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INDIAN MEDIA NARRATIVES IN GANG RAPE

by

Astha Bhandari  
B.A. May 2017, University of Minnesota

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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## ABSTRACT

### INDIAN MEDIA NARRATIVES IN GANG RAPE

Astha Bhandari  
Old Dominion University, 2021  
Director: Dr. Jennifer N. Fish

Violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon, and while brutal crimes shock us, it is nothing exceptional. This social construction of violence against women is displayed through the media's language. The language then portrays structures of power dynamics, fueling patriarchal discourse, where masculinity becomes the king, and femininity denigrated, birthing a rape culture. This study explores the impact of media reporting of gang rape cases of women in India and investigates the media reporting of nine different gang rape cases, post 2012 Delhi gangrape.

The research looks to identify the media semantics used in portraying the victims in the print media. This qualitative study follows content analysis as its method of research to examine the relationship between the gang rape cases, and the type of information published in the newspaper articles. The study uses framing analysis and intersectionality framework and finds that the Indian media's treatment towards reporting of gang rape differs significantly along with the socio-economic status of the victims. Results show that lower the victim in the social hierarchy of stratification, class and caste, lesser the positive media coverage, and higher the victim blaming and doubting language.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

"It already is bigger than everything else. It lives in front of me, behind me, next to me, inside me every single day. My schedule is dictated by it, my habits by it, my music by it" (Whitney 2012:159). This is what rape looks like to a person who has survived. Unfathomable suffering, existing right there with them. The horror they continue to live with is then known to the world as a rape story, and media reintroduces it through its headlines as a contested rape story. These are the daily navigations of living between personal post-traumatic recovery and the public issues circulating in a world of such severe gender-based violence. The interplay between the personal and the public is shaped by the political, social, and economic conditions of particular national contexts.

A survey of over 548 experts conducted by Thomson Reuters ranked India as the most dangerous country for women (BBC NEWS 2018). The study was met with widespread criticism in India for its methodology and that the survey was more about perception than reality. Many argued that India guaranteed far more rights to women than various nations considered safer by the survey. While many Indians had dismissed this survey as a matter of misguided opinion, there is no denying that various studies and international indexes reflect women's status from being far from the standards laid down under international declarations and conventions. India continues to perform poorly across various indicators of gender development. With a rating of 0.524 in the Gender Inequality Index (UNDP 2017); 112th position in the Gender Gap Index (WEF 2019); and 0.82 ratings in the Gender Development Index, it is clear that India's loss in the battle of perception related to women's safety is not unfounded. Massive gender inequality



translates to high gender-based crimes, as many grow apathetic towards women's struggle, and some even justifying the violence.

To understand rape culture and the factors influencing it, it is of utmost importance to examine the reporting of rape cases in the media, the usage, and the selection of words, phrases, and pictures by the media. When rape occurs, media becomes a mass information tool that gains the power to draw controversial events and spark potential social movements. However, the person and the subject often influence the media writings and reporting of cases. The Deputy Commissioner Police of Delhi Police, Madhur Verma (Banerjee 2017) stated,

It is the profile of the victim that decides the extent of coverage. If the victim's profile matches their readers, they will cover it more, and there is a difference between readers of English and vernacular newspapers. So, if the victim is urban, middle class, educated, English educated, then chances of the incident getting covered in English media is more than in vernacular media.

When the media uses suggestive language in reporting, it adds to patriarchal discourse, justifying male control over female bodies (Banerjee 2017). Such media reporting of sexual abuse frames skewed public opinion about rape and rape victims. India's violence against women and its chronicles from the past is a testament to reducing women's bodies to objects. These gruesome acts against women's bodies resulted from the patriarchal notion that women should carry the burden of honor through the purity of their bodies (Khosla 1989). Priyanka Dubey, in her book, "*No Nation for Women*," best describes it when she writes, "Patriarchy is the nucleus of this problem and all other factors contributing to violence against women manifest themselves around it" (2018: viii).

Violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon, and while brutal crimes shock us, it is nothing exceptional. While the extreme stratification was introduced in Indian society through religion and separation of class, caste, and gender, these categories formed the social

structures of the Indian society and continue to do so. Women are exploited throughout different phases- from pre-birth to her death, all the while expected to maintain her decorum as a woman and safeguard her family's honor (Still 2014). She is exploited socially, economically, and sexually. Her sex and sexuality develop the foreground for preserving culture and for political debates (Mahadevan 2008). Sexual violence against her then becomes a critical contemporary discussion for the nation and headlines in the newspapers.

Along with such a social divide, the caste structure ties women to structural isolation as feminist researchers have recognized that Dalit and lower-class women are further stigmatized and oppressed through violent means (Still 2014). Dalits are in the lower strata of the caste hierarchy, and they are excluded as untouchables by the upper-class Hindus. This caste segregation was formed in the ancient caste hierarchy; however, the Dalits face social and economic exclusion till the present time (Das 2019). The bodies of Dalit women are used as a platform by the men in the higher caste-class hierarchy to terrorize and suppress the Dalit community as a whole.

Suraj Yengde, a Dalit scholar in his book "*Caste Matters*," explains caste as a social construct in the Hindu social order (2019:12). He explains the caste system as old as the order of Indic civilization that works towards controlling and subjugating human capacity. Yengde quotes, "Caste in India is an absolute sanction-of the dominant class over the dominated. Caste in India is observed according to one's location. The conversation on caste is navigated by the respective person's investment in the system" (2019:13). He adds that even within the caste, the Dalit women are triply exploited based on caste, class, and gender. Pallavi Rao, in her research colloquium "*The Brahmin as 'Culture' and the Dalit as 'Death'*" writes that the "caste is determined paternally and have a major influence on how one is treated in society" (Glover

2017). When discrepancy in the media begins because of castes, it reinforces negative stereotypes and drifts differing perceptions in a crime as heinous as rape. Hence, this paper is an attempt to understand if the newspaper articles provide massive coverage of the rape cases being selective based on the victim's class (the social hierarchy), caste (social status based on religion), educational background, or on the severity of the crime.

This thesis analyzes Indian media's treatment of rape cases, significantly covering gang rape cases post-December 2012 when a critical gangrape, also known as the Nirbhaya case, took place. The central question is: “What are the media narratives and patterns in gangrape cases in India?” Through content analysis of print media outlets, newspapers, I studied the dominant framings of the rape cases and examined how these framings are brought forth by the media.

This paper examines the following:

Contextualizing the violence pattern against women in India and reporting the legal reforms in rape cases under the Indian Penal Code, I investigate this question with the following lenses:

1. Establishing different patterns that emerged in the media reporting while covering different gangrape cases.
2. Examining frames that were manifested while analyzing the media reporting.
3. Exploring the implications of these structures in the broader framework in the Indian society

In my analysis, I established some patterns in the way media reports about gangrape cases. I explained two significant theories: Framing Theory and Intersectionality Framework.

These theories examine how the media use dialects to shape news making it ‘worthy’ of reporting. The Framing Analysis explains how narratives can frame the readers to think in a certain way. The language that the media uses to cover a crime has a bearing upon how the readers perceive those crimes. It further argues that the social construction of violence against

women is displayed through the media's language and that language portrays structures of power dynamics (Nagar 2016). Through the Intersectionality Framework, I look into the intersecting identities of women- their class, caste, and gender, and the influence of their social identities or lack thereof, towards gaining media attention in their gangrape cases.

To explore the media narratives around India's sexual violence, some interpretations surrounding the history of social differences are essential to better understand the social contours that have mapped and remapped India (Coudhuri and Basu 2017). Despite under-reporting due to aspects of honor and culture, rape figures in India are high. Media raises awareness and creates a platform for public discourse against rape, but I wonder must every rape be gruesome for it to be considered a crime against women? Should every raped woman (for this research, referred to as victim hereafter) be from a middle-class family or have specific qualifications for the media to highlight the case? Or should every rape end into murder for public awakening and high reportage? To answer these questions, I explored the media reporting of gang rape cases, post-Nirbhaya case, and the media semantics used in portraying the victim in the newspaper articles in India.

With the broadcast of Nirbhaya case, the country was in a rage, massive movements against violence against women took place in different cities in India. This case commenced the public to speak against rape cases and created an awakening. As the news revealed the brutality of the case, vigils and protests propelled in different parts of India. These protests resulted in the Justice Verma Committee's formation to recommend changes in the law on sexual abuse. The report opens with,

The constitution of this Committee is in response to the countrywide peaceful protest outcry of civil society, led by the growth against the failure of governance to provide a safe and dignified environment feel the women of India who are constantly exposed to sexual violence (Full text of Justice Verma's report 2020).

Statistically, while the numbers of rape cases inclined, it also reflected that more rape cases were reported in 2014 and 2015. This rise in number is an effect of the media coverage in the Nirbhaya case. However, it is argued that one's position in the social hierarchy impacts incidents of rape. In 2008, it was reported that out of 421 solved cases in Delhi, 71% of the victims were from the lower class (Suri 2013).

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

India is one of the most patriarchal societies, and even after decades of progressivism, violence against women is rampant. In 2019, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), released their data which stated that eighty-eight rape cases were reported in India every day (Ramachandran 2020). The violence against women has become a daily occurrence and is brought forth by the media through visual telecast and newspapers. The study aims to examine the language and the tone that the media uses in reporting gang rape cases in the newspapers in India. Central research questions guide the current study:

1. What is the relationship between the victim's social status and the type of information published by the media?
2. How does the media use different languages for different victims of the same crime?
3. What facts about the victim's personal life are reported?
4. How does the media place word and phrases in its narrative to describe victims of rape?

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Media does not just develop the public's responses; it shapes the way the public recognizes rape as a crime. Crime cannot be isolated from society; hence it is crucial to analyze

crime in the context of the cultural setting and politics of the gender. Media creates and partakes in this socio-political setting. By examining the media usage of language in reporting and writing about cases, this study contributes to understanding the relationship between the way media reports a rape case and the victim's socio-economic status. Media is central to shaping and forming public and individual perceptions. These formed perceptions become the social norm and a deciding factor for what is acceptable. Vipul Mudgal, a journalist after the 2012 case, stated, "What's different [about this story] (referring to the Nirbhaya case) is that the media has given the middle-class a voice" (Rao 2013). While media raises consciousness among the public, the media also stands in a legal binding to report a case and not sell a story. It is imperative that the media sends out correct messages on moral grounds, free from their own biases.

India today has become one of the countries where people, especially women, fear to travel alone. This fear is the result of the published gruesome rape cases. While men and people of all gender can be victims of rape, I focus only on media reporting on gang rape cases of cis-gendered women and girls for this study. This study examines how media reports add to current literature and create a space for further research where the caste, class, and gender in rape cases can be examined in detail.

## NIRBHAYA CASE

On December 16, 2012, India witnessed one of the most heinous and gruesome gender-based violence crimes. A young woman in Delhi was traveling with a male friend on a bus at night, where six men brutally gangraped her. She was tortured and beaten while her internal organs were damaged by a rod. The young woman and her friend were thrown off the bus without any clothes. The woman died 13 days later (Nagar, 2016). She is known as Nirbhaya,

and the story of "The Nirbhaya Case" is integrally linked to the symbolic loss of the victim. In the backdrop of this case, many laws and reforms have been made in the Indian legal system, and in the ways, the media should report cases of sexual assault following the Code of Conduct (The Criminal Law Amendment Act). The National Crime Record Bureau of 2014 of India recorded a total of 3,37,922 cases of crime against women during the year 2014 compared to 3,09,546 cases in the year 2013, an increase in 9.2% of crimes against women in 2014. Among the crimes against women, rape is the fourth common crime in India. The National Crime Records Bureau of 2014 reported that 93 women are raped in India every day (Philip 2014; Roy and Karamchandani 2016).

Even with the amendments in the legal system, post Nirbhaya case, the rape cases continued to show an upward trend in 2014. In the months following the girl's death, the central government passed legislative reforms recognized as the Nirbhaya Act. This Act increases penalties for sexual violence, including extending prison sentences and recognizing the death penalty in gruesome rape cases and serial offenders. Despite these changes, the data from India's National Crime Record Bureau recorded a 12% rise in rape cases, from 34,651 in 2015 to 38,947 cases in 2016. On average, more than 100 reported rape cases in one day (Tiwary 2017). In order to understand the legal changes after the Nirbhaya gangrape, it is imperative to understand the framework of rape in Indian society.

#### DEFINING RAPE: INDIAN PENAL CODE: SECTION 375

The 2012 Delhi gangrape case generated protests throughout India. After demonstrations by the public, activists, and media, the Criminal Law Amendment Act 2013 was passed. This Act made changes in the previous Section 375 of the India Penal Code (IPC), Evidence Act, and

the Criminal Procedure Code. Section 375 of the IPC states laws against sexual assault and rape against girls and women (Indian Penal Code). In 1972 the Supreme Court failed to provide justice to an Adivasi girl named Mathura (Kohli and Khaira 2019). A group of policemen abducted her and raped in the police station. The policemen were acquitted in the Sessions Court Trial but were found guilty by the High Court. The case was taken to the Supreme Court where the case was reversed again. In this case, the defense was that the Mathura was of a "loose" character who had a boyfriend, and someone with such a character could not be raped. Mathura is one example of many cases that did not serve justice to rape victims in India. Hence, it is important to learn how Section 375 has made amendments in the Criminal Amendment Act of 2013 (The Criminal Amendment Bill).

The old provision defined raped under (Indian Penal Code)

375. Rape. A man is said to commit "rape" who, except in the case hereinafter excepted, has sexual intercourse with a woman under circumstances falling under any of the six following descriptions

It reads that the old provision acknowledged only penetration in the offence of rape. When the Justice Verma Committee was formed, it concluded that rape and sexual assault are crimes that express and exerts power and dominance. It made an amendment that rape should be a separate offence and cannot be limited to penetration. It added clause and noted that any form of non-consensual penetration of sexual nature will be in the definition of rape.

After amendment (The Criminal Amendment Bill),

A man is said to commit "rape" if he—

penetrates his penis, to any extent, into the vagina, mouth, urethra or anus of a woman or makes her to do so with him or any other person; or  
 inserts, to any extent, any object or a part of the body, not being the penis, into the vagina, the urethra or anus of a woman or makes her to do so with him or any other person; or



manipulates any part of the body of a woman so as to cause penetration into the vagina, urethra, anus or any ~ of body of such woman or makes her to do so with him or any other person; or  
 applies his mouth to the vagina, anus, urethra of a woman or makes her to do so with him or any other person, under the circumstances falling under any of the following seven descriptions

In the old provision of the Section 375, the age of consent was 16, whereas after amendment the age of consent has become 18. After the amendment, vagina also included the labia majora, and the Amendment specified that the consent cannot be implied, it has to be stated voluntarily and express willingness in the specific Act. The amended rape laws in the Section 375 includes all forms of sexual assault and is neither limited to the penile-vaginal penetration nor to the heterosexual intercourse. However, marital rape continues to be unrecognized by the Indian Penal Code. These policies serve as a framework to understand the landscape where prominent gang rape cases exist.

#### RAPE: THE GENDERED VIOLENCE

Rape is a literal translation from the Latin word "rapio," that means seizing; a forcible seize (Devi 2018). The question "Why rape," "How does one think of raping someone", has become pressing and central today. Is rape a new phenomenon in the crime world? When measuring a crime, *mens rea*, the intent is always measured. However, rape is one crime, that has no exception- it is always with the complete intent of raping another person. India and rape have almost become synonymous, with 93 women reported being raped each day (Philip 2014; Bhattacharya 2013). The Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women describes India's female experience as a continuum of violence "from the womb to the tomb." It explains that violence against women reflects India's structural inequality, resulting in rape, mob rape, and gang rape (Bhattacharya 2013). There are thousands of rape cases reported in India every day but

minimal conviction rates. There are many more that never gets reported because of the social stigma that is attached to rape.

In Indian mythology, there were many cases of rape, which led to questioning women's chastity (Patel 2013). One of the most known stories is that of “Ahalya”, where God Indra disguised himself as Ahalya's husband and formed sexual relations with her. When Gautama (the husband) found out, he cursed them both, turning Ahalya into a stone (Sattar 2017). In another, Danda raped Araja, for which the sage Shukracharya told the woman, Araja, to undergo ritual purification (International Gita Society). These stories portray the patriarchal standards set in the Indian society where a woman is considered pious only if she maintains her chastity. While these stories are mythological, these stories' practices are real; they are lived experiences of many women in India. In the modern-day, sexual violence has become a way to impose restrictions, limit a women's sexual freedom, and control their agency.

As a country, India has witnessed oppression and violence against women since ancient times, through mythology, the scriptures, during the war, and even today in the legal setting. Historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have studied the interplay of class, caste, and religion, a few pervasive institutions of the nation (Kumar 1993). It is essential to understand the interaction between the three to better document the source of social difference. Within these structural differences, women became the object of worship and that of control. She was to be chaste, a submissive wife, and be defined by either her fathers or husbands (Roy 2015). Dumont's theory of hierarchy best explains this dichotomous role that women were assigned to; that of ideas and value, and she was to uphold both (Barnett, Fruzzetti and Ostor. 1976) Manusmriti is the earliest work on dharma (Olivelle 2004), which was then interpreted as the divine Hindu law explicitly mentioned that women should treat their husbands like gods, and

women should always be under a man's protection as she cannot live independently. Such scriptures were used to justify then practices. Manusmriti became the backbone of the Indian patriarchal structure and the caste assembly, setting women's social status. It created the gender problem within the caste structure. During India's independence against the British rule and partition with Pakistan, there have been violent struggles between security forces and insurgents, which recorded brutal rapes and gang rapes (Kumar 1993). The partition was one of the most massive mass migrations where tens of thousands of women were abducted and kept as hostages by opposing religious communities. Women's bodies were shamed and used against corruption by other religious rivals (Ghosh 2013). Women were raped, mutilated, gangraped, and raped in front of the public. Their bare, bruised bodies marked a victory for one community and shamed the other.

Men have believed that women are their property and that women must be raped if she goes astray to keep the shame of the families as a lesson that women need to learn (Bhawana and Neetu 2014). Women were ripped off their agency, and men's masculinity was tied to the women's chastity and piousness in their families. This notion of shame and honor then got built on the backbones of women. This gendered violence against women is not just a social phenomenon, it has roots in the legal system. In the case, *State of Maharashtra v Chandraprakash Kewalchand Jain*, 1990, Justice Iyer commented, “when a woman is ravished, what is inflicted is not merely physical injury, but the deepest sense of some deathless shame” (Westmarland and Gangoli 2011). When the legal system attaches notions of shame, dignity, and honor to a woman's body exploited by a male perpetrator, the society is bound to manifest a victim-blaming attitude. Hence, the movements and protests post 2012 gang rape cases prolonged uproar to stop

external ownership of women's bodies. Eve Ensler, who travelled to India at the time of the rape and the nationwide protests that followed commented that,

After having worked every day of my life for the last 15 years on sexual violence, I have never seen anything like that, where sexual violence broke through the consciousness and was on the front page, nine articles in every paper every day, in the center of every discourse, in the center of the college students' discussions, in the center of any restaurant you went in. And I think what's happened in India, India is really leading the way for the world. It's really broken through. They are actually fast-tracking laws. They are looking at sexual education. They are looking at the bases of patriarchy and masculinity and how all that leads to sexual violence (One Billion Rising 2013).

However, this case was not the first and did not become the last. The rape cases continued to rise, the roots of which are seen in the written mythologies where the intent was to punish the woman and not the rapist. Rape cases are not new to Indian society. When India became the Republic of India in 1947, violence against women of minority and lower caste was state sanctioned during the partition. Rape was a form to punish women for harboring fugitives (Ghosh 2013). In 2002, one of the ruling parties, Hinduvta, led to Muslim women's gang rape during the anti-Muslim genocide ("What is Bikini Bano..." 2017). India has a skewed violence rate, rape cases skewing towards the woman as victims. It is necessary to understand the patriarchal setting of the Indian society to analyze further if the media contributes or recedes to these norms.

In India, the media coverage on rape has been biased with media leading to victim shaming and silencing the victim from reporting (Fadnis 2017). While some cases get much coverage, most cases remain invisible to the media. This selective visibility has been contingent upon caste and class in India. There has been an almost nonverbal negotiation between the media and the major forces of the society, where the media represents the forces (Fadnis 2017). While Maharashtra minister, RR. Patil stated, "rise in atrocities against women is due to obscene images used in advertisements," the home minister of Madhya Pradesh on rape stated, "It is

sometimes right and sometimes wrong” (“Indian politicians...” BBC 2014). When the media publishes such comments without any backlash, or criticisms, such comments become accepting to the public to regard their politicians highly.

When media focuses on such politicians' statements while reporting rape cases, it assigns victim-blaming attributes. Similarly, when the media highlights words such as "lesser" physical injuries in rape cases, it damages the victim's credibility. The notion tied to violent rape cases is that that it should result in significant physical wounds, but not all rapes result in physical harm. Several news media discourse studies have concluded that media shapes our beliefs and opinions on socially significant issues. When a society is exposed to a specific ideology or a framework, it either creates a positive or negative impact. Based on these contexts, people form opinions. Crime against women is a crucial issue, and in today's age and time, this issue is brought forth to the broader public through the media. Hence, the media has the ability to shape perceptions. The words the media chooses, the news title, the pictures- all either creates or loses traction. Therefore, it is important to examine whether in gangrape cases, media works towards case-specific coverage or phenomenon-wide coverage (Khan, Yasmeen and Jafree 2018).

The research addressed in the literature review discloses that when news stories reveal victims' identification through various descriptions, the readers either develop sympathy for the victims or blame the victims, depending upon how the media writes about them. The next chapter reviews research literature examining the way media reports cases through the usage of words and visual representation, the impact of media reporting through empirical studies, and an overview of the theoretical framework.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Media uses language as a medium to legitimize the social construction around violence against women. This study elucidates that it is important to understand the underlying languages that the media uses in writing about rape cases. Language portrays structures of power dynamics (Nagar 2016). With the growth in journalism and rape coverage, analyzing the newspaper articles discerns the dynamics behind the reportage of rape cases. In this chapter, I examined the language that the media uses to cover crimes of rape. I analyzed different articles and journals that have explained the variation in news coverage about rape. In order to understand the presentation of media regarding rape cases, it becomes important to look at how the media has influenced the public and how the readers view the victims.

Through the media, the readers either support the victims or hold them accountable in the rape cases. This chapter explores how rape cases are highlighted through visuals and the selected usage of words by the news media that contributes to the victim-blaming and shaming. It further outlines the social construction of violence in India and the theories that support media influence on rape culture. While community norms on sexual and gender violence are understood to be reflected through the mass media, it is also true that the reporters' own biases mirror those norms of the communities where they work (Baum, Dara Kay, and Yuri M 2018). Factors such as wealth, politics, religiosity then become deciding factors for the issues to be addressed.

Rape is a crime in India which still carries profound stigma for the victims. The media can either propagate and fuel the misconceptions or become agents of change, producing informed public reporting. Therefore, analyzing these newspaper articles is significant for my

thesis work as sexual crimes against women influence public perception in determining the gravity of the crime and policy-making decisions. In the Indian media, newspaper articles tend to make the crime sensational or ordinary (Radha and Govindaraju 2016). A rape victim often has to justify her rape, while victims of other crimes, say burglary, do not have to answer the same. In doing so, the rape victims are invaded of their privacy (Radha and Govindaraju 2016). When these women's stories are separated from other news, the media reinforces the idea that rape is a pathological issue rather than a social one. It shifts the blame from society to the individual who either was raped or committed rape (Chaudhuri 2012). Hence, it is important to look at how the newspaper writes about rape and the victims of rape.

The 2012 gangrape also known as the Nirbhaya case is the focal point of my thesis, which sets out to look at how the media both responds to and reproduced this most heavily gendered crime. In order to look into further gangrape cases that happened in India from 2013 to 2019, it is pivotal to understand the Nirbhaya case and the changes it brought in the Indian legal system.

## 2012 GANGRAPE CASE

On December 16, 2012, around 9 pm, a 23-year-old woman was leaving for her home from a movie, *Life of Pi*, with her male friend. They took a bus that departed from Munirka, the southeast side of Delhi. She was brutally gang raped and died days after she was raped. Her name was Jyoti Singh, also known as Nirbhaya and she was a physiotherapist student (Mandhana and Trivedi 2012). She was beaten, tortured and gangraped by 6 men, including the driver. She was severely assaulted and penetrated by a rod, her abdomen and intestines were completely damaged. After the men beat and raped her, they threw both victims off the bus with barely any

clothes on her. A passerby found them and called the police, and they were taken to the Safdarjung Hospital. She was taken to the Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore and died 13 days after her rape (“Nirbhaya gang rape...” 2017).

By December 18, 2012 this gang rape case had received wide media coverage. The responses were followed by shock, anger, helplessness, and fear as the aftermath of the crime. Widespread protests had begun and demands for justice were observed through vigils and protests. The media had brought the woman's name, occupation, and injuries on her body, which was received sympathetically by the public, and the media continued to sensationalize the case months after the crime was committed (Narang 2014). Brutal gangrape cases are not unusual in India. Women's bodies have been used as tool, a medium during the war, for war, in the name of honor, and have even fallen prey to state-sanctioned violence. However, the Nirbhaya case sparked a movement never witnessed before, a movement so strong that it led to making changes in the Indian penal Code to address sexual violence systematically. This case is the backbone of my thesis, a focal point to analyze how the media has reported other gangrape cases, including those as brutal as this one.

## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF VIOLENCE

In the Indian media, wide coverage of cases is reserved for incidents that are seen as exceptional to the public. They largely cover stories of brutal murders and rape cases such as the Delhi gang rape case of 2012 (Drache and Velagic 2013). Cases that have lesser sensational efforts do not get broadly covered. Indian media typically highlights individual cases and stories, individual episodes of crime. In crimes of sexual assault, the media considers the caste and the class when giving weightage to the case, providing details in those stories where affected parties



are from the middle or the upper class (Drache and Velagic 2013). They are less centered on writings about lower caste stories. Even then, caste is mostly mentioned when the victim is a Dalit. This displays how the media does not take into framing issues of rape per se but rape cases of particular groups.

The Delhi gang rape case was one of the many gruesome cases that have happened in India. In the aftermath of this case, while awareness on rape and voices against rape has entered the civil society, it has also revealed the stark distinction of class and caste and the deeply rooted institutionalized racism. Many protesters in Delhi and India after the 2012 gang rape case were middle-class students and professionals. Hence, they identified with Nirbhaya. The intersectional framework emphasizes that an individual's social identity influences the individual's experiences of gender, making it central to understand gender in terms of power relations. Intersectionality explains the mutuality between social identities (Dietram 2006). This feminist analysis explains the social uproar in the Nirbhaya case as the middle class associated themselves with this victim. While the Dalit women, who are the marginalized scheduled caste women of India, have been oppressed through the systemic patriarchal system, where upper-class men have been raping them are still without a voice and widespread media coverage of their rape cases (Narang 2014).

There have been numerous state-sanctioned gang rape cases over the years against the marginalized groups of women, much troubling, which have neither gotten public outrage nor media coverage on a comparable scale to the Delhi gang rape case. Bikis Bano, in 2002, a Muslim woman who was pregnant at the time, was gang raped by the Hindu fascist group, Hinduvta, during Anti Muslim program in Gujurat. A Manipuri woman was gang raped and shot through her vagina by the Indian army based on suspicion. Tapasi Mallik in 2006 was burned alive after she was raped by the people of Communist party (Dutta and Sircar 2013). There have

been many more cases where women have been murdered and sexually assaulted by men of the upper caste. An Adivasi (indigenous) schoolteacher was raped, stripped naked by junior police personnel in front of his supervisor after which her vagina and anus were filled with stones.

These are no less gruesome and violent cases that too state sanctioned which were not prosecuted. In Tapasi case the criminals were prosecuted but for murder and not for the sexual assault (Dutta and Sircar 2013). These cases were equally worthy of coverage. Some cases receive extensive coverage while others don't, and the severity of the crime is often not the deciding factor in such coverage. The framing analysis explains that this consideration of framings and biases exist in the narratives of high-profile cases. In such cases the media gives a voice to the public who associate themselves with the victim, either through class, caste or profession. The higher in the social strata the more the media articulates the anger of the public.

The media's language to cover a crime perpetuates roles and beliefs of the conventional gender and gender roles. In doing so, it legitimizes the social roles of the binary (Nagar 2016). Through Critical Discourse Analysis, Nagar attests to neoliberalism being accommodated after reporting the Delhi rape case. She argues that the growing neoliberalism in India caught the case with such massive media coverage. In this crime, the reporting reflected sentiments of the public, not just merely reporting news (2016).

## THEORIZING RAPE CULTURE

If the journalists adhere to normative social constructs, then they produce news coverage of rape that features languages of victim-blaming and empathy towards the accused, which skews the news consumers towards the same. One empirical study classified over 300,000 news articles about rape across 279 local U.S. newspapers between the years 2000 and 2013 (Baum,

Dara Kay, and Yuri 2018). Researchers developed a coding instrument in the form of a survey with 10 research assistants with a set of 21,911 manually coded newspaper articles. They used Support Vector Machine (SVM) and constructed four components of bias-victim blaming, empathy for perpetrators, the implication of consent, and questioning the victim. The results ranged across categories from 80 to 90 percent, which was high, meaning where there was more rape culture in the press, there was more rape. This pattern was so only in the rape cases. The finding suggested that articles with no focus on rape culture focused on the judicial process while victim-blaming articles cast double doubt on the victims attaching empathy towards the accused associating their identities, socio-economic and educational background to the case. For instance, in rape cases where the accused was an athlete, attaching their attributes as "player," or "coach," in the news, and rejecting the severity of the crime altogether (Baum, Dara Kay, and Yuri M 2018). As consumers of the media's contents, we take in socio-political occurrences personally when it is even remotely relatable and in the process are being largely shaped by media. In this age and time of globalization, to isolate the media portrayal of gender relations becomes difficult, further creating media influence in society.

Prior research points out that people do not infer any responsibility to either party unless the question prompts them. Such attribution can arise with media highlights of rape myths, and then those accepting of rape myths tend to hold the victims accountable for the rape that has happened against them (Bohner 2001). The media selectivity propels debates on gender. Where gender-sensitive reporting is required, the media plays an important role in bridging the gap between the existing inequalities between the sexes through proper usage of words and images. Hence, media should hold accountability in reportage and neutrality and not give in to legitimize existing gender differences (Dasgupta, Sinha, and Chakravarti 2012). Gerd looked into the

factors of linguistic indicators of blaming the victims of sexual assault (2001). One of the aspects discussed was the use of the passive voice. The passive voice seems to suggest the direct responsibility of the victim. For instance, 'the woman got raped' invokes 'got herself raped' and leads to indicate the woman's active participation. When the implications of media writings, the language they chose to portray victims affect readers' perception, it becomes necessary to understand how media creates narratives and how those narratives are framed for a wider public.

Visual imagery also largely determines social norms around rape. In one study, participants were asked to write headlines for two silent video segments that depicted scenes of rape (Bohner 2001). The variables were measured into an independent variable as depicting the victim and the dependent variables being a type of action (action leading to rape) and the grammatical voice (usage of active and passive voice). One video segment had a scene from a German soap opera 'The Black Forest,' where a woman walking is followed by two men, dragged in an alley and raped. They flee when they see someone passing by. The other segment was from a U.S. film 'Accused,' where a woman is seen alone in a bar wearing a short skirt and tight top, dances and flirts with a man. The man then pushes her against the pinball machine and rapes her. The participants answered five questions about the rape and regarding the onus of responsibility, which resulted in having good internal consistency, and high construct validity, meaning in this study the use of passive voice was highly used when describing the act of rape itself, the actions before or after was not a deciding factor for the usage of this passive voice (Bohner 2001).

Another study (Schwark and Bohner 2019) addressed that photographic images published by the media affect blame judgments. It investigates how participants' exposure to sets of victims versus survivor images can affect their judgments of victim blame regarding a rape vignette. This

study explored whether the meaning of “survivor” and “victim” conveyed the same stimuli. The study displayed two stimuli, one where the victim's picture was of a woman after an assault had taken place. She was portrayed as passive, in vulnerable positions, and crouching on the floor, shielding the body. The survivor picture portrayed a woman who was raped but was in an empowering situation with a counselor. Most participants associated helplessness with the label of “victim” and “empowering” with survivors. This perception is a direct result of the media portrayal of the victim-survivor relation. In the media coverage, dark pictures, women crying at a corner represent a rape victim, whereas bold and outspoken are synonyms for survivors. This study proves the influence the media has on the public. The readers depict what they learn and see through the media, forming such a representation as to the norm.

Another study (Johnson 1999) explores the way readers view victims and the responsibility of crimes depending upon the media's coverage of rape stories. This study examined if naming the victims developed a level of sympathy among readers or established responsibility for the crime. The study used a four-by-four Latin Square design, with variables as no identification, identification by name, identification by description, and identification by description and name. It was measured by story content involving four different stories, a victim raped by a caretaker, gangrape case, rape and kidnapping by teenage boys, and mistaken arrest of a rape victim. It resulted that while 86% of respondents said that names should not be revealed, the victim identification did not influence how the respondents answered. The sympathy level was highest for the victim in the caretaker case. In the gangrape case where the victim consented to have sex with one person, the respondent claimed that it was the victim's fault that she was raped because she had already consented to it before. Likewise, in the fault arrest case, the respondent held the victim to be at fault for their rape because of the victim's history of being

involved in drugs. Not the victims' names, but the way the media identified them affected the participants' response and the level of sympathy towards the victim.

Media reporting is considered a well thought and written depiction of an event, free from biases and prejudices. The news created by the media has meanings attached to it. These stories can influence the readers, and when the media unfavorably writes about rape cases or conforming to the rape culture, it creates negative attitudes among the readers towards the victims (Fountain 2008). Victimization of women is the most pressing issue of today and the most emerging social issue. Victimizations include physical, sexual, economic, and psychological issues, and it is universal across age, race, caste, class, culture, wealth, and borders (Bhawana and Neetu 2014).

This study on the media's influence is a call for the media to take accountability. Media today is an agent to shape norms and ideologies. When media perpetuates stereotypes, focusing on the clothing of the woman who was raped and her sexual relations, it forms perception in the readers' minds, attaching them to the mind that specific clothing and behaviors account for being raped. In doing so, the media does not give fair reporting but rather succeeds in creating an image of a woman who has the potential to be raped.

## THE FRAMING ANALYSIS

When trying to understand gender-based violence, it is crucial to learn about media framing from a feminist perspective. Framing is a way of selecting, interpreting, and presenting information in a particular manner, including excluding certain information to define and discuss specific topics, problems, and concerns (Radha and Govindaraju 2016). Framing analysis helps

understand the meanings that are put in news reporting. It has been informed that exposing certain stereotypes by the media resulting from their biases normalizes existing norms.

A 2017 study (Papendick and Bohner 2017) argues that different factors influence perceptions of sexual invasion. In rape cases where the victim has shown resistance, the victims are put on a lesser blame game, while those raped by acquaintances are more likely to be blamed. This study examined the potential effects of labels' in the perception formation of rape cases. Utilizing Attribution Theory and Media Framing analysis looks into the methods and frequency in which the language in sexual assault news stories assigns attribution. Language has the ability to assign meaning to stories by providing cues to the audience to exhibit responsibility. Studies in the past have indicated that the media's framing of issues influences public perception and extends to the perception in cases of sexual assault. (Siefkes-Andrew and Cassandra 2019). In the study (Siefkes-Andrew and Cassandra 2019), no relation was established between label and condition on participants' judgments of the perpetrator's appearance or clothing style; neither was there a relationship in determining the woman's perceived height, stature, or age, based on the label.

However, there was a distinction between casually dressed and elegantly dressed. Those who imagined women to be the 'victim', determined casual dressing (50%), and those who labeled 'survivor' imagined elegantly dressed (57%). The analysis shows the label's potential on the perception of rape cases. If the media focuses on the appearance and the clothing, it acts as a dual-edged sword. When the media advocates activism by focusing on the victims' clothing, it shifts the reporting from the crime, and the context becomes that of the clothing.

Newspaper portrayal of victims extends to how the media chooses to use the newspaper's words and sentences. A study conducted in 2019 (Siefkes-Andrew and Cassandra 2019)

examined how the media ask questions that can make us think in a particular manner. Framing analysis explains that the journalist's language, support, and doubts attached in the media can tap into the cognitive memory (Siefkes-Andrew and Cassandra 2019). This study explored that the media framing serves as a useful tool for examining traditional media and analyzing new and emerging media platforms. Previous research has indicated that the victim's appearance, mostly the dress, influences the victim's responsibility for sexual assault (Siefkes-Andrew and Cassandra 2019).

The survey was taken in this study to examine how frequently did news stories employ the language of support attached to the victim and the perpetrator in cases of sexual assault on college campuses and how frequently did news stories employ the language of doubt attached to the victim and the perpetrator in cases of sexual assault on college campuses? The study also examined the relationship between news stories that talked about the language of consent in cases of sexual assault on college campuses and the level of alcohol consumption in those campuses. The study found that language that implied consent or described any consensual sexual act such as kissing, touching, or sexual intercourse was mentioned in 18.31% of the stories, while language that implied sexual activity without consent was more common and stated in 97.18% of the stories. 40% of the articles included doubt for the victim's statements. It found that the journalists often mentioned the perpetrator's success status and mentioned their accomplishments that often were athletic successes.

Media explosion affects how news is covered. The media extensively victimize sexual assault cases in their news coverage (Tandon 20017). Even when the media does not explicitly perpetuate rape myths, that does not mean that the media is not using any indirect language to support rape misconceptions. While local newspapers do not report commonly used rape myths,



the media's language still reinforces some of these myths' attitudes and beliefs (Sacks, Ackerman, and Shlosberg 2017). Rape myth and rape are tied to inequality in society, and gender is the focal point for forming this social relation.

Victim blaming upholds power relations in society and absolves perpetrators or people of higher social status from punishment. The media's publication of the rape myth has undoubtedly helped form public opinion of sexual violence (Stubbs-Richardson, Megan, and Nicole E 2018). It is understood that the media employs frames to shape public opinions, as it did in the Nirbhaya case in India. These perspectives held strong resonance in the Nirbhaya case, influencing the readers positively. However, one case cannot be representative of media reportage in totality. Therefore, it is crucial to move beyond the Nirbhaya case in India's context and understand how the media has selected their narratives and their attention to details in reporting other gangrape cases.

## SUMMARY AND CRITIQUE OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter discussed the Delhi gang rape case, reporting the existing caste and class differences in India as this particular case gained widespread coverage of media. In contrast, the media reporting lacked to do a bare minimum coverage in stories of the marginalized women of the North-East part of India. The media needs to gain gender consciousness and imply the same in their methods of reportage. The studies in this section mirror the deep-rooted influence of the media on its readers. While there is research, it is not substantial enough to prove the media framing theory. Limited research has been conducted on how the media disclosure of names affects the readers and their perception towards the victims (Johnson 1999). Likewise, a study on how journalists cover rape cases and frame their headlines could better understand the media

framing perspective (Siefkes-Andrew and Cassandra 2019). It is understood that the media employs frames to shape public opinions, as it did in the Nirbhaya case in India. The study examines how media frames narratives and looks at different stories allowing them to have as much or as little space depending upon what the media believes to be newsworthy and whom the media portrays as real victims.

The next chapter provides a detailed methodology of how I moved further along in my thesis with my research question, research design, and implementation method.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

My thesis has drawn from content analysis as a form of qualitative methodology to explore patterns in response to gender-based violence news coverage in India. This method aims to review and analyze professional media sources and study the media's role in the widespread circulation of information in gangrape cases. This chapter examined the necessity of qualitative research for content analysis and provided an overview of the study design, the procedures, and implementation of coding and analyzing the newspaper articles. The chapter also briefly discussed the limitations associated with this mode of research, particularly to this study.

#### DATA SOURCE

The information gathered for this study focused on secondary sources, mainly newspaper articles. I used the Google search engine and Access World News database to conduct the media analysis. They provided a massive online collection of gangrape cases with access to newspaper articles, blogs, and different web content. I narrowed down my search to gang rape from 2013 to 2019 and limited my search to the six major newspaper articles- The Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Herald, The Indian Express, India Today and The Hindu. I focused on the newspaper articles, and therefore, I did not require user permission, as the newspaper article details are of the public domain.

## SEARCH STRATEGY

I focused on qualitative analysis to provide a better overview of trends in the news media outlets. For this, I foremost selected the six newspaper outlets and looked cases from 2013 to 2019. Between these years, thousands of gangrape cases have been reported in India. Statistically, by the end of the year 2017, a total of 1,28,000 rape cases were pending in the court (National Crime Records Bureau). A total of 1,80,000 rape cases were reported between 2013 and 2018. Among the many published gangrape cases, I selected the cases that gained the most media coverage. I identified, cross referenced different search terms and developed a narrowed search strategy.

Table 1: Search strategy

Search Sources/Database	Search Terms	Search Strategy
• Google	1. Gangrape in India	1 and 5
• Access World News	2. Murder, India	1 and 2 and 6
• The Times of India	3. Rape and Murder in India	1 and 2 and 7
• Hindustan Times	4. Rape and India	1 and 2 and 8
• Deccan Herald	5. 2013	2 and 3 and 9
• The Indian Express	6. 2014	1 and 3 and 10
• India Today	7. 2015	1 and 2 and 4
• The Hindu	8. 2016	2 and 4

Table 1: (Continued)

Search Sources/Database	Search Terms	Search Strategy
• BBC World News	9. 2017	1 and 3 and 11
• Professional blogs	10. 2018	
	11. 2019	

I searched the electronic database and the open Google search engine for relevant media reporting from 2013 to 2019. I conducted a manual Google search using the key terms and search strategy and found plenty of media reporting on gangrape cases. I began by noting cases that gained most media attention from 2013 to 2019. I then selected articles that were heavily reported for an extended period. After skimming through many different cases, I narrowed down my search to the cases that had most numbers of reporting. I then cross-checked with cases found through the database. After narrowing down, I had nine cases that were mostly reported. Both Google and the Access World News database had sufficient reporting in these nine rape cases. While I searched for articles in both search engines, I selected articles only from the database: full and in length. This selection bias led me to collect a total of ninety- four rape reporting from the nine cases from 2013 to 2019. I selected 10-12 articles per case for textual analysis.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This research study's main focus was to determine the media narrative through its tone and story placement of gangrape cases. The data analysis aimed to understand and evaluate the

newspapers' language to report about the sexual crimes against girls and women. My data analysis focused on the media coverage on different cases according to each victim's socio-economic and geographic location. For this, I used a qualitative research method. The qualitative research method addresses the distinct texture, approach, and message in each news coverage. The reason to use this research method was to explore various themes, verbal expression, and active-passive voices. I work from the assumption that the way news stories cover, and construct victimhood is directly connected to socio-economic systems and patterns. Therefore, I examined the placement of headlines in the reporting alongside the main writeup.

Qualitative research as a model allows the researcher to develop details from experiences' involvement, bringing forth a social phenomenon (Creswell 1994). Nagar quotes the importance of studying the media language and connects it to the social understandings (2016). She writes:

...to study media and language used by the media is a way to understand the fundamentals of what a society is doing and what it imagines its realities to be, even if they are removed from the lived experience of its people. The way language choices are made in any text is representative of and situated in broader social, political, and cultural practices.

I investigated the articles' and constructed the media writings' rhetoric to understand the importance of words in persuasion better. I used the 'tone' 'language of the media' and 'story placement' as the unit of analysis for this study. When I say, “tone of the media,” the emphasis is on the construction of social identities, that is, the victim's name, age, social background, including their class, caste, and educational background.

I looked into the themes that emerged while analyzing the media narratives on gangrape cases, of caste, race, social oppression, and hierarchy. India has a social structural basis of caste and class prejudice. It still practices untouchability through social, political, and economic exclusion of those in this caste structure's lower hierarchy. There is a fear of “pollution” that

excludes the tribal and the Dalits (Rao 2013). However, this study establishes that untouchability is not accounted for when it comes to rape. The upper caste forgets to maintain its purity when they coerce and rape the marginalized women.

The marginalized women constitute 16% of India's female population, yet she falls victim to culture, institution, and social structure (Biswas). The women's bodies are used to assert power and supremacy, either as men or as upper caste. Identities and gender cannot go in isolation; hence, it is essential to understand the construction of these social identities by the media to understand the gendered framework of rape cases in India. With an in-depth analysis of these articles, I argued that social values and societal beliefs manifest agendas around rape and rape myths. The following inquiry guided this study.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Through this study, I explored different themes through sentences, phrases and headlines that were published in newspapers articles for the nine gang rape cases. The central research question for this study addressed the following questions:

- a. What is the relationship between the social status of the victim and the type of information published by the media?
- b. How does the media use different language for different victims of the same crime (rape)?
- c. What facts about the victim's personal life are reported?
- d. How does the media place words and phrases in its narrative in describing victims of gang rape?

## CODING THE DATA

I began by collecting articles that served as a testing of media reporting of gangrape cases. For this purpose, I read the articles line by line, creating a system of coding based on:

- a. Personal Information
  - a. Revelation of names of the victims
  - b. Age of the Victim
  - c. Educational Background
  - d. Class
  - e. Caste
  - f. Life Accomplishments
- b. Language
  - a. Usage of active- passive voice: In the usage of the active-passive voice, I looked into the portrayal of rape through voice; usage of language such as- was raped v raped by
  - b. Language of support: Language of support is identified with verbs and/or adverbs such as indicate, acknowledge, support, mention, recall, and note
  - c. Language of doubt: Language of doubt is determined by usage of words such as- allege or alleged, claim, confess and make out
  - d. Words and Phrases in headlines that questioned the victim
- c. Themes (Emphasis on certain details, and the missing out of details)
  - a. Location of the crime
  - b. Time of the crime
  - c. Gangrape in city
  - d. Gangrape in a village/small town



- e. Clothing
  - f. Physical Attributes: Any reference given to the victim's bodily structure, any part of the body or their physical capacity or inability is noted
  - g. Inclusion of Photograph: Photographs that depicted rape
  - h. Photo description
- d. Labels
- a. Victims
  - b. Survivor
- e. Name assigned by the media (Eg: In 2012 Delhi Gang Rape case, victim as "Nirbhaya").
- a. Accused
  - b. Perpetrator
- f. Type of crime
- a. Hate crime
  - b. Family Honor
  - c. Riot Agitation
  - d. Religion
  - e. Raped by strangers

## ANALYSIS

I coded these themes and drafted each theme into different "tones" and subthemes to analyze the collective patterns across various levels. I paid close attention to the sentences and phrases in which the unit of analysis was found. The rationale behind it, first, was to find if the media adhered to the changes made in the Indian legal system and followed their code of

conduct. Second, to know if media provided equal amount of coverage in these gang rape cases as it did with the Nirbhaya case. Third, to locate if the social hierarchy of the victim affected the media reporting of a gang rape case. Through these cases I attempt to analyze if gangrape cases were reported differently, and if so, how was the reporting different in different cases.

To avoid writing the names of each case, and for conciseness I have used the location where the gangrapes happened as the name of the case. After identifying the frames in the media narratives, it is imperative to explore the motivation behind the patterns. These patterns that emerged out of the media coverage and media reporting tell us a story. The inclusion of information, and the absence of details often result from existing social biases. I hereby assembled a synopsis of each gangrape case to better understand how the victim's intersecting identities were tied to the media reporting of the cases.

1. Kamduni Gangrape: In Kamduni village a 20-year-old college student was abducted, gangraped and murdered by 8 men in the afternoon. She belonged to a lower-middle-class Bengali Hindu family. All the perpetrators were from the Muslim community. After raping her they tore her legs up to her navel, slit her throat and dumped her body in the nearby field. The court found 6 of the eight accused guilty and two were let off because of lack of evidence.
2. Shakti Mills Gangrape: In 2013, a 22-year-old photojournalist working with a magazine in Mumbai was gangraped by 5 men, one of them being a juvenile. She had gone with a male friend on an assignment to a deserted mills compound. The rapists took her photos during the assault and threatened her to release the photos on police reporting. This case was told to be among the "rarest of the rare" case, and three perpetrators were sentenced to death penalty.

3. **Birbhum Gangrape:** In 2014, a 20-year-old tribal girl from Birbhum district, Subolpur Village was gangraped by 13 people under the Kangaroo court for having an affair with a boy from a different community. Kangaroo courts are unofficial courts, in India such courts are set and led by the village head. In this case, the girl and her boyfriend were both first physically assaulted and the girl was asked to pay Rs. 50,000 as a fine, but when she could not pay the amount, she was ordered to be gangraped. After the trial, all 13 were sentenced for 20 years in prison.
4. **Badaun Gangrape:** Two sisters were gangraped and hanged by the tree in Katra village in Badaun in 2014. The girls were of ages 14 and 15 and had been missing from the previous night. A police report was filed but no action was taken during the time of report. The next day they were both found dead and hanging from a mango tree. Their clothes were torn, and signs of physical assault were prominent. While there were 5 suspects in this case different theories floated around for a while from honor killing, to suicide. The Central Bureau of Investigation prepared a report for suicide and ruled out gangrape and that the out gangrape. The case then gained national and international attention and further investigation was assigned to this case.
5. **Rohtak Gangrape:** A 28-year old Nepali woman, who was mentally challenged was gangraped and murdered by 9 men in Gaddikhera village in Rohtak in 2015. She was physically assaulted with several bodily injury and injured private parts. In the postmortem, blades and stones were also found in her stomach. The victim was undergoing treatment for past few months and was living with her sister for the same. Her body was found in a field near the Rohtak-Hisar highway.

6. Sikkim Gangrape: A Sikkimese woman was gangraped by three men in a moving car in 2017. The victim was abducted from outside of her house in Delhi, raped in the car and she was later dumped in Delhi.
7. Chennai Gangrape: A 11-year-old, hearing impaired girl was kidnapped, held captive and gangraped for 7 months by 22 men in Chennai in the year 2018. The offenders were detained under the Goondas Act.
8. Kathua Gangrape: An eight-year-old girl in from the Nomadic Muslim community in 2018 was kidnapped while grazing the horses and held inside a temple in Jammu's Kathua. She was subjected to multiple rapes and her head was bashed out. Six out of seven were accused in the murder and gangrape and were later found guilty, where the three were sentenced for life imprisonment and the other three for a five-year jail time.
9. Hyderabad Gangrape: In December 2019, a 26-year-old veterinary doctor was lured by 4 men with a promise to help her with her scooter get fixed, gangraped and burnt her alive on the Hyderabad- Bangalore Highway bypass. The investigation informed that it was a premediated plan of rape, and the four accused were killed by a cop near the same rape spot where they were taken to reconstruct the crime scene. The police claimed that the men were trying to attack the police which led to the open fire towards them.

The following tables present my findings in the media reporting of these gangrape cases. These tables are my instrumentation of the data and these will be discussed in detail in the Analysis Chapter.

Table 2: Number(N) of times media published personal information of the victims

Cases	Name (N)	Age (N)	Education (N)	Profession (N)	Class (N)	Caste/Tribe (N)	Accomplishments (N)
Kamduni		10	12				
Shakti Mills		15		19			4
Birbhum		11				22	
Badaun		12				32	
Rohtak		15					
Sikkim		9					
Chennai		15	3				
Kathua	3	13				26	
Hyderabad	5	13		27			

For each case, I have analyzed 10-12 articles. This (Table 2) explains the number of times the victim's personal information was published in each case. The age of victims was mentioned by all news outlets, while the name of the victims was mentioned in two cases. The profession and educational background were mentioned in four cases, and the caste of the victims in three cases. The educational background and the caste of the victims had no intersection. In these rape cases, only the caste of the marginalized victims has been highlighted whereas for other victims, there is no mention of caste or class.

Table 3: Number (N) of times the articles specified the type of crime

Cases	Hate Crime (N)	Communal Honor (N)	Crime with no additional motives (N)	Religion (N)	Stranger (N)
Kamduni					9
Shakti Mills					13
Birbhum		18			
Badaun			16		
Rohtak					10
Sikkim			13		
Chennai					15
Kathua	15			12	
Hyderabad					15

This (Table 3) explains the type of crime that was reported in these gangrape cases. Most of the highlighted gangrape cases were by stranger. There were two cases, 29 articles that covered gang rape stories where the perpetrators were the members from the community and did not have other agendas in the gangrape. In three other cases (hate, communal honor and religion), although the perpetrators were known to the victims, they had their prejudice against the victim or the victim's community.

On reviewing closely, the media writings of the gangrape cases were divided in language of doubt and support, where media placed more support in certain cases, and a victim blaming attitude on other cases. This table (Table 4) showcases the differing structures of language towards the victims.

Table 4: Language used by the media towards the victim

Language of Doubt towards the Victim	Language of Support towards the Victim
“girl was raped,” “assaulted by,” “girl was punished”	“men gangraped”
“allegedly,” “allegedly killed,” “alleged incident”	“suggested”
“were apparently,” “if the girl was indeed raped”	“reported”
“According to,” “she complained”	“survivor”
“claimed,” “confessed,” “she added,” “revealed,” “woman says.” “she also stated”	“men guilty of gangrape sentenced”
“charges framed against them” (words used in reporting after the court held the accused in conviction)	

This table exhibits the media language in writing about rape cases and describing the victims. The frequency of the language of doubt is higher than that of the language of support on the basic reporting of the gangrape cases.

After carefully analyzing the collected newspaper articles (Appendix A) with close attention to details, I established patterns and themes that emerged from the media coverage of the cases. I drafted how the media presented details and recorded the shift in the media narratives through its stories and frames. I focus on the themes that emerged during my analysis. One of the themes I explore is the media reporting style through the usage of passive active voice and its possible implications to the readers. I explain the caste relations in these rape cases and analyze the media framings; the way media frames and sensationalizes rape stories. I also look into how the media describes the rape victims and explore the different reporting of gangrape cases based on the social location of the victims. I analyze the media adherence to the Section 228 A of the Indian Penal Code post Nirbhaya case. I discuss these patterns in detail in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIA NARRATIVES

India is diverse in its media houses, producing reportage in regional as well as the English language. However, despite this diversity, they have a commonality in the reporting style, leaning towards episodic coverage rather than social contexts. In rape cases, the Indian media focuses on sensationalism and gives character to the victim/survivor and accused/perpetrator, along with unwarranted attention to details around the case. When the media provides detailed attention to the victim, focusing on her age, profession, whereabouts, and writes about unwanted details of the victim's activity of the entire day, such language shifts the readers' focus from the rapist and the perpetrator and towards the victim (Tandon 2007).

Baum, Cohen, and Zhukov conducted a study on rape culture and published their findings in the *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*. They established that set of societal attitudes towards rape and rape culture normalized sexual violence. They have also specified that media reporting and coverage are crucial to shaping people's attitudes towards sexual violence (Dalton 2018). Shakuntala Rao (2014) explains rape as a crime where the burden of proof falls upon the victim. To Rao, rape is one such crime where the society puts pressure and inflicts pain on the victims and not on the perpetrators.

Rape is a social issue deeply rooted in patriarchy and the continued practice of oppression. In India, it is the structural sexual violence that seeks social justice through the mediascapes. Media has the ability and the resources to highlight and report sexual violence in a way that influences the readers and its audience. It has the ability to report a rape incident influencing the societal understanding of the phenomenon (Dalton 2018). It can either affirm the

woman's agency or rip her from her personhood. The media can highlight the crime, perpetrators, social roots of the crime, or focus merely on the victim and details around her.

In this study, the mentioned nine cases are those cases that received paramount media attention from 2013 to 2019, some more than the other. The victims and perpetrators in these cases vary in their social status, and therefore despite the national reportage, coverage varies in extent. One commonality in all articles was the location of crime and age of victims were mentioned in each one of them. In Table 1, out of the nine cases, the educational background was mentioned in two cases, school-going girls: profession in two cases, a photojournalist and a veterinarian doctor. None of the newspapers in any other case have mentioned educational background.

Throughout history, women's bodies, especially Dalit women's bodies, have been violated through sexual violence and rape by the upper-class men to reinforce their authority (Yengde 2019). Women in the intersection of gender, class, and caste have been and continue to be victims of discrimination and violence. Historically, in India the social division has its roots in the separation of the caste system. Individuals in the lower strata of this hierarchy are socially characterized by their structural location and their social exclusion from the upper caste society. Within this hierarchical framework, Dalits (the lowest in this hierarchy and the once untouchables) still suffer from caste atrocities (Glover 2017).

The available statistics have established that ten Dalit women are raped every day. This systematic and structural discrimination affects Dalit women, making them vulnerable to the “triple burden” of their gender, location in the caste hierarchy, and their lower social class (Biswas). In this study, out of these nine cases, eighty times the victims' caste were implied through their "tribe" or the victims being mentioned as "Dalit". The caste and the tribe were

mentioned in three particular cases: Birbhum case, Badaun case, and the Kathua case. Yoval-Davis (2006) explains social division through the way minorities are represented in images, texts, ideologies, and the law; and not merely through an act of discrimination.

When the media writes about rape cases, the words, phrases, the headlines, and even the photographs that the media selects become important. When the media focuses on “dark, walking alone,” “raped at 2 pm” or “she went for a movie,” the media associates such connotations to external factors, and as Datta explains such interpretations "serves to construct rape as a function of material conditions of everyday life" (2016:176). Such an emphasis restricts women in engaging with her day-to-day activity and further suggests that women are only protected at their own homes and in their best behavior (Datta 2016).

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of my findings on my content analysis of Indian media reporting through their narratives. I have answered my research questions explaining the following themes that emerged through my research

## THE MEDIA FRAMING

Dietram Schuef examines framing in ways that are used to widen the understanding of media effects. His article, "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects," examines how media uses framing as a method of analysis. It explains that the media produces information in the form of text and frames the wordings that influence the readers' interpretation of the text. Schuef's theory focuses that framing can guide the readers in a particular way using possible frames and themes (Dietram 2006).

Individual frames are points of reference used to process new information. Thus, a story framed with an element of sensationalism could induce fear or hysteria amongst the public

(DiBennardo 2018). This brings us to the question if framing is a tool to shape or inform public opinion. Further, the insertion of great sentiment and exaggerated facts into a story about a particular topic might have the public misled into believing something that may not even be an issue. Thus, sensationalism can be studied through the lens of framing (Nelson, Rosalee and Oxley 1997).

Marshall Mchullam's claim that the 'medium is the message' holds that it is not just what is communicated but how it is communicated that holds influence at how information is processed by the receiver (McCluhan 1964). Crime reporting, in theory, is merely reporting facts related to a crime. However, the reality is reporting a specific crime; the media decides what is “newsworthy”. Once a particular crime is selected to be reported, the method of reporting comes into play.

#### The selection bias: sensationalism

Sensationalism contains the word sensation, which implies a mixture of emotions that stir human senses. The media relies on the reader's emotions to keep them attentive and interested, creating sensationalism in their reporting. In reporting gender-based violence, the Indian media focuses on the victim, her hometown, tribe, caste, workplace, and other details that have no bearing with the rape case. By providing these details, the media sensationalizes the crime as heinous as rape and ties it to the culture we live in.

The 2012 Delhi gangrape case-Jyoti Pandey's story stands as a landmark case. It is clearly a turning point in the Indian perspective on crimes against women (Mandhana and Trivedi 2012). The collective South Asian narrative remembers her not solely as a victim. She became a national martyr (Nagar 2016). The reporting that followed the incident to her death on December

29, 2012, had her story take on a turn of vigor and resistance. The names the media chose to refer to her range from misplaced pride to optimism. Articles bestowed on her the title “Amanat” (cherished property), “Nirbhaya” (fearless), “Damini” (lightning), and “India's braveheart daughter” (Thapar and Tlostanova 2018).

The outrage that stemmed around the Nirbhaya case can be traced to the outrage linked to the Indian sense of honor and sexual violence, penile-vaginal penetration in particular, being constructed as the ultimate form of violation against women. News of sexual assault that is graphic and with evidence of physical confrontation find greater space in Indian media. Reporting of sexual violence is limited to one time reporting of a single case. Follow-ups of a case is generally due to civil society groups driving the issue and not the media's sense of concluding a story. As civil society groups drive follow-up, aspects of class and caste become important elements. With increasing political elements entering the discourse, there was a clear shift to arguments of women's honor and, therefore, a need for her protection (Roychowdhury 2013).

Three key reasons come up when rationalizing why the December 2012 rape case snowballed into a civil society movement. First, the victim was perceived to be from the right class. Second, she is seen to be an unprovoked victim, and finally, the culprits were strangers (Jolly 2016). Aspects, like she was academically an excellent student to the fact that her father wanted her to become a government officer, were aspects that drew great empathy from urban India. Nagar explains this sensationalism through social class and power. She writes (2016: 261),

The roots of this 'benign objectivity' are negotiated with spaces that women are allowed to occupy within paradigms of 'traditional cultures'. That Jyoti Pandey occupied this space and yet suffered injuries and ultimately death made her the vehicle of ultimate deification as Nirbhaya.

There is a lack of balance in the empathetical portrayal of victims and the need to point out the systematic nature of violence against women. Anand interviewed various journalists working for Indian English dailies where one of the interviewees commented (2017), “After the December 16 gang rape, it has been all about 'brutal' rape. Rape stories become more important when there is a murder involved; rape is not considered important in itself if a woman survives and files a complaint.” Graphics of details is what is driving Indian reporting of rape rather than the reporting of larger patriarchal workings of society that cause rape. The discourse around individual bodily autonomy significantly lacks in Indian debates. It is more about grabbing eyeballs than about grabbing discussion. The mainstream media selects its own stories of crime where the story's determinant to be published or not depends upon the proximity of it being sold in the market (Sharma 2019:19).

In analyzing the media reports in this thesis, the media created sensationalism through headlines, images, resonance, and comparison. The Hindu published “Words of solace from a gangrape victim to the mother of another,” the Hindustan published “Celebs horrified over Mumbai gang rape,” “Hearing impaired 11-year-old raped for months in Chennai, 17 arrested”. Similarly, Deccan Herald wrote, "Child rape in Chennai that was a horror of horrors," The Indian Express reported, “Kathua rape, murder case — A father's anguish: ‘She did not know right from left... what Hindu, Muslim?’”. The media reporting also highlighted headlines as “Rishi Kapoor, Farhan Akhtar calls for timely execution of capital punishment for rape convicts,” and Deccan Herald wrote, “Bloodlust in Parliament over Disha's gangrape.” These are a few examples of the headlines in the analyzed articles (Appendix A). When the national newspapers focus on celebrities' Twitter messages on rape, the physical impairment of the rape victim, connecting rape to political and rape to religious agendas, it stirs emotions in the readers and the public. The

rape story becomes a social agenda, religious rivalry, and political discussions of the blame game. Rape then becomes a national sensation through the media information deviating from the root causes of the crime. The rape reporting also moves away from the rapists to social norms, traditions, victims, and honor.

In the Kathua gangrape, Hindustan Times wrote, “the girl from the Bakarwal tribe, a nomadic community of Muslim cattle grazers, was abducted while grazing her family's horses near her home. She was held captive in a temple, sedated and raped repeatedly for a week before being bludgeoned to death” (2018). In the Chennai gangrape, Deccan Herald reported,

..the only mistake that the family, that hails from the north of the Vindhyas, seems to have made is in assuming that the little daughter was safe in the apartment complex where it lived. And when their elder daughter, who is studying in a college in a western Indian city, came home mid-July, their happiness knew no bounds as they were hoping to spend quality time with her after six months (Sivapriyan 2018).

In both these cases, by two different newspapers reporting this manner, creating a story with a personal touch of the victim's lives generates resonance with the general public. In both cases, the victims were children (young girls), which further connects the consumers with the news. Such reporting again shifts the focus from the rape and the rape as a national issue rooted in norms, practices, and beliefs to gruesome acts that some evil people acted towards innocent children. Sensationalism does not let the core issue touch ground. It deviates the reader from rape as a social issue to rape as a crime committed by gruesome men.

### Selective outrage

What causes outrage when reading about rape is an important question. The nine rape cases analyzed in this thesis is no less violent and wrong than the other, yet some of these rape cases get extensive coverage, while other less. Even if the media cover the cases, how the media

outlet covered these rape cases has different placing significant blaming attributes in some, less in others, and absolutely none in some (Tambe 2014).

As analyzed in this paper, such a selective outrage has differed along with the victims' differing socio-economic status. Based on the media coverage, all these nine cases are high profile cases. However, after the Nirbhaya case, the case that gained considerable attention and public outcry is the gangrape case of a 27-year-old veterinarian in Hyderabad. As Nagar (2016) explained, resonance is the reason behind it. The 27-year-old veterinarian was a middle-class woman who was neither poor nor of a lower caste, and as its caste hierarchy guides India, the majority of the public could connect with her suffering. In India, being a poor woman, belonging to a tribal community (indigenous minorities), or being a Dalit is worse.

The National Crime Records Bureau has highlighted that as of 2020, ten Dalit women, as per the available statistics, are raped every day (Rathore 2020). The crime and intensity of rape are measured through physical brutality and rarely through the victim's emotional turmoil. In the Hyderabad gangrape case, one of the headlines reported was "Special Court for Disha's gangrape-murder case." Such a headline places weightage on the individual gangrape and not on the prevalent systemic gender-based violence. Out of all the ten articles analyzed in this case, not a single article places the language of doubt on the perpetrator. Among all the other cases, this case was the only one where the perpetrators were killed in a police encounter, and the general public adhered to the encounter as justice delivered. Within a week of the gangrape, the Hindu covered the case with the headline "A timeline of Disha rape and murder case." After the 2012 Delhi gangrape, it was in this very case the victim was given the name "Disha," and the name heavily circulated in the news outlet and among the public. Similarly, the New Indian Express covered the case with the headlines "Hyderabad veterinary doctor murder: Accused forced



victim to drink alcohol before raping her" (Pinto 2019), details unrelated to the rape implying the victim was forced to drink, which she would not have otherwise indulged.

Indian media has been criticized for sensationalized news with its headlines and providing details irrelevant to the rape. When such problematic headlines get published, it creates a drift in rape cases, implying blame in some cases and a ring of resonance and ability for the reader to connect in the others. Other than the Hyderabad case, all the other cases either in their headlines or photo descriptions in the news content contained wordings of "alleged gangrape." This again places doubt on the occurrence of rape itself. Similarly, when the media produces news with "Woman alleges gang rape, "She was fined for having an affair with another man," it contributes toward victim blaming. Rather than reporting a crime, the media provides a plot story where a woman was fined for having an affair due to which she claimed that she was gangraped. Another headline, "Has Bengal govt fixed price of women's ijat at Rs 1 lakh?" rejects the act of crime and makes it a governmental agenda. When such headlines are produced it gives weightage to external factors- such as the woman's affair, or the government's inability to safeguard their women.

These reporting such as, "Badaun gangrape: Rape not confirmed on one of the girls, those arrested could be innocent, says UP DGP," are inflammatory remarks which produce victim blaming attitudes. It condemns victim's acts and places their behavior objectively; the underlying message produces victim-blaming frenzy, legitimizes rape culture, and creates a basis for selective outrage.

## MEDIA REPORTING STYLE

The National Crime Records Bureau of India reports an eight-fold increase in the number of rapes reported in the last four decades. This is a much higher increase compared to other serious crimes like murder, robbery, and kidnapping (Sharma 2019). In the 1970s, India saw renewed vigor in the national Indian Women's Movement, with sexual assault being the center of the same. India went through an Emergency Period wherein various parts of the Constitution were suspended (Kumar 1993). It was a time of mass forced sterilizations under the guise of urgent population control. It also was an era that saw increased reporting on sexual assault by Police. (Kumar 1993).

Agitation for reforms in sexual assault law was not just about legal change. It was about challenging social views. In her book, Sharma, "*The silence and the storm: Narratives of violence against women in India*", writes, "Sexual violence is about women, but it is also about men. It is about entitlement, about impunity, anger, revenge, and the desire to punish. It also arises and is enforced by the entrenched hierarchy" (2019: 17).

There is a need to overhaul the entire social contract in society. The gendering of spaces needs to be made to a minimum by ensuring respect and safety in all spaces. Barring some outliers, it is the social context that is creating rapists. It is neither the law in books nor law in action that is preventing deviants but rather the minds (Sinha 2014). Table 3 exhibits the words and phrases used in the nine cases by six different media outlets. When the media uses terms such as "alleged," "admits," "reveals," "indeed raped," "complained" in reporting sexual crimes, it suggests that the woman was responsible for being raped (Wolf 2002). The burden of proof falls upon the victim to prove that she was raped, and when the media repeatedly produce such

words, it adds the victim with stigma and judgment from the readers, adding to the prevalent rape culture in the Indian society.

Table 5: Language used in describing the victim

<b>Words and phrases describing the victim</b>	<b>Words and phrases describing victim's act</b>
"The 20-year-old girl was attacked while she was returning home from college"	"she 'voluntary' left"
"girl did not die of injuries due to the rape"	"This is a lesson, but it should not have come at the cost of a girl's honour."
"In the past, when photographers staged shoots, they never entered alone"	"The woman originally from Sikkim had gone to Delhi to meet a male friend. Afterwards, the two had a meal and drinks till midnight"
"The tribal girl's boyfriend has also been arrested"	"several contradictions and mismatches in the account given by the girl's family"
"The girl, who belonged to the nomadic Muslim Bakarwal community, was abducted"	"Her last call with her sister shows how unknown persons had stopped her from moving ahead on the pretext that she will be in trouble due to her scooter's flat tyre"
"The 28-year-old victim had come from Nepal to her sister's place for psychiatric treatment"	"Sometime between 1.30-2am on Saturday, as she walked home after being dropped off nearby, three men emerged and forced her",
"rape has not been confirmed on of one of the victims"	"discrepancies in the woman's initial statements"
A doctor said she was alive "only because she is a tough tribal girl"	
"The girl, who has a hearing disability, was allegedly sexually assaulted", "may have eloped"	

When the media writes in a manner that provides details of the victim, it reinforces victim-blaming mindsets (Dalton 2018). Details listed in table 5, such as "The tribal girl's boyfriend has also been arrested," "Sometime between 1.30-2am on Saturday, as she walked home after being dropped off nearby, three men emerged and forced her," implies that women who are who have boyfriends, or those who travel out at nighttime are women who face sexual violence and get raped. Such women are considered to lack morals. When the media uses language such as, "rape has not been confirmed on of one of the victims" and "several contradictions and mismatches in the account given by the girl's family," it allows the readers to be uncertain of the crime and conforms them to the norms of rape culture (Singh and Kumar 2019). It is argued that when the media skews its reporting towards the frame of victim blaming, it reduces victims from their trauma, establishes responsibility towards the victim, and legitimizes societal moral standards (Jolly 2016).

Rape is a gross violation of human rights, an act of coercion where the fault lies exclusively and only on the rapist. The media emphasis on phrases such as "she 'voluntary' left," "this is a lesson, but it should not have come at the cost of a girl's honor" and "the 20-year-old girl was attacked while she was returning home from college" removes the rapists from the equation. Within the framework of these descriptions, it implies that women should have been cautious and responsible. Journalistic words and language have power to shift narratives and reduce rape culture. Alternating usage of words (Table 3) from "alleged" to report, "confessed" to "described," "raped by men," to "men raped her" works towards shifting blame away from the victims.

## Unveiling the victim identity

The Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code clearly says rape victims or survivors of other sexual offenses prescribed by law cannot be identified without explicit permission. A violation could carry a fine and imprisonment of up to two years (Section 228A). Not only must the victim's name be concealed, but any detail that could make the identity of the rape victim public is also illegal. Even when the media does not reveal the victim's name, providing details of the victim by identifying their location, school, or workplace, through their parents or their patterns, the media still reveals the victim's identity.

The extensive media attention around the investigation spills over to the dissection of the victim's life. Despite laws in place to protect the identity of victims of sexual violence, Indian media shows little sensitivity or understanding of the rationale of identity protection. Even with the victim's name withheld, many reports highlight multiple personal details like address, place of work, which invariably lead to the victim being identified by people who know them (Fountain 2008). One of the most blatant disregards for victim privacy was observed in the Shakti Mills case.

A leading Mumbai newspaper thought little of sending a reporter to the building where the survivor lived. Privacy under Indian law, though recognized as a right by the certain judgement of the Supreme Court, have little statutory base (Rao 2014). The protection of identity of a sexual assault is protected under Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code, Disclosure of identity of the victim of certain offences etc. The provision prohibits the publication from details of a victim of sexual violence or providing information that could potentially lead to their identification. The provision recognizes the victim's right to come forward with their identity and the next of kin's right in case of the victim's death.

In the 2012 gangrape case, Jyoti Pandey's parents did come forward after her death with their desire for their daughter to be remembered and identified by her name (Suri 2013). However, it does not imply that the media can provide the victim's details without their consent (Rao 2013). The professional and ethical standards guiding journalists reporting rape victims are complex and involve various questions from the responsibility to report the truth to intentions and consider if the story will harm (Sacks, Ackerman and Shlosberg 2017).

### Victim blaming

Response to sexual violence changes drastically based on the victim and the way they are portrayed. Victims who are seen as blameless are seen as more legitimate victims implying that they did not contribute to their sexual assault and rape in any manner. However, those who are not seen as ideal victims or are portrayed in the light of suspicion by the media are believed to have brought it upon themselves. The Hindu in the Birbhum case wrote an article titled "Rape as Retribution" (Chattopadhyay 2014). In the content it stated that, "however, this is the first time that the punishment meted out has been a gang rape in the public view". Likewise, in the Badaun gangrape, the Indian Today ("Badaun Gangraoe..." 2014) wrote, "While addressing a press conference in Lucknow today, Uttar Pradesh DGP Anand Lal Banerjee said that according to available inputs rape of one of the victims was not confirmed and property could be one of the motives." When the media publishes such statements, it is directly contributing to victim blaming and shaming. Papendick and Bohner (2017) argue that the way victims are portrayed and the labels that are used to describe them influences how the readers perceive the victims.

In the Chennai gangrape, The Hindu placed suspicion on the rape of an eleven-year girl when she could not recollect details properly. It reported (R 2018) that the victim, her sisters,

"put forth different versions of the incident and contradicted each other on several occasions." India Today (2018), in the gangrape of a Sikkimese woman, wrote, "there were certain discrepancies in the woman's initial statements, and the police were working to verify and corroborate her claims. "In the same case, the Times of India explicitly stated that "the woman had gone to Connaught Place in Delhi to meet a friend. She met the male friend, who lives in Shahdara, around 5 pm on Friday. The two went to a movie show between 7.30 pm and 10 pm. Afterward, the two had a meal and drinks till midnight, when the woman took an Ola cab back to Gurgaon along with her friend" (Sharma 2017). These details were highlighted in all the major newspapers for this particular case.

When media writes such unwanted details and discrepancies in her report, it creates biases, conforms to rape culture, and takes the victim away from being an ideal victim. Laura Niemi, and Liane Young researched with 994 participants, where they concluded that one's moral values play a significant role in victim blaming behavior. They found that failing to empathize with the victims increased victim blaming attitudes. It also reported that if the media covered more about the perpetrator, focusing more on them and their crime rather than on the victims, the victim blaming decreases (Roberts 2018). It is concluded that when the media uses victim-blaming language, biased reporting influences the audience's perception. Emphasizing the victim and the irrelevant details to the crime put the victim at the center, and the media sensationalizes around them, deciding which news becomes more worthy of reporting.

## MEDIA, LANGUAGE, AND PUBLIC RELATING TO IT

In all the articles analyzed in this thesis, the media focused on the phrase "the girl/she was raped." While some articles wrote "the girl was gangraped by men ", the other portion inevitably mentioned the former phrase in some portions of the news. Using such a phrase focuses entirely on the victim, as it does not mention the rapists. The victim who is not at all responsible for the rape still bears responsibility for her plight. This is a common language practice in the Indian media. Such headlines forget to mention that a man in fact, committed the crime. Such language through the use of the passive shifts its focus from the rapist at the expense of the woman's agency and autonomy. With India's newspaper readership at around 300 million, print media is an undeniable player in shaping public opinion and discourse (Jolly 2016) and the problematic coverage of sexual assault by media emerges as an issue.

News publications in their choice of coverage lead public opinion on not just the crime but the image of the victim. In doing so, even if the writer had no intention, it affects the reader's perception and interpretation of the rape. In the Kamduni gangrape case, the Times of India quoted a woman from the village stating, "we visited the area and found it to be very unsafe. The nearest police outpost is more than 4km away. There is no streetlight in the entire area. After dark, the area becomes a den of anti-socials," (Express News 2013). Reporting focused on explicit details accompanied by graphic illustrations contributes to the idea that rape is a rare occurrence fueled by lust rather than power dynamics.

In the Kathua gangrape, the Hindustan Times wrote, "15-year-old accused in Kathua rape case is afraid of the dark, has violent past" (Shiv 2018). Investigators said the accused developed a hatred for the nomadic Muslims after getting into a fight. Police in the charge sheet said the boy and his friends repeatedly raped the girl over the next four days and allegedly called his



cousin from Meerut to "satisfy his lust." This again shifts the focus away from the actual crime and does not acknowledge the endemic culture of rape. It humanized and dehumanized the rapist, again implying that the rapist is someone evil, who turned so because of certain events that happened in the course of the time (DiBennardo 2018). To some extent, it even places in the mind of the readers that if this rapist had not been in a fight with the community, perhaps he would not have raped. Such reporting dismisses the gravity of the crime and the intersectionality of caste, gender, and sexual violence.

### The Chaste Woman

The divide between the public and private sphere has historically had women confide to private space. Even today, one can see the traces of the same in one's observation of public areas, particularly public spaces post-sunset. Street harassment in India is called eve-teasing. The term for it underplays the impact it has on normalizing attacks on women—the timing of when and where a woman is spotted influences how men react to her. Women outside after dark in India are seen as violating the traditional notion of the private sphere. In the Mumbai gangrape case analyzed in this thesis, Hindustan Times quoted Hema Malini (“Celebs horrified..” 2013) a Bollywood star) who stated,

Terrible things are happening. Places like the Shakti Mill compound should not be so accessible that they can be used by anyone to create mischief. This is a lesson, but it should not have come at the cost of a girl's honor. Women also need to be more careful. They should not take it so easy and go anywhere as you can get caught. In the Mahabharata, Draupadi was always helped by Lord Krishna. But we as a society are not as spiritually evolved, so women should not expect anyone to come to their rescue.

When such statements are published in one of the leading newspapers, quoting a famous star, men's liability is reduced, and the burden of the violence shifted to the woman's ill choices

to have left the private sphere. It also promotes the wrong idea that homes are always safe for women.

There is a forced connection of sexual violence and honor that is constantly drawn up in Indian societies. Often rape is called worse than death by Indian politicians which indicates a problematic approach as it attacks victims' self-worth. In the same case, Hindustan Times (Shah, Charul and Thaver 2013) wrote, "The savior was weaned away from her colleague after the accused told them they need to interrogate the latter as he was a suspect in a murder which took place there." When the girl's companion, a friend she works with, is labeled as "the savior" in a leading newspaper, it again attaches a woman's worth to that of a man neglecting her agency altogether. She is reduced to a helpless woman who needs the protection of a man to protect her chastity.

While English language newspapers are business-oriented and cater to the audience's need, it makes news coverage sensational. Even while covering sexual crimes, when biased news is distributed, it rejects consent and places blame on the victims. In doing so, it shifts away from the ones who commit the crime-the perpetrators and places unwanted details on the victim allowing the public to form opinions and perpetuate the rape culture (Jolly 2016). The media is at a moral binding to produce unbiased coverage adhering to the protocols of reporting. Media is the message as well as the medium, and with the deeply rooted issues of gender-based violence, it has the potential to focus on rape cases within the framework of the social context and sensationalize it on a case basis.

## DEHUMANIZING THE RAPIST: THE FIEND, THE MONSTER

India had witnessed gangrape cases much before the nation became modern-day India. Women have faced oppression and extreme violence during war, in the name of honor, in vengeance of one family, through religious turmoil, for rejection, and also for acceptance. As feminist intersectionality explains, Dalit women have further faced triple oppression of gender, class, and caste (Yengde, 2019). Media sensationalizes rape stories; it sells sexual violence.

In reporting sexual crimes, the media mainly focus on the victims' details and the crime committed against her. The media compares the perpetrators as "beasts," creating a gruesome and ghastly reflection of the crime. However, more so than not, the details of the victims are magnified in rape stories. While analyzing the articles for this thesis, it was found that the rapists were portrayed as men who were deviant. They were found in "mills" during the evening, late night at cars who abduct women who drink at night, abduct, rape and kill girls from a secluded place, or hatch a plan and wait for their target abduct her, rape and kill her. When the perpetrators are framed in this light, it implies that the perpetrators are not normal men. They are portrayed as men who lurk on their victims and pounce when the victims are found alone. Furthermore, in creating such a nuanced picture of the perpetrators, the media again shifts the blame on the victims, maintaining that it is upon women to care for their own bodies and their safety when such men are out there (Suri 2013). When such news reporting is paired with politicians' statements as "boys will be boys", it perpetuates rape culture.

When the media does not portray the perpetrator as a monster, it then erases the agency of men altogether from sexual violence and magnifies the details of the victims. With the extreme portrayal of the perpetrators and absolutely no focus on them, the media creates a culture that normalizes aggressive masculine behavior. The media need to report sensibly in rape

cases. In the Mumbai case, The Times of India wrote (Ali 2013), "At least two of the suspects—Vijay Jadhav and Siraj Khan—were seen trembling." When such statements are published to the public the factor of "fear" resonates with the public. It sensationalizes the news and makes the perpetrator have a conscience, which again negatively impacts the victim. It sends the message that had she not been in that secluded area at that time; the monster in these two would not have come out. In her analysis (2016) of the Indian press, Jolly focuses that when the media focuses on stranger rapes and the horror of the rape cases, the systemic issue of gender-based violence does not get addressed. Neha Dixit, a freelance journalist, specializing in sexual violence, agrees with this shift in focus.

Likewise, when the Express News wrote, "Kamduni: Eight charged with gangrape, not murder," the rapists became persons who were not as gruesome as the others, creating an almost sympathetic onlook towards them, which again shifts the focus from them as rapists to them being nonkillers. The media narratives on gang rape cases are crucial towards addressing problems rooted in structural and patriarchal conditionings (Sinha 2014).

## CASTE AND REPORTING

Indian private media is keen to mirror the stories of the demography they see as their target audience. Middle or upper-class urbanites are the main groups catered by private media ads and are primarily reported. Stories from rural or tribal India find little voice in Indian media. As urban India likes to imagine itself casteless, Indian media highlights caste only in Dalit involvement cases (Teltumbde 20018). The common omission of caste only furthers Khan's observation that low class and caste stories are underrepresented in the Indian press. (Drache and Velagic 2013). Ashok Das, a Dalit activist writes (2019),

'A Brahmin woman raped' or 'A Rajput woman raped', I often wonder why I don't read such headlines in newspapers. But, every other day, I come across this headline: 'Dalit woman raped'. Is it that only Dalit women are victims of rape? No. Why then, in case of rape of a Dalit woman, her community is identified?"

Large Indian Private media houses have little or no direct presence outside semi-urban cities. Thus, geographic location of the victim influences reporting extensively. The plight and realities of rural and Dalit India are not captured correctly in dominant media despite most of the Indian population belonging to rural areas (Dutta 2013). Ambedkar, the father of the Indian Constitution, argues that control of women is core to the caste system as it requires socially enforced strict endogamy to survive. He notes, "caste is endogamy and endogamy is caste." Women are seen as the vassal of ensuring purity of bloodline and also ensuring customs survive. Thus, women empowerment stands as a challenge to caste hegemony (Ambedkar 2002).

South Asian patriarchy is unique as it is 'Brahmanical Patriarchy' (Chakravarti 1993). The focus is not just maintaining male privilege but also caste pecking order. Though not legally binding, the Brahminical text of Manusmriti continues to influence the social structure in India (Patel 2013). Caste and gender discrimination find generous support in the Manusmriti, and criticism of the text is met with the threat of violence from ultra-Hindu right-wing supporters in India. In the Kathua gangrape, the Indian Express published that the Crime Branch had found that the gangrape and murder of the girl was a conspiracy by the Hindus to force the tribal Bakherwalas out of the area as that village had 13 Brahmins, and they wanted the area to be free of other castes (Sharma 2018).

When a Dalit woman is raped, the debate on rape always focuses on her identity as a Dalit. It either turns into a blame game where the political parties point fingers at each other, where either of the parties believe it to be a conspiracy by the other as in the case of Birbhum gangrape, or the case is looked through different angles- that of honor rape and killing as in the

Badaun gangrape. Rarely does rapes on Dalit women are contested as social oppression and caste class violence. In the gangrape cases where the victims were of the lower caste, the headlines generated were- "Gang rape ordered by the council," "Tribal woman's gang rape a social malaise," "Kangaroo court gang rapes woman for an affair," "Rape as retribution," "Badaun Dalit girls gangrape and murder case." When "Dalit" is associated with the victim's identity, the rape fails to spark public outcry as the average middle-class Indian public does not associate these identities with themselves.

In the 2012 gangrape case, the victim was one of the 69 victims of the day (Yengde, 2019), yet that was one case which shook the society and brought legal changes in India. While the gangrape was brutal, there have been other gangrape cases equally as brutal. Within these cases, the Dalit girls who were hanged by the mango tree, the girl who was raped over the period by over a dozen men, the Rohtak gangrape of a Nepali woman whose body was intruded with foreign objects, and the Kathua gangrape of an eight-year-old were all equally inhumane. However, these cases did not gain the same coverage, except the Hyderabad gangrape, where again the woman was a middle-class aspiring woman, the reflection of many urban middle-class women of India.

As the Hindustan Times reported in the Kathua rape case, a Hindu village woman reportedly stated that "The killers would be fools to hide a girl in there. At least a dozen devotees visit the temple every morning and evening". For us, the temple is like Mata Vaishno Devi shrine. No one would dare defy our deity by committing such a crime there" (Shiv 2018). In the Badaun gangrape case, the distressed father of the victim, when reported his daughter's disappearance at the police station, the first he was asked was, "What is your caste?" (Kapoor 2015). He was later ridiculed for being a lower caste and was refused to assist him.

Caste in India has historically determined where a person would live, whom they would marry, and what they would work, creating division through the varna system (Fontanella- Khan 2014). India created hierarchy and seclusion through scriptures in the past and continues to practice inequalities through created hierarchy. Louis Dumont (Barnett, Fruzzetti and Ostor 1976) explains India's caste dynamics through a. ritualistic division of pure and impure, and b. Power dynamics (access to power).

Dominant groups justify their power privilege and access to resources being higher in the hierarchy. The very dominant groups then paint the Dalit and the lower caste people as those who deserve to be in the lower strata. They perpetuate violence and force themselves on Dalit women, justifying their acts as keeping Dalit women in line based on their status and labeling Dalit women as promiscuous. Hence the violence against Dalit women is then argued to keep their promiscuity in check (Barnett, Fruzzetti and Ostor 1976). The Badaun case and the Birbhum case both support Dumont's argument on how caste hierarchy creates a platform to create perpetual sexual violence against Dalit women's bodies.

### Race and reporting

Women from racially distinct Northeast face added racial bias and harassment. They are often perceived as prostitutes or "loose women". Victims from the Northeast are often targeted due to their gender as well as race. They also find little sympathy in law enforcement. People from Northeast are often denied housing in many Indian metropolitans. This has led to specific areas in cities to be turned to Northeast ghettos.

In the analysis of the Sikkim gangrape case's news articles, irrelevant details of the victim were provided in several articles. In table 3, the statement "the woman originally from Sikkim

had gone to Delhi to meet a male friend. Afterwards, the two had a meal and drinks till midnight" describes how the girl from Sikkim the Northeast was portrayed in a gangrape. In this case, she reported being abducted post-midnight, but all the articles examined for this rape case mentioned her entire activity before the rape, from watching tv to having had some drinks with a male friend, which other than bringing her to a negative light, does nothing for her case. Such statements add to victim-blaming as India's stereotype remains that girls drinking and going out late at night cause rape to occur.

Rape is a tool for maintaining power in India. There are instances of rapes being celebrated in India as they are seen by the dominant group as a collective punishment for the weaker group, as in the Birbhum case where the woman was ordered to be gangraped by the Kangaroo court. Anand Teltumbde, in his book, "*Khairlanji. A Strange and Bitter Crop*" writes, "Rape is not a private affair- in Khairlanji, it becomes a celebratory spectacle. Atrocities involve intricate and devious planning so that they become a 'lesson' for the entire Dalit community" (2008: 179).



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Media is key to how rape is defined and perceived by the readers. It shapes perceptions around sexual violence and separates victims and perpetrators. Mainstream media has power; it can impose a hierarchy that frames the legitimacy of rape and victims. News coverage through their language within their texts, headlines, images, and contents sends messages to the consumers. While it is true that no language can be neutral, the media has control to use correct words in reporting rape, cases without sensationalizing them. Media produces contents through different frames; hence it is crucial that the media personnel be informed about the implications of their framings. This study can be used for media guidelines assisting the practitioners on the direct effects of media framing in shaping the public perception. In doing so, the media house would be taking accountability for their actions, adhere to the protocols of informed reporting and become an unbiased source of information production. A just and moral reporting creates a possible interaction between the published issue and the audience (Vu, H.T. *et al* 2019), leading to public participation in addressing the societal issues at large.

In this study, I have established that sexual violence and rape have been used systematically and historically against women in the name of shame, honor and promiscuity in India. Rape has been used as a tool to control women's bodies and for men to lust over them. (Gopal 2012). This research examined the media narratives and studied the influence of the media in shaping public perception. The study used framing analysis and intersectionality framework resulting in the finding that the Indian media's treatment towards reporting of gang rape differed significantly with the socio-economic status of the victims. The literature provides

with empirical studies that show the interlink between the public opinion and the mode of presentation in the media outlet.

We have established that the media uses suggestive language in reporting, and this method of reporting adds to patriarchal discourse (Banerjee 2017). The framing analysis explained that the narratives the media uses to cover a crime has a bearing upon how the readers perceive those crimes. Media contributes to creating sensationalism by centering case-based events rather than crime-based ones. While the framing theory provided perspective to how the media constructed its contents, it also focused on the fact that the media in this study failed to acknowledge the problem with selective framing. Literature examined in study also showed the danger with selective reporting and public perception leading to the victim blaming attitude. Being aware that the media framing contributes to shaping perceptions and create awareness, it should be done in accordance with the media guidelines and without bias.

## EXAMINING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study critically analyzed each research question and established that the Indian media produced news on rape cases, where the context and the mode of the news coverage varied significantly along with the victim's social location (Glover 2017). There is a skewed relationship between the status of the victim and the information published by the media. In analyzing the rape cases, it was found that the media reporting was significantly different in rape cases of Dalit women and tribal communities.

In the recent years, the India media has provided extensive attention to rape cases. Even with these intensified rape reporting, the media attempts to invoke emotional response from the readers by sensationalizing violent rape cases. The study has established that when reporting

cases of middle class, educated women, the media focused on the victim's qualification and the innocence of the woman. This construction was witnessed in Nirbhaya case, Mumbai case and the Chennai case, where the women were from middle class families, and resonated with the Indian public. However, the rape of marginalized women is published qualitatively different. In these cases, there is atrocity borne from the social hierarchy witnessed through the imbalance in media reporting along with the language of doubt placed around these rape cases. The rape narratives in the case of marginalized women almost make retribution look okay. Even when these victims gain media coverage, it is done so to reveal the governmental shortcomings.

The marginalized women gain public attention only when their rape ends with their murder and this is the reason why even when ten Dalit women get raped each day, only some cases gain media attention, and most which have ended in murder (Rao 2013). The media reporting however, in any of the cases does not talk about the prevalent systemic oppression creating and sustaining this rape culture.

Through its findings, the study also established that the media used different language for victims to create sensationalism, with a commonality in all the reporting of rape cases; that is, the onus of rape always falls on the victim. When media attaches rape within a particular time of the day, the location of the crime, and personal enmity between the victim and the perpetrator, it establishes some blame on the victim. When the media provides details of the victim, it reinforces victim-blaming mindsets (Dalton 2018). Similarly, with the media focus on the detailed graphics of the crime rather than addressing the systemic and the patriarchal problems around masculinity and rape culture, it promotes rape culture. Such details have no bearing with the rape case.

The discourse around individual bodily autonomy significantly lacks in Indian debates. It is more about grabbing eyeballs than about grabbing discussion. The rape reporting also moves away from the rapists towards focusing on social norms, traditions, victims, and honor. Sensationalism does not let the core issue touch ground. It deviates the reader from rape as a social issue to rape as a crime committed by gruesome men. There is an immediate need to address these concerns within the media house and among the public relations personnel. There is an urgency to discuss and share grounds on framing analysis, especially in cases of rape and sexual abuse, and it is a potential area for future research.

After the 2012 gangrape case, the Justice Verma Committee recommended changes in the legal system. They also produced their findings in a 600-page report stating the root cause of the violence against women as the patriarchal mindset that places doubt on the victim, assassin's victim's character and is guided through moral policing. This study has found that while the rape articles wrote about women's safety, there was no mention of how those safety measures would be carried. The government actions to tackle gender-based violence were not reported, and neither was gangrape attributed to the failed system (Sharma and Bazilli 2014). The questions of masculinity concerns of power, hierarchical oppression was entirely out of focus. The patterns of rape were rooted in stereotypes and rape myths. The gruesome acts of violence were provided in detail, whereas violence against women was not situated in otherwise gendered social formation.

Savita, a Dalit activist in a publication of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, reported (Human Rights Council 2014) that there was no dignity for Dalit women. She added that the reporting of crime against Dalit and non-Dalit women differed because of the caste oppression. In most rape cases, the victim's details are laid out. Even though the victim's name is not specified, the other specifications attached to her make it easy to locate the identity of the

victim. In Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code, the press is prohibited from revealing the victim's and her family's personal information. Breaking this law amounts to a fine and could lead up to imprisonment (Jolly 2016). However, the victim's details are provided by the media, just not the name. In this study, when it is a Dalit woman, the media has made sure to mention her caste, while in no other case, the caste of the victim has been identified.

Through this study, I examined my research questions, which conclude that the Indian media creates a biased reporting on gangrape cases, sensationalizing certain cases more than the other. It also creates selective outrage among the public by highlighting some crimes more than the others. This selection bias is based on the reporter's own biases and their social location. The media reporting also fails to acknowledge the intersectionality of the class, caste, and gender in rape cases of marginalized and Dalit women. One of the problematic media reporting is that the media focuses mostly on those rape cases with extreme violence. The media either provides the victim's innocence or the gory details of the crime. In doing either of these, the media continues to set precedents that only violent rape crimes are actual rape. It diminishes pre-mediated rape cases, nonviolent rape cases, and reduces rape within a relationship as insignificant.

Even when the media addressed the perpetrator, and shifted the blame upon the rapists, it has done so by highlighting the rapists as beasts. Media creates the image of inhumane men, and rapists as monsters. This narrative is problematic because it does not address the rape problem as a social existence, but rather a “monster” problem. It distinguishes between the normal men, and the men who rape. This again removes the issue of sexual violence and creates “some problematic men” agenda. When the media writes in this setting it enforces stereotype and suggest that only certain type of men are harmful and potential rapists, and this unconsciously feeds into the readers’ minds. This understanding them becomes harmful and damaging as it

rejects to address the inherent issue with the systematic oppression of women. It is imperative to understand that while rape is a crime committed by a person against another person, it also is a byproduct of deeply rooted patriarchal thinking and norms (Mendes 2015). It is a result of hierarchical oppression, and it bears its fruition on the bodies of women.

## LIMITATIONS

My study is limited in understanding the influence of media reporting through their narratives due to my sample size. While I have focused on cases and victims with different social standing, because of the lack of representation in my analysis of the rape cases, it is difficult to establish the framework of gender violence within the Indian society. My study is also limited in that I have only Dalit and tribal girls as marginalized groups in these gangrape cases.

I focused my study on national media outlets. I focused on the English print media because of my inability to understand Indian regional languages. This again limits my study in analyzing the reporting of gangrape cases in the regional print media. My focus in the study was on the media narratives on gangrape cases and the media writings on the rape victims. Another limitation of this study is that due to my focus on the rape victims, I could not perform an in-depth analysis of the media writings about the perpetrators. While this study provides an examination of the biased media reporting, there is a need for more research in this area, focusing on rape, class, and caste.

The study needs a larger context and setting to understand implications of media reporting in shaping the public perception in rape cases. An empirical study by interviewing regular readers of the Indian media would be key in understanding how they perceive gangrape rape cases in relation to class and caste. I have not examined the media reporting in relation to

urban and rural setting. Studying the two associations would provide an in-depth study of the Indian society, their beliefs and attitudes towards rape culture. It would also provide more clarity in terms of the media coverage on rape cases. The framing analysis would best explain the rhetoric of the media writings, and it would make an interesting study to examine if the rape cases would be addressed differently.

The National Crime Records Bureau of India reports an eight-fold increase in the number of rapes reported in the last four decades. This is a much higher increase compared to other serious crimes (Sharma 2019). There is a need to overhaul the entire social contract in society. The gendering of spaces needs to be made to a minimum by ensuring respect and safety in all spaces. Rape is a gross violation of human rights, an act of coercion where the fault lies exclusively and only on the rapist. Men rape, yet news publish that women were raped. Despite knowing this, being aware of the fact that rape is never a victim's fault, the media continues to emphasize the victim, be it through positive headlines or negative, the age of the victim or through her class, by putting her fight on the pedestal or her shame at the bottom. The media continues to write about the victim, word the ills against her but not about the acts of the perpetrator. Journalistic words and language have power to shift narratives and reduce rape culture and it is time the media take ownership, sensationalize less and report more.

The identity of a victim is protected under Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code, Disclosure of identity of the victim of certain offences etc. The provision prohibits the publication from providing details of victim of sexual violence or providing information that could potentially lead to their identification. The provision recognizes the victim's right to come forward with their identity and the next of kin's right only in case of the victim's death.

Through this thesis, I urge that the Press Council of India should regulate the media reporting on sexual violence rigorously. The media should be held accountable for producing unwanted details and sensational news that have no bearing with the cases. The media narratives are important as it is the only medium that influences the public to the extent and shapes their perception (Johnson 1999)—in this context, labeling some victims as more worthy of national coverage while others do not even as real victims become problematic (Nagar 2016).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study established a need for the media to report sexual crimes sensibly, sensitively, and as an inherently social construct issue rather than a violent episode of gangrape. I provide with ten specific recommendations that the media outlets should possibly adhere to, in the following:

- A. The media should not release the name of the victim on its own, and neither photograph the victim or relevant parties to the case, without their consent (NCJRS).
- B. The images that portray rape as lust towards women, with half-clad, distressed women should not be illustrated. Such illustrations take away the gravity of such crimes.
- C. Rape cases that are justified for coverage should be reported accordingly, and such a narrative should not focus on women's identities as their caste or class or on their whereabouts.
- D. The reporting should adhere to the Norms of Journalistic Conducts (Rao 2014), the reporting code of ethics.
- E. While sexual violence is a crime, it should be discussed and reported as a gender issue with the intersectionality of caste and class (Teltumbde 2008).



F. The attribute of the blame should not fall upon the victim. It is time we shift the focus from the victims to the perpetrators, addressing rape as a social problem, and not as a stranger danger phenomenon.

G. The editors and the reporters should be trained to report on crimes of sexual violence.

Training on sensitivity and sensationalism should be a must, with a detailed account of the influence that media sets on the readers (Rao 2013).

F. Agencies that work closely with victims, the law enforcement, and advocacy and crisis intervention programs should provide educational forums to media journalists on the effects of rape and trauma.

G. The journalists should consider trauma informed care in reporting rape cases, and while covering interviews with victims or their family members.

H. The state and the media should limit access of information to the public about vulnerable victims (NCJRS).

I. Reporters need to actively listen and report without their own personal biases. Rather than focusing on speculations, the reporters should corroborate, do their research and then report a rape crime.

J. The media house should provide resource for its representatives covering sexual crime to cope with trauma that comes with reporting sexual crimes. In doing so, the journalists would be sensitive while covering the cases as well better informed about the effects of trauma and abuse.

These recommendations lay a foundation for journalistic reporting. Victims of sexual crime suffer from long term psychological problems, and media probing and revealing the information right after the incident does more damage than help to the victims. The general public form opinion and perception in accordance with the story that the media publishes.

Therefore, it is essential that the media publications adopt guidelines with journalistic principles and perform ethical coverage. In doing so, it creates a tool for future journalists and make way for trained, skilled and trauma informed professionals.

It is time for allyship, to fight oppression, and change the institutional practices of legitimizing patriarchy and power dynamics that makes one sex subservient to the other. This study contributes to academic research and questions the media on its accountability in reporting rape cases. It addresses the urgency to change the media practices in its rape reportage and recommends guidelines that move towards progressivism and a fair, unbiased reporting, untouched by the social hierarchy.

Sexual violence exists, is one fact, and other is that it is perpetuated by men, by those who believe to be in power- either within the social hierarchy or by simply existing as a man. Gender-based violence is an act of terrorism, and rape, a war on the bodies on women. Violence against women is that social truth around which the media, our economy and politics revolve and thrive. Take any study, any data or facts on violence, it will reiterate this truth. This study does the same, it exposes the gender-based lacunae in our society and draws a close analysis of the media as a tool for social perception and influence. This study poses the potential to shape and reshape social power relations and their impact on gender-based violence.

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## APPENDIX

## ARCHIVES OF ARTICLES WITH THEMES AND/OR FOCUS WORD

Date	Article Title	News Media	Case	Focus words/ theme
June 16, 2013	Intellectuals offer helping hand to family of the gangrape-murder victim	Times of India	Kamduni	Sensationalism: rich help the poor.
Sep 11, 2013	Kamduni: Eight charged with gang rape, not murder	Indian Express	Kamduni	“charges framed against them”
June 25, 2013	Words of solace from a gang rape victim to the mother of another	The Hindu	Kamduni	Sympathetic approach focusses on victim as a college student.
June 19, 2013	Mamata was scared to enter gang rape victim’s village	The Hindu	Kamduni	Rape set for a political agenda
Aug 21, 2013	Solar lights on Kamduni roads	Times of India	Kamduni	“women fear to step out after sunset”
June 18, 2013	Shut up, Didi tells Barasat rape protesters	Hindustan Times	Kamduni	Politicized rape into conspiracy theories
June 20, 2013	Rapes are a common affair in Bengal, admits minister	Hindustan Times	Kamduni	Blame shifts from the rapists
June 19, 2013	To civil society	Times of India	Kamduni	Political conspiracy
June 17, 2013	Pro-naxalite bodies add fuel to rape	Hindustan Times	Kamduni	Political rally
Aug 02, 2013	Senior Maoist leader held in Kolkata	Deccan Herald	Kamduni	Unwanted details
August 23, 2013	5 who raped photojournalist arrested	Hindustan Times	Shakti Mill	The before and after the rape details

Sep 1, 2013	6 pm At Shakti Mills	Indian Express	Shakti Mill	Sensationalizing the report of rape
Aug 24, 2013	Celebs horrified over Mumbai gang rape	Hindustan Times	Shakti Mill	Sensationalism: Celebrities comments and tweets
August 30, 2013	Don't go out alone, Hema Malini tells women	Times of India	Shakti Mill	Victim Blaming: Women to protect by staying indoor
August 24, 2013	Mill a den of drug addicts, gambling	Indian Express	Shakti Mill	Such is a "No" place for woman
Aug 29, 2013	Mumbai gang -rape case: Rape survivor leaves	Times of India	Shakti Mill	"dignity and courage"
Aug 27, 2013	Mumbai gang rape: Unguarded mill land, godowns	Hindustan Times	Shakti Mill	State action and measures for abandoned places
August 30, 2013	No woman's land	Indian Express	Shakti Mill	Implying victim blaming, stating "A place I would not loiter in"
August 25, 2013	Pre-planned attack? Survivor had visited mill	Hindustan Times	Shakti Mill	Man as a savior
August 24, 2013	Shakti Mills: A 'freedom' it offers no more	Indian Express	Shakti Mill	Equating gangrape and loss of freedom to video shoot freely in city
Oct 18, 2013	Victim 'faints' in court during Mumbai gang rape hearing	Indian Express	Shakti Mill	Intimate details of the victim's feelings and act of crime
Aug 24, 2013	Youth held from slum, names 4 others	Times of India	Shakti Mill	Crime details
Jan 24, 2014	Gang rape ordered by council	Deccan Herald	Birbhum	Misleading headlines
Jan 23, 2014	Woman alleges gang rape	The Hindu	Birbhum	A Woman's shame
Jan 24, 2014	Tribals support court to the hilt	Hindustan Times	Birbhum	Victim blaming
Jan 24, 2014	Tribal woman's gang rape a social malaise	Times of India	Birbhum	Dehumanizing the rapists
Jan 25, 2014	Tribal leaders take to television to clear name	Hindustan Times	Birbhum	Shift of focus: from rape to glorifying customary practices

Jan 24, 2014	Tribal girl gang raped by members of kangaroo	Times of India	Birbhum	Glorifying the bravery of the victim
Jan 26, 2014	Parties condemn Birbhum gang -rape	The Hindu	Birbhum	Politics of blame: political parties
Jan 25, 2014	On panchayat order, 20-year-old raped by 12 men	Hindustan Times	Birbhum	From rape to politics
Feb 14, 2014	Kangaroo court gang rapes woman for affair	Times of India	Birbhum	Glorifying victim's bravery
Jan 25, 2014	Has Bengal govt fixed price of women's ijat at Rs 1 lakh?	Indian Express	Birbhum	Blame within the political
Jan 28, 2014	Govt directs SPs to stop kangaroo courts	Indian Express	Birbhum	Victim blaming-relationship, a taboo
Feb 01, 2014	Birbhum gang-rape victim leaves hospital	The Hindu	Birbhum	Details about whereabouts
Feb 15, 2014	SC seeks WB govt action in Birbhum gang-rape case	Deccan Herald	Birbhum	Government accountability
Feb 28	Rape as retribution	The Hindu	Birbhum	Victim blaming
June 02, 2014	Badaun gangrape and murder: How the incident unfolded	Indian Express	Badaun	Timeline and highlight on "dalit" sisters
June 02, 2014	Two admit to Badaun gang-rape	Deccan Herald	Badaun	Night unsafe for women
May 31, 2014	Badaun gangrape more gruesome than Dec 16 incident: Family	Deccan Herald	Badaun	Emphasis on "dalit" sisters
June 05, 2014	Badaun gang-rape case: Only 5 of 12 suspects held	Hindustan Times	Badaun	Details of hanging
May 31, 2014	Badaun gang-rape case: 5 main accused arrested, two still at large	Hindustan Times	Badaun	Story of family members
June 02, 2014	Two accused confess to crime in Badaun rape case	Hindustan Times	Badaun	Governmental bodies intervening
June 04, 2014	Badaun gang-rape accused enjoy support	Hindustan Times	Badaun	The class clash

	from police, say villagers			
June 07, 2014	Badaun gangrape: Rape not confirmed on one of the girls, those arrested could be innocent, says UP DGP	Indian Express	Badaun	Conspiracy theories
June 02, 2014	Badaun gangrape: UN condemns horrific crime against two Dalit teenaged girls in UP	Deccan Herald	Badaun	Focus on legal reforms
Sep 02, 2014	Badaun dalit girls gangrape and murder case	Indian Express	Badaun	Emphasis on “dalit” sisters
Feb 09, 2015	Rohtak rape, murder case: Haryana police arrests 8 accused	Indian Express	Rohtak	“appear to be criminals”, the victim’s background and crime details.
Feb 12, 2015	2015 Rohtak gangrape-murder case	Indian Express	Rohtak	Crime details
Feb 10, 2015	Nepali woman rape and murder case	India Today	Rohtak	Unwanted details of the victim.
Feb 08, 2015	Close to cracking Rohtak rape case: Cops	Times of India	Rohtak	Probable rapists being criminal- dehumanizing the perpetrator.
Feb 12, 2015	Rohtak gangrape accused confess they hit woman with bricks after raping her	Indian Today	Rohtak	“gangrape and murder of the 28-year-old mentally-challenged woman”- physical state of the victim emphasized
Feb 13, 2015	International media calls gang rape, murder 'horrific'	Times of India	Rohtak	Comparison to the Nirbhaya case- One rape and murder becomes the point of reference for barbarity
Feb 09, 2015	Haryana: Woman raped, blades found in body	Deccan Herald	Rohtak	
Feb 09, 2015	Rohtak: 8 men arrested for rape and	The Hindustan Times	Rohtak	“men took turns raping the hapless woman”

	murder of Nepalese woman			
Feb 07, 2015	Woman raped, brutalized and murdered in Rohtak	Times of India	Rohtak	Body injuries details
Feb 09, 2015	Rohtak rape: Victim thrown off a 7ft-high-wall, says forensic team	Indian Express	Rohtak	Crime details
May 15, 2017	Three men kidnap woman, rape her in vehicle	Times of India	Sikkim	Irrelevant details of her day
May 16, 2017	Sikkimese Woman Gangraped In Moving Car In Gurgaon	India Today	Sikkim	Irrelevant details of the day- movie and drinks
May 16, 2017	Gurgaon: 26-year-old woman gang-raped in moving car, thrown out in Delhi	Hindustan Times	Sikkim	Victim blaming
May 14, 2017	Woman gang-raped in moving car in Gurugram	Times of India	Sikkim	Victim blaming, unwanted details, sensationalizing adding Nirbhaya case
May 20, 2017	Woman gangraped for hours in moving car	India Today	Sikkim	Victim blaming- uncertain of victim's details
May 15, 2017	Gurgaon: 26-year-old 'gangraped' in moving car, dumped in Delhi	The Indian Express	Sikkim	Unwanted details of her afternoon
May 15, 2017	Woman from Northeast gang-raped in moving car in Gurgaon	Indian Today	Sikkim	Racial Bias emphasizing "Northeast" and providing unwanted details
May 16, 2017	Sikkimese woman abducted and raped for 6 hours in a car, taken to remote place in Delhi	Times of India	Sikkim	Unnecessary details
Aug 01, 2018	Gang rape of 11-year-old: Family wants	Times of India	Chennai	"Hearing impaired"- physical detail of the



	death penalty for all 17 accused men			victim, and family victimised
July 19, 2018	Chennai Police intensifies probe in gangrape case involving 11-year-old girl	India Today	Chennai	A child's hand (image). Mentions of treatment provided to the victims.
July 17, 2018	Hearing-impaired 11-year-old raped for months in Chennai, 17 arrested	Hindustan Times	Chennai	Details of the start of crime Focus on this as a "special case"
July 21, 2018	Panel of experts reexamines 11-year-old rape survivor in Chennai	The Hindu	Chennai	Counselling and treatments.
Sep 06, 2018	11-year-old rape	Decan Herald	Chennai	Focus on the victim being vulnerable "hearing impaired"
July 18, 2018	17 held for sexual assault on 11-year-old	The Hindu	Chennai	Details of the crime
Aug 12, 2018	Child rape in Chennai that was a horror of horrors	Deccan Herald	Chennai	Rape exceptionalism
Jul 18, 2018	Chennai rape: 66-year-old lift operator was the first to allegedly rape 11-year-old girl	Hindustan Times	Chennai	Details of crime, of the victim's family
Jul 18, 2018	Chennai rape: 17 accused filmed each other raping the child	Hindustan Times	Chennai	Details of the crime
Sep 08, 2018	11-year-old rape accused detained under Goondas Act	Deccan Herald	Chennai	Legal details
April 13, 2018	My wife doesn't know about our daughter's torture, says Kathua rape victim's father	Hindustan Times	Kathua	Crime details, political and social unrest
April 14, 2018	Kathua rape case: Not possible to hide the girl in temple, say village women	Hindustan Times	Kathua	Disbelief of rape inside the temple

April 13, 2018	Kathua rape, murder case — A father’s anguish: ‘She did not know right from left... what Hindu, Muslim?’	The Indian Express	Kathua	Sensationalism- details beyond the crime, personal details of the family
April 17, 2018	Kathua rape-murder case: Tests confirm victim held in prayer hall, was sedated	The Indian Express	Kathua	Implying uncertain of the crime: This report writes “allegedly raped” and the report is about the forensic details, yet the use of “allegedly”
April 17, 2018	Kathua chargesheet: In J-K child gangrape, rituals, a chilling invite and a police cover-up	The Indian Express	Kathua	Sensationalism: Details of communal drift
April 14, 2018	15-year-old accused in Kathua rape case is afraid of the dark, has violent past	Hindustan Times	Kathua	Portraying the accused as disturbed
May 29, 2018	Across India, horror turns to outrage at gang rape and murder of 8-year-old Kathua girl	Times of India	Kathua	Politicians’ statements
June 30, 2018	Kathua gangrape victim’s lawyer: Being called anti-Hindu, I can be raped or killed	The Indian Express	Kathua	Rape case into religious and political agenda
April 11, 2018	J-K: Eight-year-old Kathua tribal girl raped again before being stoned to death, reveals chargesheet	The Indian Express	Kathua	Sensationalism: Before and after details of the crime
March 11, 2018	Kathua girl was raped, killed to force nomads out, finds probe	The Indian Express	Kathua	Rape and murder because of enmity and hatred
Dec 04, 2019	Hyderabad vet rape and murder	Times of India	Hyderabad	Rage over the gangrape and murder

Nov 30, 2019	Hyderabad veterinary doctor murder: Accused forced victim to drink alcohol before raping her,	The Indian Express	Hyderabad	Portraying victim as a helpless woman
Dec 01, 2019	Rishi Kapoor, Farhan Akhtar call for timely execution of capital punishment for rape convicts	The Indian Express	Hyderabad	Sensationalism- Media celebrities comments highlighted on gangrape and murder reporting
Dec 04, 2019	Killers gained Hyderabad veterinary doctor's confidence before murdering her?	The Indian Express	Hyderabad	Photograph, blurred face, with saree and necklace.
Dec 01, 2019	Hyderabad veterinarian rape and murder	The Hindu	Hyderabad	Fast tract court set up details
Dec 29, 2019	Year-ender 2019: The rape and murder that shook a nation	Times of India	Hyderabad	Crime details
Dec 06, 2019	A timeline of Disha rape and murder case	The Hindu	Hyderabad	Name assigned by the media
Dec 18, 2019	Hyderabad rape & murder: Rapists 'confessed' to assaulting, burning 9 others	Times of India	Hyderabad	“assaulted many women, including prostitutes and transgenders”
Dec 05, 2019	Special Court for Disha's gangrape-murder case	Deccan Herald	Hyderabad	Special court for speedy trail.
Dec 03, 2019	Bloodlust in Parliament over Disha's gang-rape	Deccan Herald	Hyderabad	Uproar from the politicians

## VITA

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## Education

Master of Arts (August 2018-present) in Applied Sociology at Old Dominion University

Bachelor of Arts (May 2017) in Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies at University of  
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## Relevant Experience

*Volunteer, Crisis Intervention Counselor, YWCA, Norfolk, Virginia, November 2020-Present*

*Graduate Administrative Assistant, Old Dominion University, Women's Center, Norfolk  
Virginia, August 2018-August 2020*

*Assistant Researcher, Himal Innovative Developmental and Research Pvt., Kathmandu, Nepal  
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