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EVERYDAY HATE ON FACEBOOK: VISUAL MISOGYNY AND THE ANTI-FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN INDIA

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Research Issue

The #metoo movement has been one of the key social movements of the past decade globally, and especially in India (Guha, 2021; Alcalde & Villa, 2022). But it has also witnessed a counter-response from the growing online 'men's rights activists' (MRA) community. This study focuses on the online presence of MRA movement in India and the practice of everyday visual misogyny on their Facebook pages. The research question driving this project is what are the visual aspects of everyday misogyny practiced amongst MRA groups on Facebook in India.

I specifically focus on the public Facebook page of Save Indian Family Movement. Such online communities fall within the 'manosphere' (Marwick & Caplan, 2018), which comprises of aggrieved men expressing their concerns about the alleged crisis in masculinity (Robinson, 2000). In the Indian context, the broader #metoo movement is perceived by many as one of the catalysts to the crisis among Indian men (Dey & Mendes, 2022). The broader aim of the paper is to highlight the visual misogyny in these pages which are largely neglected by the social media platforms in the Indian context.

Background

The MRA in India has a recent history as it emerged as a response to the changes in the Indian law related to domestic violence (Chowdhury, 2014). After years of protest and litigation work by the women's movement in the 1980s, many changes were made to address the pervasive presence of domestic violence in Indian households. The MRA emerged in the 90s as they claimed these new laws were biased against men and allegedly were abused by women to settle scores in the household. There are numerous groups within the MRA, but all have the same agenda to protect men's rights

against women. Save Indian Family movement is one of the prominent groups and is the case study for this paper.

The MRA groups have also reacted to the #metoo movement in India by further alleging that it is a continuation of abuse of laws and power that women have in Indian society

(Sastry, 2019). They claim feminism has disrupted the Indian family and the #metoo movement is a pernicious attempt to ruin Indian men. The MRA groups claim that women tell false accounts of sexual harassments to blackmail men in power or ruin their reputation. The #metoo movement has further pushed the ambit as women's rights activists are fighting towards including marital rape within the scope of law. To date, marital rape is not recognised within the Indian legal system (Sachdev, 2022). The MRA groups fear that the overall impact of the #metoo movement could lead to include marital rape within the ambit of sexual assault laws in India.

Methods

The scope of the study is solely focused on the public Facebook page of Save Indian Family (SIF) movement. The rationale for selecting this page as SIF a prominent MRA group in India and also played a huge role in amplifying #NotMyCji hashtag when Justice Chandrachud was appointed as the next Chief Justice of India (Narang, 2022). The paper focuses on visual posts like images in form of memes and distorted news clips shared on their public page with the aim of capturing visual misogyny, as the role of memes and humour in propagating misogyny has been well documented (Shifman, 2013; Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2022; Donovan et al., 2022).

The selection criteria were to collect all posts with an image, posted between 17 October 2022 and 21 January 2023. Only those images were collected which were either memes or cartoons or news clips. I focus on this timeframe to cover the three months after Justice Chandrachud--who is not seen favourably amongst the MRA community for his progressive judgements (Bose, 2022)--was appointed as the new Chief Justice of India.

81 posts were manually collected and categorised based on the schema of explicit and implicit misogyny developed by Strathern and Pfeffer (2022). The following table illustrates the sub-categories of misogyny:

Misogyny	
Explicit Misogyny	Call for Action/Violence
	Personal Insult/Denigration
	Gendered Personal Attack
	Weakness of character, intellectual inferiority
Implicit Misogyny	Cynicism/Sarcasm
	Skeptical attitude
	Imputation and Allegation
	Speculation
	Demonstration of power
	Taking Position

Considering the posts contain both text and image to form a multimodal text, I employ an iterative multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) approach, informed by the schema above, for a deeper analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Way, 2021).

Findings and Brief Discussion

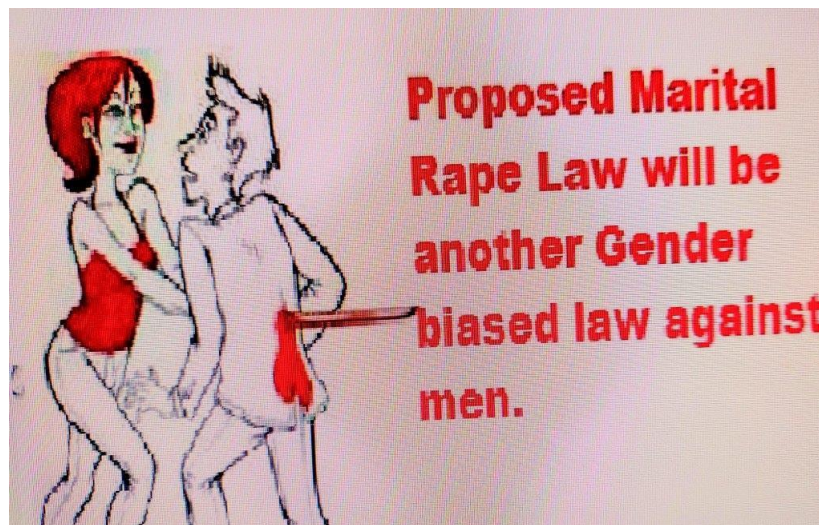
The analysis shows that majority of the posts fall within the implicit misogyny. This finding fits into the everyday misogyny rubric as the SIF Facebook page tries to subvert platform regulation by posting predominantly sarcastic or cynical posts. 68% of the posts are examples of implicit misogyny, while only 13% are explicitly misogynistic, and the rest fall within the uncategorised section.

In the explicit misogyny category, there are derogatory visuals and texts to directly attack woman as either perpetrators of violence against men, or images portraying a married wife is the tormentor of the husband. There are also visual posts attacking women's moral character through sleazy posts or memes underlying the assumption that all women 'use other men' for physical pleasures while betraying their partners/husbands/lovers. The implicit misogyny category focuses more on use of ironical ambiguity and sarcasm, which further corroborates the harmful humour framework developed by Matamoros-Fernández et al., (2022). The motifs range from structural imbalances in the law, selective focus on incidents where women have filed false cases to underline the perception that all women try to trap men, and posts focusing on the untiring strength of men as husbands or fathers, which is overshadowed by women.

Posts		
Timespan: 17 October, 2022 – 21 January, 2023		
	Sub-Categories	Number of Posts
Explicit Misogyny	Call for Action/Violence	1
	Personal Insult/Denigration	3
	Gendered Personal Attack	1
	Weakness of Character/intellectual inferiority	5
Implicit Misogyny	Cynicism/Sarcasm	26
	Skeptical attitude	6
	Imputation/Allegation	2
	Speculation	0
	Demonstration of Power	11
	Taking Position	9
Uncategorized	News Clips	8
	Others	9
Total		81

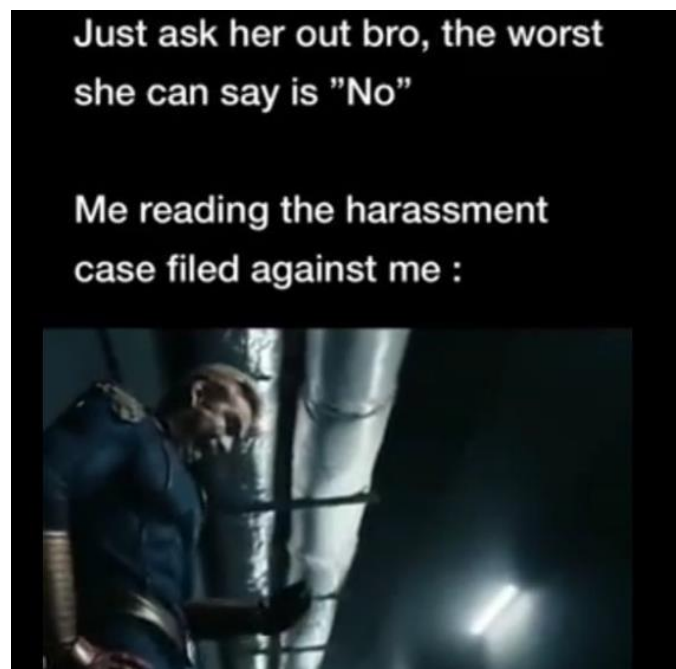
Examples of Explicit and Implicit Misogyny

To illustrate the findings here are two examples, one each from explicit and implicit misogyny. In FB1 we see a cartoon image of a woman stabbing a man with the structural sword of marital rape being criminalised. It foregrounds MRA's imagined bias against men in the Indian legal system. The post is a call for action as a number of MRA groups have already called for protests against such criminalisation of marital rape (Rampal, 2022). The image in a broader discursive environment can be perceived as a call for men to act against not only state authorities but also women supporting this legislation. The marital rape debate in India has hitherto been on the sidelines because of the provision of restitution of conjugal rights in a Hindu marriage (Vishwanath, 2021). But a spate of progressive judgements has meant the legal and social landscape is changing.



1. FB 1

FB2, though, is an example of implicit misogyny, where the MRA community imagine the dating scene in a post-metoo world. The meme is a sarcastic illustration of how MRA understands the concept of consent – or lack thereof – when it comes to women. The popular understanding of consent in India is undergoing a change in a post-metoo world as everyday stalking behaviour, normalized by Bollywood (Dhaliwal, 2015), is now replaced by a collective anxiety of men with a history of sexual transgressions ignored by the society. It is a continuing dismantling of historical inheritance of patriarchal misogyny resulting in a loss of entitlement of men in India.



2 FB 2

Conclusion and Next Steps

By focusing on everyday posting behaviour of an MRA public page on Facebook, this paper illustrates the everyday aspect of online misogyny in India, especially in a post-metoo context. The MRA community's anxieties towards amendments to laws and structural changes in the society, ushered in by years of women activism in India, has meant novel ways of posting misogynistic content online and a new impetus to band together. This research also illustrates how a revolutionary movement like #metoo can have a counter-response from the MRA community which is fuelled by the anxiety of this community and their imagined loss of manhood. The next steps in this research is do a comparative analysis of Facebook and Twitter and trace a broader anti-feminist movement on social media in India.

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