

Chapter VI

Cyber Violence: Sexual Harassment, Cyberscape and Trauma in

Anupama Chandrasekhar's *Free Outgoing*

The advancement of technology has brought about significant changes in the world, impacting the lives of individuals in various ways. Especially, women who experience new challenges emerging alongside the benefits of technological progress. In this digital information age, the computer-information systems and AI have undergone a profound transformation, revolutionising every aspect of our society. This technological information has had a significant and far-reaching impact on human interactions, particularly in the realm of communication. The advent of digital communication and the widespread use of the internet have brought about a complete metamorphosis in the functioning of our society, altering the way we communicate, connect, and share information. However, alongside these remarkable advancements, new technologies have unfortunately given rise to numerous forms of conduct that deviate from the legally desirable behaviours. In the realm of digital technologies, a host of emerging criminal offenses have emerged, falling under the umbrella term of cybercrimes. These offenses, characterised by their digital nature, pose unique challenges to law enforcement agencies and society at large.

Cyberspace has provided a platform for individuals to express their thoughts and opinions unchecked and uncensored. However, it has also become a distressing environment where women and girls are subjected to exploitation and surveillance. Cybercrime against women has become a pressing and widespread issue in the modern digital era. Perpetrators employ a range of cybercrimes targeting women encompassing

cyber harassment, cyberstalking, cyberbullying, cyber defamation, revenge porn, deepfake pornography, as well as online fraud. Unfortunately, these crimes disproportionately affect women, posing significant threats to their safety, well-being, and overall quality of life. Monika Jain in her article titled, “Victimization of Women Beneath Cyberspace in Indian Upbringing,” points out that “the advancement of technology, cybercrime and victimization of women are on the high and it poses a major threat to the security of a person as a whole. The privacy and personal security of the individual under threat with this growing issue of cybercrime in the cyberspace” (5). The emergence of the internet and the widespread use of digital platforms have provided perpetrators with new avenues to target and exploit women, exacerbating the problem further.

India is not exempt from the occurrence of cybercrimes targeted at women. India has enacted the Information Technology Act 2000, a distinct legislation aimed at combating cybercrimes against women. This law encompasses a range of cyber offenses related to computer resources, including:

dishonestly or fraudulently accessing a computer resource without the permission of its owner commonly referred to as hacking (section 66), identity theft (section 66C), cheating by impersonation (section 66D), violation of bodily privacy (section 66E), transmitting of obscene material (section 67), and publishing or transmission of material containing sexually explicit act in electronic form (section 67A and 67B) and tempering with computer source documents (section 65), etc. (“Cybercrime”)

Each of these cybercrimes is subject to punitive measures, which may include a prison sentence of either three or five years. Furthermore, according to Section 77B of the Information Technology Act of 2000, these cybercrimes are classified as cognisable

offenses. It is important to note that these cybercrimes are separate from various other cognisable offenses punishable under the Indian Penal Code, 1860, such as the act of stalking through electronic communication (section 354D).

However, it is a matter of great concern that there has been a significant rise in the overall number of cybercrimes against women. Akankhya Kabi, et.al. discuss this issue in their article titled “The Facets Of Cyber Crimes Against Women In India: Issues And Challenges,” where they present the statistical data provided by the NCRB regarding cybercrimes against women in India. The data reveals there were 4,242 reported cases in 2017, which increased to 6,030 in 2018. Shockingly, this number further escalated to 8,379 in 2019, and 10,405 cases in 2020, and the most recent NCRB report for 2021 reveals a staggering 10,730 reported cases. This alarming trend highlights the urgent need to address and combat cybercrimes against women in India.

Anupama Chandrasekhar uncovers how the perpetration of cybercrime against women detrimentally impacts their development and prospects for the future, as depicted in the play *Free Outgoing*. In this play, a fifteen-year-old girl named Deepa experiences immense hardship as a result of the widespread distribution of a sexually explicit video involving her and her boyfriend, Jeevan. The playwright not only highlights the consequences faced by Deepa, but also examines the social repercussions endured by her entire family, as they become the subject of community scrutiny and confrontations due to this incident. It is noteworthy that the play manages to cover a substantial range of themes and issues being set within the confines of the apartment’s walls. Anupama effectively exposes the existence of sexual double standard in India, where the burden of disgrace and shame is disproportionately placed upon the female character rather than the male counterpart. Michael Billington, a prominent British author and arts critic, aptly states that the play *Free Outgoing* “fills a gap in our knowledge – India seen not through sentimental

or guilt-ridden colonial eyes, but as it really is: a nation torn between rapid advance and ethical conservatism” (*The Guardian*).

In 2004, a significant event occurred at Delhi Public School, which serves as the foundation for this play. Hemant Chugh, a male student, surreptitiously recorded a video of his female classmate engaging in oral sex. Chugh proceeded to share this explicit video with others via Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS), leading to its subsequent upload on a pornographic website. The repercussions of this incident reverberated throughout the country, capturing the attention of numerous news channels. Notably, Anupama Chandrasekar even references this distressing event during one of her interviews with May Zeng, who asked what similarities existed between the public reactions to the girl involved in the DPS MMS scandal and the reactions directed at Deepa. Anupama Chandrasekar responded,

I’ve used a lot of my own imagination [in creating the reactions in “*Free Outgoing*”]. A few months after the MMS incident, a Tamil actress wrote in her column that women should practice safe sex [to prevent HIV/AIDS], and again, that just exploded way out of proportion. The general public thought she was promoting premarital sex. With both these incidents, the aspects of female sexuality were clearly disturbing the Indian community. So the question regarding female sexual rights was something on my mind when I was writing it. I mean, do girls have right to their bodies at all? Do girls have sex? That was something that was playing all in my mind when I was writing this play. (*Pacific Ties*)

In this contemporary times marked by rapid technological advancements, the mere thought of existing without the ubiquitous presence of smartphones and the vast expanse of the internet seems to be an insurmountable challenge. The pervasive and ever-increasing use of smartphones and the widespread adoption of social networks have

undeniably brought about a paradigm shift in the very fabric of human communication and interpersonal relationships. This transformative impact is aptly highlighted by Raquel Delevi and Robert S. Weisskirch in their thought-provoking article titled “Personality Factors as Predictors of Sexting,” wherein they assert that “communication via technology has become an integral element of romantic relationships” (2589). The virtual communities or internet platforms function as a medium for individuals to connect and interact with one another by means of exchanging messages, images, videos, and a myriad of other multimedia files in various formats. Consequently, this has led to the proliferation of sexting, which can be defined as “exchanging sexual contents via mobile phones or the internet” (Izdebski and Żbikowska 123).

According to Richard Chalfen article titled “Sexting as Adolescent Social Communication: A Call for Attention,” the term “sexting” typically refers to “the use of mobile/cell phone camera to transmit a sexually suggestive or explicit photograph (or videos). These images generally depict a nude or semi-nude body or body part and are sent via short-message service (SMS), Internet, and/or another digital delivery means ...” (qtd. in Calvert, 678-79). Sexting is a “prevalent behaviour” (Gordon-Messer et al. 306) among individuals of legal age, and its legality is contingent upon the consent of all participating adult. However, this practice takes an entirely different form when it involves minors, as it is deemed unethical and is punishable under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act. In certain instances, sexting may even have dire consequences, leading to the production and dissemination of revenge pornography.

Revenge pornography is a term that has gained significant prominence in contemporary media, discourse, and society. It is commonly referred to as a revenge porn. However, a more comprehensible terminology for this phenomenon is “non-consensual pornography” (“Know Your Rights” 1). Revenge pornography entails the act of an

individual sharing or uploading intimate photos or videos of another person, known as the respondent, onto the internet or mobile phone without the respondent's consent. The terms that appear to have similar meanings include involuntary pornography, image-based sexual exploitation, and image-based sexual abuse. According to the US National Conference of State Legislatures (2014), revenge porn is defined as the "posting of nude or sexually explicit photographs or videos of people online without their consent, even if the photograph itself was taken with consent. It can follow a spurned spouse, girlfriend, or boyfriend seeking to get revenge by uploading photographs on websites, many of which are set up specifically for these kinds of photos or videos" (Hearn and Hall 14).

In his article titled "'This is My Cheating ex': Gender and Sexuality in Revenge Porn," Jeff Hearn and Mathew Hall elucidate the perspective of Mary Anne Franks, an American legal scholar, and Professor of Law at the University of Miami School of Law, with regards to the concept of revenge porn. The authors argue that the term "revenge porn" is indeed misleading due to several reasons:

The term 'revenge porn' is misleading ... First, perpetrators are not always being motivated by vengeance. Many act out of a desire for profit, notoriety, or entertainment, including hackers, purveyors of hidden or 'upskirt' camera recordings, and people who distribute stolen cellphone photos. The term 'revenge porn' is also misleading in that it implies that taking a picture of oneself naked or engaged in a sexual act (or allowing someone else to take such a picture) is pornographic. But creating explicit images in the expectation within the context of a private, intimate relationship – an increasingly common practice – is not equivalent to creating pornography. The act of disclosing a private, sexually explicit image to someone other than the intended audience, however, can

accurately be described as pornographic, as it transforms a private image into public sexual entertainment. (2)

In the play, *Free Outgoing*, Deepa, a fifteen-year-old girl, is the victim of revenge porn. Following school hours, she engages in an intimate encounter with Jeevan, a senior and a close associate of her brother. Deepa, however, remains oblivious to Jeevan's malicious intentions, consequently permitting him to document their intimate encounter. Regrettably, Deepa fails to comprehend the grave repercussions that await her in the future. Subsequently, Jeevan callously disseminates the sex tape among his friends, exploiting Deepa's dignity and breaching her privacy, causing immeasurable harm to her emotional well-being. The conversation between Malini, Deepa's mother and Santhosh, Jeevan's father, clearly reveals that Jeevan's actions are devoid of genuine affection towards Deepa, merely serving his own sexual gratification:

SANTHOSH. Jeevan said he forwarded it only to Arjun. But Arjun, apparently he's forwarded to a few boys. Jeevan said, some boys in his class were watching the film. (Pause.) There are other boys who have it, Mrs Haridas. But Jeevan forwarded it only to Arjun.

MALINI. Kadavuley [Oh, God], what has he done? How many other boys has Arjun sent it to?

SANTHOSH. Three or four. At the most five, six.

MALINI. We need to get hold of them. We need to get them to delete the film. Do you know who those boys are?

SANTHOSH. No. Not yet. (18)

Jeevan's act of recording the video with Deepa's consent does not grant him the authority to distribute it among his friends. It is crucial to acknowledge that Jeevan's actions are ethically incorrect, as they infringe upon Deepa's right to privacy and breach of trust she has placed in him. As a result, an unidentified individual has disseminated the sexting video of Deepa and Jeevan on the internet.

Evelyne Wanjiku, in her article, "Revenge Pornography on the Internet: The Case of Social Media in Kenya," points out the view of Roffer and Franks on the nature of revenge pornography. They say revenge porn is exceptionally destructive due to its enduring nature and the challenges associated with removing images once they are posted online. Additionally, they suggest that revenge pornography has an amplified effect when shared on the internet. In contrast to physical violence that may have a limited audience, revenge pornography invites a global audience to participate in the humiliation of the victim. Unlike victims of offline crimes, individuals who fall prey to revenge pornography cannot simply relocate or change jobs to avoid encountering the perpetrator or individuals familiar with them. The images posted online can persistently follow them to any corner of the world. Mary Anne Franks, in her article, "Combating Non-consensual Pornography: A Working Paper," describes this phenomenon as "virtual captivity and publicity" (qtd. in Wanjiku 164). This assertion is exemplified in the play, *Free Outgoing*, where the protagonist becomes a victim of this phenomenon. Following the circulation of a sexually explicit video, the media eagerly gather outside her home, seeking interviews and engaging in debates about her character. Some print media outlets even go as far as publishing articles labelling her as devoid of morals. Consequently, Deepa finds herself trapped in a virtual prison, becoming a persona and the subject of nationwide discourse. The consequences of this situation are severe, as she is expelled from the school and

unable to venture beyond the confines of her residence due to the imminent threat of assault from the general populace.

Sexist beliefs, which are the deeply ingrained and systemic attitudes and ideologies that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination based on sex, contribute significantly to the existence and prevalence of revenge pornography, a form of online harassment and violation of privacy. These beliefs, rooted in patriarchal systems and reinforced by societal norms and expectations, contribute to the objectification of women, reducing them to mere objects or commodities for male consumption and gratification. In addition, the societal tendency to place blame and shame on the victims further perpetuates the existence of revenge pornography.

Image-based sexual abuse or Revenge pornography is regarded as the “next wave of violence against women” (qtd. in Huber 32). Daniella Citron and Mary Anne Franks, in their article titled “Criminalizing Revenge Porn,” highlight the fact that nonconsensual pornography, akin to rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment, falls within the realm of violence that defies both legal and social obligation to uphold equity. This form of violence effectively strips women and girls of their autonomy “over their bodies and lives.” Moreover, it not only inflicts grave and often irreparable harm upon its victims but also constitutes a malevolent manifestation of “sex discrimination” since its primary goal is to dehumanise and degrade women (355).

In her article titled “Rape Threats and Revenge porn: Defining Sexual Violence in the Digital Age,” Jordan Fairbairn explores the notion of revenge porn as a manifestation of gendered violence, which mirrors wider cultural trends of sexual violence directed towards women and girls. In their work, *Revenge Pornography: Gender, Sexuality and*

Motivations, Jeff Hearn and Matthew Hall support Fairbairn's assertion that revenge pornography is a practice influenced by gender and sexuality. They argue that,

revenge porn can be seen as gender, gendered, sexual, gender-sexual practices. In these perspectives, revenge porn may be interpreted as structured action, resulting from the gender-sexual social order and social structures, sometimes called patriarchy, and/or as a way of doing gender, doing sexuality or doing gender/sexuality performatively. Either or both ways, it is part of the gender-sexual matrix, dominantly heterosexual, that (re)produces gender categorisations and places them into effect. (49)

Hall and Hearn posit that the perpetrators employ the digital realm as a means to subject women to sexual humiliation and degradation. Ruth Lewis, Mike Rowe, and Clare Wiper, in their article, "Online/Offline Continuities: Exploring Misogyny and Hate in Online Abuse of Feminists," firmly assert that online and offline violence against women is an "apparent attempt to silence women and limit their engagement in public worlds" (128). Likewise, in the play, Jeevan deliberately records a video that solely centres on Deepa, purposefully excluding himself from it. This act clearly demonstrates his malicious intent to publicly shame and humiliate Deepa, and consciously distances himself from it. His deliberate actions are a malicious attempt to tarnish Deepa's reputation, thereby diminishing her quality of life.

Sarah Bloom, in her article, "No Vengeance for "Revenge Porn" Victims: Unraveling Why this Latest Female-Centric, Intimate-Partner Offense is Still Legal, and Why We Should Criminalize It," argues that, revenge porn "should be classified as a sexual offense because of its similarity to other types of sexual offenses, like sexual assault and sexual harassment" (qtd. in Bates 4). Feminist perspectives on sexual assault

emphasise that rape is not solely an act of sexual gratification but rather an expression of male dominance over women. When men engage in sexual assault, it is driven not only by an uncontrollable sexual urge but also by a desire for power, a deep-seated animosity towards women, and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles that subordinate women to men. The reason behind revenge pornography is also identical, as it highlights male dominance. The internet has become the main medium for spreading revenge pornography, which “serves as a petri dish of misogyny, in which users are emboldened by the promise of anonymity” (Serpe 19).

In a recent interview with May Zeng, Anupama Chandrasekhar highlights the play *Free Outgoing* as a powerful expose of the prevalent sexism and misogyny in society. Chandrasekhar emphasises that these harmful attitudes towards women have become ingrained in our culture, leading people to normalise and accept the exploitation of women, even within the realm of cyberspace. Ultimately, Chandrasekhar expresses her hope that through witnessing this play, “youngsters would be aware of the sexism that a lot of girls are facing across the world, and also be aware of how our technology can take control of a person’s life” (*Pacific Ties*).

The phenomenon of revenge porn primarily revolves around the behaviours exhibited by “men” and the concept of “masculinities” put forth by Raewyn Connell (xi), along with similar ideas surrounding actions that define manhood, as discussed by Michael Schwalbe. These practices can reflect patriarchal, sexist, and hegemonic forms of power, as well as more complex and nuanced expressions of complicity, resistance, and ambivalence. It is important to recognise that these practices are not simply stereotypes, but rather part of a broader range of behaviours and discourses that shape men’s experiences of gender and sexuality. While the use of technology may play a role in the

spread of revenge porn, it is ultimately rooted in larger social and cultural structures that shape gendered power relations and sexual norms.

The play *Free Outgoing* depicts a collision between the cutting-edge technological advancements of the contemporary era and the deep-rooted traditionalism of Indian culture. Despite the general societal shift towards embracing technology, individuals remain entangled in the conventional mindset characterised by patriarchal stereotypes. In the play, both Deepa and Jeevan commit an error by engaging in intimacy within the school campus; however, Deepa is subjected to harsher judgment, scrutiny, and criticism than Jeevan. Remarkably, throughout the play, no one questions the absence of Jeevan and his family. Instead, the community exhibits vehement aggression towards the victim, Deepa, and her family. The dramatist effectively highlights the gender bias prevalent among the community members through the dialogue between Kokila, the neighbour and Malini:

MALINI. She made a mistake –

KOKILA. Telling a lie, adhuoru mistake. Or being rude. But this is more than a mistake. The women and their broomsticks... political parties are getting involved now. This afternoon, people paraded her effigy on a donkey. Actually, all of your effigies. Even yours. (To SHARAN.) I saw it all on TV. My manni [sister-in-law] called from Delhi last night and asked why I have allowed disreputable people inside the colony. I didn't know what to say to her! We can't show our faces outside the colony any more. (39)

An anonymous perpetrator has uploaded an explicit video of Deepa, which has now spread to a wider audience. The playwright aims to depict the rapid dissemination of

pornographic content among individuals, particularly among teenagers and adults. Upon discovering his sister's video on Ramesh's mobile phone, Sharan becomes enraged and attempts to physically assault him. In response, Ramesh defends himself by claiming that sharing such explicit videos is commonplace among adults:

RAMESH. Malini! I have no idea how it got there. I didn't – it must be a new message. This must be the message I got a few minutes ago. You hear the beep. Someone must have sent – everybody gets these things. It's all over the place. I didn't even know it was there, if I had, I'd have deleted it, I'm a god-fearing man. Deepa is like a daughter to me. (36)

The proliferation of pornographic videos is experiencing a notable surge in recent times. This observable phenomenon has not escaped the attention of Andrea Dworkin, a prominent feminist activist, who has meticulously examined the detrimental effects of pornography in society. Dworkin, in her work, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, astutely argues that pornography serves as a dehumanising force, reducing women to mere objects devoid of agency and autonomy. She cogently asserts that pornography operates as a tangible mechanism through which individuals are transformed into commodities, stripped of their humanity, and reduced to mere instruments of pleasure. Moreover, Dworkin highlights that the detrimental implications of pornography extend beyond the mere objectification of women; it also encompasses the insidious sexualisation of insult and humiliation. These deplorable acts, according to Dworkin, are not coincidental or random occurrences but rather deliberate and systemic strategies employed to demean and devalue women within society. In the play, Jeevan intentionally films his intimate moment with Deepa. He singles out Deepa in the video and shares it with his friends. This action clearly demonstrates Jeevan's intention to degrade Deepa by objectifying her.

Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi Ann Roberts concur with Dworkin's assertion that women are objectified based on their gender differences and the power dynamics between men and women in society. In their article titled "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks," Fredrickson and Roberts contend that "girls and women are typically acculturated to internalize an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves" (173). The bodies of women are situated within the sociocultural framework, thereby laying the foundation for sexual objectification. In the play *Free Outgoing*, Jeevan perceives Deepa solely as a sexual object. He never considers the ramifications of betraying Deepa's trust by sharing the video; instead, he derives pleasure from this action, thereby demonstrating a sense of pride and achievement in his masculinity among his peers. He employs love as a tool to exploit Deepa sexually, perceiving her as a physical entity rather than as a person. The reprehensible behaviour exhibited by Jeevan serves as a reflection of the gender-based stereotypes that persist within society.

The perpetuation of gender-based stereotypes and discrimination in digital spaces further contributes to the problem by creating an environment that is conducive to cybercrime against women. Women are often subjected to online harassment and abuse simply because of their gender, with perpetrators using derogatory language, threats, and intimidation tactics to exert power and control over them. This not only violates the rights and dignity of women but also commemorates harmful gender norms and reinforces inequality in society.

The influences that shape our perceptions of gender, particularly when it comes to men and women, are numerous and varied. However, one cannot ignore the media's pervasive and powerful role in this regard. Media, in all its forms, has the uncanny ability

to weave itself seamlessly into the fabric of our daily lives, insinuating its messages into our consciousness at every turn. It is through these very messages that the media communicates its portrayal of gender, often perpetuating unrealistic, stereotypical, and overly simplistic views. Julia T. Wood, in her article titled “Gendered Media: The Influence of Media on Views of Gender,” points out three main themes that encapsulate how media represents gender:

First, women are underrepresented, which falsely implies that men are the cultural standard and women are unimportant or invisible. Second, men and women are portrayed in stereotypical ways that reflect and sustain socially endorsed views of gender. Third, depictions of relationships between men and women emphasize traditional roles and normalize violence against women. (31)

In *New Coverage of Violence Against Women: Engendering Blame*, Marina Meyers highlights the absence of exceptionality of media from sexist ideologies. She argues that the media not only perpetuates cultural stereotypes but also exhibits a biased perspective on gender. By mirroring this cultural blindness, the news inadvertently strengthens and perpetuates violence against women.

The responsibility of the media to support justice is highly emphasised and expected, but unfortunately, it often succumbs to the trap of exhibiting gender bias. Meyers postulates that the media is obligated to alter the circumstances; “they must, quite simply, become sensitive to the needs of the victim and to their role in fostering damaging stereotypes and myths” (ix). On the contrary, they exacerbate the victims’ predicament. Lacking the necessary and accurate information, the media attempts to manufacture a narrative surrounding Deepa’s sexual behaviour, maliciously asserting that she has “contracted AIDS” (40). This reprehensible act not only defames Deepa but also tarnishes

the reputation of her entire family. It is disheartening to witness the media's misguided portrayal, which ignites the aggressive tendencies of the public, leading them to besiege Deepa's residence with the intention to harm.

The media's conspicuous bias displayed in Deepa's case underscores its strong inclination towards the "virgin-whore" dichotomy (119). This is clearly evident in the conversation between Kokila and Malini, where Kokila recounts the disturbing incidents of people parading effigies representing Deepa and others on donkeys: "This afternoon, people paraded her effigy on a donkey. Actually, all of your effigies. Even yours. (To SHARAN.) I saw it all on TV" (39). Instead of objectively investigating the truth, the media eagerly concentrates on discrediting Deepa and disseminating instances of public humiliation inflicted upon her and her family. It is evident that, if "in the olden days the women who defied conventional morals were buried alive or stoned to death where as in the modern days such women are focused by the media which in turn destroys the reputation of a family" (Sunalini).

Usha, a reporter, enquires about her emotional response as a mother to her daughter's actions: "what you felt, as a mother when you learnt what your daughter had done. (*Pause.*) Malini? (*Pause.*) Malini, can you tell us, what went through your mind when you discovered your daughter's act?" (50). The repeated pauses and direct address to Malini suggest that Usha's primary objective is to compel her to acknowledge the reality of her daughter's wrongdoing. However, Usha neglects to question Jeevan or mention him throughout the interview, hence failing to acknowledge his potential involvement in the crime. Usha distinctly misrepresents the entirety of the situation as orchestrated solely by Deepa, positioning her as the sole bearer of blame and therefore subjecting her to shame and humiliation.

Chandrasekhar brings forth the lopsided media judgment through the reporter Usha. Usha's attention is solely fixated on Deepa, as she ponders over the question of "who is she? And why did she do what she did" (53). Rather than engaging in an open dialogue regarding the profoundly sensitive topic of revenge pornography, Usha displays a heightened enthusiasm for unearthing Deepa's secrets and exposing both her and her family to the harsh light of scrutiny. Usha declines to interrogate the individual who spreads the video containing explicit sexual content. Instead, she consciously steers the conversation towards the intimate relationship shared between Deepa and Jeevan. In doing so, Usha inadvertently aligns herself with the society's partial, unidimensional perspective that holds Deepa responsible for her own woeful predicament due to her participation in the creation of the video. Usha finds herself in a unique position to enlighten society about the plight of the victim, urging them to recognise Deepa's innocence while simultaneously exposing the heinous actions committed by the offender and ultimately seeking justice for the wronged party. Astonishingly, however, Usha chooses to integrate the prejudiced viewpoint ingrained within society, thus perpetuating the notion that Deepa is solely to blame for the ordeal she endures.

In "Digitalization Rape Culture: Online Sexual Violence and the Power of the digital photography," Alexa Dodge explore the impact of revenge porn on the internet, highlighting its role in facilitating the swift sharing and commentary on sexualised images of women. In her cogent analysis, Dodge elucidates that the forms of media depicting women in circumstances of sexual assault are susceptible to the reprehensible practice of slut-shaming as well as victim blaming. Throughout the play, Deepa is consistently subjected to the deplorable acts of slut-shaming and victim blaming.

Deepa, Jeevan, and Sharan, Deepa's brother, have been expelled from school. Although both Jeevan and Deepa were involved in wrongdoing, the blame is predominantly placed on Deepa by society. In response to the situation, Jeevan and his family have chosen to flee from India, leaving Deepa to face the aftermath of the incident on her own. It is evident that whenever problems arise, it is the women who suffer the most. The society, which is heavily influenced by a male-centric perspective, tends to blame the victims while sparing the offenders. This biased treatment is rooted in the belief that men are inherently superior, and women must always exercise caution, even when they are not at fault. The remarks made by Nirmala, the school Principal, further reinforce this notion:

NIRMALA. In my time, a girl like that was called a slut. Strangely, the boys who were teasing her, they used the same word. Times haven't changed all that much, have they? You have to tread carefully now. Labels like that tend to stick for life. I suspect you'll need the month to sort it all out. (13)

Santhosh, the father of Jeevan, does not experience any remorse for his son's actions; instead, he attempts to shift the fault to the youth. Rather than taking proactive measures to address the problem, he opts for evading it. In this situation, no one is willing to hold the perpetrator accountable or question the individual responsible for uploading the video. Instead, the whole spotlight is on Deepa. The presence or absence of the offender holds no significance in society; only the moral character of Deepa is the point of discussion for everyone.

Usually, when it comes to crimes such as sexual assault, women who are victims tend to be blamed more than the offenders. Victims are held responsible for their own victimisation. Moreover, victims are categorised as either good or bad. Yani Dai, in her

article titled “The phenomenon of feminist stigmatization and the research of cyber violence against women,” explains that the concept of a “perfect victim” (1407) refers to society’s expectation that the victim must be faultless and devoid of any negligence during the assault; otherwise, the assault may be deemed justified. In the play, the character Deepa loses her virginity before marriage, which raises questions about her chastity and attributing blame to her. According to the androcentric society, she is considered flawed for violating societal conventions. Therefore, Deepa does not fit the criteria of a “perfect victim” (1407). In this context, Deepa would be categorised as a ‘bad’ or ‘not real’ victim.

The victims who are considered to be ‘bad,’ meaning those who have engaged in sexting activities, do not receive the same treatment as the victims who are considered to be ‘good,’ meaning those whose photos or videos have been taken without their permission. In the case of the good victims, their privacy has been violated, whereas the bad victims have willingly produced and shared explicit materials of themselves. This distinction in treatment highlights the societal bias and inequality that lead to the growth of misogyny in society. Jeff Hearn and Matthew Hall in their work, *Revenge Pornography: Gender, Sexuality and Motivations* point out that the “public is more concerned with privacy of the affected women than with the incident itself, which inevitably leads to more violence” (1407). This perfectly explains the situation in the play, where the entire community is more preoccupied with the privacy of Deepa’s intimate relationship with Jeevan rather than addressing the incident itself.

Society perceives revenge pornography and sexual assault not merely as isolated incidents, but rather as encompassing the subjective experiences of the survivors. The occurrence of sexual assault is indeed influenced by the social context in which victims perceive themselves and how others evaluate them. In this social context, revenge pornography remains highly stigmatised, stemming from societal beliefs that assign blame

to the victims for the assault. According to sociologist Erving Goffman, stigma refers to “bodily sign designed to expose something unusual bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places” (1). In the play, *Free Outgoing*, Deepa is stigmatised as an inadequate victim, which results in limitations on her normal activities in public places and severing her ties with society.

Some individuals possess a perilous mindset that the act of sharing consensual, sexually explicit photographs with a trusted confidant should be construed as a broad authorisation to disseminate them amongst the general public. This assertion is expounded upon by Daniella Citron and Mary Anne Franks in their scholarly article entitled “Criminalizing Revenge Porn,” wherein they assert that the “victim’s consent in one context is taken as consent for other contexts” (348). While it is widely acknowledged that consent is inherently context-specific, it is regrettably not consistently applied to sexual practices, particularly in relation to women. The inability of society to comprehend the “contextual nature of consent when it comes to matters of sexual privacy and autonomy” (350) as it pertains to women catalyses the perpetration of cyberviolence against women and the perpetuation of gender inequality.

Deepa, in the act of providing her consent while recording a video, becomes the target of blame from her community for the traumatic situation she finds herself in. She is held accountable for the sexually explicit nature of the video, whereas Jeevan, being a boy, is not subject to the same level of scrutiny. This situation serves to highlight the prevailing gender stereotypes surrounding sexuality, wherein women who engage in sexual activity are often labelled as “immoral sluts,” while men’s sexual activity is typically regarded as a source of “pride” (353). This observation states that society tends to view women

engaging in sexual activity as negative as morally and ethically corrupt, whereas for the same act, men are often praised for their sexual prowess. The act of labelling Deepa as a promiscuous woman and the subsequent silence and failure to challenge Jeevan's actions exemplify the patriarchal admiration for his sexual abilities.

The mental well-being of the victim of revenge pornography is significantly impacted, as they experience a profound sense of fear. The act of revenge pornography not only subjects them to emotional distress, but also exposes them to victim blaming and societal stigma. Consequently, this leads to feelings of embarrassment and a compromised sense of safety and trust, perpetually leaving them vulnerable to harm.

The consequences of cybercrime against women are far-reaching and multifaceted. Victims often experience profound emotional and psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The constant fear of being targeted and the invasion of their privacy can have a detrimental impact on their mental well-being and overall quality of life. Additionally, cybercrime can have serious social and economic implications for women, affecting their relationships, professional opportunities, and financial stability. The reputational damage caused by online harassment and defamation can be long-lasting and difficult to recover from, further exacerbating the harm inflicted upon victims.

Murç a Ana, Olga Cunha, and Telma Catarina Almeida, in their article, "Prevalence and Impact of Revenge Pornography on a Sample of Portuguese Women," assert that the victims of revenge pornography suffer mental health consequences, including shame, powerlessness, and problems in relationships. They may also experience loss of jobs and difficulty in finding new jobs. The explicit content disseminated in revenge pornography can have a long-term negative impact on victims, leading to

psychological, personal, and social disturbances. They are also more vulnerable to harassment and stalking. Unlike happier individuals with high self-esteem, the victims often have low self-esteem and feel humiliated. Humiliation disrupts an individual's well-being and sense of dignity. Online victimisation, such as revenge pornography, is linked to mental health problems like depression and anxiety. It can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. The victims of revenge pornography have high levels of psychological distress, similar to rape or child pornography victims.

Victims who have been subjected to nonconsensual pornography describe their experience as being “virtually raped” (qtd. in Hearn and Hall 20). These victims often encounter a range of difficulties, such as feelings of humiliation, shame, and embarrassment within their intimate relationships, families, friendships, workplaces, and in public settings. They also grapple with sexual shame, sexual problems, body image concerns, disruptions in education and employment, worries about personal safety, heightened paranoia, hyper-vigilance, and trust issues. In “Unwanted Exposure: Civil and Criminal Liability for Revenge Porn Hosts and Posters,” Susanna Lichter highlights that victims have endured “embarrassment” and “reputation ruination” (1). Additionally, some victims have been subjected to stalking, harassment, and threats of gang rape due to the public disclosure of their personal information. Tragically, some victims have even taken their own lives. Consequently, some victims have felt compelled to change their names and phone numbers as a means of self-protection.

In the play, Anupama Chandrasekhar sheds light on the distressing ordeal faced by the victim of revenge pornography and her family. The playwright vividly portrays the torment they endure through the relentless stalking and humiliating anonymous phone calls from unknown individuals. Following the release of Deepa's explicit video,

numerous individuals have gathered around her residence, while the media eagerly awaits an opportunity to interview her. Deepa's family has been receiving anonymous calls, filled with offensive language, which deeply disturb the entire household. With each ring of the phone, Sharan and Malini hesitate to answer, occasionally venting their frustration towards the unknown callers. In extreme cases, they choose not to answer the calls at all, opting to leave the receiver off the hook:

MALINI takes the telephone and plugs it in. It begins to ring.

MALINI hesitates. She picks it up. It's a lewd call. MALINI. Pervert guttermouth.

The police is tracing this call.

SHARAN smiles. MALINI bangs down the receiver. The moment she lifts her

finger off the phone, it rings again. MALINI disconnects it again. She keeps the receiver off the hook. She looks at the computer. (30-31)

Being subjected to revenge pornography represents a form of sexual abuse. One is left with a profound sense of violation and a complete lack of control over the situation. The abrupt loss of privacy engenders emotions of vulnerability, disgrace, and a profound fear of seeking help from their family and friends, which ultimately leads to social isolation and negatively impacts their overall well-being. Despite her absence in the theatrical performance, Deepa's trauma resonates powerfully with the audience. The explicit video involving her engenders a sensation of exposure, contributing to her feelings of shame and apprehension when confronting the public. Following the incident, Deepa severs all connections with the external world. She isolates herself within the confines of her room, seeking solace in the darkness to evade the accusations and sits "shell-shocked" (14).

After the unfortunate incident, Deepa's ability to freely express herself and engage with others has been severely curtailed. The deep-seated trauma she experienced continues to haunt her, disrupting her physically and mentally. To shield her daughter from any harmful and derogatory influences emanating from the outside world, Malini is adamant about preventing Deepa from being exposed to any information or comments that may undermine her self-esteem or further exacerbate her fragile emotional state. When Sharan informs Malini that Jeevan's family has fled to another country, leaving them in a precarious situation, Malini intervenes and implores Sharan to exercise caution, lest his words inadvertently exacerbate Deepa's illness: "please – you'll aggravate her illness" (24). This incident serves as a poignant example of how Deepa's presence may be absent in the play, yet her trauma is vividly portrayed through the actions and concerns of her family members. Deepa finds herself completely immobilised, unable to progress beyond the traumatic event that has left an indelible mark on her psyche.

The dissemination of revenge pornography and the act of blaming the victim serve to intensify the sense of shame experienced by those who have been victimised. Shame, a commonly observed response to trauma, is linked to a range of negative consequences, including emotional distress and health issues. In his research titled *The Psychology of Shame: Theory and Treatment of Shame-based Syndromes*, Kaufman defines "Shame is an affect of inferiority. No other affect is more central to the development of identity ... Shame is felt as an inner torment" (qtd. in Bhuptani 5). Consequently, shame is an excruciating sensation that encompasses a perception of oneself as inherently flawed, worthless, and inferior. Deepa, in light of the humiliation and blame she has encountered from society, experiences a profound sense of shame concerning her actions. This shame makes her embarrassed, she feels dirty in the process she gets a diminished sense of self-worth. Deepa seeks to express these feelings through a letter she places outside her door,

in which she acknowledges her regret for her behaviour. As a result, she withdraws from both the outside world and her own family, severing all forms of communication.

The trauma not only affects the victim but also has a disastrous impact on the entire family. In this case, due to the circulation of a single video, the entire family is subjected to defamation and disrespect from the community and those around them. Deepa's family has severed ties with society and refrains from leaving their home due to the absence of safety outside, as they anticipate being targeted and humiliated. Jeevan's family, on the other hand, has fled India, embarking on a new life abroad. However, it is Deepa's family who bear the consequences of revenge porn. This has been particularly hard on her brother Sharan, who was expelled from school despite not being at fault. As a result, he has lost the opportunity for education, the ability to take exams, and future prospects.

After being expelled from school, Sharan is plagued with concerns about his future, thereby evoking feelings of frustration and an overwhelming sense of fear that his fate will be irreversibly sealed due to the actions of his sister. These distressing emotions prompt him to exhibit aggressive behaviour as he vehemently expresses his anger by directing curses toward his sister, whom he perceives as the catalyst responsible for ruining his once-promising future:

SHARAN. For 200 bucks. You said I could fight this if I get good marks. Jeevan is clever. He escaped. He'll start afresh in Sri Lanka or Canada. He'll become an engineer. He'll be all right.

MALINI. On the net!

SHARAN. Why the hell can't we run away too? Why can't we start from scratch?

(Silence.) Everyone in school knows what she did. I can't ever go back. I have

maths exams next week. I've been slogging over trigonometry the whole of this month. Make her set it right. Tell her to set it all right. (Silence.) Tell her I'll kill her. Tell your little whore I'll – kill her! (27)

As a single mother, Malini finds herself unable to bear the anguish that disrupts her tranquil existence. Despite her best efforts to enrich her children's lives, her daughter has managed to undermine all her hard work. Although Malini had great expectations for her daughter rather than her son, she ultimately falls short of realising her aspirations. Upon learning about her daughter's misbehaviour, Malini's mental state becomes unstable, leaving her uncertain of how to seek assistance from others. She is determined to safeguard not only her daughter's future but also her own and that of her son. The apprehension regarding what lies ahead, coupled with mounting frustration, hampers her ability to think clearly and amplifies her emotional turmoil. Experiencing an overwhelming sense of anxiety, she endeavours to erase the video on Santhosh's phone, directing her anger towards him:

MALINI. Who else has seen it? I've got to delete it. don't come near me, tell me how to delete it.

SANTHOSH. You press the green, go into the folder and press the red button. Let me –

MALINI deletes it. She drops the cellphone on the sofa.

MALINI. No! If you tell anyone else about it, I'll kill you. Porikki bastard! Porikki family. Cheao dirty dirty people, filthy people, perverts, stay away from my daughter, tell your son to stay away from my daughter, and my son, stay away from my family. (Crying). How c... This... Idiot, stupid stupid girl.

She cries. (17-18)

Malini asserts her daughter's innocence, claiming that Deepa is not a promiscuous individual who readily engages in sexual activity. She also alleges that Jeevan may have spiked her beverages with illicit substances, taking advantage of her vulnerable state while she was incapacitated. Santhosh immediately rejects the claim and firmly defends his son, insisting, "My son did not drug your daughter!" He further implies that any encounter was consensual by stating, "She was willing enough" (15).

Malini is unable to accept the fact that her daughter has committed the abhorrent deed until Jeevan's father presents the video evidence to her. Despite viewing the video, she remains uncertain whether it is indeed her daughter. She asserts that the video has been manipulated, claiming that the girl depicted is not her daughter. However, when Santhosh provides the specifics of the scar and marks obtained by Deepa in her Botany examination, she begins to have faith in the validity of the video, which is effectively revealed in the subsequent lines:

MALINI. It doesn't look like her. If it does, it's because, it's been digitally, her face has been morphed.

SANTHOSH. I came here because I thought you knew about it, because this is a dangerous thing, we ought to do something about it before it's too late.

Pause. Malini looks at the film.

MALINI. Avuhilley. [It's not her.] Her scar is not here. She fell off the wall when she was six and tore her skin. She has a scar.

She has a scar on her left...

She sees the scar. Silence.

It's nothing. Scars can be digitally, everything can be digitally... (17)

Malini believes that the freedom she granted to Deepa is the root cause for her misbehaviour. Consequently, she opts to sever all ties and disposes of all of Deepa's cosmetics and accessories, such as "lipsticks, nail polish, kohl, baubles in the dustbin" (20). Malini's actions not only facilitate Deepa's emancipation but also adversely affect Sharan, who is unjustly implicated in the situation. Initially, she secludes Sharan's video games and hockey stick in a cupboard. Subsequently, she disconnects the television, justifying her actions by asserting:

MALINI. No TV. No movies. No games. No entertainment. No distraction. No nothing.

SHARAN. What did I do?

She picks up cinema magazines from the table and tears them to pieces.

MALINI. He was your friend. (Tear.) She was your sister. (Tear.) You should have stopped it. (Tear.) You knew about the MMS. (Tear.) You didn't say a word. (20-21)

In situations where unfavourable occurrences arise, individuals who face challenges often opt for attributing responsibility to external factors rather than accepting accountability for their own behaviour. Here, Malini holds everything accountable and endeavours to eradicate those factors that are responsible for her daughter's misconduct. As a result, she experiences a loss of self-control and a sense of instability.

Mental well-being can be defined as a "state of balance within oneself and between oneself and one's physical and social environment" (Bhugra, et.al. 3). A mentally healthy individual possesses the capacity to establish and sustain affectionate relationships with others, fulfil the expected social roles within their culture, adapt to change, acknowledge, and express positive actions and thoughts, as well as manage emotions such as sadness.

Mental health provides an individual with a sense of “self-worth, control,” and comprehension of both “internal and external functioning” (Bhugra, et.al. 3). Malini’s mental state has been profoundly impacted by the extensive circulation of a sexually explicit video involving her daughter, coupled with the intense criticism from the community. The event has completely shattered Malini’s confidence in her daughter, leaving her with a profound sense of inadequacy and doubt regarding her parenting skills. Consequently, she finds herself withdrawing from society, cutting off all ties with the external world.

Malini finds herself in a state of anxiety, unsure of how to navigate the challenges of being a single mother. In this state of uncertainty, she yearns for some kind of emotional support and assistance in resolving the issue affecting her daughter. The words Sharan utters, filled with a sharp and painful sting, have a profound impact on Malini, causing her stability to waver. Sharan asserts that “[i]f Appa were alive none of this would have freaking happened” (26). This statement strikes at the very core of Malini’s self-esteem, leaving her with a heavy burden of self-doubt and a prevailing sense of failure as a mother. She is left grappling with the overwhelming realisation that she is ill-equipped to shield her children from the hardships of their current circumstances, uncertain of how to navigate this critical situation.

Malini is exhausted from constantly dealing with the people in her community and her neighbours. She finds herself in a state of perplexity and confusion when Sharan seeks her guidance regarding his future. In this disheartening situation, Malini’s feeling of hopelessness intensify and she articulates her emotions by exclaiming, “what do you want me to say, unh? What the hell do you want me to say? I don’t have the energy or the inclination to make you feel better. If you feel hungry, fix yourself something to eat. If you feel sad, go hug yourself. But don’t expect anything from me” (31).

Malini adopts a resolute and stringent attitude towards her children, leaving no room for them to reflect and failing to comprehend their circumstances. In her quest for control, she denies Deepa the opportunity to express her opinions, instead finding annoyance in her silence. Furthermore, she endeavours to remove Deepa from her current place and transfer her clandestinely into the custody of Ramesh, Malini's colleague, without Sharan's cognisance. Even in the face of Deepa's resistance, Malini remains impervious to her pleas, obstinately refusing to lend an ear to her grievances, and coercively compels her departure. In a drastic measure, she even cuts Deepa's hair and confiscates her cosmetic possessions, believing them to be the catalyst for the downfall of Deepa's life, a belief that has seemingly been validated in the discourse between Ramesh and Malini, where they discuss relocating Deepa:

MALINI. Ramesh, listen, listen. I've thought about it long and hard. She doesn't look like the MMS girl any more. Her hair's all shorn off now. And she doesn't wear my [kohl] and pottu [bindi] and those ridiculous earrings. She's lost some weight... No one will recognise her. It's like a disguise. (Pause.) I can provide some distraction. Like yell at them and divert their attention. What do you think? (44)

Malini undergoes the adverse repercussions of the distressing event, which not only affects her physical and psychological state but also tarnishes her standing within the community and raises doubts about her business integrity. There is a pervasive belief among everyone that Malini might be engaged in illicit undertakings concealed beneath the surface of her powder business. Even Kokila entertains doubts about a potential affair between Malini and Ramesh. As a result of this single incident, everyone begins to fabricate their own narratives in order to defame and disgrace Malini's family. However,

Malini finds herself with no alternative but to endure these circumstances until she can ensure the safety of her children.

In a sudden turn of events, Malini, Deepa, and her brother undergo a drastic transformation; they find themselves thrust into the spotlight of an overwhelming media frenzy and become targets of the furious mob gathering outside their modest Chennai apartment. The phenomenon of nonconsensual pornography significantly increases the likelihood of offline stalking and physical assault. Malini and Sharan hesitate to venture outside due to the pervasive climate of suspicion and aggression directed towards them, a reality that is confirmed by Ramesh. Ramesh elucidates his personal challenges in reaching Malini's residence, where he confronts a multitude of "media people" and "women with broomsticks," along with "women from the slums, women in starched saris," all of whom are eagerly anticipating causing harm to Malini's family (33). The details shared by Ramesh instil a profound sense of fear within Malini and Sharan. The severity of their fear is further intensified by incidents such as someone throwing stones at their kitchen window. The public aggressive conduct demonstrates that "women who violated traditional morals were either put to death by being buried alive or by being executed by stone" (Nisha, 3). As a result, the family feels an overwhelming sense of insecurity and fear and chooses to remain confined within the safety of their home.

Malini finds herself devoid of hope and lacks the strength to confront the overwhelming crowd gathered outside her apartment. Overwhelmed by the relentless pressure, she ultimately decides to relinquish her pride and seek forgiveness from the entire nation on behalf of her daughter's action. Furthermore, she herself acknowledges, in front of the media, that her daughter has engaged in promiscuous behaviour in front of the media.

The playwright has concluded the play with an open-ended question posed by the reporter Usha:

USHA. We have ten seconds. Hurry up!

MALINI gets back to her seat. Silence. MALINI tries to control her emotions.

Music.

Welcome back to this very special episode of Nation's Newsmakers and I'm Usha Singh reporting from the home of Malini Haridas. Our question for you viewers is: who do you think should be held responsible for the MMS incident? A) Parents, B) the school, or C) the society. SMS your answers to the number flashing on your screens right now because one of you will win a trip for two to Tokyo. And now, to the highlight of the evening. We have with us a very special guest. She's very young, only fifteen years old, but already she's stirred the imagination of an entire nation. Is she a femme fatale or is she the next icon of feminism? Or is she simply the girl next door? Who is she? And why did she do what she did. Let's find out. Please welcome, for the first time on live television, India's most watched teenager, Deepa Haridas ... (52-53)

Considering the seriousness of the matter, it is crucial to take prompt action to address this problem. The prioritisation of safeguarding women in the digital realm should be emphasised, as their security and well-being are in jeopardy. Endeavours should be made to increase awareness regarding cybercrimes against women, educate individuals about precautionary measures for online safety, and enforce strict laws and regulations to discourage and penalise wrongdoers. Only through concerted efforts and a comprehensive approach can we aspire to alleviate the adverse effects of cybercrimes on women and establish a secure digital atmosphere for everyone. The most crucial step is that the family

and society should take responsibility to stand behind the women and victims and support them to fight against the situation and overcome the trauma they have undergone.

In this play, no individual or society possesses the audacity to question the perpetrators of wrongdoing, nor do they dare to criticise the abhorrent conduct displayed by young Jeevan, who captured and shared the video, alongside the unknown culprit responsible for its dissemination. Jeevan's family does not show much concern about the matter, and his father apprehensively refrains from acknowledging his son's transgressions. However, Deepa's mother, in her pursuit of a resolution, takes responsibility for her daughter's actions and implores society for forgiveness, despite her own inability to fully comprehend Deepa's emotional state. Consequently, due to their perception of Deepa as a 'slut,' the entire community decide to expel her family. The only individual who advocates for Deepa is Sharan. Initially, he struggles to navigate the situation and places blame on Deepa. However, he eventually realises that she is not at fault and endeavours to support her. Sharan is the sole individual who truly comprehends the complexities of the girl's situation.

The judicial system plays a crucial role in mitigating the prevalence of revenge pornography. However, the complete eradication of this issue from society lies within the hands of individuals, who must actively challenge and eliminate patriarchal ideologies. It is the responsibility of elders to instil the belief in equality between boys and girls from an early age, emphasising the importance of mutual respect between genders. Emotional support serves as a vital remedy for women who have fallen victim to revenge pornography, aiding them in overcoming the traumatic experiences they have endured. By receiving support from their families and loved ones, these individuals can gradually rebuild the trust that has been shattered.