

**DIGITAL MEDIA AND GENDER VIOLENCE COLLOQUIUM
A REPORT**

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<http://www.prajnya.in/16days.htm>



As part of the [2013 Prajnya 16 Days Campaign Against Gender Violence](#), Prajnya in association with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung organised a colloquium that was imagined as a forum for a conversation bringing together those who are concerned about gender violence and those who work on issues relating to digital security, freedom and privacy. To be in the small group in this closed conversation, we invited a mix of women's rights activists, mediapersons, bloggers, lawyers and technical experts.



The event began with a round of introductions. The discussion was kick started with Dr Swarna Rajagopalan reading out a short write by the former High Court Judge Justice Prabha Sridevan (she wasn't able to make it to the colloquium owing to ill health) on law and freedom in the digital age. In her essay titled *Privacy, Security and Gender Violence*, Sridevan notes,

Surveillance, interrogation, telephone tapping, collecting bio-metric data and more goes on in the name of security and on parallel track it is increasing intrusion into privacy.... Violence against women is one of the enduring factors which come in the way of women's empowerment. A dignity based response is muted by repression, denial and manipulation, and women themselves are blamed for the violence and consequently silenced from protesting or seeking justice for the violence that has been done to her. This silence in turn contributes to more violence and accentuates the negative impact it has on a woman socially, psychologically and otherwise. So, it is really a culture of silence and not a culture of violence. The Internet space also increases the risk of vulnerability. "The underpinning of a claim not to be watched without leave will be more general if it can be grounded in this way on the principle of respect for person other than on a utilitarian duty to avoid inflicting suffering."¹ If we use "watch without leave" as a metaphor for any unwelcome behaviour or an act without her consent, we will see that the basis is Respect for the Right to Dignity and Equality of Women.

Justice Sridevan's essay may be read in full here:

<http://prajnya16days.blogspot.in/2013/12/privacy-security-and-gender-violence.html>

¹ Stanley L.Benn" Privacy Freedom and Respect for Persons".

Emerging VAW Challenges in the Digital Age

Usha Srinivasan of Empowering Women in IT (eWIT) facilitated this session.

Letika Saran, Former Director General of Police, Tamil Nadu, spoke about the trends in cyber-crimes against women.



She addressed issues of cyber stalking, cyber bullying, morphing, spreading of private videos containing obscene material through MMS and abuse of children online. She said that due to the anonymity afforded by the net, a large number of people indulge in cyber-crime. Offenders also assume that laws against cyber-crime are ineffective (which is untrue), and that cyber-crime often goes unreported (true). She reiterated the importance of reporting cyber-crime.

She also pointed out that according to a recent survey conducted in city schools (corporations schools, government aided schools and private schools) it was found that over 90% students admitted chatting with strangers online, and 85% said they went on to meet the strangers they had chatted with in person. She drew attention to the fact that most of these students were first generation internet users and that their parents and teachers were unaware of their online activities. She called for more awareness among parents and teachers and better communication between them and the children.

Syed Nazir Razik, Vice President, Marketing, PMI Chennai Chapter spoke about online safety in the age of smart technologies. He spoke about preventive measures against cyber-stalking/bullying. Mr Razik also spoke about the Becoming Sweetie project in which researchers carried out a 10-week sting near Amsterdam, posing on video chat rooms (using a computer generated image) as "Sweetie", a 10-year-old Filipina girl. Some 20,000 men contacted her, with 1,000 found to have offered her money. 103 were from India. He discussed the internet of things and how consumer wearable devices, like those that monitor health, could make one's personal health data available to all. He also spoke about apps that make available data usage, that monitor cognitive behaviour and make available location information. In terms of preventive measures he advocated the use of two factor authentication and tools like TOR for web and Orbot for mobiles to maintain anonymity.



This presentation is available here:

<http://prajnya16days.blogspot.com/2013/12/syed-raziks-presentation-on-online.html>



Dr Debarati Halder, co-founder and managing director of the Centre for Cyber Victim Counselling spoke about the legal remedies available for victims of gender violence in the cyber world. She pointed out that the legal options are often not the preferred line of action due to fear of revealing victim's history, social ostracisation, media and privacy issues, and preconceived notions of the judicial system. She outlined other options like reporting to the website concerned and self-protecting measures.

This presentation is available here:

<http://prajnya16days.blogspot.com/2013/12/debaratis-presentation-remedies-for.html>

Gender and Online Verbal Abuse

In the next session [Dr Anja Kovacs](#), Director of [The Internet Democracy Project](#) (IDP), spoke about gender and online abuse. She spoke about one IDP's research projects titled, [Keeping Women Safe? Gender, Online Harassment and Indian Law](#). According to this research, the kinds of abuse women faced online was very varied and so were their responses. The research found that women with strong opinions, about national politics, feminism and sexuality, were the ones most subject to online abuse. The abuse tends to focus on the targeted person's body/sexuality. She pointed out that among the women surveyed, legal options were the last resort.

Women reacted to online abuse in various ways – some ignored the abuse, some others moderated comments, some blocked or reported the abuser, while some others resorted to naming and shaming. She pointed out that contrary to popular belief, these women did not view anonymity as a threat, but as an enabling factor – empowering them to voice their views more freely. All of them also emphasised the importance of an online support group, which they thought was more of a support-system than family or friends. In most cases the women's families were unaware of their online activity and the women felt that taking their problems to their family would only lead to increased policing.



Online Initiatives against Gender-Based Violence

For this session, we had invited short presentations on online initiatives against gender-based violence—their vision and their work. Three initiatives were presented:

Hollaback! and Hollaback! Chennai

Hollaback! is a global movement to end street harassment powered by a network of local activists. This initiative is spread across 71 cities in 24 countries as of December 2013.

Video: <http://tedxwomen.org/speakers/emily-may-2/>

Hollaback! Chennai is hosted by Prajnaya, a Chennai-based non-profit organisation working on issues of peace, justice and security.

Presentation: <http://www.slideshare.net/prajnyatrust/16-days-2013-presentation-on-hollaback-chennai>

Take Back the Tech!

Take Back the Tech is a global campaign that connects the issue of violence against women and information and communications technology (ICT). It aims to raise awareness on the way violence against women is occurring on ICT platforms such as the Internet and mobile phones, and to call for people to use ICT in activism to end violence against women.

Presentation: <http://www.slideshare.net/prajnyatrust/16-days-2013-presentation-on-take-back-the-tech>

GotStared.At

GotStared.At (GS.A) is a counter culture movement that raises awareness on social issues of violence, gender and discrimination. The campaign was given distinction at the World Summit Youth Award (WSYA) 2012. GotStared.At aims at giving women in India a platform to speak out against violence and sexual assault and to prove they are not at fault. Saransh Dua, the co-founder of GotStared.At was part of the colloquium.

Dua spoke about the need to harness the power of India's youth and co-opt men into the fight against gender violence.

Presentation: <http://prezi.com/bp5yayct7a1v/chennai-presentation-gsa/>



In the discussion that followed these presentations, Harini Calamur, spoke about the still very prevalent gender imbalance amongst users of the internet in India (approx. 3:1). She said the challenge was to get more girls to use technology. She mentioned the proactive role played by certain organisations like *Breakthrough*, *CGNet Swara* and *Bell Bajao* in this respect.

Gayatri Buragohain, the founder of Feminist Approach to Technology and co-founder of Joint Leap Technologies spoke about the whole new world that was made accessible to women and girls from socio-economically underprivileged families when they were taught to use technology. She spoke about the different empowering ways in which these women employ technology. Speaking about how the girls at FAT scripted and recorded a radio show on domestic violence, Buragohain emphasised the cathartic effect it had on the girls. They were using a new tool in a way that made sense to them. They were effectively empowered to find their own solutions and did not need to look to someone else.



Concluding Notes

- Girls and women from all sections of the society must be given an opportunity to learn to use technology.
- Peer group training for young girls can break culturally established myths about girls not being good with technology.
- Parents and teachers must be given crash courses in internet usage.
- Peer support for feminists, social workers, women bloggers is a huge advantage.
- Children and adults with disability have found space, voice and solidarity online. In fact the net enables disabled people to address the issue of violence perpetrated against them.
- Using online platforms is a great way to get across to the large number of urban Indian youth on issues such as gender violence.
- Visually effective material can convey complex issues in a simple fashion and must be employed in social media to address the issue of gender violence.
- Different ways of reacting to violence online: while legal action is possible, women choose to employ various other methods as well.

Panel Discussion: Digital Media, Gender Violence, Privacy and Freedom

In association with Empowering Women in IT (eWIT), a panel discussion was organised that evening on Digital Media, Gender Violence, Privacy and Freedom. What's the difference between maintaining 'privacy' on a social network, and resorting to being a shrinking violet? Is anonymity helpful, or simply a tool for abuse? How has digital media empowered women? And what are the rules of engagement on the Internet? Issues like these were the focus of the discussion.

"Many women are online because they can remain anonymous," said Dr Anja Kovacs, Director of The Internet Democracy Project. "While anonymity is used by several people to post abusive content online, it is also used by those who find it difficult to speak about several issues using their real identity. Usually, they do not find support from family for their activities online, and therefore they have greater freedom of expression when anonymous," she stressed. The positives of being anonymous on the web override the negative, according to Dr Anja. But what about trolls? How do you tackle them? "The answer is to have the backing of a supportive online community," said Dr Anja.

The accessibility of digital media in enabling women to express themselves is another issue that the speakers stressed on. Harini Calamur, head of Digital Content at Zee Media said, "As technology evolves and becomes more user friendly, I'm seeing more women starting to use this technology to enter into what were previously considered male dominated fields. For example, films, especially editing. A lot more women are now taking up careers in editing because the technology is more accessible. And digital media empowers them further."

"But one of the biggest problems we face today is that men don't know their limits while engaging with women online," said Gayatri Buragohain, Founder of Feminist Approach to Technology and Co-Founder of Joint Leap Technologies. "A comment like 'you're sexy' is not okay for many, while it may not be considered offensive by others. You must know where to draw the line with whom, and not cross it," she added.

"Today, gender roles are changing," said Harini. "While that means that women are no longer restricted to one kind of work, it also means men are confused about their role in society. We need to have more dialogue to address this as well."

The panel discussion was facilitated by Kalyani Narayanan of eWIT, and Vice-President of ICM Computer Consultants.

Bios:

Letika Saran is the former Director General of Police, Tamil Nadu, India. She entered the Tamil Nadu Indian Police Service in 1976 as one of the first two women to be admitted. She is the only woman to head a metropolitan police organisation in India. Saran's postings include Additional Director General of Police; Training and Project Director, Tamil Nadu Police Academy; Inspector-General of Police and Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC). She became the Commissioner of Police, Greater Chennai, on April 20, 2006. On January 8, 2010, she was appointed as Director General of Police (DGP) for Tamil Nadu, becoming the second female DGP of a state in India and the first for Tamil Nadu.

Syed Nazir Razik is the Vice President - Marketing at PMI Chennai Chapter. He is Principal Advisor - Project Management and Value Creation at [SEDIN TECHNOLOGIES - RAILSFACTORY](#). He is also Co-Founder-Secretary at The Knowledge Foundation. Syed Nazir Razik has 15+ years of cross-functional experience and working with multi-disciplinary teams. His areas of expertise include strategic planning and tactical leadership with proven Project Management, Software Product Development, Quality Assurance, Product Support, Technical Marketing and Business Development experience. He is currently consulting on Best Project Management Practices for a few IT organisations. Syed has been a Project Management Professional since 2005 and Certified Scrum Master since 2007. He has also received the National Award for the best ICT initiative on Egov on Social Media for 2011.

Debarati Halder is the co-founder and managing director of Centre for Cyber Victim Counselling, India's first-ever counselling centre for cyber crime victims. Debarati holds a PhD degree in Law from the National Law School of India University, (NLSIU) Bangalore and a Master's degree in Constitutional Law and International Law from the University of Madras. She is also the Vice President of the Kids and Teens Division of the Working for Halting Online Abuse (WHOA). Debarati is a Member, Working group on Violence against women, International Scientific and Professional Advisory Council of the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme (ISPAC), Italy.

Usha Srinivasan is a founder member and advisor of eWIT (Empowering Women in Information Technology). She has over 25 years of experience working being Project management and operations professional for IT start-ups, in various functions like Infrastructure Development, HR, Training, Corporate communication and Community development. Having worked in various organizations like HCL, eFunds, iNautix and Thinksoft, she currently consults as a strategic advisor for IT start-ups. She has also served as the Chair of the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce, TN.

Prabha Sridevan served as the fifth woman judge of the Madras High Court for ten years. During her time as judge of the Madras High Court, Prabha Sridevan made important steps for women's rights in many landmark judgements, including one legitimising women's work as homemakers and another on mandatory marriage registration. She was named one of the fifty most influential people in the IP world by Managing IP. She also served as the chairperson of the Intellectual Property Appellate Board (IPAB) between 2011 and 2013. She is a member of the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) in India.



Harini Calamur is the Head of Digital Content with the Zee Media Corporation and based in Mumbai, India. Harini is a successful media professional with 18 years of experience across educational media, social media & entertainment and is also a columnist, writer, blogger and film maker. She is a trainer on the use of Social Media for communication and development. She is also the University of Mumbai Chairperson for Broadcast related subjects; she is a visiting faculty at Sophia College Mumbai and Whistling Woods. Her areas of speciality include live interactive media, social media, media strategy, children's programming, film production and production management.

Dr. Anja Kovacs directs the Internet Democracy Project. Her work focuses on a wide range of questions regarding freedom of expression, cybersecurity and the architecture of Internet governance as they relate to the Internet and democracy. Anja is currently also a member of the of the Investment Committee of the Digital Defenders Partnership and of the interim Steering Group of Best Bits, a global network of civil society members. Prior to focusing her work on the information society, Anja researched and consulted on a wide range of development-related issues. She has been a Research Associate with Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi; has lectured at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK, and Ambedkar University, Delhi; and has conducted extensive fieldwork throughout South Asia.

Gayatri Burgohain, a B.E. in Electronics and Telecommunication, realized that there was a huge gap between the women empowerment movement and technology, and that efforts aimed at empowering women were proving to be inadequate more often than not. She started Feminist Approach to Technology in 2007. FAT works to empower women by enhancing women's awareness, interest and participation in technology. Gayatri co-founded Joint Leap Technologies which works closely with FAT to provide quality web technology advice and consulting to non-profits.

Saransh Dua is the co-founder of GotStared.At, a campaign recently given distinction at the World Summit Youth Award (WSYA) 2012. GotStared.At aims at giving women in India a platform to speak out against violence and sexual assault and to prove they are not at fault. He currently serves as a Consultant to the Principal Secretary, Department of Education, Govt. of Haryana, heading a pilot project of setting up a model education system in Babain, Kurukshetra. He is also a Fellow of the 2014 Batch at the Startup Leadership Program.



We wish to thank Prema Ravi and Poongutan Cibi Sekar who volunteered as rapporteurs for this programme.

Participants tweeting from the colloquium on 'Digital Media and Gender Violence' created a record that we could share. Storified [here](#).

Prajnya put out 16 tweets a day through the 16 days of the Campaign, linking to various resources on gender violence. You can find them storified [here](#), and also on our [blog](#).

