

COMMUNIQUE

DIGITAL MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE



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EDITOR'S NOTE

You Can't Sit With Us

by Subiya Yusuf

In January of 2022, six girls from Udipi's pre-university college gave a press conference to protest against the college authorities' denial of permission of wearing their hijabs, an Islamic head covering, in their classrooms. The visuals soon took to social media and this became a national controversy.

A video that went viral on the internet showed the college principal closing the gates thus keeping the Hijab clad Muslim girls out, drew a lot of attention. While some online activism was seen in the support of those girls such as on *Twitter*, the trend of *#hijabisourright* was started in the support of Muslim women, on the other hand, the personal information of the protesting students were leaked allegedly by college authorities. The students were trolled and harassed online and physically as well. Many images and videos soon started to surface where Muslim teachers were forced to remove their hijabs/niqabs before entering educational institutions. What's vile is that this humiliation is public. These women were not given even a private space and all of this was recorded and shared in the public domain.

When a girl named Muskan Khan who went to her school to submit her assignment was heckled by some boys who were chanting 'Jai Shree Ram'- the reply the lone girl chanted was, 'Allah hu Akbar,' also got the internet divided responses. The video sparked outrage all over social media. Many known personalities came in support of the hijab. Bollywood actress Sonam Kapoor shared a post on her *Instagram*, the post asked why the turban was allowed, but a part of the population questioned the hijab. However, liberal voices were too concerned that heckled girl's response was 'inappropriate' and should have been Indian fan chants.

In one of the illustrations, a standing woman was shown wearing a hijab- surrounded by some orange

illustrations. The woman in this illustration was Muskan Khan and the orange-coloured illustration referred to the boys who chanted 'Jai Shree Ram'. A lot of support came for the hijab on social media, so did the fake news. After a viral video of Muskan Khan, a *Twitter* profile in her name surfaced. This account sent out tweets praising the 'Sikhs of Khalistan' for their support, congratulating the 'Taliban spokesperson,' and apologising to Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

However, it was later found that the account was fake and doesn't belong to her. Some images also got viral. In one of them, it was claimed that the girl in the photo is a student protesting for her hijab, who in real life doesn't even wear it, and is just doing this for some propaganda. It was later found out that the images were morphed and the girl is not even a college student but a part of some political party.

The controversy received a lot of international cognizance from Pakistani Nobel laureate and activist Malala to American-Palestinian supermodel Bella Hadid. However, many netizens supported the hijab ban as they believed it is not a part of the uniform, or is too communal.

The high court has passed an interim order not to wear hijab or any religious thing in educational institutions, very conveniently equating rights of the minority to wear a head covering with Hindutva cultural symbol of saffron scarves. The protesting students are arrested. Online protestors are also facing online abuse and bullying via anonymous accounts. Someone commented on one post on *Instagram* - 'Go to Pakistan!' Being from the most marginalised community when it comes to education according to *Sachar Report*, the media discourse is still fixated on 'hijab', as the women teaching and studying are kept at bay.

Source: Bar and Bench



The Crack of Dawn: Dalit Voices In New Media

By Srishti Chaudhary

In 1996, down the lines of history, a British reporter requested a Delhi based-correspondent, BN Uniyal to meet with a Dalit Journalist to discuss Kanshi Ram and Mayawati's recent spat with a few media figures. During his investigation, Uniyal realised he had never encountered a Dalit journalist in his entire life, which prompted him to explore the foundations of journalism in India through the books of caste hierarchy. His first attempt met with disapproval from all of the major press organisations, including the *Press Club of India*. He contacted the *Press Information Bureau of India* for information on Delhi-based journalists. The upper caste correspondents covered the majority of the 686 total records. However, because 232 names were unrelated to any caste, Uniyal chose 47 names at random from the "caste-less" reporters. Once again, dismayed, prompting him to ask an incessant question: **Where are the Dalit journalists and why are educated Dalits not actively visible in the mainstream media channels?**

Source: Srishti Chaudhary



We do not have an agreeable answer to this question after two decades of searching even; what has remained looming, however, is the minimal engagement of marginal communities in prevalent media outlets and even lesser in socially identifying as one. *"After scanning the country for more than ten years, I was able to discover eight Dalit journalists in the English media,"* Al Jazeera's Sudipto Mondal stated. *"Only two of them have dared to speak up."*

According to an *Oxfam India* report titled *"Who Tells Our Stories Matters,"* 106 of the 121 newsroom leadership positions in newspapers, television news channels, digital news media, and magazines are held by journalists from the upper castes, with none held by journalists from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

They are circled out of the news and press rooms and made uncomfortable under the urbanite's gaze.

And, as ironic as it may appear, while 'history always repeats itself,' it often duplicates both the positive and negative aspects. In a poll performed by journalist Tejas Harad to examine the representation and conditions of Dalit-Bahujan in modern newsrooms, half of the respondents indicated that they were not acquainted with a single Bahujan journalist. This is not much further than the research output provided by BN Uniyal, which was held 20 years ago. Nothing by large changed in media houses controlled by the conglomerates, although, with the presence of new media, the voices of the outvoted are progressively rising. Dalit and other marginalized youth have recently carved out diverse platforms to express themselves. In the past few years, Ambedkarite journalism has undergone a pulsating resurgence. In addition to reporting on caste crimes, the new platforms centre Dalit intellectuals to communicate with wider audiences and influence public opinion on caste and other social issues and events.

Some significant events, such as the violence at **Bhima Koregaon** in 2018 and the alleged suicide of PhD scholar and Dalit activist **Rohith Vemula** in 2016, bear credit for igniting an anti-caste movement in India and mobilising the masses on social media to speak up for the marginalised. Platforms like the *Round Table India*, *Dalit Dastak*, *Velivada* and *Dalit Camera* are holding the torch for the youth, carving better and safer spaces for marginalised voices leading to a remarkable upsurge in digital activism and political engagement.

"Writing with Fire," a documentary based on the journey of a Dalit-women run newspaper *'Khabar Lahariya'* has won a nomination in the **Academy's 'Best Documentary Feature' category**. The majority of Dalits have been left out of the social media expansion, even after the uprising of Dalit voices. Three-quarters of Dalits still reside in rural India and many of those who live in towns lack electrical and internet access. Following the completion of a platform search for suppressed narratives, the dominant voices of upper-caste Hindus have taken the course of action in disturbing the unified signal of equality. Speaking against reservation and Bahujan representation in the media apparatus is the core weapon of the dominant groups. Now, in order to strengthen Dalit socio-political movement, the next challenge is to study and find ways to deal with the upper-caste Hindu narrative cycle on digital media.

Job Journalism Met Digital

by Atulya Jain

It's 9:00 PM, Arnab Goswami is screaming on top of his lungs. Switching channels does no good, Navika Kumar is addressing some very irrelevant issues. Frustrated! You ask- 'does India have space for news anymore?'

Hope lies with the independent news ventures as digitalization takes off! Will they survive the harsh environment or will they be sandwiched between suffocating commercial and political trends?

Independent journalism or media, is a form of press or reportage that seemingly floats above the restrictions of the government, influential corporations, and the news houses themselves. This form of journalism is commonly understood to feel no pressure to sugarcoat their reporting or shy away from revealing the bad side, even if it means going against the government.

As the wave of digital media took its course, it washed over every form of journalism and reportage. The impact it had on independent journalism is twofold. On one side, it boosted and empowered free speech but on the other side, the freedom it provided, spilt through the safe boundaries.

Online media have acted as a key to unlocking the freedom of expression and unbiased reportage in many cases. In 2010, Hungary, Viktor Orban's government when came to power- attempted to silence all the critical sources of media. This reduced the largest broadcasters into nothing more than a mouthpiece. Such cases can be observed all over the world. This makes online platforms a table turner. They allow journalists to directly connect with the citizens, access resources more freely, and deliver the news with little to no amount of fear weighing on their backs. Digital media in Germany has allowed journalists to access resources and also verify them more efficiently, which has led to the production of finer news copies. Besides, several independent ventures are growing in India too.

Every now and then a notification from either *The Quint* or *Newslaundry*, or the *Scroll*, etc pops up. All of these platforms are headed by big names in the field of journalism. These are the people working for decades in this arena who were forced out of their offices just because they did their jobs! From Siddharth Varadarajan to Naresh Fernandes, all such giants took to online platforms. But this shift came with challenges. Idealistically, such brave ventures are what a democracy needs but can they survive a capitalist world? Online spaces work on a very different rule book. Along with that, the consumption patterns stumble across a whole new world.

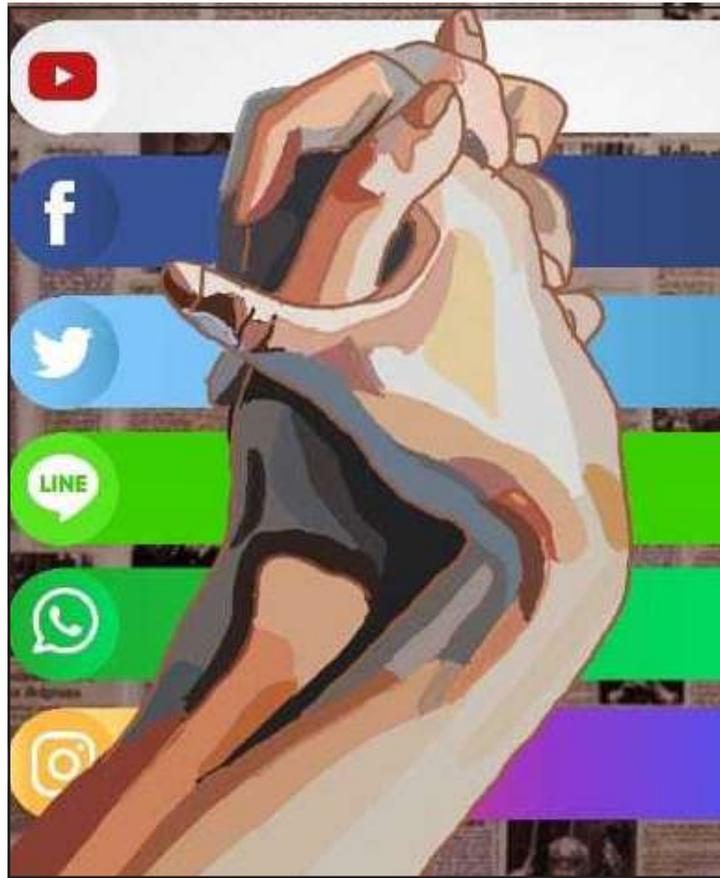


Yet another challenge is that while these ventures have provided the opportunity of speaking more freely, this very freedom sometimes works against the aim of reporting authentic news pieces. Since anyone can spread the information, sometimes digital platforms can turn into a battleground of information dissemination.

The reports have turned sloppy and journalists seem to be rampantly indulging in plagiarism. As the news cycle shrinks, the threat to journalistic standards increases. Copyright infringement and quoting without attribution are some other trends observed, in countries ranging from the United States, Canada to Asian countries like China, Japan, India, and Indonesia. Digitization has also posed a challenge in terms of data security and individual privacy. Digitization has made the theft of information and the illegal interception of conversations easier in about a fifth of the countries. Potential information leaks are a greater threat to effective journalism in the United States than plagiarism. Journalists' working circumstances have deteriorated as a result of tightening financial resources and increased competition, as they are asked to work longer hours and take on additional duties to meet demands arising from digital news delivery. Rather than news quality, digitization also plays an important role in terms of news collection and dissemination.

In retrospect of the arguments presented above, we can deduce that the digital media has acted as an enabler of independent journalism, and without it, democracy is in peril. However, the plethora of information available, the ease with which one can compromise on quality can pose a danger to the authenticity of news being consumed. If there is now a medium through which information can float easily, it also becomes a medium through which any information can float, easily. This is what we must be mindful of. The content being consumed is regulated through algorithms thus, it becomes imperative for us to exercise our choice, more consciously than ever.

Artwork Gallery



Technological Solidarity

My art is inspired from the thought that in this world of massive interconnectedness, people from opposite poles of the world can connect with each other. It is various forms of new media that have brought us together. Different colours are used to illustrate the 'hand movement'. No matter your race, caste, class, creed, new media opens doors for everyone to be treated equally and attempts to bring your loved ones closer to you. The intertwined hands depict the 'closeness' two people are able to feel because of the technology of today. Now- when politics, war, and disease try to break us apart, we are able to maintain solidarity in its face. Whenever a hot spell of catastrophe rushes by, the support that comes raining down is enabled and in a way nourished by the new media.

by Vedika Dureja



by Saanchi

Mundane Monday- A Temporal Time Lapse

by Ruchi & Vinitha



A walk to remember.



Stairway to nowhere.



Light telecast.



Night escape.

Divide Or Divine?

by Ruchi & Vinitha

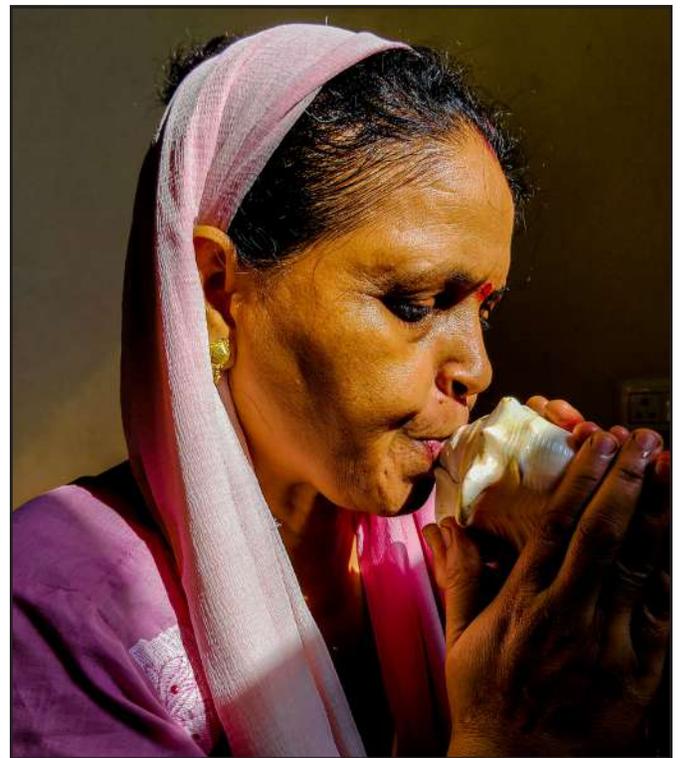
There are religious markers all around us, if we pay attention. Would the divine unite us or will the polarisation divide us?



It's a moo point to expect that I'll move.



Nihilist fleeting flames.



A conch call.

Flipping To Scrolling: News On Tiny Screens

by Devanshi Batra

From flipping newspaper pages in metros and trains to gazing and scrolling through the feeds in smartphones, the world witnessed a new source of news and information. The advent of the new media resulted in changed discourses. The rise of 'online news' gave users access to stories in one click which most definitely was not possible with print. By the time the paper hits their doorsteps in the morning, the stories reached the readers way before through the mobile screens.

In the historical context, the sea change came in the early to mid-1990s with the advent of the *World Wide Web (www)*, *CNN*, *The Chicago Tribune*, etc. We saw some of the first outlets to launch their websites online. As the web grew, sites with different niches started emerging. So readers could visit interest-specific sites and read the pieces they wanted to. Increasingly, more readers started consuming online news rather than the news available in actual newspapers. It was a matter of utility as the digital news had all mod cons. The necessary ingredients of a news story were better suited to this paradigm. The new narrative gave actual meaning to the ingredients of timeliness and immediacy. The news started reaching the masses minutes after an incident happened.

Recently, the sudden demise of the prominent singer Lata Mangeshkar made the newspaper headlines in the next day's edition but the news broke out on social media minutes after she passed away. Reading the news of her demise the next day when the consumers have already been exposed to the story the same day, seemed irrelevant to them. The 'newness' of news pertained to serving stale news (sometimes even after it loses relevancy).

Digital paradigm allowed media organizations to get immediate feedback and responses to their stories. The readers were able to share the news with their friends, family, etc. instantly. This inculcated a sense of proximity and nearness to the digital media and sustenance of constant contact. Every individual felt empowered to have a voice in the news through the corridors of commenting, liking, posting stories, etc. Digital media opened new avenues for a lot of possibilities that were not possible with print or even if they were, it was too much effort.

The new media was in a way free from editorial and organizational bias, favoritism, and political agendas. What story makes it to the headlines? What is important and what is not?

Which stories are not worthy of pursuing? A lot of these questions were based on the media outlet's bias and tilt as to what will and will not be published. The news which never made it to the newspaper was now available on digital media.



The concept of citizen journalism became popular which allowed people to post first-person accounts of events and stories. New virtual communities emerged which brought together people who share the same views and opinions.

The era of independent news organizations emerged. These outlets started providing news online, showcasing ardent and independent journalism seemingly free from the clutches of agendas. They cover stories that sometimes the print media overlook and ignore. Also, how the story is presented has changed. Where the print used to tweak stories to match the editorial policy and organization's wavelength, the digital outlets presented bare facts and information.

Tiny mobile screens and feeds inside have now become the new news hubs. The digitality of news has already marked its territory in the current social fabric and scrolling feeds is the new normal for newsreaders. A lot of traditional print media publications have also adopted the new normal. *The Hindu* still publishes its newspaper, but now the media organization also has an actively functioning mobile application. The application gives access to the latest news, opinion pieces, editorials, and everything that a newspaper does but faster than it. The dimension new media has given to news has become so vital as it has enabled more voices to be heard, more stories to be told, and more exposure to issues of paramount importance which calls for our attention!

From Analog To Digital

by Vinitha



Early template.



Mirror Mirror on the stall!



Old fashioned re-flexing.

Moving From Margins Into The Mainstream

by *Umaima Khanam*

INSTAGRAM REELS

Like the uncultured person I am, if you confessed to saying what I am about to say, you'd get called names as well. Yes, I get my hip hop from *TikTok* and pop music from *Instagram Reels*. What truly democratized pop culture was the coming of the now-banned Chinese application *TikTok*. We are counting down our top picks of racially diverse artists who are calling the shots as they go viral on social media from the margins to the mainstream.

Even in India, people from multiple diversified backgrounds of minority identities such as queerness,

small villages, working class, etc shot to fame on the platform alongside an elitist crowd, proving once again that we can all be in the centre and not at the margins. Indian rapper Sumeet Samos, entertainer Puneet superstar, etc could find their subculture and spaces to flourish through social media.

This was enabled as global media culture changed as well. What revolutionised black hip hop and American pop music? Well, moving away from toxic masculinity

in hip hop or white girl problems in popular music, it was the dominance of a few young artists who were black, plus sized, queer, and their mere existence was resistance.

In no way do I idolize them, because I don't put anyone on any pedestal but some of the mentions I am going to make deserve a shout out for carrying forward the legacy and democratising their form for the masses. The algorithm supported them and they are here to stay.



Source: *The New York Times*



➤ Communiqué | From Margins to Mainstream

1) Meghan Thee Stallion

It's your hot girl coach from Houston, Meghan Thee Stallion who went straight from trending on *Instagram* and *TikTok* to winning three Grammys. You know her from *Savage Remix*, *Beautiful Mistakes*, *Thot Sh*t*, unrivalled *WAP*, featuring Cardi B, *Butter* with BTS among other bops. What sets Meghan apart is that her music uses the same style of hip hop, just the roles are reversed. People are often accustomed to seeing black women with voluptuous bodies half-naked as they dance around the rappers on derogatory lyrics. Meghan used men in the background for her music video as she took the centre stage and rapped about her experiences as a young black woman from finishing graduating college to police brutality. We stan a humble queen. She's been around the hip hop scene since 2016, but received a Grammy for the 'Best New Artist' in 2020, after blowing up on social media.

2) Lil Nas X

We call him Nas, but the hood calls him doobie. Starting with the mega-hit country song *Old Town Road*, Lil Nas has always ridden the ranks. When he came out as queer and released *Industry Baby*, it was a culture shock for so many people to watch young confident queer black artists owning up to who they are. Nas X raps in his bop *Industry Baby* about declaring to be received as someone like queen Nicki Minaj or pop culture icon like Bieber, and he is queer and black, his aesthetics are a game-changer in the scene of hip hop. Not only does Nas X challenge the masochism in rap, but also shows the queer side too in the duality of the lyrics. Born in 1999 and he already has two Grammy awards to his credits.

3) Lizzo

Somebody come get your man, I think he got lost in Lizzo's DMs. Lizzo has three Grammy awards to her name. She set trends on *Tik Tok* with her new music releases. "*You can wake up and change many things about your appearance, but the inevitability of waking up in your skin is what unifies us,*" said Lizzo in an interview with the *Vice* on body image. The fact that she loves herself is so alien to people, but as Lizzo says it "*the truth hurts. Get over it.*"

4) Cardi B

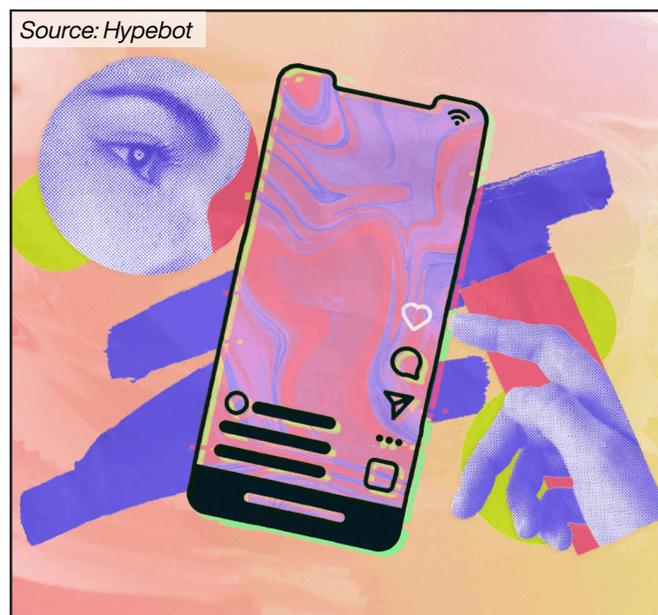
From strip club to rap scene, Cardi B paved her way. The internet hates her, the internet loves her, the internet just can't get enough of her. In 2019 she won her

first Grammy for best rap album- *Invasion of Privacy*. Her collaboration with the Maroon 5 in the song *Girls Like You* broke the internet and just when we thought what could top this, she gave drip songs like *Up, WAP, I Like It* which take back female agency of over-sexualisation and openly stating their erotic desires long asked to be suppressed and only dominated by men in the industry. Her one-liners became the next big meme on social media. Stuff like '*what was the reason,*' '*coronavirusssss,*' '*okurrr,*' are all Cardi B lingo on the lips of people.

5) Conan Grey

Half Japanese and half Irish, indie pop artist Conan Grey said in an interview that he wants to increase the scope of Asian representation in the music industry. He rose to fame through *YouTube* and his songs *Crush Culture*, *Heather*, and *People Watching* have been youth anthems. They are loved enormously by social media and he is indeed the internet's favourite. His songs have been open-ended which speculated rumours around his sexuality to which he responded, "*If labels on sexuality and gender and beliefs and all that great stuff are helpful for u, I'm all for it. But the second you start trying to shove everyone else into a neat little easy to understand the box, I get mad. Stop!*"

It's not to say that these artists shot to fame only because they go viral. They've been around but never got noticed. That's on who? It's only because of mass reaching platforms that they finally got the recognition that they deserved period!



Meta: A Utopian Virtuality In The Dystopian Reality

by Afshan Parveen

Craving to attend a concert with your friends but don't want to put in the effort of glamming up? No, it isn't a far-fetched idea but already a reality. With *Facebook* introducing *Meta*- it is connecting people through virtual and augmented reality.

On the 28th of October, *Facebook* CEO, Mark Zuckerberg announced the rebranding of the parent company from '*Facebook*' to '*Meta*'. The logo has been transformed into an infinity sign, which indicates a virtual world with infinite possibilities.

The term 'metaverse' was coined by author Neal Stephenson in his sci-fi novel, '*Snow Crash*' in 1992 where humans in the guise of avatars interact with each other in a 3-D virtual space. However, *Facebook* is not the first company to be inspired by *Snow Crash*. The virtual worlds, *Second Life* and *Active Worlds*, as well as *Xbox Live*, are the products inspired by Stephenson's novel.

During Connect 2021, the virtual and augmented reality conference, Zuckerberg said, "*You're going to be able to do almost anything you can imagine, get together with friends and family, work, learn, play, shop, create entirely new categories that don't fit how we think about computers or phones today.*" Nationwide lockdowns during the grim pandemic days led to work-from-home becoming the new normal and *Metaverse* feeds this concept through its tech advancements.

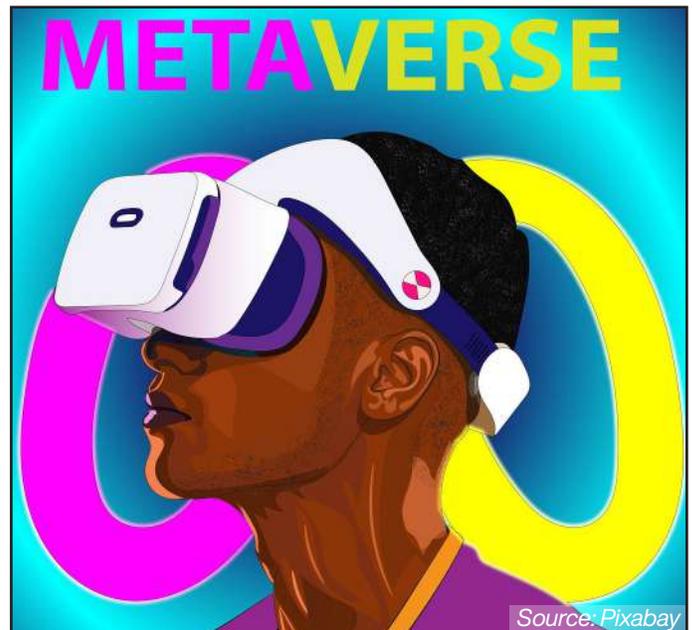
Merely two days after the big revelation, *Meta* acquired within the studio behind the Virtual Reality (VR) Fitness brand *Supernatural*. However, this is not the first VR brand that *Meta* acquired. In 2014, it acquired *Oculus VR Inc.*, a company that made VR glasses for gaming and more.

History speaks well of people's hesitations when trying anything new. When the camera was first developed, it was rumored that it would swallow the person being clicked while robots were speculated to destroy the world. So, maybe people will accept this new tech too. "*Avatars will be as common as profile pictures today, but instead of a static image, they're going to be living 3D representations of you, your expressions, your gestures that are going to make interactions much richer than anything that's possible online today,*" said Zuckerberg.

He added about the privacy and safety of users being given utter importance at the conference. Also,

people will be able to block someone from appearing in their space and choose when and with whom they want to interact. This comes after *Facebook* has been facing lawsuits in different countries for allegedly abusing the privacy of users, and spreading lies and misinformation via their profit-making algorithms.

Netizens have been talking about the concept of *Metaverse* taking inspiration from the movie '*Ready Player One*' released in 2018. It is anticipated that with this high pace of evolution in the tech industry, we might be even running towards a dystopian idea of the world, as portrayed in the popular *Netflix* series '*Black Mirror*'. Some are even hoping that if it turns out to be how it been advertised rather than just existing as a VR chat platform. With all the speculations and apprehensions around the idea of Virtual and Augmented Reality, it'll be interesting to witness the further developments of *Metaverse*.



Metaverse aims at connecting people, similar to *Facebook*. But will it fill the gaps between people or magnify them? It might be connecting people in the virtual world but can disconnect them further in the real world. With poverty and unemployment on the global rise, this might be another step towards the already inflated digital divide. Even though Zuckerberg announced that *Oculus* headsets will be made available at subsidized rates, they will still be out of reach for many, leading to an increased gap between the privileged and the marginalized creating a utopian virtual world in the dystopian real one.

To Copyright Or To Reserve The Right To Copy?

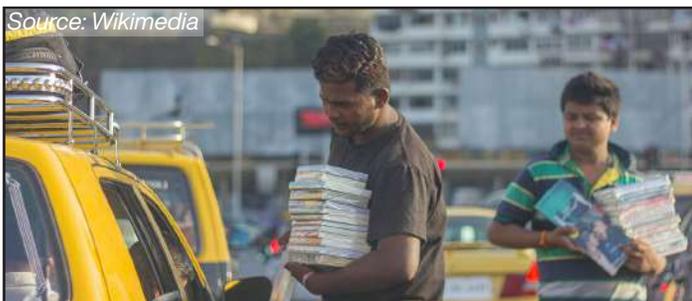
by Sanya Gupta

A rainy day, a hot cup of coffee, and a 2000s Bollywood track. What a perfect evening! Your music system blasts Pritam's "Pehli nazar main aisa jaadu kardiya..." What a song right? But did you know that this is not an original? (As if Bollywood and authenticity have ever seen eye to eye). This is just one instance, hundreds of songs, movies and much more has been copied!

Copyright and its exploitation have been making headlines for quite some time now. From Taylor Swift to T-Series, all have been bombed with lawsuits of blatant infringement of copyright. And this is not limited to only the music industry. Copyright has been a blasting issue in every field, be it drama, academics, films, or otherwise.

Now, what precisely is the significance of copyright? It is an exclusive right of ownership to use and authorise others to utilise their works for monetary benefit or otherwise. There was a lack of proper documentation of assigning rights in the mid-1900s. Over the years, the escalation of instances of copyright infringement alerted artists in ensuring secure rights over their work and thus, the Copyright Act of 1957 came into being. The Act aims to protect the original expressions of the creator and not the ideas.

Source: Wikimedia



The entertainment industry is an all-time bearer of such cases of infringement. Storylines are copied, edited, and reused- without due rights. The practice of modifying other artists' work and making it seem like one's own has unfortunately risen. For instance, the Shraddha Kapoor starrer film 'Baaghi' came under fire for allegedly copying the last twenty minutes of the film *Raid: The Redemption*. A rather similar, yet amplified case, happened with Vipul Amrutlal Shah's 'Namastey London'. Shah, whose movie was a blockbuster at the box office, sued the makers of a Bengali film, accusing them of entirely copying the storyline of the former. These are a few examples of copyright infringement in the Indian film industry.

The immensely used Torrent sites have been the go-to websites for only one thing: free newly released movies.

Films are listed, even before their formal release, irrespective of their shoddy image quality. 'Torrenting' is not monitored, making it fairly unchallenging to access them, however illegal they may be. The perceptible infringement of patents that Torrent enables is unquestionably unethical. The loss that filmmakers and producers bear at the expense of such massively used pirate websites is enormous. Tom Holland's *Uncharted*, which was scheduled to release in February, was leaked on multiple Torrent websites. The entertainment industry bears the consequences of copyright infringement probably more than any other field. Instances of similar beats of music, dialogues, or even, the entire storyline have become immeasurably common.

"To remove all barriers of science", notes *SciHub*, a shadow library website giving access to over 84 million research papers. The founder of *SciHub*, Alexandra Elbakyan, faces several copyright infringement lawsuits for giving free access to paid subscribed research papers. *SciHub* faces lawsuits in multiple countries, with the other parties demanding a complete shutdown of the website. *Libgen*, an equivalent website to *SciHub*, draws attention synonymous with that of *SciHub*. Researchers spanning different nations have moved the court to advocate for the open access of the massive pirated libraries. The string of cases against the pirate websites has raised certain serious issues, not necessarily pertaining to copyright. While copyright infringement is apparent, the question of corporate greed in academic publishing is a grave concern for scholars. However, the judgement of the courts on the future of *SciHub* and *Libgen* remains to be seen.

The exploitation of copyright does not end with the entertainment and academic sector. The diverse field of art is also plagued by the illicit use of the creators' expressions. The newfound popularity of the Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) has resulted in the sudden buzz of its relevance, concerning the copyright laws of India. NFTs slightly differ from the traditional pieces of artwork. Irrespective of the scepticism around the future of NFTs in India, the digital files of art are subjected to the Copyright Act.

The Copyright Act of 1957 has conformed to the dynamic nature of society. To date, the Act has been subjected to five amendments to include various treaties and fields. The most recent amendment dealt with the extension of the law in a digital space. With technology dominating the daily mechanisms of the globe, it remains to be seen how the copyright reforms will accommodate such erraticism.

Liberation Or Lies: New Age Politics

by Anubhuti Jain

There has been a leisurely yet constant shift in the political media system in the past four decades. This novel political media system has enabled those with power to set in motion their political and communal agenda, especially during elections. The politicization of new media is facilitating the dissemination and exchange of political content through instantaneous interaction and collaboration.

From radio shows to *Twitter* wars, political narratives have emerged stronger as new media is believed to be reigning without gatekeepers. Audience interact directly with politicians for information without the intervention of editorial gatekeepers. This lack of filtration of media consumption has led to an increased level of instability in the political communication process. New media was considered as ‘technology for liberation’, but soon turned out to be a tool with serious ramifications. In 2009, MP Shashi Tharoor was the only Indian politician who had a *Twitter* account during General Elections, but in 2014 the elections were titled the ‘*first social media election*’.

During the 2014 General Elections voters were flooded with political content via *WhatsApp*, *Facebook*, *Instagram* and *Twitter* which influenced their political perceptions. Political narratives were generated regarding a particular party and drained out the possibility of dissent and criticism. This led to the voters believing that there was no better candidacy.

By 2025, active internet users in India are expected to touch 900 million from around 622 million in 2020, according to the *IAMAI-Kantar ICUBE 2020* report. Analysis by the *Pew Research Center* suggests, 57% of India’s youth consumes the internet regularly. The omnipotence of the internet and social media cannot be questioned today. A significant part of the ruling *Bhartiya Janta Party’s (BJP)* success can be credited to its digital presence. Their ability to distribute messages through internet-based platforms has led to a

greater potential to influence a large population of its voting population.

Leveraging the help of professional agencies, political parties create social media and digital content in regional and local languages. They make use of memes from popular shows, movies, and songs. From the *Game of Thrones* memes to promotional videos inspired by popular Bhojpuri songs, the party has mastered the art of the internet.

This new world of politics extends beyond man-made borders. During the US presidential elections, Joe Biden picked a unique approach to fetch votes and garner support of the Gen-Z. He had one on one conversations with influencers and celebrities who have amassed a significant following on *YouTube*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter*.

As stated by *Village Marketing*, a branding and marketing agency that ran Biden’s influencer campaign, influencers like Mariah Carey and Billie Jean King were playing the role of small-scale press conferences for the United States’ young voters. Political advertising campaigns were run on multiple social media platforms which influenced voters. Sometimes, voting tendencies rely more on constant bombarding of targeted advertisements, rather than the socio-economic development aspirations. The lack of verification of fake news and rampant misinformation on social media further pollute the media consumption cycle.

As the digital media ecosystem evolves, its use & relevance in politics and journalism also alter. Instead of another digital campaign that sells lies, the nation needs concrete action to regain trust in the government.



Are You A Scroll Away From Seditious

by Sanya Tyagi

In February 2019, in a village in Karnataka, a Muslim chicken shop owner brought a smartphone and scrolled through *Facebook*. A few weeks later he who could not read or write was charged with sedition.

This was the time of the Balakot airstrike against Pakistan in retaliation to the Pulwama attacks in Kashmir by India. Alike others who rushed to social media to hail the army, the 21-year-old too selected a picture of soldiers to post, captioned in English, which he couldn't read- "*I stand with Pakistan Army*". He deleted it in panic but the screenshots spread through the village. "*Five minutes later, the police came to the shop and took me away. I told them repeatedly it was an error,*" said the chicken shop owner.

He was charged under Section 124A (sedition) and section 153 (provocation with the intent to cause a riot) of the Indian Penal Code, 1860. By evening, his chicken shop was burned down. His family was driven into debt. When he returned from jail, he was already a traitor. A report by *Article 14* states that **Karnataka has more sedition cases based on social-media posts than any state and most are illegal.**

Before we understand the contemporary aspect of sedition, let's go back in history during the post independence era. Abolition of the sedition law was deliberated since the sole basis of democracy is citizens' freedom to hold conversations, debates, and criticise the government. But the very controversial first amendment of the constitution in 1951 reimposed this law.

The problem here is that this poorly defined sedition law gives the government the right to suppress any opinions that are against its own ideals and values, quoting them as '*inciting offence*' or '*against the national interest*'. What constitutes the definition of a seditious act, is not mentioned distinctly.

Similarly, in February 2021, India's IT, Law and Justice Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad announced new rules for the digital media platforms like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Google*, and independent media platforms like *The Wire*, *The Quint*, etc. These provisions provide the government with the authority to take down "objectionable" web content and limit people's right to privacy on social media and encrypted messaging apps like *WhatsApp*. This practically brings everything that happens online under the government's surveillance.

When the print and broadcast media are already imperilled by increasing pressure from political parties or big businesses, the government now decides to clamp down one of the few remaining platforms for constructive journalism in our country.

According to an article in *The Hindu*, even the Indian mainstream media, which is never critical of the government, expressed concerns about the new rules, calling them "*deeply unsettling*" because "*they will give the government an honest deal of leverage over online news*

Source: Indian Cultural Forum



publishers and intermediaries." The government has claimed that the new rules level the playing field by regulating internet content in the same way that newspapers, television, and movies are regulated. The guidelines were described as "*progressive*" and "*liberal*" in the press release. "*We want them to be skilled and more accountable*" said Shankar Prasad.

They call it a measure of self-regulation. But when such kinds of regulatory measures exist in the hands of the government (with ambiguous definitions of what's objectionable), the threat of it turning into a case of state censorship looms heavily. Siddharth Varadarajan, Editor, *The Wire* said that these rules are an "*oppressive architecture*" that grants the government "*powers that are antithetical to the constitutional guarantee of press freedom*" by granting them the ability to erase or edit content. A recent example is the massive farmers' protests that used social media, such as *Twitter*, as a crucial tool for mobilisation. In response, the government had attempted to exert control over the platforms, by ordering *Twitter* to erase hundreds of accounts critical of the government and threatening their employees with arrest if they do not comply.

The government, through these new digital media rules, is trying to radically alter the way citizens receive and share information. The meaning of the inexplicit provisions of these laws and this entire culture of putting forward the '*national interest*' is indistinct. It seems as though the meaning of national interest is different for the government and the media. Be wary, you could be a scroll away from sedition!

Sanu Kise Ne Kyon Na Awaz Diti?

by Saanchi

ਸੂਰਜ ਉਸ ਦਿਨ ਵੀ ਸੀ ਚੜਿਆ,
ਜਦੋਂ ਪਰਾਈਆਂ ਦੀ ਗੋਲਿਆਂ ਸੀ ਚਲਿਆਂ।
ਇੱਕ ਇੱਕ ਕਰਕੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਸਾਰੇ ਹੋਏ ਸੀ ਕੁਰਬਾਨ,
ਫ਼ਿਰੰਗੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਹੱਥੀ ਅਸੀਂ ਹੋਏ ਸੀ ਕੁਰਬਾਨ।

ਤੇ ਸੂਰਜ ਉਸ ਦਿਨ ਵੀ ਸੀ ਚੜਿਆ,
ਜਦੋਂ ਆਪਣਿਆਂ ਹੱਥੀ ਆਪਣੇ ਹੋਏ ਸੀ ਕੁਰਬਾਨ।
ਅਸੀਂ ਤਾਂ ਆਪਣਾ ਹੱਕ ਮੰਗਿਆਂ ਸੀ,
ਗੋਹੁੰ ਦੇ ਖੇਤ ਵਿੱਚ ਤੱਪਦੇ ਹਰ ਕਿਸਾਨ
ਦੀ ਹੁਕਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਅਵਾਜ਼ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਸੀ।

ਸਾਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਨੇ ਕਿਉਂ ਨਾ ਅਵਾਜ਼ ਦਿੱਤੀ?
ਕਿੱਥੇ ਗਏ ਸੀ ਉਹ ਅਖਬਾਰ
ਜਿਹੜੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਉੱਚੇ ਉੱਚੇ ਵਾਦਿਆਂ ਦੇ
ਸਿਰ ਤੇ ਨੱਚਦੇ ਸੀ?
ਜਿਹੜੇ ਲਲਕਾਰਾਂ ਮਾਰਦੇ ਸੀ ਕੀ ਅਸੀਂ
ਲੋਕਾਂ ਦੀ ਅਵਾਜ਼ ਬਨਾਂਗੇ?

ਸਾਡਾ ਜਵਾਨ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਫੋਨਾਂ ਤੇ ਲੈ ਆਇਆ,
ਨਹੀਂ ਤਾਂ ਅਸੀਂ ਕਿੱਥੇ ਜਾਂਦੇ?
ਕਿਨੂੰ ਸੁਣਾਉਂਦੇ?
ਬੇਹਰੀ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਦੇ ਚਾਪਲੂਸਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਕਿੱਥੇ ਸੁਣਾਉਂਦੇ?

Suraj uss din vi si chadheya,
Jadon parayan di golian si chaliyan.
ikk ikk karke assi hoye si kurban,
Firangiyan de hathi assi hoye si kurban.

The sun came up that day too,
When their guns echoed all around.
Each one of us martyred,
We all were turned to dust at the mercy of foreign hands.

Te suraj uss din vi si chadeya
Jdon apnean hathin apne hoye si kurban.
Assi tan apna hak mangea si,
gehun de khet vich tapde har kisan di
Hunkar nu awaz diti si.

And the sun came up that day too,
When we were stabbed by our own.
All we wanted was respect for our rights,
All we wanted was to give a voice to every scorched
farmer working in the fields.

Sanu kise ne kyun na awaz diti?
Kithe gaye oh akhbar jehdhe aapne uche uche
vaadeyan de sir te nachde si?
Jehdhe lalkaare maarde si ki assi lokan di awaz
bnange.

Why did no one speak for us?
Where were all the newspapers and their tall claims to
be the voice of unheard?

Sadda jawan sanu phone te le aaya,
Nahin tan assi kithe jaande?
Kinnu sunaunde?
Behri sarkar de chaplusan nun kinjh sunaunde?

Our youth gave us a platform through mobile phones,
Otherwise where were we supposed to go?
Who would have heard us?
How was our voice supposed to reach the deaf gov-
ernment and it's mouthpiece media?

Sifayat

by Madeeha Lone

DAASTAAN

یوں تو پوشیدہ ہیں صدائیں اکثر،
پر آج کوئی ہنگامہ ہے طلوع سے برپا۔

Yuu toh poshida hai sadayein aksar
Par aaj koi hungama hai taluu se bharpa

The voices seem to be hidden often
But today rose with the dawn a ruckus.

Izaam e bagawat ne see diye hai labb
Zanjeeron mai kaid hai zubaan ki karvat

The allegation of sedition has sewn the lips
The chains hold the tongues tied (into silence).

Raasti pe zor jo paaya khauf o khatar ne
masoom phir maqtool aur qatil na maloom kiye

Fear and danger is taking over the truth
The innocent are murdered and the murderers remain unknown.

Bayaan jo dastaan e zulm kar gaye
Woh akhbaaron ki siyahi bhi surkh hogayi

The ones who told the tales of oppression
The ink of those newspapers turned crimson.

Qalam ko zara thaam le iss vaadi e saraab mai ae madeeha,
Warna asif, sajad aur fahad jaise bhi kayin aam hue

Hold your pen in this delusional valley Madeeha
For many in the likes of Asif, Sajad and Fahad are known.

الزام بغاوت نے سی دئے ہے لب،
زنجیروں میں قید ہے زبان کی کروٹ۔

راستی پہ زور جو پایا خوف و خطر نے،
معصوم پھر مقتول، اور قاتل نا معلوم کئے۔

بیان جو داستان ظلم کر گئے،
وہ اخباروں کی سیاہی بھی سرخ ہو گئی۔

قلم کو زرا تھام لے وادی سراب میں اے مدیحہ،
ورنہ آصف، سجاد اور فہد جیسے بھی کئے عام ہوئے۔

Editor's Note

From fleeting thoughts to final drafts, the transitory flow has been unreal, and the reason was the team behind the scenes. I am so proud of everyone who worked together on this newsletter to bring it to life. When times got serious, a wordplay in the edit made the atmosphere lighter. Unknown strangers became one unit.

The creative process made me realise that no matter how much one tries to mechanise a craft, it's bound to go beyond the limited expectations. In other words, the deadlines were missed! But it all came together towards the end, somehow, we pulled through, and somehow we made it possible, just like pieces in a jigsaw. My ultimate gratitude goes out to our beautiful team of writers, designers, volunteers, and mentors who have put in so much effort that I hope readers will witness when they read it. Here's to happy reading! Here's to Communiqué 2022!



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