JIGYASA

RECLAIMING SPACES AND SHATTERING BOUNDARIES

Illustration By: Rocio Montoya

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE

Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi

The Annual Magazine

2021-22

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A Note from the Principal

The WSC of Jesus and Mary College has completed yet another year of meaningful activities. The UGC-recognized Centre has organised several programmes that has enabled and provided platforms for students to grow deeper in knowledge, and has further encouraged active participation among them.

The focus of the college is to build compassionate, socially conscious and independent women who can inspire, lead and make a difference in society. The WSC has in a large sense contributed in this endeavour. By going beyond classroom, the WSC has added richness to learning.

The student members have been encouraged and exposed to social realities and varied lived experiences of women through innovative methodologies of experiential learning, and thus, have been enabled to internalize a certain conviction to rise up whenever they encounter discrimination and divisive forces in all areas of social life, particularly those of women.

The WSC plays a pivotal role in nurturing critical minds and seeks to create among students an awareness towards building a more egalitarian society. It encourages students to bring out their creativity and guides them towards proactive initiatives.

This issue of *Jigyasa* once again reflects student creativity, participation, academic rigour and an expression of commitment towards the cause of women. The task at hand is immense. Given the current scenario on the status of women world over, it still seems a distant dream. However, we are getting there. It is this sense of togetherness and the drive to want to be the change that will be a major factor in bringing about the necessary transformation. To that end the WSC has been and is playing a greater role in the college.

It is with much satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment that I congratulate the WSC members and faculty advisors for their commitment in bringing out another interesting issue of *Jigyasa*. I congratulate the Editorial and Design Teams for their exemplary work.

Prof. Sandra Joseph
Principal,
Jesus and Mary College

Convenor's Note

The session 2021-22 has proved to be a challenging year yet a learning experience for the students and staff advisors of the college WSC. We have mourned the loss of JMC students, made the difficult transition to the physical mode after two years of online learning in Delhi University, and have been confronted by numerous worrying developments across the country. As a large co-curricular platform for students interested in learning about gender issues and wider concerns informing the contemporary women's movement, the WSC has energetically organised workshops, certificate courses, film screenings, and informal discussions on several pertinent issues. In our journey, we have been fortunate that reputed scholar-activists and academicians have agreed to conduct many of our sessions. Students have consequently gained significant exposure to debated issues like the National Education Policy 2020, feminist critiques of mainstream science, legal anomalies and pending legislative action, feminist economics, the Indian Constitution and gender, etc. We are particularly grateful for the inter-institutional tie-ups that we have had with Women's Development Cells of other colleges, the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute (Ministry of Labour, Government of India), as well as for the sessions conducted by experts from the Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS), like Professor Ishita Mukhopadhyaya, Professor Neetha N., Professor Samita Sen, Professor Ritu Dewan and Professor Mary E. John.

It has been a pleasure, in particular, to watch the enthusiasm with which our core team and the WSC students made the quick transition to the physical mode when the University reopened. Needless to say, it has not been easy juggling events in the hybrid mode, or planning meaningful events whilst taking into consideration diverse academic calendars. The student team has nonetheless worked hard to keep the WSC active and relevant. This was evident when the office bearers and a dedicated team worked tirelessly before the NAAC inspection to put together the WSC room, PowerPoint presentation, and display board. The dedication of the team was even more evident when the WSC successfully organised the first large-scale co-curricular event of the college since its reopening in physical mode. In barely three weeks since the reopening, the team proceeded to host a rich sequence of programmes commemorating International Women's Day and hosting Jagriti 2022 (the WSC annual fest). The excitement and mass participation of students was refreshing. Notably, a lot of hard work has continued in the sweltering summer months in terms of research work by the WSC Research Cell and the putting together of the annual magazine, *Jigyasa*.

I use the occasion to express my gratitude to our Principal, Professor Sandra Joseph, for the support she readily extends us. I would also like to thank the co-advisors of the WSC, Anupama Srivastava, Kashish Dua, Jessy Philip, Bipasha Lakra, Aswathi Nair, Priya Bhatnagar and Sharon Pillai, for their invaluable contributions; the outgoing WSC office bearers, Jessica and Sania, for all the legwork, their spirited inputs and patience; as well as the core team members to whom I deeply apologize for not being able to organize a picnic and kho-kho match at India Gate! A special thanks to my colleague, Kashish Dua, for taking on the editorial work of *Jigyasa*, despite having a lot on her plate.

Dr. Maya John
Asst. Prof., Dept. of History
and Convenor, WSC

Farewell Message from the WSC Office bearers

Women's Studies Centre JMC has always resolved to represent serious values with an approachable and curious attitude. The Centre this year juggled between online and offline mode, but this in no way limited our vision and activities. Keeping in mind the same, we've organized various workshops, seminars, discussion circles and certificate courses in a humble attempt to mould the young minds' interest in ideas, actions, and discourses concerning gender. We hosted a diverse range of eminent speakers this year too and held discussions on politically and culturally relevant issues. The events created a space for our members to constantly engage with the ongoing struggles of women across the globe and also a platform for activism.

To commemorate International Women's Day, we successfully organised our offline fest, "Jagriti" soon after we switched to an offline mode. There were conscious reasons behind "Jagriti" being organised around this day that celebrates the universal spirit of solidarity. Our fest is the amalgamation of numerous competitions, *Jansunvai*, Fundraiser and a Poster Exhibition.

As the President, I hoped to create a safe and inclusive space for all our members through organising open mics, film screenings, discussion circles, cultural events, and a lot more. The success of Women's Studies Centre this year was not just because of the efforts of the staff advisors and office bearers but the efforts of the Core Team who simultaneously and tirelessly worked throughout the year and at times managed multiple events. As a result, WSC not just remained a platform for our members sensitising them to gendered issues but also a cohesive space for them to question and unlearn. The society did provide me with scope for my personal growth and has definitely transformed my approach towards not just gender issues but also towards driving issues concerning the women's movement in India. I would like to thank my Vice President, Sania Javed who is a gigantic sack of earnest efforts, I believe my WSC journey couldn't have been so beautiful without Sania's constant presence. I would also like to thank the team heads and core team for their relentless and sincere efforts throughout this academic year and for making it so successful.

I hope the new team and the new office bearers will continue to take the Centre to new heights and I will keep looking back at you for inspiration.

Signing off,

Jessica Shroti
B.A. (Hons) History, Third year
& President (2021-22)

I started off with the Women's Studies Centre as a first-year student with sparkly eyes, lots of hope, and an intense desire to learn about gender studies and activism. To our misfortune, we are the Covid-19 batch, starting out our online college right at the peak of the pandemic in 2020.

Switching from an all-virtual mode to the hassles of offline organisation and logistics has undoubtedly been pretty overwhelming for me but I would never trade the experience for anything. I have seen the entire team working relentlessly to implement the abstract ideas into concrete forms and I sincerely respect the efforts.

Though I have always had a keen interest in gender dynamics, WSC has refined and streamlined that passionate but non-structured train of thought. I would like to thank all the staff advisors and other staff members for coordinating with the council and the students' body along with providing the council with their meaningful suggestions.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to the people who made "Jagriti 2022" as it was. It would be no exaggeration to say that it is the heads, core team members, volunteers, and members who add a distinction to WSC, who make WSC more than just a compulsory society. Their passion for the society makes it an inspiring space for young minds. My time as the Vice-President has been eventful, engaging, and most importantly, extremely seasoned with knowledge and information.

WSC JMC has given me a family and I shall remain indebted to it. I am glad we all got to create memories in the offline semester after some painful months of staring at our laptop screens.

Hope to see all our members staying on to fight the good fight!

Sania Javed
B.A. (Hons) Economics, Second year
*& **Vice President** (2021-22)*

From the Editorial Desk

The conception and release of *Jigyasa* (*The Quest*) last year, had me both intrigued and surprised. The idea to have an annual WSC magazine and the sheer sincerity with which its first edition was produced, proved how important it was to have this magazine as a small window to the voluminous work WSC, JMC carries out every year. The archival role that *Jigyasa* plays and the academic rigour that WSC, JMC stands for, were the reasons why I readily agreed to become a part of this magazine's production process.

Jigyasa 2022 explores the theme of "reclaiming spaces and shattering boundaries" through writings and visuals categorized into seven sections. These seven sections bring forth multitudinous yet dialogic voices that reflect on and question the processes of (re)claiming spaces through gendered negotiations with numerous kinds of boundaries. The magazine opens with the section titled "Debating Issues of Access, Inequality & Change: Highlights from WSC Events". As the name suggests, it includes transcripts of webinars and interviews with eminent scholars, reviews of a few WSC certificate course modules and workshops, best research papers from the annual student seminar, an account of the International Women's Day march, and a succinct report on the on-going research projects at the WSC. Once readers gain familiarity with the kind of discussions the WSC had facilitated in 2021-2022, the second section, "Feminist Verses" introduces them to poetry that upholds the centre's focus on intersectional feminism.

From this expression of creativity, *Jigyasa* 2022, moves to cutting-edge critical articles in the section titled, "This Prose is Political!". It contains twelve prose pieces representing WSC members' deep sense of political commitment toward the effects of gendered existence on matters of personal, national, and international relevance. These articles interrogate spaces charted out by educational institutions, political borders, and socio-cultural and literary landscapes. This section testifies to the need for greater solidarities among the oppressed groups and demands inclusive politics. This critical insight is carried to the fourth section where the WSC students reflect on the films and books that left an impression on them.

The fifth section, "साथ, सहयोग, अनुभव (Solidarities in Campus Spaces): Reflections from the students of JMC", based on a survey conducted by the WSC, provides an overview of students' experiences of the shift from online to offline education. These responses document how the online and offline spaces have figured in the imagination, lived experiences, and the dynamics of the students' interpersonal relationships. This is succeeded by vibrant visual documentation of "The Year that Was" through photographs of the events the centre had conducted in 2021-2022. The magazine closes with a thought-provoking section titled "Pictures that Speak Volumes" containing winning entries from the photography competition held during the WSC annual festival and a comic strip on rising communal tensions in the country.

Like the WSC, *Jigyasa* 2022, is the product of the teamwork and dedication of its members, office bearers, staff advisors and the Convenor, Dr. Maya John. The experience of working on this magazine holds a special meaning for me. The gratitude for my association with *Jigyasa 2022* emerges from closely witnessing Dr. John's contagious passion for struggles against gender-based inequalities, her vision of reform and the sincerity with which she, Jessica Shroti, Sania Javed and the editorial, design, and core teams have worked to provide a platform which validates and amplifies students' voices. I am indebted to various scholars, activists and institutions for sharing their intellectual wealth and allowing us to publish their invaluable opinions. I am also thankful to Dr. Anupama Srivastava for kindly agreeing to edit the Hindi entries in this magazine. Finally and most importantly, *Jigyasa* 2022, would not have been possible without the year-round institutional support provided by the Principal, Prof. Sandra Joseph.

Publication of *Jigyasa* 2022 is marking the end of an academic session that has brought all of us back under the same roof, enabling conversations, collaborations and camaraderie that we longed for. This magazine is the result of the exhilaration we, at the WSC, felt on returning to the spaces where the power of the collective paves the way for a better world. We hope our exhilaration will be palpable as the readers go through the pages that follow.

Ms. Kashish Dua
Asst. Prof., Dept of English,
and Staff Advisor, Women's Studies Centre, JMC

Editors

Dear Readers,

The dominant social process last year has been the transition from an all-virtual mode to the 'real' world involving pragmatic logistical requirements, new strategies, and the demand for a strong vision that WSC needed to address. It is in this context that the content of the magazine has taken shape. The concept of space, pertinent to the theme of the magazine, is where such processes of transition play out. Space, as a concept, covers a wide spectrum- it can mean anything from the immediate physical space and its manifestations to mental space, socio-political and intellectual spaces. The aspect that gender influences these spaces and equally gets affected by access to such spaces drives the content of this magazine. Similar is the case with boundaries. Amongst other things it is the historical undertone of the idea of boundaries that remains important for this year's magazine. These undertones often reflect certain norms and expectations that developed in specific historical contexts.

Spaces of different kinds have often been extremely restricting for women and gender discrimination was often penetrated through varied boundaries. Women's movements have time and again challenged boundaries and fiercely attempted to expand spaces to make them more inclusive and safer. In a similar spirit, *Jigyasa* 2022 interrogates the systemic working of boundaries and the daily gendered negotiations with spaces in various contexts Through recollection of WSC's events, research articles covering wide ranging topics, poetry dealing with nuanced aspects of gender, reviews of thought-provoking movies and books the magazine attempts to challenge normalized arenas of oppression by placing concepts of spaces and boundaries under a critical lens.

It was a thrilling task to read the entries and realize the diverse ways in which different authors have interpreted the theme. The magazine is a successful collection of political pieces subtly driven by personal experiences. *Jigyasa* 2022 sincerely attempts to find an intersection between creative freedom and political sensitivity along with a socio-historical understanding of gender. It realizes that creativity and political responsibility need to be balanced with utmost precision to create progressive content. We hope the writings of the magazine find a resonance with you.

Love and Rage,

Sania Javed
B.A. (Hons) Economics, 2nd Year

Srushti Sharma
B.A. (Hons) History, 2nd Year

Section I

Debating Issues of Access, Inequality & Change: Highlights from WSC Events

WSC Webinar Series

'Towards 75 Years of Freedom: Contemplations and Reflections on the Women's Question'

Extracts from a conversation with Dr. Meera Velayudhan on her mother, Dakshayini Velayudhan

(In Collaboration with the Department of History)

Introduction: The Women's Studies Centre, Jesus and Mary College launched its webinar series, 'Towards 75 Years of Freedom: Contemplations and Reflections on the Women's Question,' in August 2021. The series marks a small effort to usher in 75 years of freedom with necessary dialogue on pervasive inequalities and gender dynamics from the time of the late colonial period into the post-independence era. We had the honour of hosting noted scholars who have spoken on pertinent aspects of debates on women's lives and experiences over a long and tenuous period of changing circumstances. Professor Archana Prasad from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Professor Charu Gupta from Delhi University (DU), Professor Samita Sen from Cambridge University, Professor Janki Nair from JNU, Professor Kalpana Kannabiran from Council for Social Development, etc. have been some of our reputed speakers at the webinar series. On 27th August 2021, we had the pleasure to host a noted academician in the field of gender studies, Dr. Meera Velayudhan, who shared some insights on her mother, Dakshayani Velayudhan, and her inspiring journey as one of the women members of the Constituent Assembly.

About the speaker: Dr. Meera Velayudhan is a Policy Analyst with a Doctorate in Modern Indian History. She has been actively engaged in the field of Gender Studies since its inception in the early 1980s in India.

Dr. Meera Velayudhan:

You asked that question, "when you were a child and you grew up with such a revolutionary figure, how did you take it all in?" I'd like to say that for all the history students, or from sociology, there's also a methodological issue in terms of how you remember. What are the frames of references or contexts? For example, my mother has written an autobiography- it's going to get published soon. How do you read it in a particular context? For me, particularly, it's intergenerational. Where do you separate your own life and activism and how do you link it with an earlier generation? These are historically very different kinds of contexts. There are multiple frames of reference and memory is- for instance, what stands strongly is the sense of justice in my whole upbringing, in my relationships, as a child onward. Something which stands out is that my mother was a very serious person. She bore 5 children- 4 sons and I was the only daughter. She paid attention to each one of us- what we liked, didn't like, and our education. Now and then, I got to know about the Constituent Assembly and its significance when I was about 12 or 13. She didn't really talk about it much, except for a few things.

I knew her at that time and I was singled out among the children because I was a girl and they were so busy in their activities. I was told to choose a boarding school. I was the only one of the 5 children who had a steady education. I think it had something to do with me being a girl. I think she ensured that. I went to a school in Nainital when I was about 5 years old for 9 months. It was a place where you don't have any exams until I did my Indian School Certificate. It had a different kind of system from the Protestant schools. I shared a special bond with my mother because she was the one who kept in touch with me every week through letters, and we also wrote a letter once a week. Towards the end of November, when the winter sets in, then we came home. Generally, we would go to Kerala. Up to Delhi, we would come with the

school party, and then I'd be put with some family or the other. In those days, train journeys were very long. Mother was always there at the train station to receive me. I remember once I couldn't spot her, so I was very upset. These are memories I have in terms of the earliest memories.

Also, we were always aware that both my parents were involved with some work among the people. They both went out together, but she always had her independent work. My parents left the house together but she went wherever she had to. In the provisional parliament, they were in two opposing political parties. My mother remained with the Indian National Congress and my father, after 3 months, joined the Socialist Party. If you read the provisional parliament debates, they were actually in two different political parties. We knew they were in different parties, but life went on as usual in the house. It was a very political house. I remember learning my alphabets from *The Times of India*. They'd read it in the morning and that's how I learned my English alphabets.

My parents were part of parliamentary committees and refugee rehabilitation. There were several times that Muslim families would be staying in some part of our house. Once, there were about 11 children. When I was doing my Ph.D., I met the youngest of them. He was a security guard at Jamia Millia Islamia. There are also a lot of partition stories that I got to know through my mother. All of Delhi-Connaught place, south Delhi rehabilitation, Janpath etc. were where all shops were allocated. They were office-bearers of the Trader's Association till they passed away. There's a whole history in terms of association in the family. I think I was special among the children to my parents. Having the privilege of getting continuous education in one place. In school also, I was the only one who read the newspaper.

[On her mother, Dakshayani Velayudhan]

She was the first Dalit woman to graduate in India, and that too a science graduate. In 1936, she passed BSc Chemistry from Maharaja's College. One of the pictures I have of her, I found in a women's journal of the 1930s. When my mother graduated, the journal published a picture of her with a quote from a poet.

There were so many firsts in her life- the first educated woman from the community. Cochin, at that time, was a princely state so they had a provincial assembly there. When she writes about it, she calls it the "beginning of her political journey." She obviously had an awareness that she was going into political life because she had to give up her teaching job which she couldn't do earlier. This was because there were a lot of mortgages, and she had a small family with her mother and younger brother in the family unit, that she had to redeem through her scholarships and teaching funds that came. In a sense, you also see how a family structure gets formed. That process you can see when she talks about her own journey going into politics. I'd like to tell you that she's written a section where she said she used to get very stressed once or twice before an exam or before speaking. She spoke at several places. There were important Dalit community meetings. She said she would sort of feel faint. I think it's very important because this whole stress of having to perform, to show that you have merit, you are capable, can all be stressful. She also writes that when she went into the state, i.e., the Cochin legislative assembly, she had no such problems. She spoke very well and she didn't have any kind of stress like that.

The other significant thing is also marriage. My parents met during the state people's movement. I don't know how they travelled but they went to Wardha Gandhi Ashram where the Indian National Congress working committee was having its meeting. In the break that took place in the meeting on 6th September 1940, this wedding took place. Kasturba Gandhi was there, wearing a white sari with a red border. Gandhiji was also present. There's a picture on my slide. This is Ba and Gandhiji. I found this interesting. We didn't have this photo at all. I was carrying out a study in Ahmedabad and stayed with Ila Bhatt. Then, I sort of talked to her and said my parents got married in this Wardha Gandhi ashram. She took me to the Sabarmati Ashram. When I entered, there was a big

wall and this picture was painted. Now it's not there. Also, she took me to the old library where one of the Gandhians gave me an old postcard with this picture. So, this actually is a picture taken from the photograph. I saw the photograph in the exhibition on the freedom struggle there as well – as in Wardha – but now they are not there either. Maybe some editing has been done and I couldn't find the thing. It's been made into a photograph now at the national museum in London. They sort of reproduced it, saying that it's such a historical picture.

A very interesting thing also took place during this marriage because Gandhiji noted that my mother could not eat the chapati and the dry stuff at Wardha ashram. He said, "do you think you'll get fish here? In your own hut, you can cook what you want to." My mother said it's a big hassle, lighting the *angithi*, so it's better to eat in a common kitchen. They were there for a few months. She was not keen on a separate kitchen.

Obviously, there was a lot of influence of Gandhi, but we also need to factor in the context that in Kerala at that stage, there was a strong influence of the civil disobedience movement and non-cooperation movement. In the context of social reform, there was interaction with various reformers like Sri Narayana Guru. Gandhiji himself came. Babasaheb Ambedkar did not have that much presence in Kerala as such. In Tamil Nadu, there was an interaction with Periyaar. So, you can understand my mother's keen response to this wider reform movement. Rather than Gandhian ideology itself, it's also what was happening in the anti-caste and social reform movements in Kerala and the debates that were going on there which influenced people like my mother.

When you talk about Gandhi and Ambedkar, i.e., who was she influenced by more, there's a lot of influence of the region and the movements that took place over there. It's interesting to see that the hostel that she stayed in Maharaja's College was SNV Sadhanam, which was actually an institution set up by the reform movement.

There were intersections and dialogues between the varied anti-caste and reform movements. This enabled people like my mother to stay there. It was not the hostel itself; it was also about various speakers who'd come and speak there and interact. There was a very good library that students could go to. It was very different from a women's hostel in that sense because it was actually a place where various reformers, activists, and leaders would come and speak and students would be listening to them.

From my mother's writings, I can make out myriad experiences. For instance, she writes of her teaching experience. There is this whole incident that she recounts about her walking on the road - just walking from where she stayed – to the higher secondary school. She was teaching the 9th class Chemistry. From the opposite direction, a dominant caste woman was coming and she made a sound like, "oh, you're supposed to move out." But my mother didn't move off the road. The lady then walked on the side of the field. She said that she was first posted in an area by the Cochin state where casteism would not be so violent. She also took up a house in the area of her first posting. She said that the people were not so enlightened. It's very interesting to know because they practiced witchcraft and various other superstition-driven practices. If these practices were still there, it means that in the mid-1930s, the impact of the reform movement was quite uneven on all the different communities. She also found it difficult to draw water from the well.

There's also an interesting history of conversion. Part of the family converted, except for my mother and her younger brother because she was 3 that time and her mother thought to let them grow up and decide. They were getting free scholarships for education, so one part of the family was converted to Christianity. When her family went to church, she and her unconverted sibling went along. My mother claims that she knew lots of parts of the Bible by heart. She was very confident about her memory. She said that she sometimes

wondered if she could go to heaven, that is *swargarajam*, without faith. That's what she writes. It's very interesting that at that age she's thinking all these things when accompanying her parents. This points to the kind of influence it was having. Her family was involved in a lot of the anti-caste protests and also some historical events of that period. Therefore, all that influence was there.

If you talk about the influence of just the Gandhian and the Ambedkarites, that of course takes place once you shift to the Constituent Assembly proceedings. It's very interesting now when I look at that moment. Not only just looking at the speeches but looking at all the other speeches of various people and women. It's very interesting that if you look at the debates and all the speeches of women in the Constituent Assembly, there were only 16 of them and they coordinated well with each other. My mother was the youngest at 34. The rest were in their 50s. She was the only Dalit woman member of the Constituent Assembly. You see that these women members never had a conflict with each other. If you read the Constituent Assembly debates, they were all putting up different points on land reforms, bonded labour, education, women's right to work, and property rights. Yet they worked closely together.

Meera on her own politics

I became a part of the National Federation of Dalit Women which was formed in 1995. There were various dimensions to it. Various Dalit women, or I should say 'Ambedkarites', actively became a part of it. The three major dimensions to its formation are important to note. Firstly, the need was felt for forming a separate federation for Dalit women. Secondly, was the need for visibility of Dalit women as a political entity with a significant identity. Lastly, the patriarchal trends within the Dalit movement needed a strong feminist counterpart. The whole framework of Dalit politics had started following the mainstream. Nevertheless, the entry of Dalit women in various fields, such as education, politics, cinema, and so on and so forth, has been indicative that things have changed for the better.

However, there is also a larger reality of people who are still the sufferers, the victims. As Baba Sahab Ambedkar wisely said that we've achieved political freedom without achieving social and economic freedom, and so, all communities and suppressed castes won't ever be able to move up to authoritative positions. His last speech in the Constituent Assembly is worth giving a read. I think we need more and more literature on caste studies and literature. I think only then can we capture and understand the social reality of various castes.

[The session concluded with a vote of thanks and closing remarks by the convenor of WSC, JMC.]

Transcribed by Jahanbi Singh (Second year) and Aditi Misra (First year), B.A (Hons) Psychology

In conversation with Professor Prabha Kotiswaran
on the 'Laws of Social Reproduction: Bridging Silos, Theorizing Resistance'

Introduction: On 13th April 2022, WSC had the pleasure to host a distinguished scholar in the field of feminist legal studies, Professor Prabha Kotiswaran, who titled her webinar 'The Laws of Social Reproduction: Bridging Silos, Theorising Resistance'. This session was part of our webinar series 'Towards 75 Years of Freedom: Contemplations and Reflections on the Women's Question'.

About the speaker: Prabha Kotiswaran is a professor of law and social justice at King's College, London. Her major areas of research include, criminal law, transnational criminal law, sociology of law, postcolonial theory, and feminist legal theory. She has authored many books such as *Dangerous Sex, Invisible Labour: Sex Work and the Law in India*, which won the 2012 SLSA Hand Prize for Early Career Academics, and *Revisiting the Law and Governance of Trafficking, Forced Labour and Modern Slavery*. Recently, she has authored the book *Governance Feminism: An Introduction* and co-edited a volume, *Governance Feminism: Notes from the Field*. She is currently working on a project on the laws of social reproduction.

Dr. Prabha Kotiswaran: I want to share my research today from a project called the *Laws of Social Reproduction* (funded by the EU, Grant Agreement 772946), and offer thoughts on how to bridge the silos that have emerged between women workers engaged in social reproduction and argue why bridging these silos is crucial for theorizing resistance.

If we look at a definition of what social reproduction is then I would like to use what Carolyn Hoskyns and Shirin Rai have proposed. Social reproduction includes biological reproduction, unpaid production in the home, social provisioning, reproduction of culture and ideology and provision of sexual emotional and affective services. In very simple terms, social reproduction is work that makes our lives possible. Feminists have theorized about social reproduction for decades now. In particular, they have theorized about women's unpaid domestic and care work. So, we find that Marxist, socialist, and autonomous feminists have debated domestic labour and wages for housework in the 1970s. We find the wages for housework campaign taking root in the UK and Italy and then spreading to the U.S. Of course, the theorization of social reproduction took shape well before the 70s, but I'm just drawing attention to the 70s and the wages for household campaign wherein feminists like Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James and Silvia Federici highlighted the role of women's unwaged labour in the home and its connection to the production of surplus-value under capitalism. So, we find that some of these activists claimed that the demand for wages for housework was a political perspective and a revolutionary strategy more than a demand for salaries for homemakers.

As Silvia Federici has clarified on several occasions these feminists wanted to put a price on the value of housework only then to reject it, whereas, other activists viewed wages for housework not only as a demand of the state for payment to homemakers, but also as a political perspective which redefined the working class internationally as including the unwaged and the low-waged men as well as women as well as those working in the home and on the land. So right from the beginning, we see there was an ecological component to their thinking on social reproduction.

Over time, of course, the wages-for-household campaign has pushed the debates on social reproduction towards demands for the right

to land ownership, decent and affordable housing, leisure time, accessible childcare centers, and related infrastructure services which are likely to reduce time spent on housework. And we find that in 2000, the international wages for housework campaign called for a global women's strike, which demanded amongst other things, payment for all kinds of caring work, whether it is work within the household or whether it's caring for the environment and the community around us. We also find that as part of the Green New Deal for Europe, there is a policy recommendation to fund a care income to compensate for various kinds of unpaid activities. However, there are other interpretations of wages for housework in this contemporary context, and we find feminists like Kathi Weeks who have argued that the demand for universal basic income would best capture the insights of the wages for housework campaign.

The *'Wages for Housework'* was a campaign that theorized about women's unpaid domestic and care work in the 70s, but it did not take off as a mainstream political campaign although it continues to be highly relevant to how we think about women's reproductive labour. What we find instead, is feminists crafting a vocabulary of reproductive labour to chronicle the international sexual division of labour. Hence, we find literature on global care chains as globalization takes shape in the 1990s. We find feminists studying various forms of reproductive labour outside the household as well. So, this includes sex work, surrogacy, egg donation, paid domestic work, nursing, and teaching. And they've deconstructed several of the binaries that prevented the recognition of the value of reproductive labour within the Marxist and materialist canon. I won't go into too much detail here, except to say that the frontiers of studies of social reproduction were further extended when you look at reproductive labour also performed in other institutional settings outside the household. This includes child care centres, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, care homes for the elderly, and so on.

Now, of course, we know that since the pandemic, these insights of feminist thinking which were often at the margins have now occupied the policy mainstream. We find that the materialist feminist classics on social reproduction have a new resonance as women have continued to perform a much higher amount of unpaid work during the pandemic and have also lost jobs in the informal as well as in the formal sector and some argue that this has brought down female labour force participation rates to what they were in the 1980s. The need to build a robust care infrastructure has registered with political leaders even in a powerful economy like the U.S. which signals a sharp shift in how we think about care work. Now how much of this moment of crisis will translate into long-term change is something that is yet to be seen, but the pandemic has certainly highlighted the centrality of social reproduction to the economy in different contexts.

I now want to say a little bit about the project that I'm currently engaged in. In my research project, I'm trying to theorize social reproduction through the lens of the law. In particular, I'm looking at five sectors of women's work in India and I map them along a marriage market continuum. I'm looking at how the law regulates sex work, erotic dancing, surrogacy, paid domestic work, and unpaid domestic work, and the idea here is to dissolve some of the silos that we've become accustomed to when we think about these various forms of women's work. The key claim that I'm making is that if you look at the empirical realities of work in these various sectors, the social realities are not so distinct from each other for us to warrant a different view of say, sex work from unpaid domestic work.

As we know, usually sex work is something that is sought to be viewed as violence against women and there's a very extensive debate around how feminists theorize sex work, but my argument, just to put it on the table here, is to say that there are enough similarities between these different forms of labour that we shouldn't necessarily treat sex work purely as violence though, of course, there is violence within sex work. Nor should we treat

unpaid domestic and care work as being on a pedestal and as being different from sex work or commercial surrogacy.

We often find that there is a high level of mobility between these sectors. We find that there is a deep interconnectedness with the institution of marriage, so you'll often find a surrogate may be a homemaker but then she becomes a surrogate for a certain period. You might find that a sex worker is married earlier and then she becomes a sex worker, and then she exits sex work to go back into marriage. So, there's a lot of interconnectedness both between the sectors and between the institution of marriage. Often you find that a lot of women, especially at the market end of the spectrum, earn a lot more than what you might expect for their educational and skill levels. Similarly, they suffer from high levels of stigma. Overall, there are very different dynamics that inform how these forms of labour are understood. So, for example, in the context of commercial surrogacy, many ethnographers have studied this in great depth, and tell us very beautifully how the commercial surrogacy sector is informed overwhelmingly by a logic of altruism. So, fertility clinics and commissioning parents will all talk about how surrogates are performing this incredibly powerful altruistic form of labour, but the reality is that for surrogates to imbibe this altruistic subjectivity means that they are then not able to demand their rights as workers when performing this form of reproductive labour. Conversely, if they are demanding rights as workers, often they are punished by actors within the sector for not being 'good enough' mothers and being simply concerned about getting paid. So, they're portrayed as being greedy. Such logic operates within each sector, which undermines women's bargaining power.

Now I will go to the third part in which I want to share with you a positive legal development in recognizing women's labour. I want to draw attention to some of the cases that I've studied under the Motor Vehicles Act of 1988. These cases show that the law's recognition of women's labour is possible, as well as the strengths and drawbacks of such kind of recognition.

The number of road traffic accidents in India is very, very high. About 150,000 people a year die from motor vehicle accidents. When someone dies because of a motor vehicle accident, their dependents will go to court under tort law, which is a regime of private law. They'll claim that they need compensation for that person's demise because if that person had continued to live, they would have earned a salary over a very long period. Then there are expenses related to their death, i.e., funeral expenses or medical expenses. In this way, relatives of the deceased go to the courts and claim compensation, which is typically paid by an insurance company. We find that there are two categories of damages. In very simple terms, one is an economic loss, i.e., the loss of income. Someone working in the formal sector would have a salary certificate which can be produced in court, and this is to be multiplied for their life span, say 25-30 years depending on the age of the person who died. To this large lump sum, you add the medical expenses, funeral expenses, loss of estate, etc. The second kind of loss is non-pecuniary, or non-economic loss. These are intangible, for it's very hard to put a price on them. It includes pain and suffering, loss of love and affection, loss of consortium, etc.

Interestingly, there's a whole range of cases that have come up to the Indian courts where, homemakers were killed in accidents so the husband of the woman and her children would come to court and ask for compensation. These women often were not working outside the home, and therefore, the courts were faced with the predicament of trying to decide how to value the labour of these women so as to compensate their dependents, who are suffering from the lack of the services that women would have provided to them had they been alive. Starting from the late 1980s, Indian courts came to argue that the work of the homemaker will be treated as an occupation. In this

way, the Andhra Pradesh High Court arrived at a monthly amount, which was multiplied by the years that she could have lived. In 2009, Justice Prabha Sridevan of the Madras High Court adopted an explicitly feminist take on the unpaid work done by a homemaker. Justice Sridevan cited CEDAW and international laws to argue that a homemaker does a lot of work in the home. Offering a largely middle-class understanding of a woman's social reproduction, which is managing budgets, coordinating activities, nursing care, managing help at home, helping children with education, etc., Justice Sridevan argued that we must compensate the women for this kind of work not only when they've died but also incorporate this into family law so that when there is a case of divorce, a woman is compensated for the unpaid work that she's performed in a marriage for a long period.

We also have a milestone decision of the Supreme Court in 2010, which has been most recently confirmed in 2021 by the current Chief Justice N.V. Ramana. Once the Supreme Court affirmed the recognition of women's unpaid work, a whole range of high courts followed suit. Some high courts have glorified the unpaid work that women perform by simply saying that women are upholding the cultural fabric of Indian society, they are nation builders, etc. There has meanwhile been another set of judgments that thought about marriage in a more equitable fashion. In these judgements we see the claim that the work a woman does at home is as important as the work that a husband does outside in paid employment, and in fact, sometimes the work that the woman does is even more valuable than what the man does outside the household. However, when courts have to decide how to compensate these dependents of homemakers who were killed, they have considered various factors; some of which prove problematic. Indian courts have been known to award grants of compensation based on whether a woman had children or not, the age of the children, etc. They've assumed that after the age of 55, women would do a lot less unpaid work, and therefore, the compensation should go down. Courts have also presumed that women's unpaid housework is completed by the age of 60. In other words, there is an assumption that women don't perform any reproductive labour, after a certain point/age, which is not necessarily the case in many instances. Also, if the women are from the upper class, their dependents are liable for more compensation because the court assumes that the opportunity cost of staying at home is high. I just want to end this point by saying that in 2021 the Supreme Court stated very categorically that the fixing of a notional income of a homemaker attains special significance. Justice Ramana said it amounts to the recognition of the work, labour and sacrifices of homemakers and is a reflection of changing attitudes, and that it is in furtherance of our nation's international obligations and our constitutional vision of social equality and ensuring dignity to all. This is indeed a very key judgment that recognizes the reproductive labour of homemakers, and I think this is what holds potential for ensuring economic freedom and independence for Indian women going forward.

Jessica Shroti: When the Indian courts and their adjudication of matters about motor accident cases have worked with the concept of the dependent position of women in marriage relations, and hence the compensation angle, how do you explain the aversion of Indian courts to the extension of this principle of dependence when it comes to recognizing sexual exploitation within marriage, i.e., in terms of rape within marriage?

Dr. Kotiswaran: It's a very complicated question, to begin with. I don't see any reason to have immunity for marital rape under the Indian Penal Code. I want to be very, very clear about that. I don't think there should be any kind of immunity for husbands. But for feminists, it's a slightly more complicated question because we know that marriage translates into economic dependence for a lot of women. Hence, I think it's well worth our consideration to think about both the intended consequences and the unintended consequences of

criminalizing marital rape, and what that would do to women who don't have any other source of livelihood or income apart from that of their husband's, and also have children who are dependent on them. Here I think we need to look at the complex interplay between criminal law and family law, and what impact a criminal case could have on the family law proceedings that are used for granting separation and divorce rights on grounds of cruelty. So, for example, if the prosecution for marital rape fails and the husband is acquitted, it could strengthen his bargaining power in a family court where he can claim that sexual abuse has not been proved. Hence, we need to be very careful about the consequences of criminalizing marital rape. On the exact question about the court's aversion to recognizing marital rape, it's really because I think it goes to the heart of the institution of marriage. Indeed, I think that if a woman in a divorce proceeding said that she wants compensation for her unpaid domestic and care work or a share of the matrimonial property, I have a feeling that she would be met with similar responses from the courts. What I mean is that it's easier to compensate the unpaid work of a woman after she has died, in an instance where the insurance company is paying the dependents, rather than if you were to bring it up in a family law case. Whether in the context of marital rape or divorce, I think the courts are generally averse to challenging the institution of marriage. Of course, we have to challenge this logic of the courts on every front, i.e., whether it be family law or criminal law.

Jessica Shroti: Looking at your PowerPoint presentation, I have a question as to how erotic dancing can be linked to licensing norms?

Dr. Kotiswaran: If you think of erotic dancing, there are many, many different forms, but the one that we are most familiar with, and which has been the subject of litigation, is bar dancing. In the context of Maharashtra, the law that governs bar dancing is the Bombay Police Act. The paradox that we need to unearth is, why is it that the police have the power to license these businesses? It's effectively a criminal law that regulates erotic dancing, but if you look at it on a factual basis, it gives the police the power to license these businesses, which is why I bring it under the ambit of licensing law. Although on the face of it, it's a criminal law, in effect what the police does is issue licenses and impose a whole range of conditions. The effect has been that although it is licensed, i.e., subject to licensing law in Maharashtra, the conditions are so stringent that effectively you shut down an entire form of labour by imposing very strict conditions on it.

Let me illustrate with the example of the Maharashtra Bar Dancing Litigation. When the Maharashtra government tried to ban bar dancing in 2005, this was challenged by an association of hotel and restaurant owners that went to the Bombay High Court. The Bombay High Court effectively said that the government could not clamp down on women's right to livelihood, and they upheld the right of bar dancers to perform erotic dancing. What they said at that point very clearly was that dancing was something that had been part of Indian culture for a very long time, and so per se, it is a legal activity. They use the term that it is res commercium, meaning that it is a legal activity; it can be the subject of commerce, and they contrasted that to sex work which they said was res extra commercium, i.e., an illegal activity. The court distinguished between these two forms of women's work. Now the point at which bar dancing becomes illegal is when it becomes obscene. So, it becomes illegal when you violate any of the conditions in the license. Effectively, the police will grant a license to a bar, and they'll say that the dancers have to be x distance from the customers, money cannot be showered on them, and owners need to have CCTVs installed. What happened consequently was that the case went up for appeal to the Supreme Court, which again upheld what the Bombay High Court said. By then, however, the Maharashtra government came up with a new law that made it very difficult to carry out any kind of bar dancing.

It was again challenged before the Bombay High Court and then the Supreme Court.

So eventually, in 2019, the Supreme Court approved some of the conditions imposed by the Maharashtra law while objecting to the validity of some. So, the Supreme Court said that if you have a CCTV camera in the bar, that should not be allowed because it violates the right to privacy. However, if you have some requirements around what distance should be maintained between the customer and the dancer, that is legitimate. It's a very mixed judgment. Of course, what would make bar dancing illegal under those circumstances is the violation of any of the conditions based on which the license was issued to the bar. The whole idea of imposing these conditions by the government is to make sure that there's less of a chance for the dance to become obscene. If you don't serve liquor, for instance, in the same place that the dancing is going on, you supposedly avoid obscenity. So effectively, in trying to make sure that the dancing is not obscene, the law makes it impossible for the business to carry on.

Dr. Maya John: Prabha, you've looked at paid domestic work and you have connected it to the contract law. I was just wondering whether you can elaborate on this further because in real terms the logic of existing labour law is such that domestic workers are one of the largest segments of the Indian workforce which is left out of the ambit of labour law. There is, yes, the notion of contract, but most of the work is extracted through an unwritten form of agreement between the worker and an employer. Such labour is also relegated as 'non-work' as the home of an employer is not recognized by the majority of labour laws as a workplace. So, can we make very concrete links with the contract law?

Dr. Kotiswaran: That's a very important question. What I've shared in my PowerPoint are the default legal regimes. I'm aware that several domestic workers' groups, unions, and academics have argued for a very long time that there should be a sector-specific law for paid domestic work. I completely agree with that. What I am trying to argue is that the contract doesn't have to be written for it to be valid. You could have a verbal contract; you could have an implied contract. Even if you don't have a contract that specifies working conditions, you still have whatever is agreed upon with the domestic worker. That's still a contract. Of course, the implied contract is violated all the time, and the conditions and terms of the contract keep shifting. However, even if you had some terms, i.e., the amount of pay, the number of days, etc. agreed upon then that's still a contract.

If you actually look at some of the case law around domestic workers, you'll find that often the context in which paid domestic work comes up before the courts, is not in the context of contract law. You'll be surprised to find that criminal law is what is invoked most often. It's domestic workers who have often been sexually abused or harassed by their employees – typically by the men in the employer's household – which results in criminal cases. Sadly, as such matters reach the courts, in many instances the domestic worker(s) turn hostile, and so the rape prosecution doesn't go ahead. Again, within non-criminal jurisprudence, we have the sexual harassment at workplace law which applies to domestic workers. However, we don't have the infrastructure to ensure its implementation. Similarly, there's a series of inclusions and exclusions in the new Labour Codes when it comes to paid domestic work. Essentially, it's a very fragmented sort of legal landscape that exists. There is then clearly an interplay of various legal regimes, reflecting contingent understandings of how the law regulates women's labour.

Michelle: Could you explain Indian laws on commercial surrogacy and why we have shifted to criminalizing it?

Dr. Kotiswaran: Let me just say that in 2005, the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) had regulations on surrogacy that were relatively liberal. This led to a very robust transnational market of

medical tourism involving Indian women surrogates and foreign couples. The institutional approach at the time though liberal was such that the interests of surrogates were not necessarily protected. We know of many instances of reproductive violence against these women, which were not even fully documented. Now when the Indian government began to think about regulating surrogacy, especially because of its transnational avatar, it tried to reduce who could access surrogacy. So, to begin with, they prohibited all LGBT couples from accessing it. Then, the Indian authorities eventually took the position that there should be no commercial surrogacy and only altruistic surrogacy such as where the couple and the surrogate mother are related to each other.

They issued an order through the ICMR and all clinics were told they cannot allow any more commercial surrogacy from foreign couples. The law subsequently drafted was ostensibly to prevent the exploitation of women, but there is a problem nonetheless. The moral panic around surrogacy that has led to its prohibition, and the notion that such reproductive labour should now be performed on an altruistic basis within the family, is breeding an illegal market. The emphasis of the law on altruistic surrogacy has, in other words, meant that a third party can perform altruistic surrogacy. At the same time, the law produces an illegal market that is not regulated. In such circumstances, all the other stakeholders benefit from the transactions except the surrogates. So, I think that when you ban something you're not actually eliminating the practice. Instead, you're only shifting the bargaining powers in a way that ensures that the women lose control over their reproductive labour.

Dr. Maya John: Do you agree with the concept of modern slavery?

Dr. Kotiswaran: Although the title of one of my edited volumes refers to modern slavery, it's not a term that I subscribe to because I do see it as invented by philanthro-capitalist organizations in the 'global north' to characterize extreme forms of labour exploitation. I prefer to think of modern slavery in terms of more indigenous terms, which have come up in the Indian context, like forced labour. For example, Article 23 of the Indian Constitution has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to mean that if you're paid less than the minimum wage, it amounts to forced labour. I'd rather use the term forced labour and trafficking. There are extreme forms of exploitation that are rampant in the Indian context. In various labour markets, there's absolutely no question about it. However, I have a problem with the use of criminal law in order to address extreme exploitation. Interestingly, the thrust towards using a criminal law is coming from the global north because if you look at the origins of anti-trafficking law, it came from the Palermo Protocol which was formulated by western countries to prevent labour migration into their countries. And so, anti-trafficking law is a project of border control.

In India too, we see an obsession with a criminal law approach when it comes to trafficking. What this does is shoring up the police power of the state, and I'm completely against that. I think, instead, what we should do is draw on the very rich jurisprudence under the country's labour laws. The Supreme Court's assertion on minimum wages, for example, has been successfully extended to MNREGA works; the approach being that if minimum wages aren't paid for such public works then it is forced labour. When it comes to extreme labour exploitation which is rampant in India, we need to have a multi-pronged approach.

Dr. Maya John: In a growing paradigm of deregulation of employer-employee relations by the state, we often see the state intervene in spheres of work involving women, such as paid domestic work, mostly when an employer–worker issue escalates into a matter of law and order. Consequently, the state's intervention is marked by resorting to the criminal law framework. The Indian labour laws that you supportingly spoke of are very often not used. Instead, state intervention is increasingly geared towards the use of criminal law,

and in particular, the criminalization of collective struggles of labour. It appears to be part of the game plan not to use the labour law paradigm that recognizes individual and collective labour's rights.

Dr. Kotiswaran: I completely agree with you. I think every parliamentary session has yet another criminal law tabled that we have to contend with. Indeed, we have to theorize the relationship between criminal law and all these other legal domains. You will find that in some very innocuous places, criminal provisions are being inserted. For example, in the context of surrogacy, medical professionals have been perturbed by the fact that they could be subject to high levels of imprisonment for any crime committed under the Surrogacy Act. Moreover, the definitions of the crimes are so broad that even lawyers are not sure about what exactly is criminalized. We need to protect individuals against this kind of overreach of criminal laws.

Michelle: A lot of people who engage in sex work are fighting for legalization and decriminalization. Do you think that unionization in sex work would be that effective for people who engage in it?

Dr. Kotiswaran: If you look at the sex workers' movement in India, it's a very strong movement when you compare it to other countries around the world. Within the sex workers' movement, the National Network for Sex Workers, for example, would limit itself to decriminalization as a demand, which is simply to say that any special law which applies to the sector, like the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1986 (ITPA), should be repealed. But if you look at the All India Network of Sex Workers, especially the Durbar Mahila Sumanwaya Committee in Calcutta, they've been articulating their demands slightly differently. They ask for labour rights, and have tried to be recognized as unions. Given that many aspects of sex work are illegal under the ITPA, they are however not registered as unions.

In one of the books that I edited, called Sex Work, which is published by Women Unlimited, if you look at the appendix, it has these drafts of laws that talk about what a unionized form of sex work would look like. But unfortunately, because of the push of the criminal law against sex work, sex workers have had to fight against the very abolition of the occupation. In my work, I have concluded that a labour law regulating the conditions of sex work can effectively segment the sex work industry into the regulated segment and the unregulated segment. The sector is so heterogeneous and women are so divided that legalization, while providing some positive consequences to certain kinds of sex workers, will simultaneously undermine the interests of other sex workers. So, this is something that needs to be put back on the table and discussed by sex workers' organizations carefully.

The webinar concluded at this point.

Transcribed by Niveditha Ajay
B.A (Hons) English, First year

To mark 75 years of freedom, WSC conducted a special interview with the well-known historian of gender, Professor Janaki Nair

(Excerpts from the Interview)

About the interviewee: Professor Janaki Nair is a former Professor of Modern Indian History, Centre for Historical Studies, JNU, Delhi. She was a visiting fellow at the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, Bangalore. She has authored the book *The Promise of the Metropolis: Bangalore's Twentieth Century* for which she received the New India Foundation Book Prize. Her other well-known publications include *Women and Law in Colonial India: A Social History* (published by Kali for Women, 1996), and *Miners and Millhands: Work, Culture and Politics in Princely Mysore* (1998).

Interviewer: As a noted historian of gender and labour, how do you explain how women from the subaltern masses and the labouring poor have been situated in Indian nationalism?

Dr. Nair: It is a very important and necessary question. Here, I must speak about how Indian feminist historiography has developed. Since conventionally historians try to focus on the political sphere and therefore the question of women's participation in the national movement has been a central concern. Historians would essentially view women as peasants, workers, and as a part of the urban poor. Historiography of the nationalist movement is running on two parallel tracks because we do not have too many works that discuss the role of women workers in the field of nationalism. This need not necessarily mean that women from subaltern classes did not participate in the national movement, this only suggests that the current historiographical material available to us is what historians found fit to write on. A very important work is by Samita Sen on women in the jute mill industry. However, it does not spontaneously focus on women in the nationalist movement. There seems to be a split in the way historians have approached this question of - nationalism, in terms of women's participation in the national movement and how they have studied labouring women.

There are not too many points where they intersect. Samita Sen says that women were politically active, participating in various strikes and actions. They were interestingly not very keen on being members of trade unions, which were directly linked to nationalist parties. This means that the kind of formal political affiliation that trade unions offered was not something women self-consciously focused on, perhaps even the trade unions did not focus on enrolling women. Unlike in Calcutta where all the entrepreneurs were European, Bombay had a largely Indian capitalist class, despite this, there was a stronger relationship between the trading movement in Bombay and the nationalist parties in Bombay. In a country like ours, we cannot speak of the entire country because of the various examples due to regional differences. We often talk largely about Bombay and Calcutta whereas in South India there were different forms of political mobilizations in which women were an active part. Particularly the non-brahmin movement of the Madras Presidency involved large numbers of subaltern and middle-class women, but it did not intersect with nationalism. In Maharashtra, different political strands were developing such as the nationalists, Ambedkarites, Communists, and the far-right such as the RSS. But they didn't necessarily intersect with nationalist mobilization. Even if women were a part of such movements, they did

not form a formal political organization. They did not join political parties either. From the 1920s Gandhi brought in many upper-middle women into the nationalist movement, but Dalit and subaltern women cannot be ruled out.

Interviewer: How were women and their issues addressed in distinctive or contrasting ways by the different shades of nationalism or different political forces?

Dr. Nair: The book, *'You Are Making History'*, brought out by the Stree Shakti Sangathan in Hyderabad based on interviews of women who were part of the Telangana armed revolutionary struggle between 1948 and 1951. It was well acknowledged by historians from the Congress Party that women had played an important role in the movement, they participated in guerrilla actions alongside men. Feminists circled back to this event and asked women what they were promised for participating in the movement. The women said that they were full of optimism when they went and joined the revolutionary movement. The party had promised them a transformation of not just the political superstructure but also their domestic life. They were promised a new set of gender relations. This did not happen; women were further pushed back into the domestic realm. This work is important not only because it tells us about the participation of women in a different kind of political movement, but it also promised revolution and a complete transition in gender roles. Unlike the movements in the 1920s, under Gandhi who brought women into his fold as moralizing beings who would definitely protest for a liquor ban, because women have a higher moral code and don't drink. It was not an attempt to improve gender roles. This movement was an interlude, such as the Quit India movement, wherein most of the senior leaders went to jail whereas the lower order leaders mobilized themselves. In Bangalore, the subalterns came out in support of the Quit India Movement. Parallelly, many other nationalist movements were being organized. On the very day Gandhi was breaking the salt law in Dandi, Kolar Gold Field (KGF) workers were coming out on a total strike, refusing to give thumb impressions that would make them look like criminals in the eyes of the state.

There is not a singular story that can be told even about something as momentous as the Quit India movement. Like in Issuru (Karnataka), a small village declared its independence, though it lasted for three days and ended in violence following the killing of two government officials. Peasant women participated in this movement in large numbers. Three women were even convicted for participating in the protest and the killings of the officials, they were also sentenced to life imprisonment. But there were differences too, in the case of Issuru, two women belonged to very socially high-standing families, while one Dalit woman did not get a single defence. There was unevenness with which participation in the national movement took place, there were also uneven consequences depending on caste and class structure.

Transcribed by Akansha Sengupta
B.A.P History-English, Second year

Mainstream Feminist Approaches & Theories: Problems and Prospects

A certificate course module conducted by Dr. Maya John

As part of its certificate course cycle, the Women's Studies Centre presented the session's first certificate course model on, "Mainstream Feminist Approaches and Theories, Problems, and Prospects" in September, 2021. The session was conducted by Dr. Maya John, an eminent scholar of history and gender studies.

As a stakeholder in the women's movement, she shared a lot of questions and concerns about society from a feminist lens. She also brought clarity to the theories associated with the women's movement. She drew attention to the blindspots of mainstream feminism. Dr. John began the module by conceptualizing and defining the term, feminism. Contemporary mainstream feminism, she said, is located within a particular historical moment of capitalism. It represents the embodiment of discontent of more privileged or upper classes of women. It is thus looked at as the general interests of women and their discontent. She then went on to talk about the various waves of feminism. A widely held view of the second wave of feminism (the 1960s-1980s) is that it has been relatively successful in transforming certain cultural values, established societal norms, and attitudes. However, the second wave of feminism simultaneously failed to transform institutions. Hence, in modern times, feminist ideas have become the norm. But on the other hand, these claims and ideas have yet to be generalised across the board so as to liberate all sections of women. She said that there is a gap in everyday experiences, in relationships, at the workplace, and home. There is a gap between what we want in theory and what is happening in practice. This is owed to an institutional failure.

Dr. John then goes on to talk about Nancy Fraser, a feminist scholar, and theoretician who debunks this argument. Fraser propounds that the diffusion of cultural attitudes associated with the second wave of feminism has been a part and parcel of another important social transformation, i.e. the consolidation of a newer form of capitalism; neoliberal capitalism. Nancy Fraser's article suggests that there has been a co-option of mainstream feminism by capitalism, which is an important intervention to recognize. Dr. John discussed how Fraser asserts that feminist envisioning of women's emancipation needs to work independently of the state, and cannot promote solutions which benefit only a small section of women, while the majority of women continue to be oppressed. The question of changing the nature of the state and redistributing resources has not been at the forefront of the issue for second-wave feminism, or for that matter even the newer waves of feminism. Mainstream feminism is tied down to a recognition-focused agenda without understanding the political economy. There is also a widespread tendency in mainstream feminism to downplay the need for redistribution and the fight against capitalism.

There is a general need to bring back the collective interest of women, which means the

needs and demands of a majority of women, i.e., women trapped in the lowest rungs of society, women from the working class, agrarian poor women, Dalit women, women trapped in conflict zones etc. Their issues and their agenda need to be brought to the forefront of our emancipatory politics and analytical frames. As we move down this social and class hierarchy, one would notice the intensification of oppression along the lines of class, caste, region, etc. Liberal feminists have essentially harbored the class-blind perspective. Such mainstream feminism can be traced to the middle-class and upper-middle-class women who gained access to good education and began landing high-paying jobs from the mid-20th century onwards. Such women's experiences breed feminism of the minority, i.e., one which hardly addresses the issues of labouring women. The feminism of the minority is locatable within the deep contradiction between the two parallelly existing worlds of a class of property-less women and that of a class of property-owning women. Notably, a woman who does not have property is compelled to work for propertied, privileged women who have the resources to employ the labour of others. For instance, an upper-class woman steps out of her home for paid employment or leisure; leaving the household work for her domestic worker or 'maid' to take care of. Upper-class women have simply sought a solution to mundane housework by subletting it to a vulnerable labouring woman who has to attend to her own backbreaking housework. The inequalities within women and the piecemeal nature of solutions to women's oppression that upper-class women seek are hard to miss. Especially during the lockdown, the façade of equality that privileged women enjoy was shattered when many of them were pushed into the drudgery of housework during lockdowns that prevented their domestic workers from reporting to work.

In this way, Dr. John John brought into question the fault-lines informing mainstream feminism. The members had many key takeaways from the session and had an invigorating time delving into the nuances of this new age of feminism and the forces of change.

(Report by Akansha Sengupta,
B.A. Program, Second year)

National Education Policy 2020 and its Gendered Impact in terms of Access, Equity and Quality

A two-day workshop conducted by Dr. Jyoti Raina, Professor Mary E. John & Dr. Maya John

The Women's Studies Centre of Jesus and Mary College organized a webinar series titled "New Education Policy 2020 and its Gendered Impact in terms of Access, Equity and Quality" on 4th October 2021. The discussion highlighted the shortcomings of the ambitious NEP 2020 in dealing with the issues of the marginalized communities, especially women. These topics were first elaborated upon by Dr. Maya John, which was followed by a presentation by Jolynne John who is a student researcher on the WSC Research Cell.

Dr. Maya John commenced the session by contextualizing NEP 2020 in the current socio-economic structure of India. There are deep-seated inequalities that affect the accessibility of education to many marginalized communities. She emphasized that NEP 2020 further increases these inequalities instead of reducing them. NEP 2020 promotes the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode. She elaborated on the numerous barriers this informal mode creates for students from marginalized communities. It hinders their socialization and learning processes. The poor exposure due to poor study material, delayed results, poorly funded infrastructure, and partial treatment puts them in a disadvantaged position. Moreover, she critically examined the essence of privatization in NEP 2020. Dr. John cautioned against the expansion of more private institutions as they will only deepen inequalities. She also informed that private institutes will be exempted from fee regulation by the state under the NEP. The disparities in the Indian schooling system are glaring. Disadvantaged students are forced to go to poorly funded and managed government schools.

Followed by Dr. Maya John's address, Dr. Jyoti Raina, an Associate Professor at Gargi College, also took a session titled, “Education, Equality and Access - A Critical Analysis of NEP 2020”. She highlighted how an entrenched framework of existing structural inequalities of class and gender, starting from the level of schooling, has gained further policy legitimacy due to NEP 2020.

This was followed by the next session titled, “The New Educational Policy in the Historical Perspective.” The speaker for the webinar was Professor Mary E. John from the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, India. Mary E. John has been working in the fields of women’s studies and feminist politics for many years. The session commenced with Professor Mary John emphasizing the importance of understanding the NEP considering its history, including but not limited to the historical context of a university, the agendas in place, and the political and social scenarios under which the university was established.

Professor Mary John discussed how the history of the education system today can be traced back to the colonial systems of education, rather than the pre-existing medieval systems that were prevalent in ancient India. The role of Thomas Macaulay was highlighted in establishing a class that would diffuse Western culture to the other Indians by establishing Indian universities that taught in the English language. Professor John then explained the percolation of social reform through the establishment of universities by the British in the 1800s. Reform was quick to take place as two women had already graduated

in the late 1800s, a privilege that even British women did not have the opportunity to explore by then. Around this time, B.R Ambedkar was also giving a speech on Castes in India at Columbia University. It was under this context that Professor Mary John explained the importance of understanding the intersectionality between social reform, nationalism, the new woman, the new caste subject, and the establishment of universities in India.

Professor Mary John then explained the term "Nehruvianism" and the division of the higher education system. A class of experts began to emerge post-colonialism with the advent of independence due to the development of science, technology, and the social sciences. Moreover, institutions began to be segregated into teaching and research institutions. Professor Mary John then talked about the late 1970s which primarily focused on student politics and movements. A new model of movement called Naxalbari emerged which placed the struggles and transformations of the system well outside the educational system. Issues such as land rights, women's struggles, civil rights, etc. took centre stage. Professor Mary John highlighted the period of the 1980s when the university became grounds for a different kind of struggle. The Mandal Movement was a critical turning point during this period as it questioned the lack of Indian representation in a largely westernized university. She also explained how in the twenty-first-century neo-liberalism has seeped into the Indian education system as well as around the globe.

The main concern with the eleventh plan is the excessive privatization of education as well as greater state interference and increased power of stakeholders, all of which would negate any positive impact this change would seek to bring about. Two questions of importance were then posed by Professor Mary John: one was what the transformed composition of the student bodies would look like in the twenty-first century and the second was what the political economy of higher education would look like in this context.

Report by Kashish Emmanuel
B.A. (Hons) Psychology, Second year

An Account of the International Women's Day March at Jantar Mantar, Delhi

8 March, Saath March!

By Muskan Joshi
B.A. (Hons) History, First year

International Women's Day, is an annual event held in order to commemorate years of women's struggle and to honour their achievements in all spheres at an international level. In February 1908, thousands of female workers from garment factories in New York went on strike and protested in support of their right to better working conditions. National Women's Day which was celebrated for the first time on February 28th, 1909 to mark the anniversary of these strikes, is still ongoing in the USA. The 8th March comes from the Russian calendar where women had started protesting in the face of adversities and food shortages in the aftermath of World War I. Mass strikes from workers of all sectors demanding better working rights, food, and an end to autocracy had started. The protests that had started on March 8th had mostly women on the frontlines as the core protesters, marking an important day in history.

Although a century has passed, women are still fighting for equal rights and recognition in society. The Women's Studies Centre allowed me to witness the commemoration of International Women's Day with a public meeting held at Jantar Mantar. Born and brought up in a family that has always taught me to voice my opinion and fight for what is right, this was the first women's movement in which I participated, instead of just witnessing it from a distance or receiving accounts of it from the newspaper. On the day of the protest, we were joined by the Centre of Struggling Women. The protest march continued towards Jantar Mantar from Patel Chowk metro station. Several prominent social workers and activists from different women's associations came forward to state socio-political demands that can help uplift women who belong to marginalized communities and are underprivileged from their impoverished circumstances. Their experiences articulated solidarity towards women across communities and also presented a verified historical account that concluded women's ongoing struggles.

In the light of the occasion, Kamla Bhasin, an Indian feminist, and social scientist was remembered through songs and sincere condolences. Bhasin who passed away in 2021, dedicated her life to comprehending and fighting gender-based discrimination. Some of her songs that were sung during the protest powerfully highlight women's struggles.

The 8th March Saath March stood as a strong reminder that we are a nation still stubbornly held in the clutches of a patriarchal mindset. While it is essential to develop a scientific temperament within children, it is equally important that they understand to respect each other's rights across boundaries of inter-subjective differences of caste and gender.

Future is feminist!

A Brief Report of Ongoing Research at the Women's Studies Centre, Jesus and Mary College

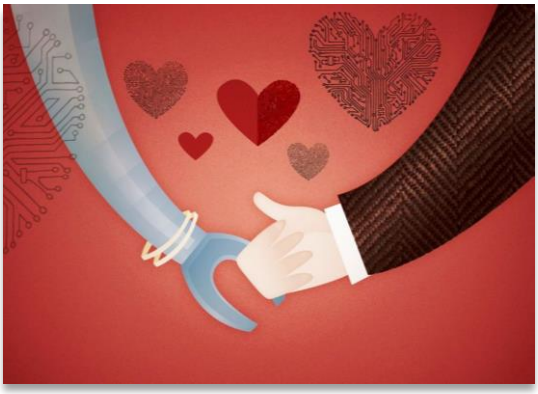
The Women's Studies Centre of Jesus and Mary College, Delhi University has been working on three distinct research projects during the academic year of 2021-22. These include projects on **'Sanitation Workers in India: Mapping Working Conditions, Workplace Discrimination and Struggles', 'Caste and Dating Behaviour', and 'Women Artisans'**. The research projects aim to highlight various vivid realities of Indian society that often go unnoticed / remain less theorized. The prime motive of the project mentors, i.e., Dr. Maya John, Dr. Jessy Philip, and Dr. Anupama Srivastava, has been to enable the students to experience the lived realities that inform the socio-economic fabric of the society; be it in terms of examining a particular segment of the workforce, social behaviour and dynamics of women's work. All the projects with their distinct research themes intend to draw attention to crucial aspects, such as the demands and issues pertaining to sanitation workers; the mental framework and social attitudes about how caste determines the dating behaviour of university students; and the socio-economic conditions informing the lives of women artisans in India.

Project on Sanitation Workers

This project is mentored by Dr. Maya John. The prime objective of the project is to trace the socio-economic background of sanitation workers, with special emphasis on women sanitation workers. Apart from trying to trace whether there is a hereditary aspect to these workers taking up such arduous and low paying work, the project seeks to delineate rampant challenges faced daily by this workforce. The field work documents the low wages, contractual nature of work, dangerous and unhygienic working conditions, tendency of overwork, casteist discrimination in workplaces, and the inadequacy of existing laws. The primary research and analysis is inclusive of data collection through the means of semi-structured interviews with the daily wage safai karamcharis in Jesus and Mary College, the members of Safai Karamchari Union (SKU), the Delhi Metro housekeeping staff, and cleaning staff engaged by Sulabh International. The students working under this project include Zubaida Ifshan (1st year, B.A prog Elective English+French), Shreya Singh (1st year, B.A prog Physical Education + History), Anjaly Clare Sebastian (2nd year, Pol. Science Honours), Vidhi Srivastava (1st year, B.A prog Eco & Maths), Mannat Lehal (2nd year, B.A prog Psychology + Sociology), Clare (3rd year, Economics Honours), Shreya Nanda (2nd year, B.com Honours), Ananya (2nd year, History Honours) Shaivie (3rd year, History Honours), Vanya Chopra (1st year, B.Com Honours) and Sandhya Jeremiah Dung Dung (3rd year, Pol. Science Honours).

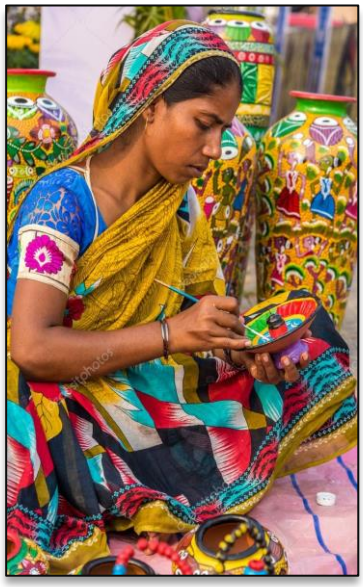
Project on Caste and Dating Behaviour

The project mentored by Dr. Jessy Philip traces the impact of caste on dating attitudes of students at Delhi University. The research project highlights the position of women through the lens of caste. The prime objective of the project is to study the existing case studies on the impact of race on dating in the US to draw a comparison and to analyse the findings of attitudinal surveys on inter-caste marriages in India. The primary research and analysis pertaining to the project include collecting data through surveys which were conducted among 100-150 students from diverse courses offered in the University of Delhi. The students working under this project include Kriti Sarin (2nd year, Pol. Science Honours), Shambhavi Mishra (2nd year, Pol. Science Honours), Akshita Pareek (3rd year, BA Programme, Psychology-Sociology), Ananya Jindal (1st year, Psychology Honours), Muskaan Babbar (1st year, Maths Honours), Tarini Madan (1st year, English Honours), Prapti (1st year, B.com Honours), Sneha Chakravarty (1st year, Sociology Honours), Muskaan Joshi (1st year, History Honours) and Tanya Yadav (3rd year, Sociology Honours).



महिला हस्तशिल्प कारीगरों पर शोध कार्य

इस वर्ष वुमेन स्टडीज़ सैंटर ने अपने रीसर्च प्रोजेक्ट के तहत विभिन्न कार्य-भागों में महिलाओं के साथ होने वाले शोषण पर प्रकाश डालने का प्रयास किया है। इसी कार्य प्रणाली में एक टीम का निर्माण किया गया, जिसका नेतृत्व व निर्माण डॉ. अनुपमा श्रीवास्तव की देखरेख में की गई और जिसमें तेजस्वी (तृतीय वर्ष की छात्रा), आरोही अंतरा, फरहा, भानुप्रिया, पायल (द्वितीय वर्ष छात्राएं) एवं ईशा और अर्चिता (प्रथम वर्ष की छात्राएं) ने योगदान दिया। इस रीसर्च प्रोजेक्ट में हस्तशिल्प कलाओं



में महिलाओं की कलात्मकता, व्यस्तता और विवशता (सामाजिक और आर्थिक आधार) पर खोज व चर्चा की है।

इस विषय में तहकीकात हेतु 'हस्तशिल्प कला संग्रहालय' तथा हस्तशिल्प कला के बाजारों में अधिकांश खोज-बीन करते हुए, इस क्षेत्र में कार्यरत महिलाओं से बातचीत कर उनकी समस्याओं को गहराई से जानने की कोशिश की है, जिसमें उनकी घरेलू दिक्कतों के साथ, आर्थिक व सामाजिक समस्याओं का पता चलता है।

Prize-winning Papers of the Annual Student Seminar on

Women's Lives: Negotiations, Contestations and Transformations

Date: 5th March 2022

नारीवाद का अंध पहलू:
घरेलू कामगार और मालकिनों का शोषणकारी संबंध

Read in the Technical Session titled Gender, Work & Familial Life: Negotiations & the Quest for Transformations

माधुरी सिंह

एम.ए हिन्दी, दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय

नारीवाद ने महिलाओं के कई अहम मुद्दों को मजबूती से उठाया है, जिसमें से एक अहम पहलू है नारीवादी विचारकों द्वारा श्रम विभाजन के बाद महिलाओं द्वारा घरों में काम की स्थिति को दर्शाना। नारीवादियों ने बताया है कि श्रम विभाजन के बाद महिलाएं घर के कामों में बांध दी गई। महान नारीवादी चिंतक सिमोन द बोवुआर ने अपनी पुस्तक 'द सेकेंड सेक्स' में घर के काम की तुलना सिसिफ़स को दी गयी कभी न खत्म होने वाली अंतहीन सजा से की है। हर दिन धूल का साफ करना और फिर उसका जमा हो जाना; हर दिन बर्तन धोना और फिर उनका गंदा हो जाना; हर पहर खाना पकाना और फिर अगले पहर भूख लग जाना; यह काम की एक अंतहीन कड़ी है। इस अंतहीन कड़ी को मलयाली फिल्म 'द ग्रेट इंडियन किचन' में घर के काम को महिलाओं के कभी न खत्म होने वाले काम के तौर पर बखूबी दर्शाया गया है।

आज के समय में महिलाओं का एक हिस्सा घरों से बाहर निकल कर पेशेवर नौकरियां कर रहा है। ऐसी स्थिति में उस घर के काम को जो परंपरागत रूप से महिलाओं का काम माना जाता है, उसे घरेलू कामगार करती है। घरेलू कामगारों की स्थिति और राज्य द्वारा उनको नज़रअंदाज़ किए जाने को लेकर मेरे अध्ययन में मुझे घरेलू कामगार यूनियन' ने और उससे जुड़े कार्यकर्ताओं और कामगारों ने बहुत मदद की। मैं अपने प्रपत्र में यूनियन और उससे जुड़े कार्यकर्ताओं और कामगारों के प्रति अपना आभार व्यक्त करना चाहती हूँ। कृषि और निर्माण (कंस्ट्रक्शन) के बाद घरेलू काम (डॉमेस्टिक वर्क) तीसरा सबसे बड़ा क्षेत्र है जहां पर महिलाएं कार्यरत हैं। एक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक तकरीबन 28 प्रतिशत महिलाएं घरेलू कामगार हैं, जो कि बहुत बड़ा असंगठित क्षेत्र है। इस काम के लिए महिलाओं को बेहद कम वेतन पर काम पर रख लिया जाता है। काम के लंबे घंटे, बहुत कम छुट्टियाँ मिलना, और छुट्टी लेने पर पैसे काट लिया जाना, इस क्षेत्र में आम बात है। चूंकि घर चलाने के लिए यह बहुत ही कम तनख्वाह है इसलिए ज़्यादातर मौकों को घरेलू कामगारों 8-8 घरों में काम करना पड़ता है। अंतर्राष्ट्रीय श्रम संगठन (आईएलओ) ने एक 2011 में एक कन्वेंशन (कन्वेंशन 189) किया, जिसमें घरेलू कामगारों के काम की स्थिति को सुधारने को लेकर प्रावधान तय हुए। इसमें घरेलू काम की सुरक्षा, वेतन, काम के घंटे, इत्यादि के संबंध में कई सुधार लाए गए। लेकिन 10 साल से भी ज्यादा समय होने के बावजूद आज तक भारत ने इस कन्वेंशन पर हस्ताक्षर नहीं किए। इसके पीछे सरकार का तर्क है कि चूंकि घरेलू कामगार किसी के घर में काम कर रही है और यह उसका निजी क्षेत्र है इसलिए सरकार इनके अधिकारों को विनियमित नहीं कर सकती। इस कारण अभी तक राज्य घरेलू कामगार और मालकिनों के कार्य-संबंध को उनका निजी संबंध मानकर इसमें हस्तक्षेप करने से इंकार करता रहा है। परंतु, घरेलू काम जिसको सरकार मालिक-मालकिनों का निजी क्षेत्र समझती है, वहाँ पर भयंकर शोषण-उत्पीड़न की स्थिति व्याप्त है। विख्यात सिद्धांतकार और घरेलू कामगार यूनियन की संयोजक माया जॉन के अनुसार जैसे ही घरेलू कामगार मालिकों के घर मे प्रवेश करते हैं वो राज्य के लिए अदृश्य हो जाते हैं। घरों में राज्य की सीमा

समाप्त हो जाती है और मालिकों के निजी क्षेत्र की सीमा शुरू हो जाती है। इसी का कारण है कि सरकारी एजेंसियों के पास घरेलू कामगारों की संख्या से जुड़े बेहद अलग-अलग आंकड़े हैं। राज्य द्वारा इस क्षेत्र का विनियमन न किए जाने के कारण ही यह क्षेत्र मालिकों का निजी क्षेत्र व स्थल बन जाता है, जहाँ पर जातीय, क्षेत्रीय, लैंगिक और वर्गीय गैरबराबरियाँ न केवल पैदा होती हैं, बल्कि इनके लगातार पुनरुत्पादित होने का कारण बनी हुई जब किसी का निजी स्थल किसी दूसरे व्यक्ति का कार्यस्थल बन जाए, ऐसी स्थिति में एक घरेलू कामगार का किसी मालिक या मालकिन के घर सुरक्षित काम करना पूरी तरह से मालिक-मालकिन की इच्छा पर निर्भर करता है, क्योंकि यहाँ पर कोई भी श्रम कानून लागू नहीं होते। ज़्यादातर घरों में जहाँ पर घरेलू कामगार काम करते हैं, वो मध्यम-वर्गीय या उच्च-वर्गीय घर होते हैं, जहाँ पर पूरा अधिकार क्षेत्र मालिक-मालकिनों का होता है। इस क्षेत्र में घरेलू कामगारों का शोषण-उत्पीड़न एक आम बात है। ज्यादा काम कराना, काम के कम पैसे देना, मन-मर्जी से कभी भी नौकरी से निकाल देना तो आम बात है ही, साथ ही घरेलू कामगारों की पिटाई करना, उनके साथ बदसलूकी, उनका यौन उत्पीड़न भी व्याप्त है। अगर घरेलू कामगार इस शोषण-उत्पीड़न की शिकायत करने की कोशिश भी करें तो उन्हें कभी भी काम से निकाला जाना आम है। ऐसे में न केवल उन्हें एक घर से काम से निकाल दिया जाता है, परंतु किसी रिहाइशी सोसाइटी या 'हाई-राइस' अपार्टमेंट में उनके प्रवेश पर ही पाबंदी लगा दी जाती है। इससे न केवल उनकी एक घर में नौकरी जाती है, बल्कि सभी घरों में वो काम करने से वंचित हो जाती हैं, जिससे उनका गुज़ारा भी बेहद कठिन हो जाता है। इन कठिन परिस्थितियों के कारण घरेलू कामगारों में भयंकर डर का माहौल बना रहता है। इस कारण विरले ही कभी घरेलू कामगारों को न्याय मिल पाता है। घरेलू कामगारों की मालिक-मालकिनों द्वारा पिटाई किया जाना आम बात बनी हुई है। 2017 में नोएडा की 'महागुन मॉडर्न' सोसाइटी में रुपये चोरी का आरोप लगाकर घरेलू कामगार को रात-भर बंधक बना कर रखा गया और उसकी पिटाई की गई। गुड़गाँव में 2017 में 17 साल की एक घरेलू कामगार की कपड़े उतरवाकर एक 25 वर्षीय महिला मॉडल द्वारा पिटाई की गई। 2018 में गुरुग्राम की एक सोसायटी में तनख्वाह मांगने पर मालकिन द्वारा घरेलू कामगार को बंधी बना कर पीटा गया। इन सभी मामलों में महिला घरेलू कामगारों की शिकायत दर्ज करने की जगह पुलिसप्रशासन ने मालिकों का ही साथ दिया। घरेलू कामगारों के साथ यौन हिंसा और यहाँ तक कि उनकी हत्या किए जाने की भी घटनाएं हुई हैं। 2017 में गुरुग्राम की एक सोसायटी में एक 19 साल की घरेलू कामगार को छत से नीचे फेंक दिया गया और उसकी हत्या को आत्महत्या कहा गया। इस मामले में पुलिस ने पूरी तरह से मालिक दंपत्ति को बचाने का प्रयास किया। ऐसी और भी बहुत-सी घटनाएं हैं जिसमें अभिजात वर्ग की मालकिने उनके घर में काम करने वाली निम्नवर्गीय कामगारों का शोषण-उत्पीड़न करती हैं। केंद्र सरकार के महिला एवं बाल विकास मंत्रालय ने 2014 में राज्यसभा में बताया कि देश में घरेलू कामगारों के प्रति हिंसा के मामले बहुत बढ़े हैं। कामगारों या उनके परिवारों के लोगों को आत्महत्या तक करने को मजबूर होना पड़ा। बाद में लॉकडाउन में ढील पड़ने पर जब उन्हें काम पर वापस रखा गया तो नए-नए तुगलकी फरमानों से उनकी जिंदगी को बिलकुल नर्क बना दिया, जैसे कि उनके लिए अलग सीढ़ियों, लिफ्ट के प्रयोग; कोरोना टेस्ट को अनिवार्य बनाया जाना; वैकसीन लगवाने को अनिवार्य बनाया जाना, ऐसे समय में जब बेहद मुश्किल से ही कुछ लोगों को वैकसीन लग रही थी, इत्यादि। सरकारों और जिला प्रशासनों ने भी घरेलू कामगारों की दयनीय स्थिति को पूरी तरह से नज़रअंदाज़ किया। ऐसी स्थिति में यह जायज़ सवाल बनता है कि क्या उस घरेलू कामगार की मालकिन जो अपने कार्यस्थल पर महिला सुरक्षा और अधिकार के नियमों को लागू करवाने की कवायद करती है क्या वो खुद अपने घर पर जो उसके घर काम करने वाली कामगार का कार्यस्थल है वहां भी उन नियमों को लागू करती है या वो स्वयं अपने यहाँ काम करने वाली घरेलू कामगार का शोषण करती है। जब एक अभिजात वर्ग की महिला अपने से नीचे के वर्ग की महिला के शोषण में लिप्त है तब क्या वो एक दूसरे की हितैशी होंगी या यह नारीवाद का वो अंध पहलू है जो अभिजात वर्ग की महिलाओं के हितों की रक्षा करते हुए दिखाई देता है। ऐतिहासिक तौर पर विभिन्न मुद्दे जो पहले निजी क्षेत्र के माने जाते रहे हैं, उन्हें बाहर करके उनको सार्वजनिक मुद्दा बनाकर नारीवादियों ने व्याप्त उत्पीड़न पर सरकार को नज़र डालने को

मजबूर किया है। भारतीय नारीवाद ने सभी निजी मुद्दों को बाहर ले कर सार्वजनिक मुद्दा बनाने का काम किया काम किया है परंतु इस मुद्दे पर अधिकतर नारीवादी चिंतकों ने अपनी आंखें मूंद रखी हैं और यह भारतीय नारीवाद के चिंतन की त्रासदी है कि आज तक घरेलू कामगारों के इस मुद्दे को मुखर रूप से से नारीवाद के केंद्र बिंदु में नहीं लाया गया है जिसका शायद एक मुख्य कारण यह भी है कि बहुत सी नारीवादी महिलाओं के घर पर का काम भी घरेलू कामगार ही करती हैं। चूंकि घरेलू कामगार बेहद पिछड़ी आर्थिक-सामाजिक पृष्ठभूमि से आते हैं, इसलिए उनके काम का मुद्दा कभी भी मुख्यधारा में लाये जाने लायक मुद्दा नहीं बनता। इसके ठीक विपरीत नारीवाद का सिद्धान्त गढ़ने वाली महिलाएँ अभिजात वर्ग से होती हैं। यह प्रचलित नारिवाद के सिद्धान्त और व्यवहार में भयंकर अंतर्विरोध को दिखाता है। विख्यात नारीवादी चिंतक मैरी जॉन ने भी इस अंतर्विरोध के संबंध में महत्त्वपूर्ण बात कही है। उसके अनुसार भारत में नारीवाद मुख्यतः अभिजात वर्ग की महिलाओं पर केन्द्रित रहा है। इसलिए बहुसंख्यक कामकाजी महिलाओं के मुद्दे उसके चिंतन के बाहर रहे हैं। इस संबंध में अनुभव सिन्हा की फिल्म 'थप्पड़' का उल्लेख करना प्रासंगिक है। इस फिल्म में अमृता एक गृहणी है, जो अपने पति और घर का खयाल रखने की एक नीरस उबानेवाली जिंदगी जी रही है। एक दिन एक पार्टी में उसका पति, विक्रम उसे सबसे सामने एक थप्पड़ मार देता है। विक्रम इस थप्पड़ को अपनी गलती नहीं मानता, और अमृता घर छोड़कर चली जाती है। वो बाद में अपने तलाक के लिए अपने पति पर मुकदमा करती है। इसी कहानी में अमृता के घर पर एक घरेलू कामगार है, जिसके साथ उसका पति घरेलू हिंसा करता है। वो भी अमृता की जद्दोजहद देखकर इसके खिलाफ खड़े होने का सोचती है। जहाँ अमृता के काम को एक नीरस उबानेवाले काम के तौर पर दर्शाया गया है, वहीं उसके घर में काम करने वाली घरेलू कामगार सुनीता जो कि हर दिन बहुत से घरों में काम करने के अलावा खुद अपने घर में भी काम करती है, उसके काम और जीवन को अदृश्य कर दिया गया है। फिल्म में मालकिन और नौकरानी बीच संबंध को सपाट करके केवल उनकी तथाकथित समान समस्याओं को ही दिखाया गया है, और उनके बीच के बुनियादी अंतर्विरोध को पूरी तरह से दृष्टि से ओझल कर दिया गया है। इस कहानी में कर्ता-बोध सिर्फ एक उच्च वर्ग की महिला के पास चित्रित किया गया है। जबकि एक घरेलू कामगार का कर्ता-बोध उच्च वर्ग की महिला के संघर्ष को देखकर ही उजागर होता है। इस फिल्म में उच्च वर्ग की महिला और घरेलू कामगार महिला के कर्ता-बोध में एक समानता भी है, जो यह दिखाने का प्रयास करती है कि सभी महिलाओं की स्थिति एक जैसी है, और उन्हें एक ही समान पुरुषों के हाथों उत्पीड़न सहना पड़ता है। असलियत इससे पूर्णतः भिन्न है। आज घरेलू कामगार भारत के विभिन्न शहरों में अपने अधिकारों और अपनी जरूरतों के आधार पर निकलते संघर्ष के लिए एकजुट हो रही। दिल्ली और उससे सटे नोएडा और गुड़गाँव शहरों में घरेलू कामगार अपने यूनियन बना रहे हैं, और अपने अधिकारों और मालिक-मालकिनों के अत्याचार-उत्पीड़न के खिलाफ संघर्ष कर रहे हैं। उनका कर्ताबोध उनकी जरूरतों के आधार पर है। आज ज़रूरत है कि नारीवादी अपने इस अंतर्विरोध को देख सकें कि किस प्रकार उनका नारीवाद कामकाजी महिलाओं की जद्दोजहद से एकदम कटा हुआ है। इस अंतर्विरोध को समझकर ही बहुसंख्यक महिलाओं की दशा, और उनके मुद्दों को मुख्यधारा में लाकर महिलाओं की स्थिति को बेहतर बनाया जा सकना संभव हो सकता है। इसी से नारीवाद अपने सिद्धान्त के अंध-पहलू से बाहर निकल सकता है, और विश्व के सभी मेहनतकश महिलाओं की एकता सुनिश्चित हो सकती है।

Crafting The 'Ideal' Hindu Woman: Reading Postcards of M.V. Dhurandhar

Read in the Technical Session titled Gender Constructions in Texts, Visual & Performative Arts: Contestations & Negotiations

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Introduction

Images have never been passive objects. They don't just imbibe ideological and political realities of a period but also reproduce them across time and space. This is not to say that images carry static ideologies from one time period to another. What they carry within them is the power and freedom to be perceived, which in turn shapes their many meanings. Yet our perception of images is also deeply intertwined with the socio-political economy in which we read them. In this paper, I study the postcard art of Mahadev Vishwanath Dhurandhar as a means of unfolding the ideologies and visuals that crafted a "homogenising and hegemonising" (Uberoi 1990, 41) identity of Hindu women. In colonial postcard art, native women of India found a hyper-visible space. Within the colonial network of postcards - which were painted or photographed in India, printed in Europe, brought back to Indian markets, and then sent to Britain - the gendered representation of women became crucial to establishing the progress of modernity in colonial India. This paper argues that the circulation of postcard art was one of the ways the colonial forces crafted what Edward Said refers to as the 'imagined geography' of the Orient (Said 1977). And this imagination in itself was gendered. Saloni Mathur's study indicates that 'native view' postcards, which produced a certain kind of representation of the colonised, were being consumed and collected by members of elite clubs (Mathur 2007, 116). The question of who consumed these postcards is important to understand how and why the postcards were created. In Said's formulation one of the key aspects of 'imagined geographies' is that the people of the Orient do not define themselves. They are not part of the narrative strategies which create knowledge about them. Here Dhurandhar's work, as an enterprising artist within the colonial bureaucracy, is significant in the ways that it reproduces and diverges from this colonial gaze and meanders in the emerging nationalist ideologies without any outright display of nationalism. This paper asks what happens when a member of the Orient (Dhurandhar) speaks about the Orient through his art? Whose imagination of the Orient is he reproducing? However, instead of studying Dhurandhar's gaze as a static monolith, this paper looks at how his depiction makes visible the different ways in which women were interacting with the colonial social sphere (Mathur 2007).

The main focus of this paper is a series of postcards painted by M.V. Dhurandhar in 1907 titled *Coquettish Maid Servant* sourced from the digital archive of *Paper Jewels: Postcards from the Raj* written and organised by Omar Khan (2018). Printed by the Lakshmi Art Printing Works in colonial Bombay this series follows the story of a Hindu couple and their 'maid servant', who presumably belongs to a marginalised caste and class. This paper critically engages with the series to examine the changing family dynamics in colonial Bombay wherein the bodies of different women become crucial to a new national imagination. This imagination ties in with the nationalist discourse of the upper-caste wife as the 'ideal' Hindu woman being placed in direct opposition to the deviant sexuality and life of the marginalised caste worker.

Modern Art and Imperialism

In India, points out Partha Mitter, academic art was part of the imperial policy at a time when British hegemony was displayed through different forms of progress - the change in artistic sensibilities being one of them (Mitter 1994, 29).

The art school in which Dhurandhar studied - Sir J.J. School of Arts - was set up by Jamsethji Jijibhai, a Parsi industrialist. Jijibhai's offer to fund the school was accepted by the East India Company and the school was set up in 1856. At this point, the aim of the school was also to rebuild India's manufacturing capabilities (Mitter 1994, 31). In 1864, however, the Bombay school, like other schools, was brought under the wing of public instruction set up in the presidencies. This paved the way for these art schools to impart European taste (Mitter 1994, 32). By the 1890s there was another shift marked by the debate between fine vs applied art. The former imbibing European tradition while the latter is seen as Indian decorative art. This is also the period when there were more expectations on the students to buy their art supply and an earlier benevolent attitude towards recruiting artisans faded as more and more elite boys joined these academies through examinations (Mitter 1994, 55). It is in this context that Dhurandhar, belonging to the Parthe Prabhu caste, becomes a big name at Sir J.J. School of Arts. However, even as Dhurandhar's professional journey was tied with the imperial policies on art, another context important to his work is that of emerging nationalism, even as he consciously separated himself from nationalist politics. Dhurandhar's art symbolised not just the colonial gaze but also, in a way, the nationalist gaze. Specifically, the ideas of womanhood that were shaping and being shaped by the push and pull between colonial and nationalist masculinity.

Reading Postcards

My focus on Dhurandhar's postcard is relevant due to the colonial network in which postcard print capitalism established itself in India. They were symbols of colonial modernity and progress, of circulation and communication. The ease with which they were circulated from one place to another (often produced in one place, marketed in another and finally, consumed in another) gave postcards a distinct form. As Mathur points out in her work, colonial postcards revealed a complex sexual and political economy by the way they connected colonial rulers with natives and thereby, postcards cannot be separated from the thematic of gender (2007, 110). Later, because consumption and collection of postcards became a women-centric activity, postcards themselves came to be attached to femininity. Often referred to as the 'cinderella of collecting' (Mathur 2007, 130) their meaning and significance changed, eventually leading to a reduction in their circulation.

In their study of postcards as multimodal ethnographic tools, Gugganig and Schor, point toward the shift in academic interest towards postcards. What was once considered "low" culture and unreliable sources came to be objects of interest in a postmodern context (2020, 691). This shift in everyday objects garnering critical academic attention is crucially marked by the studies of Indian calendar art (Uberoi 1990; Jain 2007). Calendar art, mentions Uberoi, was not in its origin a *popular* form but a hybrid one created for British patrons and anglicised Indian elites (1990, 43). This meant that at one level there was a 'westernisation' of aesthetics for the Indian aristocracy and at another level domestication of a foreign medium (Uberoi 1990, 43) which created new ways of visualisation. A similar pattern can be observed in postcard art created for circulation within elite circuits. Dhurandhar as an artist was himself embedded in this elite salon circuit that focussed on western aesthetics and techniques while painting 'exotic' and 'native' views.

These new visuals were central in creating what Edward Said calls the 'imagined geography' of India. Created for a specific gaze, these postcards then highlight difference as well as transformation - brought about by the more 'civilized'. This specification of difference is key to building the identity of not the Orient but the Occident, as Said emphasizes.

Reading Femininity: Crafting Binaries

Dhurandhar's narrative postcard series titled Coquettish Maid Servant marks a shift in this imagination. For one, these postcards were

printed in Bombay instead of Germany (where most of Dhurandhar's postcards were printed) by a local manufacturer, that is, Lakshmi Art Printing Press owned by Dadasaheb Phalke. The publisher of the postcards is important because, as Rianne Siebenga mentions in her work, there was a "skirmish" between the British and local manufacturers in the kind of narrative they created through the postcards that they published. Indian manufacturers focussed on displaying the individuality of native Indians allowing them to show Indians as capable of self-rule (Siebenga 2017). Second, by creating a narrative through the postcard art Dhurandhar's work was now being created not just for the colonial audience but for an amorphous mass Indian audience who would later become the consumers, as Tapati Guha Thakurta suggests, of the radio or Hindi cinema (1991, 92).

The story in the 10 series of postcard art goes like this: A middle-class man meets his domestic worker and is allured by her coy sexuality. The imagery of the postcards can be studied through Roland Barthes' theorisation of symbolic messages within images (1977). The amalgamation of western and Indian aesthetics is displayed through the man's clothes. He is wearing a waistcoat and a coat over his kurta and dhoti. In the third and fourth postcards, we see his tiny tuft of hair tied at the back of his head pointing toward his high caste/Brahmin status. He is the image of a man progressing towards colonial modernity. At the same time, he is also a man giving into forbidden desire, a symbol of corrupted purity. The man and woman flirt and seduce each other but his wife catches them because of the white hand prints on his coat. The wife is holding a basket of flowers and was perhaps on her way back from a temple (one of the socially approved spaces an upper-class woman could venture to on her own). The titles of the different cards are important in the linguistic messages they convey. Written in English, Gujarati, and Hindi they remind us that these postcards are meant for national mass circulation. The first card reads 'tarun dasi' translating into 'young female servant' and the fifth card is titled 'patniprakop' loosely translated to 'the wrath of the wife'. In the nationalist discourse there was a development of the devi/dasi dichotomy which is conveyed through these titles. Here upper caste, upper-class women became the embodiment of the true nationalist spirit - of spiritual and cultural strength (Channa 2013). It is to this strength to which the fifth card speaks. The devi who nurtures can also destruct. This devi/dasi binary, Channa points out, did not just arise from reflections on the traditions of India but was impacted by Victorian norms (Channa 2013, 56). While the British created an image of Indian women in need of saviours, nationalist masculinity crafted narratives of Indian women's spiritual superiority in order to display the strength of native masculinity. However, there were always women who did not fit into these straitjackets. Those who did not qualify to be a part of the ideal imagery of womanhood, suggests Uberoi, were either appropriated within a bourgeois mould or exoticised/eroticised (1990, 44), a process at work in the erotic framing of the domestic worker in this series. This separation is also exemplified by Sumanta Banerjee's work on the marginalisation of women's popular culture in colonial Bengal in Recasting Women (Sangari and Vaid 1990). Banerjee points to the shifts in the attitudes of bhadralok men towards a popular culture of marginalised caste women artistes and the rise of the bhadramahila in opposition to these 'other' women as crucial to the nationalist framework. In the postcards, this separation between the upper caste wife and the 'maid servant' is made evident in card eight where the wife is dismissing the maid. She occupies a position of authority sitting on the sofa chair with confidence. She knows she is in power - the devi of the house. In contrast, her demeanour in card nine is that of a sad wife, disappointed in her husband but awaiting his apology. As the husband and wife reconcile the only solution to his infidelity, masked as a comical ending to the series, is the employment of a non-threatening dasi, whose body cannot fit into the imagination of the erotic.

Conclusion

Just like images are never just images, postcards were never just postcards. As flimsy and dainty as these pieces of paper were, they embodied diverse modalities of power. They were symbols of modern colonial progress while also being representations of emerging national identity. The images used on postcards created an 'imagined geography' for those who lived outside the colony - setting in motion a transnational cultural exchange that would only intensify in the years to come. Through this series, however, we see a new 'imagined geography' emerging through the nationalist discourse, circulating ideas not just for the colonial gaze but for the people of the nation. This cultural exchange of postcards plays a vital role in examining the visual culture that crafted subjectivities within a colonial hierarchy of gendered power structures. My focus on a singular postcard series by M.V. Dhurandhar was an attempt at critically investigating these subjectivities and their representations that continue to evolve and impact the contemporary politics of gender and caste. To end with the Patricia Uberoi quote I begin with, colonial postcard art helps us interrogate a visual power structure that creates a "homogenising and hegemonising" (Uberoi 1990) image of womanhood both from a colonial and nationalist gaze. However, it also brings to the forefront the gaps and fissures within the homogenic category of 'ideal Hindu women', opening it up for further exploration.

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Sexual Harassment at the Workplace and Privatized Redressal Mechanisms: Justice Denied

Read in the Technical Session titled Violence, Displacement & Exclusion: Women's Contestations & Negotiations with Institutions & State Policy

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Globally, about two billion of the population aged 15 years and above work in the informal sector of the world economy, representing 61.2 percent of the world's employment figures. In India, a higher percentage of women workers are in informal employment as compared to men, as per assessments of several feminist economists, with some even pointing to a recent trend of growing unemployment among women (Indrani Majumdar). It is a known fact that the bulk of those trapped in informal modes of employment comprises the unorganised section of India's workforce. Typically, the informal sector includes a very large proportion of women, who are employed as domestic workers, agricultural workers, construction workers, piece-rate factory workers, street vendors, and others. With a large chunk of the female labour force being unorganised, the issue of the country's laws on sexual harassment at the workplace and their implementation is a hotly debated one, and represents an issue that demands a deeper analysis. For my critical engagement with the 2013 law, I have drawn on fieldwork among safai karamchari workers. I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the activists associated with Safai Karamchari Union (SKU) in assisting my assessment of everyday harassment and discrimination faced by the women safai karamcharis, and their tenuous interface with the redressal mechanism that exists in some of their workplaces.

The informal work sector is an arena brimming with unchecked and unregulated over-exploitation and vulnerability of the working masses. Hailing from socially and economically underprivileged backgrounds, women workers in the informal economy comprise one of the most vulnerable groups in the labour force in the country. Unlike women in the higher rung, most of whom aspire to become economically self-dependent, most women in the informal workforce are forced to work as a matter of compulsion rather than will to facilitate the sheer survival of themselves and their families. As a site of workplace where the state and the law refuse to intervene and regulate, it serves as a breeding ground for not only oppression and exploitation, but also added vulnerability for sexual harassment. High-end workplaces like corporate media houses, banking sector, etc where generally women from the better-off sections in the society seek and find employment, have come to make space for a mechanism of redressal against sexual harassment, formalising the Vishakha guidelines and the Sexual Harassment in the Workplace (Prevention, Prohitbition and Redressal) Act of 2013.

According to the Act of 2013, and earlier according to the Supreme Court's Vishakha Guidelines, all places of work should form a mechanism of internal inquiry for complaints of sexual harassment in the form of standing committees. Workplaces in the formal sector must constitute an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC; now known as ICs) involving representatives of the employers/management among others. Understandably, since the workplace in the informal sector comprises less than 10 workers at the workplace, the blind spot has sought to be addressed by assigning the district administration the task of constituting and maintaining a Local Complaints Committee (LCC) for inquiry in cases against sexual

harassment in informal workplaces, and for cases where an employer himself is the accused. Of course, individual studies by women's organizations have shown that LCCs are rarely constituted, and knowledge about them is hardly available in the public domain.

As put forth by the broader women's movement, the intent behind constituting ICs lay in the need to foster and create space for civil proceedings wherein sexual harassment is perceived as a transgression of human rights rather than a criminal offence given a broad history of criminal proceedings proven to have been heavily biased against women. It thus strengthened the process of committee formation within institutions where the task of instituting the committee was devolved to the employers/management leading to the emergence of the employer as a quasi-state in the realm of workplace relations. Thus, what is often perceived as the victory of the broader women's movement in the legalising of such committees is something deeply problematic and deserves scrutiny.

The inherent problem with the IC system becomes quite apparent specifically when we begin to observe the larger socio-economic backdrop of its coming into being and getting institutionalised as a redressal mechanism. Strikingly, this piece of legislation had been debated, deliberated and instituted during the historical conjuncture when the Indian State has been increasingly withdrawing itself from its role of regulating and intervening between the employer-employee relations and regulation of work conditions, thus paving the way for even more insecure work contracts and work ambience (John 2014).

The specificity of the added struggles, plight, exploitation and harassment of female workers in the informal sector remains a seldom theorised and broadly marginalised domain in the mainstream feminist discourse. The past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic have laid bare the brute and the harsh reality of their survival in a society that has increasingly come to excuse the state of its responsibility for upholding the rights of the working masses. Thus, the State's gradual deregulation and non-intervention in workplace relations and issues have been most intensely felt by those trapped in lower segment jobs and who thereby constitute the more vulnerable section of the working population; of which needless to say, the average woman worker and employee constitute the more vulnerable section. Further, the deregulation paradigm, the weakening of the powers of the labour inspectorate and the push towards self-certification by employers of their compliance with statutory labour laws – trends which stand to be strengthened by the new labour codes – mean that women workers employed through informal means like *thekedaari* (ie through middlemen), and on a daily wage basis, will further be pushed into precarity.

Undeniably, growing deregulation of employer – employee work relations, warrants and fosters the probability of sexual harassment to persist and greater impunity. Burial of instances of sexual harassment is particularly smooth and easy as the majority of workplaces viz factories, construction sites, hospitals, offices, educational institutions, farmlands, etc usually have no mechanism for redressal in place through which grievances of sexual harassment can be taken up, adjudicated and settled in the best interest of women employees. Indeed, when crucial labour rights, such as that of minimum wages, timely disbursal of wages, access to leave/rest, etc. are routinely denied in a large number of workplaces, particularly in the informal sector, then the possibility of a separate formal redressal of women workers' complaints of sexual harassment rarely emerges.

The Act, though itself a terrain of contested 'victory' for the rights of the working women, does not apply equally to all sections of the working population. The Act itself tacitly recognises the fact that in workplaces where an IC

cannot be formed (which comprise a majority of the workplaces in India), the district administration would be liable to create an LCC. Regardless to mention, for victims of sexual harassment in such workplaces, seeking redressal or justice from the district administration is as tedious and despairing as getting/seeking justice from the criminal justice system. Thus, the so-called victory of the mainstream feminists in their demand for the institutionalisation of internal complaints committee formation as the redressal mechanism against sexual harassment at workplace, has not dared to penetrate the threshold of the common informal sector workplace and largely continues to remain (though problematic) prerogative of the workplaces of the privileged few. Take for example the case of employment of women agricultural labourers in the village farmlands by the landlords, majority of whom employ women from the most backward castes and class, in rampant cases of sexual harassment, rape and gangrape on the fields (which is the workers' workplace and the employers' tacit territory, free of state regulation and intervention), even if the mechanism of establishing an IC was practicable, would it be fair to devolve the task of investigation, adjudication and redressal to the (often guilty) employers and his henchmen? Is it not akin to making the accused, the judge, the jury and the executioner in his own case?

What needs to be especially noted is that even in the formal sector workplaces, including government offices, a plethora of works like sanitation, security, etc. are **outsourced** to contracting agencies. There is then a significant measure of informality prevailing in the more formal sector as well. Overall, work such as sanitation, security, caregiving, housekeeping, etc. is being undertaken on a largely contractual basis where the workers' access to rights at the workplace and rights against exploitation exist no more than an optical illusion. A glance at the sanitation workers' struggle in various university campuses in Delhi, like that of Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD) and Indira Gandhi Delhi Technological University for Women (IGDTUW) against rampant instances of harassment, casteism, forceful termination, etc would be enough to elucidate what is being precisely argued here. The female sanitation staff, working in spaces of overt dependence on supervisors and University authorities, etc. especially when hired on a contract basis, can seldom dare to speak against any such rampant instance of discrimination/injustice, let alone tabooed, stigmatised and multiply-disadvantaging instances of sexual harassment. Often the complicity in casteist and sexist behaviour on the part of people constituting ICs and their lack of communication vis a vis the contractual staff in colleges/universities is a clear expression of a tacit submission of the handicap of such committees.

Quite evidently then, mainstream feminists seem to have gazed at the workplace comprising women workers from a very upper-class lens, wherein the nature of the majority of workplaces has been presumed to be of an 'egalitarian, justice-loving and justice-fostering nature' and the work relations, material conditions and reality which go into shaping the subordinated and overtly exploitative nature of the majority of the country's workplaces especially in the lower segment jobs, has been conveniently and to an extent deliberately, overlooked. What has also been facilitated, is the undesired and unhelping segregation of gender-related concerns from labour issues and the concomitant development of economism within trade union politics (John 2014). The mainstream feminists have presumed that female workers' concerns can be fairly raised and addressed without the prior need for their strong unionisation and empowerment in terms of other working rights which can only be ensured by the State's regulation and intervention.

The devolution of investigation and adjudication of cases of sexual harassment to the domain of the private or players within the

institutions falls into place with the larger scheme of deregulation by the State. Instead of challenging the employer-employee relationship, mainstream feminists have only, to say it most clearly, created an enclave of a 'sanitized', 'civil' workplace for women like themselves in high-end jobs, leaving the (concerns of) rest of the women folk unaccounted, uncompensated and vulnerable manifold. It's interesting to note how the same Feminists from upper-class and upper-middle-class sections who seem to be avowed votaries of ICs and LCCs against sexual harassment at the workplace, are quite uncritically and complicitly silent on the redressal mechanism against sexual harassment of women at workplace who are employed as their own house help.

The 1990s was a period that witnessed the phase of the State's successive withdrawal from its role of regulating employer-employee relations and overseeing the nature of the workplace from the vantage point of safeguarding workers' rights. This period witnessed the opportunism of mainstream feminists where instead of challenging the State's corporate-sponsored attack on rights at workplace, feminists exhibited complicity with the State's agenda of devolving its responsibility towards investigating and adjudicating the rights of the majority of working women against sexual harassment at the workplace, onto the very structures and agencies which breed the unequal power relations and conditions fostering exploitation and sexual harassment at the workplace. The prevention and redressal of sexual harassment at workplace were further allowed to be made a private and intra-institutional affair precisely at a time when the overall work culture was seen to become exceedingly anti-labour. *The fallout of this overall phenomenon is tremendous as the conjoining of the withdrawal of the state, the entrenched problem with the IC framework in terms of its unsuitability for certain kinds of concrete workplaces, and the limitations of the criminal justice system, go to strengthen and reproduce caste, class and gender inequalities*. This complicity can be seen to be stemming from the mainstream feminists' own inherent class interest which remains oblivious to the predicament of the majority of the labouring masses in the country. Therein lies the faultline and therein lies the probability and a challenge for the feminist movement to search for new horizons to build on a real sisterhood of women vis a vis the Capitalist state and the socio-economically gendered reality of the workplace. The contestation of sexual harassment at the workplace and the gaining of the right to safe workplaces for the majority of women ultimately requires the condition prevailing in the informal sector to be itself transformed.

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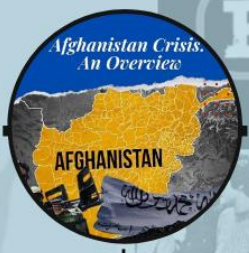
Timeline: WSC in Solidarity

The WSC, JMC took to its social media platforms to extend political commitment to matters of national and international importance by issuing solidarity statements throughout the year.

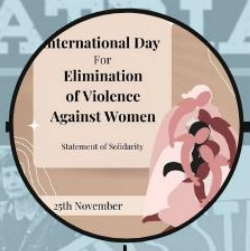
Women's Studies Centre Solidarity Statements 2021-2022

On 1st June 2021, WSC released a statement in solidarity with the Palestinian people and condemned the horrific violence inflicted on them by Israel's imperialist expansion project.

On 9th July 2021, WSC released a statement opposing the Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill.



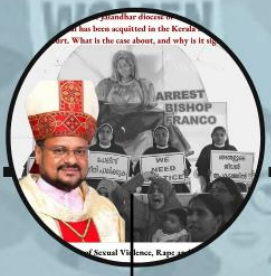
On 19th August 2021, WSC stood in unconditional solidarity with the women, children and people of Afghanistan who are grappling with manifestations of both Western Imperialism and Fundamentalism.



On 25th November 2021, WSC released a statement in support of the International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women.

On 8th January 2022, WSC released a statement demanding strict action against individuals responsible for the creation and maintenance of the "Bulli Bai Deals" app.

Women's Studies Centre Solidarity Statements 2021-2022



On 28th January 2022, WSC condemned the acquittal of the former bishop of Jalandhar in the Kerala nun rape case.

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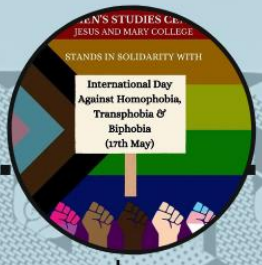
On 28th January 2022, WSC released a statement in support of women who were restricted from attending classes while wearing Hijabs.



On 17th May 2022, WSC released a statement in solidarity with the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia.

On 18th May 2022, WSC released a statement hoping to reveal the dire situation of women workers in light of the fire in a building in Mundka, Delhi which resulted in the death of 27 people.

Section 2
Feminist Verses

तू सिर्फ एक नारी नहीं

By Aditi Pandey,
B.A.P. English-French, First year

कपड़े छोटे हो तो आवारा हूँ,
सर पर घूँघट हो तो संस्कारी हूँ
बोलू मैं ग़र ज़्यादा तो बड़बोली हूँ
न बात करुँ तो घमंडी हूँ
आवाज़ ऊँची हो तो शासक हूँ
और धीमी हो तो बेचारी हूँ
वज़न और रंग से खूबसूरती का
इन्साफ करने वाले समाज का मैं हिस्सा हूँ
क्या पहचान मेरी बस इतनी सी कि
मैं सिर्फ एक नारी हूँ?

खौफ़ है मुझको जीने से,
फैसले लिए जाते हैं
यहाँ अखबारों की सुर्खियों से खुद देख लो
इक़रार करुँ तो बेहया
और जो इंकार कर दूँ तो अभिमानी हूँ
बात केवल इतनी नहीं
कभी इज़्ज़त का डर है इश्क़ में
तो तेज़ाब का खौफ है रंजिश में
संभलना हैं किससे आखिर किस पर मै ऐतबार करुँ ?
किसी चौखट का बोझ हूँ मै,
तो जन्मी अपने घर हीं परायी हूँ
कायनात के इन खोखले कैदों से हारी हूँ
क्या शख़्सियत मेरी बस इतनी सी कि
मैं सिर्फ एक नारी हूँ?

जो अगर ये सवाल है तुझमे भी
तो सुनती जा तू सिर्फ एक नारी नहीं,
तू महीने का परिश्रम है,
उस परिश्रम का परिणाम भी
तेरे एक हाथ में किताब है तो दूजे में तलवार भी,
जो अगर तू शांत रुप है शक्ति का
तो तू भद्रकाली का अवतार भी
तू शिव की सती है जो आप अग्नि में भस्म हुई थी
अंश है तुझमे राम की सीता का भी,
जिसने अग्नि परीक्षा दी थी,
वंशज है तू कान्हा की सखी द्रौपदी का,
जो कि अग्नि पुत्री थी,
तुझमे माया है रज़िया सुल्ताना की
और छवि है तुझमें लक्ष्मीबाई की
जिसने अंग्रेज़ो को धूल चटाई थी
तू सिर्फ किसी की बहन, पत्नी या बेटी नहीं,
तू सिर्फ एक नारी नहीं!

तू सिर्फ एक नारी नहीं,
तू आरम्भ भी तू अंत भी,
तू इस जगत जननी है
ये बात समस्त ब्रह्माण्ड ने जानी है
तू युगों युगों की गाथा है,
तू सदियों पुरानी कहानी है
तू सिर्फ एक नारी नहीं, तू सिर्फ एक नारी नहीं ...

सैलाब

By Tanushha Rathore,
B.A. (Honours) Psychology, 2nd year

कहीं हाथों में ज़ंजीरें हैं,
तो कहीं बेड़ियों में खयाल है
बंदिशें हैं कुछ सदियां पुरानी,
कुछ पाबंदियां हैं जो फिल्हाल हैं

वो कहते हैं, एक तरफ़,
खुदा का तुम बखान हो
शक्ति हो तुम, काली हो तुम,
सबसे ही तुम महान हो

देवी-देवी करते हुए,
यह बोझ मुझको दे दिया,
फिर बोझ बोझ कहके मुझे,
हवाले किसी के कर दिया

कब तक तारा, सिमट कर
मैं रह जाऊंगी अपने जिस्म तक?
कब तक तारा, रह जाऊंगी
मैं जागीर की एक किस्म तक?
न समझा मुझे इंसान बस,
यही मुझे एक मलाल है,
बंदिशें हैं कुछ सदियां पुरानी,
कुछ पाबंदियां हैं, जो फिल्हाल हैं।

नजरें झुकाओ, न बोलो कुछ,
पहचान नारी की लज्जा यही,
जो सब कहा, मैंने किया,
मन फिर भी उनका भरा नहीं

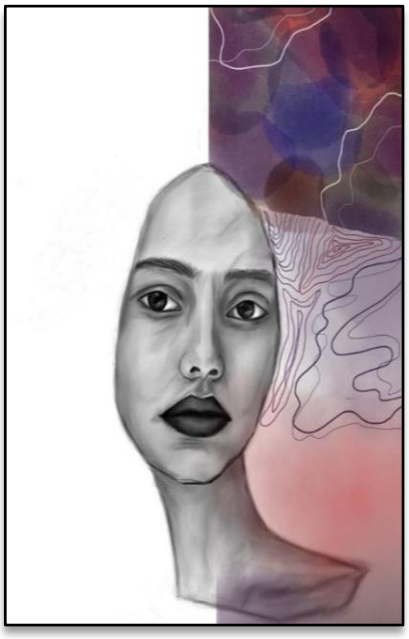
छोड़ उनको फिर, सोचा कि बस,
सांचों में नहीं ढलना मुझे,
महज़ पानी नहीं, सैलाब हूं,
पत्थरों से नहीं डरना मुझे,
और यह तो बस इंकलाब की
नई सी एक शुरुआत है,
दिन और हैं कुछ, शामों के भी,
फिर तो आनी ही प्रभात है।

[Aditi Pandey and Tanushha Rathore secured the first and second position, respectively, in the Poetry Competition conducted by the Centre on 7th March 2022 as part of its Annual Fest 'Jagriti'.]

नारी : तुम श्रेष्ठ थी, हो, रहोगी

Tejaswi,
B.A. (Hons) Hindi, 3rd Year

तुम श्रेष्ठ थी, हो, रहोगी।
इस बात का मान रखो।
अपने उठते कदमों से
अपने होने का सम्मान करो।
कोई ऐसा क्षेत्र नहीं,
जहां तुम्हारा हस्तक्षेप नहीं।
संगीत हो या हो खेल,
राजनीति हो या फिर एवरेस्ट।
अपना परचम लहरा आई हो।
नारी हो, नारी का मान बढ़ाई हो।
कोमलता गर गहना है
वीरता को तुमने पहना है।
कभी अहिल्याबाई,
तो कभी मैरीकॉम
बन जाती हो।
कभी अरुणिमा बन,
एवरेस्ट चढ़ जाती हो।
नभ से दूरी भी कम कर आई हो।
कल्पना, सुनीता बन,
देश का मान बढ़ाई हो ।
नारी हो हर किरदार,
खूब निभाई हो।
हाशिए से मुख्य पृष्ठ पर आई हो।
पतझड़ भी बसंत बनाई हो।
बावजूद इसके कि,
ग़म का पर्याय कहलाई हो।
हर रोल बखूबी निभाई हो।
तुम्हारा व्यक्तित्व ही,
तुम्हारी पहचान है।
तुम हो विश्व का गौरव,
तुम्हें शत-शत प्रणाम है।
नारी के हक से जीती हो।
मर्यादा खूब समझती हो।
परिस्थिति विकट बने,
पहले ही हल ढूंढ लाती हो।
आत्मविश्वास की प्रतिमूर्ति बन,
सबकी मन:स्थिति मजबूत बनाती हो।



Artwork by Pratishtha Jindal
BA Programme (History-English), 2nd Year

Where is my hue?

By- Srishti Gupta

BA(Hons) Political Science, 2nd Year

I sit and let my anguish dew,
Let the unpleasant memories brew.
Beginning first with how I grew
In a world of pink and blue.
And I experience nothing new
Just an agitating, suppressed query,
What exactly is my hue?

Leave this cooking to your sister,
For one day- you've got to be a mister.
These mundane tasks, let her learn;
You should go outside and earn.
In the real world, we bifurcated labour.

Often I did find my crew- and I would
Stick to them like paper to glue.
Yet distances invariably always grew
Every time they would ask me,
'Which gender exactly are you?'

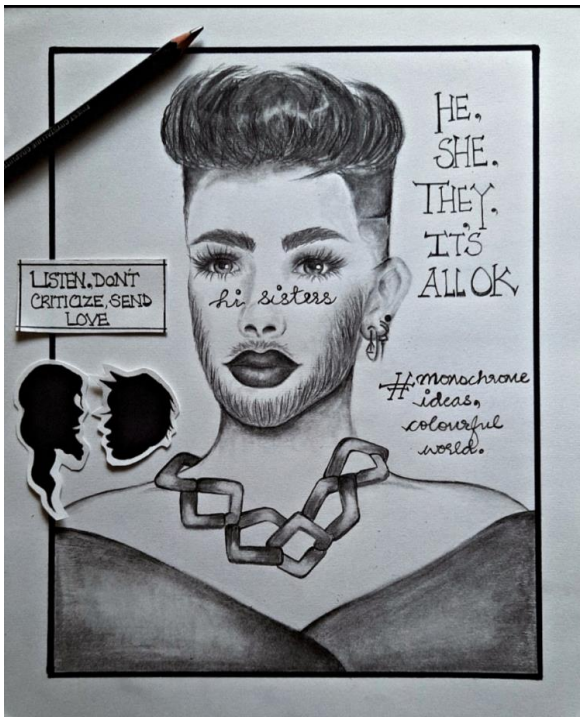
Having hair, short hair, long hair, body hair
Breasts to hide, and chests to bare
Were kept separate then. Remind me,
How are fragrances marketed again?
Bindis, bangles, makeup and danglers
Cologne, tattoos, jeans and a beard,
I like them all, but it's probably weird
Given that we have bifurcated fashion.

I don't like gender. I don't see gender.
I can't understand gender. I don't feel gender.

Men don't cry; toughen up, dude!
And lady- smile some more; wow, so rude.
Try to make a good first impression for
Somehow, we even bifurcated emotion.

They say you could choose your gender
Well, I don't want one; maybe it's not fun.

Yet, in this world of morality undue
Of black and white, and pink and blue,
I look up at the rainbow with its
Red, orange, yellow, green, violet and Two
shades of blue- I embrace it whole,
Yet lament the same doubt over all Where
exactly is my hue?
What use is the spectrum really
To someone pre-destined
To be non-conforming perpetually



Artwork by Anuriti Bahl
B.A. (Hons) Sociology, 2nd year

Ofsilence's Tale

By- Pratishtha Jindal

BA(Programme) English- History

Ofsilence is calm,
Ofsilence is grey,
Ofsilence is in pain.

This gut-wrenching pain
that lives inside her–
(Maybe it is her)
encompassing this shell
Ofsilence.

It is writhing inside of her
as if she is in her mother's
womb again– kicking,
lashing,
wanting to get out,
wanting to be born.

Ofsilence is calm–
but beneath its fragile surface
of ice–
there she is
with a scream that lives inside
her, echoing in every cell of
her body.

Ofsilence is calm,
Ofsilence is grey,
Ofsilence is in pain.
This gut-wrenching pain
that lives inside her–
(Maybe it is her)
encompassing this shell
Ofsilence.

It is writhing inside of her
as if she is in her mother's
womb again–
kicking,
lashing,
wanting to get out,
wanting to be born.

Ofsilence is calm–
but beneath its fragile surface
of ice–
there she is
with a scream that lives inside
her, echoing in every cell of
her body.

It creates a thunderstorm
with lightening but the
downpour of this storm is
also concealed, unexisting
above the calm,
hidden in the
darkness of her room–
with no eyes,
not even her own.

She is blind to her own
name–
Is this emotion
what they call shame?

Sitting at this table–
her eyes trace faces.
Faces of her people,
their daughter–her:
an intruder.
Within her–
the human:
silenced.

Suffocating in her grave
beneath the thin layer of ice.
Frigid because of the reality,
not the cold lies–but truths.

She is Ofsilence
but she is also –
Ofscreams
Ofme.

Artwork by Pratishtha Jindal

BA(Programme) English-History, 2nd Year

Poem Reference and Description –

The name of the protagonist is inspired by Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Offred's name, as David Ketterer observes- is not her real one. "Like all Handmaids, her real name has been erased in favour of the form 'Of' plus the first name, possibly abbreviated, of her Commander." Here, her name signifies that her identity belongs to the male Commander. In my poem, the protagonist has lost her identity to silence as she grows up in a patriarchal society. The reasons for this silence can be diverse and are dependent upon the reader's interpretation. The poem showcases a journey undertaken by a woman to find their own diverse identity while breaking free from the oppression and norms, especially in our heteronormative society. She tries to give words and meaning to the unexplored blank space where her name – her identity, should be.

Section 3

This Prose is POLITICAL

DU @ 100: Gendering the Discourse on its Centenary

Ananya Atrishya and Muskan Joshi
B.A.(Hons) History, First Year

Education plays a crucial role in the holistic development of a country. Though labelled as the panacea for social mobility and equality and as the only hope for the subjugated, it is also a factor that reproduces social stratification. The latter tendency can be traced to the fact that India's youth go to different schools and that many never make it to the hallowed realms of formal university education.

From every nook and corner of the country, lakhs of individuals come to Delhi every year in search of quality education and/or employment. With dreams in their minds and fire within to prove themselves, scores of youths aspire for a seat in the country's renowned central universities like Delhi University (DU). At the end of the day, only a small percentage become part of such prestigious public-funded universities. Getting in has increasingly become a paradigm of success; eluding the fact that public-funded universities are part of a long history of exclusion. Within these dynamics, how do we reflect on DU, especially as it commemorates its centenary? We use the occasion to critically introspect on its journey through a gender and class prism; thereby tracing histories of the University and facets of its functioning that are often less spoken of.

DU in the Colonial Era and Initial Decades Post-Independence

The capital city, Delhi, was an important centre of learning in the late colonial period. After Delhi was converted into the new imperial capital, it was not long before a university was established in the city. Established in 1922 as a unitary, teaching, and residential university by the Act of the Central Legislative Assembly, Delhi University became a premier university in the country. As of 2022, the University has completed 100 years. It is with much jubilance that its centenary is being commemorated. However, the moment calls for reflection, and the changes within the University's edifice and functioning demand closer scrutiny.

During its early stage, the University failed to attract undergraduate or postgraduate students from other parts of India. Aparna Basu in her essay, 'The Foundation and Early History of Delhi University,' says, "The university had failed to receive any substantial measure of public confidence because of competition and rivalry between the colleges and because of internal strife and factionalism in university affairs."

Constant changes and political movements across the subcontinent impacted the University space. Students were instructed, more so in some colleges than others, not to get involved in political activities as the British government threatened to withhold funding to the University. But still, a perusal of histories traced by DU colleges on their websites reveals that Indian revolutionaries like Chandrashekar Azad were provided refuge in men's hostels, that both women and men students participated in the Chandni Chowk protests which were part of the Non-Cooperation movement, and that during the Civil Disobedience movement in the 1930s, national flags were being unfurled across some of DU's colleges. Later in 1942, during the Quit India movement, students of Hindu College and IP College for Women orchestrated a march in opposition to the arrest of Congress leaders. Though less in number, women showed solidarity and participated in the march by jumping over the walls of the university with the help of the students of St. Stephen's College, and continued raising slogans. This led to the government cancelling wheat permits of the three colleges IP, Hindu, and SRCC. Following all these initiatives, several students joined the AISF to participate more meaningfully in the national movement. While the DU campus proved to be a vibrant political space

of nationalism, it is worth noting the limited number of colleges that existed, and their heavy concentration in North Delhi. The University was an exclusive educational space, which in terms of prevailing gender and class inequalities meant limited access for women and the poor, particularly for women from lower sections of society. This persisted well past Independence. Notably then, a 1968 *Hindustan Times* report revealed that in the said year the seats for women would fall short by over 1000 (Singh 2021).

Though the first two decades after independence boasted of educational facilities in Delhi, it couldn't be considered a success story as many girls still did not have access to schooling and by default could not enter higher education. The gender gap in access to education and retention of female students across educational levels remained low, with some parts of Delhi reporting a dismal 30% female literacy (Government of India, 1981). The concept of gender equality was still taboo and for many female scholars a dream that proved difficult to sustain. Despite the policy recognition of the importance of female education, the planners and the Delhi government failed to promote substantial gender equity in education. One could easily observe the widening gap between male and female literacy as one moved up the age group of 10 years and above (Singh 2021).

Delhi University had a similar story to portray. With 54 men's colleges and 20 women's colleges in existence between 1947 and 1979, a disparity in the enrolment figures for men and women was systemic. Certain patriarchal gender norms synced with the shortage of educational infrastructure for women. The patrifocal ideology of sons being the caretaker of the family while daughters being removed from their natal family physically and economically after marriage played a pivotal role in curbing the investment of families in the higher education of their women members. Another factor behind higher male enrolment was the gender-based division of labour which assigned men the primary responsibility for income generation and domestic labour to women.

A close examination of gender and education in the *Towards Equality Report* commissioned by the Government of India in 1974 revealed that women's literacy and entry into college education were driven by an ulterior motive, i.e., the perspective that formal education improved prospects of marriage. Since education could add to a girl's attractiveness as a prospective spouse, marriage became one of the strongest social justifications for a girl's education. Nevertheless, this in no manner promised higher literacy rates for women across class and caste lines. It was mostly *middle-class* women whose enrolment increased steadily in higher secondary and college education from the 1970s. Since the relationship between marriage prospects and education operates in complex ways, shaped by class status, the education of girls also triggered demands for higher dowries. Educated daughters propelled the search for bridegrooms with still higher educational qualifications, who demanded higher dowries. Such pressures amounted to a disincentive for educating girls, resulting in many parents withdrawing their female wards' names from schools after the primary level; more so in rural areas and the case of lower sections of society.

Breaking Down the Female Experience in DU

In urban areas, women from the middle class and more privileged caste groups entered the higher educational institutions, propelling the need for certain restructuring of the universities like DU. The shift to *co-educational* institutions was one such development. A more discerning eye would of course catch the chequered history of such transitions.

St. Stephen's College, which was one of the earliest colleges established in Delhi, was an all-men institute up until the 1970s. The United Nations had declared 1975 the 'International Year of Women' and the Union Ministry of Education

decided that all the men's colleges in DU would become co-educational. Women's colleges meanwhile were to remain single-sex institutions. Although a lucky happenstance, it brought with it loads of problems for the newly admitted female students. St. Stephen's long harboured a sexist tradition, typified in a culture of freely circulating sexist remarks, chick charts, hen charts, outright gender discrimination embodied in unequal distribution of college infrastructure like hostels, etc. Implicated in such sexism were not only the male students but often the authorities too. Desperate attempts (which were futile) were made to turn the clock back on the 'takeover' of St. Stephen's by women.

Saba Dewan, an alumna of this institute wrote to expose the 'chick lists' which were circulated and promoted during her time in college. The practice entailed rating the 'top-10 chicks' in college based on their physical attributes. This generated excitement and controversy among male peers and was considered 'good fun'. It was touted as a 'harmless' boy's tradition that made the college so special. Even the college administration seemed to think so and therefore allowed such lists to be displayed on its official notice board. Complaints fell on deaf ears, but as all bad things must come to an end, this did too. India in 1984 faced catastrophic communal violence which shook the very nerves of Delhi. Indira Gandhi's assassination, followed by the anti-Sikh riots in the capital and other parts of the country led to the shutting down of the University. Many young students worked as volunteers in relief camps for Sikh refugees. Re-opening of the University a month later saw many grim faces trickling back. Shockingly, within a week the 'chick-list' makers decided to strike again. In a masterstroke, they drew up a 'Sardine' chart, rating the 'top ten' Sikh women students based on their sex appeal. It was neatly pinned up for all to read on the college's official notice board. The disgust felt by all had no bounds.

Female students started realizing that the mirage-like good times were nothing but repressive. After receiving an overwhelming response from peers of other colleges, especially women's colleges like Miranda House, I.P., and Daulat Ram College, a dent was made. Flummoxed and cornered by the overwhelming anger of women students, the authorities declared peace. The boys involved were identified but sadly never punished. Though this doesn't appear like a happy-ending straight out of a fairy-tale, it was enough to pave the way for the demise of some of the most misogynistic practices within the college campus. The misogyny, of course, did not die out completely, as evident in the toxic response in the "Spice" literature circulated shortly after Maya John won the Student's Union Society elections in 2005, becoming the first woman President of the college. One such "Spice" belligerently declared that Maya John "should go back to the kitchen where she belongs!"

Sexual harassment of DU's women students and staff, and the marked struggles against it, are another facet of the University's lesser told history. The entrenched phenomenon of sexual harassment has affected the female population of DU in innumerable ways. From being touched inappropriately by male professors, and stalked and ogled by male peers to being assaulted or living in fear of being molested while walking the streets of the campus or while attending DU festivals, women in DU have battled sexism day in and day out. With cover-ups being the norm, many distressed women have left their jobs/studies at the University. The suicide of Rajni Parashar, a research scholar of the Botany Department, in 1987 also revealed how a lack of institutional support in matters of sexual harassment could result in such dire consequences (Gender Studies Group 1996). Repeated instances of harassment nurtured important campaigns that pushed for a zero-tolerance approach and implementation of the Vishakha Guidelines issued by the Supreme Court in the late 1990s. DU took the exemplary initiative and became one of the few workplaces to set up dedicated committees for the investigation of complaints of sexual harassment and awareness building.

However, things have not necessarily changed even after high-profile cases of sexual harassment surfaced and triggered vocal campaigns for women's safety on campus. A safety audit carried out by Jagori in 2010 at Delhi University's North Campus, for example, revealed that one in two girl students had been sexually harassed and that nearly 75% of these incidents took in broad daylight. Afraid of the consequences, only 4% of students reported it to the police. Moreover, the ugly sad truth is that in many institutions of DU, committees are present only on paper, and are often inactive. Some studies reveal that in certain instances committees do not have a woman as their chairpersons, do not comprise 50% women members, and do not include an experienced external member.

The 'Othering' of DU's SOL Students

After the partition, Delhi observed immense changes to accommodate the high influx of refugees. In 1962 the School of Open Learning (SOL) was established with the supposed aim of making higher education more accessible. Students who enrolled in SOL have generally come from weak socio-economic backgrounds, and a vast number are women who are first-generation learners. Ironically, as SOL expanded, its share of funding dwindled, severely affecting the quality of education imparted.

Even now, there is a marked difference between the functioning of the regular colleges of DU and SOL. The majority of the students have been denied even the handful of promised offline classes that SOL authorities advertise in the admission handbook. Punished for their poverty, poor schooling and for daring to aspire for a DU degree, SOL students are extended a step-motherly treatment which takes ridiculous forms, like denying them quality study material, adequate classrooms, qualified teachers, and library facilities; herding them off the campus as soon as the infamous Sunday classes conclude; etc. Take, for example, SOL women students being threatened in one of the North Campus centres – a premier women's college – with expulsion if they were found taking selfies in the college corridors (Chettri 2017). One wonders if such admonishments would ever be administered to regular-mode women students who confidently use their college campuses for their social life.

Matters only worsened during the closure of the University in the wake of the pandemic. While regular college students were provided daily lectures in the online mode, SOL students were left to fend for themselves. The few splattering of online classes that were offered were conducted arbitrarily in the late evenings when many SOL women students were preoccupied with making the evening meal, etc. (WSC 2021). Even today, it takes months for students to receive the prescribed study material. Indeed, the University's heedless decision to conduct an open book mode of examination without providing requisite study material was very imprudent; more so when considering that many SOL students, especially women students, do not have regular access to smartphones and stable internet. Shockingly, even after DU reopened on 17th February 2022, DU SOL did not immediately resume offline classes; leading to protests and demands for the dismissal of the acting principal of SOL.

Time and time again SOL students have expressed their issues and disappointment with DU but they are yet to be met with an effective response. SOL has been continuously neglected by the government. Since 1997 the government has not funded SOL which in turn has led it to be heavily dependent on student fees to pay the salaries of the teaching and non-teaching administration. The constant exploitation of the students (generally from a poor background), who took admission in higher education to bring change in their life, both economically and socially, has pushed them more into the periphery of the society. For a university that is proudly commemorating its centenary, can we forget that its School of Open Learning has completed 60 years of imparting highly unequal education to scores of the most underprivileged students?

Lingering Questions: An Appeal for Reflection

Delhi University has come a long way from the time of its inception. From three constituent colleges in 1922, it has expanded to include 90 colleges and 16 departments. We have also seen the University expand in terms of its intake of women students, researchers, and teachers, but the physical inclusion has not necessarily been on an equal footing. Although society is changing and many battles against sexism, casteism, and class bias have been fought within the University, it would be misleading to say that DU typifies equality. Issues surrounding the rights of the most underprivileged students, vulnerable contractual employees, the LGBTQIA+ community, etc. are still matters of concern. Furthermore, students from the North-East and South India continue to be subjected to racist discrimination within and beyond the DU campus.

The myriad inequalities informing DU as an institution is a matter of concern that centenary celebrations cannot easily brush aside. Can we be ignorant of the University's not-so-rosy past or indifferent to the trajectories of exclusion that DU will facilitate as it adopts new curriculum frameworks, new admissions tests, new diktats on online learning, etc.? The crucial question is, given the past and present conditions, does a better future lie ahead of this centenary year?

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Who Cleans India?
The Human Cost of "Swachh Bharat"

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As the sun rises and the world slowly awakens, an army of men and women undertakes the arduous and mammoth task of cleaning up our mess. They can be found in schools, colleges, offices, hospitals, houses of the rich, and even in the sewers, silently cleaning the nation. They are sanitation workers – a large group of people facing unlawful discrimination out in the middle of the street while the world continues unbothered around them. We write this essay in a bid to shake our peers out of indifference and to expose misconceptions about progress and development in the country.

The toiling bodies of sanitation workers are often consumed by the filth of our streets, sewers, landfills, septic tanks, toilets, etc. as disease, fatigue and lethal exposure to poisonous gases envelop their lives. Fighting frustration, stigma, and despair, sanitation workers continue with this routine of backbreaking work because of entrenched poverty that they have inherited from their ancestors. More than seven decades since independence have lapsed and hardly anyone has lifted them out of the vicious cycle of poverty and stigmatised work. Many sanitation workers are forced to believe that their life might not amount to anything more.

Most of these workers come from the Dalit community, which comprises several discriminated caste groups. These caste groups have been stuck for generations in an endless loop of caste discrimination, untouchability, intense labour exploitation, and violence at the hands of privileged castes. Historically, Dalits have been denied access to land and have been provided the least share of the resources of the village commons. Treated as servile castes who were to serve the upper-caste community or the 'twice-born', they have always been assigned the "dirty", i.e., stigmatised jobs that no one else wished to perform. They have correspondingly been restricted from civic spaces, denied the basic right to education, and are faced with high levels of prejudice at work and otherwise.

In the colonial period, employment opportunities in cities, municipalities, public works, etc. provided some alternative sources of livelihood for Dalits, but wages offered to them were often lower than those provided to caste Hindu workers. Even today they couldn't be further away from leading a dignified life and the majority are heavily concentrated in low-paying manual work in villages and cities.

Sanitation Workers and their Distress Work Conditions

Caste has always played a major role in creating a vicious circle of stigmatisation where there is little scope for these workers to improve their quality of living. Earlier the Valmiki community was hired to carry out sanitation work by various municipalities. Slowly, Bangladeshi refugees, living in the worst conditions, have also entered this work in all the big cities.

The sanitation industry in the past provided permanent employment in government institutions with some semblance of labour rights being extended to sanitation workers. However, times have changed drastically in recent decades, and so have the lives of these workers. Contractual employment through a middleman

(*thekedar*) has engulfed the industry, and *thekedars* wield vast powers that allow them to heavily exploit sanitation workers. The state, meanwhile, has washed its hands off sanitation workers and their rights, as evident in the massive contractualisation of this work within public-funded universities and government offices/undertakings.

Sanitation workers toil away their days only to receive meagre salaries that are below stipulated minimum wages. A significant proportion of their salaries is extricated by *thekedars* as 'commission' or as bribes for guaranteeing regular employment. As 'housekeeping staff', cleaners, '*safai karamcharis*' and so on, they are regularly subjected to unpaid overtime, extra hours on holidays, and are confronted with pay cuts worth two to three days' wages if they miss just one day of work. They can be asked to leave the job on the whims of the *thekedar*. They particularly suffer job losses, extortion, etc. whenever there is a change in the contracting company managing sanitation in a workplace. This often happens even if they've spent the past 10 to 20 years working in a particular institution.

For a job that requires them to report every day – be it through rain or sunshine, hell or high water – their occupation should be considered permanent. They should be awarded job security and minimum wage, but in reality, they are reduced to provisional/non-temporary workers. They are consequently always burdened with the fear of being asked not to report to work the next day. When removed, so as to be employed back, they are often asked to pay tens of thousands of rupees as bribes.

Despite performing such socially necessary labour, sanitation workers don't have the privilege of ESI, PF, or bonus. Even during the pandemic and the imposed lockdowns, sanitation workers were continuously called to work. They weren't given proper masks, gloves, or sanitisers when they were asked to pick up the public's garbage or clean septic tanks. The government made a huge deal about labelling them as "corona warriors" when indeed they were losing their lives due to the negligence of their safety. For months in many workplaces, they were not given wages for the work performed.

On one hand, sanitation workers have to deal with financial exploitation, and on the other, they have to deal with everyday casteism. Their work often entails tolerating casteist insults and caste-based restrictions as to which rooms to enter, where to drink water from, where to sit, where to stand, where to eat and what to say. As per unwritten rules, they cannot be seen everywhere by everyone. They are treated, in no uncertain terms, as untouchables. Dehumanised as they are, their desperation trumps all. It is often difficult for them to assert their rights, given the pervasive fear of losing their job. And so, employers leave no leaf unturned in taking advantage of them.

In such light, the situation of women sanitation workers is expectedly even more precarious. They face heavy exploitation in terms of lower wages, casteist slurs, and sexual harassment in their workplace. When they try to speak up, they are intimidated and forced to withdraw their complaints with the threat that they will be fired or be "transferred" to another worksite (SKU 2022). Our ongoing study of women sanitation workers in Delhi reveals that at times they are threatened into signing letters of apology for reporting "false" incidents of harassment.

Of course, apart from sexual harassment at the workplace, many women sanitation workers are also victims of domestic violence. Their path to justice is arduous because of the insensitivity that surrounds them. Hostile marital conditions make the struggle for justice at the workplace all

the more difficult. Women workers also have it harder because on top of the gruelling sanitation work where they are employed, they have to go back home to take care of huge volumes of housework.

In universities where our study is based, on average, women sanitation workers work for nine hours a day with about an hour of break in between for which they are not provided with an adequate place to rest. They are instructed to eat out of sight. Many times the women workers are not given a separate place to change into their uniforms. Despite such vulnerability in the workplace, most women sanitation workers are in a desperate position to tolerate anything if it means a little more money for their families. Many have grown accustomed to abuse and insult.

The Law and its Implementation

If the sanitation workers make the bold decision to unionise and raise their voice against the pathetic job conditions, the contracting company makes a quick decision to replace them with new workers, who are basically the unemployed poor, and hence grateful for any kind of work. Most of the time it is then difficult to form trade unions. Indeed, existing labour laws grant little relief to this workforce. The 1970 Contract Labour and (Regulation and Abolition) Act, for example, prescribes that work of a permanent nature should not be extracted through *thekedari*, and still sanitation work thrives on the exploitative use of vulnerable contractual cleaners, with little regard for their labour rights. From sanitation work in private workplaces to even government institutions, offices, municipalities, etc., *thekedari* is rampant.

In 1993 the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act was passed. However, news reports and documentary films like that of Amudhan RP on Madurai Corporation's use of 'untouchable' labour for manual scavenging often revealed the pervasiveness of such stigmatised work. Due to several loopholes in the Act of 1993, the government was compelled to pass the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers & their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, which reinforced the ban on manual scavenging. However, because of the government's growing disinterest in the regulation of employer-employee relations, the practice of manual scavenging has not been weeded out. Even today workers are paid Rs.200 to Rs.300 to enter sewers wherein they inhale poisonous gases that take their lives. Right under the government's nose, we lose about 7 lakh workers to manual scavenging every year.

A recent incident at the Delhi University North Campus illustrates the blatant disregard of the law by the authorities. In February 2022, at the Gwyer Hall Hostel, some students came across a sanitation worker covered from neck to toe in filth, preparing to enter the open sewage drain. He had no protection and little clothes on. He was employed by the administration to manually clean the sewers and had little choice but to accept the job. The students took pictures and recorded the incident in hopes of filing an FIR, but they were met with a lot of resistance at the Maurice Nagar police station (SKU 2022). The police were unwilling to file an FIR. After much pressure from the students, the police agreed to "investigate" and had them deposit their phones with the photos and videos for "forensic analysis". It's been months since the incident and still, no progress has been made, and neither have the phones been returned to the students.

Unionisation: A Flaming Beacon of Hope

Such indifferent attitude of the government can clearly be remedied only through the organisation of sanitation workers

into unions. Their collectives are empowering and ensure a huge difference in the working conditions – a fact most evident when we compare unionised sanitation workers to workers in places lacking unionisation.

Take for example, the incident at the Indira Gandhi Delhi Technical University for Women (IGDTUW) in September 2021 wherein the sanitation workers were given a one-day notice to leave their jobs because a new contract company was taking over. These workers had worked at the University for years, but all it took was a company handover for them to receive a disrespectful and hasty letter of dismissal. The aggrieved workers turned to the Safai Karamchari Union in this crisis. Unionists reached the site and spoke to the administration about the unfairness of the situation. Initially, all their requests for a proper conversation were turned down, compelling the union to resort to agitational modes of struggle. The IGDTUW sanitation workers organised in front of the Vice Chancellor's office for a peaceful protest. Shamefully, it took the authorities till late evening to reach a decision to facilitate talks with the workers and the new contract company. Under pressure, the company agreed to give them a month's notice and a chance to get reemployed as long as they submitted the required documents to the company office.

The company clearly wanted new, young, naïve, and unorganised workers rather than the existing vocal and organised workers with knowledge of the law. Hence, the documents they asked for had nothing to do with sanitation work but were designed to be unobtainable; creating grounds for easy dismissal. The documents included high school graduation certificates, family bio-data, parents' and children's Aadhar cards, etc. In addition to these, the company made it clear that the workers were to receive Rs.15,000 out of which about Rs.1,500 would be deposited into the ESI and PF and Rs.2000 would be deposited as a fee to the supervisor. The workers would receive only Rs.11,500 a month, which is grossly inadequate to support themselves and their families. These conditions invited much anger. Repeated efforts by the union to meet the Registrar and resolve the issue amicably yielded little. Eventually, escalated collective action by the union outside the Delhi Chief Minister's residence and a concerted social media campaign against Delhi's Labour Minister ensured the required relief, i.e., unconditional reinstatement of all sanitation workers by the new company.

Evidently, our institutions and politicians are complicit in the dehumanisation of sanitation workers and the precarity that envelops their lives. Institutional apathy, criminal negligence, and lack of accountability are exposed most poignantly when the collective voice of dehumanised sanitation workers grows louder and bolder. We need to ask ourselves whether we can continue to turn a blind eye to the hollowness of the "*Swachh Bharat*" campaign that actually rides on the lack of mechanization of sanitation workers, the persistence of manual scavenging, mushrooming of toilets *without* laying of proper sewage pipelines in India's villages, the rampant contractualisation of sanitation jobs, the denial of higher wages and other benefits to a workforce that ensures the cleanliness of our daily environs. Isn't it time that our profit-driven economy returns the dignity of life and livelihood to those who toil to ensure the country is not ravaged by dirt and disease?

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The Inheritance of Bharatanatyam

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The Decline of Sadir

Conventional narratives about the emergence of Bharatanatyam paint a rather revisionist picture; one that focuses on a pan-Indian transhistorical 'devadasi' and her linear deterioration that took her from the temple to the court and eventually to the street, from where she and her art were eventually rescued. In reality, the story of Bharatanatyam is fraught with complex intersections of caste dynamics, nationalist politics, Victorian morality, and the Oriental gaze.

Traditionally, Devadasis were women who were dedicated to temples at a very young age to serve and worship the deity. As a part of their duties, devadasis performed rituals and dances at the temple. The dance performed by Devadasis was known by many different names, such as Sadir, Kootu, Cinna Melam, etc. It is important to note that the term 'devadasi' was not introduced until the advent of colonial rule, after which it was used as a blanket term to refer to all kinds of dedicationary practices. Therefore, while conventional narratives talk about the sexual freedom and high status enjoyed by devadasis in pre-colonial times, this is only true for women who belonged to performing communities (hereditary dancers) such as the Isai Vellalar community in Tamil Nadu. While it is true that women belonging to these communities enjoyed some sexual freedom and an independent livelihood as an artist under the patronage of kings, the same wasn't the case for women belonging to various other communities that formed the other end of the devadasi spectrum. Those belonging to marginalised Dalit communities faced abuse and sexual exploitation and were restricted to domestic work. Additionally, women from hereditary performing communities had a choice to work and earn as artists and therefore take on the responsibility of their family and household. Thus, they didn't enjoy complete equality or complete freedom.

In 20th century Tamil Nadu, western ideals and rationale of morality quickly took root with the introduction of English as the medium of higher education. This meant the indigenous customs and traditions were re-perceived in the light of Victorian morality and rationality. Women's rights activists were convinced of the necessity for either single monogamous marriages or celibacy for working women. This is why puritanical ideas of asceticism and celibacy were forced on performing women. The presence of hereditary dancers in the temple – a Brahmanical religious institution was considered to be polluting and corrupting. Thus, during the height of the nationalist movement, India saw furious debates on the morality of performing women, ending prostitution and the social acceptance of so-called immoral women, reform ideas, and a push to democratize the arts. Consequently, the Anti-Nautch movement was launched due to the conflation of Brahmanical concerns about ritual purity along caste lines with Victorian ideals about social purity.

The Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act was passed in 1947, amongst a strong opposition from hereditary dancers, in a bid to abolish dedicationary practices. The act prohibited dancing inside the precincts of the temple. While some argue that the act was necessary to stop the exploitation of women, they neglect the fact that whole communities of female artists lost their livelihoods and were disenfranchised and this came at no cost for the oppressors.

Reformation and Restructuring

Following this course of events, a new group emerged to preserve what they considered their cultural heritage. These reformists (predominantly upper-caste Brahmin men and women) worked to transform Sadir into a more 'respectable' art form, while actively discrediting the institution of hereditary dancers. They did so

by separating the dance form from its original practitioners. Rukmini Devi Arundale, a reformist credited with reviving Bharatanatyam said that she created Kalakshetra (an institute for Indian arts and crafts), "with the sole purpose of resuscitating in modern India, recognition of the priceless artistic traditions of our country, and of imparting to the young the true spirit of Art, devoid of vulgarity and commercialism." Thus, the assumption is that the dancing body of the Devadasi is what made Sadir vulgar. As such, the art form that she considered to be priceless could survive only by purging all references to sexuality and sensuality due to the growing acceptance of the Oriental gaze. Thus, she removed Sringara (the erotic element) from the dance form, and emotions such as lust, greed, and sexuality were also purged. Furthermore, there was an emphasis on geometrically precise shapes, vigorous dynamics, and pure lines on the technical front of the new reformed dance. Thus, dance was Brahmanised with the fear that it would become polluted due to its association with the devadasis. The Brahminic powers controlled the new aesthetic required to be considered the 'ideal' dancer.

Rukmini Devi Arundale through her work ensured that the art form was bestowed upon 'respectable' (upper caste and class) women who chose not to earn a living through the practice of it but sought social enhancement. Thus, while hereditary performers struggled due to the loss of their livelihood, upper-caste women gained social perks and were even seen as cultural ambassadors and saviours of Bharatanatyam. In the present day, the middle class chooses to learn performing arts and strives to make a living out of it, thus, proving the failure of the elitist model of art production and consumption devoid of commerce envisioned by Rukmini Devi Arundale. Swarnamalya Ganesh, a dance historian says, "It was the dancing bodies of Devadasi women that were obliterated. When newer bodies of women who were mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters danced the same dance, somehow it became respectable."

Non-hereditary dancers patronized the male members of hereditary dancing communities and learnt Sadir from them. But these new consumers wished to appropriate the art form under a different name. Sadir was officially renamed Bharatanatyam in the 1950s. The term Bharatanatyam was not new or founded by the new practitioners but rather was a deliberate move made to further delineate hereditary performers from the art form and disempower their communities.

Present Day Context

We can now see that Sadir (now Bharatanatyam) was appropriated by upper-caste communities who systematically pushed out the original practitioners of the art form – the isai vellalars, kalavantula, tawaifs – into the margins. Sadir's inherent secular qualities reflected by its varied repertoire have been completely erased along with its association with hereditary performers.

The lack of caste diversity in the classical dance world is evidence of the persistence of historical inequalities. The dance world continues to be caste and class-exclusive. Women from the Isai Vellalar community still struggle to find space to showcase their art. Nrithya Pillai, a Bharatanatyam dancer from the Issai Vellalar community has spoken aloud about these problems frequently, which has often been met by derision from upper-caste members of the dance community.

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Can You See Me?
An Analysis of the Gender Data Gap in Science and Research

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"When we exclude half of humanity from the production of knowledge, we lose out on potentially transformative insights."

- Caroline Criado Pérez

Is Everything Designed for Men?

In her book *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (2019), Caroline Pérez deftly articulates an experience that is commonly felt by women as they negotiate different spaces: that this world isn't designed for them. This all-encompassing statement may sound too unrealistic to be true but, in a world, where 'the male experience' has historically taken the forefront and served as a prototype for everything, women indeed have been invisible from multiple realms. From urban spaces that aren't designed with their needs in mind to scientific research that is based on predominantly male samples, women's experiences are often side-lined. So much so that even something as crucial as seatbelts were previously designed using only male crash dummies, putting the lives of female drivers at risk. Thus, women have existed in the interstices of society or on the margins, begging for an invite in. This is the gender data gap- a paucity of data centred around women's needs and experiences.

What's at Stake: The Manifestations of the Gender Data Gap

As Pérez puts it, the gender data gap is a product of a world that has been male-dominated and where norms are centred around patriarchal and androcentric values. From Aristotle considering the male body as the 'standard' to Sigmund Freud describing women as 'incomplete men', an implicit bias against women seems to be woven into everything, with its ripples being felt in many different areas.

The field of medicine has been notorious for this. Why are women more likely to die of a heart attack due to ischaemic heart disease than men? This phenomenon, known as the Yentl Syndrome, is a result of medical research that has relied on male symptoms of heart attacks for diagnosis. The gender gap blaringly shines through as research in this field has for a long time ignored how these symptoms manifest differently for men and women. In another example, women over the world are also grossly underdiagnosed when it comes to endometriosis. Doctors often dismiss their patients' complaints and some have gone as far as chalking down the excruciating symptoms of endometriosis to simply being the part and parcel of the experience of being a woman. One survey found that one in five women had to see between four to five health care practitioners before receiving a correct diagnosis.

These issues suggest that even physical pain and symptoms have culturally constructed meanings and gender becomes an important determinant here. Research has demonstrated that pain is experienced differently by men and women (Bartley and Fillingim 2013). While women report more severe and chronic levels of pain as well as more frequent incidences of pain, they are nonetheless treated for it less aggressively- a product of a cultural understanding that women are more enduring than men. In a field like medicine with stakes as high as this, it's a disservice that women continue to be

underrepresented. For a long time, clinical trials for medication and therapies also used male cells and animals for their samples. They have been excluded from the study with the most common reason cited that cis-woman go through hormonal changes every month due to their menstrual cycles which may confound research findings. Women have been penalised and excluded from medical research, which exacerbates and contributes to the gender data gap.

If we shift the conversation from medicine to its close relative, Psychology, the picture doesn't improve much. The feminist critique of Psychology challenges the androcentric bias the field has harboured since its inception. Psychologist Naomi Weinstein in her paper, "Psychology Constructs the Female" charged that research in the discipline had failed to generate any valuable information about women's experiences because of built-in biases in its research methodology, i.e. Psychology's blindness to the importance of social context. Even in the field of psychotherapy, the male model of reality was treated as the prototype, an exemplar of 'healthy' behaviour. When compared to these standards, women who arrived at therapy were consequently deemed abnormal or hysterical as was evident by their overrepresentation in certain disorders like depression. While the advent of the feminist movement transformed the field significantly, many strides are yet to be made.

Conclusion

The gender data gap thus creates a very real chasm in our understanding of the world and this has grave consequences. While the issue has gained more traction over the years, the gap is far from being narrowed. We remember how during the initial days of the pandemic just two years ago, female frontline workers had to struggle with PPE kits that weren't designed to fit their build. The United Nations has recognised the lack of data on gender-related indicators like gender pay gaps, women's representation in local governments, violence, abuse, etc, as a hindrance to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, it's also important to consider the experiences of people of other gender identities while speaking of the gender data gap.

While they still lie almost invisible in numbers and statistics, the cracks in the knowledge that is bereft of women's experiences are inevitable. Addressing the data gap is an important step in making the world and its resources more accessible to women. When we neglect insights and valuable data that could potentially be collected from women, we are further widening the already existing divides that exist in our society.

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Daughters of Kobani: Kurdish Women at War

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"We've been pushed outside of our land, so now we should go and defend our land, but now I have a purpose to fight and a target"
- Serekaniye, a Kurdish fighter

In the tumultuous political climate that we find ourselves in, the world is marred by politics of inequality, a rampant war for resources, and a religious divide. The Middle East, in particular, has historically found itself amid an unending civil war that has stretched on close to more than a decade. The year 2011 was a turning point for the Middle Eastern political landscape due to the Arab Spring, a series of protests and revolts demanding accountability from an authoritarian and oppressive government. The Arab Spring started in Tunisia as a popular movement of dissent against an authoritarian regime spearheaded by a dictator, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who clamped down on free speech. Ali was ousted by the people, becoming the first Arab leader to be driven out by the people. On March 6, 2011, Syria exploded with a wave of protests following the arrest and torture of a dozen teenage boys for painting their school walls with anti-Asad graffiti. The graffiti said, "Your turn, Doctor", referring to President Bashar Al-Asad, a trained ophthalmologist. Amid this Tunisia saw its first independent election and Yemen descended into violence, ousting President Ali Abdullah Saleh. But in Syria, one could see a revolution taking place as the government continues to curb dissent and violently suppress protestors with water cannons, tear gas shells, and bullets. The country was soon plunged into civil war with Russia and Iran backing Asad and the US siding with Syrian rebels fighting to end Asad's occupation. To fill this political vacuum, Islamic extremist groups like ISIS rose to claim power and establish an Islamic caliphate whilst conducting genocidal attacks against minority groups like the Kurds. The Kurds make up Syria's largest ethnic minority, roughly 10 percent of Syria's 21 million pre-war population. They are one of the world's largest ethnic groups with no state of their own. During the civil war, the Kurds seized the opportunity to fight for their own sovereignty while opposing threats like ISIS.

Contextualizing the Kurdish struggle for Autonomy

The Syrian Kurds in many ways lived as second-class citizens within their own nation. They were denied citizenship, voting rights, and in Kurd-dominated areas schools only taught in Arabic. The government was on a path to disembody Kurdish culture and identity.

In such a stifling environment, what was the role of women? Were they confined within the walls of their house or did they actively take part in the revolution? Their story is synonymous with the Kurdish struggle for autonomy and self-determination. Abdullah Ocalan, the founder of the Kurdistan Workers Party and political thinker, brought his Marxist-Leninist movement for an independent homeland from Turkey to Syria. He coined the term "Jineology" or the science of women and brought it under the broader umbrella of feminism. The background against which "Jineology" developed was a dauntingly political one. It pertains to an: anti-state, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist ideology. One of his famous writings, *Liberating Life: Woman's Revolution*, defines national liberation as the liberation of women, "a country cannot be free unless the women are

free", he writes. Within pre-war Kurdish society too, the enslavement of women was a direct manifestation of the loss of political power that the Kurdish male faced. While external forces like Arab suppression of Kurdish identity, the Kurdish women faced a higher degree of disempowerment and marginalization. On the face of it, they were the worst sufferers of oppression from both the Arab and the Kurd sides. Ocalan hypothesizes that the women's fight for equality in the political arena is the most difficult as it entails shaking off the shackles of patriarchal structures within political institutions, it is a fight between the statist, challenging hierarchical structures and state institutions. Ocalan stressed on women taking part in traditional male gender roles and picking arms to join the armed insurgency against the oppressive Arab state. At the heart of the Kurdish struggle was also the desire to liberate women and create a radically different society.

Middle Eastern society was deeply patriarchal and continues to be till this day, how then, did the women take up arms and join the liberation movement? Ocalan's teachings took root in the young minds of women from Kobani, a city lying on the Syria-Turkey border. While war raged on in Syria, with heavy bombardment from Russia and ISIS expanding its hold across Syria and Iraq, a revolution was taking place parallelly in Kobani. In 2014, the unthinkable happened, an all-women's militia went head-to-head with ISIS and pushed them back from their territory. Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, in her book titled, *Daughters of Kobani*, documents the journey of young Kurdish women from teenagers to seasoned soldiers, trained in guerrilla warfare, as they take on roles forbidden for women. Stories and news from the Middle East have often been marred by western liberal propaganda and fail to shed light on issues that perturb the Arab world. Liberal feminists in the west have an anti-militarism stance and propagate the idea of the military being a gendered arena which reinforces and upholds patriarchal institutions that women seek to tear down. Then how have Kurdish women fought alongside men and managed to demolish such ideas? The answer to this question is multi-faceted. First, it deals with the systemic oppression and state-sponsored violence faced by the Kurds, Kurdish women face dual oppression based on ethnicity and gender. For a long time, Kurdish women remained absent from public life and had limited political participation, however, the Syrian civil war reshaped the Kurdish struggle for autonomy. Structures of oppression in the form of nationalist and patriarchal institutions have prevailed in Syria, with Kurdish society mirroring masculine hegemony.

Since the beginning of the uprising, the Kurds questioned their role in the uprising, or rather the lack thereof. Some abstained from the protests, while others supported Asad's Ba'ath Party because they believed whether a democratic government was elected or Asad was to remain in power, it would not make an iota of difference. The Arab regime would continue to subdue their culture and civil rights. The year 2014 marked a fundamental change in the Kurdish revolution and its political agency. This was when women started partaking in the revolution.

Women Spearheading a Revolution

From 2014 onwards, international media started picking up on the extraordinary stories of young women fighting Daesh (ISIS) in Syria and north-western Iraq. Most of these women spent their entire lives feeling oppressed by a culturally and religiously male-dominated society, these women chose to lay down their lives not just for the Kurdish cause but for the greater cause of women's autonomy and political agency. Clad in military gear and armed with AK-47s they

challenged the traditional conception of womanhood. In Syria, this movement has taken place with the inception of the YPJ, a faction of YPG also known as People's Protection Units. The YPJ spearheaded a larger movement of gender equality. It has also transformed the way women are viewed in Kurdish societies. In the Kurdish context, gender equality grew out of political necessity. While annexing oil fields and towns along Syria in an attempt to create a radical Islamic Caliphate, they deemed women as primary targets. ISIS considered it 'halal' or permissible to rape, kill and abduct women as they pleased. Women were either sold to ISIS fighters and used as a vessel to give birth to more fighters to join their barbaric force or become suicide bombers.

On June 18, 2014, in Mosul, the ISIS mufti decreed: "Wives and daughters of soldiers and politicians who work on behalf of Maliki are halal for members." Rape and sexual violence continue to be active tools in conflict zones. ISIS continues to breed contempt against women by limiting their agency and free movement within the public sphere. Taking up arms was a form of active resistance for the women's special unit whose stories were marked with bravado. Their motto was "Jin, Jiyaan, Azadi!", literally meaning, "Woman, Life, Freedom".

Feminism is central to the movement as women are considered important social and political actors, hence, expanding their life outside the domestic sphere. The Kurdish women's movement groups do not understand the dichotomy between male and female. In a war zone, gender ceases to exist, so does desire. Women in the militia are treated as asexual beings. They have two identities, one as Kurdish people and the other as women, the two identities complement and reinforce each other, one as the oppressed nationals and the other as the oppressed gender. Hence, the struggle for autonomy is two-tiered.

Journalists across the Middle East have chronicled accounts of women blowing themselves up to defend their territory against ISIS. The fight began in Kobani, where the YPJ delivered ISIS with their first decisive loss. Parents willingly sent their girls to fight, many in a bid to send their girls away from a repressive life in villages. On military bases, they were trained in war tactics, physical combat, and ideology, they freely moved within political circles, and they were comfortable in their power and not afraid to exercise it. Their stories of unflinching bravery rewrote the future of Syria in the years after 2015. The American troops stationed in the region were amazed to see women in combat, firing machine guns and running laps around the field with flowers in their hair, some with hijabs covering their heads. Proudly pumping their chest, they said, "ISIS is afraid of girls, they can't bear losing to a girl in battle, a girl who shoots the gun better than them".

Though the future of Syria remains bleak, as if written in invisible ink, these women reconcile the principles of feminism with militarism and challenge patriarchy. Several women have died fighting or were captured, however, contempt against the oppressive state and ISIS remains strong. They find courage in resistance.

Women arriving on the outskirts of eastern Raqqa. 2017

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What Kashmiriyat Entailed for Women – Remembering the *Naya Kashmir* Document

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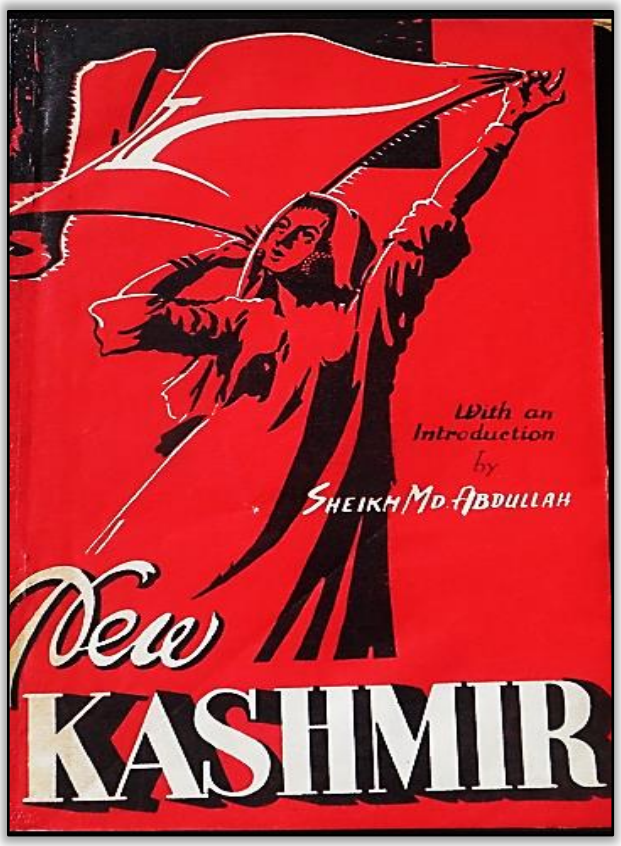
Upon the return of Maharaja Hari Singh, the last Dogra Maharaja to rule Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), from the meeting at the Imperial War Cabinet of Great Britain in 1944, a visionary document was submitted to him by the National Conference leader, Sheikh Abdullah. This document has gone down in history as the *Naya Kashmir d*ocument. It was not an ordinary political document for its time, or for that matter, even by today's standards. It was the official manifesto of the **National Conference** – a political party that by the 1930s had transitioned from being a religious, community-based organization, earlier known as the Muslim Conference, to a secular and radical platform with strong anti-monarchy overtones. *Naya Kashmir* encapsulated the aspirations of an oppressed and highly exploited peasantry in a princely state where calls for freedom from colonialism and monarchy were growing strong.

The document sought to transform the status of J&K from an absolute monarchy to a people's democracy; thereby revolutionizing the identity of the state. The introduction of the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto was a forerunner of the promised land reforms in modern India. The architects of the document, B.P.L. Bedi, Freda Bedi, Mohd Ashraf Kanwar, Danyal Lateef, etc. were highly influential intellectuals of their time with a commitment to socialist restructuring of the society, polity and economy. They drafted the manifesto keeping in view Kashmir's oppressive past under the Dogra rule, and the larger movement that was emerging among the workers and peasants of the region. Indeed, the peasant masses of the Valley had feverishly participated in numerous anti-colonial struggles, including the Quit India movement. These struggles coalesced with strong opposition to Dogra rule. The anti-feudal, anti-monarchy, and anti-British dynamics of the Kashmiri people's movement actually drew its leaders closer to the wider anti-colonial movement in the Indian subcontinent.



To elevate the status of the workers, peasants and women the document proposed revolutionary reforms like the provision of land to the tiller, equal wages, free education, equal political rights, etc. The cover page of the document, along with its preamble, gives us an insight into the revolutionary tenor of the document. The cover page is significantly red with a progressive woman activist, Zuni Gujjari, depicted on it; indicating the centrality of common women's liberation within the future of a new Kashmir. How she is depicted was

strikingly different from the usual feminized and religious representation of women in public mediums that were *a*historical and removed from material realities of women's lives and struggles. Zuni Gujjari was consciously chosen as she was an inspiring woman leader who fought for real struggles. The document's preamble passionately depicted its radical purpose and reforms:

To raise ourselves and our children forever from the abyss of oppression and poverty, degradation and superstition, from medieval darkness and ignorance into the sunlit valleys of plenty ruled by freedom, science and honest toil, up worthy participation of the historic resurgence of the people of the East.

When the rest of the country was deluged by the horrors and preposterousness of partition, Kashmir remained calm and Kashmiri women organised themselves in a voluntary battalion in defense against the invasion by neighbouring tribal militia from Pakistan. The women's battalion raised powerful slogans like "*Hamlavar Khabardar, hum Kashmiri Hain Tayaar*" (Beware o attackers, we Kashmiris are ready). Interestingly, deriving strength in such precarious and sensitive times from the *Naya Kashmir* document, Kashmiri women fought off several patriarchal impositions like the burqa (veil), which in itself had never been a widespread practice among common peasant women. By 1947 the Syeds and Khoja women also discarded their veils and began working in the field of education (Sikander 2012). Important figures like Shamla Mufti, Zenab Begum, Begum Zehan Abdullah and Mahmuda Ali Shah rose from among their ranks. Well into the 1980s and 1990s, Kashmiri women valiantly resisted the burqa's imposition by groups such as Dukhtaran-e-Millat, the Jamat-e-Islami, Tablighi Jamat, etc.

Banishment of child labour; prohibition of bonded labour; and the provision of equal educational, economic, political, legal, health and motherhood rights for women constitute the hallmarks of *Naya Kashmir*. Four pages of the document are dedicated to the rights of women. The comprehensive Clause 12 of the document gives us further insight into how women's liberation was envisaged:

Women citizens shall be accorded equal rights with men in all fields of national life: economic, cultural, political, and the state services. These rights shall be realised by affording women the right to work in every employment upon equal terms and for equal wag es with men. Women shall be ensured rest, social insurance and education equally with men. The law shall give special protection to the interests of mother and child. The provision of pregnancy leaves with pay and the establishment of a wide network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens shall further secure these rights.

Other rights like the right to vote and contest elections, right to employment, abolition of human trafficking, etc. were also stated in the document; making it a very radical manifesto, pro-women and quite ahead of its time.

Naya Kashmir was heavily inspired by the models of socialist states and communist-led struggles in different parts of the world. According to Andrew Whitehead (2020), many parts of *Naya Kashmir* were borrowed from the Constitution of the Soviet Union where the first workers' state had been established. *Naya Kashmir* was nothing less than the Magna Carta for the common people in terms of the various reforms that not only aimed at equal distribution of land but also at the equal distribution of *all* resources. Some of the key reforms in the document were the abolition of the *jagirdari* system, and the provision of land to the tiller as well as promotion of collectivized agriculture. Other crucial reforms entailed the reduction of land revenue, and the liquidation of official and private debts. When in 1948, National Conference came to power, the agricultural system was reorganized by appointing a land reform committee that oversaw implementation of the above-mentioned reforms. The Justice

Wazir committee was also appointed in 1952 to review the working of the land reforms. Importantly, by guaranteeing more secure livelihoods through land reforms, the *Naya Kashmir* document and its supporters facilitated the education of girls as improved economic conditions paved the way for more concrete interest in schooling of children.

For the local handicraft industry that was in an abysmal condition, the *Naya Kashmir* manifesto envisaged that "a machine could be a friend of man, if it was owned by the state and used for the benefit of all citizens." Thus, the document aimed to confiscate all the individual monopoly over industries. It also promoted the small-scale industries within the framework of the state-led industrial planning.

The socialist orientation of the document triggered much unease among the exploitative landlords as well as communal forces within the Kashmir Valley and in Jammu. However, popular aspirations of the people for building Kashmir anew were hard to dismiss. It is this fervor and vision that propelled scores of men and women across the Valley to spiritedly defended Kashmir against the invasion of 1948; dispelling assumptions that a Muslim-majority people wished for integration with newly formed Pakistan. Sadly, the new Indian state, suspicious of the radical appeal of Kashmiriyat, negotiated integration of the princely state with the Dogra ruler rather than leaders of the people's movement; paving the way for a process of continuous sidelining of the core principles of *Naya Kashmir*. Maharaja Hari Singh remained titular king till 1952 while his son, Karan Singh, was made Head of State in 1952, and later Governor of the state in 1964. Ironically, in the Indian republic, the powers and privileges of erstwhile rulers of princely India remained intact; creating difficulties for land reforms, redistribution of wealth, etc.

Naya Kashmir, indeed, was a revolutionary step forward. It hasn't lost its relevance even now. With the dire socio-political conditions in the state and no genuine visionary socio-political organization capable of articulating the sentiments of the people that resonate with the principles of *Naya Kashmir*, the actualization of its numerous provisions seem a distant dream. The manifesto has been effaced from popular memory over the years. It has been reduced to mere rhetoric by those in power and with little commitment to the uplift of the common Kashmiri people. Given its radical provisions on equality and a new way of thinking about the economy and society, *Naya Kashmir* can be a cornerstone for the settlement of the 75-year-old issue. It harbors the potential to draw Kashmir's struggling populace closer to the exploited common masses across the country.

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Feminist Theatre in India: A Medium of Self Expression and Dissent

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"Of course, we all come to the theatre with baggage. The baggage of our daily lives, the baggage of our problems, the baggage of our tragedies, the baggage of being tired."

- Vanessa Redgrave

Indian theatre has been an active platform to showcase socio-political issues through the lens of personal experiences. Street theatre especially has been an avenue of self-expression and dissent for the working-class people of the country. It aids in de-concentration of historical narratives by the lenses and elites and highlights pressing concerns of the people. However, like most art forms, Theatre is embedded in the social structures of society which makes it patriarchal and gendered.

Although Indian theatre has historical roots dating back to 1st century BCE, the presence of women centric plays written by women only came to the picture in the 19th century. In the 18th - 19th century as well, most social reformers who stood against social evils like sati burning, dowry etc were upper caste, western educated men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Tutun Mukherjee, a professor at University of Hyderabad having research interests in women's studies and theatre arts writes, "The denial of education to women, the male exclusivity in the print culture, the tendency to 'vulgarise' and 'devalue' oral culture (generally the female domain), the separation of the private and public space has all served to confine women to certain genres and restrict or erase their presences in others."

A significant boost to the number of women centric plays was given by the emergence of IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Movement) in 1943. Several theatre groups sensitive towards the issues of women organised numerous workshops and festivals as well. MS Swaminathan Research Foundation's 'Voicing Silence' and the National Women's Theatre Festival by *Yavanika* are some examples women-centred workshops that were organised in the 20th century.

Political developments in India and around the world like the second wave of feminism, labour unrests, Naxalbari movement in the 1960s - 70s paved the way for street theatre and plays with significant Ideological underpinnings. The growing number of women playwrights is a determining factor in women's issues in the world of theatre. Although, not all of these playwrights were feminists. The feminist plays that emerged in the 1960s- 70s questioned male-centrism and orthodoxy. They were revisionist in spirit and adopted new ways of enacting theatrical acts.

In ancient India and in an upper-caste male-dominated society, a linear way of narration was favoured. The story of a single protagonist shown in a chronological way undermined the intricacies of memory and thoughts that were crucial to women's experiences. Feminist plays were critical of this linear aesthetic and emphasis was directed toward collectives and memory. "Antaryatra" by Usha Ganguly is one example of this new aesthetic. It is an 'autobiographical introspection' and it is visually portrayed through multiple women characters in different social settings but bound by the virtue of being a woman. Usha Ganguly herself enacted all the characters to show the intricacies of feminine life and introspection about the same. She covered

women in middle-class households to marginalised women in Bengal and to women in Hitler's Germany. The juxtaposition in their experiences despite their differences is what the author was trying to show. In another play, Binodini, five different actresses portrayed the story of the protagonist. Here, emphasis was laid on memory; Binodini's schizophrenic personality and her emotional turmoil.

Street theatre with a socially relevant theme pertaining to gender were numerically increasing in the 1970s. Dowry deaths, domestic violence, illiteracy and more gender related issues were the central themes. "Aurat" (Women), a play by Safdar Hashmi's Jan Natya Manch, dealt with the issues of dowry and domestic violence in 1979. They delved into the story of working-class women. Groups like Jan Natya Manch (JANAM) performed in non-commercial spaces of urban areas. The stories they portrayed attracted a working-class audience and it challenged the status quo.

Gender identity and fluidity in sexuality is another pertinent theme of feminist theatres. "Shikhandi: The Story of the In-betweens" is a story by Faezeh Jalali which explores the mythical story of Shikhandi and highlights the gender fluidity aspect of it. "Umrao" (1993) by Geetanjali Shree is another play that deals with the theme of sexuality and shame in women's lives. It portrays how a woman who embraces her sexuality is labelled as a fallen woman and how women themselves internalise it sometimes. The theme of honour, murders, and sexual violence during partition is another central theme highlighting women's plight in a patriarchal society. At Delhi University, plays like "Ahsaas" and "Aurat aur Dharm" were performed in 1979 and 1984. While "Ahsaas" was produced by a group of Delhi University students who met in hostel rooms, "Aurat aur Dharm" took shape in response to the anti-Sikh riots which made grass-root level women activists think about women and communalism.

Feminist theatre is an avenue to showcase social realities through a gendered lens. It is a stage to unveil hidden discrimination and sensitise people in an engaging way. An increase in women writers, directors, and actors in the production and execution process of feminist theatres makes them the epitome of self-expression and dissent.

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Horrors of the Place called Home: A Vision into Child Sexual Abuse

Shreeja

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TW: Mention of sexual abuse

Growing up in the Indian society, all of us have been conditioned to believe that familial ties are the most pious of our relationships. The idea of home being in people, and friends turning into family has also emerged from the same belief. The concept of 'home' is that of a safe space – a place where one can truly embrace who they are. But what if that safe space shatters? What if home becomes the place wherein one feels the least secure?

Are we building a safe space for children? According to a data by the National Crime Record Bureau, 109 children were sexually assaulted every day in India in 2018. However, there are a number of cases of child sexual abuse that go unreported because they have happened within the primary circle. Last year, I had the opportunity to interview several powerful women who are survivors of child sexual abuse. Most of them were wronged by some of their closest family members. In most of these cases, the victims' longest trauma stemmed from the fact that their abusers were culturally the people who were supposed to protect them – their brothers, fathers and uncles.

Instances of sexual assault and long-term abuse also have long-term psychological effects that last from childhood to adulthood. While these effects may vary from one victim to another, some of the most common consequences are body image issues, intimacy issues, social anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These instances also affect interpersonal relationships and lead the victims to question their familial bonds. Apart from psychological effects, there are other physical and emotional aspects such as hyper sex drive or low sex drive, repression of emotions, mental regression, and denial. Most victims I interviewed also witnessed a hindrance in their psychological development because of their trauma.

Several cultural aspects also play a role in trauma-building. One of the women I interviewed stated that the idea of her mother tying a *rakhi* to her assaulter was one of her trigger points. Every year, she would dread seeing him, and then hate the sight of her mother laughing with the man who caused an irreversible trauma in her life. Another woman said that it was the *maulvi* who came to teach her about religion who had assaulted her, and it would trigger her each time someone would talk about him in high regard because of his knowledge. Some women I interviewed had gathered the courage to tell someone about their instances of assault but were asked to keep shut because their assaulter was a part of their 'close-knit' family. Many of these women continue to live with their assaulters. In many instances, children who are forced to remain silent have had issues with their parental relationships. They often drifted away from them leading to a further stunted psychological and emotional development.

After everything, we are left with several unsettling questions – who will protect children from the people who are supposed to be their protectors? How long will the institution of family and social standing of their perpetrators keep young victims from receiving justice? Is the idea of a 'close-knit family' more important than making children feel safe in their own homes?

Contests Over Gender and Sexuality in India: A Historical Perspective

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Gender: Talk of the Town

Partha Chatterjee points out, "The 'women's question' was a central issue in the most controversial debates over social reform in early and mid-nineteenth century Bengal." Chatterjee further argues that nationalism addressed the said 'question' without losing sight of its 'preferred goals'. In this way, nationalists constructed a dichotomy between the private and public domain, which can be symbolized by the 'inner' and 'outer' spheres of sovereignty respectively. The outer sphere represents the domain of political action and material interests, whereas the inner sphere represents the repository of cultural 'tradition' and women (associated in patriarchy with the domestic sphere). It is in this context that the feminist movement in India gathered steam. However, Nivedita Menon states that, from the beginning of the 1970s, the identity of a 'woman' came to be challenged by caste and sexuality. Menon describes how the division of the world into two watertight gender identities was being impugned and gained traction during the 1980s and 1990s. However, such issues boast of a much longer history in India.

Tracing Gender and Sexuality in Ancient India

The LGBTQ+ community has left its mark on such features as books and architecture in India since ancient times. According to Dr. Vasumathi T. and Geethanjali M. in their article 'Transgender Identity as Hidden in Vedic Literature and Society', the *Vedas*, notorious for dooming some sections of society to the fate of impurity, welcomed the transgender community with open arms in contrast to ostracising it. The community was acclaimed for having gained expertise in such skills as singing and dancing. Their presence on the occasions of birth and marriage was considered auspicious. Concerning architecture, Sanjana Ray claims that the Khajuraho temples in Madhya Pradesh contain depictions of intimate relations between people of the same sex.

Women, unfortunately, did not meet the same fate of acceptance as the LGBTQ+ community in ancient India. In their work "Status of Women in India: A Historical Perspective", Sophie M. Tharakan and Michael Tharakan note that, while the community in question enjoyed the same status as men in the pre and early Vedic period, this utopia came to an end with the invention of the plowshare. Before the tool was existent, men and women had contributed equally to sustaining the household: women had taken charge of the household while men had busied themselves hunting and gathering. Since the dawn of time, men have always been seen fit for responsibilities that evade the domestic sphere. The writers thus claim that when they naturally came to wield the plowshare upon its creation, they also became the owners of farms and thereby the wealth generated from them. Women did not have any control over the said wealth, which had legal and social ramifications that persist even today.

Women and LGBTQ+ Community: A Shared Fate

The texts produced during the later Vedic period, especially the *Manusmriti*, captured women's weakening legal and social standings due to the negligible role they now played in accumulating wealth. The *Manusmriti* is said to

have legitimized women's subordination to men during the Vedic period. Such social evils as child marriage and illiteracy among women, targeted right at the outset of the women's movement in India, are said to have their roots in these texts.

In the case of the LGBTQ+ community, it was not an indigenous text that condoned its alienation. It was only with the arrival of the British in India that homosexuality came to be seen as unnatural. They brought the mindset of the Victorian times that intimacy and procreation went hand-in-hand, which led to the exclusion and stigmatisation of people who identified with non-normative sexual orientations in India. This manifests in Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code.

Abrogation of Section 377 IPC

Sumit Saurabh Srivastava examines in 'Disciplining the *Desire*: *Straight*' State and LGBT Activism in India' that Section 377 IPC elicited great resistance during the late 1980s and the 1990s due to the growing awareness about the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the expanding influence of the Western media. The LGBTQ+ community began to make room for itself in the legal space through its enterprise.

The first challenge to Section 377 IPC came from a petition filed by the AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA) in 1994 when Kiran Bedi, the inspector general of the Tihar Jail in New Delhi, refused to distribute condoms among male inmates. This petition did not reap much success and was dismissed in 2001. In the wake of this dismissal, the NGO Naz Foundation Trust submitted another petition against the Section in the same year. The petitioners contended that it violated Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India. Considering the submissions, the Delhi High Court passed the landmark judgement ruling Section 377 partly unconstitutional (to continue to prohibit bestiality) on July 2, 2009.

Finally, the Navtej Singh Johar and others vs Union of India case of 2018 led to the fall of Section 377 IPC. The petitioners took recourse to the previous cases to explain how the Section infringed various articles of the Constitution. They also invoked the statement of the American Psychological Association, which said that while it occurred in relatively fewer numbers, same-sex attraction was a natural condition. Thus, the Section was put to the litmus test and declared partly unconstitutional once again on September 6, 2018.

It must be kept in mind that the community in question took vast strides in India due to the perpetual efforts of its members and allies even when Section 377 IPC was in force. It was only on December 18, 2021, that Telangana witnessed its first same-sex marriage though they are still not permitted by the law. Such incidents embody the spirit of defiance that the community has always displayed against the skewed perception of the 'norm'.

Feminist Movement in India

The feminist movement in India exhibits similar vigour. In 'The History of Feminism and Doing Gender in India', Rekha Pande attributes the rise of this movement to contact with the west and, more specifically, the spread of western education in India. While there is little concurrence about the dates thereof, this movement is popularly classified into various phases. For instance, Mahua Roy (2018) propounds three such phases along with an intermediary phase between the first and the second phase.

According to Roy, the colonial project and the social reform movement gave shape to the ideals of the first phase, which lasted till India attained independence in 1947. It is characterized by a heavy focus on securing formal equality for women. As a result of unrelenting efforts during this phase, *sati pratha* was banned in 1829 and widow remarriage was permitted in 1856.

Roy touts the second period as the interwar period (from 1917 to 1945). It took on two issues in particular: extending the right to vote to women and attempting to reform personal laws. Regarding reforms in personal laws, the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was established in 1927 by Margaret Cousins, which took issue with Hindu personal laws for condoning polygamy and depriving women of divorce and property rights.

If the first phase is criticized for favouring upper-middle-class women, the intermediary phase is lauded for paying heed to the concerns of poor women. Roy pitches the intermediary phase as ranging from the post-Independence period to about the mid-1970s. During this phase, women's participation in movements (such as the Chipko movement of 1973 and the Sampoorna Kranti movement of 1974) registered an uptick. The phase also saw the rise of various women's organizations following such movements, such as the *Shramik Sangathana* and the Self-Employed Women's Association.

Roy regards the publication of 'Towards Equality' (1974), the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India as one of the central features of the third phase of the women's movement in India. A positive attention towards women's issues and the possible solutions encouraged the sponsorship of research into women's issues and the establishment of autonomous women's organizations, which occupied themselves exclusively with women's problems. This boost in women's status translated into various legislations in their favour, the chief ones of which included the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971 and the amendment of rape laws in 1983 to clarify the definition of consent.

According to Roy, the third phase, which perhaps commenced around the 1990s, not only acknowledges the grievances of Dalit women but also allows for the induction of the LGBTQ+ community into India's feminist movement.

Way Forward

It is commendable how the two communities have found pockets of success in a world that is rigidly patriarchal and heteronormative in its outlook. Despite such achievements, there seems to be a long way to go. On one hand, even in developed countries, women continue to fight to secure their reproductive rights. The picture is, however, not entirely gloomy. One must remember that the communities have never been as visible and strong as they are today. With continued efforts, a world where patriarchy and heteronormativity are not the norm is not a far-fetched idea.

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Women and Political Spaces: The Reality of Systemic Prejudice Against Female Politicians

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The movement for Women's suffrage started in the mid-1800s, and it has been almost a century since women's right to vote began to be recognized in most nations in acknowledgement of their invaluable effort during and following World War I. In our own nation, women were formally granted the franchise alongside men in 1950 when the Constitution of India came into effect, granting universal adult suffrage to all citizens.

It has been nearly a century since these events as we examine the participation and experiences of women in political spaces. Women constitute half of the human population, but this number does not translate to equivalent political representation. In national parliaments around the world, only 25 per cent are women. In India, this number shrinks even further to a dismal 13 percent female parliamentarians. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, only around 9 per cent of the total candidates fielded were women. This disparity is not just observed at the top, but at all tiers of the political system starting from the grassroot level women are sorely under represented.

The field of politics still largely remains a man's playground. When we think of a politician, the first picture that emerges from our collective unconscious is a man in a suit, or perhaps a clad in a khadi kurta and Nehru jacket. Men are regarded as the norm in politics, whereas female politicians are viewed as anomalies or aberrations. They are seen by some as an unnatural deviation from the preordained way of things as they have carried on for centuries, a disruption of 'tradition'. Through another perspective female leaders in politics are held up on a pedestal: viewed as token exceptions and miraculous inspirational stories, rather than something that should be standard and normalized, seeing as they are representatives of fifty percent of humankind.

Women are systematically excluded in the field of politics. They are treated as alien and denied entry into male lobbies and alliances, excluding them from the decision-making process in the nascent informal stages, preventing them from voicing their opinions and manifesting their interests in the eventual formal legislation and executive decisions. Women are treated with hostility in political spaces by their male counterparts and not considered equal partners. Their competence is questioned as statecraft has historically been the prerogative of men. It is very conveniently overlooked that this was so because women were denied entry into political roles, and not because of a supposed lack of required qualities or disinterest. In fact, throughout history, we find many stories of women exercising political influence indirectly through their sons and husbands, as in the case of Mughal empress Nur Jahan, believed to be the real power behind the throne of Emperor Jahangir.

We find that a similar form of proxy power is still utilised by women to this day in a democratic system. Nepotism is rampant in politics, and female leaders often derive their initial entry through their male connections. It is not a level playing field for women at the entry level itself as those from political families are more easily accepted and able to rise in the ranks faster than ordinary party members. Women in this way derive their (initial) political legitimacy from men; Indira Gandhi from her father Jawaharlal Nehru, Jayalalithaa from MGR, and Mayawati from Kanshi Ram. This trend is rather disheartening as it implies a woman standing on her own merit will not be taken as seriously, and requires a male stamp of approval.

Being assertive and strong-willed are traits that have conventionally been associated with masculinity, and are believed to be essential traits for a successful politician. These masculine qualities when they are possessed by male political

figures are celebrated as virtues. Being too feminine is perceived as weak, and women in politics displaying these characteristics are likely to be labelled 'air headed'; elected only for their charm and not merit. But those very same celebrated masculine characteristics when displayed by female politicians are seen in a very different light. Masculinity is considered superior over 'soft' femininity, but the only acceptable wielders of this masculinity are men. When women are assertive and iron-willed, they are labelled with a myriad of not-so-flattering adjectives, such as unfeeling, rigid, bossy, ruthless, and domineering. They are not considered to be 'real women'. It is quite common to see a female leader be labelled an 'ice-princess' (or even a 'cold bitch'). Femininity is considered inferior, but the alternative of female masculinity is derided even more.

With such harmful stereotypes floating around and other societal barriers there are already a limited number of women in political spaces. Attempts are made to suppress the voices of these women participating in politics in a variety of ways. They are mercilessly mocked online by trolls. A recent study by Amnesty International found that one out of every seven tweets directed at women politicians in India are either "problematic or abusive". Rape threats are not uncommon. From Smriti Irani and Jaya Prada to Atishi Marlena, women in political spaces are subjected to objectification and slut-shaming by their opponents. These attacks in the form of sly remarks and sexist jokes, sometimes delivered directly to their face in parliament, cross the line into sexual harassment.

Young first-time MPs from the Trinamool Congress Mimi Chakraborty and Nusrat Jahan were intensely ridiculed online for simply wearing western outfits to parliament. Male politicians are never scrutinised and judged so harshly for their appearance. Former US president Barack Obama made it his custom to only ever wear grey or blue suits, while in sharp contrast the world eagerly dissects every outfit Kate Middleton sports, and nit-picks on Hillary Clinton's fashion choices.

The press questions female leaders' legitimacy and competence. The family life or lack thereof of women in politics is made a public matter and used maliciously against them. A divorcee or unmarried woman is 'incompetent' in her private life, *How could she handle governance when she can't manage her own family?* she is questioned. There is a double standard that exists. The private matter of the care of her children if a woman is elected to office becomes a public concern, while in contrast the concern over the parental role and responsibility of politicians as fathers is nearly non-existent. She is asked how she will manage her public life alongside her family life and is demonized for it, but we never stop to question our belief of why family life must be solely the responsibility of women. The overarching patriarchal system prevalent in society affects women in all spheres, including the political.

The need of the hour is recognition and redressal of these concerns over unequal treatment of women in political spaces. Women in politics must be empowered and given a platform to speak instead of suppressing their voices. Lone women at the top cannot hope to bring about much change alone without a supporting system of adequate female representation at every level of the political system. More women in political roles are essential. The 2010 Women's Reservation Bill to reserve 33% of all seats in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies for women is still pending in the Indian parliament. In 1999 France was the first country in the world to introduce a compulsory 50 per cent gender parity provision. Political parties are required to ensure the equal representation of men and women on their lists of candidates for most elections. Non-compliance with the 50% parity rule (only 2% difference allowed between the number of female and male candidates) results in a financial penalty. The first major impact of the quota was in 2007, when the number of women in the French parliament rose to 18.5 per cent. A record number of 38.8% women were elected at the 2017 French legislative election and sit as deputies in the 15th National Assembly of France. This optimistic picture of women's representation and participation in politics sadly remains an exception, rather than the universal norm. Great strides are still to be taken for women to make political spaces truly their own, and share them with men on a truly equal footing.

When Revolution Is a She: A Historical Narrative on the Women of Manipur

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TW: Mentions of sexual assault and violence

The north-eastern region of India has always remained aloof from "mainland" India due to the marginalization of the region from the rest of the country. Manipur, though largely little known to most, has seen instances of extreme atrocities. It is infamous for being a militarised and insurgent zone for decades. Most of the citizens of Manipur have been deprived of their basic rights and have often seen the use of violence. These long decades of extreme exploitation have been a major driving force for the dissatisfied public to resort to protests against the various injustices meted out at them. Throughout Manipur's history, we have seen a tremendous scale of women's participation in the political arenas, with instances of them leading major protests all across the state.

The first trend of the Manipur women's organized movement was witnessed during British rule (1891-1947). The first women's war of Manipur broke out in the year 1904 when Manipuri women decided to team up and stand against the extreme injustices and manipulation of the British authorities. The British government-imposed restrictions on the flow of free trade of basic commodities. It also ensured the imposition of forced labour. This severely impacted the socio-economic conditions of the people, making it difficult for them to sustain themselves. They took a strong stance and launched a movement against the colonial authorities. The agitation marked one of the first major successes of the women's movement, when women managed to save the Manipuri men from forced labour and extreme oppression.

Another pivotal landmark was the Second Women's War in Manipur in 1939, commonly known as the Nupi Lan. The Nupi Lan is a Manipuri term translating to 'women's war' in English. This movement sowed the seeds for a series of new economic and social reforms within the state in the early 1940s. The stimuli of this war can mainly be attributed to the oppressive economic and administrative policies of the Maharaja of Manipur. There was, for example, a re-imposition of the 'lallup' system, wherein the male members of the society were forced to do work for free for 10-15 days. The spread of Nupi Lan gave a voice to the once voiceless people of Manipur, especially in terms of resolutely questioning the policies of the rulers. It later evolved and accelerated the movement for important administrative as well as constitutional reforms.

The Second Nupi Lan started with the introduction of a colonial administrative system in Manipur. It was during this time that excessive rains caused a large-scale disruption in the production of rice in the state. The issue was further exacerbated by the fact that rice was being exported by the Durbar and Marwari businessmen, limiting its supply to the local market. Hundreds of women took to the street to protest in the heart of the capital, Imphal. The movement steadily garnered a massive following of 4000 women. The non-violent protests were met with violence by the authorities. This led to an agitation between the Assam Rifles and the women protestors in which some women lost their lives. This incident looms large in the memory of the people of Manipur and stands as a long-lasting legacy of the unsurmountable and indomitable spirit of women.

The second phase of the women's movement in Manipur continued even after the annexation of Manipur by India. This system of integrating Manipur with the centre was met with strong resistance. It was in the light of the various

protests and conflicts arising in the state, that the youth turned to arms and substance abuse. The second phase was firmly established when women decided to organise themselves and fight against the prevailing social injustices and prevalence of addiction amongst the Manipuri men. The 'All Manipur Women Social Reformation and Development Society' called for bandhs all across the state, further intensifying the campaign. The Meira Paibis started to submit their demands to the government, demanding the immediate implementation of prohibitory law, orders against intoxication and alcoholism, an immediate halt of the price surge of basic commodities, and peaceful negotiations between the government and the insurgents. It was during this time that despite a patriarchal resistance, women came to the forefront and led the fight against alcoholism and drug abuse, famously known as the 'Night Patrollers Movement'. They patrolled the streets during the night and punished men found drinking. Raids on liquor shops and systematic bans on the selling and drinking of liquor were also implemented. This movement catalysed the further mobilization of women-led struggles all across Manipur.

These movements have further paved the way for the rise of inspiring women activists fighting against the despotic conditions under which the people of Manipur live. One such remarkable woman is Irom Sharmila who was the face of the anti-AFSPA movement in Manipur. She fasted for almost two decades as a response against the implementation of the AFSPA act in certain parts of Manipur.

Another important moment of resistance was the Manipuri women's protest against the rape and killing of Thangjam Manorama by the Indian Army in 2004. This protest took an unconventional approach in which women protested naked in front of the Kangla Palace, urging army men to come and rape them as a response to the atrocities inflicted upon Thangjam. Their non-violent protest served as a lens through which we view the subjugation of women by the state.

Even today, in this highly globalised and ever-changing world, we can see the legacy left behind by the women's movements all across the state. An important example would be the Ima Keithel, which translates to 'Mother's Market.' It now stands as an important commercial hub with dozens of shops lined up. The market has made a name for itself as the largest all-women market in Asia. Even in the present context, thousands of women from all parts of Manipur have been mobilised to be active in the political sphere, taking inspiration from the struggles of the women who came before them.

As rightly highlighted by the UNICEF, "the Manipur story indicates that active participation by women in public affairs can and does contribute to better conditions for children and society at large." It is evident that history is full of testimonies highlighting how the successful participation of women in the economic and political sphere, shaped Manipur in what it stands for today. Women's movement has completely revolutionised the status of women in Manipuri society. Women in Manipur are now perceived as individuals whose limits extend beyond the domestic sphere to that of the political, social and economic.

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Women In K-Dramas

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K-dramas have become a huge sensation in the entire world, especially in our own country. Most of the credit goes to the pandemic. In 2020, when everything was shut down and people had nothing to do, K-dramas came to the rescue. These dramas have always been around but they gained more prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic. At a time when everything became uncertain, these shows provided a sense of calm and an alternate utopic world to its viewers. K-dramas contain that happy and fairy-tale feel, making them extremely popular. People want to escape into a world where things aren't grim and dark. There are different genres in K-dramas but the genre that is the most famous is 'rom-com', for all the reasons that I previously stated.

And, this is also how my personal journey of watching K-dramas started. One of the first things that I noticed in these shows, other than the beautiful cast and scenery, were the female characters. In most of the dramas, especially the older ones, women are shown as damsels-in-distress. They are almost always portrayed as being very clumsy and always messing things up. They either keep falling for men, both literally and romantically or they just don't have a personality of their own. Often women are shown as characters who need a knight in shining armour to come and help them or save them. Even if a woman is portrayed as being 'strong' or 'assertive' she is made the villain of the story or is portrayed as a character who has no emotional intelligence and is very cold towards everyone. There has also been a constant representation of the strong and assertive female lead who evolves into a milder, submissive and docile character after being involved in a complicated love relationship. Women turn out to be weak and dependent on the male leads, soon losing a distinct part of their identities. Their entire life revolves around the whole romantic relationship and the challenges it brings with it.

It is important to remember that South Korea is a very patriarchal society and this plays a major role in the kind of content that they put out. South Korea generally upholds the belief that women should be feminine and 'soft' to be considered attractive, which is why the female characters are mostly portrayed according to the conventional feminine ideal. For a female character to be seen as 'good', she has to have family values and has to keep the needs of her partner before hers (a saint-like individual). However, this is not the case for all the dramas. Many upcoming dramas have female leads who are not shown stereotypically. A breath of fresh air is also being brought by women-oriented dramas. This evolution has a lot to do with the fact that several female directors and writers are increasingly becoming a part of this industry. The increased employment of women has led to a more sensitised representation of female characters.

Earlier, under the male gaze, the camera used to adopt a heterosexual, distinctly voyeuristic perspective as women served as the object and men became the bearer of the look. In several K-dramas kissing scenes demonstrate a skewed sense of power dynamics and lack of female agency where the male lead was always shown as initiating the kiss while the female lead was presented as a passive and lifeless recipient with her eyes open. Often such representations, leave their female viewers uncomfortable for it seems like the kiss is non-consensual and the

female character is the victim of male-centred demands of the market.

Furthermore, in K-dramas, only men were shown as sexual beings who like to enjoy pleasure, and women were increasingly represented as beings who are too naive to even know what pleasure was.

Nevertheless, things are gradually changing in Korea. With the increase in female writers and directors, the tables have been turned and many stories have started using the 'female gaze'. Women have started writing the kind of stories they want to see, this has resulted in dramas like *Nevertheless* which shows a female lead who has desires, wants to explore her sexuality and isn't shamed for wanting to do so. And of course, the director of the show is a woman. Another drama called *My Name* also shows a female lead who is a trained assassin but isn't a villain and has a complex past story with a complex personality. Again, written by a female writer. At the end of the day, who can tell the story of a woman better than a woman herself. This change is good, even though it's slow. Some change is better than no change.

As I researched more, I found out about the major wage gap in the drama industry, arising from the wage gap in the country as a whole. This also plays an important role in the content creation process. In 2020, a drama called 'It's Okay to Not be Okay' made headlines, not only for the new and interesting storyline but also because of the male lead Kim Soo Hyun's pay per episode. According to news reports, Kim Soo Hyun received ₩500 million KRW (about $440,000 USD) per episode, excluding the money that the show made from advertisements. This compared to the pay of his female counterpart in the show is a lot! According to reports, it was difficult to find A-list female actors who received a salary of more than ₩100 million KRW (about $89,500 USD) per episode for a drama series production. This number is significantly lower than the average salary of ₩200 million KRW (about $179,000 USD) that most male leads receive per drama episode. While ₩100 million KRW (about $89,500 USD) is still a large sum of money, compared to that of Kim Soo Hyun and other male actors, it is a fraction of what male actors receive. Different industry insiders state numerous reasons behind the pay discrepancies. One reason that was brought up as an argument was the fact that dramas usually focus more heavily on the male lead rather than the female lead. Another argument compared the popularity of male versus female leads overseas. They claimed that the salary of an actor is dependent on their popularity overseas and plays a major role in the wage gap. It is just a matter of time until the hypocrisies of these excuses will get exposed. There is a possibility that the emergence of female oriented dramas will play a role in decreasing the wage gap in the industry.


Section 4
Reviews

Film Review:
The Great Indian Kitchen

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The Great Indian Kitchen directed by Jeo Baby revolves around the patriarchal stronghold over Indian households. The ground-breaking film is directed from the point of view of the kitchen. Baby's skillful screenplay writing brings out the unspoken horrors that unfold in the kitchen of many orthodox and supposedly 'traditional' Indian households. The plot revolves around a newlywed woman, played by Nimisha Sajayan, struggling to come to terms with the patriarchal norms in her new home. A woman's struggle in the kitchen is familiar to almost all women across India, who have to bear the brunt of patriarchy in their own homes.

The film explores the notion of an arranged marriage in India, where getting a wife is like getting a socially sanctioned slave. Women often have to prove their worth in their in-law's houses. The irony here is that the male protagonist is a Sociology teacher, played by Suraj Venjaramoodu, who can be seen lecturing his students about a family. He says that a family is a unit. However, this facade of his melts at the doorstep of his house, wherein his wife is forced to clean up after him. He acts as the sole decision-maker in the relationship while lecturing his students about being 'equals' in a family. What's interesting is that there is no representation of physical violence in the film, but the subtle cues of emotional abuse and oppression are ever-present throughout the film. From the father-in-law sweetly asking the female protagonist not to work outside the home and the husband asking her to comply with his demands, they silently impose their will on the woman. It is just the raw truth that Jeo Baby brings out through this well-directed tale of sexism.

The film is far from an exaggeration, it is blunt and gets the point across. This is the reality behind many 'happy' marriages. The girl chops, grinds, sweeps and mops while her husband does his stretching calmly. What enraged a lot of viewers was the male protagonist's sheer denial to acknowledge her labour. The scenes showing how her father-in-law needs to be spoon-fed most of the time and is unrelenting with his demands demonstrate how gender roles are passed through generations. The old man needs to be handed his shoes and even his brush. Women have always been confined to the kitchen, as the popular saying goes, "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach." But the uncomfortable close-up shots of leftover food, coconut being ground, a leaking sink, and clangs of pots and pans are central to the theme of the film, which explores the solitary confinement of women in the kitchen. The repeated scenes shot in the kitchen tire out the viewer, however, it is a calculated attempt on the director's part who subtly asks 'imagine how tired they are'. The film reaches its climax when the two men decide to go to Sabarimala for a pilgrimage.

Viewers are appalled when the protagonist is locked in a room while she menstruates. Her husband shies away from her touch and her presence during the days she bleeds, of course, he does not want to be tainted by her impurity. The *Great Indian Kitchen* makes practitioners of patriarchy squirm uncomfortably in their seats. The hours of

slaving away in the kitchen are almost never acknowledged. The continued practice of the exploitation of women at the hands of men is yet another aspect that is worth noticing in the film. The mother-in-law is shown to be perfectly habituated to presenting herself at her husband's beck and call. Similarly, the son expects his wife to follow him around like a lap dog, because that's what he saw his mother doing. This is why the protagonist's subtle resistance is met with shock.

The movie is a brilliant piece of craftsmanship, despite being a low-budget film. *The Great Indian Kitchen* with exceptional acting and powerful background score, serves a bitter and unsavoury slice of sexism.

Book Review:
The Absence of Women – A Feminist Review of *Frankenstein*

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"I have love in me the likes of which you can scarcely imagine and rage the likes of which you would not believe. If I cannot satisfy the one, I will indulge the other."

– Mary Shelley, Frankenstein

Mary Shelley, an English writer who wrote during the 19th Century, is credited with writing one of the first science fiction novels ever - *Frankenstein*. A gothic story about one man desperate to play God and his subsequent fall into despair and grief, *Frankenstein* has been immensely influential in modern-day literature and media. Mary Shelley was the daughter of political philosopher William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy. As such, radical ideas and interpretations of Shelley's work are ample. Thus, it didn't take long for scholars to take note of the gendered subtext present in Frankenstein - specifically in the absence of women.

Plot

The story begins with Captain Robert Walton detailing his expedition to the North Pole in correspondence to his sister, Margaret Walton Saville. A failed writer, hoping to expand scientific knowledge, Walton rescues an emaciated man named Victor Frankenstein, who is found freezing to death. Sensing the same obsession in Walton that destroyed his own life, Victor decides to recount his story as a warning.

Born into a wealthy Genevan family, Victor displays a strong thirst for knowledge and a desire to understand the world from a very young age. At the age of five, Victor's parents adopt a young girl named Elizabeth Lavenza whom he ends up marrying. Once Victor leaves for university his scientific endeavours grow much more intense until one day, he successfully figures out how to impart life to inanimate matter. Thus, the Creature is born, an 8 feet tall humanoid with yellow skin and watery white eyes. Disgusted at the sight of

his own creation, Victor runs away and the Creature is nowhere to be found when he returns.

After some time, Victor receives a letter from his father, informing him about the murder of his younger brother William. When he returns home, Victor sees the Creature around the crime scene and correctly surmises that he must be responsible for his brother's murder. Even after being aware of the truth, Victor lets Justine (his brother's nanny) take the blame for the crime and doesn't do anything to stop her execution. Later, he is confronted by the Creature who details how he has been constantly ostracized by humans and treated with cruelty at every turn. He demands that Victor create a bride for him so that he isn't alone anymore. Victor agrees to do so when the Creature threatens to harm those close to him. Even though he agrees, Victor fears the implications of creating a female companion for the Creature and ends up destroying his work, sending the Creature into a rage. Vowing vengeance, the Creature kills both Elizabeth and Henry Clerval (Victor's close friend) leaving Victor in a pit of despair. Victor then chases the Creature to the North Pole, where he is eventually found by Captain Walton. He dies shortly after.

A Gender Analysis

Frankenstein is a predominantly male-oriented novel. Its narrative and storytelling are always controlled by men. At the same time, it boasts an abundance of subordinate female characters that bring out the hidden and apparent inequalities between the genders. Male narration is used to show how women are thought of and treated by the men in their lives. The peripheral roles played by the women and their absence are an important part of the novel's narrative.

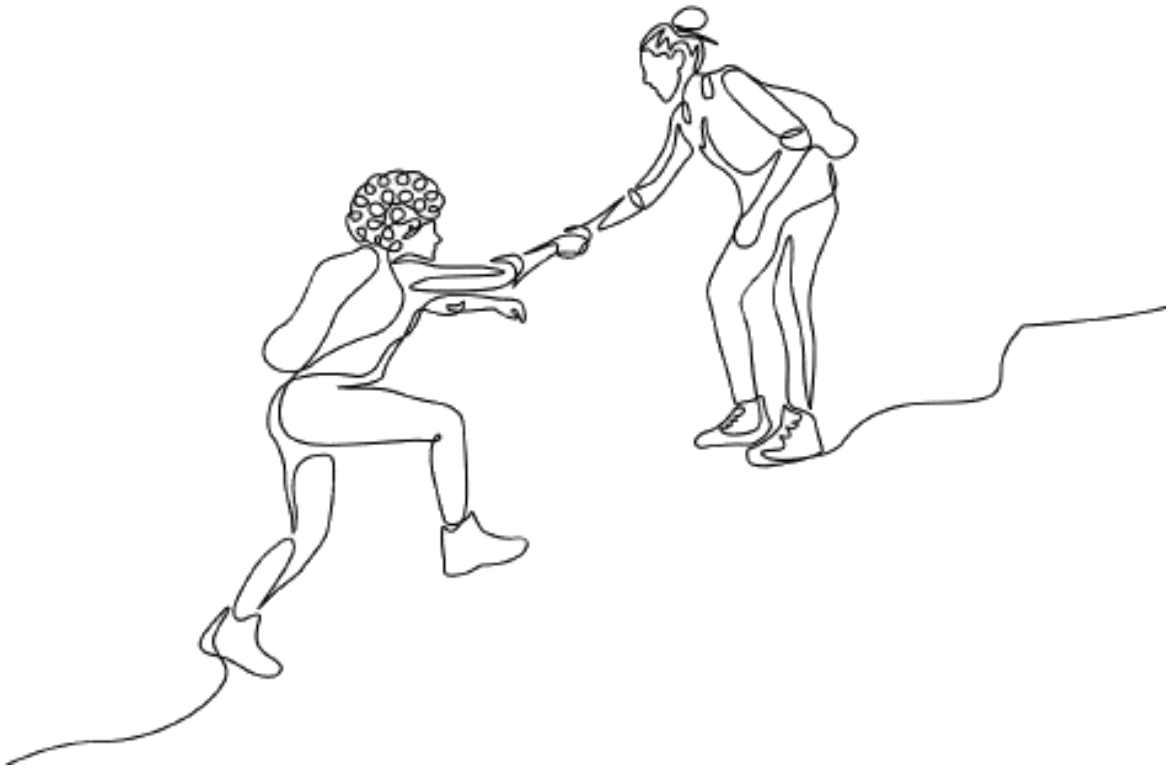
The majority of the female characters are portrayed as self-sacrificing and docile angels and are frequently described by the men in terms of their physical appearance, not their personality. Victor's mother, Caroline dies at the beginning of the story after taking care of Elizabeth when she is sick from scarlet fever. Thus, Caroline chooses to be an angel, completely surrendering her own personal comfort and desires, and ends up dead (as noble self-sacrificing angels tend to do).

When describing his first encounter with Elizabeth, Victor refers to her as his promised gift and his possession. After Caroline's death, it is Elizabeth who must take on the responsibilities of the mother of the household while Victor solely pursues his dreams and ambitions. Caretaking duties are considered to be hers alone and she is expected to comfort everybody. William's nanny, Justine is also continually described by her outward experience as exquisitely beautiful and tranquil. Even when she is falsely accused and executed, Victor prioritizes his emotions and anguish over her life. Victor's self-absorption continues later in the novel when he is convinced the Creature wants to kill him after he threatens to see Victor on his wedding night. This directly leads to the death of Elizabeth.

Another important part of the story is the De Lacey family whom the Creature observes closely during his exile. Members of the De Lacey family present a stark contrast to the others present in the narrative as they continually break traditional gender norms. Felix De Lacey becomes a role model for the Creature who secretly observes his loving and caring temperament. Since the Creature is not born with an understanding of traditional gender norms, he internalizes what he learns from observing the De Lacey family. As such, the Creature comes to accept and appreciate

'feminine' ideals and traits, unlike Victor. Safie, a foreign woman in a relationship with Felix is the only woman to not die in the novel and the only one to challenge gender roles. She is a traveller, in a time where exploring and traveling are considered a masculine activity. She is also educated due to the persistence of her mother. Thus, the presence of a maternal figure and freedom allows Safie to aspire for independence and knowledge.

When creating the female 'monster', Victor fears that upon creation she would exercise her autonomy, that she could decide to simply reject the other monster. This terrifies Victor as he believes this would enrage the Creature and make him an even bigger target. He is also afraid of the possibility that the two creatures would come to like each other and procreate, producing a race of monsters. Frankenstein from the beginning has been interested in playing God and creating a life without the involvement of women. Therefore, female sexuality and autonomy become a threat to Victor. Frankenstein thus destroys the nearly completed female creature, setting the next set of events in motion. In this way, Shelley critiques Frankenstein's decisions to create a completely masculine mode of reproduction and how the absence of femininity leads to disastrous results. The lack of traditionally feminine traits such as compassion, kindness, warmth, and nurture are the reasons behind the abandonment of the Creature and its subsequent experience with violence and abuse. Mary Shelley presents a chilling narrative about the real and tangible harm caused by the negation of femininity.



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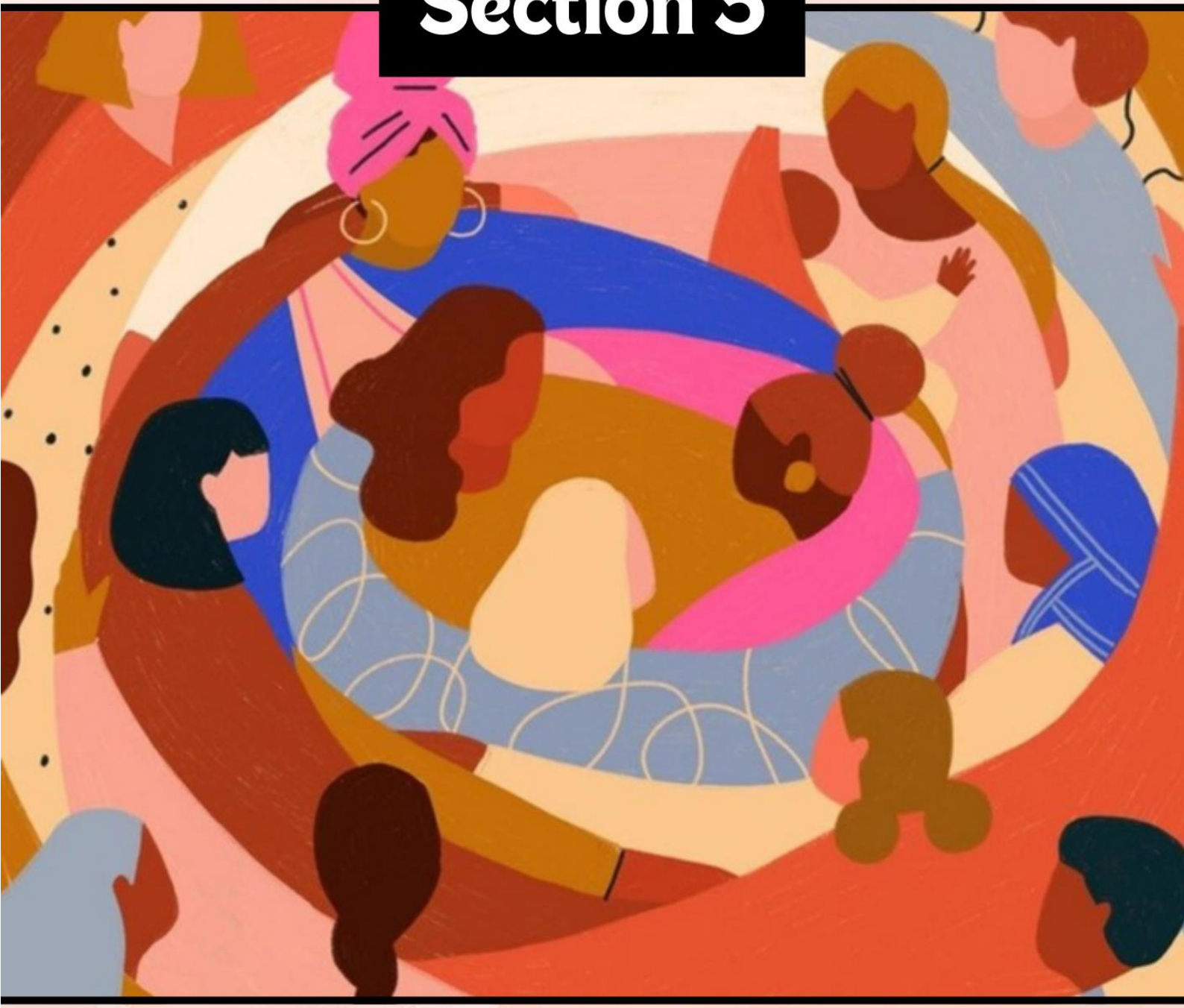


साथ, सहयोग, अनुभव

SOLIDARITIES IN CAMPUS SPACES:

REFLECTIONS FROM THE STUDENTS OF JMC

How were your interactions with other students affected in the online mode? Did you feel that forming a bond was difficult?

Yes, I did feel forming a bond was difficult since I am the kind of person who doesn't believe much in online bonding and physically getting to know each other enables to understand the other person's nature in a better and accurate way which in turn is the foundation of bonding for me and that these things weren't allowed by the online mode.

I think the online mode has really affected the bonds formed in college in both positive and negative ways. When I say positive, I mean that the online mode allowed the students to interact with a lot of students. From following tons of people on Instagram to meeting them in WhatsApp groups I was able to interact with a lot of students across courses and years which I don't think is possible in offline mode. At the same time, this precisely is negative. That is, even though we talked to a lot of people, we didn't have in-depth conversations. There was no sense of bonding or closeness as you never got to know how the other person laughs at jokes or sits and so on.

It was extremely difficult especially as an introvert who doesn't really like texting. I had minimal interactions with people from my department and it mostly concerned work and academics. The most interaction I had with people was when we had shared work or group projects and that helped a little with getting to know people a little better. But overall it was just really hard for me to find that core group solely based on online interactions.

In the online mode, did you feel like you're a part of a bigger community? Could you feel a shared sense of solidarity with other students?

"Yes, in a way we did feel that we were a part of a bigger community. Our session was delayed, we all felt the frustration of not being able to come to college immediately and attending classes in online mode for months. In a way, we had all been excited about going to college, exploring the campus, meeting people there and we all wanted classes to commence in the physical mode after sitting at home for two years and attending online classes. "

"No. Talking in the online mode felt like so much work after a year. Especially after boards where everyone's mental health was at its absolute worst. At the end of the day even if students had something to say they mostly kept shut because talking (that too online after already attending 6-7 hours of work online) was very exhausting and ended up being more frustrating than being a solution to a problem. "

How has the situation changed for you in the physical mode (especially being in a women's college)?

"It has definitely changed for the better at least for me. It's easier to talk to people when you have shared experiences and are in the same physical space. The campus has started to feel like a safe space. If I ever wear any kind of 'revealing' clothes, I do have some anxiety about being in public spaces especially around men but that goes away when I reach college. I mean I still worry about other people judging me but that's kind of different than being afraid for your safety. College does sometimes feel like a sanctuary."

"It was an instant boost of my confidence when I see other women my age or older (even the teachers) carrying themselves so unapologetically and it's great to be around women. I love it personally."

"The situation has changed a lot. Now that we are attending physical classes, things are a lot clearer to me. Travelling to and fro from college for four hours daily has given me a sense of confidence that I can travel on my own. Coming to college and finally meeting and interacting with people physically has been a lot of fun and I made new friends in the process."

For me, the Amphitheatre is the place where I have this sense of togetherness. Having your lunch under the big tree, or events held there, it's an amazing place. The environment there is soothing and the society practices that take place there is also something that we as students enjoy together.

Library is a place I love and relate to and I feel all the readers, chatters, and the writers sit under the same roof to share some space and energy.

What are some places in college (physical spaces, any society, dept etc) where you feel a sense of solidarity with the larger community?

I think the sense of being part of a larger group is at the highest in the classroom for me. Sometimes it happens when there is an event happening in the amphitheatre especially if I am part of it. Society meetings are also really great at enforcing solidarity, I think.

The common Room, where students sit together, and just the commute between classes, even classrooms.

The state is increasingly introducing measures to completely change the mode of education to an online one. How do you think this might affect the lives of women students?

I don't really know but since the online experience was kind of a nightmare for me, I am not really optimistic. There are so many people who find refuge in colleges, schools and other environments outside the home because for them home isn't really a stable environment. In a country like India where societal and family pressure is so high and oppressive, most people find college to be a liberating experience (especially out of station students). People are really exposed to so many different opinions and experiences that they don't really have access to, in their primary family. With the general inclination of people to not support or encourage women's education, online education could become a convenient excuse to not let them leave the house.

If at-home education is promoted, it can have a two-sided impact. Some women aren't allowed to attend college only because they have to go outside and after school people think that an adult woman shouldn't go outside regularly. Situations for such women will improve since they can have most of the college at home without having to go out much. On the other hand, some women want to go out as it's the only way that can let them have exposure which they had expected from college. School doesn't provide an independent space so campus for them is their exploring area and space but with an inclination towards online college, things might not look good for them.

People who are not active on social media would definitely miss out on a lot of opportunities to form genuine female friendships and to grow in the presence of women from different places with different stories. If online education does become a norm, I hope we find a solution to allow people to explore college life even in the virtual space.

Section 6

THE YEAR THAT WAS!

A report of
Annual Fest: Jagriti 2022

Organized from 5th-9th March 2022

Annual Student Seminar on
Women's Lives: Negotiations, Contestations and Transformations (5th March)

As part of its commemoration of International Women's Day, the Women's Studies Centre, Jesus and Mary College, organised its Annual Fest, Jagriti, and an annual student seminar. The student seminar witnessed 22 paper presentations by students from universities across the country. These presentations were divided in three technical sessions including "Violence, Displacement & Exclusion: Women's Contestations & Negotiations with Institutions & State Policy", "Gender Constructions in Texts, Visual & Performative Arts: Contestations & Negotiations" and "Gender, Work & Familial Life: Negotiations & the Quest for Transformations". These papers engaged with pertinent gender issues like disability; intersections of caste, religion, and gender; domestic violence; harassment and exploitation at the workplace' queerness; critiques of representation of women in cinema and literature, among others.

The judges for these sessions were Dr. Justin Mathew (History Department, Hansraj College), Ms. Reshma Jose (Psychology Department Jesus & Mary College), and Dr. Simmi Kapoor Mehta (History Department, Mata Sundri College). The seminar concluded with the announcement of the best papers from each technical session. These winning papers by Mudita Singh, Isheeta, and Madhuri Singh can be found in Section I of this magazine.

Bilingual Debate Competition

WSC Annual Fest- Jagriti, Debate Competition, organised on 7th March 2022.

During Jagriti 2022, WSC hosted the Savitribai-Fatima Sheikh Memorial Bilingual Debate Competition. The debaters were required to speak for or against the topic: "This house believes that the legal age of marriage for women should be increased to 21 years".

Winners:

The first position was awarded to Srushti Sharma, a second-year B.A (Honours) History student, and the second position to Teesta Dayal, a second-year B.A. (Honours) Psychology student. The best interjection was awarded to Smriti, a first year B.A. (Honours) History student.

Judges:

Dr. Jessy Philip and Dr. Roshan Xalxo.

Photography Competition (7th March)

Themes of the Photography Competition were released on the morning of 7th March, and JMC students had till the afternoon to share their work. Winning photos are indicated below.

Winners:

Nandini Jain, Second year, B.A. Programme.
Vishehta Sharma, Second year, B.A. Programme.
Vania Chaudhary, Second year, B.Com Honours.

Judge:

Ms. Kashish Dua, Assistant Professor, Department of English, JMC.

Bilingual Poetry Competition

The Women's Studies Centre, Jesus and Mary College, under its annual fest *Jagriti* organised an intra-college bilingual poetry competition on the 7th of March, 2022 from 2.00 to 4.00 P.M. The topic for the same was, "*Contesting Stereotypes, Transforming the World.*" The competition saw enthusiastic participation from students from all across the departments and years. 19 participants performed their original written pieces on the overarching theme. Since there were no restrictions on the poetic style of the pieces, the competition provided a vibrant space for the participants' creativity to come forward.

After much deliberation, the first position was finalised. The winners also got a chance to perform their pieces at the Open Mic held on the 9th of March, 2022.

Winners:

Aditi Pandey, First year B.A. Programme, First Prize.
Tanushha Rathore, Second year B.A. (Honours) Psychology, Second Prize.

Judges:

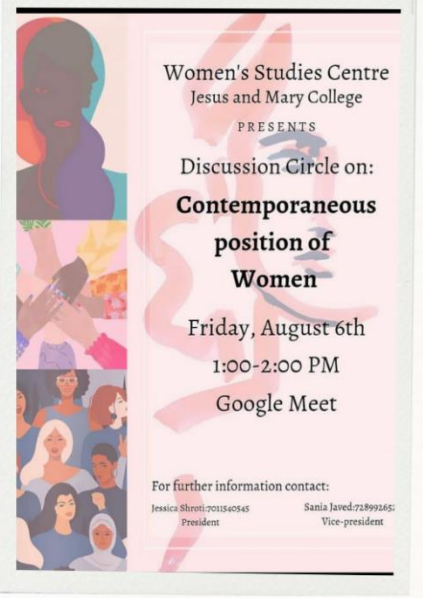
Dr. Prabhjyot Kaur, Assistant Professor, Department of Elementary Education, JMC
Mr. Jobin Thomas, Assistant Professor, Department of English, JMC

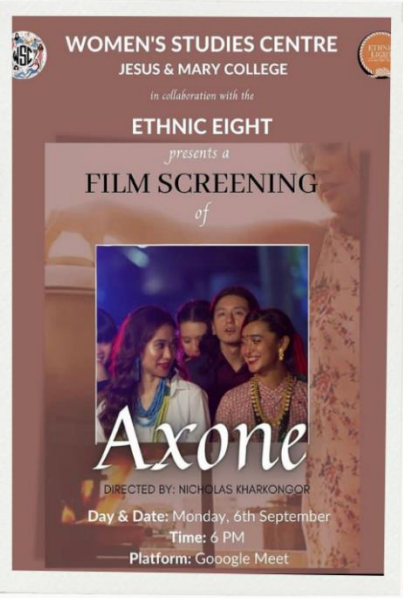
Jagriti 2022: International Women's Day Celebration and WSC's Annual Festival

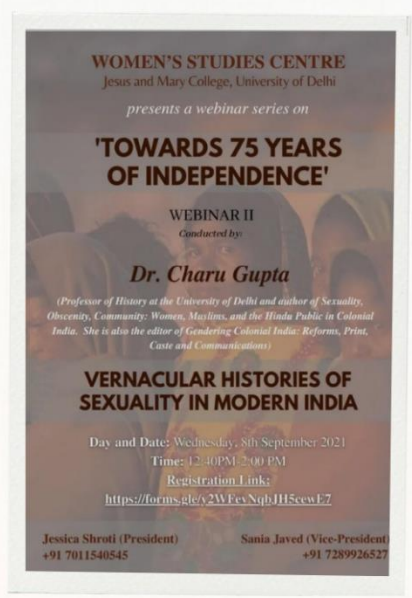

JAGRITI
2022
Poetry Competition
HELEN KELLER
CSW
#International WomensDay
Unity is Strength!
CSW
JUSTICE, EQUALITY, FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE!
WE WANT IT ALL!
CLARA ZETKIN
CSW
आखिर मैं सुरक्षित कहाँ,
गर्भ में...
घर में...
देश में...

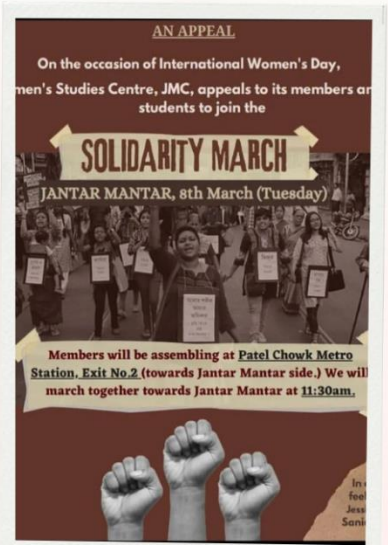

JAGRITI 2022
WSC FUN
WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRE
A KALEIDOSCOPIC OVERVIEW

Poster Collage



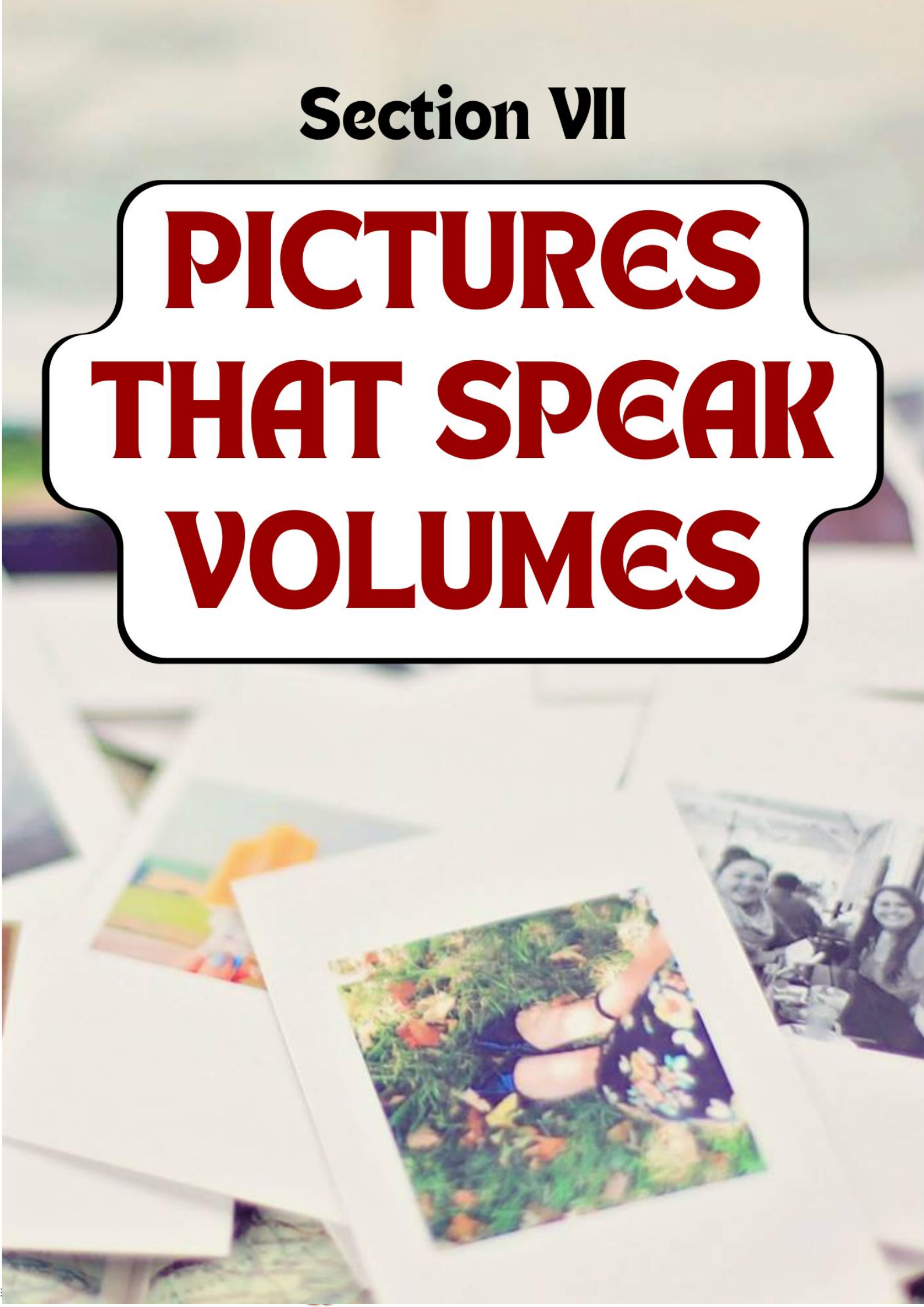






Section VII

PICTURES THAT SPEAK VOLUMES



“One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.”
- Malala Yousafzai

By Akhila

B.A. (Hons) English, 2nd Year

- First Prize -

Nandini Jain

("PLATFORM")

BA(Programme) Psychology-Philosophy, 2nd Year

"I need solitude. I need space. I need air.
I need the empty fields round me;
and my legs pounding along roads;
and sleep; and animal existence."

— Virginia Woolf

- Second Prize -

Vishehta Sharma

("WOMAN CROSSING THE ROAD")

BA (Prgramme) Psychology-Philosophy, 2nd Year

"Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, and penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope."

- Maya Angelou

- Third Prize -

Vania Chaudhary ("SISTERS LAUGHING")

B.Com (Hons), 2nd Year

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."

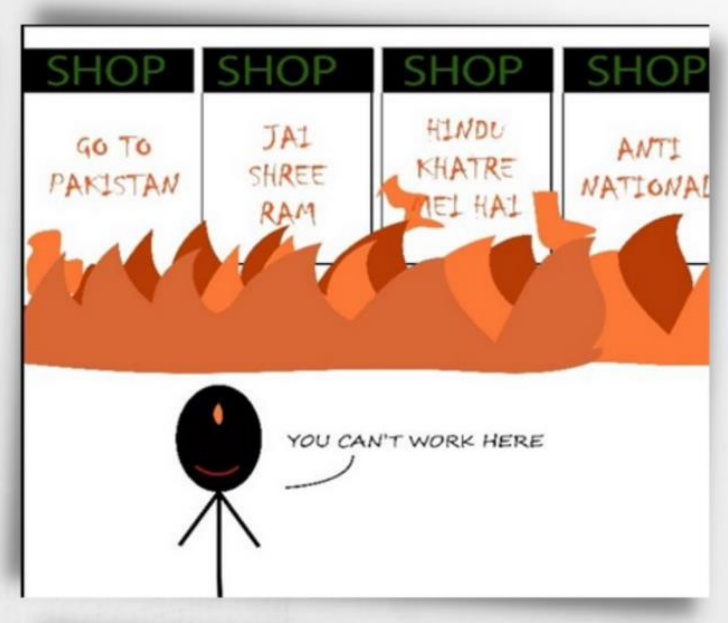
— Audre Lorde

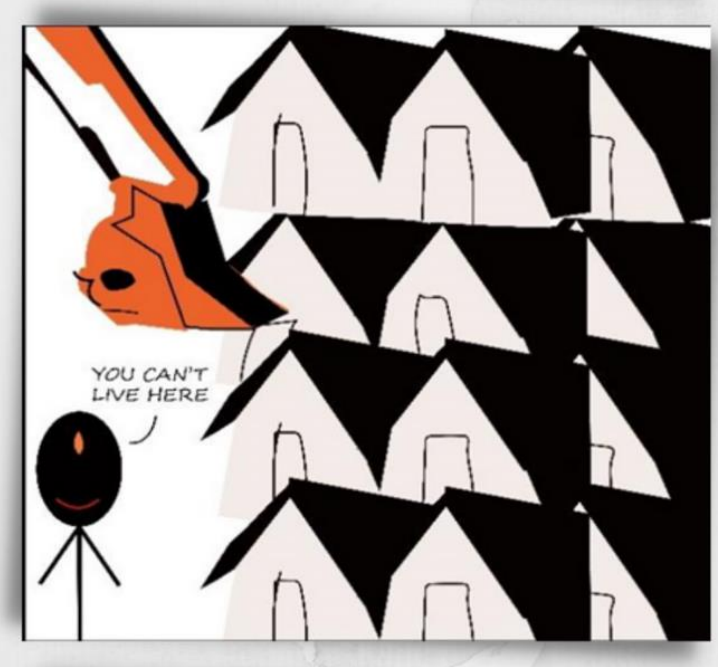
- Special Mention -

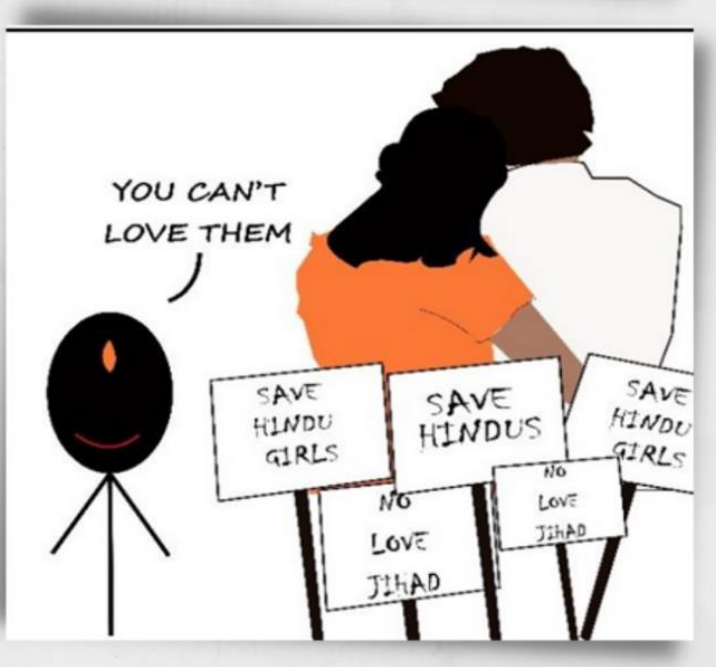
Khyati Dubey

("INTERSECTIONALITY VIA MODERN-DAY ADVERTISEMENTS")

BA(Programme) Psychology- Philosophy, 2nd Year







Description:

This comic strip attempts to depict the reality behind the façade of the largest democracy in the world. From businesses owned by people of the Muslim community to the homes they've built for themselves to the clothes they choose to wear, it is visible that their rights and freedom are being curbed. This comic strip expresses the concern of a Responsible citizen about the progressive ideas on which the secular republic of India was built on.

By Shreeja Paschal

B.A. (Hons) English, 3rd Year

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II Year

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II Year

Annapurna
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Kashvi Chaudhary
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Jahanbi Singh
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B.A. (Hons) Economics
III year

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II Year

Aditi Misra
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Ananya Atrishya
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I Year

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Nikhita Gollapinni
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B.Com Hons.
I Year

Priyanshi Saxena
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I Year

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II Year

Kaashni Pahwa
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I Year

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Ardra Goodwin

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Riana Singh

Kaashni Pahwa

Nikhita Gollapinni

Priyanshi Saxena

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Sera Choudhary

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Jaanya Chopra

Grace Xess

Vanshika Vishwanath

Ishika Ahluwalia

Alisha Abraham

Jolynne John

Ria Bains

Tanisha Kapoor

हम इंकलाब हैं,
हम इंकलाब हैं,
हम किसी की जागीर नहीं
इंकलाब हैं,
हम जुल्म की तस्वीर नहीं,
इंकलाब हैं...

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