The Power of Hashtag Activism in India - A New Mode of Political Mobilization

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
	This paper analyzes the profound role of social media in the democratic landscape of India, where hashtag activism has emerged as a new form of mobilization that reflects the voices of the unheard and marginalized, thereby questioning the dominant narratives framed by our society. Beyond a sphere of online interaction, this paper deeply highlights the dynamic role of digital democracy through an in-depth understanding of various case studies that have emerged over time. Through an understanding of various case studies that have evolved, the paper also highlights how hashtag activism plays a detrimental role in the policy formulation of a diverse country like India. The understanding of various prominent campaigns such as **#MeTooIndia, #DalitLivesMatter,** and **#PinjraTod**, this paper explores how these movements were effectively used to question caste hierarchies, gender inequalities, and centralisation of institutional power. Despite its limitations of digital divide and censorship issues, hashtag activism played a very profound role in reshaping India's political discourse, thereby allowing greater awareness among civilians in our country. This paper also critically evaluates the agenda-shaping process of these political campaigns that have emerged as dominant in social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, reflecting a significant shift from a traditional process of political mobilization to the transformative age of digital campaigns. While the paper concludes that hashtag activism cannot replace conventional forms of mobilization due to various limitations, the prospects of hashtag

activism have emerged as a vital supplement in reshaping voices, thereby providing an alternative to collective action in India's evolving landscape.

Introduction

Over 8 years, hashtags have become a very effective tool of political communication advocating for a strong community engagement, which could be reflected in socio-political movements around the world. However, in the context Indian political framework, the idea of hashtag activism played a very profound role during Narendra Modi's political campaign in 2014, but over time, it has been witnessed that this technological development of hashtag activism has played a very detrimental role in shaping policies, representing communities thereby raising a larger participation in political discourse of our nation. The use of Twitter by activists raising issues of gender inequities, caste inequities, etc, has raised significant concerns over time. Hashtags such as **DalitLivesMatter** and **#PinjraTod** reflects deep structural inequalities that have been very predominant in the geographical landscape of India. The very idea of hashtag activism began in 2012 with the Nirbhaya movement, but over a while. This paper analyzes the profound role of hashtag activism in raising concerns of gender and caste inequalities in India, where three case studies have been emphasized.

MeTooIndia

#DalitLivesMatter

#PinjraTod

This paper highlights how hashtags function not only as a mere tool of conversation but it functions as a larger tool of social change. These various movements in India highlight how voices that involve women, students, and Dalits have played a pivotal role in the digital sphere, emphasizing its reach and policy formulations, allowing a better engagement in the development of digital democracy in India.

Research Questions

1) What are the major ways through which hashtag movements such as #MeToo, #DalitLivesMatter, and #PinjraTod reshaped political mobilization in India?

2) In what ways does hashtag activism allow greater online participation and interaction among various communities

3) What are the core limitations of these various hashtag movements in India?

Objective

This analysis's main objective is to trace the rise of hashtag activism as a form of political mobilization in India and how it has been effectively used to amplify marginalized voices to influence public discourse and social movements. This paper also highlights the role of digital media as a vital supplement in allowing larger political participation. It further assesses the broader role of social media platforms in raising concerns, which a certain dominant narrative can often ignore. By assessing the overall impact of hashtag activism, this paper also delves into the technical limitations of hashtag activism, focusing on how a broad social issue can be used as an effective source of miscommunication by certain stakeholders in various online platforms. But the primary objective of this paper is to highlight the role of hashtags as a new form of political engagement, which could be reflected in understandings of the narratives behind hashtags in shaping their reach, visibility, and political outcomes.

Methodology

This research involves a qualitative approach combining literature reviews and understanding of case studies, with emphasis on historical analysis, to explore the understanding of various hashtags in raising a social cause. The analysis involves a ground-root understanding of these various hashtag movements in contemporary India. The research follows a descriptive analytical design using aggregation of historical and present data to understand the purpose of these movements and how the idea of hashtag activism played a pivotal role in framing and challenging policies in India. The methodology also highlights issues of caste inequalities, gender inequalities that have played a crucial role in India's social structure. It involves a strong role of social media platforms in shaping public discourse over time, thereby allowing a larger representation under a collective umbrella to express their opinions.

Selected case studies involve

#MeTooIndia

#DalitLivesMatter

#PinjraTod

Review of Literature

The research qualitative in nature focussing on case studies, reports addressing concerns of gender based violence, caste discrimination and youth dissent focussing on literature of several notable movements evaluating the profound role of social in shaping political perception of our society along with its limitation highlighting a critique of hashtag activism in india.

A movement which has its origination roots in Europe found a very powerful voice in India around 2018. Several studies BNC Academy,2024 Economic times , 2020 have given importance in highlighting the voice of womens specially in the Entertainment and Film industry. Scholars like Gangwal 2021 and Mehra 2023 also raise the concerns of slacktivism in shaping of #MeToo movement in India arguing that the long term concerns of hashtag activism still remain questionable. While the 2012 Nirbhaya movement laid down the foundation of hashtag activism in India. Studies by Ahmed 2016 deeply analyze the emotional appeal of various tweets and posts. Later the harthas rape case 2020 brought into attention the caste based violence in which works of Khatri and Biswas 2020 deeply analysed the intersectionality of caste and gender violence in India focussing on the Dalit- led oppression in our society where Nirjana M.d thesis critically examines the idea of selective coverage also focussing that online platforms such as twitter and facebook violated certain ethical norms during the coverrage of Harthasb Rape Case illustrating the challenges of digital media. Student led dissent such as #Pinjratod challenging the so called misogynistic policies of certain universities were given in depth analysis through works by scholarly works of Kumar Sharma highlighting how young students effectively used platforms like twitter, facebook in challenging patriarchal norms embedded in our society.

While the hashtag activism has emerged as a crucial form of communication among the youth but also concerns and parallel critique of slacktivism is also extensively covered through understanding of newspaper coverages like Newslaundry 2020

Key Findings

1: The rise of hashtag activism and its history

"Several studies have established the fact that the internet and social media are more than useful tools to facilitate and mobilize offline protests. In this context, social media have been emerging as a significant tool to promote participatory behavior, organise public discussion, disseminate information, and connect new participants. Most of the mass protests are born online, virtually gathering people on social media platforms by isolated actors and organizations, and then float offline in recent times. On top of it, the added feature of Hashtag (#) in the social media site Twitter has simplified such online campaigns to streamline. It was later adopted by users to promote such a campaign on different social media sites."**(Goswami, 2018).** Although the idea of hashtag activism is considered very new to the course of academic discipline, this tool has been effectively used by citizens to bring various social and political issues to the forefront. "The earliest mention of the term 'Hashtag Activism' is found on the online International edition of the British daily newspaper, The Guardian, in September 2011, where it referred to Illustrate Occupy Wall Street protests." **(Goswami, 2018).** Since then, the symbol # has been used in order social issues, political protests, awareness programs, etc, to bring a larger social change in society. Online platforms have become a very effective way of communication in contemporary times, where the idea of hashtag activism was introduced in 2012 in India. A movement known as the Nirbhaya movement, which witnessed a large amount of public outrage on Social media platforms. Social media platforms such as Twitter played a very inspiring role in raising a voice against the government's lack of response concerning the Nirbhaya case, which took place in Delhi. This incident saw the development of hashtag activism in India, where Twitter became vee=ry common platform for the citizens to raise their common voice.. Hashtags such as #StopthisShame, #InHumaneBastards, and #Braveheart was widely used by activists to demand justice against a broader issue of women's suppression, allowing for an active participation of people under a common umbrella. This reflected a collective voice on how a country like India is unsafe for women. Tweeting reached its peak on 23 December 2012, which was the second day of major protests at India Gate. On average, 6561 tweets were posted per day, with a maximum of 15,421 on 23 December 2012," **(Ahmed et al., 2016).** The various reactions on social media reflect the various moods and emotions which are attached to this particular incident. "In India, the Nirbhaya incident in 2012 marked a turning point in how social media influenced public policy in India. While traditional media initially reported the brutal gang rape and the ensuing public outcry, it was social media that amplified the issue to an unprecedented level" **(Kumar & Nikhil Kumar Singhmar, 2025).** The various hashtags used during this discourse were trending internationally, gaining a worldwide view regarding the condition of women in India. This global reach of the hashtag eventually pressured the authorities to take stricter measures concerning women's safety. This reflects how hashtag activism can lead to policy

reforms more quickly and efficiently, where digital mobilization enables the public to raise a common voice, enabling coordinated response and larger participation. "Social media enhanced transparency by providing real-time updates on developments related to the Nirbhaya case, including legal proceedings, government responses, and public reactions. Citizens could follow and scrutinize institutional actions and responses, holding authorities accountable for handling the case."**(Kumar & Nikhil Kumar Singhmar, 2025).** "The *Nirbhaya* case is analogous to the #MeToo movement of the developed world." **(India, n.d.).** Initially a movement which sparked out in the US, but this movement soon gained global recognition as women actively came forward and shared their experiences of blackmail, sexual harassment, etc, using the # MeToo symbol, particularly on Twitter.

Figure 2. The impact of the December 2012 Nirbhaya case on reporting of rapes, and reporting of molestation and sexual harassment
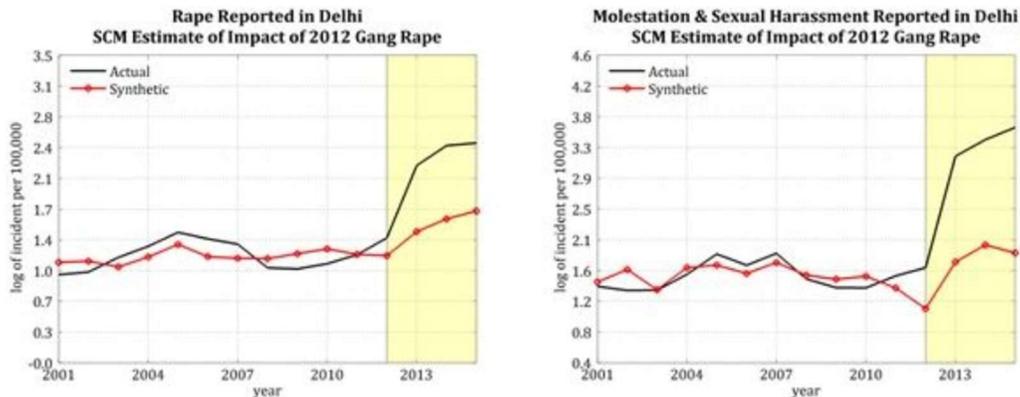
(India, n.d.)

This figure reflects the profound impact of nirbhaya case in the rise reported cases of molestation and rape of women in India. Thereby," Nirbhaya was belatedly characterised as belonging to the framework by #MeToo. In other words, Nirbhaya was seen as the prologue to "India's #MeToo" instead of as a separate product of independent, non-Western feminist voices relevant to feminist discourses in their own right. **(Mehra, 2023).** Despite the progress made after the Nirbhaya rape case but this movement laid the foundation of hashtag activism in India also stood as voice for women in #Meetoo in India because India as a nation suffers from sexual violence. The Nirbhaya movement stands as a reminder to our nation that despite legal enforcement and provisions made concerning women's safeguards, the problem of sexual harassment still serves as a social ill in our country, and the # MeToo too deals with this societal ill worldwide till contemporary times.

1.1 # MeTooIndia

The original roots of the #MeToo movement began in Hollywood during 2017, but its influences were witnessed in the Indian entertainment sector during late 2018 when an Indian actress publicly accused Nana Patekar. This movement, which was initially confined to the entertainment sector, soon gained influence in other sectors too. Inspired by a global movement, "women across the spectrum opened up and shared their stories about abuse by men in positions of power." (*2018: The Year When #MeToo Shook India - 2018: The Year of #MeToo in India*, n.d.). Meanwhile, Nana Patekar, the accused, refused to accept the allegations and was given a clean sheet by the Supreme Court. The roots of the movement in India had a widespread impact across various states and sectors. This movement sought to expose the gender based violence in India across various sectors, where platforms like Twitter and Facebook became a very effective means to discuss individuals' experience of suppression marked by institutional barriers. "One of the most significant impacts of the #MeToo movement in India was that it led to the public scrutiny of high-profile figures, including government officials, media personalities, and corporate leaders."(*2018: The Year When #MeToo Shook India - 2018: The Year of #MeToo in India*, n.d.). This movement eventually helped to break the culture of silence regarding gender based discrimination, a concept which was very prevalent in Indian society. The viral nature of the #MeToo hashtag also encouraged women to come forward with their stories, as it provided a sense of solidarity and collective power. (*The #MeToo Movement and Its Impact in India – BNC Academy*, 2024). This #MeTooIndia not only sparked high controversy, but it also exposed the various prominent figures across various sectors, including names such as

M J Akbar, RK Pachauri thereby bring larger awareness and policy reforms in India. The movement catalyzed discussions about the gaps in the legal framework concerning sexual harassment in India. (*The #MeToo Movement and Its Impact in India – BNC Academy*, 2024).

While provisions such as the POSH act, which criminalized harassment of women in the workplace, had already been enforced previously but the widespread use of #MeeToo in India led to an increase in awareness and enforcement of provisions in the POSH act where various "organizations began actively implementing the provisions of this act, forming committees, and conducting sensitization programs." (*The #MeToo Movement and Its Impact in India – BNC Academy*, 2024) where it ensured that employers a aware of their rights and duties by providing support systems such as counselling sessions for survivors of workplace harrasment. The then women and child minister Maneka Gandhi ensured to create a

committee to deal with this particular movement, which was referred to as People's Movement, and also to create a friendly working environment for women, a complaint online portal #SheBox was initiated. The introduction of #SheBox reflects a progressive effort by the Indian authorities concerned, thereby enhancing measures to ensure safer working conditions for women. With this initiative, female employees now have another channel to raise workplace sexual harassment complaints. The government will, however, need to quickly implement the requisite infrastructure and resources to manage this initiative to achieve the desired objectives. **(Gupta, 2020).** This movement also ensured active involvement of Courts to issue directions to States and other local authorities, and an Internal Complaint Committee needs to be established in both the organised and unorganised sectors. Despite the # symbol serving as a catalytic force in challenging the institutional boundaries of gender, reflecting on some long-term policy reforms, this movement highlighted certain limitations, which will be discussed in Chapter 1.2

1.2- Limitations of the # MeToo movement in India

It was widely noted that this movement was urban-centric, where opinions and experiences of educated urban women were widely viewed. One of the structural limitations of the # MeToo movement in India was that it largely ignored the rural population of our nation voices of women of marginalized caste, such as have been left out during the # MeToo movement in India. This movement was widely criticized by citizens, scholars due to its limited framework analysis. There was a lack of coverage of issues of harassment concerning women's agriculture in the informal sector, reflecting a larger technological divide between the rural and urban populations. Large cases of gender violence and sexual harassment went largely unheard. Moreover, this movement failed to create a lasting structural or legislative framework to deal with problems of gender inequality. This movement is viewed as a reactive movement rather than a sustained policy movement. It failed to create larger institutional advancement/reform because the very notion of this movement ignored the prospects of caste, religion, and socio-economic status, where limited access to justice was provided. It lacked a grassroots understanding of the problem and was confined to only a certain section that had the privileges of education, money, power, etc. Moreover, this movement faced significant backlash, with victims blaming those who share their experiences, faced severe trolling threats, etc. The responses often reflected a strongly patriarchal ideology where victims were accused of seeking attention on a social media platform. Also, people who shared their experiences via an online platform faced the prospect of legal retaliation, professional setbacks, and reputational damage. Various factors here plays a crucial role, such as factors of female behaviour, dress, authenticity, etc. Thereby, this

movement lacked a sense of gender sensitivity in the quest for justice. Overall, in conclusion, the problems of the digital divide, victim blaming highlighted a very limited structural change in the society.

But through the course of the discussion, an important point to analyze in the context of Indian politics is that the oppressions and grievances of the marginalized class and caste have always been ignored- their voices reflect a very limited intersectionality towards achieving a perfect democratic society, as India as a nation claims. It is important to note that the idea of the four-fold division of caste has played a very pivotal role in framing the cultural hegemony of our society, where people of the lower caste are often denied equal access of opportunities until 2018 where the roots #DalitLivesMatter was carried out in Kathmandu Nepal but the influence and network reach of this movement via social media was also observed in India where the main aim of this movement was to empower civic actors and dismantle caste based discrimination and untouchability. "The term 'Dalit' refers to a social group made up of diverse ethnicities that have been systematically marginalized in South Asia. Dalits are considered to be 'untouchable' in the traditional social hierarchy of the Indian subcontinent. Based on the Hindu Varna system, this hierarchy excludes many ethnic groups deemed "too impure" to merit inclusion." (**About Dalits, n.d.**) However, this global movement also played a very profound role in India throughout history.

2 #DalitLivesMatter- it's beginning in India

The #DalitLivesMatter movement emerged in 2020 as a digital response to socio-political violence faced by the Dalit community for years before independence. Drawing its inspiration from a global movement #BlackLivesMatter, which gained a large support during the 2010s. This hashtag in India was used as a response to a high rise in caste atrocities. More importantly the rise of #DalitLivesMatter was witnessed durig 2020 when a 19-year-old was brutally raped by 4 men in the district of Uttar pradesh, India. It was reported that "She was a Dalit, or a member of one of India's lowest scheduled castes. Her mother had found her two weeks earlier, lying in a millet field, "…battered and bruised, barely conscious and naked from the waist downwards." Although the victim filed multiple complaints with local police and identified her attackers, the authorities made no record of her allegations. The officers responsible for the case attempted to deny that a rape occurred at all." **(Khatri, 2020).** This event followed a brutal intersectionality of caste and gender discrimination, which continues to be a dominant theme in the Indian political and social scenario. This case made international coverage within a few weeks, but there were massive efforts from various authorities to silence the media and the audience. The Hathras gang rape could simply be an example of upper castes attempting to put Dalits in their place. However, caste alone

cannot explain the unmistakable gender dynamics at play. **(Khatri, 2020).** The power dynamics in social institutions play a very detrimental role in a country like India. Protections that do exist for Dalit rights, such as the <u>Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989</u> **(Khatri, 2020),** but over a while it has been observed that enforcement of these provisions remains weak and diluted. It has been observed that Dalit women have been victims of sexual violence in Rural India, where "in a 2006 study of 500 Dalit women in four states across India on the forms of violence they had faced, 54% had been physically assaulted; 46% had been sexually harassed; 43% had faced domestic violence; 23% had been raped; and 62% had been verbally abused.**" (Biswas, 2020).** Attempts of social transformation, such as promoting education among Dalit girls or raising a common voice under an umbrella of Dalit Feminism, have been witnessed, but their counter movements and backlashes have been brutal. In this scenario there were considerable restrictions on coverage of the news by the traditional media houses. Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram became platforms of mass awareness where the issue got attention as hashtags trended, forcing the government to respond. In Social Media platforms a dialectical sphere of argument emerged, enabling an alternative narrative from Dalit people, also allowing a space to share their collective experiences. Apart from these individuals, media organisations like *The Times of India*, *News18*, *Dainik Jagran*, *TV9 Bharatvarsh.com,* and *India.com* have also revealed the victim's identity while posting web stories on the hashtag.**(Team, 2020**). This also led to the intervention in the Supreme Court concerning the coverage of victim identity in Social media platforms **(Team, 2020**). During the judgement, the apex court also laid down that under Section 228A that offences to disclose a victim's name can lead to imprisonment of a person till 2 years. As outrage and influence of online platforms concerning the coverage grew more, it mobilized a common protest which was reflected in both online and offline platforms. Here, the caste identity of the victim played a very pivotal role in shaping the narratives of the audience. This widespread mobilization on online platforms helped in highlighting Dalit women's vulnerability and oppression in India, exemplifying the power and rise of digital mobilization in India. In line with the agenda-setting theory, social media and hashtag activism highlighted a strong public discourse in illuminating an issue that remained silent and ignored by the mainstream dominant political institutions. "It was observed that the alternate media/social media, along with the development of hashtag activism, took a more grounded, intersectional perspective of the 19-year-old's position as a Dalit woman. It was observed that the discussion spearheaded by these is focused on how the system is still vulnerable to the dictates of the caste system."**(Niranjana, n.d.).** Here in highlighting the issue of the social emergence as a crucial space for the Dalit community, thereby making this issue a global issue. "#HathrasCase trended widely, drawing attention to the victim's plight and the broader issue of violence

against women in India. Social media facilitated the rapid dissemination of information, ensuring that the incident received widespread attention and condemnation." **(Kumar & Nikhil Kumar Singhmar, 2025b).** Citizens, media, and activists used these platforms to demand justice for the victim, thereby also leading to the development of online petitions and driving public support. "Here in this issue, Social media played a crucial role in the Hathras case by amplifying public outrage and drawing widespread attention to the incident. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram were flooded with posts condemning the crime, demanding justice for the victim, and criticizing the authorities for their handling of the case." **(Kumar & Nikhil Kumar Singhmar, 2025b)**. Thereby pressurising authorities to respond and implement quicker policy reform shortly. This case study illustrates the role of social media and hashtag activism as a very crucial source for mobilizing public reaction, thereby allowing a common platform for everyone to raise various issues of National importance, allowing more active participation of Citizen participation in the larger policy-making process.

2.2 Limitations of #DalitLivesMatter

It failed to address the legal question of Dalit atrocities and violence in the context of India's political scenario, highlighting its temporary fragility. Although this movement gained widespread popularity on social media platforms, eventually, over time, the momentum shifted, reflecting only a temporary visibility. The long-term issues of Dalit rights and caste based violence remain a major issue in the context of India, leading to a very minimal impact on the understanding of the grassroots problems of caste and class hierarchy in indian society. Although a large number of online outrages eas seen in this context, it could hold authorities accountable, as in due course of time, the CBI took over the issue, which did not lead to symbolic structural change when it comes to dealing with Caste-Based sexual violence. Many claimed the eventual rise of hashtag activism in context of Hathras rape case eventually led this movement as a temporary online struggle.

Also, one of the crucial limitations of this movement was the imposition of censorship, where it was observed that a large number of online activists were detained, and also a large number of Media outlets were fined. Social Media posts from organisations like the Dalit rights group were occasionally removed or suppressed through technological algorithms. The state actively used its instruments to monitor and suppress the voices of the marginalized through online platforms. Also this movement lacked a structural engagement as it struggle to bring a later justice to the victims and dalit community also leading to a larger judicial outrage as a larger number of hashtag involve the victim's name as "the 2018 A bench of justices

Madan B Lokur and Deepak Gupta directed WKDW Qo person can print or publish in print, electronic, social media, etc. the name of the victim or even in a remote manner disclose any facts which can lead to the victim being identified and which should make her identity known to the public at large," Thus it is illegal to publish her name both on Twitter and on news reports. Multiple reports in OpIndia even mention the victim's and father's names directly, which may also lead to disclosing her identity." **(Niranjana, n.d.-b).** Over time, it has been observed that the hashtag activism in India has not confined itself to the issue of race, gender, but also, over time, it has been observed that the platform of social media is used effectively in raising concerns about student issues where platforms like Twitter, Instagram has emerged as a common platform to raise a unified common voice. One such movement that reflects the common voices of the students was the #PinjraTod, a collective movement that was carried by students of Delhi University and alumni of various colleges under Delhi University. This case reflects the use of # as an important tool of political mobilization, but also, more importantly, interrelating the concept of gender and student politics in a larger societal cause opposing the larger sexiest policies of the institution.

#PinjraTod

The year was 2015 when Jamia Millia Islamia, one of the premier institutions of India, imposed an early curfew in women's hostels, whereas male hostels had no such restrictions. When the authorities were questioned, they argued that the very rationale behind this rule was to protect the female students. Apart from that, they were subject to additional surveillance where questions were raised on their clothing, preferences, and they were also not allowed overnight leave without parents' permission. These norms within an institution highlighted a larger unequal gender space, reflecting a strong patriarchal notion of Indian society. In the name of safety, it had rather imposed restrictions on women's freedom, highlighting women as a vulnerable class incapable of governing themselves. This movement was welcomed by large alliances, which were confined only to students of Jamia Millia Islamia. "The campaign, which began in early August, comprises women from DU, Jamia Millia Islamia, Ambedkar University, National Law University, and Jawaharlal Nehru University. **(Sharma, 2015)** Who used Facebook as a common platform to reflect their personal experiences with guards, wardens, principals, etc. The main idea of this movement was to ensure that a certain idea of freedom, one of the core ideologies of our constitution, should be confined to only one gender. It involved the active participation of DCW (Delhi Commission of Women), which issued a notice that universities should provide more reasons behind such a notice. "Soon Pinjra Tod movement spread to other universities across the country, in places like Patiala, Thiruvananthapuram, Raipur, Cuttack, Chennai, Aligarh, etc., drawing more support. Many Students joined the movement, and

soon it metamorphosed into a common platform for vindication of the rights of women, where they could share their experiences and plight." **(Lepcha et al., 2019).** This movement initially began with only a handful of students participating in it, but later it offered a wider national appeal to the masses, and one of the distinctive features of this movement was the active use of social media, where all women of various regions demanded equality and here #PinjraTod emerged "as a symbol, standing against institutional patriarchy"**(Lepcha et al., 2019).** The movement over a short period gained widespread attention, most importantly among the student community of India. "The cages of protectionism, which promise safety at the cost of liberty, stunt the capacities of women and prevent them from fighting their own battles. These are the cages the women of Pinjratod want to break free from; the social attitudes caged by sexism, they want to destroy. The movement also comes hot on the heels of protests by students of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune, and Jadavpur University, Kolkata, making a statement, in solidarity with them, in favour of resistance and opposition as legitimate forms of democratic life. **(Kumar, 2015).** This movement, which is viewed as political in its form, questions the idea of space. And on 8 October, a women's association comprising more than 150 women across various campuses in Delhi decides to go for a march reflecting the broader ideological framework of this movement. "The march was a statement: that locking up the women, blaming the victim, for the crimes perpetrated on them, is no way of making the city safe." (**Kumar, 2015).** In this context of digital technology, hashtag activism highlights a very important form of digital campaigning emerging as an effective way to amplify a common voice. In #PinjraTod, there lies a very important power of collectively highlighting common issues, pressuring institutions to respond. This movement, reflecting the important use of hashtags, is viewed as significant because it reflected upon societal assumptions about female safety and the female body, questioning the perspectives of society in the context of India's political and social scenario. "Common experience and study reports have proven that more incidents of assault on women take place inside the perceived „safe zones", by familiar/known persons. The „Pinjra Tod' movement insisted upon the need to sincerely and urgently reconsider the state of women in society and questioned the regressive social psyche.**(Lepcha et al., 2019)**". This movement, which initially began as a mere form of resistance against hostel policies, later questioned the patriarchal framework of India, where the active role # reflects a wider appeal of the people beyond students of Delhi and beyond a framework that questioned the politics of space. With the active rise of digital media platforms in contemporary times, "social media has gained greater

relevance, and women's unique positioning in the Indian social environment makes it perilous for her to raise her voice against authority in public platforms without the support of a powerful institutional framework. Women's presence in social media as activists, as individuals with a distinct sensibility and identity of their own, is an inspiring trend. Even though it is restricted primarily in urban India and the hurdles in the form of online stalking and abuse of various kinds are ever present, Women have emerged as cautious yet conscious online presence who will soon build itself into a force to be reckoned with" **(Gopinath, 2017)**

The hashtag movement in contemporary India and its limitations

"The expansive reach of social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram has created an ever-breathing space for an exchange of opinions and information, and active mobilisation for socio-political protest movements, thrusting life and voice into the fence-sitters who choose not to associate with these movements actively and physically."**(Riya Gangwal & Riya Gangwal, 2021).** The rise of digital networks and the space they provide ensures that voices never die out, and here, the rise of hashtag activism plays a pivotal role in shaping voices. Social media in context, if hashtag activism has played a very pivotal role in shaping voices, one must not forget that the privilege of these voices is confined to only a certain section of our society. In this, it deeply discusses that movements like #MeeTooIndia, #DalitLivesMatter, and #PinjraTod, a very large section of the population from industrial workers to agricultural labourers who face prospects of harassment in their everyday life, could not reflect on a common platform concerning their experiences because they barely had any digital access. It focuses on selective coverage rather than understanding the core elements of a societal ill. Also, one of the important critiques of hashtag activism is that these movements are often short-lived in nature. "Outrage lasts only as long as the issue is trending. Real activism requires sustained efforts, legal reforms, and continuous pressure on authorities, not just viral outrage." **(Mohd Naushad, 2025).** More importantly, to get the masses involved in driving towards a social change, bridging the gap between social media and mainstream media plays a very pivotal role, but over time, this has failed to evolve in context to India's political and social scenario, where movements like #DalitLivesMatter barely gets any mainstream coverage. It has been highlighted that hashtag activism plays a very pivotal role in connecting people for a cause, but in a country like India marked by various factors like caste, class divisions this fight for cause is only confined to certain people who have the social, political,economic influence in our society whereas grondroot reality is often ignored. The rise of hashtag activism lacks an organizational structure. This lack of organizational structure often also decreases the accountability of the protester involved during a

particular course. Also, the success of the movement lies in assessing the measures taken by a particular action in achieving social justice in society. Movements like #DalitLivesMatter and #PinjraTod failed to create certain long-term societal change in India, as the country still deals with problems of caste, gender discrimination, whereas these movements were unable to enforce policies that would deal with long-term challenges of caste, class, and gender discrimination. Throughout history, hashtag activism has often been referred to as slacktivism because of its ease, allowing participants to participate in a larger decision-making process. "Many argue that it fosters a culture of slacktivism, where individuals engage in token gestures of support without committing to meaningful change. Critics contend that while emotionally satisfying, clicking a hashtag often replaces tangible actions, such as volunteering, donating, or engaging in meaningful dialogue." (*Hashtag Activism: Real Change or Slacktivism?*, 2025). There have been widespread debates about whether the rise of online activism is eroding the traditional practices of activism, where this whole debate lies in the effectiveness of a political or social cause through hashtags. It has raised concerns that hashtag activism in the context of India has temporal visibility, also raising concerns over emotionally charged or sensitive content over various issues. In the context of India's political scenario, slacktivism has a very prominent concept among the people, where people often use hashtags, post for one's branding rather than a genuine societal issue, where one truly feels that this digital engagement is a substitute for civic action. The rise of digital activism, which allows active participation, has also left behind a very critical question of whether it dilutes in fostering of a sustainable social change. This rise of hashtag activism has also seen the rise of censorship culture in India and countries around the world, where misinformation can also be easily attached to a larger social movement, illustrating the digital vulnerabilities of the hashtag movement in India. "This new form of clash, which occurred entirely online, opened up new ways for scholars to think about activism, interaction between opposing groups, and the ways that social media platforms are changing communicative norms, but also creating vulnerabilities." (Hahn, 2024)

Conclusion

This paper highlights the rise of hashtag activism in the context of India, along with its limitations, but most importantly, reflecting on a pragmatic shift in the landscape by creating a larger political consciousness among people. Issues of caste, class, and gender have been given more importance in the course of the discussion, highlighting how these social issues of a society have been given a spotlight under the rise of digital media. Allowing a platform for marginalized voices to challenge dominant narratives of our country. It emphasizes the powerful instrument of social media in our evolving society.

Thus, it must be noted that hashtag activism in India has completely replaced the traditional notion of resistance because of its short-term tendencies, rural-urban divide, however over a while it has been observed that the rise of hashtag activism in India has refined the course of our society allowing a larger voice in decision making proces thereby allowing a larger network solidarity. Yet this evolving form of activism has its share of limitations, but over time this rise of hashtag activism has played a very pivotal role in reshaping democratic practices,thereby providing an alternative space of political communication.

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