

## **Citizens Journalism in India: a Case Study of Delhi**

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### **Abstract**

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. - Margaret Mead*

*At a time when the main stream media is seen diverting from its objective and focusing more on profit making motive many social and vital issues and stories relating to the masses are either neglected or rejected by the media that has led to a huge gap between issues reported and neglected. With an aim to bridge this gap a new concept and trend of participatory journalism has slowly but steadily emerged across the globe known as public or participatory journalism popularly known as "Citizen Journalism". A form of journalism when any common man in his capacity as a citizen take up an initiative to express ideas irrespective of their educational or professional background, it is an act of citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information. This concept is now being explored via new media and technology that facilitates the reach to a large number of audiences with or without the support of mainstream media. This paper evaluates and analyzes the emergence, trend, and role of Citizen Journalism with explicit reference to Delhi Gang rape – Nirbhaya case in 2012. The paper at the end raises concerns on the ethics and to what extent unfiltered information can reach the masses and strike a balance in the society.*

**Keywords:** Citizen, Journalism, Mainstream Media, Social Media, democracy

### **Background of the Research**

India being the largest democracy in the world has the greatest challenge of running the democratic system by proficiently encouraging the freedom of speech and expression. Access to information is essential to the health of democracy that ensures citizens make responsible and informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Media forms an integral part of democracy as it contributes to those factors that are intrinsic to genuine democracy. Media acts as a mirror in the society reflecting the various social, political and economic activities happening around the world, it also facilitates the process of empowerment of individual by providing an arena for public debate and by reconstituting private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion.

Today in India, the main stream media is seen diverting from its objective and focusing more on profit making motive resulting in many social, important issues and stories relating to the masses are either neglected or rejected by the media which has led to a huge gap between issues reported and neglected. With an aim to bridge this gap a new concept and trend of participatory journalism has slowly but steadily emerged across the globe popularly known as participatory journalism or "Citizen Journalism"<sup>1</sup>. A form of journalism when any common man in his capacity as a citizen of a nation take up an initiative to express ideas irrespective of their educational or professional background, it is an act of citizens playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating news and information.

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<sup>1</sup> Citizen Journalism- [www.stateofthenewsmedia.org](http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org)

Empowerment with information is a crucial tenet of citizen journalism in India, a democracy with over one billion people thus the objective of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging, and relevant information that is vital for a democratic country like India. Citizen Journalism has slowly but steadily revolutionized the entire media in the country; it is influencing and making an impact in mainstream media henceforth become a powerful tool for every citizen to report the news that touches their lives.

The concept of citizen journalism became a powerful tool and a reality mainly due two reasons firstly the Right to Information Act 2005, proved to be a Source for information. Secondly the technology empowered every citizen to be informed and updated through social Media, internet and mobile technology. Thus Citizen Journalism become a phenomena explored via new media and technology that facilitated the reach to a large number of audiences with or without the support of mainstream media. With the popularity of Citizen Journalism no longer in question, even the national media around the world are sourcing leads from stories and pictures filed by Citizen Journalists.

### ***Citizen Journalists Raise Their Voice to Bring in Change in the Law and Perception of People***

India in general and Delhi specially has recorded many incidents of crimes, atrocities and violence against women. According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)<sup>2</sup> data – 572 rapes were reported in 2011, the number rose to over 800 in 2012 highest in the last 10 years making it India's "rape capital".

But for the first time in the history of India the power of citizens through social media was seen and the impact was tremendous during the Delhi Gang Rape - that involved a rape and murder of young 23-year-old female physiotherapy intern who was beaten and gang raped in a bus in which she was travelling with her male companion on December 16, 2012 in New Delhi. The young girl died from her injuries thirteen days later while undergoing emergency treatment in Singapore. The media called the young victim as Nirbhaya - a brave heart. Nirbhaya's case was able to cut deep into the hearts of people irrespective of their caste, creed, religion or age, the incident made the general public's collective anger to explode and come out on streets. If not for collective efforts of the people, Nirbhaya incident would have been another case of violence in the capital city, it would just be another girl, another daughter, another child who was another victim in a society that didn't see rape as a crime, but just a common act, although the public would be outraged and angered by the violence against another young victim, nothing would change. The United Nations Human rights chief calls rapes in India a "national problem"<sup>3</sup> it is a social stigma in India for the women to go to the Police station and report rape or any other kind of violence unfortunately the result of which is that only one in three cases are reported and ends in a conviction. It was a people's movement and it was the conscience of the people that made them come out and demand justice for Nirbhaya.

For the first time in the history of India many citizens come forward to report the events as Citizen Journalists they were actively posting photographs and videos online and the main stream media was taking user generated content. The young technology savvy Indians spread its national outrage across the country and united together to voice their opinions against the weak law and flaws in our legal system within days it became a place for social change in India.

### ***A New Trend - Platform for Citizen Journalism***

The Nirbhaya news caught the attention of the entire main stream media but a new trend was witnessed and the power of Citizens through Citizen Journalism was actively playing a role. There was also a plethora of citizens on the ground reporting the developments as it happened and reported in Social Media and posted their videos and comments on twitter, the main stream added a section in their news bulletin and programs as "Citizen news & Views" and the comments on Twitter, you tube videos and so on. The Delhi gang rape demonstrated how citizen journalism has really come to the fore. Change.org, an online petition "Stop Rape Now" was initiated by former Journalist Namita Bhandare seeking the intervention of President Pranab Mukherjee<sup>4</sup> and Chief Justice of India.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://ncrb.nic.in/index.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21569031-horrible-attack-could-prove-turning-point-indias-women-rape-and-murder-delhi>

<sup>4</sup> [www.timesofindia.com/delhigangrape](http://www.timesofindia.com/delhigangrape)

Today there are many channels having exclusive programs featuring reports and stories filed by Citizens called "Citizen Journalists" aims at encouraging and creating a formal platform for Citizen Journalists like the popular show on TV channels like ibnlive and Headlines today that telecast - CJ Show and Right to be heard (RTH) on weekly basis and has gained popularity over a period of time. In addition to TV channels we have various websites like the Citizen Media Network an open forum, platform to nurture and promote Citizen Journalism from all walks of life to express themselves through new media tools and get trained in digital journalism methods and techniques. Popular websites like merinews.com, ww.reportindia.com, www.indiaonline.in.cj, www.mynews.in and many more websites giving a platform for Citizen Journalists in India and South Asia.

### **Review of Literature**

Citizen journalism is the act of citizens "playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information", according to the seminal report *We Media: How Audiences are shaping the Future of News and Information*, by Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis. They say, "The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires." In 2003 Online Journalism Review article, J. D. Lasica classifies media for citizen journalism into the following types: 1) Audience participation (such as user comments attached to news stories, personal blogs, photos or video footage captured from personal mobile cameras, or local news written by residents of a community), 2) Independent news and information Websites, 3) Full-fledged participatory news sites, 5) Other kinds of "thin media." (Mailing lists, email newsletters), and 6) Personal broadcasting sites. The term citizen journalist did not exist before the advent of the Internet. Citizen journalism grew in tandem with the growth of the interactive functions on the Internet. Although it encompasses many aspects and comes in different forms, including blogs, forums, uploading photographs or videos to the media, citizen journalism has one fundamental basis. In "*Writing for a convergent media*", author Thom Lieb says this one thing is "contributing journalistic content to the news process" and gives blogging as an example of one component of citizen journalism.<sup>5</sup> According to Niemen Journalism, during the protests of the Nirbhaya gang rape incident, "activists and journalists used social media to follow the protests and to discuss India's problem of violence against women" (Niemen lab). The Indian Government, which is disgracefully slow when it comes to passing significant legislative action, expedited action because social media garnered "international attention to India's problem of violence against women" (Niemanlab)<sup>6</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

In Nirbhaya's case, the public sentiment was heard; action was finally taken. It facilitated Indians to come together and mobilize for change. Today there is lot of awareness in Delhi, authorities are more active and alert and forthcoming in tackling and providing security to young girls and women. The India government decided to review it polices on rape and other crimes of violence against women and brought in new stringent laws in the country to ensure safety and protection to women. Finally, on February 3 2013, President Pranab Murherjee passed the Criminal Law Ordinance, which provides for death penalty in case of any rape in India.

### **New Horizon**

The incident not only changed the people of India, its government, but its journalist too. The ideals of journalism never change, but its people, government, and even its journalist change with the times, the technology has brought in this new change the journalists must understand this and embrace it to make our democracy more efficient and effective for India to progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a strong democratic nation.

### **Further Reading**

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<sup>5</sup> Lieb, T. (2009). *All the news: writing and reporting for convergent media*. Boston:

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports.aspx>