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Uncovering the Psychological Hegemony Behind Communal Violence: A Strategical Deployment of ‘Disinformation’ by the Media

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ABSTRACT

The ever- increasing pervasiveness of misinformation and disinformation by the third pillar of democracy, amidst the widely celebrated heterogeneity of the citizens in India, is having an extremely adverse impact upon the social order of the nation. This frequent deployment of disinformation is rampantly triggering violence amongst various communities and is fatal to the peaceful existence of the nation. The lacking authenticity and responsibility of this organ, which is otherwise required to be the most responsible, is forcing a hollow damage in shaping the minds of the individuals. Media as a tool, having the responsibility of bridging the gap between the society and the individuals by uncovering the facts for a conscious and informed mind-shaping of the citizens is today highlighting specific aspects perpetuating the division of communities upon the communal lines. Purposeful construction of images over sensitive issues of religion and casteism not only promotes communal riots but also foments bigotry and targeted hatred against the intended specifics. Tender minds, youth and uneducated are highly receptive to this media distortion. Media today is failing to balance transparency, participation, and accountability by deliberate sensationalism and diversionary tactics under favourable opportunities, which can infest and trigger communal conflagration and is playing a heavy role in exacerbating tensions in the community.

Keywords: Misinformation, Bigotry, Disinformation, Strategical, Sensationalism, Conflagration, Diversionary Tactics

I. INTRODUCTION

“The media’s the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that’s power. Because they control the minds of the masses.” - Malcom X

A. A Strategical Deviance of the Fourth Pillar of Democracy

One of the core functions of media is – Reporting, Questioning and Informing. What we are

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seeing today is a failure of the part of the mainstream media to abide by these basic responsibilities. Why the impact of media is so powerful is because it has the power to shape events and to shape the minds of the Individuals, thereby shaping the course of events and changing an entire community consciousness.

Over the last few years, we have seen brazen attempts by the media to openly disseminate disinformation and propagandas in order to leave a strong impact on the minds of the people and to guide their minds by influencing them to see what the media wants to show instead of showing what it is supposed to show. For this, the media is nowadays using eye-catching headlines, sceptical statements, catchy slogans, affirmative statements with question marks- all *with the intent of changing the course of thought in the minds of the individual and to guide them into 'believing' what they ideally would not have believed if such attempts of influencing were not made.*

The ever-increasing pervasiveness of this influencing media, which is constantly and actively making attempts in impacting the minds of the individuals by giving a pattern of false and misleading information, is directly and adversely affecting the democratic fabric of the country by inciting violence and triggering the communal harmony - which is much intended and predicted all by the display of certain specifics by the media.

For any democracy, media is the undoubtedly the backbone. It supplies the people with the information upon which they base their political information and it is upon this decision, they lay their voting decisions on. I won't be wrong in saying that the media mirrors the true picture of any society. Collection of information, identifying the problem and presenting it to the masses is the core functioning of the media. It thus serves as a medium for deliberation by welcoming different approaches and opinion. They serve as watchdogs and help in unleashing and uncovering the information in order to spread the awareness. It is thus expected to be a tool of utmost transparency and responsibility because it not only a medium serving the democratic society but is also the voice of the democratic society.

In practicality, when the government tends to interfere into the democratic functioning of the media by putting unnecessary restrictions, it emboldens it to very carefully deploy an information which is false in nature to spread disinformation and propaganda that plays an important role in spreading communal violence and an atmosphere of tension and hatred.

B. The Communal Divide: A Religiously Divisive Political Agenda

India is a country which is extremely rich in its religious and cultural heritage. Religion becomes such an important element that it impacts the personal lives of the people. Thus,

politicians tool the sensitivity of religion to their own favour and to their own advantage in order to take benefits from the religious consciousness of the masses. They play on the religious issues using the media as the most expansive and desirable platform. The way a politician is known to the people in the state is through the help of the media. Media thus serves as a medium of communication and bridges the acquaintance between the politician and the public.

There has been a stark rise and surge in the communal violence in the country which has shaken the cores by sparking concerns in the minds of the citizens who believe the country to be divided alongside two religious' lines- the Hindu and the Muslims. For the majority of the population, the government has to be blamed for coming up with a religiously divisive political agenda which is only diving the nation into two and causing communal tensions every now and then. But if we look deeper into the cause, we being conscious individuals cannot easily drift away into the politics of strategical deployment of disinformation.

The essence of democracy lies into the **freedom of the notion of fair selection of representatives amongst the broadest of the competent choices by carefully removing the incapable ones**. This selection is made in order to bestow upon the political representatives, the political accountability, which makes them answerable to the aims and aspirations of and the promise made to the citizens.

This political answerability and accountability are directly reflective of the information that the citizen receives of his choices. – in such a case, the perspective formation is directly dependent upon the portrayal of such perspective by the media. But what is important here is not the perspective formation but the consciousness of the citizens which makes them form an informed choice and that depends upon the accuracy of the information. This is where the role of checking upon the veracity, authenticity and the accuracy of the information comes in. because any false or inaccurate of unauthentic information portrayed by the media has the capacity of changing the entire choice of the individual by shaping their minds to make certain preferences over others and on the broader picture it will change the entire fate of the democracy.

The existence of information at various sources and the easy access to them becomes a critical aspect for the citizens to search for the truth and make their own political preferences completely independent from the government-laid narratives.

C. Democratic Backsliding of a Strategically Narrated Democracy

This is a phenomenon where the government takes the power in its own hands by arraying

itself all power to strategically deploy the information which is false in nature against any critics targeted against them or against a particular set of community, the worse of which could be the against a targeted religious community.

This what is believed as ‘disinformation’ – **which is the strategical deployment of information in a manner that it formulates the ‘desired’ perspective out of that information.** But with this shaping of the desired perspective of the individual, is the government trying to cover the lack of trust that the citizens have on the government or the lack of trust that the government has upon the citizens’ ability to make an informed choice? This becomes a crucial question. To what extent is the government willing to treat its citizens as autonomous and ready to allow them to have a balanced access to the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms?² Is the government ready to consider the citizens as morally responsible citizens who can be trusted to listen to any speech or expression they wish to and still be trusted to make up their own mind about the content they hear? To what extent will the government go on to close off the channels of the communication because of the selfish fear of slipping away of political power from their hands if the citizens are given free access to hear in an unrestricted manner any speech that comes their way – howsoever true it might be. This is where we can realise that ‘censorship’ is used as a tool at the hands of the government to control the media and the media using the disinformation as tool to influence the individuals.

It saddens me to realise that one of the pillars of democracy today is infested with the fides of the control of another institution. One of the pillars of democracy today is infested with the reporting of disinformation – intended to target and attack a particular community. One of the pillars of democracy today is infested with tutelage despite knowing that it is this honoured institution which is bestowed with binding together with the fabrics of the democracy. It has thus became not so honoured today and resulted in down sliding of democracy.

India is not new to the concept of control of media, spreading of misleading information, promulgation of false information and stifling down the voices of the critics. What is new to this nation is the ever-increasing effectiveness of these strategies and the complete dilapidated functionary of the media which have completely shifted their focus from the capacity of a reporting as a responsible body the prominent issues and awareness to that of reporting what is intentionally displayed.

² GAUTAM BHATIA, *OFFEND SHOCK OR DISTURB: FREE SPEECH UNDER THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION* (First edn). Oxford University Press (2016).

II. FROM NON-INFORMATION TO INFORMATION; MISINFORMATION TO DISINFORMATION

In simple terms, misinformation is a type of information which is not true but is shared by a person who believes it to be true. Disinformation on the other hand is sharing of an information despite knowing it to be misleading. It is this distinction which I believe is important for assessing the role of media which thereby has a heavy impact upon the democratic health of India.

The media can do this in two ways – firstly by engaging in spreading of the disinformation by an imperative direction of the government, or secondly, by magnification of the disinformation to achieve a desired result. This is the reason why media can be the best tool of exploitation used by the politicians and the government to achieve the political and the ideological ends.

Media as a body has major impact upon the integration, inclusiveness, and indiscriminate participation of the masses. The systematic preference and co-optation of the mainstream media is blurring today the distinction between the news and the propaganda- between the mainstream media and state-owned media has become difficult to make out.

Amplification of hashtags that are biased by putting on eye-catching hashtags that form majoritarian narrative or the headlines that reiterate the governments version of what amounts to the truth are a big issue today; this has led to the deflection of the media where it is rarely reporting the important issues today and is attacking anyone who questions the majoritarian ideology. The difference in the approach of the media in dealing with the dominant community and the minority community, in dealing with the ruling party and the opposition party is stark and is today, overriding the journalistic ethics which ought to be supreme and uninfluenced.

Media reporting is not limited to the issue of what gets reported but extends to the issue of what does not gets reported. The issue of deflection from professionalism thus becomes visible here. When there is any clash or tension in the community, the sensational headlines and exaggerated tags such as '*Urban Naxalites*', '*Anti-nationals*' '*Pakistaani*' '*Deshdrohi*' not only contribute to actively triggering the hatred and violence in the community and affirms the existing divide and the biases against a targeted community. What saddens me as a member of the legal fraternity is the normalisation of the use of such hashtags for anyone who stands as a critique.

III. A MOCKERY OF THE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION

A. The Delhi Riots Case: Edited Snippet Used in Filing Chargesheet

The active link between the media and the intentional triggering of the violence took a clearer shape during the Umar Khalid's case popularly known as the Delhi Riots case wherein he was booked under the Anti-Terror Legislation – UAPA. It was during the hearing when it came out that the video clip of Umar Khalid, on the basis of which he was booked and the charge sheet was filed, was nothing but a video clip which was used by Republic TV; s coverage. It was an extraction of 37 seconds heavily mixed and edited by a complete of a 20 minutes video. when the clip was further inquired, it was realised that the clip was 'edited' snippet and was taken from the twitter account of Amit Malviya who was the BJP IT head.

Promotion Of Generalised Distrust by the Trusted Institution of Media

This is a perfect example of legitimisation of information whose origin has not been defined nor the veracity verified but still used by the media upon their channels as a reliable source of information. Now the effect of this edited snippet, would create a generalised temperament in the minds of the society, to have a biased opinion against that targeted individual and the community as a whole. This is where the role of media becomes important. Media being the third pillar of democracy is not just another agency that exists in the system. It bridges the public gap between what is true and what is untrue – the rumour and the facts. When the media itself poses and airs such content which it has neither verified nor checked, it can have devastating effects on the decision-making conscience of the individuals. This communal conflagration will then take the shape of a national narrative because such clips shown by 'responsible' media would be accepted as 'facts' across the country. This communal conflagration would then be used by the politicians to build their ideologies based upon the freshly formed narratives this leads to normalcy of a particular belief having greater harms such as a 'generalised distrust' against a particular community

With a rise in the social media, disinformation has spreader like never before. 70% of the Indian household today is dependent upon television news as the most reliable source of authentic information – it has thus become the biggest source of news consumption³. We often see the grainy pictures and video clips of the recent incidents being telecasted in most of which the face of the person in the video is unrecognisable and the voice is indistinct – but these clips are still used as reliable sources without verifying their origin. What is even worse

³ Pradeep Naik, *Science Journalism in India: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats*, 44 SCIENCE COMMUNICATION 656 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/10755470221134253> (last visited April 14, 2023, 8:55 p.m.).

is that these unverified videos are even used as the basis for the legal action.

IV. VIRULENCE OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA- AGE

In my opinion, social media evidences have no lesser sensitivity and deserve no lesser degree of care as is given while avoiding the contamination of the forensic evidences – blood sample, fingerprints, semen, etc. Infact, wider the reach, wider the degree of care. Tampered evidence will not only impact the victim but will create a generalised notion or generalised distrust in the society against the targeted person which he will have to carry on his whole life.

Today, usage of the bystander videos as authentic have heavily impacted the court room proceedings as well. As per my opinion, these videos, lead firstly to media trials and then the media trial affects the courtroom proceedings. And anything that has the effect of impacting the administration of justice must undergo a double fact check before being posted in the public domain. Social care can be taken by the media houses and the journalists before disseminating any information which can have such horrific impacts.

Thus, the major question that pops up for concern is that – can a journalist, having played an active role in dissemination of false information (disinformation) who otherwise had the ‘responsibility’ of displaying verified information, be called as ‘**instrument in perpetuations**’ of the communal tensions that take place thereafter?

A. Islamophobia – A Strategic Target

Today, the worst targeted community is the Islam community. I have time and again seen that any conflict that arises in the society is almost always associated with the Muslim community. There is no dearth of evidence in presenting the evidence of islamophobia during the infamous event of Tablighi Jamaat. According to a detailed analysis by the Indian Journalism Review⁴ Dainik Jagran, the largest selling newspaper followed an extremely Islamophobic approach targeting the Muslim community as the ‘sole’ cause in spread of the coronavirus disease and the containment and quarantine of the Muslim community solely would render us free from the virus. When the coronavirus pandemic was spiking in India, every case was linked to have been spread by this particular community specifically and there was a widespread use of sensational hashtags all across Twitter - such as **#CoronaJihaad #CrushTablighiSpitters #BioJihaad #Muslimmeaning Terrorist**.

⁴ 156 Stories, Eight Editorials, And Five Cartoons Over 15 Days: How ‘Dainik Jagran’ Kept Up The Constant Islamophobic Dog-Whistling On ‘Tablighi Jamaat’, As If India Would Be Free From #Coronavirus If Only , IJR, <https://indianjournalismreview.com/2020/04/11/156-stories-eight-editorials-and-five-cartoons-over-15-dayshow-dainik-jagran-kept-up-the-constant-islamophobic-dog-whistling-on-tablighi-jamaat-as-if-india-would-be-free-from-coronaviru/> (last visited June 14, 2024 8:55 pm).

The Bombay High Court in *Konan Kodio Ganstone and Ors vs. State of Maharashtra*⁵ rightly concurred that the politicians try to find a scapegoat whenever there is a situation which goes out of the control of the government – especially in the cases of calamity or pandemics. It that strictly clarified that this is nothing but a propaganda against a targeted community. It dismissed the charges after the back-to-back attack of barrage of misinformation against the petitioners.⁶

A group of lawyers, and activists, who have formed a collective complaining against the hate speeches – known as the ‘Campaign against the hate Speech’ raised a complaint, based upon which the News Broadcasting Standards Authority – which is an independent Adjudicatory authority set up by the News Broadcasters Association ordered a few news channels to air a heartfelt apology and pay a fine in addition to it for having a communal approach in targeting the Tablighi jamaat people for the spread of coronavirus in India – which is otherwise a highly contagious disease – ‘independent from the religion of the carrier.’ It is hysterical to even believe that a virus which caused a global medical emergency- took a religious colour in the secular country of India.

Some of the news channels which faced these sanctions were – *News18Kannada*, *Suvarna News*, *Times Now*, conglomerates of *News18*, *Asia net network* and *Times Group* respectively. Sanctions and timely censure of such acts by one of the most popular and authentic media channels is the high need of the hour as this will keep these media houses within the holy clutches of their responsibility and discourage any deflection.

B. Other Infamous Incidents of Social Media Playing: An Active Intermediate Role in Exaggerating the Communal Violence

1. Assam Violence (2012)⁷

In essence this was an ethnic tension that took place between the indigenous community of Bodos and the Bengali speaking Muslims which escalated quickly into a riot after a few miscreants killed 4 Bodo adults. In counter to this incident, was a subsequent killing of Bengali Muslims. Pictures and videos of the tension were rapidly circulated in the social media. The effect of this incident was seen all across India - social media was used as a

⁵ Konan Kodio Ganstone and Ors vs. State of Maharashtra CRIMINAL WRIT PETITION NO. 548 OF 2020

⁶ Nitish Kashyap, Bombay HC Says Tablighi Jamaat Foreigners Were Made “Scapegoats”; Quashes FIRs Against Them; Criticizes Media Propaganda [Read Judgment], (2020), <https://www.livelaw.in/news-updates/bombay-hcsays-tablighi-jamaat-foreigners-were-made-scapegoats-quashes-firs-against-them-criticizes-media-propaganda161793> (last visited June 20, 2024).

⁷ Sayantani Roy, Aditya Kumar Shukla, *SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE DOMAIN OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE: A STUDY OF ASSAM RIOT 2012*, (IJARIE) International Journal of Advance Research and Innovative Ideas in Education (2016) <http://ijariie.com/FormDetails.aspx?MenuScriptId=563> (last visited June 20, 2023).

platform for mobilising and organising mobs and cop attacking strategies. Later on, threat messages were circulated in large numbers saying that the people from assam will have to leave the city of Bengaluru before Eid-Ul-Fitr and if they do not do so, they would have to face dire consequences and would be attacked harshly. This created immense fear and chaos in the city.

This was just a rumour which was circulated to create fear in the minds of the individuals and the Union Home Minister had to step in to clarify the situation and ban internet for a stretch of 15 days in order to avoid the spread of any fake news.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER UPON -Media as Perpetuators

Then a significant question that arises is whether the social media (a form of new-age media which has the widest and quickest reach within a few seconds) should be banned/shut down by the government in order to avoid the dissemination of 'strategical rumours? the answer lies in the question itself. In any event of ethnical / communal / caste-based tension in the social, which are matters so sensitive that they have the tendency of shaking the public order to their core, social media is such a tool in the hand of the perpetrators that they can easily take the advantage of the tensioned situation and easily create an air of tension, confused, chaos and hatred against a particular targeted group of individuals. In such events, we need strong regulation and checks against the spread of rumours and fake news. The reason why I am suggestive for this strong check only during the times of communal tensions is because it is this very communal tension or ethnic tension or caste-based clashes which have been time and again used for creating the political propaganda by the politicians and have been the most common approaches in dilapidating the threads of democracy of this nation.

2. Muzaffarnagar Riots (2013)

This is said to be the worst ever riot in the history of Uttar Pradesh – which took the shape of communal riots from an eve teasing clash between the Hindus, Jatts and the Muslims. This became a highly aggravated communal clash between the two communities which led to the displacement of more than 50,000 people and more than a 100 people from both the communities killed and injured. What aggravated the situation is our concern here. Ample number of fake videos were started to be circulated throughout the social media containing age-old clips of Muslim men attacking and killing the Hindu youths. On crisp investigation, it came out that the video was not the latest video of the Muzaffarnagar Riots but a very old

video originating from Pakistan's Sialkot.⁸ The then chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, blamed social media⁹ for the aggravation of the riots in the state and condemned such rumour spreading. The Prime Minister during that time – addressed the issue of use and abuse of social media at the 'National Integration Council'¹⁰ where he suggested that the Anti-National powers should not be allowed to abuse the social media.¹¹

According a committee formulated by the U.P. Government, chaired by Vishnu Sahai, constituted to look into the causes and the roots of the riots submitted its report known as the **Vishnu Sahai Commission** Report, according to which the circulation of the Kawal video backs its root from Pakistan, having no relation to the Muzaffarnagar riots, and this was stated to be the most significant factor in the events leading up to the riots.

V. SHAPING OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL HEGEMONY - STATE'S CAREFUL ESCAPE AND SHIFTING OF BLAME

Now if we carefully look at these issues, the risks of the social media have in all scenarios, outweighed the benefits attached to it. Is it then right to identify social media as a tool of deploying violence and lawlessness in the society? Will merely blaming the social media for the increasing disruption in the law-and-order situation, help the state escape from its administrative responsibility of containment and regulation of it?

Whenever the risks of abuse outweigh the objectives and the benefits attached to the social media, the entire objective of creation of it defies. But we as informed citizens, also have the duty to not sway into the strategically deployed propagandas of certain miscreants that we go on to destroy the fabric of the democracy of our nation for which our ancestors fought for. There are miscreants in the society who tend to function by taking advantage in times of communal tensions and still stay out of the clutches of 'accountability' because of a simple reason of anonymity upon the social media. This unregulated domain leads to the creation of a psychological hegemony in the lines of communalism over a person's perception; it is a very gradual process which creeps into the minds of a rational human and pushes him to think in a particular way thereby leading to the alignment of the individual in a certain direction. Thus, it

⁸ N. Kumar, & M. Dayal, *RUMOUR MONGERING IN SOCIAL MEDIA: A STUDY IN CONTEXT OF MUZAFFARNAGAR RIOTS, 2013*, International Journal of Advanced Research and Development, 3(2), 286-288 (2018).

⁹ Muzaffarnagar riots and viral video: Why social media isn't the villain-India News, Firstpost, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/muzaffarnagar-riots-and-viral-video-why-social-media-isnt-the-villain1097331.html> (last visited June 18, 2023).

¹⁰ Held on September 23rd 2013.

¹¹ NIC calls for collective efforts to contain communalism | Deccan Herald, <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/358904/nic-calls-collective-efforts-contain.html> (last visited Jul 20, 2023).

is a two- fold process.

1. Gradual politico-psychological hegemony – strategically deployed to align an individual's thought into a desired perception by the use of disinformation and rumours.
2. Resistance and lack of curious spirit that makes the individual reluctant in verifying the authenticity of the information spread.

The effect of this is inevitable, it leads the youth in the direction of a politically biased strategical deployment of the ideologies of a few – and created a political culture in the society by the creation of such psychological hegemony which is extremely unhealthy for the nation. I won't be wrong in saying that communalism today has broke out into various forms and its magnitude of spreading has increased faster than ever. With the fast-changing dynamics of communalism social media has been retooled as a tool of deployment and furthering the mala fides of political agendas by creation of

1. Mobilisation of the masses into a desired communal line
2. Creating attack-based rumours in order to aggravate the existing tensions
3. Organisation of mobs and riots
4. Deployment of political agenda by creation of psychological hegemony
5. Digital Communalism etc.

VI. PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN CONTAINMENT – BRINGING DOWN BIGOTRY, HATRED AND PROPAGANDAS

A. Then what are the ways ahead?

Banning and shutting down of internet after the Assam riots in major cities of Bengaluru , Pune and Chennai , strike at the issue of non-regulation and rather inefficient regulation by the government, who , despite having the best intentions (of avoiding the spread of rumours and hatred) were seen to be marred by the procedural and administrative irregularities which lead to administrative overreach of their powers.¹² In 2016 , United Nations Human Rights Council, passed a resolution where it expressed its deep concerns over the issue of ban of internet and passed a resolution about the measures that were meant to disrupt the

¹² The Blocking Rules, section 69A , Information Technology Act require – ‘ *persons and intermediaries hosting the content should have been notified and provided 48 hours to respond (under Rule 8 of the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public) Rules 2009). Under the emergency provision (Rule 9), the block issued has to be introduced before the "Committee for Examination of Request" within 48 hours, and the committee has to notify the persons and intermediaries hosting the content* ’

dissemination of information online but on the other hand, there have been various Indian legal orders which emphasise the need of warranting such major steps.

The Social Police Force - One of the commendable steps taken by the youth of Pune city in order to stifle down the rumoured and span circulation of content is creation of Social Police Force, which is created by normal citizens – who have formed a group on social media platform of Facebook. They took an active role in acting as watch dogs against any political driven antisocial messages by monitoring the content on social media and spreading awareness by educating the masses about the careful use of the social media – by spamming the rumoured content which will transparently reflect upon the posts.

The motto and reason stated behind the creation of his active self-help activists was to respond to those miscreants who were strategically involved in the dismantling of the social threat of unity and integrity of India – the rich cultural heritage of which – lies in its multi-cultural and existence of a strong social hegemony. The result of this was that the Pune police contributed to this motto by actively collaborating with this SPFs and created the scope and ambit of this project.¹³

Indian Law Enforcement Versus The Social Media Regulation

The problem here that erupts here, is the problem of the Indian law enforcement versus the social media. Most of the social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Google, Instagram, all have their headquarters in the U.S. and the U.S. in its very approach is far more liberal following a liberal standard that is way different and beyond what we follow in India. So, the request for taking down any content that might be disruptive sheathed, may not have an effect of imposition upon the social media administration control forces. This leads to a stagnant tension between the Indian law enforcement and the internet platforms – and clearly leads to the issue of tied hands of the law enforcement agencies when it comes to the regulation of social media content.¹⁴

Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty – A Formal Approach

On of the viable approach, in such a case could be signing of *Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty* – which would act as a formal way in which one particular country can get the assistance from the other country in bringing down the and gathering the evidence in order to initiate the

¹³ Dangerous Speech in Real Time: Social Media, Policing, and Communal Violence, (2017), <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/dangerous-speech-real-time-social-media-policing-and-communal-violence> (last visited June 22, 2023).

¹⁴ Report: Online Harassment – A Form of Censorship, Software Freedom Law Center, India, (Nov. 24, 2016), <https://sflc.in/report-online-harassment-form-censorship/> (last visited June 23, 2024).

investigative proceedings against the criminals by involvement of Departments of Justice, State and Commerce. Just Like YouTube has come up with the flagging mechanism where the users can flag down any content that they believe violates the YouTube community guidelines, Facebook has also headed in creation of an Online Civil Courage Initiative that works in the same line by collaborating with the non-government organisation in various countries to tackle hate speeches and spread of hatred in the society. A commendable step was taken by Twitter by forming a trust and safety council¹⁵ which consisted of advocates, academics and activists in tackling the harassment and harmful speeches but was eventually dissolved by promising a more diverse step.¹⁶

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS AGAINST GLORIFICATION, AGAINST RUMOURS: DEVELOPING CONSCIOUS CITIZENS

We as informed citizens must undoubtedly remain attuned to our own unbiased and informed ideologies but we must also match with the fast-changing pace of the new age technology of Suppression, hatred, bigotry, violence and falsehood. The Juxtaposition of strategical disinformation by the media with the inability of the government to curate and contain such information forms the essence of purportation of harassment, critics etc. The freedom of the press is a constitutional safeguard – in the absence of which citizens would be at a greater risk of violence. Today when India as a country has reached at the heights of communal hatred, violence, bigotry etc., it has no return against the harm that has been caused already and it is thus bestowed upon the media as its rightful duty to forgo its profit biased approach and vested interests in holding state accountability.

What saddens me more is the constant glorification of criminals in the society and granting protection to them under the colours of religion. The recent killing of *Atiq Ahmed*, - a gangster from Uttar Pradesh has yet again led to a communal spark across the nation. When referred to on the news headlines, he is being stated as a **‘lawmaker’ ‘the father whose son got killed’ ‘a Muslim politician’ ‘brazen murder of an Indian Lawmaker’**. It is astonishing how the Western media outlets (BBC News, The Guardians, Reuters) skillfully manipulate their news headlines to create a particular spin to further shape their narrative. A natural corollary of this issue would be communal tensions emanating from the tricky media headlines. The state action against especially dreaded criminals are now being carefully portrayed to be issues of

¹⁵ <https://about.twitter.com/safety/council>

¹⁶ Twitter trust and safety council: Elon Musk dissolves Twitter’s Trust and Safety Council - The Economic Times, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/technology/elon-musk-dissolves-twitters-trust-and-safety-council/articleshow/96186093.cms?from=mdr> (last visited June 22, 2023).

religion and caste. What will be the effect of this? The effect of this would be the creation of the psychological hegemony that will be biased and deviant from the main issues of attention. Carefully manipulating the perception of the citizens and making the minority feel vulnerable is an interesting art played by the media these days. Killing of a don who turned into a politician, is today being portrayed as a member of Muslim community being killed and attacked – this is being done in order to claim vote banks by using the minority groups as pawn in the game of politics.

How do we tackle the circulation of rumoured headlines? Is circulation the only way instead of prosecution of the originator of such information? The entire issue comes down to a bigger issue – that is the difficulty in tracking the originator in/across the nationals which are protected under the sheath of anonymity. What I see as a problem here is clearly the lack of responsibility owned by the Indian media, by implicating diversionary tactics from the main issues coupled with attacking the minority community to feel more vulnerable in any event with involves the killing of that particular group. In addition to this, we as citizens must take the responsibility upon ourselves to develop into well informed and conscious citizens, curiously doing a factcheck and ascertaining the authenticity of any information which can have the impact of leading to communal / ethnic /caste based/ hatred and tensions in the society.
