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A BRIEF EXPLORATION OF THE EFFECTS OF ICTs AND SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE GENDER ACTIVISM IN INDIA POST DECEMBER 16TH 2012

ABSTRACT

Over the last few decades, while information and communication technologies (ICTs) and social media have been increasingly popular and a widely used tool for activism around the world, it is only in the recent past that people have started using these technologies as an alternative platform for activism in India. One of the most extensive use of digital technologies was witnessed in the nationwide protests in India post the Delhi Nirbhaya rape case on December 16th 2012 making it one of the biggest gender movements that the country has witnessed. The focus of this research is to investigate the use ICTs and social media by civil society actors, activists and organisations specifically for gender activism in India. The cyberconflict framework forms the foundation of this paper. The cyberconflict framework developed by Karatzogianni (2006) uses elements of the social movement theory (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996), including the mobilizing structures, political opportunity and framing process, and combines it with media theory and conflict theory in order to understand the use of ICTs and social media in conflicts occurring in the cyberspace. In order to develop a critical analysis, a case study approach was adopted for this paper. The data was collected by conducting qualitative interviews along with analysing news reports published online, videos, articles on blogs and posts on social media sources such as Facebook and Twitter. Further thematic analysis was used to understand the nature and impact of use of ICTs and social media for gender activism in India.

KEYWORDS

Digital activism; gender activism in India; cyberconflict theory; social media

1. INTRODUCTION

In India today it is estimated that there are about 243 million Internet users which represents a penetration of about 19.19% of the current population (Internetlivestats, 2014). According to a report published by the Internet and Mobile Association of India, there are 875 million mobile users in India and according to an Aventus Capital report, out of the total Internet users, 86 million accessed the internet on their mobile devices in 2013. (Singh, 12th january 2014). Cheaper smartphone and the growing telecommunications industry have together pushed India towards a digital revolution. Zafar Adeel, Director of the United Nations University's Institute of Water, Environment and Health and chair of UN-Water said, 'It is a tragic irony to think that in India, a country now wealthy enough that roughly half of the people own phones, about half cannot afford the basic necessity and dignity of a toilet' (United Nations, 2010). The diffusion and easy availability of mobile phone and social media has helped create a new platform for activism in India. Online activism escalated in India with the emergence of blogs around 2004 (Gurumurthy, 2004) and over the last decade it has encouraged the formation of new connections and collaboration between grassroots advocacy and service organizations, educational institutions, coalitions, unions, conferences, legacy media, policy makers, politicians, entrepreneurs, etc. Thus, as Morozov puts it, 'in the past we needed a fortune or, at least, a good name to cause much damage. Today all one needs is an Internet connection' (Morozov, 2009).

Violence against women is not an uncommon phenomenon in India and in many cases it often goes unnoticed. However, the rape case on 16th December 2012 in New Delhi was very different in this regard. This case generated 'both publicness and personalisation of rape' (Simon-Kumar, 2014) in a way that has not been seen before. India witnessed one of its biggest gender movement and social media and mobile phone played a huge role in it. This paper focuses on the gender activism in India after the December 16th, 2012 Delhi rape case and explores the effect of social media and ICTs in the process of mobilization and collective action. The Internet and mobile phones have given gender activism a new voice and new means of social movement and activism. This paper also explores the role played by ICTs and social media in keeping the gender movement in India alive for the last two years. Therefore, the main research question for the paper is to focus on the socio-political activism with the help of ICTs and social media in India after the rape case on December 16th 2012 and also exploring the advantages of ICTs and social media as a tool for gender activism in India.

2. NIRBHAYA, DECEMBER 16, 2012

On December 16th, 2012 a female psychotherapy student was gang raped by 6 drunken men in a moving bus in a popular area of New Delhi, the capital of India. She was with a male companion at the time who when tried to protest was beaten up and then their unconscious half naked bodies were thrown on the streets. When she was finally taken to the hospital, the doctors confirmed that she had undergone severe intestinal damage after being repeatedly hit by a blunt object on her abdomen. The blunt iron rod was also inserted into her private parts and a large part of her intestine was pulled out. After 13 days of struggle she died in the hospital. On complying with Indian laws the actual name of the victim was never released to the media and pseudonyms like 'Damini' (lighting), 'Jagruti' (awareness) and most commonly 'Nirbhaya' (the fearless one) were used to honour the victim's courage and struggle. This case is important to mention because it was perhaps the first time in post-independence India so many people from across the country united to fight for gender rights. India has not witnessed women's movements as big as this ever before and ICTs played a huge role in this.

Following the circulation of Indian media reports regarding the incident, huge protests broke out all over the country. Thousands swarmed the streets of Delhi following the death of the innocent victim, protesting for improvements to be made to matters concerning women's safety, women's rights and anti-rape laws. The internet was swarmed with news of the event and protests from people all over the world. It was something that India had never witnessed before. In this respect Barn commented, 'It is evident that India as a country is witnessing a significant technological revolution' (Barn, 9th January 2013). A social media boom happened in India in 2012. 'Research firm Socialbakers estimated in November 2012 that the number of Indian Facebook users swelled by 14 million in the past six months' (Answer & Shrinivasan, 31st December 2012). In this respect Professor Barn from the University of London commented,

So to what extent were the India protests organized by Twitter, Facebook and other forms of social media? And were these mass protests the Indian spring? Well - going by the headlines in Indian newspapers, social media has played a significant role - 'social media feeds protests fire', 'social media turns pivot for Delhi protests' and 'The year social media came of age in India'. (Barn, 9th January 2013)

3. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ICT AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

Digital activism can be defined as political participation, activities and protests organized in digital networks beyond representational politics (Karatzogianni, 2006). McAdam et al. (1996) explains the emergence of social movements, their development and outcomes by addressing three interrelated factors namely mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and framing processes. The cyberconflict framework was developed by Karatzogianni (2006) which uses elements of the social movement theory (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996) including the mobilizing structures, political opportunity and framing process in order to understand the use of ICTs and social media in conflicts occurring in the cyberspace. The resource mobilization theory emphasizes the “significance of outside contributions and the cooptation of institutional resources by contemporary social movements’ (Jenkins, 1983, p. 533). Resources like time, money, organisational skills and certain social and political opportunities are of outmost importance for the success of any social movement (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011).

4. MOBILIZING STRUCTURES

For any social movement to be successful, one of the main tasks of the mobilization process is to generate solidarity and commitment in the name of the movement. ICTs may be able to foster collective identity across a dispersed population, which organizers can then mobilize in support of collective action (Zald & McCarthy, 1979). Thus groups that are motivated by ideological commitment, sharing strong interpersonal networks and a distinct identity are more effective and can readily be mobilized. According to Tilly there are two reasons for why social integration or social solidarity facilitates mobilization. Firstly social solidarity provides people with a communal goal, a set of common values around which they can mobilize, a communication network and a structure of authority (Tilly, 1980). Secondly, solidarity makes bloc mobilization possible. Social movements can expand in two ways, either by recruiting individuals or by recruiting an entire bloc of previously mobilized people. ‘Mobilization is made much easier when ongoing movements are able to draw previously established groups into their organization’ (Useem, 1980, p. 357). Thus, bloc mobilization is impossible without the existence of a certain degree of solidarity within the community.

According to McCarthy (1996), the least organised end of the map of the mobilization network is families and networks of friends and a wide

range of the local dissent is built upon the structures of everyday life. Kinship and friendship networks have been central to the understanding of movement recruitment as well as understanding the formation of emergent local movement groups (McCarthy 1996, p. 142). In this case the role of the informal structures of everyday life have been widely linked to movement mobilization where informal and less formal ties between people served as solidarity and a communication facilitating structure. Fireman & Gamson also have talked about how the existence of previous bonds makes solidarity behaviour a reasonable expectation. 'A person whose life is intertwined with the group [through friendship, kinship, organizational membership, informal support networks, or shared relations with outsiders] ... has a big stake in the group's fate' (Zald & McCarthy, 1979). The idea of linking technology and participation helps in the promotion of collective identity and creating a perception among individuals that they are members of a larger community by virtue of the grievances they share (Garrett, 2006).

5. OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

According to Garrett (2006), opportunity structures can be defined as attributes of a social system that facilitate or constrain movement activity. They shape the environment in which activists operate that must be taken into consideration when crafting their actions. McAdam (1996) suggests four dimension of the political opportunity structure that must be considered and they are relative accessibility of the political system, the stable or fragmented alignments among the elites, the presence of elite allies, and the states tendency and capacity to repress the movement (McAdam, 1996). Cultural factors and organisations factors are often included in the conceptual schemes of political opportunity so that collective actors can create as well as frame new opportunities for mobilization purposes (Ayres, 1999). In talking about the relationship between ICTs and opportunity structures Ayres (1999) states that ICTs in combination with the global economic processes results in contentious activities becoming increasingly transnational which in turn affects national level opportunity structures. On the other hand, it also results in the emergence of new avenues of transnational opportunity structures for collective action. He says, 'the Internet contributes to this internationalization of contentious activity... In effect, the Internet has become an international opportunity in its own right, as it provides disparate groups around the world with a means for collectively contesting new and emerging global arrangements' (Ayres, 1999, p. 136).

6. FRAMING PROCESS

The concept of framing can be derived from the works of Goffman (1974) where he states that frames denoted “schemata of interpretation” that enable individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences within their life space and the world at large (Goffman, 1974). Tarrow goes on to talk about the management of the frames as a crucial of collective action and the process of mobilization. He states that, ‘building a movement around strong ties of collective identity, whether inherited or constructed, does much of the work that would normally fall to organization; but it can do the work of mobilization, which depends on framing identities so that they will lead to action, alliance, interaction’ (Tarrow, 1998). Garrett (2006) states that the framing process as dependant on the flow of carefully crafted movement information, in the form of frames, across networks of influence. ICTs have helped create new networks over which these frames can be propagated and they have transformed the role of communication media in politics, making media skills, persuasion and socialization fundamental to contemporary contention (Castells, 1997). According to Garrett (2006) one of the most important changes associated with ICTs is its ability to bypass mass media outlets and using the Internet to promulgate a coherent frame.

7. METHOD

For the analysis of the activism after the Nirbhaya case, the data was collected in two stages. Firstly social media sources like Facebook and Twitter as well as news reports published online by Indian news agencies were looked at. This stage of data collection started right after the news was reported in order to get as much information as possible about the protest activities. The second part of data collection consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews, both in- person in India and over Skype. In this case snowball sampling was used to find individuals and organisations who participated in the protests. The people interviewed consisted of organisations, feminists, political activists, celebrities and also individuals who did not have any political or organisational ties but still participated in the protest activities. From these two sets of data, this paper examines the effects of social media and ICTs on the protests and how these can become a platform for gender activism in India.

8. THE ROLE OF ICTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE NIRBHAYA PROTESTS

When the news of rape on December 16th 2012 reached the masses it created an internet revolution that India had never witnessed before. It spread like wildfire and thousands of people gathered in streets of the country to protest. Nilanjana Roy was present at the protest march in the Raisina Hills in New Delhi and she wrote about her experience on her blog. Her account noted that it was predominantly a young crowd mainly consisting of students, young men and woman in their twenties. There were small groups of people who represented political organisations but it was mostly people who were drawn together only by their anger. Roy wrote, 'Almost all of them heard about the protest on Facebook and Twitter, or from friends - not through the mainstream media' (Roy, 22nd December 2012). A large group of young people especially students had come out onto the streets because they felt strongly for a cause. They lacked coherence and were often confused but their energy to participate for the cause and promote change was unparalleled (Roy, 22nd December 2012). To describe the mobilizing structure of the protest Barn has commented that, 'What has been striking about the Indian protests is that while they were led by both young men and women, who were educated, urban and middle class, they reached out and connected with others from a diverse range of backgrounds throughout Indian society' (Barn, 9th January 2013).

Active participants in a movement are usually networks of groups and organisations who mobilize and protest to promote or resist social change which is the ultimate goal of a social movement. However, in this case apart from groups and organisations there were also individuals who participated in protest activities and contributed resources without actually being attached to movement groups or organisations. There was sense of solidarity that the movement successfully created and this is evident from the following quote

The position of women in society played a huge role in this movement. Women who are usually deprived in different ways and are taught to be quite, found a new voice within this movement. We were not alone anymore and we walked with people who shared and understood our everyday experiences. (Participant 1)

A large number of individuals came to know about the movement from friends or through social media and mobile phones.

My friend messaged me about the protests in Delhi and asked me to come. But I know of a lot of people who got

the information through Facebook, or through the people they followed on Twitter. (Participant 2)

The open, decentralized, non-hierarchical structures of this movement made it ideal for internet communication (Karatzogianni, 2006, p. 59). On a social media platform free speech is unhindered. 2012 saw social media creating a new phenomenon. 'It saw the rise of the virtually connected Indian youth which is likely to redraw the terms of engagement between the state and its urban population' (Anwer & Shrinivasan, 31st December 2012). In December 2012, a Pew Research study established that nearly 45% of Indian web users, most of them from urban areas, connect on social media to discuss politics (Bakshi & Mishra, 2014).

The diffusion of internet, mobile communication, digital media, social media, has led to the development of horizontal networks of interactive communication, that include the multimodal exchange of interactive messages from many to many both synchronous and asynchronous, that connect global and local at a chosen time leading to the formation of a networked society. This enables movement activists to gain international attention to their cause at unprecedented speed even without the support of mainstream media (Karatzogianni, 2006). The use of ICTs and social media also enabled individuals in the movement to control the media without any political influence and mass media became secondary to alternate forms of media that were used to grow the movement. Due the huge popularity of the movement it automatically received considerable support from the mainstream media. Also due to the large scale use of social media the government failed to anticipate the strength and intensity of the movement. The protestors wanted answers from the government and they had none. They were taken by surprise by both the rapidity and the popularity of the movement. 'For the government and keepers of law, it was a PR disaster. They had lost a battle they were accustomed to winning hands down. Now, there was a pesky entity the public seeking to change the rules of the game. A teenager armed with a smartphone had used the magic platform called social media to devastating effect, catching the agents of the state flatfooted' (Anwer & Shrinivasan, 31st December 2012)

Sharing of information has become extremely simple through text messages, blogs, vlogs, social media, RSS feeds, podcasts, mobile applications like Whatsapp and other similar technologies and this has given people the counter power to challenge power relations institutionalised in society. This serves as an extraordinary medium for people and groups to

build movements and gain interest and participation both locally and globally. Nineteen year old Shambhavi Saxena was at the protests march in New Delhi on the 25th of December, 2012 that was broken up by the police and Saxena along with other agitators were taken into police custody (Anwer & Shrinivasan, 31st December 2012). On her way to the Police station and all the time while she was detained there she shared what was happening with the world through her tweets, 'Illegally being held here at Parliament St Police Station Delhi w/ 15 other women. Terrified, pls RT' (Barn, 9th January 2013). There was no denying that her voice was heard and more than one thousand and seven hundred people retweeted her SOS message. According to Favstar, a social media analytics site, her tweets reached over two hundred thousand people all over the world (Barn, 9th January 2013). This resulted in the galvanising of the civil society where activists and lawyers arrived at the police station where she was detained to provide her and the others arrested with help and advice. Celebrities and the common people from all over the world also joined in to condemn the police on different social media sites. The internet offered new and innovative opportunities for mobilizing and organizing individuals. Thus 'the space of the new social movements of the digital age is not a virtual space, it is a composite of the space of flows and of the space of places' (Castells, 2007, p. 13). Movements that emerge locally can lead to physical mobilization not only at the point of origination but can generate global interest and impact. It leads to the elimination of boundaries between the global and the local creating a new space for new social movements to act and flourish. In this context Castells states,

Mass self-communication is self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many that communicate with many. We are indeed in a new communication realm, and ultimately in a new medium, whose backbone is made of computer networks, whose language is digital, and whose senders are globally distributed and globally interactive. (Castells, 2007, p.11)

The most important aspect of the Nirbhaya case was that it created a community which was held together by solidarity and understanding and that was primarily because they could relate to the incident. She was perhaps the ideal victim that could trigger a protest like this. She was educated, belonged to the urban middle class, she was accompanied by a male companion who would be expected to protect her, it was not late in the night, it happened in a very popular and populated area in one of the busiest cities

in India. Everything about the circumstances was extraordinarily ordinary. Almost every urban middle class woman could relate to her background and circumstances and if it could happen to her it could happen to anyone. The protestors wanted answers from the government that had failed them and most certainly they wanted change and in order to achieve their goals they stood united. In talking about their reason for participating in the protest marches, one of the interviewees answered

We were on the streets because we could no longer be in the house. We could not be caged. I wanted to see that we can walk together, believe together, say no together, say enough is enough together. People just opened their front doors and walked out. I don't know who I walked along side and I did not care..... The spirit was there, the will was there, the urge to get out was intense but we did not know where and when. Social media made it possible. Social media helped create Tahrir Squares all over India and it is social media that would generate the fuel required to propel gender movements in India. (Participant 4)

Social movements are dependent on and draw upon a larger societal context. Societal and cultural norms dictate and define injustice and violation. The current political and economic environment further fuelled the rise of the middle class. Over the months of April and May 2014 India witnessed one of the most controversial elections of recent times. Over the past two years several cases of corruption against the current government came to light leading to tremendous agitation especially amongst the middle class. Due to the gross corruption of those in public office and deeply unimpressive economic performance, India's annual growth rate sunk from 9.3% in 2010-2011 to under 5% in 2014 leading to huge amounts of public borrowing, substantial growth of the national deficit, inflation and the plummeting of the India rupee by more than 20% (Dalrymple, 12th May 2014). This incident came as a final blow to the government when it proved to the people of the country its failure to protect its citizens. Social media fuelled the anger that was already there. The people of the nation wanted change and this provided organisation and activists the perfect opportunity structure. Whilst talking about the Nirbhaya rape one of the interviewees commented,

Nirbhaya represented the middle class sensitivity. She could have been anyone's daughter or sister. It is sad that it often takes something like this happening to someone

belonging to the educated middle class to bring these issues into visibility. (Participant 3)

Meera Vijayan, a charity consultant said, 'I have been hooted at, I've been called names and told to dress modestly, and let me remind you this is from people my own age and not older conservative people. This girl could have been me, it could have been any of my friends and no-one would have taken us seriously' (Brown, 4th January 2013). The anger had been fuelling and the Nirbhaya case acted as a trigger and in blew into something big. For the last 2 years gender has been the epicentre of public discourse in India.

9. ICT AND SOCIAL MEDIA AS TOOL FOR GENDER ACTIVISM IN INDIA

The protests after the Nirbhaya case finally led to a change in the Indian Penal Code in order to provide more severe punishments for those convicted of sexual assault. It also proved to be a great example of the power of ICTs leading to a series of projects that were undertaken by the government, NGOs, media agencies or even individuals that used ICTs for gender activism in India. Identities formed within the movement were not limited to the movement itself and extend beyond it. This case also brought other gender related issues in the limelight including homosexuality and transgender related laws.

The Nirbhaya case also proved to be a huge catalyst to bring many such gender related issues in the limelight and created a culture of protest for women's rights. (Participant 3)

It also led to increased reporting of cases related to sexual assault and rape (Nelson, 16th December 2013). Various NGOs and feminist groups in India have found a new platform to voice their opinion and fight for the rights of women. The explosion of feminist blogs, online magazines, online petitions and social media campaigns in India are changing the way young entrepreneurs, leaders and grass-root activists perceive feminism and discuss the most pressing issues. In many cases, online feminist blogs have been called 'the 21st century version of consciousness rising' which constitutes as a 'communications arm for the contemporary feminist movement and an inexhaustible force continually radicalizing and challenging its institutionalization' (Martin & Valenti, 2012). Online feminism has the power to mobilise the young, the old and everyone in between and take political actions at an unprecedented scale at an unprecedented speed. So far, this power has often been used in an ad-hoc and unsustainable ways

as opposed to being used more proactively. However, it has produced remarkable effects and changed the way advocacy and action functions and conducted within the feminist community.

Advancements in ICTs especially hand held computers, mobile phone and their links with the internet, has changed the way citizen groups mobilize, build coalitions, inform, lobby, communicate and campaign (Hajnal, 2002). In talking about advocacy an interviewee comments

The Internet is a blessing for NGOs working with women. The small NGO community in India is always looking for ways that are low cost to spread awareness. The internet and mobile phones have enabled NGOs to mobilise people and build up movement at a remarkable speed and garner international attention. (Participant 5)

De Wilde *et al.* talk about the how organisations and the internet can mutually benefit from each other for further development. They say, 'The internet provokes innovation, but this innovation has to be organized and disseminated. NGOs are specially innovative in this field: not only has the internet helped these organizations, NGOs were also very important for the further development of the internet (De Wilde et al., 2003 in Van De Donk, Loader, Nixon & Rucht, 2004, p. 5). Large political organisations that are rich in resources use ICTs mainly to enhance internal or external communication and reduce cost but relatively new, small and resource-poor organisations tend to reject traditional politics and in many ways are defined by their online presence.

Several feminist blogs operating at the moment aim to spread awareness and educate people using new ICT tools. Erin Matson, the former Action Vice President of the National Organisation of Women commented that 'We can't move too quickly over the important cultural (and deeply political) feminist work that younger women are leading, largely online. All this work is rapidly building into a platform that has the power to force big policy changes, and that's exciting' (Martin & Valenti, 2012). On talking about the Nirbhaya case one of the activists interviewed said,

The most important thing that emerged after the Nirbhaya case was the increased importance given to women's safety in public places. So women's safety has become the next sexy thing in development'. (Participant 6)

Organisations put more emphasis on how new technologies can be used to improve women's safety. Apps like 'VithYou', that is meant to be a

panic button, gained a lot of attention. A lot of effort was also made by data collecting organisations and non-profits to try and create an unsafe map of different cities in India. The primary aims of these mapping projects were to inform commuters which areas to avoid and then coordinate with the police to reorder and increase security in such areas. This information was mainly crowd sourced but they also devised algorithm to crawl the internet in order to acquire information about assaults in areas from verifiable sources like the newspapers. Online campaigning platforms also gained huge popularity. These online platforms used the very basic internet technologies to take the fight from the desk to the ground. Women have found their voice. More and more women are coming out of their traditional patriarchal upbringing and breaking the mould.

The online petition platforms have actually been quite key. Two hundred thousand or three hundred thousand signatures on a petition do drive some amount of change. But in this case every small change is important. (Participant 6)

10. CONCLUSION

The Delhi rape incident led to 'intense public introspection into the nature of Indian society and the current structures of governance that have failed to keep women safe' (Simon-Kumar, 2014). The growing discontent against the government and the need for change provided the perfect political opportunity for the civil society organisations and gender activists. The global discourse and campaigns on gender also helped create a national level opportunity structure in India (Ayes, 1999). The anger brewing in people, especially the urban educated middle class was channelized into a movement that had far reaching effects. When the news of the protests reached the people they gathered in large numbers on the streets to show their solidarity and protest against the incident. The participants were both from organisations and also individuals who participated because they felt strongly for the cause. Social media and mobile phone played a big role in the process, helping in the circulation of news related to the time and venue.

I came to know about the protest though a friend but even on the days when I was not present at the protest I would follow what is happening there through Facebook or Twitter. This helped me remain connected to the movement even though I was not physically present there. (Participant 7)

ICTs tend to have consequences for the ways in which social movement interact their environment. ICTs improved the movement's capacity to act in a coordinated and coherent way in order to react more quickly to external challenges. It also helped organisations and individuals to be less dependent on the established mass media in conveying their messages to a broader audience base. The action and reaction followed each other in very short cycles, and the speed of diffusion of new ideas, tactics and arguments considerably increased. ICTs also helped to facilitate mobilization across large territories to reach a wider audience and create an global impact (Van De Donk et al., 2004, p. 9). In this context and interviewee comments,

Online conversations are generating the fuel required to propel gender movements in India. (Participant 4)

Online activism in India is a relatively new area of work and people are still struggling develop an infrastructure and means of funding. In order to overcome this, the online community will have to strategize and partner with a range of feminist allies. Meaningful and profitable collaborations will have to be set up among advocacy and non-profit organizations, philanthropists and entrepreneurs, corporate leadership with a feminist sensibility, educators, political leaders, community organizers, artists, youth and many others (Martin & Valenti, 2012). However, the most important things that social media and mobile phones have done are that it has opened up channels for communication and collaboration. It has become one of the primary tools to raise consciousness and has given people a platform for technological innovations in the field of gender. The internet has resulted in information becoming widely and easily available to a large section of the population. 'Where information is power, sometimes someone's personal power, it is more likely to have to be shared' (Pollock & Sutton, 1999). Organisations in India are also widely using the Internet to collect data for mapping and policy recommendations.

We have developed programmes that can crawl the internet in order to find data and about gender violence and inequality. This data then helps organisations and governments to take the right decisions. (Participant 8)

The internet and social media has also been used to generate useful debates and meaningful conversations related to gender. It has given people a chance to express themselves

Through the Internet many women have found their voice. They can now express themselves much more freely,

especially in India. More and more women are coming out of their traditional patriarchal upbringing and breaking the mould. (Participant 9)

However, irrespective of the huge possibilities of online activism one of the interviews talk about the need of physical activism.

We should not forget the emphasis on physical activism on the streets parallel to online activism in order to attain results so that voices online are not lost in the virtual world without creating any real impact. (Participant 3)

Online activism should go hand-in hand with physical activism. (Participant 7)

It is difficult to organise and strategize such a decentralised movement and steps need to be taken in order to establish vital connections and collaborations in order to keep the new age feminism alive in India. In this ever changing and ever developing society the future is difficult to predict. However, campaigning through a medium that people are most comfortable with is creating a wave of awareness in society. As one of the interviewees comment,

The Nirbhaya case has resulted in change. Real change. This movement in particular, has reminded people about the power that they hold. It has empowered them. It may not succeed. But the people who have raised their voices, are now much more fearless than they used to be. The real change happens inside minds, not on the outside. (Participant 9)

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