



## **2. #MeToo Movement: A Global Overview of the Nature and Relevance of the Movement with Special Reference to India**

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### **Abstract**

#MeToo movement has crossed physical, temporal, and social boundaries as a social movement, demonstrating the extent to which digital platforms can provide normative and emotional relief to survivors of sexual harassment, even as offline resolutions remain a distant dream and a journey of horrifying experiences. The article has highlighted the intertwined histories of these ideas through critical debates in the public domain arguing that an intersectional approach to the study of social justice enriches the developing narratives of #MeToo. Even while keeping ideals of justice at the forefront, the #MeToo dialogues in India have purposefully avoided legal remedies for women, a trend that has been reinforced by the faulty and insensitive coverage of the issue by the national and mainstream media. The article has earnestly attempted to analyze the #MeToo movement in a comprehensive manner with a special emphasis on its relevance and nature in the Indian context. The article has also highlighted the negative role of Indian media in the reportage of crimes against women and the harm it has caused to the victims of sexual harassment and violence who have shown exemplary courage to speak their truth out during the #MeToo wave.

**Keywords: #MeToo Movement, Women, Sexual Abuse, Media, Sexual Harassment, Intersectionality**

## Introduction

The month of October 2018 was not India's first foray into speaking out against sexual harassment in a collective wave. A crowd-sourced list known as LoSHA (List of Sexual Harassers in Academia) made waves in academic circles in 2017. The words "Me Too" were all over social media in the aftermath of the news about Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein's sexual crimes, with women all around the world sharing them in solidarity (Sood, Singh, Mandhani & Khan, 2019). It gained traction in India in October 2018 when actress Tanushree Dutta accused actor Nana Patekar of sexual harassment while filming 'Horn Ok Please' in 2008 (Sood et al., 2019).

Hundreds of survivors of alleged sexual assault and misconduct broke their silence, resulting in a powerful movement. They resorted to social media and called out people by name. Skeletons were pouring out of the closets of politicians, comedians, actors and directors, journalists, advertising experts, award-winning authors, and artists (Sood et al., 2019). This is a significant turning point in Indian history. Women named and shamed their abusers, the majority of them held high-ranking positions in their occupations. Despite the expected response, hate messages, and the stigma associated with being a victim, a substantial number of women stepped forward to share their stories of harassment and abuse (Jain, 2020).

Because our society is so fond of victim blaming, the accusers were frequently investigated, their accounts were faked, and they were frequently subjected to trolls, hate, and abuse. Some women have been accused of sabotaging men's careers, while others have been condemned for their timing. More assertions were made that the survivors were 'attention-seeking' women who just did it for the publicity (Jain, 2020).

Jain (2020) said that for a long time, Indian women have been taught to keep quiet in order to maintain the status quo. Yes, there are rapes and sexual assault cases every day, and yes, there is national indignation over selective rape instances, but we women are expected to remain silent and believe that India is safe since there are some nations that are even worse. In India, 'rape culture' has become acceptable through years of systematic brainwashing to silence, subjugate,

discriminate, and mistreat women. However, in October of 2018, Indians, particularly on Twitter, were swept up in a maelstrom. India's #MeToo campaign was in full swing.

Despite the backlash from "Men's Rights Activists" and society in general, it was empowering to see women dare to share their stories openly. Some women preferred to stay nameless because of the obvious risks to their personal and professional lives, but those who ventured to tell their stories in public risked grave consequences (Jain, 2020).

It wasn't like the #MeToo movement erupted out of nowhere. It was the years of persecution and cruelty that had finally given way. Even the names of some of the guys involved in the campaign did not come as a shock. This is due to the existence of so-called "whisper networks" for many years. They are unofficial lines of communication between women that carry the names of (mainly) powerful men who have been accused of sexual harassment or assault. As a result, in many cases, the accused men's behavior was already known to those around him, but it was neither questioned nor halted (Jain, 2020).

### **The Origin**

The #MeToo movement came into being with the efforts of a prominent civil rights activist as early as 2006. Tarana Burke, an African-American civil rights activist, laid the groundwork for the #MeToo movement. Burke's response to a girl's complaint about her mother's boyfriend sexually assaulting her was the catalyst for the campaign. The campaign began with the phrase "me too," implying that the victims are not alone and that others have experienced similar suffering (Naik, 2020).

In the setting of the Indian context, feminism's struggles, affects, and knowledge have gained new potency, visibility, and legitimacy. Internal competition, responsibility, and conflict are all increasing at the same time. If feminists are unable to respond to sexual violence as a group, there is a risk that they may be subjected to harsher repercussions from patriarchal forces. The threat of co-option by external forces such as right-wing nationalists, neoliberal capitalist society, the market, and the state is also one of the consequences (Farris & Rottenberg, 2017). In actuality, there is a widespread opinion around the world, including India, that gender equality

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and the concept of feminism have greater credibility today than in previous generations (Naik, 2020).

However, when feminism is considered as a political project, the basic contradiction is not apparent (Roy, 2018). During the nineteenth century, anti-British activities and reform initiatives set the groundwork for feminist philosophy, which became the first wave feminist movement in India. This movement saw a significant advancement in women's rights, with concerns such as political participation, education, events, employability, and modernization rising to prominence. Women's engagement in public life was also expanded in unanticipated ways during this period. Despite the fact that women have been speaking and participating in public forums since the 19th century, the current #MeToo movement has introduced the country's women to a new face of empowerment (Naik, 2020).

The campaign in India began with actress Tanushree Dutta's allegations against the veteran actor Nana Patekar, unfolding her experiences in the course of a film, Horn OK Please, which was ten years ago. The tweet by Dutta followed by other exposes the entertainment business and also the media industry. The allegations made against the celebrities and prominent personalities, including the former Union minister MJ Akbar had severe implications. Eleven women have accused Akbar against sexual misconduct (Naik, 2020).

What followed was a series of posts by other women who shared their experiences with the world. From actors, film directors to advertising top guns, artists and writers and politicians, women professionals called out obnoxious behavior at the workplace. From unwanted attention in the office to sexual innuendos on the film set, there were many kinds of allegations that surfaced (Roy, 2018).

### **#MeToo: Negative Role of Indian Media**

According to a Thomson Reuters Foundation global poll of 550 gender specialists around the world, India is the most dangerous nation in the world for women because of high rates of rape, marital rape, female feticide, and human trafficking. Violence against women is caused by a

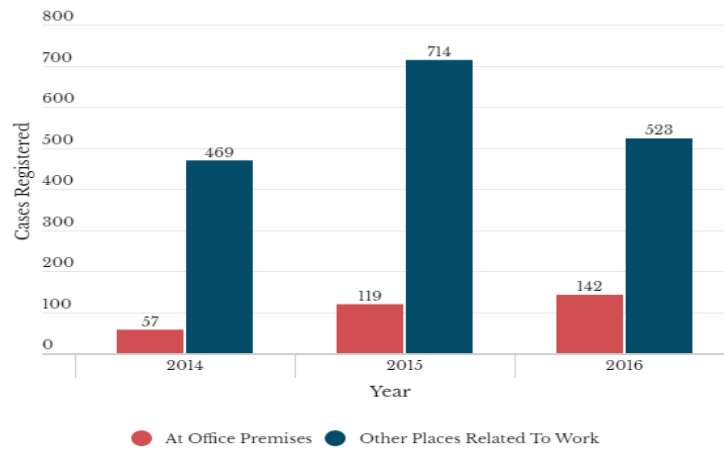
number of factors, including economic corruption, a lack of security for vulnerable populations, a lack of public amenities and services, and a corrupt political system (Naik, 2020).

Even though the media has not been helpful in reducing domestic violence against women, it can play a leading role in society's battle against violence against women. As the society's eyes, ears, and limbs, the media could play a significant role in reducing violence against women. The role of the media should be to expose and raise consciousness about society's flaws and evils, thus it should be even more effective. The media needs to be more conscious of gender-based violence. The media needs to be more conscious of gender-based violence. Because of their insensitivity in using images, publishing names, and other invasions of privacy, many women have remarked that media coverage (of rape or other violence) was like a second assault all over again (Sarup, 2005).

The Indian mainstream media has a poor track record when it comes to reporting on violence against women in India. In the past, rape and sexual assault incidents were rarely reported unless they involved a celebrity or a person in a position of power, or the journalistic value of being bizarre (Naik, 2020). According to figures maintained by the National Crime Records Bureau of India, the number of 'reported' occurrences of rape and sexual violence (assault and harassment) against women has consistently climbed from over 62,000 in 2005 to over 260,000 in 2016 ([ncrb.gov.in](http://ncrb.gov.in), 2006; 2017). The amount of news stories about these incidents has remained insignificant (Naik, 2020).

Following the shocking incident of Delhi gang-rape in December 2012, a simple count of stories using Factiva (a well-known newspaper database) shows that the number of news stories covering cases of rape and sexual assault by three leading English newspapers, The Times of India, the Hindustan Times, and The Hindu, was less than 150 in 2005; this increased to around 2,000 in 2013. Other 'rape and assault' news stories involved alleged crimes perpetrated by a public authority, such as a police officer, a politician, an editor, or a self-declared god-man (Naik, 2020).

**Figure 1: Cases of Insult to Modesty of Women, 2014-16**



**Source:** National Crime Records Bureau 2014; 2015; 2016

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) categorizes "insult to women's modesty" under section 509 of the IPC in a set of statistics. This involves harassment in the workplace. In 2016, the NCRB reported 665 such incidents, down 20% from 833 cases in 2015 and up 26% from 526 cases in 2014. A lady could be insulted by expressing a phrase or voice, making a gesture, or doing something else. According to a study of 6,047 respondents done by the Indian Bar Association in 2017, as many as 70% of women indicated they did not report sexual harassment by superiors because they were afraid of the ramifications, IndiaSpend reported on March 4, 2017 (Mallapur, 2018).

Naik (2020) explained that for Media Studies' research of the leading television news channels' coverage of the deadly Delhi gang rape and murder case in December 2012, contrasted the media coverage in the week following the gang-rape incident in December 2012, compared to a week in March 2012 when all rape cases received 46 minutes of attention and all molestation cases received 17 minutes (Sachdev, 2013). NDTV 24x7 spent 1,998 minutes on the subject, Aaj Tak spent 1,104 minutes on it, and Zee News spent 1,275 minutes on it. Similarly, the huge government-funded TV broadcaster Doordarshan devoted 1,208 hours to the gang-rape case, giving government ministers air time to pacify the shocked and angered demonstrators and clarify the government's response to the atrocity and ensuing protests. The visual media sparked heated arguments on the topic of 'women's safety,' highlighting the divisive opinions of some

politicians, public officials, and Indian spiritual leaders on issues such as women's dress code, cell phone use, and conduct expectations.

The involvement of the media in the topic of violence against women is critical, both in terms of how the media covers the issue and in terms of how the media may be utilized to assist activists and governments in raising awareness and implementing programmes on the subject. The media should also promote violence-prevention strategies (Sarup, 2005). The stream of claims and the seriousness of the movement prompted various inquiries in the news media regarding how the allegations were handled. At the height of #MeToo, the scale, speed, and sensitivity necessary were not something Indian media had prepared for. The media completely failed to look past charges and consider the cultural background (Sood et al., 2019).

Sood et al. (2019) wrote that one criticism of #MeToo is that it focuses on social media outrage rather than addressing the mindset and culture that allows harassment. Aparna Jain, an author and leadership coach who facilitates workplace diversity and inclusion training, recalls that many of the males in attendance had no idea their behavior was inappropriate. Instead of '*Beti Bachao* (Save your Daughters)', it should be '*Beton Ko Samjhao* (Counsel Your Sons)'.

Companies have begun to set aside funds for workshops and training sessions. They've formalized processes and now place a greater emphasis on adherence to POSH and related policies. However, Mumbai-based lawyer Rutuja Shinde, who provides pro bono services to survivors, claims that many of the women who did come up ran against roadblocks in the systems that were supposed to support them (Sood et al., 2019).

Many people believe that the movement accomplished nothing to help people from smaller towns or those who were financially disadvantaged (Sood et al., 2019). Sagina Walyat, a lawyer in Chandigarh, agreed that the movement magnified the views of the media and the fashion business, but that it ignored the concerns of low-wage workers and domestic workers because they aren't on social media. It had an effect on someone (Sood et al., 2019).

### **#MeToo: Identity Issues and Intersectionality in the Indian Context**

The movement has gathered a critical mass of survivors and sparked a global discourse about ending the silence, confronting shame, dispelling misinformation, and creating safe spaces, empowered communities, and channels for redress. Because the elites of showbiz, journalism, and academia acknowledged the grassroots effort done by lower-class women of color, and because the movement inspired solidarity across racial and class lines, #MeToo was able to achieve this. Ms. Burke was so nominated for an Academy Award and appeared on the cover of Time Magazine alongside other powerful and privileged women (Atrey, 2018).

Now that #MeToo has made its way to India, let us learn from this setting, which is unmistakably 'Western,' but educational for its intersectional roots. So, at this point, we may recognize the backdrop that preceded the present moment, namely, Dalit women's resistance, which has been fighting routine kinds of sexual harassment and assault for over four decades. The struggles of Dalit-Bahujan and Adivasi sisters have defined the Indian movement from the Mathura case to the Bhanwari Devi issue (Atrey, 2018).

As a result, our roots are also intersectional. Sexual harassment is dictated not just by sex or gender, but also by criteria such as race, caste, religion, colour, region, age, disability, and sexuality, as we have learned from our own movement and that of the West. Sexual harassment is made worse by racial and caste divisions, but privilege in terms of both makes a difference in avoiding, seeking help, and healing from abuse (Atrey, 2018).

Atrey (2018) also emphasized that it is critical that this lesson is reflected in the #MeToo story. This entails going beyond the stories of upper-caste, middle-class, non-disabled, cisgender women in urban places and listening to them. We must find a means to connect the movement to the subaltern in a country where over 833 million people live in villages. The success of #MeToo in India will be determined by this. Everyone recognizing the grief, struggle, and resilience of Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim, disabled, gay, poor, and non-English speaking women, and expressing #HerToo, should be the stuff of true solidarity.

Furthermore, problems of identity are far more intricate than a "men vs women" debate can address, especially in a nation like India. Not all women have the same access to the Internet to make accusations against abusers. Similarly, men from vulnerable groups may find themselves



unable to respond to accusations made against them on social media or to use formal judicial channels to refute claims to the same extent as their more privileged colleagues. Furthermore, in a political atmosphere when any dissent is suffocated by inflated claims, it is all the more critical to build, enable, and maintain mechanisms that protect survivors' and accused's rights, as well as their mental and physical well-being (Dash, 2020).

Given the uncertainty of what constitutes sexual harassment in different situations, as well as the prevailing atmosphere of sexual policing in India, finding fair remedies within the due process framework is rarely straightforward. Despite this, feminist efforts should be focused on enforcing the law against sexual harassment while also addressing its shortcomings (Dash, 2020).

### **Discussion and Analysis**

The fact that the movement itself is a result of a breakdown of due process adds to the difficulties surrounding 'Me Too.' Years of indifference to the Supreme Court's Vishaka rules failed to ensure a safe working environment for women and actively obstructed their access to justice. However, failing to recognize that the "Me Too" movement is merely a symptom of the problem, not a solution, is like mistaking the forest for the trees. Now that there is a law against workplace sexual harassment, it is critical that the newfound attention on 'Me Too' lead the way for structural improvements based on fair principles of justice delivery to all parties (Dash, 2020).

A look at some of the situations that have arisen as a result of India's "Me Too" movement demonstrates the urgent need for mechanisms that are fair to all parties. When a woman claiming to be Varun Grover's junior and colleague at a theatre group at Banaras Hindu University made anonymous sexual harassment charges against him, Netflix considered cancelling his web series, *Sacred Games 2*. Mr. Grover explained how the dates in the claim demonstrated that he had not worked with the woman at Banaras Hindu University in detail. An independent investigation later absolved him of all charges (Dash, 2020).

Dash, (2020) also wrote in her article that Comedian Utsav Chakraborty was accused of sexual harassment, and CEO Tanmay Bhat was accused of failing to take adequate action, in one of the episodes that engulfed comedy firm All India Bakchod in a massive controversy. Although the

communications were unsolicited, one of the women who had accused Mr. Chakraborty admitted to having consensual intercourse with him a year later, and another stressed that she was not underage. It's unclear whether the women who made these allegations had access to formal complaint registration and grievance redress mechanisms, such as the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) or the Local Complaints Committee (LCC), as required by the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act of 2013.

The sheer presence of ICCs or LCCs may not be enough, as sexist and discriminatory views toward women are typically prevalent among employers and committee members. But this isn't to say that a culture of naming and shaming can take the place of the framework. Without solid processes in place, drastic results such as company closures, employee firings, and show stalling can occur, which is why every institution must put its weight behind developing powerful systems (Dash, 2020).

### **Figure 3: Percentage of Sexual Harassment in Men & Women**



81% of women and 43% of men reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment and/or assault in their lifetime, with more than 3 in 4 women (77%) and 1 in 3 men (34%) experiencing verbal sexual harassment.

**Source:** “The facts behind the MeToo Movement, A National Study on Sexual Harassment and Assault”, Stop Street Harassment

The amount of violence against women in India shows that widespread perceptions of women "abusing" the system by filing false reports are unfounded. However, conceptions of "believing the survivor" must be based on the principle that a woman cannot be disbelieved simply because she does not meet cultural standards of ethically acceptable behavior. At the same time, one cannot rule out the possibility of a false accusation or privilege subjective feelings over objective facts by interpreting all contradictions in a woman's statement as trauma evidence (Dash, 2020).

All parties must be able to probe, and decision-makers must be able to judge the credibility of the parties and witnesses in a fair procedure. Giving the accused a full and fair chance to defend themselves should be one of the unalienable norms of natural justice. Diluting these principles not only increases the risk of people being unfairly and disproportionately punished, but it also allows accused people to be vindicated later in court through lawsuits, as artist Subodh Gupta attempted through a civil defamation suit that resulted in a settlement and the removal of the posts (Dash, 2020). This might further erode the survivors' trust, making them more vulnerable.

In call-and-cancel societies, looking for answers does not benefit survivors in the long run. Survivors hoping for closure through such speaking out may be disillusioned, especially because power systems work in such a manner that even when powerful men are called out, their lives appear to return to normal after what may have been just another stormy incident (Dash, 2020).

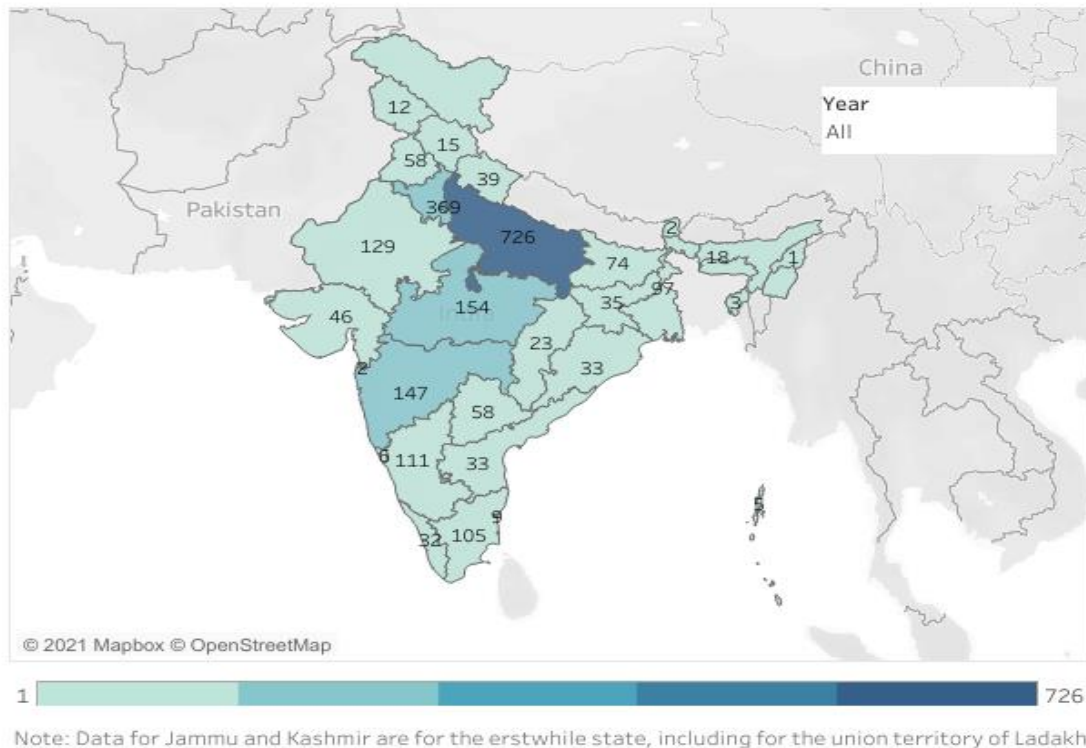
In India, #MeToo movement has brought in many positive changes in the workplace atmosphere. It sparked a discussion on what constitutes inappropriate behavior and harassment. It compelled businesses and organizations to reflect, form Internal Complaint Committees (ICCs), and adhere to the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, better known as POSH law (Jain, 2020).

Jain (2020) said in a few companies, the number of complaints filed under the POSH law also increased. It was an encouraging sign that women are increasingly confident in their ability to report sexual harassment and are aware of their rights to do so. In addition, more complaints suggested that women had faith in their companies to provide a proper redressal system. Most significantly, males were being held accountable for their actions, even if they had not been proven guilty (due to a lack of evidence or a proper trial).

Granted that an online trial of any case, particularly delicate cases of sexual harassment and rape, is ineffectual and inefficient, but the #MeToo movement, which originated on social media, provided women with a venue to disclose their tales first and foremost. This exemplified the legal system's unwillingness to encourage women to approach them through proper routes. It also provided women with a sense of security by allowing them to remain anonymous while reporting their situations. Finally, it gave resources and support to women who wished to report their events but were unable to do so (Jain, 2020).

Retaliation against the patriarchal worldview comes at a cost for women, despite the fact that it was a movement that enabled women to speak up. Women were subjected to direct violence and intimidation by the accused in a few situations. They had difficulty getting work and were labelled as "troublemakers," and were sometimes shunned for speaking out (Jain, 2020).

According to data presented in the Lok Sabha, Uttar Pradesh, the country's most populated state, had the most cases of sexual harassment at work place (726 or 29 percent) between 2014 and 2018, followed by Delhi (369), Haryana (171), Madhya Pradesh (154), and Maharashtra (147) (Mallapur, 2018).



**Figure 2: Sexual Harassment Cases at Workplace, 2014-18**

**Source:** Lok Sabha, 2018 figure as on July 27, 2018

Sood et al. (2019) stated in their article that when it comes to sexual misbehavior, Ajay Verma, a criminal lawyer in Delhi, says a complainant's prospects of successfully proving charges stemming from an incident that occurred years ago are slim. A magistrate cannot take cognizance of an offence under Section 509 of the Indian Penal Code (statement, gesture, or act designed to offend the modesty of a woman) for more than one year under Section 468 of the Criminal Procedure Code. There is a three-month statute of limitations under the PoSH Act [Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act,

2013]. It can be extended for another three months, but not later than that. The problem is that many people are unaware of the proper procedure (Sood et al., 2019).

Meanwhile, MJ Akbar has sued Priya Ramani for defamation, which is currently being disputed in court. While a sexual harassment case against former Supreme Court Chairman Ranjan Gogoi was presided over in court by a committee that comprised Gogoi himself, he was found not guilty. Males accused of rape have been acquitted in several other cases due to a lack of evidence or correct procedure (Jain, 2020).

The fact that the majority of Indian women have been harassed or know someone who has been harassed is a dreadful truth, yet it is buried in silence and taboo. Women in our society need a lot of courage to speak up about the violence they face, and when they do, they face societal pressure, victim shaming, assault, character assassination, intimidation, and other sorts of abuse (Jain, 2020).

India as a society is preoccupied with preserving its "culture," which systematically excludes women from power structures while simultaneously making them the culture's safe caretakers. Apart from their personal 'dignity,' they are also responsible for defending the family's honor; thus, they are forced to remain silent about anything that contradicts the sanctity of being a woman (Jain, 2020).

Women are also hesitant to name their abusers for fear of getting fired or being labelled a problem. Furthermore, the lack of support, harassment, and the misery of coming to court and reliving the trauma are more draining on the victim than they are on the abusers. After an assault, survivors typically experience psychological trauma, and when the accusers are praised and accepted in society, it can be traumatic for the survivor (Jain, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

The #MeToo movement in India has ignited a significant national debate in India, highlighting several major elements with international ramifications. The right to be free of sexual harassment and violence, the right to privacy, and the materiality of virtual space are the three. Others, on the other hand, believe that change is slowly creeping into workplaces, movie and comedy show

scripts, and ordinary encounters and conversations. In any case, the post-#MeToo India is one in which discussing sexual harassment is no longer taboo, and that is a start (Sood et al., 2019).

The news coverage of violence against women has frequently been sensationalized, opportunistic, and devoid of a thorough examination of the issue's prevalence. However, the media's portrayal of sexual assault and domestic violence has begun to shift. However, there are still issues. The problem emerged because the morality and ethics of a particular episode were underemphasized while the acts of violence were overemphasized in the media. The media served as a mirror, reflecting society's flaws (Sarup, 2005).

Despite the fact that incidences of violence against women have always existed, the media must play a critical role in bringing these issues to light. Aside from various forms of brutal violence against women, there are certain lesser offences such as wife-battering, needless limitations, such as not allowing the wife to leave the house, and so on. Despite the fact that these activities are considered a violation of human rights, they are more or less acceptable in our society. The media has aided in the promotion of human rights, it should work as a pressure group to combat this injustice (Sarup, 2005).

In terms of individuals, social location, gender identities, and experiences, the #MeToo movement in India is heterogeneous and fluid; it is a coarse and unstructured arena, the undulations of which attract attention to a politics of affect that plays out on a physical-virtual continuum (Tella & Kannabiran, 2021). Many LGBTQ people claim that the movement only recognized a heteronormative paradigm, and that even after the 377 ruling, societal stigma and the threat of family excommunication made the #MeToo movement inaccessible to them.

Building solid systems would go a long way toward ensuring that survivors' complaints are handled seriously, without the interference of sexist attitudes and power structures and in this media played a vital role. The #MeToo movement arose as a radical departure from patriarchal society's established standards, allowing women to speak out against abuse and raise their voices. There is a need to re-engage and reconsider patriarchy in order to move away from the dominant viewpoint (Enloe, 2017).

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