

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE

JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE



JIGYASA

POLITICS AND PLAY OF IDENTITY

THE ANNUAL MAGAZINE, 2020-21 OF THE WSC

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A NOTE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Jesus and Mary College was started in 1968 with the vision of providing a meaningful, all-round higher education to young women so as to enable their intellectual development, sharpen their social conscience, and nurture their fullest potential and self-worth. The College endeavours to build compassionate, socially conscious and independent women who can inspire, lead and make a difference in society.



minorities, growing communalism, regional backwardness and deep economic disparities play themselves out and affect the lives of students in subtle ways. Students expectedly develop strong opinions and their own ways to cope with surrounding realities.

It is these opinions, experiences, energy and the willingness to defend what is right and just that the Women's Studies Centre seeks to harness and further channelise towards achieving the vision of the College. As one of our compulsory societies, the WSC consciously nurtures the creative talents within students, mentors sound research activities, and works towards the intellectual enrichment of students. This issue of *Jigyasa* reflects such work, academic rigor and an expression of commitment towards the cause of women.

It is with much joy and pride that I congratulate the WSC members and faculty advisors for their consistent efforts at awareness building, and for providing a safe, vibrant space for discussion. Despite the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the academic year, the WSC has been able to bring to fruition this magazine. I congratulate the Editorial and Design Teams for their exemplary work.

Enjoy the read!

Dr. Sandra Joseph
Principal

Needless to say, we live in a far from egalitarian society. Nurturing critical minds, and building sensitive and responsible young adults under the prevailing conditions is a challenge indeed. Often the given circumstances of rampant gender discrimination, casteism, stereotyping of linguistic and religious

A Note from the Convenor, WSC

The Women's Studies Centre (WSC) is the nerve center of a lot of rich academic discussion, continuous interface with well-known scholars as well as activists, student research, and a wide spectrum of events, including several off-beat ones. Apart from a



hardworking core team and a research cell comprising of students spread across all courses and years, the WSC has been mentored by a team of dedicated teachers from different departments. As the Convenor, I have had the privilege of working with the following colleagues, who have been very valuable as Staff Advisors: Dr. Sharon Pillai, Dr. Anupama Srivastava, Dr. Jessy Philip, Dr. Priya Bhatnagar Babbar, Ms. Kashish Dua and Ms. Aneesh Puri.

When we entered the new academic year in the summer of 2020, each of us knew that it would be an unusual and difficult year in terms of the online mode of teaching-learning that was to unfold. Our work as a Centre had been rudely disrupted shortly after the commemoration of International Women's Day on 5th March 2020 as the University did not open after the mid-semester break. In this light, the anxiety of the new office bearers, Dhvani (President) and Riya (Vice President), about the planning and execution of events was understandable. However, we have clearly sailed through, and have remained one of the most vibrant and active co-curricular societies of the college in the academic year 2020-21.

Our aim has been to make WSC activities as regular, diverse, student-centric and meaningful as possible, irrespective of the continuous crunch in UGC funding and despite the challenges of managing everything online.

This past year, we strove to encourage our 300 odd student members to use the WSC as a platform through which they could actively engage with the gendered realities surrounding them; comprehend gender and sexuality *not* in isolation from the axes of class, caste, community, race, region, etc.; learn about ongoing struggles; and to take inspiration from organized, progressive social movements. Through a wide spectrum of events, we tried to ensure that there was something of interest for every student member to engage with.

Given our focus on much-needed discussion on burning social issues, the WSC has organized dedicated certificate course modules and workshops on issues like the lockdown, the deep crisis in social reproduction as exposed in the past one year, changes in the country's labour laws, problems with gender-related legislation, the alarming trends in women's workforce participation, growing caste atrocities, the problems of coming out, LGBTQIA+ writings from India, among many other issues. Through such activities the Centre has exposed the student members to ongoing debates and literature. In the process, the WSC has tried to sensitize students by widening the expanse of their

engagement with complex realities around them. Apart from intensive training workshops, certificate course modules and the annual student seminar, the Centre has also used several stand-alone events, as well as online campaigns, blog writing and cultural programs like online film-screenings, power-point presentations, open mic sessions, poetry-reading, etc., to spread awareness and inculcate critical thinking among the members.

The Centre has also consciously tied up with prestigious research institutions like the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute (VVG NLI, Noida), Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (Berlin), Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (Delhi), Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women's Studies (Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi) as well as other WDCs to enhance the exposure of the students to ongoing research and to the international women's movement. In this regard, the WSC's collaborative training workshop with VVG NLI on "Gender and Development: A Special Focus on the Labour Policies for Women Workers", and the interactive workshop organized with assistance from Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, which was titled "Dialogues with Feminists Abroad: Critical Questions and Some Reflections", offered a rich experience indeed. It was particularly interesting to discuss with activists from Italy, Spain and Argentina the fault-lines informing mainstream feminism, as well as the nature of mass women's movements of recent years. This apart, the WSC has consciously invited several noted scholars, including scholar activists to conduct sessions with the student members. It has been an honor hosting scholars and academics like

Lakshmi Lingam (Tata Institute of Social Sciences), Ved Kumari (National Law University, Odisha), Ruth Vanita (University of Montana), Ritu Dewan (Indian Society for Labour Economics), Jayanti Kajale (Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics), Christa Wichterich (Kassel University), Urvashi Butalia (Zubaan Books), Praveena Kodoth (Centre for Development Studies), Panchali Ray, Cynthia Stephen, among many others.

Another rewarding experience was, of course, the annual student seminar, which was hosted as part of the WSC's commemoration of International Women's Day (IWD) and its festival, Jagriti. Although every year, IWD and Jagriti are commemorated through a host of programs, including a *jansunvai*, street plays, songs, etc., we did not let the ongoing closure of the University dampen our spirits. The core team saw through a series of online events as a build-up to Jagriti 2021, which culminated on 5th March 2021 in our inaugural program that comprised of an online public lecture by Advocate Kirti Singh, a noted activist of the progressive women's movement in India; followed by the student seminar where 15 papers from across universities in India were presented. In the given context of successive onslaughts on democratic aspirations and steady communalization of politics in the bid to conceal rising inequalities in society, the WSC consciously chose the theme "Gendered Realities in Times of Growing Authoritarianism" for its annual student seminar. We were happy to receive quite a few critically argued student papers, on which our judges gave detailed feedback.

As part of our effort to inculcate socially meaningful research, the WSC launched three short-term research projects and one long-term project, for which a dedicated research cell was constituted. Most of the research projects draw on concerns stemming from contemporaneous conditions such as the economic and social dislocation ushered in by the pandemic-cum-lockdown, growing dependence of the youth on social media platforms, etc.

The WSC started off its journey with much energy in August 2020 when the college reopened for online teaching. In a remarkable adjustment to new conditions, our second and third-year members began to attend events in the early evenings after their regular online classes, and even signed up for workshops and modules slated for Saturdays. A burn-out was expected, especially as the senior years stepped into the semester examinations in December 2020. What charged us up as a Centre was the entry of our first-year members, who entered the scene in the tail end of the last semester. Our first-year members have brought so much more energy into the WSC, and we have been happy to note that WSC events are increasingly attended by a relatively quiet yet attentive audience of our first-year members. This was also evident in the seriousness with which they have taken on tasks, be it in the research cell, or work on the WSC blog, or the transcription work of the Centre.

I have sometimes wondered whether the WSC has shaped the lives of its members in any significant way. In this past year as I struggled to put a face with the name, and often felt restless staring at dots on the computer screen rather than actual faces, I had my moments of self-doubt. The echoing “can you hear me, am I audible” was, needless to say, a dampener. Awkward silences before one of the members unmuted to speak or put down something in the chat box have been a part of our everyday experiences. As an advisor to the WSC, I have come to realize that the sensitization of our student members is an ongoing process; a journey which some, may be not all, will definitely see through. Our role then as a Centre is essentially to provide a window for comprehending the uncomfortable realities that surround us as women. We strive to provide the information on debates on social issues and on trajectories of social movements. We try to provide a nuanced and not an abstract, text - bookish, class / caste / race - sanitized definition of gendered experiences. We seek to provide contacts and channels of communication with progressive forces in our society. That our members use such exposure to become informed, sensitive women with empathy towards and involvement in the women’s movement is something that only time will tell. At least, they wouldn’t look back at their college years and feel that no one told them that rights and justice are never given; rather they are fought for and taken.

* * * *

Dr. Maya John

Asst. Prof., Dept. of History and Convenor, WSC

JIGYASA

(7)

Farewell Message from the WSC Office Bearers...

The Women's Studies Centre this year has attempted to establish a legacy for our future office bearers, team heads and core team through diverse events, engaging online campaigns, (soon to be published) research projects, and by reviving our annual Society magazine, *Jigyasa*. The society continuously adapted to the challenges of functioning during a pandemic by effectively utilizing the online mode. We invited renowned speakers to discuss politically and culturally relevant issues, and to create an intersectional platform which allowed space for activism and forging meaningful student solidarities. We responded to brutal acts of gender-based violence through creatively conceptualized placard campaigns and solidarity statements.

As the President of the WSC, I attempted to create an inclusive and safe environment for all our members through organizing open mics, poetry readings, discussion circles, and short film screenings. Our team consistently and tirelessly handled several projects simultaneously. As a result, the WSC did

not just remain a platform for raising awareness and providing training on important gendered and feminist themes, but it functioned as a cohesive team working to evolve an understanding of the contemporary movement that was at once socially and individually significant. By allowing space for personal change, the Centre has deeply impacted me in my trajectory as a feminist and gender activist.



I would like to thank my Core Team and Vice President, Riya, for making this academic year a success. From our monthly meetings to last minute crises talks, we have truly been through it all! It has been a special yet difficult year, full of working together and understanding each other. In this amazing and beautiful journey, it is evident that every single one of the team members has put in their heart and soul into the functioning of the society, and I thank you for that. You continue to inspire me every day. Signing off...

Dhwani Jaisingh

President, WSC (BA Hons. English III Year)

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My journey with the Women's Studies Centre has been nothing short of an adventure. From the novelty of organising events in the online mode to increasing our social media presence, my learnings at the Centre have been manifold. The support of our very enthusiastic Core Team made the experience a lot more valuable. And, working closely alongside Dhwani, our President, has been inspiring.

Interacting with the scholars and activists who participated in the various events which the Women's Studies Centre organised this academic year was enriching as well as exhilarating. The involvement and enthusiasm of our members was something that motivated me and gave me a sense of purpose. I hope to keep growing and learning with the WSC, learning to have a better understanding of the gendered world around us, and to fight on.

Riya Arora

Vice President, WSC (BA Hons. Sociology II Year)

From the Editorial Desk...

I came on board this “ship”, so to speak, in late February of this year, as mentor to the students involved with the WSC magazine. Since then, it’s been exciting working closely with Snigdhaa and Riya and other members of the student editorial and design teams to give this issue of *Jigyasa* its current shape and form.



WSC this year. The sheer volume of work catalogued in the calendar is testament, of course, to the dedication of every member of the WSC, student or faculty, to contribute meaningfully to the success of the society. But most of all it is testament to the tireless commitment of Dr. Maya John, Convenor of the WSC and the driving force behind it for the last few years.

Our theme this year is “identity”, more specifically, the “politics and play of identity”. The magazine is divided into four sections. The first section offers a representative selection of some of the stellar work at the WSC that aligns with our chosen theme: transcriptions of online interactions and sessions with scholars and activists of repute; the best papers from the annual student seminars 2020 & 2021 hosted by the WSC; a brief but handy write-up of the four research projects undertaken by the WSC; and, finally, a poster collage as a visual referent. The second segment consists of the takeaways of students and faculty who attended and/or conducted various workshops and certificate course modules. The third part features explorations of, and ruminations on the theme of identity by our students in the form of poetry, fiction, critical essays as well as photography and artwork. The fourth and last section of the magazine is a calendar that provides a meticulous enumeration of all the events, programmes, online campaigns, etc., organised by the

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank every member of the student editorial and design teams, helmed by Snigdhaa and Riya, respectively. I am especially grateful to every scholar, activist, faculty and student who has contributed to this magazine, sometimes on very short notice. Dr. Anupama Srivastava deserves special mention for generously helping us copy-edit, and proof-read the contributions we received in Hindi. Maya’s been a fantastic support and sounding board. And finally, many thanks to the Principal, Dr. Sandra Joseph for all institutional encouragement and smooth facilitation.

It’s been a month or so of hard work putting this issue of *Jigyasa* together: collaborating, brainstorming, occasionally butting heads, tracking submissions, editing copy, proof reading. It’ll all be worthwhile if what we’ve put together, you, our reader finds edifying and engaging, if not in equal parts, at least, in parts!

* * * *

Dr. Sharon Pillai
Asst. Prof., Dept. of English, and Staff Advisor, WSC

It was back in January 2021 that the editorial team of the WSC started brainstorming about what the central theme of *Jigyasa*, the WSC Magazine, should be. Together, the team came up with a long list of topics, issues and concepts as possible options. After endless back and forth, it hit us that “jigyasa” when translated literally means “curiosity”. That is what convinced us to explore the conundrum of “identity” in this issue.



when these come from places of artifice or from pretensions to perfection, is more or less doomed to failure. Deconstructing one’s identity, recognizing aspects of it that are fascinatingly paradoxical at times, is what takes true courage. This magazine is a fine blend of the creative and the critical, assertive and reflective, political and personal exploration of the multi-dimensional nature of identity.

As the world evolves, our identities evolve too. But in addition to being dynamic, identities are also inconsistent and fragmented. People’s identities are multi-faceted and ultimately a sum of different pieces or parts. While we strive for equality and fight against injustices, we forget the hard journey we have undertaken to become strong and aware individuals who can see the flaws of society. The roads we have travelled to become resilient and informed has changed us in a fundamental way, enabling us to see the inequities around us. While these battles we fight are important, it is also imperative to explore and understand who we become as we live, grow and learn through that process.

None of this would have come to fruition without the efforts and hard work of the entire team, for which I am extremely grateful. *Jigyasa* 2020-21 started out as a rough yet complicated idea in our minds, which received unstinting support from the convenor, Dr. Maya John and the staff advisors of WSC. At each step, Dhvani and Riya stood with the team and brainstormed endlessly to understand what we wished to communicate through the chosen theme of identity. The constant guidance and endless dedication of Sharon ma’am, one of the staff advisors of WSC, helped us visualize how *Jigyasa* could be shaped.

Identity, a simple word, raises complicated questions—questions to do with silence, acceptance, evolution, transition, alienation, resilience, and the personal battles that we fight on a day-to-day basis. Curiosity, with its associated sense of intellectual inquiry and peppy energy, is just what is needed to read the palimpsest of identity marked by the scrawl of prescription and taboo. A curious mind, keen to learn, will always want to discover themselves and look at others through fresh and searching lenses.

In the end, I would like to thank the entire editorial team comprising of Michelle Sanya Turkey, Manjri Nene, Riya Kapoor, Jahanbi Singh, Akanksha Sengupta, Srushti Sharma and Sania Javed for their hard work and enthusiasm. I also thank the design team, comprising of Aleena Verghese, Nashra Sehar, Pratishta Jindal, Radhika Bhandari, Rishita Kishore Shah, Sehar Sabharwal, and Visheshta Sharma, who stepped in at the last moment and helped us realise our vision with their art.

The Japanese art form Kintsugi teaches us about the beauty in brokenness. It paves a path of acceptance for the obscure, disavowed aspects of ourselves. That is exactly what the magazine team wanted to share with the readers. Accepting ourselves, broken bits, warts and all, is tough. But trying to practice self-love and humanitarianism,

Working to put together this issue of *Jigyasa* has been a source of immense joy for me; it has given me learnings that I will take with me forever and set me on the journey of discovering my own identity anew—a journey I wish for all the readers. Bon Voyage!

* * * *

Snigdhaa Ghai
BA Hons. English III Year & Editor, *Jigyasa*

Exploring Axes of Inequality: Highlights from the WSC Events



State Policy, Women's Migration and Social Disruption

WSC Certificate Course Module on Public Health and Global Care Chains conducted on 23rd January 2021

Praveena Kodoth
Professor, Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum

Professor Praveena Kodoth: I will be addressing three interconnected sub themes, which are:

(i) How India's emigration policy, as it pertains to women domestic workers and nurses, is gendered. I will first lay out the policy and illustrate how it is gendered, focusing mostly on domestic workers because policy on nurses, until recently, was not different from that which pertained to skilled workers. So, nurses were not really demarcated for "special" treatment (through restrictions) or adversely affected as women domestic workers were. Since 2015, however, there has been an effort to control the migration of nurses and that's an interesting story in itself. I will deal with it only peripherally as my focus will be on women domestic workers.

(ii) The second sub-theme, related to the first, pertains to the effects of policy on women's migration. How have policy restrictions on their migration affected women domestic workers? I will look at two aspects here: one, the paths through which women migrate in the face of restrictions and two, the effects of policy restrictions on Indian women's labour market prospects overseas. This sub theme also addresses how policy actually shapes who migrates. Indeed, policy can either narrow the social categories of women who migrate or expand them which has implications for the rating of women on the overseas labour market.

(iii) The third aspect is the *care chain*. I will examine the global care chain framework critically from the source end of migration in the Global South (from the literature) and

India, (from my own work). The global care chain framework has been formulated largely from the standpoint of the Global North and is not adequately informed by the details of institutions, state provisions and policy frameworks of the Global South. Again, there are two aspects here. First, a point that the global care chain framework takes into account, that women's migration disrupts pre-existing care arrangements at the source. We must recognize here that families at the source are patriarchal and that care arrangements impose the entire burden of care work on women. Women's migration is disruptive because it takes the care-providing woman away from the site of care. Second, how does state policy, its effects on women's migration (the first and second sub themes) and societal perceptions of migrant women, which is also linked to state policy, affect the ability of migrant women to translate the gains from overseas migration into well-being for themselves and their families? This is an issue that is really at the very core of the care chain.

To begin, let me place women's migration in perspective. It is not well known that India is a major source of women migrant workers to the Middle Eastern countries, especially workers at the lowest end of the skills' hierarchy. India is also a leading source of nurses across the world. In fact, India and the Philippines are the two largest sources of internationally migrant nurses. Indian nurses are largely from the state of Kerala, which has historically dominated overseas migration in this profession. India, like the Philippines, is also a leading source of women domestic workers in several of the Middle Eastern

countries with the difference that unlike in the Philippines, women from India lack recognition as they are not visible in the migration statistics from India.

Kerala and Andhra Pradesh (AP) are the largest source states of migrant women domestic workers from India. Women started to migrate to the Middle East in the 1950s, maybe even as early as the 1940s. They were working as domestic workers in the Middle East much before Filipina women. The Philippines has followed a policy of promoting women's migration—which has its own negative impacts as it does not generate employment at home. Therefore, women have few options at home and may be under pressure to migrate. But the Philippines extends strong support to migrant women, in terms of skilling prior to migration and in laying out an infrastructure for the protection of those workers to the extent that is possible in the Middle East, which is known for very repressive policy frameworks when it concerns migrant workers as a whole. Overall, the Middle East is the largest destination of Indian workers and this is quite well known. I must also mention that the Middle Eastern countries have more Indian workers than they have nationals in those countries. That is to give you a sense of how big the migration is from India. But the Indian state provides little protection to its workers in the Middle East.

Survey data on migration from India, which is available for Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Goa shows that only 15 to 20 percent of all migrants have been women and only half of this 15 to 20 percent, have been workers. So, you can see that at this scale, women migrants have been only about one-fifth of all migrants, and an even smaller proportion of them are workers. If you take a different scale – because women's migration is highly spatially clustered compared to men – you find areas where women's migration is highly concentrated. Therefore, if you take three

mandals, and I'm talking from my own familiarity with Andhra Pradesh because I've conducted field work there, there are these *mandals* or *taluks* where women are more than half of all migrants. So, it depends on the scale at which you are examining migration. Scale matters because, one, women's migration is spatially clustered in specific regions of southern India and two, the bulk of women migrants in the Middle East are clustered in two occupations, domestic work and nursing.

I am mindful of the sizeable migration of women in the IT sector, but IT workers are largely bound for the OECD countries. Nurses migrate all over the world but a major destination of Indian nurses is the Middle East. Estimates from destination sources indicate that there are over 2 lakh Indian migrant domestic workers in the Middle East and between 2009 and 2013, about 10,000 women were recruited through regular channels each year. This is official data from the Indian state and I mention these years because after 2013, state policy became extremely repressive. I'll show you data later where you can see that the number of migrants nosedived after 2014. But even when the official figures are low, the reality is that there is considerable irregular migration. In fact, there is an inverse relationship between policy restrictions and regular or legal migration.

For nurses, there was no official data prior to March 2015. That was when the Indian State started to control the migration of nurses, but from 2015 up to January 15, 2021, for which I sourced data through an RTI, 34,838 nurses were recruited to the Middle East. You can see that it is a considerable number of nurses and this is after the State introduced control over migration.

Two questions were raised: Why do women migrate to the Middle East for domestic work where there is so much

exploitation, rather than to nations like the US and Canada where the laws are relatively stringent against exploitation of women? Is it not the responsibility of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women to protect these women workers from the exploitation that takes place in the Middle East?

Prof. Kodoth: Apart from the Middle East, Indian women also migrate as domestic workers to some of the countries of Southeast Asia, i.e., Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia as well as to Israel and Italy. Now, if you look at the ethnic composition of the women who migrate to these different regions, you will find that there are very interesting patterns. It is Tamil women who migrate to Malaysia and Singapore and Goan women migrate to Hong Kong. It is largely women from Kerala and Andhra Pradesh and from Goa who work in the Middle East. More recently Tamil women also. Again, if you look country-wise, there are very interesting patterns. So, from a particular region like the Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh, women migrate to Kuwait. From Kadapa – another prominent source of women’s migration from Andhra Pradesh – they go to Kuwait, but Saudi Arabia is also a prominent destination. Kuwait is an important destination of women from south Kerala but UAE followed by Saudi Arabia are the important destinations from north Kerala. From Kerala, you find that there is migration across the state, but is clustered in the coastal region, highland region, and in the urban slums. It corresponds to poverty regions, though it is not the poorest women who migrate. The women who migrate usually are women with networks. That is really the answer to your question.

The fact that you find these patterns actually tells you about the networks that different people from these regions have fostered in different destinations, which in turn, reinforces this migration. It is one reason

why you find that there is still a fairly strong trend of women’s migration to the Middle East, despite a fairly longstanding repressive emigration policy adopted by India. It is true that there are incidents of abuse but it is also true that we know only one side of the picture because our media, as well as our government policy tends to publicise only the stories of abuse. We are not adequately informed about the more routine, ordinary experiences of women migrants. One of the things that happens when women migrate from a particular region is that there is a lot of information about that migration in the source regions. There is misinformation, but there is also a lot of experience and a lot of information which is different from what the media highlights and the general public is aware of.

Moreover, there is something which economists call the demonstration effect – people in the source areas see for themselves when migrants do well. They have come back from the Middle East; they are doing well. This actually fosters greater migration. Part of the answer to your question is the kind of networks that women have in these regions. But networks are spawned through a history of migration. Migration to the Middle East from both Kerala and Andhra Pradesh were underway by the mid-20th century. Interestingly, both Kerala and Andhra Pradesh had a prior history of migration to Southeast Asia. The mid-20th century marked a sharp break as migration turned west towards the Persian Gulf. Demand for domestic workers and nurses in the Middle East with modernization and the development of the health infrastructure were, of course, important factors. But the clinching factors were prior familiarity with migrant livelihoods and networks that were shaped through employment of Indian intermediate skilled workers in oil instalments controlled by the British in a large part of the Middle East from the 1930s. In fact, Kuwait was governed by the British from Bombay.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Malayalis already had relatively high education level and demographic transition had already set in among the Christian Community. So, there was scarcity and a push for jobs. Educated Malayali youth looking for jobs found their way to Madras, and Bombay. Recruitment to the Middle East was done in Bombay. Malayali youth were there and willing to take up migrant jobs. These connections also paved the way for the migration of Malayali nurses to the Middle East.

Women from Kerala entered into professional nursing right from the 1930s. Notably, migrant Malayali nurses in the Middle East were one of the channels for employment of domestic workers from Kerala. Domestic workers also responded to opportunities through other kinds of connections. The coastal sector people had connections across the seas. They traversed Southeast Asia and the Middle East by boat and were also present in Bombay, doing all kinds of informal sector work. These connections enabled migration of women from the coastal communities as the wages were exponentially higher than could be earned at home.

Moving to the question of policy, I wish to point out that there are basically two main sources of regulation: legislation and government orders. Migration is governed by the Indian Emigration Act, 1983, and by government orders issued from time to time within the broad framework of the 1983 Act. Let us examine how the Emigration Act has affected migrant domestic workers or aspiring women.

The Emigration Act creates two classes of citizens. At present, all citizens who have less than 10 years of completed schooling have Emigration Check Required (ECR) passports. All citizens who have ECR passports are supposed to get emigration clearance through a specifically designed

procedure. We being people with higher education have passports that are designated Emigration Check Not Required (ECNR). ECNR/ECR used to be printed or stamped on the inside of passports. ECR passport holders must submit a prescribed set of documents to the Protector of Emigrants [POE], a Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) official. So, all workers who have less than 10 years of education must obtain emigration clearance from the POE in order to be able to migrate through regular/legal means. This is a tedious bureaucratic procedure that requires a whole lot of running around to mobilize these documents. People with little education find it difficult to navigate this process on their own and usually seek the assistance of intermediaries for which they pay sizeable sums of money.

The Emigration Act also required mandatory licensing of recruitment agencies and prohibited sub-agents and commission agents. Now, these two provisions had a big effect on the recruitment of domestic workers. Licensed recruitment agencies operate out of the major cities and they do not have direct links in the source villages of domestic workers in southern India. Prior to the Emigration Act of 1983, recruitment agencies mobilized recruits through intermediaries who had direct links with the source villages. With the abolition of an entire tier of intermediaries, it became very difficult for licensed agents to mobilize workers. This does not mean that recruitment of domestic workers was stopped; it simply moved to irregular channels. So, legal changes contributed to a shift in recruitment from regular to irregular channels, or, what is popularly called, illegal migration.

The ECR category was created to protect less educated migrant workers who were considered vulnerable to exploitation. Emigration clearance was the mechanism through which vulnerable migrants were to be protected. Emigration clearance is required

for only 18 countries which are known for poor working conditions and include all of the Middle East. Verification of documents as a condition for emigration clearance has not served to protect workers in the Middle East where even regular migrants are abused. To make matters worse for Indian workers, the Indian state maintains a paltry infrastructure for their protection. In this respect, the contrast with the Philippines is very stark. India has far fewer embassy outreach centres than the Philippines.

Regulatory changes made in March 2015 brought nurses under the ECR category. As you know, nurses are highly educated workers, and therefore, in the normal course would not be under the ECR category. Their recruitment was also confined exclusively to two state-run agencies in Kerala. These measures were taken to combat large-scale corruption by private agencies. Private agencies immediately challenged the government order and a few months later the MEA accommodated private agencies through a new set of procedures. Foreign employers were permitted to recruit through private agencies on the basis of country-specific orders obtained from the Protector General of Emigrants (PGE). The PGE is right at the top of the emigration bureaucracy. There are about eight POE offices across the country that report to the PGE in Delhi.

The PGE is required to vet applications by foreign employers and can bar private agencies named in these applications if there are complaints against them. However, agencies can morph overnight through changes in identity and registration. The private agencies were very quickly back in business. The whole idea of confining recruitment to state-run agencies in 2015 was to combat corruption, but hasty accommodation of private agencies indicates their influence with the government.

What are the restrictions placed on women seeking to migrate as domestic workers? Women with less than 10 years of education (in the ECR category) must comply with additional conditions in order to obtain emigration clearance. There is a minimum age of 30 years, which has been in place since 1990s. In August 2016, recruitment was confined to six specified state-run agencies or directly by foreign employers through the *eMigrate* website. To recruit directly, employers are required to obtain embassy attestation of work contracts by paying a security deposit of \$2500. At present emigration clearance is entirely through the *eMigrate* portal of the MEA, and private agencies or social networks are banned from recruitment. Unlike in the case of nurses, private recruiters did not challenge this order of the government.

Confining recruitment of domestic workers to the state-sector was a tricky thing. Prior to the August 2016 order, none of the state-sector agencies had recruited domestic workers. They had recruited nurses before that, but not domestic workers. Pleas from the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Kerala, which organises migrant domestic workers to recruit, were ignored. State agencies pointed to the irregular practices that obtained in recruitment of domestic workers to suggest that their entry into the sector would be a risk to their reputation. For nearly two years after the 2016 order there was uncertainty because the stipulated agencies did not embark on organised recruitment. Of course, women continued to migrate through irregular channels.

One last point on the issue of regulation, the security deposit of \$2500 which was to be made to the Indian embassies by sponsors of women domestic workers was a large sum of money. Therefore, sponsors in the Middle East were quite happy to

circumvent it through irregular recruitment. Kuwait objected saying that the imposition of a security deposit infringed on its sovereignty and eventually banned recruitment of Indian domestic workers in 2015. Other countries accepted the condition but there was large-scale circumvention through irregular recruitment. The security deposit was supposed to be used to repatriate women domestic workers if they found themselves in trouble with their employers but it made recruitment so expensive that it pushed aspiring women also to seek irregular ways of going. As a result of these conditions, emigration clearance granted to women nosedived from 10,192 in 2013 to 345 in 2018. As regular or legal migration reduced, there were reports of increased irregular migration, which could be more dangerous, unless workers are protected by strong informal networks and connections in the destination.

What is an appropriate characterisation of India's emigration policy as it pertains to women domestic workers? Well, three kinds of characterisations appear to be relevant. The emigration policy is *protectionist* in so far as it seeks to protect women through restrictions on their mobility. Protectionism usually applies to a policy of protecting domestic industries by means of restrictions on foreign competition. In the migration context, a high-ranking official of the External Affairs Ministry justified India's restrictions in these terms: "the best way to protect Indian women workers from abuse is to not let them go at all". Clearly, this perspective sees women's mobility as a problem irrespective of outcomes. As a restrictive policy is also a response to exploitation by recruiters, there is a conflation of mobility and trafficking. Protectionism is also apparent in the ban on migration of women (below 30 years of age), which infringes on the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to

which India is a signatory. India's emigration policy may also be characterised as *paternalist* since it seeks to restrict the freedom and responsibilities of those considered weak or vulnerable, supposedly in their own interests, much like parents may restrict the freedoms of young children "for their own good". So, here you have the Indian state saying that this segment of women cannot take care of themselves, they are not capable of shouldering this responsibility, and therefore, they need to be restricted. A third characterisation, evident in the kind of statements that state officials make, is in terms of a *nationalist and patriarchal logic* underpinning policy that represents women domestic workers or poorly educated women workers as either too weak to cope with overseas jobs or as unruly and eager to profit from them, through illicit sexual activities. Officials of state-run agencies express this fear when they say that the women who make good through migration are willing to do "anything". Such statements imply sexual permissiveness and are made to malign women. To summarize, women domestic workers are seen as a potential threat to the implicitly patriarchal image of the nation.

So how do women migrate in the face of severe restrictions? Migration controls have spawned a complex nexus between unauthorized intermediaries and aspiring women that enables women to circumvent regulation and to migrate. Over half of the women immigrants who started working in the Middle East between 2000 and 2013 in the survey that I conducted in 2013 in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, were below 30 years on their first journey. This is the extent to which the rule is flouted. False age on passports helps circumvent the minimum age criterion with ease.

There is also something called "pushing", which is a term used both in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. It means bribing an emigration official at the airport to allow

the woman to go across the emigration check without emigration clearance from the POE. The unauthorized recruiters know which officials are willing to be bribed and coordinate with these officials to send women when the latter are on duty at the emigration desk. After the 2016 changes in rules, because women are no longer permitted to migrate through private intermediaries, the latter have devised a way of tampering with visas such that an electronic work visa is digitally transformed into a visit visa. So, the original work visa that a woman shows at the airport of departure will appear to be a visit visa. The other technique is to travel on a visit visa to an intermediate destination. Like, if I'm going to work in Kuwait, I will travel to the UAE on a visit visa and from there go on my work visa to Kuwait. These are the ways in which the current rules are circumvented.

So, what does all this say about policy? Policy is focused on the interminable task of closing gaps, but as Stephen Castle, a well-known scholar of migration, explains, regulatory failures are produced by the economic and bureaucratic rationale of state-centric analysis, which assumes that migration can be turned on and off like a tap by appropriate policy settings. State policies may affect migration, but they do not drive the migration process. The failure to see migration as a social process undermines an understanding of the complex motivations of actors involved as well as the significance of connections and networks that assist migration. State policy is not at all concerned with the social dynamic underpinning migration. Policy makers believe that more and more bureaucratic controls will prevent "undesirable" migration. They do not stop to think whether stopping mobility is desirable and what it would do to the livelihoods of the women in regions that see large-scale migration.

Policy assumes that women flout regulations because they lack awareness and

are ill-educated. Policy makers fail to recognize women's aspirations and that women make decisions based on the information available to them. But policy curbs have affected women's migration. They have raised the cost of migration, reduced potential returns and provide little incentive to women to invest in skills. When policy raises the cost of migration, it obviously reduces the returns for migrants. Though migrant domestic work is generally better paying than comparable opportunities in India, a restrictive policy has reduced the expected returns. Therefore, aspirants are unwilling to invest in skills. This is where Filipina women are at an advantage. Now, in the Middle East labour market, rating for domestic work is according to ethnic groups. Definitive wage rates are quoted for women from Indonesia or Ethiopia, India or the Philippines. Filipina women have the highest market wages. The minimum wages set by the Philippines is also higher than India's minimum wage for migrant domestic workers. So, irrespective of qualifications or skills or experience, Indian women are unlikely to command wages equal to that of Filipina women. This is a disincentive to invest in skills and has a reinforcement effect as it diminishes the reputation of Indian women. Indian women were the first foreign workers in the Middle East, other than Arab women from other countries, and they enjoyed a good reputation until the 1970s. Policy has been instrumental in reducing the reputation of Indian women domestic workers.

State policy has also had effects in terms of narrowing the social and spatial diversity of women who migrate. Because policy has led to unauthorized recruitment, rampant irregularities and returns that are not commensurate with skills and qualifications, it has narrowed the social and spatial profile of women aspirants. So, migrant domestic workers from Kerala are mostly from Other Backward Classes (OBC) and women with a few years of education. They are mostly

coastal sector people who are Catholic or Muslim with a sprinkling of women from urban slums and highland areas. Their demographic profile is also distinctive with a disproportionately large segment of women outside marital protection, i.e., divorced, separated or not married. In Andhra Pradesh, migrant women domestic workers are disproportionately from the Scheduled Caste (SC). SCs, otherwise, have had very little access to international migration in the post-independence phase. This is particularly true of Kerala, but in Andhra, especially from East Godavari, over 60 percent of women migrants are from the SCs. There is a fair segment of SCs in the Rayalseema region as well but OBC women were dominant in this region owing to a sizeable presence of Muslims. In Kerala, women migrate when there is a certain kind of compulsion arising from the breakdown of the conventional provisioning framework of marriage. In Andhra Pradesh, women's migration is more mainstream. Married women migrate with support from their husbands.

How are policy and its effects linked to social disruption at the source areas of migration. How does a policy of restrictions make the social disruption at the source worse than it would otherwise be? Nurses are able to migrate with their spouses and children so there is less "disruption" of care arrangements at the source. In fact, migrant Indian nurses constitute a significant source of demand for Indian domestic workers in the Middle East. Even if initially nurses are not be able to migrate with their families, by and large, it is only a small section of nurses who face this disruption of care arrangements at the source for a prolonged period. But nurses have been subject to stigma, owing to the nature of their work which involves touching and cleaning of the human body and which brings them in touch with bodily substances, all considered polluting within a caste framework. This also complicates the social disruption generated by

women's migration at the source. When women are stigmatized – because they are then blamed for going away and vacating their care responsibilities – they try to compensate in various ways. Expanding opportunities and upward mobility have reduced the stigma on migrant nurses, allowing them to translate economic gains into a certain degree of societal respect. Marriage advertisements for brides with a stated preference for migrant nurses suggests that their overseas location and money are certainly respected in Kerala. The growing number of male nurses is also an indication of the desirability of nursing opportunities and declining stigma.

Coming to migrant domestic workers, we find that repressive policy and its fallouts have intensified stigma in source contexts. Stigma was expressed differently in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. I found this very interesting. In Kerala, stigma was expressed across social and spatial locations. This is partly because of the universalization of the male breadwinner family. In Andhra Pradesh, there was very strong stigma outside of the main sending community. Among the Scheduled Castes, for instance, stigma was not reflected in the narratives of the husbands of these women. Men's narratives did not suggest a sense of being demasculinized or rendered inferior because their wives migrated. In fact, they appreciated their wives' contributions. However, outside of these communities, migration of women was basically seen as sexual servitude. Stigma was rampant among the privileged castes and people who were economically well-off.

The global care chain has drawn attention to how migration of care workers from the Global South, that are the developing countries, depletes care provision at the source end. When women who are the principal care providers migrate, you have families at the source deprived of their care services, even as it gives employers in the

Global North access to care workers at relatively low cost. Migration produces a hierarchical chain of reproductive labour as kin networks of migrant women or low paid labour take over these migrant women's work in their own homes in the Global South. Drawing on the work of Rachel Parrenas, Arlie Hochschild argues that employers in the Global North extract surplus value because part of the cost of employing care workers from the Global South is rendered invisible as it is replaced at the source by unpaid work of kin networks and not fully monetized or compensated. The Global North obtains cheap workers.

It is as if employers in the Global North are receiving a *subsidy*. But as Parvati Raghuram points out, the global care chain framework universalizes the concept of care, the notion of family and childhood that are rooted in the modern histories of the Global North. This is a problem because the assumption that families are nuclear and care of children is the sole responsibility of the mother does not square up with the way a wider kin group of women may be involved in routine care giving in the Indian context. This would be the case even when the mother is not a migrant but simply employed outside the home. Essentially, lived-in families are considerably more diverse in the source contexts of migration in South India than the care chain framework would suggest. There are differences according to religion, caste and class, as well as along the lines of regional development histories.

The global care chain framework tends to characterize social solidarities in the Global South as benign. In other words, it is assumed that before the woman migrated everything was well within families, and now that the woman has migrated, there is social disruption. So, for example, it is emphasised that there are children growing up in the Global South who have been deprived of care. The existing social arrangements in the

Global South are patriarchal. In actual practice, social solidarities are constituted and fractured simultaneously by hierarchies of caste, class, race, age and patriarchy. As Paula England, the feminist scholar, points out, there is no evidence that children whose mothers migrate (or families in which women migrate) are actually worse off than they would be if these women had stayed.

However, the gains from women's migration may be considerably reduced by the social cost of disruption of social arrangements at home. This is linked very closely to stigma and the kind of gender norms and sexual norms that prevail. Despite being the main breadwinners, migrant women may find it difficult to challenge the marital authority of their spouses. This limits women's ability to determine how remittances are used and enables their spouses to misappropriate women's earnings for their own personal leisure. Spouses of migrant women have become involved in other intimate relationships and neglected their household responsibilities. Notably, men's extramarital relationships have caused very little social tensions at the source whereas migrant women are constantly under suspicion of breach of sexual norms.

Moving on, the position of the primary caregiver to children of migrant women is usually taken by another woman from the kin network, frequently the mother or sister of the migrant woman or a female relative from her husband's family. Migrant mothers feel the need to compensate the caregiver in cash and kind to ensure that their children are taken care of. It is not as if the migrant women do not pay the cost. They may pay a high cost for fear that otherwise their children may not be taken care of. Rarely were children left solely in the care of their fathers but when they were, daughters assumed household responsibilities, which adversely affected their time for schoolwork and play. Migrant women were forced to return, owing to other

tensions at home despite having well-paying jobs overseas. Early marriages of daughters were attributed by migrant mothers to the fear of lack of safety when only the father was at home to care for them. Young girls had eloped and gotten married at an early age. Interestingly, this is what happens when there is breakdown of patriarchal policing by mothers but this must be seen in a social context of sexual suppression. Male children, expectedly, have been differently affected compared to girls. They had access to laptops and bikes, and jobs in the Middle East. This had capped educational aspirations of boys at the level of school. Boys think that they can easily obtain jobs in the Middle East and neglect higher education.

Of course, outcomes vary and women's experiences are far from homogeneous. Besides, the upward economic mobility of migrant domestic workers has been extremely fragile. A single health contingency could be the beginning of a downward spiral. In the younger generation of families of early cohorts of migrant domestic workers, there could be professionals as well as migrant domestic workers, i.e., we can see three or four generations of migrant domestic workers in the same family. We have to think of this in terms of the lack of social power at the lower end of the caste hierarchy to be able to harness better economic opportunities within the country. Networks enable these women to access migrant opportunities, reinforcing the social reproduction costs attendant on women's migration.

In response to the question on whether the men generally tend to stay in the house and do the household work in the case of Malayali families where women have migrated overseas for work...

Prof. Kodoth: Actually, that is not true. When women migrate, very rarely do men take their place at home. On the other hand, when men migrate, women do take their

place, in the sense that a lot of money and property management involving banking as well as running around for family errands falls on the woman. I have heard wives of migrant men say that they are happy their husbands are coming back and they are going to sit back and relax as they have had to take on so much of responsibility. When women migrate, nothing of this kind really happens to the men. It is a small section of men that actually assume responsibilities of childcare and domestic work. As we have seen women from their kin networks assume the role. Sometimes, mothers' put girls in hostels and children spend their holidays with relatives. This is true, even of Andhra Pradesh, where most women were currently married and their husbands supported their migration.

In response to the question of how to curb the exploitation of Indian maids in places like the Middle East...

Prof. Kodoth: There can be no individualized solutions for abuse which is systemic in the Middle East. Solutions have to be institutional. Abuse is linked to the governance framework of migrant workers in the Middle East, the harsh *Kafala* system. *Kafala* is derived from "Kafeel" which actually means host, and the terminology indicates that workers are like guests, to be treated honourably. But the defining element of the *Kafala* system is that only the person who sponsors the worker can employ her. The sponsor is responsible legally and economically for migrant workers. The sponsor is supposed to bear the expenses of the migration of workers, but in practice intermediaries usurp this money and workers end up spending huge amounts on migration expenses for which they raise loans. Workers must work full time for the sponsor and find it nearly impossible to change jobs. Therefore, to avoid being sent back (which would mean heavy debt at home) they bear with a lot of exploitation. Many women spoke about routine forms of exploitation which they

tolerate. What bothers them is not being paid after putting up with exploitation.

The problem is made far worse for Indian workers because they migrate without any inkling of the conditions overseas. By conditions, I do not mean exploitation – that is something they are usually aware of even if the intensity can be shocking. They go there without any knowledge of the kind of skills they would need to work in a home in the Middle East. They fail to appreciate the importance of knowing the language. I know it is not easy to learn a language in a few days, but in the Philippines, migrant women are provided some training in the language. Filipina women also know English and they work for the higher economic strata of Arab employers, who desire English-speaking workers. Indians work largely for Arab-speaking middle- or low-income families, who are unlikely to speak English. Indian workers who have returned after many years of work in the Middle East speak the level of Arabic that is needed to work in a household. Sadly, however, the Indian official skills training initiatives do not draw upon their skills to train aspiring workers. This is not unrelated to a repressive policy approach that fails to recognize the aspirations of women migrant workers.

In response to the question on how the migration of nurses from India somewhere manifests a cost of social reproduction in terms of a shortage of trained nurses in India's public health care system...

Prof. Kodoth: This is actually something that really merits thinking about in the context of the kind of employment conditions we have for nurses here. The nurse-population ratio, which is used to

indicate whether we have adequate numbers of nurses for the population, is much below the World Health Organization standard in India. But, on the other hand, private sector nurses are paid very poorly and exploited. So, if we have more supply of nurses in India (say by preventing migration), the private sector may be able to employ them in poorer conditions. Unless the government actually steps in to employ more nurses on fair terms by expanding public health infrastructure, closing the doors on migration is not going to solve the problem.

In response to the question on how the unequal division of labour continues by transferring unpaid work to another woman in the kin network...

Prof. Kodoth: It is important to think of solutions to this in terms of public provisioning, because otherwise, we are reinforcing a patriarchal state and society, where it is women's responsibility to care for children. In the short term, it may be difficult to redistribute care work to men. We ought to demand provisions from the state because the state is benefiting from the remittances. The fact is that women are really contributing to maintaining livelihoods and sustaining families, which is at least partly the responsibility of the state. Clearly, you need to make an argument for better public provisioning of childcare like state-of-the-art *Anganwadis* and schools that makes provision for children of migrant women. The Philippines does that. Of course, there are plenty of problems in the Philippines because of this large-scale migration of women, but to the extent possible, the Philippines does try to mitigate problems because the state promotes migration. So, that is the other side of the picture.

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*(This session has been transcribed by
Jahanbi Singh & Kashish Emmanuel, BA Hons. Psychology I Year)*

Interactions with Andrea Zamparini

An Interactive Workshop: Dialogues with Feminists Abroad – Critical Questions and Some Reflections conducted on 13th February, 2021

Andrea Zamparini, Activist with the Argentinian advocacy group, Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito (National Campaign for the Right to Safe and Free Legal Abortion)

Dr. Maya John: Please share a little bit about your journey, i.e., how you look back at your trajectory of politicization, and the focus of your political work?

Andrea Zamparini: Well, I'm a biologist and have worked as a researcher for many years abroad; in the United Kingdom first, and then in the United States where I have also worked as a middle school teacher in a STEM program with under-served communities. I then started taking studies in social anthropology, back in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where I was born, and I became very interested in sexual and reproductive rights, which got me to start exploring a course at the University of Buenos Aires organised by "the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion" (in Spanish "Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito). This is the social and feminist movement to which I belong, since then.

I now work as a research consultant and I am part of the Gender Department at the National Agency for the Promotion of Research, Technology and Innovation, aimed at applying gender-responsive policies and promotion of women and sexual diversity's equal access to science and technology in the public and non-profit sector. I have done ethnographic fieldwork that involved reproductive rights and abortion access at a healthcare centre in a low-income area in Buenos Aires. I'm a member of *Campaña* whose main aim for years has been fighting for reproductive

justice and the right to voluntary abortion in Argentina.

To focus on the political work, I would like to take some time to build the context of the political movement, and to take it back to earlier times because I think it is important to tell the history of *Campaña*, to understand what unfolded later. The law has not come like magic; it was not an overnight event. It has a history. I therefore think it is important to tell the history and where we came from.

Campaña is a political movement, which was founded in 2005, 16 years ago as a result of many coordinated activities across more than 70 grassroots organisations ranging from Catholic groups to leftist movements. It is a huge mix of different types of people, coming from different backgrounds. It has its seeds in the "National Women's Encounter", held in Rosario, Santa Fe, in 2003, and the one held in Mendoza the next year. These "encounters" are very unique annual events that are organized in Argentina since 1986. These bring together women from all over the country to talk about issues concerning women's lives and struggles, and have an important role in building the feminist agenda. So, from these encounters we can trace the origins of *Campaña*; from these we can trace the origin of many other women's issues. They actually imbibe a very politically interesting approach that we have here in Argentina – one which has been in existence for 33 years. Unfortunately, because of the pandemic,

last year we didn't have one, but we are looking forward to having the next one maybe this year or the next.

Campaña is huge, it has more than 700 organisations including feminist groups, political parties, human rights activists, academics, scientists, health workers, trade unions, social communicators and many more. Something that I think has been very important along our history is to work under the triple slogan: "Sexual education to decide, contraception to avoid abortions, legal abortion so we do not die". These slogans allowed us to function in a collective and diverse fashion, and it brought us here, to the legalisation of abortion. Our Campaign exists in many cities of the country and in almost every province, but it was not always like this. Indeed, the campaign grew over time and it is now that we are thousands.

To give you all a little bit of history in terms of the law in Argentina: abortion used to be legal in Argentina only if the woman's health or life was at risk, or the pregnancy was a result of rape. Many women feared that they would be prosecuted if they tried to abort. Those who tried to access safe, legal abortion had lots of trouble finding a provider, because many doctors also harboured the fear of criminal prosecution. There were many barriers, and those barriers were even greater for women living in poverty or in rural areas, or those who are discriminated against because they are immigrants. Many women had to face the risks of unsafe, penalised practise, which sometimes even led to death.

The Campaign aims have been to install in society the debate around the need to legalize abortion, to achieve the approval of a law that decriminalizes and legalizes abortion in the country, to encourage more and more people and organisations to join the cause, to highlight the political weight of the territories, and to make visible the

multiplicity of voices and diversity. The green scarf that we usually wear around our necks has been the symbol of the Campaign from the beginning. It is actually really nice because it invokes the memories of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the women whose children disappeared under the dictatorship in Argentina during the 1970s and early 80s with their white scarves. Legalisation of abortion has been decades long and has inspired many generations of feminists.

Within our Campaign I have been part of the communication, press and social media area that is composed of activists from many parts of the country. We aim at developing and implementing communications strategies, campaigns, events, multimedia content and other initiatives in support of the political cause and issues of importance to *Campaña*. I have also been part of the organization and implementation of the course that was called "Abortion as a Public Health Issue" which was an initiative aimed at advancing awareness of abortion and abortion-related medical and social issues at the medical school in the University of Buenos Aires. I think such initiatives were – and still are – crucial because we have professors who do not talk about abortion in their classes, and if they do, they talk about it as a crime. We thus need to change their mindsets and the content of their discourse, and we are keen on promoting that strategy from *Campaña*.

Maya John: In current times we see relatively widespread acceptance of several feminist ideas, let's say compared to the early decades of the 20th century. However, corresponding institutional and larger structural changes that would embody widespread actualization of these ideas/claims is missing. How would you explain the paradox?

Andrea Zamparini: I think structural changes obviously take time. I would say

that we have seen some important changes in Argentina, some institutional reforms. I can think of the women's suffrage law in 1947, the equal co-parental responsibility, the divorce law in 1987, the sexual and reproductive health law in 2003, and more recently, we have now the constitution of the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity, which has been created over a year ago. The creation of this institution was definitely the result of the women's movement in the country and its perseverance. It was also the result of the National Women's Encounters (the ones that I was telling you about earlier), which harboured an important political agenda and represented the efforts of many people, of many women in political parties. The Ministry of Women Gender and Diversity was definitely born from the feminist movement. Because it was the outcome of organized activism, it is composed of many feminist activists. I would say that the huge visibilization, action and power of the "green wave" generated by our Campaign had a key role in the creation of the women's Ministry. It was organized activism.

It is too early to judge, of course, and with the COVID pandemic, they face a huge challenge. I'll just mention that one major agenda of the Ministry is to abolish violence against women. As you may know, in Argentina we are struggling with femicides. Another of the points in the Ministry's agenda is care work, referring to the feminized role that leaves women far behind, especially mothers. The Ministry also committed itself to work for the LGBTQ community, their needs and their access to jobs and education.

However, there is another side to the story. In a way, the State had colonized parts of the movement. There is a part of the feminist movement that is subordinated to the interests and specific agendas of political parties. Such feminism keeps quiet about everything that threatens political power, and that definitely causes a tension.

Having the Ministry was an important achievement because we needed a space. We needed an institution and many things have been organized under the aegis of the Ministry, such as data collection, databases, etc. We are starting to have official numbers, and statistics, and public policy towards gender-equality. But we now have a significant colonization of the movement. Institutions do not change overnight from being patriarchal to being emancipatory.

Maya John: What do you see as certain priority demands/priority issues in the women's movement? Further, do you feel that the network of transnational women's strikes has ushered in a common vision-based set of demands and aspirations?

Andrea Zamparini: I think that the demands of the movement have been many, but I want to focus on two, which I think we share within the region. One is of course the legalization of abortion and the other one is violence against women. If we look at the legalization of abortion, which has definitely been a priority in the women's movement, we see the Argentinian Congress passed a Bill last December making abortion legal in the country. From 24th January, the new national law is available to every person able to gestate, which includes cis women, non cis women and trans men. Those who want to have an abortion can do so now in a public hospital without having to explain the cause or reasons and it can be done up to the fourteenth week of the pregnancy. The country is now reorganizing the public health sector to properly implement the law because now another journey starts. We have the law – that is the basic, but now we have to build the infrastructure and everything else which is needed to actually guarantee that the law is accessible to everybody.

We also have a huge demand and struggle on the issue of violence against

women. Our Campaign forged alliances with the *NiUnaMenos* movement which is the biggest movement we have against femicides. It started as a response to the murder of a 16-year-old, Lucía Pérez, in 2015. This movement joined with the already existing movement known as the “campaign against violences”. These two movements now articulate with us, and share agendas. They were allies in the legalization of abortion in the country. To me, this is an example of the really powerful interaction that made feminism stronger here in Argentina. I believe that we were able to achieve a good coalition, but none of this was guaranteed as a consequence of the transnational women’s strike, necessarily.

Let me comment on the transnational women’s strike. The first international women’s strike, which we call *Paro internacional de mujeres*, was in 2017, in Argentina, and it was big. The first one was actually really big. But, in the country, it was not just about traditional unions; it was based on many more women’s issues. The slogans raised were to end sexist violence, but there was also the demand that work should be viewed in a feminist way. In other words, what was central was that women’s care work and reproductive tasks are *also work* and have to be taken into account as a social issue and not left as a weight on women’s back. Other slogans brought light to why women have precarious jobs; why we do not have legal, safe and free abortion; the need to widen LGBTQ rights and the labour quota law for trans people, among many other demands. Basically, the transnational strikes made visible the invisible work of women.

We do see the traditional female union movement not always participating in feminist mobilisations in our country. Rather they have followed patriarchal lines – they were not usually feminists – although that is changing now. Further, I will say that unfortunately the international women’s

strike, lost the character, the strength and the power present in the beginning. We need to work on that and maybe redefine it. We definitely need a discussion, at least, in Argentina about what do we expect from it.

Maya John: Do you see the prominence of certain demands in the women’s movement as reflecting / mirroring the logic of certain undeniable developments within capitalist societies? While claiming to resist and subvert, are the mainstream feminist movements reproducing the very thing which they claim to resist? In other words, are some of the key feminist ideals reflecting a convergence with the demands/logic of late 20th century and 21st century capitalism?

Andrea Zamparini: I think that, yes, the mainstream feminist movement or the feminist ideals are compatible with capitalism. However, there is a left feminism alongside the liberal, and right-wing feminism. I also believe that capitalism is not always the same; it is under transformation. So, in our Campaign, from whose standpoint I can talk more comfortably, we solve this with an intersectional approach.

Feminism reproduces some things of capitalism, but not others. Sometimes feminism transforms logic. Having said this, there are many mediations, changes, peculiarities in people’s lives, and their being cannot be reduced to their history of class or race only. The right to abortion is an individual right, for example, although the way to conquer it is collective. Now capitalism makes it so, that only some women can afford abortion. Our Campaign achieved the right to transform this, and I will say that our Campaign is indeed partly composed of mainstream feminism from its origins. We are this coalition but we have mainstream liberal and shades of

conservative feminists within. Our position is of political pluralism: an organisation like “Catholic women for choice” coexists with a leftist party in our front – not without tension, of course. In our case, the adjusting to the triple motto, to our triple slogan (which I mentioned earlier), helped us nurture this unity and continuity in time. Of course, the issue of abortion extends and broadens to other issues like economy, culture, etc. It has multiple determinations. That is why we also get ourselves multiple strategies. For example, we were keen on organising initiatives within different universities, medical schools, law schools, etc., to spread our reach and raise awareness about abortion and other abortion-related issues.

Maya John: How are the concerns of working-class women who are spread across different communities, races, regional lines, etc., addressed by ongoing feminist movements and initiatives? We ask this, given that feminist discourses often appear to account for class in flat sociological terms rather than in political terms, such that, in these discourses class hierarchy is *selectively* used to explain vulnerability of certain segments of women in capitalist society, but correspondingly, class hierarchy is *not* used to explain the complicity of a section of women in sustaining and perpetuating the exploitation of other sections of women. Do you not think that such fleeting deployments of the class dimension is a very fundamental concern?

Andrea Zamparini: Well yes, I do think it is a fundamental concern. Most working-class women do not have their own job placement here in Argentina. Their job placement is the reproduction of daily life and the reproduction of people. The movement for abortion rights targets all

women, and especially those who are economically exploited.

To explain, I want to focus on our Campaign, given that all these issues can be extended to it too. For the Campaign for free abortion and free contraceptive methods, we definitely believe that women should have the right to abort; both domestic employee and her employer should have the same right and access. So that was one of the main concerns of *Campaña*, which is why the emphasis has been on *free* abortions. Argentina is a capitalist and neo-colonial country and it is also a country that is undergoing a transition in class structure. We are going from being a country with a large middle-class to one with more dominant poverty. Social differences have been accentuated in the last few years. Not surprisingly, our Campaign saw that there is an enormous class relation which is at play when it came to the prohibition of abortion. Hence, we placed the demand that the State has to be present, and able to cover abortion costs. It is a matter of social justice for us.

Maya John: Some have argued that the past year of the pandemic-cum-lockdown has acted as some sort of “great equalizer”, implying that the relative equivalence in exposure to contagion/disease, as well as the rearrangements of household dynamics or care work (which stemmed from the shocks in the care chains such as the inability to utilize hired domestic work, etc.), have created a common oppression, i.e., across class, race, community, etc., lines. To what extent do you agree with this assessment based on the pre-existing social divisions and appended precarity within the society and economy of your country.

Andrea Zamparini: Well, I do not really like the idea of *common* oppression experience actually. I mean the pandemic did reveal some common issues; that is undeniable. However, it produced other types of ties in care work relationships, and it produced other types of subjectivities. There is no doubt that the pandemic affects everyone but *not* in the *same* way – definitely not in the same way. In any case the difference in class is still present, and in Argentina, class divisions have probably deepened. I mean it has deepened because we have a lot of impoverished people who were pushed to depend on the black market, and for whom we did not have appropriate healthcare services. There were some benefits extended by the State, but definitely that was not enough. There is a gender issue here, too. We are going backwards in a way, with women pushed back more within the family structure, and the more conservative the family structure, the more dangerous the push back.

In response to the question on trans activism in Argentina and feminist mobilizations...

Andrea Zamparini: I guess the question is about a common agenda between feminism and the LGBTQ movement. In issues related to the right to abortion, I would say that at the beginning abortion was a women’s issue in Argentina. But later on, that started to change. There are undeniable power disputes between both movements. We have had many debates on this topic within the Campaign. And LGBTQ people have always been included, but focused on the objectives of the Campaign. Our abortion bill has widened the subject of the right to abortion to include

every “person able to conceive”. It was a fundamental recognition of the fact that there are diverse bodies with the potential to conceive, and that should enable people to terminate a pregnancy despite their gender identity. This legal achievement is in dialogue with the 2012 Gender Identity Law that requires State agencies to recognize self-perceived gender, and forces private and public health systems to provide free access to gender-affirmation treatments. Now outside of the Campaign, and probably sometimes inside too, I think the issue is more complex.

In terms of rights, trans activism and how they fit into the workspaces, the healthcare system, the education system, etc., they have it hard. In Argentina, we now have a law wherein trans people have had to be employed by the State, i.e., the public administrations within a quota. Needless to say, there is a problem with this. After all, you cannot just take someone, who is a trans person who has undergone many transitions, and force him or her to face a patriarchal structure without helping that person to develop skills, and thereby, get adjusted to that work environment properly. The Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity appears to be working on establishing ways to reach a basis through which to build the environment for trans people to work within an institution. I would say that there has been quite a transition, and there is a vibrant movement to integrate trans people in the society. However, it takes time and a lot of trans people do not feel included. They suffer from a lot. They may not have support from their families; they do not have support from institutions.

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(This session has been transcribed by Aleena Verghese, BA Hons. English I Year)

The Labour of Care: The Persistence of Gender and Caste in the Service Economy

Session-II of the WSC Certificate Course
Module on Public Health and Global Care
Chains, conducted on 22nd January, 2021

Dr. Panchali Ray

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Dr. Panchali Ray: The research that I am presenting is mostly on the nursing profession. One of my core focuses when doing my research was to look at how gender, caste and sexuality work within the profession and the micro-politics of labour. I've titled my presentation "The Labour of Care" and I attempt to show how gender and caste persist in the service economy. The reason I used the word "persist" is because there's been a lot of theorization and a lot of economic theory which says that with modernization and liberalization, caste has in many ways disappeared from the labour market. I think one of the reasons why I used the word "persistence" is to show that with informalization and liberalization, social identities have not dissolved but have got reinforced in myriad ways.

I will just kind of run through what reproductive labour is and why caste and gender, particularly in the Indian context, are so persistent. Let us start with this very basic understanding that human labour is at the heart of creating and reproducing society as a whole. What is the kind of labour that we are talking about when we are talking about creating and reproducing society? We're talking about birthing, cooking, cleaning, nurturing children and nursing the sick and the elderly. So, all activities that reproduce society and that are at the heart of the reproduction of society is women's work.

If we do a cursory reading of western philosophy, from antiquity to contemporary

times, we see that reproductive labour has always been relegated to women and slaves, and thus also denigrated and devalued. For instance, Aristotle's *Politics*, which is a very influential book and which, in many ways, still influences the way we think about society and democracy, argues that the *Oikos*, which is the household, was the basic social unit of the *Polis*. He makes a very clear distinction between the private and the public, the *Oikos* and the *Polis*. He argues that the *Oikos* was the basic social unit and the citizen is the one who is freed from all reproductive labour that sustains the *Oikos*. Instead, the relegation of this labour to the private sphere to be performed by women and slaves was natural as by their very "virtue" or their inherent nature, they were excluded from citizenship. They were the ones who should do this very necessary but invisible labour that would sustain the *Oikos*. The contempt for this very harsh, monotonous and repetitive labour that was relegated to women and slaves is not an incidental ranking of labour, but was constitutive of citizenship in ancient Greece.

Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958), again is a very influential book that revisits the notion of *Oikos*, *Polis*, labour, work and action. The reason I bring it up is because I think we also need to understand the difference between labour and work. It is what goes to the heart of understanding the difference between reproductive and productive labour. In Hannah Arendt's understanding, labour is that activity which corresponds to the

biological process that necessitates human existence. It is one that is necessary for the maintenance of life. It doesn't create anything of permanence. Its effects are quickly consumed, what Marx would call very simply: use-value labour. Arendt, however, stops short of critiquing this very explicit connection between patriarchy and reproductive labour and the production of the public realm. In many ways, it was left to feminists, particularly in the decades of 1970s and 80s, to make this very powerful case against patriarchal devaluation of women's reproductive labour.

I picked up a couple of books that I thought were important in understanding how work and labour was related to the question of social identity and why reproductive labour was devalued. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, for instance, argues that domestic work dehumanises women—it is monotonous and an impediment to women's rightful place in the public domain. What she does not question is that when women step out in the public realm on equal terms with men, who is now going to take on the chores of everyday reproduction? bell hooks critiques this brand of white, liberal feminism to argue that it was class and race, rather than gender that kept white American women out of the labour market. This was because college-educated white American women refused to take on these very low paying, low status jobs that were available to most women. Those were left to poor women and black women. This kind of stigmatized, dehumanized, ill-paid, repetitive and back-breaking work was the lot of black and poor white women.

Very interestingly, Pat Mainardi in *The Politics of Housework* writes this very provocative line, written in 1970, that "Liberated women—very different from women's liberation". That is when she calls

out bourgeois feminism and white liberal feminism. She said that a liberated woman is a product of liberal feminism and she was the new commodity within this capitalist, patriarchal society and economy. So, she occupied some limited spaces in institutions which were otherwise overrepresented by men, like the university. Mainardi argues that this kind of feminism does not demand a radical shift in the way gendered societies are organised. What it actually does is that it includes some women but it leaves the rest out. She said that women's liberation demanded that men participated equally in what is historically and traditionally perceived as women's work. The question was no longer that are women going to do men's work but rather, the question is that are men going to participate in care work?

In 1979, Mahasweta Devi, a Bengali writer wrote "Stanadayini" which is a very powerful text, where she brings up the questions of indigenous patriarchal institutions and capitalist formations. She also brings up the question of class and caste. I am sure a lot of you do not know of the text so I'll just take a minute to tell you about it. It is the story of a woman called Jashodha, who works as a wet-nurse/*dai*-nurse, who breastfeeds the children of the feudal landlord for a payment. She is a Brahmin and her husband is a priest who has lost his job and she sustains the household. So Gayatri Spivak, in a very influential essay, argues that the representation of the *dai*-nurse as a gendered subject brings to the fore the joint forces of the indigenous patriarchal institutions and capitalist formations and how feudalism works with capitalist formations. In that text, the many daughters-in-law of the landlord say that they cannot ruin their figure by breastfeeding and that their participation in the labour market will get affected if they breastfeed and so they need to outsource this labour. This shows

how indigenous patriarchal institutions function with capitalist formations. So, Jashodhas to constantly have children herself, otherwise how will she lactate? Jashodha is central to the emancipation of the young daughters-in-law of the landlord's family. The trained, educated, and professional woman is now aided by the labour of the subordinate women. The emancipation of one section of women is aided by the exploitation of another section of women and I think that is something we really need to keep in mind because when we talk about economic empowerment and emancipation of women, we forget how patriarchal, indigenous formations like caste and feudalism function so seamlessly in many ways with capitalist formations to produce a labour force that is deeply divided by caste and class.

I will now come to the Indian context and look at the intersectional approach to understanding women's labour. There's a lot of research on women and labour markets, right? One of the crucial interventions has been that women's labour, despite its entry into the public sphere, has been ranked much lower than men's labour, and therefore badly paid. What is more important for us to understand is that occupations which commodify women's reproductive labour, from sex work to surrogacy to domestic work to nursing has not necessarily meant women's emancipation. Why is this so? It's because of harsh working conditions, rampant exploitation and no opportunities for growth. These occupations continue to remain ghettoized. They are also the sector that gives the maximum employment to women. So, that is also telling in many ways and the other important thing is to understand that these segments which commodify women's reproductive labour have become crucial grounds for analysing power structures emerging from the

interstices of gender, caste, class, and ethnicity. All women do not experience work similarly. For some, it is more exploitative than it is for others, even if they belong to the same segment of the labour market. So, in India the question of women's work has almost always been embedded in social identities and the stigma that is embodied in such labour. Housework, care work, manual and menial labour – which woman does this work and what has this labour done for the identity of the woman as a worker? So, there is a very clear caste and class-based division of labour which shows that different women perform different kinds of labour, even within these narrow sub-sectors.

Dalit women have always worked, both in the private and the public domain, and upper-caste and middle-class women have been relatively restricted in their economic activities. Scholars have pointed out that historically, upper-caste and middle-class women have never performed manual, menial labour at home. One of the ways, respectable femininity is performed is to outsource that labour to the poor and/or Dalit woman. So, in fact, in Bengal the whole idea of the *Bhadramahila*, the very construction of the respectable, middle-class woman is that she distances herself from all kinds of manual labour. Caring labour or nurturing and nursing is closely associated with lower-caste and working-class feminine labour, even if offered within homes. Middle-class and upper-caste women will probably take on supervisory roles, but the actual menial, manual labour has to be done by the poor and/or Dalit woman.

If that is the case, then the main question that I ask is, does commodification of erstwhile stigmatized labour revalorise the labour? In other words, does the commodification of stigmatized, menial,

manual labour dispel the humiliation and degradation embedded in it? Can such kinds of labours be revalorised and given social and economic worth? If you see some of the debates around care work, that is what the drive has been – to say that we, as policymakers, must emphasize the emotional and the affective component of that labour in order to recognize it as work. I would like to put in a note of caution that when we talk about revalorising labour by focusing on the emotional and the affective part of it, we sometimes forget that this labour is stigmatized labour. It is just not women’s work, it is lower-caste women’s work. Caste has a very central role in defining women’s work. Then, does commodification really dispel the stigma associated with it?

Nursing, for instance, has seen many takers because of the social and economic mobility that it offers. It has also now become a profession that middle-class women aspire to take up. I nevertheless argue that nursing is done at various levels and by women who come from different communities. Let us first delve into the historical context because the role of the “dai” has been so important in shaping the contours that the nursing profession has taken on. Nursing labour, very similar to domestic labour, was offered by women located at the margins of the Hindu Brahmanical society. So, it was really looked down upon because it was corporeal labour that dealt with blood, fluid, and with other bodily detritus. Both the caste-based society and the sexual division of labour which pegged nursing as women’s work, contributed to the devaluation of nursing. Nursing started emerging as a modern profession, however, women entering medicine preferred to become doctors. Clearly, middle-class women did not perceive it as a respectable profession, primarily because of the hands-on body care that constituted nursing care.

Both in pre-colonial and colonial India, the field of gynaecology and obstetrics was always the forte of the “dai” who came from working class, lower-caste communities and practiced intergenerational midwifery. So, when the nursing profession was being established a lot of nurses were being conflated with the “dai” and to be conflated with the “dai” was to be identified as a low-caste, menial worker. Nurses had to distance themselves from the figure of the “dai”. The “dai” was, you know, a powerful institution. She was not a handmaid to the doctor like the nurse has become in many ways. She was an expert on women’s gynaecology and reproductive health. It was her knowledge that was co-opted by the colonial medical system. The role of the “dai” included not just attending to birth but also giving postpartum care to mother and child and this kind of knowledge practice did not go down well with colonial medical knowledge-practice which had a clear divide between cure and care. None of the western trained nurses were ready to take on the role of the “dai”. This resulted in a splintering within this profession where the nurse aided the doctor or attended to child birth but it was the “dai” who was left to deal with the postpartum care. A division of labour started emerging within nursing services, which started producing a differentiated workforce.

With modernization and professionalization, nursing started witnessing changes. The role of the nurse-*dai* who gave hands-on care was slowly taken over by the attendant or the *ayah*. This becomes the central contradiction of the nursing profession: there is one category of worker who offers hands-on care and you have one category of workers, who are registered nurses, who take on more administrative-supervisory roles. If we look at the global care chain and if we look at the

social and economic mobility that nursing as a profession has offered, we see that it has really opened up pathways for middle-class women. This also resulted in further institutionalizing the splinter within the profession, where we see clear distinctions of who does what work. This has also been, in many ways, encouraged by the new economic model (since the 1990s) that focused on trade and financial liberalization, market deregulation, and most importantly, privatization that started affecting the public sector, particularly health and education. This has very contradictory outcomes in terms of employment. If you look at the data, the two biggest sectors that offer employment to women are health and education, but they create jobs that are not regulated or protected. If you see the 8th and 9th Five-Year Plans and particularly the 10th Five-Year Plan, there is a push towards casualizing jobs. Between the years 2000-2015, there has been an increasing casualization of healthcare workers and at the Group D level, there was an increased hiring of outsourced labourers. So, what does that do to the nursing labour market?

I have argued and I have seen in my research that the nursing labour market resembles a pyramid-shaped labour market, which is deeply inflected both by social identities as well as precarity. This brings me to what professionalization does and a very powerful book titled *Patriarchy and Professions* by Anne Witz which argues that professionalization of medicine has led to masculinization. However, in India, the nursing profession has witnessed a class and caste differentiation process whereby the top echelons of nursing are populated by middle-class and upper-caste nurses, and the bottom, by Dalit and working class women. To eliminate the working class from the profession, middle-class nurses set up criteria that could not be met by poorer women who had no access to public

resources. Why is that? It is because as more and more middle-class women started entering the profession, they wanted to enter a profession which was prestigious and respectable. If not at par, then at least close to doctoring. So, for nursing to be valued as a socially acceptable and economically viable profession, it had to reinvent itself as a modern service, meant for educated and trained women.

Let me elaborate how the nursing profession is now splintered along caste and class lines. Most healthcare service workers are now what are called the *ayah* or the attendant or the unregistered nurse. Only the top of the pyramid has a few registered nurses formally employed and protected by labour laws and the bottom is populated by casually hired women, struggling with low wages, stigma, low status, and no labour rights. This pyramidal structure is legitimized by the discourse on skills, social identities, and organizational strategies. What we see is that these labour processes have also led to an increasing split in nursing labour. For example, registered nurses have redefined their jobs as supervisory or managerial or administrative and that is considered as prestigious labour, while the “dirty” labour, i.e., the work of bedside caregiving continues to be given by those located at the bottom. Actual nursing care at the top has been minimized and administrative responsibilities have increased and thus there has been an expansion of the role of the nurse to include record-keeping, administration, but with no relief from intense work pressure. What it has done is that it has expanded the role of the nurse without a parallel increase in her salary or entitlements. The bottom part of the pyramid has been given the intense work, the actual hands-on caregiving and this is justified both in terms of skills as well as social identities.

B.R. Ambedkar famously said that the caste system is not merely a division of labour, it is also a division of labourers. Workers were graded and slotted into watertight compartments and this division of labour is neither spontaneous nor is it based on natural attitudes. He goes on to argue that the essence of industry is, of course, change but the caste system does not allow individuals autonomy to take advantage of these opportunities by selecting the jobs they would rather take. There are jobs that are degraded and despicable and assigned to a certain group of people belonging to a certain caste. This has an effect of degrading them individually as well as a group.

In this context, I would like to locate the notion of dirt and how dirt plays with the idea of labour to invisibilize a whole section of the workforce that is keeping the healthcare system running. If you think about hospitals and nursing homes, what is the first thing that comes to mind? Infection, pollution, dirt, something to stay away from, something to be careful about, something that I will contract if I hang out too much in a hospital or a nursing home. It is something we all feel, as it threatens our very being. In nursing, the notion of dirt is very deeply embedded in the nature of work and how we describe the work. It becomes an important factor in not only describing but also shaping workers' subjectivity.

Let me draw your attention to something a Dalit attendant at a hospital said to me. She was widowed and came from a family of landless labourers in a district in Bengal. She came looking for a job and was disappointed that the only work she could find was that of an attendant. Explaining how others treat her and her children, she says "They are disgusted by us. For them we touch dirt, we are dirt". Thus, dirt is an embodied experience. The difference

between the labour and the personhood of the worker gets blurred. By coming in contact with dirt, by doing dirty work, the person also comes to be perceived as "dirty". Women attendants who I have interacted with throughout my fieldwork often talk about experiences of being held in contempt by those who are seniors in rank. A nurse told me, "I am a nurse; I do administrative work; I'm not like the "dai"; I'm not like this lower-caste caregiver who touches dirt; I don't even let them touch me".

Interestingly, the relation between dirt and respectable labour is so complex that even when Brahmin women do an attendant's work, they face similar contempt. Due to the agricultural crisis in many regions of Bengal and employment contraction, a lot of women of upper-caste status, who otherwise would not take to this profession of attendants in hospitals, are now compelled to pick up such work. For example, I met Ritu, who is 22 years of age. She is a Brahmin and works as an attendant. She comes from a family of priests who owned land and who have lost their land to indebtedness. She studied till class twelfth and she came to the city in the hope of becoming a receptionist in the hospital. However, she was given the job of an attendant, which she hides from her family members in the village. She sends money home but she does not tell them that she is working as an attendant. She claims she is "doing office work in the hospital". She says, "I am a Brahmin. My grandfather was a priest, but it is because we are poor that I have to do this work. Here I am being treated like some lower caste just because I am cleaning dirt and touching fluid and blood".

Ann Lindberg in her study on cashew nut factories in Kerala has demonstrated that lower-caste women were given the

dirtier job of shelling and the higher-caste women were given a slightly better job that would not compel them to deal with dirt. As and when masculinization of the workforce started taking place and more and more men started working in the cashew nut factories, the jobs that were given to these women were now given to men. Working conditions started improving. A change in the social identity of the worker valorised that work. However, in my research on hospitals and nursing homes, I have seen that although they are few in number, the Brahmin woman who does the work of an attendant, and touches the body and bodily detritus does not lead to a revalorisation of labour. On the contrary, it dehumanizes her. She loses caste status; she loses caste pride. All the ritualistic and symbolic practices that one does to maintain caste purity, completely come undone with such work/employment. The performance of this unclean labour on an everyday basis is easily perceived as the inability of the person to maintain caste purity.

My argument thus is that not just gender and class, but also caste plays a very strong role in stigmatizing certain labour. As we know, Marxist feminists have said that the devaluation of women's labour stems from its unproductive nature. Work like cooking food is not seen as productive, and therefore it is devalued or under-valued. However, Mary John has argued for a "stigma theory of labour", which is looking beyond gender and class, to a caste analysis of why certain labour is always stigmatized because it is tied to the Dalit body. Here, specifically the female Dalit body. In this way, the nature of work, the discourse on skills, and the relation between social identities and occupation, constitute labour as degrading and humiliating.

Going back to my initial question: does just commodifying reproductive labour

and giving it a market value, revalorize labour? Will it be seen as work? Will it be seen as respectable work? My argument is that the notion of caste, dirt, shame and stigma continue to devalue such care work. Such work is not allowed to reinvent itself as respectable work; work that deserves recognition, visibility, living wages, and everything that the workers' movement asks for. We need a lot more research on the internal contradictions of these service economies that offer low-end menial/manual jobs and who is taking on which jobs? For example, in parlours, who cuts and styles hair, who does the pedicure, and who does the cleaning? Even that, I have a feeling, is caste-based and that is also because a lot of this work is learned on the job, particularly in smaller neighbourhood parlours. The notion and ideology of skill, the discourse on skill, the combination of caste practices with gender, etc., plays a pivotal role in structuring the labour market.

In response to the question of whether upper-caste women develop any sort of reinforced caste consciousness or anti-caste sentiment while being part of stigmatized segments of the workforce...

Dr. Ray: This is a very interesting question. For upper-caste women, it does not lead to a questioning of social hierarchies and the overwhelming sense is that of an individual loss of caste status. Hence, the oft-repeated assertion: "My husband died or my parents did not send me for higher studies because we were too poor, or else I could have been a nurse." I think all this reflects a way of trying to make sense of the world *without* actually questioning it. In fact, I would say Dalit women have more caste consciousness than upper-caste women who were feeling the loss of caste status. I think Dalit women were more questioning about this division

of labour. They asked me questions like, “Mother Teresa is seen as a saint for doing this work; and we are also doing similar work, then why are we seen as people who are stigmatized or people who are to be avoided?” So, it was not so much upper-caste women as much as Dalit women who were really, in many ways, questioning the whole structure of the hospital. They were the ones who would insist that they do all the work and yet, they are the ones who are paid the least. I think sometimes, individual loss of privilege does not necessarily politicize us. This is the standpoint theory that just because you are marginal, does not mean you will question it. It requires a certain going against the grain. It requires a certain questioning of doxic knowledge.

In response to the question on whether certain systemic changes can revalorise such arduous, stigmatized work performed by hospital attendants, municipal workers, etc., and whether technology offers a potent solution...

Dr. Ray: On the question of technology, I would say yes and no. I’m very alert to the question of technology because it also can be labour-displacing. We are seeing machines taking over so many jobs. We have, for example, the shift from call centre jobs to the automated service sector calls that we get. I have been trying to grapple with this. What does technology do in a country where employment generation is so low? I mean, does it displace labour more or how does it work towards revalorisation? I think we need to think more on the future of work.

In response to the question on how the enhanced entry of male nurses into the

professionis working towards revaluing nursing labour...

Dr. Ray: When I started my research in Kolkata, male nurses were not given access to nursing education because (as explained by the principal of a nursing school) it was a way to protect the services from becoming masculinized. Now there has been one lobby which has been saying that if men come into the nursing profession, wages will go up, working conditions will be better, and unionization will increase. Contrastingly, another lobby has been arguing that if men come in, women will start losing jobs. In 2013, this embargo was removed and men have started entering nursing in Kolkata as well. I believe one of the reasons why there has been so much more unionization and strikes in nursing is because men have come into the profession. I’ve been reading these reports, particularly in the southern states where even in the private hospitals, nurses are striking. If you look at the gender composition, you will see that there are more men coming into the profession in those states.

Of course, this leads me to think whether this caste division of labour would be now replaced by a sexual division of labour. Would more women become attendants? Would men then take on the upper part of nursing, the upper strata of administrators and supervisors and more medical, managerial kind of labour while women get relegated to the bottom? Will there be a masculinization of the top levels and what would that do? The jury’s out, let us see what time will tell.

(This session has been transcribed by Jahanbi Singh, BA Hons. Psychology I Year)

Women and Resistance: Contextualising the Feminist Protest Chant “The Rapist Is You” in Kolkata

Best Paper: WSC Annual Student Seminar,
2021

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(*This paper discusses sexual violence. Please take appropriate caution.)

Introduction – From Chile to India: The Origins of a New Feminist Movement

Chile has been recording rapidly rising cases of femicide, rape and other forms of gendered violence. The Chilean Network Against Violence Against Women stated that 42 cases of sexual abuse were reported in a day in Chile, and in 2019, 46 women were killed because of their gender.¹ It was in this context that the Chilean feminist collective, Las Tesis, performed the protest performance art piece “A Rapist in Your Path” for the first time to mark International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women in 2019. Hundreds of women came together to take part in the protest chant in front of the Supreme Court in Santiago. Since then, the protest chant has gone viral and has been recreated in over 52 countries in the world, including India. On January 4, 2020, over four thousand women came together in Kolkata in Esplanade, New Market Area, to perform the protest chant in vernacular Bengali, garnering nationwide attention, and in equal parts, appreciation and backlash.

As a part of the feminist collective based in Kolkata that organised the local chapter of the protest, I aim to contextualise this feminist movement keeping in mind the socio-political climate and milieu of Kolkata at that point of time: protests and widespread dissent; as well as the larger global significance of the movement in line with different cultural feminist traditions.

My paper attempts to locate the different intersections of religion, gender and class among its participants, among the people who showed up for the protest: Muslim, Dalit and queer women and gender minorities. Lastly, it will look at the political significance of the movement. My research is built upon existing literature surrounding women’s political protests; and my autoethnography as a woman protestor and organiser of the movement in Kolkata.

This paper ultimately attempts to establish that this feminist intervention is not an isolated protest, but the expression of a dynamic, powerful, global feminist movement tied to ongoing, localised issues, and driven by and largely inspired from Latin American feminist traditions.

Tracing the Movement with Latin American Feminist Traditions

As put by scholar Eugenia Palieraki, “A Rapist in Your Way” draws its strength from the talent of the young artists who created it and from the Chilean feminist movement they belong to and that inspired them. This movement is characterized by extraordinary dynamism. It has aligned itself with the Latin American feminist tradition, particularly that of Argentina, and has renewed the tradition by inventing new means of action, with a major focus on performance art.²

¹ Lopez, Oscar. 2020. “Factbox: Where Latin American women are fighting the world’s highest murder rates.” *Reuters*, March 7, 2020

² Palieraki, Eugenia. 2020. “The Rapist is You: Origins of a Worldwide Feminist Movement.” *iD4D*, January 22, 2020

In the year 1990, Chile came out of a dictatorship that lasted 17 years, while still retaining some of the political and administrative institutions from the Pinochet regime. The dictatorship was marked by horrific human rights violations, specifically the widespread use of sexual violence as a means of torture against political opponents. Among the several sites of violence and abuse, an otherwise unremarkable building in south-east Santiago has a grim history of being used to torture and exterminate detainees. As the detainees would be blindfolded at all times, the perpetrators of torture allegedly coined the macabre name, “Venda Sexy”, or, Sexy Blindfold.³ The blindfold finds a place in most recreations of the movement, including Kolkata’s.

Cultural historian Katia Chornik’s work on the use of music in political detention centres conveys that not only was music used as a very potent means of torture in Venda Sexy, it was also largely used by the prisoners and detainees as a form of self-expression, communication and resistance.⁴ Sites like Vanda Sexy go beyond being physical buildings – in addition to their historical significance, they serve as an important reminder of the large-scale gendered violence perpetrated by the Pinochet regime, and of the progress that Chile is yet to make with regard to it.

Argentina underwent a shorter and far more brutal military regime than Chile that collapsed in 1983. Argentina’s civil society was therefore able to break with its dictatorial past and become very dynamic very fast once again. It was in this context that the Argentinian feminist movement was reshaped. In the 2000s and 2010s, Argentinian feminism took up several causes that were later adopted by the Chilean movement, causes that are implicitly

and explicitly referenced in “A Rapist in Your Way”. The first cause was the fight for the legalization of abortion. In Argentina, green scarves have become the symbol for this cause. They can be seen on participants in the performance piece by Las Tesis, and were eventually taken up by feminist protestors recreating the feminist chant in different countries.⁵

The second Argentinian feminist cause adopted by its #NiUnaMenos (“Not one less”) movement is the fight against violence against women, sparked by the brutal murder of a 16-year-old pregnant Argentinian girl. In Argentina, and Latin America in general, doctors and medical staff who perform abortions face severe penalties, as do the women who have the abortions. However, violence against women, sexual or otherwise, and femicide are rarely punished and the penalties are minor. The fight against violence against women is at the heart of the performance piece by Las Tesis.⁶

The message behind the chant, whichever vernacular language it gets adapted into, is that rape doesn’t happen in a political vacuum; that it is welded to patriarchal power structures as a means of keeping women and gender minorities down. The title mimics an old slogan portraying the police as “the friend in your path” and the lyrics describe the systemic use of sexual and other violence by the Chilean police. The Chilean police has been accused of 200 cases of sexual abuse since the start of this movement. The dance steps also tell a story: performers squat three times, representing the degrading position arrested women have allegedly been forced to adopt for body cavity searches, often while being stripped naked. It’s more like street theatre than a traditional political protest, and

³ Chornik, Katia. 2019. “Sexual Violence, Torture, and Chile’s Struggle for Historical Memory.” *Open Democracy*, October 7, 2019

⁴ Chornik, Katia. 2019. “Sexual Violence, Torture, and Chile’s Struggle for Historical Memory.” *Open Democracy*, October 7, 2019

⁵ Palieraki, Eugenia. 2020. “The Rapist is You: Origins of a Worldwide Feminist Movement.” *iD4D*, January 22, 2020

⁶ Palieraki, Eugenia. 2020. “The Rapist is You: Origins of a Worldwide Feminist Movement.” *iD4D*, January 22, 2020

that's the point, says Paula Soto of the British-based Asamblea Chilena En Londres, a Chilean solidarity group. To South American eyes, she explains, British political marches look bafflingly dull – “people just walking, and walking very slowly at that” – while in Chile, protest is more of a performance – “There's a lot of music, and generally a lot of singing and movement. And the movements are always symbolic – when you're shouting for something to fall, a woman will go down low”.⁷

Contextualising the Movement in Kolkata: An Autoethnography

The concept and practice of resistance through art, music and movement is not one that is new to Kolkata; the localisation of cultural motifs from different geographies and historical epochs has characterised much of the protest art that has been generated, with the absorption of feminist motifs and iconography being especially notable.⁸ The streets had been erupting in protest since as early as the last weeks of November; against the citizenship law, against the crackdown of the state on students and journalists, and violence within different university spaces. These protests would very frequently be accompanied with loud, collective singing, music, street theatre and other forms of performance protest. The Dhorshok Tumi-i movement in Kolkata was seen in four different locations: the first time on January 4, 2020 on the busy street of Esplanade.⁹ Over 4000 women and people of gender minorities joined, with the choreography and subsequent rehearsals for the same having

taken place for three weeks prior. In different batches according to their convenience, around 40 people attended at least one rehearsal. Most other people mobilised from the calls given on social media, word of mouth, or the strong media presence. Pamphlets and handouts with the lyrics were distributed, along with blindfolds cut out of black, translucent cloth. Participants were primarily non-cis men. Their age ranges varied from 16 years to over 60. Visibly gender non-conforming people also formed a significant part of the crowd, in addition to visibly Muslim women. Students between the ages of 18 and 25 arguably formed the largest denominator among the participants.

The Bengali version of *Un violador en tu camino* (“A Rapist in Your Path”), *Dhorshok Tumi-I* (“The Rapist Is You”) included lyrics, which, roughly translated, go as follows:

Patriarchy has put us in a cage

*My crime is such, that I have been born
The punishment for this crime, is violence.
That you see, but ignore
Patriarchy has put a cage on us.
A woman gets killed.
The killer gets no punishment.
The girl child gets killed.
The killer gets no punishment.
We keep getting killed.
Our killers walk away scot-free.
In the name of gender
In the name of caste
In the name of religion
In the name of respect
Our voices get lost.
In our homes, on the streets,
In the day, at night
In the office, in custody
We keep getting lost.
In the name of power
In the name of rage
In the name of war
In the name of politics
We keep getting lost.
This is rape!*

⁷ Hinsliff, Gaby. 2020. “‘The Rapist is You!’ Why a Chilean Protest Chant is being sung around the world”. *The Guardian*, February 3, 2020

⁸ Roychoudhury, Supriya. 2020. “The Art of Resistance: When imagination meets technology at protests from India to Chile”. *Scroll*, March 14, 2020

⁹ Mitra, Chandrajit. 2020. “‘The Rapist is You’: Women Protesters vs a Macho Hindu Rashtra”. *The Federal*. January 17, 2020

*This is rape!
No matter what I wear
No matter where I go
The fault is never mine.
The rapist is you!
Balatkari tum ho!
Dhorshok tumi 'i!
And rapists are the police,
The court, this nation
This Brahmanical tyranny
This terror, this orthodoxy
Homophobic, transphobic
Fascist Hindu Rashtra!*

*The rapist is you!
Balatkari tum ho!
The rapist is you!
Dhorshoktumi 'i!*

The movement garnered a lot of publicity and attention. Since the videos went viral, most of us among the organisers received rape and death threats, primarily by the right-wing that resorted to trolling, doxing and abusing online. Performed against the backdrop of widespread anti-government protests, we also received resounding support from student communities and unions, other performance art groups and feminist collectives. It brought the largest, most diverse protestors from all over the city. There were a large number of queer women, students from institutions like Jadavpur University, Presidency and Calcutta Universities; a significant number of school-going students; members of several different feminist organisations and left-wing collectives including Feminists in Resistance, AIPWA (All India Progressive Women's Association), AIDWA (All India Democratic Women's Association), Swayam Organisation; a large number of Muslim women students from Aliah University; women from trade unions and labour rights organisations. Quite a few working-class women from the localities joined in; even if they had not performed, they stood in

the crowd. Several passers-by and onlookers, especially women, joined in too.

The second time was on January 9, 2020, outside Jadavpur Police Station, as a protest against the lathi-charge on women in a peaceful protest on January 6, 2020. The larger message was against the police being the tools of the status quo: to protest against the seemingly state-sponsored violence in campus spaces like Jawaharlal Nehru University, Aligarh Muslim University, Jamia Millia Islamia, where the police had allegedly gone so far as to enter ladies' hostels at night and harass and assault them. The movement was not able to mobilise as much as the first; there were some hundred people in the rain in front of the police station, but the reaction was large-scale, especially because it was set against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA when conversations surrounding police brutality were being had all across the globe.

The third time the chant was performed was on January 12, 2020, against Prime Minister Modi's visit to Kolkata.¹⁰ The intervention was a part of a larger political rally formed of several thousand people, most of whom joined in during the protest. The fourth and last time that Dhorshok Tumi'i performed its feminist chant was on January 22, 2020, in front of Victoria Memorial; during the annual Tata Steel Kolkata Literary Meet 2020. The Tata Meet had invited one of the main propagators of the Hindu Rashtra ideology of the RSS along with a vice chancellor of a university with a #MeToo allegation against his name, as well as allegations by students for having helped goons carry out an organized attack on campus, to speak on "Awakening Bharat-Mata". Dhorshok Tumi'i, as our collective had come to be referred to by then,¹¹

¹⁰ Daniyal, Shoaib. 2020. "The Rapist is You': Feminists sing Bengali version of Chilean piece to protest Modi's Kolkata visit." *Scroll*. January 12, 2020.

¹¹ <https://www.picuki.com/tag/DhorshokTumii>

performed the protest chant at the meet, standing against the use of the female body and femininity in order to spread ideologies that had led to cases like Asifa, Nirbhaya and Ishrat Jahan. Aligning firmly with the belief that sexual violence does not happen in a political vacuum, Dhorshok Tumi'i protested to make the point that sexual predators in positions of power should not be given platforms to speak about femininity.

Against the backdrop of the anti-CAA-NRC-NPR movement and repeated instances of brutality across the country, the city of Kolkata emerged as a vocal critic of the incumbent government's policies and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had also refused to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act in the state. The anthem further gives strength to the critical voices in the city.¹² At a time when protests were getting divisive and fragmented, the TRIY movement in Kolkata acted as a network connecting a large number of stakeholders; women across different intersections in the larger resistance against authoritarian forces.

Conclusion: The Political Significance of *The Rapist is You (TRIY)* as a Feminist Movement

Unlike the #MeToo movement, which focuses on isolated cases of abuse, "A Rapist in Your Way" includes violence against women in its portrayal of violence as a systemic problem. #MeToo is sometimes accused of speaking mostly to white western women living relatively privileged lives, and this movement comes from a place it didn't quite reach.¹³ The fact that TRIY is a grassroots movement that originated

in the Global South, in POC dominated countries is very much politically significant.

The movement, wherever recreated, follows the footsteps of Rita Segato, a leading figure in Argentina's feminist movement. Segato focused on the use of sexual violence against women as a weapon of war in civil conflicts, or as a political tool used by the police in order to "discipline" leaders of social or ethnic groups. She came to a number of conclusions that opposed the generally accepted social representations of rapists as antisocial and of femicide as a crime of passion. She explained that these acts of violence comply with the existing social codes. The authors of these crimes see them as social acts aimed less at the women who fall victim to them than at other men. They seek to reaffirm a masculinity that has been undermined by unemployment or humiliating and mind-numbing work. For the army or police, they can become a strategy for fighting subversion and quelling or punishing social protest. But why does femicide and other violence against women often go unpunished? According to Rita Segato, this is proof of a judicial system that is intentionally blind to the systematic nature of gender-based violence. The system therefore relegates this violence to the private sphere, explained by the uncontrollable individual impulses of the attacker or the victim's "provocative" attitude. The words that go with the minimalist choreography of "A Rapist in Your Way" echo the ideas presented by Rita Segato. That is the message behind "The Rapist is You": rapists are not deviant individuals on the fringes of society. The words "They are policemen, judges, the State" denounce the judicial system and the use of sexual violence as a weapon by the police and political authorities.¹⁴

Since late 2019, a rapid convergence of feminist groups with other mobilized groups is

¹² Dutta, Rajeshwari. 2020. "When Kolkata Chanted 'The Rapist is You'". *Youth Ki Awaaz*, January 13, 2020

¹³ Hinsliff, Gaby. 2020. "'The Rapist is You!' Why a Chilean Protest Chant is being sung around the world". *The Guardian*, February 3, 2020

¹⁴ Palieraki 2020 "The Rapist is You: Origins of a Worldwide Feminist Movement." *iD4D*, January 22, 2020.

being seen. The leading role of feminism can be explained by the dynamic young generation that has taken up the historical ideas and causes of Latin American feminism and its capacity to reinvent means of political action. In this movement, many collectives of women artists and feminists, including Las Tesis, Dhorshok Tumi'i, and all the other feminist collectives that have participated in its recreations, play a crucial role. Their performance art portrays the female body and seeks to make an impact. Female bodies are revealed and exposed, reminding audiences that the bodies are primary targets of violence in our societies. They also expose themselves to invite women to use their body as a tool for emancipation. The aim is to break with the sense of shame or guilt that is often linked with this act, and to break free from exploitation at work, from abuse, and from social control over the reproductive function of their own bodies.¹⁵ The strength of “A Rapist in Your Way” lies in its role as a sounding board for a fight for emancipation, equal rights, and against abuse and violence—causes that now unite millions of women in Chile, in Kolkata and around the world. The movement becomes heavily symbolic and indicative of a significant political statement made by women from widely different realities, channelling anger and frustration, but also a universally shared solidarity and sisterhood.

Chornik, Katia. 2019. “Sexual Violence, Torture, and Chile’s Struggle for Historical Memory.” *Open Democracy*, October 7, 2019 (<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciabierta/sale-of-venda-sexy-torture-centre-highlights-chiles-struggle-for-historical-memory-regarding-sexual-violence/>)

Dutta, Rajeshwari. 2020. “When Kolkata Chanted ‘The Rapist is You.’” *Youth Ki Awaaz*, January 13, 2020 (<https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2020/01/quick-byte-when-kolkata-chanted-the-rapist-is-you/>)

Hinsliff, Gaby. 2020. “‘The Rapist is You!’ Why a Chilean Protest Chant is being sung around the world.” *The Guardian*, February 3, 2020 (<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/feb/03/the-rapist-is-you-chilean-protest-song-chanted-around-the-world-un-iolador-en-tu-camino>)

Lopez, Oscar. 2020. “Factbox: Where Latin America women are fighting the world’s highest murder rates.” *Reuters*, March 7, 2020 (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-latam-women-protests-idUSKBN20U095>)

Mitra, Chandrajit. 2020. “‘The Rapist is You’: Women Protesters vs a Macho Hindu Rashtra.” *The Federal*. January 17, 2020 (<https://thefederal.com/the-eighth-column/rapist-is-you-women-protesters-vs-a-macho-hindu-rashtra/>)

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¹⁵ Palieraki 2020 “The Rapist is You: Origins of a Worldwide Feminist Movement.” *iD4D*, January 22, 2020.

The Bulbul Sings Her Song: Shaheen Bagh and Female Resistance

Best Paper: WSC Annual
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“Shaheen Bagh is the emblem of resistance for India against the unconstitutional CAA and NPR-NRC”. This line is the profile-bio for the official Instagram handle of the protests at Shaheen Bagh against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which began after the students of Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) were subjected to police brutality on their campus, on the 15th of December 2019. The students of JMI along with other universities like Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) had been protesting against the CAA that was passed by the Indian Parliament on 9th December 2019. Since then, the protests developed into a larger movement that came to “define not just the way protests shaped up against the new law, but how the nation looked at women in general, and Muslim women in particular” (Ausaf & Salam, 2020, 27).

Various twenty-first century philosophers, thinkers, and intellectuals have argued that post the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th 2001, by Al-Qaeda, world history and politics changed in more ways than one. This was already a continuation of the West’s supposed Orientalist view of the East in general, and Islam in particular (Said, 1997). The effect of this on Muslims all across the world has become an important issue that has found place in media discussions. One of the popular ways of depicting Muslims, is demonising Muslim men, and victimising Muslim women. Drawing from this popular Western perception, the Indian representation of Muslims has become increasingly stereotypical. The Shaheen Bagh protests managed to give Indian Muslim women an

alternative space and image, despite the fact that most national media channels’ portrayal of the protests was far from genuine. Even if not completely shattering the stereotypes, it provided a counter-narrative that was not limited to their stereotypical representation in mainstream Bollywood, for instance.

I. Of Alternate Pictures: Painting Oneself

The perception of Muslim women as victims waiting to be saved was a narrative that was made popular by the Bush-led US government as a justification for their invasion of Afghanistan in 2003, and in the years of occupation that followed. American feminists spoke out for their Muslim “sisters” who were being oppressed by Afghani (and by extension, all Muslim) men.

Threading this to the change in the politics of the world after 9/11, Abu-Lughod comments, “...the images of oppressed Muslim women became connected to a mission to rescue them from their cultures” (Abu-Lughod, 2013, 6). This narrative has changed forms but the basic plotline remains the same. When Indian media show Muslim women, it is either an image of a victim of religion and Muslim men (like Najma Malik in *Secret Superstar*), or she is portrayed as a vile influence who is a threat to an otherwise chaste society (like Mastani in *Bajirao Mastani*). In between these two polar opposite representations, there exists an intense and harmful over- sexualization of these women’s bodies, because they are looked at as entities waiting to be conquered, or saved, by “knights in shining armour”, the privileged men. With the

Indian Parliament passing the bill banning *Triple Talaq*¹, it was made to look like the victim Muslim- woman had been saved from the clutches of Islam. Of course, it wouldn't be entirely correct to claim that institutional Islam has not been a means of the subjugation of Muslim women.

However, creating a narrative that portrays these women as damsels-in-distress to further another system that actually contributes to subjugation is what Islamic feminists have been arguing against. Abu-Lughod talks about how our perspectives on what are acts of resistance are defined by the West. She says, "Instead of simply reading such acts (in reference to a Bedouin woman discarding her veil and wearing lingerie²) as moments of opposition to, and escape from, dominant relations of power, they should be understood as re-inscribing alternative forms of power ..." (Mahmood, 2004, 9).

In the Shaheen Bagh protests, we witnessed how the voices of real-life women (Muslim women, specifically), that gained amplification became an important thread that ran throughout the movement. The majoritarian idea of the "victimised Idiot-Muslim-Woman", who because of her veil is incapable of thinking for herself had become quite popular (Naqvi, 2020). The women at Shaheen Bagh were consciously, or unconsciously, extremely vocal about their Muslim identity; they made it an integral part of the entire movement, by re-claiming their attire that had been repeatedly used to question the legitimacy of their identity, and their independence. This movement holds importance because it created a space for these women to occupy the status of the subject, rather than being an object about whom conclusions are drawn based on the popular narrative. For instance, Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* based

on fieldwork from 1995 to 1997, subjectivizes the experience of Muslim women involved in the women's piety movement in Cairo. The movement was similar to the Shaheen Bagh movement in two respects—Muslim women, conscious and vocal about their identities were the face of the movement, and, great importance was given to their attire, looking at it in relation to the attire's politically charged history, and as an extension of their own sense of selves. One of the reasons for *choosing* this attire, Mahmood mentions in her study of the movement, is the resistance against a) the commodification of women's bodies, and b) Western hegemony (Mahmood, 2004).

Besides being a landmark event for the Muslim women of India, the protests at Shaheen Bagh were a double-edged sword for the state. On the one hand, the resistance was for a unified, inclusive India, something that the state's current philosophy seems against. And on the other, the representation of the power of the veiled Indian Muslim woman goes against the majoritarian idea of their victimhood (Rao, 2020). Along with portraying an alternate picture of the Muslim woman, interestingly, the all-woman space also portrayed an alternative picture of the Muslim man³. Shaheen Bagh being a residential colony, the protest site was in the middle of houses of many families. The men from the families stood back, watched and supported them as women took the centre-stage and voiced concerns that were not women's alone.

"It was also a unique moment for the men—most of them steeped in patriarchal values—to be on the sidelines of a movement led by women. They only tried their best to make the women feel safe",

¹ The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019

² Abu-Lughod takes this incident as a general example to point towards the hegemony of western culture.

³ The image of the Muslim man in popular narrative is constructed as "the other", a threat to the dominant ideology and power. Forced sexual endogamy, and the narrative of *Love Jihad* (a Muslim man "trapping" a Hindu woman and marrying her by forcing her to convert), are results of this.

writes Zayed Masroor Khan (Khan, 2020). Like in Khan's essay, there are various records of personal experiences by women, who visited the jam-packed protest site, and appreciated it for being a space free of harassment, something that is unfortunately rare. This can be looked at as a counter-narrative to the demonisation of Muslim men, popularised in media depictions.

II. Redefining Love, Loyalty, and Solidarity

The women protesting at Shaheen Bagh came as an unexpected surprise as they were raising their voices not only for themselves, but for their community and country; they subsequently went on to stand for all those who had been oppressed, from Rohith Vemula⁴, to the Pandits of Kashmir⁵, while being extremely vocal about their Muslim identity. Most importantly, these women were speaking for themselves. Clearly, their existence on the fringes, both physically and sociologically, positioned them as subaltern in the society. Although, after the movement was made to stop, there have been a significant number of writings on these women, in that moment of the protests, these women were speaking for themselves, and many of them, are still writing for themselves (Spivak, 1988). Women speaking up for issues that are not women's alone has been a characteristic feature of what some feminists are now calling the global fourth-wave of feminism (Dasgupta & M, 2020). Another characteristic feature of this wave is that ordinary women are not being spoken for, they are speaking up for themselves. At Shaheen Bagh too, women who had never stepped out of their houses were sitting at the protest site speaking loud and clear, making their demands, singing revolutionary songs, well aware of their centrality in India's resistance against CAA.

⁴ A Dalit PhD scholar who was found dead on his Hyderabad University campus under mysterious circumstances.

⁵ Victims of the Mass Exodus in 1990.

Furthermore, it is the vastness of their struggle in terms of how they incorporated their ordinary daily lives into these protests that makes them stand out. As recorded, these women would take turns at feeding their children and taking them to school, while the rest would sit at the protest site. Similarly, they would cook their meals in the house with the largest kitchen standing in solidarity not just with all those they were speaking for, but also with each other, thus inculcating a domestico-political sisterhood (Ausaf & Salam, 2020). Much after the protest site had been cleared, the women of Shaheen Bagh did not mourn their defeat; rather, they celebrated their victory. For them, they say, having stepped out of their homes, having sung songs of resistance, having been known by the world, was a part of their victory (*The Wire*, 2020). It would be very interesting to dwell on the concept of romanticisation of these protests as an extension of the extreme romanticisation of the concept of motherhood in most cultures, however, that is beyond the purview of this paper and deserves independent inquiry.

The past decade in India, notably since 2012, has been witness to an aggressive, masculine nationalism that was used by the state to first come to power, and subsequently, to decide with whom the power resided. Slogans like "Bharat Mata Ki Jai⁶," were slogans of the freedom movement that pointed towards the victory of Mother India, a feminine figure; now, they began gradually taking the form of a violent test of "patriotism" and "nationalism" for marginal communities with undertones of a masculine idea of saving and owning the feminine. The women of Shaheen Bagh, through the revival of national symbols, redefined patriotism in their struggle to reinforce their belonging to their land (Ausaf & Salam, 2020). Specifically, the revival of the heroes of Independence, Bismil and Ashfaq, Maulana Azad, and most importantly Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was their attempt to recall the birth of secular India. This was these

⁶ Literally meaning, "Victory to Mother India".

women's resistance against the politics of renaming, and erasing of history that is being practiced widely.

Rahul Rao further suggests that the hoisting of the tricolour by the four women⁷ at Shaheen Bagh on Republic Day 2020 definitely put forward the question of who the nation really belongs to, by creating an alternate space that was led by women as opposed to the hoisting of the national flag in the same city, at the same time, by the head of the state (Rao, 2020). Similarly, Shaheen Bagh also attempted to remind the nation that the idea of patriotism belonged equally to the fringes when they ushered in the new year 2020 by singing the national anthem.

Shaheen Bagh was an important part of the debates in the Delhi Assembly elections of February 2020, and the women, through an act of covering their mouths, refused to be objects in one political narrative. Perhaps this was also a response to the appropriation of the struggles of the community as a whole, by political leaders, solely for their personal gains during elections. In these acts of defiance, the women of Shaheen Bagh brought their history, as a part of the country that they feared eviction from, to the centre-stage, thus concretizing a past that is threatened by violent erasure.

III. Contending Land and Language

Shaheen Bagh being a women's movement was reflected in all forms of art that were produced in that space, or were influenced by it. Most artworks featured fierce women, their head covered by scarves, pointing towards the end of a long subjugation. The poems, and other written forms of art that emerged from these protests were words that not only embraced but also empowered the feminine. Furthermore, even the poetry of famous

⁷ Sarwari, Asma Khatoun, Bilkis (collectively known as the "daadis"), and Radhika Vemula (mother of Rohith Vemula)

revolutionary poets like Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Habib Jalib, being recited by these women was a landmark event of reclaiming their resistance, and their verses. That said, the voices of Muslim women that emerged from this movement is an important matter to engage with.

Protest-poet Iqra Khilji, who was a prominent voice at the Shaheen Bagh protests has repeatedly talked about how the women of Shaheen Bagh, in their act of protesting are resisting on two fronts, fighting two evils—fascism and patriarchy. In her poem "Azad Hai", she writes,

*Bulbul Kahe Saiyyad Se,
Lazim Teri Ab Haar Hai*

(The Nightingale tells *Saiyyad*⁸,
now surely you will be defeated)

The figure of the *bulbul*, the bird who has been captured and tortured by *Saiyyad*, the trapper, finally finds a voice in Khilji's words. Empowering the figure of the *bulbul* is another example of the female vocabulary of these protests. Khilji says that although there have existed prominent women Urdu poets like Fahmida Riaz and Kishwar Naheed, most of them have been from across the border (Agha, 2020). In the protests against CAA/NRC/NPR, the Indian Muslim women have finally found their voice in Urdu poetry. By writing in Urdu, they have defied the imposition of the state's Hindutva, and have reclaimed the language of their ancestors, in which mostly the men wrote. In another poem titled "Shaheen Bagh", Khilji writes,

*"Qismatein Iss Mulk Ki Hain In
Sunehri Jhurriyon Mein Inqalabi Ik Asar
Hai Ab Hamari Siskiyan Mein"*

(In these golden wrinkles now lies the fate of this country
And in our sobs, lies a change that is revolutionary)

⁸ The relation between the *bulbul* (victim) and the *Saiyyad* (predator) has often been explored in Urdu literature as a typical example of the dynamic between oppressed and the oppressor.

Here, the act of crying that is associated with women in order to call them weak is used as a powerful symbol of resistance (*inquilab*).

Another prominent poet that emerged from the protests at Shaheen Bagh, Nabiya Khan's poem "Ayega Inquilab" became the tagline of the protests.

"Ayega Inquilab, Pehenke Bindi Chudiyen Burqa Hijab"

(And surely the revolution will arrive, donned in bindi, bangles, veil, and *hijab*)

This line could be seen on artworks, on posters, on graffiti painted on walls, and smeared across social media. Khan, who is also a student activist, through her poem reclaims both language and attire for the Muslim women. Her poem, she says, was a response to what the Indian Prime Minister had said about "identifying the rioters from their clothes", and what the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh said about the Muslim men wearing bangles, "Chudiyen pehen rakhi hain"⁹, because it was the women who were protesting. These writings are what Cixous had termed "écriture féminine", woman writing herself, and claiming herself through claiming language (Cixous, 1976).

Mushaira-e-Mohabbat, a poetry reading was organised on the evening of 13th February 2020 that saw recitation by six women poets, to celebrate both Urdu and poetry. The focus on "revolutionary Urdu poetry by women" during the protests is an important political affair from the perspective of gender (giving voice to women in Literature), of language, and hence, of power.

⁹ Literally translating to "You have worn bangles", this comment has been historically used to mock men for not being "masculine enough". It entails humiliation that is supposed to be similar to the act of castration.

Conclusion

The coming together of women from different social, political, physical spaces at Shaheen Bagh's *pandal* questioned the status of the women of the Muslim minority in India. It painted a new image of the Muslim women internationally. And most importantly, it brought together women from different backgrounds and generations, and wove through them a thread of recognition and sisterhood, something that was lacking among women from different generations because of their different responses to the western idea of feminism. In a TED talk¹⁰, Khilji addresses this tear in the feminist movement among Muslim women, citing *hijab* as a symbol that threatens the power of some, and gives power to the others. She points towards Miriam Cooke's crediting of Islamic Feminists (the label itself called oxymoronic by many) for placing themselves between their mothers-in-law and their daughters (Cooke, 2000).

By creating and recognising a sisterhood, throughout a struggle that is not limited to save only themselves, but also their community and their country, the women of Shaheen Bagh have successfully claimed their attire, their identity, their language, the physical and political space where they would never be imagined, and have registered a claim to their nation. In doing this, they have made a major contribution to the writing of her-story, a counter-narrative.

¹⁰ Delivered at PDP on 30th April, 2019

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Who's Afraid of Secularism? Exploring the Relationship between Constitutionality, Women's Assertion and the Issue of Mass Secularism

Best Paper: WSC Annual Student Seminar,
2020

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In response to the new Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) and National Population Register (NPR), various cities across India witnessed sustained protests, especially sit-in protests since December 2019. These “spontaneous” sit-in protests that have emerged in Delhi and other cities across India have attracted not only the imagination of women’s rights activists and other democratic organizations, but they have also been subjected to pervasive high-handedness of state agencies and the ruling party which have often unleashed oppression at protest sites in a bid to muzzle the incisive critique of its laws.

A significant development at these protests cum sit-ins has been an active participation by women, who have been at the forefront in these protests, both as participants and as organizers. This participation of women has been much lauded and welcomed by progressive sections of the society, and is seen as an empowering development for a section which had hitherto been considered as distant from public life. Similar trends have been observed, of course, in several anti-colonial Gandhian movements, where the participation of women was quite spectacular. However, seeing the Anti-CAA sit-in protests as an out-and-out instance of empowerment of women would be to severely limit our understanding about the patriarchal moulding of women’s involvement in these protests. Women’s participation is not just of their own autonomous will, but is another instance where their role is seen as central to a re-fashioning of Muslim identity. This paper

argues how women have been central to such a re-moulding of their role within the parameters of Muslim identity in these protests.

We witnessed horrific communal riots in North-East Delhi, which claimed the lives of at least 49 people from both Hindu and Muslim communities. What has emerged in the talks since the riots is the need to revitalize the ethos of secularism in our country. The colonial rulers had throughout their rule tried to sow seeds of communal dissension among the people of India. As a result, secularism was enshrined as a principle to be followed by the rulers of India after independence from colonial rule. The Indian Constitution was created by the Constituent Assembly of India, elected by a *limited* franchise. Only seven percent of the people, and that too only of British India, participated in the formation or election of the Constituent Assembly. The monarchs of the Princely States, meanwhile, got to nominate their representatives to the Assembly, bypassing the need for election or choosing of representatives from the huge anti-colonial, anti-feudal struggles that had been waged in princely India. In the original Constitution, it was laid down that the state is not going to discriminate against anyone on the basis of caste, creed, race and sex. With the 42nd Amendment, secularism was added to the Preamble, and essentially came to convey that the state should not discriminate between people on the basis of creed, i.e., religion. Despite the fact that our Constitution’s Preamble commences with the phrase “We, the People of India”, due to the limited franchise, a large majority of the people were not part of the process which

created it. So, in real terms, it was unrepresentative and, hence, remained an irrelevant and abstract document for a large majority. Frequent amendments to the Constitution could never really rectify this.

Secularism, thus, came to signify a behaviour, a *modus operandi*, for the equation between different communities. It came to mean that the state would not discriminate among the people and secularism as an ethos would govern inter-community relationships between people. Subsequently, in the context of majoritarian politics, secularism came to be identified as minority appeasement. Amongst the majority community, secularism seen through the majoritarian lens, became simply another means of appeasing the minority community. In our own times, it has come to be derided as “Sickularism” or “Pseudo-Secularism”.

The movement against the discriminatory CAA and NRC has largely been led by women from the minority community, assisted by various progressive, democratic and left-wing forces of the country. Contrary to it, the majority community of the country is considering this as something detrimental to their interest. It is also being argued that the projection of secularism in the “Muslim-led” movement is basically “counter-Hindu” communalism, and not real secularism. So, the main purpose of my paper is to interrogate why there is so much apathy towards the ethos of secularism amongst a majority of the country’s population. Why is it that the majority thinks that in secularism, there is something for the minority community but not for the majority? How do we revive or create an interest in secularism for the majority of the masses in the country? This remains a task and herein lies the contemporary deadlock.

The word secularism literally means separation of state and religion and non-inclination of the state towards any religion.

However, the secularism so envisaged by the rulers of independent India was imposed from above, which ruling elites paid lip service to, and which largely remained absent from the lives of the people. The intention behind the inclusion of secularism as a principle in our society was to accord it acceptance as a basis for the relationship among different communities. But there was no concerted attempt to bring attention to oppression and exploitation which was sanctified due to religious dogmas within all communities. Thus, secularism came to be seen as a ploy of minority appeasement by a significant section of the majority. The so-called majority community has remained untouched by secularism, since the issues internal to it, such as caste discrimination, oppression of women, etc., based on religious sanction remain largely unaddressed; making the majority community distrustful of secularism.

The so-called majority community has a large section of Dalits who have been historically discriminated against on the basis of religiously sanctioned dogma. Likewise, women in both majority and minority communities have been accorded a subordinate position and their discrimination has been justified by resorting to religious texts and customs. In all religious communities there are substantial sections that have been exploited based on the traditional religious dogma. Secularization in the true sense has consequently remained a distant reality for the toiling majority, which not only continues to be socially oppressed, but economically exploited, too. At this juncture there is broader need to revive secularism not just as the basis for inter-community relationship, but as an active ingredient in intra-community life as well. Such secularization is important for the dismantling of hierarchical relationships of oppression and exploitation within respective communities, which have hitherto been justified by traditions and religion.

No struggle is likely to be successful, unless it creates a kind of universalism for itself, or in other words, it gets considered as universally valid. Thus, there needs to be something that can be seen as beneficial in secularism both by the people of the majority and minority communities. This is the impasse which needs a breakthrough. To break this deadlock of the contemporary movement, the women of the majority community need to see that secularism is something which is also important for them and that it is not something just to safeguard the interests of the minority community. A shift is badly needed from viewing secularism as something limited only to an amicable relationship between different communities, to *intra-community* issues which are influenced and determined by religious traditions. A fight against the debilitating and exploitative religious traditions in the majority community, around the axes of caste, gender, etc., will galvanise the support of a majority within the majority community for secularism. This then would not be just an abstract, constitutional secularism, but would herald an era of truly mass secularism.

It becomes pertinent to raise some glaring questions emerging from the protest sites themselves, in the present context of the struggle against religiously discriminatory laws like CAA and NRC. From my personal experiences from various protest sites, I have seen women from the Muslim community who switched to *burqa* and *hijab*, when participating in the protests, which unlike before, was meant to portray their modesty in public. Women are increasingly being subjected to amplified community surveillance and it is being insisted that they have to respect community traditions in public, especially in the present times when their religion is under attack. This points towards a significant development, wherein women are

increasingly being seen as repositories of communal identity and bearers of the larger honour of Islam. What we are seeing is not “empowerment” but recasting of patriarchal mores to suit the contemporary conjuncture within which the minority community finds itself. In this process, the image of a model Muslim woman is being crystallized where women are supposed to subordinate their interest to the larger interest of the community.

However, the movement has also in a way furthered middle-class and Islamophobic biases. It is a general stereotype of Muslim women that they are more house-bound than women in other communities. Reproducing this stereotypical bias, gatherings of women at protest sites in Muslim attire are seen as women coming into the public sphere from the private confines of their respective households for the first time, as if so far Muslim women weren’t coming out in the public domain, such as educational institutions and workplaces. Muslim women comprise no less a proportion of the workforce in India, as compared to women from the so-called majority community. Thus, such biases concerning the role of women perpetuate the regressive traditions which are being hailed as the assertion of an oppressed community. In this context, patriarchy is re-cast and reinvigorated when in a bid to fight against communal repression, regressive traditions like wearing a veil or *hijab* get reinforced, and this development gets *mis-recognized* as “empowerment”! In fact, such developments are synonymous with reinstating those very patriarchal practices and systems which reformers in both the communities had been struggling against in their bid to rid religion of its orthodoxy and conservatism in order to achieve the true liberation of the backward masses and women, in general.

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Women and War: A Re-evaluation

Best Paper: WSC Annual Student Seminar, 2020

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Abstract: Since time immemorial, women have been considered a part of the private domain, of the domestic sphere, and especially more so during conflict. Womankind is the first to be sequestered and hidden because patriarchal narratives would have one believe that women have never participated in conflict in any capacity, and have always featured in said narratives as powerless victims of forces beyond their control. The paper attempts to challenge this stereotype and elaborate upon the role of women as equal, albeit marginalised, stakeholders in the socio-cultural, economic, and political structures of their times.

Divided into two parts, the paper will look at female representation in the most documented conflict of human history: World War II. The two parts will include an investigation into the detailed accounts and histories of German Pilots (Primary Text: *The Women Who Flew for Hitler: The True Story of Hitler's Valkyries* by Clare Mulley), and Soviet Snipers (Primary Text: *The Unwomanly Face of War* by Svetlana Alexievich). All of the texts revolve around women who changed the face of World War II as it were, demonstrating the overlap of the personal with the political, along with an intersection of various identity positions to achieve the most personal yet political of matters: freedom. Deriving from personal accounts, memoirs, translated testimonies, recorded interviews, and government corroboration, the paper will attempt to highlight the under-representation of women not only in the public sphere, but also in a personal capacity and bring to light the relationship between armed conflict and women, women who are in the thick of conflict as active participants and not as placid sufferers.

Keywords: War, Women, Soviet, Snipers, American, Cryptographers, German, Pilots

This war, more than any other war in history, (World War II) is a woman's war.

– John G. Winant

4,000,000. Four million. A number which is near impossible to ignore, no matter what the context. This is the total assumed number of women who participated in World War II, for unlike men, very little detail is divulged about the number of women involved in wartime activities. World War II remains the most documented war to date, with a plethora of work and literature from all the involved parties, including personal memoirs, second-hand accounts, military documents, etc. Yet, somehow, despite a paper trail a mile long, the female contribution to World War II is rarely even acknowledged, let

alone understood or celebrated. It was only with the late 1960s that various nations declassified documents and data from World War II, allowing historians a glimpse into the contribution of the “other” gender, although only in the works of select female historians in the West did this find acknowledgment. Some of the most prolific male historians of World War II continue to deny or airbrush the role of women in the war. This paper seeks to counter this narrative, no matter how infinitesimally, and highlight not just female involvement in World War II, but also how the personal became political for these women who, despite being caught in the middle of a severe identity politics, fought for their nation. Of course, the morality of their values is open to further discourse.

Soviet Union Snipers

The Soviet Union saw the most contribution of women in the war, despite Stalin being a deeply misogynistic man who famously said: “a woman with ideas is like ‘a herring with ideas: skin and bones’” (Vajskop, p.8). However, Stalin strove to uphold the communist ideal, which dictated that men and women participate equally in the war. This is what led to him reluctantly allowing women to join the frontline *only* after all the manpower, so to speak, had been exhausted. The Soviet Union has always had a history of female resistance and leadership in battle, which is why even in the lead up to World War II, they pressurized local authorities, and eventually, the national office of the Komsomol for the right to serve at the front lines. Perhaps the most direct and brutal involvement with the battle is of young girls who volunteered to serve the “Great Motherland” who were sent to Sniper School. Even as these girls were trained for the war at the School, they were looked down upon by their supervisors, who would frequently use patronizing language, such as:

“How am I to make soldiers out of you, dear Girls, and not targets for the Fritz?”

“They’ve foisted girls on me. What is this, some sort of women’s round dance?”

“What am I going to do with you, my dears? Where did they find you?”

(Alexievich, p.12-14).

The misogyny did not end there. Even as the Soviet women learned how to use guns and rifles, their commanding officer would often mention: “After the war, the men will be afraid to marry you... You’ll fling a plate at his head and kill him” (Alexievich, p.16). Even after surpassing men in shooting capabilities, they were still treated like second-class soldiers, and sent in pairs to take out high profile German targets, because they were not trusted to complete the job individually, and would

need another person for emotional support. However, they became so adept at their tasks, that the fellow male comrades of the Red Army were forced to reluctantly accept them as equals. This can be easily supported with their kill counts, which was almost always upward of 50, with the most successful being Lyudmila Pavlyuchenko, with a kill count of 309.

Those on the Soviet side still had their reservations despite seeing them at work. The reason for this ideological conflict between the ideals of communism and the inability to treat women as equals has been explained by sociologist and historian Samantha Vajskop,

Stalin changed the image of women to serve the needs of his regime and to teach Soviets (especially men)... On the one hand, there was the idea of a woman as an equal participant as a man. But on the other hand, the Soviet campaign also showed this ideal woman as “sweet, innocent, untroubled by hardship, let alone by war”. The ideal Soviet woman was not merely a hard-working, active citizen; she was also a loving wife and mother. This tension would become an issue for men both during and after World War II in dealing with women as comrades in arms. (Vajskop, p.11)

Thus, despite their accomplishments on the field as well as off it, as soon as the war started to come to a close, a lot of these women received dishonourable discharges, permanent medical leaves, as well as being referred to as “menopausal personnel” which, according to Stalin, rendered women permanently incapacitated and therefore, unable to fight anymore.

Perhaps the most strikingly tragic occurrence is not a story, but a statistic. Out of the 150,000 people decorated after World War II in Soviet Russia, less than 0.1 % were women, even though in totality, they formed more than 10% of the Soviet Army by the end of World War II.

Pilots/Diplomats of Germany

Germany too had great reservations about employing women in battalions with Hitler passing many legislations that women were not supposed to be trained in combat weaponry. Even so, Hitler inducted upwards of 5,000 women into aviation, which was considered one of the most important technological pursuits undertaken by the Germans after their crushing defeat in WW I. Despite their national as well as international contributions, however, these pilots find very little mention in contemporary history. Evelyn Zegenhagen finds twofold reason for this: not just because of the subject's relative obscurity, but in what she refers to as "a conscious effort in society before and after 1945 to neglect and ignore female contributions to aviation" (Zegenhagen, p. 579-596).

In the early days of World War II, Germany recruited several women with a pilot's license only for acrobatic shows because with women as the face of flying, Germany's aviation looked charming and non-threatening, appeared civilian and modern rather than martial and revisionist. This also camouflaged the fact that they were evading the laws laid down by the Treaty of Versailles, which imposed heavy restrictions on German aviation developments. They were given aviation training, but not allowed to apply for combative aviation licenses.

Also, the feminist desire for emancipation seemed to be missing from the women pilots themselves. Even as they covertly lobbied for the rights to fly for battle, they would continue to appeal to the male gaze by emphasising their feminine features, characteristics, and beauty: "I believe I can say, in the name of the German women pilots, that in us the hierarchy of values of all womanhood has in no way been altered, and that aviation never [was] a thing of [achieving] emancipation. We women pilots are no suffragettes"

(Zegenhagen, p.584). Or statements such as, "And yet I am a woman pilot with all my heart, only with the limitation that I remain a woman, with all my weaknesses" (Zegenhagen, p.584-585). According to Zegenhagen:

That women pilots remained "truly women in the most beautiful meaning of the word" meant above all that they remained aware of their inferior position in aviation and never tried to challenge male superiority. By stressing a disinterest in emancipation, announcing their intentions in humble words, never challenging official politics that limited them in all areas, and presenting themselves as feminine and technically challenged, women pilots made sure that they were accepted by the male pilots' community, and by society in general. (Zegenhagen, p.584-585)

Emancipation, then, was not a concern for them. What *was* a concern for them was the defense of the Fatherland, their ambitions not to free themselves, but free Germany from the oppressive Treaty of Versailles. As such, they were trained for a short period of six months in acrobatic flying, before they were sent to foreign lands to perform shows for people. On the surface, female pilots looked charming, non-threatening and welcoming as opposed to the male pilots who were subject to scrutiny and suspicion.

Obviously, behind this innocent surface was Hitler's true goal: to use these women as ambassadors to revive the lost German reputation. Women pilots also carried out propaganda missions abroad for Germany's political goals. Thus, Hitler managed to utilise prevailing gender roles to his advantage, by painting women as non-political entities, all the while making them propagate the German cause, which is further made evident by the close eye that Germany's foreign office kept on them.

It was only in 1944, with a sharp lack of male pilots, that female pilots were finally employed with the army outside of acrobatic shows. Hundreds of women pilots followed an appeal in the summer of 1944 to be trained and employed as gliding instructors for the German Army. Even so, very few of them got to fly again; most women were restricted to the role of gliding instructors only, and out of the 5,000 women capable of flying, only 60 were ever allowed to see conflict. In the two newly founded Germanys after World War II, the services of these women aviators were no longer required. Women pilots underwent a quick and, in most cases, easy denazification. Very few ever took up flying again, with most succumbing to societal gender roles and resultant obscurity.

Conclusion

Though there may be two very different portrayals of women in war, one side actively encouraging women to participate, and the other actively restricting them, some core problems prevailed with both sides. On both ends of the conflict, women's personal lives were subject to the political exigencies of the times and they were often considered state property. Women had to deal with the societal pressures of conforming to gender roles of femininity even as they strove to make it to the frontlines, with varying degrees of success. D'Ann Campbell comments on why there may be such imposition on women: "Young men saw military as validation for their virility, and as a certificate of their manhood. If women could do it, then it was not very manly, was it?" (Campbell, p.321). She also emphasises that it was only a lack

of sufficient manpower and not feminist ideals that allowed women to fight at all. Women at the battlefield presented additional problems. What do you call a female rifleman or a commander, or a tank driver? There was no feminine term for a lot of martial roles, which gave rise to a linguistic issue. In addition, there was a lack of facilities specifically for women, such as ill-fitting uniforms, no washrooms for female use, etc. Though these are ruminations for a separate line of inquiry, there is also a strong need to recognise the contribution of these women as impactful, consequential, of some import. It is only when there is acknowledgement of their actions, that they can be held accountable for those actions, and be condemned for the same, as in the case of the German pilots. If one never even accepts their role in the World War, there can be no further discourse on the morality of the values they stood for, and there will be no acceptance of the fact that a lot of their actions were not to be glorified, but to be castigated. Therefore, there is an urgent requirement to delve deeper into this area of study.

World War II saw the involvement of more than four million women across all sides, and not just in the traditional roles of nurses and caretaker, but as messengers, codebreakers, riflemen, drivers, snipers, pilots, mechanics, airplane operators, etc., all of which has often been conveniently glossed over by history to pretend as if this never happened. At the very least, it highlights a pressing need to address this gap in knowledge and awareness, to acknowledge women as more than placid sufferers of the whims of men who plot and play at wars.

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Women's Safety When Commuting: Gender Insensitive City Design of Delhi

Best Paper: WSC Annual Student
Seminar, 2020

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Abstract: The Indian constitution guarantees equal rights and representation to every section of society, but the reality on the ground is very different. This much can be concluded from the daily reports of atrocities committed against women in the public sphere in India. Cities like Delhi promise many opportunities but are biased against women in their design and planning. There have been efforts by the government to make commuting for women a safer experience but all these initiatives either lack in the reform imagined or in proper implementation. The period of commute that women choose, the mode of travel they use, etc., reflect how well a city has managed to create an inclusive public space for women. A well-planned city by ensuring the safety of women in the public space ultimately guarantees greater participation of women in the democratic decision making of a polity. This study is conducted to get an insight into what the design of such a democratic city space that encourages more women in the public space would look like. The study also addresses the experiences of women and their perception of safe spaces. Secondary sources like articles and reports from newspaper and magazines and government organisations and primary sources like interview and street auditing have been used for this study.

Keywords: women's safety, civilian rights, democratic space, experience

Introduction

Delhi is consistently registering highest rates of total cognizable crimes against women amongst major metropolitan cities in India. Women's safety concerns in contemporary public spaces of Delhi have been discussed and debated on several platforms, but the problems still remain unresolved. According to a 2014 Thomson Reuters Foundation survey of some of the world's largest cities, Delhi is one of the cities having the most dangerous transportation system for women. In the past, several studies were carried out on the necessity of female safety in public spaces, the need for safe mobility for women, and how safe mobility is related with the right to live as an equal citizen in any city. A pan India study (Bhatt, 2015) found that in India where 5.5 million women enter the workforce each year, more than 50%

express high concerns about the safety of their commute. This highlights that women's safety is not made a part of the city planning process of public transport systems in urban centres. This limits the women's educational and occupational choices and they are forced to live in a city that has been planned without taking their concerns into account. It is often found that women prefer to choose a college in the bottom half of the quality ladder over a better college due to lack of safety in the route to those better-quality colleges (Borker, 2017). Generally, women experience higher levels of fear of crime in comparison with men as cities are mainly planned for men and don't work properly for women. Therefore, it is important to consider women's concerns and perspectives and incorporate it into the design process. Of course, what works for women works for men as well but not the

other way around (Dastgheib, 2018). According to a report by the National Democratic Institute, at the socio-cultural level, the representation by the media of women in leadership still tends to focus on what they wear, their marital status or their voices, as opposed to their policy positions or competence. The existing literature shows that a nation cannot be considered truly democratic if a particular section of the population faces extreme inequalities in access to urbanised spaces vis-à-vis other sections of society. Therefore, there is a need for women to reclaim their spaces in public transport systems and other urban public spaces, and become a part of the conversation regarding their own safety while commuting and accessing urban environments.

Methodology

This study includes both primary and secondary data. Primary data collection was done through an online questionnaire-based survey and personal interviews of focus groups (parents, academicians and college students). Participants of the online survey include 210 women from 11 different colleges in the age bracket of 18-21 years. Likert scale was used for scaling the responses in the survey for research. Secondary data was collected from different government reports and newspaper articles as well as data from the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB). A separate offline survey on the impact of the Delhi Government's latest free ride scheme for women in DTC buses was conducted, along with a street audit to map the specific vulnerable spots on the streets of Civil Lines, New Delhi.

Experiences of Women in Public Spaces

This section explains the spatial and temporal relationship with reference to the experience of women when commuting via various public transport options, and their immediate response to the undesirable situations they may have to encounter or navigate as part of their commute. Time and duration of travel play an important role in

determining major aspects of the commuting experience of women in general.

Regarding the most unsafe time to travel, that is, when women feel most vulnerable, 81% of the respondents agreed that the post 9:00 PM time-frame is the most unsafe for commuting. The reasons cited by them mainly point to poor public infrastructure and facilities. 86% of the respondents said they commute daily by public transport, like bus, metro, autorickshaws, cabs, etc. 71% amongst these women prefer commuting via Metro, as it is considered the safest option. The remaining 29% of the respondents feel that buses, autos, and cabs are relatively unsafe as here the period of commuting is unpredictable, and dependent on the behaviour of the driver and traffic congestion.

The report by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) points out that there is a shortage of 5,000-10,000 buses in Delhi. Initiatives like installation of Panic button, our data shows, is helping little, since 91% of the respondents said they did not know about the location of the panic button in a bus. This underlines the need for smart city designing where there are adequate resources provided to advertise the measures for improving safety being undertaken by governments.

Analyzing the City Design through a Street Audit

The Delhi Declaration on Women's Safety (2010) states, "Violence against women and girls constitutes a human rights violation and continues to be an obstacle to reaching gender equality and equity, peace, and sustainable development; Women's diverse experiences of city life are affected by gender-based discrimination and abuse in public and private spaces, including exclusion from political and socio-economic participation, as well as limited access to essential services and infrastructure.

Women's and girls' right to the city includes the right to live free from violence and fear, in more equitable, democratic, and inclusive cities. Women and girls have the right to participate and be part of decision-making processes in local governance, urban planning, and management." The right to inhabit the city fully and freely has been denied to women given how vulnerable women are on the streets, and other public spaces in Delhi at any time of the day. To understand the challenges that women experience on the streets, a street audit of an 800m long stretch, Shankaracharya Marg (A) and Ramkishore Marg (B) inside a Civil Lines residential colony was conducted. The audit sought especially to gauge the women's experiences in terms of various indicators pre-selected for the study like – street lighting, condition of pavements, speed breakers, residential gates (considering the surveillance), CCTV (working or not, private or government), footfalls, condition of road (disable friendly or otherwise), resting places, and maps/direction boards for navigation.

We found that the number of working street lights on Street A was seven and on street B was eighteen. Of these four and two street lights, respectively, were not in working condition in both streets. Poorly lit streets are crime hubs as criminals can take advantage of the dark spots to assault women.

Pavements in street A were encroached upon by parked vehicles, flower pots etc., which reduced the walking space. Encroachments on safe public pedestrian pathways not only make the terrain uneven, narrow and dangerous to navigate, but by pushing women off the sidewalks, it also makes them easier targets of attack. Street B did not have any pavement. Besides, surprisingly both streets did not have any speed breakers. This suggests a flawed

street design where women can be attacked with impunity because the attackers can make their getaway in high-speed vehicles.

Also, on both Streets A and B, very few residential gates were manned by security personnel, and they lacked surveillance. However, there were sixteen privately owned and installed CCTVs in proper working condition on both the streets. Street A had generally high footfall at all intersections, with moderate footfall on Street B. Despite the satisfactory condition of the road on both streets, the requirement of navigation maps and sign boards was felt while commuting during the hours when the roads are almost deserted. Besides no resting places and no disable friendly paths, many loopholes and concerns with relevance to women's safety like the presence of abandoned properties, the lack of police presence, and deserted patches in between houses were flagged through the street audit.

The number of street lights and the condition and width of pavements are directly related to the free movement of women. In the absence of "eyes" on streets i.e., people (footfall), CCTVs and street lights women feel their freedom of movement is adversely impacted. Even the length of walls of residential housing matters since lower walls ensure more eyes on the roads. All this points to the need for a more inclusive and gender sensitive design of our city spaces.

Security Scan of Delhi Government's Free Ridership Scheme

Delhi Government's Free Ridership Scheme for Women which was launched on 29th October 2019 was intended to promote safety, security and accessibility for women in Delhi. A survey through interviews was conducted to analyze the difference (if any) this scheme made in the lives of women. 13 regular women commuters of DTC buses who availed the benefits of the scheme responded. The majority of them agreed that

this scheme had increased the presence of women in the DTC buses. Besides 38% of them said that they themselves had started travelling more using buses. While for some the increased crowd, mainly comprising of women, made them feel safe, for others the experience is contrary. They believe that the congestion adds to their discomfort as boys now keep on hooting creating a vile environment. However, buses are their first preference. The metro is the second resort when congestion in the buses becomes too much. None of our respondents related the scheme to the economic gap between men and women but all agreed that this scheme had increased the mobility of women from lower income groups and motivated them to come out of their homes.

Encroachments by men of reserved seats in public transport is nothing new. The respondents indicated a reluctance to take action if the seat was occupied by elderly men, out of courtesy. But if the seats were occupied by younger males, then a few do try to get these seats vacated when men don't do so on their own. Others admitted that they don't ask for the seats to be vacated out of fear and because they feel that men should understand and vacate the seats voluntarily. According to them, the idea of bus marshals is quite successful. Almost all the buses have marshals now but male marshals are lagging behind in effective service as compared to the female marshals. The reason cited by some of them for this is that men don't listen to male marshals and male marshals don't insist very much on compliance when it comes to issues like the occupation of reserved seats.

Sustainability and success of the scheme is still moot because of the negative attitude of drivers. For instance, many drivers do not stop the bus for female commuters. This is a new and rather unfortunate problem confronting the women because of the lack of a positive response among men towards the scheme. Also, regarding the question of sustainability, respondents believed that even if on the face of it the rides are free for women,

ultimately, they would have to foot the bill as tax payers. In other words, they were skeptical about freebies being a long-term solution.

Conclusion

City design and urban planning does not only include the roads, drains or the means of transport but also designing the spaces in such a way that they can serve their purpose for all without prejudice. What we are seeing today are the urban spaces created by men and for men which ignores every assertion of the existence of other genders in the city. The studies clearly show that height of walls, street lights, width of pavements, number of speed breakers, CCTVs, footfall and even the presence of vendors have bearing on the security of women in public spaces. Likewise, while the metro is considered the safest form of transport, its safety is severely compromised by the lack of last mile connectivity. One of the main reasons behind this state of affairs is certainly the lack of women's representation in city planning compounded by the lack of mechanisms for collecting feedback from different sections of people and women in particular to improve city designs for everyone. Safetipin has started such an initiative but its scope is limited to looking at the situation of Delhi.

Democracy is not only to be sought by demanding 33% representation of women in local governments. What is required is the promotion of safe and democratic public spaces freely accessible to all women at all times of day and night to ensure that they can begin claiming their long-denied rights to the city.

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Brief Report of the Ongoing Research Projects at WSC, JMC¹

The Research Cell of the Women's Studies Centre (WSC), JMC, comprises of 14 members from several departments in the college. Dr. Maya John, Dr. Jessy K. Philip, Dr. Anupama Srivastava and Ms. Aneesha Puri are the faculty members who are mentoring the four ongoing projects of the WSC. The student coordinator of the Research Cell is Gayatri Ahuja from third year Political Science (Hons).

The WSC in the past has carried out socially meaningful research, and the Centre is proud of its work on the experiences of out-station JMC students living in paying guest accommodations (2016-17), on two rape crisis centres in Delhi (2017-18), etc. This academic year (2020-21), we have broadened the scope of our research and also the size of the Research Cell. Our more expansive endeavours are influenced by the massive social and economic disruptions that we have seen this past year since the COVID-19 pandemic set in. In an attempt to map experiences stemming from a context of heightened dislocation, alienation, socio-economic disparity, and the generalization

of online teaching-learning which has dangerously added to internet real time as well as dependence on social media, the WSC has launched four projects.

The Research Cell aims to create a culture of informed research initiatives and discussion on challenging issues which persist in India. It is our effort to shine critical light on much-needed reforms in favour of women, especially for those from marginalised sections of society, and in keeping with the demands of social justice. The emphasis is on analysing current government policies, comprehending the contemporary situation in depth, and engaging with grassroots level struggles and initiatives of women. With respect to the last objective, the Research Cell has also been working towards tracing JMC alumni who are committedly working on issues such as gender equality, female education, social justice, etc.

The four projects taken up by the team for the academic year 2020-2021 are as follows:

Project 1

Tracing Distress and Enhanced Precarity: Gender Analysis of the Lockdown

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the livelihoods of millions of people, across the world. Informal workers, and among them migrant workers, have been most severely affected in India. Reports and micro studies this past year have revealed that women workers have borne a disproportionate burden in terms of being the first to lose jobs in March 2020 when India went into a sudden

months-long national lockdown, and the last to be re-employed during the phase of COVID-19 restrictions being unlocked.

The project is anchored in documenting the voice of the most marginalised sections of working women, such as those in paid domestic work, construction, garment production, home-based work, etc., and the detrimental effect the ill-fated lockdown has had on everyday lives and livelihood well into the post-lockdown period. The project also attempts

¹ This brief report is bilingual. The write-up of one of the ongoing Research Projects in this document is in Hindi.

to trace exclusion, alienation, helplessness, etc., as experienced by young women students, who, via the online teaching-learning mode, were forced into an academic routine in schools and colleges during abnormal times, and that too without adequate access to internet and digital devices.

This project was envisaged while unlock restrictions were still quite pervasive. Consequently, ongoing data collection has been based on small samples and structured cum semi-structured interview method. The findings are based on an engagement with existing data and analyses, i.e., secondary literature of the lockdown period, which the team strives to verify against its own sampling and documenting of experiences. Apart from workers of the aforementioned industries, the team is interviewing noted scholars/researchers, trade unionists and labour department officials to get an

overview of conditions in the concerned sectors.

The team looks forward to presenting detailed perspectives on women's experiences this past year, and seeks to highlight the question of required reforms in policies and schemes for the benefit of women workers in India.

The team of scholars undertaking this project comprises of Anna Sara Baby and Archita Agarwal of third year, Economics Honours, Gayatri Ahuja of third year, Political Science Honours, Jolynne John of second year, English Honours, Sandhya Jeremiah of second year, Political Science Honours, and Soumya Jha, of second year, History Honours. The project is mentored by Dr. Maya John, Faculty Convenor of WSC, and Dr. Jessy K. Philip, Staff Advisor, WSC.

Project 2

Cyber-Bullying and Cyber-Stalking: Mapping Young Women's Experiences

Cyber-crime and cyber-stalking have been as old as the invention of the internet itself. However, instances of both have become worryingly rampant in the past decade due to several social factors, one of which is the phenomenal increase in the accessibility and use of the internet and digital technology across age groups, particularly so among younger age groups.

This project is geared toward collecting and analysing the experiences of university-going students, especially women in the age group of 18 to 25 years, with respect to cyber-stalking and cyber-bullying. The project is working with the premise that cyber-stalking and cyber-bullying are rapidly growing phenomena, that a bulk of the victims are women

students, and that official reporting of the matter is often minimal. In this light, an online survey has been widely circulated among Delhi University students.

As part of the analysis of experiences recorded, the team aims to comment on the existing legislation against cyber-stalking and cyber-bullying and, furthermore, the accessibility of legal redress to young women. While looking to highlight and contribute to ongoing discussions on model practices for online interactions, this project also seeks to explore the debate on the importance of stronger laws balanced against the pitfalls associated with draconian surveillance of digital spaces by government bodies.

The project group comprises of Grace Xess of second year, Sociology Honours, Pawni Khurana of second year, Mathematics Honours, Simran Rai of second year, English Honours, and Shaivie Sharma of second year, History Honours.

Kriti Sarin and Shambhavi Mishra of first year, Political Science Honours are also contributors to this project mentored by Dr. Maya John, Faculty Convenor of WSC, and Ms. Aneesha Puri, Staff Advisor, WSC.

Project 3 Documenting Alumni Models

A team of scholars at the WSC has undertaken the Alumni Research Project, which aims at documenting some life stories of alumni of Jesus and Mary College, who have made noteworthy contributions in society. Since the college was started in 1968, the team strives to collate information on such alumni from batches across different decades. Through this project, the WSC wishes to provide an insight into the experiences of alumni who have been contributing towards important social issues. The attempt is not to merely trace career graphs of our hardworking and socially conscious alumni, but through their life stories—the recollections of their college days, their experiences of young adult life in the metropolis, their struggles against discrimination and inequality in society, etc.—to reconstruct the important trajectories within the larger unfolding gender dynamics of postcolonial Indian society.

The project would not only prove to be a much-needed platform for recognizing, highlighting and appreciating the hard work of countless women, but would also be a means of inspiring, educating and empowering current students of JMC to take up genuine social issues. The team has already begun the process of identifying, tracing and contacting alumni in the field of school and university education, media and journalism, social work, law, administration, politics, etc.

The project group includes Vedika Sharma of second year, Sociology Honours, Kriti Sarin, Navdha Malhotra and Shambhavi Mishra of first year, Political Science Honours, and Sanskriti Bhandari of first year, Sociology Honours. It is mentored by Dr. Maya John, Faculty Convenor of WSC.

Project 4

‘दिल्ली-6’ की उद्यमशील महिलाओं की स्थिति पर आधारित परियोजना कार्य

यह कार्य डॉ. अनुपमा श्रीवास्तव (WSC Staff Advisor) के निर्देशन में किया गया है। इन्हीं का सुझाव था, जिसे पूजा और नंदिनी रॉय (हिन्दी ऑनर्स, तृतीय वर्ष) ने भली भाँति क्रियान्वित कर इस प्रोजेक्ट के स्वरूप को साकार किया। सबसे पहले विचार विमर्श किया और इन्होंने मिलकर टीम तैयार की। टीमके साथ डॉ. अनुपमा की मीटिंग हुई और उसमें कुछ बिन्दुओं को रेखांकित कर के कुछ वस्तुनिष्ठ प्रश्नों को तैयार किया गया। फिर फील्ड-वर्क का प्लान किया गया,

जिसमें कुछ वास्तविक किरदारों के साथ मुलाकात करके प्रोजेक्ट से सम्बंधित कुछ ज़रूरी बातों को और भी विस्तार से जानना तय किया गया।

इस प्रोजेक्ट का उद्देश्य चांदनी चौक की मुस्लिम महिलाओं की आजीविका के बारे में जानना, इसमें उनके परिवार और समाज की भूमिका और उनके संघर्ष को समझना है। किस प्रकार से वे अपनी आजीविका से उनको और उनके

परिवारों को क्या लाभ पहुंचा पा रही हैं, उनकी रोजी रोटी के अन्य स्रोत क्या हैं आदि। इसके अलावा प्रोजेक्ट के लिए हमने इंटरनेट और अन्य माध्यमों से भी कोर्स वर्क किया। कुछ महत्वपूर्ण तथ्यों को एकत्र किया। शोध कार्य को हमने गुणात्मक प्रविधि से पूरा करने का प्रयास किया है।

भारत में मुस्लिम धर्म की दुनिया की तीसरी सबसे बड़ी आबादी बसती है। यह अध्ययन भारत के संदर्भ में मुस्लिम अल्पसंख्यक महिलाओं द्वारा अनुभव की गई सामाजिक आर्थिक स्थिति की तुलनात्मक जांच करता है। भारत की कुल आबादी में 14.2% की हिस्सेदारी के साथ, देश के सबसे बड़े अल्पसंख्यक वर्ग से मुसलमान हैं। अनुसंधान के एक उभरते निकाय से पता चलता है कि समाज के विभिन्न क्षेत्रों के लोगों द्वारा सामाजिक स्तर पर सामाजिक विकास और गुणवत्ता के स्तर को धर्म के अनुसार अलग-अलग माना जाता है। 'आर्थिक संसाधनों के लिए महिलाओं की पहुंच धर्म के साथ भी होती है। भारत में मुस्लिम समुदाय का जीवन स्तर अन्य धार्मिक समुदायों की तुलना में खराब है। घरेलू निर्णय लेने में मुस्लिम महिलाओं की भागीदारी सीमित है। मुस्लिम पुरुष सार्वजनिक जीवन में महिलाओं की भागीदारी की नियंत्रित करते हैं और उनकी सामाजिक गतिशीलता को प्रतिबंधित करते हैं। कई मुस्लिम परिवारों में महिलाओं को प्राथमिक आर्थिक एजेंट नहीं माना जाता है। ये कृत्य महिलाओं की आर्थिक आत्मनिर्भरता को प्रभावित करते हैं।' मुस्लिम महिलाओं को भारतीय नागरिकों के रूप में सामाजिक आर्थिक गतिविधियों में पूर्ण और समान भागीदारी सुनिश्चित होनी चाहिए।

योजनानुसार हमने कुछ महिलाओं के इंटरव्यू (साक्षात्कार) लिए। हम सुहासना सफिना बुटीक के दुकान में गये उस दुकान की मालकिन का नाम सफिना(35) है। यह बिहार के भागलपुर से है। इनके घर में चार सदस्य रहते हैं। वह नौ साल से अपना बुटीक सभाल रही है। इनका काम स्वरोजगार है। इनकी आमदनी 1.25 लाख है। इनकी रोजाना की आमदनी होती है। चांदनीचौक में चितली कब्र के व्होलसेलर्स यह अपना रॉ-मटेरियल लेती है जिसका इस्तेमाल वह खूबसूरत परिधानों को बनाने में करती हैं। साथ ही वे

अपना कपड़े सिलने का बुटीक सफलतापूर्वक चला रही है। इनकी जल्दी शादी हो जाने की वजह से इन्हें फैशन-डिजाइनिंग करने में भी दिक्कतें आयी, जैसे इनको परिवार को सभालना एवं तब तक उनकी एक बेटी भी हो चुकी थी तो उसे संभालना और उसे स्कूल छोड़ना खुद कालेज जाना। इनके पति सबसे बड़े सहायक थे। इनकी हर तरह से मदद की फैशन-डिजाइनिंग कोर्स के लिए इनके भाई एवं ससुर ने आर्थिक रूप से मदद की थी। इनके परिवार में थोड़ी सी बंदिशें थी, जैसे मॉडर्न कपड़े नहीं पहन सकती थी एवं बाहर जाने के लिए पाबंदी थी। पढ़ाई में कोई रोकटोक नहीं था। इनके परिवार में औरतों को इज्जत दी जाती है। इनका मानना है कि महिलाओं को परिवार के साथ चलकर आगे बढ़ना चाहिए पर एक दायरे में रह कर।

दूसरा इंटरव्यू हमने शाहीन बेगम (54) का किया जो बल्लीमारान के राबिया स्कूल के पास के एक घर में Oriflame में वितरक का काम करती है। इनके परिवार में चार सदस्य रहते हैं। इनको काम काते हुए 22 साल हो गये। इनकी आमदनी 6000 से 9000 तक है। इनके परिवार में भी कोई बंदिश नहीं थी। यह अपने बल-बुते लगभग 22 सालों से इस काम को करते हुए न केवल वे अपने पैरों पर खड़ी हैं, बल्कि अपने परिवार की आर्थिक सहायता भी कर रही है।



तीसरा इंटरव्यू हमने मेहविश (34) का लिया जो बल्लीमारान कि एक-एक तंग गली में छोटे से पर अत्यधिक सफल ब्यूटीपार्लर को चला रही है। इनके परिवार में चार सदस्य है। इनकी आमदनी 10,000 है। यह लड़कियों को मुफ्त में मेकअप करना सिखाती है। इनको यह करते हुए तीन साल हो गये है। वह अपने घर को आर्थिक तरह से भी मदद करती है। यह अपनी एक अलग पहचान बनाना चाहती है। पूरे परिवार ने इनकी मदद की। इनके अलावा हमने कई और उद्यमशील महिलाओं से बातचीत की जिसका विस्तृत वर्णन हमारे प्रोजेक्ट में प्रस्तुत हुआ है कि किस प्रकार से यह महिलाएँ अपने-अपने हुनर में दक्ष हैं और उसी हुनर के सहारे वह न केवल अपने पैरों पर खड़ी है बल्कि तमाम चुनौतियों का सामना करते हुए अपने परिवार का भी पालन पोषण कर रही हैं।

* * * *

POSTER COLLAGE

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE,
JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE

PRESENTS A
**CERTIFICATE
COURSE MODULE**
ON

**GENDER ANALYSIS OF
THE LOCKDOWN**

SESSION III:
**INDIA'S LOCKDOWN AND ITS
RAMIFICATIONS ON RURAL WOMEN**

CONDUCTED BY
PROFESSOR JAYANTI KAJALE
(PROFESSOR AT GOKHALE INSTITUTE OF POLITICS
AND ECONOMICS, PUNE,
SPECIALIST IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS)

DATE: 18TH NOV, 2020
(WEDNESDAY)
TIME: 12:45 - 2 PM
VENUE: GOOGLE MEET

THE LINK WILL BE CIRCULATED AFTER REGISTRATION.

FOR ANY QUERIES, CONTACT -


DHWANI JAISINGH (PRESIDENT): +91 99100 73735
RIYA ARORA (VICE PRESIDENT): +91 80544 56866

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE
JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE

PRESENTS
A CERTIFICATE COURSE

LGBTQIA+
WRITINGS FROM INDIA

MEMORY OF LIGHT:
WRITING LESBIAN HISTORICAL FICTION
SESSION II CONDUCTED BY



Prof. Ruth Vanita
*Professor of English, University of Minnesota and author of several books
including Same Sex Love in India: Reading Your Literature and History and
Memory of Light*

6 FEBRUARY 2021
9:30 AM - 10:30 AM IST
GOOGLE MEET

For further queries, contact
Dhwani Jaisingh: 9910073735 Riya Arora: 8054456866

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE,
JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE

PRESENTS A
**CERTIFICATE
COURSE MODULE**
ON

**GENDER ANALYSIS OF
THE LOCKDOWN**

SESSION I:
**CONDITIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF
WOMEN: LOCK-DOWN AND BEYOND**

CONDUCTED BY
DR. MAYA JOHN
(ASST. PROFESSOR AT JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE,
LABOUR HISTORIAN AND SOCIAL ACTIVIST)

DATE: 6TH NOV, 2020 (FRIDAY)
TIME: 12:40 - 2 PM
VENUE: GOOGLE MEET

THE LINK WILL BE CIRCULATED AFTER REGISTRATION.

FOR ANY QUERIES, CONTACT -


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RIYA ARORA (VICE PRESIDENT): +91 80544 56866

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE
JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE

PRESENTS
A CERTIFICATE COURSE

LGBTQIA+
WRITINGS FROM INDIA

SESSION I
CONDUCTED BY
Ms. Kashish Dua
(Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Jesus and Mary College)



4 FEBRUARY 2021
6:00PM - 8:00PM
GOOGLE MEET

For further queries, contact

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE
JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE

PRESENTS
AN INTERACTIVE SESSION

**NARRATIVES OF GENDER
AND SEXUALITY:
COMING OUT**

BY



Sonal Giani
(LGBTQ+ Activist and Filmmaker)

13 NOVEMBER 2020
4:30PM - 6:30PM
GOOGLE MEET

Join the Meet: <https://meet.google.com/whw-tdm-ayw>

For further queries, contact
Dhwani Jaisingh: 9910073735 Riya Arora: 8054456866

Women's Studies Centre, Jesus and Mary College
in collaboration with
Women's Development Cell, Miranda House

PRESENTS A WORKSHOP ON
**THE 2021 BUDGET FROM A
GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

SPEAKER FOR SESSION I:
Prof. Ritu Dewan
(Founder-Member of the first Centre of Gender
Economics in Asia & Vice President of the Indian
Society of Labour Economics)

SPEAKER FOR SESSION 2:
Ms. Shruti Ambast
(Senior Policy Analyst, Centre for Budget and
Governance Accountability)

DATE: 19 MARCH 2021, FRIDAY
TIME: SESSION I- 12:40PM-2:00PM
SESSION II-4:30PM-6:00 PM

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER.

FOR ANY QUERIES, CONTACT:


DHWANI JAISINGH (PRESIDENT, WDC JMC): 9910073735
ADITI BHARDWAJ (PRESIDENT, WDC MDI): 8424890394

Women's Studies Centre
Jesus and Mary College

presents
an interactive session
on
**NARRATIVES OF
GENDER AND SEXUALITY:
THE TRANS ACT AND ITS DISCONTENTS**

Speaker:
Zainab Patel
Director of Inclusion and Diversity KPMG, India

Date: 26 October 2020, Monday
Time: 6:00pm-7:30pm
Platform: Google Meet




In case of any queries, contact
Dhwani Jaisingh (President): 9910073735
Riya Arora (Vice President): 8054456866

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE
JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI

PRESENTS
**GENDER AND CASTE:
RETHINKING FEMINISM**

A WORKSHOP BY



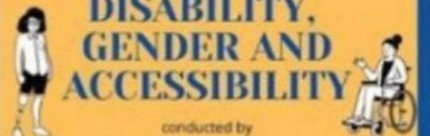
MS. CYNTHIA STEPHEN
(Dalle Ass't, Writer, Social Policy Researcher
and an Independent Journalist)

FRIDAY, 20TH NOVEMBER 2020
4:30 - 6:00 PM
GOOGLE MEET

For further queries, contact
Dhwani Jaisingh: 9910073735
Riya Arora: 8054456866

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE
JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF DELHI

in collaboration with
RISING FLAME
presents an interactive workshop on
**DISABILITY,
GENDER AND
ACCESSIBILITY**



conducted by
Srinidhi Raghavan
Co-Lead Programs of Rising Flame,
Sexuality and Women's Disability Rights' Activist,
Researcher

DATE: 17th February
TIME: 4:30-6:00 pm

POSTER COLLAGE

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE

BRINGS TO YOU

A PRESENTATION FOLLOWED
BY A SCREENING OF THE
SHORT MOVIE

READY, SET, GIRL

ON 03.10.2020 (SATURDAY)
AT 11:30AM
TO CELEBRATE WOMEN'S
SPORTS WEEK

For any queries, contact:

Dhwani Jaisingh (President) 99100 73735
Riya Arora (Vice-President) 80544 56866

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE
x
PANORAMA, JMC

SHORT MOVIE SCREENING
AND DISCUSSION

Devi

Directed by Priyanka Banerjee

Starring: Neha, Shruti, Sneha, Raha, Shreya, Sneha
Eakranta, Rakta Barua, Shikha Singhrao

DATE: 16 SEPT, WEDNESDAY
TIME: 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm
PLACE: GOOGLE MEET

Attendees are requested to join through their
Institutional @Site Accounts.

FOR ANY QUERIES, CONTACT:

Dhwani Jaisingh: 9910073735 Diya: 9718784738
Riya Arora: 8054456866 Payal: 98502 03347

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE,
JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE
presents a lecture on

**DALIT WOMEN'S LIVES
MATTER**

by
Ms. Bhasha Singh
(Senior Journalist and Writer,
currently associated with NewsClick,
as Consulting Editor)

LINK WILL ONLY BE SHARED UPON REGISTRATION

Date : 7th October,
Wednesday
Time : 1 - 2 PM
Venue : Google Meet

Dhwani Jaisingh (President)
+91 9910073735
Riya Arora (Vice President)
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WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE
JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
PRESENTS
A CERTIFICATE COURSE
ON
PUBLIC HEALTH AND GLOBAL CARE CHAINS

SESSION 2
Conducted By
Dr. Panchali Ray
Independent Researcher and Author of: *Politics of Precarity: Gendered Subjects & Health Care Industry in Contemporary Kolkata.*

ON THE TOPIC
THE LABOUR OF CARE:
THE PERSISTENCE OF GENDER AND CASTE IN THE SERVICE ECONOMY

FRIDAY, 22nd JANUARY 2021
4:30 PM - 6:00 PM
GOOGLE MEET

Women's Studies Centre,
Jesus and Mary College
presents
a workshop on
**Inculcating Body
Positive Behaviour**

Date: Monday, 2 November 2020
Time: 4:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Our speaker:
Dr. Priya Bhatnagar

MY BODY
MY RULES

Women's Study Centre
Jesus and Mary College
Commemorates
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
and
JAGRITI 2021

INAUGURAL LECTURE
by: KIRTI SINGH
leading women's rights lawyer and activist
Topic: Women's rights and the non observance of
the law and the Constitution.
Date: 5 March 2021(Friday)
Time: 12:40PM to 2:00PM

NATIONAL STUDENT SEMINAR
Presenting 15 student papers from across universities in India
Theme: Gendered Realities in Times of
Growing Authoritarianism
Date: 5 March 2021(Friday)
Time: 4:30 PM onwards

Click here for the Registration link

For further details, contact:
Dhwani Jaisingh: 9910073735 Riya Arora: 8054456866

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE,
JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE
in collaboration with the
INTERNAL COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE (ICC)
presents a
WORKSHOP
on
**Sexual Harassment in the
Workplace**
(with special emphasis on Internships)

conducted by
**Ms. Uttanishi Agarwal and
Ms. Ashita Alag**
from One Future Collective

Date: 21st October, Wednesday
Time: 4:30 - 6:00
Venue: Google Meet

For any queries,
contact:
Dhwani Jaisingh (President):
+91 99100 73735
Riya Arora (Vice President):
+91 80544 56866

Jesus and Mary College
Department of History
in collaboration with
WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE

COMMEMORATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
WITH A SPECIAL LECTURE BY
Urvashi Butalia

An Indian feminist writer, publisher and activist, she is known for her
work in the women's movement of India, as well as for authoring path-
breaking books like 'The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the
Partition of India' and 'Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir'

TOPIC: A History Of Our Own: Mapping Women's
Movements and Feminisms in India

DATE: 10th March 2021
(Wednesday)
TIME: 12:45 pm - 2:00 pm (IST)
Click here for registration

VRISHI MONGIA DAISY NEHTA Dr. BIKHARJAN Dr. MAYA JOHN
President Vice President Convener, Co-Convener,
997812419 886094842 History Association History Association

Women's Studies Centre
Jesus and Mary College
University of Delhi
PRESENTS AN
**INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP ON
DIALOGUES WITH FEMINISTS ABROAD
CRITICAL QUESTIONS AND
REFLECTIONS**

This workshop is anchored on interactive sessions with women activists
abroad. We aim to steer the discussion in the direction of examining the
limitations of mainstream feminisms that speak of liberation in terms
that are often divested of the realities of class, race, region, religious-
minority status, etc. The dangers of co-optation of many feminist
endeavours are amply indicated in the paradigmatic shift from the
concerns centered on socio-economic redistribution towards struggles
for recognition that have pushed to the margins the more
transformative remedies for justice. Drawing on their
experiences with political work, the invited women
activists will be asked to share their views on the
current positioning of the working-class woman's
question within the women's movement, the
co-optation of mainstream feminisms within
the capitalist order, among other critical issues.

DATES & TIME:
12TH FEBRUARY (FRIDAY), 4:30 PM (IST)
AND
13TH FEBRUARY (SATURDAY), 5:30 PM (IST)

Reflections, Recollections and Review



Towards Casting Gender: Reflections on the “Workshop on Caste and Gender”

Dr. Jessy K. Philip

Asst. Prof., Dept. of Sociology, JMC, and WSC Staff Advisor

The Women’s Study Centre, JMC, believes in engagement with various strands of feminist thought and consequent refinement of political practice on the ground. It is my observation that while students engage with critical thought emerging from the global north, their understanding of indigenous radical alternatives has been far from satisfactory. This state of WSC interventions has been particularly a cause for concern, as the Hindu right wing has begun a project of reorienting gender relations within the country by engaging public opinion, right wing public sphere and various institutions of the state. A socially salient understanding of gender relations as it is shaped by other social institutions peculiar to India, and the ways in which political practice can reshape them, therefore, is of crucial significance in contemporary times. Gender as an ideological system is shaped by other systems of social value, such as, in India, caste. This is clear from the difference in the response to sexual violence according to the caste position of the victim and the accused, as seen from countless cases such as the Hathras or the Hyderabad rape case. It is important that students are able to locate themselves in these contemporary events and orient themselves to contemporary political challenges to gender equality.

With this objective in mind, I organized a three-part “Workshop on Caste and Gender”. The different sessions of the workshop aimed to locate political practice within India at the intersection of feminist thought elsewhere as well as social structures here. Thus, sessions were designed to orient students to locate Dalit

feminist interventions within global feminism and to comprehend the ways in which these interventions can change concepts developed globally. An attempt was made also to orient students to the ways in which gender is structured by the unique institution of caste in India. Lastly, the aim of the workshop was to demonstrate to students the divergent political practice that can emerge from different conceptions of gender.

The caste question in India has often been framed as a question of social justice and livelihood, but the ways in which caste structures personhood has received lesser attention. The workshop on caste and gender explored the relationship between sexual and social reproduction, caste inequality and Brahmanical patriarchy. On the basis of such an understanding of the intersections between caste and gender, ways to organise political responses to gender inequality were discussed. The workshop raised questions on whether there could be an exclusive feminist or anti-caste politics considering the intersections between these two systems of inequality. Basing itself on the pioneering Ambedkarite analysis of the connections between caste endogamy and practices aimed at maintaining control over women’s sexuality and lives, Dalit feminists developed ideological differences with upper caste feminists on the issue of addressing and situating “caste” within the women’s movement. This workshop introduced students to Dalit feminist perspectives on transforming hierarchical inequalities of gender in Indian society.

Caste and Gender Workshop Sessions

The Workshop started with an inaugural lecture by Cynthia Stephen titled “Gender and Caste: Rethinking Feminism” on 20th November 2020. Cynthia Stephen is a Dalit activist, writer, social policy researcher, and an independent journalist. Her body of work includes leadership in several people’s initiatives for justice and women’s empowerment groups, among others, dealing with perspectives of women and girls from marginalised sections in India. She introduced students to her personal stories of caste discrimination. She elaborated on her work within the feminist movement during the path breaking decades of feminist activism between 1970-1990. She described in detail the emergence of a Dalit feminist viewpoint from the experience of feminist engagements with the question of caste. In the light of her work with the government as a Director of the MahilaSamakhya in Karnataka, she talked at length of practical interventions in gender issues from anti-caste points of view and elaborated on the theoretical refinement required in the conceptions of “woman” and “man”.

The second session of the workshop was handled by me. Titled “Caste and Indian Feminism”, this session conducted on 22nd February introduced students to the concept of Brahmanical patriarchy. I discussed the ways in which caste regimes of gender dictate the experience of gender for women belonging to different castes in Indian society.

The last session was conducted by Nikita Sonavane on 26nd February 2021. Nikita Sonavane is a researcher, advocate and Co-founder of the Bhopal-based Criminal Justice and Police Accountability Project, an organisation focused on holding the criminal justice system and the police accountable for targeting marginalised communities. Her session was titled “Rethinking Feminist Interventions in Law from an Anti-Caste Perspective” She elaborated on the ways in which the logic of Brahmanical patriarchy finds its way into legal reasonings. She also examined feminist legal interventions in landmark court cases such as the Mathura rape case. She described the erasure of the caste logic which nurtures sexual attacks on women from Bahujan communities in the mainstream feminist discourse on sexual harassment. She also urged students to think beyond law for the reform of gender relations.

Looking back, the engagement of students revealed the current gaps in their knowledge and possible ways in which these could be addressed in future. While students could comprehend caste as a social system, they were unable to easily identify instances of caste and gender intertwining. By the last session of the workshop, however, an understanding of the varied policy outcomes due to different feminist positions could impress itself on students. All in all, I feel workshops that teach concepts with legal cases and testimonials are more effective for furthering student understanding and engagements with the caste regime of gender in India.

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Reflecting on “Disability, Gender and Accessibility”

Vyushti Bhattacharya
BA Hons. History III Year

The talk by Srinidhi Raghavan on “Gender, Sexuality and Accessibility” was particularly eye-opening for me. It brought to light the intersectionality of disability, gender and sexuality, which is often overlooked by people, in addition to other issues, both trivial and significant.

Srinidhi Raghavan started the talk by showing us a TEDx talk by Stella Young. Young spoke about the association of achievers and disability, and “inspiration porn”. Many disabled people are congratulated and promoted for doing extraordinary things that are really quite ordinary for non-disabled people. Non-disabled people objectify disabled people to gain perspective on their situation, which makes them feel they could have had it worse. She questions such inspiration porn and asks why the world is not simply made more accessible for disabled people.

Srinidhi pointed out the world is not designed to be accessible for everyone and spoke about her own experience with booking hotels and having to constantly confirm the provisions they have for disabled people. This reminded me of something I had read about the world being designed for white men. For example, airbags in cars and bullet proof vests are made with white male proportions in mind, in effect making them potentially life-threatening for differently proportioned women and men.

Even social media, which is assumed to be one of the most democratic methods of communication, is not designed for disabled people. Visually challenged people can access only about 10% of the content online due to the rise of infographics and pictographic material that caters to people with complete vision. It was a privilege check for me to learn that something I use every day was inaccessible to so many people.

Srinidhi Raghavan told us there is a belief amongst people that disabled people cannot be sexual beings and are unlovable. She recalled a story of someone she knew who was told by her parents that she is not desirable due to her disability. On one end of the scale are body image issues that such views would precipitate, and on the other is ignoring, or worse, discrediting instances of sexual violence and trauma suffered by disabled people. The trauma then, of sexual assault or violation, would be exponential for the disabled. If society believes they cannot be desired, who will believe their accounts of assault and stand with them? How easily are their experiences brushed under the carpet? How many have suffered like this and will continue to suffer?

A point that has stayed with me since the talk has been about intersectionality. When one thinks of disabled people, the assumption is of a heterosexual cisgender individual. But Srinidhi Raghavan reminded us that disability is not limited to only some social groups and can affect anyone. Someone can be a disabled non-binary individual, a disabled Dalit or tribal, or a disabled non-heterosexual. Intersectionality is prevalent but needs to be recognized and acknowledged.

We have to strive to make our spaces more accessible for disabled people by thinking differently and being more accommodating in our thinking. We have to listen to them, support them, and stop assuming we know what they want or need. We have to stop classifying people into various categories and accept that such categories are unhelpful beyond a point – individuals have multiple identities which may or may not include having disabilities. The session with Srinidhi Raghavan underlined for me how in so many ways we as a society have to do so much better than what we have managed thus far.

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Identity, Inclusivity, and Knowledge: Thoughts on the Course “LGBTQIA+ Writings from India”

Shreya Ghosh

BA Hons. English III Year

The Women’s Studies Centre conducted a certificate course series under the theme of “LGBTQIA+ Writings from India” from the 4th to the 8th of February 2021, covering a wide range of texts temporally and in terms of genre. The series was efficiently conducted and instrumental in creating a space for learning and conversation regarding gender, sexuality, and identity. Not only was it a success within this particular academic session, it was also one of the crucial milestones in the centre’s work over the last few years, parallel to its exponentially growing size and activity. It involved extensive participation and recognized different perspectives, leading to an enriching experience over its three sessions.

The introductory session with Ms. Kashish Dua problematized and challenged normative definitions of sex. It brought historical life-writings, poetry, and other texts (such as the *Baburnama*, *rekhti* poetry, and “Lihaaf”) to the fore, exploring what these say about gender and sexuality. Even well-known texts like the *Kamasutra* were discussed. It became clear that fluid and wide-ranging notions of pleasure and sex exist in this ancient text. The session helped raise pertinent questions about how different sexualities and gender identities have been inscribed into writing and literature in India since the distant past, and how these realities have been deliberately and politically glossed over or obscured.

Moreover, it became evident how a language inclusive of different kinds of identities has been in dynamic existence and development.

The second session with Professor Ruth Vanita entered the more specific realm of lesbian historical fiction. The focal point of the session was Professor Vanita’s book, *Memory of Light*. This led to further discussion on women’s fiction (such as Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*), the relation between text and various forms of desire, and the subversion of dominant narratives.

The third and final session with Sharif D. Rangnekar was specifically about the need for queer life-narratives from India. This session not only involved the writer’s perspective on his own experiences and work, *Straight to Normal: My Life as a Gay Man*, but also highlighted that although a lot more is to be done in order to create an egalitarian world in terms of gender and sexuality, crucial changes have already occurred and are continuing to take place.

Each of the three sessions was highly informative and interactive. The audience’s questions provided deeper insights into the various dimensions of the broader theme. Through this series, a space of inclusivity, plurality, and dialogue was created. The readings and resources that were circulated promptly and regularly made the space an academic one as well, where the audience

learnt not only from the speakers but also from each other. Personally, the series created a point of extensive discussion among me and my friends, and completely overhauled certain conditioned and latent ways of thinking about love and sexuality.

I was deeply impacted by what I saw as a necessary and radical redefinition of sex. It was pointed out that the conventional definition is restrictive and centred on an active-passive gender binary, delegitimizing and diminishing every form of sexual activity apart from it. This struck me as important because it helped me rethink something I had been taking for granted. It reminded me of something I have been coming to terms with lately: how seemingly commonsensical definitions are expressions

of power and therefore actually political. Another point that I found highly illuminating, partially connected to the previous one, concerned the role language plays in both expressions of power and resistance to the same. Thinking about identity and language reminded me to take note of not only the distortions and concealments, but also and most importantly the critical potential of even day-to-day conversations. Overall, this series took me further in my attempt to understand the politics, inclusions, and exclusions of my own context better. Bringing this knowledge and understanding with myself in my daily life has truly broadened the horizons of my mind and vision.

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Looking Back on the Session on “Consent and Building Healthy Boundaries”

Mannat Lehal
BAP Psychology + Sociology I Year

On 19th January 2021, the Women’s Studies Centre, Jesus and Mary College, conducted a session on “Consent and Building Healthy Boundaries”, in collaboration with Pratisandhi Foundation, which is a non-profit organization based in New Delhi working towards sexual health and education among the Indian youth.

The resource persons for this event were Ms. Sanskriti Baxi, the Head of Training and Research and Development at Pratisandhi who creates awareness and has conducted workshops for over 2000 students and Ms. Aanya Wig, volunteer at Pratisandhi.

India is making huge progress in terms of science and technology, but when it comes to topics such as sexuality, consent, personal boundaries, etc., our society is still conservative. It wants to brush problems concerning these matters under the carpet and pretend as if they do not exist. We still do not understand that it is extremely important to address these issues since they impact one’s mental health if not addressed, leading to a loss of trust in self and others.

Ms. Aanya Wig threw some light on what personal boundaries mean, i.e., a set of subjective guidelines and limits. She described how boundaries help us in forming our individuality and also touched

upon the role of socio-cultural paradigms in coloring our perception of legitimate, healthy and necessary boundaries.

Ms. Baxi highlighted the key essentials for forming a boundary, namely, safety, accountability, trust and support. She added that “setting boundaries is the first means to self-care”. She also helped us in understanding the distinction between a healthy and an unhealthy boundary and highlighted the importance of creating a healthy boundary for each individual.

She went on to identify the barriers to creating healthy boundaries. According to her, we generally hesitate to hurt other people’s feelings and due to this reluctance, we let other people invade our boundaries. Our inability to say “no” to people stems from the fear of looking bad in the eyes of society. But we need to understand the imperative to take charge of our own selves, to take control of our lives, since, ultimately, we are, and need to be accountable for ourselves, our health, our safety, our happiness.

Ms. Baxi explained how when someone invades our personal space, breaching the boundaries created by us, it has a negative impact on our mental health. If we don’t protest the violation of our boundaries when it occurs, we, in effect,

suppress our own voice and self. Over time this results in an accumulation of negative energy inside us which eventually consumes us. When personal boundaries are invaded, it is often experienced as traumatic and/or deeply disturbing and this can have long term adverse impact on our lives. Thus, Ms. Baxi reiterated the need to create healthy boundaries to define our own personal space, a space that is safe and which no one can access without our consent.

This segment of the session ended with the attendees analysing three case studies to better understand how to create healthy boundaries.

The next segment discussed what was meant by “consent”. Ms. Baxi highlighted the role of media and Bollywood in influencing the discourse on consent through songs such as “*Tera peecha karun toh rokneka nahi*”. Given how much influence media and cinematic representations have in shaping social practices, she stressed the importance of responsible depictions.

The acronym VISER (Voluntary, Informed, Sober and Specific, Enthusiastic and Reversible) was used by Ms. Baxi to explain the key features of what constitutes consent. She emphasized how the absence of even one of the factors would mean a “No” in any situation. Ms. Baxi concluded by reiterating the need to unlearn old, unhelpful and sexist notions about consent

and boundaries, and work towards our own well-being and safety by adopting and maintaining healthy boundaries.

I was very impressed with the session for talking about matters that impact our lives so powerfully and yet are ignored socially. I feel women have to take some of the social and moral responsibility for the sorry state of affairs prevalent in our country today when it comes to understanding issues such as healthy personal boundaries and consent. In families, mothers and grandmothers invariably silence young girls when they ask questions about sexuality, rape, boundaries, consent or even menstruation. Even when men violate a woman’s boundaries and assault her, other women blame the victim instead of standing up for, and with, her. This lack of solidarity with their own kind is the reason why women are still not able to shatter the glass ceiling and assert their constitutionally guaranteed rights as full and equal citizens of this country.

Women must commit to change this scenario. We must be the pioneers who empower young girls with knowledge about what constitutes consent and the necessity and ways to build and maintain healthy personal boundaries. For our own safety and well-being, we must never be afraid to say “no” when our personal boundaries are threatened physically or via manipulative coercion and disrespect.

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Takeaways from the “Sexual Harassment in the Workplace” Workshop

Divjot Kaur

BA Hons. English III Year

The Women’s Studies Centre, Jesus and Mary College, held a workshop on “Sexual Harassment in the Workplace” (with a special emphasis on Internships) in collaboration with the Internal Complaints Committee of the college. This virtual event was conducted by Ms. Uttanshi Agarwal (Senior Program Officer, FemJustice Legal Center) and Ms. Ashita Alag (Senior Program Officer, Knowledge and Advocacy). The workshop delved into the legality of seeking redressal – the what, how and where of justice for sexual harassment faced at the workplace. Through a well-researched bibliography, the resource persons presented facts and figures to challenge the traditional notion that law is a neutral, objective and rational set of rules, unaffected by the perspective of those who wield power in societies.

The session was enriching and empowering as it presented real and concrete mechanisms and systems that exist for seeking aid as a victim of sexual harassment. As a 20-year-old, internships and fresher jobs is now a prime preoccupation of mine and to quite an extent an unavoidable one too. The workplace is where students as young as I intend to actively test the practical application of our education. Our intention while applying for internships is quite often to get hands-on learning experience from what we presume to be skilled professionals already established in the job. It’s a space where feeling safe is of utmost importance, as is true for any other space. One should be able to feel safe no matter where one is. This is just a basic necessity that I wish

were the reality of our lives in India, but alas it is not. And herein lies the significance of awareness and the action-oriented work that associations like FemJustice do.

Law (as a culture, system and as an institution) is a reality that women and non-binary people face and engage with. It is essential for them to have a platform to gain knowledge and tangible help in understanding and utilizing the law to transform their lives. The workshop addressed the social, cultural and political contexts that shape the legal system.

We left that evening equipped with far more than we previously knew about laws and policies that directly affected us. Considering the milieu of compromised integrity and sexist mindsets (whether it be within our government and its extended machinery, or the private corporate sector that routinely turns a blind eye to what doesn’t benefit it), I think it is becoming more and more important that we equip ourselves with knowledge and tools that can play a positive role in seeking appropriate legal redress for any act of repression or violence of which we may be a target. I was, thus, grateful for this session organised by the WSC and ICC. Through the resource persons invited I was also able to discover the site of one future collective which is basically a holistic repository for anyone who wants to be more aware and engaged in matters pertaining to gender and law. Overall, the workshop was a great experience; I’d say it had very real impact on many who attended it.

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Impressions from the Session on “Civil and Criminal Law with Respect to Crimes against Women”

Jessica Shroti

BA Hons. History II Year

The session on “Civil and Criminal Law with Respect to Crimes against Women” was a WSC Certificate Course Module on Gender and Law conducted by Audrey D’Mello (from MAJLIS, a Forum for Women’s Rights Discourse and Legal Initiatives) on 28th October 2020. It was an interactive session. Ms. D’Mello began with asking crucial questions about the issues that concern us as women in our personal life, the effectiveness of the laws in place and their accessibility. Along with talking about the relevance of the various laws in place, Ms. D’Mello discussed the means through which we can access and implement these laws. She pushed us to think more critically about the laws that are made specifically for women. For example, she spoke about laws and provisions pertaining to dowry prevention, the prohibition of sexual harassment at the workplace, special seats for women in buses and metro, etc. In doing so, she focused on the social paradigms that propel the need for certain laws, on what the laws say on particular subjects, as well as on the implementation successes and failures of legal provisions in society.

The idea of equality was also stressed on. We looked at how feminists and other marginalised sections of society like Dalits, etc., are attacked by the dominant discourse which constantly reminds them that by having access to special laws, reservations, special seats in buses or all-women educational institutions, they have “violated” the concept of equality. The

assumption of the dominant discourse is that equality means equal treatment of everyone in the society. Women, in turn, find it difficult to defend the questions related to special laws and provisions provided to them.

Ms. D’Mello explained that while our Constitution talks about equality which is enshrined in Article 14, we also have Article 15 (3). This latter constitutional provision recognizes that while the state guarantees equality to all citizens, there is a need to take into account sections in our society that have been marginalised for decades. Thus, emerges the need for special laws to empower them, to enable such segments to develop, and consequently, to have equal status in society. In this way, the state can make special laws for women and children. Similarly, Article 15 (4) provides for special legislation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The constitutional exceptions to equality allow women, for example, to have special laws for them. The provisions for special seats in buses, special reservation in college or specific laws against sexual harassment of women in the workplace stem from this context, and it is nothing but a right provided to women by the Constitution. Through such provisions, every woman gains access to the right *not* to feel like a second-class citizen in the country. This is an important right and women must not be apologetic about asserting it. All laws such as the law against domestic violence, rape, provisions for reservation, and labour laws made

especially for women like the Maternity Benefit Act draw from the logic of Article 15 (3).

The discussion then gravitated towards how it has always been easier to speak about sexual violence “out there” rather than domestic violence, or interpersonal violence that happens at home. Ms. D’Mello pushed us to consider whether there are enough laws to protect women from violence. She stressed that there are, indeed, enough laws already in place for women (such as the law against molestation, groping, voyeurism, all kinds of rape, stalking in public, harassment on the internet, cyber laws, child marriage law, domestic violence criminal law, the domestic violence civil law and Dowry Prohibition Act). She reiterated that with respect to crimes related to women, the country has enough laws that guarantee women their rights, and so there was actually no need for any *new* law. Ms. D’Mello cautioned us against the tendency of a new crop of activists to push for new special laws – a process that often culminates in the legislation demanded. In 1983, for example, for domestic violence we got 498A, i.e., for the first time a section was added in Indian Penal Code. Section 498A states that if any married woman faces any physical or mental abuse from her husband or his family members then it is a crime and there is a provision for punishment for three years. And this law related to domestic violence should technically cover marital rape, too (though we know that marital rape to this day fails to be recognized in court). However, using this example, Ms. D’Mello pressed home the point about the kind of ignorance and misinformation we tend to harbour with respect to the laws in place. To quote Ms. D’Mello, “We pick what is the buzz since

we keep on looking for what we do not have and forget what we have”.

Special laws like 498A, of course, do not per se do away with the structural constraints on women when it comes to accessing legal remedies. Large numbers of women are afraid to file complaints related to domestic violence because of the fear of the eventual breakdown of marriages and the lack of support from their natal family. This we know is because marrying is considered a priority and staying married is considered an even bigger priority, especially for women, thus creating a widespread belief in our society that marriage and family should be saved at all costs. We do not approach the law because we do not have a support structure. For the average woman, marriage and family are institutions that solely continue to offer protection, etc. Women are afraid to demand their rights because of the fear of being accused of being home-breakers, and so on and so forth.

Ironically, campaigning for special laws has worked in favour of patriarchal institutions and the state. We sadly have fed into the system and were ignorant or negligent about the requisite systemic demands to make. As a consequence, the law on domestic violence has seemingly facilitated a situation where the police literally have come to act as a local “goon”. Instead of filing the report for a cognizable offence and further investigating the matter, they have been known to try and effect compromises.

According to Ms. D’Mello, the only party benefiting from the same is ultimately the state, which employs more and more people to implement the laws related to women. It was in 1993 that the campaign for civil law on domestic violence emerged

in India. Throughout the 1990s we realized that the criminal law was not working and we need a civil law for domestic violence. It was finally in 2005 that the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act was introduced. In this act the definition of Domestic Violence changed: a new understanding of physical violence was spelt out and the scope of domestic violence was further expanded to include mental, emotional, sexual and economic abuse.

When such laws come into being, we become elated and believe the law will work. We do not demand wider systemic changes such as budgets being put in place; we do not become the watchdogs during the implementation of law on the ground, etc. Indeed, nobody wants to work on the ground level and everyone wants to be the policy-maker. Nobody wants to work closely with the victim, take her to the police station, and counsel her at each stage.

Talking about the organisation that she is a part of, i.e., MAJLIS, Ms. D'Mello stresses how the focus has been on recognizing that there are enough laws for women: that, in fact, what is needed are feminist lawyers who are practicing and ensuring that women can access their rights on the ground. As women lawyers, the team at MAJLIS works closely with victims, accompanying them to the police station, to the courts, arguing with judges, and helping the victims not only legally but also by providing them with social support so that they can come out of the abusive marriages that they may be trapped in.

Again, Ms. D'Mello cautioned that while most women are not raised with the education or other requisite exposure and skills so as to become independent, we ask victims of domestic violence to suddenly

become independent and live independently. In a way, this is setting women, these victims of domestic violence, and ourselves up for failure. To avoid this, it is imperative for us to read the Constitution for the fundamental rights enshrined in it. We owe this to the women we fight for and we owe it to ourselves.

Ms. D'Mello's concluding remarks touched upon the job of civil right activists, human rights activists, etc., to be responsible and vigilant watchdogs monitoring the system and bringing anything that is amiss to the attention of the courts. Accountability, exposure and documenting, she said, are the important measures needed for effective implementation of laws. For the implementational success of our available legal provisions, it was imperative for us to be part of the system, to get our hands dirty, and be located on the ground where the law operates.

I found the session to be thought provoking. It provided valuable insight into laws specific to women, to how the legal system functions, and how the notion of equality is often mis-conceptualized. The emphasis on domestic violence and how is it difficult for women in general to come out and speak about it because of the lurking fear of the collapse of their marriage was a very important point which is often forgotten when we exhort women to leave abusive marriages at the first incidence of violence. The session highlighted the areas where women really need to come together for change to happen on the ground. The session broadened our horizons of thinking on the intricacies of gender and law, empowering us with a very useful perspective.

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The Rainbow of Hope: WSC and Queer Politics

Kashish Dua

Asst. Prof., Dept. of English, JMC, and WSC Staff Advisor

The Women's Study Centre, JMC, has been working towards promoting, practicing and creating awareness about intersectional feminism. One of the steps in this direction has been discussions on the issues of non-normative gender and sexual identities. Building on our past endeavours of enabling platforms where this otherwise neglected issue gets addressed, in the year 2020-2021, I took the opportunity to organise two series of events that brought heteronormativity under a critical lens.

A superficial look at newspaper headlines on the repeal of Section 377 (2018) and the implementation of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 often gives a false impression about the "improved" conditions for people from the queer community. While the laws seem to be changing, a closer look can bring to light the many fissures and problems in these laws. The reality of the queer community either never makes it to mainstream news or gets lost in the small columns it is squeezed into. The cases of death of LGBTQIA+ people by suicide, everyday bullying, dropping-out of educational institutions and the violence that they experience in its many forms, have not reduced despite legal transformations.

It was important to make the students aware that issues such as these cannot get resolved without intervention at micro-levels. It is ultimately the society, including the space of one's own home, educational institution and workplace, that has the power to be both an agent of oppression and an agent of positive change. Unfortunately, matters of non-heteronormativity are struggling to become a part of school and

higher education curricula in India and this lack of conversation is feeding into the lack of awareness and widespread misinformation. This was the reason why the highly committed WSC team and I chose to work on subjects of gender and sexuality and attempted to initiate change through dialogue.

The first series that I planned under this larger project was titled "Narratives of Gender and Sexuality". The aim was to make students engage with and develop sensitivity towards the lived realities of the LGBTQIA+ community. One major aspect that the WSC core team and I tried to cater to was ensuring that the discussions in this series were led by people from the LGBTQIA+ community itself. This series included three events—screening and discussion of the short film "Boxed" (2020), a workshop on "Understanding Queerness: Creating Safe Spaces and Building Allyship", and an interactive session on "Coming Out".

I decided to begin the series with the screening of GAASH production's film "Boxed" because the suggestion of the film came from some of our own students who also happily agreed to contribute to its discussion through their own reading and experiences. I was hopeful that a film screening and an informal discussion would work as an ice-breaker and would set the tone for more focused reflections. The screening of "Boxed" and the workshop conducted by Ruhaan and Vihaan, trans activists from Nazariya: A Queer Feminist Resource Group primarily facilitated a dialogue on trans lives and issues. These two events made WSC members question,

interact and deliberate on varied aspects—from the fault lines of the Trans Act, to the need for non-gendered language and ways of being a good ally—in a much-needed safe online space. The most pertinent output of the film discussion that I moderated was the way we moved beyond academic jargon and theories to understand the more palpable lived realities of trans people from non-English speaking, Dalit Bahujan Adivasi backgrounds. I was content that the interactions that followed made the participants rethink the ways in which empowerment for the trans community should be envisioned and achieved.

I felt that the first series required a befitting conclusion where students could further shed their inhibitions and this was why I invited Sonal Giani, a noted LGBTQ+ Activist and Filmmaker, who is known for her ability to connect with young people. Her interactive session on “Coming Out” systematically dealt with the meaning, the process, the dos and don’ts of coming out. What I was particularly pleased with was the way she gave the students practical advice on the importance of being financially independent and patiently shared several smaller steps to manoeuvre one’s own or a friend/family member’s journey as a queer person. It was gratifying to see that this session that was planned with a young audience in mind, was received with much excitement that manifested with the way WSC members voiced their opinions and posed their questions with an increased sense of confidence and freedom.

The second series of the year was a certificate course on “LGBTQIA+ Writings from India”. More academic in nature, I had designed this course to introduce to the students a rich corpus of writings on non-heteronormative themes produced in India. I conducted its first session and addressed the beginnings of homophobia and historical

efforts at silencing and erasure of LGBTQIA+ themes in Indian writings. I tried to undermine this historical onslaught by bringing back the attention to queer writings from ancient, medieval and the modern period without losing sight of the human rights discourse. Instead of overwhelming WSC members by circulating numerous readings before my session, I experimented with methods of story-telling and critical discussion during my interaction with them. I read out and had conversations on diverse excerpts from literary, historical and other non-fictional writings to first ignite some interest and curiosity amongst the students. I hoped that the introductory session would encourage the students to further explore queer writings from India and subsequently the WSC office bearers did receive several requests to provide them with resources.

Having laid the foundation for discussions on LGBTQIA+ writing from India, I believed that focused interactions with experts who have written fiction and non-fiction and belonged to the LGBTQIA+ community would prove to be productive for the participants. This made me extend an invitation for a talk to Prof. Ruth Vanita, Professor of English, University of Montana and author of several seminal books on same-sex love and sexuality. Prof. Vanita’s session titled “*Memory of Light: Writing Lesbian Historical Fiction*” invited conversations on method of writing, the genre of lesbian fiction, power dynamics in same-sex relationships and on specific themes of her novel, *Memory of Light*.

The series moved from the debates on fiction to the concluding session of the course where I introduced WSC members to Sharif D. Rangnekar’s (Communications and Workplace Consultant, author, singer/songwriter and festival director of Rainbow Literature Festival) autobiography

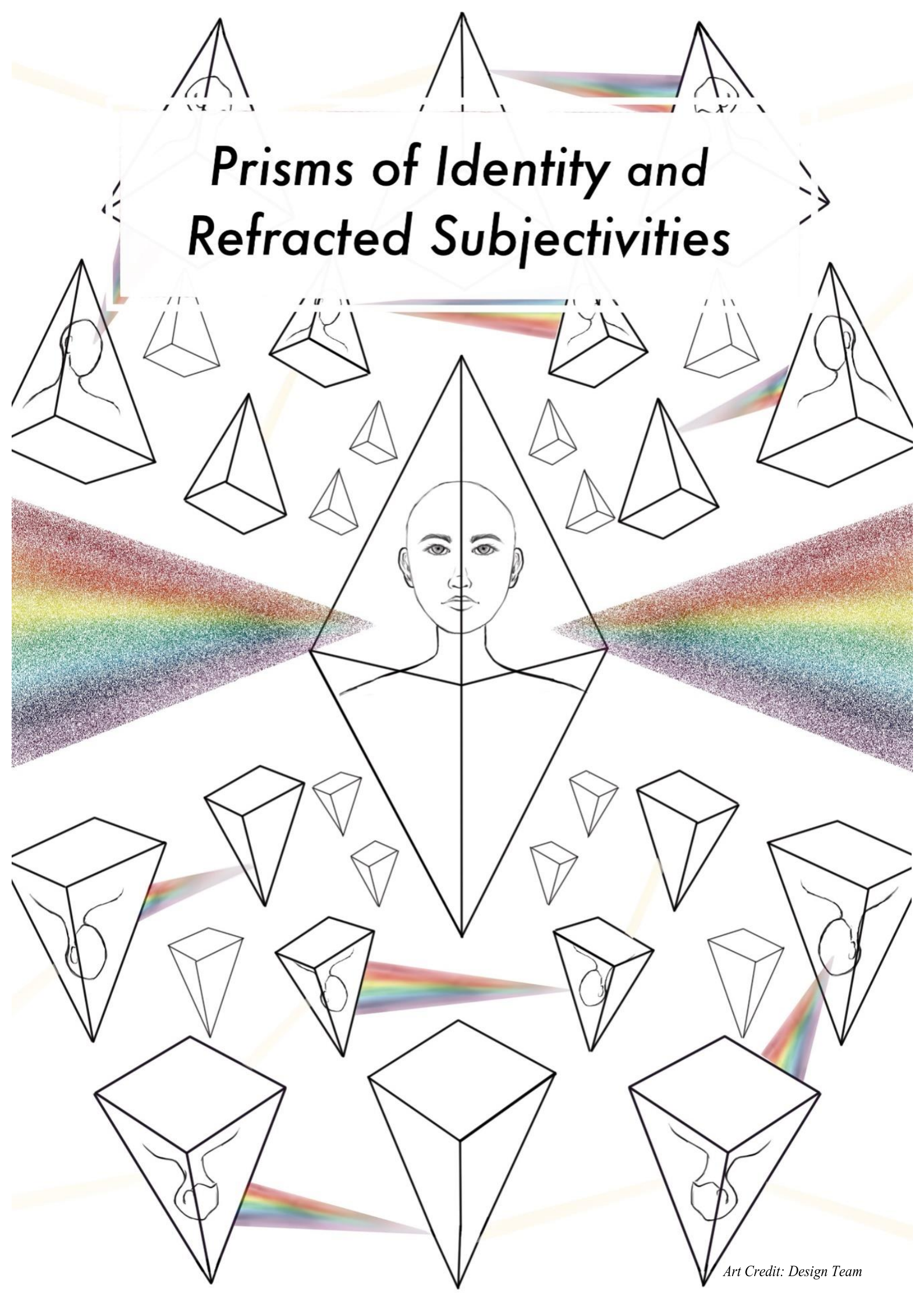
Straight to Normal: My Life as a Gay Man. In the session titled “Straight to Normal: The Need for Queer Life Narratives from India”, Rangnekar, during the conversation with me, talked about his efforts at encouraging self-acceptance amongst more young queer people by sharing his own story of struggles, obstacles and the comfort of finding support in his family and friends. Covering a range of issues like the role of journalism in tackling the socio-political problems of queer people, the difficulties of writing and publishing one’s own life story and yet the need for more autobiographical works to counter the lack of queer personal narratives, the session ended on an inspiring note.

I am confident that the productivity of these sessions did not remain limited to the

ideas they highlighted. By the end of the two series, we also managed to curate and circulate a database of relevant textual and digital resources on gender and sexuality. I also witnessed how these sessions became a means of building more solidarity and understanding between cisgender and heterosexual students and students from the LGBTQIA+ community. More than the positive reception of the two series of events, it is crucial for me to mention the impetus behind their conception. WSC had received requests for events on LGBTQIA+ issues from the students themselves and it was these requests that led me to think about, and plan, the two series. It is requests like these and the openness with which the students received the sessions, that give me hope that this generation can forge a better future and make a more inclusive society.

* * * *

Prisms of Identity and Refracted Subjectivities



Leftovers

Sharmee Godhulika

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I am a passerby in her life. Her Baba lovingly called her “Sur” while her ma affectionately called her “Soor”. Her name means musical notes. Musical notes flow from one song to another, they fit in everywhere. True to her name, Sur drifted from the melody of home to a new rhythm upon marriage.

I am a passerby in Sur’s life. Passing by her life, I listen to the new song she is languidly swinging to. A song of passive melancholy, a slow soothing song (humming and breaking into the song)

Taser ghore dore

Palok hoye jhore

Amar hariye jawa danar sei.

Khelar sese cholo

Tomarkotha bolo

Amar alada kono golpo nei

Amar kono golpo nei.

A slow soothing song with heavy words.

In this house of cards

The feathers fall off,

And I am losing my wings

When the game ends, let’s talk

We can talk about you, your story

No, I have no other story to say

I have no story!

Sur thinks her life is bereft of any story. But I, the passerby, think that she has a story, just that her story dies down in the middle of the cacophony of stories in her new house. For Sur, it is the house of cards, a house where she has to take calculated and careful steps to be the ideal daughter-in-law.

Now, I, the onlooker can see her making dinner for her family of 7 people. 4 cups of *atta*, 1 cup of water, a pinch of salt and here she is mixing everything.

I, the onlooker think that the dryness of wheat represents her wounded mental state while water represents the words of comfort she tells herself to heal her wound. Once the wound has started healing, the pinch of salt added will hurt less. She kneads and kneads but the dough is still dry, it needs some more water, some more comforting words. One spoon of “it will be alright”, another spoon of “one day they will realize my value” and one last spoon of “I am doing my duty”.

She lets the dough absorb the water and kneads some more till it looks smooth. She keeps it aside to make it softer, to make it more pliable. I, the onlooker, think that perhaps the pliability of the dough is a euphemism for her adjustability.

She now proceeds to cut vegetables. She cuts the onions, garlic cloves and chillies finely. To me, an onlooker, it seems like she is dicing her dreams. She slices the potatoes into thin and long strips. To me, an onlooker, it seems like she is slicing her expectations. She washes those potatoes thoroughly to remove the extra starch. Maybe she is discarding traces of her feelings. She adds 2 spoons of mustard oil to a heated *kadhai*. At the right temperature, she adds a spoonful of cumin and mustard seeds to the oil. Maybe, those seeds are really the seeds of desire for the acceptance that she will never find in this house. She tosses the chopped onion into the *kadhai* and the water from the onion evaporates making a noise only Sur can hear; because of course she is the only one in the kitchen. That noise heard is the shout of reluctance let out by water on meeting the oil; or maybe that noise is the announcement of the finality of her dreams. Soon, the onions turn

brown, a sign that it's time to toss the remaining diced dreams. Sorry, garlic and chillies! After a few seconds, she tosses all her sliced expectations into the *kadhai*. Oh sorry, my bad, the potatoes are tossed into the *kadhai*! And finally, lots of spices and salt are added for flavor!

Everything is mixed and cooked on a low flame. Meanwhile Sur starts rolling the *rotis*, rolling her ability to stretch and cater to every need of everybody. She puts the perfect round *roti* on the hot *tawa*. The *roti* starts to bubble a little, and surprisingly I see traces of anger and bitterness on her face. She flips the *roti* for cooking the other side. A few more bubbles and I can see, I can feel, the anger a bit more. She takes the *roti* off the *tawa* and places it directly on the flame. The *roti* puffs up to its fullest, marking the threshold of her anger. I, the onlooker, really hope she uses her anger and leaves this place. But eventually the *roti* flattens and the anger dies down. The anger dies down due to passive acceptance.

Sur makes the remaining *rotis* and in that time the *bhaji* is cooked. Her unhappiness is cooked into a delicious, aromatic and filling dinner and is served to others to satisfy their appetites. The food is so delicious, someone asks for a second helping as well. Sur accepts the appreciation wholeheartedly. She thinks appreciation is the panacea she needs to heal her inner turmoil. I, the trespasser,

think appreciation is a placebo.

I, the trespasser, am actually hated by Sur. I, the trespasser, am actually related to Sur. Sur cannot take my words that shatter her illusions. She knows that I can see her naked truth, the truth she wants to hide from both me and herself. Sur, just like a musical note fits into everyone's songs; she fits so perfectly that she forgets she can sing a song of her own.

I am a passerby in Sur's life. Before passing by her life, I seek the last glimpse. There she is nibbling on the leftover food searching for the musical notes left in her.

* * * *



Picture Credit: Rishita Kishore Shah, BAP Psychology + Philosophy I Year

Women and Student Politics: On Screen and in Reality

Michelle Sanya Tirkey

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*(A few spoilers ahead)

Revolution, dissent, solidarity, *azadi* or freedom are important semantics of resistance that have become almost criminal under the current regime. Movies like *Rang De Basanti*, *Gulaal*, *Yuva*, *Ranjhanaa* and now the popular web series *Tandav* have done their part in effectively articulating this language through metaphors and art and have time and again tapped the imagination of the youth through their compelling stories. These stories, however, have more than just that in common. Women throughout history have been systemically kept away from politics. This patriarchal gatekeeping that extends to student politics is also unsurprisingly reflected in Bollywood which has pushed women to the backstage while men become the face of resistance on screen.

After much prodding by peers and the critical reviews alike, I decided to give *Tandav* a go. While it did live up to the praise it got, the glorification of Shiva, the male protagonist of the political thriller as the campus hero throughout, along with the constant relegation of another equally significant student leader and candidate, Sana Mir, was a serious turn off. This is seen right from the beginning when Shiva's friend Imran is put behind bars, picked up from the college campus and imprisoned for partaking in a "controversial", "anti-establishment" play they had put up. When Sana tries in vain to reason with the police officer to release Imran and is humiliated for speaking up, it is Shiva's words that have the desired effect.

Throughout the series, Sana is shown standing by and admiringly gazing at Shiva

while he gives fiery speeches or speaks up for the communities he doesn't represent. While Shiva, the UPSC aspirant steps into the world of politics looking at the injustices meted out to his Muslim friends by corrupt policemen and even goes on to win the student election through intense debates and campaigning, Sana stands as a silent spectator. Despite being a solid representative of the very community that is being constantly targeted, harassed and perpetually suppressed, she is continuously confined to the other side of the podium.

Despite Sana's important role in campus politics, it is the men who are seen carrying out all the planning and taking charge. Disappointingly, despite Sana's phenomenal backstory involving her sister's arrest due to her partner's death by suicide, or her unintentional involvement with a student's kidnap and death, her role remains secondary. She never emerges as a significant leader; nor do any other women on campus.

Rang De Basanti which has been immortalised by many as the movie that redefined patriotism against today's singularly jingoistic nationalism, also sadly fails to do justice to its only significant woman student lead played by Soha Ali Khan. How painfully nauseating it was to see four men take the wheel of the revolution that had been sparked by their friend *and* Soha's fiancé's death. Once again, in order to make heroes out of these four revolutionaries a token weeping woman had to be included only to be conveniently pushed to the background once the action stirred up. Even when they

decided to assassinate the corrupt defence minister, Soha was kept out of the picture.

The reality of women's participation in campus politics isn't too far from such depictions in terms of the control of their manner and extent of engagement. One can start by looking at the locations of non co-ed colleges in Delhi University to understand the deep rootedness of the problem. It might not seem like much of a deal on the face of it but the way these colleges have been strategically placed either at the peripheries of the university or away from other politically charged educational institutions points at a very gendered agenda of the authorities to curb women's political participation. When these non co-ed colleges choose not to be a part of DUSU, many students are institutionally barred from participating in democratic processes at the university level in the garb of "safety". Politics is reiterated as a *dirty* game involving both overt and covert forms of violence from which women must be protected. This idea of safety isn't any different from the traditional patriarchal notion of denying women access to public spaces to protect the honour of the family. Instead of focusing on ensuring a better space for political participation of women through proper implementation of rules and regulations, the current system of politics strives to maintain a male dominated university space where hooligans can thrive. There is a serious need to reconsider the current model of politics at the university and college level in India.

Returning to the question of women and student politics in reel and real life, there seems to be a serious gap as well. The anti CAA-NRC movement had seen the participation of large numbers of women and students. In fact, it is safe to say that it was indeed a woman and student led movement. When both universities of Jamia Millia Islamia and Jawaharlal Nehru

University had faced a brutal crackdown in December 2019 and January 2020, respectively, it was student leaders and activists like Aishe Ghosh, Safoora Zargar, Devangana Kalita, and many others who had stood their ground despite being charged under various draconian laws, receiving death and rape threats, and some even after being attacked by goons in their own campus.

Post the JNU protest of 2016 that subsequently had the students of the university re-christened as "anti-nationals", student leader and activist Shehla Rashid had emerged as a strong voice of dissent. She had refused to back down in the face of blatant Islamophobic and misogynist threats of death and rape, and despite the colonial era sedition law being instrumentalised against her, she continued to speak out loud.

These are just two examples out of the hundreds of women students who have contributed greatly to campus politics as well as the larger socio-political movements of the country. From the freedom struggle, the fight for women's education, the Chipko movement, to the recent anti CAA-NRC, and the farmers' movement, women have been at the forefront of resistance throughout the course of history. Be it women like Savitribai Phule, Fatima Sheikh, Tarabai Shinde, or many others in times past, or those like Irom Sharmila, today, women have been important catalysts of social change and pioneers of reform and revolution. Despite their struggles, the stories and contributions of such women are hardly ever recognised or considered inspiring enough by filmmakers who only weave stories from a man's perspective because, well, they are all men! But that's a discussion for another time. Until then let us keep asking for better representation of women both on as well as off the screen, and basically EVERYWHERE!

* * * *

The Struggle of the Yazidi Women

Manjiri Nene

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(*Trigger warning: abduction, genocide, forced sexual work, trauma)

War has a high human cost, affecting not just those people who are victims of such wars, but also the environment in which the future generations grow up.

In the 21st century, conflicts are limited to certain regions across the globe, but their impact is not diminished. Let us take the example of the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. A perfect example of “too many cooks...”.

The region has been considered extremely turbulent since the late 20th century and its human cost is discussed widely. But it is also important to acknowledge that the human cost borne by the various communities in the Middle East and outside it is different. While cases such as those of the ISIS brides and their children, living in Al Hol camp are frequently touched upon by the government institutions and independent organisations of western nations, the trauma faced by the Yazidi community, especially, their women, is not.

Through this article, I will attempt to highlight how the collective trauma faced by Yazidi women has led to an evolution in their identities as women and the identity of their community as a whole.

The Yazidi were first recorded as a group in the 1200s, based in Mosul, Iraq. In the 20th century, this group has settled in cities and camps across Northern Iraq, Syria and Turkey. This community’s name has been corrupted over time, but the word “Izidi”, with which they identify, means “Worshipper of God”.

The Yazidis, throughout history, have been a minor group in the Middle East, as their religion does not allow conversions. Due to the religious conflicts that have existed in their region for centuries, this community is isolated. Although their

traditions are largely oral, the Yazidis also believe in the Bible and the Quran. Their beliefs in the seven spirits, especially the spirit Melek Taus, whose story parallels that of Satan or *Shaitan*, has turned them into targets of the Christians and Muslims in the region.

This community has faced genocide, assault and enslavement in the 21st century at the hands of the Daesh. In striving for the true caliphate, the Daesh attempted to wipe out all the non-believers from the region under their control. In 2014 itself, the group killed more than 5,000 Yazidi men and abducted almost 7,000 Yazidi women. The abducted women were forced to convert to Islam and many women who have fled the region claim that they were physically assaulted if they refused or were not able to recite the Quran.

The younger women and girls, as young as 10 years old, were forced into sex work and/or married to Daesh fighters who came from other countries. Videos that surfaced in 2013 and 2014—the peak of the ISIS caliphate—showed these terrorists auctioning the enslaved young women and discussing the details of the explicit acts they would conduct later. The older abducted women were used as forced labour, helping the Daesh by transporting rations and ammunition to the frontlines and working as domestic help in Raqqa and other ISIS strongholds.

Towards 2016, these women were freed from their captors and reunited with their families in refugee camps as the armies of the western alliances began to gain more ground. They began to forge a new identity for themselves in the aftermath of their trauma, which would also affect the identity of the Yazidi people as a whole. Of the women who reunited with their families,

a large portion were those who had been “bought back” by their families at prices ranging upwards from USD 800.

A disturbing aspect of their trauma is that the perpetrators and bystanders of these events still exist as their neighbours in both their hometowns and in the refugee camps. The documentaries which are focussed on reuniting Yazidi families, invariably also depict the proximity to their oppressors. In camps such as Al Hol, the “non-combatant” members of ISIS are placed in an encampment adjoining the refugee camps of the Yazidis. Due to their lack of means and constant struggle, the “non-combatant” members of ISIS in the camps continue their romanticisation of a Caliphate. The prejudice and hate against groups such as the Yazidis remains deep-rooted in these camps.

The children on the “non-combatant” side of the camp live in much more violent conditions; fights are common in the area over the limited resources provided to them by the UN. A chilling example of the extent of the indoctrination of these children is the sign they use to threaten the Yazidis. Many of these children can be seen in the sweltering heat in the camps, choosing to stand next to chain link fences separating the two camps rather than engaging in any other activities. In the documentaries, these children regularly hold up their index fingers to the camera, with the other fingers folded into their palm, to signify the existence of a single god. Unlike the Sufi tradition within the Muslim community, which aimed to encourage brotherhood among different people by encouraging the idea that everyone worshipped god in their own ways, these children view this sign as a threat to all non-believers. They use this sign to signify the end of the *kaafirs* who worship anyone other than their prescribed god and prophet.

As the country has gained relative stability, the Yazidi groups have started returning to the Sinjar mountain and its surrounding regions. Many families have returned to their ancestral homes, and to

their Arab neighbours. A majority of the returning refugees are open about their distrust of this group. The Arabs in the region were either open supporters of the Daesh who handed the Yazidis over or they were bystanders who did not help the Yazidis to ensure their own security. These feelings of betrayal and insecurity will inevitably be passed on to the coming generations, born in refugee camps or in the villages which have been reduced to rubble.

A sizable portion of the Yazidis who have returned have built temporary shelters for themselves, fashioned out of mud, tarp and plastic sheets. Due to their traumatic memories, they refuse to step foot in their ancestral homes.

As the Yazidis begin to revive their community and regain some semblance of order, they have started changing their traditions and cultural rules as well. Previously, any married Yazidi woman, who was sexually assaulted, could be divorced or even be excommunicated from the religious group. But now, the returning women are being supported by their families, who are helping them recuperate from their trauma. Many surviving women have started helping NGOs and international aid organisations in their programmes of the rehabilitation of freed women. These women attempt to raise funds to buy the freedom of the women who are still enslaved by ISIS, as well as to create better residences for the Yazidis returning to their homeland which has been reduced to rubble. These women face difficulties in attempting to reach out to women who are enslaved, as the Daesh fighters who “own” them are in hiding and refuse to entertain any form of contact. They also have to combat the pessimism that has taken hold of their community. With a majority of their family members either missing or dead, the residents of the refugee camps are sceptical about the idea that they might be able to rescue their daughters, sisters or mothers from ISIS.

Now the community has begun to value its women much more, allowing them

greater freedoms and treating them more justly. The only thing that the Yazidi men want is that their female relatives return safe and sound. In 2017, the Yazidis gathered in the Sinjar mountains of Iraq for the Eid al-Jamma, the first festival they would be celebrating outside their refugee camps. For a festival celebrating spiritual rebirth, the affair seemed very sombre. In an interview, one of the Yazidi men at the prayer talked about how the prayers conducted were not of a festive nature, instead, focusing on the well-being and safe return of the Yazidi women who are still under ISIS control. But this greater freedom hinges on the choices that the freed women make about their children.

A much darker future for these women is a looming threat. The highest Council of Yazidi spiritual leaders may have revoked the rule which stated that any woman with sexual relations outside the religion will be cast out. But the question of the children, the product of their rape has a much more difficult answer. The initial response of the Council was to accept these children, but due to a severe backlash, this statement was rescinded. The Yazidi Council now claims that children can only be considered Yazidi if they are born to parents who are both of the Yazidi faith, and that taking the children of the Daesh fighters into their fold would amount to white-washing the genocide and enslavement of the Yazidi community. The returning women are given the difficult choice of keeping their children and leaving their society or giving away their children to orphanages.

In an interview with the BBC, an anonymous victim of the Daesh's slave trade spoke about how difficult and conflicting the experience of her pregnancy was. She stated that she attempted to induce a miscarriage several times. But when the child was born, she felt like her daughter was a "part of her soul". When she returned to the refugee camp in 2017, her extended family told her to leave the child and over

time other members of her community threatened to burn her tent down. She had to give her daughter away to the orphanage run by the UN, with no provisions for contacting her daughter ever again.

Orphanages in refugee camps and major cities in Iraq and Syria have numerous instances of Yazidi women being compelled to give away their children. Many of these women point out how they have received "receipts" for having handed over their children.

Although the road ahead is long, the Yazidi women have the help of their families and some international organisations and private charities and NGOs. The truth is that the region is still not truly secure, small pockets of ISIS and other radical groups are still operating in different pockets of Syria. This brings into question the idea perpetuated in the west that the conflict in the Middle East has peaked and is on the wane now. The fact is the conflicts still remain just as important and solid for the women who have to rebuild their lives in families that are largely orthodox, in a region occupied by those who oppress them. For women who were treated as commodities, the "choice" of "receipts" in exchange for the children born from their traumatic experiences with the Daesh must be heart-wrenching. These women still exist in a society that views them as an extension of the man to whom they are most closely related. During the rise of the Daesh in the Middle East, they were oppressed for being the female relatives of Yazidi men. Today, they are held responsible in their community for the actions of the terrorists they were forced to have relations with. In such a situation, the steps taken by international organisations, to rehabilitate these women, must be examined closely. Otherwise, the price that the women of the Yazidi community have to pay will remain a continuous, incomprehensible and monstrous one.

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The Raw and the Cooked¹

Bhavika Soneja

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On the flames of societal expectations,
A woman heats the pan,
To make a dish called “body image”.
She adds a lot of self-doubt,
With a handful of beauty standards,
And of course, five tablespoons
of media suppositions.
To make this dish,
She starts with her face,
Her double chin and lots of pimples,
Makes her wear a veil, for
She doesn’t want aunties to gossip,
About how makeup would do wonders.
For the second layer,
She moves on to her chest,
That is not big enough for a man to hold.
She constantly reminds herself,
That puberty betrayed her
And how she won’t find a suitor.
Moving on, her big waist,
makes her want to starve and
Try all the fad diets, for
The mirror tells her,
She isn’t slim enough for her favourite clothes.

You might be impatient.
Please wait, we are almost there.
Her flabby arms order her,
To refrain from sleeveless tops.
Her thunder thighs make her wonder,
If the gap is wide enough,
To fit a man’s love.
Voila! The dish is ready.
Let’s add some garnish.
Stretch marks on her abdomen and breasts,
Makes her want to scream.
Why, why on earth is she
the most imperfect one?
Makes her want to hide herself.
Makes her think how beautiful she should be, if
She was slimmer, taller and
Had no “imperfections”.
Well, thank you for bearing with me.
The dish “body self-image” is ready.
Please serve to all of society,
And make a woman doubt herself some more.

¹ Hat tip to Claude Lévi Strauss

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Picture Credits: Isha Dawar, BAP Psychology + Philosophy II Year

Farmers' Resistance against the Corporatisation of Agriculture in India

Sanskriti Bhandari
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In a democracy, dissent is an act of faith. Dissent refers to the expression of opinions which are at variance with those officially or normatively held. Some form of dissent, protest and difference are inevitable in the formation and protection of identity, be that individual identities or collective identities. In recent times we have seen how dissent and protest against the three Farm Laws have influenced the processes of intersectional as well as coalitional identity formation and consolidation.

The past few months have seen various media platforms amplifying the voice of many ordinary farming people, who have been camping at Delhi's borders, as well as sitting on protest across certain states. While these harried agriculturists were making news headlines in the initial weeks of their struggle against the three Farm Laws, their heroic efforts have steadily faded from the mainstream media. This makes it imperative for us to better understand the protesting farmers, and to dislodge the negative, seditious identity ascribed to them by the powers that be and the corporate mainstream media.

Chaudhary Charan Singh once said, "A true Indian resides in the village", and rightly so. To this, of course, we must add that there is no homogenous identity when it comes to the rural community. Importantly, there are disparities between the rich and marginal farmers in rural India. In India, a major portion of its population is poor and resides in rural areas, with up to 90% of rural India comprising of small and marginal farmers, as well as landless agriculture labourers. This vast component



Picture Credit:
Nandini Jain, BAP Psychology + Philosophy I Year

of rural poor owns just 3% of land in India while a much larger share of landholdings belongs to rich farmers. Small and marginal farmers are further distinguishable from rich farmers by the fact that they do not employ paid labour on their fields and instead make do with the labour of their family members. Agriculture in India is relatively backward as there is neither good resource management facility, nor are the bulk of farmers well acquainted with, or have equal access to the new technology that can immensely benefit them. Given the dire situation, it was important that the regime in power works for the betterment of our farmers.

Amidst much protest, the union government proposed and passed three laws in September 2020 as part of its plan for agricultural reform. These three contentious laws were met by extreme dissatisfaction by

Indian farmers despite all the projections that these new laws were to serve farmers' interests. The three laws include the Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020. The asperities of these laws have been pointed out in the backdrop of earlier efforts of successive governments to facilitate *corporatisation* of Indian agriculture.

Firstly, farmers feel that these laws are systematically destroying the Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) run *mandis*. Each state operates regulated markets or *mandis* in different places within their borders, geographically dividing the state. In the decades post-independence, some northern states like Punjab and Haryana have developed many more *mandis*, allowing middling and small peasantry to access produce markets with relatively more ease as compared to other states. Generally, farmers are required to sell their produce via auction at the *mandi* in their region. However, the new farm laws mention that agricultural products which will be sold *outside* Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) run *mandis* will not be taxed. Hence, it becomes clear that this will encourage farmers – particularly the rich segment – and corporate players in food production and distribution to buy and sell outside the *mandi* in the interest of more profit generation. This will make the government *mandis* defunct, and it is projected that private players, such as food corporates, will come to heavily dictate prices, supply chains, etc. Just as we have seen in the healthcare and the education sector, once a private player enters a sector, it increasingly takes over, corporatizing the sector.

By doing away with the powers of the APMC, the government seeks to also withdraw from the responsibility of fixing the Minimum Support Price (MSP). MSP has assured farmers a minimum income on some 28 crops, even in conditions of adversity. However, these laws do not mention or talk about MSP even once. Of course, before MSP caught public attention with the farmers' protests, it is important to remember that it has been mostly rich farmers who have been the ones to benefit from the majority of agricultural policies of successive governments, finding it easier to avail of MSP for earmarked crops like rice, wheat, etc. So even in usual situations a marginal farmer was rarely at the receiving end of the actual advantage of MSP, and was struggling to avail the policy. MSP nevertheless is a rallying cry for both rich and marginal farmers because the latter are often compelled to sell their produce to rich farmers, who have the resources to transport the produce to the *mandis* on time and have often tied down marginal farmers in debt.

Secondly, the new Farm Laws have triggered protest as they strengthen contract farming. In contract farming there is an agreement between the farmer and the buyer, and the buyer is usually a big private sector company. In such arrangements, it is not unusual to find the private company/corporate dictating the price for the farm produce. There is a lot of exploitation of farmers when they are working with the big private sector whose aim is simply to rake in maximum profit. Moreover, according to these laws, in the case of dispute (for example if the company refuses to pay the price it fixed for the farmer's produce), the farmer can only approach the subdivisional magistrate or the district magistrate. They cannot approach the judiciary for justice.

Lastly, under the amended Essential Commodities Act, the practice of hoarding grain stands to be encouraged as these laws do away with the provisions that put limits on storage. Hence, with such amendments any private company can easily indulge in hoarding. This can lead to the private sector controlling the supply of these products, and in turn, their price. In conclusion, the prices of several essential food commodities will be controlled by the private player if these laws are implemented.

It is also important to study the gender dimension to agricultural activities to comprehend the adverse impact of the new Farm Laws. Women are an important component of family labour used by small and marginal farmers on their small plots of land. In a context of growing rural impoverishment, women agriculturists have been seen to stay back and pursue agriculture while male members of their families move to cities for waged work. Given this reality, it is ironic that the Supreme Court in its intervention earlier this year ruled that women and the elderly camping at various borders of Delhi in protest against the Farm Laws should return to their homes. Apart from infantilizing women agriculturalists, such efforts simply reveal how distanced the higher judiciary can be in terms of engaging with the socio-economic realities. The goal of women's equality is far from reached; it's a long fight but we cannot deny that the protest has created a space for them. Women are getting increased respect, they are on stage, they are taking the microphone to put their views forward.

The denial of MSP, the weakening of the local agrarian markets/*mandis*, and the overall bid of corporates to dictate agricultural prices through generalization of contract farming practices will essentially spell ruination for scores of women

dependent on agriculture. Women's organizations, who commemorated Mahila Kisan Diwas on 18th January 2021, have also rightly observed that taken together these Farm Laws will additionally hit the urban poor (of whom women are a large component) as huge corporates will monopolize food production using several provisions in the new laws. Rising food prices and complete destruction of the Public Distribution System (i.e., state-subsidized ration system) are real threats that trade unions, women's organisations and civil liberties groups have rightly projected.

Corporatisation will put an end to governmental public service works. The monopoly of corporates is the worst thing for any democratic country. Through the entry of these big private players and corresponding withdrawal of the state in terms of regulation of produce markets and markets for agricultural inputs, the already neglected marginal farmers will become even more vulnerable and voiceless. We have only to turn to certain precedents to better comprehend the fears especially of small and marginal farmers who are the backbone of the current agitation. The end of *mandis* and the entry of corporates in some states have had severe consequences on farmers, as seen in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh where farmer's incomes dropped tremendously. This was followed by an increase in the cases of farmers' suicide and the migration of the affected farmers to Punjab and Haryana where the past struggles of the peasantry have ensured a stronger network of *mandis* and state regulation of prices. Looking at the situation that the new Farm Laws threaten to unleash, the Punjab and Haryana farmers are rightfully protesting about how the corporatisation of agriculture will destroy their livelihood.

Critiques of the new laws also argue that corporatisation will make the small and marginal farmers of our country unemployed; pushing them in turn to join the urban workforce as cheap labour. Those who would choose to stay in farming will be exploited by these private players. We must ask ourselves, therefore, whether any of the three Farm Laws improve the condition of the most vulnerable sections of farmers i.e., the 90 percent of rural society. When small and marginal farmers are otherwise struggling to get a decent price for their crop, to access agricultural technology (tractors, trolleys, fertilizer, etc), and are more often than not forced to sell their produce to rich farmers at low prices, it is unlikely that the removal of *mandis*, the guarantee of fair pricing, etc., will help small and marginal farmers improve their lot.

The farmers are protesting day and night to stop the corporatisation of agriculture. The resistance and the continuing protest shown by our farmers against corporatisation of agriculture is essential to democracy. The protest started peacefully but when the protesters entered the national capital on 26th January 2021 to commemorate Republic Day through a tractor rally, their protest was consciously projected by the mainstream media as anarchic and “anti-national”. Incidents of some tractors that broke away from the main rally were continuously replayed on news channels; consciously undermining the image of the toiling farmers on peaceful protest and seeking to divert attention away from the real issues of agrarian distress and failures of successive rounds of talks.

It is important for us to understand that while the farmers’ protests started with the aim of protecting the rights of farmers, when it entered the national capital, it had steadily turned into a power play fuelled by

the interests of different leaders from within the ranks of rich farmers. However, while rich farmers and their leaders continue to dominate the anti-Farm Laws movement, it cannot be denied that the groundswell comes from the much larger component of small and marginal farmers.

Even after so many months, the farmers’ protest is still going on. The farmers look like they are here to stay for long, as they do not see the benefits of the laws as portrayed by the government. While it is very common for a protest to lose its legitimacy when it turns violent, as citizens of this country, it is important for us to understand the repercussions of not involving target groups while formulating policies for them. Sadly, even after the opposition parties in the Indian Parliament asked the government to review the Bills through a select committee of the house, their demand was not heard and the Bills were passed in a hurry, propelling many to argue that the government was defying the parliamentary procedure.

It is very important for a country to maintain consensus while bringing laws for the public because such political activities shape the identity of each member of that community. If the voices of the opposition would have been heard, the grave problems with the laws could have been corrected, and in the long run it could have also been an appropriate representation of a democratic decision making. Instead, an environment of mistrust surrounds the hurriedly passed laws because the voices of the key stakeholders were disregarded, because many provisions threaten the very existence of small and marginal farmers, and because corporatized agriculture spells doom for the already crumbling Public Distribution System on which scores of the country’s poor depend.

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Women and Body Image

Aleena Antony
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Body image is based on someone's thoughts and feelings about the way their body looks. Sometimes the way people think other people are judging their appearance can affect that person's body image. Poor body image comes from negative thoughts and feelings about appearance, and a healthy body image is made up of thoughts and feelings that are positive. Body image is a major factor in self-esteem. Self-esteem relates to how much you like and value yourself; how much you recognize or appreciate your character, qualities, skills, and accomplishments. Like body image, self-esteem, or the lack of it, can also be based on how you think other people look at you as a person. People who have low self-esteem may not always feel confident about themselves or how they look. It is often hard for them to see that they are an important and capable person. People with positive self-esteem often have a confident attitude about their body and mind, and can recognize their strengths as well as personal value and worth.

Self-esteem is extremely important for everyone because it helps one keep a positive outlook on life and makes one feel good about the person they are, both inside and out. Most teens with self-esteem find life much more enjoyable. They tend to have better relationships with peers and adults, find it easier to deal with mistakes or disappointments and are more likely to stick with a task until they succeed.

Studies have shown that 87% of women and 65% of men compare their bodies to images they consume on social and traditional media. In that comparison, a stunning 50% of women and 37% of men compare their bodies

unfavourably. A negative body image increases the risk of engaging in unhealthy lifestyle behaviours, such as dieting or restrictive eating, over-exercising and other disordered eating or weight control behaviours. All of this can be bad for someone's physical and emotional health if not done under the supervision of a trusted doctor or a health expert.

Dieting is a strong risk factor for developing an eating disorder. Research shows that even "moderate" dieting increases the risk of developing an eating disorder in teenage girls. While dieting is normalised in society, it can lead to serious physical health complications, and for most people who lose weight through dieting, the weight lost is gained back over time. Dieting is not sustainable. Instead, focusing on eating a wide variety of foods for nourishment and enjoyment, and trying to be flexible with one's intake is recommended.

Body image can also affect a woman's relationship with physical activity. Feeling self-conscious or uncomfortable with their appearance or body size or shape can lead to women avoiding physical activity. This could be because they feel that being active or engaging in particular activities exposes their body to the public eye. Alternatively, a woman may over-exercise or engage in an excessive amount of physical activity to lose weight or change their body shape. A healthy relationship with physical activity means engaging in regular physical activity that is focused on maintaining or improving physical fitness, and is an activity that is fun and enjoyable. Trying to focus on the benefits of physical activity for physical, mental and social health, rather than for weight control, or changing body size or

shape, is highly appreciated by many people across the globe.

Body image and self-esteem start in the mind and not in the mirror. These can change the way you understand your value and worth. Healthy body image and self-esteem are a big part of well-being. Body image is mental and emotional: it's both the mental picture that you have of your body and the way you feel about your body when you look in a mirror.

In one Swiss study conducted by Ann Kearney-Cooke and Diana Tieger in 2015, on "body image disturbance and the development of eating disorders" of 1000 adult women aged 30-74 years, despite 73% of women falling within the normal weight range, more than 70% of these women expressed a desire to be thinner. This trend also held true for older women who are 65 years and above; 65% were of normal weight, yet 62% of these women wished to be thinner.

Body image disturbance affects feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and behaviours related to the body and has long been recognized as a clinical feature of grave significance in the development and maintenance of Anorexia Nervosa (an eating disorder causing people to obsess about weight and what they eat) and Bulimia Nervosa (an eating disorder marked by bingeing, followed by methods to avoid weight gain, like purging through induced vomiting, etc).

Healthy body image is more than simply tolerating what you look like or "not disliking" yourself. A healthy body image means that you truly accept and like the way you look right now and aren't trying to change your body to fit the way you think you should look. It means recognizing the individual qualities and strengths that make you feel good about yourself beyond weight, shape or appearance, and resisting

the pressure to strive for the myth of the "perfect" body that you see in the media, online, or, in your communities.

Self-esteem is how you value and respect yourself as a person—it is the opinion that you have of yourself inside and out. Self-esteem impacts how you take care of yourself, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Self-esteem is about your whole self and not just your body. When you have good self-esteem, you value yourself, and you know that you deserve good care and respect—from yourself and others. You can appreciate and celebrate your strengths and your abilities, and you don't put yourself down if you make a mistake. Good self-esteem means that you still feel like you're good enough even when you're dealing with difficult feelings or situations.

Social media can have an impact on your body image and relationship with food, due to increased exposure to thin and toned body types and particular diets. Studies have shown that 88% of women compare themselves to images they observe on social media, with over half of them emphasising that the comparison is unfavourable. This is extremely problematic as it can lead to lower self-esteem, an unbalanced diet, deficiencies of vitamins and minerals and possibly eating disorders.

Social media allows us to feel like we have a personal connection to the people that share certain content (e.g., thin/toned bodies and healthy food). This is a false sense of community which makes it easier to be influenced. The selected exposure and influence of particular content can make us believe that a thin/toned body type or a certain diet is more natural than it actually is. On social media, particular body types are prioritised as ideal body types and this may lead society to view these body types and specific eating behaviours as more attractive and healthier than other ones. The majority of social media allows the users to

like content produced by others; often idealised bodies and certain trendy diets receive many likes. In other words, certain bodies and diets are perceived as more attractive.

This also encourages the objectification of bodies, whereby bodies that are observed on social media are processed like objects and not human bodies. These social norms may impact how we view our body because humans, especially, because of socialisation, have a general need to gain approval from others and avoid disapproval. As a result, we might feel pressured to conform to the social norms related to appearance. Social media users often choose to share the best parts of their life with the world. We may begin to feel that we are not good enough, compared to the people we see on social media platforms.

This experience, coupled with photoshopped images promoting thin ideals, can lead us to feel that by having the “ideal” body image, we may feel more worthy and happier in ourselves. One of the ways social media can hurt our body image is by exposing us to images of “idealized” body types, causing us to compare ourselves to them. “People end up creating unrealistic ideals for themselves based on what they see and feel distressed when they aren’t able to meet those ideas or self-expectations”, says Neha Chaudhary, MD, a child and adolescent psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School.

A study performed by Jasmine Fardouly and Lenny R Vartanian in 2015 on how “negative comparisons about one’s appearance mediate the relationship between Facebook usage and body image concerns” found that female-identifying college students who spent more time on Facebook had poorer body image. The researchers concluded that “young women

who spend more time on Facebook may feel more concerned about their body because they compare their appearance to others, especially to peers”. The negative impact of social media on body image are well documented, but social media can also have a positive effect on one’s body image, Chaudhary says.

A 2019 Australian study, “an experimental investigation of the effects of viewing body positive content on young women’s mood and body image” was conducted by Rachel Cohen, Jasmine Fardouly, Toby Newton-John, and Amy Slater. They surveyed women between 18 and 30 years of age after these women viewed body positive content on social media. Body positive content seeks to show appreciation and acceptance for all types of bodies. Researchers concluded that after viewing positive content, the women not only felt better about their bodies, but they were also in better moods. “People tend to emulate what they see or adjust their expectations of themselves based on what others are doing or how they look,” Chaudhary says. “Advocates of body positivity and influential figures have a unique ability to make a positive impact on how people view themselves and their bodies, especially when it comes to young people.” Another way social media can positively impact body image is by connecting us with others and building a body-accepting community, according to Jill M Emanuele, the senior director of the Mood Disorder Centre at the Child Mind Institute.

A positive attitude can come by defining an identity for yourself that is not based on looks or the negative things other people may say. Focus must be on one’s unique qualities. Everyone has their special talents that make them unique. People should be more confident in themselves if they are good at something which makes them stand apart from others and makes

them happy and proud of themselves. Learning gives one the power to make a difference in one's life and the lives of others. An educated mind can do wonders both for themselves and for others too. Trying out a new hobby, finding out what one is passionate about, or participating in a variety of sports activity can be a great way to stay healthy and focused and motivated to be happy every day. Having something to look forward to can give one a sense of purpose and pride and help one to work through different challenges through life. If one thinks one has found a way to

successfully cope with social situations and build confidence, then one may find it rewarding to share that advice and offer encouragement to others. People should work for their happiness, their purpose in life. We should not bother about what people think about us, but should they offer constructive criticism, we should accept and appreciate the same, because constructive criticism can help us improve, creating a better version of ourselves. A happier version, too, because happiness is all that matters.

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Picture Credit: Aleena Verghese, BA Hons. English I Year

For How Long Do I Have to Change Myself?

Anna Grace Mathew
BA Hons. English I Year

(*Trigger warning: mentions eating disorder, insecurity about self and self-disgust)

Let me tell you a story
In the form of a verse
A story about something
that happened so long ago
And something that still happens now.

When I was 13, I gained some weight
Suddenly I changed waist sizes from 26
To a size 32
And gradually to a size 36.

I went from shopping for a size M
in the kids clothing section
To a M in the adults clothing section
And gradually to hunting for a L or XL
or sometimes even a XXL
from the pile of clothes in the store.

I noticed the look of disapproval
From the aunty next door
To the salesperson of one of my favourite stores
And suddenly I felt small, insignificant.

Their disapproving looks bore into me
And I suddenly wanted to change myself
I wanted to fit “their” standards of beauty
Because I didn’t want to be different.

Every time I looked at my reflection
I felt repulsed by what I saw
For on the other side of the mirror
stood a “heavy” representation
Of who I am. And I didn’t want to be her.

So, I set a goal for myself
Started eating less, or sometimes not eating at all
Consuming just enough so I won’t pass out.
Started working out for longer and longer hours
Till my vision was blocked by my sweat.

And I “sized down”.
Went from a 36 size waist to a 32 size.
But somehow, even that wasn’t enough
I was thinner yes! But still not “pretty”.

I wasn’t pretty, because I was too thin
My breasts were smaller and
my curves were non-existent now.
So, I worked to change myself again
Because I wanted to fit the standards
others set out for me.
No matter how hard I tried
I never seemed to fit others’ standards
I was always either too thin or too fat.
Why couldn’t I ever be the perfect size?

I knew it was unhealthy
I knew I should not change myself
but care for myself
And for this reason, and this reason solely,
I stopped myself
before changing my diet plan yet again
And asked myself
“Why can’t I accept myself for who I am?
Who has set these beauty standards for me?”

Slowly I stopped. It was hard, but I stopped.
I stopped trying to squeeze myself
into clothes that were too small for me.
And I stopped feeling dejected
and ashamed when I couldn’t.
I stopped waiting
to be on the verge of passing out to eat.

I stopped trying to perfect my body size for those
Who would change their opinion the next day.
And I stopped trying to obtain
that “perfect figure”
Which somehow was the only acceptable
body dimension?

But time and again, now and then
I feel smaller sometimes,
sometimes even insignificant
Sometimes still trying to fit the standards
the others set out for me.
But then I stop myself! If I slip back sometimes
I ask myself this:

Why should I change myself
into what others want me to be?
Be it my personality or the way my body looks.
Why am I ashamed of looking at my reflection?
Why am I worried about the size of my breasts
or if I have curves?
Why am I so insecure every time
I dress to go out?

* * * *



Picture Credit: Isha Dawar, BAP Psychology + Philosophy II Year

Women of Ima Keithel: Changing Gender Roles in Conflict

Michelle Sanya Tirkey

BAP History + Political Science III Year

(*Trigger warning: mention of r*pe)

From the earliest times women's work and contribution to society has either been strategically confined to the domestic space or perceived as less important than men's work. This hypermasculine patriarchal society of ours thrives on the subservience and subordination of women and undermines their identity, while perpetuating sexual division of labour as well as gender roles at every level in order to maintain itself. Despite these *man-made* impediments, women have time and again pushed through the crosshatches of patriarchal control to reclaim their agency and become catalysts of social change and justice.

One such example is from the heart of Imphal in Manipur where several generations of women have been running the Ima Keithel—which literally translates to “Mother's Market”—for more than 500 years entirely on their own, making it the largest market in Asia, and possibly, the entire world, run by women. The women of Ima Keithel have become the polestar of social change and movements in the north-east over the centuries owing to their struggle for socio-economic and political freedom against patriarchal oppression.

Birth of Ima Keithel

The story of Ima Keithel can be traced back to the 16th century when it emerged as a consequence of the imposition of the *lallup-kaba* by the king of the region. This was an ancient system of forced labour where men of the Meitei community were sent off to distant lands to cultivate, collect tax and fight wars. Back in the village, the



Stock Photo : Ima Keithel

Meitei women had to shoulder the entire responsibility of the household, working in paddy fields and weaving textiles and handicrafts. They began to sell their own produce and carry out trade and commerce in markets, the biggest of which came to be known as Ima Keithel. In the absence of men, these women found the freedom to become self-reliant and financially independent.

Since then, trouble has come their way several times throughout the course of history. Post the abolition of the *lallup-kaba*, the market hit a low due to the aggressive commercial policies of the British such as high taxation on water and large-scale export of locally produced rice abroad. In 1939, the women of Ima Keithel united in fierce opposition to these reforms and organised protests, meetings, rallies and blockades in an uprising that came to be known as the *Nupi Lan* or Women's War. The attempt of the British to quell the movement through brute force was thwarted successfully by these women who had even inspired the men of the city to join their

cause. Even though this movement fizzled out with the onset of the Second World War and the insurgency that followed in Manipur, it became an epoch-making battle for social movements and women's empowerment in the state. All these developments altogether established this market as a centre for important decision-making.

Present Day Scenario

Today the market is governed by a union formed by its women. This union is called the *Ima Keithel Sipham Amasung Saktam Kanba Lup* (Mothers' Market Profession and Identity Protection Organization) which stands as an embodiment of the long-enduring narrative of their struggle and identity. The union also manages a credit system that helps women take small loans for purchasing goods. Along with running their everyday business, these women continue to preserve this market as a space for voicing dissent and the exchange of socio-political ideas and affairs of the country. This culture of Ima Keithel has kept the women informed and empowered.

In recent years, whenever the clouds of injustice have loomed over Manipur, these women have continued to unite against the multitude of socio-political issues that affect the region, be it human rights violations, gendered and racial violence, draconian state policies like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act and the recent Citizenship Amendment Bill (now, Act). The women had protested against the Centre's ceasefire agreements in the Naga Peace Talks of 2001 which would have had grave consequences for Manipur. In 2004, these women had staged India's first naked protest against the abuses of the paramilitary forces who raped and murdered the 32-year-old Thangjam Manorama. In the face of threats from both state and non-state players these women have time and again

upheld the ethos of democracy by taking to the streets to agitate and organize protests and rallies in demand for justice. Even after years of Independence, the Ima Keithel is more than just a source of livelihood for these women; it stands as a symbol of their cultural identity, unity and gender justice.

Ima Keithel's women have managed to keep the market thriving despite facing multifarious challenges. It's interesting to note that they often attribute this success to the rule that disallows men from operating in the market entirely. Men can only carry out menial work as labourers and transporters and are prohibited from owning stalls of their own. In addition to this, only married or widowed women can become vendors, hence its name. Through the years they have kept alive the tradition of inheritance where they pass down their business to the next generation of daughters, daughters-in-law and other women in the family. While this particular rule is strictly followed to honour their age-old tradition, it leaves many unmarried and young women in need, bereft of the opportunity to earn a living through the market. This downside to it notwithstanding, the Ima Keithel has contributed greatly to the local economy, to social and political attitudes as well to the personal growth of these women.

Today the rapid growth of supermarkets and shopping complexes in the city along with some policies of the state government have posed a serious threat to the Ima Keithel. Despite this, the women of the market continue to stand undeterred as before. If the past is any indication, it is extremely likely that this historically significant market, a marker of the identity, enterprise, and spirit of the women who run it, and have run it for so long, will continue to host them for years to come.

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Representation, Community and Media

Sania Javed

BA Hons. Economics I Year

“औरतें उठी नहीं तो जुल्म बढ़ता जायेगा”

– सफ़दर हाशमी

India, the greatly polarised land of diversity, accommodates deeply religious people, and their significantly political lives, *stemming from* and *culminating in* their respective religions. The issue of representation in the context of the women’s movement in present-day India with the hyper fixation of the state to politicise events by gazing at everything through a communal lens can be studied only by understanding the power dynamics between these “gullible-and-needing-to-be-saved women” and men with a god complex. The state visibly aims to reinstate the hegemony of a *certain* group of people it alleges are in danger from the people who are barely a fifth part of the total population of around 966 million Hindus who live in India. The unique set of challenges when it comes to the issue of representation has to do with misrepresentation and biased or faulty assumptions rooted in masculine ideas of “how these women *must* be” rather than, as should be the case, efforts to understand the lives of these women as they really *are*.

The evident shift in the connotation of the word “secular” in the largest democracy with pluralist values is a worrying subject. At least for those who stand for the social fabric of our very diverse, very plural, highly “tolerant” land of the Mahatma.

Our Constitution has laid down in Articles 25 to 30 the rights of religious, cultural and linguistic minorities. The Constitution protects the interests of the minorities by making a provision that any section of citizens having a distinct

language, script or culture has the right to conserve the same. It also provides an absolute right to the minorities that they can establish their own linguistic and religious institutions and at the same time can also claim for grant-in-aid *without any discrimination*. Ironically enough, discrimination against the minorities coupled with the sense of insecurity is the biggest reason for concern for the people of India.

The problem with media representations of communities in India is that with regard to minorities more often than not, these representations tend to villainize the communities. As for representations of other marginalised groups, identities and communities, caste and/or gender identities of the subjects end up getting erased to fit the narrative of the mainstream media to sell the image of a perfect nation. The constitutional protection of minorities, in theory, paints a far rosier picture of the “progressive” state of affairs than what it really is like on the periphery of social spaces or when being constrained in political spaces because of one’s caste and gender identity. The pursuit of creating consciousness around caste, class and community in India has always had a concurrent impact on matters of gender inequalities. In practice, belonging to subaltern groups and being a woman at that, only puts women in the most vulnerable of positions with their male counterparts in a patriarchal society.

Patriarchy, Media and Television

With the mass media’s impact on opinion formation and public-policy making being astronomical, it is important to understand the process of reproduction of

information/misinformation under the influence of the all-pervasive media. In a democracy as diverse and as large as ours, it is through media that the state retains hegemony in shaping the society more than any other institution within the system. The current-day media has been successfully asserting half-truths, pushing stereotypical, misogynistic and vile notions about women and certain communities to curb emancipation at any and all cost. With men occupying the majority of important positions in the media, it becomes the breeding ground for elitism to bloom, creating a space overflowing with discourses about women but without actually taking into account the experiences of women. Even with the shrunken space, and gendered nature of media, the women who do find a spot on the same table as the privileged men are the upper-caste/class women, mostly coming from backgrounds of privilege. This makes an intersectional approach of vital importance while viewing the issues of representation.

With the overall increased impact of media and television, the ideas presented through these channels tend to seep into social dynamics as well. The sexist and generalised views about women being over-dramatic, clingy, dependent on men, enmeshed in their relationships, and less outspoken than men are visibly repeated as they “sell better” on television. Common misinterpretations are about the lack of sisterhood between two women, about jealous competitiveness and catty sniping between women, or about the depiction of a strong, independent, working woman, who is a terrible mother. Of course, women must either be primary care-givers for their families or mean workaholics who hate children, right!

Characters representing minorities are always given a *supporting role*, as the best friend of the “hero”. Very conveniently, they are always shown to be trapped in the

clutches of their religion, husbands, fathers or are just victimised in general (Safeena & Murad in *Gully boy*, Najma Malik in *Secret Superstar*, Aslam in *Rang De Basanti*, Imran in *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*).

Presently, since these stories emerge from a privileged point of view, there exists a lack of perspective from marginalized communities to correct and/or balance the one-sided representations in circulation. Even the stories of women affected by discrimination are written by people who are in a privileged position. The media just ends up becoming a space for these people to reinforce their opinions and reflect majoritarian perspective while ignoring and/or silencing the voices of minorities and subaltern groups.

The Politics of Representation

The idea of women sitting in resistance to the regime along with their male counterparts has been romanticised to such an extent that when women alone, take the centre stage in acts of dissent, we often tend to overlook their contribution as they stand up for the collective struggles of the citizens. The matter of representation, along with the communal and caste identity of women in political spaces and nationalist movements has often been left out of count to retain a brahminical idea of “true patriotism”.

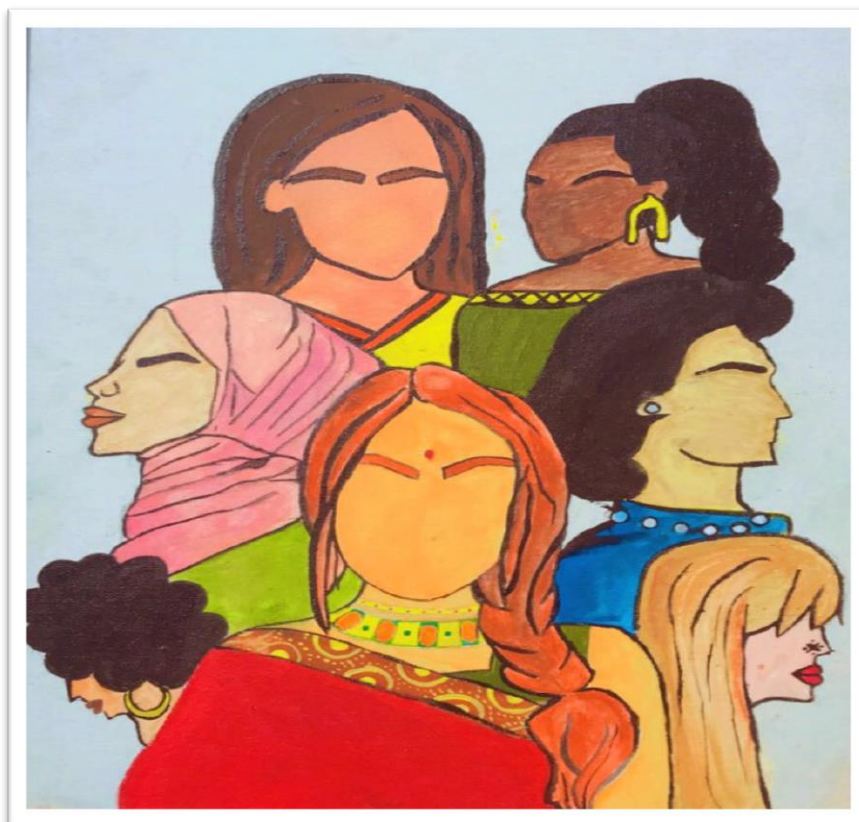
In the case of a society as layered as India, caste and class differences will always tend to overwrite the gendered reality of women occupying positions in male dominated arenas such as politics. Even with the mass mobilization of women in politics during the nationalist movement, the representation of women in institutions of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies was dismal after independence. Political under-representation of the subaltern sections of the society can be attributed to the gate-keeping of these positions by political parties and malign personal agendas. Even

with the constitutional provisions to help the participation of women, it is often seen that women in “major” positions of power are often the ones coming from well-to-do backgrounds with connections. However, at the grassroots levels of local governance, higher participation of women from all sections can be seen.

The conversations around “politics of inclusion” when it comes to Muslims, lower-caste women, and other minorities has to be seen through a social lens wherein the identities of the subjects need to be erased to paint a promising picture about the harsh realities of the state of affairs of the marginalised groups. The women of Shaheen Bagh tearing down their falsely imposed identities as “excessively domesticated” and “victimised subjects under Islam” by taking to the streets of New Delhi, carved out an enabling space for

numerous women to reclaim their voices, attire and personhood. Along with the Dalit-Bahujan feminists and activists raising their voices against the caste atrocities, they set out to dismantle the hyper-romanticised ideas of poverty, living on the fringes and their identity as the “sufferer” at the hands of the dominant caste. Their fight is as much against the ignorance of upper-caste/class feminists and scholars who tend to hog the platforms and spaces meant for Dalit men & women and women from minorities to tell their stories. Space must be cleared for newer, more accurate, representations of variously marginalised identities to be seen and understood. The echo chamber of majoritarian ideas must be challenged and dismantled. Else, they will continue oppressing women from minority and subaltern groups, as their “damsels in distress”.

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Picture Credit: Akhila Rajeena, BA Hons. English I Year

Intersectionality: Where Is the Line Drawn?

Anonymous

Intersectionality has become the crux of contemporary feminist debates. How does being a woman tie in with one's social and economic position; this is a question most feminists ask themselves. In theory, this question seems like one which would promote inclusivity, where each individual has the ability to tick as many "boxes" of labels as they wish to and still identify with a larger tapestry of concerns, but the reality is somewhat different.

As a preliminary statement, I would like to say that for most left-leaning individuals, whether consciously or otherwise, society can be interpreted only as a two-dimensional concept, where one is either "the oppressed" or "the oppressor". With this template, all oppressed groups become automatically affiliated with each other. This becomes an unfeasible concept in the contemporary political arena, where the boxes of labels, those limited descriptors, cannot be viewed as independent components operating in a historical vacuum devoid of contexts, experience and values. A person can tick all the "right" boxes except the one. Does that negate the effort they've put in to achieve their other goals?

One might perceive this push for coalition to be one for the greater good, where different groups can seek justice by mobilising the masses. But the problem is that despite the willingness of left-wing groups to encourage diversity, they seek ultimately to merge all these categories and classes of people into a huge conglomerate pitted against that which is perceived to be



*Picture Credit:
Aditi Sharma, BA Hons. History III Year*

the majority identity. By virtue of this merger, each individual in this conglomerate is then expected to have the same views and beliefs. This acts in a manner contrary to the essence of diversity and accommodation. Instead of being a coalition, this grouping becomes a clique. And at its peak, any divergence can come to be considered a valid reason to start a cancel campaign against the offending mark of difference.

I do not mean to imply that different groups can never align. But it is necessary to understand that a blanket rule cannot be applied to the alliance of different groups. What needs to be understood is that there is no single way of being a "feminist". Individuals can hold the same, or, similar beliefs, but have different methods of achieving their goals. Most people value the

importance of an egalitarian society. For a higher caste woman, this may imply striving for a society which does not discriminate against women. On the other hand, a woman from a lower caste might prioritise the end of caste-based discrimination over the gender struggle. Alternatively, a lower or higher caste woman may identify with neither the caste struggle or the gender struggle as these are articulated. Which one of them is right? And more importantly, how do we measure the degree of “correctness”?

The conflict of identity between traditional feminist ideals and more contemporary gender discourse is helpful in understanding a key facet of any kind of strictly defined, and, to all purposes, “enforced” intersectionality, that is, uniform ideology. This conflict was first highlighted in the protest movements and feminist struggles of the 1980s and 1990s. Prior to this period, the feminist movement was mostly centred around a Marxist approach; that is, religious and caste identities were given little primacy in theorisations. However, in the late 20th century, as religion, and therefore caste, gained a central position in the socio-political context of the nation, the feminist movement could no longer ignore the inherent religious identity of its participants. While the debates on the rectitude of the decisions relating to the Ram mandir or the Mandal Commission ran rampant, one thing became clear: it could no longer be assumed that individuals would feel a sense of comradeship simply on the basis of gender. According to the idea of uniformity one of these groups was inherently wrong. Did that mean that they were no longer feminist?

An interesting parallel is that of the Shiv Sena, which gained prominence during the late 1990s as well. The party was formed as a “Hindutva” party. But interestingly, this party would actively

partake in anti-Brahmin activities. This begs the question, where do we put them? In a societal order which is black or white, where do religiously majoritarian groups which have uplifted the lower castes go?

In the contemporary era, given the politics of gender identity in the public space, the most obvious divergence between feminist and non-traditional gender thought processes concerns the primacy, or lack thereof, of pronouns. Barring certain articulations of radical feminism, most other feminist schools of thought essentially focus on understanding a person’s identity by going beyond their socially assigned gender and its associated “qualities”. On the flip side, due to their social and historical context—being denied the right to self-identity—many transgender, gender-queer and non-binary individuals find it important to view themselves as an extension of their chosen pronouns. Once “transitioned”, these individuals want no longer to be considered any different than their “cis-gender” or biological counter-parts. The encouragement of “political correctness” and “politeness” in political discourse encourages the marginalisation of both groups involved. The convention of political correctness encourages individuals (at least in the public sphere) to actively pass over the fact that transgender women are any different from biological women. The lack of acknowledgement of the greater physical prowess of a trans-woman, for example, not only ignores the implications for cis-women in terms of limited opportunities when competing, say in sports, it also side-tracks the challenges and alienation a trans-woman feels, which is not felt by her cis-gendered counterparts.

In this context, the feminist effort to make pronouns a necessary part of regular introductions in day-to-day life is conflicting with the idea of “uniformity”. Either, gender does not matter or it does. By

trying to bring the use of pronouns into the mainstream, the feminist movement has largely made the choice to focus on gender identity. This choice can lead the feminist movement down one of two diverging paths: either, different standards must be applied to different groups, regardless of the degree to which they conform to your ideology, or the women who choose to forgo socially assigned gender identity as an important aspect of their identity must be deemed wrong and/or unevolved and cancelled.

The second choice is one that has foreseeable damaging effects on the feminist movement. It cannot be guaranteed that the consensus on the inclusion of non-cisgender individuals in the feminist discourse will continue. If, per chance, it does not, drawing from their experience of having been excommunicated, these new centres of power within the feminist movement will push their opposers out of the fold. Once this precedence is set, it will inarguably lead to an unending, petty conflict. Some shifting boundaries are expected to be a part and parcel of any shift in power-dynamics. But extending those boundaries to ensure the erasure of the “others” within the fold of the movement and their contributions is harmful to the movement as a whole.

Does this mean that contemporary gender discourse and the feminist movement cannot ever align? No. However, the dogmatic adoption of the same talking points by both groups feels both counter-intuitive and regressive. Surely, a feminist can empathise with the struggles of a trans/non-binary/ gender-queer person without

necessarily subscribing to the importance they pay to gender identity.

At its most extreme, this “my way or the highway” understanding of intersectionality paints any divergence from its doctrines as the action of an evil person who is not rational and/or moral and thus, to be dissociated from. This trend is alienating of people and minimizes any possibility of holding mature and productive debates. Unfortunately, for this exact reason, the leftist feminist belief system is disregarded entirely as a marginal and unproductive discourse on the basis of the aggressive environment created within its boundaries.

This is not to say that problematic views and practices of individuals, groups and social systems should not be called out, but as we do that, some degree of critical self-reflexivity is required to assess our own initial prejudices, opinions, complicities and motivations. It need not always be true that the impolite or insensitive behaviour of an individual stems from their “true” identity as a racist, misogynist, casteist, or homophobe. It could be that an individual is truly unaware of the consequences of their actions.

In conclusion, intersectionality can only occur in those situations where different groups actually line-up their thought processes, situational complexities, agendas and aspirations but not as a means to erase these in the service of some “higher” goal. In the latter scenario, inevitably, a squabble will break out within the attempted coalition which will be to the discredit of the warring factions in the eyes of the general public.

* * * *

Jailor of My Own Making

Jahanbi Singh

BA Hons. Psychology I Year

Every night I die and am reborn again
The moon stands to witness the pain
As I craft my own purgatory,
No chance of winning, no hope for mercy
I am the mother of my woes
I'm the cruellest jailor ever known
I gave myself wings,
I said I could be who I wanted to be
But what is this cage I've conjured up and
where is the key?

Did I fly too close to the sun; is this a
reprimand?
A cost to bear for what I didn't do,
For the lives I was too scared to withstand.
I take all these words and
tie them around the bars
This place feels like home,
I've been here at ungodly hours.

Home is where the heart is
And my heartstrings are tied here endlessly

But when light hits my home, it's time for
some normalcy
The moon withers away,
it got too much for her
Handing her duties to the sun, .
she disappears.
I break free of the cage or it breaks me
I slather a smile on my face and pretend my
life isn't a tragedy

I move through my day
But I don't know who I am;
I don't know where I'll be.
I pretend I am untethered.
I pretend I am free.
But I know I'll be here again when the
clock strikes three.
I know I'll have to witness the pain
As I traverse this path of discovery
As I learn, unlearn, grow and break free.
But until then I have no one else to blame,
I'll be here again,
I'll be here again.

* * * *



Picture Credit: Shreeja, BA Hons. English II Year

Femininity in the Crosshairs of Masculine Conflict: Women of Kashmir

Srushti Sharma
BA Hons. History I Year

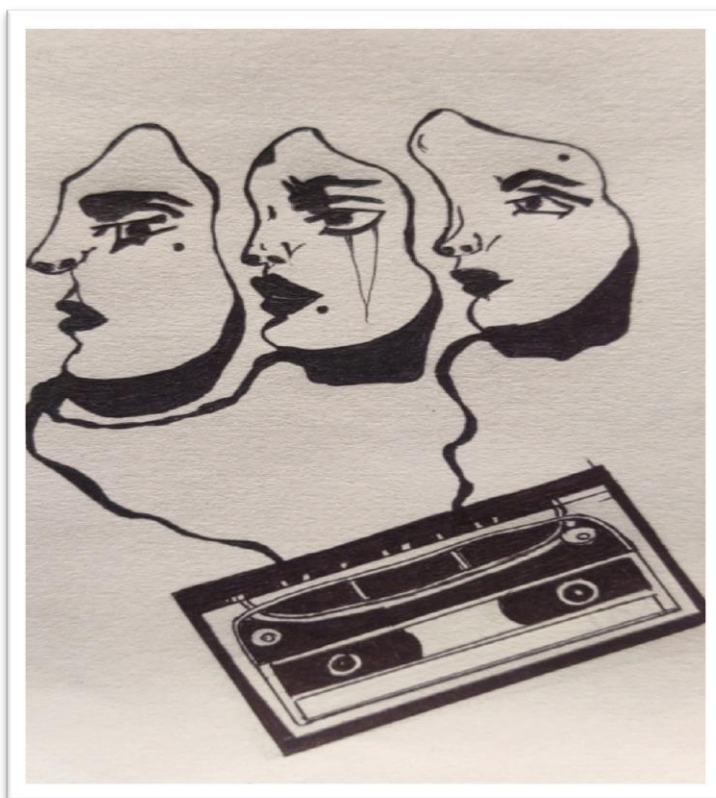
*She says, when are we going to meet?
I say, after a year and a war
She says, when does the war end?
I say, the time we meet*

*Mahmoud Darwish,
Palestinian poet and author*

Before delving into the topic of this paper, a clarification about how the terms “masculinity” and “femininity” are being used here may be in order. Since ages past, political organisation has been largely controlled by men and hence the patriarchal nature of our political practices cannot be ignored. Annexation or invasion is a feature of a male-dominated political structures. It would not be much of a misrepresentation, therefore, to associate modern day conflicts based on national boundaries with patriarchy, male-dominance and even “masculinity”. Femininity in the article does not refer to specific sets of traits customarily considered “womanly”. Rather, it is used to reference the bulk of the women who have historically had little or no say in political decision making and thus are trapped in situations of conflict that are not of their own making.

Masculine territorial conflicts shatter human lives and tear asunder the social fabric with their violence and brutality. While men often take the decision for a particular community or state to engage in conflict,

women are merely expected to acquiesce and play variously supporting roles as needed. They are expected to cry when their loved ones become casualties or martyrs to the cause or show strength and resilience, even taking on covert operations so as to inspire, encourage and support their men in conflict. Trapped in a situation they didn't choose and one that ultimately exacts a heavy price from them, a quote from Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* comes to mind as an apt description “The perfect gift. A girl trapped in a box. She only dances when someone else opens the lid. When someone else winds her up. If this is a story I am telling, I must be telling it to



*Picture Credit:
Aditi Sharma, BA Hons. History III Year*

someone. There's always someone even when there is no one".

Poets and authors often write of women in times of war as lovers anxiously waiting for their men to return or weeping mothers and sisters, etc. In other words, popular characterisations of women in conflict zones are suffused with emotion—something identified especially with women in many androcentric cultures, especially to devalue them. However, themes like the futility of war, the psychological agony, and socio-political costs of conflict are often examined via the emotional experiences of women. This fact, in itself, is very interesting and points to the inadequacy of reason (often identified as a masculine trait in sexist narratives) to fully understand the manifold consequences of conflict that “rational” men determine the course of. This paper looks at the distinct way in which women in conflict zones perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. It looks specifically at the example of Kashmiri women.

While stereotypical representations of Kashmiri women are easy to find, it is important to not ignore the ways in which Kashmiri women themselves are authoring resistance. Zanaan Wanaan, “woman speak” in Kashmiri, is an anonymous Kashmiri Women’s Collective and multi-media platform that is one example of women taking charge of their own narratives, resisting multiple crisscrossing forces of oppression that are patriarchal as well as militaristic in nature.

Patriarchy is equally fatal to women as conflict is. Women in conflict zones deal with dual manifestations of patriarchy, an oppressive state and regressive social structures. Instead of succumbing to these, journalists like Masrat Zahra and Iffat Fatima, Kashmiri women, are asserting their presence, their voice and their rights in

brave and imaginative ways. As Masrat Zahra shared in an interview given to *The New Humanitarian*, “In male-dominated societies like ours, women usually give up their dreams and suffer in silence but I chose not to do so”.

A distinctive quality of the works of Kashmiri women authors is how they depict agony while liberating the writer with every written word. It is heartening to note that, today, women from Kashmir dominate various Delhi-based academic circles. Central universities like Jamia Millia Islamia, University of Delhi and Jawaharlal Nehru University note an increasing representation of Kashmiri women in various academic programmes. Also, the internet has opened various avenues for women to express themselves and register their protest.

Before starting to write this piece upon women of a completely different place, faced with absolutely different realities, I was quite unsure about whether I was right. What, after all, gives me, a mainland privileged Indian, the right to appropriate struggles and battles of Kashmiri women? Perhaps, the answer is in the essence of women’s solidarity. But, can the principles of women’s solidarity stand true when a group of women have far more problematic sets of concerns to deal with? Women in Kashmir are ultimately fighting with dual patriarchal manifestations: oppression from patriarchal conflict, and from patriarchal social structures. Maybe, it is the latter that connects women of the world in a strange way. Perhaps the termination of both these aspects of patriarchal power is crucial to attain the promise of a just world denied to women for so long.

* * * *

Conversations with My Body

Akshita Pareek

BAP Psychology + Sociology II Year

I woke up a little insecure today,
my mind and heart again duelled
in my dream.
They were trying to figure out who caused
the existential crisis I had,
on Wednesday.
Both of them threw allegations
like two siblings
pestering each other
with water balloons on Holi.

And so, when I woke up,
I felt like the disoriented mother
who doesn't know which kid
she should stop first.
But my teeth are experts at solving
problems,
just like my father
which is exactly why they observed two
minutes of silence
before declaring both of them...
"Guilty".

Sometimes, my palms speak to me;
they ask me to stop growing my nails
so long
because they torture them
inside closed fists,
leave their angry marks on them
and my palms hate to bear
any more marks;
they already have so many of their own.

My feet tempt me
to try on all the pairs of heels
on the rack,
walk to all corners of the shop
as if I were some Gigi Hadid,
but then they reluctantly settle
inside my dirty white sneakers
as I walk out of the door.
Their gentle thuds tell me
that they would always be

my walking partners;
even if they walk slowly
or start hurting a little.

My ears become strangely similar
to my toes when they ask me to
hold onto life a little longer,
just like they hold onto
my *jhumkas* with energy, all day.

My fingers trace the remaining
route for me,
they take me to the periphery of my eyes,
lined with beautiful, long lashes
apart from,
the swelling and dark circles.

When I look into the mirror,
I use my eyes
to look at my own eyes,
and glance at the depth
stored in those browns;
I am starting to get lost in my own eyes
when I suddenly spot my smile
trying so hard to keep smiling
because it wants me to know that
I am its favourite face
...to smile on.

* * * *



Picture Credit:
Sharmee Godhulika, BA Hons. Sociology III Year

Same Sex Relations in Pre-modern India

Akansha Sengupta

BAP Elective English + History I Year

India, the land of rich customs, traditions, and home to many cultures, is no stranger to same-sex love. And contrary to the various orthodox groups saying that modern India has rejected homosexuality, in all actuality, modern India has embraced homosexuality. The Indian courts passed a landmark judgment on the 6th of September 2018, when it abolished article 377. Article 377 had been like a thorn in the side of many homosexuals who fought hard for their right to love. On the 6th of September that year the streets were bathed in the colours of the rainbow as people took to the streets celebrating history in the making. Modern Indians have made their stark refusal to be straitjacketed into the heterosexual society evident time and again.

However, more often than not same-sex love has been viewed as unnatural and in many cases often devious. Indian society has made many believe that “sex” is supposed to happen only between a man and a woman. Biology plays a great role in such descriptions as only those who correspond with their biological sex at birth can be socially allowed to love and marry. The act of intimacy is such a taboo subject in our nation that we don’t even get sex education because it involves illustrative and vivid descriptions of sex. Vile things are

said about the legitimacy of homosexual relationships by reducing them to the sole motive of “pleasure” (as if that is a bad thing) and dismantling the romantic experiences of queer people.

All that we are taught about sex is that we shouldn’t do it, at least not till we are married. The purpose of marriage is only to reduce women to baby-making machines, where sex is just for procreation and even thinking about female pleasure is made out to be a crime. So, imagine bringing up the topic of homosexual relationships at the dinner table. It’ll have your mother gawking at you in shock and your father thundering with rage, because “nobody wants their daughter to become a girl’s bride”. In this largely heteronormative society, same-sex love is talked about in hushed whispers and in the privacy of one’s bedroom.



Picture Credit:

Simran Tapparwal, BA Hons. History I Year

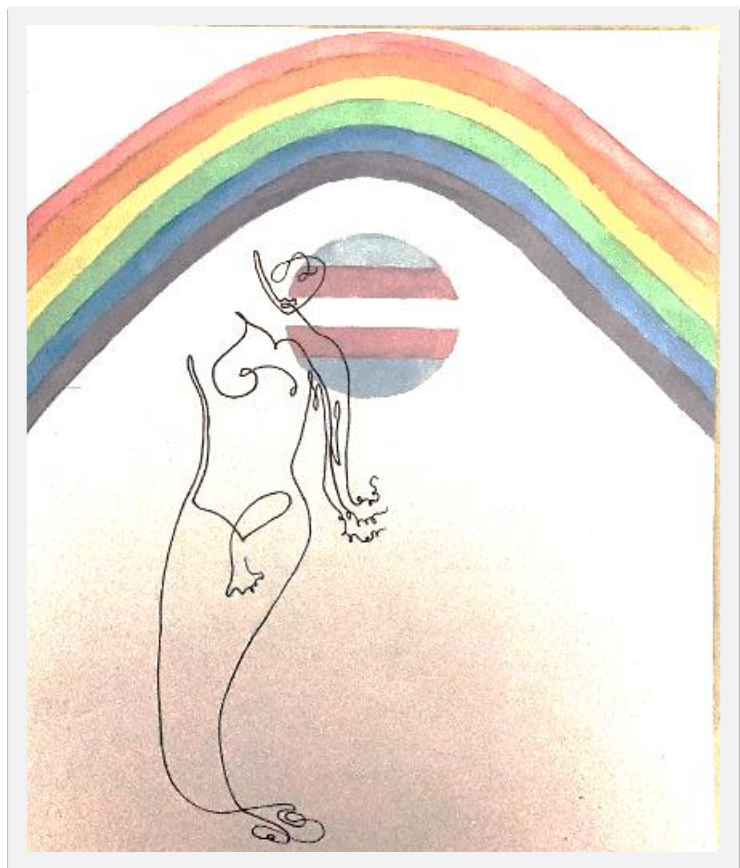
The current government while it supported the decriminalisation of homosexuality, does not support legalising same-sex marriage, feeding prejudices about homosexuality being unnatural and/or a mental health disease, etc. But has India in the past always conformed to these jaundiced views and norms? Well, if you think so, then, think again. Ancient India was a much more liberal and tolerant society. People were predominantly tolerant towards homosexuals and even towards people of the third gender. The Mughal harems had many eunuchs' serving as slaves and servants, sometimes even as advisors. The eunuchs or Khwajasera's played an important role in the functioning of the Mughal harem. They were employed as the queen's servant in waiting and would more often than not spy on the royal women and report back to the emperor. Because even in medieval India it was important to control and curb the movement of women.

Depictions in Literature

Presently we refuse to acknowledge that a thing like "sex" or "love-making" even exists because we just don't have the courage to talk about it. But our ancestors wrote the *Kamasutra* amongst other sexually explicit texts. Surprisingly, the Vedic system recognized homosexual unions. Varying sexual identities and preferences were widely recognized. The Purushayita, a chapter from the *Kamasutra*,

mentions lesbians and calls them "Swarinis". These women married other women and raised families together; they were widely accepted within the society, even amongst the third-gender community. Lesbians are not just mentioned in the *Kamasutra*, the text also documents the sexual escapades between women in some detail. In fact, female intimacy and pleasure find special mention in the *Kamasutra*.

Scholar and renowned author Devdutt Pattanaik notes that the *Markandeya Purana* tells the story of a prince who refused to marry a woman because he believed that he was a girl. Gender was fluid for Rakshasas and humans alike in the ancient Puranas. The story of Teeja and



Picture Credit:
Sehar Sabharwal, BA Hons. History I Year

Beeja resonates in the deserts of Rajasthan. The two were unwittingly promised to each other. Beeja brought up as a “man” marries Teeja. The story ends with them happily living together as women. Folk tales like this often talk of same-sex love and marriages. Ismat Chughtai’s “Lihaaf” and *Tehri Lakeer* were rather bold explorations of sexuality in the *zenana* for her time. “Lihaaf” was even the subject of an obscenity trial in the 1940s for its treatment of sexual relations between women.

Even though the *Manusmriti* says that homosexuality, a union between people of the same sex would bring about a loss of caste, other texts composed at the same time openly describe homosexual relations. In the colonial era, when Victorian prudery was imposed on and valorised in India, same-sex relations were carried out on the sly.

The temple of Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh has many sculptures that very evidently depict homosexual activities. The Khajuraho sculptures are widely known for their unconcealed and overtly sexual imagery. The sculptures depict sexual activity between two women and at times even between groups of women. Even the Ramayana depicts intimacy between women. The Rakshasis or female demons of Lanka are said to have engaged in sexual activity, and Valmiki even says that

Hanuman happened to witness it.

Hence, it is safe to say that homosexuality is very much part of the Indian past. Modern-day politicians and groups who insist that homosexuality is a western import contaminating Indian culture clearly need to learn a bit more about the culture they claim to speak on behalf of. References in Hindu mythology and other popular texts serve as abundant evidence of lesbian relationships in the past. India not only recognized homosexuality in the past, in many cases it even accepted same-sex relations. It is hoped modern India will work to shed its inhibitions and prejudices on the subject.

* * * *



Picture Credit:
Rikita Kishore Shah, BAP Psychology + Philosophy I Year

Criminal Love

Sharmee Godhulika
BA Hons. Sociology III Year

I played 3 songs for you – songs of love,
longing and desire
but they were muted by the “noise”
canceller

I reached out to hold your hands
but my palms were tied with barbed wire
I wrote a letter to you
a letter of love, longing and desire
but it was shredded by the “deviance”
shredder

I walked 3 different paths to meet you, but
my shoes were snatched
and the road was covered with a new layer
of hot coal tar and gravel
I paused to look into your eyes but they
threw sand into mine
the dust of their feet is the consequence of
my love
I weaved a poem for you but it was cut into
isolated words and empty letters
with the knife that has been passed on from
generations
and my shredded poem was tossed into a
hot pan to burn into black carbon

I plucked 3 flowers – a rose, a jasmine and
a hibiscus
she claimed those flowers would rather find
solace in her God
the flowers adorned the feet of the God
whose ardent devotees are blind to our
love
I whispered endearments into your ears yet
normativity eavesdropped
my lips were smeared with a glue which
deceptively looked like lip balm
I sketched a portrait of us and took it home
in my pocket
the homecoming was unexpectedly rainy
and I hadn't packed my raincoat,

the faces in the portrait became ponds of ink
and she threw it out of the window while
cleaning “her” house.

I called out your name 3 times in an empty
hall
to hear it echo, to hear it a little longer
to feel the world reverberating with our love
for once
but my echoes died down amidst the sound
of a clock

The clock just keeps ticking incessantly

Tic tictic
3 2 1

Tic tictic
3 2 1

Tic tictic
3 2 1

My Internal clock just keeps ticking

Do you feel the threat too?

They might strangle our love

Our love fated to die without a funeral

* * * *



Picture Credit:
Sharmee Godhulika, BA Hons. Sociology III Year

देह – स्त्री और आत्मछवि (महिला नसबंदी के सन्दर्भ में)

दीपा

हिंदी ऑनर्स, द्वितीय वर्ष

भारत जैसे देश में जहाँ मध्यस्तरीय लोगो की संख्या अधिक है और ग्रामीण क्षेत्र उससे भी बड़ा है। इन गाँवों में विकास अभी कुछ हद तक ही अपनी झलक दिखायी पड़ती है। यहाँ जनसंख्या वृद्धि एक बड़ी समस्या है। इसके साथ ही इस देश में पुरुषों की प्रधानता अधिक देखी जाती है, इन स्थितियों में एक स्त्री के लिए परिवार नियोजन के मायने कैसे बदल जाते हैं, आइए जानते हैं।

समाज में किसी भी परिवार के निर्माण में स्त्री की रूप में बराबर 'पति' प में तथा पुरुष कीके रू 'पत्नी' की महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका होती है। इन दोनों के बिना एक परिवार के निर्माण की कल्पना करना मुश्किल है। भारतीय समाज का एक रूढ़िवादी पहलू परिवार नियोजन के मुद्दे पर देखने को मिलता है। परिवार नियोजन के लिए अधिकतर स्त्रियों को ही प्रोत्साहित किया जाता है। हमारी सामाजिक व्यवस्था व सरकार भी मुख्य रूप से स्त्रियों पर ही परिवार नियोजन के लिए नसबंदी कराने को प्रोत्साहित करती है। भारतीय समाज व इसकी संस्कृति के बीच पला बढ़ा एक परिवार भी घर की स्त्रियों को ही नसबंदी के लिए हिदायत देते हैं। परिवार में सकुशल बच्चे होने 2-1 के बाद एक माँ अपनी बेटी को ही हिदायत देती है कि वह जीवन को आसान और सुगम और आगे और बच्चे ना करने के लिए नसबंदी कराए।

यहाँ एक महत्वपूर्ण प्रश्न यह उठता है कि क्या एक माँ अपने विवाहित बेटे से कभी ऐसा सवाल करती है ? शायद यह माना जा सकता है कि यह माँ की अपने बेटे के साथ की गयी ज़्यादाती हो सकती है या उसको यह बात गलत लग सकती है। इसलिए वह इस बात को अपनी बहू को समझाना आसान व सामाजिक तौर पर ठीक मानती है।

अधिकतर माताएं अपनी बेटियों को ही निरोधिकरण के लिए दबाव डालती हैं। इस स्थिति में मेरा यह विचार है कि स्त्रियों पर इस तरह का कोई दबाव नहीं

होना चाहिए। न तो सरकार का न ही किसी स्वास्थ्य अधिकारी का साथ ही साथ परिवार का दबाव भी नहीं होना चाहिए।

ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों की स्थितियां तब और खराब हो जाती हैं जब अकसर मेडिकल औजारों को जीवाणु मुक्त किये बिना ही ऑपरेशन कर दिए जाते हैं। पुरुष नसबंदी के मुकाबले महिलाओं में इस प्रक्रिया को अंजाम देना अत्यंत ही जटिल है। स्वास्थ्य की दृष्टि से इसके कई दुष्परिणाम भी हो जाते हैं। अगर गौर किया जाए तो यह देखा व समझा जा सकता है कि महिलाओं में किसी भी तरह के निरोधिकरण के साइडइफेक्ट महिला को झेलने ही पड़ते हैं। जानकारी व शिक्षा की कमी के कारण ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में महिला मृत्यु दर बढ़ रही है।

जबकि पुरुषों में निरोधिकरण की प्रक्रिया आसान होती है व इसमें समय भी कम लगता है। पर भारत जैसे देश में पुरुषों की निरोधिकरण कराने को लेकर मतभेद है। पुरुषों के मुकाबले स्त्रियों पर दबाव ज्यादा बनाया जाता है अधिकतर मामलों में स्त्रियां विवश हो जाती हैं न चाहते हुए भी उन्हें परिवार या पति के दबाव में आकर खुद को आत्मसमर्पित करना ही पड़ता है। दरअसल भारतीय समाज की रूढ़िवादी विचारधाराएं ही इस सोच को बढ़ावा नहीं दे रही। रूढ़िवादी विचारों के साथसाथ - पुरुषों में भी इस प्रक्रिया को लेकर कई गलत धारणाएं हैं, उन्हें भी समझना आवश्यक है।

जैसे, इनमें से कई यह है कि इस प्रक्रिया के बाद पुरुषों की शारिरिक शक्ति क्षीण हो जाती है। दूसरी यह कि हमारे देश में इस प्रक्रिया को मर्दानगी से जोड़कर देखा जाता है। उनका यह कहना भी होता है कि महिलाएं तो घरेलू कार्यों में संलग्न होती हैं तथा पुरुषों को घर चलाने के लिए बाहर कमाने जाना पड़ता है। इसलिए अगर वह वसेक्टमी नहीं करा सकते। यह सोच मात्र मध्यस्तरीय या केवल निम्नस्तरीय लोगों की ही नहीं अपितु पूर्ण रूप से शिक्षित उच्चवर्गीय लोगो की भी है।

आज ऐसा कोई कार्यक्षेत्र नहीं है जहाँ महिलाएं कार्य करते हुए अपना सार्थक योगदान दे रही हैं पर इस सन्दर्भ में स्थिति पहले जैसी ही शोचनीय है और ऐसी गलत अवधारणा ज्यों की त्यों बनी हुई है। अब तक इसका कोई तोड़ नहीं।

परिवार की मान्यताओं के साथ ही साथ हमारी स्वास्थ्य प्रणाली भी महिलाओं पर ही ये जिम्मेदारी डालने की कोशिश करती है या कह सकते हैं कि पूर्ण रूप से डाल चुकी है। ऐसी स्थितियों में स्वास्थ्य कर्मचारियों के लिए महिलाओं को बहलाना पुरुषों के मुकाबले ज्यादा आसान हो जाता है। नतीजतन नसबंदी शिविरों में महिलाओं को ही ज्यादा देखा जाता है।

भारत में मर्दों के लिए उनकी मर्दानगी बेशकीमती है चाहें उन्हें कितना भी पैसा मिले वे अपनी मर्दानगी पर कोई सवाल उठने देना नहीं चाहते हैं।

नसबंदी शिविरों में जाने के लिए महिलाओं को ही बढ़चढ़ कर भाग लेने के लिए क्यों प्रोत्साहित किया जाता है? जबकि पुरुषों पर उस तरह का दबाव नहीं बनाया जाता।

सरकार द्वारा बनाए गए परिवार नियोजन कार्यक्रमों पर आधारित विज्ञापन भी स्त्री को केंद्र में रखकर बनाये जाते हैं।

**बच्चों जो लगा ले एक इंजेक्शन
फिर तीन महीने न गर्भ की टेंशन
परिवार नियोजन से तू न शर्माना
सब जानकर ही तू पिया घर जाना।**

उक्त पंक्तियों में देखा जा सकता है कि कैसे एक लड़की को विवाह के पूर्व परिवार नियोजित करने की बात समझायी जा रही है। ऐसे ही कई अन्य विज्ञापनों में सारा पारिवारिक परिवार नियोजन की जिम्मेदारियों को एकतरफा स्त्रियों पर ही लाद दिया जाता है।

स्त्रियों की भी विवशताओं, उनकी शारीरिक स्थितियों को बराबर रूप से समझा जाना चाहिए। किसी भी महत्वपूर्ण फैसले में पुरुषों का एकाधिकार पूर्णतः गलत व अमानवीय व्यवहार है। स्त्रियों को चुप्पी तोड़नी पड़ेगी। और वे क्या चाहती हैं ये बात भी स्वतंत्र रूप से जाहिर करनी पड़ेगी तभी स्थितियों में परिवर्तन होगा।

एक जागरूक स्त्री होने के नाते हमारी जिम्मेदारी है कि आगे आने वाली परिस्थितियों में हम खुद से फैसले कर सकें न कि किसी के दबाव में आकर। स्त्री की देह और उसकी आत्मछवि अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण है। ऐसी स्थितियों में जब वह दूसरों की इच्छाओं को न चाहते हुए भी पूर्ण करने लगती है तो उसकी आत्मछवि उसकी खुद की नहीं रह जाती और दूसरों की इच्छाओं का प्रतिरूप बन दूसरों में ही घुल मिल जाती है उसका अपना अस्तित्व कहीं खो सा जाता है। इस आत्मछवि को बनाये रखने के लिए महत्वपूर्ण है कि हम अपनी (स्त्रियाँ) देह अपनी शारीरिक क्षमता के अनुसार ही फैसले लेना कि किसी के दबाव में आकर। एक स्वतंत्र और स्वस्थ जीवन के लिए यह आवश्यक है।

* * * *



Picture Credit:
Nandini Jain, BAP Psychology + Philosophy I Year

*Trigger Warning

Ruth Singh

BAP Political Science + Sociology II Year

The day I realised I was overweight I became self-conscious.
I wouldn't wear revealing clothes.
I was told they made me look ugly.
And fat.

My mind and body learned that lie like I learned the alphabet song
Its lyrics branded on my brain.

I started checking the calorie count at the age of 14.
Often even starved myself
Only to overeat the next meal.
I pendulum between pitying and hating myself.

I couldn't look at myself for days. A single glance revulsed me.
I told myself I am not worthy of love coz let's be real
Who can love a person like me.
Fat. Obese food junkie with anxiety
And depression.

Hours I walked on the street till I couldn't feel my breath or my heart.
It felt like my body rejected me. And I was already a social reject.
I couldn't make sense of what was happening.
So, I blamed myself. For that.

I resisted my craving. Almost put my life on hold
Spiralled into an endless pit of despair and self-loathing.
I wanted to cut my skin. Hurt and bleed it all away.
Seemed better than trying so hard and failing.
Over and over again. Over and over again.

I couldn't come out. I knew I should
I knew my destination. But the lines got blurry

Years have passed.
I've learnt to love myself.
Not entirely.
But some parts.

Like an addict going back to rehab
I find myself often spiralling.
I should just accept myself.
But sometimes it's someone I love,
And sometimes I can't look at myself.

* * * *



Picture Credit:

Isha Dawar, BAP Psychology + Philosophy II Year

Women against Patriarchy

Anuriti Bahl
BA Hons. Sociology I Year

The charcoal work and the cloth covering her face represents the monochromatic life of a woman due to the presence of patriarchal authoritarianism and her being told to restrict herself because of society's beliefs. The red bindi stands for her power, beauty and capability to fight all odds and add value to the world.



* * * *

Child Marriage in India

Riya Kapoor

BA Hons. Sociology II Year

Studies on the phenomenon of child marriages have been an area of utmost interest to many sociologists and humanitarian workers. In simple terms, child marriage may be described as a marriage or union of two people in which one or both the parties are under the age of 18. Despite not being accepted by the National Human Rights Commission of India and organisations like UNICEF and Red Cross, child marriage is practiced in many economically middling or poor South Asian countries. Despite public denunciations and legal penalties, the complex mesh of forces and circumstances that uphold this practice on the ground and among communities, often escapes the limelight.

If we focus on India, various statistics indicate high rates of child marriages right up until the colonial period. They also shed light on the fact that even though the number of such marriages has significantly reduced, they still are practiced in various parts of the country and in large numbers. According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) statistics available in the public domain in 2020, about 1.5 million girls under 18 get married in India, and nearly 16% of adolescent girls aged 15-19 are already married. To make matters worse, researches on the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic estimated that an additional 13 million child marriages will occur all over the world in the next decade.

Why does the practice of child marriage persist in India? When one tries to find the answer to this question, one is often met with a certain set of similar, and might one add, stock responses. Child marriage is mainly described as a symptom of a deeply divided and fragmented patriarchal society. Dowry, poverty and fear of sexual violence are some of the underlying reasons for engaging in such a ritual in modern-day androcentric cultures. The requirement of a "guardian" for the female child is considered extremely important, especially in

a country where sexual harassment and assault cases are reported by the hundreds every day.

Meanwhile, dowry and poverty are also important causes, when all the financial costs and expenditure associated with marriage traditionally are taken into account. In most societies, the girl in the house, an unmarried daughter, is seen as a burden and is married off early in order to get that pressure off the parents' back. For parents of daughters, there is enormous social pressure to secure the life of their children by finding their "ideal match" at an early age. This is especially so, if the family comes from a poor background, because the dowry is decreased according to the age of the girl child—the younger the girl, the lesser the dowry.

The groom's family are also extremely accepting of a young bride as they not only gain an extra member that can perform unpaid labour for them, but one that is young and can be moulded more easily to their liking. For the groom's father, child marriage is also a way to reinforce his authority in the family since the son, his bride and their children would be dependent on him and therefore, bound to obey him at all costs. The new bride being so young would be subservient to the wishes of the senior male and female members of the household and contribute to the family income, either by providing household services *gratis* while the rest of the family goes out to do paid work or by helping them cultivate fields and/or perform different sorts of paid labour.

Of course, there is the issue also of sexual control. As the children are married at an extremely early age, they do not get a chance to explore their sexual identity and are forced to consent to the socially entrenched protocols of heteronormativity.

While speaking of the problem of child marriage, it is also important to take note of the issue of marital rape. In a country like India, where thousands of girls are harassed and raped

on a daily basis and the National Crime Records Bureau's report on "crimes in India" (2019) states that a woman is raped every 16 minutes in the country, marital rape is not recognized as a crime. When this fact is coupled with the prevalence of child marriage in the country, it is impossible to ignore the gruesome ways in which a woman's consent is socially nullified and her autonomy trampled upon. Married young girls have little choice but to satisfy their husband's sexual advances. Oftentimes, they are forced to engage in sexual activities without any prior knowledge of what constitutes safe and protected sex. While provisions in the Indian constitution, like section 375 of the IPC do exist in the country to battle rape, they are grievously flawed as non-consensual intercourse or sexual acts forced by a man on his own wife (the wife being over the age of 15) is not considered rape. Of course, if a child wife who is not yet 15 is forced to have sex by her husband, it would be extremely unlikely either for her natal or her affinal families to bring charges of rape against the husband. In effect, there is a grotesque disregard and deliberate misunderstanding of the meaning of consent not just among communities following various patriarchal customs like child marriage, but equally by the state for ignoring or minimizing the problem of marital rape. Far too many girls in India are routinely condemned to live out lives that are a series of unwanted pregnancies, suffering serious damage to their health, and loss of opportunities for education and self-development, in the process.

If we evaluate the role of television, we see that the Indian media and cinema have often showcased contrasting views on child marriage. Shows like *Balika Vadhu*, which aired for almost a decade tried to raise awareness on the issue and its implications in states like Rajasthan where the practice is rife. On the other hand, soap operas like *Pehredar Piya Ki*, showed the marriage of a 10-year-old boy to an 18-year-old girl in a positive light. Even though it was taken off air after the broadcasting station received numerous complaints against its portrayal of child marriage, the show had a high viewer count and was nominated for various Indian awards. This sort of monkey balancing by media houses alternately critiquing and

glorifying child marriage only muddies the waters. It prevents the problem of child marriage from being identified, understood and addressed in a way that helps us as a society to do away with the practice.

Laws, like the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006, have not been very effective in discouraging the practice. Our laws must move beyond just being on paper and the resolve to implement the laws effectively on the ground must be strengthened. Child marriage happens because despite criminalizing the practice, the state and society continue to wink at it. This must change.

Better policy initiatives too are needed like supporting education beyond the primary school level, the provision of economic incentives for delayed marriages and the creation of safe spaces for work. In fact, researchers and thinkers are now advocating the use of education to bring about a major change to promote the eradication of child marriage. The attempt is to empower young people so that they are well-informed and can take considered decisions about their lives. The aim is to support the creation of alternative life options and a space where themes like livelihood, education, sexual and reproductive health and rights etc., can be studied in safety and without censure. The workspace, for instance, is being looked at as a place for imparting education of basic human rights, be it through government intervention or the help of civil society groups. The hope is that educating all members of the society and promoting gender sensitization and social awareness can help in the eradication of the practice of child marriage.

As can be seen, there is a lot of work to be done before we can successfully eliminate the practice of child marriage in India. While many organizations are trying their best to work towards this goal, the road ahead is difficult and demanding. We owe it to our foremothers, like Rukhmabai, the young woman who braved ferocious backlash to so courageously raise the question of consent more than a century ago, however, to not give up till we succeed.

* * * *

Transference of Internalised Misogyny

Manjiri Nene

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By the time their teen years are over, most girls have heard “suck it up”, “but you’re meant to be more mature”, “he’s just being a boy”, “you’re smarter than that”, or a similar sentiment being expressed to them. These sentiments are focused on when received from men, but what seems more concerning is the fact that women train each other into imbibing skewed values. Often such behaviour of women is compared to the crab-bucket-behaviour, a more complex form of “if I can’t have it, neither can you” mentality.

Why is it that women perpetuate the ideals that discriminate against them?

This question can’t be answered without understanding the context within which it becomes imperative to the social order. Crabs do not naturally occur in buckets. So why must we forget the human hands that placed them in the bucket, to begin with?

The thought-process and actions of an individual depend on two things: their risk aversion and the support of their peer group. For women, as a group suffering the consequences of systemic discrimination, the effect of these two determinants become much more imperative because their social context is not conducive to change. Women without secure and comprehensive support groups suffer in both aspects. Their place in society is determined by the entities they co-exist with, so a lack of peer support can cause unnecessary stress to an individual. Upon repeatedly undergoing stressful situations, the ability of an individual to endure social stigma reduces.

Seen from a feminist perspective, this highlights the importance of the opinions of those around a woman, regarding her choices, be it about clothing, career, eating-habits, the choice to not have children or have children in a non-traditional manner, the choice to pursue life as a career woman or not. The reason that such opinions are widely perpetuated and carry so much weight is because of the inability of women to stand together. When girls and

women across the board face different levels of the same discrimination in their public and private life, their immediate concern is myopic, self-preservative and conformist in nature. By separating women from each other and pitting them against each other, a competitive culture is created. Public, and sometimes even private lives, of women, become zero-sum games. Women begin to perceive other women’s successes as their loss. So, instead of bringing women together, the achievements of individuals, makes women envious and aggressive.

When such a precedent is set, young girls inherit a skewed belief system. Often, these beliefs are perpetuated by their own cautious mothers, aunts or grandmothers, who feel the need to protect and keep them “safe”. These double standards, when introduced in the private sphere might come from a place of concern or worry, but quickly work to establish an understanding among young girls that they lack a genuinely supportive peer group. So, the unwarranted questions that detached individuals in society seek an answer to, become regular topics of conversation among young girls who begin to understand their right to make choices as an abstract after-thought.

What can be done to change this scenario? It shouldn’t be par for the course that women only collectivize when grave-crimes are committed on the basis of gender. Such movements are not the *deus ex machina* that the media portrays them to be. The origin of such movements is in every participant and affected party. We must come together and understand that the context within which such crimes become possible is also equally to blame. The patriarchal organisation of society cannot be dismantled through isolated movements outraged about extraordinary instances of violence and brutality when the everyday normalised systematic assault of patriarchal cultures on women through misogynistic conditioning is ignored.

* * * *

Unerase

Pratishtha Jindal

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I'm a woman,
Unnamed in history.
I'm a woman – confined,
I don't even know –
What is my crime?

In the mirror,
And on every surface –
I find different reflections,
And in every face – I see etched,
Yearning,
And the pain – of a prisoner –
Openly caged.

I am a woman,
Why is that a reason for hate?
To call me frail?
Who gave me this fate?

I am a woman,
Why have I been silenced?
Why did it take so long –
For me to have a voice?

In this room,
And on this old desk,
Through broken fragments,
I find the truth
– In history, and through facts;
In the hidden disparity,
Or rather – the unfeeling reality.

Within the smudged and unwritten
words – I hear them enunciate –
Their words,
That never had a home,
That couldn't find a page.

Their words, I wish we could have read.
Their words,
That they wished would have fled.

I'm a woman,
Tired of being shamed.
I'm a woman,
Tired of others defining me.
I'm a woman
Tired of hiding
I'm a woman,
Who will not now be meek.

I will be un-erased
In the past
In the present
In the future.

Come, get to know me
If you dare.

* * * *



*Picture Credit:
Shreeja, BA Hons. English II Year*

Women and the Biological Clock

Aditi Kapur
BA Hons. History I Year

Since time immemorial women have been subjected to so many rules and regulations framed by the society. One of these rules are centred around the idea of marriage and “settling down”. According to the norms of the Indian society in particular, time is of utmost importance in a woman’s life. Settling down isn’t a commonly used phrase for getting a job but it’s used in relation to marriage, and ultimately, to bearing children. Of course, given the circumstances, the significance of age in the life of women who wanted to bear a child couldn’t have been disregarded in olden times.

Certain socio-economic factors were associated with the significance of the biological clock in a woman’s life. Times prior to Independence weren’t the same as they are currently for women. Women were largely illiterate; only about 8.9% women were literate on the eve of Independence. Illiteracy kept from them the awareness required for their own holistic development. Also, job opportunities were scarce for women. Financial-dependence paves the way for low self-esteem and the inability to make decisions for oneself. Besides, society pressured women to conform to archaic sets of rules regarding marriage and motherhood.

Much has changed since those days. Women have much greater access to education and career options. With time, women are working to throw off the shackles of prejudiced practices to realise their constitutionally guaranteed rights as citizens. The institutions of family, marriage and motherhood are also beginning to be questioned by women on several counts.

Vis-à-vis motherhood, technology has played a big role in freeing women who wish to have children from the tyranny of time, the tick tock of their biological clock.

IVF and now mature oocyte cryopreservation, a method used to preserve women’s ability to get pregnant in the future by freezing their eggs, have helped. These frozen eggs can be thawed, combined with sperm in a lab and implanted in a women’s uterus (in vitro fertilization). This preservation technique was devised in 1986, at a time when women’s position in India had already improved multi-fold since the time of Independence.

Egg freezing is variously advantageous for women. It allows women to make deliberate decisions about when they wish to have children. It takes away the pressure on women to compromise their studies and career opportunities in the rush to have babies before they are too old. With cryopreservation of eggs, woman no longer have to choose between having a career and being a mother.

Of course, the stranglehold of the biological clock, which has been somewhat neutralised by technological innovation, is only real if a woman wants to have children in a patriarchal society that is structurally inimical to allowing women to have children and careers without having to choose between them. The biological clock is meaningless for women who do not wish to become mothers. Therefore, along with scientific advancements, society must change so as to not keep thinking that marriage and motherhood are inevitable choices for a woman, and to fundamentally reimagine childcare norms as well as professional structures.

Ultimately, every woman should be able to decide for herself what is good and right for her. For this the bogey of the biological clock needs to be exposed and made redundant not just by technological interventions but by much more far reaching socio-political and attitudinal changes.

* * * *

I Am Like Other Girls

Jahanbi Singh

BA Hons. Psychology I Year

I still remember watching *10 Things I Hate About You* and being enamoured by the protagonist, Kat Stratford. She was just so different from the other female characters I'd seen. She read books and played sports. She didn't care about her appearance but the male lead still fell for her. She wasn't like "other girls", she was *better*. I also remember wanting to be like her and not like the "other girls" in the movie. It took me a while to realize that I was crushing my own gender just so I could stand atop the rubble. My identity was starting to revolve around putting down every other girl.

The "I'm not like other girls" phenomenon is a phase most young girls go through, and it's not hard to understand why. In a society that constantly devalues women's interests and their diverse identities, it's no wonder that they have been conditioned to associate femininity with being superfluous, dramatic, or simply put—boring. Dressing up, liking make-up, and other such interests are seen as shallow and vapid. Such women are shown to be incapable of deep thought. This image is also reinforced by the media. The movies that many of us grew up with showed the "popular" girls as always being prim and proper, only caring about boys, and not being as intelligent or multifaceted as the protagonists. This way, we learn what these "other girls" look like. They are the ones who conform to traditional gender roles and norms. The truth, however, is that many girls don't identify with that image and for good reason. Young girls who are on their

way to define themselves view such a portrayal of women as being reductionist, so they tend to move in a different direction altogether. They detach themselves from this "conventional" figuration of a woman and it becomes a powerful statement for them to reject femininity entirely.

On the one hand, women face social pressure to conform to such gender roles but there are also negative connotations attached to it. Women witness this hatred of stereotypically "girly" traits and absorb this sentiment. Naturally, it becomes uplifting for them to try to be layered individuals who have depth and are smart because women, in general, are routinely shown to be the opposite. This socially constructed identity of women where they are seen as vain, and their interests, as unimportant, leads to some girls really believing that being "not like other girls" is the greatest achievement.

What I just described was the internalised misogyny working behind this phenomenon. It seeks to pit all the "manic pixie dream girls" and the "plain Janes" against each other. Some people also argue that women engage in such a rejection of femininity in order to appease men. The cigar-smoking, whiskey-drinking, laid-back girl (looking at you, Robin Scherbatsky) is infinitely more attractive to heterosexual men than the needy and dramatic ones that the "other" girls are usually portrayed to be. This was what Margaret Atwood was talking about when she wrote, "Male

fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? Upon a pedestal or down on your knees, it's all a male fantasy: that you're strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do anything about it. Even pretending you aren't catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy".

However, this explanation of the "I'm not like other girls" phase is overly simplistic. Isn't thinking that women engage in this negative behaviour only to seek male approval a sexist assumption? Is Atwood right in attributing all of women's actions to appearing desirable to men? This explanation plays into the negative stereotype that no matter what women do, they are never capable enough to have true agency over their actions. It ignores just how toxic internalized misogyny can be.

The "I'm not like other girls" trope has existed in popular culture for a long time now and has received its much-deserved backlash. There are entire online communities that ridicule women who fit this description. However, in ridiculing these women who think they're "different" and hence better than others, we've just created another version of a woman whom we're allowed to mock. It's also exhausting to see how women are always the ones being shamed for either being "too girly" or not "girly" enough. It's not surprising that we haven't witnessed the "I'm not like other boys" phenomenon on such a scale. Even though men do face social pressure to conform to rigid stereotypes, women are often the ones facing public ridicule for whichever direction they choose.

This is not to say that women who demean their entire gender just to claim their individuality aren't wrong in doing so. The problem is that we tend to create binaries everywhere—the Madonnas and the Whores, the Angels in the house and the Monsters. Why is it still so difficult to digest that any person can have a multitude of facets to their personality? A person who chooses to be more "feminine" still has more to themselves just like a person who chooses not to conform at all. Even though it feels that society has moved on from such a rigid classification of people and, particularly, women, this thinking still manifests in other ways. More recently, a social media trend asked women to introduce themselves as the reason why other women hated them. The responses ranged from "because I'm pretty" to "I'm one of the guys", begging us to think if we've really moved on from internalized misogyny and the "I'm not like other girls" mentality.

So, was I wrong in liking Kat Stratford among other female characters in the movie? Not entirely. She was a dynamic heroine and certainly had good character traits. What I have realized now and wish I could have realized then is that Kat was actually *like* other girls. There were just not enough complex female characters in mainstream media at that time. In actuality, Kate was an amalgamation of all the qualities I admire that weren't associated with femininity at that time. In the larger context of the world where women are still pitted against each other, this realization may not be much, but it's definitely a starting point!

* * * *

पेंडेमिक और स्त्री

दीपा

हिंदी ऑनर्स, द्वितीय वर्ष

नैराश्य लीला कुछ इस प्रकार हुई
दुनिया कोरोना महामारी का शिकार हुई
फिर शुरू हुई अनंत लोगो की जीवन समाप्ति की लीला
हृदय विदारक स्थिति आपार हुई
इस स्थिति के संकट की दोहरी मार
नारी पर कुछ इस प्रकार हुई,
अनंत संघर्ष, निर्दयता की वर्षा फिर इनपर आपार हुई

हर युग में नारी बने अपने त्यागो से श्रेष्ठ महान
खुद को समर्पित कर दिया , करा सबका उत्थान
इस वर्ष कोरोना ने इनपर कुछ ऐसा प्रकोप दिखाया ,
फिर अत्यंत कठिन इनका जीवन बनाया
लॉकडाउन में रहकर करती रही 24 घंटे सबकी सेवा और काम
कभी पति कभी बेटा-बेटी न मिला इनको आराम
परिवार-काम, काम से फिर परिवार, यही रही इनकी जिंदगानी
काम बेतहाशा बढ़ा ,और जीवन बना नीरस सी एक कहानी ।
सहारा देकर परिवारों को तपती धूप में भी किया सफ़र
न नेहर से मदद मिली इनको न सरकार से ही हो पाया गुज़रा

गरीब स्त्रियों का हाल , की तो पूछ मत ऐ खुदा
तूने क्यूं जनां, जब जीवन में था यही बदा ।
फिर भी प्रेम लुटा तन-मन दिया, करती रही बलिदान
स्नेह , ममत्व की वर्षा कर इस संकट के समय को
परिवारों के लिए बनाया कुछ आसान

आँचल में छुपाती अपने लाल को ,
करती रही अपना मातृत्व कर्म अनवरत
कइयों ने देखा एक माँ का संघर्ष
खिंचती रही एक बैग को, तन-मन से हारकर
जिसपर सोया था उसका एक बालक
कुछ पल की नींद, सुकून और एक छोटा सा संघर्ष विराम
दिलाने के लिए
खुद झेल गयी वो कड़कती धूप को ,
बालक को आराम दिलाने के लिए ।

ऐसी कई अनगिनत दर्दनाक कहानियां गढ़ती गयी ।
सड़को पर रोटी रोटी को कई विधवा माँए तरस गयी
आशाएं कही डूब कर मूर्छित हो गयी
तो क्या गरीबी की जिंदगी इसलिए दी गयी.....?

एक बेटी का संघर्ष कुछ यूं रंग लाया
लाचार पिता का सारथी बन जब उसने उनको
निश्चित पड़ाव तक पहुँचाया ।

पिया संग जो है कामनी , मातुल सूत के साथ
सास-ससुर को सेवती रूके कभी न हाथ
नारी तुम अतुल्य , स्वतंत्र हो
हर स्थिति में जीवन धन यंत्र हो
कोरोना के कपाल पर लिखा
स्नेह सुख मंत्र हो ।

* * * *



*It was the year of twenty-twenty
When the streets all went empty,
While you were all in your humble abode
This shelter above me, with nothing but my voice
echoed.*

*Picture and Text Credit:
Visheshta Sharma, BAP Psychology + Philosophy I Year*

“Giving Away” Brides

Sania Javed

BA Hons. Economics I Year

The existence of the institution of *marriage* can be traced back to the most ancient societies. Even if not in the present form, it is found that marriage, of some sort, has been found to have existed in all societies, past and present. With marriage comes the inextricable aspects of societal life, namely, customs, rituals, and traditions.

And one such tradition marking the dawn of the institution of marriage is the elaborate scheme of a wedding! Earlier forms of marriage existed as strategic alliances wherein romantic love was irrelevant. Women were offered as a means to strengthen alliances. Our perceptions of marriage have evolved since then. Even today, while different communities across the globe may have different rituals to mark and solemnize a marriage, one feature they have in common is the practice of “Giving away the bride”. The practice has been in existence for so long and has fed the ideas of patriarchy so conveniently that up until recently, not many women even thought about questioning the glorification of the “traditional” practices of *kanyadaan* and *bidaai* (and, even the dowry system), for instance, in India. With the sense of antiquity associated with these traditions, what we seem to ignore is that by participating in these practices, we are complicit in reinforcing the view that women are transactional objects (*paraaya dhan*) for the family to “give away” or to be walked down the aisle and “handed over” by the father to the groom.

These so-called traditions are justified in the name of our ancestors, but in reality, they are aimed at perpetuating existing norms of male dominance in the structure of Indian families. Religion has always been

an important part of the Indian Subcontinent, and most people follow religious injunctions to such an extent that it is difficult for them to move away from traditions that they have grown up with and which they perceive as having religious sanction. In a situation like this, where a big part of the population is not adaptable or so tolerant even, it is important to introspect. After all, we can only progress when we can cast a critical light on our past and when necessary move away from the undesirable customs of a bygone era.

With feminism gaining global momentum, women around the world have realized how their need for liberty has been overlooked by society, yet, these traditions which reek of male supremacy are still tolerated and left unreformed because they are thought to be unquestionable. Many women have come out and called out the patriarchy that envelopes our traditions. Dia Mirza (actress & social worker), recently got married and chose to say “No to Kanyadaan and Bidai”. “Change begins with choice, doesn’t it?” she said. Another such representation of “strong women” was seen in the Netflix programme, *The Big Day*. Its second episode titled, “Here Comes the Type A Bride”, is dedicated to two highly independent and strong women who decide to take on patriarchy. The episode attempts to normalize equality between men and women in a relationship and showcases how today’s generation does not believe in some of the age-old marriage rituals and refuses to conduct them at their weddings.

Now, while acknowledging that these are privileged women who can afford to stand up against archaic rituals, it is also important to give credit where it’s due; to

understand that however small a breakthrough it may seem, this is a step in the right direction!

The idea that women should be “given away” to their husbands like a commodity that has no real power or control over their life and choices implies that their only value is donning the gender roles socially assigned to women at the time of their birth. It is also important to acknowledge the deeply institutionalized perpetuation of the ideas of “gullible” women, incapable of independent thinking and in need of “constant protection” by the State. The most recent, ever-so-misogynistic spectre of “love jihad” finding legislative sanction is a perfect example. The entire discourse pivots on the notion that an adult Hindu woman is so naïve and therefore vulnerable that any man (specifically, a Muslim man) can feign love and seduce her. Not only is this narrative deeply Islamophobic, one cannot also look away from the underlying misogyny driving this narrative! Ultimately, the power of making our own decisions, about love and marriage is being snatched away from women by claiming we don’t understand what’s best for us; moreover, we must be “protected” against ourselves and by legislative writ if necessary!

Taking a good look at these “traditions” we can see that they not only propagate (and against constitutional guarantees) the dangerous notion that women are owned first by their fathers and later, by their husbands but also, infantilize women making them subjects that need to be “looked-after” and “saved”. Women don’t need saving, at least not of this sort! In fact, such a mentality pushes them to be seen as the responsibility of their in-laws

and reinforces the social compulsion felt by women to subordinate their personal choices to the choices and desires of the people around them. The construction of women’s identity as a “passive citizen” and victim is inextricable from the dominant roles envisaged for men through centuries of institutionalized religious practices. Given how deeply enmeshed the domination of men is with the subordination of women, it is not farfetched to infer that systemic androcentrism not only damages women but also harms men—through valorizations of the different iterations and expressions of toxic masculinity as ideal and exemplary conduct.

By and large, currently, in India, the traditions of the community are seen to be beyond interrogation especially when women are the only ones at a disadvantage. Women’s agency in society is affected, among other things, due to the normalization of misogynistic marriage practices in the name of culture, religion and tradition. One’s “name” is an extremely important symbol of one’s identity, lineage, and, culture, especially in matters of marriage. That’s exactly why most men never even think about changing their name, nor are they expected to. Women, on the other hand, are routinely expected to change the last and sometimes even their first names upon marriage. No one should ever have to sacrifice his or her own identity, even symbolically, to wed someone else. Getting married doesn’t make one’s existence as an individual invalid. It’s high time we start to rethink our ideas of a wedding, its customs (why must the bride’s parents pay?), and everything circling a marriage and women’s identity and personhood.

* * * *

“Ratification – Repudiation”

Nashra Sehar
BA Hons. English I Year

This is a piece on acceptable standards that exist in every sphere of life, and the loss of identity while trying to live up to them. “Ratification” or “repudiation” basically translates to “acceptance” or “rejection”. We all wish to be accepted by other people because of which certain narrow boundaries for identity are valorized and upheld as standards. An individual tries to fit that acceptable standard with every possible mask they can try on, losing their organic identity, in the process. The shattering of narrow normative boundaries can only take place when one proudly and confidently accepts and embraces their true self. The change to an accepting society begins from one’s own self.



JIGYASA

(132)

***Thappad*: Turning a Critical Light on Marriage and Domesticity**

Divjot Kaur

BA Hons. English III Year

Thappad (2020) is a thought-provoking reflection of how women are treated in our society. Its meticulous screenplay has been brought to life powerfully by Anubhav Sinha's able direction and Taapsee Pannu's commendable acting.

The movie revolves around the seemingly "normal" life of Amrita and Varun. An economically well-off young couple with everything but mutual "respect", as is evident from Amrita's identity being taken for granted and discounted by Varun without a moment's thought. Amrita devotes herself to fulfil her husband's life, being there as a homemaker and caretaker. Her character is the consummate selfless homemaker but one who barely finds any validation in return. Amrita performs her domestic duties with an infectious smile and jolly spirit—all because she *chose* to marry Varun and be a homemaker. "*Housewife hoon, meri choice thi. Wo paise kamaega, mai ghar chalaungi. Fair deal thi meri. Unfair wo thappad tha, unfair hai mujhse expect karna ke main move on karun*". During a celebratory gathering at their house, Varun slaps Amrita—a violent act which the people either attempt to pretend never happened or find excuses for. It is referred to as "just a slap". The movie here highlights how society is complicit in sanctioning violence against women by excusing it as a part of the wear and tear of marriage, something

that is not to be made much of as a problem. The power a man exercises over a woman has been normalized by the dehumanizing norms of society that dictate how women ought to behave in an accommodating, forgiving, selfless and submissive way whether as wives, as daughters and daughters-in-laws. In the film, the societal agents who reinforce this messaging come in the form of her own mother, her brother, the silent onlookers of that party, and, of course, Varun, her husband.

At the surface level, this movie is about the slap, a violent, unacceptable act on Varun's part. Amrita rightfully seeks accountability from not just her husband but the society which enables and trivializes such behaviour:

"Par thappad ki goonj mei bahut si gehri sachaiye chupi hai"

"Uss ek thappad se mujhe woh sari unfair cheese saaf saaf dikhne lag gayi jisko main undekha karke move on karte ja rahi thi"

At a deeper level, this film raises multiple issues faced by women belonging to different spheres and classes. The slap in itself is also a twofold metaphor—the violent act as an infringement and violent degradation of a woman's basic dignity and agency, and on the other hand, if we are to see it as an ironical title, as a slap in the face for society with its archaic and inhuman patriarchal prejudices.

The movie exposes the fact that women are robbed off their agency at all levels. The domestic worker whose husband is abusive, the reputed lawyer whose husband ignores her lack of consent, Amrita who is treated with no appreciation for her unpaid labour or respect and the single widowed mother whose existence and success are questioned on the grounds of her being “without a man”.

The film is poignant. It is a complex coalition of simple truths of our society, one that leaves us feeling angry about all that’s wrong but at the same time empowering each character with due agency and dignity in realistic representations that gives hope that real change is possible. In the movie, the single mother taking charge of her private life as much as her professional life, prefers a loving, warm and unproblematic family life with her daughter. Amrita, by the end of the movie is pregnant, but literally and metaphorically in the driver’s seat (she’s shown to take up driving lessons, which is the movie’s clever way of emphasizing that she is charge of the direction her life takes). Varun is shown to recognize his folly. He apologizes for his mistreatment of her, but, and this is where the movie departs from tried and tested cheesy reconciliation plotlines, while Amrita accepts his apology, she does not take him back. Instead, the movie concludes with both going their separate ways,

traversing paths of rediscovery and self-improvement.

It’s worth noting that the film wasn’t received with unopposed applause. In fact, while it is considered a critically acclaimed film, it was a “flop” from the perspective of box office collections. The film made less than Rs. 45 crores. On the other hand, a film like *Kabir Singh* which glorified everything that *Thappad* attempts to challenge about the kind of violence that gets normalized and romanticized under the guise of conventional patriarchal love and marriage, saw a whopping Rs 300 cr collection at the box office. Clearly, the Indian audience, by and large, prefers to watch and entertain themselves with various conventional but misogynistic tropes and narratives. This is unfortunate, but we must persevere, for films like *Thappad* being made at all are cause for hope.

Thappad addresses thorny issues about violence that is normalized by patriarchal marriage practices. It turns a critical and uncomfortable light on marriage and family as patriarchal institutions. For this reason, *Thappad* is a movie one must watch with one’s family. It’s something that will certainly add the necessary spice and zing to our humdrum insipid dinner conversations. Address the problems raised by this film as a side dish or garnish to your dinner; get the talk going—it’ll be the first step in our quest for change.

* * * *

Freedom to Be

Akshita Pareek

BAP Psychology + Sociology II Year

When you sliced my mother's stomach open,
picked me out
and cut the umbilical cord
holding me back,
you called it
F R E E D O M,
Mistook my constant wails for excitement,
and wrapped me in an unloving, coarse cloth;
my mother's womb was softer.

I did not like it;
the entire process of being born
into this world,
at the cost of my mother
hurting and risking;
the same mother
who caressed me
a hundred and fifty times a day.
Sang me to sleep
in between her sniffles
and prayed for my peace.
For, she knew
I was going to be a girl
and that my father would scorn me,
refuse to hold me in his arms,
and lower his eyes
while revealing my sex
to the family,
as if my sex
were a misfortune,
As if my sex
was responsible for all the hardships
in his life.
As if his own sins
Didn't count.

So, why didn't you
seek my consent
before introducing me
into a world
where you knew
I would have to fight;
fight for keeping my identity alive,
where I would have to
rely on the mercy
of my father's anger
for not getting thrashed
while humming a song,
or for skipping

two particles of dust
while mopping the floor?

When you called my birth
F R E E D O M,
did you allow
patriarchy rule over my body?
Did you allow patriarchy to control
my learning,
my physical and mental health,
the age I get married at,
the children I give birth to
and the number of bruises
I bear on my body?

How can YOU claim
to understand the notions
of MY freedom,
when you can't even
spell it properly?

I wish you'd asked me,
if I ever wanted to be,
if I ever was ready for the injustices
you were going to throw at me,
if I had the strength
to keep myself from being eaten alive.
I wish, you'd given me
the F R E E D O M
to just, be.

* * * *



Picture Credit :

Isha Dawar, BAP Psychology + Philosophy II Year

Hidden within Sight

Pratishtha Jindal

BAP Elective English + History I Year

Every night, when the sun bows out, the moon and stars try to console my broken body and heart; they steal in and give me respite for a few hours.

In these hours, I lay motionless in the prison of his arms and talk to myself. I search for my thoughts; I allow myself to feel and dream. Taking out a shovel, I dig up the grave of my thoughts, let them find their breath, in silence and in the comfort of the dark, set them free for a little while.

I remember the time I used to paint, watching watercolours bleed into one another. Back then, I thought the world was mine and perceived it as kind. Now, as I map out the blues, yellows, reds, and purples making a home on my skin, I miss my sketchbook. I wish I could imprint this pain on it.

This house is not mine, even though every morning I make sure it feels like his. This bed is not mine, and nor is this life. Would that come true if I say it enough times? When I was little, my dad bought me a dollhouse. I used to take such good care of her. Even back then, I had no one else to help take care of her and that huge house. Funny how I never found that wrong. I wish I could shake that child, tell her, “don’t let this be your life. Darling, dream the dreams they snatched away and placed in your brother’s hand, take back that plane which commands the sky and refuse to give back that tie you stole. It looks nice on you”. Before, I could get out of this disguised prison. I never knew how much life those short walks for chores breathed into me, the healing that came with a cup of tea with mom, hearing her nonsensical banter with dad. I miss their hugs.

This time, it has been like one never-ending day, one thing to do after another, a

never-ending list of work. I walk with my ears full with constant reminders of my uselessness, him reminding me of my place at every wrong step. Each bruise and cut, a proclamation of his power and hard work. I deserve it. I deserve it. He’s had a hard day, he hasn’t been able to go out for a while, his boss was unjustly unkind, he is under a lot of pressure, he just needs to breathe and let it out... I am just an easy target within sight. I wish I could tell him about my day and work.... frivolous tasks. I wish I could talk to anyone. As I look at his sleeping face, he looks calm and kind. I almost can’t remember that rage and animal in his voice.

When the first phase of the lockdown ended, he looked at me and said, “This time, it was a nice break”. For a moment there, I thought he was talking about my bones. It was stupid I realize now; he hates looking at or thinking about what he did. Some days, I want to scream, point out my scars and show him the horror he unleashed, break apart this cultivated reality of him as a husband and make him face the monster that breathes within him. But even thinking of these words having a sound, makes my body ache, bones crying out in warning. I wish the sun would never come up; I am tired.

I thought about mentioning my name and describing my face, along with the house that I live in, but realised that you don’t need to know any of that. However, if you try hard enough, you will find me in the reflection of countless women and their concealed wounds. You would find my voice there, but hidden, muffled. Will you look for it? Will you look for me outside these pages and give me a place to say the words I couldn’t confide to this ink?

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Calendar of Events

2020-2021



CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2020-21

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE, JMC

AUGUST	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Independence Day Celebration on August 15th, 2020, 10.00am onwards Presentation by WSC Office Bearers and Core Team on “The Indian National Movement, Women’s Issues and Participation” 2. Inaugural Panel Discussion: “Women and Lockdown: Differential Experiences and Realities”. Date: August 29th, 2020; Time: 12.00pm to 2.30pm Speakers: Professor Ritu Dewan (founder-member of the first Centre of Gender Economics, Univeristy of Mumbai), Priyanka Kotamraju (co-founder of Chitrakoot Collective, formerly with Khabar Lahariya - feminist collective of journalists who covered stories of women during the lockdown), Meera Jatav (co-founder of Chitrakoot Collective, Senior journalist, formerly with Khabar Lahariya)
SEPTEMBER	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Short Film Screening of “Devi” in collaboration with Panorama, the Film Making Society of Jesus and Mary College Date: September 16th (Wednesday), 2020 Time: 12.45pm to 2.00pm 4. Online Campaign: <i>What is Feminism?</i> Dates: 27th September 2020 to 1st October 2020
OCTOBER	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Presentation on “Women in Sports” by the Editorial Team Date: October 3rd, 2020; Time: 11.30am to 1.00pm 6. Online Campaign: <i>Women in Sports</i> Dates: 6th October 2020 to 7th October 2020 7. Lecture on Dalit Women’s Lives Matter Date: October 7th, 2020; Time: 1.00pm to 2.00pm Speaker: Ms. Bhasha Singh (Senior Journalist and Writer, currently associated with <i>Newslick</i> as a Consulting Editor) 8. Online Campaign: <i>PCOD/PCOS Campaign</i> Dates: 8th October 2020 to 14th October 2020 9. Workshop on Ecofeminism in collaboration with Advaita, an initiative which is a call to action for a more sustainable and conscious world. Date: October 9th, 2020; Time: 6.00pm to 8.00pm Speakers: Dr. Richa Shukla (Assistant Professor of Philosophy, O.P. Jindal Global University) and Ms. Jis Sebastian (Research Execution Head, United Natural History Society) 10. Lecture and Open Mic: De-stigmatising Mental Health in collaboration with Sunny Mugs, the Poetry Society of Jesus and Mary College Date: October 10th, 2020; Time: 4.00pm to 7.00pm Speaker: Dr. Priya Bhatnagar (Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Jesus and Mary College)

	<p>11. Lecture on “Gender as a Social Construct” to celebrate International Girl Child Day, in collaboration with JMC Education Programme Date: October 12th, 2020; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm Speaker: Ms. Nisha Dedhwal (Assistant Professor in the Department of Education, University of Delhi)</p> <p>12. Narratives of Gender and Sexuality: Screening of the Short Film “Boxed” followed by a discussion with Ms. Kashish Dua Date: October 14th, 2020; Time: 4.10pm to 6.00pm</p> <p>13. Certificate Course Module on Gender and Law Session I: The New Labour Codes and Women Workforce Date: October 16th, 2020; Time: 12.50pm to 2.00pm Speaker: Dr. Maya John (Assistant Professor, Department of History, JMC, and WSC Convenor)</p> <p>14. Sexual Harassment in the Workplace (with special emphasis on Internships), in collaboration with the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) of JMC Date: October 21st, 2020; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm Speakers: Ms. Uttanshi Agarwal (Senior Program Officer, FemJustice Legal Center), and Ms. Ashita Alag (Senior Program Officer, Knowledge and Advocacy) from One Future Collective, a feminist lawyering firm</p> <p>15. Certificate Course Module on Gender and Law Session II: Reimagining Labour Law framework for Domestic Workers in India Date: October 24th, 2020; Time: 11.00am to 12.30pm Speaker: Dr. Sophy Joseph (Assistant Professor, National Law University, Delhi, and Post-Doctoral Research Associate at King’s College)</p> <p>16. Certificate Course Module on Gender and Law III: Civil and Criminal Law with respect to Crimes against Women Date: October 28th, 2020; Time: 12.45pm to 2.00pm Speaker: Ms. Audrey D’Mello (Programme Director at Majlis Manch)</p>
<p>NOVEMBER</p>	<p>17. Workshop on Inculcating Body Positive Behaviour Date: November 2nd, 2020; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm Speaker: Dr. Priya Bhatnagar (Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Jesus and Mary College)</p> <p>18. Certificate Course Module on Gender Analysis of the Lockdown Session I: Conditions and Experiences of Women: Lockdown and Beyond Date: November 6th, 2020; Time: 12.40pm to 2.00pm Speaker: Dr. Maya John (Assistant Professor, Department of History, JMC, and WSC Convenor)</p> <p>19. Narratives of Gender and Sexuality: Understanding Queerness: Creating Safe Spaces and Building Allyship Date: November 9th, 2020; Time: 4.30pm to 6.30pm Speakers: Ruhaan and Vihaan from Nazariya: A Queer Feminist Resource Group, an organisation formed in 2014 by Delhi-based queer feminist activists</p> <p>20. Certificate Course Module on Gender Analysis of the Lockdown Session II: Gender Dimensions of COVID Date: November 11th, 2020; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm Speaker: Prof. Lakshmi Lingam (Dean & Professor, School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai)</p> <p>21. Narratives of Gender and Sexuality: Coming Out Date: November 13th, 2020; Time: 4.30pm to 6.30pm Speaker: Sonal Giani (an LGBTQ+ activist and filmmaker. She is known for her pioneering work in lesbian and bisexual women’s issues. She has previously worked on human rights issues and Section 377 related violations.)</p>

	<p>22. Solidarity Statement: Condemnation of the institutional murder of LSR Student <i>Aishwarya Reddy</i> issued on 16th November 2020</p> <p>23. Certificate Course Module on Gender Analysis of the Lockdown Session III: India's Lockdown and It's Ramifications on Rural Women Date: November 18th, 2020; Time: 12.45pm to 2.00pm Speaker: Prof. Jayanti Kajale (Professor at Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, Specialist in Agricultural Economics)</p> <p>24. Gender and Caste: Rethinking Feminism Date: November 20th, 2020; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm Speaker: Ms. Cynthia Stephen (Dalit Activist, Writer, Social Policy Researcher and an independent Journalist)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">JANUARY</p>	<p>25. Solidarity Statement: Against <i>gang rape of Anganwadi worker</i> in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh issued on 8th January 2021</p> <p>26. Certificate Course Module on Public Health and Global Care Chains Session I Date: January 16th (Saturday), 2021; Time: 10.00am to 11.30am Speaker: Dr. Maya John (Assistant Professor, Department of History, JMC, and WSC Convenor)</p> <p>27. Session on Consent and Healthy Boundaries, in collaboration with Pratisandhi Foundation: a non-profit organization based in New Delhi, working towards sexual health and education among the youth in India. Date: January 19th (Tuesday), 2021; Time: 4.30pm to 6.30pm Speaker: Sanskriti Baxi (the Head of Training and Research and Development at Pratisandhi)</p> <p>28. Online Campaign: Love Jihad Campaign Dates: 20th January 2021 to 23rd January 2021</p> <p>29. Certificate Course Module on Public Health and Global Care Chains Session II: The Labour of Care: The Persistence of Gender and Caste in the Service Economy Date: January 22nd (Friday), 2021; Time: 4:30 PM to 6:00 PM Speaker: Dr. Panchali Ray (Independent Researcher and Author)</p> <p>30. Certificate Course Module on Public Health and Global Care Chains Session III: Women's Migration, State policy and Social Disruption at the source: Experiences of South Indian Women Date: 23rd Jan (Saturday), 2021; Time: 10.30 AM - 12.00 PM Speaker: Prof. Praveena Kodoth (Associate Fellow, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram)</p> <p>31. A Collaborative Training Workshop on "Gender and Development: With a Special Focus on Labour Policies for Women Workers" co-organised with V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, Noida. V.V. National Labour Institute is an autonomous institute of the Ministry of Labour & Employment, Govt. of India. Dates: 27th January (Wednesday) to 29th January (Friday), Time: 2:00pm to 4:30 pm on all three days Speakers: The Inaugural Address on 27th January was made by Dr. Rajni Palriwala, Former Professor of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics. Other sessions were conducted by distinguished Fellows of the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute.</p> <p>32. A Creative Writing, Photography and Art Competition conducted in collaboration with Cauldron, The English Magazine Society, on the theme "Deconstructing Gender". Dates: 23rd January 2021 to 31st January 2021 The following were the prompts for the competition: Carl Jung's Anima and Animus</p>

	<p>Fluidity of Identity Bin the Binaries Redefining Appearance and Sexuality Breaking the Glass Ceiling Transcending Boundaries</p>
FEBRUARY	<p>33. Certificate Course Module on LGBTQIA+ Writings from India Session I Date: February 4th (Thursday), 2021 Time: 6.00pm to 8.00pm Speaker: Ms. Kashish Dua (Assistant Professor, Department of English, JMC)</p> <p>34. Session on Sustainable Menstruation, to commemorate Menstrual Health and Awareness Day, in collaboration with Girl Up Sakhi Date: February 5th (Friday), 2021; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm Speakers: Sanjina Gupta (Founder and Director of Rangeen Khidki Foundation) and Dr Ankita Kaushal (an expert and specialist on IVF and sustainable menstruation)</p> <p>35. Certificate Course Module on LGBTQIA+ Writings from India Session II: Memory of Light: Writing Lesbian Historical Fiction Date: 6th February (Saturday), 2021; Time: 9.30am to 10.30am Speaker: Prof. Ruth Vanita (Professor of English, University of Montana and of several books including “Same Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History and <i>Memory of Light</i>”)</p> <p>36. Certificate Course Module on LGBTQIA+ Writings from India Session III: Straight to Normal: The Need for Queer Life Narratives from India Date: 8th February (Monday), 2021; Time: 4.15pm to 5.30pm Speaker: Sharif D. Rangnekar (Communications & Workplace Consultant, Author, Festival Director – Rainbow Lit Fest, Singer / Songwriter)</p> <p>37. Certificate Course Module on Public Health and Global Care Chains Session IV: Care, Healthcare Crisis and Gendered Migration: Inequalities and Connections Date: February 10th (Wednesday), 2021; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm IST Speaker: Dr. Christa Wichterich (Visiting Lecturer, Basel University and freelance author, scholar activist)</p> <p>38. Interactive Workshop series titled Dialogues with Feminists Abroad: Critical Questions and Some Reflections Dates: 12 February (Friday), 2021 and 13 February (Saturday), 2021 Timings: 4.30 pm - 5.45 pm IST and 5.30pm to 7.00 pm IST Speakers: Alessandra Spano (Scholar-Activist, Marxist-feminist based in Italy, who is associated with Migrants' Coordination and Precarious Dis/connections); Andrea Zamparini (Activist with Argentinian advocacy group: Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito/National Campaign for the Right to Safe and Free Legal Abortion); Marta Carramiñana (Women’s Rights Activist from Spain, who works with the autonomous trade union CNT and has helped organise national level Feminist Strikes: Huelgas Feministas and La Revuelta Feminista)</p> <p>39. Interactive workshop on Disability, Gender and Accessibility Date: February 17th (Wednesday), 2021; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm Speaker: Srinidhi Raghavan (co-Lead Programs of Rising Flame: a non-profit working for human rights of People with Disabilities; Sexuality and Women's Disability Rights Activist, Independent Researcher)</p> <p>40. Short Film Screening and Discussion of “Sisak”, India’s first silent LGBTQ+ Love Story. The short film is written and directed by Faraz Arif Ansari, starring Jitin Gulati & Dhruv Singhal and is produced by Aparna Sud & Futterwacken Films. Date: February 18th (Thursday), 2021; Time: 5.00pm to 6.30pm</p>

	<p>41. Solidarity Statement: Solidarity with <i>Unnao victims</i> and condemnation of crimes against Dalit women issued on 19th February 2021</p> <p>42. Lecture on Caste and Indian Feminism Date: 22nd February 2021; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm Speaker: Dr. Jessy K. Philip (Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Jesus and Mary College)</p> <p>43. Caste and Gender: Rethinking Feminist Interventions in Law from an Anti-Caste Perspective Date: February 26th (Friday), 2021; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm Speaker: Nikita Sonavane (Legal researcher, advocate and Co-Founder of the Bhopal-based Criminal Justice and Police Accountability Project; an organisation focused on holding the criminal justice system and the police accountable for targeting marginalised communities)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">MARCH</p>	<p>44. Speak Up, a Discussion Circle, was conducted broadly on the theme of “Sexism and Gender Inequality”. To commemorate International Women's Week, WSC wanted to create a comfortable and interactive environment that is a safe space for conversation and discourse. Participants were encouraged to respond to pictures, caricatures and short clips coordinated by the WSC Core Team. Date: March 2nd (Tuesday), 2021; Time: 4.30pm onwards</p> <p>45. Poetry Reading on the theme Reading and Reflecting on Revolutionary Women's Poetry Date: March 3rd (Wednesday), 2021; Time: 4.30pm onwards</p> <p>46. Women's Studies Centre (WSC), JMC, commemorates International Women's Day and Jagriti, Annual Festival. The schedule for March 5 (Friday), 2021 was as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Inaugural Lecture was conducted by Kirti Singh (Leading Women's Rights Lawyer and Activist) from 12.40 pm to 2.00pm. She spoke on “Women's Rights and the Non-observance of the Law and the Constitution”. ii. The National Student Seminar was conducted 4.30pm onwards where 15 students presented papers from across universities in India on the theme “Gendered Realities in Times of Growing Authoritarianism”. <p>47. Public Lecture to commemorate International Women's Day, on A History of Our Own: Mapping Women's Movements and Feminisms in India, in collaboration with the Department of History, Jesus and Mary College Date: 10th March 2021; Time: 12:45 - 2:00 pm Speaker: Urvashi Butalia (Indian feminist writer, publisher and activist. She is known for her work in the women's movement as well as for authoring path breaking books like <i>The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India</i> and <i>Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir</i>).</p> <p>48. Solidarity Statement: Support for <i>Delhi University Teacher's Association (DUTA)</i> strike against the unpaid salaries and unjust treatment of the teaching and non-teaching staff of 12 Delhi Government funded colleges issued on 12th March 2021</p> <p>49. Series of workshops on the 2021 Budget from a Gender Perspective in collaboration with Women's Development Cell, Miranda House Date: March 19 (Friday), 2021</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. <i>Session I</i> was conducted by Professor Ritu Dewan (Founder-Member of the first Centre of Gender Economics in Asia, & Vice President of the Indian Society of Labour Economics) from 12.40pm to 2.00pm. ii. <i>Session II</i> was conducted by Ms. Shruti Ambast (Senior Policy Analyst, Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability) from 4.30pm to 6.00pm.

	<p>50. Series of workshops on the theme “Gender and Media” Dates: March 20th (Saturday) and March 22nd (Monday).</p> <p>i. Gender in Media from an Intersectional Lens <i>Module I</i> will be conducted by Soumya Mathew (Community Editor at Feminism in India, Journalist, Independent Reporter) & Arati Kade (Content Editor at Feminism in India, Pursuing a Women's Studies PhD from TISS, Mumbai) from 10.00am to 12.00 noon on March 20th.</p> <p>ii. Gender and Media News Reporting <i>Module II</i> will be conducted by Vandana Sebastian Bawa (a noted Television journalist who has worked with major national channels like NewsX, CNN-News 18 and India Ahead News) from 2.00pm to 3.30pm on March 20th.</p> <p>iii. Gender and Media News Reporting <i>Module III</i> will be conducted by Priyanka Dubey (Bilingual multimedia investigative journalist currently with BBC, and author of <i>No Nation for Women – Reportage on Rape from India, the World's Largest Democracy</i>) from 4.30pm to 6.00pm on March 22nd.</p> <p>51. Online Campaign: Brand Inclusivity Campaign Dates: 30th March 2021 onwards. The Campaign is still ongoing in April 2021</p>
APRIL	<p>52. Training workshop on Gender, Community and Personal/Family Law organized in collaboration with Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women's Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi</p> <p>Dates: April 22, 2021 (Thursday) – Introductory session; April 24, 2021 (Saturday), 11:00 am to 1:00 pm – Sessions on Muslim, Hindu and Christian Personal Laws from the Gender Perspective.</p>
JUNE	<p>53. Solidarity Statement: In support of healthcare workers & to highlight the state's negligence & mismanagement during the crisis, issued on 11th June 2021</p> <p>54. Certificate Course Module on Public Healthcare, Modern Medical Science and Capitalism: Contextualizing India's Health Crisis Session I Date: 16th June 2021; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm Speaker: Dr. Maya John (Assistant Professor, Department of History, Jesus and Mary College)</p> <p>55. Certificate Course Module on Public Healthcare, Modern Medical Science and Capitalism: Contextualizing India's Health Crisis Session II Date: 18th June 2021; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm Speaker: Santosh Mahindrakar (Practicing nurse and scholar activist with Innovative Alliance for Public Health)</p> <p>56. Certificate Course Module on Public Healthcare, Modern Medical Science and Capitalism: Contextualizing India's Health Crisis Session III Date: 22nd June 2021; Time: 4.30pm to 6.00pm Speaker: Prof. Imrana Qadeer (Noted public health activist and distinguished faculty member at Council for Social Development)</p> <p>57. Official release of WSC Research Projects Date: 26th June 2021; Time: 4:30 pm onwards</p>
JULY	<p>58. Solidarity Statement: Against denial of a trial and custodial murder of Fr. Stan Swamy, issued on 7th July 2021</p> <p>59. Solidarity Statement: Against the Cinematography (Amendment) Bill</p> <p>60. Official release of the annual WSC magazine, Jigyasa 2020-21</p>

* * * *

EDITORIAL TEAM



“ Snigdha Ghai is a book lover, writer and a coffee addict. For her, writing is instinctive, and she believes firmly in exploring the depths of identity with each thing she writes. ”

Snigdha Ghai

BA Hons. English III Year
Editorial Team Head

“ Historical fiction, coffee and conversation ”

Akanksha Sengupta

BAP Elective English + History I Year



“ My sense of identity is ever-shifting and dynamic. While on some days the answer appears clear as day, on others I simply take solace in the fact that “I am, I am, I am...” ”

Jahanbi Singh

BA Hons. Psychology I Year

“ Manjiri Nene is an avid reader and a content writer. She hopes that this magazine brings as much joy to the reader as it has brought her in its compilation. ”

Manjiri Nene

BA Hons. Political Science II Year



“ “None but ourselves can free our minds”
—Bob Marley ”

Michelle Sanya Tirkey

BAP History + Political Science III Year

“ Hoping to make sense as I ramble my way through conversations while making everything unnecessarily political. ”

Sania Javed

BA Hons. Economics I Year



“ Liberation is to triumph over personal havoc and smash societal farce. ”

Shrushti Sharma

BA Hons. History I Year

“ I truly believe that one can turn their weaknesses into their strength. ”

Riya Kapoor

BA Hons. Sociology II Year



DESIGN TEAM



“ Art is infinite, and so are all of us. ”

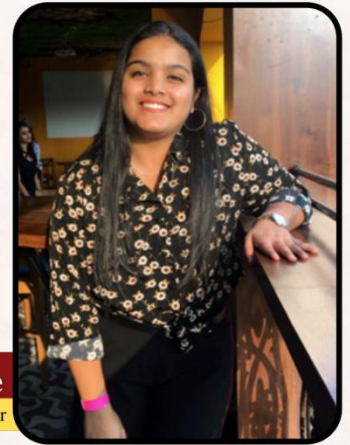
Riya Arora

BA Hons. Sociology II Year
Design Head and Vice President, WSC

“ I believe art is one of the most beautiful ways to express one’s identity. It portrays what words can’t express and in it we find pieces of the creator’s very soul. ”

Aleena Verghese

BA Hons. English I Year



“ I believe that art provides a worldview of things, which otherwise goes unnoticed. Identity through art delineates a beautiful diversity of varying perceptions, resulting in a more open-minded mindset. ”

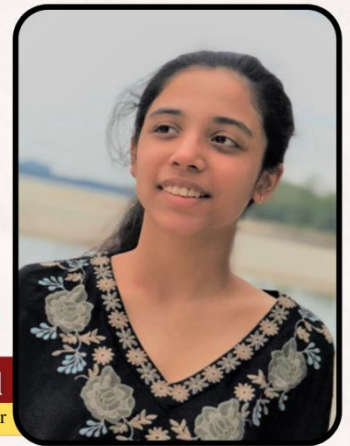
Nashra Sehar

BA Hons. English I Year

“ Art provides a reflection of reality; it spells out the truth. This stands true both for the artist as well as the audience, and inevitably, our perceived reality is deeply intertwined with our identity, mirroring our thoughts, beliefs and aspirations. ”

Pratishtha Jindal

BAP Economics + History I Year



“ For me art is to evoke emotions and thoughts. It has been a language without words conveying things more comfortably. It’s so amusing that every eye has a different perspective to see art. ”

Radhika Bhandari

BAP Psychology + Sociology I Year

“ I see art as a medium to explore myself. It provides me a lens through which to experience the world in my colors. For me, art and identity are two faces of a coin--I see my identity through my art and art through my identity. ”

Rishita Kishore Shah

BAP Psychology + Philosophy I Year



“ I see identity through the artist’s mirror of expression. I see it but I do not perceive. ”

Sehar Sabharwal

BA Hons. History I Year

“ For me, art is about sharing the way I experience the world, a way of communicating thoughts, emotions, intuitions when words are not enough to do so. ”

Visheshta Sharma

BAP Psychology + Philosophy I Year



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President and Organising Team Head



Jessica Shroti



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Sandhya Jeremiah D Dung



Simran Rai



Anna Sara Baby



Navdha Malhotra



Sanskriti Bhandari

'आओ अपनी बात कहें'

***WE WILL RISE LIKE THE SUN
WE WILL RISE LIKE THE OCEAN***

***TOGETHER
WE WILL RISE***



WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE, JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE

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