Ye Toh Deshdrohi Hain: The Experiences of Women Journalists Under Hindu Nationalism in Contemporary India

By

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of women journalists working in India under the current Hindu nationalist government. In particular, it looks at the gendered expectations, challenges at home and in workplaces, and the strategies used by women journalists to negotiate dominant discourses of ideal femininity, gender and nationalism. It explores how such experiences are influenced by the rise of right-wing Hindu nationalism, along with a parallel rise in new media technologies. Therefore, the thesis adds to the literature on gender and nationalism in light of recent political and technological advancements in the Indian context. To approach this topic, I have conducted fieldwork in two parts: a guided internship and semi-structured interviews. I have conducted interviews with eleven women journalists working in various mainstream, digital and alternative media platforms. Most of the interviewees were urban, upper-caste, middle-class Hindu women as these are the groups which dominate the field of journalism. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be universally applied to all women journalists working in India: other identity markers such as class, caste and religion are important in shaping the experiences of women journalists. This study reveals how the norms of ideal femininity and sexual respectability located within Hindu nationalist discourses structure and inform the lives of women journalists. The thesis argues that when these women transgress such norms in workplaces or online platforms, they are severely sanctioned via sexual harassment, intimidation, threats and violence. However, the thesis demonstrates that women journalists continue to persist in the male-dominated field of journalism by using several strategies of resistance and negotiation. In so doing, they challenge and rework dominant discourses of femininity and respectability. By shedding new light on these strategies, this thesis reveals the different forms of women's agency in the Global South by taking into consideration the specific cultural and societal context. By studying the experiences of women journalists in India, I aim to capture how the lives of professional women are affected by nationalist discourses and rise of new media spaces.

Key words: Hindu nationalism, women journalists, media, violence, harassment

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 29965

Entire manuscript: 34300

Signed: Sneha Singh

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List of Abbreviations

ABP: Ananda Bazaar Patrika News

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party)

CNN: Cable News Network

DMK: Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Dravidian Progressive Foundation)

IFJ: International Federation of Journalists

INC: Indian National Congress

IPI: International Press Institute

NDTV: New Delhi Television Limited

NBA: National Broadcasting Authority

RSS: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Organization)

VHP: Vishwa Hindu Parishad (Universal Hindu Council)

Introduction

> Before this Modi [BJP] government, there was a like a golden period. People started accepting women journalists… there was respect for women… they were respected by political factions too. That scenario is finished… if you are in that category, talking in their [BJP's] words, then you are good. Otherwise, you are gone. I know journalists from different religions [Muslims]… they are living in so much fear… they have stopped using these digital phones to avoid being tracked.

The above quotation from Suman Kansra, India's first female video journalist, concisely captures the complex and challenging situation of women journalists in India today. Kansra was perhaps the only journalist in my project whom I could interview in-person due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview took place at a historically important place, the Women's Press Club in Delhi, where Kansra and I sat to have an informal conversation about her experiences working as a journalist. Having been in the media industry for 31 years, Kansra has witnessed the reign of two governments: the previous Congress government and the current Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, or Indian People's Party) government. She has also experienced the media industry without and now with the advent of new social media technologies like Twitter and Facebook. Kansra's seniority and varied experiences place her in an apt position to draw a contrast between the situation of women journalists in the past and now (as she does in the above quotation). Kansra also expressed her fear that the Women's Press Club, a predominantly liberal institution, would be taken over by right-wing nationalists – like the country – if the current government stays in power.

Since coming to power in 2014 the BJP, a "religious nationalist party [that] asserts a deep affinity between Hindus and the nation" (Basu 1999, p. 116), has grown in power and influence. The party is supported by two powerful Hindu paramilitary organizations: the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, or National Volunteer Organization) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, or Universal Hindu Council). Together, these organizations evoke the image of an ideal Hindu nation that is envisaged in masculine terms. Despite claiming to be non-political cultural entities, the influence of the RSS and VHP in the political domain is manifested through the ideology of their many leaders who enter politics: for example, the current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is a former member of the RSS. The RSS connotes Hindu men and Brahmanical Hinduism as

superior,[1] thus "othering" people of lower caste and Muslims as threats to the formation of a unified Hindu nation. This kind of right-wing Hindu nationalism, often referred to as Hindutva, maintains that Hindus are the true citizens of India and that Muslims are "foreigners" or "invaders" (Siddiqui 2016).

Women are represented only marginally within this nationalist framework as supporting mothers or sisters, whereas the Hindu man carries the burden of forming this unified Hindu nation through his masculine strength and virility (Baccetta 1996, p. 136). Basing its ideological standings on the RSS and the VHP, the BJP believes that Hindus are the authentic and natural inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent. Its politics are based on the assertion that the Hindu nation is losing its moral bearings, thereby its deep anxieties lie in the moral corruption of Hindu women due to the advent of modernity (Das 2008). The rise of the BJP and the associated re-assertion of right-wing Hindu nationalism thus present distinct challenges for the lives of Indian women.

This thesis examines how the rise of Hindu nationalism within the context of the current BJP government has affected the experiences of female journalists in online and television newsroom spaces. It is based on the assumption that the parallel rise of new media platforms and Hindu nationalism has produced a new set of gendered challenges for female journalists. In July 2020, for example, Rana Ayyub – an award-winning journalist and writer – received rape and death threats following her coverage of violence and police brutality in the north-western region of Kashmir (IFJ 2020). While women journalists have long experienced a degree of social and cultural resistance to their career choices in India, their lives have become more difficult under the current BJP government, under which they experience frequent threats to their lives and dignity (UN Women 2015). The thesis will consider how these journalists negotiate conceptions of "ideal femininity", as contained within official discourses of right-wing Hindu nationalism, within their everyday lives – and what happens when they transgress these gender norms. I also explore the agency of female journalists and the strategies they use as they negotiate these conceptions and exhibit certain transgressions from gender-specific roles. Specifically, the thesis will look at new media spaces as platforms where national and religious identities are asserted, and the gendered violence that is produced if women transgress gender norms.

[1] Brahmanical Hinduism is a sub-set of Hindutva. This idea refers to the superiority of Hindu scriptures and the preservers of such scriptures i.e., the Brahmans (the upper-most social strata in India).

My primary research question focuses on the experiences and agency of women journalists as they negotiate notions of "ideal femininity" and the challenges of their work as journalists under a Hindu nationalist government. The thesis suggests that under these conditions, female journalists have had to constantly negotiate their subjectivities as women and as journalists: two identities that are often contradictory and in opposition to one another (Mullick 2015, p. 703). In contemporary India, female journalists have had to perform the dual roles of the "good woman" and "good journalist", which has presented particular challenges that are distinct from male journalists. Thereby in this project, I also explore how women journalists navigate both of these roles and the strategies they use to do so. While this project focuses on "women", it is important to note that we cannot reduce all Indian women to one group with a uniform experience of journalism in contemporary India. I acknowledge that "women" is not a monolithic category, that it is socially constructed and, as I discuss in Chapter 2 and 3, intersects with various other axes of identity that are specific to the Indian context.

This topic builds upon my previous work experience in journalism, during which time I had the opportunity to talk to several female journalists and which sparked my interest in the complex relationship between gender and nationalism in contemporary India. However, my interest in this area dates back to my bachelor's degree at the University of Delhi,[2] when I witnessed my close friend being threatened by students (who aligned with the Hindutva ideology of the government) after writing an article that opposed the right-wing politics of the Indian government.[3] Consequently, I became dedicated to further exploring the relationship between the gendered threats received by female journalists and the rise of right-wing nationalism in contemporary India. Above, I outlined the aims and arguments of my research project. In the following sections, I provide a brief overview of the media landscape and the methodology of the project. Finally, I provide an overview of the content of the thesis, briefly detailing the main aims and arguments of each chapter.

[2] I pursued a Bachelor in Humanities and Social Science with a major in Journalism at the University of Delhi, India.
[3] The article was taken down from online platforms as a result of a series of serious threats and trolls that took a toll on the mental health and safety of the author. (Hence, I cannot provide its link in my sources). The article was written on the controversial Indian stance on Kashmir.

The Media Landscape in India

India has experienced a steady decline in the World Press Freedom Index under the current Hindu nationalist government. Sliding two places last year, it has stumbled to 140 out of 180 countries on its freedom of press and media (2020). Further, Reporters Against Borders, which prepared a report on media freedom in 2020, argued that "Attacks against journalists by supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi increased in the run-up to general elections in the spring of 2019. Those who espouse Hindutva are trying to purge all manifestations of 'anti-national' thought from the national debate." There has been an increase in the number of journalists killed in relation to their work in India. Under the current government, India has witnessed the largest number of murders of journalists under police investigation in its entire history (The Wire 2018).

The rise of the BJP government has dealt a hard blow to mainstream media and journalism. It has led to the relative delegitimization of mainstream media outlets, with the Prime Minister choosing to directly communicate with people through various new media technologies and social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Ninan 2019). The entry of private players and big corporations like Reliance Industries has made the media biased towards the government and corporate owners. Besides that, politicians exercise a significant level of control over the media, as they own several big media outlets and thereby many channels. For example, Subash Chandra, a Member of Parliament (an independent candidate supported by the BJP), owns the biggest and oldest television network ZEE, which has around 14 news channels across 8 different languages (Parthasarathi and Agarwal 2020, p. 4). Its subsidiaries also extend to print and digital media. Government advertisements are the most significant source of funding for the Indian media, both television and print. As such, speaking out against the establishment can be fatal. Media outlets and journalists writing anti-establishment pieces are constantly intimidated and effectively delegitimized. Trolling, online attacks, threats and even physical attacks or murder are the intimidation tactics used against those vociferously voicing opinions against these big players (Gudipaty 2017). This violence is usually perpetrated by anonymous troll armies, often by people who believe in Hindutva, and sometimes the IT cell of the government itself.

In addition to these intimidation tactics, there has been an increase in the use of sedition laws against journalists, human right activists, students, professors and protestors. According to a report published by the National Crime Records Bureau, the number of sedition cases have increased

from 47 in 2014 to 93 in 2019 (NCRB 2019, p. 31-36). The government has misused laws like the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (1967) and Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act (2002) to harass independent journalists and stifle press freedom. These laws are intended to protect the sovereignty and integrity of the country and punish terrorist or unlawful activities, yet they are now frequently used against anyone who voices dissent. The brutal murder of Gauri Lankesh, a prominent left-wing journalist writing against Hindu nationalism and the caste system in India, by right-wing Hindu nationalists in September 2017 is one troubling example of how free voices in India are shut down (Poovanna 2019).

With the advent and increasing use of new media technologies like Facebook and Twitter, there has been an exponential increase in the number of Indians consuming news through online media sources. This rise has coincided with the rise of the BJP since 2014, which very effectively used these technologies during the national election campaign. Two-thirds of the Indian population under 40 years of age have shown an inclination to online news consumption, which has made these online platforms an incredibly important source of information and medium of communication (Parthasarathi and Agarwal 2020, p. 8). Many mainstream media channels and newspapers have created digital editions to cater to the expanding demand. Besides that, there has been a rise of alternative digital-only news platforms since 2014, such as *Scroll.in*, *The Wire* and *The First Post*. These alternative media platforms work on a different model of funding in that they are subscription or donation-based, unlike the mainstream media outlets whose funding model relies heavily on the government (Parthasarathi and Agarwal 2020).

With the proliferation of social media and new media spaces, Hindu nationalist paramilitary organizations like the RSS and VHP have extended their performance of Hindu nationalism to the online sphere, in an attempt to maintain contact with the youth. Volunteers from the RSS, VHP and other self-proclaimed Hindu nationalists are increasingly occupying online media spaces to advance their nationalist agenda. Some scholars, such as Rita Manchanda, have attempted to understand the mediated relationship between mass media and the construction of Hindu nationalism as a core component of contemporary Indian politics. Manchanda shows that the mass media has provided a space for the polarization and manifestation of what constitutes an authentic "Indianness". This polarization, Manchanda argues, has led to a transformation of political and cultural discourses, which effectively delegitimizes certain (mainly minority) voices and

perspectives (Manchanda 2002, p. 304). I agree with Manchanda's argument, but as my thesis demonstrates, there are explicit gender dimensions to these discourses and their implications.

Online political discourses transform right-wing hate politics into ordinary public discourses, making them beyond the reach of fact-checking and objectivity. The construction of Hindutva memes and discourses – which combine sarcasm, jingoism, irony, parody and allegory – are important for Hindu nationalist discourses online (Udupa 2019, p. 3156). Combining politics with pleasure, these online discourses have transformed the style of communication among Hindu elites. The internet thus serves as an effective medium for the expression of Hindu identity and a site for the production and maintenance of Hindu nationalism. Sagarika Ghose, a journalist, coined the term "Internet Hindus" to describe young, middle-class men who aggressively support Modi as the only leader who has the potential to restore the glory of India as a Hindu state (Mohan 2015, p. 341). The internet not only provides a space for the emergence of "Internet Hindus" but has also given them a platform to assert their Hindu identity and thereby "imagine" India as a Hindu nation that is under attack by "outsiders" (Muslims in this case) – thus creating a rhetoric of "us" vs "them" online. This imagination of the Hindu nation and the perpetuation of Hindu nationalism in online spaces also imposes particular ideals of gender and notions of "sexual respectability" on women participating in these online spaces. This connection often poses a danger to female journalists who are seen to transgress "ideal femininity" in these online spaces.

Methodology

This thesis examines the experiences of women journalists in newsrooms and online spaces working under the current Hindu nationalist government. For this, my research methodology is divided into two parts: a guided internship and semi-structured interviews.

Guided Internship

The guided internship helped me understand the complex intersections between gender, nationalism and the media, and helped me develop a base from which to conduct interviews with female journalists working in India under the current Hindu-nationalist government. During the Spring of 2020, I interned with the International Press Institute (IPI): this is a global network of editors, media executives and leading journalists that seeks to defend media freedom and the free flow of news across the globe. The IPI follows the working model of other international

organizations like the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe, who also work to protect freedom of expression and media freedom. As I part of this internship, I primarily engaged in two tasks: first, media monitoring i.e., compiling and segregating data on press freedom violations in the Asia Pacific region; and second, writing articles and press releases.

One of the most important sets of data that the IPI produces is a list of categories of violence against journalists and press freedom. They categorise violence against journalists into 5 fields: legal harassment, killing, arrests, physical attacks and online harassment. Notably, there is no category for violence against women[4] journalists or sexual harassment.[5] This paucity effectively renders the experiences of gendered violence against female journalists invisible as they have to be fit into these strict, "gender-neutral" categories. My experience interning at the IPI helped me to understand this system of "masking": how international organizations like the IPI, the UN and the Council of Europe camouflage violence against female journalists under the dominant narrative of attacks on the media or press freedom more broadly. This kind of "masking" erases gender from violence against journalists and ignores the gendered aspects of violence against female journalists. These gender-neutral narratives of attacks on journalism make women's participation in journalism invisible and construct journalism as an inherently and defensibly masculine field (Delanthamajalu 2020, p. 1131).

At the same time, I observed that the IPI did not completely ignore violence against female journalists: it published articles on attacks and sexual violence, but there was no quantifying of this data. These stories[6] had a distinctly personal tone and were usually narrated by the female journalist herself, which made the story appear sensitive and sensational, but did not identify a broader pattern of attacks and violence against female journalists. These instances were presented as isolated, rather than stemming from an institutionalized system of gendered oppression. This tendency also aligns with the fact that the project of nation-building itself is masculinist project built on masculinist expectations and masculine ideas (Nagel 1998), as I discuss in Chapter 1. This

[4] The United Nation Declaration on Elimination of Violence Against Women defines gender-based-violence as "any act that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women" (UN 1993).
[5] Sexual harassment is one form of violence against women. UN Women define sexual harassment as "any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment" (UN Women 2008).
[6] For example, see: https://ipi.media/in-the-crossfire/

observation suggests that the experiences of female journalists in India are marginalized in the male-dominated field of journalism in same way that women are marginally situated in the Hindu nationalist project. Therefore, I argue that it is essential to document the experiences of women journalists, as well as their efforts to rework the dominant gender discourses by actively entering masculine public spaces such as the media.

This internship experience also allowed me to conduct preliminary conversations with journalists, policymakers and other stakeholders that widened my understanding of the issues that journalists – and particularly female journalists – face during their work. It also provided me with a network of contacts that I drew upon to conduct more detailed interviews as part of this project, thereby acting as a primary site of identification and interaction with female journalists. The journalists whom I interviewed for an article that I wrote for the IPI[7] gave me their permission to use the material as a part of my thesis. They further helped me identify other potential interviewees for my project.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In addition to the internship, I also conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with Indian women journalists. While one interview was conducted in person in Delhi, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health restrictions, the remainder of the interviews were conducted online using Zoom or Skype. Most of my interviewees were young, upper-caste,[8] upper-class women working in urban Delhi. The field of journalism itself is quite elitist, which makes the entry of lower-caste and lower-class individuals into the profession difficult. Since most interviewees (7 out of 11) were my personal contacts or colleagues, they were more or less my age (less than 25 years old). This age, class and caste representation affected the nature of my interviews in terms of the language used and the authority shared in the interview space, which I discuss below.

My interviewees were affiliated with both print and television news sources. Three of my interviewees worked or had previously worked for some of the oldest and most reputable television Hindi news channels like NDTV, ABP News and Aaj Tak. Reliance Industries headed by Ambanis, a close ally of BJP, now have ownership shares in Aaj Tak. One of my interviewees also

[7] The article was not published because it directly called out the current BJP government as a "right-wing" nationalist one.
[8] Caste is a system of social stratification in India. It is based on hierarchy and is hereditary in nature.

worked at CNN-News18, which is primarily owned by Reliance Industries. Two other interviewees worked at prominent English newspapers like *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*. These interviewees explained that they felt freer to voice their opinions on social media even if it was against the government. Two were affiliated with foreign-owned news channels or websites like the BBC and IFJ Asia Pacific. They also felt freer to express their opinions online but expressed concerns about the problems of disinformation which accompany a complete freedom of speech. All of these TV channels and newspapers have also extended to online media forums through their respective news websites. One of my interviewees also worked for *News Laundry*, an online alternative media platform; while another worked at *Khabar Lahariya*, a newspaper with an all-female staff. These alternative media organizations seemed to be more independent from the pressure of the government as they did not rely on it for funding. The interviewees from such organizations felt less pressured to self-censor and more supported by their organizations.

It is also important to note that while all the interviewees faced different levels of pressure from both within and outside their organizations to work in a specific manner as female journalists, they did not completely surrender to these pressures. Rather, they negotiated their roles as women journalists, challenging the dominant gendered framework and patriarchal structures both within and outside their organization. Notably, even those journalists belonging to traditional families and working at news channels with conservative ideologies exhibited rather progressive thinking about the modern Indian women who, according to them, can break from dominant gender roles. They did not shy away from expressing their views on the current state of Indian politics and criticizing the government for its Hindu nationalist ideology. In the thesis, I explicitly chose not to reference the articles, tweets and social media posts of these women journalists in order to protect their anonymity, and instead, I give detailed explanations of their social media posts and articles (by avoiding the headlines and further paraphrasing). While this approach was important in terms of protecting the anonymity of the interviewees, it still allowed me to give an insight into the experiences and struggles of these women.

Since I contacted several of the interviewees through mutual friends, the authority lines between the interviewer and interviewee were somewhat blurred. This relationship reflected Judith Stacey's description of "an egalitarian research process characterized by authenticity, reciprocity, and intersubjectivity between the researcher and her subjects" (Stacey 1991, p. 112). My positionality

as a former student journalist and as someone who has observed the profession close up put me in a vulnerable position to some extent, as I had to constantly negotiate my own subjectivity and journalistic experiences by being self-reflexive in a way that did not affect the views of my interviewees (Behar 1996, p. 1). However, this "vulnerable position" also put me on a more trustworthy footing with my interviewees. Thereby, my interview process flowed more like a conversation between friends marked by reciprocity rather than a strictly formal interview space, which made it easier for my interviewees to confide in me and narrate their difficult experiences as women journalists (Blee and Taylor 2002).

Bilingualism was an important part of the interview process. Although the questions were designed in English and were supposed to be answered in English, most of the interviewees switched between English, Hindi and Urdu (I am fluent in all three of these languages). Often the switch between these languages occurred when an expression was difficult to explain in English. For example, while talking about the abuse inflicted on male journalists in India, one of my interviewees explained that even those abuses are sexualized and feminized through the use of phrases such as, "*teri maa ka*", "*teri maa chod denge*" (loosely translated as "motherfucker"). Bursts of aggression and emotion were similarly expressed in Hindi. For example, one of my interviewees expressed her frustration over opportunities being taken away from women journalists in the name of "safety", proclaiming: "Ramjas College cover *krne k liye baaki ladke jaayenge aur ladkiyaan aap* flower show cover *krna*" (So, all the guys will cover the protests at Ramjas College and you guys will cover the flower show).[9]

My interviewees talked in depth about their strategies of negotiation between their dual identities as women and as journalists in the Indian context. I inferred that their experiences and ability to freely voice their opinions also depended on their age and seniority. While the younger journalists were more prone to experiencing pressure from their editors, the more senior journalists appeared to have more freedom to write what they wanted and also felt less pressured to conform to societal expectations – both in a political and a gendered sense. The ideology of the media agency or organization for which they were working, and its relationship to the BJP government, was also

[9] Student right-wing groups attacked the English and History Department of Ramjas College as they invited leftist scholar Umar Khalid to give a lecture on campus. This was not well-received by right-wing groups and they resorted to physical violence, injuring several students and professors. The students at the college later held a protest against this kind of violence on campus. This was the protest that Niharika was referring to in her quotation.

an important factor in enabling or limiting their expression. However, as I discuss in Chapter 4, all of my interviewees exhibited agency in some way or another, even if their news organization did not give them the space to write their opinions freely.

I have used a feminist methodological approach to privilege the voices of women journalists in my research (Wigginton and Lafrance 2019). To do this, I have incorporated extended quotations from interview material instead of paraphrasing or transcribing them. This kind of approach ensured that women's voices were at the center of the analysis.

Chapter Overview

In Chapter 1, I provide a literature review and an overview of the theoretical framework. This chapter sets the scene for the subsequent three analytical chapters. In Chapter 2, I examine the notion of an ideal Indian woman, as discussed by my interviewees. I propose the cultural concept, *Sati Savitri*, to capture the notion of ideal femininity in the Indian context and explain how this concept fits within the life of an Indian woman. This chapter helps to understand how the notions of "sexual respectability" are transmitted through families and communities, as well as internalized by young Indian women. In Chapter 3, I focus on the experiences of female journalists in India, particularly the social and cultural challenges, as well as forms of violence that they face in online and newsroom spaces. In particular, this chapter considers the "double burden" of female journalists: that is, how both their gender and their profession put them in a more vulnerable position. In Chapter 4, I examine the forms of agency these female journalists assert as they negotiate through these often-contradictory roles of being a "good woman" and a "good journalist". I consider some of the strategies that women use within this process of negotiation. In the Conclusion, I reflect upon the aims of the thesis, and summarize the key arguments made within each of the chapters.

This study considers how the rise of Hindu nationalism in contemporary India has affected the experiences of women journalists in online and television newsroom spaces. More broadly, it provides a timely contribution to a growing body of literature about the intersections between gender, nationalism and new media spaces. In the subsequent chapters, I demonstrate how nationalism (with a specific focus on Hindu nationalism) is gendered. These gendered underpinnings are reproduced on various social media platforms to inflict violence against women

who do not conform to social norms of femininity and respectability. The thesis also helps understand how professional women in India negotiate the norms of femininity and thereby, exhibit a degree of agency by reworking dominant definitions of ideal womanhood and produce counter-nationalist discourses.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

My thesis topic engages with scholarship on Hindu nationalism, notions of ideal womanhood and women's agency. Theoretically, it adopts a slightly different approach to study the life of women journalists working in India by looking not only at the gendered pressures they experience at home and in the workplace, but also examining how their lives are challenged by a rise in Hindu nationalist discourses in the country (brought by a right-wing government). This chapter, therefore, lays the foundations for understanding these dominant discourses of gender, sexuality and respectability and situates their origins within different forms of nationalism. I begin by examining the existing literature on nationalism, focusing specifically on postcolonial and Hindu nationalism. This discussion will demonstrate how notions of ideal femininity and womanhood are located with nationalist discourse and, in doing so, it will reveal the gendered expectations posed by society on women journalists in contemporary India. In the second half of the chapter, I point out the gaps in existing studies conducted on women journalists in India and show how this thesis seeks to address these gaps. Ultimately, this chapter argues that women journalists in contemporary India are pressured to conform to notions of ideal femininity and national sexual respectability in workplaces and online spaces.

Gender, Sexuality and Postcolonial Nationalism

In this section, I will discuss how nationalisms (post-colonial and Hindu nationalism) are exclusionary and masculine by their very nature. Further, I demonstrate how the norms of sexual respectability that are located within these nationalist discourses reinforce the marginal roles assigned to women in the nationalist project. In the final part of this section, I will discuss the norms of ideal womanhood and respectability located within Hindu nationalist discourses, which lay the foundation to my analysis in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.

For this thesis, I draw upon literature that considers nations and nationalisms as cultural, historical and gendered constructs. According to Benedict Anderson, the nation is "an imagined political community" which is imagined as limited and sovereign (Anderson 2006, p. 4). While Anderson proposes that nations and nationalism are historical and cultural products, this does not erode religious and cultural certainties. Rather, he suggests that nationalism is aligned with and is formed

out of these historical systems. This system of nations exists on the principles of sameness and difference of these imagined communities i.e., citizens of one nation are the same but they are essentially different from the citizens of another nation (Puri 2004, p. 2). This strict demarcation of "us" vs "them" forms the basis of nations and national identities.

Partha Chatterjee critiques this western conceptualization of nation and nationalism as it does not leave the possibility of imagination to Third World nations: rather, Chatterjee argues, it implies that postcolonial nations are forced to choose and adapt to the modular forms of nationalism produced in the west. Chatterjee suggests that a distinct form of nationalism was produced in postcolonial contexts that always established themselves in contrast to its western forms (Chatterjee 1993, p. 5). Focusing specifically on India, Chatterjee explains that nationalist history has been subsumed by the history of Hindu rulers and Hindus in ancient India. Therefore, Indian nationalism and Hindu nationalism have become synonymous as they both struggled against foreigners or non-natives; that is, British and Muslim rulers. Therefore, unlike its Western counterparts in which the imagination of nation and nationalism is based on other national identities, in India, the religion Hinduism has served as a petri dish in which Indian nationalist culture has been nurtured. The ideology that considers Hindus as the true inhabitants of India – or "us" – and Muslims as outsiders – or "them" – is called Hindutva. This ideology of Hindutva is central to my thesis as it is the site in which the particular discourses of womanhood and ideal femininity are formed.

While the nation itself is imagined essentially as a hetero-male project, as feminist scholars of nationalism have demonstrated, it is women whose reproductive capacity is controlled and monitored to maintain this boundary of "us" and "them" so as they reproduce the "right kind" of ethnic collectivities of that nation (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989). In this nation-building project, women are implicated only as "biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities and… ideological reproducers of the nation and ethnic groups" (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989, p. 6-11). George Mosse explains that women are considered "national symbols for immutability of the nation" (1985, p. 18). They are represented as authentic bodies of "tradition" which is passive, inert and unchanging; while men, in contrast, are represented as the agent of national modernity (McClintock 1993, p. 66). The nation-state itself is a site for the realization and assertion of

masculine identity and ideals, while the female body is often employed as a metaphor for the modern nation (Mosse 1985; Einhorn 1996). This metaphor can be in the form, for example, of a "wailing mother" or a "raped woman" whose honour has to be avenged by the male citizens (Nagel 1998; Mookherjee 2006). Therefore, citizenship is associated with the ability to take an active part in the armed struggle to defend the honour of the state i.e., maleness; while femaleness is associated fragility and chastity which needs to be saved (Yuval-Davis 1997, p. 20). Thereby, the passive citizenship of women is mediated through her marital relationship with her husband and her social relationship within her family. This subordination of women over men in familial relationships is reproduced and naturalized at the national level as mothers and wives (McClintock 1993, p. 63). Such masculinist underpinnings of the nationalist project marginalize women by domesticating them and imposes sanctions if women transgress this domestic sphere.

The long history of colonialism of the Indian subcontinent, along with Hindutva ideology, has played an important role in the construction of both Hindu nationalism and its relation to manhood and womanhood (Chatterjee 1993, p. 121). As Sikata Banerjee has argued, the Hindu nation is usually expressed through masculine images in terms of "martial ability" and "physical strength" (Banerjee 2005, p. 82). The Hindu nationalist project imagines the Indian nation as a manly, strong and unified Hindu community which strives to eradicate past humiliations (mainly colonialism) and reassert its commitment to Hindutva. In the early to mid-20th century, Indian independence activist and politician, V. D. Savarkar, was one of the most profound voices that expressed Hindu nationalism, as visualized by Hindu paramilitary and political organizations like the RSS, VHP, BJP and Shiv Sena. Savarkar represented Indian Muslims as the "other" in most of his work (Savarkar 1923; Savarkar 1925). According to Savarkar, the "effeminacy" of the Hindu male is the root cause of foreign invasion over India. Notably, Savarkar envisaged India as a "Hindu nation", "othering" Muslims as invaders/foreigners (Savarkar 1965). Women, however, also play an important part in his work. In his view, the Indian medieval period (15th-18th century) was marked by attack on Hindu "national" honour as Muslim men raped innocent Hindu women; therefore, Hindu sons of the country were compelled to avenge their women's honour. These images of "Muslim barbarism" versus "Hindu effeminacy" are still widely circulated by the Hindu nationalist organizations to arouse the anger of the humiliated Hindu (Leidig 2020). These images

are important to understanding the BJP's ideology and the dominant discourses of manhood and womanhood it disseminates, as I discuss further in the next sections.

The use of "Ram"[10] (a Hindu mythological deity) as a manifestation of the ideals of masculine Hindu nationalism is particularly significant within this context (Banerjee 2005, p. 96). The incorporation of this religious symbol into nationalist discourse has given national politics a distinctly communal flavor. The BJP portrays "Ram" as an aggressive male with ripped muscles as he protects his temple against any attacks (Kapur 1993, p. 105). This image of Ram is used to evoke Hindu anger against national enemies i.e., Muslims.

Figure 1: Lord Rama [http://hinduspiritualism.blogspot.com/2010/03/lord-ram.html]

In this section, I have shown how nationalism itself is a masculinist project in which women are implicated only through passive, marginal and symbolic roles. In Hindu nationalism, the roles of women are underscored not just by masculinist underpinnings of nation and nationalism, but also the colonial and postcolonial history of the Indian subcontinent.

Sexual Respectability

[10] Ram is a mythological deity in the Hindu epic, *Ramayana.* According to the tale, Ram was exiled for 14 years by his stepmother. He was accompanied by his wife Sita and his brother Laxman. During his time in the exile, Ram killed Ravana, the demon who had abducted Sita. Therefore, Ram is considered the symbol of good over evil.

Notions of sexual respectability are also used to implicate women in the nation-building project. To understand these ideas, I draw upon George Mosse's concept of "middle-class sexual respectability" and its relationship to nationalist processes – but consider how these ideas apply specifically to the Indian context. According to Mosse, "respectability" means "decent and correct manners" and attitudes towards "sexuality". In early 19th century Europe, Mosse argues, the middle classes were characterized by ideals of respectability, which helped to distinguish them from the lower classes and aristocracy. Nationalism co-opted middle-class manners and respectability and imposed them on all the classes. Nationalism, therefore, assigned a distinct place to men and women in the nation to make them "respectable". There was an idealization of masculinity while females were considered frivolous, but at the same time, as the guardians of morality and traditional order. Therefore, they were assigned motherly and domestic roles. As such, domesticity characterized the ideal modern family which policed sexual behaviors, passions, friendships and love. In 19th century Europe, Mosse demonstrates, women were depicted as medieval figures in sculptures, paintings and images, looking backwards in a traditional dress suggesting innocence and chastity against modernity. The modern woman who co-opted "masculine" ideals threatened the nationalist process and was condemned as "abnormal". If the sexuality of such an "abnormal" woman is not controlled, she could be seen to pose a danger to men's masculinity and the sexual respectability of the nation (Trumbach 1978). I employ this idea of respectability and control to explain gendered expectations and challenges experienced by women journalists in contemporary India.

To consider how these ideas of "sexual respectability" relate to the Indian context, I draw upon the work of Jyoti Puri (1999). Puri goes beyond Mosse and contextualizes norms of "sexual respectability" by explaining how class, caste and gender interact to produce these norms in the Indian context. Puri explores the ways in which the bodies, sexualities and gender identities of middle-class, upper-caste women are regulated. She shows how female sexualities are controlled through the notions of normality and abnormality using the personal narratives of urban middle-class, upper-caste women. This thesis examines the experiences of women of the same class and caste group as Puri, but it expands on Puri's work by considering how these ideals of femininity and respectability affect the work of women journalists in particular. Puri explains that the contemporary Indian nation-state produces hegemonic codes of gender, sexuality and a standard "sexual respectability" to regulate the bodies of these women (Puri 1999, p. 34). This concept of

sexual respectability is also central to the project of Hindu nation formation. It defines the codes of social conduct and sexuality for men and women; that is, these codes should always manifest "Indianness" (in opposition to the "corrupt" western codes of sexuality).

The notion of sexual respectability reinforces the role of women as wives and mothers in order to be seen as "respectable" in Indian society, which corresponds to the role of women in a nationalist framework. Narratives of women's sexuality emphasize self-control and surveillance, the absence of which causes sexual aggression over fragile female bodies (Puri 1999, p. 198). Puri demonstrates that women often negotiate and challenge the dominant heteronormative gender norms and notions of sexuality and respectability within the nationalist framework: the women journalists who feature in my thesis provide key examples of these processes of negotiation and their effects.

I thus employ Puri's and Mosse's understanding of sexual respectability in my thesis to demonstrate how these norms of respectability characterize the experiences and challenges of women journalists in India and what happens when these journalists transgress such norms both at their workplaces and in online media spaces. However, similar to Puri's argument, this thesis will also show that women journalists are not passive adherents to such norms – rather, they strategically challenge and rework the dominant discourses of ideal femininity and womanhood.

Discourses of Ideal Womanhood within Hindu Nationalism

The ideals of femininity and womanhood are located within the official discourses of Hindu nationalism. Therefore, this section looks at the image and role of an ideal Indian woman in Hindu nationalist discourses to understand the pressures experienced by women journalists in India. This discussion lays the foundation for Chapter 1 as it contextualizes the discourses of ideal femininity in relation to the formation of a Hindu nation, relating this discussion to the gender ideology of the current BJP government.

The image of an ideal woman in India is also captured in the writing of Swami Vivekananda,[11] a late 19th and early 20th century proponent of Hindu nationalism, as he wrote: "Now the ideal

[11] Swami Vivekananda was a key figure in late 19th and early 20th century India. He was famous for spreading the Hindu philosophy, spiritual culture and religious consciousness in India and America.

woman, in India, is the mother, the mother first, and the mother last. The word woman calls up to the mind of Hindu motherhood" (Vivekananda 2000). Vivekananda's view idealized Hindu women as wives and mothers while, at the same time, attacked western women as being immodest and impure. This dichotomy was often evoked both in colonial and postcolonial times to maintain the superiority of chaste Hinduism over the corrupt West. For Hindu nationalist proponents and their associated organizations, the ideals of Indian womanhood were icons from Hindu mythology and folklore like Sita, Savitri and Mirabai (Banerjee 2005, p. 66).[12] Such mythological underpinnings form the core of the BJP's goals and ideology, as I illustrate below.

In contemporary India, the BJP government and the Hindu right more broadly disseminate this idea about the role of women as mothers and wives through its policies and ideologies. Although it proposes formal equality for men and women, the government considers men and women to be essentially different in nature (Kapur and Cossman 1995). For example, the Prime Minister often addresses women as *maataon, betiyon aur behenon* (mothers, daughters and sisters), while he evokes the term *mitron* (friends) when addressing a rally of male supporters.[13] Such gendered language demonstrates how the BJP sees and positions the women of the country. The BJP's objective of gender equality can be seen as the "restoration" of a "Golden Age", where women enjoyed equal status as men traditionally according to the Indian tradition (BJP 1984).[14] The government's current policies for women focus on natal and maternal care, and as such, essentialize differences between men and women. For example, the Ujjwala scheme that was launched by the BJP to provide rural domestic households free cooking gas was announced in 2016 with the tagline, "*Mahilaon ko mila samman*" (Women get honoured). It is to be noted that the BJP's policies also focus on the prevention of female infanticide and education of girl children, but not for their upliftment or empowerment. Rather, these policies are intended to enable women

[12] Sita, the wife of Lord Ram, is considered the embodiment of wifely devotion and virtue. She followed Ram into his 14-year-long exile leaving behind all the "comforts" of the court. Savitri is also a Hindu mythological character who fought the God of Death Yama to save her husband. Mirabai emanates from Hindu folklores. It is said that she gave up all worldly possessions just to be the wife of Lord Krishna (another Hindu God).

[13] It is to be noted that election rallies in India are extremely masculine spaces. Although there is no rule for gender segregation in rallies, this segregation usually happens when there are a large number of people.

[14] Often the term *Ram Rajya* is used to define this golden age. It is a mythological period under rule of Lord Ram when men and women were assigned fixed places in the society. One of the agendas of BJP is to bring this mythological *Ram Rajya* back and thereby, most of its modern discourse is built around this nostalgia of the lost *Ram Rajya*. Quite paradoxically, the term is severely criticised by feminists because it was this era in which Sita (Ram's wife) had to cross a burning pyre in order to prove her chastity. Even though she was able to prove herself chaste by crossing the fire, she was still exiled by Ram into the forest again just because one of the citizens of his state was not convinced by Sita's test.

to maintain their traditional domesticated roles. This rhetoric can be seen clearly in the following advertisement for the prevention of feminicide in the rural areas of India:

Figure 2: An advertisement for the prevention of female infanticide (Source: The Wire)

The above Hindi advertisement says, "How will you eat food by the hands of girls if you do not allow them to be born". Such language and imagery push women into the domestic sphere where they are only seen to be worthy if they conform to traditional roles. As Mridul Sinha, Indian writer and politician, explains, "An Indian woman will command the affection of the father, the love of the husband, and the respect of the son only when she has been provided with equal rights and opportunities" (Sinha 1985, p. 5). Thus, such restoration of women to the domestic spheres as in the "Golden Age" remains at the heart of the BJB government's discourses and policies (Kapur and Cossman 1995).

The domestication of women as mothers and daughters is accompanied by surveillance and control of their sexuality, in accordance with Hindu nationalist ideology. Steve Derne argues that Hindu men, who embrace modern culture, enforce the practices of Hinduism among their wives and mothers to keep their modernity in check (2000). He conducted his study in Varanasi, a city in Uttar Pradesh (the largest state of India) and Dehradun (a city in Uttarakhand) to show how men's national identity is embedded within particular gender regimes. Derne found that most Indian men considered their wives' "willingness" to obey their husbands as the most "Indian" and ideal quality, while they identified *sharm* (shyness)[15] and *lajja* (shame)[16] as the markers of a woman's

[15] *Sharm* literally translates to "shyness" in English. However, in the Indian context, *sharm* is regarded as one of the most desirable quality in Indian women. If a woman has *sharm,* this means that she will dress in traditional clothing, respect elders and not speak up i.e., she will be submissive at all times.
[16] *Lajja* translates to "shame", however, it is a complex concept in Indian society: it also means to be civilised: "to know one's rightful place in the society, to conduct oneself in a becoming manner" (Menon and Shweder 2010).

identity. These men believed that westernization had corrupted women as they had begun working outside (the private sphere), going to parties and becoming independent. In the Hindu nation, the corruption or westernization of men is not seen to cause much harm to society, while that of women is seen to bring collapse to the entire family, community and nation. Hindu nationalist propaganda is "full of the fall from greatness in the past, challenge of foreign domination today, the need to prove strength, courage and manliness. What better way to prove manliness than by showing that women are under your control?" (Chhachhi 1989, p. 575). Hindu fundamentals advocate for women to give up their jobs for their husbands and stay at home (Chhachi 1989, p. 572). In recent decades, Hindu nationalist organizations have also been appealing Hindu women to produce more "Hindu sons" and become mothers, arguing that the fertility rate of Muslims is increasing rapidly (Patwardhan 1995; van der Veer 1994). Therefore, Hindu women must fulfill their biological roles and "regenerate the weakened race" of Hindus who are endangered by the multiplying Muslim population (Chakravarti 1990).

However, with women being seen as the marker of civilization and progress, their education was an important benchmark to measure the advancement of the nation and community. Charu Gupta writes that the education of women has become a moral imperative for a middle-class Hindu national identity. Soon after the national independence of India, there was an organized attempt by the state to domesticate women through "appropriate education" designed specially to make girls embodiments of "Indianness" and enlightened, amicable companions of their husbands (Gupta 2002, p. 166). This education was supposed to train young girls to bring out the best traits of Indian womanhood and thus, contribute to the future of Indian society (Shyamkumar 1935). During colonial times, the notion of a *pativrata* wife was constructed to depict an ideal Indian woman (Giri 2000). *Pativrata* translates to a wife completely devoted to her husband. While the concept is centuries old, it is evoked even in modern times to reflect upon of the most "desirable" qualities in an Indian woman, as I discuss in Chapter 2.

This section argues that notions of gender and sexuality in India are influenced by the official discourses of Hindu nationalism. As Hindu nationalism interacts with modernity, the Hindu woman remains sandwiched between the two. My thesis adds to this existing literature by examining how these colonial and postcolonial underpinnings of ideal femininity have affected

the lives of professional women, particularly women journalists, in the context of contemporary India.

Women Journalists in Contemporary India

With the rise of modern educational opportunities for women in the 1970s, many women entered the male-dominated field of journalism. This has been extremely challenging for women as the field of journalism itself takes them out of the domestic sphere transgressing the norms of Hindu respectability in its very nature. Several studies have highlighted the challenges faced by women journalists in India, including their deliberate exclusion from important beats (Pain 2017), sexual harassment at workplaces (Joseph 2000), aggressive online behavior and gender trolling (Mantilla 2013; Fichman and Sanfilippo 2014), less pay (Bhagat 2004) and fewer opportunities compared to male journalists (Joseph 2004). Other intersections like caste and religion have also been identified as important factors that influence the experiences of women journalists in India (Mullick 2015). However, there are very few studies that focus specifically on the experiences of women journalists in contemporary India within the context of the rise of right-wing Hindu nationalism and a parallel rise in social media technologies like WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook. Previous studies that have focused on the rise of nationalism and journalism in India are largely gender blind (Roychowdhury 2013). They consider the challenges faced by journalists under Hindu nationalism, but do not address the gender-specific nature of these challenges making journalism a predominantly male field (Delanthamajalu 2020).

The lack of comprehensive studies in this field is also due to the sheer paucity of female journalists in India. Male journalists outnumber female journalists by a ratio of 4:1 (India Today 2015). In one small study, Shakuntala Rao shows that the two factors that affect the lives of female journalists in India most dramatically in recent years are the rise of Hindu nationalism and the rise of social media, which is also one of primary assumptions of my research. Rao maintains that female journalists are either excluded or deliberately opt out of national political reporting, and that those who remain active in mainstream media spaces often face threats of violence and online abuse. She writes: “The moral character of a working female journalist, one who might appear to advocate for checks and balances for the BJP government or Hindu fundamentalist elements in the country, is constantly under attack” (Rao 2018, p. 50). However, my study takes a different approach to Rao’s as it does not aim to present women journalists as victims, trapped between the

shackles of new media technologies and Hindu nationalism. My thesis adds to this picture by arguing that these journalists also assert a degree of agency within these online spaces and newsroom spaces and, accordingly, negotiate the notion of "ideal femininity" in a Hindu nationalist society.

In another relevant study, Richard Lego argues that social media – similar to homes and public spaces – has become the domain of sexual harassment and subjugation of women in India (Lego 2018). The rise of social media has provided people with a platform to easily target those who do not conform to dominant gender norms and state ideology. By analysing the Twitter posts of prominent female journalists in India, Lego demonstrates that social media platforms have become havens for anonymous misogynistic trolls against women journalists who write against the state. The abuses received by these journalists were personal, sexual and condescending in nature, which denigrated their integrity and dignity (Lego 2018). Unlike Lego, my research understands digital media not just as platforms where gendered violence is inflicted on female journalists, but also a space for the reproduction of nationalism, Hindu nationalism in particular. Further, this study will demonstrate how nationalism is gendered by perpetually excluding women and assigning them marginal roles. When these roles are transgressed, violence is perpetuated by self-proclaimed Hindu nationalists in an attempt to maintain the status quo. Like public spaces, this violence is also extended to online spaces when women journalists transgress the norms of respectability, as I discuss in Chapter 3.

Women Journalists in Online Spaces

The expansion of media technologies in India has pushed journalism and women journalists into these online media spaces. News and media outlets are extending to digital platforms for a wider outreach. Therefore, participation and engagement in this digital public sphere has become an important part of life for journalists (Barnard 2014). However, with traditional Indian media being largely male dominated with men occupying most of the leadership positions women's voices have remained marginalized. A recent study (2019) conducted by Media Rumble Initiative in partnership with UN Women showed that women have been denied fair representation in print, radio, news websites, TV news channels and digital spaces. The study found that women occupied no leadership positions in print media, only 13.6% in magazines and 20.9% in TV. Women occupied the largest number of leadership positions on digital platforms at around 26.3%. In terms

of articles addressing gender issues, women's representation was better in English language newspapers and channels than in Hindi ones. Even in English language newspapers, however, only 2.6% of all articles are based on gender issues and only 39.6% of those are written by women. The situation improved slightly in digital spaces where 3.7% of the articles are on gender issues and 63.6% of those are written by female journalists.

The study inferred that women journalists and media professionals were better represented online than in print or television. In these platforms – including *The Ken, The Quint, The News Minute, The Print and Scroll.in* – women accounted for one-third of writers and wrote around 40% of the articles (Media Rumble Initiative 2019). More women journalists write about politics in online spaces (35.1%) than the progressive English newspapers (19.8%) and Hindi newspapers (7.6%). The Indian media is also an elitist, upper-caste institution. A report by Oxfam India and News Laundry showed that most journalists in print, TV, magazines and digital media are Brahmins (the highest caste in India). The lowest caste, despite comprising more than 70% of the population, are represented only marginally in the field (Bhatia et al. 2019).

The above statistics reveal that the proliferation of internet technologies has provided opportunities for women to participate in the media sphere, and this point has been observed by several scholars. Carolyn M. Byerly and Karen Ross (2006), for example, analyze women's agency in media activism and their participation in public spaces. The authors explain that female journalists use their agency (their insider role) in media organizations to challenge the male-dominated media environment and further their feminist agenda. Even though online media represents women better than their traditional counterparts, women's participation in these platforms is as low as 12%. However, as Saayan Chattopadhyay argues, these women on digital media often consider this platform as a space where they can voice their concerns and gain support (Chattopadhyay 2012, p. 77). While these new online media spaces have allowed women to have a voice, they have also exacerbated the threats and online sexual violence against women. Online media is a key site for the reproduction of nationalist discourses, effectively marginalizing women and forcing them into restrictive roles. If these roles are transgressed, women are often criticized and attacked for it.

In India, gender-based attacks against women who are active in this sphere are directed by the so-called "Internet Hindus", who are essentially provided with freedom of speech due to internet technologies. This makes the position of female journalists engaging in politics online highly

vulnerable. These new online media platforms provide a space for women journalists to strategically enter the male-dominated public sphere, but at the same time, they also provide a platform for advocates of Hindutva and present challenges to women's equality and activism (Chattopadhyay 2012, p. 79). A recent study showed that female journalists face heightened levels of harassment and violence if they engage with certain topics (specifically, politics and feminism) and involve themselves in a routine of journalistic reciprocity, which makes the online space more dangerous for them (Chen et al. 2020, p. 889). In India, the topics that arouse such response are politically sensitive issues like Kashmir, the Khalistan movement, the Pakistan issue, Jawaharlal Nehru University student politics, and minority-related discourses.

In this section, I have argued that the Indian media has been historically male dominated but with the rise of internet technologies, women's participation has increased on digital media platforms. However, the proliferation of such technologies has also led to a new kind of violence in the form sexual harassment against women online.

Conclusion

This literature review and theoretical framework builds on the work of a number of scholars and studies to illustrate the gendered and historical underpinnings of Hindu nationalism. By discussing the notions of ideal womanhood and sexual respectability, this chapter forms the foundation of the subsequent analytical chapters as these concepts explain the challenges faced by women journalists in contemporary India. This thesis, by examining these challenges within the context of the current BJP government, will discuss how dominant forms of nationalism interact with masculinity and violence to subdue women and relegate them to the domestic sphere. However, as discussed above, the question of women's agency in the Global South will remain the heart of this project, as I will illustrate the methods that women journalists use to negotiate and challenge dominant national discourses of ideal womanhood.

Chapter 2: *Sati Savitri Aurat*: The Ideal Indian Woman

In this chapter, I will discuss how the notion of "ideal femininity" is understood in the Indian context. I propose the term *Sati Savitri aurat* (woman) to describe this ideal image of Indian womanhood. This phrase is a combination of two ideas: *Sati* and *Savitri.* Each of these words have Hindu mythological tales attached to them. *Sati* refers to the practice of self-immolation by Hindu wives of a certain community when their husbands die in war; the idea of *sati*, therefore, refers to godly devotion to the husband to the extent that the wife should be prepared to sacrifice her life for him (Sharma 2000, p. 63). Savitri was a princess who married an exiled prince named Satyavan, who was prophesied to die at an early age. When the day of death came for Satyavan, Savitri saved her husband from the Death God Yama by nature of her devotion and virtue (Vivekananda 2000). Both these tales signify how an ideal Indian Hindu woman should be: chaste, virtuous and a self-sacrificing wife. In modern Indian society, these mythological tales are evoked to assign the place of women in society: that is, as passive and chaste wives. This formulation is also in accordance with the role of women in Hindu nationalism and the modern nation-building project. In this chapter, I argue that urban upper-caste, middle-class Indian women are expected to embody the virtue of *Sati Savitri* as markers of Indian national identity. These ideas are disseminated in Indian society through everyday stories, myths, the family and popular culture.

I argue that the modern *Sati Savitri* woman must embody three values that make her truly an ideal Indian woman in the eyes of society: modesty, marriageability and silence. The combination of these values makes an Indian woman socially respected and desirable. These themes reverberated when I asked my interview participants about the concept of an ideal Indian woman. In this chapter, I categorise their responses into the three values I have highlighted above and propose that the embodiment of all these values constitutes the modern *Sati Savitri,* a prototype for middle-class Hindu women. I argue that respectable norms for women's sexuality are located within the discourse of nationalism (Hindu nationalism in this context). In examining notions of "ideal femininity" in the Indian context, this chapter reveals the gendered expectations and challenges encountered by women journalists in contemporary India.

Modesty

Badan dikha rhi hai, sharam nhi aati?[17]

(You are showing your body, aren't you ashamed of yourself?)

Modesty is seen as a virtue for an Indian woman: not just for the woman herself, but for the honour of her entire family. A central aspect of modesty is "covering up". This means that she should not expose her body too much because she would risk getting unwanted male attention, which could be dangerous to her modesty and could potentially bring "shame" upon her entire family. Women embody the family's and nation's honour; therefore, their "shame" is seen as the men's shame, the family's shame and the nation's shame (Nagel 1998, p. 254). The Urdu term *izzat* is used in the South Asian context to capture the concepts of honour, shame, respect and prestige that are attached to an individual or a community. *Izzat* gives a community the most important cultural capital (Lindholm 1982, p. 189). Women are repositories of *izzat*, and hence their sexuality has to be actively controlled in order to avoid deviance that may bring harm to the entire family's *izzat*. Wearing traditional clothes or "covering up" is an important measure of a woman's *izzat* as it distinguishes an Indian woman from the promiscuous western one (Chatterjee 1993; Fernandes 2000).

These ideas were conveyed to me by Akansha, a 22-year-old journalist at *Sunday Guardian*, a weekly newspaper, and India TV, one of the oldest Hindi TV news channels in India. When I asked her about her understanding of an "ideal Indian woman", she responded:

Ki bhai, sir ka jo baal hai use le k toe tk vo dhaki rhe, ankhe na dikhe, ungli na dikhe

bhar nikal rhi, dekh rhi galat hai.

(Like you know, she should be covered from the hair of her head to her toes, her eyes shouldn't be visible, her fingers shouldn't be visible. If she is going out, looking inappropriate, it is wrong.)

If a woman does not conform to these expectations of "covering up", she will be subject to unwanted attention. When talking about the work environment at India TV, for example, Akansha said: "*kuch bhi pehen k jaao* (whatever you wear), they [her male colleagues] will check you out

[17] This comment was made by Akansha while talking about her experiences of being a woman journalist.

and it is really weird". She explained that she has to take precautions in terms of what she wears to the office, how she presents herself on social media, lest people will "talk". She continued with an example: "So if I am uploading a picture [and] a bit of my cleavage is showing … people will comment like *kaam dekho kaisa krti ho, dikha rhi hai apna badan* (Look, she is a journalist doing such kind of work, showing her naked body)". In the workplace, modest women who embody symbolic cultural capital and perform "ideal femininity" are seen as reliable and respectable workers (Radhakrishnan 2009, p. 208). Therefore, women are required to take precautions to monitor their appearance at their workplaces, so as to remain within the national framework of "sexual respectability".

Women must self-surveil their bodies and their sexualities because any deviance will put the *izzat* of their entire family and community in danger, while men are not pressured to do the same. Akansha explained these different expectations of men and women:

> Obviously, the things that happened to us didn't happen to the men… like my senior wears heels, they used to say *tak tak kr k aati hai* (she walks with the heels making this sound) … I don't think these things happened with male colleagues. There was this colleague… he used to wear shades in the office. But if a woman does that people will say… see she is wearing sunglasses indoors.

In her reference to heels, Akansha switched to Hindi, as she tried to imitate the sound that they make while walking. This expression in Hindi is also a derogatory way of saying that the woman is "being too glamorous/flashy" or just "too western". Being western makes her not Indian enough and most importantly, not *respectable* enough for the job (Chatterjee 1993).

This connection between modesty and sexual respectability is discussed in detail by Jyoti Puri. Puri explains that there are two dimensions to the Indian notion of sexual respectability: the threat of male sexual harm upon pious female bodies, and the threat of a woman transgressing the code of conduct (Puri 1999, p. 77). These norms of sexual respectability produce women as "sexed bodies" that need to be self-regulated and disciplined.[18] Within this framework, an attack on the sexed body of a woman is explained – and indeed justified – by her sheer failure in self-regulation

[18] The Indian education system, for example, stresses marriage as a way to regulate female sexuality.

and self-surveillance. Therefore, whenever a women's sexual body is violated by a man, the onus lies on the woman as not having effectively regulated her own sexuality.

A sense of anxiety about different standards of respectability imposed on men and women was also expressed by Niharika, a 22-year-old journalist. As Niharika told me:

> A man can still go [out] in like shorts and nobody will like say anything… they might think *ki kya pehen k aa gya hai* (what is he wearing?) but then continuously *mundi uski taraf nhi jaayegi na 10 baari* (their heads will not turn to him and would not be stared at 10 times).

Like Akansha, Niharika made a comparison between how men and women are treated differently at the same workplace. It is seen as a women's job to not attract attention and if she fails in this task, any harassment that she experiences becomes solely her responsibility. Niharika, who worked for student newspapers and alternative media forums like *News Laundry,* is also very close friend and a former colleague of mine. In our interview, however, she deflected from questions about her personal experiences and appeared increasingly conscious of the relevance of her answers to my research questions. For example, when I asked about her personal experiences of harassment during her days as a student journalist, she started talking about the vulnerability of women's bodies, thereby deflecting from her personal experiences. "Our bodies are made in a way that… you know… it becomes easy for anyone to attack," she said, commenting on how female bodies are made docile, fragile and sexual by national and cultural institutions. Niharika's point resonated with Ayşe Gül Altınay's argument about Turkish national identity: that cultural, familial and social institutions use modern disciplinary techniques to produce docile and disciplined bodies. In the case of women, these sexed bodies are disciplined to conform to the normative gendered norms of the given nation (Bartky 1990, p. 80).

A key site for the disciplining of women's bodies in India is the family. The family is the first unit of socialization for a child; therefore, it is the first unit that makes the child "a woman". The organic nature of the family naturalizes a woman's subordination to the man, the head of the family, and thus the nation. (McClintock 1993, p. 64). One interviewee, Diksha, a 33-year-old senior journalist at BBC News and one the oldest interviewees within my research project, explained the role of male family members in terms of inculcating notions of ideal femininity among young girls:

> My father used to say an ideal Indian woman is someone who wears traditional clothes, who talks keeping her eyes down, looks down while walking, who is just concerned about her own business, who doesn't wander around, comes straight home after work.

For Diksha, the image that was constructed by her father corresponds to the fact that notions of "ideal femininity" – modesty, honour and shame – are constructed and appropriated by men (Bannerji 1995). "Keeping [her] eyes down" is associated with modesty. If a woman makes eye contact, she might be seen as "sexually available". Diksha's father's emphasis on "traditional clothing" explains the importance of clothing in measuring the "respectability", "chastity" and "desirability" of women (Banerjee 2012, p. 9). This example demonstrates that while men define the ideas of womanhood, women internalize them in order to be seen as "respectable" members of the community.

Despite the emphasis upon similar values, my interviewees did not have a monolithic, singular idea of what an ideal Indian woman should look like. Instead, socialization from different sources often led to the development of somewhat contradictory ideas. For example, Diksha, who was the only interviewee who did not fall into the upper-caste and middle-class group,[19] explained the development of her contradictory ideas about an ideal Indian woman: "I thought I would drop it [her Diploma in Journalism] but my mother insisted and somehow she managed the fees… and then I thought… no… if my mother is doing so much effort then I have… I should do the same". Notably, while her father was the one who told her how to be a woman, it was her mother who made that extra effort to ensure that Diksha received the training and education that she needed to become a journalist. Her mother emphasized that independence was the most important thing for a woman. Perhaps her parents had contradictory ideas about what this ideal woman should be, which may have affected the notion of ideal femininity for Diksha,[20] as well as her career choices.

One of the important components of being a modest woman in India is being "beautiful": this means adhering to dominant standards of beauty. Explaining the pressure to adhere to unrealizable beauty standards, Avantika, a 23-year-old journalist and reporter at ABP News, a Hindi News

[19] Diksha never explicitly mentioned her caste, which was understandable considering how taboo being "lower caste" is in India. Instead, she mentioned that she comes from a humble background and her family could hardly afford the fees for her journalistic training.

[20] I draw upon the "alternative definitions" of an ideal Indian woman given by some of my senior interviewees in Chapter 4.

channel, explained: "people used to say you won't look good on screen, you need to take care of your skin, your hair is becoming bad, you had such silky hair when you came." Avantika explained how being light skinned makes a woman more attractive on the screen and in real life. Women with a lighter skin tone are seen as more rational, civil and competent, compared to those with darker skin shades who are naturally associated with barbary and danger (Hunter 2005; Mishra 2015). This idea was also taken up by Niharika while she was talking about "pretty privilege" in India:

> Conventionally attractive women… I mean thin and fair-skinned […] excel in their careers. They get noticed more than someone who doesn't adhere to these beauty ideals but has the same talent.

As Niharika pointed out, fair and "pretty" women are more given more credit for their work and intellect than women who are not considered "pretty," but have the same or even higher capabilities.

The obsession with fair skin comes from the long history of European colonialism and the caste system of India, in which light skin is associated with upper castes and dark skin with lower castes (Mohanram 2007; Majidi 2020; Shevde 2008). With the urban middle-class upper-caste Hindu woman being seen as the embodiment of national sexual respectability, her fair skin becomes a natural marker of her identity and therefore, her *izzat*. Being fair automatically gives a woman a "social capital" i.e., she is seen as naturally more respectable and modest. Thus, women who adhere to these beauty standards portray "collective and national belonging" by how they look (Dhillon 2015, 209). Therefore, simply telling a woman that she does not conform to these racist, classist and colonialist ideas of Indian beauty implies that she is not Indian enough and perhaps has no right to speak or be heard. As another senior journalist, Shilpa (pseudonym), stated: "one of the ways to silence outspoken women is [to] say they are not pretty enough."

In this section, I have argued that modesty is a complicated concept in the Indian context. It incorporates not just discourses of honour and shame, but a myriad of ideas to define a women's virtue, ranging from clothing to walking and even the colour of their skin. These factors are also important in determining a woman's marriageability, as I discuss in the following section.

Marriageability

Humari puri zindagi shaadi k hisab se chlti hai.[21]

(Our lives revolve around our marriage)

Marriage and children are central to the idea of a good Indian woman. Marriage is considered the ultimate destiny for Indian women: whether she belongs to any profession, she should make the choice to prioritize her family and children over her work (Radhakrishnan 2009, p. 202). As Akansha explained to me:

Ghar pr rhe bacha paida kre. Usse jyda tum kuch nhi kr skte Journalist ho ya na ho.

(She should stay at home and reproduce kids. Whether she is a journalist or not, she should not do anything beyond this.)

In the above quotation, Akansha describes the restrictive and marginal roles women are assigned in the family as well as the nation. (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Nagel 1998; McClintock 1993). As I discussed in the previous chapter, women are implicated in the nation-building project only through symbolic, domestic and passive roles: as signifiers of the nation, mothers or wives. To understand this trope of the "domestication" of Indian women, it is important to look at the postcolonial critique of nationalism advanced by Partha Chatterjee. In Chatterjee's understanding of nationalism, women occupied the "inner" domain, in which the nation protected postcolonial "modernity" and national identity (Chatterjee 1993). Women became the sites of chastity, purity and support, while the "domestic" sphere became the only "natural sanctuary" for these virtues (Sarkar 1995, p. 98-115; Sarkar 1987, p. 2011-15).

The modern Indian woman, who is expected to participate in the capitalist economy, is also domesticated but in a different way. This idea was explained by Avantika:

Ideal Indian woman (smiles)… they would expect us to return home by let's say not more than 6 pm … prepare food, get things ready, get things done for the family … that's sort of the Indian notion for the ideal woman (laughs) because right now I am on shifts and I am in the evening shift and if I were married, that would be a problem to my family.

Avantika's mother is a Professor of Journalism and her father is Head of the Hindi Language Department at the University of Delhi. Thus, even though she was raised in a relatively modern

[21] This is a quote from my interview with Diksha, a senior journalist at BBC News.

family, her understanding of an "ideal woman" is derived from the traditional roles of women in a Hindu nation. Like Akansha, Avantika focused on the "domesticity" of Indian women, yet the domesticity she hinted at was slightly different. It combined traditionalism/conservatism with modernity/progress, which comes to being in the form of a *modern* Indian woman. Rama Mehta argues that this modern Indian woman is trapped between the shackles of western modernization and Hindu cultural values (1970). As such, women must always remain domesticated when they are not earning a wage (Lahiri-Dutt and Sil 2014; Hervey and Shaw 1998). GN Ramu (1989) shows that the ideal roles of husband and wife are still manifested in traditional terms: this means that women's employment is seen as an egalitarian decision and therefore, she is expected to engage in domestic work while the man is supposed to the primary provider of the family.

In contemporary India, where many women are engaged in paid employment, these traditional roles of wives and mothers are idealized through television advertisements and soap operas, which show that "women can have it all" (Munshi 1998; Rajan 1993). The Hindutva movement aligns with these demands of consumerist individualism. It incorporates women into the public sphere through a new kind of activism where it reconstructs the domestic realm as moral, while at the same time, maintains the façade of gender equality in the public sphere (Sarkar 1998, p. 104). This idea of domesticity and doing family chores was also taken up by one of my older interviewees, Apeksha, 40, who works at NDTV, one of the only progressive left TV channels in India. Talking about societal expectations and burden on women, she said:

> Listen Sneha, it has been a long time since I thought of what society expects… I don't give two… (pauses) hoots about what society expects because if I had thought that I would be sitting in some small town in Bihar making *paranthas* [a form of bread] for my husband and in-laws.

Apeksha was the one of the most senior journalists I interviewed for this research project. Her answer to my question on the ideal Indian woman was very different to my other interviewees. Right in the first sentence, she established authority through her tone and expression, and addressed me directly saying that she never cared about this ideal image or society's expectation. Perhaps this forwardness and radicalism came from her age, experience and seniority. In the above quotation, she contrasted herself with the societal image of the ideal woman, who stays at home and makes bread for her family in rural India. This depiction made Apeksha herself seem like an

emancipated modern woman who does not feel the need to conform to this ideal image of an Indian women.

The domestication of women is directly related to their modesty, virtue and sexuality. As such, it is considered important to control their potentially dangerous and promiscuous sexuality (Puri 1999). Diksha demonstrated the importance of "appropriate" manners in conditioning young girls for marriage to make her a "respectable" domesticated woman:

> Your life is dependent on marriage… your style of sitting, walking is monitored. People say … this will not work in another house when you get married… like you are talking too much… this will not work in your husband's house (laughs). You feel like you are born so that you can marry, make kids and then… we are taught like this.

The monitoring of women's movement and their speech is a way to control her sexuality and protect her virginity solely for marriage. If she is not a virgin at the time of marriage, she will be considered immodest.[22] Married women should also have a natural desire to procreate and carry the patrilineal lineage of the household (Uberoi 1994; Dhruvarajan 1989). This familial expectation of a married Hindu woman to procreate also corresponds to her duty to the nation: to produce Hindu sons, who will fight for the honour of the nation and help build a unified Hindu nation (Banerjee 2005). If she fails in this duty, she will be considered *ashubh* (unlucky) for the house. Diksha emphasized the "husband's house" or "another house" where her current ways of living would not work, and she would have to change them in order to conform to the "ideal Indian femininity". This idea links to Uberoi's work on Hindu conjugal marriages, where middle-class Hindu women have to "adjust" to their conjugal families and husbands asymmetrically and unilaterally to maintain the quality of their marital relationship (Uberoi 1995, p. 392). For upper-caste Hindus, if the newly wed girl cannot adjust to the conjugal family, it is seen as a reflection of the lack of "necessary" training she received from her parents (Srinivas 1977, p. 231).

For several of my interviewees, this need to demonstrate to their conjugal families that they had been well brought up often conflicted with their work as a journalist. Like Diksha, Avantika also

[22] Since her modesty is tied to her family, the entire family bears the "shame" if a woman deviates from heteronormative sexuality which is expressed only through marital relationships (Puri 1999).

expressed her parents' concerns about the nature of her journalistic work, which might not be acceptable in her conjugal family:

> Sometimes I have early morning shifts… sometimes I have evening shifts… sometimes even I am going out with men… So, my parents are worried that how will your husband accept that you are roaming around with another guy at night (laughs)

For her parents, Avantika's "roaming around with another guy" late in the night would make her seem unchaste. While men's infidelity in a marriage is considered "natural" or a "biological deficiency",[23] the body of a married Hindu woman is seen as a critical site of struggle for the preservation of Hindu cultural values and purity (Sarkar 1995, p. 102). Since the chastity of women centres around the discourses of *izzat*, the family and community assume a "social responsibility" to surveil women's bodies to avoid any risk of sexual deviation (Chakravarti 1993).

In contrast to journalism, the teaching profession is largely feminized in India because it is considered that women will be able to fulfill child-caring and child-rearing duties along with this stable job and regular working hours. Diksha explained this to me:

> The thing is for women is … only [the] teaching job is considered safe for them… so people think if you are a teacher, you are doing a good job, besides that if you do anything else, people think that this girl could not get married.

It is not expected of a married Indian woman to pursue career advancement. Female teachers are also seen as "role models" for other young girls and the embodiment of morality and respectability (Kellehar et al. 2011). The profession is considered "safe" for women as it does not make them too ambitious and allows them to prioritize their families. One of the other basic requirements for a woman to be married is that she has to have a "lower" status than her potential husband: this means that she has to be less educated and less ambitious (Srinivas 1977, p. 232).[24] On this connection between education and the marriageability of women, Diksha explained:

[23] MN Srivinas calls marriage a strikingly asymmetrical relationship as it requires godly devotion of the wife for the husband: this means that she is supposed to be a virgin before marriage, remain chaste throughout, and cannot divorce the husband under any circumstances (Srinivas 1977, p. 231).

[24] Even inter-caste marriage becomes acceptable if the woman is from a lower social stratum than the potential husband, but the opposite is seen as socially unacceptable (Liddle and Joshi 1989).

> When I started studying [an] LLB, my relatives started talking like that… they ask[ed] my parents why are they making me do this… she wouldn't get married… we are never taught that we should have an identity of our own. Similarly, we are taught like that only… like if you study this you will get a nice boy (laughs).

Diksha made a strong statement claiming that women in India are taught to become good potential wives so that they can marry into a "good" household. Since the law profession is associated with ambition, it is not considered suitable for a potential wife. Geraldine Forbes argues that women's education in colonial India began as an attempt to make women "presentable" wives and mothers rather than seeking employment (Forbes 1999, p. 54). Starting as a colonial practice, things have not changed much since, and women are still educated to get married into a "respectable" modern household – not to make passionate career choices. During the colonial era, educated and modern women were seen as better allies to their western educated husbands and a better representative of modern Indian civilization (Jayawardena 1986, p. 13). After marriage, they are supposed to keep their ambition in check and move on to the next stage of their lives i.e., motherhood. They are taught that they will only be "worthy" if they become mothers, since motherhood implicates them in the nation's respectable public sphere (Mookherjee 2008).

Indian women, no matter what, have to be seen as "less than" their husbands in all fields: be it education, employment, or even height. This idea was captured by Jaya as she explained her family's concerns about her marriage owing to her "unusual" height:

> So, like I am really tall… I am like 5'8 – 5'9 (laughs)… so there are some extended family members who have spoken about my height that… it will be difficult for me to find a guy to be with… because I am so tall and men don't like to be with tall women.

As discussed above, a woman in a heteronormative marital relationship is only acceptable when she is lower or less than her potential husband (Srinivas 1977). Jaya's family expressed similar anxieties over her height. Since she is taller than the average Indian male, her family assumed that it would be difficult to find a "suitable" husband for her. In Indian society, a tall woman is considered to have an overpowering presence in a man's life, which cannot be accepted either by the husband or their family (Sharma 2010).

In this section, I have argued that the marriageability of an Indian woman encompasses her ability to "domesticate" herself in one way or the other, reproduce children, have a "respectable" profession and most importantly, be "lesser" than her husband in all domains. All my interviewees expressed concerns about how this concept of marriage and motherhood practically governs their entire life, right from their education to their training and manners.

Silence

> I think the ideal Indian woman is somebody who shuts up… who doesn't [speak]… in every sense of her being she is submissive to her parents, her husband, her kids, her in-laws or whatever. And you know even with… women who are sexualized like this trope of "Savita Bhabhi" [an Indian porn character] … but like she is a woman who is not out there… she is seductive but… ohh I have my curves in all the right places… she is perfect and she doesn't have to say a lot of words. So, I don't think anybody expects a traditional Indian woman to talk so the moment you put out your opinions you sort of cross the line.

Aradhana is a former student journalist who works at *The Indian Express*, which is one of the oldest English language dailies in India. In our interview, Aradhana established the importance of "silence" in an Indian woman's life: "talking", she suggested, throws a woman out of the domain of national respectability. Aradhana made a clear demarcation between the private/domestic domain, which is occupied by women, and the public domain, where they are not supposed to speak (Chatterjee 1993). Opinionated women are considered detrimental to the Indian household as they do not conform to the domestic and submissive roles expected of them. Taking the example of Savita Bhabhi, Aradhana pointed out that "visible" women are sexualized but not expected to speak. Andrea Dworkin and Catherine McKinnon similarly argue that pornography "is an expression of encouragement to men to objectify and assault women", which aims for complete and ultimate silence of women (McKinnon 1993, p. 22). For example, in the Indian context, actresses in mainstream Bollywood movies are often more appreciated for their "sexual" appeal rather than their performance in the film, while this does not happen with male actors (Jain 2018; Aamir 2019; Alexander 2021).

Silence and speech are much debated themes in feminist circles both in India and beyond. During the socialization of young women, qualities like talking, laughing or even confidence are often

discouraged as they are considered less feminine (Rich 1979, p. 243). With reference to the US context, bell hooks explains that women are not taught absolute silence, they are supposed to "talk a talk that was itself silence". Silence is regarded a "sign of woman's submission to patriarchal authority" (hooks 1989, p. 7). Not conforming to this silence makes the woman appear deviant. In the Indian context, silence is similarly regarded as a virtue. Talking also means that the woman is sexually available and therefore, immoral and immodest. Deepa Narayan argues that Indian culture teaches young girls to be invisible. They should not acknowledge their bodies, cover up, never look straight into anyone's eye, not laugh too loud, not answer back to elders and most importantly, embody a culture of silence. A silent woman is considered respectable, desirable and marriageable. Women are trained to be silent as it makes them invisible in the public domain (Narayan 2018).

These ideas were also articulated by my interviewees. Diksha, for example, explained the meaning of an ideal Indian woman through the example of a "domesticated silent woman". This woman is lauded for her virtue of silence while, at the same time, makes herself productive by doing "domestic work". Therefore, she becomes a desirable and marriageable woman. If she is talking too much, she is seen as "not nice":

> Basically, everyone thinks a woman should talk less… you know. Someone told me, like when people go to marriages… umm… they tell me that there was this girl in the marriage function, she was a very nice girl, she wasn't speaking anything, just doing domestic work. Later women were talking about her… that this girl was so nice… we didn't even hear a word from her (laughs). So, for them, the ideal Indian woman shouldn't talk.

Diksha was smiling (in fact laughing) while answering this question on the notion of an ideal Indian woman. Her reaction suggested that these ideas were socialized to her as a young girl but as she grew up, she started finding these ideas humorous and unacceptable. Her laughing can also be seen as an act of resistance to such traditional ideas. Diksha further explained the construction of this ideal Indian woman with reference to her capacity for agency:

> So, this is it, a woman who doesn't speak, doesn't talk about her rights, who doesn't question others… like if my brother is going out why can't I go out? If my brother has permission why don't I? … or something like why I cannot make my career first and then marry? Why am I not free to choose my life partner? So, if I ask these questions then I won't be an ideal woman in the eyes of society.

Here, Diksha emphasized who is "not" an ideal woman. A woman asking question, demanding equal rights or making a "choice" by herself is not considered an ideal woman. Diksha made it clear in her response that this definition of an ideal woman is imposed upon young girls by society. She made a comparison between her brother and herself, implying that social discrimination starts with the family.

Several feminist scholars have written about the philosophical underpinnings and cultural implications of silence. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, wrote about the socialization of silence and invisibility in women right from childhood. The "othering" of women makes them objects who remain subjected to men, she argued. These objects are forced into a culture of silence. For the subject to maintain its subject position, the silencing of the object becomes necessary. (Beauvoir 1949). Silence is a form of discourse that communicates various thoughts or emotions. In the above case, the silence of an Indian woman communicates her submissiveness and acceptance to her position in the household and society. "Silencing" is, therefore, an important process of becoming a woman. Speech makes a woman come to power and attain visibility. The very act of speaking is a form of resistance to male domination, and therefore, deviance (hooks 1999, p. 129).

In addition to this silence, an ideal Indian woman must not make her own decisions. All her decisions are to be made by the male figures in her life; she is not supposed to question them. This idea was explained to me by Jaya:

> [The] ideal Indian woman is like a prototype, you know… which is common to a lot of South Asian countries: good daughter, good wife, good mother, good sister, modest, quiet … umm… willingly allows just things to happen according to other people's wishes, not like really saying anything, being okay with how things are going around her… because she feels like okay. Like this simulation in which they are living in… is… none of this is decided by their own terms… it's decided by the male figures around them.

In the above quotation, Jaya described the desirable qualities in an ideal South Asian woman. Her identity is associated with the males around her, and she must perform all the roles associated with these identities in a "respectable" manner. Jaya uses the term "simulation", thus acknowledging that women do not actively choose to remain silent, but rather, they are silenced and forced to pretend to live a "simulation" rather than reality.

In this section, I have argued that silence is one of the main characteristics of an ideal Indian woman. Silence does not just encompass being quiet and submissive, but it also implies not making any decisions for herself. Since mere "talking" is an act of deviance, the profession of journalism poses particular challenges for female journalists, as I discuss in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The above discussion of the modern *Sati Savitri* describes the roles of women in the postcolonial Indian nation and demonstrates how these restrictive roles are naturalized as an essential part of "becoming" a woman. For most of my interviewees, explanations of the ideal Indian woman were marked with smiles, laughs, sarcasm and sometimes even frustration. All my interviewees identified similar features of an "ideal woman" – modesty, marriageability and silence – and explained that they came to understand these features through processes of socialization. At the same time, they used both verbal and non-verbal means of expression to communicate that they did not agree with this definition. None of my interviewees identified themselves within this definition of the ideal Indian woman, however, they felt the need to conform to these images at some point in their lives. It is also to be noted that the three characteristics of the ideal Indian woman which I have discussed in this chapter are based on the responses of women from a particular location, class, caste and religious group and therefore, cannot be universally identified as ideal qualities for all Indian women.

In this chapter, I have used the mythological concept of *Sati Savitri* to explain how women's subordination and subjugation is ensured through the evocation of these concepts in the postcolonial Indian context. The Hindu mythological concept of *Sati Savitri aurat* remains important even after centuries as it keeps postcolonial anxieties about westernization in check. The modern Indian woman, who has entered the labor force and public sphere, is represented as a safe repository of the archaic but rich Hindu tradition. Since women have been relegated to the "inner" realm of nationalism, they must embody tradition which is truly representative of the nation. The concept of *Sati Savitri* combines complex values of chastity, devotion to one's husband, virginity and beauty; at the same time, it is symbolic of the ideal Indian woman.

My interviewees discussed the notion of an ideal Indian woman with reference to three main themes: modesty, marriageability and silence. In this chapter, I discussed how these concepts have been borrowed and evolved from colonial and postcolonial understandings of women's role in the

nation-building project. All three themes entail complex meanings in the Indian context. Modesty entails virginity, chastity, sexual respectability and beauty; while marriageability refers to the eligibility of a woman to marry. Silence is an essential virtue for an Indian woman, as it is associated with respect and submission to the patriarchal structures. These "ideal" qualities, and silence most importantly, seem the most unsettling for a woman journalist, and often leads to conflict between the roles of an "ideal Indian woman" and a journalist. I address this conflict further in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: A Double Burden: Being a Woman Journalist in India

Journalism is a largely male-dominated field that often ignores the participation and experiences of women. Even at the international level, non-profit organizations marginalize the violence and sexual harassment against women journalists making the field "gender-neutral". This is something I observed while working as an intern at the International Press Institute (IPI) during the Summer of 2020. The organization categorizes its tangible data on press freedom violations into 5 different sub-categories: legal harassment, killing, arrest, physical attack, and online harassment. Similar to other major international organisations, such as the Council of Europe, the IPI completely overlooks sexual harassment and gender-based violence faced by women journalists. As interns, we were required to fit instances of press freedom violations in our region (in my case, this was Asia and the Pacific) in these so-called "gender-neutral" categories, which were unable to accommodate online sexual harassment faced by many female journalists. The field of journalism itself is male-dominated and thereby, the experiences of journalists is seen to correspond with the experiences of *male* journalists. This tendency also aligns with the fact that the project of nation-building itself is masculinist: as Nagel writes, it is built on masculinist expectations and masculine ideas (Nagel 1998). Thereby, discourses around women or violence against women journalists are often invisible or marginalized as they are deemed not "so important" compared to "physical" attacks on men. The tangible data of press freedom violations produced by the IPI and other international organizations plays a big role in making journalism a largely male-dominated field and nullifying or subordinating the experiences of female journalists.

This chapter, therefore, will shed light upon the experiences of women journalists in India, particularly the social and cultural challenges, as well as forms of violence that they face in online and newsroom spaces – something that is not discussed openly in public spaces. Based on my interviews, I have classified these challenges into four different forms: navigating through families and communities, sexual harassment, gendered pressures and threats on online media. In particular, this chapter considers the "double burden" faced by female journalists: that is, how both their gender and their profession put them in a vulnerable position in contemporary Indian society. It is important to note that this chapter will focus on the particular challenges faced by mostly young, upper-caste, middle-class women journalists in India; therefore, this study neither can nor does it aim to represent the experiences of all women journalists in India with vast caste, class and

age differences. Most of my young interviewees received some kind of formal training in journalism and made an informed decision to enter the field (often because of their family background in the field). For my older interviewees, journalism was usually something that they fell into as they were exploring their career options. This is also because the field was not exactly developed as they were establishing themselves and there were even fewer women who chose journalism as their occupation – partly because, as I discussed in Chapter 2, it was not considered a "respectable" career choice for a woman. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the profession of journalism poses specific challenges to women in India by nature of their gender, and that these challenges are intensified by the current context of right-wing Hindu nationalism.

Navigating through Families and Communities

> *Isse nhi smjh aane wala*[25]
>
> (She is not going to understand)

As discussed in the previous chapter, journalism is not considered a "respectable" profession for Indian women as it requires them to embody the very qualities that are seen as undesirable for a modern *Sati Savitri aurat*.[26] This tension was explained to me by Aradhana when talking about how her identity as a journalist was perceived by her parents:

> When I told them that I want to be a journalist, they were not really motivated… umm… they tried everything in their power to persuade me to not pursue journalism. Of course, they have been in the field for so long. They know things about it, so they didn't want me to pursue it.

Both of Aradhana's parents are journalists and she grew up with lofty ideas about what journalism was. The reluctance of her parents to pursue journalism came from the fact that they had been in the field and knew the challenges of being a woman journalist in a male-dominated country, in

[25] This comment was made by one of my interviewees, Jaya, while talking about the reaction of her family to her career choice. This expression in Hindi captures the dispirited response of her family when it comes to her work. As Jaya explained to me, her parents said that they were tired of making her understand the unsuitability of journalism as a profession and therefore, they have given up on explaining it to her.

[26] See discussion on the ideal Indian woman (especially the section on silence) in Chapter 2.

which women occupy only 25% of the positions in the media (UN Women 2015). Aradhana further discussed how her professional choice was considered just a youthful fit of passion by her family:

> My mother always told me about how you are going to get married [it will be difficult to] take care of kids as a journalist… but now not so much… because part of that is they believe that once I do grow up and mature… age matures me, and I will understand what my real responsibilities are and leave journalism behind.

Aradhana, like other Indian women, will be expected to choose her family and children over her career when she gets married. This cultural choice is naturalized and embodied in middle-class women as "symbolic capital" where these women are seen equal to men at the workplace, but they are effectively required to choose their "responsibilities" of marriage and motherhood making Indian culture the center of their lives and decisions (Radhakrishnan 2009, p. 204). Such women are more valued in Indian society.[27] Similarly, Jaya, one of my other interviewees, also expressed her concerns about her family's anxieties and obsession over her marriage: "I haven't been able to explain them that this is what I want to do because at the end of the day, they are worried that how will I get married." Since marriage is considered the ultimate goal for Indian women, young women journalists find it difficult to justify their career choices to their families (Puri 1999).

Cultural and familial resistance to the career choices of young female journalists also come in the form of social isolation and demotivating responses from the family. Akansha, another young journalist, explained this to me:

> Initially when I decided to pursue journalism, they were a bit skeptical that *kya hoga* (what will happen). My papa (father) didn't talk to me for 6 months… when these things used to happen at IndiaTV he said once, you know I am not at all proud of your career choices.

While talking about the response of her father, there was anger and pain in Akansha's voice; it was high-pitched but sad. It seemed to me that she knew she had been wronged by her family. Indeed, her father used social isolation as a passive-aggressive method to control Akansha's choices, yet she was too ashamed to admit that and quickly moved on to discussing that her family is supportive now. She further added:

[27] See the discussion on marriageability in Chapter 2.

> When their [my parents'] colleagues tell them that we saw your daughter, she was good, then they are happy… otherwise they are constantly worried about what will I make in my future (laughs).

It is important to note that the family's support and affirmation of her work only came after it was accepted and recognized publicly. Here too, like Aradhana and Jaya, the family's concerns over "her future" (that is, her marriage) takes priority since this is seen as the ultimate destiny for women in India (Ramu 1989).

Similar concerns about the safety of women journalists in public spaces were also expressed by my older interviewees. Diksha, for example, discussed the social resistance that she faced in her family and community because of her career choice: "When I joined the media institute, they used to say that I am roaming around with a guy with no safety… There is no time, there is no life… a lot of people tried to demoralize me." One of the reasons why the profession of journalism is considered "unrespectable" for women is because they are required to work beyond regular working hours and spend a considerable amount of time outside in the field, as opposed to other jobs which are more stable and involve indoor office work. A woman spending a lot of time outside leaves room for suspicion of infidelity (Ogundoyin 2020). Therefore, the profession of journalism itself makes woman appear deviant. Woman journalists who do not conform to the norms of ideal femininity are seen as a threat to the militarized Hindu nation and thus, violence is perpetuated and indeed justified against these "sexual deviants" to protect the nation (Basu and Banerjee 2006). I discuss this issue of sexual harassment and violence against women journalists in India in the next section.

Sexual Harassment

Around 40% of women journalists working in South Asian countries report experiencing some form of threats, abuse or intimidation related to their work (UN Women 2015). In most of the cases of sexual harassment at work, the perpetuator was the male boss or superior. This section will consider two places where women journalists are most vulnerable to sexual harassment: the field and the office.

Harassment in the Field

Bheed se darr lagta hai[28]

(I am scared of the crowd)

Fear of sexual harassment in crowded public places makes women journalists extremely conscious of their sexed bodies, a concern to which male journalists are less (or not at all) susceptible. This sentiment was captured by Niharika when she described the different experiences of violence faced by women journalists: "The kind of violence you suffer is different because okay like the male journalists get beaten up, but we get beaten up but also like sexually harassed." Niharika discussed how women journalists face a "double oppression" because they are not only physically beaten, but also sexually abused. Similarly, another of my senior interviewees, Ritika, made this comparison between her experiences and the experiences of male colleagues:

> When you go to other states like I went to Bihar recently for Bihar elections for some time… for 3-4 days… there was lot of eve-teasing[29] that happened… but that doesn't happen with male colleagues.

In the above quotation, Ritika acknowledged the different experiences between male and female journalists, but at the same time, she maintained that this could be avoided if women journalists did not go to "other" states like Bihar (which are considered socially and economically backward).[30] Women internalize the responsibility of such attacks on their modesty from a very young age, so that they constantly limit themselves and monitor their movements when they are out (Puri 1999). This was also explained to me by Aradhana when she discussed the challenges faced by women journalists in crowded places:

> You know… because you are a journalist you want to cover these things, right? And then you have to keep limiting yourself, especially as a woman. There was this one major political happening in the country, but then it was so crowded, I decided not to go. And then when Stalin was being inducted as a president of DMK, I remember going there… umm… it was so crowded… it's so difficult to concentrate on what is happening on the

[28] This statement was made by Aradhana while talking about her experiences of sexual harassment.
[29] This is a term used in South Asia to connote the sexual harassment of women by men.
[30] Bihar is considered to be a backward state with poor socio-economic groups. Ritika's reference to Bihar also asserts her upper-caste and middle-class identity while, at the same time, "others" people from Bihar by implying that eve-teasing is a common practice amongst "those" people.

> stage because you are always worried about someone feeling you up… someone groping you.[31]

Aradhana implied that fear of sexual harassment in the field makes it difficult for women journalists to cover important stories and fulfill their journalistic responsibilities. This pressure puts women journalists in a difficult situation of conflict between the responsibilities of their gender (i.e., to protect oneself) and the duties of a journalist. Aradhana further elaborated this point by adding:

> I don't know how I say this… [when men are attacked] it's not because of their gender, it's just because of their profession. Women on the other hand, because it's a double thing for them – because they are journalists – they are putting themselves out there… they are constantly told, who asked you? You are a woman… who asked you to come here? That's what I was told when I was at the Stalin induction like *Aap ko kisne bola tha aap itni bheed mei aaye* (Who asked you to come to such a crowded space?). Men also face violence but then women are always told that this is not a space for you… so if you [are] putting [yourself] out there then you better be prepared for whatever consequences fall on you.

Men are more likely to blame women victims in cases of sexual attacks on her body. In their study of sexual violence in Mumbai, for example, Menon and Kanekar (1992) show that there was a negative correlation between blame and the victim's appropriateness; that is, the more the victim befits the definition of ideal femininity, the lesser the blame that is placed upon her. A respectable woman is supposed to domesticate herself: if she is going out, then it is her responsibility to protect herself – failing which, the onus of sexual aggression falls entirely on her.

For some of my interviewees, it seemed like they had normalized the presence of sexual predators in crowded areas. Akansha, for example, said: "So, when you are covering a press conference [….] these things happen you know… groping or you know touching." There was a tone of normalization when she said, "these things", as if it was expected to happen. This observation relates to the fact that sexual aggression on the part of men is considered "natural" or "biological", while women are thought to be passive receivers of such aggression (Burt 1980). Adding to how

[31] MK Stalin was inducted as the President of the DMK, one of major political parties in South India, after the death of the most famous political leader (South India) Karunanidhi. It was a big event in the history of the DMK.

"these things" happen, Akansha narrated her ordeal of harassment and fear while covering one of the biggest protests in the national capital:[32]

> Like when this JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University) protest was happening it was so so so crowded and I felt… I felt… umm… someone hugging me… (hesitation)… *piche se* (from the back) and it was late at night… it was very, you know, it gets scary…we are supposed to be courageous, but it gets scary at times.

There was shame, embarrassment and hesitation in Akansha's voice when she told me about this difficult experience. She also described feeling conflicted between how a modern, strong woman journalist should behave and how she actually behaved to protect her modesty.[33]

Harassment at the Workplace

> *Roz ek nayi ladai thi bht struggle kia*[34]
>
> (Every day was a new fight, I have struggled a lot)

A recent survey conducted by the Network of Women in Media, India, and Gender at Work reported that over two-thirds of women journalists in India have experienced sexual harassment at the workplace, while half have not even reported the incident (2020). Most of my interviewees described facing harassment by their superiors in one form or another. Akansha, for example, talked about her experiences of sexual advances and harassment by one of her bosses at her workplace:

> Obviously, he knew that my editor was gone… he called me into his cabin [office] alone. Whenever you need to talk, there has to be another female employee, you cannot talk alone like this… he was sitting on [a] chair and very creepily he checked me out.

The experience described by Akansha fits with Beth A. Quinn's concept "girl watching" at the workplace, in which sexually watching and objectifying women is more like a standard display of

[32] JNU is a liberal arts institution whose students regularly speak out against the atrocities of the current government. This particular protest happened when the government reduced the public budget of JNU by a significant amount.
[33] She could not resist it actively (beating, slapping or scolding the guy) because she was afraid of the crowd.
[34] This comment was made by Simran, a senior video journalist, while talking about the challenges that women journalists face at the workplace.

their masculinity for men which they do not even acknowledge as harassment (2002). In our interview, it seemed that Akansha was well-aware of her rights as woman employee. In fact, she was quite assertive when she said "you cannot talk alone like this" with a woman; however, she felt that she could not file a harassment complaint against this senior employee. Her intersectional position as a newcomer and a young female journalist put an additional burden on her as it made her more vulnerable to lose her job. This kind of harassment therefore not only affects the mental wellbeing of women journalists, but also has an impact upon their personal and professional lives (Jamil 2020). Akansha further explained the physical and psychological impacts of workplace harassment to emphasize the amount of pain she suffered: "It was affecting so terribly my mental health. My periods got irregular, I used to get panic attacks… it was so messy".

Even if a woman journalist is able to tackle these challenges and advance at work, she could face verbal harassment from her colleagues and superiors who would always see her as "lesser". Jaya, both of whose parents are journalists, told me this was the reason why her mother dissuaded her from pursuing a career in journalism:

> Every step you would be told… every promotion you get… or if you are slightly better than a male colleague you are going to hear a lot of shit that… if she is sleeping with the boss.

The inferiority of women in any given field is naturalized (Srinivas 1977) and if she is a stronger employee than her male colleagues, it is "normally" considered that she had to "do something" to get "favors" within the job such as a promotion. This is also one of the reasons why women journalists are forced to quit their jobs, as they are never considered equally talented as men (Jamil 2020).

These perceptions are intensified when it comes to pregnant women, who are considered less effective and productive for the organization. The media industry, which relies heavily on strenuous fieldwork, does not encourage women to take maternity leave. Discussing the case of one of her colleagues, Akansha said:

> There was this girl… she was very hardworking and enthusiastic. She decided to resign because she wanted to take maternity leave. And that Abhinav Pandey [the boss-name changed] called her and said *abhi kyu bacha lana hai mat laao na*? (Why are you bringing

> a baby now, don't do it) … you know… it's a crime to say things like that to your female employee, you cannot say when a woman will decide to have a child or not.

There was a shift in language (from English to Hindi) when Akansha explained the boss' comments on her colleague's decision to take maternity leave. This shift signified her anger and emotions over her boss who had harassed her as well (as discussed in the above paragraph). Since women are considered homemakers and child bearers, it is also often expected that they will leave their job once they have children (Dashora 2013). Therefore, it is considered a waste of resources to give that woman paid maternity leave if she is supposed to quit the job eventually anyway.

India passed the Maternity Amendment Bill (2017) quite recently, which incorporated the unorganized sector and increased the maternity leave time period. Before that, laws for working mothers were confusing and chaotic, giving organizations loopholes to terminate the employment contracts of women. Suman, one of my senior interviewees, was also the first female video journalist in India. She talked in detail about how the male-dominated industry did everything in its power to stop her, even forcing her to make critical life decisions, as the below exchange indicates:

> Suman: I was forced to abort my baby… (muffled cry) … because my boss thought I would be useless after that. At that time there were no laws to protect women at workplace… I had no other option… It was so difficult…
>
> Sneha: (crying)
>
> Suman: There was no female video journalist at that time. They wanted me out at any cost. They were looking for excuses.

Later in the interview, Suman also mentioned that she was not even given leave after she had the abortion, and she had to come to work the very next day. Indeed, this experience was very difficult for her to narrate and difficult for me to hear. There was silence after she talked about this; I had absolutely no words. My body felt numb, and I shivered. Owing to her seniority and her experience, it seemed that she was stronger than me; she realized my emotional response and directed the conversations towards the next question.

In this section, I have discussed how women journalists are harassed both at their workplaces and the field, which makes none of these spaces completely safe for them. Harassment makes these women journalists aware and conscious about their disadvantaged gender while, at the same time, they feel pressured to restrict themselves and thus lose opportunities at work.

Gendered Pressures

> *Tumhara jyda ho rha*[35]
>
> (You are doing/being too much)

Women journalists in India feel pressure to write or articulate their stories in a certain way. Further, their stories are more prone to being dismissed or changed just because of their gender (Pain 2017). Women's issues are taken less seriously within media organizations and, therefore, their writing is considered less important than their male colleagues. These gendered pressures were discussed by many of my interviewees. Niharika, for example, talked about an experience when her male colleagues asked her to "tone down" her stories because they were considered too "radical":

> Maybe *thoda tone down ho jaao* (tone down yourself) and they offer help sometimes. But [this] also depends on how their tone is, so sometimes you might feel that they are just concerned but then sometimes you also might feel like this is another way of essentially telling you to shut up.

In the above quotation, Niharika was referring to the response she received to an article that she wrote about Kashmir, a disputed territory between India and Pakistan.[36] She was a student journalist at the time and received a huge backlash and trolling from the student community over that article. Kashmir is one of the most sensitive topics in India, especially in the current times

[35] This comment was made by Niharika when talking about the responses of her colleagues to her work.

[36] Kashmir is a highly militarized disputed zone between India and Pakistan where India only occupies 55% of the land. However, the Indian state propagates an ideology in which it considers the whole of Kashmir an integral part of India, something that is considered geographically and historically incorrect. The article that Niharika wrote was addressed to the Indian state and was called, "Kashmir isn't ours, deal with it". Even though the article was written considering the historical and geographical position of Kashmir, the very headline made the article and the author appear "anti-national" since it was against the basic ideology that is circulated by the Indian state.

under a Hindu nationalist government (Behera 2002).[37] People who support Kashmir and Kashmiris are considered anti-nationals in Hindu nationalist discourses (which was the reason why Niharika was targeted). Therefore, journalists covering such politically sensitive topics generally face more serious threats than others (Rao 2008).

Further explaining that she would not dare to write such things again, especially under the current government, Niharika added: "I wrote that in February 2019 but now I wouldn't write it, or I would only write it without the byline." Since the current government has only gotten stronger since being re-elected in April 2019, it has become even more difficult to talk about these politically sensitive issues without being harassed. Explaining how the right-wing has bloomed in India under the current government and has the audacity to inflict violence on anyone who dissents, Niharika added:

> *Aisa nhi ki ye right-wing wale log abhi paida hue hai* (it's not that these right-wing people are born just now). They have been on this earth for a long while now. But *abhi na inhe aise himmat mil gyi hai ki hum kuch bhi kr denge kuch bhi bolenge humara kuch hoga nhi* (Now they have got this power of doing anything and speaking anything knowing that nothing would happen to them).

Niharika emphasized that the current government has bolstered the actions of right-wing followers who are not punished for anything they do.

Gendered prejudices in the Indian media are, however, not new. There is a long history of objectifying, othering and marginalizing women into relatively less important news beats (Nelson and Chowdhury 1994; Staudt 2002). Stephen D. Reese (2001) has shown that gendered attitudes are constructed on an organizational level: that is, the very process of selection of news to be covered is gendered and largely male-defined. A woman journalist is constantly told what she can and cannot do, as Apeksha explained to me:

[37] The Hindu right-wing has a very troubled history on the Kashmir issue. While the formation of the Indian nation gave autonomous status to Kashmir through Article 370, the Hindu right-wing was adamant to revoke that special status as they believed that it gave special rights to the Muslim-majority state. Recently, in 2019 under the current BJP government the status was revoked, and the autonomy of Kashmir was snatched away by the Indian state. This step was accompanied by a 9-month long communication lockdown, extensive militarization and violence in Kashmir against Muslims. This history makes Kashmir a very sensitive issue to discuss in Indian politics.

> Women journalists, so you will be told that *aap yahan nhi jaa sakte* (you can't go there) because it's not safe but then men will be sent out… [the] intention might be right but at the end of the day, you are missing out on something which actually as a journalist you should be doing.

This discourse of "safety" takes choices and opportunities away from women journalists. Women should always have "manufactured" or "legitimate reasons" to be in public spaces (Jagori 2016), and they should avoid these places as much as they can for their own safety. This idea also reverberated in Niharika's experience of reporting, when she told me how her female boss did not allow her to cover "important" protests and forced her to instead cover a flower show:

> *Ramjas college cover krne k liye baaki ladke jaayenge aur ladkiyaan aap flower show cover krna* (So, all the guys will cover the protests at Ramjas College and you guys will cover the flower show). So other male correspondents from the south campus had to come to the north campus to cover the protests at Ramjas but we girls couldn't go because, you know, we are women and I am like covering a flower show (laughs). So, *humare liye options kam ho jaate hai* (so the options for us reduce).

Like Apeksha, Niharika said that that this kind of "safety" reduces opportunities for women journalists, while men get to do more (and more "important" political stories). This explains the low number of women reporters (just 2.7%) in political journalism in India as they are deliberately pushed away, or they have to opt out because of pressures from the male-dominated arena (Pain 2017).

Besides facing harassment at the workplace and in the field, it is also difficult for woman to just do their job as journalists due to the lack of inclusivity of public places which are intended for only men to occupy (Phadke 2007). This idea was communicated to me by Avantika:

> It is true that you have to sacrifice a lot of things when it comes to your body also because being a female… it's not easy to work in [the] field… you have to constantly look for clean washrooms that is a basic requirement and sometimes you don't even get the privilege to go to a clean washroom.

These ideas also link back to Suman's experience of abortion, where she had to make a huge sacrifice for her work.

It is noteworthy that the identity of an Indian women is not singular, and there are several layers to it – caste, class and religion. Similarly, the nature of harassment is intersectional: it exploits every identity marker of a person. Some of my interviewees, like Niharika, acknowledged their caste and class privilege:

> As an upper caste woman, I w[d]on't feel as much as a tribal journalist. Yes, the right-wing politics is very gendered, but the way they are attacking is also in terms of religion and identity. And sometimes I feel as a Hindu woman I am less attacked than a Dalit or Muslim woman.

The lower-caste (Dalit) and Muslim identity is even more disadvantaged than gender identity in certain situations or while writing certain articles. Since the politics of the current government is based on this upper-caste notion of masculine Hindutva, it is not possible to ignore such intersections when talking about violence. The category of woman intersects with caste and religion, which is key to rationalizing such violence inflicted by the Hindu right (Niranjana 2006).

In this section, I have demonstrated how women journalists face a disproportionate amount of pressure from their workplaces and society due to their gender. I have also discussed how this pressure or violence faced by women journalists is intersectional in nature depending on other layers of their identity.

Threats in Online Media Spaces

> *Twitter pr inko alg himmat mil gyi hai*[38]
>
> (These people have got a new power on Twitter)
>
> Dealing with right wing social media trolls becomes [a] regular part of successful women journalists, that is, if they think and report independently. Sometimes, they may lose lives too as in the case of Gauri Lankesh.[39]

[38] This comment was made by Niharika while referring to the right-wing nationalist troll army on Twitter which comes after anyone who criticizes the current government or the Prime Minister.

[39] Gauri Lankesh was a vocal left-wing journalist-turned-activist in the South Indian state of Karnataka. She wrote vociferously against the Brahmanical Hinduism and caste system in her weekly periodical, *Lankesh Patrika*. Lankesh was killed on September 5, 2017, allegedly by a group of Hindu nationalists.

The above sentences were spoken by Shreya (pseudonym), a prominent woman journalist in India, while talking about her own experiences of threats and abuse online. This kind of online gendered harassment is supposed to be a way of the audience suggesting that misogynistic abuse, sexist remarks and threats are just a part of their jobs in these times (Chen et al. 2018). These threats increase when a woman is seen to transgress national notions of respectability and cross the line of what women are traditionally meant to do (Byerly 2013).

An opinionated and vocal woman is considered a danger to the notion of ideal femininity and thus the entire masculine nation-building project.[40] Apeksha discussed these ideas while talking about her experiences on Twitter. She was particularly referring to a post in which she discussed the Delhi riots in 2020 (which were supposedly sponsored by the state).[41] As discussed above, being anti-establishment is politically sensitive in contemporary India, and people who exhibit these tendencies are more vulnerable to harassment. Another of my interviewees, Apeksha, pointed out why women journalists in particular are prone to such harassment:

> Just because you are putting out some aspects and you are thinking aloud, people are trolling me, they are calling me names. Sometimes they tell me that I have taken money, sometimes it is like simple plain abuse… so, Twitter is a very toxic place.

In the above quotation, Apeksha described the "toxicity" of Twitter and how it has made the life of women journalists more difficult under the current government. The BJP government is the first to use the power of social media to come to power in 2014, after which it has remained extremely active on media platforms like Twitter and Facebook (Mohan 2015). At the same time, these platforms have become mediums to harass dissenting voices. When it comes to women journalists, these mediums become extremely toxic as they embody the extremist right-wing voices coupled with sexism and misogyny. Therefore, women journalists are "doubly" trolled: because of their gender and their anti-establishment opinions (Rao 2018).

One of the most prominent examples of women journalists in India being harassed online when they speak on such issues – albeit not from one of my interviewees – is found in the responses to

[40] See the discussion about silence in the previous chapter.
[41] These riots were followed by the anti-CAA (anti-Citizenship Amendment Act) protests in Delhi where thousands of Muslim women came out onto the streets to protest against a law that was discriminatory towards the Muslim minorities in India. During and after these protests, Muslim minorities were attacked and their homes were abolished by right-wing Hindu nationalists.

an article posted by a famous female journalist, Rana Ayyub, on the Kashmir issue. Below are screenshots of the comments that Ayyub received on Twitter:

Figure 3: A snapshot from the comment section of Rana's Twitter post

Figure 4: Another snapshot of comment section

In both screenshots, Rana Ayyub was verbally abused, called a prostitute and a national traitor. Besides being attacked on the basis of her gender, Ayyub was also called out because of her Muslim identity, thus reinforcing the argument I made above about the intersectional nature of violence and harassment against women journalists. It is also important to note that many of these comments were in Hindi, especially if they were attacks on her character. Since English is considered an egalitarian language of the urban middle-class that normalizes discourses around sex and sexuality in India, making it more respectable and acceptable, the use of Hindi for character assassination makes the abuse even more vulgar and unrespectable (Puri 1999). Another senior journalist, Suman, told me the kind of abuses she received on Twitter:

> *Ye log gandi gandi gaaliyan dete hai Twitter pr mujhe… kothe wale khte hai… kya kya bolte hai* [sniffs] (These people hurl very bad abuses towards me on Twitter… they have even called me prostitute… they say so many things).

The language of these attacks was also Hindi, making the abuse more obscene and even more hurtful for urban middle-class women. As she spoke the above words to me, Suman's pitch lowered to almost a whisper. Since we were sitting in a public place (a coffee shop), speaking these abuses aloud (and in Hindi) would have drawn attention to us and led to comments on our character. Therefore, Suman lowered her voice and stared into my eyes as she said this; I could almost see her burning tears lining her eyelids, reflecting the pain she suffered when she was called these names.

Another journalist, Diksha also pointed out the sexual nature of threats faced by women journalists in India, which go beyond the simple abuse that many male journalists face. Since the virtue of *Sati Savitri* is considered the greatest asset for a woman, attacking her character means attacking the very essence of her womanhood and femininity. Diksha explained this to me as follows:

> For a woman people start talking about her virtue, her character, they don't talk about men's character, they don't even care. For woman, she is called a prostitute. So that's the difference… the impact on both men and women is also different… maybe men wouldn't be affected by this… but women are… we feel bad… even the trolling is done like this.

Diksha stressed that women are more affected by gendered abuses and trolling than men. This relates to the fact that the socialization of women is done in a way that they feel socially responsible for any kind of attack on their character and virtue (Puri 1999; Eagly and Wood 2011). One senior journalist, Rita explained why this government is bent on attacking modern "emancipated" women journalists:

> The mind-set of right-wing nationalism doesn't easily accept a modern or say an emancipated woman. Trolling of women by the BJP social media army of trollers for example has become common. For women, its worse as it takes sexual overtones. You have cases of Barkha Dutt, Rana Ayyub, Swati Chaturvedi, Nidhi Razdan etc.,[42] which amplify what women journalists have to deal with.

[42] These are popular women journalists in India who have faced rampant threats, sexual harassment and trolling on media platforms. Their anti-establishment opinions have posed a danger to their lives and work. It is to be noted that these are all senior journalists.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Hindu nationalist ideology domesticates women into realms that are socially respectable. Women journalists – by their very profession – defy the norms of such domestication and silence, and therefore, they are often trolled on social media. Importantly, Rita also mentioned the presence of BJP troll armies on social media who are paid by the government to attack those who defy the norms of Hindu national respectability.[43]

Shreya faced a similar fate of threat and abuse in 2018 when she drew a cartoon following an incident in which an eight-year-old Muslim girl, Asifa, was brutally gang-raped and murdered in a temple in Kashmir. The eight male perpetrators, one of whom was the caretaker of the temple, were all identified as Hindu nationalists. The cartoon was published on her personal Facebook page:

Figure 5: Cartoon drawn by Shreya (her Facebook page)

This cartoon shows Ram, the highly revered God by Hindus, and his wife Sita.[44] Hindu nationalism propagates that the reign of Ram was an ideal one in which all citizens were happy and prosperous, something that the movement wants for India now. Ram's rule, which was called "Ramrajya", is one of the goals of the current government. Bhakts is a term used for Hindu nationalists in India

[43] Swati Chaturvedi, a broadcast journalist, has written a book titled *I am a Troll: Inside the Secret World of BJP's Digital Army* (2016), for which she interviewed politicians, bureaucrats, marketeers and trolls. In the book, Chaturvedi claims that trolling is an "organized political activity" making trolls equivalent to organized mob attacks.

[44] Sita was abducted by Ravana, a demon God in Hindu mythology. According to the tale, Ravana kept her in solitary confinement and never tried to violate her. She was rescued by Ram later.

who want to bring back Ramrajya.[45] Shreya's cartoon was a satire on the idea of "Ramrajya" that the so-called Ram devotees aim to achieve. The cartoon was said to invoke religious fundamentalism, which triggered the Hindu nationalists who filed a case against Shreya. Shreya also received extensive threats from Hindu nationalists:

> I received threats to [my] life and threats of rape when I drew a cartoon depicting the right-wing idol Lord Sriram[46] in 2018, in the backdrop of [the] rape and murder of a little girl Asifa in Jammu by Hindutva elements. A case was slapped under non-bailable sections against me by a Hindu fringe group, alleging that I was fomenting communal tensions.

Shreya further commented on the impact of such abuse on her mental wellbeing:

> The one time I received these threats, I had to go incommunicado under the resultant stress. I could not proceed with my normal life for several days [….]. I was subjected to horrible abuse, denigrating my integrity as a woman and as a human being. I was worried for my family and feared the threats could actually result in action. Later too, the police [were] calling me repeatedly and expecting me to attend the police station for interrogation over the case slapped against me, gave me sleepless nights.

The fear of harassment and the actualization of threats haunted Shreya for a long time, making it hard for her to survive – let alone work independently. Like other interviewees, Shreya also highlighted that the abuse she faced was particularly gendered in that it compromised her "dignity" as a "woman".

This section revealed how the threats and abuses faced by women journalists in online spaces is mostly gendered, however, other markers of identity such as religion and caste also come into play depending on the identity of the woman journalist. Most of my interviewees were abused online in one way or the other because of their anti-government opinions, yet they said that this kind of abuse had especially heightened under the current government. They explained that this was due to a parallel rise in social media technologies and the rampant use of such technologies by the

[45] The term Bhakts is used in a derogatory sense to connote that these people are propagandists and blind followers of the current government.
[46] Lord Sriram, also known as Ram, is the hero of the great Indian epic, *Ramayana*.

government itself to propagate its Hindu nationalist ideology, as well as the growing presence of trolls – right-wing Hindu nationalists – in such spaces.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how women journalists are burdened both because of their gender identity and their journalistic duties. Often these identities require contradictory roles, and the friction between them is one of the leading causes of that they experience. The field of journalism, therefore, itself is like a masculinist nation-building project which excludes women by marginalizing their experiences in the field. I have divided the various challenges faced by women journalists in India into four different categories: navigation through families and communities, sexual harassment (both at the workplace and in the field), gendered pressures and threats in online social media spaces. As I have explained, these are not four discreet categories: indeed, they are mutually inclusive and often, one kind of challenge is followed by another. These four categories further elaborate the "double burden" faced by women journalists in India, something which male journalists do not encounter in the same profession.

It is important to note that my interviewees (who were limited in number and came from a specific background) faced these challenges at different points in their lives; therefore, these categories are not to be understood as a comprehensive list. I have highlighted that the harassment is intersectional depending on other markers of identity. However, for most of my interviewees (who were upper-caste, middle-class urban Hindu women), their gender identity assumes particular salience since other identity markers enjoy relative privilege in Indian society. It is also important to note that despite their disadvantaged positions, these women journalists do not give in to such challenges: indeed, they negotiate their contradictory identities and exhibit agency to subvert dominant national discourses of gender, sexuality and nationalism. I discuss the particular strategies that women journalists use in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Negotiation and Agency: Strategies Used by Women Journalists in India

Jaise Jaise ek ladki badi hoti hai

Uske samne ek deewar khadi hoti hai

Krantikari kehte hai deewar tod deni chahiye

Lekin ladki hai samjhdar itna samjh lijiye

Vo deewar mei lagati hai khootiya

Siksha aur rojgaar ki

Aur vo uske chadd k deewar ko paar kr leti hai

(As a girl grows up, a wall in front of her also grows in length

Revolutionaries say that the girl should break the wall,

But she is smart, you should understand that,

She inserts nails of education and employment in that wall,

And crosses the wall by climbing on those nails.)

The above poem was written by Mamta Kalia – a Hindi language poet, feminist author and teacher – whose work examines the personal lives of Indian women: their domestication, their pain and their love. Diksha, one of the senior journalists whom I interviewed, answered my question about an ideal Indian woman by reciting this poem to explain her personal understanding of the concept. The poem beautifully captures both challenges faced by Indian women and their agency in the face of gendered expectations. In the poem, there is a contrast between resistance and agency as the girl does not break the wall, but rather, she puts nails in it. This understanding evokes Sharyn Graham Davies' explanation of the difference between resistance and agency: "Agency is something deployed towards ends that may be self-serving and self-pragmatic while resistance should be reserved for more direct challenges to the power structures" (Davies 2007, p. 150). The above poem advocates agency and negotiation over direct resistance in certain circumstances because, the poet suggests, it can help women achieve pragmatic goals which a revolution might not. The poem also encapsulates the experiences of women journalists in India as they demonstrate various strategies and forms of agency when negotiating the often-contradictory roles of being a "good woman" and a "good journalist".

Accordingly, this chapter will discuss the strategies and forms of agency exhibited by women journalists by classifying them into three categories: everyday strategies of negotiation (being careful/self-censorship, being thick skinned, working extra, taking control/assertiveness, and dressing down); alternative definitions of the concept of an ideal Indian woman; and perseverance. However, I must emphasize that these categories are not absolute and are based on the responses of a limited number of interviewees, who come from a specific economic and social class. Therefore, I do not intend to generalize these strategies as relevant to all women journalists in India today: they face intersectional challenges depending on their social and economic status, making this categorization limited to Hindu upper-caste, middle-class women. These strategies, as this chapter demonstrates, allowed my interviewees to persist and continue working in the male-dominated field of journalism in India and, indeed, to hold out hope for a better future.

Everyday Strategies of Negotiation

My interviewees explained that they used various strategies in their everyday lives to overcome daily challenges of being women journalists in India at a time where they are not only burdened by social and cultural resistance to their career choice, as the previous chapter discussed, but also by a regressive right-wing government which serves to intensify these challenges. In this section, I have divided the strategies my interviewees used to overcome everyday challenges into 5 different sub-categories: being careful/self-censorship, being thick-skinned, working extra, taking control/assertiveness and dressing down. The interviewees used these strategies depending on their individual circumstances and capacity; however, it is important to note that these strategies were mostly a "pragmatic" means to achieve a short-term goal, rather than an attempt to revolutionize the structural inequalities prevalent within the field of journalism, as well as the gendered expectations within which they live their lives.

Being Careful: Self-Censorship

> *Likhne se phle sochna padta hai*[47]
> (I have to think a lot before I write anything)

[47] This comment was made by Diksha while talking about self-censorship.

In recent years, there has been a steep rise in the number of sedition cases filed against journalists for expressing dissent or criticizing the current Indian government. According to a recent report by *Article 14*,[48] 96% of all sedition cases filed in the last decade were registered under the current Modi government. There has also been an increase of 28% in cases each year from 2014 to 2020 (Purohit 2020). This has created an environment of fear for journalists in India, leading to an increase in the practice of self-censorship in order to avoid such detrimental outcomes. Therefore, one of the strategies used by women journalists to prevent the risk of political sanctions and harassment is to change their style of writing and reporting (Stahel and Schoen 2019; Adams 2018; Chen et al. 2018). I argue that women journalists are more likely than their male counterparts to use style-changing techniques like self-censorship due to greater risks and higher stakes because of their "doubly burdened" position.[49]

Most of my interviewees talked about being careful in terms of what they wrote or posted on social media platforms to protect themselves from charges of sedition. Diksha, for example, explained why a little self-censorship was important for journalists: "I understand it is for our own safety […] you self-regulate… you regulate your language and tone as a journalist." Diksha was one of the many interviewees who worked for media organizations where they were not permitted to give personal opinions on social media; however, that could be done if the employee distances herself from the organization. This kind of policy ensured that journalists took extreme care in terms of what they wrote online. Explaining this, Diksha added:

> Well, we are not supposed to give our personal opinions on social media… whatever we say we say as journalists and journalists of our organizations… we take care of words we use but many times, we have to face trolls and criticism even on that.

In the above quotation, Diksha also emphasized the need for self-censorship for women journalists, specifically to avoid excessive trolls and threats online, in the current politically charged environment. Aradhana, another interviewee who worked at *The Indian Express*, one of the oldest

[48] *Article 14* is an initiative by academics, lawyers and journalists that provides extensive research-based reportage and in-depth investigations of the issues that are important for safeguarding democracy.

[49] This means that women journalists in India are attacked not just for their work (like their male counterparts), but also because of their gender. Every intersection of caste, class and religion makes them even more vulnerable to such attacks. In my study, the intersection of caste, class and religion did not hold much relevance because most of my interviewees are upper-caste, middle-class Hindu women. Therefore, I say women journalists in my study are "doubly burdened" i.e., because of their profession and their gender identity.

and most progressive newspapers in the country known for its commitment to responsible journalism, explained that the practice of self-censorship was routinely common even at progressive news organization: "You sort of self-censor yourself… you do it at your personal level… before submitting the report to your editor you try to play things down."

This kind of censorship is prevalent not at the organizational or editorial level i.e., journalists are not openly asked to refrain from writing something, but they also censor themselves to avoid political sanctions or trouble (Yesil 2014, p. 73). Another senior interviewee, Apeksha, who worked at NDTV, one of most progressive TV news channels, also raised a similar issue:

> Even in an organization, you are outspoken about how you feel about something, even if you are not speaking of the same things or in the same way in the platform itself, but somehow that self-censorship creeps in.

Apeksha told me that self-censorship "creeps in", even if she is very outspoken. Somehow, explained, she has to remember to censor her words and speech so that she does not get into trouble. In order to deal with the problem, Apeksha uses the strategy of writing or expressing herself, as she explained the following to me:

> I hold myself back and think twice whether I should say it or not say it and because I have been a journalist for such a long time, I cannot like shut up… and now I also know how to say where I can legally fight it, you know. I mean I put [it] out but in a way that legally it wouldn't stick to me, where I cannot be held up for something like that.

Apeksha writes in a such way that she will not get into legal trouble. I argue that this approach is agential itself, as Apeksha writes what she wants to, but at the same time, saves herself from sanctions. For example, in one of her Twitter posts, Apeksha shared a story about rising COVID-19 cases due to a large Hindu social gathering event and actively refrained from saying anything except "no comment".[50] Had she criticized the social gathering, she would have faced huge backlash by Hindu nationalists (she still faced some, but it was very limited). So, she strategically decided to censor her opinions. Apeksha emphasized that she had learnt "how to say" things in a way that safeguarded both the integrity of her profession, as well as her own dignity.

[50] During a Hindu social gathering (Kumbh Mela), around 1700 people were tested positive on April 15, 2021. Apeksha shared this information on Twitter, explaining that she is posting this without any comments.

In this section, I have demonstrated how and why women journalists use self-censorship for their own safety and precaution, as they are at greater risk of political sanctions and gender-based harassment on online media platforms.

Being Thick-Skinned

> *Ek point k baad farak padna band ho jata hai*[51]
> (After a point, you stop getting affected)

Another strategy used by women journalists to cope with online harassment and misogyny is avoidance: they avoid active engagement with comments and hatred they receive online on their articles and tweets. Avantika, one of my interviewees who actively used this strategy to deal with right-wing troll armies, told me: "We tend to become [a] very thick-skin rhinoceros [so] that we don't let such things affect us… it is just like some random comment coming from anywhere." Here, Avantika was specifically referring to an incident when she interviewed the wife of a national martyr.[52] Afterwards, she was immensely trolled by right-wing nationalists who called her a "shameless" and "insensitive" woman.

A recent study conducted by Lea Stahel and Constantin Schoen (2019) in Switzerland concluded that avoidance was one of the principal strategies used by women journalists to prevent such attacks. The journalists in this study limited their contact with audiences by monitoring their social media engagement, avoiding reading and responding to comments or sometimes moderating their comments. This strategy of avoidance was also reflected in Avantika's further comment on the need of this strategy: "You always have to be careful… sometimes you feel tempted to reply to the trolls and threats… you give them attention. But you know… it's genuinely not a good idea." Stahel and Schoen explained that the reason for such avoidance is gender differences and difference in the socialization of males and females through the social role theory (Eagly and Wood

[51] This comment was made by Aradhana as she explained that being thick-skinned was important for women journalists.
[52] The martyr's wife wanted the government to give her deceased husband national honour as he put his own life on risk to save hundreds of people. She expressed her grief in the interview and told Avantika that from now onwards no one in her family will go into her husband's profession. The interview took place on August 9, 2020 and was covered by ABP News.

2011).[53] Women journalists also refrain from active engagement online because of heavier sanctioning. The sanctions for women journalists for violating gendered expectations online are usually harsher and tend to take the form of attacks on their sexuality and gender (through misogyny and rape threats). The study also showed that women journalists generally experience more stress because of online hate, in response to which they used avoidance to lessen the threats and their adverse impacts (Leets 2002).

Since women journalists experience greater stress, they also try to desensitize themselves to avoid emotional engagement with the stories or the comments. Some of my interviewees felt the need to desensitize themselves from their stories or the comments they received online. Jaya, for example, talked about her "desensitization" because of online abuse:

> Being in the media you have desensitize yourself from all of it… you can't be emotional about it. Online hate, online abuse… yes it was new for me and I was a little awkward about it, but I never felt this was unusual, I was expecting it.

In the above quotation, Jaya said that she was expecting the abuse as a woman journalist and therefore, she was able to desensitize herself from it. She knew that if she became "emotional" about it and engaged, then the attacks would just become even uglier. Jaya received a hefty amount of online hate due to a story that she wrote about the concept of "political depression".[54] Even though she never mentioned any political party in her article, right-wing nationalists came after her, accusing (of being anti-national) and harassing her. Still, Jaya did not engage with any of such comments on social media. Jamieson (1995) suggests that women journalists in positions similar to Jaya's are confronted by a so-called double bind of silence and shame. This double bind describes situations in which women journalists are thought to be powerless if they stay silent in the face of abuse, but they are shamed or punished if they speak out against misogyny online. For some journalists, it was important to not take online threats "seriously" so as to concentrate on their journalistic work. For example, Apeksha said: "We tend not to take it very seriously because if you concentrate on those threats how would you work." Therefore, women journalists preferred

[53] Social role theory states that the differences and similarities between the behaviors of different sexes are due to their socialization and formation of gender roles (Eagly and Wood 2011).
[54] The story was published on July 10, 2020 on the website of News18.

not to engage with the comments on their stories so as to focus on their work and protect themselves from online sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment and online abuse of women journalists on new media platforms have also disrupted the journalistic routines of reciprocal journalism (Chen et al. 2018; Lewis et al. 2014). According to this concept, a reciprocal relationship exists between journalists and audiences which is mutually beneficial to both. A recent cross-country study (in Germany, the US, the UK, India and Taiwan) suggested that this relationship was disrupted because of the gender-based harassment of women journalists online as they tended to refrain from participating in this reciprocal relationship because they were sexually attacked (Chen et al. 2018). Avantika further explained the reasons why she stopped responding and participating on social media:

> I want to report where things have not been reported yet… I am doing my job on the other side… the other side also need to be reflected. People didn't understand my point but then I stopped explaining myself.

In the above quotation, Avantika was referring to a story in which she exposed how a young Muslim boy was lynched by Hindu nationalists during the anti-Muslim riots in Delhi.[55] The comments' section was full of Islamophobic tweets instigating further violence against Indian Muslims. Avantika was heavily attacked on this story and called names like "Muslim sympathizer" and "anti-national" and verbally harassed. Due to this treatment, she refrained from replying to any comments because she knew that it would only escalate the abuse.

In this section, I have discussed how women journalists often use the strategy of avoidance in social media engagement, so as to protect themselves from further harassment. This strategy of avoidance also aligns with broader literature on how women deal with sexual harassment at public places (Barnett, 1993; Dedovic et al., 2009; Matud, 2004), which in practice leads to the "informal ghettoization" of women in private spheres. (Bowman 1993). Similarly, when women journalists refrain from engagement in the long run, it can lead to a new kind of "ghettoization" which throws them outside the modern public spaces i.e., social media platforms.

[55] The Delhi police forced Muslims to sing the national anthem and kept on beating them until one person, Faizan, died. The story was initially posted on Avantika's own Twitter handle on February 28, 2020, and then was later shared by her organization ABP news.

Working Extra

> *Taaki koi question na kr sake*[56]
> (So that no one can question my talent)

Alongside the strategy of avoidance, several interviewees mentioned that they often worked more than their male colleagues: this meant that they completed more assignments, made an extra effort for their stories, and even worked on weekends, so that no one questioned their credentials or talent. This idea reverberated when Suman talked about her own experience:

> My organization never supported me… *ladki hai na iske saath hua h* (this has happened to her because she is a woman). I never tell my organization… I dealt it myself… I had to work hard, double triple. Many times I had to do assignments that were extremely difficult, but I never said a no… because I never wanted anyone to question my talent my potential.

Suman made sure that she over-worked so that people could not pass comment on her potential as a woman. Since she worked in a male-dominated environment, she felt a constant need to show that she was as talented as her male colleagues.

One survey conducted in Australia showed that men over-invested in work by up to 4% while women over-invested in work by up to 11% (HILDA 2018). However, this over-investment has no relation to women's lower confidence or credentials. Rather, it is because of the existing gender biases against women in workplaces who are thought to be less hardworking than their male colleagues. Such biases at workplaces made some of my interviewees work extra or over-time in addition to their regular job. This experience was also narrated by Avantika, for example, who said: "So I was not allowed to do reporting during my shift so I used to go out… like I used to work extra after my shifts or on my week offs." The Australian survey also showed that women internalized the need to jump more hurdles than men in order to be considered qualified or credible. The pressure to work and not make any mistakes was higher among women. In the Indian context, most professions have historically been male dominated; with women entering such workplaces

[56] This comment was made by Suman while talking about the "extra work" that she did in order to prove her potential.

only recently, they often feel more pressured to prove their talent and merit than their male colleagues.

Similar anxiety to work without leaving any room for mistakes was expressed by one of my other senior interviewees, Apeksha:

> Sometimes there are problems with tweets but with the stories, but it wouldn't happen with my stories because I am trained in a different way. I don't speak only on one side so if I am taking a byte from let's say a Congress[57] guy, I would also, to the best of my ability, try to take a reaction from a BJP guy as well on the same topic, especially so because I have covered the Supreme Court of India for 8 years. So, I couldn't afford to make any mistakes.

Apeksha mentioned that she used a different method of reporting, which meant that she had to work extra. In her stories, she took bytes from opposing sides (Congress and BJP, in this case) in order to appear impartial and also to make the story stronger: to be a good journalist. Apeksha's emphasis on not being able to "afford" any mistakes also reflects the kind of pressure that she puts on herself to avoid any problems with her stories and tweets. This also relates to the earlier point about changes in the style of reportage by some female journalists to avoid sexual harassment online.

For some of my interviewees, working extra for a job search (searching harder to find a job) was also a way of showing resistance or their belief in a certain ideology. This was reflected in the ideas expressed by Akansha, who had wanted to quit her job because of the regressive work environment and pro-government ideology of her organization, IndiaTV:

> So, I was looking for a job for six months while working for IndiaTV, I was not getting the job, but I wasn't applying for Republic TV... this was my way of contributing… *maar jaaungi lekin wahan nhi jaaungi* (I will die but I won't go there).

Akansha told me how the right-wing ideology of her organization did not allow her to publish several stories – mostly those that criticized the current Prime Minister or discussed the Kashmir issue – as a result of which, she had wanted to quit. However, she emphasized that even in such a

[57] Congress is the largest opposition party in India. It was also the first political party in India and was in power for several decades after Indian independence in 1947.

situation, she did not apply to other pro-government media channels like Republic TV. In our interview, she switched to Hindi when she expressed her anger over the restrictive policies of such organizations and used a hyperbolic statement to convey the seriousness of her ideas: she would prefer to die than work at such an organization. This statement in itself reflected a degree of agency, control and a deep sense of commitment to her duty as a journalist.

Therefore, this section demonstrated how women journalists work extra to prove their credentials, make their stories stronger, and even to conform to their personal beliefs about the role of a journalist. While the experiences of my interviewees paralleled those of women journalists in other contexts, the societal expectations of domestication and marriage in the Indian context posed particular challenges to their work.

Taking Control / Assertiveness

> *Apni ladai khud ladni hoti hai*[58]
>
> (You have to fight your own battle)

In certain cases where the situation escalated, some of my interviewees had decided to take direct action against misogyny, sexism and harassment at the workplace by confrontation. In most cases, the confrontation was an extension of other preventative strategies and only happened after these women felt that other strategies would not work. (Dhillon and Bakaya 2014). For example, Apeksha talked about how she confronted her harasser only after she became extremely frustrated:

> So, I used to ignore [it] and *ek din mereko gussa aa rha* (one day, I became really angry). On that day I confronted him… and said "*bhaiya*,[59] *video call kyu kr rhe ho*?" (why are you video calling me?) so he started laughing. Then I decided the same day that I would complain.

Akansha told me that she was continuously harassed by her bus driver (who worked with her organization and usually picked and dropped people to their homes): he used to video call her quite frequently. She said that she ignored the calls initially for a few weeks, but then one day she

[58] This comment was made by Niharika when explaining that women must fight for themselves.
[59] This term literally translates to "brother", but it is also used to address anyone who provides services like catering, travel, food or literally anything. It is usually used by women to address men as a term of respect.

confronted him directly as the avoidance strategy was not working. Even after the confrontation, the driver did not take her seriously, which made her resort to filing an official complaint. She further narrated to me another incident that happened a couple of months later, wherein she directly resorted to confrontation without using any preventive measures:

> Ravi Kumar [her senior- name changed] asked me to meet over tea. So, I told him that sir, don't irritate me, talk to me only when you have some work. Don't comment on my DPs [display pictures]. He understood this and never called me again.

In the above quotation, it seemed like this time Akansha was more belligerent and up-front in her action. Learning from her previous experience, she had not waited months for the harassment to continue. She immediately confronted her senior and took direct action, which turned out to be quite effective. Therefore, it is evident that preventive strategies leading to confrontative actions often gave women more confidence and agency to take direct action in response to future incidents. In Akansha's case, this was followed by another major incident where she retorted to confrontation:

> So, I said today you guys have spoken finally that IndiaTV censors its employees… there was a lot of mess. I threatened to tell everything to NBA [News Broadcasters Association] … so they got scared and approved my resignation the next day.

As discussed earlier, Akansha had wanted to resign from her organization due to their regressive policies and pro-government stance. The above incident happened when she submitted the request for resignation. Subsequently, she was asked to pay a hefty compensation and even told that she had made "so many mistakes" by writing obnoxious anti-government tweets. This accusation frustrated Akansha and she burst out in front of the entire office, even threatening that she would complain to higher authorities about such policing of journalists.

Everyday acts of resistance at home like "talking back" was also one of the strategies used by some of my interviewees to reduce restrictions on their movement and career choices. Aradhana, for example, explained me how she responded to her family's criticism of her work and profession:

> Because they know that I am not going to take things like sitting down… I will argue and fight… if they ever say that we don't want you to do something because you are girl. So… I think because my family is just scared of saying this stuff to me.

Aradhana mentioned that her parents were not supportive of her journalistic career in the beginning, however, when she started standing up for herself at home, things changed. She even made a joke that her family is scared to say such things to her, which probably meant that her family has said "such things" in the past, but that she fought back. And now, her parents do not question her choice because they know that she will fight back. Giving another example of direct confrontation, Aradhana explained how her senior used the same method of direct confrontation when she was criticized for her choice of clothes:

> Once my senior wore ripped jeans then also, they [her colleagues] started talking but then the next day, she wore even more ripped jeans… she said *bolo jisko jo bolna hai* (people can say whatever they want to, I don't care).

When Aradhana narrated this incident to me, there was a sparkle in her eyes and laughter in her voice. She seemed to agree with such strategies and even argued that women should use them under such circumstances as it empowers them.

In this section, I have discussed the way in which women journalists use confrontative strategies in certain cases where they feel that other methods would not – or did not – work. It was also evident that women journalists felt more confident and used these strategies directly after they had previously used them or seen someone else using them.

Dressing Down

> *Taaki log ghur ghur k naa dekhe*[60]
> (So that people don't weirdly stare at me)

As discussed in the previous chapter, several of my interviewees faced harassment in the field or online. Therefore, they used strategies like dressing "down" or more dressing "more appropriately" for their own comfort in such public spaces. One of my interviewees, Akansha, discussed these ideas:

> When I am thinking about going on field [sic] for example, going to cover a protest, I need to ensure that I am properly dressed. I need to ensure that *jyda saj dhaj k na jaaun* (I don't

[60] This comment was made by Niharika when she was explaining why she dressed in a certain way when she was reporting in the field.

> go all dressed up). I have to do these creepy things…… I put my worst outfit when I go on field [sic] I don't even comb my hair… so that people don't look at me. It's very sad, but this is my trick.

In the above quotation, Akansha emphasized trying to "dress down" when she is going out into the field. Even though it seemed that she was not very happy with her "trick", she continued to use it for her own safety in public spaces. Dressing down made the navigation of public spaces easier and more comfortable for her as a woman. This connects to Saba Mahmood's conceptualization of agency (2001), which gives choices to women on what to wear at the workplace in order to make them feel more at ease. This is also a part of the "accommodation strategy" used by working women, in which they negate their "proper" femininity to blend in at male-dominated workplaces (Agostino 1998, p. 4). Not following the hegemonic codes for the conduct of femininity and taking on so-called masculine behaviors (for instance, by not taking care of their looks) is a strategy for survival used by some women (Hilsdon 1995). Even in doing so, they exhibit a certain degree of agency by transgressing the dominant notions of ideal femininity.

Similarly, Niharika mentioned that when she went out to report at certain places, she dressed in a particular fashion: "So then for your own comfort you'd wear a *kurti* (traditional Indian dress) because you don't want to be an attraction like that." A *kurti*, which is loose item of traditional clothing, is considered "safe" and "respectable" form of dress, and one that would not "invite" attackers. In India, a woman dressed in a *kurti* is considered modest, ideal and unavailable, which makes her less vulnerable to sexual attacks from people in public spaces. This connotation relates to the discourse in crime-preventative literature, which suggests that women dress appropriately and with discretion in order to prevent attacks (Gardner 1990, p. 320). Women thus restrict their apparel choices and present less than their best possible self in public spaces to be safe. This was also expressed by Suman, when discussing how she dressed for outdoor assignments:

> When I dress up every morning, I don't know what I am going to cover during the day so I can't wear jeans or a top because I might have to cover slums, crime scenes or the Parliament. If I am covering a slum in jeans, people will look at me… people will whistle at me.

Suman expressed that the fear of sexual harassment (in the form of whistling) made her conscious to dress in traditional Indian clothing. In a study conducted in Delhi on 500 working women, 95%

of the women reported that they dressed in a certain way or avoided certain items of clothing while working in public spaces (Jagori 2006). This is also related to the common notion that women who dress "provocatively" are inviting trouble and therefore, do not deserve public support or sympathy (Phadke 2007). Sometimes, women also used similar strategies online to prevent harassment and abuse on social media. Explaining this, Akansha said: "So, you have to put pictures and DPs that match your profession." She told me that she tried not to put pictures in which she was not "covered up". She felt pressured to dress appropriately in accordance with the respectability of her profession in order to avoid sexual harassment online.

In this section, I have discussed how women journalists use strategies of dressing down to reduce the risks of sexual harassment in public spaces and online. In doing so, they either transgressed or conformed to the notions of respectable ideal femininity, according to the circumstances. In some cases, this engagement with discourses of ideal femininity extended to a radical reconceptualization of the concept, as I discuss in the below section.

Alternative Definitions of the Ideal Indian Woman

All of my senior interviewees provided some form of alternative definition to the concept of an ideal Indian woman. These alternative definitions were very different from the gendered societal expectations given by Indian society to women, which I discussed in Chapter 2. These definitions were only given by senior journalists, which perhaps meant that as journalists rise in seniority, they feel less pressured to conform to societal expectations. Through these definitions, the senior interviewees challenged the dominant frameworks and gendered expectations of Indian women.

Diksha, one of those interviewees, recited Kalia's poem (which opens this chapter) and explained to me that it was a source of her understanding of the concept of an ideal Indian woman, as well as an inspiration for her to become one:

> So according to me, this is [an] ideal Indian woman. I get inspired by this that I have to put nails of education and employment on this wall, and I can cross it without breaking the wall.

According to Diksha, education and employment are the ways for a woman to achieve true freedom and independence. Like Diksha, another senior journalist, Suman, also gave me an alternative definition of what she considers to be an ideal Indian woman:

> *Haar koi apne aap mei ideal hai* (Every woman is ideal in herself). Whether she is a housewife or an IT worker, *har koi apne field mei ladti h* (every woman is fighting in her field) … *har koi apne field mei survive krti hai* (every woman is surviving in her field).

Suman emphasized that "every" woman is ideal, thereby freeing them of the categories in which they have fit in order to become the perfect Indian woman. Her further elaboration that each woman is ideal regardless of her profession makes her definition something of an ode to all women working and surviving in their own respective fields.

These kind of ingenious strategies for survival are central to understanding the agency of women in South Asia. As Amrita Basu argues, women's activism and agency assume more subtle and hidden forms because of the challenges that it faces if it directly attacks gender inequality. Basu suggests that the vast social and ethnic differences among South Asian women have complicated women's activism and solidarity in the region. Therefore, women's agency should be seen in acts of negotiating gender norms, rather than direct resistance (Basu 1998, p. 11). Basu argues that women, while conforming to traditional roles, can also transgress certain patriarchal norms. It seemed to me that Diksha talked in a similar fashion about her own agency, in which she conformed to the role of a "good daughter," but transgressed the domestic sphere through her education and employment. It can also be seen in how women rework these dominant gender discourses through subtle acts and alternative definitions. These alternative definitions and discourses, therefore, challenge the nationalist discourses of gender and sexuality (Dywer 2000). By reworking these nationalistic discourses and ways of belonging, I argue that women journalists also produce their own kind of citizenship in the Indian nation.

Within this formulation, women's citizenship is not passive and domestic, but involves their active engagement in the public sphere. This idea was expressed by Apeksha, another senior journalist, who emphasized that ideal Indian women should "stand up" for themselves. She maintained that women must speak, as it is the only way to make their voices heard:

> I think if you are a journalist or not… even as a woman, you have to stand up for yourself because no one else will. That's true for any person but as a woman, it is even more relevant that you have to stand up for yourself, speak […] your mind and I would say there are consequences also, but that's true for everyone.

Apeksha was, perhaps, my interviewee with the most radical views about nationalism and gender equality. Throughout the interview, she maintained an assertive and authoritative tone. Her understanding of speech was resonant of bell hooks' ideas: speech as something that gives power and embodies resistance to power structures. According to hooks, voice is an "essential to liberation" and a "move towards freedom". Apeksha further explained that women need to occupy public spaces and not "shy away" from challenges:

> So, social media is important because even with this government, even before it came to power in 2014, it built a narrative through the social media, a very successful narrative and they are still at it. So why should a woman shy away because [the] more space a woman […] leaves, the more they stand to lose.

The mere entry of women in public spaces is thus seen as transgressive and a threat to masculinity, thus arousing masculine anxiety. Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade argue that women must radically enter public spaces to claim their space. Through a series of interviews conducted in Mumbai, they show how women enter public spaces by strategically embodying "sexual respectability" and legitimacy of purpose. However, if this sexual respectability is not embodied by women entering and claiming public spaces, their entry into these spaces becomes a threat or transgression which is regulated by violence, "ranging from social ostracism to… assault and even murder" (Phadke, Khan and Ranade 2011, p. 39). Therefore, senior women journalists (who spoke from their own experiences) advocated women to speak out and participate both in physical and online public spaces to reclaim those spaces from the hands of patriarchal domination, and to make them safe for other women.

In this section, I have discussed how senior journalists challenge and negotiate the gendered societal definitions of an ideal Indian woman by giving alternative meanings to the concept. These alternative definitions challenge the dominant nationalistic framework and produce a different kind of citizenship for women.

Perseverance: Hope for a Better Future

> *Change dheere dheere aata hai*[61]
> (Changes happen slowly)

Many of my interviewees mentioned that they used several everyday strategies (as explained above) to persist or resist traditional patriarchal frameworks. They did not directly confront these patriarchal structures, but rather, they kept trying to make a "change". One of my interviewees, Diksha, expressed this similar struggle in her everyday life. She told me:

> Change cannot come by revolution alone; you have to work for these small changes in life. Initially, I faced a lot [of resistance] too, it feels bad of course… but in time you shouldn't be shattered in fact [you should] become more determined to work. At least that's what I did.

In the above quotation, Diksha suggested that women must be "determined" and not "shattered" by obstacles. Giving an example of her own household, she said that people's remarks on her profession felt bad, but that they motivated her to work even harder. This understanding is similar to Veena Das' explanation of agency, which involves endurance of pain and suffering in difficult times. Writing about women victims of violence during the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, Das argues that agency is not limited to dramatic defiance or transgression. Rather, she suggests, it involves "doing little things" for active engagement in the struggle (Das 1990, p. 11-12). Another interviewee, Suman, also discussed how she had to do "little things" for years so as to bring about a change in the attitude of people at her workplace:

> As a woman, I feel […] people want to take advantage of you, do stuff… but then I was tough… and people got to know that they just can't get away with saying anything. So, over the years they stopped because I will not shut up… I will answer back… It took time, but they changed.

Suman showed both resilience and engagement in pain in order to bring a "change". She did not defy the traditional structures up front, but her everyday acts of resistance – like being tough and not being silent – brought gradual changes to the workplace and in the attitudes of her male

[61] This comment was made by Diksha when talking about how conceptions of working ideal Indian woman are changing in society.

colleagues. Being the first woman in her all-male team, she preserved her status and sense of self by remaining resilient and tough.

Other interviewees also suffered at their workplaces, where they had to endure certain things for their career. Jaya, for example, told me that she withstood the policing of her stories in the hope of a better future when she became more senior:

> It's obviously a lot of policing and all and I think even I have learnt how to internalize it. I have to write it… how would you expect 24 to 25-year-old people who are just trying to give themselves a start… you give yourself a start here and then you build your credentials enough… then [you] become senior and then tell your editor that I am in a position in life that you can't tell me *mujhe kya chapna aur kya nhi chapna hai* (what I can or cannot print).

Jaya explained that she was just starting her career and therefore, she needed to obey her organization and endure the policing of her stories. Once she is more senior, however, she will not have to do that: she will have more independence to write and publish what she wants. Thus, perseverance is necessary for Jaya if she wants control over her future stories. In a similar vein, Saba Mahmood has analyzed the concept of *sabr* (enduring pain with patience) as agential, defining it as the capacity to endure and persist. Choosing to endure is a site of struggle and achievement as it makes women individually responsible for how they approach or see difficulties (Mahmood 2001, p. 217). In Jaya's case, her endurance empowers her to envisage a better future for herself and for her journalism. This kind future was similarly apparent when Ritika told me about the case of her own organization, *Khabar Lahariya*, whose reputation developed only after being engaged in grassroots journalism for several years:

> I would say after 18 years we are getting established enough that we are going ahead and reporting on whatever we do want to report […] like sort of like regardless of the threats and challenges.

Ritika emphasized that the credibility of her organization has been built after having been in journalism for a long time. This experience has given them the power to report on anything they like, notwithstanding the threats and challenges that they encounter. It seemed that Jaya, in fact, looked forward to this kind of a future for herself.

In this section, I have demonstrated how women journalists choose to endure certain kinds of policing policies and familial restrictions, thereby persisting in difficult situations in the hope of a better future for them and their work.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how women journalists negotiate their dual roles as women and journalists, and the kind of agency they exhibit to smooth the friction between these roles. Based upon their responses, I have categorized these strategies into three different fields: everyday strategies of negotiation, proposing alternative definitions of the concept of an ideal Indian woman; and perseverance. These categories were not discreet, but rather one often followed another, or one was an extension of another.

Through these methods, the women journalists in my study reworked the dominant nationalist discourses of gender, sexuality and citizenship, exhibiting their own agency to overcome social and cultural resistance. These methods show that women journalists in India do not remain passively oppressed by new media technologies and Hindu nationalism, but that they selectively conform or actively resist these very discourses, making an individual choice to approach a problem. They resisted and persisted according to their circumstances in the hope of a better future. Therefore, this chapter reveals the strategies of agency and resistance used by women journalists in India who are actively devise methods to overcome specific social and cultural barriers. These strategies were small steps towards a short-term pre-defined goal with a bigger hope of making journalism a better and safer space for women.

Conclusion

The title of this thesis, "*Ye Toh Deshdrohi Hain*", has been picked up from the comments' section of a post written by a famous female journalist in India, Rana Ayyub.[62] The Hindi phrase literally translates to, "These people are anti-nationals". It is one of the most common criticisms made of anyone who speaks or writes against the current government. The label has been increasingly used against journalists, especially female journalists, if they write anything that is seen to potentially damage the government's interests. Therefore, this phrase captures the challenges faced by women journalists in India within the context of right-wing Hindu nationalism under the current BJP government. While women journalists in India have historically faced a range of social and cultural challenges, the rise of the current government along with a parallel rise of media technologies has made the situation even more difficult for them.

This thesis, thereby, explored the experiences of women journalists in India working within the context of the current BJP government. It focused on the gendered challenges they face and the simultaneous strategies they use to negotiate or transgress the patriarchal frameworks of Hindu nationalism. My internship at the IPI acted as a primary site where I met some of my interviewees; this experience also helped me gain a better practical understanding of women journalists' experiences in newsrooms and online media spaces. Further, I used a qualitative feminist methodology to approach this topic by conducting semi-structured interviews with 11 women journalists. Most of my interviewees were upper-caste, middle-class, urban Hindu women because the field of journalism itself is quite elite, making the entry of less privileged women extremely difficult. Therefore, my study does not claim to be representative of the experiences of all women journalists in India which vary in caste, class, religion and location. However, it does provide insight into the experiences and challenges faced by a particular set of Indian journalists.

Following a discussion of the relevant literature on gender, nationalism and sexuality in the Indian context, I have addressed my research question through three analytical chapters. The first chapter examined how women journalists in India experience gendered expectations of ideal femininity located within the official discourses of Hindu nationalism. I coined the term *Sati Savitri Aurat* to

[62] This comment was taken from Rana Ayyub's post on Kashmir in which she criticised the government for its oppression in the state. She was received a number of rape and death threats, accompanied by comments calling her anti-national or *deshdrohi.*

capture this notion of a modern ideal Indian woman. I argued that the associated gendered expectations – which I characterize as modesty, marriageability and silence – contradict the expectations of their journalistic profession, making it particularly difficult for women journalists to simultaneously perform ideal Indian womanhood and the demands of their profession. With the rise of the current right-wing BJP government, there has been a surge in Hindu nationalist discourses (borrowed from colonial and postcolonial ideas of Hindu femininity), which has disproportionately pressured women journalists in India to conform to such ideals.

The second chapter revealed the particular challenges experienced by women journalists, which I characterized as: navigating through families and communities, sexual harassment, gendered pressures and threats on online media. Women journalists, I argued, faced greater sanctions and experienced violence both at work and in online media platforms when they transgressed the norms of ideal Hindu femininity. This pressure was particularly heightened due to the rise of social media platforms where sexual harassment and abuse have become rampant. I demonstrated that the proliferation of social media, which has coincided with the rise of the Hindu nationalist government, has made women journalists more susceptible to such online violence and harassment. Media technologies, especially Twitter, has become a space where national and religious identities are asserted by the middle-class. With nation, nationalism and Hindutva becoming synonymous with the current government, Hindus have taken to social media to direct attacks against anyone who seem to be "anti-national". Therefore, women journalists experience tremendous online violence and harassment when they write or speak against the current government, its practices or policies – especially those pertaining to the Kashmir issue, the Hindu-Muslim issue or COVID-19 crisis management.

In the third chapter, I discussed the various strategies that women journalists in India use to navigate the contradictory roles of being a woman and a journalist. This chapter revealed how women journalists resist, persist and persevere in changing and challenging times. I argued that they use everyday strategies like being careful/self-censorship, being thick skinned, working extra, taking control/assertiveness and dressing down. These methods were used strategically by my interviewees depending on the situation. They devised new techniques and revised old ones to continue working in journalism. I argued that in doing so, they challenged not only patriarchal frameworks, but also the dominant discourses of womanhood located in Hindu nationalism. It is

also important to note that the experiences of young and senior women journalists were different: my senior interviewees explained that they felt less of a need to conform to the national ideals of femininity and respectability. I suggested that this was due to their varied experiences and seniority. These senior journalists also gave alternative definitions of the concept of an ideal Indian woman and thereby, reworked the notions of femininity and sexual respectability prevalent in India. Therefore, I argued that women journalists exhibited a degree of agency by challenging national gendered discourses and producing alternative ones.

This study expands the literature on gender and nationalism by looking at recent political developments and their impact on professional women. The implications of my work include recognizing the gendered underpinnings of Hindu nationalism that pressure women to conform to national norms of sexual respectability. I argued that this becomes more prominent for women journalists, whose very profession demands transgression from such norms of respectability, thereby making them more vulnerable to harassment and violence both in newsrooms and online media spaces. This unique study also demonstrated the importance of postcolonial perspectives to understanding the agency of professional women in non-western contexts. This agency involves everyday strategies of negotiating patriarchal structures, rather than up-front revolutions to break those structures. Building on Amrita Basu's (1998) approach to understanding women's agency in patriarchal frameworks, my thesis demonstrated the need to approach theories of women's agency by contextualizing women's experiences in postcolonial nations, instead of universally adopting western definitions and approaches. It further highlighted the importance of looking at religious and cultural contexts to understand nationalism and its gendered implications. While my focus was on gender, violence and agency through the norms of femininity and national sexual respectability in the Indian context, this approach can be applied to the experiences of professional women in other contexts, particularly those in the postcolonial world, informed by an in-depth understanding of the local social and cultural context. Following the social role theory, this thesis also demonstrates that socialization of women plays an important part in understanding the strategies of negotiation and resistance women journalists use as they navigate through social and political challenges.

This thesis has used a slightly different methodology than what was initially planned. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the interviews (10 out 11) were conducted online. This

unintended medium not only affected the dynamics of the interviews themselves, but it also highlighted how the pandemic interacted with the forms and expressions of right-wing nationalism that affected the experiences of women journalists writing about this very topic. In some of my recent interviews, for instance, I observed that several women journalists who publicly exposed the Indian government's mismanagement of the pandemic were severely criticized and harassed online. This development shows that journalism in India has become a way to prove one's commitment to the government and the nation; if a journalist fails in doing so, they are severely sanctioned. For women journalists, this sanctioning comes in distinctly gendered forms of harassment and violence in online media spaces, which often forces them to either opt out or withdraw entirely from these spaces. As Suman Kansra, one of my interviewees, told me: "*Chorrh hi dia twitter bilkul, mei nhi kha skti itti gandi galiyan"* (I have left Twitter, I cannot bear ugly abuses any further). The future of women journalists in India under the current government seems to be full of challenges, yet as my interviewees demonstrated, these women have not stopped. They have demonstrated an extraordinary capacity to negotiate these challenges and devise new strategies to enable them to continue their journey in the profession that they love. As Kansra explained in our interview: "Some of us are just keeping our heads down and working perpetually, hoping the time [will come when the government] will change. We need to keep journalism and its ethics alive when this change happens."

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