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Research paper

Digital feminist activism against rape culture in universities: #Metoo in India and #RUReferenceList in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

In October 2017, Raya Sarkar, a 24-year-old Indian law student, joined the global #MeToo movement by creating a crowdsourced list on Facebook naming male Indian academics accused of sexual harassment. Similarly, a year and a half earlier, an anonymous list of men accused of sexual and gender-based violence surfaced on social media in South Africa, quickly going viral on a Rhodes University Facebook page and sparking student mobilization under the hashtag #RUReferenceList. This research draws on online data from X and Facebook in South Africa and interviews with survivors and student activists in India to explore why survivors and activists in both countries turned to social media for justice. While some critics argue that these movements undermine due process and unfairly target individuals, our findings reveal that both sought to expose broader structures of violence. They emphasize the importance of moving beyond a narrow focus on due process to develop a more nuanced, intersectional understanding of campus rape culture. Both movements highlighted power dynamics, revealing the impunity of perpetrators within institutions and the vulnerability of survivors, and prompted the creation and sharing of these lists.

Keywords: university, digital activism, rape culture, intersectionality, feminist activism

In October 2017, Raya Sarkar, a 24-year-old law student from India, joined the global #Metoo movement of exposing powerful sexual predators by creating a crowdsourced list on Facebook of male Indian academics who allegedly harassed women. This came to be known as List of Sexual Harassers in Academia or LoSHA, and during the initial phase of India's #MeToo movement, universities played a crucial role, becoming spaces for discussion, debate, and activism against the prevailing culture of patriarchy, misogyny and casteism foundational to the Indian higher education (HE) system and the resultant power dynamics. Some of the most important debates that emerged after LoSHA included questions about due process, the urgent need for intersectional approaches to address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in academia, and the ideas of institutional accountability.

However, it must be pointed out that LoSHA didn't emerge spontaneously; it resulted from years of simmering anger on campuses across the country. The 2012 Delhi Nirbhaya rape case marked a turning point in feminist activism in India, utilising social media and digital technologies on a large scale (Dey, 2019a). Subsequent years witnessed numerous feminist movements led by young feminists centred around university campuses. Campaigns like #HokKolorob, #WeWillGoOut, #AintNoCindrella, and larger movements like Pinjra

Tod leveraged social media and catchy hashtags creatively to address issues such as women's rights to public spaces, the establishment of sexual harassment committees in universities, and the demand to abolish curfew times in women's hostels on campuses. Hence, Sarkar's list is also the result of growing frustration within universities in India, fuelled by the anger and organisation of previous similar movements on campus.

Notably, a year and a half before Sarkar's list was published in India, a similar list had circulated on various social media platforms in South Africa. Initially posted anonymously on the 'Rhodes University Queer Confessions, Questions, and Crushes' Facebook page, the list featured the names of eleven men ending with 'et al.' (meaning 'and others'), with no accompanying details (Seddon, 2016). It soon became evident that the list contained names of former and current students who had been accused of SGBV. In a matter of hours, the anonymous post went viral as students began organising and mobilising under the hashtag #RUReferenceList. This online mobilisation led to campus-wide demonstrations. As the offline demonstration gained the media's attention, a debate ensued about the #RUReferencelist campaign, with many online expressing solidarities for the campaign while others condemning the publication of the list as a form of rape itself (This Is Africa, 2016; Burnet 2016).

While much of the public discourse regarding the campaign grew increasingly focused on the publication of the list, the aim of the activists involved in the campaign was to draw attention to Rhodes University's highly problematic SGBV policy and how it was configured to protect perpetrators while providing little support to survivors (Pilane, 2016; Mohana, 2016). #RUReferenceList was also a continuation of the activism that had begun two weeks earlier on Rhodes University campus as part of the Chapter 2.12[1] campaign in collaboration with other activists at Stellenbosch University and the University of Cape Town (Chengeta, 2016). The list emerged because of the university management's total unwillingness to engage with the Chapter 2.12 campaign. The list of demands drafted by the activists in the #RUReferenceList movement also reiterated issues stated in the Chapter 2.12 campaign.

Through the lens of both movements discussed above, we ask the crucial question of why survivors and activists in India and South Africa turned to social media platforms in their search for justice. This question has been of specific interest to us as many Indian and South African universities have existing processes and committees to address SGBV (Gouws and Kritzinger, 2007; DHET, 2020; Bull and Dey, 2022). Critics of campaigns in both contexts claimed that lists of sexual harassers devalue due process and survivors must follow existing institutional mechanisms if they want justice. However, survivors and activists still chose the path of digital activism (De Maio, & Shae Rodriguez, 2022). A growing body of research explores both digital activism on campuses across the world and the drawback of due process within universities (see Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2018; Dey and Mendes, 2022; Bull and Shannon, 2023). However, there is very little comparative research on the topics examining SGBV in HE as a global problem requiring global conversations and solutions. Our paper aims to fill in this gap.

However, we aim to look deeper and explore what digital activism in both contexts tells us about university spaces and the rape culture within them. While many critique both movements as devaluing due process and attacking individual perpetrators, our research shows that both movements aimed to expose larger structures of violence, emphasising the critical necessity of moving beyond simply asking for due process to developing a more nuanced and intersectional understanding of campus rape culture that foster SGBV and survivor centred approaches to dealing with and preventing SGBV. Both movements brought attention to multiple power dynamics, exposing the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators within institutions and the vulnerability of survivors, prompting the creation and disclosure of the lists. Hence, there is a need to scrutinise institutional justice mechanisms and the underlying power dynamics (Subramanian and Sharma, 2022). Only through such approaches can comprehensive cultural and structural shifts be achieved.

FEMINIST DIGITAL ACTIVISM

Digital platforms have become a revolutionary tool for enacting social and political change (Sivitanides and Shah, 2011), enabling activists to disseminate ideas and connect to different audiences (Baer, 2016). Marked by the utilisation of social networking platforms for widespread mobilisation, digital activism gained prominence with the rise of well-known hacker collectives such as Anonymous and Lulzsec, as well as the emergence of 'social media activism' in movements like 15-M, Occupy, and other square-based movements (Gerbaudo, 2017). In Gerbaudo's (2017) view, the ongoing discourse in the evolution of digital activism tends to favour a typical techno-deterministic stance, emphasising technology as the primary force behind social change. This approach

[1] Chapter 2.12 of the South African Constitution ensures every individual's right to safety and security. The Chapter 2.12 protest was organised by members of the Gender Action Project at Rhodes University with the support of other organisations and individuals. One of the posters of the movement read: 'You are more likely to be excluded for plagiarism than you are for rape.'

overlooks various non-technological factors, including socio-economic, political, and cultural influences, which also play a crucial role in shaping the character of activism.

In her examination of feminist digital activism, Baer (2016) asserts that digital platforms have the potential to circulate feminist ideas broadly, create new ways of discussing gender and sexism, connect with diverse groups, and enable innovative forms of protest. The study conducted by Mendez et al. (2019) on how girls and women navigate rape culture using digital platforms show that their participants utilised these platforms to establish community and connections while also fostering solidarity as they addressed rape culture. According to Clark (2020), networked collectivities and the immediacy offered by social media platforms have been utilised by feminist activists to seek accountability from various influential figures. This drive for accountability has given a rise to a form of online activism specifically employed to counteract online misogyny, (Jane, 2016). At the same time, accordingly, Jackson et al. (2020) networks formed by women using hashtags on Twitter amplify feminist critiques beyond traditional reach, providing cathartic release, solidarity, and highlighting the demands against a persistently patriarchal society. For Williams (2015), social media hashtags have emerged as an effective tool for raising intersectional awareness about black women's issues and this organising is particularly important in response to a media landscape that has historically overlooked the experiences of black women, especially concerning violence. Thelandersson (2014) agree with this view and writes that the Internet offers a platform where feminists can exchange knowledge about why actions or ideas that some view as harmless may be hurtful or offensive to others. While many feminists are aware of intersectionality, not all of us fully understand every way in which intersecting forms of oppression operate. These cross-border discussions have the potential to advance feminist politics by making them more inclusive, intersectional, and internationalist.

In the forthcoming section, we speak about the methodology that guided this research, followed by our findings.

FEMINIST DIGITAL ACTIVISM

This paper stems from the desire of both authors to find points of solidarity in post-colonial contexts, with multiple intersections of shared histories. We write this paper as academics working on the issues but also as activists who have been involved in these movements and other feminist movements in our contexts. As we write this paper, we have actively discussed what we can learn from each other and how we can support our collective struggles through an intersectional and internationalist perspective.

The data presented by the first author is from empirical data collected in the form of 100 interviews with students, members of staff, and activists (many of whom were also people with lived experiences of SGBV in HE) from 12 states, 30 universities, and 25 activist groups across India. Activist groups include student unions, student wings of political parties, student societies, student-led collectives operating at the university, and independent organisations supporting student survivors within the university. These interviews were conducted following LoSHA between July 2018 to September 2019 as part of the research project titled 'Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in Indian Universities: A Study of Campus Life, Student Activism, and Institutional Responses', and ethical clearance was obtained for all fieldwork. In conducting these interviews, the first author was mindful of the deeply intersectional nature of SGBV and how power and privilege continue to shape which experiences are not only heard but recognised and believed (see Alcoff, 2018). As a result, she specifically sought out participants from Dalit and Muslim backgrounds, and queer communities. All participants were completely anonymised in the research process and only pseudonyms are used.

In contrast, the second author gathered information by following the hashtag #RUReferenceList on the internet. The process commenced with a Google search to locate articles and blog posts associated with the hashtag, followed by an exploration of the hashtag on social media platforms like Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter), where it gained popularity. This methodology is categorised as digital ethnography due to its emphasis on studying social interactions in online spaces. Paoli and Auria (2012) argue that the cognitive aim of digital ethnography lies not in examining the features of the medium or its utilisation but instead, it focuses on exploring the cultural, relational, and value-based experiences cultivated within cross-media digital environments. Therefore, the focus here is not the quantity of tweets or Facebook posts associated with the hashtag, or identifying which of these social media platforms is preferred for activism. The emphasis lies in searching for posts by those engaged in the hashtag campaign, as activists made a deliberate effort to not only utilise social media for organising and mobilising but also to document their activism through various formats like writing blog posts and op-eds or creating a dedicated Facebook page for the hashtag campaign. Consequently, a wealth of material is available, capturing their personal experiences throughout the campaign. Notably, the analysed data spans from April 2016 when the hashtag gained widespread attention until 2022, as the activists have continued referencing the hashtag over the years, particularly when five of their peers were expelled by Rhodes University due to their involvement in the #RuReferenceList movement.

Though the data for India and South Africa was collected using two different methods as stated above, we are of the view that they are comparable as both data sets record the voices of survivors, activists, students, and members of staff who participated in the movements in questions and have been involved in the work of SGBV in HE in India and South Africa.

FAILURE OF DUE PROCESS

Despite the laws and guidelines, in this paper, we were interested in exploring why survivors and activist turned to online spaces and digital activism in both India and South Africa to disclose their experiences and to name perpetrators. We begin our analysis by discussing institutional failure as it comes up repeatedly in our data. In the cases of both India and South Africa, participants speak about the systematic failures of due process, which left them feeling like they had nowhere else to turn to find justice or closure except social media. According to activists in South Africa, victim-blaming responses by the university were deflection tactics used by institutions and their legal offices to protect perpetrators while dismissing survivors. Participants in both contexts speak about a general culture of disbelief and silencing of survivors around SGBV in their universities. This could be from members of staff, management or even their own peer groups. Participant Reema in India narrates an incident by a professor in her class following a reported rape case at her university. Reema states,

> *She was talking about truth and reality, and her own definition of what truth and reality are. This was a few days after a woman was raped on campus. Suddenly she said- let us take this rape incident, for instance, the truth is that this woman was raped. But that is not enough for me. I want the reality. I want to know what she was doing in that boy's room. I want to know what her relationship with this boy was prior to the rape. And she actually said it in class. The way she spoke about it was pure victim blaming. So, the university is all about victim blaming.*

Reema further speaks about how the university continuously protects perpetrators while survivors are silenced. Several participants in India also talk about how they were actively deterred by professors, security, wardens and management not to file complaints. For example, participant Rupa said,

> *There was girl in my class who was stalked on campus. When she went and complained to her professor, he said you should know how to handle these situations by yourself. These are the same people who asked us to follow 'due process', after the list. But when we complain they asked ask us to 'handle it'. They are contradicting themselves.*

In instances where complaints were filed, survivors recount experiences of victim-blaming, slut-shaming, comments about dress and attitude, and an overall lack of support (Dey, 2020). Additionally, some participants narrate instances where survivors were themselves blamed for the harassment they faced, or explicitly told that their experienced 'cannot be termed as harassment' (Dey, 2020). A significant number of posts during #RUReferenceList focused solely on exposing the victim-blaming culture that existed at Rhodes University. In one of the tweets posted on April 22, 2016, the user tweeted the following hashtags '#StopRapeCulture #RUReferenceList #SRHRDialogues' alongside an image of a woman with the words 'RAPISTS RAPE PEOPLE NOT OUTFITS' written on her back. This tweet, like many others, emphasised the prevailing practice of focusing on outfits and clothes as consent. Participants in both movements repeatedly critiqued institutional mechanism and how their current practices were not only neglectful of the voices of the survivors and their ability to say no but also sent a clear message that perpetrators would be protected and can rape with impunity.

Throughout the #RUReferenceList movement, participants also echoed this and explicitly emphasised the culture of disbelief leading to safeguarding the perpetrators while completely disregarding the needs and well-being of the survivors. One user made this issue particularly evident by expressing that, 'You say my reporting he raped me will ruin his reputation…what about what he did to me?!#RUReferenceList' (April 22, 2016). This disregard and neglect of the survivors is also evident in university policies. As these two posts on Facebook point out:

> *Change the policy which currently requires victims to prove that their perpetrators intended to rape them. Who agreed that this was reasonable (April 18, 2016)*
>
> *I'm totally baffled. policy ... currently requires victims to prove that their perpetrators intended to rape them. If you rape someone, what other intention could you possibly have? Were you planning to make a cup of tea and then you slipped? …The other thing is the presumption of innocence. Doesn't that only apply to criminal trials? (April 18, 2016)*

When some netizens called for due process as a criticism of the #RUReferenceList, supporters of the hashtag continually pointed to the failures of due process. As one tweet read,

> *You talk about due process as if due process had even begun to be followed the eons ago when these rapes were reported in the first place. Any other crime the victims are more than encouraged to get justice but not this one (April 18, 2016).*

This was followed by another user who also explained,

> *AS A SURVIVOR i CAN TELL YOU YOUR DUE PROCESS BECOMES AN SECOND 'RAPE' and is almost worse because you do not expect someone who is supposed to help you to punish you for a crime committed against you. I am all for the campaign, toughs if a few men get listed who are innocent... small price compared to the thousands of women who have been violated (April 18, 2016).*

Participants in India also spoke about the lack of peer support. Survivor Amrita filed a formal complaint about sexual harassment from a fellow student. However, she was not believed when she approached the perpetrator's girlfriend to warm her. Amrita states, 'I spoke to his girlfriend about it because she and I were still friends at that point, and she told me "Why you are making a fuss about it". Like he didn't touch me inappropriately. And I was really upset after that incident'. Amrita goes on to share how she lost her entire friendship group following her complaint and was completely isolated. Tweets during #RUReferenceList also alluded to the lack of peer support. Participants also called out women who dismissed survivors speaking out about their rape by responding, 'but he has never been violent with me' (April 17, 2016). Others highlighted the audacity of their peers to respond with the 'not all men' moniker. Here is how one tweet challenges this sentiment,

Dear "Not ALL men" brigade: Ever consider the radical idea that maybe, just maybe, you're not the victim here? #RUReferenceList. (April 18, 2016)

This failure of the institutional due process and silencing resulted in LoSHA and #RUReferenceList where these initiatives provided an avenue for numerous survivors to break their silence regarding incidents of SGBV. Academic and feminist activist from India Radha (2019), point out that existing mechanism in HE was predominantly focused on student-on-student violence, rarely taking into consideration staff-on-students violence. While this knowledge existed, LoSHA brought the conversation around power dynamics in academia to the very forefront of the discourse around SGBV in universities. Contrary to LoSHA, the #RUReferenceList focused mainly on student-on-student violence and the failures of the existing mechanisms of addressing SGBV on campus. However, posts from the #RUReferenceList movement also pointed to the power dynamics and how perpetrators continued to be rewarded by being allowed to hold positions of power within universities (April 17, 2016).

The experience of any form of SGBV can be extremely dehumanising. Academics have highlighted how institutional processes, victim-blaming and stigma were significant barriers for survivors to come forward, especially after witnessing other survivors being stigmatised, victimised, shamed and bullied, and want to avoid the re-traumatisation of disclosing their own experience (Burgess et al., 2008). The silence is further reinforced by the negative portrayal of women who speak out, labelling them as vengeful individuals seeking retribution for an alleged imaginary harm or troublemakers for attempting to disturb the status quo (Ahmed, 2021). LoSHA and #RUReferenceList brought to light the widespread prevalence of SGBV in academia in India and South Africa, shedding light on the misogynistic cultures that persist in universities worldwide (Anitha et al., 2020). Data collected by both of us distinctly show that even if due process exists in practice, as it does in many cases in India and South Africa, the larger prevailing cultures makes it almost impossible for survivors to access them and find justice and healing following these pathways.

INTERSECTIONAL CONCERNS

A key challenge highlighted by both LoSHA and #RUReferenceList was an urgent need for intersectional approaches to understanding the failures of due process in Indian and South African HE encouraging academics and activists to not only look at HE spaces through a gendered analysis but also incorporate an analysis of caste, class, coloniality, and sexuality among others (Dhanaraj, 2018; Maluleke and Moyer, 2020). The intricate issues of whom the due processes serve, who can access institutional justice, whose narratives are accepted, and who is excluded were some of the most valuable questions raised by both movements without the understanding of which any due process mechanism remain hollow and inaccessible to most survivors while serving the interests of institutions and perpetrators. The term intersectionality, coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, contends that the experiences of women of colour arise from intersecting patterns of sexism and racism. Rather than treating categories such as gender, race, class, and nation as separate systems of oppression, intersectionality explores how these systems mutually construct and articulate one another (Hill Collins, 1998). Crenshaw (1991) further argues, 'The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of colour, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women' (Crenshaw, 1989). In reality, no single social identity category fully describes how individuals respond to their social environment, necessitating consideration of the interconnection of multiple identities for a complete understanding of the complex nature of reality (Shields, 2008). While intersectionality as a theory may lack precision, its very imprecision makes it dynamic and a vital tool for critical feminist analysis, encouraging complexity and creativity (Yuval-Davis, 2006). McCall (2005) considers intersectionality one of the most important contributions to contemporary feminist theory.

However, authors have also pointed out the risk of using the concept of intersectionality in an additive or formulaic and emptying it of meaning and as a result depoliticising it (Bilge, 2013). Dhamoon (2015), agrees with this and states that understanding power-dynamics is crucial for developing an understanding of gendered

relations for two key reasons. Firstly, gendered processes of differentiation are inseparable from other systems of colonial and racist domination, and marginalised people operate systematically within a matrix of interrelated forms and degrees of penalty and privilege. Secondly, power relations exist among various manifestations of oppressed-oppressor dynamics and variations in colonial- and racial-gendered processes of subject formation. These power dynamics must be central to any liberatory political organising. Therefore, a feminist praxis of decolonising anti-racism should not prioritise one struggle over others, as they mutually contribute, albeit differently, to structuring white-supremacist capitalist heteronormativities (Dhamoon, 2015).

Gouws (2017: 24) points out that the other caveat of the theory of intersectionality is the exclusion of 'white privilege as a dimension of white women's identity entanglements with race, class and sexuality'. Contextualising intersectionality in university hashtag campaigns, Gouws (2017) further writes that in the context of post-colonial universities it is important to consider the matrix of domination in relation to the intersections of colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy. The student activists involved in the #RUReferenceList were cognizant of this complex matrix and sought to highlight it in various ways. As the online campaign shifted to offline protests, the activists started emphasising the University's decision to involve the police through the lens of its colonial and apartheid history. While some students pointed out the irony of the police arresting individuals protesting rape instead of those accused of rape (April 20, 2016), a white student activist and media officer of the Gender Action Project (GAP) at Rhodes University pushed back against the media representations of the protesters by arguing,

> *Representations by national and international media as well as ignorant commentators have cast the student protestors as irrational, emotional and violent radicals. The consequences of this are twofold: they obscure the purpose of the protest and shift the public's attention away from discussions about rape culture and patriarchal social structures. They also contribute to a violent racist discourse that constructs women, and in particular black women, as overly emotional, 'angry' and unwilling to 'hear reason' (April 26, 2016).*

By underscoring the criminalisation and misrepresentation of the protestors, the activists aimed to draw attention to a tactic frequently employed against black people in South Africa. This approach is deeply ingrained in the country's colonial history. The significance of this point is underscored by one of the student activists in a post on X

> *I have read of the statements Rhodes has written about her and her case and thought about how strongly they emphasise criminality, their most recent conjuring being something about the need to protect society from "the reign of the law of the jungle" (???!Bathong!???). In their narrative, Yolanda and by extension, all of us who were in solidarity in those fateful moments, can never be innocent. We- angry, hurting, black, queer, fallist*[2]*, woman, non-binary, femme- could never be innocent in a place like that. We stood against Rape, which, as Prof. Pumla Gqola has outlined, is a founding element of colonial conquest and colonial order (April 17, 2022).*

Throughout South Africa's history, resistance to coloniality by black people has often resulted in violence, with those in power justifying their actions by criminalising protestors. While most universities in South Africa have transformation offices claiming to address historical and present discrimination and violence, including SGBV, in practice they continue legacies of colonisation, apartheid and patriarchy through criminalisation and silencing. In a similar vein, the activists' undertaking of publicising a list have been branded as vigilantes. Activists have expressed dismay at the labelling of their activism as 'the reign of the law of the jungle' because of its racial connotations (April 17,2016).

It is also important to note that several activists, students, and staff who participated in the #RUReferencelist movement were also fallists and through #RUReferencelist they continued the legalises and lesson from the fallist movements including fights against colonial and apartheid legacies in the context of SGBV and their deep commitment to intersectional politics. According Mazibuko (2020),

> *Fallism is developed from the urge not only to recognize multiple forms of oppression but also to work actively against these interlocking oppressions… Being feminist and fallist means knowing that we need to write, to cry, to fight, to mobilize, to teach, to encourage one another, to step back, to show up in numbers or alone, to crush the systems that both oppress and connect us. Being feminist and fallist means being productive in the simultaneous destruction of multiple forms of oppression in a number of varying ways.*

Hence to the activists of fallist and #RUReferncelist movements intersectionality was not merely about acknowledging multiple and interconnected oppressions but also a deliberate methodology adopted by feminists

[2] The Fallist movement is a student movement in South Africa that began in 2015 at the University of Cape Town with the #RhodesMustFall hashtag and spread to other universities across the country under the #FeesMustFall hashtag. Initially focused on decolonising the physical and intellectual architecture of the university and ending the outsourcing of university workers, the movement's demands broadened as it gained momentum. Central to these were the halting student fee increases and expanding government funding for higher education, alongside other urgent calls for universities to address sexual violence at university.

and the Queer community that necessitated the consideration of various forms of protest and intervention be used simultaneously to challenge systemic oppressions (Mazibuko, 2020).

As participants in the fallist movement, student activists in the #RUReferencelist movements of all races were conscious of the historical privilege afforded to white students. Therefore, during certain fallist marches, they strategically utilised this privilege to shield black protestors from police intervention (Ahmed, 2019). Mazibuko underscores this perspective in her analysis of the #RUReferencelist protest documented in 'Disrupt', a documentary chronicling the UCKAR[3] community's struggle against SGBV, university management inertia, and societal indifference. The deliberate choice to feature a white student activist directing the protest and confronting a white lecturer is seen as a strategic decision. According to Mazibuko, 'it may be covertly strategic to place a white womxn at the centre of disruption because raging white women are read differently from raging Black womxn (2018).

While #RUReferencelist spoke about the intersections of SGBV with race and colonial legacies, LoSHA highlighted the complex dynamics of SGBV and caste. In the context of India, researchers argue about the power, privilege and entitlement rooted in the class-caste network which is foundational to Indian academia both nationally and transnationally (Gajjala, 2018; Gajjala et al., 2023). In this environment, the belief that Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi (DBA) women enjoy equitable access to due process and reporting mechanisms in universities is what Chadha (2017) refers to as 'misplaced optimism.' Sharma (2021), points out that the politics of caste privilege which establishes the voices and narratives of Brahmin-savarna women as the universal experience of women in India, became especially prominent during the LoSHA debates. This became particularly crucial in an environment where DBA students entering university spaces are inherently in precarious positions due to their caste locations.

Academics speak about how historically the bodies of DBA women have been more sexualised and hence more vulnerable to SGBV and exploitation, but their narratives least believed (dos Santos and Sara Morais, 2019; Kamble, 2023). This is also echoed by Subramanian and Sharma (2022) who state that the demand for due process in cases of SGBV should consider the histories of punishment and impunity and avoid reinforcing the oppression faced by communities marginalised due to their caste, class, and religious identities. This widely manifests in universities and echoed through the narratives of multiple participants. Participant Richa, a member of staff who headed that SGBV committee in her institution, boldly claimed how DBA women 'made-up' complaints of SGBV and casteism about male colleagues in the department. Participant Rahul, a student activist said, 'lower caste poor women sacrifice a lot for higher education. Even if they are harassed, they tolerate it because they cannot go back'. DBA women also frequently find themselves caught between their gender identity and a sense of loyalty to their caste group. They often face the dilemma of choosing between their identities—either seeking solidarity within the predominantly upper-caste dominated feminist movement or within male-dominated Dalit spaces where gender-related concerns are downplayed (Ayyar, 2017).

RAPE CULTURE: INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES

While many critique both #Metoo in India and #RUreferencelist in South Africa as devaluing due process and targeting individuals, our data show that both movements aimed to move beyond the individual and expose the larger rape culture on campuses and the need for intersectional interventions. As Participant Pooja comments in the context of LoSHA, 'I am not even in the university anymore, what will I gain targeting one person. I just want things to change of the current and future students. Similarly, in the case of the #RUReferenceList only a list of names was shared with no other details, but everyone immediately knew that it was a list of known serial sexual abusers on campuses. For many university students, the issues highlighted by the #RUReferenceList movement were not unique to Rhodes University but endemic to universities across the country (Pilane, 2016).The concept of 'rape culture' was put forward by US feminist movements in the 1970s. Rape culture encompasses a set of societal beliefs that condone male violence against women, including notions that such violence is an inevitable aspect of life, that there exists a connection between violence and sexuality, that men are active while women are passive, and that men possess an entitlement to sex. These beliefs also perpetuate harmful 'rape myths,' such as the idea that women derive pleasure from rape, and contribute to the misconception that consent is blurred, resulting in widespread scepticism towards rape survivors and culture of victim blaming, slut shaming and invisiblisation of the violence. In a rape culture, sexual assault is not only considered as something that is inevitable but is also viewed as desirable or excusable behaviour (Mendes, 2015). Additionally, women are unjustly seen as provoking or deserving rape due to their failure to conform to a chaste feminine ideal or because they are perceived as sending signals to men that they are open to sexual advances, regardless of their protests. These supposed 'signals' encompass behaviours such as staying out late at night,

[3] UCKAR, an acronym for University Currently Known as Rhodes, embodies the language utilised in protests addressing the colonial history and violence linked to Cecil John Rhodes, the individual for whom the university is named.

consuming alcohol, flirting with men, wearing 'provocative' clothing, or engaging in sexual activity (Bonnes, 2013). Within HE 'rape culture' encompasses various harmful practices beyond just rape and sexual assault. These include rape jokes, sexual harassment, catcalling, sexualised banter, constant scrutiny of women's bodies, attire, appearance, and behaviour, shifting blame from the perpetrator to the victim in assaults, and the impunity granted to wrongdoers, regardless of their actions (Mendes, 2015). This is the widespread culture that both movements addressed.

As shown in the previous section, both #Metoo and #RUreferencelist highlighted the need to develop an understating of campus rape culture through an intersectional lens that centre power in a multipronged way, shifting across different sites and scales (Gouws, 2017). A truly intersectional understanding of rape culture in HE must be the first step in the development of due process and practices in HE which are intersectional, survivor-centred and can result in long term cultural and structural changes. This is echoed by authors such as Gouws (2017) and Kessel (2022) who write that since rape is a political act, the scope of rape culture in HE should broaden beyond the realm of male dominance to encompass various forms of political domination, including white supremacy, heteronormativity, xenophobia, and colonialism. It is crucial to examine the intersections and interactions among these different forms of political domination in understanding rape culture in universities. Unfortunately, this comprehensive analysis is frequently absent in current discussions on rape culture in HE and there is an urgent need to redefine the concept in an intersectional way, that recentres the question of power that is exerted by rape culture rather than solely focusing on who might be targeted by it. Kessel (2022:132) re-defines rape culture as,

> *A set of intersubjective and collectively reproduced myths, discourses, and practices that individuals use to assign interpretations of rape victimhood and perpetration, innocence and guilt, and power and powerlessness that, in turn, reproduce a culture that normalizes rape and other sexual violence as an effective (though outwardly condemned) way to reinforce relations of subordination.*

This is the intersectional definition of rape culture that we use in our understanding and analysis and highlighted by both movements. However, the conversation started by both LoSHA and #RURefenceList needs to be pushed further to understand how different form of power operates within campuses. There is also a lack of conversation on the nexus of class and SGBV on campuses. Participant Nina from India, comment, 'There are non-teaching staff, there are sanitation staff, who face the worst of sexual harassment in such universities. Other participants speak about the SGBV of cleaners in male hostels. Every queer participant from India interviewed speaks about discrimination on campus. Queer student activist Shreya says, 'But when it comes to talks on sexuality the campus is not progressing any more… I am oppressed as a sexual woman and part of the LGBTQ community'. Queer student Lekha from India, point out that in some campuses in bigger cities queer and trans politics have become more visible, but it has also opened up people from those communities to more violence. Collins et al. (2009) state that SGBV in South African universities is not only rife against women but also targeted at queer communities. Graziano (2004) research with 20 queer students and the relationship between their social support networks, their involvement in a gay and lesbian Society at Stellenbosch University reveals that some queer students remain silent about their sexual orientation due to hostile campus environments and fear of discrimination and victimisation. The #RUReferenceList activists recognised the discrimination encountered by the queer community on campus. In their student-led and organised lecture series held during the protest, they incorporated issues such as the exclusion of communities from anti-rape campaigns and SGBV faced by queer communities (Chengeta, 2017). Participants used terms such as 'womyn', which is used interchangeably with 'womxn' in South Africa and is seen as an acknowledgment of all experiences of womanhood, including those of queer and trans women. Through the movement, participants spoke about shifting the focus from gendered violence merely happening between men and women to a more intricate narrative involving people in positions of power violating those in subordinate positions. They not only highlighted narratives of heterosexual female survivors of SGBV on campus but also included trans and queer individuals. In this context activists in the Black Womxn Caucus writes, 'History has no blank pages #OrganizingForSurvival #SandtonShutdown #TheTotalShutdown #GenderSummit #RUReferenceList #Iam1in3 #RememberKhwezi'. This was accompanied by a short video clip of womxn protesting gender-based violence in South Africa. (February 4th, 2021). However, queerphobia and transphobia is rife in campuses across South Africa.

According to Baer (2016), by bringing together diverse feminist constituencies, digital platforms enable new kinds of intersectional conversations. This was one of the main contributions of both movements. While survivors spoke about individual cases of abuse and trauma, they were also highlighting larger structural dimensions of social inequality and male privilege underpinning SGBV on campuses globally. This echoes with Baer (2016: 29), who writes, 'By emphasizing the way individual stories of oppression, when compiled under one hashtag, demonstrate collective experiences of structural inequality, hashtag feminism highlights the interplay of the individual and the collective'. Participants in both movements used digital platforms as means to break their

silence and speak truth to power. As Participant Minu from India says, 'It is naming a genuine problem'. Hence following dos Santos and Morais (2019), we see both movements as digital 'parrhesia'. Parrhesia entails the effort to change the set of rules by which truth is produced. This can be viewed as a form of critique, not just at a content level but as an infrastructural critique that disrupts not only the content but also the organisational and networked processes. Following this, both movements were disruptions creating fractures in the status quo and aiming to create larger cultural changes (Dey, 2019b).

CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of two digital activist movements, #LoSHA and #RUReferenceList, this paper aimed to answer the question of why survivors are increasingly turning to social media spaces for justice. The failure of due process was prominently discussed by participants and those engaged in the digital activism in both contexts directing attention to highlighting the university's complicity in the prevailing rape culture. Many critiqued both movements of solely focusing on naming and shaming or as witch-hunts of men (see Chadha, 2017). This is similar to what Franks (2019: 124-125) states speaking about the global #Metoo movement, 'The efforts to silence these women should be seen as modern-day witch hunts, carried out by men in "the bondage of irrational fears" that the mere word of a woman has the power to destroy men's lives. Instead, the very term "witch hunt" has been energetically and ironically repurposed to convey the persecution and silencing of men by women'. We contest this claim to suggest that both LoSHA and #RUReferenceList were not aimed at individual perpetrators or survivors. Both movements pushed the conversation of due process further encouraging developing a more nuanced and intersectional understanding of campus rape culture that foster SGBV enabling institutional silencing, victim blaming, and the erasure of survivor narrative making due process inaccessible and inadequate. They highlighted survivors needs and larger structural violence, rather than individual cases and reimagining what transformational structural changes could look like in HE. Finally, they pushed for a more nuanced intersectional understanding of rape culture which consider multiple power dynamic. The concept of intersectionality's reminds us that it is increasingly challenging to discuss gender without considering other social identities and structures of dominance (Knapp, 2005). On talking about intersectionality Davis (2008: 79) states that 'it encourages complexity, stimulates creativity, and avoids premature closure, tantalising feminist scholars to raise new questions and explore uncharted territory'. These new questions and imaginations that both movements brought to the forefront remain one of their biggest contributions.

Despite significant movements such as LoSHA and #RUReferenceList, rape culture remains pervasive in universities across India and South Africa. Academic scholarship, activism, and policymaking related to SGBV in these countries often fall short in understanding the failures of due process and the intersectional aspects of rape culture. The intricate issues of whom the due processes serve, who can access institutional justice, whose narratives are accepted, and who is excluded are key to understanding how university processes need to be restructured to make them survivor centered. In this context, there is much to learn from both movements and the critical questions they raise about structures of inequalities and the urgent need for intersectionality. Through this comparative research, we conclude that unless mechanisms addressing SGBV in higher education are intersectional and restructured to assure survivors the availability of support and justice, it should come as no surprise if survivors keep turning to social media for justice and support.

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