

CHAPTER 7

MAINSTREAMING GENDER, ENDANGERED, UNGENDERED? ANALYSIS OF MEDIA REPORTS OF THE 2012 CASE OF RAPE IN INDIA*

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few years, the electronic media, as represented by the internet version of print media and independent blogs of journalists, has become a major player in the coverage of incidents related to violence against women. While this has brought forward issues of violence and specifically rape prominently into the public sphere, the media portrayal of women has often been as victims or victims who are somehow responsible for the violence against them. Such portrayal has been repeatedly challenged by feminists. Using data from 572 national and international English media reports for a six-month period (from December 2012 to April 2013) the coverage of the protests about the 2012 case of gang rape and eventual death of Jyoti Singh Pandey in India's capital city, New Delhi, is examined in this chapter. Drawing from past research, three main frames are discerned in the portrayal of women in the reports: mainstreaming gender, endangered woman, and the ungended woman. Media portrayals of these three frames by three broadly categorized actors most prominently covered by the media reports are analyzed: activists, state representatives or political actors, and ordinary citizens. The findings suggest that while some reports allude to women's agency and rights particularly when they cover feminist

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activists, women's agency is marginalized in the debates around safety and protection for women when other actors (such as state representatives or political actors, and ordinary citizens) are considered. Indian women's rights have been reduced to passive messages negating the broader politics of the contemporary women's movement.

Keywords: Gender; media; rape; violence; India; protests

In December 2012, India witnessed an unprecedented public outcry against the failure of the government to address violence against women. This outrage arose in the context of a brutal gang rape and eventual death of a 23-year-old woman (Jyoti Singh Pandey) in India's capital city, New Delhi. The spontaneous mass protests that emerged in the days and months that followed also drew attention to the unusually large number of cases of violence against women occurring daily in India. For instance, in 2011, a total of 228,650 crimes against women were reported by the National Crime Records Bureau; but it is uncertain if this number is an accurate representation of all cases of violence primarily because of non-reporting of crimes.

The Pandey case drew the attention of the public as well as the national and international media. This media coverage has received little attention in research, which is surprising given the remarkable speed of legal and social reforms that followed from the aftermath of the incident. Not only did the Pandey case lead to much-needed legal reforms for rape crimes in India, it has also sparked some changes in the way rape and sexual violence is covered by the media (Rao, 2014). Increasingly, the media coverage has been about sexual violence of the middle and upper-class segments of the population with limited attention to the violence faced by the rural, poor, and lower caste women (Rao, 2014). Even then, as our findings show, the coverage of the violence faced by women from the middle and upper classes is fraught with stereotypical depictions of gender and women's rights.

Recent limited analysis of the 2012 rape case using selective international mass media describes India as a society that is both modern and traditional, and more specifically, discusses the violence as one that violates the Third-World woman's desire for modernity, rights, and justice (Nagar, 2016; Roychowdhury, 2013). Although these analyses are pertinent to the consideration of the depiction of violence against women across borders, they are based on a selective set of media sources. We expand these early efforts to systematically examine both national and international media sources and the ways in which the media frames women in discussions of rape and sexual violence. The questions we address in this chapter are: What are the key representations of women reported by the media during the coverage of protests regarding Pandey's rape, and how do they vary across national and international media and across actors such as activists, political representatives, and ordinary citizens? What kinds of politics do these representations validate? What impact does it have on the broader politics of the contemporary women's movement?

Using the electronic archives of media sources, we examined reports and articles from 572 newspapers and one television channel website for a six-month period – December 2012 to April 2013 – which was the most active period of the protests about the December 2012 rape in New Delhi, India. All the reports were in English language. Systematic analyses of the qualitative data from both the national and international media in their coverage of the rape protests show three different frames: women as active agents with rights; passive women who need protection; or simply in an ungendered way such that their physical presence in the protests and demands for justice are invisible. These three frames are deployed in similar and different ways by the three broad sets of actors we focus on – activists, state representatives or political actors, and ordinary citizens.

These discourses contribute to discussions about the appropriation of women's agency by the media and reinforce the discourse of the state and right-wing movements which view women as passive individuals to be used for state and religious interests. Typically, media discussions and reports frame rape as a violation of a woman's body and the need for her to seek protection, thereby divesting her of agency. Such discussions contradict the demands for action by the contemporary women's movement, particularly the recognition of women's agency. Our analysis recognizes the important work of the contemporary women's movement in India which has over the past few decades actively demanded formulation of laws related to violence against women and the enforcement of those laws by the state.

WOMEN, RAPE, AND MEDIA

There are several explanations for the occurrences of rape (Bhatt, 1995; Crenshaw, 1991; Jaising, 1995; Kelkar, 1992; Purkayastha et al., 2003 among others). One dominant explanation is that rape is a form of social control by men to assert power over women (Baron & Straus, 1987). Such explanations of rape as a male prerogative form a key part of Susan Brownmiller's (1975) classic publication, *"Against Our Will": Men, Women and Rape*. Contemporary scholars, while recognizing that rape is a form of gendered violence, have expanded our understanding of the issue as an attack on femininity and feminism in its various forms (e.g., the rape of the "feminine" man in a prison, rape of a transgender) by patriarchal masculinity (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014). Globally and in India, the number of incidences of rape against women has grown significantly.

Sociologists have extensively studied gender and violence as well as the ways in which class and race are implicated in such violence (e.g., see Bhatt, 1995; Crenshaw, 1991; Jaising, 1995; Kelkar, 1992; Purkayastha et al., 2003 among others). Violence against women such as rape is thus a political act that is used to preserve and extend gender inequalities. Violence itself as an enactment of gender is used to enforce gender performance and maintain gendered hierarchies (Jakobsen, 2014). Such violence against women occurs in public settings and in the private sphere. One factor that makes it hard for women to address violence in the private and public domains is the nature of structural privileges that exists for men; and is maintained through gendered expectations and norms. Some argue

that gender equality increases rape rates in the short term but leads to a decrease in the long term (Whaley, 2001). Interventions that enable gender equality may cause a short-term surge in violence against women as a backlash, but in the long term the violence is expected to decrease. Such strong relationships between social inequality and interpersonal violence are very evident in the United States as well as India. Despite decades of research on rape, the issue remains, according to some, as academia's most under-theorized and perhaps un-theorizable issue (Mardorossian, 2002) due to its complicated nature. Yet, we argue that researchers should examine rape contextually across space and time and its relation to other areas of women's lives in the public sphere.

In the Indian context, scholarly reviews of violence against women primarily focus on rape, dowry deaths, and wife battering, with this research agenda being shaped by problems that garner public attention (Purkayastha et al., 2003). These analyses of violence against women have relied on the cultural and structural context as well as individual-level factors (Kelkar, 1992; Prasad, 1990; Sinha, 1989; Visaria, 2000). Patriarchy is generally an overarching framework within which violence is examined (Kelkar, 1992; Prasad, 1990; Sinha, 1989) and relatively less attention is directed to caste-based violence against women in India (Rao, 2014; Subramaniam, 2006).

Studies examining rape in India also focus on perceptions of acquaintance rape among undergraduate students (Kanekar, Shaherwalla, & Franco, 1991) and ethnic prejudices in victim-blaming (Murthi, 2009). In the wake of the 2012 case of rape, some scholars examined the connections between sex selective abortions and the structural and deep-rooted prejudices that may have implications for violence against women (Himabindu, Arora, & Prashanth, 2014). However, the role of the Indian media, its portrayal of, and subsequent implications for violence against women has not been the focus of research so far. It is toward this end that we focus our chapter as an attempt to respond to Mardorossian's (2002) call to connect media portrayal of the rape protests to women's rights issues and address how women are viewed in the public sphere.

The gang-rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey has spurred an increase in the intensity of concern about violence against women in the public sphere, particularly in urban spaces in India. Only a few of the analyses, as noted above, have examined media reports of violence against women (Nagar, 2016; Rao, 2014; Roychowdhury, 2013). Moreover, collective memory, past experiences with rape, and media coverage about rape have impacted public understandings of gender, rape, and crime (Markovitz, 2006). Mass media plays an important role because people often become emotionally invested in celebrated cases and these investments can often shape an individual's perceptions and beliefs about gender and rape.

In the United States, rape and women's rights often garner substantial media attention when celebrities or athletes are involved. For example, it was during Mike Tyson's trial for rape that Tyson's celebrity status arguably was used to make Black female survivors/victims appear to be deserving of violence (Griffin, 2013; White, 1999). Similarly, the rape trial against Kobe Bryant created tensions in the media about the role of sports and celebrity in public life (Markovitz, 2006). One study found that women exposed to sports media are more likely to be accepting

of various rape myths. For both men and women, exposure to crime drama was related negatively to intentions to intervene in a sexual assault situation (Hust et al., 2013). However, the 2012 case in India did not involve celebrities; rather, it involved ordinary citizens. Further, the gang rape was not an isolated incident. Such reports of gang rapes appeared frequently in the Indian media before and after the Pandey rape case. Given the extensive media coverage about this particular case, it is interesting to examine the ways in which the various actors involved in the protests portrayed Indian women in arguing for women's rights.

Our primary aim is to examine how women are portrayed by the media in India and elsewhere and what the long-term implications for women's rights are. We find that the 2012 rape protests covered extensively in media reports describe women as active agents with rights; as passive women who need protection; or simply in an ungendered way such that their physical presence in the protests and demands for justice are invisible. These three main portrayals or frames are not without complexities in that they may overlap in a single media report.¹ We borrow from Subramaniam (2014) to define the first two frames. The first frame, *mainstreaming gender* recognizes women with agency who have rights. The *endangered woman* is the second frame which depicts women as passive victims in violence and therefore individuals that need to be protected, that is, they are endangered and naive. In this frame, safety is the primary emphasis. We define the third frame – the *ungendered frame* – as women without rights or agency and who are considered as ungendered members of their communities as their gender status and demands for rights and justice are overlooked.

DATA AND METHODS

We begin with a contextual overview about violence against women in New Delhi (the location of the rape) and more broadly in India and then explain the data used for the analysis.

Overview

India gained independence in 1947 and prior to this there was a general atmosphere of ambivalence toward women's rights as the focus was on nationalism (Chaudhuri, 2010; Kumar, 1993; Ray, 1999; Subramaniam, 2006). The partition of the Indian sub-continent into India and Pakistan at the time of independence in 1947 led to religious violence between Hindus and Muslims which was rooted in gender (Subramaniam, 2004). Women's organizations confronted the violence and worked with women from both religious groups.

Prior to the 1980s, violence against women in India received little attention by women's organizations, political parties, or media. While state-initiated actions put issues involving women's economic welfare on the agenda, it was women's groups outside of the government that got body politics on the agenda (Katzenstein, 1991–1992). Much of the period during the 1970s and 1980s focused on dowry related violence within the family (Kumar, 1993).

Rape as a form of sexual violence became a public concern after the Supreme Court verdict in the Mathura rape case – the rape of a young tribal woman by

male police officers (Kumar, 1993). The widespread women's movement campaign between 1970 and 1980 aimed to raise awareness and lobby for change in the rape laws. The major demands for legal reform were to shift the onus of proof from the accuser to the accused and to guarantee that during a rape trial a woman's sexual history would not be used as evidence. However, when the law was amended, the latter was not incorporated, and the former only partially accommodated cases of custodial rape. Other reports of rape, such as that of Rameeza Bee, a poor Muslim woman in the southern city of Hyderabad, and that of Maya Tyagi, an upper caste woman in North India led to protests by women's groups across major towns and cities in India (Butalia, 2003; Kumar, 1993).

Within India, there are regional differences in the forms and extent of violence. New Delhi, India's capital city, has frequently been referred to as the "rape capital," with 706 reported rapes in 2012, even as activists assert that the majority of rapes go unreported (Hindustan Times, 2013). With more than 24,000 reported cases in 2011, incidences of rape in India saw a 9.2% rise over the previous year (International Business Times, 2013). More than half (54.7%) of the victims were between the ages of 18 and 30, and over 17% of the total number of reported instances of rape in the country occurred in New Delhi. Official statistics on rape are limited and incomplete, and there is the widespread assumption that rape in India is vastly unreported given the shame associated with being the victim of rape.

Data

We examined electronic media reports for a period of six months – December 2012–April 2013 – on the protests against the December 2012 rape in New Delhi, India. This six-month period was the most active in terms of the coverage of the rape and corresponding protests. A search beyond April 2013 and until September 2013 yielded very minimal results and hence extending the time-period for the search was not meaningful.

Three large databases – Lexis Nexis, Proquest, and Gender Studies – were used to retrieve reports from the electronic archives of newspapers and the website of one major television channel, *NDTV*. See the Appendix for the number of reports across the media sources. The following sets of keywords were used for the search: rape India, Delhi rape protests, Kavita Krishnan (Secretary of All India Progressive Women's Association and a feminist activist), rape law India, Justice Verma Committee, Justice Verma Report, and All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA). These search terms were chosen based on our prior knowledge of the rape case and initial searches showcased the most helpful terms to find relevant articles. The search yielded a total of 572 articles – 344 from national media and 228 from international media – after deletion of the repetitions in reports. Searches using the key words "rape India" yielded the most results with 296 sources, followed by "Justice Verma Committee" with 178 sources.

All the 572 articles were entered into the qualitative software, NVivo, and checked for consistency and repetitions. The articles were analyzed using a

combination of directed content analysis and conventional content analysis methods (Berg, 2009).

Directed content analysis involves the use of more analytic codes and categories derived from existing theories and explanations relevant to the research focus. In this case, the investigator will immerse himself or herself in the raw data, using these themes and those that may emerge from the data itself. (Berg, 2009, p. 341)

Conventional content analysis uses a grounded theory approach whereby codes are derived inductively from the data. Combining a deductive and inductive approach, we open coded the text of the articles using NVivo.

While our status (the authors) as educated middle-class women meant that we differed from some of the victims, as Indians we are in a unique position to explain the narratives in the media reports considering our own familiarity with gender relations and cultural practices in Indian society. Our familiarity as Indian citizens allows us insights into the language used in the media sources. Our personal experiences with Indian families and state institutions, alongside the theoretical framework of gender, provide a unique lens for this analysis.

Patterns related to gender and representations of women were identified from the articles by reviewing the language of the article. We were also open to emerging themes. Several reports included quotes from politicians, activists as well as common citizens and they were coded as such. Reading the textual data resulted in several initial themes. Quotations from the articles were organized under important themes. Further, based on these emergent themes, the second named author conducted a text search using key words such as “consent,” “stigma,” “protest,” and “marital rape” in NVivo to create a more exhaustive list of quotes from the articles. Major themes were developed from reading the quotes. In the following section, we discuss the various representations of women in the media reports using the three frames discussed above.

MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN BASED ON 2012 INDIA CASE

As noted above, we discerned three main frames in the portrayal of women in the reports: *mainstreaming gender*, *endangered woman*, and the *ungendered woman*. We analyzed the frames used in the reports by focusing on three actors most prominently covered by the electronic media reporting on the rape protests. They are: activists (mostly feminist activists), state representatives or political actors (police, politicians, or bureaucrats), and ordinary citizens (men, and women who voluntarily participated in the protests). These three broad categories represent the background of individuals who participated in the protests and were most vocal in articulating the demands to the media. We discuss the coverage of each of the three frames below.

Mainstreaming Gender

Mainstreaming gender or the representation of women as agents came up prominently in both the international and national electronic media mainly when they quoted feminist activist actors in their reports on the rape protests. Such descriptions focused on women's autonomy, freedom, consent, and justice through both legal and social reforms. For example, the BBC division on South Asia news, an international media source includes the following quote from a feminist activist.

Demanding *bekhauf azadi* or freedom without fear, AIPWA secretary Kavita Krishnan said: This report is a measure of the success of the ongoing movement against sexual violence, because it has redefined women's violence from the perspective of women's autonomy and freedom. This is precisely what the ongoing movement has been demanding, as is evident from its slogans of "Azaadi" with its countless variations. (India's republic day sees protest against sexual violence. January 27, 2013. *BBC Monitoring South Asia*)

Similarly, a report from a national source, *The Times of India* also presents the view of women as agents who need to fight back while quoting another feminist activist:

The positive thing is more people are recognizing there is a problem and are discussing women's rights, especially after the Nirbhaya [Jyoti Singh] case. Women too need to fight back, block and report abusers, create a supportive community online. (Online violence of women increasing in India. May 6, 2013. *The Times of India*)

In the above two quotes, the emphasis is on women bringing about change, whether it is to free themselves from the terror of patriarchy (*bekhauf azadi*) or fight against their abusers or perpetrators directly. The important point to note here is that women are represented as being very vocal and articulate about demands for justice and rights. However, a closer examination shows that both media sources focus on urban, middle-class, upper-caste women. Lower-caste, lower-class and rural women are not covered.

State representatives or political actors in national and international media outlets focused on the frame of *mainstreaming gender* when they referred to women. For instance, Brinda Karat, a well-known left party politician noted:

The kind of protests we've seen show that Indian women are not going to tolerate this kind of violence. There's an assertion of independent identity and there is a backlash against that. It requires dealing with son preference, the education of boys and understanding masculinity, which is currently in contempt of women. (The agony of India's daughters, January 4, 2013, *The Telegraph, Kolkata*)

Similarly, depictions of *mainstreaming gender* were evident when national media focused on women politicians or bureaucrats. For example, Kiran Bedi, a well-known retired high-ranking woman police chief and currently a politician, asserted:

It is a historic opportunity to make right demands from the Government. Our priority should be to get the recommendations of the Justice Verma Committee implemented because in all likelihood the recommendations will be in the favor of the demands being expressed through protests She also highlighted the urgent need for social auditing of police stations and local courts. Only after auditing these two institutions can we get to know the delay in the justice delivery system. The delay in ensuring justice to survivors needs to be exposed and audited. (Gang-rape protests all over Delhi, January 17, 2013, *The Hindu*)

It is pertinent to note that the voices of state representatives, political actors, and the women they represent are urban upper class and upper caste. Both Karat and Bedi are upper-caste and upper-class elite urban women who represent only one section of Indian women. Here again, there is almost no representation of the rural lower-class and lower-caste women.

The *mainstreaming gender* frame was not associated with ordinary citizens in the international and national media. The very few references to this frame were made by former victims of gender-based violence. For example, “So many rape survivors came out to speak in public, and their trauma was a lot like mine,” said Aggarwal, a thin-framed 24-year-old. “I did not join the protest, but the wave of anger that swept the country gave women like me some courage” (Amid rape fiasco, India’s leaders keep up insensitive remarks, January 4, 2013, *The Washington Post*).

Overall, we find that the media depictions of the *mainstreaming gender* frame were predominantly of feminist activists when compared with other categories of actors, such as political actors, state representatives, and other citizens, we consider in this chapter. So while media depictions show that feminist activists were articulate about women’s agency, other actors recognized that women should be protected by the state, as depicted by the *endangered woman* frame.

Endangered Woman

The *endangered woman* frame refers to media reports that presented women as victims of rape who needed to be protected.

Rather than emphasizing women as persons with rights, this passive frame situates women as representatives of their communities on the fault line of the violence which is then played out over and through their bodies. (Subramaniam, 2014, p. 84)

The responsibility of protecting them lay primarily with the men: the law-makers, the police, and the fathers and brothers. In these media reports, women did not have a voice and they were presented as lacking agency. Further this frame portrays women in reference to their familial relationships such as mother, wife, and sister rather than as women who advocate for their individual rights. While we found limited evidence for the use of the *endangered woman* frame in reports that focused on women activists, we find that most often politicians and state representatives along with men activists and citizen actors tend to frame women as passive members of society. For instance, an international media source quotes a politician referring to the need for a bill that would address concerns regarding violence against women, where he refers to the women as members of their family rather than as independent individuals who have rights over their bodies.

Replying to queries, Shinde said the purpose of the bill is to provide stringent punishment also for offences like stalking, voyeurism, acid attacks and human trafficking. “The bill is significant as it aims to protect mothers and sisters of this country. Over years, such stringent law has not been made,” he noted. (Indian parliament passes anti-rape bill; minister calls it “unique law,” March 21, 2013, *BBC Monitoring South Asia*)

The reference to women's familial roles, in the above quote, suggests that addressing violence against women is a functional need for society rather than as a legitimate need for justice. At times, references to women as sisters and daughters were used strategically to engage the public in the discussion about violence against women. For instance, the following report from another international media source refers to an awareness program where the activist explains the prevalence of sexual abuse by referring to women in their families.

If you have four sisters or four daughters, just think if you were aware one of them would be abused in her lifetime. The one who is going to be abused, there is also a 50 percent chance she is going to be sexually assaulted. (Orange county temples vigils hope to raise awareness, January 11, 2013, *India-West*)

In particular, several organizations sought to involve men in discussions about violence by using the strategy of invoking women as daughters, mothers, and wives. The following excerpt from an international media describes one such event organized by a non-profit organization whose founder is incidentally a man.

In October 2012, in recognition of the United Nations' first annual International Day of the Girl Child, the Bindi Project and Manav Sadhna held a "Daughters Day" celebration ... several local fathers spoke about their love and respect for their daughters to hundreds of other fathers and daughters. In a following "open microphone" period, several other fathers in the audience spontaneously stood up and spoke about their own love and respect for their daughters. (Save our girls: Ex-marine aims to change attitudes, January 4, 2013, *Eastern Eye*)

In this case, fathers were encouraged to speak of their relationship with their daughters and thereby engage in the discussion about women in society. However, there were other articles where authors questioned such framing of women as persons who are important only in connection to other people in the family. For instance, in the following excerpt from an international media source, an author who had experienced sexual abuse within the family comments on sexual abuse, the family, and women's right to freedom, and challenges how government procedures consider women as the property of men in the family.

In the area of rape, women's bodies in particular are often discussed as though they were property: How much freedom should the Indian family allow its daughters, wives, sisters, mothers? This way of thinking almost always reinforces curbs on women's freedoms, by heightening the idea that a woman's honor – rather than her well-being – must be safeguarded, because she is someone else's possession. This used to be, until very recently, underlined by most Indian government and legal documents, in which we were asked for the name of the father (not the mother), the husband (not the wife), as though the terms "parent" and "partner" were alien to the notion of the Indian family. (Accepting the power of "no"; in discussions in India on sex abuse, the issue of consent is often absent, March 8, 2013, *The International Herald Tribune*)

In addition to the similarities between the national and international media sources in the coverage of the *endangered* frame across actors, it is significant to note that they also referred to the stigma that was attached to rape victims and their families. For instance, the media attention on the New Delhi rape incident had provoked family members of other rape victims in the country to demand justice as well. They joined the rape protests in New Delhi and their participation was widely reported in the media. Yet, while depicting the trauma of the victims,

the media reports emphasize how women and their families were stigmatized in the aftermath of the rape. For instance, the following excerpt is from an article that describes how soldiers from the Indian army engage in sexual violence against women which also describes the lack of state action against the perpetrators of the crime. Specifically, the article provides quotes from men in the family who describe how the gang rape inflicted by the Indian soldiers affected their daughters' marriages and their sons' education.

"My sister was raped. We had to marry her off to a man more than double her age. Many other girls too had to make such compromises. We still face problems in getting suitable grooms for them," said Ghulam Dar. Abdul Dar said his son had left school after Class IX. "His classmates and teachers would want him to narrate what happened that night, perhaps out of sympathy. But they couldn't understand how painful it is for a son to narrate the brutality his mother suffered. Several other boys faced a similar problem and they too gave up their studies," he said. (Kashmir grannies who fear kids' questions. July 15, 2013, *The Telegraph*)

Ungendered Woman

The wide national and international media attention on sexual violence against women was a result of the massive protests that emerged in New Delhi in response to the brutal rape. While some reports involving protest actors described them as women who were either agents or passive recipients of violence, there were others that described protesters and victims of rape in gender-neutral terms. The rape protests were successful in including men and women in demanding action from the state, a major feat given that previous demands for justice in gender based violence comprised mostly women participants and representatives from women's organizations. These protests were forums where women had spoken vociferously about the various forms of violence that they face (Chaudhuri & Fitzgerald, 2015). We argue that masking the sex of the actors renders gender invisible in the process of protesting. For instance, the following is an excerpt from an international media source that describes the participants without their gender identity, in a scenario that is violent.

Protesters flocked to the India Gate monument throughout the day, ignoring police attempts to deter them and defying a hastily enacted ban on protesting in New Delhi. The demonstrators taunted the police and attacked the car of a Member of Parliament. The police, in turn, fired tear gas and water cannons, beat protesters with bamboo sticks, and arrested dozens. (Anger boils at Delhi rape protest; Demonstrators defy ban, turning out in thousands to demand firm action. December 24, 2012. *The International Herald Tribune*)

Protesters were referenced at least 334 times in the 572 reports. Yet not all articles provide insights into the gender composition of the protesters. In another reference, also from an international media source, the description of actors engaged in violent protests and demanding justice, is also described in gender-neutral terms.

Police with batons chased angry protesters, some of whom fought pitched battles using steel rods and rocks as they tried to get past steel barricades and a wall created by hundreds of policemen to reach the president's mansion to present their demands. "We want justice," they shouted. Television footage showed that some protesters were injured in the clashes. Police

blamed the violence on a few trouble-makers. (Police fire tear gas after violence at Delhi rape protest. December 23, 2012, *The Independent*)

As is evident from the above quotes, protests take several forms and different factions demand varying actions from the state. This was also the case in the rape protests where various actors often demanded opposing legal action from the state. These differences were highlighted in the international media sources particularly on the issue of the death penalty for the perpetrators. In general, the women's movement in India is opposed to the death penalty as a response to rape, yet several reports suggest that the protesters demanded the death penalty against the perpetrators of the crime.

The New Zealand Herald describes protesters demanding the death penalty: "Some protesters have called for the death penalty or castration for rapists, who under current laws face a maximum punishment of life in prison" (India rape victim in Singapore; PM pledges action, December 28, 2012, *The New Zealand Herald*). In another international source, a feminist activist criticized the call for the death penalty, "Every country is moving toward the elimination of the death penalty, and India is strengthening the legislation for the death penalty," said Kavita Srivastava, the national secretary for the People's Union for Civil Liberties. "Here we are still looking for an eye for an eye framework" (Notorious attack spurs India to approve new rape laws, February 4, 2013, *The New York Times*). In both these extracts the focus is on the protestors as a single homogenous unit. Perhaps by attributing a gender-neutral tone to the protesters, news articles may have rendered women's voices invisible in the protests.

We found similar patterns in the national media sources in the *ungendered* framing of women in the protests. Here, all three categories of actors and the victims of gender-based violence were referenced using terms that did not reveal their gender; either as victims or protestors. For instance, the following is an excerpt from a news report that highlights both the activist and political representative actors and the victims of rape in gender neutral terms.

Close to a hundred protesters from different parts of Delhi mobilized by groups like All India Progressive Women's Association, National Federation of Indian Women and All India Democratic Women's Association gathered at Jantar Mantar about 12.30 pm. Student groups like SFI and Jawaharlal Nehru Students Union also took part in the stir. There was loud sloganeering for the resignation of Neeraj Kumar, Delhi Police commissioner. A petition addressed to the home minister was circulated. All organizations were vocal in their criticism of police's handling of the crime. "The police chief should resign as the repeated rapes in Delhi prove that he is not fit for the job," Rashpal Kaur, Delhi secretary of NFIW, said. "The government must answer. This is a sad state of affairs for the capital city of any country." (Protests across Delhi for third day, April 24, 2013, *The Times of India*)

Similarly, specific references to protestors as common citizens were *ungendered*.

Barely a few hours after the Republic Day Parade ended, a large number of protesters gathered a few hundred meters away at Jantar Mantar [protest venue] demanding freedom and justice for all victims of sexual violence. (A freedom parade for the public, January 27, 2013, *The Hindu*)

Overall, any reference to common citizens in the media reports used the gender-neutral term of “protesters,” rendering invisible women’s participation in one of the biggest protests for women’s rights in recent times in India. Further, monolithic descriptions such as “protesters” mask the various ways in which people understand justice and women’s rights. By using gender neutral terms to refer to protesters, the strong demand for women’s rights, the need for women to have their own voice, and agency were not incorporated in this frame.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our examination of international and national media identifies three main frames in the portrayal of women: *mainstreaming gender*, *endangered woman*, and *ungendered woman*. Within these three frames, we found some patterns in the way media focused on the actors. The bulk of the actors within the *mainstreaming gender* frame were women. While these women came from a specific upper class, upper caste and urban background, not all of them self-identified as a feminist or were members of a women’s organization. In the *endangered* frame, the bulk of the media focused on male actors while women as active participants of the protest were pushed to the background. Finally, in the *ungendered* frame, both men and women actors were pushed to the background, and instead the identity of the actors were presented in a gender neutral way.

At a theoretical level, our analysis shows the ways in which the media combines the very active “woman as agent” discourse with the passive “protection of the woman” frame as they report views of various actors such as activists, politicians, and citizens. Media reports discussing women’s rights relied on quotes mainly from activists. But there was little discussion of women’s rights in media reports that covered views of politicians and citizens even when the discussion was about sexual violence against women. So, women could be at the center of media representation as victims of rape but still not be active participants in its construction. Thus, media discourses construct women as “passive symbols” who need to be ensured of safety. As noted by Phadke (2013), the tendency is to frame the issue in terms of women’s safety in the streets rather than their right to access public space.

We also found limited evidence of differences between the portrayal of women as reported in the national and international media. All media fail to sponsor the “women’s movement” frame even though women were clearly visible in the media coverage of the protests. Therefore, visibility of women should not be confused with the demand for women’s rights, often raised by the Indian women’s movement. Although the Indian women’s movement has consistently focused on the state as the primary target, our analysis showed that the media maybe yet another major actor that movement groups must contend with to center-stage the discourse on women’s rights.

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NOTES

1. In social movement theory, a frame is an “interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the world out there by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environment” (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 137). A frame (a noun and a product) can be seen as a story line (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993, p. 117), while framing (a verb) is the active process of creating the story line.

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APPENDIX. LIST OF MEDIA SOURCES AND REPORTS

	Newspapers/Websites	No of Articles
NATIONAL		
1	<i>NDTV</i>	2
2	<i>The Times of India</i>	94
3	<i>The Hindu</i>	86
4	<i>Telegraph Calcutta</i>	123
5	<i>India-West</i>	15
6	<i>News India</i>	24
	Number of national media reports	344
INTERNATIONAL		
1	<i>The New York Times</i>	25
2	<i>The LA Times</i>	1
3	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	1
4	<i>Gender Studies Database</i>	4
5	<i>The Washington Post</i>	10
6	<i>The Toronto Star</i>	2
7	<i>India Abroad</i>	23
8	<i>The Irish Times</i>	2
9	<i>The Business Times</i>	1
10	<i>The Independent</i>	9
11	<i>Eastern Eye</i>	38
12	<i>The Australian</i>	6
13	<i>The Guardian</i>	1
14	<i>Belfast Telegraph</i>	4
15	<i>USA Today</i>	1
16	<i>The Straits Times</i>	5
17	<i>Herald Sun</i>	2
18	<i>The Telegraph</i>	5
19	<i>The Sun</i>	1
20	<i>Canberra Times</i>	2
21	<i>Australian Financial Review</i>	1
22	<i>The Age</i>	4
23	<i>The Times</i>	7
24	<i>The Independent</i>	9
25	<i>The Nation</i>	2
26	<i>The Christian Science Monitor</i>	4
27	<i>BBC Monitoring South Asia</i>	10
28	<i>The New Zealand Herald</i>	2
29	<i>Northwest Asian Weekly</i>	9
30	<i>New Straits Times</i>	1
31	<i>Daily Record & Sunday Mail</i>	1
32	<i>India Currents</i>	5
33	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	2
34	<i>Northwest Asian Weekly</i>	9
35	<i>The Globe and Mail</i>	5
36	<i>Irish Voice</i>	1
37	<i>The Sunday Times</i>	2
38	<i>Washington Informer</i>	1
39	<i>The International Herald Tribune</i>	4
40	<i>Birmingham Mail</i>	1
41	<i>The Epoch Times</i>	2
42	<i>New African Woman</i>	1
43	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	1
45	<i>The Evening Standard</i>	1
	Number of international media reports	228
	Total articles	572