes. If our problem was limited only to these two causes, it would have been resolved by capital punishment. But the reality is even more scary. Our worst social trait is our rank insouciance in stealing or grabbing that or which does not belong to us and our shameless denial of this impertinence.

Another story calls for ‘Care of victim’s children is the government's responsibility’. This is a gender justice approach to the information that should not get missed out.

5. Recommendations

Good Practices for Rape Coverage

We recommend that it is essential to put together a good practices guide for rape coverage to help journalists navigate the coverage of rape and sexual assault.

Some of the aspects that need to be highlighted in such a guide are:

1. **Being mindful of language and tone:** Language is key to gender sensitivity in the coverage of rape cases. As suggested by various studies earlier, the passive construct of sentences, especially in headlines should be avoided. Headlines should not be ambiguous and must identify the perpetrators. Unnecessary jugglery of keywords should be avoided as their use in the headline, such as ‘2 men rape 3 women’ are disturbingly jarring in the way they add information in a casual indifferent way.
2. **Sourcing for stories:** Gender diversity of sources is fundamental to gender sensitive reporting, more so in the coverage of rape cases. Since women and other marginalized genders are routinely ignored and invisibilized, it is important that newsrooms build a culture of giving priority to women and other marginalized genders as news sources, across intersections of caste and class, amongst others. There is also a need to move away from the high reliance on official sources of information and instead also quote the right gender experts in academia or non-profits who are well-versed on rape and sexual assault and can bring in more nuanced perspectives.
3. **Morality and Privacy:** There is a critical need for the media to not apply a moral lens when viewing survivors/victims of rape and sexual assault. What they wore, where they went, with whom they were seen, what time did they return, whether they were single or smoked or drunk or had a boyfriend has no bearing on the fact that they were subjected to a

horrendous crime and deserve justice. At the same time, it is important that all identifying details about rape survivors are not publicly shared and that their privacy is maintained and not invaded at random.

4. **Knowing all aspects of the current rape/sexual assault law:** Media organisations and individual journalists (reporters and those on the news desk) need to have a full understanding of the law as well of any changes made to it. This includes the law related to identifying details (Section 228-A of the IPC), medical and forensic evidence, etc. It should be noted that the FIR filed in a rape case cannot be legally published as it contains too many identifying details related to the survivor.
5. **Intersectionality to be recognised and included in coverage:** Gender is never a category on its own – it constantly intersects with class, caste, sexuality, disability, seniority etc. Stories involving caste and other intersectional elements need to highlight how the power equation may have played a role in the incident and refrain from casting aspersions on the survivor or their family members. Denials of rape and its co-option is very common in stories with caste intersections. Denials, if any, need to be corroborated by facts that emerge from cross-questioning and thorough investigations. Mere reporting of official versions as facts in the stories needs to be avoided. The media needs to recognise that certain intersections such as caste, minority status, disability with gender, increase the vulnerabilities of those women to sexual assault, rape and violence.
6. **Training:** News media organizations need to invest resources in round-the-clock training and skill-upgradation of journalists who cover gender-based violence. At the same time, they need to make available mental health and trauma-related resources to their journalists who report on such news on a regular basis. News editors also need similar training.

6. Acknowledgements

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I am thankful to Population First for having faith in us and providing us with the opportunity to undertake the study and particularly thank Dr. A. L. Sharada for all the encouragement and trust in us that guided us to embark upon this exercise that involved a motivated team of journalists, academicians and student volunteers.

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I also thank all our student volunteers from different parts of the country Maulika Rana, Rishu Raushan, Divya Kumari Singh, Tasneem Parveen, Jyoti Prasad,

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I am also grateful to Sanju Kumari for continuous data support that helped in the analysis of the study.

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– Dr. Sweta Singh

7. Appendixes

Appendix I: Methodology

In order to examine gender sensitivity in news media reportage, the study selected eight rape cases after 2012 whose news stories would be monitored. The aim was to map patterns of gender sensitivity or the lack of it, given that after the ‘Nirbhaya’ rape case there have been major changes in the law, including in the definition of rape, the trial-proceedings and a general questioning of the news media’s role about its insensitive reportage of rape cases. The initial concern with the proposed study was to find out if there are indicators of a more gender sensitive coverage of rape cases by the news media on the counts of language depictions, privacy, sensationalism etc., just to list a few.

Research Questions:

The following are the research questions this study attempts to answer in the quest to unpackage gender sensitivity in rape coverage:

- 1) How do the language elements of the news stories depict facts about the rape?
- 2) What is the nature of representation of sources in the news stories?
- 3) How do the legal, medical and forensic issues feature in the news stories?
- 4) How do issues related to privacy, morality and intersectionality get incorporated in the news stories?
- 5) Whether the news stories have elements of sensationalism and voyeurism.

The project started off with initial discussions with the identified researchers - journalists and academics - on the possible research approaches, sampling of the cases and news publications, languages and the parameters to measure gender

sensitivity. Based on the inputs provided by them, we organised another level of discussion to operationalize the terms and parameters. Based on the discussions, an explanatory sheet was shared and the tool for data collection was agreed upon. Then a set of questions were listed using google form. These inputs guided by the project consultant prepared the grounds for pilot testing the tool for data collection and the freezing of parameters.

The form was divided into two broad sections incorporating 42 elements: the first section of the form had pointers seeking basic information about the rape cases whose news coverage was being analysed (1-18).

The second set of the form (19-42) included the eight parameters of sources, language, legal/medical/forensic issues, privacy, intersectionality, sensationalism/voyeurism and gender justice in order to measure and evaluate whether gender sensitivity was factored into the reportage of the rape news stories.

A few of these parameters were sub-categorised to meet the application of the Likert-like four-point scale for measuring gender sensitivity through these eight parameters. So, for instance, the parameter of language was measured through the sub-categories of tone, keywords and stereotypes. The same scale was used to gauge the presence of elements related to other parameters such as intersectionality and gender justice.

Sample:

In all, eight rape cases from different regions of India were identified based on the initial consultation with the researchers. For each of these eight cases, news publications - digital and print - were sampled in English and a corresponding regional language (please see Appendix). Of these, five cases - Shakti Mills,

Jisha, Kushmandi, Hathras and IIT-G were sampled for detailed analysis. Three additional cases – Kokrajhar, Sakinaka and Kopardi were also studied for added perspectives on the coverage of rape cases. Seven other cases from Assam were included for quantitative purposes only.

The major publications in English are: The Time of India, The Indian Express and East Mojo. The major regional language publications are Loksatta, Maharashtra Times, Amar Ujala, The News Minute and Anandabazar Patrika.

The stories were collected mostly from the digital platforms of these news organisations. A smaller number of stories were also sampled for their print versions. The stories were also sourced from other publications like the Mid-Day, The News Minute, Malayala Manorama amongst others. The stories were monitored in the months of November and December 2021.

A total of 200 stories from these publications were monitored. The story count for each of the cases are: Shakti Mills (English and Marathi) - 47, Jisha (English and Malayalam) - 16, Kushmandi (English and Bengali) – 10, Hathras (English and Hindi) - 48, IIT-G – 19 (English and Assamese), Kokrajhar (English and Assamese) – 9, Sakinaka (English and Marathi) -17 and Kopardi (English and Marathi) 12.

Out of 200, the total story count for English is 117 and that of regional language is 83. The share of stories for English and regional languages are 58.5% and 41.5% respectively. Within the regional languages, the largest share was that of Marathi (55.4%), followed by Hindi (27.7%). Assamese, Bengali and Malayalam constituted the rest.

181 out of 200 stories were marked as news stories as they were the focus of the study. The remaining nineteen stories were marked as opinions, features and others.

The word count of 199 out of 200 sampled stories were entered and most of the stories exceeded 250 words (44%). This was followed by stories of less than 200 words (33%). Only 55 stories (17.5%) had a word count of over 500 words.

(Due to accessibility issues with newspaper archives due to the Covid-19 pandemic in November – December 2021, the researchers collected stories mostly from online sources.)

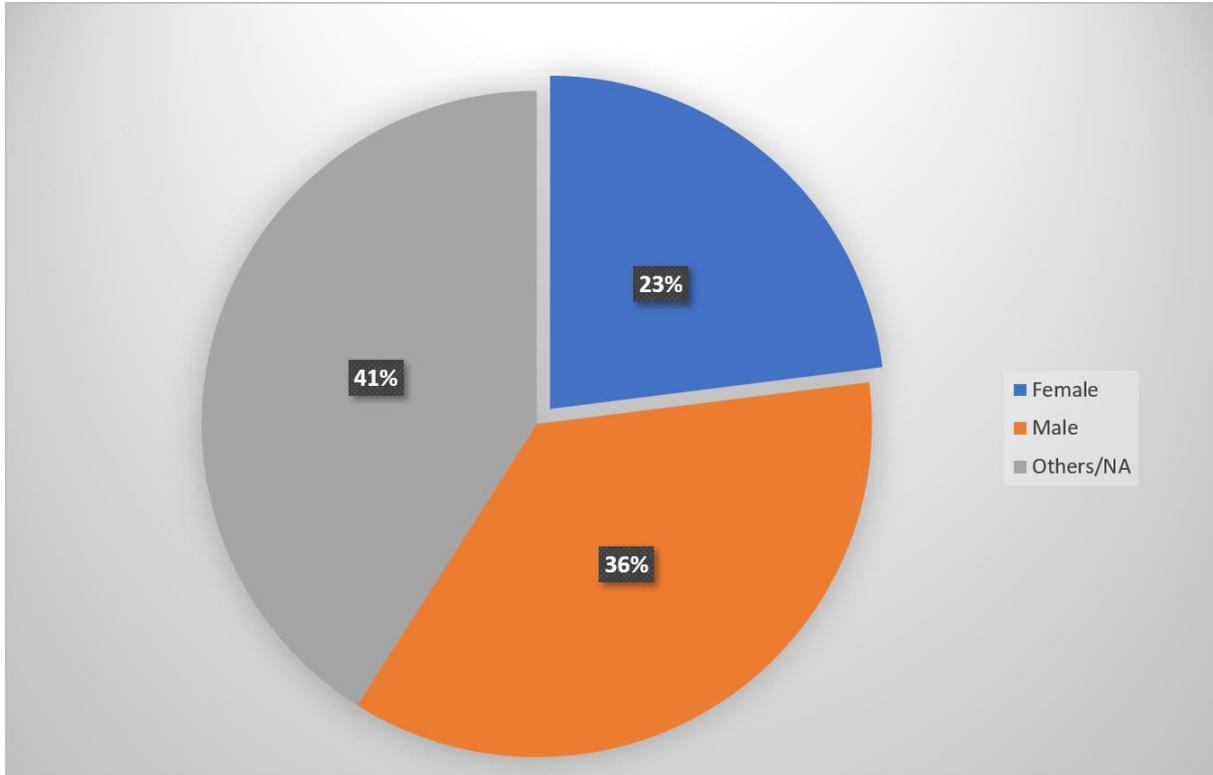
Appendix II: Data Tables and Charts

Table 1: Case wise story count of rape cases in English and regional languages

Case	Language	Story Count
Shakti Mills	English	26
	Marathi	21
Jisha	English	11
	Malayalam	5
Kushmandi	English	5
	Bengali	5
Hathras	English	25
	Hindi	23
IIT-G	English	17
	Assamese	2
Kokrajhar	English	7
	Assamese	2
Kopardi	English	12
	Marathi	15
Sakinaka	English	7
	Marathi	10
Others	English	7
Total		200

Appendix II:

Chart 1: Gender Distribution of Sources



Appendix III: Names of Publications

Names of Publication and Story Count for English Language

Language	Name	Total Stories
English	BBC News	1
	Business Standard	4
	Deccan Chronicle	1
	East Mojo	12
	First Post	1
	India Today	4
	Indiatoday.in	1
	Mid-Day	6
	Mid-Day epaper	1
	News18.com	1
	Newslaundy.com	1
	Outlook Magazine	1
	Rediff.com	7
	Scroll.in	2
	Shethepeople	1
	The Assam Tribune	3
	The Hindu	2
	The Indian Express	12
	The New Indian Express	2
	The News Minute	7
	The Northeast Today	1
	The Print	1
	The Quint	2
	The Sentinel	1
	The Times of India	39
	timesnownews.com	1
	www.oneindia.com	1
Zee News	1	
Total		117

Names of Publications and Story Count for Regional Languages

Language	Name	Total Stories
Assamese	Asomiya Pratidin	4
Bengali	Anandabazar Patrika Online	5
Hindi	Amarujala	16
	BBC News	1
	NDTV India	2
	Quint Hindi	1
	R.Bharat	1
	Zee News	2
Malayalam	Asianetnews.com	1
	Malayala Manorama	2
	Mathrubhumi	2
Marathi	Loksatta	25
	Maharashtra Times	21
Total		83

Appendix IV: Names of Project Team Members

Project Assistant: Gauri Vij

Researchers

Athila Hussain

Ghazala Yasmin

Jennifer Shaheen Hussain

Rahi Gaikawad

Samhita Barooah

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Student volunteers for monitoring support

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Divya Kumari Singh

Tasneem Parveen

Jyoti Prasad

Khushi Goel

Puja Duarah

Syed Parvez Ahmad

Data Support

Sanju Kumari

Appendix V: Further Readings

1. *Sixteen Ways To Implement Gender Ethical Journalism* by Sameera Khan (2015) <https://feminisminindia.com/2015/12/12/improve-media-reportage-gender-ethical-journalism/>
2. *GBV-Media Toolkit* <https://feminisminindia.com/campaigns/the-gbvinmedia-campaign-media-reportage-of-gender-based-violence/>
3. UNESCO_MAAR_Report_Sexual_Violence_and_t.pdf - Sexual Violence and the News Media Issues, challenges, and guidelines for journalists in India Chindu | Course Hero
4. *Hear #MeToo in India: News, Social Media, and Anti-Rape and Sexual Harassment Activism* by Pallavi Guha, Rutgers University Press (2021).
5. *Silence and the Storm: Narratives of Violence against Women in India* by Kalpana Sharma (2019).
6. *No Nation for Women: Reportage On Rape from India, the World's Largest Democracy* by Priyanka Dubey (2019)
7. White Paper: *How Sensitive, How Nuanced? Review of Media Coverage of Kathua Rape Case.* http://populationfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/White-Paper-Final_PN.pdf

Appendix VI: Abbreviations

ABP:	Anandabazar Patrika
AP:	Asomiya Pratidin
AU:	Amar Ujala
BBCN:	BBC News
BS:	Business Standard
IT:	India Today
MT:	Maharashtra Times
TDC:	The Deccan Chronicle
TNIE:	The New Indian Express
TOI:	The Times of India
TQ:	The Quint
MM:	Malayala Manorama
MD:	Mid-Day
RP:	Republic Bharat
TP:	The Print
EM:	East Mojo



Dr. Sweta Singh is Senior Assistant Professor and Course-Coordinator at the University School of Mass Communication, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi. She has more than twenty years of academic and industry experience. She started as a television journalist with Doordarshan News, New Delhi and has also worked with digital news ventures. Her recent most works include the co-authored report *Locating Gender Perspectives in COVID-19 Reportage in India: An Analysis of Print Media in 2021* and *M3: Man, Male, Masculine: Staging Progressive Masculinity* for which she monitored and analysed the data. Sweta studied Radio and Television Journalism at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi and her research interests include new media, international communication and development communication.

Sameera Khan is a Mumbai-based independent journalist, researcher and co-author of the critically acclaimed book, *Why Loiter: Women & Risk on Mumbai Streets* which examines women's access to public space. A former Assistant Editor of *The Times of India*, for the past decade she has guided journalists on covering violence against women, particularly rape. She won the National Laadli Media Award for Gender Sensitivity 2020 for her consistent engagement as a teacher, trainer, researcher and a journalist in promoting sensitive reporting on gender-based violence. In March 2021, she co-authored with Sweta Singh the research study, *Locating Gender Perspectives in COVID-19 Reportage in India: An Analysis of Print Media (March 2020 to September 2020)* which looked at how the Indian print media covered the COVID-19 pandemic with a gender perspective.



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