

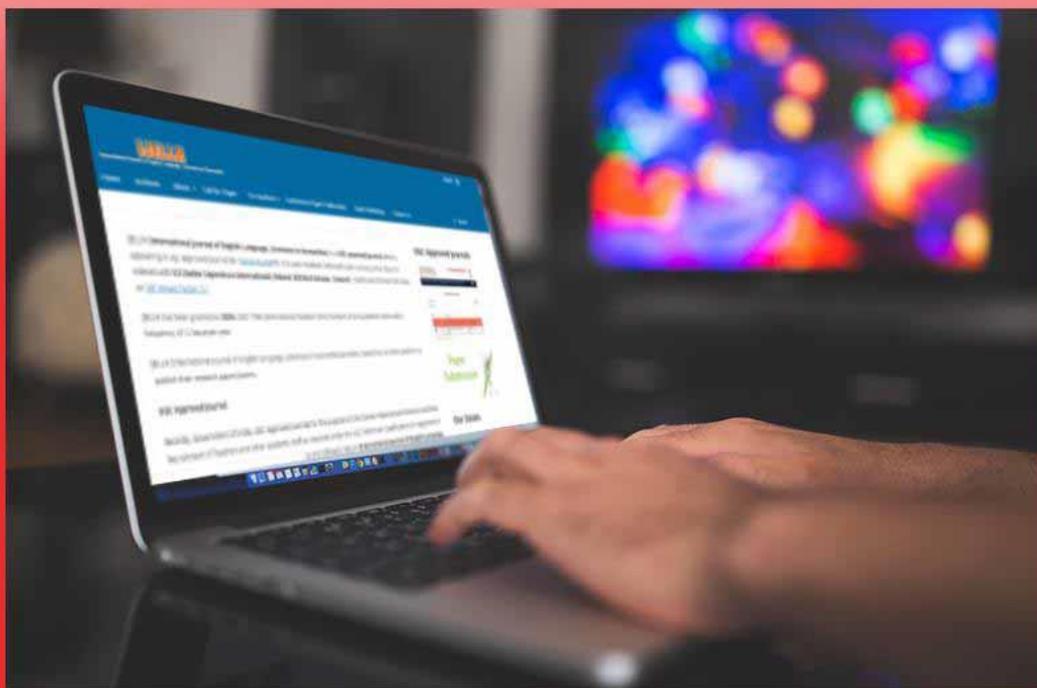
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Cyber feminism an Analytical study

Abstract: One of the major objectives of the feminist principles is to guarantee that the Feminist Discourse is intensified using the massive power of the Internet. The Internet should become the space that helps to provide a platform to the voices of women, queer people and the marginalized and there after helps the voices to be escalated to levels where everyone takes notice of the same. Using the strength of the power of the Internet, a feminist Internet, would also assist in providing the much-needed impetus to expound the practicalities and realities of a woman's life and would be an apt way to make available a medium for sexual and gender expression. It is pertinent to provide the women complete access to the control of information about themselves. They must be the one and only deciding agency making choices as to what information about themselves they would like to share online. They must be also aware of their rights to privacy, digital security thereby having cent percent control over their own data.

Keywords : discourse, intensified, marginalized, escalated, impetus, expound, pertinent.

Reiche and Kuni assert that in the male western cultural tradition the two masterpieces of "women and machine" have both been worshipped.¹

Like we say that a 'coin has two sides', so is the fact with Internet. Slowly but surely there is an increasing drift observed in the society where the medium of Internet and social media

including websites like Facebook, Twitter, etc. are being used to pester, threaten, Like we say that a 'coin has two sides', so is the fact with Internet. Slowly but surely there is an increasing drift observed in the society where the medium of Internet and social media including websites like Facebook, Twitter, etc. are being used to pester, threaten, demean and regulate women and girls.

Even though there have been voices raised and concerns shown by media, politicians, technology companies, et. al, against the upsurge in the violence women and girls experience online, what is missing to reach the forefront and being missed out of discussions are the stories of women who have fought back against this online violence and taken a stand of their own. Social activists are becoming proactive and initiating action against online abuse and attempting to develop a "feminist Internet".

A feminist Internet being envisioned would be the one where all women would get affordable and equal access to the Internet services. They would be able to create, design and use such technologies that would help them in overcoming sexual exploitation, challenge sexism and discrimination.

According to Gajjala the cyberfeminists' intention "to resolve what they see as 'Third World' women's oppression did not actually address or impact any of the issues women faced in third world countries."²

One of the aims to create the feminist Internet is that it will provide an effective medium where online violence against women is taken cognizance of and requisite actions initiated. It would also empower us with the ability to contest attempts by the capitalists in the areas of technological spaces where they desire to achieve privatization and absolute control while maximizing their profits. We need to comprehend what it means when the many primary spaces of public and private interactions, to also include activism, are held in control by the big corporations of the world. There is thus a need to develop newer technologies that are

centered around alternative economic systems which can be achieved by exploiting and sharing information and data using the open-source software, tools and platforms.

"Just as there are liberal, socialist, radical and postmodern feminists, so too one finds these positions reflected in the interpretations of cyberfeminism."³

We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost's familiar poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been traveling is deceptively easy, a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster.

Using the strength of the power of the Internet, a feminist Internet, would also assist in providing the much-needed impetus to expound the practicalities and realities of a woman's life and would be an apt way to make available a medium for sexual and gender expression. It is pertinent to provide the women complete access to the control of information about themselves. They must be the one and only deciding agency making choices as to what information about themselves they would like to share online. They must be also aware of their rights to privacy, digital security thereby having cent percent control over their own data.

"with in and among cyberfeminism(s) there are a number of theoretical and political stances in relation to Internet technology and gender as well as a noticeable ambivalence about a unified feminist political project."⁴

Surveillance has also been effectively used against women to restrict them and their movements, speech, and activism and this is a real threat to women who rise to defend human rights.

With people thinking aloud and bringing their voices to the forefront, today we can find various tools that care for feminist ideas.

The 17 Feminist Principles of the Internet were released in August 2016, by APC which also collaborated with several activists and feminists, also including the Indian movement Feminism in India.

“A feminist internet works towards empowering more women and queer persons – in all our diversities – to fully enjoy our rights, engage in pleasure and play, and dismantle patriarchy. This integrates our different realities, contexts and specificities – including age, disabilities, sexualities, gender identities and expressions, socioeconomic locations, political and religious beliefs, ethnic origins, and racial markers.”⁵

The penetration of the Internet in India is ever growing, however, even today it is skewed since only 29% of women have Internet access while for men it stands at a whopping 71%. Figures for the other genders is not available.

“Women are denied access to the internet just like they are denied access to mobility.”⁶

This is further compounded as restrictions are imposed on them for accessing the Internet thereby denying access to information. Such actions also stem from the unrealities of the society where it is feared that women would bring “shame” to the family if they are allowed to possess mobiles, which has come to become the major point of access of the Internet. The Indian society has been the one with ‘closed doors’ attitude, denying women from obtaining or gaining information about sex, sexuality, reproductive health, health care, government services, pleasure on the web, etc. If we understand this at the macro level, these societal norms have kept the women away from accessing technology thereby stopping them from making their mark in the fields of technology, design, coding and other such aspects.

The primary aim of this principal is to bring about a change in the way women and queer people get the access to Internet and technology. The object is to provide them access to all components of technology. For example: Under the Dharavi Diary project, girls (as young as 14) in the slum area of Dharavi now have more access to the internet and have used this to

code and design applications like Woman Fight Back and Paani Hai Jeevan. It is evident from this example that if access to Internet is provided, it can directly help to revolutionize societies.

To commemorate the anniversary of the Delhi-gang rape, three years after the gruesome incident, a book titled 'Why Loiter' was released in 2011. Following the release of the book, the twitterati world saw the hashtag #WhyLoiter trending taking the online community by storm. There were stories by individual women, posting pictures and tweets, describing how they were breaking free of the societal shackles and reclaiming public spaces that were traditionally under the control of men. The stories were spread far and wide using the hashtag #WhyLoiter. Not only in the virtual spaces but because of this movement, the struggle to overcome the male domination and patriarchy was challenged even in the physical domain. Movements like Pinjra Tod and Girls at Dhabas are other revolutionary movements that reclaim public spaces by using the online as a mouth-piece.

Similarly, around the world there were other movements taking shape and form and gaining ground. In Poland, women protested against the abortion laws using the hashtag #BlackMonday to popularize the movement amongst the masses and spreading awareness.

This had a chain reaction as the same hashtag was used in South Korea. This is a worthy example which brought forth the power of this medium as a movement that began in one part of the world crossed borders and fueled the fires of another movement in another country. It demanded accountability and transparency from the State and thus became a potent builder of the feminist movement.

The rules and policies of Internet Governance need to be rewritten and formulated again, keeping in mind the needs of women and the queer people. The movements taking shape around the world are a fact to this need and cannot be ignored. Without a change in our approach, thoughts, actions we cannot aim to have a feminist world.

It is heartening to see that there is a positive upward rise towards the acceptance and inclusion of all genders in the Internet governance regime.

"Cyberfeminism is also concerned with the relationship between existing systems of discrimination and computing technologies, including race and racialization."⁷

Most of the times we are gullible and take the big companies and corporations at their face value. A case in point is of Facebook. In 2011, Facebook had refused to take down a page dedicated to 'Rape Jokes' insisting that "Facebook is a space where people should openly discuss and express their views" but in 2013 felt it necessary to remove the picture of a breast cancer survivor's chest tattoo. Such an action evidently showed that Facebook was more concerned about offending men and his freedom of speech and had opposing views for women, thereby proving that it viewed men and women from different sets of glasses. For a feminist, this construes as a clear case where it is felt that Capitalism is a tool for oppression of women, which is further confirmed by scrutinizing the Corporate Organizational Chart that would be based on patriarchal structures. The goal of the feminist principles is also to question and contest the way in which capitalism uses technology towards own profit, privatization, and achieving absolute control of queer people and women. The ultimate aim is to develop differently working economies that are shaped on values and ideologies such as cooperation, solidarity, environment sustainability and openness. It also aims to challenge the white male supremacy of the capitalistic organizations that surreptitiously control the Internet. To move towards such an economy we need to share, use and spread information about free and open software, tools, and platforms that would be free from capitalistic control and monitoring.

If it is true, as Sadie Plant argues that "women have not merely had a minor part to play in the emergence of the digital machines.....[that] women have been the simulators, assemblers, and

programmers of the digital machines"⁸ then why are there so few women in visible positions of leadership in the electronic world?

One of the major objectives of the feminist principles is to guarantee that the Feminist Discourse is intensified using the massive power of the Internet. The Internet should become the space that helps to provide a platform to the voices of women, queer people and the marginalized and there after helps the voices to be escalated to levels where everyone takes notice of the same. With this approach we will be able to counter and challenge the hegemonic powers of the Governments/State and their 'behind the curtain' actors who secretly dictate the terms of discussion. In August 2016, when India's only women run rural newspaper Khabar Lahariya went digital, it did exactly this. The newspaper has kept at its forefront the reporting of issues related to caste, gender and rural grievances and has leveraged its experience of the structural barriers prevalent to present such stories to the people all over the world. Commendable to say that this newspaper is managed and run by women, most of whom belong to the marginalized communities.

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