On December 16, 2012, a 23-year-old physiotherapy student was brutally gang-raped and assaulted by 6 people in New Delhi, the capital of India. The victim, who came to be known as ‘Nirbhaya’ (one without fear) died thirteen days later. The ghastly incident evoked widespread protests. The national and global media covered this extensively. It was the cover story in Indian media for a few weeks and never quite dropped out of national discourse unlike other issues. This was unprecedented. But given that it happened in the Indian capital and Indian media’s own past in engaging with women’s issues, it is more easily understandable. The widespread coverage of this incident in international media calls for greater explanation given India’s traditionally low visibility in it. One possible explanation is that Delhi has emerged as one of the important nodes and switches, in Castell’s language of the global network society and that without the massive mediatisation of this critical event in Indian media, western media would hardly have become aware of it (Castells 1990, 2000).

While this is an undeniable fact, I would argue that any attempt to understand this has to also pay careful attention to the historically specific context within which the discourses were played out. The context I argue is new. Both globally and nationally, it is defined by neo-liberal globalization, India’s own economic ascendency within it\(^1\), the rise of a host of international organizations fitting norms of global governance, new technology, media convergence and the unprecedented role of a mediatised public discourse. This paper argues that though there is a growing convergence between ‘national’ and ‘global’ discourse, important differences still persist in the content and tenor between the two sets of discourses. It is through a comparative study of the two on ‘Nirbhaya’, that this article seeks to examine how and why they differ.

This paper therefore argues that an imperative need exists to bring in history and political economy to have a better understanding of contexts, commonalities and differences between ‘national’ and ‘global’ discourse. Neither the
logic of media nor the mandate of proliferating project-based research would explain this. Yet it is evident that India’s past bears heavily on the present ‘national’ discourse. And the history of orientalism cannot be wished away entirely from global discourse. The latter, one can argue stems from ‘the inequality of ignorance’ that Dipesh Chakrabarty pointed to many years ago that persist between first world and third world scholars (Chakravarti 1992). Academic centres of global excellence such as Harvard University too are not free of this bane of unequal ignorance’ as Prabha Kotiswaran’s remarks in the context of ‘Nirbhaya’ imply. She argues that “circuits of feminist scholarship and activism have become so inter-disciplinary and transnational that maintaining and policing turf is an utterly useless endeavour.” The problem however lies in the fact that. “Some Western feminists ... barely care to become familiar with the context in which they are trying to intervene” even as their “particular versions of American legal feminism have been propelled out of their provincial contexts into international law and policy making” (Kotiswaran 2013, 1).

I would like to argue that the above observation holds true today in most key sites of knowledge production other than the academia such as international institutions (IIs), global think tanks, corporate research institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These institutions hold great influence in the contemporary global order and we shall see how they also form key sources of information for contemporary media and for the emerging global public sphere (Chaudhuri 2010b). While this asymmetry of knowledge perhaps has been long true, what is new is a potent convergence of ‘ignorance’ and ‘instant access’ that new technologies have made possible. It is within this configuration that I attempt to analyze both the content and form of the mediated discourse in the aftermath of the gang rape.

This article is based upon a thematic analysis of public discourse in the aftermath of the ‘Nirbhaya’ rape. I have followed discussions in newspapers, television and Internet on a daily basis in the immediate months after the event and have continued to follow them since. Television channels followed have been primarily English and Hindi, and occasionally Bengali, while my study of the Internet and print media has been in English.
The Argument and Approach

My emphasis on a historical and political economic perspective stems from a certain unease with the manner that media is often seen as a discrete entity that can be analyzed either in terms of its texts/images or their reception and resistance by people who too are treated as bounded empirical beings, rather than an ensemble of social relations. My argument is that it is important to distinguish between the concrete economic and legal structures of the global order from the logic of new media technologies and its almost magical possibilities. I make this claim, fully aware that the latter is played out within the ambit of the former. This section therefore first elaborates how my distinction between 'national' and 'global', discourse rests on a political economic understanding of contemporary capitalism. And second explicates the nature and consequences of new media technologies and the reason for my use of the term mediatization.

The political economic

The transformed relationship between the 'national' and the 'global' I argue has to be seen in the way states and markets have been recast in contemporary capitalism. I am not using 'national' and 'global' to refer to empirical regions or entities alone. But fundamental to this article is the idea that in the current stage of capitalism the state and nation as we have understood since Westphalia has been reconfigured to take on board the play of global capitalism and trans-national capitalists. My argument is that though distinctions between national and international media in the Nirbhaya case are apparent, it is equally true that significant processes of transformation are already underway. Important structural changes mark the relationship between Indian and international media. An example of collaboration between India Real Time and Wall Street Journal is one example.

My contention is that states have been major players in laying the terms of public discourse in modernity. In India, where civil society had not emerged in the way it had in western modernity, the state had an even more important role to set the agenda for public discourse (Kaviraj 1991). The media did play a significant role in the growth of Indian nationalism and later in projecting state policies. A greater role was however played by the engagement of political leaders and organizations with people through direct interaction at different
levels. Public meetings held in different corners of India even at a time when travel entailed considerable time, defined the story of India's nation building project. Stories of how news of protests travelled by word of mouth to different parts of India, are also part of this history. In the current context of global capitalism however, the state is no longer the only player. Social movements leverage media and the media itself no longer simply 'represents' but 'sets' agendas. This would be evident in both the national and global discourse, which I examine below. The media does not act alone in this regard but along with a host of national and new transnational players within which the media as an industry is implicated.

In the 'Nirbhaya' case, we see within the national discourse the role of: Indian feminists; civil society organizations; political parties representing different ideological positions; and the Indian state. In the global discourse on 'Nirbhaya' we witness a greater role of: international institutions (IIs); international non-governmental organizations (INGOs); consultancy sectors such as risk assessment organizations; and the tourism industry. The pervasive presence of the global discourse draws its legitimacy from the hegemonic position that IIs occupy in this new order. However, this omnipresence would be impossible without the technology that makes media convergence possible. As stated earlier, this article therefore at once privileges both political economy and media logic. If the former reflects the compulsions of capital, the latter provides information of a "format" of "how material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior, and the grammar of media communication" (Altheide and Snow 1979, 10).

Media logic, new technology and mediatization

This article acknowledges that the extraordinary spread with which 'Nirbhaya's' tragedy travelled would be impossible sans the new configuration of media technology brought about by the digital revolution and the birth of the World Wide Web. This ushered in paradigmatic changes of creating, delivering, and consuming content. The emergence of new media, widespread use of multimedia and an inevitable transformation of traditional media has ushered in a world of instant access to people and institutions across the world. Notwithstanding the magical possibilities of new technology, instant access does not necessarily spell either equal or informed access to content. For content remains constitutive of a host of historical, political, economic, cultural and social forces.
In this regard, I would like to also make a point about media convergence, which is often understood as post-ideological for convergence speaks of a cultural shift where consumers seek out what they want, making discrete connections among the scattered media (Jenkins 2006). The claim is that people are no longer ‘passive media spectators’ but participate at all three levels of production, selection, and distribution. I disagree for there is a clear ideological content that is emerging from specific sites of knowledge production and decision making in the new global order. This article develops this argument at some length. Jenkins also contends that the digital divide is less about access and more about the "participation gap". I agree with this for even in a country like India where inequality is sharp and the digital divide large, a very large section of people, literate or illiterate, rural or urban do watch, see, listen to the media, and then discuss what they saw and heard. They are not ‘passive victims’ but the script of their debate is also not entirely theirs.

A key approach that informs this article is the intersection of the political economic and the new multimedia technology. This is most evident in the increasing cross ownership in the media sector and media convergence. Cross-ownership of media has been a matter of some concern as India is one of the few countries where there has still not been any regulation in place, though it is in proposed policy discourse. Strong opinions have emerged in the media industry – both for and against – the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India’s (TRAI) initiatives regarding cross-media ownership in the country. It has been defended from associations representing the print media on the grounds of attaining economics of scale for “Cross-media operations can reduce the cost of news gathering, news dissemination, while also providing affordable access to international news” (Kumar 2013). My concern here is not about the need for economy of scale, nor to economy of access but the trend towards less diversity of sources.

It is within this convergence that I seek to capture the themes that emerge in the multiple discourses in the aftermath of the December Rape. The case of ‘Nirbhaya’ is an early and dramatic instance of ‘mediatization’ in India where the media appeared to shape and frame the processes and discourses of political communication (Lilleker 2008). Different actors in the event ‘adjusted to the demands of the mass media’ in the manner that Kent Asp in 1986 described as the ‘mediatization of political life’ (Asp 1986). I use the term ‘mediatized’ therefore to enable one to see the media not as an external institution that effects social life but as entangled in almost all spheres of economic, political, social and cultural life.

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Key Assumptions

There are a couple of assumptions which flow from my understanding of the political economy of 21st century global capitalism on one hand and media logic on the other. The first is that some of the key tropes that define dominant global discourse-governance, development, gender and human rights are broadly crafted by international institutions (IIs) such as the World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations (UN), and a host of human rights agencies. Crucial in the dissemination of this script have been the large number of international non-governmental organizations (INGOS), new and critical sites of knowledge production, which actively engage with the media. There is a dominant presence of a global human rights discourse in the responses to the 'Nirbhaya' case. Admonishment for India's human rights violation is evident in: travel advisories issued by foreign states; statements by international institutions; commentaries in international media; trans-national feminist academia; sundry blogs; and corporate commentaries.

Second, in the national discourse, there is greater intervention by different sections located within the Indian nation such as social movements, women's organizations, legal fraternity, courts, conservative patriarchal sections of Indian society and the state. Hence my contention is that the 'national' does continue to matter even as 'global' discourses impinge upon the 'national.' It gets transformed but is not entirely subsumed within the global.

Thirdly my use of the term 'national public sphere' is deliberate. I am acutely aware of India's 'internally differentiated publics' in view of language plurality and the manifold asymmetries within the public sphere in India. However empirically, as would be evident from this article, there is a basic difference in the intense and variegated discourse within the country from the reactions of institutions and people located outside India (irrespective of 'national' or 'ethnic' origins) to the case. I would also stand by the term 'national public sphere' to counter theoretically the idea that the 'fragments' of the nation, or in this instance the various 'publics' within the political entity India are discrete, bounded entities that operate independent of each other. This view has widespread academic currency in post-colonial theory but is questionable on grounds that are both theoretical and empirical. Theoretically it looks at the 'publics' as 'bounded' entities, in the manner that traditional western anthropology studied 'native' communities and 'villages' as though untouched by macro processes even of the scale of colonialism. Historically, it belies the fact that politics outside the dominant Indian 'nationalist framework' had to engage to counter and critique the former.
Empirically we know that there has been a long tradition of Indian newspapers being read aloud and discussed in village teashops among people, literate and non-literate. The last quarter century has witnessed the ubiquitous television set in city barbershops, which again is a 'public' and shared site of consumption and discussion. Nothing brings this more to the fore than the General Elections in India 2014 where ‘chai pe charcha’ (discussion over tea) became a key campaign strategy of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) after its Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi was mocked for his humble beginnings as a tea seller. He won the elections. In other words the idea of a “split public” (Rajagopal 2001) appears to make both the role of the political state and an expanding market in the making of everyday life inconsequential. Significantly the last few years have seen greater expansion of Indian language media than English language ones. More recently we have English language television channels conducting interviews in Indian languages with English subtitles. Further, media logic has increasingly transformed Indian language media on lines that mirror the format and content of English media, once again raising questions whether one can hold on the idea of split publics.

My fourth contention is that the purported boundaries between old and new media seem to collapse as we witness in the multiple discourses a seamless continuity in both content and form. One of the profound ways in which the Internet and new media change the public sphere is through a change in temporality. Highly mediated and highly capitalized forms of circulation are increasingly organized in the 24x7 instant access rather than punctual (Warner 2002). There is, in other words, a dissonance between a content reflecting a deep-seated hierarchy and a form that apparently spells instant uploading and global access. In this regard my fifth contention is that we need to take history into account to appreciate that the women's question has been central in modern Indian public discourse and this past that has been rendered invisible in media gender discourse. A historical perspective therefore is more important than ever before, as we face an increasingly dominant, homogenized and effectively mediatized narrative that can travel instantly and spread everywhere even as 'unequal ignorance' in key sites of knowledge production persists.

The sixth and final contention of this article therefore is that in a mediatized and publicity driven world, we have to recognize that the role of talking, discourse and communication acquire a different order of centrality. As a sociologist, I am aware of the limits of seeking to understand the 'social' through a study of media discourses. However, what I would like to under-
score here is that we need to take cognizance of the fact that the 'social' in a fundamental sense has been redefined. The volume of information and images, their scale and reach, speed and persuasive power marks a new era. This redefines the meaning of 'experience' as a commodity form that mediates people's relationship to both their pasts and presents. There are a couple of theoretical and methodological issues that this observation raises with regard to any attempt to study the events pertaining to the case of 'Nirbhaya'.

Can we study this particular event sans its media discourses? How do we look at the matter of commodification of experience in the media? Did the personal 'experience' of the victim or her family or her friend get commoditized in the media? The broader political question that arises thereof is whether this commoditization cancels out the expansive potential of democracy contained in the sheer scale of public protest and the wide-ranging debate on core feminist questions even within mainstream media. A more careful examination of the responses may provide an answer to the limits and possibilities of mediatization for democracy. The structure of this article flows from the argument articulated above. It is broadly divided into two parts: the national discourse and the global discourse; that there will be inevitable overlapping is part of the story that I seek to tell.

Part A – National Discourse

Bringing in History

Historically, gender issues have often been central to modern India's public discourse and even as gender remained a pivot, it tended to spawn discussions on a whole range of issues that do not directly pertain to gender. My decision to overtly refer to history is to counter the current obsession with the 'contemporary' if not the 'immediate'. That this is widespread in the media with its 24×7 logic and 'breaking news' syndrome few would disagree. I however contend that this focus on the immediate and an orientation towards a checklist of 'problems' and a reader check-list of 'solutions' increasingly inform social science academia too. It is not surprising therefore that there is a widely prevalent view in gender global discourse, now spilling into the 'national', that gender rights in India are a fall-out of the United Nation's Declaration of International Women's Year and Decade in 1975 and the initiatives of IIs and INGOs since. A social science analysis of media discourse therefore has to bring in
history, political economy and the minutiae of everyday life\textsuperscript{16} apart from the specificities of media logic and its form of presentation.

From the early beginnings of modern media in colonial India, various issues pertaining to women have occupied centre stage: sati\textsuperscript{17}, widow remarriage\textsuperscript{18}, child marriage\textsuperscript{19}, age of consent, and education for women (Chaudhuri [1993] 2011). Debates in the then young Indian media (ibid.) and within women's organizations such as in All India Women's Conference (AIWC) (1926), Women's India Association (WIA) (1917) and others have in a fundamental sense been debates on: Indian modernity and its uneasy relationship with tradition; on nationalism and democracy; culture and individual rights, inequality and citizenship; public and private spheres; west and east; gender and sexuality; progress and backwardness. This is how it was during the 19th century and this is how it is in the 21st century.

There was a retreat of the women's question from public discourse after independence in 1947 and resurgence with the Indian women's movement in the 1970s, also termed as the second phase of the Indian women's movement, triggered by the Mathura rape case that led to sustained efforts by the women's movement to change the law.\textsuperscript{20} The range of issues raised in the second phase of the Indian women's movement, as in the first, were carried widely by a media, increasingly engaged with questions of women's equal rights as citizens (Kumar 1997, Shah and Gandhi 1992, Sen1990).

The 1980s witnessed the Shah Bano\textsuperscript{21} and the Deorala Sati\textsuperscript{22} case which once again brought back many of the old contestations such as cultural versus gender rights, community versus state centre stage (Sundar Rajan 2003; Sangari and Vaid 1989; Chaudhuri 1993). The media played an active role raising questions of gender justice with regard to this case (Chaudhuri 2000). However the nature of the media during this entire period was different. It had neither the broader political economy set up by neo-liberalism, nor the technological sophistication of an interactive media, nor a publicity driven culture, which is constitutive of the media today. It is this transformed media that was both an actor and a central site for representing the public outcry against the gruesome case of rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi in December 2012.

Sixty-six years of Indian independence, development, affirmative action by the state, and social movements have all contributed to both a deepening and expansion of democracy. There is an increasing presence of marginalized sections in the public sphere (Rege 2006). In the immediate years preceding Nirbhaya's death, India has seen the rise of a strong anti-corruption movement.
and a growing presence of what has been termed civil society organizations. This movement has drawn huge support among the urban middle class and it has used the social media extensively. This movement was actually being covered in real time. At its peak it was a media event, drawing more audience than even the most popular soaps.\textsuperscript{23}

The anti-corruption movement, drawing heavily from the transparency and governance discourse of the World Bank was primarily directed against the ruling government. The state and not the corporate was the object of critical scrutiny as the media had actively projected since the early 1990s that the 'market' was more accountable and responsive to the 'public' than the 'state' (Chaudhuri 2000, 2001, 2010b). More recently however, in the campaign for the 2014 general elections, the Aam Aadmi (common man) Party (AAP), whose leading members were part of the anti-corruption movement, has been attacking the major political parties for being in cohort with big business houses who now have a major say in state functioning.

It is however with the emergence of new media and media convergence that recent practices of an interactive 'public' became possible. A significant convergence of a political mood of the 'public' and the technological possibility for enhanced public interactivity took place. In the aftermath of the December 2012 rape, the dominant media rhetoric was that the 'public' has risen. The 'public', the media pontificated, will no longer 'take things lying down'; significantly it was the word 'public' that was increasingly being used even in Indian language media discourse. In everyday parlance it meant the 'everybody'. The spontaneous outburst was triggered by what happened to 'Nirbhaya', but it happened at a point where there was already a growing anger against the government seen as corrupt, as cut off from and unresponsive to the ordinary person, the 'Aam Aadmi'.\textsuperscript{24} It is worth mentioning here that it is a common sight in Indian television these days to watch a news broadcaster breaking off in the midst of debating live with a range of people\textsuperscript{25} to read from purported SMS, or attend a caller, even as the television screen would have audience responses ticking below.\textsuperscript{26}

Multiple sites, multiple discourses after the brutal incident

I have already stated in my initial observations that in the national discourse, the central actors are members representing different sections located within the Indian nation such as social movements, women's organizations, legal fraternity,
courts, conservative patriarchal sections of Indian society and the Indian state. In my schematic account of the national media discourse on the Nirbhaya case, the role of these actors would become visible. Readers will also notice how the Indian media took on an aggressive position, became a spokesperson of the protests and sought to set the agenda for both public discourse and the state.

In the initial weeks, “Hang the rapists” was the strident cry of the media. Nothing less than capital punishment would assuage the collective grief and anger of the ‘public’ was dominant discourse. As the crowd surged, demanding justice for ‘Nirbhaya’, remembering the ‘daughter of India’, the government appeared unsure about its response. Police attempts to disperse the crowd through water cannons further fuelled public anger. The media was shrill, demanding instant justice. The active intervention of women’s organizations and feminist lawyers in media discussions mitigated this stridency. This shift in focus has been described as one from a ‘retributive public’ where death penalty or castration became a ‘vocabulary of protest’ to a ‘passionate reasoned’ public intent on “what the government needs to do to be accountable to rape survivors” (Baxi 2012). The active intervention of women’s organizations and feminist scholars appeared to have persuaded the media to change track from hysterical ranting to more reasoned debates (Agnes 2013; Geetha 2013).

However, there did emerge a new “public in solidarity” which has ‘informed, provoked and supported’ a ‘determined fight’ against sexual violence anywhere in the country” (Baxi 2012). Women’s groups of diverse ideological persuasions, students’ organizations, individuals with no political affiliations, and housewives came together on the streets with a common intent to fight for gender justice. In response to this public demand of Indian citizens, the Indian state set up a committee headed by Justice Jagdish Sharan Verma, a retired Chief Justice who passed away in April 2013. Representatives of women’s and human rights groups, lawyers and activists from across the country who had for decades fought towards reforms on rape and sexual assault, welcomed several provisions of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013, Criminal Bill 2013 that was passed by Parliament in response to the Verma Committee recommendations.

If the women’s movement alongside many ordinary citizens from diverse walks of life were anguished with the incident, there were others, who raised quite different kinds of questions. Political parties appeared divided. It ranged from dominant liberal views to communist critiques to cultural Hindu nationalist statements. It is pertinent to mention here that for the first four decades after independence, a conglomeration of left of centre liberal ideas defined the
dominant discourse. This has been changing over the last two decades with a growing articulation of Hindu nationalist ideas pitted against what they described as pseudo secular politics. It is therefore important to take note of the observations of Mohan Bhagwat, chief of the right-wing Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) who opined that rapes are an urban crime shaped by westernisation, and is not a matter of concern in rural India where traditional values are upheld. “Mohan Bhagwat doesn’t know either India or Bharat,” said Brinda Karat, a Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPM politburo member and a leading member of All India Women’s Democratic Association (AIDWA) for “the largest number of rapes occurs in rural areas on Dalits, tribals and rural workers (Ghosh 2012). Asaram Bapu, a popular Hindu guru, said that the New Delhi rape victim could have saved herself if she had simply held the hand of one of the men and said, ‘I consider you as my brother’ (Harris 2013). In yet other sites, debates of a very different order were carried out about Marxism and gender (Chauhan et al June 10, 2013). Yet others commented on the differential response to rape committed against poor Dalit women, which often went unreported and unremarked in the media.35

We had a string of administrative measures launched by the government even as parliamentarians during the debate on the anti-rape law made offensive sexist remarks. Sharad Yadav, a legislator of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) justified ‘following girls’ for ‘when you want to talk to a woman... you have to put in a lot of effort’. Mulayam Singh Yadav, leader of the Samajwadi Party (SP), the ruling party in Uttar Pradesh state wanted to stop co-education while Lalu Prasad Yadav, head of RJD a regional party in Bihar... called on the government to cover up ancient erotic sculptures in Khajuraho and in Konarak – both of which are UNESCO world heritage sites.34 Sumitra Mahajan, a member of the BJP, criticized Indian reality television for “throwing young boys and girls together [...] and [...] dancing together to all kinds of love songs” (N.N. October 2013).

Advertisements since Nirbhaya have often addressed questions of gender and sexual harassment.35 Popular television serials dealt with training women for self-defense36 even as other TV programmes discussed gender related issues, including glass ceiling for corporate women. In this entire process the news channels in particular took on the role of spokespersons speaking to and behalf of the ‘nation’37 and the public. What however cannot be ignored is that gender justice did become a key issue in public discourse, something that every political party has had to contend with in India’s 2014 general elections.
Part B - Global Discourse

Part A provided a glimpse of the diverse discourses that covered an entire range of perspectives – marxist, liberal, Dalit, patriarchal, feminist – in different languages that constitute the national public sphere. I had earlier stated my reservations about the idea of a “split public” and would like to once again suggest that there does appear to be a mutually comprehensible though diverse conversation going on across the nation. In Part B, I look at the global discourse whose focus and tenor do appear to differ. Two significant differences are: one, global media’s condemnation of the Indian state’s failure to live up to India’s global brand image as an economic power expressed variously in a tone of horror, dismay, shock and mockery; two, greater dependence on specific sources for information which I elaborate upon below; three a broad brush treatment of India as one monolithic entity.

A central contention of this article has been that any analysis of the media has to take into account the new structure and functioning of trans-national capitalism. Linked has been my contention that this new economic order is accompanied by the emergence and growing influence of international institutions, global think tanks, corporate research organizations, a new regime of international human rights and women rights laws that inform the practice not just of states but also big business houses that want minimum norms of gender justice, law and governance in place. Likewise we have the rise of the tourism industry as an essential element of the new global architecture. New organizations like global risk assessment firms have emerged to facilitate both global investment and tourist flow. They monitor social risks such as violence against women. A whole corpus of reports has emerged from these sites. They are readily available sources on the web not just for the media but as I have documented at some length elsewhere, also within the practice of social science (Chaudhuri 2010b). As of now international media’s dependence on these sources appear to be greater than in the national media in the ‘Nirbhaya’ case. This as things stand today is bound to grow in the near future cutting across both national and global discourse. These are significant producers and disseminators of ‘knowledge’ today and it may not be inappropriate to see them as the new ideological apparatus for governance.

Before I go any further, I would like to make a clarification on my take on these new developments towards better global governance. I would like to reiterate that while at one level, international laws on human and gender rights
are commendable and enabling; there is a need for caution. I do not wish to engage with the dangers of an II based governance here except to mention two points: one, a point often ignored in the buzz on 'global governance', that they are sites of power and they work in tandem with other centres of strategic power; and two, that while democratic states are accountable to citizens, IIs are not. Its people can vote the government out but not IIs. This was a major point of debate in India when Indian acceded to the WTO regime.

My focus in this article is however on their role as media sources and I return to that here. There are issues with both the content and format of these studies. The content apart from reflecting 'unequal ignorance' also suffers from the logic of writing 'reports' and 'project evaluations' which have a set motif that defines the questions, indicators and mode of data analysis. The rise of global index as a measure typifies this. This trend gets further compounded in the media with the limits of the form of communication that contemporary media practice deploys sensational stories, sound bites, and set-up controversies programmed to convey flattened, easy-to-consume information.

This straitjacketed treatment of social issues mode also gets reflected at the ground level in the everyday functioning of myriad NGOs, with its mechanical dissemination of buzzwords and tropes that fit in with the managerial mode of much of professional grass-root activism. This, in combination with deep-seated ignorance of histories and contexts, I would like to contend cannot further either critical awareness or democratic rights which in a fundamental sense is the task of the media in liberal democracies. But liberal democracies rested on an institutional base of the nation state and national public discourse. How then do we imagine a democratic 'global public sphere'?

International Media

As mentioned earlier, one significant way that the national media discourse differed from the global was the focus on India as an economic power and its poor showing in its social indicators. The New York Times observed how "India is a rising economic power but the world's largest democracy can never reach its full potential if half its population lives in fear of unspeakable violence" (Ghosh 2012, emphasis mine). Claire O'Sullivan in the Irish Examiner Reporter asks "What is going on in the world's ninth richest economy that women are now increasingly scared of being brutalised on the streets, that they can't board a bus, stay in a hotel alone, or camp with their husband?" (O'Sullivan 2013, emphasis mine).
A central marker of orientalist discourse has been 'barbaric' treatment of women. A 2013 report on the Global Slavery Index carried in international media and in the Indian newspaper, Times of India reveals a convergence of 21st century human rights discourse and 19th century orientalism.

Sixty-six years after independence, India has the dubious distinction of being home to half the number of modern day slaves in the world. The first Global Slavery Index has estimated that 13.3 to 14.7 million people live like slaves in the country [...] The index, published by the Australia-based Walk Free Foundation, ranked 162 countries based on three factors that include estimated prevalence of modern slavery, a measure of child marriage and a measure of human trafficking in and out of a country [...] India has half the world's modern slaves. (N.N. March 2013).

'Nirbhaya's case was seen as a major dent to India's image in global business circles. A media report on a visit by the then Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh to Germany after the incident observed, that "India ... found itself once again in the dock on its high maternal and child mortality rates. The embarrassment happened in full view of the world press, which had assembled to hear ... the outcomes of the Indo-German Inter-Governmental Consultations" (Subramaniam 2013, emphasis mine). The report saw this as a serious 'human rights violation' as the state could be seen as complicit in 'murdering' its women and children.

I would like to draw attention to the assortment of keywords in the above news report: "Indo-German bilateral ties, Bilateral Investment and India-EU Free Trade Agreement, maternal mortality, child mortality, gender insecurity and crime against women". They indicate how closely matters of trade and commerce have been intertwined with human rights issues in the new global order. While few would have any quarrel with the extension of human rights, the problem has been that this has often been used by IIs and western states selectively.

O'Sullivan's piece in the Irish Chronicle show the same media practice of using available statistics (from UN source in this case) and select interviews with NGO personnel. In this instance it was one Paul Healy who was working as Programme Manager to a local partner INGO Trocaire run by 'National Alliance of Women in Odisha' (NAWO). What is discomforting is that the O'Sullivan's account of women in India virtually rests on this very limited source of information. This actually exemplifies what I mean by the potent
convergence of ‘instant access’ and ‘unequal ignorance’. The quotes from the report below may help make my point clear.

Baby girls and young girls are also more at risk in India than anywhere in the world, according to the United Nations. The Indian child rights organisation CRY estimates say that about 12m girls are born in India every year, however, one million of these girls die by the age of one. [...] Dowries are still engrained in Indian culture. (O’Sullivan 2013, emphasis mine)

The dismal account does not stop here as it recounts horror stories of the rampant practice of dowry without a mention of either the anti-dowry campaign that marked the second phase of the women’s movement or the whole gambit of laws that were put in place or any reference to feminist scholarship in the field.

[...] Sometimes what they do is poison her; they can kill her with weapons, throttle her or bride burning — that is common. They pour kerosene and burn her alive. ... Then with one wife killed, they can get another girl and another dowry (ibid.).

In a world of instant access one can assume that older distances, hierarchies and misrepresentations have been done away with. The quote below suggest otherwise.

[...] According to Paul Healy [...] the victim of the Delhi bus gang rape was savagely killed as she dared to go out with a boy and at 8.30 pm [...] (O’Sullivan 2013, emphasis mine).

Wall Street Journal posted an article on the website of India Realtime (whose tagline is “The daily pulse of the world’s largest democracy”) on whether it was safe for foreigners to travel in India. Stancati, the author of the piece provides a compilation of information through interviews with foreign tourists, members from Tourist Bureau as well as information gleaned from websites of different states. I present below a longish quote from the piece to highlight the sources that she uses.
[...] There are always bad things happening everywhere. What is happening here is a little bit worrying but when you are travelling, irrespective of where you are travelling, it’s important to have your wits in place,” said Ms. Beard, who is traveling with a tour group.

[...] Delhi representative of the Travel Agents Association of India, a lobby group, says that the December rape case has not affected the tourism industry in the country. “In every country of the globe, these kinds of incidents happen from time to time,” says Mr. Singh, adding that the industry is now more aware about the need to help prevent sexual crimes against tourists.

[...] director at the Delhi-based Sadhana Tours, says he hasn’t received any questions from clients on women’s safety in recent months. Still, “there are certain rules we follow [...]”.

Guide books and foreign governments have long warned women to be careful when traveling in India.

Tripadvisor, the travel website, has a whole page on tips for women traveling on their own in Delhi [...].

Foreign governments have similar travel advice for their citizens in India. “U.S. citizens, particularly women, are cautioned not to travel alone in India,” says a note from the U.S. Department of State [...].

If you are a woman traveling in India you should respect local dress codes and customs and avoid isolated areas [...] says a notice on the website of the British foreign office (Stancati 2013, emphasis mine).

Before I end, I would like to refer to one particular debate on the Age of Consent that was covered extensively both within the global and national media—old and new. I quote illustratively from this to make the point of unequal levels of ignorance. An intense public debate on the Age of Consent Bill had divided public opinion in the late 19th century. More than a hundred and a quarter years later, the central actors were different. The colonial state had long since gone. It was the Indian state that was being addressed by the women’s movement and other groups to bring in a more effective law. Stating that the Bill is a step forward for women’s rights in India, activist and lawyer Vrinda Grover said:

[...] this Bill seeks to protect our entire society from the scourge of sexual violence. This is not a bill against men; it is a Bill against criminals; it
is a Bill from which all citizens stand to gain peace of mind against the mindless violence that stalks us [...] (emphasis mine).

Farah Naqvi, women’s rights activist, went on to say that this stand is not a moral endorsement of teenage sexual activity. We must recognize that ‘criminalising as rape’ the consensual acts of young adults will make most vulnerable our young men, particularly those from marginalized communities” (RINA 2013, emphasis mine).

The government’s decision to fix the legal age for consensual sex at 18 from an earlier agreement by the Cabinet for 16 was seen by women’s organizations and feminist scholars as succumbing to pressures from conservative leaders that the move would encourage young people to experiment with sex. The police felt that the move could make it harder to secure rape convictions in cases where the victim is between 16 and 18, as she would be asked at trial to show she didn’t consent. The fault lines of Indian society were clearly in play.

Globally however this dimension did not get reflected. The caption of a report read: “India which has more child brides than any nation in the world” did not sign a United Nations initiative to end child marriage. This report had to be corrected shortly after.

Correction: an earlier version of this story and headline said that India failed to “sign” the resolution. In fact, it chose not to co-sponsor it. The story and headline have been edited to reflect this.

...Syed Akbaruddin, a spokesman for India’s foreign ministry spokesperson said that although the government was not a co-sponsor it nonetheless “supported the objectives of the resolution.” (Stuart 2013)

But for Avert, a U.K.-based charity group was quick to conclude that, “by raising the age of consent to 18, India last year became one of the most conservative countries in the world, according to data compiled by Avert, a U.K.-based charity.” The global average on the legal sex age according to it is 16.4 This same report refers to the All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA) with an organizational presence in 22 states in India, with a current membership of more than 9 million of which several state units came into existence during the ‘freedom struggle’ as a New Delhi-based ‘non-profit organization’. This may appear a trivial point to make. However it demonstrates the igno-
rancel of the history of social movements in India. For in this global discourse all movements for gender justice are seen as off shoots of efforts by well meaning global NGOs, charity groups and IIIs.

Conclusion

The questions that I raised at the start of the article were: Does greater visibility in media means greater democratization and gender justice? And did the logic of media practice and commoditization cancel out the expansive potential of democracy evident in public protest and wide-ranging debate on feminist questions after Nirbhaya.

A year and half later after ‘Nirbhayas’ death, one can say that the campaign against gender violence and rape have been sustained by the media. News reports, TV serials, blog discussions have all kept the pressure on. But violent incidents of this kind remain and seem to be growing. It is undeniable that the media was critical in drawing attention to violence against women after ‘Nirbhaya’ and making gender justice a key issue in the General Elections of 2014. But it is also true that the media is not the magic institution that would solve all problems though this is an impression that has been gaining ground.

It is only concerted action by social movements, political parties, the state and society at large that would help usher in changes that would not allow such incidents from taking place. Indeed legal changes have taken place. But it is important to recall that India is a country where historically laws have usually been far more democratic than social norms. This gap between the two reflects the fault lines of Indian society. It can be legitimately asked that despite all the movements why is sexual violence becoming a norm, or is it? We as social scientists need to answer that.

But neither the tropes of Global Indexes nor the here and now sensationalism of media logic would be able to understand the complexities involved. This, in combination with ‘unequal levels of ignorance of histories and instant access’ cannot further either critical awareness or democratic rights which in a fundamental sense is the task of media in liberal democracies. The problem gets compounded when liberal ‘global governance’ and ‘governance feminism’ redefine nation-based democracies. How do we then address what ought to be the nature of a democratic ‘global public sphere’?
Bibliography


1 This was an oft-repeated theme in global discourse but absent in the national media.

2 Kotiswaran observes that “So it is not surprising that a couple of years ago, Catharine MacKinnon after urging the Indian government to pass a law criminalizing customers of sex workers, was stumped when asked an innocuous question on what she thought about the ban on bar dancing. And lest we forget, this inequality of ignorance matters! Western feminists have access to Indian institutions in a way that Indian feminists do not. Indicative of this is the profuse thanks that the Justice Verma Committee offered to Diane Rosenfeld of Harvard Law School in their mammoth report (Kotiswaran 2013).

3 This approach has been termed ‘governance feminism’.


5 I quote “Real Time offers analysis and insights into the broad range of developments in business, markets, the economy, politics, culture, sports, and entertainment that take place every single day.

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in the world’s largest democracy. Regular posts from Wall Street Journal and Dow Jones News-wires reporters around the country provide a unique take on the main stories in the news, shed light on what else mattered and why, and give global readers a snapshot of what Indians have been talking about all week.” [INDIAREALTIME – This is a blog operating from India but with some understanding with Wall Street Journal and Dow Jones].

There are indeed more mobile phones in India than toilets. (Jagannath 2013)

Even as I put the last touches to this paper the decision has been reported in the media that ‘industrialist Mukesh Ambani’s Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) is acquiring a majority stake in Raghav Bahl’s Network18 Media and Investments and its subsidiary TV18 Broadcast through Independent Media Trust (IMT) of which RIL is a sole beneficiary. Network18 Media and TV18 control a suite of broadcasting channels like CNBC-TV 18, Viacom18 and CNN-IBN, besides a bevy of e-commerce business and digital Internet sites. (BS Reporter 2014)

It may be recalled that TRAI had organised an open house discussion with stakeholders on June 29, 2013 regarding the ratings issue and cross media ownership. “Experts divided over TRAI’s move on cross media ownership” (Hasan 2013).

Tilak Kumar, President of Indian Newspaper association (INS) pointed out that though print media continued to register growth in the country, advertising was steadily getting directed to electronic media. Recognizing that internet was fast emerging as a potent force in today’s multi-media environment, Tilak Kumar said, “Any attempt to bring in restriction on cross media ownership in India will almost certainly stop any further investments in the print media industry, which currently operates on fragile profit margins. The horizontal cross-media ownership is important to attain economies of scale.” (Kumar 2013)

This was also an election where the role of social media and new technology such as widespread use of hologram of the BJP Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi was unprecedented.

The Indian Readership Survey (IRS) is the largest continuous readership research study in the world with an annual sample size exceeding 2.56 lakh (256,000) respondents. IRS collects a comprehensive range of demographic information and provides extensive coverage of consumer and product categories, including cars, household appliances, household durables, household care and personal care products, food and beverages, finance and holidays. IRS is not restricted to survey of readership alone but is synonymous with both readership & consumption across various FMCG (Fast-Moving Consumer Goods) products throughout India. IRS covers information on over 100 product categories. IRS is conducted by MRUC (Media Research Users Council) and RSCI (Readership Studies Council of India) The two most widely read Hindi newspapers, Dainik Jagran and Dainik Bhaskar, together recorded a total of 89.8 million readers in 2008, while the most read English daily, The Times of India, had 13.3 million readers (Indian Readership Survey). There are in all 622 TV channels either already operating or planning to commence operations in India. (www.Scatmag.com, accessed January 20, 2009)

Narendra Modi, the new Prime Minister’s public speeches are either in Gujarati in his home state or Hindi elsewhere. His interviews in the English language TV channels such as Times Now were conducted in Hindi.

Rajya Sabha Television had a discussion on why we need to bring in history in media discussions which are usually obsessed with the immediate. 1st June 2014.

Almost every leading newspaper and magazine in India these days seems to think it is necessary to organize an “intellectual” event. They call these events summits, conclaves or conferences. The organizers project these events so as to appear on the side of “thought” or “ideas” as if seeking credibility and justification for their existence. But these gatherings are nowhere close to the brain storming sessions they are cracked up to be. Basically, they are huge “talking” extravaganzas in which every participant is a performer before an audience, and like any other performer, craves its approval (Krishna 2012 emphasis mine).

PhD thesis on gender for example invariably begins with the WAD, WID and GAD debate.

Inhabiting the world you study offers one what anthropologist call a woman’s eye view of your object of inquiry.

Satis a custom practiced by some dominant Hindu castes in India in which the widow was burnt to ashes on her dead husband’s pyre. The Sati Act was passed in 1829 (Chaudhuri 2011, 20–24).

Upper caste Hindu women of some regions were not allowed to marry if widowed. A campaign to
change this was launched. The Act legalizing the marriage of Hindu widows was promulgated in July 1856 (ibid).

19 Age of marriage for girls was of central concern with child marriage being common across many parts of the country. The first Age of Consent Bill was passed in 1860 (Chaudhuri 2011, 72-78).

20 Mathura, a teenage tribal girl was raped by two policemen in the police station in 1972. The legal battle began when a woman lawyer took up her case but the Supreme Court of India held that Mathura had given consent. A nation-wide anti-rape campaign demanded reopening of the Mathura Rape Case and amendments in the Rape Law. Prominent lawyers took up the issue, as did the national and regional language press (See Patel 1985).

21 The Shah Bano case (1985 SCR (3) 844) was a controversial maintenance lawsuit in India (See Sunder Rajan 2003).

22 Roop Kanwar, aged 18 immolated herself on 4th September 1987 in Rajasthan. Several thousand people attended the sati event. The event quickly produced a public outcry in urban centres. The incident led first to state level laws to prevent such incidents, till then under the central government’s Commission of sati (Prevention) Act. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roop_Kanwar.

23 See Udupa 2014 for an analysis of Aam Aadmi Party which spearheaded the anti-corruption movement as a media creation.

24 The emergence of the Aam Aadmi Party bears significant resemblance to earlier political events in recent Indian history. An Emergency was declared in 1975 by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. All democratic rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution were suspended. The large coalition of political parties that fought this and finally won the general elections in 1977 was tellingly christened Janata Party (translating to People’s Party). More recently, the anti-corruption movement initiated by Anna Hazare and led by others such as Arvind Kejriwal chose to form a political party titled Aam Aadmi, meaning literally the ‘ordinary man’ figuratively the ‘everybody’.

25 This usually comprises of various spokespersons of political parties, other veteran journalists, ‘experts’ and ‘celebrities’ from various fields.

26 These are the everyday minutiae that I referred to earlier.

27 Le Monde reported: “New Delhi roars of emotion and anger. The crowds are out in the street, candle in hand, to honour the victim or the more virulent call for hanging attackers” (Ghosh 2012).

28 Flavia Agnes welcomed the nationwide protest but hoped that “for the sake of quick and easy solutions,” the discourse “will not flatten out the complexities involved in issues concerning violence against women” (Agnes 2013, 14).


30 Acting on the recommendations of the Verma committee, the parliament passed the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013, that widened the definition of rape and also provided for death penalty in rape cases that cause death of the victim or leave her in a vegetative state. It also created several new offences such as causing grievous hurt through acid attacks, sexual harassment, use of criminal force on a woman with intent to disrobe, voyeurism and stalking.

31 The RSS is a critical element of the BJP led Indian government, which took over in May end 2014. What the RSS public position will be now is yet to be seen. It is too early to take a final call even as possible changes may be expected. RSS recently agreed to take a fresh look at homosexuality.

32 Asaram Bapu has since been arrested of charges of sexual assault.

33 “…Dalits who suffer alone when their daughters are raped and murdered with impunity are annoyed by this sudden burst of concern for rape victims” (Telumbde 2013, 10).


35 A ready example is that of a Gillette Advertisement stating that we need soldiers not for warfare but for standing up for women, has been appreciated by some and condemned by others.

36 The long running popular serial Doli Doli on child marriage had the protagonist Anandi run a campaign on sexual harassment and ways to fight it with her screen husband. Colours 17th September 2013. In 2014 we saw the same serial depict one of its central protagonists as a rape survivor.
Indian television anchors increasingly invoke the 'nation' on a daily basis. Arnab Goswami of Times Television, modeled on Fox Television lines, initiated a combative style, appropriating the voice of the nation.

Many experts participating in debates move from one TV channel to another, across Hindi and English language channels.

Katherine Mayo became notorious for her polemical book Mother India (1927), in which she attacked Hindu society and religion, and the culture of India. The book created an outrage across India, and it was burned along with her effigy. It was criticised by Mahatma Gandhi as a "report of a drain inspector sent out with the one purpose of opening and examining the drains of the country to be reported upon". The book prompted over fifty angry books and pamphlets to be published to highlight. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_India_%28book%29.

Core labour standards are inserted into an article within the WTO Agreements. If a member state violated the social clause, the breach could become subject to WTO scrutiny, through the usual WTO dispute settlement provisions. At the request of the complaining party retaliatory trade measures could be taken against the offending country.

While the orthodoxy had criticized this on grounds of religious sanction, a section of nationalists had opposed it on grounds that the British state had no business in interfering in domestic matters of Indians when they had turned a deaf ear to other pressing issues raised by Indians.

A Criminal law (amendment) Bill 2013 was passed and women's groups persisted with their campaign to ensure that the law passed by the Union cabinet was approved in parliament. (The Hindu March 17, 2013).


The All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) is an independent left oriented women's organisation committed to achieving democracy, equality and women's emancipation. AIDWA members are from all strata in society, regardless of class, caste and community. About two-thirds of the organisation's strength is derived from poor rural and urban women. AIDWA was founded in 1981 as a national level mass organisation of women. However, several state units of the organisation came into existence in the crucible of the freedom struggle, each with a commendable record of anti-imperialist and pro-working class actions. See: http://aiidwonline.org/.

Two young cousins were raped and hanged in Badum, Utter Pradesh, which once again has become a prime event on national media. Political parties, the National Commission for Women, the media has once again rallied around the case. The United Nation's has issued a condemnation. It may not be easy to ignore this terrible crime any longer as an aberration (NDTV, 2nd June 2014).