



THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ritu Talwar

Guest Faculty, Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication, Gulbarga University, Kalaburgi.

ABSTRACT

Technology has done wonders for the physical, social and cultural health of society. One of its latest contributions has been the internet and the social media through it. Social media provides advantages to its users by not just being a way of entertainment but its recent use as a social watchdog has added a new dimension to its existence. Social media is gaining immense popularity with the younger generation and informed seniors also. It is providing platform for discussions and debates in which the participants can share their thoughts from the comfort of their homes and innumerable people simultaneously.

The plight of the weaker sections of society especially women has gone unheard for longer than it should have and is now being heard on the social media. Little sounds and contributions about their concerns and rights are getting together and creating an uproar that is resounding in the whole world. It is this social media that has changed the world into a global village where a person in a corner of the world can express his views and supporters from all over the world join him within no time. The significance of this media is evident from the fact that all the conventional media have also opened their portals on it. The social media is empowering people in general and women in particular for their basic human rights on one hand and sensitizing the youth about relevant issues and urging them towards activism.

KEYWORDS : Social media, Violence, Gender equality, Gender discrimination, Women empowerment, Sexual harassment

INTRODUCTION

Media old and new has always strived towards the goal of betterment of society and in this endeavour it has strengthened various social movements by extensive reporting. Issues such as corruption, inequality, rights of the underprivileged etc have always been championed by it. Today media finds itself at the spearhead of the movement fighting for the rights of women and gender equality. Media in general and journalists in particular are playing a great role by not just finding stories that depict the epidemic nature of the violence women are facing today but also telling them well-with the latter part being a crucial aspect.

Conventional media faces many challenges in their efforts as they try to find humane sides to the stories, discover new ways of telling them to make them more compelling and also simultaneously abstain from sensationalism. New media on the other hand offers unprecedented opportunities via the social media to raise awareness about violence against women so as to make the society and communities safe and social networking safer. The various faces of the social media like twitter, facebook, Youtube etc enjoy a host of advantages over the conventional media. They are easily accessible, inexpensive, instantaneous in delivering the message, have a global reach, provide a platform for discussion and these are but just to name a few of its pro's. Social media also provides anonymity to the user which allows the victims to communicate without revealing their identity and in societies such as India where the women bear the onus of holding the honor of the family on their shoulders it is not easy the most modern and forward of women to speak up publicly and accept the violence they have suffered, be it physical or mental, within the confines of the homes or on the streets (Pandey Avinash 2013)

Another advantage social media provides is that of being interactive. Any event on this medium gets instant delivery to millions of receivers in an instance and within no time these receivers can exchange their views simultaneously causing a ripple effect akin to sensationalisation. Sensationalisation of the news has a rapid impact as it thrives on human psychic, but a lot goes on behind the scene for that impact to occur. Millions of smaller instances that add up over time result in the impact and also the effects to the impact. (Slizner Frank)

The most prominent incident of the present times which reflected the heightened violence against women in India was seeded by the social media by and large a huge tide of emotions and support of the masses for the infamous delhi gang rape victim "Nirbhaya" via Twitter and Facebook brought the administration and think to realize the grave situation of women. Marathon efforts by the faceless crowds in the form of protests and candle marches organized by tireless tweets and status updates on Facebook resulted in framing and redefining of the laws for protecting the rights of women. The laws themselves are not acting as deterrent as is witnessed by the continuing occurrence of such incidents but surely it has provided a framework of strength for

violated women to come out and speak to get justice.

The Fight for women's rights on the social media although started much earlier with the 'Blank Noise Community Art' project which confronted street harassment in India. It was started by Jasmeen Patheja in August 2003 as a student project but soon spread in far flung areas. In the year 2009, 'Pink Chaddi Campaign' with registration of 2,900 was started on face book. The campaign raised its voice in favor of today's Indian women. Seeing its success, other organizations such as 'Gulabi Gang', "The pink Brigade", "Project Nirbhaya- A dream to empower every girl child in our society", opened Face book accounts. Arushi's murder got 14287 posts, Honor killing got 9367 likes, Stop acid attacks got 10813 likes within minutes. This reflects the mood of modern society and its unwillingness to tolerate injustice.

Recently another incident gripped the nation where a young law researchers blog about sexual harassment by a retired supreme court judge who she had earlier worked with went viral and the apex court found itself in an embarrassment spot 'Dixit'. The finding of the enquiry committee setup to investigate the charge resulted in identifying the culprit holding a high office after retirement also. The sensitivity shown by the people at large towards women's issues is the strength which is enabling victims of violence to get a voice of their own.

Innumerable incidents at home and around the world show that gender and equality are moral challenges of the present times not just in India but the whole world and concrete actions are required to turn oppressing into opportunity for women. "Violence against women is a global epidemic and increased awareness and participation through the general worldwide community can help eradicate it"- Higa Liriel. UN encompasses domestic violence, child marriage, acid attacks, rape, trafficking and any other form of physical, mental and sexual abuse as violence against women. Internationally collected data states that 35% of women worldwide have either experienced either and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non partner sexual violence. However in some countries this figure is as high as 70% (Global review,2013). When an act of violence occurs, more focus is placed on finding the causes of violence (Giobbio Matthew 2012) where as a strong focus on prevention of such acts through the promotion of gender equality, women empowerment and their enjoyment of rights should be emphasized as acknowledged by the 57th session of the UN commission on the "state of women". In this avenue also the role of social media is significant.

Today it is accepted that violence against women is real and continuous, humiliating and damaging for the society and social media is acting as a catalyst of change to decrease such incidents of violence by sensitization of both men and women. "The internet and mobile phones connect women victims, survivors and service providers around the world to offer mutual support and assistance. Online training and capacity building sessions also ensure women's critical

and strategic use of technology". (Mesina lenlen) Many social networking sites and websites are being used and developed all over the world to provide public information and create awareness about violence against women as well as to promote women's rights.

Lessons can be imitated from initiatives taken from developed countries like UK where websites such as "Womenkind Worldwide" an international women's human rights charity- are working to help women transform their lives in developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. They partner with local women's rights organizations tackling the day-to-day issues that affect the women's life. Their role is to deliver the essential support. These women organizations need to amplify their voice and bring about grater change. In the US, the national task force as an online organization to end violence against women called "Survives and advocates for empowerment-(SAFE)" which is committed to ending domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stocking. Experiences of women such as Keisha, Danielle and Shays are shared via updates to enlighten other women about what the organization is doing to rehabilitate women who suffer violent experiences.

'Hollaback organization' is another organization that has evolved from the blogs in cell phone camera users of victim of street harassment. It defines street harassment as sexual harassment in a public place. It recognizes it as the first stage of violence against women. It invites women to write blogs and upload picture and photographs on social media sites on Twitter to seek change. This global movement with its presence in 62 cities, 25 countries and 12 languages works towards ending street harassment with the motto 'A Safe society is a women friendly society' (Emily May). Another organization with a prominent presence on the YouTube – 'Action aid International- Fighting for Women's rights' enables the cause by uploading videos of victims telling their stories. Such videos often courage to the ignorant masses and make them realize that the time for suffering in silence is a thing of past. In India also the organization champions the cause of women under the domain name of 'Beti Zindabad'

The international rescue committee encourages free psychosocial support, medical treatment and legal advocacy as the various forms in which violated women can be helped (Kandeh Amie). The same sentiment is echoed in "The overall value of the law is to protect and provide for relief, redress and support the victims in all circumstances"- The legislative advocacy coalition on violence against women(LACVAW) which is also a network working towards the common goal of eliminating violence against women with the presence on Twitter.

CONCLUSION

The presence of innumerable sites, Twitter accounts and blogs on the different social media is a testimony to the fact that to effectively fight for violence against women the power of social media is being used for mobilizing positive images and promoting human rights internationally. Social media is enabling women to stay safe and empowering them to share meaningful stories and shed light on women's issues worldwide. Those still at its infancy, the social media is playing a large and growing role in helping prevent violence against women by inspiring people to engage in social activism.

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10. The e-Guillotine Portal System has been tested and evaluated through the successful implementation of the government's regulatory simplification project around the world, "E-Guillotine – The Pros of social media" Retrieved from <http://wikianswers.com/>
11. The two sites are very popular in India and the increased activity at these sites at that time <http://www.facebook.com/SwiftJusticeInDelhiGangRapeCase> <http://www.facebook.com/NirbhayaIndia>
12. Criminal Law (Amendment Act) and Sexual harassment of women at work place (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act –2013
13. Womankind- an organization with the motto- worldwide Equal Respected Proud.

www.womankind.org.uk

14. The Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence Against Women(LACVAW) is a redress and support for women in all circumstances. Retrieved from <http://on.fb.me/17Xyv9-LACVAW@LACVAW>