

HOW #ME TOO #TIME'S UP MOVEMENT IN THE USA IMPACTED INDIA, THE SOCIETY WITH BOUND NORMS

Munira Zaylobidinova
Ferghana State University

ABSTRACT

This article researches how social movement in the USA, uprising of women, made a great impact to Indian women. It also investigates that many women in the world suffer from gender disbalance where men still dominates with their strength. However, this article indicates that social media has become main tool for mobilization of women and women took advantage to voice and perform their rights.

Key words: social movement, mannism, Guardian, mobilization, feminism, rape, hashtag, Facebook, Twitter, violence.

АННОТАЦИЯ

В этой статье исследуется, как общественное движение в США, восстание женщин, оказало большое влияние на индийских женщин. Он также исследует, что многие женщины в мире страдают от гендерного дисбаланса, где мужчины по-прежнему доминируют в своей силе. Однако в этой статье указывается, что социальные сети стали основным инструментом мобилизации женщин, и женщины воспользовались этим, чтобы заявить о своих правах и реализовать их.

Ключевые слова: общественное движение, манизм, Guardian, мобилизация, феминизм, изнасилование, хэштег, Facebook, Twitter, насилие.

INTRODUCTION

Crucial changes people face as the result of the evolution of social media because it provides maximum conveniences and opportunities in all spheres. Consequently, this growth impacted all countries including India which brought many benefits and some drawbacks to the society. *India Statistic* (2017) reports that internet evolution began in 2005 and considerably expanded in the last decade. According to these statistics, online sites as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are the most consumed portals (88%) because they create many opportunities in sharing blogs and photos, modifying their profiles, and updating the latest news. Hence, social media has become an important platform to inform and to be informed and plays a pivotal role in the mobilization of feminist activist against sexual atrocities.

This paper will analyze what merits social media holds in the mobilization of #Me too movement and also its impact on India, a country where people are bounded

with social norms through its cinematic, literary, and social media narratives. Additionally, I will review Kaitlynn Mendes's scholarly arguments "Is Twitter a safe space for feminist activism?" or "Does fear, hostility, and trolling dominate Twitter?" (K. Mendes's 2018). I will examine women's challenges in Indian society where men dominate using their privileges. Also will argue how state censorship about "India's Daughter" (Sonora Jha, 2017) is losing its priority and social understanding about "Ideal women" is being replaced by "governmental encouragement" of women's fight against sexual harassment with the help of TV documentations and online blogs.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Section 2 in this paper provides information about the #Me too movement expansion in social media and its purpose as well as the reason of victims remaining silent and invisible. The third section outlines the advantages of social media in the mobilization of any kind of movement and cultivation of feministic activism in Indian society. The fourth section talks about effectiveness and the speed of social media in Indian women's unification including women's unification across the borders and its results, while section 5 summarizes ideas and makes the conclusion.

Although officially the first hashtag of the #Me Too movement appeared on the 24th of October in 2017, the movement began long earlier and the founder of it was "Afro-American" woman, Tarana Burke. In an interview with the *Guardian* columnist Brockes (2017), Tarana Burke claimed that she started the #Me Too twelve years earlier but had no public presence at all. She outlined that she started this movement to make voices heard from those who were assaulted for sexual violence but did not state it publicly.

Tarana Burke was shocked seeing that the #Me Too hashtag was posted more than 12 million times in one week (Brockes 2017). In fact, the dramatic rise of hashtag #Me Too was started on Twitter after the post of Alyssa Milano, the American activist, and actor, saying "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted, write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet." (*Guardian* 2017) The main reason for her post was her indignation after reading the articles in the New York Times about Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein who was exposed for multiple sexual assaults. According to Emma Brockes that on the next morning there were 55000 replies for the post and the following week, there were stories of women on Facebook and Twitter sharing their incidents reposting "me too" for several times (2017). Consequently, this online revolution caused legal problems for powerful men because

“Me Too” hashtag was used millions of time and incredible stories were shared by the victims.

It is important to note that celebrities like Alyssa Milano, play a significant role in the expansion of any movement and social media is a useful tool for mobilization it. Being inspired by the Hollywood example Indian Bollywood celebrities also started mobilization becoming the perfect model to the victims. Since then the #Me too hashtag has been used millions of time with the protest against rape on social sites as Facebook, Twitter, and U-tube.

According to Samita Sen (2000), women’s awareness of gender issues began long before in India and the “woman’s question” was raised in the 19th century.” She emphasized that the recognition of gender issues on a government level began in 1974 because from 1911 till 1974 data showed high gender discrimination rate in all spheres. Parents became afraid to send their daughters to school or university believing that they will be the next victims of sexual coercion and those actions led to the dramatic decrease of female education. Apparently, it is impacted significantly by the government policy and economic growth. At that time small female group activists started mobilizing in a small group unsuccessfully protesting in the streets which were easily brutalized by police. But due to technological development, in the last two decades, social media spontaneously penetrated to the lives of people in India generating more opportunity for mobilization of the social movement. Currently, social campaigns are common events in India. Moreover, in less time it can reach remote places and attract the majority of people. Hence, the Internet simplified the method of communicating and exchanging information and also united female activist under one hashtag #Me Too.

However, it is interesting that most victims of sexual harassment remain silent instead of reporting to the police. I want to analyze this in the example of India. In Asian culture including India for females having sexual relationships before marriage and two-timing are an unforgivable sin and the penalty for it is exile and separation from society. Daughters are brought up in restrictive social bound norms, traditions, and expectations that any kind of the wrong step makes a girl oppressed. From the interview (author 2015) with Indian women “Will you report to the police in case of sexual harassment?” 132 of replies were “No” and 52 prefer to commit suicide instead of reporting and 247 did not reply to the question. (*personal communication*, 2015). But each time there were abhorrence and hatred in their eyes when they came across the expression “rape”, or “sexual harassment”. Social media provides the

platform for those who could not find justification in government protection such as the police.

Furthermore, social media provides anonymity to the users that makes them confident to be spoken out and share their story as well. It also helps to find likewise-minded people and mobilize them in the groups. “Social media is a healing and disastrous power that unites people with different goals”-proposed Sonora Jha in her new book (2017). Additionally, Social media plays a vital role in the mobilization of any movement as its users stay connected and informed all the time. As Zeynep Tufekci states “It has the potential to reach millions of people at once... and can easily connect with many people who are not in the same physical space or even people who do not know each other at all” (*Twitter and tear gas* 2017, p 6). For example, in the Arab Spring Facebook and Twitter mobilized youth, this led to the sparking of the revolution in Egypt, Tunisia, and other Middle East countries. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and numerous online communities have created platforms for strong participation in gender discrimination and security debates and discussions. To the question: “Why anonymity is important for victims of rape?” the research of K. Mendes shows that firstly women are afraid of losing their reputation and coming blame and stigma on women themselves, moreover feeling of loneliness in front of relatives and neighbors as she stated “...feeling alone’ in one’s feminist views and feeling upset by institutionalized cultures of sexism among friends and family as well as at work, school and university was salient”(2018, p 243). Secondly, they are completely sure that government authorities barely will take action, on the contrary, protesting voices mostly will be suppressed by blaming the victims themselves and petition of rape will be adjudicated. Thirdly casualties believe that it will influence her future marriage perspective and promotion in a working environment.

Alka Kurian, *India Today journal*, reported (2018) “A new and powerful anti-sexism movement began in India, long before the present day feminist resurgence in the U.S In the early 21st century, millennial Indian women launched a radically new kind of feminist politics that had not been seen before.” Moreover, she emphasized that movements such as Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring initiated for social media campaigns against rape and sexual coercion and protest amongst the youth arose considerably. Furthermore, she outlined that despite many years of feminist activism, the deepest root issue of sexual obsession and gender inequity still exist in India, and online struggle awoke an enormous bunch of frustration among the young people in the country. It is true that social media made a great impact on Indian youth

as Facebook pages and Twitter were overflowed with stories of sexual assault that fastened the mobilization and performing protest against it. Since then the number of protests increased. These include groups like Blank Noise Project in 2003, Chaddi (underwear) movement in 2009, “ SlutWalk “ protest in 2011, Pinjra Tod and Pink (Break the Cage) movement in 2015, the Bekhauf Azadi

(Freedom without Fear) in 2017. All of them were against sexual atrocities and performed by anti-sexism activists.

The main reason for the cultivation of the # Me too movement in India is long time surged frustration against sexual harassment and bound social norms which put Indian women in a cage. Proceeding from social norms women’s responsibility in India is too overloaded comparing with Western women, although they make the same financial investment into the family budget. Inequity in sharing responsibilities made women exhausted and campaigns in Facebook and Twitter increased dramatically. Danish Siddiqui reported in the *Guardian*(2018) that 82% of Indians still encounter with a major problem with inequity. It would seem the possibility of having been heard is greater in social media. For example a recent case shook the public and raised awareness about the basic issue of Indian girls’ safety. As *FIRSTSPOT*(2018) reported that a 27-year-old lady from Gurgaon was allegedly raped by an Uber driver while she was returning home from the dinner party. The incident was titled, “Delhi Rape: Twitter flooded with angry messages against Uber”. Many tweets were posted expressing disgust and abhorrence that damaged the Uber business. It was apparent that people would refuse to use its services in the future. Consequently, in this case, social media played a significant role in spreading information and Twitter made the public aware about the woman safety issue in such hired taxis. Additionally, the Internet is a convenient tool to communicate with people from remote places making strong and weak ties. And most of the time weak ties become more wholesome as it gives great opportunity to be connected with people who have different background knowledge and different economic and social resources. Thus, it is a unique opportunity for mobilization and cultivation of any kind of movement, including #Me too.

According to Smith (2014 p 87), the internet and especially Facebook is one of the strongest power where among all global issues, related rape and violence against women find the most followers. This recent technological industry created the possibility to find supporters easily even from remote places and unite them for one purpose. Although there is a controversial idea: Is social media safe place for sharing issues especially about rape? Confidently, the freedom, and independence of social

media provided a huge opportunity for launching and bringing forth the contemporary women movement dealing with gender issues like women atrocities and injustice.

However, social media is not always a safe place to get support from others. There are times when victims tweet about their stories of assault and mostly are asked the question what were they wearing when they were assaulted. To the deepest regret, some tweets could be sent using foul language insulting more those who suffered from sexual coercion, such as accusing the victims themselves. These types of posts soon became a widespread conversation on social media and blogs among victims as for whether sharing stories on public platforms of social media was a healthy step in the recovery process? Additionally, it brings a financial downturn to some companies and enterprises. From the example above Uber, taxi agency has lost the trust of its customers that is an essential feature for taxi companies to get through in competitive market economy in India. Moreover, social media creates a false sense of actions and achievement. It seems the movement is on and activists are mobilizing, but is it true in reality? Is there anything achieved besides creating a new hashtag? How do victims receive negative feedbacks? Moreover, there could be fake stories that will damage the reputation of high positioned men. The reasons for posting false stories could be several but until “culprit” is exculpated how much moral and financial losses will he encounter? There is a one more interesting theory could we say if there is no social media no movement will be mobilized and criminals of sexual harassment in India will continue? According to Alka Karan (2017) social media only assists the users and quickens events but if there is a strong protest and discourse it will happen by all means but it will take a longer time. However, another kind of method of spreading information could be used, for example, flyers, in any case.

The possibility of the formulation the #Me Too movement in India was apparent as the female activists were inspired by the US example. The Internet and social media expanded significantly over the past decade in India becoming the strongest tool for online campaigns which supports feminist activist. Today one can find the number of applications focusing on women empowerment specified in the diverse sphere as knowledge, health, education, and lifestyle. Other than Facebook and Twitter, there are many social apps as Whats Upp, Telegram, YouTube that could create an expanded network even with those whom you have never come across before. Women share their stories and get support from others through these online apps. However, there are posts blaming women themselves for sexual harassment, intentionally insulting them in their entire hard life. Especially, when they struggle to

avoid the feeling of loneliness and relieve the agony by staying connected with likewise women. That has happened with the #Me Too when people united under one hashtag expressing anger and hatred to those who present his “mannism” culture against the weakest human beings. Consequently, violence made women unite through social media raising their awareness of possible rape in every future step of their life. The reason of mobilization of the #Me Too in India was the consequences of the highest percentage of statistics in the commitment of rapes and sexual harassment and reluctant attitude of authorities to the raped. Therefore social media became a safe place where their voices could be heard. On the other hand, social media is not always safe to share all rape stories because of the possibility to become a victim of cyberbullying is high. Moreover, fake stories can ruin authorities’ reputation and finances. Furthermore, those who actively support online movements are not a guarantee that they will do the same in reality. Therefore, the number of online activists is always greater than in real life. Social media movement sometimes is an illusion and this is the reason that the rape and sexual harassment happens till these days in India.

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