

Uproar Over Nirbhaya and Aftermath : A Review on News and Articles

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Introduction :

The happening of an issue of unwanted nature is normally followed by a number of protests, shower of sympathy and strong condemn. The issue captures the headlines of all national or regional dailies. Electronic media arranges special talk programmes. Politicians proceed for politics with political explanations. Policy makers forward policies covering social issues. Academicians give academic interpretation. As a whole, the entire situation as expected remains hot. Overflow of lots of comments, suggestions and remedial measures from several corners continue. But with time all become history. True, everybody expects not the repetition, but in reality there is repetition. Again there is revival of same sequential activities and this way we all are in a constant march. Based on these insights, the present writing attempts to look at the Nirbhaya issue that occurred a few years ago in our country.

Objectives :

The basic thrusts of the writing are (a) to make a review of the nature of literature that appeared after the fatal incident and (b) to assess to what extent these literatures are helpful to the society.

Data Source and Methods :

To collect the literatures on the issue, only one national daily "The Indian Express" has been selected as a source. All the issues appeared from 18.12.2012 to 17.03.2013 from search based on the internet. The period of search is fixed only for three months as almost all news appeared during the period. From these daily issues, all related news and articles have been studied, categorized and finally an analysis is supplemented through them.

Review of the Works :

The first news on Delhi gang rape, subsequently symbolized as Nirbhaya, was unveiled by Shalini Narayan in Indian Express on 18th December 2012. It was the first news on front

page captioned “23 year-old gangraped inside Delhi bus; Thrown out”. It was a factual presentation of a horrible work narrated what actually happened on the night of 16th December while the victim along with her friend was travelling in a bus. The incident touched the hearts of every conscious citizen and everyone felt the guilty must be booked. After this report, the Indian Express made extensive coverage of the incident presented by Express News Service (ENS) itself, individual reporters and great columnists. The tenor of these reports vary significantly from one another. The ENS reports are factual and the reflection of the offshoots of the incident. The reports of individual reporters are found to be of two types; the first type is structured and continuous and directly related to the victim’s psychological and physical status while the second type is of fragmented nature reflecting the opinion of the writers only. The third type of presentation made basically by the renowned writers are analytical in nature with deeper explanatory framework against the backdrop of existing social milieu.

Express News Service (ENS) seems to stress more on repercussion and reactions that developed elsewhere in the country around Nirbhaya and all these came always in the front page. The first such reaction among the political circle appeared on the next day captioned “Delhi gang rape shakes parliament; Sushma, others seek death penalty”. The issue was discussed in both the houses of the Parliament and all members irrespective of political affiliation expressed serious concern and demanded the amendment of section 307 of IPC (Indian Penal Code) to include rape under its purview. On the same day, Indian Express also covered the Home Minister’s reaction who commented after witnessing the protest of several organizations at India Gate. The news appeared as “Shinde gets to work, no curtains, no tinted glass, verification must”. In its another report, “Delhi Outraged”, the ENS highlighted the demonstrations made by All India Students Association and All India Democratic Women’s Association who came out to the street demanding justice. That the protesters’ fury spread like fire was reported by the ENS as “Delhi protests take violent turn, 150 injured, policement critical”. Consequent upon the protests, the Govt. decided to initiate a number of steps and all these appeared in front page of Indian Express with headlines as “Panel to look in to law change, PM says”, “Appeals for peace; Govt. sets up helpline for women in distress”, “Transfer sexual assault cases to fast track court”, etc. Unfortunately, the ENS remained silent for more than a month till 26th January 2013 when a news covering the Presidential remark on the eve of Republic day appeared as “Gang rape left our hearts empty”. After two days, another news titled “Juvenile board says Delhi gang rape accused is a minor”. There was no report of the incident in March 2013 except a small coverage on 15th March with headlines as “Cabinet approves anti-rape bills”. It is thus seen that the ENS emphasized more on related happenings rather than the incident itself focussing on what other people thought and perceived about the incident got privileged in the coverage.

As far as the reporting of the individual reporter is concerned, one must mention

about P. Chattarjee who remained in touch with the relatives of the victim since the occurrence of the incident till the end of victim's life. These factual presentations are different from the ENS as these attempted to reflect the mental agony and physical status of the victim as well as their relatives. All writings of Chatterjee appeared at the front page with sensitive footages drawing attention of all concerned. Her first reporting "I want to live, Delhi gang rape victim tells her mother, brother" was indicative of the psychological situation of the victim herself. The writer was closely monitoring the health status of the victim and presented the information in different forms as "Still critical, Delhi gang rape victim made to record statement again", "Gang rape victim flown to Singapore hospitals renowned for transplant", "Rape victim extremely critical, has severe cardiac problem", "Victim showing sign of severe organ failure" and finally the "Rape victim loses battle for life, outpouring of grief across India". The writer is successful in informing day-to-day situation of the victim, but ironically enough, no serious writing is found from her with the death of the victim as if her duty has also come to an end. However, these serial writings are directly related to the mental and physical status of the victim and her family.

The presentation of other writers are fragmentary in nature and not directly linked to the victim but centred around the incident. For instance, A. Mathur covered the revelation made by the culprits after four days of the incident. The news simply appeared as "Two gang rape suspects confess, one says hang me for horrible crime" in 2nd column in the sixth page. Based on a personal investigative survey in jails among the rapists, V. Singh observes that the rapist has got the tendency of repeating the same crime and part of the findings of this study appeared as "Of Delhi raper this year, 8 by those held earlier for crimes". Considering increasing trend of violence against women, S. Thapa made an appeal to all through his article "Ensure women feel safe at all times", A. Ghosh went a step further and emphasized more on finding alternatives that can be used as a viable weapon to control rape. Analysing the pros and cons of the alternative, she finally suggests a new system of punishment through the article captioned "The medical punishment for rape". The article is really thought provoking. M. Chibber's writing appeared almost a month later and the writer presented how pathetic was the incident through his article "Hearing stories of rape victims, Verma panel members swept".

The third type of presentation was serious in nature and attempted to explore the existing socio-political and legal aspects and their interconnections with incidents like Nirbhaya. Altogether, four articles appeared in the editorial page written by P.B. Mehta on "Rage and Helplessness", B. Karat on "Remaking Ourselves", M. Kabir on "Against Street Justice" and A. Bhurwania on "Media and the Accused". Within a week of the incidents, two editorials in Indian Express captioned "Crime and Control" and "Justice, not vengeance" had drawn the attention of Indian intelligentsia.

Observing the movements developed at that time demanding peace and justice, Mehta remarked that protests are more than about rape. He also states that law in the country 'has become a lottery, protectors have become predators, virtue overrun by venality. A lot of the punitive rage being expressed is a sign of helplessness'. He blames the entire social, cultural and legal aspects of the country responsible for such happenings. The author accused the state machinery as well as its functioning pattern under the influence of market driven economy. In her article, Karat stresses on thinking and rethinking of issue from social perspective. To her, the low rate of punishment of rapist is the source of inspiration for occurrence of crime like Nirbhaya. Women have to be treated as equal citizens and this has to be supported by laws and social attitudes. M. Kabir criticizes and Juvenile Justice Act and focused on loopholes that makes the Act handicapped. A minor involved in the incident was released because he is a minor and justice of that kind is not acceptable. Punishment should be awarded but the law prevents from doing so and hence, she stresses for revision of juvenile law. Bhuwania's article centred around "India's Daughter", a documentary on the incident. But this documentary incorporates some contradictory statements of the accused and the author raises a lot of questions on it. Kabir and Bhuwani writings appeared more than a month later of the incident and both of them concentrated on some legal aspects only.

Besides these editorial page articles, the two editorials that appeared in Indian Express have focused on what forces contributed towards that incident and what ought to be done by the government. The articles states the inadequate security arrangement, cultural hostility towards women, patriarchal culture are responsible for occurrence of Nirbhaya like incidents in the country. Therefore, the first-track court as reflected through the editorial, can be a useful step to address rape. The second editorial that appeared four days later categorically blamed the government machinery and remarks it as a 'test of leadership'. The author stresses on justice that needs to be ensured, revenge is not the solution.

Reviewing all literatures that appeared immediately after Nirbhaya till 17th March 2013, the following conclusions may be derived.

- a. The news related to the victim and incident is factual with no exaggeration. News items always covered the front page with footages.
- b. Articles are basically explanatory in nature blaming either the social or legal system of the country but no concrete suggestions have been offered.
- c. Both the news and articles got wider coverage in the first fifteen days of the incident. With the passage of time, the intensity of writings declined sharply.
- d. News and articles are successful in generating awareness among the masses. Certain changes in Indian judiciary system have been made.

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