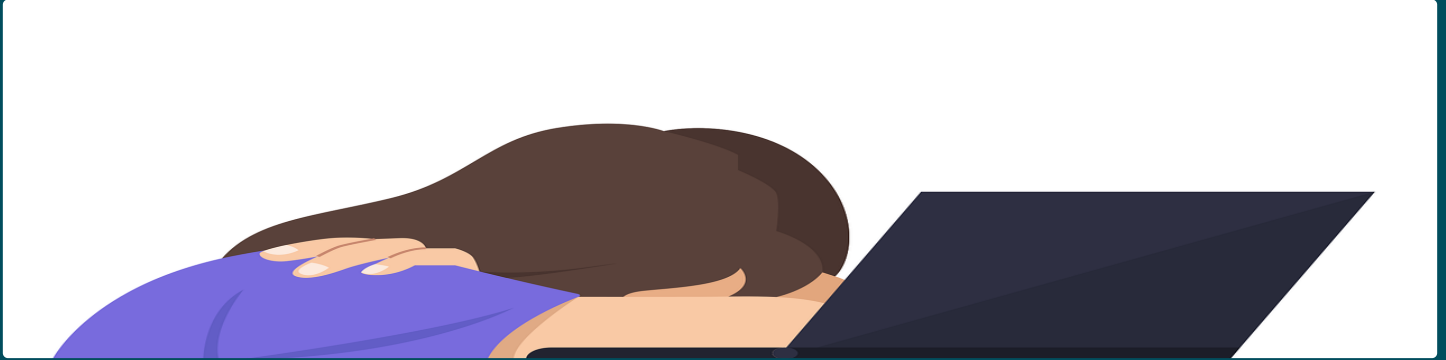




CYBER LAW

Delete. Block. Report. Repeat No More — Madras HC Brings End to Women's Online Ordeal

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Introduction

In a groundbreaking verdict that highlights the urgent need for digital safety, the Madras High Court has delivered a powerful judgment against the unchecked proliferation of Non-Consensual Intimate Images and Videos (NCII abuse) online. In what is being hailed as a watershed moment for digital rights in India, Justice N. Anand Venkatesh's ruling on July 9, 2025, in *X v. Union of India & Ors.* (WP No. 25017 of 2025) addressed the deep trauma faced by one survivor and laid the foundation for stronger State and platform accountability in online abuse cases. The case brought before the Madras High Court exposed the devastating consequences of digital betrayal. The petitioner identified only as 'X', a young practicing advocate, fell victim to a harrowing act of intimacy betrayed and then weaponized online.

The Case: A Young Advocate's Agony Becomes a National Wake-Up Call

The petitioner, referred to as 'X,' is a practicing advocate who was subjected to a grave invasion of privacy and dignity. What began as a college relationship turned abusive, with the accused coercing her into sexual acts under false promises of marriage. Unaware to her, these private moments were secretly recorded and eventually uploaded across numerous digital platforms without her consent. The perpetrator, along with others, circulated the videos across over 70 platforms including pornographic websites, messaging apps like Telegram, and cloud storage like Google Drive. The viral nature of the content led to repeated re-uploads, making the digital abuse relentless. The fallout was devastating. X was humiliated before clients, peers, and her legal community, forcing her into seclusion, psychological trauma, and social isolation. Despite an FIR being filed (Crime No. 21 of 2025) under *Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita 2024* (BNS), *The Information Technology Act, 2000* (IT Act), and the *Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Harassment of Woman Act, 1998* and even after identifying two accused (A1 and A2), the explicit content continued to surface online.

After failed attempts to get action from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) under Section 67A of *The Information Technology Act, 2000* (IT Act) the publication or transmission of material containing sexually explicit acts in electronic form, X approached the Madras High Court for urgent intervention.

The Core Constitutional Clash: Dignity vs. Digital Ubiquity

The Court was confronted with a clear violation of Article 21 of the Constitution, the Right to Privacy and Dignity. Justice Venkatesh acknowledged that the petitioner's rights were being violated "every second" as the videos remained online.

The central legal question: **how to balance digital freedom with immediate protection from cyber exploitation?**

The Court's Vision: Empowering Victims Through a Concrete Framework

In a remarkable move toward ensuring real-time relief and long-term reform, the Madras High Court laid down a structured and actionable framework to guide victims of non-consensual intimate content toward justice. First and foremost, it directed the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) to act within 48 hours of receiving complaints, mandating swift removal and blocking of such content across all platforms and digital intermediaries. The Court emphasized that victims have the right to directly approach intermediaries or law enforcement agencies, who are in turn legally bound to act within 24 hours of notification.

To strengthen judicial recourse, the Court clarified that petitioners must submit detailed affidavits in sealed covers, listing specific keywords, URLs, and content to enable prompt and focused takedown orders. Recognizing the sensitivity of such cases, it called for sensitized grievance officers across platforms, trained specifically to handle NCII abuse complaints without victim-blaming or delay.

Further, the Court reiterated the vital role of the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (cybercrime.gov.in), instructing that it must include multilingual guidance, complaint status tracking, and accessible contact details of cybercrime units in every district. It also mandated immediate police intervention upon notification of offenses, and the appointment of dedicated officers in each cyber police station to interface with intermediaries and expedite redressal.

To support victims emotionally and legally, the Court ordered the establishment of a 24/7 helpline with trained, empathetic responders and access to mental health professionals and legal aid services. It also imposed a non-negotiable obligation on

search engines to employ hash-matching and token-based technology to prevent reappearance of removed content without requiring victims to chase new links. Any delay or deviation from the statutory timelines would disqualify platforms from liability protection under the IT Act. The Court even envisioned a future government-backed encrypted platform for registering and hashing NCII content to automate its identification and removal.

By putting this framework in place, the Court didn't just provide relief in a single case it created a lasting system that empowers women and survivors to reclaim control over their digital identities and fight back against the trauma of online exploitation.

The Judgment: A Turning Point

The Madras High Court, led by Justice N. Anand Venkatesh, held that the continued circulation of non-consensual intimate content was a direct violation of the petitioner's right to privacy and dignity under Article 21. The Court ordered MeitY to act within 48 hours to remove the content

from all platforms and invoked continuing mandamus to ensure ongoing compliance. It also impleaded the Director General of Police to fix responsibility for law enforcement. Importantly, the Court adopted digital safeguards from earlier Delhi High Court rulings mandating swift takedowns, hash-matching, and a victim-centered approach. The judgment reinforced a clear message: digital abuse will face swift legal consequences, and victims will not be left to fight alone.

Conclusion: A Digital Reckoning Begins

This ruling marks a turning moment in India's battle against online sexual exploitation. Acknowledging the "pathetic story of a young girl" and the "untold agony" inflicted upon her, the Madras High Court has done more than deliver justice. It has laid a roadmap for reclaiming digital dignity. By shifting the onus onto State actors and digital intermediaries, the Court has delivered both hope and a warning: the era of digital impunity is over. For survivors of NCII abuse, this ruling is a beacon affirming that justice in the digital world is inevitable, not just possible.

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