Chapter 8

Experiencing Sexual Harassment in Hindi Print Journalism

8.1 Introduction

There have been several reported incidents of sexual harassment in media workplaces. Sexual harassment is not about sex but rather about the execution of gendered power relations. Feminist theories argue that sexual harassment is the product of an organized gender system by dominant and normative form of masculinity (Uggen et al., 2004). Sexual harassment is a reality at workplaces where women have to negotiate their presence in a male-dominated profession like journalism. Berdahl (2007) argues that sexual harassment is both motivated and made possible by the persistent and deep-rooted stratification of social status by sex which is repeatedly used to guard or enhance one’s sex-based social status.

The 2013 ‘Tehelka’\textsuperscript{89} sexual assault incident has brought to the fore the loopholes in functioning within Indian media. The organization itself showed unwillingness to take up the issue and tried to brush it off in a very systematic manner. The “Tarun Tejpal\textsuperscript{90} sexual assault imbroglio has been revelatory at multiple levels, but perhaps most of all of the truth of Noam Chomsky’s observations that for the powerful, crimes are those that others commit," writes Ayesha Kidwai in one of her articles.\textsuperscript{91} This incident drew

\textsuperscript{89} Tehelka is a news magazine known for its investigative journalism and sting operations.

\textsuperscript{90} TarunTejpal is an Indian journalist, publisher, novelist and former editor-in-chief of Tehelka magazine. In November 2013, he stepped down as editor for six months after a female colleague accused him of sexual assault.

national attention to the neglected issue of sexual harassment, especially within media which is ironical in many ways.

This chapter begins with an attempt to understand the provision of the sexual harassment law at workplace in the Indian perspective. It deals with a theoretical-legal understanding of this law. Further, this chapter reflects on the lived experiences of women journalists to understand workplace power hierarchies. It documents their journalistic work experience and nuanced acknowledgment of sexual harassment. How do these women define or identify incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace?

This chapter also tries to tap those normalized forms of sexual harassment which are trivialized in the name of journalistic work-culture. It recounts journalists’ experiences of varied forms of sexist-vengeful treatment at the work place. Taking advantage of the socially vulnerable location of women, it traces narratives of how male-dominated workplaces turn into traps victimizing women. Despite having Vishakha Guidelines by the Supreme Court of India, in the judgment on the Vishakha and others versus State of Rajasthan case in 1997 and more recently the The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Bill (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, which seek to address sexual harassment at workplace, it is notable that media fails to ensure a healthy and safe workplace for women. This is an effort to understand the culture of silence towards issues and incidents of sexual harassment in media, particularly in Hindi print journalism.

8.2 Sexual Harassment at Workplace Law

Sexual Harassment has been a prevalent reality at workplace since the advent of waged labour (Chaudhury, 2011). It was in the decades of seventies that the term sexual harassment was coined. In the Indian context the brutal gang rape of Bhanwari Devi in 1997 brought the issue of sexual harassment at workplace in the mainstream media. A

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women’s rights group called ‘Vishakha’ filed a public interest litigation to seek justice for the rape survivor which resulted in a landmark judgment by the Supreme Court of India in 1997. It brought in the Vishakha Guidelines by the Supreme Court of India in the prevention of sexual harassment at workplace.

Despite having clear guidelines by the Supreme Court, sometimes such cases go unheard, unregistered and unnoticed. The Supreme Court directive of 1997 defines sexual harassment (Vishakha versus State of Rajasthan, August 1997) which includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour as:

a) Physical contact and advances;

b) A demand or request for sexual favours;

c) Sexually coloured remarks;

d) Showing pornography;

e) Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature for example, leering, telling dirty jokes, making sexual remarks about a person's body, etc.

“The Supreme Court directive provided the legitimate space for the hidden truth about sexual harassment at workplace (SHW) to surface; earlier one only heard about victim-blaming, witch-hunting and blackmailing. Now women are fighting back tooth and nail. The electronic and print media have become extremely responsive to the issue of SHW.”93 Apart from this, there have been incidents which go unheard and unseen in media workplace making women a vulnerable category having no space to show their dissent towards the issue.

India did not have any legislation until The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Bill (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 was passed by the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian Parliament) on September 3, 2012. It was later passed by

the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of the Indian Parliament) on February 26 2013.94 Eapen (2010, p. 20) writes that “this bill derives from the Supreme Court (SC) judgment in 1997 in the Vishakha and Others versus the State of Rajasthan (air 1997 SC 3011), which came to be known as the Vishakha guidelines (incorporating General Recommendation 19 of Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to protect women against sexual harassment at the workplace since the then civil and penal laws in India did not contain adequate provisions to address this form of violence against women.”

Policies and research have tried to focus on sexual behaviours that amount to harassment for example a boss pressurizing his subordinate into sexual activity, a colleague who keeps asking another out on a date despite repeated refusals, or an environment prevalent with sexual jokes and materials. This has widely given rise to debates around the issue while assuming that sexual harassers are aggravated by a desire for a kind of sexual expression and fulfillment. Conversely, there have also been debates to address how realistic and desirable it is to regulate sexual expression at workplace (Schultz, 1998 cited in Jennifer L. Berdahl, 2007).

Whereas Tejani (2004, p. 4491) critically writes, “sexual harassment is rooted in cultural practices and is exacerbated by power relations at the workplace. Unless there is enough emphasis on sensitization at the workplace, legal changes are hardly likely to be successful. Workplaces need to frame their own comprehensive policies on how they will deal with sexual harassment. Instead of cobbling together committees at the court's intervention, a system and a route of redress should already be in place.” The International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF)95 Survey (2014, p. 23) informs that ‘Violence and Harassment against Women in the News Media: A Global Picture’, an Indian journalist mentioned about sexual harassment in the office: “The boss would physically touch me in the corridors, stalk me all over the office, try forcing himself on


95 The International Women's Media Foundation is a Washington-based organization that is dedicated to strengthening the role of women journalists worldwide.
me, kiss me, [and] fondle me when alone with me.” 96 Research and studies are trying to bring gendered-power relations in practice in order to identify the multiple level power hierarchies at media workplace. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) 97 Act, 2013 states that each employer of a workplace should have an ‘Internal Complaints Committee’ which shall have a senior level woman as a presiding officer. 98 This law also directs that in case of unavailability of a senior level women employee, the same employer must nominate an eligible woman employee from other workplace of their organization. Despite having legal guidelines on sexual harassment media organizations often fail at providing a healthy working environment for women journalists. Incidents of sexual harassment remain unaddressed, unheard or unregistered, which reinforce a culture of silence in media organizations. In my research, women journalists’ narratives suggest the need for a deeper inquiry into sexual harassment at the workplace which is often ignored or denied by media organization.

8.3 Lived Experiences of Sexual Harassment

Workplace sexual harassment is one of the most difficult and insidious issues to tackle because victims are often in a position of vulnerability afraid of harming their careers or even losing their job if they dare to raise their voice against the issue. National Commission for Women report (2004, p. 10-11) found that, “sexual harassment is a part of work culture in media organizations in India but women either do not know how or, for a wide variety of reasons, choose not to do anything about it.” Another study by


Khabar Lahariya et al. (2014, p. 49)\textsuperscript{99} unravels that negotiating harassment is unfortunately seen as part of the job. The form of direct or indirect harassment includes sexual banter, assault or discriminatory practices, which results in women journalists dropping their stories and not giving space to their ideas and views in edit meetings. Both the studies with a time gap of ten years bring to light the same reality of sexual harassment as part of journalism.

One of the participants mentioned that cases like sexual harassment happen in big cities and not in small cities like ours. Most women journalists themselves prefer not to clearly talk about any such incidents. In my research study, while interviewing women journalists, the immediate response when asked about their experience of facing sexual harassment, was, ‘no, we don’t face such incidents’. But as the interview progressed, it often comes out in layered realities of the workplace.

\textit{Ritu}: There is no chance of sexual harassment as it’s all about how do you project yourself at the workplace.

\textit{Jeevika}: Hindi print media is extremely concerned about this issue. Such incidents are rare in Hindi print media.

\textit{Babita}: If there is some professional weakness in a female candidate then only it is possible to face discrimination. I never faced any kind of discrimination based on my gender in my career.

\textit{Samidha}: It’s up to you how do you conduct yourself, how do you carry yourself. Your behavior matters in such incidents.

\textit{Harshita}: I have never faced any such incident. You need to have a bold and strong attitude in this field.

These narratives are from the participants who have been working in higher positions and their immediate response was denial of existence of instances of sexual harassment. It has been found in many research studies that women experiencing sexually harassing behaviour prefer not to label such experiences as ‘sexual harassment’ (Ellis, Barak, &

\textsuperscript{99} Khabar Lahariya (et al, 2014: 49), a study conducted by Delhi-based organization Nirantar and Women Media and News Trust. This study covers life experiences of small town and district level women journalists in In Hindi-speaking North Indian cities. This survey includes team members of Khabar Lahariya, a local language run predominantly by rural women from marginalized backgrounds.

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Pinto, 1991; Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald, & DeNardo, 1999; Magley & Shupe, 2005 cited in Holland et al., 2013).

The immediate denial of sexual harassment is an indicator that in journalism it is still not a subject to be discussed and there is an attitude of deliberate ignorance towards the issue. Moreover, it is a matter of patriarchal character of the Hindi print media, which prefers not to address such issues at all. The women working at senior positions prefer to give safe answer to avoid the inconvenience of getting into the issue of sexual harassment. These narratives reflect the unconsciously internalized patriarchal approach of making a woman’s behaviour responsible and suggesting that one needs a bold attitude in order to avoid harassment at workplace.

It is important to mention here that during interviews, few senior women journalists clearly discussed or shared incidents of sexual harassment. If a male colleague cracks a double-meaning joke or appreciates a woman colleague’s dress, it is normalized. Many of these journalists have accepted that such things occur in newsrooms on a daily basis and are quite normal.

The reluctance to address or label sexual harassment is an act of overlooking the gender-discrimination and power relations at different levels at workplace. There has been persistent silence or hesitation to talk and speak about incidents and cases of sexual harassment. The journalistic workplace is taken in more idealized way by the senior-positioned women journalists. The ‘No See No Show Theory’ works well here in this context where it is easy to deny the issue so that there will not be any further question. For senior women journalists it is more about speaking from their higher position which ignores the flaws in structure where it is women who need to be careful to ensure their safety.

Nandita: There is no formal body/functional body to address issues of sexual harassment here. Few things are normal at work place and part of the working culture when you work with male-colleagues. Through joking the workplace milieu remains lighter.

In a city like Bhopal, such cases of sexual harassments are neither heard of nor it has happened, though there have been deliberate charges against some people to take revenge out of personal rivalry.
This opinion of a respondent reveals about the issue with dual understanding towards the sexual harassment. Her narrative brings out an uncritical view towards normalization of the jokes and over friendly behaviour of male colleagues. And it remains an unacknowledged fact that what kind of jokes and comments remarks are used by their male colleagues. Also, her narrative informs that small cities reflect misogynistic nature of the journalistic workplace. Uggen (2004) argues that consciousness of sexual harassment varies throughout social groups. It is a critical issue from both the perspectives legal and sociological purposes.

The cases of sexual harassment are not heard because they are not revealed, told and registered but they do occur in different forms and are often ignored through the normalization of such acts. The vulnerability of women at the workplace is visible through such incidents which largely go unheard due to the culture of silence around sexual harassment. Moreover, the ‘self-victimization’ approach makes a woman silent. The fear of losing job and reputation in the society also hinders women form reporting such instances in the public.

The possibility of sexual harassment and violence against women is been attached to big cities or metros. The self-boundaries made by women regarding sexual harassment do not eliminate the power hierarchies being executed at workplace. Nandita’s narrative says that such incidents do not happen in small cities but the narrative that sexual harassment cases stem out of personal vendetta shows the active presence of patriarchal violence which tends to victimize women.

Sangeeta: Many a times I have found that the editor inquiring about female journalists and trying to have a friendly conversation with them. Many a times he is in office after getting drunk. As I always addressed him as an elder brother, I told him that this is not good so when I am in office better you don’t come in such a condition.

At worst the boss/editor can fire me but if I am taking all the risk while traveling long distance and keeping my family’s dignity aside for my work and similarly other girls I know should have a safe workplace.

I got to know a few incidents about him and I personally called him and said that this particular thing you did was wrong. He commented on me that are you a legal advisor for me, who are you to teach me things? I told him that I am normal
Sangeeta’s narrative reveals that a journalist’s workplace operates with a patriarchal and male-chauvinistic approach and ironically does not want to acknowledge that incidents of sexual harassment exist. Mackinnon (1979) quoted in Uggen (2004) puts forth that the social context of power relations at the workplace and in society give meaning to the sexual harassment. A respondent tried to assert about her safety at office through her effort while raising the issue but the kind of response she gets from the editor reinforces the legitimacy of ‘non-questioning’ from a woman also reasserts man’s freedom of behaviour and conduct at workplace.

It reveals that journalistic workplace has internal safety issues towards women journalists where professional responsibilities are not taken with due seriousness and attention. Having a drunkard editor at workplace who is trying to disturb others’ work aggravates the sense of being unsafe at workplace.

**Vijeta:** Women journalists are asked to leave the office early because there are scribes who take alcohol on a regular basis in the office, and hence, women colleagues leave office. Not allowing women in night shifts and sending them home early to ensure their safety is a trick which works in the favour of male journalists who take drinks and organize their own activities while on duty. It also works as a tool of professional networking among them.

It has been a pervasive culture in journalism that drinking and smoking are the most preferred ways of networking among journalists. Women journalists are not given more spaces in profession because male journalists are not able to enjoy their freedom at workplace which remains mixed with their personal-pleasures too. Utilizing workplace for drinking alcohol incites fear and insecurity among women regarding their workplace.

National Commission for Women Report (2004, p. 50) found that “women in the media are vulnerable to harassment from colleagues who come drunk for night shift and the night staff leaving pornographic pictures and messages on their computers. Making sexist, vulgar comments are considered a common thing in the editorial rooms of newspapers as also so-called humorous or snide remarks on women colleagues work.”
This report also revealed that mostly women journalists were hesitant to speak about sexual harassment but shared their experiences of the unwanted sexual banter they are subjected to at their workplace. It is perhaps a sign of internalized patriarchy or self-preservation which makes them reluctant to name sexual harassment.

_Ritu: If any such incident happens, women must not need to tell anyone. A woman must be able to study intention and read mind of people. A woman should be able to know everything beforehand if such condition arises. One must know all rules and laws in this regard. Most of the times senior journalists (males) are quite smart to play with the words and their language doesn’t let one understand the very beginning of the harassment at workplace. It might start with appreciating your dress and then pointing you among everyone or trying to get over friendly with certain interests._

This narrative put forth the most common response towards sexual harassment, which is to be silent. On one hand her narrative reinforces the patriarchal notion of ‘silence’ against harassment, on the other hand she is trying to explain about how a woman should be able to identify the possible threat which actually keep them in constant insecurity.

Perpetrators are often senior to and more experienced than the victims. They are in most of the cases placed in higher positions of responsibility which secures them systematically as it is near impossible for those being harassed to complain.

Ritu’s narrative brings out that a woman must know the legal aspects involving in such incidents. Also, she should be capable of understanding the man’s sexist approach which might be mistaken for appreciation. There is a link between how a man at a senior position uses words and vocabulary while overpowering a woman and taking advantage of her being less powerful. The widely-known ‘Tehelka’ magazine’s sexual harassment case has been one where the perpetrator was a senior journalist and the victim was an intern, which shows obvious patriarchal power-relations and an attempt to the voice of the victim. Tangri et al., (1982) cited in Welsh (1999) writes that as an outcome of gender socialization process sexual harassment is a mechanism which allows a man to assert dominance and power over women. This assertion of dominance and power is wielded by man both at workplace and in society.
It has been observed that many fellow journalists do the ritual of touching feet to show tremendous respect to their ‘boss or editor’, and stay ‘good’ in their eyes. Sangeeta, one of the respondents mentioned “I gave my senior male journalists the same regard and I found them like my mentors, who have given me a chance to work with this organization.” Keeping such moral boundary through certain social relation reproduces social hierarchy at workplace which actually does not let the professional space be free of feudal hierarchies.

8.4 Sexual Banter: Comments /Sarcasm/ Character assassination

The presence of women journalists in the Hindi print media workplace reflects a contested space where a woman scribe often cannot escape the challenge of facing sarcasm direct at her every single move.

Shivani: I am here by choice not by chance, thus, I have been quite aware of the possible challenges. Here, a man has made strong chains for women to not let them progress. If a woman breaks it she is labeled as ‘characterless’. Here, man is the one who is deciding and defining things for woman.

It is the biggest challenge here where clashes and cold wars between men-women reach at the peak when male journalists leave no chance to comment on women journalists’ presence. No matter how senior you grow in the profession, there is always a sarcasm hurled at you by male colleagues, making you feel that you are a woman, thus, a misfit here in the field. These are the men coming from rural background and for them women are supposed to be at home and under veils.

Sometimes jokes/sarcasm are deliberate to vent out their ego problems, which certainly makes newsroom a place to exercise power relation dynamic between men and women colleagues. Most of the times jokes are sarcasm targeting female scribe’s marital status and her personal life, sharing double meaning jokes, discussing women bodies in an indecent language like ‘maal’ meaning female body like an object or commodity, for married women they say ‘maal ka maalik mil gya hai’, meaning female body has got the owner after her marriage. They deliberately crack jokes on woman’s body, her appearance. ‘Madam’ is the most sarcastic term with sarcastic tone used by males for their female colleagues, which a man has to say out of compulsion otherwise behind your back these men use most abusive and offensive language to talk about a senior woman.

This narrative is trying to reveal that there is a rigid patriarchal mindset among male journalists. It points out that a man coming from a rural background with a rural
patriarchal understanding find women unfit according to their conventional approach which disapproves a free-working woman even at workplace. Also, tradition of veils in rural areas indicates the execution of patriarchy to control women and keeping them under veils covered and home. It indicates poor status of women in these areas of Madhya Pradesh. This is the case not just in rural areas but in cities as well as Shivani’s narrative testifies.

Sarcasm is a tool to reclaim their male-superiority while making and treating a woman like a ‘second sex’.

Expression of male-power through double-meaning jokes and particular terms reassert that women are seen in an objectified manner. Their presence is taken as an object linking it with sexual jokes thus expressing the gendered power relations. In her narrative the term ‘maal’ (object or commodity) and ‘maalik’ (owner) describes the power-relations between man and woman constructed through society. Marriage is seen by the male like owning the woman as an object, they use the term ‘maalik’, which shows the acute patriarchal mindset which objectifies women. The use of word ‘madam’ according to her narrative points out that the word carries more sarcastic value rather than professional to address a woman journalist. Basically, ‘madam’ is a compulsive – recognition of a woman by a patriarchal man which disapproves the coherent power in this term ‘madam’ in comparison to ‘sir’. The participant finds that ‘madam’ does not equally contains the understanding of power and depicts more about being a woman inferior to man. It is a compulsive recognition of a senior woman journalist by men which here is a misogynistic term.

Jyoti: While targeting personal life of a woman journalist male journalists are always sarcastic in their words at the workplace and make it a common topic of discussion. Sometimes they comment even on the colour of your attire. Once a woman journalist was wearing a blue dress and the moment she entered into the office, one of the male colleagues started murmuring among others that today ‘blue film’ has come in the office.

100 The Second Sex (French: Le Deuxième Sexe, 1949) is a book authored by the French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir. This work critically elucidates treatment of women in history and their socially constructed status as a second sex. It is the commendable work of feminist philosophy at the starting point of second wave of feminism.
Double meaning sexually coloured jokes are shared among male journalists, which been a habitual way to seek an upper hand over women at the workplace. It is also because women generally prefer to be silent in such situations as such sexual expressions are read as a ‘bold’ expression. The use of double meaning adult expressions is deliberate attempt which shows a ‘sexist-mindset’ of males at workplace.

*Jyoti:* I have experienced that once you lose temper it gives further power for the male to enjoy seeing you breaking down or getting upset. When I rejoined after my marriage, I had to face comments over my physical appearance, choice of dresses, my body, weight and hours of working which used to be extra noticed by my few male colleagues and they used to comment on my each move and activity.

I made it clear to them not to mess with me and mind the boundaries and not interfere in my personal space. I could see, my taking a stand gave them further a chance to be more critical and go against me. It resulted in more gossips and rumours that because I am not happy in my married life, I shouted back.

For a woman journalist making a comeback after marriage is in itself is difficult but if one dares to, it brings all attention to her and everything related to her married life. Also, this narrative shows that resistance against such incidents further motivate the harasser making him feel more charged to retain his superior social status. It has been a key reason of fear among women journalists that if they go against them it will bring them long run trouble. Thus, better let go of such issues.

The lack of professionalism is experienced when there is no boundary of behaviour observed by male colleagues. In the name of satire or sarcasms they actually target women, demeaning their presence with their sexist and misogynist approach.

*Shivani:* Their sarcasm directly mean as if we are here to enjoy or on a vacation from home. It’s very common to hear from male colleagues that why are you troubling your youth in this job, here mind works more and not your appearance, why don’t you women stay at home and let other men have employment in journalism.

Sometimes answering such things fetches a big fight and hurts their fragile male-ego but there came a point where I said that ‘I am not anyone from ‘Malwa’ (region) to carry long veils and be confined to four walls like you all want women to be. I could see that since then I could hear warning words that ‘women are bad at taking jokes, they take it personally.’ I could not understand that whether that was a joke, sarcasm or abuse.
Shivani’s narrative indicates the sense that men see women as an inconvenience in journalism. Men seem to believe that journalism is for those with intellect and women do not have intellect. Moreover, commenting on her appearance is objectifying her rather than acknowledging her work. Her answering back brought her more sarcasm undermining the real issue, particularly pointing out that ‘women are bad at taking jokes’, questioning her sense of humour. Her narrative suggests that why woman’s mind is interrogated. While questioning woman’s mind, a man tries to assert his power and dominance at workplace.

Meenakshi: During meetings and discussions where women journalists’ news ideas are unaccepted, rejected with over-discussion. Usually these meetings are a male dominated space with an aggressive tone. Many a times we are made fun of by male colleagues as they repeat what we say followed by their own explanation about the news idea. Like if a woman proposes to do a story related to child rights, male colleagues will try their best to reduce the idea unworthy and will impose their perspective on the idea. And you are finally made not to speak.

Usually it’s a sarcastic expression demeaning news ideas of a women journalist in front of others, which is mostly done by seniors to let down women journalists. Once openly in a meeting, a male journalist said that ‘oh! despite being a woman you have an idea for news’ and everyone burst out in a sarcastic laugh.

Challenging a woman’s mind or actually questioning it shows that how male journalists try to prove themselves superior, thus, reducing a woman’s ideas to a sexist joke which is a reinforcement of the male superiority. Also, in such meetings where number of males is usually higher than their counterpart, they find it convenient to take advantage of the situation.

Rebecca Solnit, an American author critically elaborates her own encounters of such incidents that “men explain things to me, still. And no man has ever apologized for explaining, wrongly, things that I know and they don’t. Not yet, but according to the actuarial tables, I may have another forty-something years to live, more or less, so it
could happen. Though I’m not holding my breath.” 101 In her famous book ‘Men Explain Things to Me (2014)’ Solnit describes how men’s assumptions about them of knowing everything and women do not anything incite gender-wars even during conversations between them.

It is due to the prevalence of this ‘unnoticed-culture’ that male colleagues’ overconfidence target women journalist’s discussion and day to day conversation. Many a times it is a deliberate approach to establish their knowledge superiority over a woman journalist’s knowledge which is basically a ‘mansplaining’.102

Soraya Chemaly,103 a feminist, writer, satirist, not necessarily in that order, wrote in an article published by the Huffington Post that every woman should learn the following ten words: Stop interrupting me, I just said that. No explanation needed. She writes men interrupt women, they repeat what a woman has already said they explain things at length to women. She point out that sexism is expressed gendered socialization which has a default cultural preference of male domination of public life. Man is positioned as dominant in such group conversations as he plays at being superior through disapproving women’s opinions or views.104

In journalism too, women respondents explicate that they have been actively facing mansplaining in editorial meetings where aggressive tone of male journalists with their attitude of mansplaining mostly dismiss ideas of women journalists their ideas. Many respondents shared that even during informal conversations at workplace usually male colleagues often show an edge in often dismissing views and opinions of women. It has

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102 Verb, informal gerund or present participle: mansplainings (of a man) explain (something) to someone, typically a woman, in a manner regarded as condescending or patronizing.

103 Soraya Chemaly is a writer and activist whose work focuses on the role of gender in culture, politics, religion and media. She is the Director of the Women’s Media Center Speech Project and organizer of the Safety and Free Speech Coalition.

been a most commonly encountered experience by most of the women professionals where they are unnecessarily explained thing by men.

8.5 Masculine Workplace Politics: Struggling Within and Outside

The work-atmosphere in newsroom is generally considered boiling under the pressure of meeting the deadlines, competition which many a times turns into personal ego issue. This understanding of the journalistic workplace indicates dominating behaviours of the journalists’ which brings out a lot in the form of sarcasms attacking personal spaces. Personal attack through words has been a powerful tool to give vent to the ego, which is basically a form of masculine-rage being done through words. It’s a form of verbal violence attacking woman’s personal life and bringing her character as the ‘easy target’ to make her feel morally incorrect.

Harshita: Most of the seniors at high positions in newspapers have more interests to be fulfilled from their female employees, They would ask them to accompany them on outdoor assignments. One of the media-house owners was known for his over friendly treatment to the females with the intention of taking advances. There have been complaints against him but since he is a high profile person nothing could affect him. On the contrary, the woman journalist who has been working there was defamed and questioned were raised on her character. When the woman tried to get access of the higher authorities in this regard, she had to face a tough time. Later, she started getting threatening calls, stalking and also faced a boycott in the profession where it became difficult for her to get a new job in the city.

Hershita’s narrative indicates that there is a clear power-relation where senior positioned male would try to initiate friendly conversation with a young woman. The higher level of sexual harassment is experienced by single and young women as they are viewed as ‘available’ for sexual interactions (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Lafontaone & Tredeau, 1986; US MSPB 1981 cited in Welsh, 1999). Generally women are not able to understand the involved masculine manipulation and face harassment. In this narrative, the respondent shows that when the victim tried to approach the authorities, she did not get support and on contrary her character was questioned with ‘blame the victim’ approach. Leaving the city by the victim reflects a withdrawal from the situation and also her vulnerability for
having raised her voice against her issue that brought her lack of support in professional space too. Socialization of a woman is deeply rooted process in our society, which keeps her under moral evaluation and assessment, often her own-self.

Moreover, the politics of revenge is played out by male who cannot take it when a woman actually stands up against the harasser. Here, the professional norms and laws are never considered but personal-ego-satisfaction work through male-psyche which provokes him to take revenge while harassing the complainant. It is a complete nexus where masculine workplace politics operates that ultimately a woman cannot fight or go against.

In patriarchal society, ‘character’ is a moral construct mainly burdening a woman to be responsible for maintaining the image and her conduct according to the social norms. It is a fragile social construct and sensitive one to be morally attacked on a person (woman) as a revengeful behavior in order to fulfill the self-ego.

For women journalists the imposition of moral values at workplace in their journalistic path is the most challenging aspect which shows a typical patriarchal image of the workplace. The progress path of a woman is questioned on moral grounds in which a woman’s hard work is always in the dock. ‘Zile Ki Hulchul’ study (2014) captures that many studies have shown over 60 per cent women journalists have faced some kind of harassment at the workplace mostly by senior employees. This harassment includes written, oral as well as character assassination of women journalists and it is commonly done within media organizations (Frank, 2013 cited in ibid, 2014).

Many women journalists quit journalism as they find it difficult to handle the pressure of being in such male-dominated newsroom which is challenging even after doing well in their career. National Commission for women report (2004, p. 50) reveals that ‘character assassination and slandering is a common ploy to increase women’s insecurities and impair professional accomplishments. For example, with success comes the assumption

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105‘Khabar Lahariya’ et a.l, (2014), a study conducted by Delhi based organization Nirantar and Women Media and News Trust. This study covers life experiences of small town and district level women journalists in Hindi-speaking North Indian cities. This survey includes team members of Khabar Lahariya, a local language run predominantly by rural women from marginalized backgrounds.
that a special relationship exists between the woman journalist and her superiors or between her and the source. Since most of the time these superiors and interviewees are men, people believe that female journalists carry out sexual favours.” This is a misogynistic response to women’s success and growth in journalism commonly faced by women journalists.

Roshani: It gets stressful to deal with personal targeting at workplace, which makes one very uncomfortable to be at work and it keeps posing many challenges to answer such gossips related to women’s character and work. Despite having a confident attitude, a woman is pushed to quit the job or profession completely. It has been more than five years I have been working Hindi print media but still I have to struggle to keep my identity intact. When I was doing well in my job, my desk-lock used to be fixed by chewing-gum and I used to get mad over such nasty things in office. Important files and paper used to get misplaced from my work-desk and I had to face mental torture.

I bore the brunt of complaining against such incidents and ultimately it all resulted into leaving the organization and getting into new set of male politics around you. It was all known who has been doing these things to trouble me but despite my raised voice nothing was done. I tried to inform the top senior in head office but I was taken as a ‘trouble maker woman’. On top of that, I was told that ‘since women are so complaining, that’s why we don’t appoint them’. The matter was never addressed after that. Many a times it came to my mind that it is easy to report many issues in news but it is mentally taxing to tackle with such politics being played like a spy against you on a daily basis in your office.

Very few women journalists showed the courage to bring the matter to the authority and even they were not given any attention. Unable to bear the success of a woman in journalistic profession make men to take help of such masculine politics which is actually a revengeful in nature.

8.7 Negotiating Virtual Presence

Increasing incidents of trolling over social media has extended the debate on misogynistic online-virtual spaces. The issue of women facing harassment on social media has revealed multiple sides of vengeful trolling world-over. Internet companies have been
experiencing difficult time as their response towards online abuse has been slow and less helpful due to censorship issues. There have been much needed feminist initiatives to fight back against online trolling and abuse which actively work for gender digital rights in network society.

Jesica Valenti, an American feminist blogger, writer and founder of Feministing blog (2004) got trolled on twitter for expressing her views on feminism. She received death and rape threats against her five-year-old daughter. In her memoire ‘Sex Object’, Valenti describes her personal narratives on how feminism was not a choice made by her but a stand point to analyse her enduring of psychological and emotional toll for being objectified for decades. Online misogyny is a global concern as women have been targeted with no limits often forcing them to be silent.

A news piece titled ‘Why are India women being attacked on social media’ reports that well known TV journalist Sagarika Ghosh stopped giving her views on Twitter after she was threatened regularly with gang rape and stripping. The same news piece reports


about a prominent Delhi-based women rights activist Kavita Krishnan, who was also attacked on a leading website Rediff.com during a chat on violence against women. Meena Kandasamy, activist and writer quoted in the same news-piece believes that many Indian men react to posts that are critical of "caste and of Hindu nationalism”. Quoting the views of K Jaishankar, who has been working on bullying, stalking and defamation of women online this news piece writes “India’s patriarchal mindset has pervaded the internet space. Men don’t like women to talk back. Public personalities who express strong opinions are trolled in a bid to force them off line.”

The well-known Indian TV journalist Barkha Dutt was trolled on social media, which indicates that social media too is misogynist. “As women who choose to work in the public eye and who have the audacity to hold opinions, Krishnan and Dutt are vulnerable to the attack of anyone with opposable thumbs and access to the internet.”112 While critically writing, Yadav (2016) tries to raise core argument of such trolling mindset that “only in a culture so warped by casual misogyny does a troll’s psyche become clearer. Disagree with a female activist? Threaten to rape her. Don’t like a female political candidate? Accuse her of sleeping around. Find a female journalist annoying? Organise a mass campaign to circulate her number on the internet so you can call her a whore. Now that you have dragged her sexuality out into the world and made free with it, you have destroyed her personhood, because those two are clearly one and the same thing.”113 The misogynistic mindset can’t accept a woman as an outspoken and speaking her mind, thus, a collective patriarchal attack like trolling on virtual space has become a pattern to vent rage against powerful women including journalists, academicians, and activists.

In another incident of sexual harassment, a team of women journalists of a rural newspaper ‘Khabar Lahariya’ had to face phone stalking, lewd harassment, threats of


violence and later their phones’ where simcards were illegally locked by the stalker. When the complaint was registered, rural Uttar Pradesh police ignored it for nine months.\textsuperscript{114} Such incidents present the misogyny prevailing in journalism which cannot find women expressing their minds and trying to suppress their voices where ever they are.

During interviews I have found there are two reasons first women have self-injected fear of losing the job, second the image-consciousness or character assassination which is again a social construct.

\textit{Shivani: There was this senior woman news editor with a Hindi news daily around 2001 and had to stay late night to manage work and meet the deadline. Male colleagues used to mentally torture her and used to leave porn sites, pictures on her desktop. It maligned her image, which affected her. She had to hear ordering attitude even form peon of the office and at last she had to quit the place or perhaps the profession. Male journalists used abusive language behind her back just because she was holding a higher position and they had to work under her.}

\textit{Men do not want and will not let any women journalist reach here to higher position at all.}

\textit{These days there are numerous social networking applications (Apps) that are accessible on mobile phone, which directly bring porn and sexually explicit content to a user. Receiving sexual jokes, obscene messages and more to trouble through smart phones is a common thing. Male colleagues don’t leave any chance to take revenge through texting sexual jokes and other stuff. Social networking platforms are also used for harassment. If a woman chooses to quit such spaces she is also out of professional networking.}

Her narrative brings out the different forms of sexual harassment being executed in the official space or the workplace. It directly affects the mental peace of the victim, who is unable to share or bring it to notice. Reskin (et al., 1994) quoted in Welsh (1999) argue that sexual harassment is usually done to let the women know that they are not welcome in certain workplaces thus they are not respected members. Respondent indicated that

women have to face professional boycott as well if they choose not to have their presence in such virtual networking it results into their loss of news sources and networking.

Their silence goes in benefit to maintain the dominant gender relations even at workplace. This silence basically indicates lack of legal consciousness about the sexual harassment and incidents related to it. Moreover, it demands identification of such issues which are systematically weakening negotiation of the women journalists in Hindi print media workplaces. The respondent mentioned about mobile phones and social networking platforms as another medium, which are used as a tool for sexual harassment. Interestingly, among the respondents, only few showed aversion towards social networking and most of them do not have a Facebook account. When I asked them that, ‘why you don’t have Facebook account despite being in such profession of networking?’, they responded that it doesn’t assure privacy and women do not feel safe there.

I emphasize here that the absence of these few women journalists on social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter does indicate the fear of cyber-spaces, which too have male-dominance. “While many women are victimized online, what makes Indian women unique? India is predominantly patriarchal and orthodox country and women who are victimized are mostly blamed and online victims are no exception” (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011a cited in Saha et al., 2014). Whereas Citron (2009, p. 374) critically argues “the harassment of women online is a pernicious and widespread problem.” Further, Citron (2009, p. 375) mentions that “Cyber harassment is a uniquely gendered phenomenon - the major individuals are women, and the abuse of female victims invokes gender in threatening and demeaning.”

In my research, during one particular interview with a senior woman journalist, I witnessed that at the meeting place she was howling on phone as the caller was troubling her through unknown calls and stalking her journalistic work. This incident was the beginning of the conversation with her and she said:

*Meenakshi:* Don’t worry! I have been experiencing such things from long back as I have been working for a longer period in this field. No life security for journalists and women are the easiest target for harassment. For such unknown abusers, women’s life is not the cost but making them scared of their character and ‘izzat’ (honour) is the intention behind every act of rage through unknown
calls, stalking, blackmailing and anything like this. They harass women more as they know women cannot be bribed unlike men. When I expose scam, crime such threats and stalking is part of my work experience.

Meenakshi’s narrative is important to understand the misogynist politics exists outside workplace as well and also while one is on the job away from the workplace station or on the field. It is a grave concern where women journalists are targeted because of their socially weaker position in the society. The respondent significantly mentioned that in this profession, harassing a woman journalist with a revengeful intention is simply to target ‘izzat’ and ‘character’, glaringly indicating rape threat to a woman. She mentioned here that as women are not or cannot be usually easily bribed, perhaps she meant unlike men, who work through nexus matters are settled through bribing. As per her narrative, it happens when a woman journalist engages in reporting such as investigative, exposing scam, corruption, crime or more, she has to face abusive, life threatening calls, basically rape threatening calls. Exposing scams and corruption are suppressed through rape-violence threats given to women journalists wherever these women emerge strongly speaking their mind. Here, political or institutional power added with patriarchal nature subjugates women, controlling their intervention, which go against the power-nexus. Conventional forces including state, police and administration many a times seems to suppress these voices, which show dissent and women journalists’ freedom challenge these conventional forces’ patriarchal character.

Sangeeta: I do not feel so comfortable on social media, though I use it for professional purpose only and recently only I opened my Facebook account. It doesn’t give a sense of security as one’s information can be manipulated. Especially for women, social media doesn’t ensure safety because women are targeted there too for expressing their free mind and views.

Sangeeta’s narrative suggests the nature of social media which doesn’t allow women to feel safe and free. She also elaborates that use of social media is limited to professional purpose but a woman doesn’t feel complete her presence belonging to her ownself. Fear of misuse of information indicates that women do not have freedom over their virtual presence, thus they refrain from social media. Also, when I asked the same respondent that what has been the restrictive factor that does not let women journalists to be there on
the social media, she answered that fear of ‘image’ is one of the reasons because in a place like Jabalpur which is already a conventional city, thus, use of social media can be a professional compulsion but not a personal choice of a woman.

In my research, women journalists did not feel free and comfortable to discuss incidents of sexual harassment shows that they are dealing with more vengeful and patriarchal environment of small cities. According to a news piece, “Fired for reporting sexual harassment”\(^\text{115}\) reported by Geeta Sheshu, a woman journalist who headed the bureau of a television news channel IND24 in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, was fired for complaining against the channel head, who used to make suggestive remarks to her and recite poetry to her. She tried to get access of the CEO of the channel regarding receiving life threatening and abusive calls, but she was simply fired.

Sheshu in this report argues “this woman’s story is an unnerving indicator of the extreme vulnerability of women who live and work in smaller cities and seek to redress their work grievances. What they often end up confronting is a powerful network—the police and administration, local politicians, the business community, and the media—that is ranged against any attempt to secure justice.” In the same report Seshu suggested that “that a complete audit of all news channels—their employee practices, funding sources, financial viability, codes of conduct—might be useful so that journalists know what they are getting to when they take up jobs with these channels. With so little information about them available in the public domain, it is near impossible for journalists to exercise caution.”\(^\text{116}\)

In small cities things are complicated as media houses do not have transparent accountabilities which make this complex due to lack of information for women.

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journalists. Lack of professionalism function strategically with patriarchal mindset thus women cannot escape these structural hierarchies at workplace.

8.6 Conclusion

The presence of women journalists at the workplace and while working in the field has been fraught with struggles in negotiating sexism and in dealing with a culture of silence and an overall denial of the presence of sexual harassment. Apart from this, there is a lack of legal understanding of sexual harassment apparent from the conversations with these women journalists.

When women journalists were asked about presence of any functional body to deal with incidents of sexual harassment, their response was an unequivocal negative. They responded, ‘No, there is no such functional body, only two-three big newspaper brands have such body.’ To ensure a safe and healthy workplace, there is a need to have a working body to address sexual harassment cases. Several newspaper organizations do not have any such working body, a fact which reflects their unwillingness to even address such issues in Hindi print media workplace. Absence of a formal body in dealing with cases of sexual harassment is a serious concern as women journalists themselves rarely come forward voicing their concerns on sexual harassment.

With no functional body to address sexual harassment cases, the character of such a workplace appears to be more patriarchal in terms of suppressing the voices of women journalists. The non-existence of any functional body or gender sensitization cell further increases the chances of such incidents taking place in the Hindi print media workplace. The character of Hindi print journalism emerges as a ‘patriarchal structure’ which victimizes women and it continues as a vicious cycle of unequal power relations between men and women.

Along with negotiating with the physical workplace’s issues women are also facing harassment in internet and cyber spaces. Growing incidents of misogyny on social media has raised a serious concern as these are adding another patriarchal dimension to
harassment. In my research, women journalists are not actively engaged on social media and those who rarely are, often have to maintain a low profile to avoid harassment. Cities like Indore and Bhopal demand a greater social-media presence from their employees but women journalists choose to remain neutral with a minimal presence, whereas in Jabalpur and Gwalior, it was revealed that women have an aversion to these virtual spaces as for them it is a kind of public space, which also does not accept presence of women. Their narratives also reveal that their virtual presence is misused as women have to often encounter online trolling and violence and thus they make a ‘safe’ choice of being absent from such spaces. It reinforces the fear of being on social media in these cities’ work-culture which is an indication of these workplaces as masculine in nature, both physically and virtually. Sexual harassment in the workplace needs far more attention in the Hindi print media.