

# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

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## Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

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POORVIKA MEHRA, MAY 18 2023

On 16 December 2012, a 23-year-old woman named Jyoti Singh, who was initially named *Nirbhaya*[1] for privacy by the Indian press, was gang-raped on a bus (Times of India 2012a, Hindustan Times 2012a). The incident served as a microcosm of the rampant structural and physical violence cases against women, frustrating citizens in India. It culminated in the country's most influential women's rights movement — the 2012 Nirbhaya Movement. The movement protested incidences of harassment and violent attitudes against women and has been described broadly as a spontaneous campaign against “patriarchy entrenched in society” (Nandi 2013).

Five years later, on 5 October 2017, Jodie Kantor and Megan Twohey's article in the New York Times, titled “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades”, and actress Alyssa Milano's tweet about her own experiences with harassment and assault using the hashtag ‘Me Too’, encouraged other women to share their stories using ‘#MeToo’. The birth of the #MeToo movement[2], much like Nirbhaya, was sudden, and it gained traction overnight, with 300,000 women using the hashtag the day after Milano's tweet (Kaplan 2018). The movement aimed to highlight the egregious nature of violence against women and give a voice to victims (Santiago & Criss 2017).

Despite the similar aims of these two movements — that is, to prevent sexual harassment, assault and violence against women while giving voice to the victims of such violence — the #MeToo movement has come to be regarded as the “movement that galvanised the world,” while Nirbhaya, until the birth of #MeToo, was seen as another symptom of “India's rape problem” (Burke in Global Fund for Women 2017; Hundal 2013). Notably, after 2017, Nirbhaya was belatedly characterised as belonging to the framework set out by #MeToo. In other words, Nirbhaya was seen as the prologue to “India's #MeToo” instead of as a separate product of independent, non-Western feminist voices relevant to feminist discourses in their own right (American Enterprise Institute 2019: 1).

The suppression of Nirbhaya and the characterisation of Indian women as mere victims of the country's rape problem, when compared to the wide acceptance of #MeToo and the portrayal of associated activists as “courageous women who changed the world” may seem puzzling and inexplicable (Global Fund for Women 2017). Nevertheless, this thesis takes the position that it is not novel. One must only look at the discourse on Afghan or Arab women during the Global War on Terror to find examples of distinctions being drawn between the lives of women in the American or European ‘West’ and the Arab or Afghan ‘East’. Here, the Eastern[3] woman is cast, not by her own volition, as “uniformly oppressed, powerless in the face of religiously induced patriarchy”, while her Western counterpart's existence is synonymous with a “culture of liberation” which should be emulated (Hamid 2006: 80; Manchanda 2020: 178).

How can we understand this diverging treatment of women's experiences? Which women's voices are more ‘heard’ in debates surrounding international gender politics, and what does that lead to? In other words: *are Western agents consistently centred as ‘voiced’ in transnational gender politics dialogues? What effect does this centring have on the socio-political identities of women in the West and the East?* This study will evaluate two primary theoretical streams of thought to answer these questions. First, it will analyse the argument that Western feminist epistemologies and experiences are not privileged in gender politics discourses; any perceived ‘othering’ of Eastern experiences occurs due to the ‘cultural specificity’ of these experiences, which results in them not translating universally. Consequently,

# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

the second view, guided by Edward Said's Orientalism and related other works, such as those of Chandra Mohanty (2003), Gayatri Spivak (1987), and Nivi Manchanda (2020), will be explored. This argument directly contradicts the 'cultural specificity' case by categorising it as an Orientalist excuse. It further postulates that Orientalist framings of the East as 'naturally barbaric' or 'backward' are used to implicitly suppress the concerns of the East and prioritise Western feminist epistemologies, which are painted to be the source of rational knowledge that the perpetually 'victimised' East is meant to follow. A wide array of examples will be used to explain these theoretical positions before analysing the comparative case study of Nirbhaya and #MeToo specifically.

Using a mixture of thematic and Foucauldian discourse analysis, this work will study the journalistic coverage of both the Nirbhaya and #MeToo movements. The goal is to reveal how the 'fixed' socio-political identity of Indian women as "victims," India as naturally "rape-prone," and Indian men as "excessively brutal" populate current iterations of Orientalist American discourse within the transnational gender politics dialogue between India and the U.S. Furthermore, it will show how this discourse constructs the 'Oriental' Indian woman as the 'Other' for the 'Occidental' American woman's 'Self', securing the latter's hegemonic superiority over the former (Sidner 2013; Hundal 2013; New York Times 2012a). Based on this evidence, it will be concluded that Western ideas, including its feminisms[4] and, by extension, its women, are centred as 'voiced' Subjects[5] in international gender politics. By 'voiced' this study refers to the treatment of Western epistemologies as legitimate and conferring primacy upon them. In contrast, 'Eastern' and 'Oriental' women are trapped in a continuum of epistemic violence stemming from the Occidental imaginary that silences their voice even when she tries to speak (Spivak 1987). Further, the perpetuation of Orientalist discourse creates for the non-Western, subaltern[6] woman the 'fixed' socio-political identity of what Mohanty (2003) calls an 'average third world woman' who needs to be spoken for by the authoritative West due to her "constant state of despair and backwardness;" thus leaving the subaltern woman's reality, which is much more complex than that of her discursive counterpart's, unaddressed (Manchanda 2020: 146).

It must be noted that the purpose of this thesis is not to cast aspersions onto Western feminist ideas or to suggest in a binary fashion that these ideas are 'wrong.' Furthermore, the case studies of Nirbhaya and #MeToo are also not included to authoritatively claim that Indian society is devoid of dangerously excessive patriarchal inclinations or to contest the global proliferation of #MeToo. Instead, this research only seeks to use this example to explore the modes in which Orientalism is embedded, knowingly or inadvertently, in discourses stemming from the West and the impact such West-centrism may have on understandings of challenges faced by or arguments postulated by non-Western subaltern women. Ultimately, it approaches the questions posed above by sincerely engaging in the critical process of feminist reflexivity and adjudging the role of positionality, power and privilege in formulating feminist discourse and priorities.

## Literature Review

### *Specifying Cultural Specificity*

Prevailing discourse responds to trepidations regarding the marginalisation of concerns raised by non-Western women with the implicit or explicit assertion that these challenges are 'culturally specific' instead of 'universal'; hence they cannot be 'mainstreamed' in feminist discourse. These arguments are subliminal manifestations of Samuel Huntington's 1993 *Clash of Civilisations* thesis, which approximately equates cultures to 'civilisations' and emphasises that the differences between these cultures/civilisations are "not only real; they are basic" (Huntington 1993). The differences between such societies are purportedly many. Where Western culture champions "individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, democracy [...] and a separation of church and state", these ideas allegedly have "little resonance in Hindu, Islamic, Confucian, and other *Orthodox* cultures [emphasis added]" (Huntington 1993). The latter group instead supports "indigenous values diverging from modernity, like those of religious fundamentalism" (Huntington 1993). Hence, any attempt at diffusing ideas from one 'civilisation' to another is bound to cause conflict. Inherent in this argument is that the West boasts a modern outlook that is not only different from but also beyond the cultures of the homogenous, monolithic and orthodox East. Any concerning patterns of belief in the East, therefore, cannot translate to the obliquely superior Western civilisation/culture.

Within the feminist context, Western writers have tacitly lent support to creating the non-West as culturally specific in

# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

their analysis of female genital mutilation or Eastern patriarchal societies. Indeed, while writing about female genital mutilation, Mary Daly (1978) and Fran Hosken (1984) repeatedly categorise it as a “sado-ritual syndrome of ancient origins” which has proliferated all over the world but allegedly originated in Africa. They also assert that purportedly “widespread” African female complicity in continuing this ‘tradition’ is solely due to them being “mentally castrated” by an excessively patriarchal African society (Daly 1978: 104-106, Hosken 1984). By this account, African women are cemented as ‘forever victims’ of their male counterparts and their concerns are settled as endemic to their environment (Hosken 1984). Cutrufelli (1983) and Mincos (1980) make similar arguments regarding the position of women in the ‘third world’ or the effect of family dynamics in Arab nations. Cutrufelli pinpoints the move away from modern enterprises and toward local mutual aid associations as rooted in a bid to keep women oppressed — something that a transition to a “modern market economy” as seen in the West would not allow (1983: 5). Further, Mincos, when talking of the patriarchal Arab family, establishes it as the root of female oppression in these regions and thus cements all Arab women to be analogously “ignorant, tradition-bound, oppressed veiled Muslim women” in contrast to the Western woman’s “progressive, enlightened, liberated” being (Hamid 2006: 80-81; Mincos 1980: 23). Jill Lewis (1981) supports Mincos’ argument through her characterisation of Black women as manipulated and indoctrinated by patriarchal, sexist Black men. She attributes this conditioning as the reason behind Black women’s lack of participation within mainstream Western feminism, reinforcing the cultural specificity mindset.

In these discourses, the question of female autonomy for the non-Western woman is moot since she has been mentally incapacitated or brainwashed by the patriarchy and cannot present the story of her struggles to the world — the Western woman must do it for her (Lorde 2002). Further, this line of argumentation holds features of culture — here, underdevelopment and patriarchal control — responsible for the problems faced by women in the ‘East’, hence containing such challenges within the ‘civilisation’ at hand (Said 1978). Mincos’ study, in particular, goes as far as delineating an idealised identity for the Western woman that is oppositional to an Arab Muslim woman. By polarising their beings in this way, she implicitly reiterates the impossibility of solidarity from a Western woman for the situation of a woman in the East since the Western woman is everything that the non-Western woman is not (Mohanty 2003, Amos & Parmar 1984). Movements from the non-West protesting violence against women then become unsuitable for the modern and progressive West, where women are seen not to be labouring under such brutal cultural specificities and excessive patriarchal control (Zine 2006; Manchanda 2020). It appears that, through a grammar of distance and difference, any cross-cultural diffusion of experiences is rendered inappropriate and inapplicable from the non-West to the West. Thus, the plight of these non-Western women cannot be universalised or mainstreamed into feminisms due to its culturally specific, backward and distinctly traditional origins.

After the line of argumentation was outlined, this thesis will now turn to framings of the non-West as ‘Oriental’ and the consequent argument that non-Western women are not accidentally left out due to cultural specificity. Instead, they are systematically marginalised due to glaring portrayals of them as ‘Oriental’ to maintain the subject-position of Western feminisms as centrally ‘voiced’.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Understanding Orientalism*

Postcolonial theorists and critical feminists vehemently argue against the ‘cultural specificity’ thesis. They stipulate that non-West feminisms are marginalised due to a neo-imperial pattern of privileging Western feminisms and suppressing non-Western imaginaries to secure the hegemony of the ‘West’ as the ‘mainstream’ while fossilising the non-West, or the ‘East’ as the ‘Other’ (Said 1978). The bedrock of this viewpoint is Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism, which posits that the West ontologically and epistemologically creates a distinction between the ‘Occidental’ West, which is seen as “rational, virtuous, civilised and normal”, and the “Oriental’ East, conversely portrayed as “childlike, uncivilised, depraved and different” (Said 1978: 48). In turn, this distinction allows the Occident to justify its domination of the Orient in a complex cultural hegemonic sense.

Two core themes of Said’s Orientalism, that is, the creation of binary, hierarchical identities and the concept of ‘Othering’, are reflected in Sara Ahmed’s writings on ‘stranger fetishism’. Ahmed’s ‘stranger’ mirrors Said’s ‘Orient’ as a mechanism to help us face bodies that “we have already designated as the beyond” (Ahmed 2000: 3). As

## Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

Ahmed argues, in this form of discourse, the stranger, much like the 'Orient', is the unknown, abnormal, dangerous, and inhabiting "a place of ambivalence, in which one is not quite like 'us'" (Diken in Ahmed 2000: 11). The ambiguous character attributed to the Orient is what gives the stereotypes associated with it their currency; the effect of "probabilistic truth and predictability" is beyond what can be proven, projecting the Orient as mystical or incapable of being logically construed (Bhabha 1983: 19). The stereotypes of difference and mystique are faithfully and performatively repeated in Western discourse, circulated until the representation embedded within them is socially accepted as 'truth' (Bhabha 1983; Manchanda 2020; Foucault 1972). This preoccupation with familiarity and the contrived synonymy between 'familiar' and 'safe or desired' emanates from what Oyěwùmí labels the "bio-logic of Western culture", that is, the West's preoccupation with visual and physical elements of reality, which is what she believes to be the root of race and gender classifications (1997).

Creating identities and hierarchies through discourse reinforces the Foucauldian nexus between power and knowledge. The intellectual labour of fashioning the Oriental stranger occurs by imposing a "grid of intelligibility" designed by Occidental epistemes onto it (Foucault 1973: xx). In this grid, the Occident holds the central subject-position. So, the Othering discourse of difference employed against the Orient views Western intelligibilities as the "primary referent in theory and praxis" (Mohanty 2003: 62). This argument contradicts the way proponents of cultural specificity portray the East as 'inherently problematic' or 'backward' as if this is a known fact rather than a fluid discourse borne out of asymmetric power relations between the East and the West. In other words, it shows that representations cannot occur in a vacuum; they need to originate from somewhere — and here, this privileged locus is occupied by the Occidental entity sourcing its cultural superiority by maintaining its status as a primary, organising referent or a subject position in knowledge production about the Orient.

The practice of Western feminist imaginaries to present non-Western women as ahistorical, "ourselves undressed" or "victims and the preyed-upon," and their concerns as culturally specific or "politically immature" exposes the privileged position of Western feminisms as centred and 'voiced' and appropriates feminist as Eurocentric and Western (Rosaldo 1980: 392; Lorde 2002: 102; Amos & Parmar 1984: 7). The marginalisation of challenges faced by women in the Orient as not being problems of the West due to cultural specificity speaks to the embedded patterns of disavowal that deny the heterogenous complexities of female experiences both in the Occidental 'here' and the Oriental, Other 'there;' condensing women, or people identifying as women in the Orient to "an undifferentiated mass with homogenous, if not identical experiences and opinions" (Manchanda 2020: 145). Following this logic of homogeneity, Mohanty (2003) posits that this neo-colonial, Orientalist power-knowledge nexus is used to marginalise non-Western women by congealing their identities to create the "Average Third World Woman", whose homogenously victimised image is used to reinforce the subliminally superior identity of the Occident (Mohanty 2003: 65). This analytical conclusion is seen in the cultural specificity arguments explored in the previous section, where Oriental women are perceived as uniformly 'powerless' by their Western counterparts. However, this categorisation is made possible by privileging Western ideas about the Orient instead of the Orient's assertions about itself. Indeed, when Minces, Lewis or Daly talk about the mental incapacitation of 'Oriental' Arab, Afghan or African women, they blatantly disregard these women's autonomous activities, distort their histories and render these non-Western women invisible in favour of Occidental 'knowledge' about their conditions (Amos & Parmar 1984). This discourse maintains a grammar of "third-world difference", a nebulous characteristic that uniformly oppresses women in Oriental countries and separates the concerns of women in the Occident from the Orient (Mohanty 2003: 63).

The interest in conserving Western women as the subject-position for the Orient, that is, creating the Oriental woman as the West's shadow, results in a continuum of epistemic violence that shuts the voice of the Oriental subaltern woman even when she tries to speak. Oriental women are not voiceless; they are ignored in favour of 'voiced' Western feminisms, and hence, even when they try to talk, they are not heard (Spivak 1987). Ideas emanating from subaltern women are immediately treated as endemic — not because of an overwhelming cultural specificity, but due to preconceived notions of the Oriental women's body and mind as one that needs to be saved, as opposed to one that can serve as the source of new, worthwhile 'mainstream' feminist discourse. It is important to note that this argument does not seek to falsify claims of the mere existence of cultural specificity. Communities across the international political landscape, including the West, exhibit peculiar features. Instead, this viewpoint determines that essentialising the particularities of a specific culture to form the basis of the dismissal of a nascent episteme, as is the case with Oriental feminist epistemes, is evidence of the hierarchical power structure between Occidental and

# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

Oriental epistemes. By extension, this essentialism ensures the centring of Western feminisms as 'voiced' while fossilising Oriental women into the mould of tradition, conservative, incapacitated victimhood. Utilising an interpretivist analytical framework and the technique of Foucauldian discourse analysis, this study explores the applicability of an Orientalist critique to the Nirbhaya and #MeToo comparative case study, detracting from the cultural specificity viewpoint. Consequently, it will determine Orientalism's practical implications on the socio-political identities of Western and Oriental women.

## Methodology

This research's case study sections follow an interpretive framework and utilise thematic discourse analysis as the dominant methodological technique to analyse news articles within India and the United States of America (USA or the U.S.) on the Nirbhaya and #MeToo movements. Limiting focus to only India and the U.S. is a grounded choice for analytical coherence. These two countries have specifically been chosen because the movements in question originate from them. When analysed, the USA's reactions to Nirbhaya are expected to demonstrate markings of Orientalist discourse towards Indian feminisms. Therefore, the relationship between the American #MeToo and Indian Nirbhaya feminist movements is a microcosm for power hierarchies between Western and Eastern feminisms.

The interpretivist stance taken by this study allows it to reject the simple binary between objective reality and subjective perceptions in favour of problematising the idea of an exclusive, objective 'Truth' by adhering to Foucauldian notions. Here, socio-political and historical exigences are credited with creating the power-knowledge nexus existing between Occidental and Oriental feminisms (Foucault 1972). This nexus, in turn, impacts the processes of truth-creation and meaning-making (Foucault 1972). Discourse analysis, as undertaken by this study, recognises the reality of discourse being performative and of ideological value and bears in mind Foucault's notion that the discourse, at its core, is a violent epistemic imposition through the lens through which realities are created, and meanings are forged (Foucault 1979). Through discourse analysis, this work uncovers which agents' grids of intelligibility are centred as hegemonic and fit to ascertain what knowledge is repeated as 'truths' in transnational gender politics discourses.

1,000 news articles from the U.S. and India were cumulatively surveyed for this analysis to facilitate a deeper understanding of prevalent sentiments and discourses in both nations for, first, their domestic movements, that is, Nirbhaya for India and #MeToo for the U.S.; and second, the external, 'foreign' action, that is, #MeToo for India and Nirbhaya for the U.S. 39%, or 412 articles, were directly relevant to the content of this study. A portion of these has been directly cited in this analysis. To collate relevant articles, 21 searches on the Nexis database were conducted with combinations of keywords such as "me too+ movement+ accusations", "me + too + twitter", "delhi + gang + rape + protests" and "nirbhaya + movement + rape+ problem" used to create a board constellation of data for this work to analyse. The first fifty results from each search were surveyed uniformly, and relevant articles were assorted by theme before being subjected to a deeper discourse analysis.

While additionally analysing press releases or government statements in depth would have been worthwhile, considering the breadth of literature available from news media itself and keeping in mind the scope and length of this paper, the sources analysed were limited to journalistic articles. CNN, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, The Associated Press and Fox News were chosen to represent American journalistic discourse. At the same time, samples from the Times of India, Indian Express, The Hindu, Economic Times and Hindustan Times reflected Indian discourse. These outlets were chosen since they are some of the most widely circulated newspapers or the most frequented news websites in both countries, barring outlets focusing on sports and entertainment (Majid 2022; Agility PR 2021; Bharti, n.d). Further, these outlets represent a range of political outlooks, from conservative to liberal, providing an ideologically balanced sample for the study. Considering the presence of numerous local newspapers in India, all written in various regional vernaculars, choosing only English-language news outlets prevents the exhibition of regional biases in this study[7]. Moreover, the Washington Post was excluded from the American discourse sample despite its widespread nature due to its extremely sparse coverage of the Nirbhaya movement. Both sets of samples were collected throughout the five years after the beginning of the movements: for Nirbhaya, articles that were published between 2012 and 2017, while for #MeToo, the period is between 2017 and 2022.

# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

Having discussed the methodology upon which this thesis is premised, Indian and American discourse on their domestic movements will be analysed to determine whether the aims of these movements were indeed congruent.

## Domestic Dialogue

Before delving into the analysis of Orientalist discourse concerning Nirbhaya, it is crucial to establish congruence between the aims of Nirbhaya and #MeToo, as stipulated by their domestic audiences, to ensure that the differential treatments of the movements indeed arise from the Orientalist discourse, and do not exist due to fundamental dissimilarities between the movements. Consequently, this section will outline Indian and American discourses on Nirbhaya and #MeToo to identify and compare domestic understandings of the movements.

### *Indian coverage of the Nirbhaya movement*

Domestic Indian coverage of the Nirbhaya movement was incessant. The five sampled media outlets— Times of India, The Hindu, Hindustan Times, Indian Express and the Economic Times — covered the campaign persistently and uniformly as it unfolded due to the large scale of its civic participation. Searches conducted on the Nexis database suggest that these agencies published 353 articles about the protests within a month of the incident (Appendix A, entries 14 & 15). Headlines ranged from “Gang Rape Protests: Delhi Turns into Fortress, Protesters Gather at Jantar Mantar,” “How the 16 December, 2012, incident will change the discourse around women’s safety in India,” and “Candle march, human chain for Nirbhaya” (Times of India 2012a; Hindustan Times 2018a; Times of India 2012b). The discourse that defined the movement was characterised by outrage, solidarity, and a call for systemic change. In the words of Sunny Kumar of the All-India Students Association, the action was powered by accumulated anger toward a “culture of fear” and aimed to shape a worldview with no tolerance for sexual violence (Kumar in Nandi 2013a; Saxena 2016). This statement, combined with steady discourse emanating from news agencies that characterised the goal of the movement to be stymying structural violences against women, including “verbal sexual assault, sexual harassment at the workplace and more,” is evidence of the fact that the Nirbhaya Movement was not limited to the specific incident of Jyoti Singh’s gang rape (Nandi 2014). Instead, the declaration of broader goals to secure the safety of women against discrimination or violence veers this movement away from being one that demands justice for one individual to one that levies a systemic critique against entrenched societal patriarchal norms, aiming to transform the judiciary and policy framework around sexual harassment (Hindustan Times 2014a). This analytical conclusion is best supported by thousands of protesting Indian women, who declared that Jyoti Singh had transcended from victim to symbol, with her death posing the question: “what is the meaning of ‘woman’? How is she looked upon by society today?” (Times of India 2015a).

### *American coverage of #MeToo and similarities with Nirbhaya*

The #MeToo movement spawned similar discourse within American media. Regardless of political affiliation, the five sampled newspapers — CNN, Associated Press, Wall Street Journal, New York Times and Fox News — covered the movement tenaciously, producing over 200 articles within the first month. Like their Indian counterparts’ views on Nirbhaya, 71% of participating American women, as polled by CNN, described the #MeToo movement as geared towards highlighting sexual harassment as “an extremely or very serious problem” and erasing the stigma that comes with being assaulted (Agiesta & Sparks 2018; Santiago & Criss 2017). Further, as Ted Bunch, founder of the violence prevention and male socialisation organisation ‘A Call to Men’ outlined, #MeToo resonated beyond sexual harassment and lifted the veil on the egregious social problem of women’s perceived in society as “objects, property, and having less value than men” (Bunch in LaMotte 2017). This echoes the questions Nirbhaya poses about a woman’s place in society. Like Nirbhaya, #MeToo was a reckoning for patriarchal structures, challenging the small space given to women in culture and highlighting the structural violence they faced. Ultimately, as the Wall Street Journal focused on in its discourse about the movement, #MeToo in America inspired efforts by lawmakers, executives, and citizens to change the corridors of power by holding an increasing number of men accountable for instances of harassment and assault — the scale of this ranging from accusations against a Supreme Court nominee to everyday employers who may have abused their power — hence, working towards achieving the same broad social goals Nirbhaya set out to fulfil (Weber 2018).

# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

The congruence between the two movements is not limited to their aims. It is also loosely visible in their modes of organisation. For instance, in India, support for the discourse emanating from the Nirbhaya movement was widespread, fanned by what Indian media terms “revolutionary organising” by a “virtually connected youth,” and the campaign was held together not by a single organiser but “just a message that resonates” (Economic Times 2013a). The social media application WhatsApp was a vital tool for disseminating the Nirbhaya movement’s discourse throughout India, as millions of citizens changed their display pictures to black as a show of solidarity (Bakshi 2017). This grassroots unity with a decentralised organisation structure is also characteristic of #MeToo, which gained steam as a spontaneous movement when thousands of women flooded social media with the hashtag ‘me too’ to signify having undergone some form of sexual abuse or harassment (New York Times 2017a). Hence, through a preliminary analysis of discourse in both American and Indian media, the foundation of a comparative case study can be set by considering the analogous nature of not just the movements’ destabilising, anti-patriarchal rhetoric aiming to ameliorate structural violence against women but also their grassroots character, reliance on mass mobilisation and utilisation of technology for ideological diffusion.

## *The dilemma of cultural specificity*

Despite this, proponents of the cultural specificity school may argue against such comparisons using Huntington’s clash of civilisations logic, proposing that Nirbhaya was borne out of a “savage rape” in a country riddled with overly patriarchal instances of violence and a discriminatory attitude towards women and hence cannot be equated with a Western movement rooted in a “civilised” nation such as the U.S. (Hundal 2013; Sidner 2013; New York Times 2013). Indeed, attitudes towards the Nirbhaya movement were not uniform throughout India, with several government officials arguing that rapes “are not committed intentionally” and “can only be stopped by God” (Times of India 2014a). Further, the refrain “boys will be boys” is persistent in official governmental discourses. For instance, prominent parliamentarian Mulayam Singh Yadav insisted that boys should not be punished for rapes because “mistakes happen” and that “women should be blamed as well” for tempting men (Yadav in Times of India 2014a). However, contrary to the axioms of cultural specificity, this discourse was not limited to India but was also present in the speeches of detractors of the #MeToo movement. For instance, Donald Trump and other members of the Republican Party in the U.S., such as Senators Steve King and John Kennedy, painted the movement as one that falsely targets and victimises men, going as far as to say that “it is a very scary time for young men in America, where you can be guilty of something you may not be guilty of” or that “a man’s life can be ruined now by one unsubstantiated allegation” (Trump in Klein, Malloy & Sullivan 2018; King in Lucey & Colvin 2018). This rhetoric had a direct impact on perceptions of the movement within certain groups in the country, as a CNN poll conducted by polling company SSRS in 2018 showed that less than 50% of Republican-identifying citizens would believe victims of sexual assault, as opposed to 87% of Democrats; the former being behind the propagation of the ‘false accusations awareness’ hashtag ‘#HimToo’ (CNN 2018a).

Hence, the hallmarks of ‘cultural specificity’, that is, an aversion to progressive ideas, equal human rights, and liberalism, as identified explicitly by Huntington and implicitly by radical feminists such as Daly and Lewis, are not limited to India. Sections of American society display an adherence to ideologies diverging from such liberal norms as well. Consequently, attempts to explain the relegation of Nirbhaya as merely a symptom of the ‘Indian rape problem’ due to India’s inherently patriarchal structure and oppression of women are reductive, especially since this stream of discourse was absent from reactions to #MeToo despite the head of state of its country of origin making disparaging remarks regarding the movement. The ability of Western feminist discourses to aptly situate Trump and other Republican politicians’ reactions as manifestations of global patriarchal conditioning without rendering them as problems ‘specific to the U.S.’ speaks to the capacity of feminisms to rise above the particularities of a movement’s area of origin to see the value of the ideas being propagated in context of transnational gender politics discourses. This argument will be further built upon in light of Indian media’s discourse on #MeToo in the next section. Nevertheless, considering this point and the similarities between #MeToo and Nirbhaya, the insistence on reducing the latter to a “reminder of the dangerous conditions faced in India” cannot be explained by cultural specificities explanations and must be explored as a potentially Orientalist discourse (New York Times 2012a).

## **Transnational Coverages**

# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

The cultural specificity thesis' reliance on a 'clash between civilisations' as a pre-existing fixity, as opposed to a socially constructed subjectivity, fails to explain the marginalisation inherent in the American transnational dialogue about Nirbhaya. Therefore, this study now turns to Said's theory of Orientalism as an analytical framework. An analysis of the transnational coverage of the movements, that is, the Nirbhaya movement in the U.S. and #MeToo in India, will demonstrate the presence of Orientalism in American discourse around Nirbhaya, which centres Western feminisms and cultural ideals and freezes the identity of Indian 'Oriental' women as powerless victims. Secondly, it will underscore that cultural particularities are not hindrances to the diffusion of feminist ideas cross-culturally, as seen in Indian reactions to #MeToo. Hence, Orientalism is the most convincing explanation for the marginalisation of Nirbhaya and Indian feminist epistemes.

## *The Nirbhaya movement in American news*

Discourse on Nirbhaya in American news outlets remained uniformly ethnocentric at its core but differed in severity depending on the ideological affiliation of the source. Decidedly liberal sources like the New York Times or CNN produced more articles on the subject than the politically neutral Associated Press, which in turn engaged with the issue more than the conservative-leaning politics section in the Wall Street Journal (Pew Research Survey 2019; All Sides 2020). Out of the surveyed outlets, firmly conservative Fox News produced the least journalistic literature on the Nirbhaya Movement. Relevant articles in CNN, Associated Press, the Wall Street Journal and Fox News display discursive similarities in their assertions that Nirbhaya only galvanised India because it is a country where "sexual violence is rampant", "horrendous rapes" are a common occurrence, and "stalking, sexual harassment and voyeurism are commonplace" (Associated Press 2015; Sidner 2013; Fox News 2015). The New York Times echoes these sentiments more implicitly by stating that this movement "serves as a reminder of the brutal conditions women face in India" (New York Times 2012a; New York Times 2013). Notably, the Wall Street Journal focused heavily on linking the aims of Nirbhaya to primarily reforming "India's chauvinistic men, many of whom clearly see women as inferior and see no issue, therefore, in abusing them without fear of consequence" (Beckett 2012). Further, the discourse surveyed in the five chosen American outlets more or less uniformly fixates upon positive coverage for the British documentary 'India's Daughter', which, according to director Leslie Udwin, sought to "amplify the voices that said 'enough is enough'" during Nirbhaya. The voices of Indian women are often cited to reinforce images of them as "beaten because they could not pay dowry", oppressed because "the arrival of a daughter is a tragic event in India", or victimised by the patriarchy that blames them for the violence they face (Udwin in Krishnan 2015; Fox News 2015; Associated Press 2015; Hundal 2013).

In limiting their reportage of Indian women's accounts of their occupied social space and their understanding of #MeToo to disjointed quotations, the surveyed American discourse engages in a selectivity that begs the same questions that Audre Lorde posed to Mary Daly in her critique of the latter's work — does the analysed discourse truly hear the voices of Indian women? Alternatively, does it "merely finger through them for quotations which they thought might valuably support an already- conceived idea?" (Lorde 2002: 103). Additionally, the idea that the Nirbhaya movement's aims were limited to reforming Indian men or that Indian women are all uniformly silenced victims of violence in "such a conservative country with patriarchal traditions, where it will take years to erode devastating sexism" is reductive considering Indian media's more or less uniformly positive perception of Nirbhaya, as analysed in the previous section. Moreover, the choice to cover the 'India's Daughter' documentary is telling of a subliminal pattern to render subaltern Indian feminists invisible, especially since the documentary has been widely criticised in India for furthering what Kavita Krishnan, Secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Alliance, has labelled "the white saviour mission" in its portrayal of all Indian men as having "brutal attitudes" that have "no place in the civilised world" (Krishnan 2015; Streep in Krishnan 2015). Additionally, CNN and New York Times, in particular, provided grotesque and vivid descriptions of the gang rape itself, notably repeating how the victim was "brutally assaulted with an iron bar in a way that destroyed her intestines" and "raped for over an hour before she was left on the road to die" (CNN 2013; New York Times 2013). In doing so without giving appropriate coverage to the Indian citizens participating in the Nirbhaya protests, both these outlets feed the discursive regime that paints Indian men as quintessentially Oriental in their brutality and reinforces the image of Indian women as the hapless, voiceless, brutalised (Krishnan 2015; Manchanda 2020). This image is embedded in any American 'Occidental' understandings of Nirbhaya, thus privileging this American episteme as voiced while obscuring, almost entirely, the experiences and heterogeneous voices of Indian women.



## Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

Beyond criticising men's attitudes in India, underscoring 'India's rape problem' and giving detailed descriptions of the rape, the five surveyed American news outlets have not engaged with the aims and structure of the movement itself. This is exemplified by the fact that the search terms "Nirbhaya movement", "Nirbhaya protests", "2012 gang rape protests", and "2012 Delhi rape protests" yielded a cumulative 827 results on the Nexis databases for the period between 2012 and 2017, but "Indian rape problem 2012" alone yielded 5,708 results wherein 38 of the first 50 results were directly linked to categorising the Nirbhaya movement as a result of "yet another horrendous rape in India" spurred by a "morally corrupt" attitude towards women in which "blaming women for rape is what hundreds of millions of men here are taught to believe" (Appendix A, entries 6, 11, 12, 13; Appendix A, entry 10; Sidner 2013; Associated Press 2015).

In emphasising Nirbhaya as a reaction to "India's increasing incidents of rape and patriarchal family structure," American discourse echoes ideas postulated in Minces' work in 1980 on Arab families and relegates the Nirbhaya movement to an 'Indian problem', as opposed to giving merit to Indian feminists' understanding of the movement as a globally relevant phenomenon (Times of India 2012c). This exposes the 'first-world' tendency to represent and speak for the 'brutal, primitive, and uncivilised' subaltern, which it views as "unknowing and lacking agency" (Spivak 1987; Said 1978: 30). In this process, the Nirbhaya movement is subjected to two-pronged colonisation within hierarchical-race gender relations in a neo-imperialist framework, wherein it is first "dominated, exploited and inferiorised" for being an Indian movement by American news media and then "separately marginalised and inferiorised" as a movement for women's rights in a global patriarchal framework (Oyěwùmí 1997: 123). The disqualification of the Indian conscious regarding Nirbhaya and feminist agendas here is an instance of what Spivak (1987: 76) calls "subjugated knowledge," wherein subaltern knowledge, often considered "naïve" or "beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity," is buried under 'Occidental' modes of thought, which here privilege the idea of Nirbhaya as a 'reactionary' movement to ameliorate "the dangerous realities of Indian women" (Timmons and Gottipati 2012).

The superimposition of 'first-world' feminist rhetoric over subaltern ideas regarding Nirbhaya signifies the 'voiced' status of the Occidental U.S. at large over the Indian subaltern within the transnational gender politics discourse at hand. This 'voiced' status has a variety of effects — first and foremost in shaping the Indian identity itself, by shifting focus from the Indian ability to organise against and protest structural violence onto the 'ignorant' and 'uncivilised' attitudes of Indian men as an unwarranted homogenous social grouping. By blaming 'men from villages' who "do not understand the moral boundaries" of cities and focusing on "poverty, institutional gender bias and lack of education," the sampled American coverage diminishes the movement to instead promote Orientalist images of India as primitive, uncivilised, and irrational (Said 1978). In doing so, the U.S. deploys its cultural hegemony to leverage "positional superiority" as modern, civilised, and rational in its co-constitutive identity as the developed 'Occident' to India's undeveloped 'Orient' (Said 1978: 30). Moreover, CNN and Wall Street Journal's specific characterisations of the Indian woman as "not having enough independence", being subjected to a national "war on women," or being potentially being violated by an Indian man who would treat her like a "crazed dog would ravage a toy" is an example of the construction of a 'third-world difference' — a continuous factor that "oppresses most, if not all, women in these countries" (Sidner 2013; Hundal 2013; Agarwal 2015; Mohanty 2003: 63). Such coverage paints the subaltern woman as "sexually constrained" and "archetypal victims", hence reducing the entire Nirbhaya movement to a reaction by Indian women, who are frozen into the mould of "objects-who-defend-themselves" against the oppression of Indian men, who are permanent "subjects-who-perpetuate-violence," as evidenced in Orientalist media portrayals of them as chauvinistic, controlling, oppressive and backward (Mohanty 2003: 65-67; Agarwal 2015).

Implicit in the perpetuation of this Indian identity is the (self) construction of western women as antithetically having liberties, freedom, and assured safety, unlike Indian women. Such thinking is implicitly embedded in the sampled American discourse in this study, as CNN (2013), Fox News (2013), and the Associated Press (2012) varyingly refer to the need to "make India a safer place for women" since this brutal mindset has "no place in *our* civilised world, where the liberties and safety of women are secure [emphasis added]" (Streep in Krishnan 2015). By defining the juxtaposition between 'their' situation in India and 'our' civilisation in the U.S. as one that mirrors the dichotomy between the backward and the civilised, the analysed Occidental discourses reiterate stereotypes about India as Oriental and Indian women as restrained and oppressed. They hence bypass the opportunity to see the transnational value in Nirbhaya's anti-sexual violence message (Bhabha 1983; Said 1978; Bakshi 2017). As Mohanty (2003) and Manchanda (2020) note, this portrait of women in the American Occident may not be accurate but is discursively

# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

potent in furthering the ingrained Western feminist goal of self-preservation and (self) centring. In juxtaposing the American western feminist sense of self so heavily with the Oriental, 'third-world', subaltern woman, any feminist contributions made by the subaltern are automatically considered redundant to western feminist discourse — explaining the stereotyping of Nirbhaya as simply "India's rape problem", despite its structural and ideological similarities to #MeToo (Bhabha 1983).

The dispossession of subaltern Indian voices and centring of American feminist discourses is most evident in the belated legitimisation of Nirbhaya as the precursor to 'India's #MeToo moment' by the New York Times (2018), rendering it part of a global discourse around sexual violence and harassment but only under a banner fashioned by western feminists. This plays into the discourse that "feminism, and feminist demands which are of any relevance and validity, have been developed by white, Western women", and then Western feminists maintain 'subject' status in international gender violence and feminist narratives (Amos and Parmar 2005: 50; Spivak 1987). Hence, in spite of its potential to generate a broader movement of international relevance, Nirbhaya remained localised to India, Indian women remained relegated to an 'object' status, and the subaltern woman remained represented by the West, despite her efforts to finally 'speak' (Spivak 1987).

## *Indian response to the #MeToo movement*

Much like with the sampled American outlets, Indian media's discourse on #MeToo broadly varied depending on the political leaning of the outlet in question. The left-identifying Hindustan Times and The Hindu avidly reported on #MeToo developments and were closely followed in their volume of coverage by the centre-to-centre-left Indian Express. The centre-right Times of India did not produce a vast amount of discourse on the movement, while the contribution of the conservative political section of the Economic Times was sparse. Despite variations in the volume of articles produced, the pieces emerging from these publications supported the #MeToo movement in America. They often echoed the understanding of the movement as propagated by American feminists. Just as three New York Times op-eds in 2018 called #MeToo a "rallying cry to stand against sexual harassment and sexual assault", Indian media celebrated the movement as a spark that "lit not one but hundreds of fires which have now become a blaze against men in positions of power who have sexually harassed women at work with impunity" (Aravind 2018).

Further, while #MeToo, like Nirbhaya, also began due to a particular incident — here, the sexual harassment accusations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein — unlike the aforementioned American discourse on Nirbhaya, the sample set of articles surveyed by this study did not diagnose #MeToo as a symptom of American cultural deficiencies, or its inherent 'harassment problem'. Indeed, a preliminary search for the keywords 'metoo movement' narrowed to these publications in the Nexis database reveals that 120 articles were cumulatively published about the social media movement within a month of the hashtag first being tweeted out by Milano on 15 October 2017 (Appendix B, entry 5 & 6). The discourse disseminated through them was aimed at generating solidarity, as seen by the headlines of some of the very first Indian articles to be written about #MeToo: "#MeToo: Did this appear in your social media timeline? It's important to know what it means", "Kolkata Police comes out in support of #MeToo, penned a heartfelt note to survivors of sexual harassment", "Lucknowites rally behind #MeToo", "#MeToo, respond Mumbai women, recount abuse", and "Why Delhi feels it's important to say #MeToo" (Economic Times 2017a; Indian Express 2017a; Hindustan Times 2017; Times of India 2017a; Times of India 2017b). In all of these articles, Indian media dissected the methods in which #MeToo was transnationally applicable and saw it as a "movement about equality [...] about dismantling hierarchies of power that have existed for centuries" (Madhav 2018). The widespread attention given to #MeToo ensured that the movement permeated into Indian society, with companies nationwide instating methods to curb sexual harassment, sexual violence or discrimination at the workplace and state governments beginning initiatives to educate boys at school about consent (Hindustan Times 2018; Times of India 2017c; Bhushan 2018 ). This discourse serves to highlight further the ways in which cultural specificities are not fixed obstacles or 'Truths' but are instead only discursively modelled as such in Nirbhaya's context within the analysed American media discourse, hence following the Orientalist premise of an Occidental, Western grid of intelligibility founded upon a grammar of difference when it comes to addressing imaginaries originating from the primitive non-West (Said 1978; Foucault 1979; Manchanda 2020).

Indian coverage of #MeToo was not simply receptive to the movement as it was presented in America. Still, it was

# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

also reflexively critical of its aims in a manner that mirrors the ethos of feminist theorising. Coverage of #MeToo in the Indian Express (2017b) particularly noted certain exclusionary elements, like #MeToo's focus on upper-middle-class women in Hollywood, the government, or salaried mainstream jobs and the converse lack of representation of women from lower socioeconomic strata. Accordingly, it sought to remedy this lacuna by including stories from India's marginalised *Dalit*[8] community (Indian Express 2018). In posing this reflective critique of the movement, this stream of discourse posed by Indian Express challenges the implicit assumption that the issues thought to be important in #MeToo uniformly include the experiences of all women and highlights the way the movement is exclusionary for marginalised women in both India and the US (Banerjee 2017). In addition to this, Indian coverage of the campaign also insisted on the need to be "receptive to stories that do not conform to our understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment" and hence do not conform to the mainstream narrative woven by 'voiced' Western feminism (Indian Express 2018). In deploying this critique, Indian media questions the perceived ascendancy of western, white feminism over the concerns of non-white, non-Western women everywhere and seeks to ameliorate this by de-centring Western feminist ideals by respecting feminisms in their multiplicity (Amos and Parmar 2005). Hence, the Indian coverage and response to #MeToo strongly counter Orientalist assertions about the character of the Indian community. It contests the reduction of the identity of Indian women to perpetual, reactionary victims struggling against the brutal and culturally specific oppression of their male counterparts, who cannot participate as fruitful thinkers on transnational issues (Mohanty 2003). In doing so, it also forces us to critically examine the Orientalist discourse that privileges or centres the U.S. as the 'voiced' agent with its ability to not only marginalise the voice of the subaltern Indian woman, but also serve as a determinant for her socio-political identity.

## Conclusion

In exploring the comparative case study of the transnational media coverage of the Nirbhaya and #MeToo movements, this study aimed to uncover whether Western agents are voiced in transnational gender politics dialogues. Additionally, it contemplated how this affects the socio-political identities of women in the East and the West. The review of academic literature and media sources revealed two dominant streams of thought: the cultural specificity model and the Orientalism framework. These concepts are situated in a broader context with examples from Africa and the Middle East to provide a fuller understanding of their argument before the study focuses on the Indian-American transnational context.

The cultural specificity model argues that Western agents are not privileged; problems emanating from the East often bear 'civilisational' particularities that amount to a cultural specificity that cannot be universalised to the West. Utilising Orientalism as the dominant analytical lens, the given analysis contends that, unlike the assertions of the cultural specificity argument, Western discourses are 'voiced', and subaltern imaginaries are suppressed to secure the cultural hegemony of the West over the East in transnational gender politics dialogues, as seen in the Nirbhaya-#MeToo case study. The U.S. here serves as a microcosm for the Western 'Occident', while Indian voices are a part of the Eastern, Oriental, subaltern complex in this transnational gender politics dialogue. The analysis above also shows the effect of this hierarchy on socio-political identities since it creates a binary between the 'Western' woman and the 'Eastern' woman, cementing the first to be 'ideal', 'modern' and 'liberal' while the latter in a perpetual victim of the patriarchy, oppressed and backward. In creating this identity for the Eastern woman in India, American or 'Western' discourse more broadly settles itself as the primary referent using which all other identities are characterised.

The cultural specificity argument is further detracted from as the Nirbhaya and #MeToo comparative case study shows that both movements, as opposed to only the Nirbhaya movement, had some culturally specific, overly patriarchal opponents, but media discourse of such opposition, in sampled American media, was amplified in Nirbhaya's case through Orientalist discourse. Lastly, the incisive and reflective discourse propagated by the five sampled Indian media outlets on the #MeToo movement clears a path for the transnational acceptance of 'foreign' movements and epistemes despite the specificities of the cultures they originate from. This approach is helpful in the feminist context because it reflects an adaptability inherent in the axioms of intersectional feminism, which is much needed in the contemporary context given the strong winds of globalisation and the ever-increasing interconnectivity it heralds.

# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

Through tracing this divergence in reactions to two analogous movements, this study concludes that the propagation of neo-colonial, Oriental epistemes within feminism detracts from the 'mainstream' feminist theories' fundamental aims of inclusivity and reflexivity by generating an unbridgeable cultural divide between the East and the West. Limiting understandings of non-Western women to a caricatured 'Average Third World Woman' allows languages of power, grammars of difference and acts of stigmatisation to permeate into feminisms, while actually neglecting the lived reality of these women (Mohanty 2003). The automatic assumption that women's experiences in the East are due to "brutality" and 'barbarity' limits their voices and knowledges to the imagined 'Orient' because such experiences are considered beyond possibility in the 'civilised' West. The congruence between the aims and methods of Nirbhaya and #MeToo empirically disproves such an idea and inherently underscores the value of treating non-West epistemes with the same potential universality afforded to the voices of Western agents.

This analysis can be expounded upon by broadening the types of sources being considered— the addition of government policy papers, non-governmental organisations' statements and more could be considered to provide a more detailed picture of American and Indian discourses in this case study. However, the applicability of this analysis goes beyond simply the American-Indian transnational interaction. It can be potentially generalised if more case studies from non-Western areas were considered, like the Russian "I Did Not Want to Die" movement or the Argentinian "Ni Una Menos" movement. In all, discursive introspection on this issue, considering its implications on representation and identity, is unmistakably important to maintain the virtue of self-reflection in feminist discourses and postcolonial international relations.

## Notes

[1] translation: the Fearless One. While this moniker was given to Jyoti Singh, the gang-rape victim, it was later co-opted as shorthand for the Nirbhaya movement in India. Here on forth, this thesis will use 'Nirbhaya' to refer to the anti-sexual assault movement and will refer to the gang-rape's victim by her given name, i.e., Jyoti Singh.

[2] 'Me Too' as a phrase of solidarity amongst sexual abuse survivors was coined by Black feminist activist Tarana Burke in 2007. While there is much to be said regarding the fact that the movement's history is often traced to begin with a tweet by a White actress, that is beyond the scope of this study. Hence, for analytical coherence, the study will refer only to the social media movement that popularised in 2017 but will do so using #MeToo to differentiate between the popularisation of the hashtag and the true beginnings of 'Me Too' by Burke.

[3] This study makes this monolithic linguistic choice considering its repeated and popular usage in international relations discourse, but it does so only for theoretical expediency, with no desire to lump cultures, nations, and populations into one discursive analytic lens. The choice made here illuminates what Manchanda (2020: 13) may call the "knotty practices of knowledge", which necessitate the perpetuation of some discursive myths in the path of challenging others.

[4] This thesis makes the barbed discursive choice of pluralising 'feminism' to indicate the presence of multiple streams of thought within gender politics and to challenge the idea of a singular, universal feminism that may fit the experiences of all women around the world

[5] 'Subject' as used in this study denotes a Spivakian understanding of the term, evoking the idea of a centred, primary referent that is used as an organising lens for identities around it (Spivak 1987).

[6] The subaltern here links to the idea posited by Gramsci in his theories about cultural hegemony. In contemporary settings, it can be seen to denote populations that are socially and politically excluded, or considered inferior than the Subject population (Spivak 1988; Sarkar 2021).

[7] Contrary to popular opinion, Hindi is not the national language of India and is merely designated as an official language of government alongside English according to Article 343 of the Indian constitution. Hindi is also concentratedly spoken in northern India, and hence the presence of Hindi newspapers would prevent equal representation of southern India.

# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

[8] refers to lowest caste or social group in India on the basis of ancient social structures of Hinduism; this group was historically considered 'oppressed' or 'untouchable', and these sentiments are still prevalent in some parts of India (Ghildiyal & Mathur 2018).

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# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

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# Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

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## Appendix A: Nirbhaya Search History

**Entry no.** **Date** **Database** **Terms searched** **#Comments** 19-03-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 16 December 2012- 16 December 2017, Publications in India, Newspapers, Tol, Indian Express, Hindu, Economic Times, Hindustan Times.

Search term: Nirbhaya protest movement 10,000+ First 50 results checked, even distribution of relevance across sources 21-03-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 16 December 2012- 16 December 2017, Publications in India, Newspapers, Tol, Indian Express, Hindu, Economic Times, Hindustan Times.

Keyword: gang-rape, rape case, indian

Search term: Nirbhaya Indian rape problem 10,000+ First 50 results checked, discourse on international perception of Nirbhaya 27-03-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 16 December 2012- 16 December 2017, Publications in United States, News: CNN, NYT, A.P., WSJ, Fox News

Search terms: nirbhaya gang rape 200 First 50 results checked. WSJ, Fox News and CNN with relevant coverage 27-03-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 16 December 2012- 16 December 2017, Publications in United States, News: CNN, NYT, A.P., WSJ, Fox News

Search terms: Nirbhaya protests 100 First 50 results checked 27-03-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 16 December 2012- 16 December 2017, Publications in United States, News: CNN, NYT, A.P., WSJ, Fox News

Search terms: india gang rape 512 First 50 results checked 27-03-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 16 December 2012- 16 December 2017, Publications in United States, News: CNN, NYT, A.P., WSJ, Fox News

Search terms: India rape 1106 First 50 results checked, need to specify 27-03-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 16 December 2012- 16 December 2017, Publications in United States, News: CNN, NYT, A.P., WSJ, Fox News

Search terms: india rape problem 5708 First 50 results checked, 38/ 50 relevant to search. 27-03-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 16 December 2012- 16 December 2017, Publications in United States, News: CNN, NYT, A.P., WSJ, Fox News

Search terms: 2012 delhi rape protests 481 First 50 results checked 30-04-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 16 December 2012- 16 December 2017, Publications in United States, News: CNN, NYT, A.P., WSJ, Fox News

Search terms: nirbhaya movement 41 First 50 results checked. 30-04-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 16 December 2012- 16 December 2017, Publications in United States, News: CNN, NYT, A.P., WSJ, Fox News

Search terms: 2012 gang rape protests, Keywords: rape or protests or protests and demonstrations 200 First 50 results checked. 30-04-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 16 December 2012- 16 January 2013, Publications in India, Newspapers, Tol, Indian Express, Hindu, Economic Times, Hindustan Times.

Search terms: Delhi rape protests 205 First 50 results checked. 30-04-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 16 December 2012- 16 January 2013, Publications in India, Newspapers, Tol, Indian Express, Hindu, Economic Times, Hindustan Times.

Search terms: Nirbhaya protests 148 First 50 results checked.

## Appendix B: #MeToo Search History

## Nirbhaya, #MeToo & Orientalism in Transnational Gender Politics

Written by Poorvika Mehra

**Date Database Terms searched #Comments** 21-03-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 15 October 2017- 15 March 2022, Publications in India, Newspapers, Tol, Indian Express, Hindu, Economic Times, Hindustan Times.

Search term: #metoo movement 2740 First 50 results checked, maybe 14 relevant sources

21-03-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 15 October 2017- 15 March 2022, Publications in India, Newspapers, Tol, Indian Express, Hindu, Economic Times, Hindustan Times.

Search term: #metoo india workplace 6508 First 50 results checked. 6-10 unique sources. Articles focus away from elite to general workspace reflections on MeToo 21-03-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 15 October 2017- 15 March 2022, Publications in India, Newspapers, Tol, Indian Express, Hindu, Economic Times, Hindustan Times.

Search term: #metoo nirbhaya

Keyword: me too 5132 First 50 results checked. 15-05-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 15 October 2017- 15 March 2022, Publications in the United States, News: CNN, NYT, A.P., WSJ, Fox News Search term: #metoo movement 9142 First 50 results checked. Majority results CNN+NYT, some AP 15-05-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 15 October 2017- 15 November 2017, Publications in India, Newspapers, Tol, Indian Express, Hindu, Economic Times, Hindustan Times. Search term: what is #metoo movement 32 First 50 results checked. 15-05-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 15 October 2017- 15 November 2017, Publications in India, Newspapers, Tol, Indian Express, Hindu, Economic Times, Hindustan Times. Search term: #metoo movement 88 First 50 results checked. 15-05-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 15 October 2017- 15 March 2022, Publications in the United States, News: CNN, NYT, A.P., WSJ, Fox News Search term: #metoo movement senate 976 First 50 results checked. First 7 sources specifically good. Well covered by WSJ + CNN 15-05-2022 Nexis U.K. Filters: 15 October 2017- 15 March 2022, Publications in the United States, News: CNN, NYT, A.P., WSJ, Fox News Search term: #metoo movement workplace 3465 First 50 results checked.