

Why the Threat Is Always Rape



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The women who protested at Jantar Mantar have been doxxed, threatened and named in six FIRs. Meanwhile, the men who threatened them with rape have, in the main, gone unbothered. This asymmetry is not a failure of policing – it is the mechanism working.



Illustration: Pariplab Chakraborty.

Shradha Singh, a 23-year-old yoga instructor from Madhya Pradesh, went to Jantar Mantar, Delhi, in the third week of July, angry about question paper leaks. At the protest she posted a seven-second Instagram reel, set to a cleaning-products jingle, gesturing at Rapid Action Force (RAF) personnel. Within hours, the video had been reshared by anonymous meme pages that claimed she had insulted the armed forces. Within a day, national news channels were broadcasting it. Within a week, Singh says, users had worked backwards from her car number plate and gotten hold of her phone number and address.

Then the calls started. She says men rang her **with threats** of murder and rape. Her mother's and friends' accounts were traced and people badgered them for her whereabouts. She has not

stepped outside since. Moreover, Meta has removed 33 of her posts documenting the protest, while giving her no route of appeal.

Another protester is only **15 years old**. Videos show her using cuss words directed at the prime minister, as a great many protesters did. Her Instagram handle, phone number, workplace and family details have been widely circulated. Someone even put her face on an AI-generated “Most Wanted” poster.

Six first information reports followed, filed in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, by a Supreme Court advocate who told Scroll.in that doing so would deter others: “It will make sure that other kids don’t do this.” On July 31, a video of the 15-year-old, hands folded, apologising, went out on television.

Outrage is the obvious response and the least useful one. Men in Indian public life are threatened constantly, some of them murderously. The more pertinent question is why the threat, whenever the target is a woman, is almost always rape.

A threat borrows its power from somewhere

Nobody threatens a stranger with something that carries no social meaning. Threats draw on already established fears, and rape acquired that status long ago. It promises injury, yet injury is the smaller part of the promise. What it offers is humiliation, the ruination of a reputation that was never hers alone to hold and the reminder that a woman’s body remains imaginable as a legitimate place to mete out punishment for something she said.

Susan Brownmiller, in *Against Our Will* (1975), argued that the fear of rape ‘disciplines’ women, shaping where they go and when they speak. Fifty years on, the medium has changed but the function has not. A protesting young woman still fears the men who called. She also fears the taunts her mother will receive for ‘giving’ a daughter freedom.

Thus, the threat works twice, once in inducing terror and again as an ammunition handed to anyone who already believed the woman should have stayed home. Simply calling this trolling isolates the problem within a few disturbed men behind anonymous handles, which, despite being comforting, is utterly wrong.

Singh noted that most of the accounts abusing her had no posts or followers; the rest were ordinary users following those accounts. On August 1, **Scroll.in** reported that a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) social media volunteer in Uttar Pradesh posted a video of three women protesters swearing and encouraged his followers to identify them and file FIRs.

Anonymity is not even a requirement. On July 26, T.G. Mohandas, a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ideologue, who has served as convenor of the BJP’s intellectual cell in Kerala, **uploaded a**

[video](#) to YouTube saying that, if he had authority, he would seal off Jantar Mantar and have the police open fire into the crowd.

He then turned to women protesters. He said the women would be “gang raped” and no complaints would follow as “the women there would enjoy it”. “Some women like being raped, especially leftists, secular, democratic and proletarians,” he said, as per the remarks translated and reported by [AltNews](#) and [Maktoob Media](#). Thiruvananthapuram cyber police registered a case against him on July 29.

The threat provides justifications that anonymous callers never do: rape, according to them, is a fitting consequence for a woman who speaks out, particularly a woman who is leftist, secular and *bahujan* (the majority of Indians, who also belong to historically disadvantaged or socially marginalised communities), coming with an assurance that they would never ‘complain’. A threat of this sort requires a victim who cannot go to the police and an RSS ideologue has explained on camera who he believes these women are.

The pattern is documented

Amnesty International India’s [Troll Patrol India](#) analysed 114,716 tweets sent to 95 women politicians during the 2019 general election and found that 13.8% were problematic or abusive, a higher share than comparable studies conducted in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Identity predicts this abuse better than ideology does. Politicians who are Muslim faced 94.1% more ethnic or religious slurs, while women from marginalised caste groups experienced 59% more casteist slurs.

Rana Ayyub’s case epitomises this trend. After a fabricated tweet in April 2018 attributed to her a defence of child rapists, Ayyub received a flood of messages calling for her gang rape and murder. Her phone number and address were uploaded online and a pornographic deepfake video of her was disseminated.

Five UN special rapporteurs [asked India](#) to protect her. They reiterated their demands in 2022, reporting that organised groups were sending her anonymous death and rape threats and that the state’s own investigations had deepened the danger.

The [Inter-Parliamentary Union’s 2016](#) survey of 55 women politicians across 39 countries found that 44.4% had been threatened with death, rape, violence or abduction while in office, much of it by male colleagues.

UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists [found that 73%](#) of women journalists surveyed worldwide had faced similar online violence; with the figure going up to 75% in a 2025 follow-up report by [UN Women](#) and offline consequences doubling to 42%.

Different countries, different parties and different grievances, yet one common instrument.

What the state does next

No concrete actions have been taken against most individuals who made such threats. However, visible actions have been taken against the victims.

The recently lodged six FIRs invoke sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) on insult provoking a breach of peace, statements conducing to public mischief and defamation. Advocate Shahrukh Alam told Scroll.in that all three are misapplied, with the last not applicable as the police cannot bring up a charge that only the allegedly defamed person can bring.

Then came the prime minister's video, posted on his social media accounts, which described the protesters as "children who had used bad language", whom he "forgave" and would "guide." Set beside the FIRs, this paternal register settles who counts as a child to be corrected and who counts as a citizen making a legitimate argument.

Mona Lena Krook's [*Violence against Women in Politics*](#) argues for treating this practice as a distinct phenomenon with its own name, one that attacks women as political actors in physical, psychological, sexual, economic and semiotic forms, to push them out of the public space while keeping others from entering. Krook is careful about effects: fear demobilises, anger mobilises and plenty of women dig in.

Singh says she regrets the reel about the RAF but does not regret going to the protest.

None of this is aimed merely at the recipient. Every circulated screenshot is a notice addressed to other women thinking about going to Jantar Mantar, clearly stating the price. While some will carry forward regardless, others will do the arithmetic and stay home, their absence from the political arena quietly disregarded.

Exclusion of that kind needs no ban. A country becomes unequal the moment a 15-year-old learns that swearing at a politician earns her a wanted poster and six FIRs, while the men promising to rape her stay anonymous, unbothered and within the law.

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