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## **Framing Gendered Atrocities: A Critical Discourse Analysis of International Media Coverage of the Manipur Sexual Violence**

**Swapan Kumar Roy\*** (Ph.D. Scholar, DMCJ, BBAU)

**Prof. Gopal Singh** (Professor, DMCJ, BBAU)

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### **ABSTRACT**

This academic article outlines an exhaustive critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the diverse and multifaceted coverages released by four global media giants concerning the disturbing incidents of sexual abuses that took place in the Manipuri on May 4th which later escalated to prominent levels of attention when a video of the incidents surfaced on July 19, 2023. These leading media outlets come from four different countries on three different continents, showcasing an array of global viewpoints. The study is founded upon the strong theoretical base of Fairclough's three-dimensional model (1995) and van Dijk's perceptive socio-cognitive approach (1998), which together provides a profound look into how major world media agencies—the BBC, CNN, DW, and Al Jazeera—framed the tragic incident. The reading scrupulously explores the complex ways in which language, voice, agency, and ideological framing shaped representations of the victims, the perpetrators, and the various institutions engaged. The results of this analysis indicate that the popular news outlets, overall, favored a liberal feminist frame that emphasized the emotional and, yet, lacked engaging in deeper elements of structural and political critique that might offer a more comprehensive view of the forces that are at work.

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**Introduction:**

In July 2023, a disturbing video emerged from Manipur, India, showing two women from the Kuki tribal community being stripped and paraded naked by a mob. The video circulated widely online and triggered national and international outrage. The event occurred against the backdrop of ongoing ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities. International media gave considerable attention to the incident, often emphasizing its brutality and the delayed response of authorities. Despite the brutality of the incident, it remained largely absent from national discourse for over two months until a viral video emerged on social media on July 19, triggering widespread condemnation. This delay reflects a long-established pattern of media centralism, in which Indian mainstream media have historically marginalized the Northeast and rendered its populations symbolically peripheral (Baruah, 2020; McDuierra, 2012). Scholarly critiques of Indian media's uneven geographies of coverage (Chakravartty & Roy, 2013; Udupa, 2015) illustrate how editorial priorities are shaped by ideological nationalism and proximity to state power, rather than democratic responsiveness to regional crises.

The Manipur case, therefore, indicates a structural deficiency in Indian journalism, whereby normative values of democratic media—objectivity, inclusiveness, and watchdog role—are constantly being traded for market values, political patronage, and cultural ascendancy (Jeffrey, 2000; Thussu, 2007). The assault on Kuki women was not simply a failure in law-and-order, but a signal of broader failures in journalistic ethics and representational equity. When national outlets such as Times of India, NDTV, and Zee News eventually covered the Manipur violence, their narratives adopted episodic or event-driven frames, focusing on the shock value of the video rather than interrogating the gendered, ethnic, and political dimensions of the violence (Thounaojam, 2023; Dutta, 2023). In stark contrast, regional media outlets such as Imphal Free Press, The Sangai Express, and ISCom TV documented the violence consistently, despite the constraints of digital blackouts and direct threats to journalistic safety (Kipgen, 2023). These platforms, though under-resourced, exercised journalistic resistance from the margins, playing a critical role in constructing a counter-public discourse centered on local suffering and indigenous testimony (Fraser, 1990; Pao, 2023).

***<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0606-6486>***

Such grassroots reporting complicates dominant narratives of 'media silence' by highlighting the existence of peripheral voices that resist erasure, even under precarious conditions. The regional press thus becomes a crucial site of epistemological agency, challenging the homogenizing gaze of national media and asserting the specificity of local histories, cultures, and traumas.



Their early coverage documented that gendered atrocities themselves were no anomaly, but fit within a broader pattern of systematic ethnic targeting, mirroring the work of scholars discussing gendered violence within communal conflict (Menon & Bhasin, 1998; Butalia, 2002). This pattern echoes historical continuities of gender-based violence as a tactic of domination in ethnic and communal conflicts in India—from the Partition to Gujarat 2002—where women's bodies are rendered battlegrounds for expressing ethnic hatred, political assertion, and collective punishment (Pandey, 2001; Sarkar, 2002). In Manipur, this tactic took on added dimensions of settler colonialism and racialized violence, further marginalizing tribal communities from both the state and public discourse.

The international media coverage of this had also been far more critical, contextual, and rights-oriented with the BBC, CNN, The Guardian, The New York Times, DW, Al Jazeera, France 24, intervening. These outlets constructed the violence as symptomatic of democratic erosion, institutional indifference, and the culture of impunity surrounding sexual violence in India (Ellis-Petersen, 2023; Masih, 2023; Schmall & Kumar, 2023). This framing echoes trends identified by Cottle (2009) that global journalism today acts as a moral witness of crises in the Global South, shaping global public opinion and diplomatic pressure.

The response of the Indian government was also explicitly condemned by The Guardian, which underscored the impropriety being a state that fails to preserve constitutional protections for minorities and women (Ellis-Petersen, 2023). The New York Times and The Washington Post similarly linked the incident to larger fears of Hindu majoritarianism, state indifference, and democratic illiberalism, repeating concerns articulated in political science scholarship about the rise of authoritarianism in present-day India (Chatterjee 2020; Jaffrelot 2021). The Wall Street Journal, Reuters, Sky News and Associated Press took a less incendiary and more news-driven approach, although it lent to fanning the flames of global outrage and spreading visibility via syndication. These global narratives cast Manipur not as a local ethnic impairment, but as a symbolic gangrene on the body of India's highly feted secular democratic project.

In projecting the crisis to the international space, the international media reconfigured conditions for visibility and accountability. This external witnessing not only returned symbolic dignity to the survivors, but created diplomatic pressure and an activation of civil society. This is the kind of coverage that illustrates how once in a while transnational media can work as a discursive remedy and a source of pressure for domestic media in situations where the latter seems to have gone into autopilot mode.



The variegated responses within media layers—regional urgency, national lag, and global condemnation—reveal how news value is differentially manufactured through the filters of ideology, geopolitics, and the spectacle principle (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Tuchman, 1978). Here, women’s bodies violated are rendered hyper-visible only when they are framed and travelled to through digital virality or Western moral approbation, highlighting the global politics of recognition and silence (Spivak, 1988). As will be seen, the Manipur incident is not just a matter of humanitarian concern, but also as a site of discursive contestation which brings out the exclusions within national media infrastructures as well as in global human rights journalism. Finally, this case speaks to the urgency of critical, feminist and decolonial media scholarship that values subaltern voices, resists epistemic erasure and calls for structural accountability in reporting on gendered violence.

The analysis of international media discourse within the Indian subcontinent recently has become not only relevant but a necessity in cases where human rights abuses, gendered violence or ethno-political conflict is at stake of the kind that is also illustrated by the 2023 Manipur case. Where domestic media may follow house-style nationalisms, this narrative might be shaped by editorial censorship or market-savvy sensationalism (Udupa, 2015; Chakravartty & Roy, 2013; 82) international media often prefers such a human rights-based framework that may provide critical distance from domestic political pressures. In the Manipur case, the involvement of media outlets such as The Guardian, The New York Times, BBC and Al Jazeera lent force to the voices of the silenced or sidelined victims who India’s mainstream media had disregarded. This global attention reconfigured the ‘local’ scandal as not simply an issue of regional law-and-order breakdown, but as a symbolic crisis of Indian democracy along the lines of wider global norms of minority advocacy, gender justice, and state responsibility (Fraser, 2007; Cottle, 2009).

In addition, international reporting itself can be a counter-public sphere through which subaltern suffering is expressed and legitimated, particularly when national discourses are silent, complicit, or exclusionary (Spivak 1988). Studying this global media discourse can help scholars and policymakers understand how India’s internal crises are transformed, framed, and contested on the world stage, and how these narratives then affect local activism, judicial pressure, and state response. It also emphasizes the geopolitics of media attention—who-gets-to-report, whose suffering becomes visible, whose stories are amplified—and in doing so prompts questions about issues of epistemic injustice and representational justice in the global mediascape (Couldry, 2006; Moyo, 2020).



## *Methodology*

For the purpose of the current study, a critical-qualitative investigation based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been used to expose how leading international media houses framed the July 2023 sexual violence that occurred in Manipur state of India. Thereby, the focus lies on how discourse practices in global journalism contribute to perception making and stereotyping of gendered and ethno-political violence in postcolonial settings, in which subaltern communities are subjected to a systematical othering.

The analysis adopts Norman Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional CDA model to enable a multi-layered examination of media discourse in terms of:

- a. Textual Analysis: Analyzing linguistic, stylistic, and rhetorical features of news stories;
- b. Discursive Practice: the examination of the processes of production, circulation and consumption of media texts in institutional context;
- c. Social Practice: Situating the discourse in larger ideological, cultural, and sociopolitical systems: Gender hierarchies, ethnonationalism and postcolonial statecraft.

This framework is extended by Teun A. van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive approach that relates discursive structures to social cognition, mental models and ideological representations. It allows for an investigation of how international media construct and perpetuate public knowledge and power by selectively representing actors, causes and effects. Taken together, these frameworks enable a critical dissection of how meaning is constructed, silences are maintained, as well as agency is performed in narratives of gendered violence.

### *A. Sampling and Data Selection*

For this study, sample were purposely gathered and used from the freely accessible online platforms of four renowned international media outlets: BBC News, CNN, Deutsche Welle (DW), and Al Jazeera. These outlets were selected because of their international spread, influence in shaping global debate on issues of gender-based and communal violence, and their established editorial domination over global news discourses. This study included a total of eight (8) articles and two (2) of each outlets published July 20–21, 2023, close on the heels of the virally circulated video post the Manipur sexual violence case.



- **BBC News (UK)**
  - *India outrage over sexual assault video filmed in Manipur* – 2023-07-20
  - *Manipur: Women paraded naked, spark national outrage* – 2023-07-20
- **CNN (USA)**
  - *India grapples with outrage over Manipur assault video* – 2023-07-20
  - *Video showing sexual assault sparks protests in India (CNN Video)* – 2023-07-21
- **Deutsche Welle (Germany)**
  - *India's Modi says Manipur violence 'can never be forgiven'* – 2023-07-20
  - *India: Mob burns suspects' house over naked women video* – 2023-07-21
- **Al Jazeera (Qatar)**
  - *Outrage in India over video of Manipur women paraded naked, raped* – 2023-07-20
  - *What is happening in India's Manipur?* – 2023-07-21

We chose two articles from each source according to the following criteria:

- Application to the Manipur incident;
- In-depth coverage (beyond just the headlines and briefs);
- Editorial framing related to rights, politics and sociocultural.

Articles were retrieved through the official websites using Boolean operators and advanced search features with terms individual such as, 'Manipur sexual violence', 'Kuki women', "or 'tribal assault video'. This purposive sampling design gives an opportunity for a detailed comparative analysis of elite global media discourse at the manageable level of depth for analysis.

#### *B. Analytical Technique and Coding Scheme*

The research adopted a manual, iterative coding technique of CDA tool and framing analysis, with a mix of inductive and deductive methods. Coding occurred in MS Word for open-text annotating and in Excel for thematic matrixing and cross-outlet comparison.



The theoretical framework was based on Entman's (1993) definition of framing, which consists of four main functions- defining the problem, assigning responsibility and blame, promoting a moral judgment, and suggesting a solution-all of which, in turn, were traced through the analysed articles.

The framework adopted into the coding of data referred to the following discourse:

- *Lexical Choices*: Focus was on the denotative and connotative meanings of certain words and expressions for victims, perpetrators, state actors, and events. This entailed singling out emotionally loaded or ideologically loaded words (for example, 'mob,' 'tribal,' 'horror,' 'India's shame').
- *Voice and Agency Attribution*: Based on the research, it analyzed grammar structures that could not only indicate agency (i.e., explicit or implicit) in the sentence ("the mob attacked the women / the women were attacked"), but also hide it. This study provided an evaluation of the blame assignment and moral clarity (or lack thereof).
- *Metaphorical Language and Symbolism*: The use of metaphors and symbolic framings – universalising, localising, and politicising the event (e.g., "national disgrace", "tipping point", "democracy's failure").
- *Sources and Quotation Patterns*: The study measured which voices were quoted or silenced - victims/survivors, local officials, international human rights organisations, national authorities, or anonymous sources. This was an important factor around the analysis of Representational Inclusiveness.
- *Portrayals of Victimhood and Resistance*: We assessed whether women were framed as passive victims, cultural icons or active agents seeking justice. This also involved a sentiment and narrative tone analysis.
- *Ideological Markers and Editorial Framing*: The project followed the way in which each outlet added deeper ideological layer or categories like human rights, nationalism, democracy, gender justice etc in the reporting.
- *Intertextual References*: Articles that refer to past incidents (such as the 2012 Delhi gang rape, or Kashmir, Bosnia, or Rwanda) were coded to analyze how the Manipur incident was framed within global or historical discursive templates.



### *C. Theoretical Orientation*

The analysis was underpinned by intersectional feminist theory (Crenshaw, 1991; Mohanty, 2003) and postcolonial media theory (Spivak, 1988; Muppidi, 2012) which bring to the fore how media representations are entangled within intersecting apparatuses of subjugation—such as gender, ethnicity, caste, location, as well as coloniality.

This perspective allowed analysis of how international journalism may serve to unveil injustice and underpin epistemic hierarchies, depending on which voices are lifted, which contexts are cut and which moral framings are offered. The study employed CDA also to investigate not only the manifest language of the texts, but also the hidden ideological and epistemological structures which make certain narratives possible and others silenced within the global media economy.

### *D. Validity, Reflexivity, and Limitations*

In order to improve methodological integrity, themes saturation and cross-case rigour were confirmed by means of iterative coding and memoing. Coding categories were regularly clarified by comparing between texts and sources. The latter was achieved through critically reflexive positioning, reflecting on positionality and, in this case, the dangers of reading texts produced in multiple media cultures through the blinders of a single academic discipline.

Limitations of the study include:

- A small sample size is inevitable because the required qualitative depth;
- Emphasis on English-language articles (at the cost of losing valuable perspectives from the international media in regional languages);
- No analysis of how these representations were received by global publics.

### *Finding and Discussion:*

This chapter presents a critical synthesis of the discursive formations observed across the corpus of international news reportage of the July 2023 case on sexual violence in Manipur. Based on analyses of eight articles published by four leading international news agencies namely BBC, CNN, Deutsche Welle (DW) and Al Jazeera, the study deploys Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in combination with van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive model. It allows for a dissection of the lexical, grammatical, metaphorical, and intertextual resources that structure meaning,



assign blame, and disseminate ideology. The examination demonstrates the ways in which global media organisations discursively produce gendered and ethno-political forms of violence as comprehensible crises for international publics, often using affectively loaded, depoliticised and institutionally aligned narratives. The findings are discussed in relation to four interlocking analytical dimensions.

## 1. Textual Fabrication Lexicon, Voice, and Metaphor in the Language of Terrorism

### *Lexicographic Challenges and the Affective Politics of Spectacle*

That's apparent from the linguistic choices across all four outlets, which are thick with affectively laden and morally laden terms such as “paraded naked,” “horrific,” “brutal,” “mob” and “viral video.” These linguistic elements prompt the reader to a guttural reaction and emphasize the affective spectacle of the event. Nevertheless, as van Dijk (1998) points out, these lexicalizations are not neutral; they do ideological work in that they construct certain social cognitive representations while marginalizing others.

Critically, the repeated noun “mob” operates discursively in two ways: moving the violence further up the sensational scale and at the same time de-individualising those responsible. This anonymization displaces ethnic specificity (and with it the participation of Meitei actors), hiding the ethnonational context in which the attack is embedded. In news providers like BBC and CNN, this linguistic circumvention accords with both journalistic risk-aversion and global liberal editorial norms that privilege non-partisan neutrality over contextual exactitude. DW employs a more moralistic vocabulary, including such words as “shameful,” “deeply concerning” and “can never be forgiven,” which serve to describe the incident as an ethical anomaly, not a system that is broken

Al Jazeera diverges slightly with the use of context-driven terms such as “ethnic riots,” “reservation tensions” and “Meitei–Kuki conflict,” situating the violence within a wider history of marginalisation and colonial modernity. Still, the emotive lexicon in all of them constitutes part of a broader discursive regime in which trauma investment is the new primary material of global journalism formulated for transnational moral purchase.

### *1.2 Grammatical Voice and the Politics of Responsibility*

The ideological work of grammar—the active-vs.-passive contrast in particular—emerges quite clearly in the corpus at hand. Acts of violence are reported almost exclusively in the passive tense across media platforms, while state and institutional responses are presented in the active tense. This syntax asymmetry



performs a discursive tactic of separating agents from actions of harm-doing and repudiating the authority of the state institutions as moral beings.

Terms such as they were “paraded naked” and “were sexually assaulted” (BBC), or “women were paraded naked” (CNN), place an extraordinary emphasis on victimization while systematically effacing the agency of the perpetrators. The perpetrators go unnamed, or are lumped together as some undifferentiated “mob. By sharp contrast, state interventions narrated in assertive active constructions: ‘Modi condemned the attack,’ ‘Police arrested suspects,’ ‘The Supreme Court took cognizance. These formulations reposition the state as a reactive, good authority, re-legitimizing institutions that were previously in question over inaction or default.”

Even Deutsche Welle (DW), which adds some syntactic flavour (e.g. “the crowd set fire to the suspect’s home,” “women threw stones”), comes up short by not naming and shaming the institutions or pulling back the curtain on the structure of rule. Al Jazeera, too, reinforces this dichotomy, using passive constructions (“women were raped”) to describe the violence, but employing the active voice (“Police made arrests,” “PM Modi said”) to restore institutional agency.

This is a grammatical pattern that might be described as discursive absolution. Textually disentangling violence from accountability and cramming responses into legitimacy, media coverage makes state actors look remedial as opposed to complicit, prioritizing performative justice over the reform that is required.

### 1.3 *Metaphorical Framing: The Emotional Spectacle & Structural Obfuscation*

Metaphorical language is key in making sense of complex systemic violence in more emotionally compelling ways. Yet these metaphors, albeit cognitively available, tend to be highly reductionist with respect to causation. All four outlets use metaphors of combustion, eruption, and transformation to characterize the violence in Manipur, portraying it as sudden, reactive, and emotionally volatile, rather than as historically embedded or structurally produced.

The BBC employs a metaphor of “trauma to courage”, which represents challenges experienced by survivors as steps on a personal journey, of surviving and growing, related to dominant liberal feminist ways of making sense as long as it doesn’t challenge institutional power. The words like “violence-hit” “strife-torn” have characterised Manipur in one stroke as a volatile which re-enforces orientalist views of India’s North East. The action is framed as having “sparked outrage” (an attempt to point to the act of becoming visible, rather than making the public angry) in lieu of the more appropriate,



but [unsaid] action of bringing about justice, having consequences for the aggressor. CNN fuels these themes with one-line carry by phrases such as "violence erupts," "outrage spreads," and "ethnic flashpoint." Said metaphors depict violence as an eruption—an emotional act of nature which could not have been prevented—making political leaders and state institutions blameless. DW's focus is on moral rupture as can be observed in metaphors like "breaking the silence" and "can never be forgiven," and its full of that dramatic effect and emotional weight that tilts toward drama rather than the systemic. Al Jazeera (which, to be fair, has had more skeptical coverage): "Triggered by outrage," and "clashes erupted," an image of violence as angry, emotional, and reactive, instead of as a matter of failed governance or possible inter-ethnic conflict.

Taken together, these metaphors create an emotional story of violence that incites sympathy and alarm, while evading the causes that lay beneath. Violence is placed under the theatrical spotlight, and its deeper sources are hidden from sight. The overall effect is of a discourse that waves a sympathetic moral flag without engaging fully with political realities, encouraging audiences to feel but not necessarily understand.

## **2. Discursive Practice: Recontextualization, Voices Hierarchies, and Narrative Authorship**

### *Quotation Patterns and Epistemic Marginalization*

The choice and denuded reuse of quoted materials further sustains hierarchies of epistemic entitlement. Both the BBC and CNN emphasised the voices of the institutions like the government, judiciary and international agencies, yet they sidelined survivor testimony and grassroots activists. Even when survivor voices are incorporated, they are generally reported in anonymous or indirect ways that remove them from discursive authorship.

This filtering mechanism accords with van Dijk's (2008) claim that access to discourse is a function of institutional power. Survivors are reduced to things that are told about, not tellers; their testimony is always filtered, penned in by juridical or technocratic accounts. Although DW and Al Jazeera are more discursively inclusive to community-agency actors and protest voices, the asymmetry remains: speech of the sub-electric is being translated through elite frames, mirroring broader journalistic norms around credibility, professionalism and audience expectation.

### *Agency Representation: Discursive Sanitization and the Neutralization of Culpability*



In the global reporting of the Manipur sexual violence case, the making of agency— who is figured as an agent, experiencer, imploder, or institutionally enabled— shows up in a generally vectored discursive imbalance. Throughout the BBC, CNN, DW and Al Jazeera, survivor agency is largely represented in post-facto, mediated, and limited terms, state actors are positioned as reactive, moral arbiters, and perpetrators are de-individuated and de-personalised. The BBC reports on the limited re-active agency of survivors by using phrases such as “speaking out” and “reporting”, associations that suggest resilience and recovery. Inside the event, however, victims are linguistically rendered as passive receivers of violence, while the perpetrators are only labelled as a “mob” without an ethnic or political appendage. This abstraction spreads responsibility thin and obscures the communal and structural nature of the attack.

CNN in the same way represents victims as virtually silent during the actual violence, with virilization only through mediated outrage and symbolical protest. Yeah, the protesters are pretty demonstrably active, but the government is not; the government is both sort of lethargic - that would be the dominant image here, is they're sluggish - and they also just exist in a created vacuum of time. Prime Minister Modi and the judiciary are thus cast by DW as the main agencies acting to crises under public observation. While the project does sensationally emphasize women’s protests as an expression of collective agency, albeit fleetingly challenging the simple subject-object dichotomization of the female, it continues to use vague language such as “suspects.” Also, it presents the police as advisory not coercive in nature, which tames the image of state force.

Al Jazeera is comparatively more sensitive to the structural and historical context, mentioning ethnic groups such as the Meitei and the Kuki. However, the stories of survivors cannot be direct and they are filtered through intermediaries of family and community, and the identities of perpetrators are converted into types. Institutional agents—police, courts, and politicians—dominate discursive foregrounds, reasserting a logic in which the state is the domain of visibility as a problem-solving machine, rather than as a terrain of complicity or structural failure.

Together, these representations tend to foster a discourse that marginalises the experiences of survivors, normalises state actors (represented as making appropriate decisions), while perpetrators are stripped of their social and political dimension. This has the effect of creating a detachment between political discourse about violence and discussion about violence in changing the focus from within the system to the broader institutional repertoire without addressing the perlocutionary factors in the background.

*Intertextual Referencing and Discursive Anchoring*

It is well known that intertextuality understood as the strategic reference of previous texts and of historical events, and of discursive memory, is a basic procedure through which media are able to ground meaning and to establish credibility. Intertextuality as deployed in the show expresses distinct editorial philosophies and imaginaries of the audience across different-mediating institutions.

While BBC venues and CNN telecast sites articulate what may be called universalizing intertextuality, for example the 2012 Delhi rape case, or simply a generalized “history of gender-based violence.” These references place the Manipur case in a liberal feminist moral universe, where gender violence is depicted as an exemplar of patriarchal outrages that require international condemnation. But this rhetorical move also works to depersonalize the issue at hand -- to disconnect the violence from its ethicized, militarized and geographically specific origins.

By contrast, DW makes use of a system of institutional intertextually that involves domestic developments in interrelation to debates in the European Parliament and global governance discourses. If this serves to lend the reportage a kind of technocratic weight, it also confines it to elite epistemologies, separating readers from the vernacular knowledge or insurgent perspective being reported.

Al Jazeera draws a postcolonial intertextual horizon. Its allusions to reservation quotas, the Meitei-Kuki conflict, and the historical marginalization of communities frame the event in a longer history of violence. This discursive shift both contextualizes and politicizes the narrative by allowing readers to reframe the event as more than an isolated break, but a continuum in a settler-colonial state logic as well. "Intertextual" is Al Jazeera 's counter-epistemic move here, an effort to bring history back into the record of a media discourse whose procedure it is to erase.

It is through these divergent attitudes that intertextuality ceases to be a textual matter and emerges as a mode of ideological adherence: BBC and CNN universalize and depoliticize; DW legitimates through institutional buttressing; Al Jazeera historicizes and politicizes. The discursive positioning of each outlet represents a larger calculus between an editorial ethos, a geopolitical alignment, and an audience's perception.

### **3. Social Practice, Ideological Investment and Global Framing Regimes**

*Markers of Ideology: Discursive Positioning and Regimes of Representation*



Media texts encode these ideological markers—lexical, thematic, and narrative signposts—that allow us to see their epistemic commitments and political investments. These markers matter, their support is essential to maintain the substantive notion of role based on media organizations as cogs in the global wheels of finance, governance, and knowledge production.

The BBC's reporting is typical of a liberal-humanitarian narrative, one organized around a series of individual trauma-recovery narratives. Phrases like “courage,” “speaking out” and “justice through the courts” bolster the project of redemptive liberalism, where legal help and emotional healing stand in for the hard work of making real change in our society. Citing legal mechanisms and political figures (e.g., the Chief Justice of India), the BBC obscures the structural realities – the militarisation, the ethno-nationalist politics and the context of postcolonial marginalisation – which would impose the event upon a palatable, depoliticised framework.

CNN shares a very similar ideological framework, using affective terms (‘horrific’, ‘shocking’, ‘global outcry’) that draw on emotion to help develop a global liberal conscience. But this impulse to globalize leads the battle to become a morality play for the world and strips it of the historically rooted circumstances that led to it in India's Northeast. The violence is approached in the context of human rights abuse but also not viewed as indicating a failed state or ethnically saturated state. This framework reinforces the Global North's right to police violence in 'other' places.

DW occupies an intermediate ideological space, blending legal-rational discourse with a reluctant recognition of popular resistance. By invoking civil sine-societal actors, resolutions of the European Parliament and women's protests, DW participates in a discourse of deliberative democracy - the kind of democracy that draws its legitimacy from institutional proceedings and moderate civic activities. However here too structure-critiques are marginal with the state being imagined as one that is reformable rather than responsible.

By contrast, Al Jazeera analytics offer a decidedly post-structural and postcolonial framework, placing the event in a web of ethnic governance, statecraft, and gendered grievance. Lexical choices such as — ethnic riots, state failure and rape as a weapon of conflict emphasise the instrumental use of sexual violence in ethno-political conflict and thus, a refusal of liberal abstraction of trauma. The discursive formation at work in Al Jazeera asserts that gendered violence and structural inequality are co-constituted, a reflection of an editorial decision to decolonize media discourse.

*Framing Architectures: The Logics of Systems of Plural Technics*



Framing is essential to how we perceive events, for discourse, for emphasising interpretations and for marginalising others. Framing and framing effects in the media coverage of social protests: The case of extremism, politics, and policy-making Patterns of framing in the media coverage of social protest Event-Related posting. The framing patterns which are observed in the discourses of in different media correspond to different commitments to the legitimacy of the state, to the urgency of the moral, and to structural critique.

The BBC is characterizing the whole incident as proof of a national moral decline, with descriptors such as ‘shamed India’ and ‘thousands of complaints’. This focus on the role of the law and the state creates a top-down model of diagnosis that holds institutional intervention as the primary corrective measure. The viral video is framed as both disclosure and topos of movement, crystallizing a techno-legal imaginary that justice begins when something is revealed digitally and passes when legal authorities get involved. Most notably there are no ‘variables lis’ that include such factors as ethnic violence, resource wars or military state interventions—a retreat back to more orthodox forms of reporting in times of crisis.

CNN uses a visual-ethical frame, effectively controlling the level of affectivity while maintaining journalistic norms (e.g., no graphic images and obscuring faces). Its story is one of emotional and institutional breakage, with the state’s silence mischaracterized not so much as a structural complicity as a denial of moral responsibility. This in turn fosters a global empathy, bypassing political specificity, while perpetuating a style of “good governance” journalism based on liberal accountability rather than critique.

DW’s narrative mixes moral normativity with legalism, drawing on locutions such as “shameful for any civilized nation” and references to transnational bodies such as the European Parliament. This two-pronged strategy locates India’s crisis in the larger normative global order, where the hallowed status of liberal democratic institutions is elevated as the custodians of civilization. At the same time, DW reports on symbolic acts of protest, for example when women set a house on fire of a suspect, to emphasize a grassroots involvement—yet this involvement remains subordinated to the power of formal institutions.

Al Jazeera positions the assault in Manipur within an enduring matrix of ethnic conflict, dispossession, and postcolonial state failure using a structuralist, intersectional lens. Rape is not portrayed as just a violation of human dignity, but a weapon of domination being used in a violent matrix of ethno-nationalist recasting. Concentrating on reservation quotas, settler expansion and state bias, Al



Jazeera "moves the focus from liberal framings of individual injustice to systemic analysis of state violence". The story focuses on historical exposure rather than solution, making justice an impossibility in the face of continuing structural oppression.

## Conclusions

The comparative discourse analysis of BBC, CNN, DW and Al Jazeera exhibited striking convergence between narrativization of the way the international media reported on the 2023 Manipur sexual violence incident. According to each of their geographically-specific and editorially-specific positioning, also different concerning their geopolitical orientation, however, such outlets also reproduce a moral-emotive grid that tends to focus on institutional responses, reinforce a shock affect and marginalize structural critique and survivor narratives. This is more than a stylistic coincidence: it is evidence of deeper ideological convergence across global journalism when it comes to representing postcolonial gendered violence as spectacular, legible, and depoliticized for international audiences.

Persistent use of an emotional vocabulary is a discursive ploy to generate global outrage. But this emotional high has long supplanted any critical examination of trauma, turning it into spectacle, and distracting us from the conditions that have made such violence possible. In this rhetorical atmosphere, visibility passes for justice, and outrage overwrites explanation.

One key feature of this discursive trend is the dearth or weakening of agency. Nearly all survivors are constructed as passive victims of violence—comforting childhood survivors by winter, resilient through mediated terms like “speaking out.” Contrarily, offenders are dehumanized into a “mob” or “suspects” devoid of ethnic or political identification resulting in a derivatization of responsibility in a context that is entrenched in ethno-political hostility and state collapse.

And that dynamic is further enhanced by grammatical Asymmetry. For all the matter-of-factness with which individual acts of violence are described in the passive voice, the actors of institutions are rendered in a tone consistently active, “Modi condemned,” “Police arrested,” “Supreme Court intervened.” Such syntactic selections discursively restore the state as a reactionary moral agent as opposed to a structurally embedded one. The end point is a story that preserves institutional credibility, and does not unsettle the architecture of impunity.

Additionally, the hierarchy of access to news in the four outlets reflects this time uppermost echelon of elite and professional sources—government officials, judges, and international bodies, with the stories of survivors and other non-institutional sources relegated to second-hand information or



entirely mediated. This top-down narrativization is consistent with contemporary journalistic norms, which privilege institutional authority, thus reproducing epistemic asymmetry and marginalizing subaltern knowledge from the domain of “credible” discourse.

Intertextual strategies also foreground the ideological position of each outlet. BBC and CNN universalise it by invoking global human rights norms and prominent incidents of sexualised violence cases, thereby evoking moral solidarity across regions and subduing regionality. DW and Al Jazeera, on the other hand, are accompanied by greater degrees of historical and political framing, the latter referring to specific ethnic groups and longstanding conflicts in the region. But even Al Jazeera's depth of contextualisation is limited by the reliance on these institutional voices, which limits the... discursive space for... survivor agency.

Taken together, these dynamics establish a discursive regime that privileges affect, institutional morality, and narrative coherence at the expense of structural critique, political identification, and survivor testimony. Its discourse thus communicates moral urgency rather than political depth, making visible the violence but occluding its systemic conditions.

In sum, international media representation of the Manipur case is illustrative of the structural limits to global journalism in covering postcolonial gendered violence. This indicates how transnational media, despite best intentions, relies on the representational practices of the sanitization of politics, the depoliticization of trauma, and the preference for elite epistemologies. This speaks not only to editorial selectivity but to how crises in the Global South are told through frames that are constructed for Northern audiences, institutional legitimacy, and affective economies. To overcome this limitation, there is an urgent necessity of media practices that focus in context, accountability, and subaltern testimony, that undermine the current discursive status quo and open space for more ethical, situated, and transformative narratives.

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