Chapter 7

Reckoning With #MeToo and the Aftermath:
Perception of Workplace Harassment, Sexism, and the #MeToo Movement Among Journalists in India

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ABSTRACT

In 2017, following the #MeToo movement stirred by the public outing of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, the safety of women at the workplace became a prime agenda for international news media. Although far from being truly inclusive, the #MeToo movement rapidly spread to other parts of the world. Women of different nationalities, backgrounds, and race shared their stories of abuse and survival using the #MeToo hashtag and its variants. In 2018, women within the news media industry in India joined the movement and called out prominent editors, filmmakers, and artists on social media for perpetrating and abetting acts of sexual harassment and abuse against them. As an immediate result, several accused were made to resign from their organizations and dropped from prestigious public posts. However, a backlash to the movement followed soon after, most evidently in the form of victim-shaming and defamation lawsuits against women. Based on the theory of epistemic advantage, the study explores the perception of sexual harassment among journalists in India using in-depth interviews.

INTRODUCTION

According to a poll by London-based charitable organization, Thomson Reuters Foundation, India was ranked as the most dangerous place in the world to be a woman in 2018. The report, based on a survey of 550 experts in women's issues, highlighted India's failure to address severe risks faced by women in the country (Thomspon Reuters Foundation, 2018). Women, in India, are perceived to be at a high risk

of sexual assault, slave labor, and female infanticide. In 2018, the Indian media was rocked by shocking revelations of the prevalence of workplace harassment, perpetuated by male-dominance, and discrimination against women in the industry. In what is being considered as India's MeToo Movement, several female journalists took to social media to publicly out sexual predators within the Indian news media industry and recounted incidents of sexual assault and harassment at their workplace. In most cases, the accused was either a senior male journalist, a male colleague, or a famous personality from the media, arts, and entertainment industry, who took advantage of his position and power to threaten and silence his victims (Bhattacharyya, 2018).

At a size of about USD 215.5 million, the media industry in India has rapidly grown in the past decade. As of 2018, there are 1,18,239 registered newspapers and other periodicals in India, 1600 satellite channels, over 240 radio stations, and a fast-growing digital media sector (Registrar of Newspaper for India [RNI], 2018; Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler [KPMG], 2019). While mapping media in India, Pasti et al. (2015), point out that while the media industry in India is primarily male-dominated, more women are increasingly joining the profession. However, women continue to face systemic discrimination in the workplace. Gallagher (2002) argues that while it is widely believed that with more women entering the field a gender-balance at all levels of media organizations will be attained gradually, the data from several developed countries shows that the reality is different. A survey of 410 women journalists by the Press Institute of India (Bhagat, 2004) revealed that female journalists in India are paid lower wages than their male counterparts; they struggle to gain access to resources; face sexual harassment, and do not always have maternity or child care benefits. A report by United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (Press Trust of India [PTI], 2019) stated that men occupied the majority of the leadership position in the Indian media organizations, which had led to institutionalized marginalization of female news media professional and female voices in the news media.

Chadha (2017) points out that the most popular discourse about the Indian media landscape is centered around the narrative of its exponential growth and dynamism that's partially a result of India's vibrant multicultural media market and the deep social penetration of affordable communication technology. However, issues related to structural trends, such as, the mass-level corporate and cross-media ownership leading to the concentration of power, and the political and state control of media, which primarily define the Indian media landscape, are neglected. Chadha explains that the celebratory discourse of the growth of media in India presents a misleading image of the media landscape in India, which in reality is progressing towards being less pluralistic and is being forced to trade quality for quantity. The position of female journalists in the Indian media landscape is characterized by the structural trends of ownership and the culture of male dominance, which is deep-seated within the corporate structure and ownership policies.

The workplace, in India, is an extension of other male-dominated spaces of Indian society and carries deeply embedded gender-bias at all levels of its organizational structure (Rajan, Sudha & Mohanachandran, 2000). Rao and Rodney-Gumede (2020) analyzed Indian female journalists' perception of their participation in decision making and role in the newsroom. The study highlights that although significant progress has been with regards to the representation of women in the media industry, male dominance and hegemony continue to prevail at the Indian news media workplace. The study reveals that female journalists feel that still have to fight professional stereotypes and gender bias at work. There is evidence that all sectors of the Indian economy, both urban and rural, organized as well as unorganized, are plagued by the problem of sexual harassment at the workplace. Studies focusing on sexual harassment in the Indian bureaucracy, education, information technology industry, legal and medical professions

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