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Justice for Jessica: A Human Rights Case Study on Media Influence, Rule of Law, and Civic Action in India

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact and implications of various aspects of the Jessica Lal murder trial, understanding that many factors of Indian society contributed to both the murder and the outcome. This paper will focus on a number of specific aspects of the trial and assess their significance for human rights issues: journalism in India, social media and public participation in civic action, Indian film and its direct influence on the trial, structural issues in the police and judicial system, purpose and actions of local and international human rights organizations, and the ongoing 2011 anti-corruption movement in India. However, in order to properly contextualize the Jessica Lal case and its components within modern Indian society, it is necessary to identify a number of other criminal cases that are similar in relation to social issues.

As a human rights study of a political and social phenomenon, this paper will attempt to answer certain questions: In what way does the modern use of technology and social media impact journalism and social activism? Is there a culture of violence against women in India, and if so, why, and how is it viewed in India? What successes and problems have Indian society encountered in terms of minimizing corruption in the police and judicial system? The paper will examine as well as look for the different answers to these questions in a format that engages many contributing factors that aid in the explanation, reasoning, and definition of human rights issues in India.

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

JUSTICE FOR JESSICA: A HUMAN RIGHTS CASE
STUDY ON MEDIA INFLUENCE, RULE OF LAW, AND
CIVIC ACTION IN INDIA

BY

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Overview of the Jessica Lal Case

The date of the incident was April 29, 1999, a Thursday night. Jessica Lal, a 34-year-old local actress and model, had been hired to work as a celebrity bartender at the Tamarind Court restaurant in Mehrauli, a southwest district of Delhi. She was working along with fellow actor Shayan Munshi. About three hundred people had reportedly been at the restaurant that night, including Manu Sharma. The 24-year-old son of Venod Sharma, who was a Congress Party minister at the time, arrived at Tamarind Court along with three friends, at around 11:15pm. The bar officially closed at midnight, but there were a few who attempted to buy a few more drinks after the fact. Sharma was the last. According to Ramani, the owner of the restaurant who overheard the conversation between Sharma and Lal, Sharma walked up to the bar again at around 2 a.m. to order another drink. After he was told that the bar was closed, he offered Jessica Lal 1,000 rupees. She, in return, told him “I wouldn’t give you a sip even if you gave me a thousand bucks.” It might be prudent to note that some sources, including then-Joint Commissioner Amod Kanth, proclaimed that the two had exchanged more provocative dialogue at the bar (Baweja and Chakravarti). The word “sip”, in this case, could have been a double entendre, and when Lal refused Sharma’s advances so sharply he felt more inclined to draw his revolver. He fired two shots, one at the ceiling and the other at Jessica Lal. She was hit near her temple and collapsed. An ambulance was called and she was rushed to the hospital, where she was pronounced dead a few hours later. Sharma and his friends left the scene during the confusion immediately after the gun was fired.

Manu Sharma was fingered as the culprit by numerous witnesses, including Jessica Lal’s fellow bartender Shayan Munshi, Bini Ramani’s husband, and a handful of others. He was not

apprehended for another week following the incident, and in that time he was helped by friends to hide and to dispose of the weapon responsible for the attack. During police interrogation, Sharma initially confessed to the murder. However, the confession was later dismissed as evidence due to a procedural technicality committed by the police.

The initial trial began in August of 1999. By the end of the hearings, four of the main witnesses who said they were present on the night of the murder turned hostile by retracting their initial statements. Nearly three hundred other party-goers claimed to have either not attended the event or to have left before the incident occurred. Shayan Munshi, the primary witness in the trial, claimed on the stand that the statement he signed was written in Hindi, a language he allegedly did not understand. After extensive hearings of dozens of witnesses, all nine suspects, including Manu Sharma were acquitted in the lower courts on February 21, 2006. The decision was largely based on the Judge's reasoning that the police had failed to find the weapon that was used to kill Jessica Lal and to gather enough evidence to support the claim that the two cartridges recovered from the crime scene were fired from the same weapon (The Hindu).

The ruling sparked a huge public outcry. Hundreds of text-messages and emails were sent to major news channels and newspapers protesting the "injustice", and many claimed that Sharma's innocence was only upheld because of his father's powerful position in government and believed that the court had purposefully overlooked evidence. *Rang De Basanti*, a Bollywood film which premiered less than a month earlier, inspired a rash of protests in the area. One of the scenes in the film depicts a large crowd holding a silent candle-light vigil at the India Gate in honor of a fallen airman, whose wrongful death was covered up by the government and the military. This seemingly struck a chord within the public at the time. Two major copy-cat

vigils occurred, one among models, actors, and other celebrities in honor of Jessica, and the other was organized by a group called the “Middle Finger”, now known as the Human Rights Protection Group. Other protests, now under the title “Justice for Jessica”, against the perceived miscarriage of justice were organized in the area by the group.

With the growing pressure from the public, the higher courts of New Delhi admitted a police appeal on the case on March 26, 2006, only a month after the acquittal. It was not a re-trial, but an appeal based on evidence already marshaled by the lower courts mainly due to a re-examination of the bullet casings found at the scene. In the meantime, a New Delhi-based magazine known as *Tehelka* embarked on an extensive mission to uncover the truth behind the accusations of bribery and corruption against Sharma’s father. The undercover operation would reveal to its subscribers on September 9, 2006 a detailed interview—which would later be broadcasted by Star News and NDTV—with Shayan Munshi. In the interview he was led to believe that the interviewers were producers for a film, and that they wished to audition him. In the filmed interview, it is recorded that he clearly speaks, reads, and understands Hindi. Another interview orchestrated by the magazine revealed that large bribes were given to witnesses by Sharma’s father Venod to keep them quiet about the case. By December 15 of that year, the courts held Manu Sharma guilty based on existing evidence, based on two spent cartridges recovered from Sharma's car. The ballistic analysis for one of the bullets matched the bullet recovered from Lal's skull.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact and implications of various aspects of the Jessica Lal murder trial, understanding that many factors of Indian society contributed to both the murder and the outcome. This paper will focus on a number of specific aspects of the trial and assess their significance for human rights issues: journalism in India, social media and public participation in civic action, Indian film and its direct influence on the trial, structural issues in the police and judicial system, purpose and actions of local and international human rights organizations, and the ongoing 2011 anti-corruption movement in India. However, in order to properly contextualize the Jessica Lal case and its components within modern Indian society, it is necessary to identify a number of other criminal cases that are similar in relation to social issues.

As a human rights study of a political and social phenomenon, this paper will attempt to answer certain questions: In what way does the modern use of technology and social media impact journalism and social activism? Is there a culture of violence against women in India, and if so, why, and how is it viewed in India? What successes and problems have Indian society encountered in terms of minimizing corruption in the police and judicial system? The paper will examine as well as look for the different answers to these questions in a format that engages many contributing factors that aid in the explanation, reasoning, and definition of human rights issues in India.

News Media in the Jessica Lal Trial

The free press has often been considered to play a pivotal role in developing and sustaining human rights as well as being a watchdog network for human rights abuses (Sawant 14). In the case of Jessica Lal, the press ended up being more productive than the judicial system in bringing out the truth behind rumors of bribery committed by Sharma's father. By taking it upon themselves to gather that evidence, the magazines and television stations involved were directly picking up where the police left off. The press then fanned the flames of fervor against what was perceived as injustice in that society and directly called upon the public to act out against what they revealed as a flawed and dangerous system. NDTV, for example, encouraged its viewers to send emails and texts to the station about their opinions of the trial. They also promoted the Indian Gate vigil and other protests nation-wide regarding the trial. The police and judicial system in a sense were less able to take avenues like the *Tehelka* magazine took in its sting operation. On lower levels of governance there can be political roadblocks, such as bribery and threats (in this case), that prevent police from investigating a crime properly (Sawant 17). These issues will be discussed more thoroughly later in this paper.

News media have been largely liberalized in India since the economic reforms of 1992, which began the large free market expansion in reaction to severe economic crisis at the time (Ghosh). Since then, most television stations and newspaper publishers have been owned by private companies rather than government entities. This ownership is conducive to Indian journalism's ability to operate outside of government influence, although that freedom is not entirely secure. There are instances of government involvement, such as the banning of Press TV, Iran's state-run station, in the mainly Muslim province of Kashmir after a controversial video

was broadcasted depicting Christians ripping copies of the Qur'an (PressTV). It is prudent to note that there was little press coverage of the incident in India.

There is, however, a danger of conducting a “trial by media” in order to appease a passionate public. To say that sensationalism is not uncommon in the free press would be an understatement. In this sense, at some point the judicial system must act in a fair way, which means that lawmakers and judges might have to ignore the opinion of the masses in the process and focus on the evidence of a case. Broadcasting misrepresentations of events in order to gain more viewers or subscribers is a serious issue with news media. Provoking particular responses, especially violent or at least passionate ones, allows for the “story” to continue while the station or publisher can reap the benefits of their audience's attention. Sharma's defense lawyer and other lawyers in similar high profile cases consider such actions by the media as unlawful and unfair in a trial (NDTV), especially when it does seem like the position of the media is one that influences the judge and jury. In this sense, the public is responsible for holding news media accountable (Sawant 20). Insisting on accurate reporting and objective opinions is the responsibility of the audience in a free society, because the alternative is government regulation, which may lead to worse conditions in the media.

Life Imitating Art – Film and the Justice for Jessica movement

A History of Social Commentary in Bollywood

“In a decaying society, art, if it is truthful, must also reflect decay. And unless it wants to break faith with its social function, art must show the world as changeable. And help to change

it.” (Ernst Fischer). Art is perhaps one of the more under-appreciated tools used to engage communities and push groups into action. While journalism played a large part in influencing the outcome of the Jessica Lal case, there was another element that not only had a major part in the protests, but continues to manipulate civic actions and issues in modern India society. This element was Indian film, which is often broadly categorized as Bollywood (Lutgendorf 1). For the purpose of this paper, Bollywood will be used in lieu of the category of Indian film, or Hindi-language film. While the term “Bollywood” comes from a conflation of “Bombay”—the city where early popular Indian film had its start in the first studios—and “Hollywood”, it has a long and prestigious history rivaling Hollywood itself (Lutgendorf 2). The first silent film made on Indian soil was released in 1913. Demand increased when sound was introduced. By the 1930s, the industry was producing over 200 films annually. India has since increased its film production per annum to between 800 and 1,000. This is in comparison to Hollywood’s current average of 500 films per annum. Granted, Hollywood does bring in significantly greater worldwide revenue, but the amount of films produced in India does stand to show the prevalence of film in Indian culture.

The films of the 1930s and 40s mostly dealt with escapist themes due to the World Wars, the Great Depression, the Indian Independence movement, and the violence of the Partition. However, there were filmmakers at the time who dealt with social issues, particularly with the backdrop of the independence movement. This trend of social issue films did not fade with the coming of Bollywood’s “Golden Age of Cinema”, which is considered to have fallen between the 1940s and 60s since most of India’s most critically acclaimed films were made in this time. The problem of corruption is a popular theme in Bollywood film, from the earliest films, like

1931's *Alam Araa*, to 2011's *No One Killed Jessica*. The 1955 film *Shree 420*, Mehboob Khan's 1957's *Mother India*, and 1994's *Anjaam* all have plots which center around the issue of the wealthy and powerful taking advantage of their position at the expense of those who are considered to be "below" them. Characters whose power has corrupted them often use violent means to get what they want.

***Rang de Basanti* – Synopsis and Impact**

Rang de Basanti is a modern example of a Bollywood social issues film. Directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra and starring Bollywood heavyweight Aamir Khan, the film was released on January 26, 2006, in conjunction with India's Republic Day, which celebrates the day that the Constitution of India came into force. The plot follows a young British filmmaker Sue McKinley, whose grandfather had served as a jailer for the Imperial police during the Indian Independence movement. She finds his diary and wishes to film a documentary about his encounter with five revolutionaries, as well as their personal stories. She journeys to India to cast her film at the University of Delhi, with the help of her friend Sonia. Sue finds that this task is harder than expected. With a list of botched auditions and time running out, Sue finally enlists a few of Sonia's friends, who are initially unenthusiastic about the project. The cast includes DJ as Chandrashekar Azad, Karan as Bhagat Singh, Sukhi as Rajguru, Aslam as Ashfaqullah Khan, and Laxman as Ramprasad Bismil. DJ, whose character is played by Aamir Khan, is portrayed as the fun-loving playboy who flirts with Sue but is actually the first to be drawn into the story of the revolutionaries. As the boys find that their lives begin to mirror that of their historic counterparts,

they begin to open their eyes to the modern injustices occurring in their society. Laxman and Aslam, for example, are at first violently at odds with each other because Laxman is a political activist and severely anti-Muslim while Aslam is the only Muslim in the group. However, they eventually grow beyond their initial misgivings and create a brotherhood that flies in the face of old prejudices that Laxman, and his political party in particular, was raised to live by. Laxman is kicked out of his party membership because he defends Aslam.

But it is when Sonia's fiancé Ajay, a flight lieutenant in the Indian Air Force, is killed when his MiG-21 crashes that the young men's transformations truly begin. The military blames the accident on pilot error, but his family and friends know that the young pilot was one of the best. They begin to suspect a cover-up, and later find that the MiG-21s used by the Air Force relied on a contract for cheap, illegal, and faulty parts signed by a corrupt defense minister. DJ, Sonia, and the others believe that instead of ejecting from the plane when the aircraft failed and possibly risking the jet flying into a nearby town, Ajay chose instead to sacrifice his own life in order to guide the jet away.

Disillusioned and furious by the lies perpetuated to dishonor the fallen pilot, the group organizes a peaceful vigil at the India Gate, a war memorial in New Delhi. They are met with fierce brutality committed by the police, forcing the participants to disperse. The mother of the fallen airman is hit on the head by a policeman and sent into a coma. This incident convinces the boys to take action against the defense minister and others who were responsible for the casualties of the family. They believe that the only way to rectify the situation is to emulate the former revolutionaries and resort to violence to achieve justice. The film then parallels the boys' actions with flashbacks to their revolutionary counterparts. First they retaliate by methodically

killing the defense minister and Karan's corrupt politician father, and then—when both are hailed as martyrs killed by terrorists—by taking over a radio tower in order to broadcast their intentions behind the killings. The police are told that the boys are terrorists and to shoot them on sight. As the radio station is breached by police and the modern revolutionaries are shot down one by one, DJ and Karan are able to finish sending their message on the air before they, too, are executed. They die laughing as the public listens to their radio broadcast. The film ends with Sonia and Sue standing in the place where Ajay had proposed to Sonia. They have a vision of the boys running through fields, whooping and throwing their shirts into the air.

Rang de Basanti is a powerful film because it addressed recurring themes and issues of Indian society. The title roughly translates to “Color Me Saffron”, which is connected to the highly patriotic nature of the color saffron. The independence movement used saffron-colored scarves and other clothing to mark themselves. The effects of colonialism and the partition of India and Pakistan are still felt in modern-day India. Tensions between Hindus and Muslims continue to plague social interactions and nationalistic political parties.

The film took these underlying themes in Indian society and presented them clearly in a time when such corruption was a hot topic. The response to this film was significant in its passion. It not only sparked a rash of protests against the outcome of the Jessica Lal trial, but it also caused a significant rise in “public ire against the government”. Meghana Dilip, a student of the University of Massachusetts Amherst, presented her 2008 Master’s thesis titled *Rang de Basanti – Consumption, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere*. It examines the possibility that the film in question “stimulated citizenship among young audiences and caused an expansion of the public sphere in India (Dilip 8)”. The film's themes “captured the political angst of the urban-

educated Indian youth (Dilip 31)” and boosted the Internet-centered generation's interest in current affairs. Dilip presents specific “blogger” entries and explains how their interaction with *Rang de Basanti's* material and with their own audiences connected. The evidence presented by Dilip concludes that such an increase in Internet activity has proved that a film may be able to stimulate citizen participation in political and social events. This is evident in the events that took place directly after the premiere of *Rang de Basanti* which influenced the Justice for Jessica movement.

No One Killed Jessica – Bollywood’s Take on the Jessica Lal Case

No One Killed Jessica is a Bollywood film directed by Raj Kumar Gupta. The film was shot in 2010 and was released on January 7th, 2011, roughly four years after the final trial which sentenced Manu Sharma to life imprisonment for the murder of Jessica Lal. It is a semi-fictional retelling of the Jessica Lal murder and the protests surrounding the lower and higher court trials. Most of the names and characters, except for Jessica and her sister Sabrina, were altered in the movie’s storyline. Manu Sharma became Manish Bharadwaj, and the *Tehelka* magazine was represented by the fictional war journalist Meera Gaity and her associated television station NDTV. The film focused on the media coverage of the trial and the aftermath rather than the trial itself, notably enhancing the importance of both film and journalism in the process. The title of the film itself is taken from a *Times of India* article of the same name.

The film follows two main characters; Sabrina Lal and Meera Gaity. It opens with the reenactment of the night of the murder in April of 1999, which was fairly accurate in terms of

following the established timeline and events given to the Higher Court by Sharma and the main witnesses in the original trial. Manish attempts to bribe Jessica for another drink after the bar is closed. Shayan Munshi's counterpart in the film, Vikram Jai Singh, accompanies her as Manish attempts to convince her to give him another drink. When she refuses the first time, he insists, telling her he saw her give a friend a refill. When he tries to hand her a wad of cash, she throws the money back at him with an insult. He pulls a gun in a rage, seemingly furious that Jessica dismissed him so carelessly. He first shoots the ceiling and then at her. He flees immediately after with his two friends and they hurry to bury the gun and hide Manish. Jessica is rushed to the hospital where her sister, her parents, and Vikram wait to hear of the prognosis. Sabrina is depicted as a bookish, plain young woman who is very close to Jessica, her wilder and more carefree celebrity sister. She had declined her sister's invitation to the party at the Tamarind Court earlier in the film, and later rushes to the hospital to stay by her sister's side until she dies from a gunshot wound to the temple. Devastated by her sister's death, Sabrina attends the court proceedings with her grieving parents only to find that the whole trial becomes a debacle of useless testimony by hostile witnesses. Manish had his initial confession retracted because the detective in his care was bribed to make sure the interrogation went contrary to procedure and therefore rendered it inadequate in court. As the police refuse to cooperate with exposing the suspicious way that more and more witnesses refuse to come forward during the years of the trial, even after they promise to support the Lal family, Sabrina becomes increasingly desperate to find people who have not been swayed by Manish's father's influence. Her mother's health rapidly declines the years following her daughter's death, and her father gradually withdraws from the trial, exhausted from fighting the powerful Cabinet minister.

As the trial draws to a close in 2006, another character is introduced into the storyline. Meera Gaity is a feisty, foul-mouthed news journalist who recently returned to New Delhi from covering the war in Kargil. At first she only sees the Jessica Lal murder trial as a sensationalist celebrity “open and closed” case, and is assured that the court will find the man guilty. However, when Manish is acquitted based on lack of evidence, she is encouraged to take a closer look. The public floods the television station with questions and accusations concerning the trial and its outcome. It becomes clearer to Meera that there is a trend of politicians and other people in power taking advantage of the weak and corruptible penal, justice, and police systems, and that the public was sick of it. Meera believes that those of privilege feel that they are above the law and therefore can act with impunity. She begins a media crusade—contrary to the wishes of her supervisor—against Manish and his father. Meera is encouraged to reach out to Sabrina Lal. However, she finds that Jessica’s sister has been disillusioned by the whole ordeal and is unwilling to believe that NDTV could bring justice to her family. Meera is forced to look for other avenues to bring attention to the trial.

The film includes a montage of the public, including Meera, attending screenings of *Rang de Basanti*, and it shows all are obviously affected by the India Gate vigil scene. Meera catches wind—by text message—of a protest group called the Middle Finger which plans to replicate the scene. She announces the time and date of the vigil for Jessica on the station, hoping to reach her audience and encourage them to attend; “I will be there. Will you?” The scene of Jessica’s vigil opens on a fog-covered India Gate, with Sabrina, Meera, and a few Middle Finger members standing before a small makeshift picture of Jessica. At first they are discouraged at the poor turn-out, but as the fog begins to lift they see hundreds approaching with candles to honor

Jessica's memory. The vigil sparks passion for the Justice for Jessica movement and the subsequent video montage in the film shows that the media coverage of the case and the movement picks up drastically in the next few months. Sabrina slowly comes to realize—especially after the minister is forced to step down out of pressure by the other ministers—that the movement could possibly bring the justice that her family had waited for for so long. She works with Meera and the other reporters to help bring the trial's corruption to light.

Meera is able to gather evidence from former hostile witnesses that they were bribed and threatened to keep quiet about the case, and develops a plan to expose the primary witness's—Vikram—lie that he could not speak Hindi. Two of Meera's associates go to his residence disguised as talent agents for an upcoming Bollywood film. They ask Vikram some questions about the Jessica Lal trial while secretly recording a video of the whole encounter. Finally, they ask him to speak Hindi, a language that he would be required to speak for this particular part they wanted him to play. He reads the text off of a script and easily switches back and forth from English to Hindi, proving that his testimony in court was false. Meera broadcasts the footage on NDTV, and it sparks yet another public surge of protests against the case. The members of the higher courts are seen to be convinced that this case must be re-opened. The film closes with Manish being ushered back into court and the Higher Courts quickly come to the verdict of guilty. Satisfied with the success, Sabrina thanks Meera for her help. The last part of the film depicts real television coverage of corruption cases, attached with a message that the fight for real justice for all is still on-going.

There are a number of events in the film which deviated from the actual trial, protests, and media coverage, but the explicit purpose of this film was to highlight the power the media

and grassroots protests had over the trial. It also takes time to focus on the struggle of two women fighting a judicial system where men are mostly dominant. The actual Sabrina Lal's reaction to the film was very positive. She appreciated the respectful way the director dealt with her family's ordeal (RaniFan1), and felt that the film did the case justice.

Social Media and Civic Action

The term "media" has cultivated an expanded definition in recent decades, rather than simply television, radio, and print information. With the dot.com boom in the nineties and the rise of the digitalized age in the beginning of this millennium, the platform of sharing information and news has become that much more relevant to human rights. Social media and wireless communications have become increasingly prominent as tools for engaging in political and social dialogue and organizing civic action, especially for youth. While these communication platforms influenced the Justice for Jessica protests, other clear examples were made regarding the power of social media in 2011's "Arab Spring", and the United States' August "Occupy Wall Street" movements, where pages on social networks like Facebook and mobile device capabilities such as text messaging were used to help create an unprecedented explosion of grassroots protests in the Middle East, United States, and eventually worldwide. Also among these types of movements, and particularly in India where the Jessica Lal case made such an

impact, are the Jan Lok Pal Bill and the 2011 anti-corruption movement in India. They will be discussed more thoroughly later in this paper.

The Arab Spring

What is known as the Arab Spring protests is actually a rash of revolutions, civil uprisings, and demonstrations aimed at oppressive regimes in Middle East nations like Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain, Syria, and Algeria. The first protests began in Tunisia in late December of 2010, and started a trend of civic uprisings around the area. A variety of factors led to the protests; oppressive regimes, human rights violations, severe poverty and widening class gaps, corruption, and economic decline were all motivations for the protestors. In terms of social media, the demographic significance of a large population (WolframAlpha) of educated but dissatisfied youth plays a large part in examining the importance of the Internet being used as a tool for these demonstrators. For the purpose of brevity when examining the Internet's influence on the Arab Spring, the focus will be primary on the revolution in Egypt and in particular the use of Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter in spreading international interest in the movement.

The Egyptian revolution began January 25th, 2011, following the Tunisian revolution. It began as a peaceful protest in Cairo, Egypt aimed at the government. Then-President Hosni Mubarak 30-year reign as head of government under a one-party system became the target of the protestors' grievances. One young woman, Asmaa Mahfouz, took up the proverbial torch and made it her mission to bring Egyptians to the streets. A recent graduate of Cairo University with a B.A. in Business Administration, Mahfouz became one of the central figures of the Egyptian youth movement because of her video blog. The video was posted to YouTube on January 18th,

2011, and it features Asmaa Mahfouz in a simple black and white headscarf proclaiming "I, a girl, am going down to Tahrir Square, and I will stand alone. And I'll hold up a banner. Perhaps people will show some honor (Goodman)." The video soon became a very popularly visited and shared link on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media websites; or, more succinctly, "went viral". She is credited by journalist Mona Eltahawy to have helped "spark" the January 25th attendance in Tahrir Square (Martin). Other videos posted on YouTube defied the restricted television news coverage of the violent government crackdown on the protestors in Tahrir Square as the weeks went on (Russia Today).

Another notable internet phenomenon at the time was the use of the Facebook. After a number of Facebook pages such as "We Are All Khaled Said" (a tribute to a young student killed by police in Alexandria) and "January 25 Revolution Day" were created to organize the protests, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians showed up in Tahrir Square to express their dissatisfaction with the Egyptian government. Even after the government ordered Internet providers to shut down international connections to the Internet from January 28th to February 2nd (Cowie), pro-demonstrator supporters continued to use Facebook to raise awareness about the movement. Mubarak finally stepped down on the 11th of February 2011, less than three weeks after the initial occupation of Tahrir Square.

Occupy Wall Street

There have been significant consequences to the demonstrations in the Arab nations beyond the overthrown governments and political changes. It has influenced other grassroots protests organized and popularized by Internet users; the most recognizable being the "Occupy

Wall Street” demonstrations and its off-shoots. Occupy Wall Street, also known as the “American Fall” (Mohyeldan) is, as of October 2011, an ongoing series of protests in New York City with connections to similarly-named “Occupy” movements worldwide. While there is still debate as to what exactly their objective is (Lowenstein), one popularly shared purpose is to express the discontent of the “99%”, or those who consider themselves a large group disenfranchised by the government catering to the super-wealthy on Wall Street, or the “1%” (OWS.org). At first, there was very little to no news coverage of the large demonstration in Zuccotti Park when it started on September 17th, 2011. It was both social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook, and the amateur YouTube video uploads of what seems to depict undue force by the police (TheOther99Percent) that raised public awareness to the movement. The growing attention to the Occupy Wall Street protestors on the Internet sparked the increased coverage by major news networks. The movement has gained ground in achieving recognition by major political leaders such as the President of the United States, but has yet to directly influence the system it is attempting to change.

The Internet and Free Speech

Although governments do have the ability to restrict the information that can be accessed by their citizens on the Internet, as in countries like China and North Korea (OpenNet.net), for most the Internet is a freer platform to express political or social opinion than in traditional media. Both the groups organizing the protests in India and the news media involved in covering the Jessica Lal story utilized modern technology to reach audiences and fuel civic action, perhaps

in the process bypassing certain arenas where corrupt politicians and police may have more easily suppress organized protests. This ability to keep important communication open in order to support protests is supported by the more extensive news media coverage of the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street movements, usually after the movements begin to gain ground. In some ways, this conundrum is much like the whole “chicken or the egg” argument. Is it the public that brings the attention of the media, or is it the media that brings the attention to the public? Perhaps the more important question is how informal social media and formal news media complement each other in terms of bringing civic action to the masses. There are controversies as to how the news media may choose to cover such protests.

The Internet and the access to social networks helped those involved in the Jessica Lal protests and other anti-corruption cases because they bypass the often restricted platforms of communication such as radio or television. The Internet allows people to express their opinion freely, and is often used as an outlet for societal frustrations that are not addressed publicly. These frustrations are often heightened by the dysfunctional aspects of Indian governance and the lack of significant changes to help alleviate the issue of corruption. While the Internet can bring to light the opinions of the people, it is actually the actions of the government and the entities that govern the state which determine the outcome of cases like Jessica Lal's.

Rule of Law in India

“No confession made to a police officer shall be proved as against a person accused of any offense.” (Section 25, Indian Evidence Act)

This section was used by the Sharma defense team as a loophole within the trial. While Sharma initially confessed to shooting Jessica Lal while in police custody, the prosecution was unable to neither bring it as evidence in court nor put it on record. A confession to guilt can be used as evidence only if it is recorded by a magistrate under Section 164 of the criminal procedure code, after abiding by a set of precautionary conditions to ensure that it is voluntary and including that the accused would not be sent back to police custody after making such a statement. Although created to keep abuse from happening within the police station, this law impeded justice due to understaffed, overworked police who likely were pressured to go around this law despite the consequences.

Actions Against Human Rights Violations in India

Human Rights Watch released a report in 2009 evaluating the legitimacy of the current police system of India. The title itself, “A Broken System”, offers insight into how troubled the situation has become (Human Rights Watch). According to this document, junior-ranking officers often face unrealistic demands from their superiors to solve cases quickly. Even if officially encouraged, their use of professional crime investigation techniques is effectively discouraged by the dearth of time, training, and equipment with which they operate. These officers also face frequent intervention in investigations by local political figures, who sometimes act to protect known criminals. They repeatedly take short-cuts, resulting in mishandled or corrupted evidence and testimony. There is a trend in the Indian police system, as in any corrupted system, to draw

illicit confessions out by force. This creates a climate of fear of the police, creating a vicious cycle of distrust and misuse of authority under the guise of keeping order.

In order to make the motive of gender violence relevant to the discussion of the Jessica Lal trial, it needs to be supported by a trend in India of violence perpetrated against women by men of authority. There are a number of cases which did not have the same media coverage but are significant in their similarity to the Jessica Lal case not only because of the sexual nature of the violence, or because of the elevated status of the men involved, but because of how easily the men involved were initially able to escape full legal prosecution for their actions.

As much as the media explored the social justice and corruption aspect as a problem for the community as a whole, there is an important part of the murder itself that needs to be addressed. The circumstance in which Jessica Lal was shot begs the question of motive of the shooter. There is a clear possibility that Manu Sharma was simply a severely inebriated privileged young man who was used to getting what he asked for, and was pushed to violence when he was denied another drink. However, the suggestion from some witnesses from the scene that Jessica had refused his sexual advances as well as his request for alcohol, makes more of a story to be examined. There are many possibilities as to the reason why the media diminished the importance of Jessica's gender in the crime. The media may either feel compelled to stay away from a possibly tasteless emphasis on what can be seen as only a *potentially* sexually-driven crime, or there is simply less gender inequality in India, which makes that particular point irrelevant.

The National Human Rights Commission (hereto referred to as the NHRC) keeps in its own particular archives cases of women filing their human rights abuses and grievances. As an

autonomous agency initiated under the Indian Protection of Human Rights Act 1993, the NHRC functions to independently inquire into “the complaint of violation of human rights, abetment, or negligence in the prevention of such a violation by a public servant”, examine penitentiary conditions, study international treaties on human rights, and review inhibitions on human rights and recommend “appropriate remedial measures”(NHRC FAQ). It has its own investigating staff and its powers include all the powers of a civil court; namely summoning witnesses, receiving evidence on affidavits, and requisitioning public documents (NHRC FAQ).

There are three specific cases pursued by the NHRC which indicate a gender bias in the justice system. Usha Kiran Vaipayee was a woman performing her duties as a medical representative in the Uttar Pradesh province on December 10th, 2000, when she was sexually harassed by four drunken police constables who “misbehaved with her and outraged her modesty” (Case 22, NHRC). When she refused their advances, they chased and shot at her until they were overpowered by the villagers. The victim ended up needing amputation of her foot from the injuries sustained from the incident. However, she was refused compensation by the government, despite the report filed by the police department and a show of cause notice issued to the government by the Commission. The NHRC ended up paying an interim amount to Usha Kiran Vaipayee, with the State government only paying a fraction of the full amount suggested by the NHRC by March 2003.

In the spring of 2000, a report was filed by a resident of Kokrajar, Assam detailing the alleged rape of her 17-year-old daughter by Rajan Mushahary, a Minister of State in Assam (Case 20, NHRC). The incident took place at the Shantival Hotel in Barobisa, West Bengal on the 27th of February of that year, and the victim was raped again a month later. She was reportedly

threatened by the minister to keep her from registering a complaint against him, and when her mother registered the complaint with the Gosaingaon Police Department no action taken against the Minister even though the girl ended up pregnant from the incident. The Commission, when it was made aware of the case, insisted to the government that allowing the minister to continue in his position in office “ran counter to the rudiment of the rule of law” and was likely to interfere with the case proceedings from that position. When press reports at the time revealed that the Chief Minister of Assam “took strong exception against” the case and the Human Rights Commission, the Commission released a statement on April 23, 2001:

“The Commission was constituted under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 for the better protection of the human rights and its functions include inquiring into violation of human rights or negligence in prevention of such violation; review of safeguards provided by the Constitution or any law, etc., and such other functions as it may consider necessary for the promotion of human rights.” (Case 20, NHRC)

Rajan Mushahary was placed under arrest on August 6, 2001 when DNA analysis proved that he was the father of the child conceived by the rape of the girl.

On August 14th, 1998, a fifteen-year-old dalit (“untouchable”) girl was drawn by two firemen and a police constable to rented premises where she was beaten and raped (Case 12, NHRC). She was told she would be killed if she told anyone. She did notify her family, who brought her to the Police Station to report the incident, but they were threatened with the

implication of filing false charges instead of being taken seriously. The girl committed suicide not long after by immolation, and succumbed to her injuries on August 15th, 1998. A case was registered on August 17th, but only after a large protest and blockade had been staged by the village. The Commission found it necessary to conduct its own investigation into the case. They found that the Sub-Inspector and the Fire Station Officer had not “conducted themselves in a manner befitting their office” and had made derogatory remarks against the girl and her family. They also found that the station diary, in the days following the incident, was tampered with. The Commission then shared its report with the Government of Uttar Pradesh, recommending a State inquiry and compensation for the family.

Statistics of Gender Violence in India

It should be mentioned that while certain aspects of Hindu culture, such as its religion, urges society to value the power of women as mothers, unmarried women are often seen to be of little value. Women who are considered promiscuous, rebellious, or otherwise outside the traditionally accepted conditions of society are particularly vulnerable to attack and rejection in such a system. As in the case of the dalit girl, social status potentially enhances the dismissal of women's rights in sexual assault cases in India. The women and families affected by these three cases were lucky in that they were able to receive support from the National Commission of Human Rights, because it is very likely that they would have not received justice otherwise, considering the way the justice system behaved in each case.

The feminist movement in the 1970s gave rise to the groundbreaking Mathura case. Like the cases described previously in this paper, the Mathura case involved sexual exploitation by

authority figures. A sixteen-year-old girl, Mathura, was raped by police constables in the compound of their station when she arrived to report her missing husband. The Supreme Court found them not guilty because of lack of injury on the girl's body, which to them indicated that the act was consensual. The protests to the ruling ended in the government of India amending the Criminal Law Act in 1983, adding a statutory provision that if a victim says she did not consent to sexual intercourse, the Court must presume that this is true.

A 2010 National Crime Records Bureau report on crime statistics in India included a detailed chapter on the number of reported crimes against women. Sexual violence disproportionately affects women, especially in societies where women are considered less than equal under the law. The National Crime Records Bureau noted that the incidence of crimes against women increased by 12.5% since 2007 (NCRB). A 2009 survey indicated that there has been at least a 6.2% increase of dowry death, murders committed in order for the husband's family to gain the dowry of the wife (Alves 9). In domestic violence cases, 93.9% of the reported cases were charge-sheeted, but the conviction rate was only 20.9% (Alves 11).

“And, despite growing inclination to register or report a case of rape our laws and judgments are still behind the times, as the conviction rate shows, rape in India is still not seen by police officers and law makers as a heinous crime against women. Rather its severity is judged from a patriarchal point of view: the taking away of a ‘woman’s precious possession: her virginity’ or the besmirching of the honour of another man’s wife.” (Alves 12)

The laws handling sexual violence in particular committed against women in India are also marked with problems. The “moral character” of the person allegedly raped may be allowed to be contested in a legal proceeding according to section 155 (4) of the Indian Evidence Act. Under this provision, a woman who is not considered to be of good character based on her society's standards may not have the right to accuse a man who is considered a moral and upstanding citizen.

Dealing with women's rights in India is unique; the history of Indian women is marked by both progressive equality and harsh inequality. This juxtaposition in women's rights can be seen in the Jessica Lal case: an independent working woman refuses to bow to the whims of a man who possessed a certain amount of authority and—regardless of whether or not the motive was sexual—was promptly punished by that man.

The Role of Human Rights Organizations

An easily overlooked aspect of human rights is a person's right to be protected, as described under the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, Article 7). If that is to be accepted as an equally important right along with free speech, free practice of religion, and right to property, then the Human Rights Campaign report indicates a severe violation of a human right in India. Only providing protection to those who can afford it, such as those with significant power and influence in their society and political systems, is in gross violation of the principle that all are equal under the law. Such corruption is a dangerous impediment to promoting human rights in India, and the importance of reforming such a system is pivotal to India's progression as the world's largest democratic society.

The Internet as an informational platform allows both international and local groups, like the Human Rights Campaign and the Human Rights Protection Group, respectively, to make statistics and stories available to the public. The Human Rights Campaign, based in New Delhi, archives hundreds of cases pursued by the international organization and documents the various human rights trends within the nation (HRC.com). The Human Rights Protection Group (Dhingra) currently has both a website and a Facebook page which keeps a record of its actions and current issues in India. The Facebook page encourages discussion among those who follow the page (Dhingra).

Current Trends in Civic Action in India

Jan Lokpal and the 2011 Anti-corruption Movement

One particularly interesting movement that has caught wind recently in India is the Jan Lokpal Bill, or the “citizen's ombudsman” bill (“ombudsman” translating roughly into “grievance man”). Originally conceived in 1963, and presented to Parliament in 1968, it was drafted to solve the problem of grievance redressal mechanisms. Public grievances and redressal mechanisms are considered important in protecting the public's responsibility to hold a democratic government accountable. It was not passed due to government infrastructure changes at the time and the bill was dissolved. Other incarnations were presented almost twice per decade since (IBNLive) but none passed. This section will explore the details of the Jan Lokpal Bill and the government of India's draft, the actions of activist Anna Hazare and his association with the

India Against Corruption group, and the anti-corruption movement of 2011 in India and its support in the United States.

The Jan Lokpal Bill was drafted by a former Supreme Court judge Justice Santosh Hegde, a Supreme Court lawyer Prashant Bhushan, and “Right to Information” activist Arvind Kejriwal in August of 2011, but the push to create an anti-corruption bill had been present since 2005, and the issue became more prominent in fall of 2010 when various anti-corruption campaigns were launched. The Right to Information Act had been passed in 2005, detailing the framework in which the public citizens may inquire into information under control of public authorities, promoting transparency and accountability. The 2010 campaigns and protests which sparked the 2011 movement dealt with various issues in Indian society ranging from political controversies to economic scams. The government came up with a Lokpal Bill which addressed some of these issues but was shot down by public activists calling it inadequate.

India Against Corruption (IAC) is an organization founded in 2010, headed by a number of activists including social activist Anna Hazare. Hazare is a follower of the nonviolence method as promoted by Gandhi during the Indian Independence movement and a major actor in the anti-corruption movement of 2011. Anna Hazare began an indefinite fast in April 7 of 2011 at the Jantar Mantar park in New Delhi to convince the government to take action. He called for a joint committee to address the need for an anti-corruption bill. Other protests started around India, demanding that the people's bill be incorporated into law. Hazare claimed that his group received more than 60 million texts in support and had the backing from a large number of Internet users. Hazare and the Jan Lok Pal movement put weight on the fact that most of the support had little input from political parties; most at the time were discouraged from becoming

involved in the movement. Hazare ended his fast on the 9th of April when the government agreed to set up a drafting committee of ten members—five from the government and five from the civil society. Their goal was to draft a version of the bill to satisfy both sides. Hazare demanded that a deadline be set for the draft by the 15th of August, 2011. The committee failed to agree on a draft and each formed their own separate drafts in August of 2011.

Its current form, a collaboration drafted by activists and other non-governmental entities of the IAC, was introduced earlier this year in opposition to the government's 2011 draft of the Lokpal Bill. The collaboration draft addressed some of the provisions the Jan Lokpal Bill asked for but did not have a financial memorandum (Narayanan). The government's draft was considered insufficient in addressing the people's demands, according to activist and main 2011 Jan Lokpal Bill proponent Anna Hazare (The Hindu 2011). It ignored a few key principles including: disallowing the public to register complaints, no protection policy for “whistle-blowers”, and protecting the Prime Minister from investigation (The Hindu 2011). One major issue the Indian government had with the proposed bills was the expense. The cost of each proposed bill had gone up through the years. The 2011 Jan Lokpal Bill proposed budget would have been exactly half of the home ministry's 2010-2011 budget (Narayanan).

After the failed attempts to reconcile the government's Lokpal draft and the Jan Lokpal draft, Hazare declared another indefinite fast on August 16th, 2011.

Ramlila Ground Protests

However, before the second fast, tensions had already begun to rise in other parts of India. In Ramlila Maidan, an open ground area in New Delhi which is often used as a playground

or area for religious festivals, Swami Ramdev organized a protest for June 2, 2011. The objective was to raise awareness of “black money”, or money on which income and other taxes has not been paid, being deposited abroad for foreign interest. It is estimated that the Indian money stashed away may be on the order of \$1.4 trillion (Nanjappa). Ramdev declared that this practice was unacceptable and called for the sums to be redirected towards Indian interests.

As the date for the protests approached, four senior Union ministers opened channels of discussion with Ramdev and the movement in order to address his demands. Although they came to an agreement and a formal commitment by the government to end black money being repatriated abroad (Times of India), Ramdev decided to go ahead with the protests and his declared fast. The fairgrounds at Ramlila had been booked for 40 days and the grounds were supplied with a medical facility, drinking water facility, media center, waterproof tents, and over 600 toilets, 40% of which were specifically for women (Zee News).

On midnight of Sunday June 5th the police raided the site, forcefully detained Ramdev, and dispersed the supporters using tear-gas and lathicharge, a riot tactic used by Indian and southeastern law enforcement agencies which involves rushing a crowd with long wooden sticks called *lathi*. Seventy-one people were injured and moved to the hospital, and four were reported to be in critical condition. Ramdev and supporters alleged that the CCTV footage of the raid was missing, which raised the public's suspicions that the police wished to dispose of evidence that “contain[ed] atrocities committed by the police...on Sunday (Salim).” The police defended their actions, saying that “they had sent three letters to Ramdev on Friday and Saturday asking him to only perform yoga (Chauan).” When Ramdev continued to mobilize the protests the police were given permission to disperse the crowd.

After the protest was dismantled, both the National Human Rights Commission (NHR) and the Supreme Court of India (Singh) issued notices to the police and Delhi government seeking reports regarding the “midnight crackdown” on the Ramlila ground protests. The Supreme Court later ruled on August 29th of 2011 that the police be held responsible for their actions, citing excessive force.

August 2011 Protests and Anna Hazare's Arrest

On July 18th Anna Hazare declared that he had written a letter to the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh about his decision to go on an indefinite fast on August 16th, 2011 at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi (Parsai) in protest of the Lokpal Bill submitted and approved by the Union Cabinet. On the morning of his determined fast, police detained Hazare at his residence claiming that Hazare was “defying probationary orders” (TNN). Followers and supporters of Hazare were later detained under similar warrants. The arrest caused public outrage and sparked a growing number of demonstrations around India. The All India Students Association waved black flags in support of Hazare and his aides at a seminar hosted by Kapil Sibal, the Minister of Human Resource Development. The Prime Minister was accused of being “out of touch” with public opinion (Burke) and the government was again under pressure by the nation.

After seven days of fast in solidarity to his cause and imprisonment at the Tihar Jail, Anna Hazare was released by the police (Vohra, Pandey) along with his aides and over 1,000 protestors who had been detained. He immediately headed to Ramlila grounds to launch a 15-day mass protest that “would not end until the Jan Lokpal Bill was passed”. During the Ramlila protests,

various politicians and major figures in Indian society pledged support and interest in the Jan Lokpal Bill. Over the following 12 days, the Prime Minister would conduct an “all-party meeting” which would end in a request for Hazare to end his fast if the government initiated a debate in Parliament regarding the bill. On August 27, 2011 the government agreed to a voice vote on the Jan Lokpal Bill (PTI) and in particular the three key demands of the movement; Citizen's Charter, Lokayuktas in all states with Lokpal powers, and inclusion of lowest to highest bureaucracy. Both houses approved the resolution to pass the Jan Lokpal bill with its provisions (Dhawan) and Hazare agreed to end his fast.

Support in the United States and Around the World

The anti-corruption movement was not contained to India. The movement reached the United States and many Indians in American communities have expressed solidarity with their countrymen, particularly after Anna Hazare's arrest in August. Students in colleges such as Florida State University, University of Florida, and Cambridge University have all voiced their support for Anna Hazare and other activists. FSU students that were part of the vigil on campus supporting the law say they have seen corruption in India firsthand (WTXL). Students at the University of Florida resolved to “cleanse themselves and to not indulge in any form of corrupt activities in the future” in support of the anti-corruption law (Akshay1986). This global experience has initiated global campaigns through community campaigns such as Avaaz. Avaaz is an international organization for funding and setting up socially-motivated campaigns and protests. It describes itself as a “web movement to bring people-powered politics to decision-

making everywhere”. According to Avaaz, over 500,000 members joined through their site in support of Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement (Avaaz Highlights).

Public Opponents of Jan Lokpal

While Anna Hazare has been publicly on the front lines regarding the discussion of anti-corruption, there are various groups and individuals who do not agree with his tactics and messages. Certain politicians and political groups have expressed concern over some of the demonstrators' activities and motivations. The National Congress party general secretary accused Hazare and Ramdev of “blackmailing” the government with the Ramlila protests. The financial problems and danger of “über-bureacracy” the bill presents and the controversial Gandhian tactics used by Hazare and his followers to sway the government have portrayed the movement in a conflicting light. Some human rights organizations, such as The Human Rights Protection Group (previously the Middle Finger Protests) have made it clear that they believe Hazare is simply using the movement to gain political and financial power for himself.

Some minority groups have also cited concerns that Hazare's movement caters to Hindu supremacists and that the nationalist ideals Hazare presents could possibly threaten the political legitimacy of religious and social minorities such as Muslims, Christians, and Dalits. They worry that “lawmaking is moving from Parliament to the streets, undermining the constitution and leaving minorities less protected from populist threats in the future (Arnoldy).”

However, these misgivings do not prevail in the polls. Upwards of 80% of the population backs the bill sponsored by Anna Hazare and anti-corruption activists (NDTV).

Conclusions

The Jessica Lal case reveals several key aspects of the sub-continent of India in its current stage of development. The first is its media and the way that social, news, and film media influenced the outcome of the case. Jessica Lal would only be a young woman who died brutally and tragically if it was not for the publicity her case underwent. Instead of falling into obscurity, this minor actress and model became a symbol for the nation, something to represent the often suppressed frustrations of the public. Technology and modern media helped the case by making the symbol—Jessica Lal and the trial—readily available to the people. Digitalized civic action is the current trend in India, as it is in the United States, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Modern media has a profound hold on social action and political development. The effects themselves are as instantaneous and progressive as the technology that promotes it.

However, India must also consider the long-term effects of social justice being controlled by mass communication. More problems may erupt if certain large-scale movements usurp political power from the central government. The Internet is not the best place to get reliable information, and there are entities who would take advantage of that ability to misinterpret facts. Indians may find that in order to continue to develop into a nation which minimizes corruption and keeps its politicians accountable there must be a balance between the different forms of communication. In India, the government could be considered the least accessible in terms of information. The press and other mass communication networks controlled by companies could be considered more publicly accessible, but still restricted in certain aspects. The Internet is virtually unrestricted in terms of accessibility. The Jessica Lal case reveals that all of these institutions must be utilized in order to achieve justice. The government or, in this case, the

justice system had to conduct a fair and thorough trial, the press was able to uncover the truth behind rumors of bribes and threats against witnesses, and the Internet was used as a platform to organize the Jessica Lal protests to encourage active participation and awareness in the society.

The second aspect reveals the long struggle against gender violence and the continually evolving views of women and their place in Indian society. The Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women regards women, like children, to be of a special case in any society because of a historical trend of being “second-class” citizens in almost every civilization to date (Cook 10). The film *No One Killed Jessica*, by making the two main characters female—Sabrina Lal, Jessica's sister, and Meera, the fictional journalist representing the *Tehelka* magazine (*No One Killed Jessica*)—creates an emphasis on the paradoxical position of women in Indian society. They are given more rights by law, but the same system refuses to protect those rights so they must work just that much harder to gain in practice what they have on paper.

The third aspect takes into account the difficult situation the current justice system finds itself and also shows the progress that India has made to try to improve its justice system. These worldwide grassroots movements which have also influenced the Lokpal Bill, do not address the issue of bureaucracy in India. India already has the National Human Rights Commission which handles a number of corruption cases. Would it not be more productive for the government to put money in updating their police and justice system rather than adding yet another institution to deal with the issue of corruption? The media “derides them (the police) as professionally incompetent and criminally negligent” (Human Rights Watch), which in turn encourages distrust among the public. The legacy of distrust and intimidation has created a challenging obstacle for India to overcome in order to promote a society that not only is protected in practice but feels

protected. The Human Rights Watch in particular gathers recommendations for the Union Home Ministry, Union Territory Police, State Home Ministries, and State Police. Briefly, those recommendations include: reducing human rights violations, such as a focus on the gender disparity in both the police force itself and in the guidelines of treating gender-based violence; reducing police misconduct by means such as establishing police complaints authorities, or PCAs; and building a more professional, self-respecting police by improving recruit training and reducing demoralization factors in the workplace (Human Rights Watch).

In studying international affairs it is necessary to look into localized events and understand the many possible factors that could have influenced those events. Economics, culture, art, religion, history, geography, politics, and language all are likely indicators when researching the reaction to the event and the event itself. In this case, looking at the aspects of media, rule of law, and civic action in India through the lens of human rights is appropriate as an international affairs study because it relies on a fundamental international document agreed upon by the United Nations. When considering the impact of each portion of society involved in the Jessica Lal trial, one can discern the integrated nature of the event, as well as its international implications. While few in the United States may feel the direct impact of the results of the Jessica Lal case, social media as a tool for civic action is not a foreign concept, nor is the push for continual improvements in gender equality.

A significant part of the compilation of this paper has been gathering the resources necessary to identify details of the different topics discussed. Many of those resources have been online news articles and videos. It is important to note that as a student in the United States studying present-day issues in India, I would have had a much more difficult time gaining access

to those articles, videos, and files if it were not for the modern information sharing system that is the Internet. I have repeatedly uncovered the impact that modern media and information platforms have had and continue to have on the reality of social action and how an individual may view the world. The Jessica Lal movement stands as an example, a case study for certain global trends in our present age. The fascinating part of studying such a phenomenon is finding those trends, and when the worlds of academic thought and global application begin to merge, marveling in how multifaceted they become.

The many issues pertaining to human rights have long been a part of our history as a human race even though the phrase itself is a relatively recent invention. Its place is known in certain areas of academic thought, within the realm of social and political philosophies. Definitions of the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness have been endlessly arranged and rearranged in the vast spectrum of human perceptions to suit the needs and desires of individuals and groups. However tempting it is to believe there is one solid answer to apply to every problem that exists in the world (or at least every problem that exists in India), the purpose of this paper is not to try to find that answer. The purpose of this paper is to help make connections, and to reveal particular tendencies—both explicit and implicit—of specific cultural, societal, legal, and political systems.

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