

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS



Open Access, Refereed Journal Multi Disciplinary
Peer Reviewed

www.ijlra.com

DISCLAIMER

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, transmitted, or distributed in any form or by any means, whether electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the Managing Editor of the *International Journal for Legal Research & Analysis (IJLRA)*.

The views, opinions, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in the articles published in this journal are solely those of the respective authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Board, Editors, Reviewers, Advisors, or the Publisher of IJLRA.

Although every reasonable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy, authenticity, and proper citation of the content published in this journal, neither the Editorial Board nor IJLRA shall be held liable or responsible, in any manner whatsoever, for any loss, damage, or consequence arising from the use, reliance upon, or interpretation of the information contained in this publication.

The content published herein is intended solely for academic and informational purposes and shall not be construed as legal advice or professional opinion.

**Copyright © International Journal for Legal Research & Analysis.
All rights reserved.**

ABOUT US

The *International Journal for Legal Research & Analysis (IJLRA)* (ISSN: 2582-6433) is a peer-reviewed, academic, online journal published on a monthly basis. The journal aims to provide a comprehensive and interactive platform for the publication of original and high-quality legal research.

IJLRA publishes Short Articles, Long Articles, Research Papers, Case Comments, Book Reviews, Essays, and interdisciplinary studies in the field of law and allied disciplines. The journal seeks to promote critical analysis and informed discourse on contemporary legal, social, and policy issues.

The primary objective of IJLRA is to enhance academic engagement and scholarly dialogue among law students, researchers, academicians, legal professionals, and members of the Bar and Bench. The journal endeavours to establish itself as a credible and widely cited academic publication through the publication of original, well-researched, and analytically sound contributions.

IJLRA welcomes submissions from all branches of law, provided the work is original, unpublished, and submitted in accordance with the prescribed submission guidelines. All manuscripts are subject to a rigorous peer-review process to ensure academic quality, originality, and relevance.

Through its publications, the *International Journal for Legal Research & Analysis* aspires to contribute meaningfully to legal scholarship and the development of law as an instrument of justice and social progress.

PUBLICATION ETHICS, COPYRIGHT & AUTHOR RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

The *International Journal for Legal Research and Analysis (IJLRA)* is committed to upholding the highest standards of publication ethics and academic integrity. All manuscripts submitted to the journal must be original, unpublished, and free from plagiarism, data fabrication, falsification, or any form of unethical research or publication practice. Authors are solely responsible for the accuracy, originality, legality, and ethical compliance of their work and must ensure that all sources are properly cited and that necessary permissions for any third-party copyrighted material have been duly obtained prior to submission. Copyright in all published articles vests with IJLRA, unless otherwise expressly stated, and authors grant the journal the irrevocable right to publish, reproduce, distribute, and archive their work in print and electronic formats. The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors alone and do not reflect the views of the Editors, Editorial Board, Reviewers, or Publisher. IJLRA shall not be liable for any loss, damage, claim, or legal consequence arising from the use, reliance upon, or interpretation of the content published. By submitting a manuscript, the author(s) agree to fully indemnify and hold harmless the journal, its Editor-in-Chief, Editors, Editorial Board, Reviewers, Advisors, Publisher, and Management against any claims, liabilities, or legal proceedings arising out of plagiarism, copyright infringement, defamation, breach of confidentiality, or violation of third-party rights. The journal reserves the absolute right to reject, withdraw, retract, or remove any manuscript or published article in case of ethical or legal violations, without incurring any liability.

THE NEW ACTORS: SEEING CANNIBALISM THROUGH THE LENSES OF MEDIA

AUTHORED BY - NABIHA ANSARI

ABSTRACT

Cannibalism spans diverse survival, ritual and pathological contexts, presenting legal, psychological and cultural challenges. While sensationalist media narratives often distort investigations and re-traumatize victims, systemic administrative failures frequently remain unexamined. The study examines how India's Right to Information Act, 2005 serves as a vital investigative and accountability mechanism. Used responsibly, RTI counters media hysteria, addresses legal lacunas and fosters institutional transparency without compromising victim dignity.

Key word: *cannibalism, media, right to information, second victimization, media trial, victim, sensationalism.*

"The cook promptly butchered [the sailor]... he cut up everything, including sailors skin and every inch of his intestines... the cook threw himself upon the sailor's head and before our eyes scalped him and pulled off his face."

By Yann Martel (Life of Pi)

I. INTRODUCTION

Hunger is an innate biological drive fundamental to all living organisms, typically satisfied through the consumption of either plant or animal based nutrients.

If we look at the cultural perspective, dietary habits are broadly categorized into vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism. While the former is relatively straightforward, non-vegetarian dietary practices encompass diverse subcategories- such as pescatarians, eggetarians and general omnivores- all primarily centered on the consumption of other animal species. However, many records reveal that human consumption has not been limited to other fauna; it has occasionally extended to members of the human species itself. This phenomenon of cannibalism- the practice of consuming one's own kind- has remained largely obscured and continues to be an

unsettling, unresolved subject throughout human history,

“The act of consuming human flesh has been documented throughout history and across various cultures, raising profound questions about the underlying psychopathology and motivations of those who commit such acts. It is important to note that the practice of cannibalism is not a homogenous behavior; rather, it encompasses a range of practices, each with its own psychological basis.”¹ The major categories which can be elucidated under cannibalism are: nutritional or survival, ritual and pathological.

Cannibalism linked to the consumption of human flesh for the caloric contents or at some extreme times like acute starvation, famine, or other life threatening conditions is the nutritional or survival cannibalism while the one which is linked with the cultural practices or done as a part of religious ceremonies is the ritual cannibalism. However, beside these the other includes the pathological cannibalism which is widely concerned with the criminal psychology like someone “who is acutely psychotic or committing the act of cannibalism to act out paraphilia.”² Thus, our democratic system is extremely tested by pathological cannibalism. We see the media outlets chases the sensationalism by often trading the facts for shock value to boost views. On the other hand, Authorities like police and courts often hides facts to protects ongoing investigation and such secrecy makes public think officials are hiding incompetence and corruption. However, the Right to Information Act, 2005, can function as an important instrument for public and investigating authorities to get connected with the suspicious deaths, missing persons, mental-health patients and trafficking cases. RTI does not give journalists unlimited access to sensitive personal or investigative material, but it can help establish accountability when used lawfully and ethically.

II. THE TYPOLOGIES AND SOCIETAL IMPACT OF CANNIBALISM

In human, cannibalism occur in several different circumstances. It may range from survival cannibalism during famine or disaster to ritual practices associated with historical societies. These various categories are not interchangeable and treating every report identical may lead to inaccurate results. Thus, various facets of cannibalism may include the followings:

- **Survival Cannibalism:** “During famines, shipwrecks, or wartime sieges, people have sometimes eaten the dead to survive. These acts weren’t cruel — they were driven by

¹ Sean E Oldak, Anthony J Maristany, Brianna C Sa, *Wendigo Psychosis and Psychiatric Perspective of Cannibalism: A Complex Interplay of Culture, Psychology and History*, available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>, edited by Alexander Muacevic and John R Adler, updated on 30th October, 2023 (last visited on 19th August, 2026)

² Ibid

raw human instinct. The Andes plane crash is a powerful example of survival taken to the edge.”³ Another example is the Queen v. Dudley and Stephens (1884)

- **Ritualistic Cannibalism:** “Practiced in ancient tribal cultures, this form of cannibalism was deeply spiritual. Specific body parts were believed to hold power or divine essence. In these societies, it was reverence — not horror.”⁴ It may include the Aghori sects who consume human flesh from cremation grounds.
- **Endocannibalism:** “In this form, people consumed flesh of their own kin or community members. It was a sacred farewell in many indigenous cultures — a way to honor the dead or absorb their essence.”⁵ The Wari’ people from Brazil consume the flesh of their marriage partners to show their affections towards them.
- **Exocannibalism:** “This involved eating enemies after battle — a brutal act of dominance, vengeance, or humiliation. It symbolized stripping power from the enemy and claiming it for oneself.”⁶
- **Pathological Cannibalism:** “When cannibalism results from severe mental disorders or sadistic impulses, it becomes pathological and criminal in nature.”⁷ The Nithari killing case highlights the horrors of the psychology of a cannibal.
- **Vorarephilia:** “A rare fetish, vorarephilia involves fantasies of consuming or being consumed. It mixes sexuality, death, and fantasy. While often confined to the imagination, some cases cross into real-world crimes — blurring the lines between role play and reality.”⁸

THE SHOCK DOCTRINE OF TABOO: Unlike other crime which are motivated by some universal vices like greed, revenge, lust or anger, cannibalism has a pure taboo effect as it lacks the required human motive which is an essential part of a crime. This make it a completely alien and incomprehensible crime. Moreover, the society which gives a high spiritual and moral value to the human body, even after death, this act reduces it to a mere object of consumption. Thus, cannibalism poses a conflict between the two ingrained concepts i.e. humanity (protection and empathy) and meat (food and consumption). At last, it leads to the existential threat to identity as it blurs the line between humans and wild animals.

³ Palak Bansal, *Cannibalism: Culture, Crime or Survival?*, available at <http://bnblegal.com>, (last visited on 19th August, 2026)

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

LEGAL LECUNA: Unlike other crimes like murder, rape, or theft which are explicitly punishable by law, there is no direct specific legislation that deals with cannibalism. So this raises a question whether cannibalism is legal in India?

However, the answer to it is not straight, even though there are no specific laws but the different sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 and other statutes indirectly deals with it in the form of murder, culpable homicide, trespass over the graveyards and other sections related to rape and other sexual offences as these offences form an integral part of cannibalism. One of the major section that deals with unnatural offence is section 377 of IPC which is unfortunately been done away with enactment of BNS.

III. THE MEDIA'S DUAL ROLE: WATCHDOG AND SENSATIONALIST

The media is fundamentally tasked with serving as a watchdog for the public interest, responsible for reporting accurate and essential information. By bridging the gap between societal issues and the general public, it plays a vital role in raising awareness about pressing problems.

Over the years, however, this watchdog function has significantly eroded. Driven by the pursuit of high ratings and viewership, many news outlets selectively broadcast stories tailored primarily to capture public attention. This practice fosters severe sensationalism, which becomes particularly dangerous when reporting on extreme criminal cases—such as incidents involving cannibalism. Relying on provocative labels like "monster," "beast," or "man-eating devil" may drive clicks, but it may shape public perception in a negative way. Consequently, such inflammatory reporting fuels prejudice, encourages a premature presumption of guilt, and risks inciting mob violence.

“Because of this, cannibalism in media has been firmly rooted as a longstanding horror genre. And just recently, we have begun to see a rise in films that involve anthropophagy. Even the notorious pop culture icon Hannibal Lecter recently got a reboot starring Mads Mikkelsen as the world’s most favorite cannibal.”⁹ Such cinema carves the individual understanding of humanity. Showing only the beast side of the cannibals also incites rage for them, even though the circumstances under which such act was done is completely ignored. However, the story of

⁹ Katherine Page, *The History of Cannibalism in the Horror Genre*, available at <https://theliberatormagazine.com>, posted on 2nd March, 2023, (last visited on 20th August, 2026)

Life of Pi by Yann Martel portrays the difficulties and circumstances that lead a man to turn to a cannibal.

Another difficulty that come from the sensationalism and incomplete reporting by media is the media trial. Televisions, social media and newspapers takes the role of court and before legal court decide they declare the accused whether they are guilty or not. The 2006 Nithari Serial murders case experiences a severe media trial, where sensationalized news coverage branded the accused as ‘monster’ and ‘cannibal’ before evidence were tested in courts. This intense public pressure compromised the objective of investigating procedure, leading courts years later to cite botched police work and acquit the accused due to lack of evidence.

Not only the accused but the victims also get affected by such reporting as the problem of “second victimization” sets in. The victim who has already gone through the horrors of the crime, just for the sake of freedom of press is forced to live those moments again. The dehumanizing graphics, speculative or overly sensationalized details strip victims of their humanity, turning real tragedy into consumer content. Moreover, the institutional failure of handling the sensitive data also lead to leaking of crime scene photos and poor communication from legal authority also re-traumatized the next kin.

The Netflix crime thriller SECTOR 36, inspired by Nithari Killings faced a widespread criticism for sensationalizing real life trauma. The gore graphic and shock value over the genuine plight and human stories of marginalized victims and their grieving families was highly objected.

However, this type of reports and cinema had shifted the public focus from the administrative failure to individual pathology. So we can say that media lack the principle of proportionality i.e. the more disturbing the allegations, the greater is the need of restraint. Public curiosity is taking over the public interest and even facts irrelevant to the case are also being published to attract public attention. Thus, such structural bias has made the sensational claims travel faster than the real explanations.

IV. RTI AS AN INVESTIGATING & ACCOUNTABILITY TOOL

“The Right to Information (RTI) Act, enacted by the Indian Parliament in 2005, is widely regarded as one of the most transformative laws in India’s democratic history. It gave ordinary citizens a legal right to request information from any public authority – fundamentally changing the power equation between the governed and the government. What was once a culture of bureaucratic secrecy shifted, at least in principle, toward one of default openness. The impact of this shift has been enormous: from exposing multi-crore scams to helping a village woman

obtain a simple death certificate, RTI has reshaped how governance works in India.”¹⁰ In light of cannibalism, RTI serves as an important tool in the process of investigation and unveiling the required information necessary for the records.

RTI pierces through media hysteria to access official documentation in the following ways:

- **POLICE FIRs AND RESPONSE TIMELINES:** RTI requests by many activists has dismantle sensational media narratives by uncovering the information related to exact timeline of police report. Accessing to official logs helps in finding the drawbacks of investigations and avoid unnecessary trial by media on the bases of false and incomplete information. This also lowers the public outrage and made a more evidence based accountability of the officials.
- **AUTOPSY AND FORENSIC LABORATORY BACKLOGS:** The sensationalized reports often blame the individual investigators for slow criminal inquiries, but RTI discloses the deep systematic failure. Many cases of cannibalism were being suppressed in the name of animal attack in order to avoid further investigation. However, the reports from experts and forensic laboratories serves as medium to unveiling the truth.
- **MISSING PERSON STATISTICS IN VULNERABLE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AREA:** Media coverage of missing persons is very selective and limited to only high profile cases like that of Madeleine McCann. RTI filings provides a comprehensive, disaggregated data on vulnerable socio-economic sectors as these missing persons mainly involves women, children and weak people. This is not only essential for cannibalism cases but also others like human trafficking, sexual offences etc.

All these points may also strengthen the media role as watchdog, including educating people, public service delivery, and highlighting corruption, fraud and citizen grievances.

Even though RTI is providing us with the lots of recourses but the state intact actions may make them a complete waste. Frequent dismissal of reports of person from marginalized communities, ignorance of vital pattern and failure to investigate timely leads by police and other investigating authorities has poses a lot of difficulties in locating the cases of cannibalism. For instance, the infamous case of Jeffrey Dahmer, an American serial killer who used to lure young boys and men from marginalized

¹⁰ Journalism. University, *Unveiling the Impact of RTI: A Tool for Transparency and Accountability*, available at <https://journalism.university>, updated on 14th January,2026, (last visited on 20th August,2026)

communities and then used to murder them and involve in the act of cannibalism. This case highlights the administrative failure of Milwaukee police who had returned a dazed, bleeding teenage boy directly to Dahmer after accepting his superficial explanations. This systemic apathy can inadvertently enable horrific violence.

Consequently, the modern human rights framework demands tracking compensations and rehabilitation of the victims and their families. This has been ignored for a longer period. Cannibalism inflicts exceptional psychological trauma, social stigma, and profound grief, thus the state carries an obligation to provide restitution of such.

V. CASE STUDY ANALYSIS: MEDIA AND CANNIBALS

THE SHOCKING CASE ARMIN MEIWES:

“Armin Meiwes is a German former computer repair technician who received international attention for murdering and cannibalising Bernd Brandes, whom he had found via the Internet as a voluntary victim, in March 2001.”¹¹

“On 9 March 2001, at 10:40, Meiwes and Brandes met at Kassel-Wilhelmshöhe station. Meiwes had initially planned to live with Brandes for a few days so they could get to know each other, but Brandes insisted the "slaughter" should take place that day. They drove to Meiwes' house in Wüstefeld, where they cuddled and made out on a mattress for several hours. They set up video equipment to film the mutilation of Brandes. Meiwes had prepared six knives, a hatchet and a meat grinder for the act. Additionally, Meiwes had downloaded and translated a step-by-step guide for the butchering of a human male.”¹²

After that, Meiwes had Brandes consume a bottle of cough syrup containing alcohol along with several packets of sleeping pills to render him unconscious. Once Brandes's blood alcohol level reached 1.4%, Meiwes made his first attempt to castrate him, cutting off several parts of his body, including his genitals, while keeping him alive so that they both could eat the remaining parts the following morning.

Later that night, when Brandes got up to use the restroom, he collapsed from severe blood loss. Believing he was already dead, Meiwes tied his body to a table and cut off further parts. After much hesitation and prayer, he ultimately killed him by stabbing him in the neck. Over the next six months, Meiwes continued to consume the remains, eating approximately 22 kg of human flesh.

¹¹ Wikipedia, *Armin Meiwes*, available at <https://wikipedia.org>, last edited on 14th August,2026, (last visited on 21st August,2026)

¹² Supra note 11

Between 2001 and 2002, Meiwes became involved in slaughter forums again, where several individuals volunteered but eventually backed out; around five men were involved with this voluntary cannibalism. Finally, in 2002, an Austrian college student conducting research came across Meiwes's webpage and contacted him. After receiving an affirmative response, the student grew suspicious and reported him to the police. Following his arrest, several legal proceedings were held against Meiwes, during which the voluntary nature of the act sparked intense legal and ethical debate.

Thus, media has sensationalized this case by giving him the title of 'Rotenburg Cannibal' a framed his consensual act through a lurid predator v. prey narrative. Media has also created a cultural impact through films like Grimm Love and Cannibal, Rammstein's controversial song "Mein Teil", plays like Taste and the very famous fictional character Hannibal Lector in books, using dramatization to explore consent, alienation and modern taboos.¹³

Concurrently, digital media and press exposure has also played a pivotal role in the investigation and jurisprudence. Online reporting led that Austrian boy to alert authorities to Meiwes's posting while intense journalistic security pressured German courts to confront legal loopholes surrounding victim consent, ultimately contributing to his final murder conviction.

VI. LIMITS AND EXEMPTIONS IN RTI

Even though RTI is powerful but it's not unlimited. Several exemptions relating to national security, personal privacy, confidential information, privilege and information that may impede investigation procedure, can't be given to general public. Information of current investigation may be withheld if it obstructs the further process. Personal medical records and private details of victims or accused may be protected.

Transparency cannot be used as an excuse to expose the survivors and families. It is important that personal interest must be balanced with public interest. Moreover, RTI cannot replace criminal investigation. The Public Information Officer is not required to determine the guilt, reveal the unrecorded information or conduct inquiry merely because an application has been filed.

RTI follow the approach of selective disclosure. The aggregate statistics, rules, reports and action taken records may serve the public interest without revealing sensitive personal information. It is important for a journalist to publish only what is necessary and true about the incident.

¹³ Supra note 11

VII. CONCLUSION

Cannibalism is a combination of complex historical, ritual and societal context that simple narratives of evil fails to explain. There is strict responsibility of media report such disturbing incidents proportionally, protecting the victim dignity while exposing the institutional failures instead of giving sensationalized reports. Public education and institutional reforms with the help of RTI has uncovered public administration shortcomings. Ultimately, a strong partnership between responsible media and lawful RTI access is essential to transition public discourse from rumors to facts, spectacle to systematic accountability, and fear to informed democratic actions.

