

The image features a dense grid of stylized eyes on a black background. Each eye is composed of two white, almond-shaped shapes representing the eyes, with a small red dot in the center representing the pupil. The eyes are arranged in a regular pattern, with some eyes having a red dot and others not. In the center of the grid, there is a white rectangular box with a thin black border containing the word "DISSENT" in a white, serif, all-caps font.

DISSENT

Meraki
Annual Magazine of the Department of Sociology
Jesus and Mary College
University of Delhi

*Dissent is necessary not only for democracy- it is necessary for the survival
of the human race.*

-Sundar Sarukkai

From the Editorial Board

Dear Readers,

The Department of Sociology, Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi is back with its annual magazine, **Meraki**, for the year 2020. For the uninitiated, it is an exclusively sociological magazine, prepared by the students of the Department of Sociology. This academic release is a dynamic platform of learning, ideas, exploration, and expression from student voices rising within the discipline and stands to represent a medium of free exchange of sociological thought and perspective. Targeting topics relevant to the social set up, Meraki weaves a multitude of voices into the contemporary sociological imagination.

We are proud to present some important new features this year with the aim of significantly increasing Meraki's readership and accessibility. There are two key interviews with prominent intellectuals done exclusively for the magazine by members of the editorial board. We will also be sharing the digital version/ e-copy with the entire department to ensure all work is shared and read by our peers, inviting feedback from all. These will also be shared with our department alumni via mail so as to keep them up with the on-going intellectual production of the department. Moreover, we are also introducing an alumni section this year with two special pieces by former students of our department. Finally, Meraki is also coming out as bilingual for the first time, with pieces in both English and Hindi.

This edition of Meraki seeks to give space to subversive thoughts and defiant voices with its theme - **Dissent**. In contemporary times, when ideological propaganda pervades individual existence and propagates conformity, we at Meraki felt the need to encourage independent thinking and critical questioning towards authority. We wish to go beyond dissent in its physical manifestation of protest rallies and campaigns and seek to engage with dissent as an ideology, as a philosophy, as a way of thinking and its manifestations in everyday actions. It is with this spirit that we invited entries for the magazine and conducted interviews with esteemed personalities who express dissent through their work.

We live in times where we can attest that the youth is the catalyst to change. While some seek shelter in the name of privilege, some acknowledge it and take matters into their hands. Expressing dissent is intrinsic to our identity in more ways than not. We dissent in many ways- from striking an opinion that stands in complete contradiction to your family on the dinner table, to taking your voice to the streets. Dissent in the form of art, music or pop culture references that exhibits the beautiful manner in which students portray their anger. While taking a stance in times like these is imperative, taking an informed stance and making the movement ours' is what makes all the difference.

The aim and endeavor of this year's issue has been to illustrate, explain and encourage informed dissent among young adults in general and students of sociology in particular. The Editorial Team has put in efforts towards the singular goal of making dissent, and everything that it includes, more tangible and widely understood. The magazine engenders a multidimensional approach as it contains scholars' interviews, book reviews, poems, visual images and other creative pieces, apart from simple articles. Through the magazine we hope that students are able to see the beauty dissent in its plethora of forms and its presence in everyday life, beyond its simplistic and mainstream understanding.

Our team is immensely grateful to all those who contributed in the making of the latest edition of the magazine by volunteering their time and talent. We are grateful to Prof. Susan Visvanathan, and Unnamati Syama Sundar for engaging with us on the idea of dissent. We are thankful to Prof. Sundar Sarukkai for agreeing to release the current issue of Meraki.

Meraki's impeccable quality and content has been ensured by our very punctilious and approachable teachers, Dr. Renny Thomas and Dr. Jessy Philip. They tirelessly guided us through every step of its making with their valuable suggestions and advice and we are ever thankful. We are extremely appreciative of all those who contributed to the magazine- our alumni, Srijana Sidharth and Rebecca Rose Varghese and fellow students. Finally, we thank Ishita Mohan for the cover of the magazine and the illustrations accompanying the subsections which beautifully represents the spirit of dissent.

As we publish this year's Meraki, we hope that you come back to these pieces with broader thoughts and new perspectives. Our efforts will always be aimed at amplifying voices and opinions that are born out of a desire to subvert norms and challenge mindsets. Passing on this tradition to our juniors and those upcoming, we hope that fresh viewpoints and strong statements continue to find home in the pages of Meraki.

The Editorial Board

Date: 4th March, 2020

Place: New Delhi



Dr. Jessy Philip, Dr. Renny Thomas

Akshita Taneja, Ananya Kaushal, Anisha Maini, Avantika Jhunjunwala, Avita Singh, Gayatri Sarin, Jhilam Gangopadhyay, Kaavya Jacob, Smiley Nadar

CHRONOLOGY SAMJHIYE

Dissent in the Daily

1. ~~Actions~~ Clothes Speak Louder Than Words
Akshita Taneja
2. Shaadi Qubool Nahi
Ananya Kaushal
3. The Art of Resistance
Anisha Maini
4. But you don't really care for music, do you?
Gayatri Sarin
5. Stand Up! Dissent
Kaavya Jacob
6. चारों और
Sayna Mishra

I Question, Therefore I Am

7. Critiquing the Critique
Avantika Jhunjunwala
8. Decolonizing Feminism through Tagore
Avita Singh
9. Femvertising
Jhilam Gangopadhyay
10. The Reflection of an Indecisive
Kasvi Bhardwaj
11. Mixed Media Parallels
Smiley Nadar

Alumni Speaks

12. Untitled

Rebecca Rose Varghese

13. JNU and its Protests: A Journey from Theory to Praxis

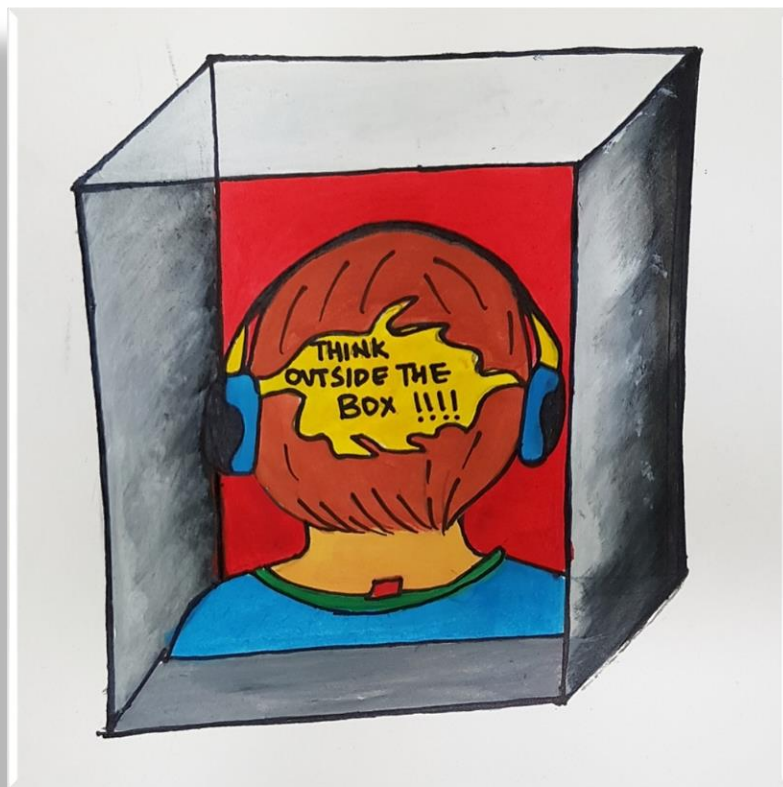
Srijana Sidharth

Conversation Café

14. Teaching, Writing, And Dissent: A Conversation with Prof. Susan Visvanathan

15. Cartoons and Dissent: A Conversation with Unnamati Syama Sundar

Dissent in the Daily



Actions-Clothes Speak Louder Than Words

Akshita Taneja, Sociology (Hons.), 2nd Year



image Source: telegraphindia.com

Our honourable Prime Minister implied in his speech back in December, “those creating violence can be identified by their clothes,” and every uncle in the country nodded their head. It seems like the lecture our elders have given since we were young and immature, which we still are in their eyes, has not yet been accepted and subsequently applied by them – don’t judge a book by its cover.

Soon after this statement, a college student from Kolkata, Indulekha, dressed up in a hijab holding up a placard that challenged the Prime Minister to identify her. It is funny how one hijab adds the anti to the national.

It should be noted that this is a much larger issue. Actually, the identification and analysis of one’s entire existence happens at a glance. The kurta that you got from Sarojini Nagar or the slogan tee you picked up off the rack from H&M will end up having a larger impact on how people decide their engagement with you. The “Feminist” t-shirt will get no boys approaching you for dates or some boys asking you, “I also believe in equality, but I don’t understand you feminist types!” If I were to wear my black kurta with a stole around my neck and a simple black bindi on my forehead and walk with a group of my friends around Jantar Mantar, I’ll be scared that the people will call the police. The issue ranges from the character assassination of every girl in a crop top to the de-humanization of rape victims to you thinking your neighbourhood aunty isn’t well educated or ambitious just because she chooses to dress in a basic cotton suit every day.

Interestingly, researcher John T. Malloy, author of the book *Dress for Success* (1975) attempted to explore the biases we form in everyday life. When the researcher dressed in a suit and asked for money from random strangers at the station to get back home, he collected 7.23 dollars. By wearing the same suit and just adding a tie, he managed to collect 26 dollars. Our clothes translate our class to those around and these distinct signs form their biases against or for us. It’s almost amusing how we would give money to someone who wears a suit and a tie and not someone with torn and worn out clothes because somehow the former deserves help more than the latter. In a study conducted in 2009, Swiss undergraduates were shown photos of candidates competing in the 2002 French elections. The students were further asked to choose the most competent candidate. As many as 70% of the students that were a part of this study chose the candidate who then went on to win the election. Their choice was completely based on the candidate’s looks shown in the photographs. This elucidates the point of how many other citizens who weren’t part of the aforementioned study probably did the same and let their decision be swayed merely by what they saw, which is just what was shown to them.

It may be news to some that many politicians hire professional stylists to make sure they appear approachable and trustworthy to the voters. The colour white is worn most extensively because it symbolizes purity and pristineness. You are most likely to think of someone wearing a black kurta as a goon and of someone wearing a kurta as a person full of wisdom and clean intentions. If the female Ministers were to wear even suits, let alone

pantsuits, instead of saris in their rallies or in Parliamentary discussions, they're inadvertently losing out on their vote bank which, as absurd as it may seem, is true. The



Image Source: cartoonistsatish.com

liberating safes-space to wear whatever you want regardless of whether it holds up to the norms delegated to one's gender. But it's also about what you don't wear. The #freethenipple movement on Instagram features girls voicing the need to put a stop on reducing women's bodies to mere sex objects for the male gaze. The need to dress a certain way and cover up certain parts of your body is the first thing young girls have to think about every time they go outside. The movement not only addresses this but originates from the hassle that women have to endure wearing bras for hours on end.

People have, however, manage to use this tendency to their advantage. Taking up the instance of the hijab again, Muslim women have replied to the islamophobia and the comments on the culture of wearing hijabs by incorporating it into their identity. The hijabis now hold the hijab as a fundamental part of who they are and reiterate their *choice* of wearing it by emphasizing how proud they are to wear it. It doesn't come without its own troubles and constant passing of comments reeking of prejudice but wearing a symbol of your identity with no qualms is a much more explicit display of bravery than it would seem, in today's times and scenario.



Image Source: temple-news.com

So, where do you draw a line? Yesterday it was your hijab and turban, today it is your slogan tee and your bra strap, tomorrow it could literally be if the rubber band you use to tie your hair is saffron or not. If your appearance decides if you create violence or not, maybe the government should send out an official list that tells me which t-shirt of mine makes me look like a protestor or not. As I write this article, I speak from a privilege - from the comfort of my house with a nameplate that boasts of an upper caste Hindu surname, in my room in front of my closet that holds at least a couple hundred pairs of clothing. I could still push some limitations despite of being the second sex but it will continue to amuse me how I have to think more about the political connotations of my outfit than if it makes me look fat or not. Well the good news is, even if the country is in shambles, everyone will still look pretty and perfectly put together.

Shaadi Qubool Nahi

Ananya Kaushal, Sociology (Hons.), 2nd Year

“The most beautiful tales are always the most difficult to share.” Who knew an American author could define Indian romance so perfectly for me?

India, a single word that symbolically stands for the diversity of all things. Romance, a single word that essentially defines all things life and absolution. When you put the two together though, they pose as nothing but contradiction to their original roots.

“*Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Isai, rehte hai sab bhai bhai.*” A statement that we all heard as kids. Trust me when I say that I truly started to believe it. But then, I unfortunately grew up. Life no longer remained as simple as it used to be, incased within four walls, filled with childhood poems and nameless friends. No, life became more complex, both literally and metaphorically. I began to feed roadside cows to pass my Math exam. I stopped covering my head during summers. I started to openly downgrade the practice of polygamy. I started choosing Jaya Sharma over Kanak Siddique, and I didn’t even like Jaya that much.

Funny how the differences are always there but as you get older, they almost become uncanny. Somewhere along the way, I started viewing myself as a Hindu first and an Indian second. I don’t think I can ever pin point the exact time when it all started, but it did.

One area where none of this tarnished my thoughts though, was the idea of love. Please don’t mistake this as the whole ‘mother-daughter’ scenario, I am a twenty-year-old girl. Respect my youth and all things that come with it. I am talking about *the one*, the perfect royalty blend of Prince Phillip, Prince Eric, Prince Charming, with a side of normalcy made out of Aladdin, Flynn Rider and Hercules. Everyone has dreams, the big bang love tale was once mine.

This fantasy soon stopped being so untouchable. All the little oblivious religious gestures began to make even more sense when I saw a perfect happily ever after reaching a tragic end right in front of me. Modernity might run in the name of their family, certainly not in their veins however. I remember my mind just being jumbled up, unable to comprehend the severity of the situation at sixteen years of age. It was as if this montage of beliefs was crumbling right in front of me. I thought love conquers all, then why can’t a gorgeous Brahman girl be with her fakir, albeit one minus the traditional off-white robe?

The sad part about living in dreamland is that one day, you do inevitably have to wake up. “*Ankit Saxena, a Hindu man, was killed in Delhi, allegedly by relatives of his Muslim girlfriend. Some of the alleged assailants were arrested later. In December, Hindu right-wing groups barged into an interfaith wedding celebration just outside Delhi.*” ~**Religion News Service**

The hypocrisy that most Indians swear by became visible to me at sixteen. There is no denying that a chameleon changes its color to protect itself sometimes. But once that instinct fades away, gone along with the fear of being caught, true forms do come out under the sun.

Most marriages in India are not really formed out of love, rather laws of religion and family affiliations. We seem to take the front row seats in a show of discrimination

against each other. The current generation seems content to have apparently embraced the western ways of living. But the more important issue at hand is that till the time forty-five-year-old Sharma aunty forbids her son from dating his twenty-year-old girlfriend, Melissa Khan, we are not going to progress. Hiding away is not the solution, it is delaying the inevitable. Because sooner or later, truth will come out and then Sharma aunty will no longer take to passive aggressiveness. Rather, poor Melissa will have to suffer the full-blown wrath of a *Hindu* woman.



Image source: OplIndia.com

True, inter-religious couples, especially between Hindus and Muslims, have never had it easy in India. But after the elections of 2014, with a dominant Hindu party coming to power, the hatred towards such relationships have become more vocal and prevalent.

Personally, as a millennial born in Delhi to a particularly progressive family, the idea of inter-religious marriages being

restricted in the city was foreign to me for the longest time. In my head, this taboo was prevalent, and in velocity, among the rural classes. I am no stranger to this taboo anymore. As a humanities student, you study a lot about the environment around you. Some of those reality checks are pleasant, and some make your skin crawl. So far, I have never been presented with a middle ground. I either read about progressing women who married multiple times until they were satisfied, or about twenty-two-year-old young widow who became a victim of sati. The idea of a docile woman who manages her kids and gets beaten up occasionally by her drunk husband is a rare case of interest. I believe that is the reason that the *issue* of inter-religious marriages only become prevalent within the sphere of educated, well respected class when you really turn your head and look into it. Up until then, it always seems like a possibility that is only one real conversation with parents over evening tea away.

If anyone is keen on knowing the details of the said tragedy I briefly touched upon: chants of “*Hai Ram!*” or “*Yah Allah!*” weren’t enough to save their relationship. They are still in touch, pretending whole heartedly to be friends while their parents seek for potential relationships that check their boxes of *ethics and God*.

I guess in the end, the love story of some carves out a path of thorns and not actual roses.

“I believe in recognizing every human being as a human being--neither white, black, brown, or red; and when you are dealing with humanity as a family there's no question of integration or intermarriage. It's just one human being marrying another human being or one human being living around and with another human being.”

~Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

The Art of Resistance

Anisha Maini, Sociology (Hons.), 3rd Year



Image Source: Dailyhunt.in

*Bol, ke lab azaad hai tere:
Bol, zabaan ab tak teri hai,
Tera sutwan jism hai tera –
Bol, ke jaan ab tak teri hai.*

*Dekh ke aahangar ki dukaan mein
Tund hai shu'le, surkh hai aahan,
Khulne-lage quflon ke dahane,
Phaila hare k zanjeer ka daaman.*

*Bol, ye thora waqt bahut hai,
Jism o zabaan ki maut se pahle;
Bol, ke sach zinda hai ab tak –
Bol, jo kuchh kahna hai kah-le!*

Poetry: Bol by Faiz Ahmed Faiz

When the authoritarian clamp down is brutal, oppression stifles words and fear permeates through empty lanes, the only thing which flourishes and speaks through its brush strokes are the drawings on the walls.

Resistance has many forms, some as loud as voices of thousands shouting “Aawaz do! Hum ek hai” and some eerily silent, with only the sound of fingers on keyboard audible as words pour out into the deep abyss of the internet. All these varying forms of resistance have one aim – to express. And all the authoritarian regimes have one aim – to curb expression which doesn't agree with their ideology.

For Indians, recent years have seen a resurgence of art and poetry under a regime which passes controversial and prejudicial bills swiftly, without any debate, through the parliament and imposes its will on people by using draconian medieval laws that violate the basic rights of man. In such a context, what spreads amongst the masses is not reluctant acceptance, but fear. But with fear, born is a resilient spirit which speaks without using prose and resists with the power of its pen.

With new technology, new ways of resistance are born. In India today, we see an amalgamation of the old and the new. Graffiti bleeds into social media and words sang in far corners of the world find their home on walls seeing the same repression. This art – whether on sign boards or on phone screen – is political in its very essence. Their aim is not only to express but also to incite reactions from those who turn a blind eye to the authoritarian excess and make those who believe in their ideology to introspect.

Why does this culture of art and poetry bloom during times of repression? The famous philosopher Ranciere answers this question simply – all art is political. He talks about the ‘critical nature’ of art, whose only aim is to bring out, by using various techniques, the exploitation of individuals which is hidden from view in everyday life.

This culture of art and poetry has taken a technological turn. Social media bestows upon the ordinary man the gift of freedom of expression in their hands. Words, art, opinions,



Image Source: Indian Cultural Forum

memes and images, are shared at lightning speed – to travel far and wide, to propagate and to undermine, to ridicule and to promote – whatever pleases the will of the individual. Born out of this are the new ways of resistance. Memes, stand-up commentary, filters – all have become politicized and are used to express dissenting thoughts.

With the ‘millennials’ always on their phones, it is no surprise that the revolution has been digitized. One of the most peculiar ways in which dissent is now expressed is through Instagram

filters. The one shown below was made by media artist Akshat Nauriyal. Interestingly, filters – whose original purpose was to alter the image into the other or to beautify the image, are now being used as a tool which shows not only the ironically unfiltered face but also the ideology of the person for the world to see. Instead of revamping the original, it is now being given the front stage.



Image sources: ScoopWhoop.com, joinpaperplanes.com

Other than filters, memes have also taken over the revolution- both on screen and on streets. The art of meme is a different category all together, but the tool it uses is very powerful – humor. Memes incite reactions and create visual dissonance by distorting original images and modifying it to bring out the irony or exploitation of the situation. This distortion creates an impact which is unexpected and ignites pearls of laughter which reduce the power of ideology which is being forced by the authoritarian regime. Making fun of something changes the power dynamics; it undermines the supremacy of the original content. Youth today does this by juxtaposing the political with the popular culture, for example, saying Ok Boomer to political comments. Even stand-up comedians and those who dabble in slam poetry are using these mediums to express dissent.

However, there is one thing common to this art of dissent – it uses visuals to transform ideologies. What we are seeing today is not only intellectual dissent but a visual dissent. In this case, an image really conveys what a thousand words can't. More than that, this image is really important when the repression is so brutal that those who use words as weapons to

break the dominance of the authority are being silenced and jailed. When words are jailed, images set the truth free. These images -and the spoken words in case of poetry- have a stronger impact on the mind of individuals as they bring out the truth in such a raw, unaltered state that all one can do is gape as shackles of authority are questioned.

Another reason why protest art –mainly graffiti - is blooming under the current regime is also due to the anonymity it offers. In times when protests are being identified by their clothes and detained in a blink of the eye, it becomes imperative for the resistor to find ways to evade the government, remain free while expressing their dissent.

This is the art of the subaltern, of the local people. Drawn on the road and away from the hollow walls of museums as today's movement is not gaining ground or standing on the fame of prominent personalities. Today's art is an expression from those who witness the ground reality, it is gaining ground because of their experience, their thought which is being conveyed through Instagram filters and hangings on the street signs. It is the common youth which hides behind anonymity offered by the technology of today to speak out and preserve the society of tomorrow.

We must not, however, be under the impression that use of art is only by the resisters. Those in power also try their best to use the medium of visuals and mold the narrative to suit their interests. By using images, they try and portray the authority figure as a benevolent leader who can do no harm, yet the one who is strong and won't be afraid to protect his people. The figure is spoken of with reverence, shown to have risen from amongst the masses, having lived their lives, having understood their problems and now will be their messiah

and eliminate the 'threat' that his people face.



Image source: [The quint.com](http://Thequint.com)

They paint their target as terrorists, inducing images of horror and feelings of fear in the mind of the masses, twisting the reality to suit their ideology and to undermine the validity of those who offer a perspective of the narrative other than theirs. Media plays a huge role in this. While visuals can speak for themselves, often the words that are spoken with them contort their authenticity. In such

times, one must remain careful, one must remain critical and one must keep on questioning, for in this war of visuals, it is easy to get disoriented.

The movement of today rests on the shoulders of the common man, the energetic youth and powerful voice of the thinker. This article started with the words of Faiz, encouraging the laymen to Speak Up, for his words are free while he may not be, and must acknowledge that the resisters of today are speaking up, in new and old ways - through the photos on their online apps, through the spray cans creating images on walls, through the symphony of voices chanting 'controversial poems', through the words they type on their keyboards – but all while saying the same thing that Faiz did many years ago – *Hum Dekhenge*.

But you don't really care for music, do you?

Of music and expressing dissent

Gayatri Sarin, Sociology (Hons.), 3rd Year

Music is perhaps most central to cultural life. If our everyday existence becomes a part of our social life, where does music lie? Music on some days is found in festive hues, and on some, the calm to a storm. Its emotion is one that reflects our experience, our place in the society, with all its dynamic facets.

The act of dissent finds its way in tunes, more often than not. It doesn't limit itself to a teenage rebellion, but is the reflection of revolution. It becomes a sentiment to a life that the artist leads, and what he wishes to see in the world.

When Bono in Drunken Chicken/America sings, "America, why are your libraries full of tears?", his voice echoes of Ginsberg and the Beat generation of literary writers of 1950's and 60's. With them, they envision an end to the war. A cry for better times is linked with an idea of pride in history. A history of emerging victorious, the American Dream then becomes one of sleepless nights. The Beat movement found itself amalgamating poetry with jazz, bringing in a social movement. For them the lack of joy and dominant misery, was enough ground for withdrawal and protest.

In rally for a better world, times were changing, and Bob Dylan hummed all along- "I'm just writing it as something to be said, for somebody, by somebody". Although he never confined to the label of writing songs of protest, topical as his music was, it found recognition in the Civil Rights Movement.

On one side, we see Dylan keeping away from claiming to be part of the protest, but still letting his words speak of a progressive world. We see, Bob Marley, saying it as it is. His music was that of problems, but in its own way hinting at solutions. "Until the philosophy which hold one race / superior / And another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned — everywhere is war." When dominance goes unchallenged, this at all points is reality, as we live it.

Hierarchies persist everywhere, even in the world of music. Marley challenged that, and popularized Reggae, in a sense that it stood for all the positivity and peace. It stood for a social context where humanity was the central goal. He initiated discourse through spiritual musings, something that to this date remains unmatched.

If we're talking about equality personal identity becomes centric to the realm. If the personal is political, Nina Simone's Four Women had to meet the world. As a black feminist, she spoke of colour that countered the mainstream. The first black female classic pianist was not enough of a shocker to the world. She created space for women who couldn't find themselves to be associated to a rather singular and privileged dimension of women's liberation. She took to address the double burden of race and gender that Black women faced. While they were to confront sexism from both Black and White men, they were also excluded from the male dominated civil rights movement.

She can be seen as one who brought a movement to music. It becomes imperative to see her key role in the form of African American music, one that spoke for the struggle for freedom in many ways. In a space of a politicized and gendered work, she took time to

appreciate overcoming adversity. And well, celebrating to be a woman, a new dawn it certainly was, and we're still Feeling Good.

Breaking from the shackles of gendered expectations became important in songs about sexuality. Evolution renders survival of fittest thereby characterising who can best channelise strength and identity in a society. A society where gender binaries prevail, it becomes important to talk about gender from a different lens.

This was portrayed by Lady Gaga, "No matter gay, straight or bi; Lesbian, transgendered life. I'm on the right track baby, I was born to survive". The video opened with an inverted pink triangle, a symbol for gay rights, but originally used as badge required to be worn by homosexual men in Nazi concentration camps. The most obvious and striking image, however is Gaga's birthing scene drawing inspiration with respect to surrealism from Salvador Dali's "Geopoliticus Child Watching the Birth of the New Man." Her song sought to depict her as the mother of a new race. One based on equality, a campaign for LGBTQ+ rights and well a world where one survives not by fitting into a mold, but embracing their true self.



Image Source: baeblemusic.com

It almost becomes impossible to not talk about rock, a genre that is seen as the clearest form of dissent and rebellion. Sometimes they tend to a postmodernist reality of the gruesome nature of war. Kid A was a recent album by Radiohead, where the title referred to an atomic bomb, and transgression from peace to war and a world that grapples to survive. It talks about the birth of a child and his journey. That Kid A, is an atom bomb.

“Who's in a bunker, who's in a bunker? Women and children first and the children first and the children.” In a time where the world is said to develop towards progress, Radiohead took few steps back to remind you of times of war. This disturbance could be few steps into the future.

This phrase “ice age is coming” is most likely referring to global warming. The expression ‘let me hear both sides’ following this apocalyptic prophecy indicates the scientific division between global warming as man-made or as natural cyclic phenomenon.

Conversations of crisis have become a recurrent theme within music. The 1975, Love it If We Made It talks about survival in a world where we invite war. “Modernity has failed us” then becomes a narrative that sets to preclude the view that innovation is the ultimate comfort and would somehow lead us all to glory and a peaceful, more connected world.

We see how artists now have internalized to an extent that their words are cure to many of us who are somehow deprived in various social contexts.

Peace concerts are their offerings to aid, together with music. When Chris Martin sang Don't Look Back in Anger at the One Love Manchester concert, post the terror attack, it became a symbol of solidarity, an anthem that would make you hold hands in troubled times.

This could be too seen in the recent advent of the rise of independent music artists in India. Ankur Tiwari's Mohobbat Zindabad, in the context of an anti – CAA protest, is now love

in the face of hatred. Amir Aziz's poetry put with instruments, are words engrained in us, to unite us. "Ke kuchh log the jo zinda rahe the apne maut ki khabar aane ke bad tak"- this immortalizes the efforts, and how the youth took to streets, to express their anger in the most beautiful manner.

Music becomes essential to express dissent. It is thus, a way to own and express vision and realities, perceived to inspire. It's a song on your phone, yes. But more importantly, it becomes a song in your heart. One that echoes with your lived experience.

Music in its revolutionary roots is a part of our social fabric adding a new meaning to resistance. With these acts of dissent found in music and lyrics, we make a movement ours to call.

Stand Up! Dissent!

Kaavya Jacob, Sociology (Hons.), 1st Year

Recognizing the current state of right-wing affairs that have taken off in Indian politics, the need to dissent has increased rather drastically. With growing liberalization and promotion of humanitarian awareness, the public has become more and more mindful of the diverse nature of humankind. So much so that the status quo is often challenged. While, on many forums it could be subject to dispute, comedy is one medium where defying the *status quo* is, in fact, the *status quo*.

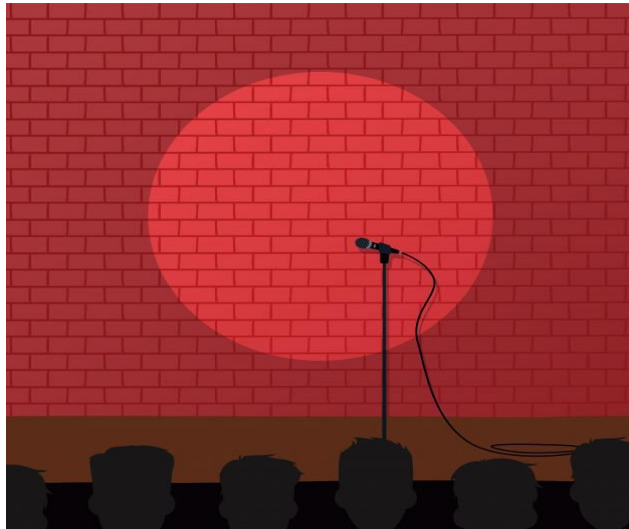


Image Source: freepik.com

Yet another means of dissenting on a large platform is stand-up comedy. Something as insignificant as a simple one liner in the script, has enough punch and power to make one question the entire world as we see it, at present. However negligible it may seem, their constant efforts to break taboos, stereotypes and conventional ideologies is a step towards normalizing everyday affairs that may cause one to flinch at the thought of having an open conversation about.

People often shy away from a lot of conversations that may seem even slightly uncustomary; something as common as sex and sexuality, as natural as menstruation, as mainstream as drugs, as ordinary as contraceptives, as normal as homosexuality or even something as controversial as religion and politics. These matters are often transformed into groundbreaking, power packed punch lines by stand-up comedians.

When Neeti Palta, an Indian woman, spoke of the time she went out to buy condoms for her brother, she managed to get a loud round of laughs from an audience that would probably, in reality, stare down upon a woman at a pharmacy asking for a condom. Another very relevant situation that Nik Dodani puts forward through his stand-up piece is that of homosexuality. He quips about coming out to his father as gay and his father's rather enthusiastic response - "That's fantastic, Nik. But don't you mean lawyer?", therefore using humor to illustrate a genuine concern for acceptability of something as natural as homosexuality which may not be seen as the usual 'garden-variety' to the ignorant and parochial minds, and at the same time rendering an accurate image of the pressure put on young shoulders to do something that doesn't interest them in the least. Another rather whimsical, yet notable, remark made by the very famous comedian, Kenny Sebastian, really compels one to reflect upon the education system that kids are put through these days and how seemingly oblivious parents are to its effects on the child's mental wellbeing. In his words - "It's so depressing, this CBSE, that the only thing we look forward to is discussing our marks." His one sentence very nearly defines the era that we live in; where grades allegedly define the person.



Image Source: rollingstone.com

More often than not, giving in to conventional affairs, regardless of their effects on society in the long run, results in normalizing of issues that could possibly manifest into something exceedingly toxic. Therefore, the role of stand-up comedians such as the ones I mentioned before and others like Varun Grover and Kunal Kamra is rather significant in terms of dispersion of information to the masses. Irrespective of the differing views among the general population, what these comedians joke about is inevitably embedded in many minds. Their popularity and reach allow them to speak their thoughts and make differences on a large scale. Varun Grover spoke of the same - whether they are dissenters or not, and whether the masses agree with them or not, at some point when the audience engages itself with stand-up comedy for light hearted entertainment, it often goes away with much more than what was bargained for. Kunal Kamra also mentioned in an interview, “We have an ecosystem which hates us. We also have an ecosystem out there to protect and nurture us.” Hence, like every other public figure, their work, thoughts and ideas are always under scrutiny of skeptics, but nonetheless, there’s always a huge chunk in the population that encourages and fosters this craft. Regardless of whether there is concurrence of views between the comedian and the audience or not, stand-up comedy has, in fact, turned into a fairly popular platform to dissent.

चारों और

Sayna Mishra, Sociology (Hons.), 1st Year

हम अक्सर हमारे चारों और देखते हैं
और सोचते हैं कि आखिर चल क्या रहा है
कोई अपने में खुद को धूँड रहा है
कोई अकेला हैं तो कोई प्यार में
कोई जीना चाहता है तो कोई ज़िंदगी से गया है हार

सबके दिल में है एक चुभन
करदिया हैं इसलिए ज़माने को सफ़ेद और काले में अलग
पर कौन है जो तय करता है क्या सही और क्या ग़लत
और अगर करता भी हो तो दिया किसने है उसे यह हक़?

माना की तुम्हारा मत हमसे है थोड़ा भिन्न
पर इसलिए क्या लोगे हमारी जान हर दिन?
सवाल पूछे तो देश द्रोहि हम
विद्रोह करे तो उदंड हम
और ना करें तो आलसी हम
जिसका नहीं है कोई दम

अब जान के विषय पे चर्चा हो ही रही है
तो दो तीन लफ़्ज़ कह देते है हम आज।
तेरी जान है इस धूल के बराबर
जिसका कोई मोल नहीं इन नंगी आँखों में
तेरी जान है इस हवा जैसी
जिसका कोई खौफ़ नहीं इन बेदर्द दिलों में
परवा है तो बस की
जानो में है कितना अंतर!

हम नादान इसे बग़ैर समझ
हला बोल देते है एक चुटकी में
और तबाह कर देते है
कई साल की दोस्ती प्यार और मासूमियत

ये जहाँ हम ज़हनूम बनाने आए नहीं
तो इतनी कोसिस करते क्यूँ हो जनाब
क्या अपने स्वार्थ के लिए किसी कि
जिंदगी से खिलवाड़ करना सही है?
पर कौन बोले क्या सही क्या ग़लत
यहाँ अलग है सबके हालात

पर मैं यह नहीं कह सकती की
मैं दूध की धुली
मैं सही और सब ग़लत
क्योंकि मैं बस अपने चारों और बिना कुछ कहे
अक्सर ही तो बस देखती हूँ।

I Question, Therefore I Am.



Critiquing the Critique

Avantika Jhunjunwala, Sociology (Hons.), 3rd Year

While teaching dissent is central in today's world within several disciplines and is often accomplished by our esteemed teachers and professors remarkably, tolerating dissent in their own classrooms is a different ball game altogether. And surely, we've all met our fair share of professors who do love the idea of dissenting but will not accept it as a valid form of resistance when it is against them.

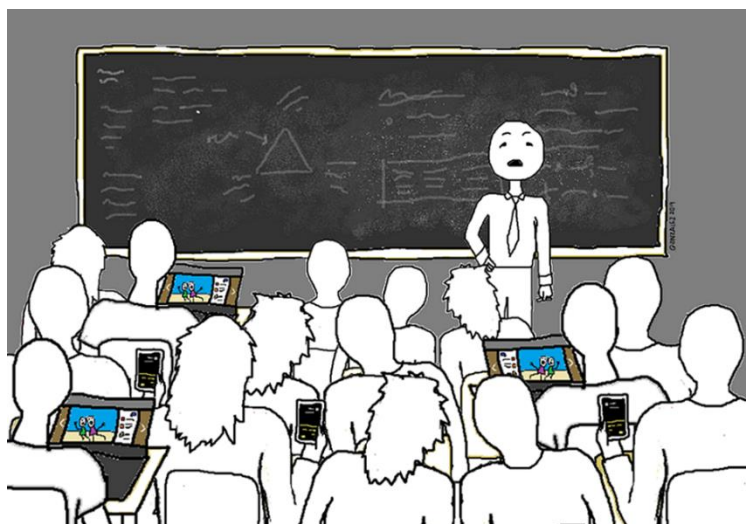


Image Source: cultofpedagogy.com

Students often react negatively to negative classroom and teacher experiences in various ways. One such reaction takes the form of dissent which, in its most simple form, is holding or expressing disagreement or contradictory opinions regarding various official norms, rules, and practices. Students further express this dissent in various ways- ranging from the smallest facial expression during classroom interactions which convey disagreement

with what the teacher is saying to commonly organized absences known as mass bunks. Often, various such practices by the students, like chatting during a lecture, making fun of the teacher, disregarding commands or tasks assigned, are looked down upon by teachers as disruptive and counter-productive practices done by rebellious students who are disinterested in learning and simply want to obstruct smooth classroom functioning. But the fact of the matter is that most teachers are not able to recognize that these student practices are the various ways students are trying to express dissent against the teachers and their ways. These practices are minuscule ways of exerting some power in the classroom by the students or simply of bringing about some sort of change in classroom interactions and processes or to student-teacher interactions. They may also be aiming towards a mere communication of disagreement.

When students have negative experiences in the classroom, they often feel distanced and detached from the teacher as well as the learning process. Through various ways of dissenting, students are actually trying to establish some sort of relationship with the teachers. When students' expectations and needs are overlooked by teachers, they tend to use several dissent strategies to bring the teacher's attention to their problems. It is essential to note here that the "good" students in any classroom also often use various dissent strategies. While it is a whole other discussion on who is a good student,- whether it is the one who contributes to class discussions, one who greets the teacher in corridors, one who adheres to deadlines and submits quality work, one who celebrates teachers' day, or the one who engages in quality discussion with the teacher outside the classroom- these subjective images in the minds of teachers regarding a "good" student is what blinds them to all the other students who want to build a relationship with the teacher in their own ways. Regardless, all of these students challenge and oppose the teachers by non-compliance to norms and rules. Students express our dissatisfaction with the teacher and often our

disagreements with their ideas by not adhering to these categorical classifications of the “good” student.



Image Source: indianlink.com.au

Students may also feel dissent but choose to not express it. Often, students end up repressing ideas of and desire to dissent in relation to certain circumstances and expected consequences. Here, the power dynamics between students and teachers come to play as teachers hold the power to make crucial decisions which inevitably impact students, their future prospects, and their classroom experiences. Often, students choose not to question teachers’ evaluation methods, their testing/marking procedures and rules, their teaching methods, and definitely also their views on certain things and on some specific students. Students often feel contradictions and disagreements

regarding these but are not able to communicate these feelings when they feel their dissent is unwelcome. When they do dissent against these, they are more often than not faced with negative repercussions from, and judgements in the minds of, the teachers. These judgements end up translating into long-drawn assumptions about the students’ character which automatically become a frustrating barrier to building positive teacher-student relationships.

This brings us to the idea of favoritism for certain students, and a constant disregard and dismissal against other groups of students. While students recognize a conscious effort on the part of teachers in college-level to not let their subjective views about students come to surface level, students unavoidably feel teachers’ biases and prejudices in the classroom. Teachers also often consciously or subconsciously favor students outright in classroom interactions, evaluations, and in focusing on and catering to only those students’ expectations and desires. Here, students dissent by further catering to the teachers’ positive and negative expectations. Students also end up creating a culture in the classroom where they avoid hanging out with the perceived good students or the “disruptive” ones to avoid being associated with the other group by the teacher. All of this creates further distance between the students and teachers and drives students into adopting forms of dissent which are more detached in nature.

Furthermore, a more sensitive issue is that of teachers claiming to adhere to higher standards of ethics and values but not being able to achieve those standards from the perspectives of the students. This becomes very difficult to maneuver around for the students since the teachers are in a position of authority in the classroom and continue to scrutinize the lives and daily behavior of their students, whereas, students are never able to find themselves in the position from which they can, in any way, communicate to the teacher their dissatisfaction or disagreement with the teacher’s ideas and practices. It is, understandably, inevitable that teachers often preach what they do not practice and while their gaze works powerfully over students, the fact that there are 40 pairs of eyes looking back at them and seeing them is often overlooked. Students in this way hold the power of gaze over teachers and it is through this gaze they dissent by critiquing the teacher’s methods and practices.

It is, however, not my intention to disregard the herculean task that is being a teacher. Most students understand and recognize the responsibilities and complications that come with this profession. To put yourself and all your ideas out there to be scrutinized by 50 young students ready to question every facet of what you say is truly intimidating. The task is further made difficult due to the institutional restrictions that come with teaching certain ideologies in a minority college and having to constantly negotiate and re-negotiate both with the students and the higher administrative offices. Furthermore, I, for one, truly believe that it is imperative for students to be the first ones in the relationship in putting an effort to understand teachers' expectations and be able to recognize when they are crossing a line and forfeiting the teacher's respect and their ability to understand the student's problems.

What I aim to bring out here is, thus, a need to reflect on teacher-student relationships and a conscious effort from both sides in open communication and in putting an effort in understanding one another's expectations and disagreements. It is, I believe, crucial for the ones in power within any relationship to be able to perceive the power dynamics involved and thus accompany the other party in question in building a balanced, interactive, and humble relationship. This article in itself is a way in which students are dissenting. And it will be decisive to observe how those in power will receive and react to this dissent.

Decolonizing Feminism Through Tagore

Progress Beyond Renunciation of The Traditional Sari and Family

Avita Singh, Sociology (Hons.), 3rd Year

When one thinks of feminism, the literary giants that come to mind are Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, and Elaine Showalter, since the growth of feminism is usually attributed to western influence. No doubt these women were some of the first to lend a voice to feminist needs and desires in the form of unparalleled writing. But these famous names and their popularity often function to conceal the multicultural and diasporic nature of feminism. There is a difference, and a massive one, between first world and third world feminism. The latter's importance lies in the fact that it arose in the 1960s and 70s primarily due to the former's negligence towards the voice, issues and social context of women in developing nations. The needs of women who live in different countries are dissimilar, and they are conditioned by several factors: familial, societal/racial, marital, economic, and cultural and individual consciousness (subjectivity). In such a diverse context, it is a grave mistake to even attempt drawing similarities between Indian and western feminism. Yes, the oppression is universal, but that universality by no means nullifies intersectionality. Hence, invoking western feminist critics to analyze the problems faced by Indian women in particular, is fallacious.

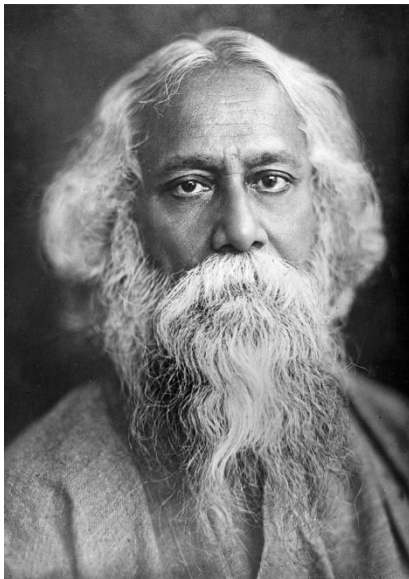


Image Source:Brittanica.com

When I speak to my fellow country-women and men about a 'modern feminist woman', their mind inevitably equates this phrase with a white, upper class woman wearing a dull colored, high end business attire, going out to work, without worrying about any household responsibilities. She is the epitome of liberty, freedom and equality. She is not entangled in the 'traditional' household and family environs that consist of scheming relatives-in-law or a dominating and overbearing husband or nagging children. This however, is the domain of the 'traditional Indian woman'. Engulfed by family duties, tortured by demonic relatives, burdened by illiteracy and inequality, she is synonymous with a 'downtrodden, backward woman'. Who would imagine a sari clad, vermilion wearing, and docile looking Indian woman as a representative of liberty, freedom and independent thought? Fortunately, the herculean task of challenging this very binary of modern versus traditional,

liberated versus downtrodden was beautifully fulfilled in the 20th century by the 'Bard of Bengal'. Also known by his pen name *Bhonita*, Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore created characters that were revolutionary and feminist in thought, challenging and questioning the role of a woman in domestic spaces and marriage, which were infested with social inequality. This article will pay tribute to two brilliant examples of progressive feminism in Tagore's stories, which portray what it meant to be a woman in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Tagore's stories were set in pre-partitioned Bengal during a politically volatile period in Kolkata. His literary work focused on the intricate and complex nature of human relationships. Unconventionally, Tagore portrayed his women as chance-takers who

defiantly resisted social and familial norms in a conservative Indian society. No written piece is capable of doing justice to and appreciating the intricacies of his work and likewise, mine does not even attempt this task. I have narrowed down to two examples because they represent the polar ends of the social spectrum i.e. one is a widow and the other a married woman but both choose to renounce the traditional social norms while remaining within the bounds of a society that swears by traditional ideas of morality. Their methods may differ but the courage to dissent remains the same and revolutionary for their time.

Tagore's 1903 Bengali novel *Chokher Bali* (*Grain of Sand/ Eyesore*) is considered to be one of the first modern Indian novels as he tackles issue of women's education, widow remarriage and social injustice in 19th and 20th century Bengal. The protagonist is Binodini – a beautiful, intelligent, piano playing, convent educated woman who cannot easily endure society's negligence. However, these wonderful traits come in sharp contrast to her being a widow, clad in a white sari with open hair and denied of any ornaments, ostentation or color that were deemed fit only for married women. She is earlier rejected by Mahendra, who later marries the younger and uneducated Asha. Binodini becomes envious of their marital bliss and her increasing mental and sexual frustrations lead her on a path of revenge and manipulation. The novel explores the extramarital affair between Binodini and Mahendra, her friendship with Asha, and her real feelings for Bihari, Mahendra's brother.

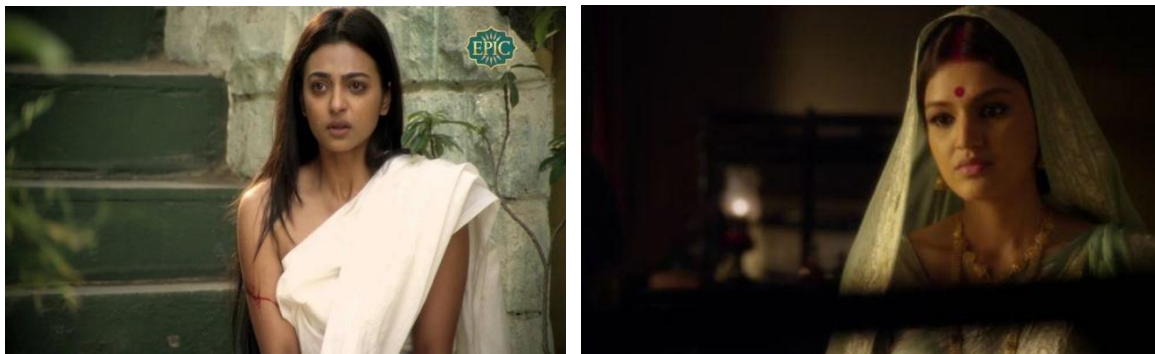


Image source: Tumblr.com

Binodini is presented in many avatars- a hopeless widow, a loving friend, an evil temptress, and a remorseful woman. Tagore gives readers an insight into her desires and longings- which were never supposed to exist for widows at the time and if at all they did, they had to be suppressed. Binodini cannot come to terms with her life as a widow, as she is still young, has wants and desires and does not consider herself inferior or in any way deserving of the morbidity and disability that widowhood brought with it. Tagore's depiction of Binodini is impressive as she subverts the expectation of society for widows to forego all worldly desires- especially when she feels wronged by destiny because despite being educated, intelligent and beautiful, she does not get a fulfilling life that Asha, an innocent, illiterate girl is enjoying. Tagore draws parallels between the educated and the uneducated through Asha and Binodini. The latter is deprived of any financial provision, but is left with education which allows her the liberty of free thinking. Asha is a poor orphaned girl, which in junction with her young age and illiteracy, subjects her to subordination at the hands of a woman she considers her friend; and her husband who she worships. Tagore's novel is radical and unconventional presenting a viewpoint that is ahead of the conservative times of 19th and 20th century India. Binodini does not accept her fate, and attempts to seek what she feels she deserves. She is smart and educated and strives to be more than just an inauspicious widow: *"if I had been uneducated, like other widows, I would have been able to easily endure the society's negligence."*

Streer Patra (The Wife's Letter) is an epistolary written by Tagore, expressing a woman's plight and resentment with the way her life unravels. The plot revolves around Mrinal- a smart, educated young woman married in an upper-class, upper-caste patriarchal *zamindar* household. Through her narrations of her life, we come across patriarchal customs that were so normalized in society that, when Mrinal resents being subjected to them, it is almost an act of dissent in itself. For instance, when she is being 'seen' for marriage, her parents are both sitting in anxiety waiting for the approval of the groom's uncle or when her husband asks her, "what will come out of your reading books? Will you get titles like Raichand and Premchand? Mrinal narrates, "Mother always used to worry about my intelligence; she thought that it was a curse for me... The person who has to follow restrictions, shouldn't want to follow her brains, then she'd have to face resistance."



image source: YouTube.com

Her banal life however is soon filled with happiness when she meets Bindu- a young girl in her teens and the widowed cousin of Mrinal's sister-in-law. Tortured by her extended paternal family, she had run away to seek shelter in her cousin's family. Troubles surface when Mrinal grows fond of Bindu and starts fighting for her with the rest of the family. However, despite Mrinal's frantic efforts, Bindu is hastily married off to a mentally-challenged man,

in order to avoid giving any dowry and get rid of the burden which unmarried girls were considered at the time. Terrified of her torturous husband and mother-in-law, Bindu tries to run away and come back to Mrinal but ultimately, they both succumb to family pressures and patriarchal norms which ends up in Bindu being sent back to her husband. Mrinal makes one last desperate attempt to rescue Bindu when she decides to leave with her for Puri, where they can lead a peaceful life. However, it goes in vain as she receives the news of Bindu committing suicide by self-immolation. Losing all faith in the institution of the family and marriage, something snaps within her as Mrinal decides to leave her husband and family forever to find solace in *tirtha* (pilgrimage).

Tagore exposes the hollowness of the 19th century Bengal Renaissance Movement. It was a cultural reformation by a group of intellectuals within the state to improve the status of women. Despite progressive steps like right to education for women, widow remarriage and ban on the *purdah* system, women were still seen as repositories of respectability and honor of the society, which only led to further policing of their behavior.

After 15 years of marriage, when Mrinal runs away to another town, vowing to never return again to her in-law's place, she represents a feminist transformation. She writes a letter, addressed to her husband, detailing society's wrongdoings against not just herself but against women as a whole, demanding to be recognized and treated as a human being. For Mrinal, the act of writing the letter is a feminist act at this time because it was considered improper for women to know how to write. She was only judged by and valued for her beauty, no one had ever appreciated her talent in writing or her intelligence. Writing the letter allows her to tell her own story, explicitly calling out all the ways in which women are oppressed, ultimately liberating herself to think and act freely.

The story is told in epistolary form where Mrinal writes a letter to her husband expressing the many ways in which she felt suffocated and subordinated. Unlike her elder sister-in-law who unquestionably accepts the patriarchal system, and the poor orphaned Bindu who

commits suicide, Mrinal's education does not allow her to do the same. After a chain of tragic events, Mrinal realizes that women have no freedom in an oppressive society where they are considered inferior: "*I am not just the youngest daughter in law of your house. I am me... It took me 15 years to understand the position of women in your house and your society... I want to breath freely now*".

Binodini and Mrinal exemplify the beauty of dissent - it cannot and should not be restricted to a certain race, nationality, gender or any other social stratum. The struggle to attain liberation and freedom has been a collective one. Representing these struggles as *women's suffrage* in the First World and *victimologies* in the Third World is inadequate and incorrect. There is a need to analyze the feminist movement in India in a historical perspective, free from the hangover of western concerns.

Nagarajan, in an article titled *Feminism: the Indian Context in The Hindu*, rightly remarks: Our epics and puranas, with their plurality of narrative strategies and multiplicity of interpretations, touch upon all possible aspects of human life helping us to raise — and comprehend — some of the basic questions that govern family and public life. Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* and Ilango Adigal's *Kannagi* are supreme instances of women who, though brought up and nurtured in a domestic set up of patriarchal exclusion and total surrender and subservience to authority, fight for their moral rights, putting the kings to shame... women in the bhakti movement defied all restrictions and achieved gender equality. They even challenged patriarchy and revolted against the caste divide. Meera, Avvaiyar and Karaikal Ammaiyar, for instance, protested against patriarchy and subverted the hegemonic structures by staying outside the domain of marriage.

The native ancestry of Indian feminism has to be traced over the past 200 years. No western writer, theory or idea can do justice to it because it has been shaped by our colonial past. It is indeed like a river- its source, its past, its ingredients and the future course it will take- are entirely determined by the force's endemic to the environment in which it flows.

The aim of my article is to assert that associating feminism with fiery emancipated women is naïve as it obscures the historical context of that very emancipation. When we see Mrinal resolving to leave her affinal home for good or Binodini using her intelligence to exact revenge, we must not forget that these decisions, this fire and the desire for emancipation comes from a long history of being exploited, suppressed, dominated and wronged. Real emancipation is not really leaving behind the household and family to go to the workplace, voting booth etc. It is when women begin to exercise their own independent thought, when they no more can be made to feel guilty of being educated and opinionated within these very institutions of marriage and family.

Femvertising: Dissent in capitalism?

Jhilam Gangopadhyay, Sociology (Hons.), 3rd Year

Most of us are comfortable living in a life of binaries: being a millennial is hard enough, it is simpler to judge the world based on our ideas of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, so that things are black and white. Of course, most often this is not the case, there’s always more to the story, but unfortunately very few of us have the time to get into the grey area. These days, social media operates in the same manner: there is the politically correct or ‘woke’ crowd, while the rest are ‘problematic’. The issue with this distinction is the authenticity and bigotry of the first group of people- nobody really knows if they truly believe in what they claim or are simply being hypocrites to establish a positive impression of themselves.

It is a similar problem that surrounds what has come to be called ‘femvertising’. At a time when the fourth wave of feminism is mobilizing the internet to advocate its concerns, several companies have begun to use feminist ideologies in their marketing and promotional strategies to sell their products. This has come to be called ‘femvertising’ and this term was given by SHE Media in 2014, a digital media house company that literally gives out awards to brands for showcasing feminist content in their advertisements. So, not only is feminism being commercialized, brands are being encouraged to compete with each other on who can be ‘more’ feminist.



image source: themilfordmessenger.com

Femvertising is seen to be a win-win for both the consumers as well as the company. Often the advertisements illicit a ‘feel good’ factor among the viewers, especially women, who have a much higher consumer-influencer power today and prefer brands with progressive imaging, as well as for these brands, whose sales inevitably rise.

I remember some years ago Fastrack, a brand with the youth as their target audience, launched a series of ads under the campaign *#SorryForWhat* with the tagline ‘opinions are overrated’. I saw a huge billboard on a mall with a woman posing and her underarm hair showing. For a second, what that ad portrayed seemed so easy. There was nothing repulsive about the model, as women with hair anywhere other than the head are often made out to be. In fact, I found her non-conformity empowering. For a young girl in high school, this was an extremely encouraging and liberating initiative.

Other brands in India too have created some meaningful content. For instance, Titan’s *#HerLifeHerChoice*, Urban Clap’s *From Equals to Equals*, Anouk’s *Bold is Beautiful* and Havell’s *#HawaBadlegi* campaign are examples of companies who have quite maturely addressed the issues of alternative sexuality, everyday sexism, pregnancy.

Interestingly, a number of brands which sell underwear are using similar strategies for promotion. For instance, Zivame has been increasingly using models of all shapes and sizes to showcase their products. However, the brands doing some real convention-breaking work are Tailor & Circus and WearEqual. Tailor & Circus, a clothing brand operating out of Bangalore, sells sustainable underwear. But what really appealed to me was their Instagram page, which was filled with colorful and playful images of women of all shapes

and sizes just having fun and being comfortable. Their tagline, ‘underwear that loves you’, reiterates this idea of comfort.



image source: bestmediainfo.com



image source: TailorandCircus.com

Wear Equal, an intimate women’s wear brand based out of Kolkata, focuses on intersectional feminism, and believe that women from all kinds of socio-economic backgrounds must have access to underwear, as the lack of it would severely affect their menstrual hygiene and reproductive health. They also have a similar Instagram page and Preeta Chaudhuri Ghosal, the founder says, “We not only choose models of all shapes and sizes, but also make sure that no editing is done on the features of the body such as stretch marks, underarm hair, skin marks, blemishes, pimples, facial hair, etc. We also pick models from different parts of the country to represent a diversity in general features such as skin tones and hair types.”

Generally, models who pose for underwear brands tend to be really thin with perfect skin, especially because the nature of clothing exposes a large part of one’s body and invites a lot of unwanted attention and scrutiny. Underwear are undoubtedly the most intimate piece of clothing we own, and for a long time the marketing strategies have focused on their sexual appeal rather than comfort.

“For us, our product category of underwear is most often (and wrongly) associated with lingerie. This is what struck us during the plan of our first shoot. All shoots of underwear/lingerie were done with a sexual connotation where women had to be styled in a revealing dress and made to wear sensuous expressions and pose arousingly in a bedroom setting. It seemed like women were not given the freedom to even wear a basic garment without including the man's interest in it! We wanted to undo this image of underwear - which is an even more important need for women in order to support their menstrual hygiene and reproductive health. We, therefore, chose to make our photographic content showcase women in their homes, doing daily work and home activities, wearing comfortable clothes and feeling at ease wearing our underwear”, concludes Preeta.

Femvertising can be traced back to 1968, when Virginia Slims encouraged women to smoke their cigarettes with the tagline ‘You’ve come a long way, baby’. More recent examples include brands Dove with their ‘Real Beauty’ campaign and Gillette’s famous ‘Shave off toxic masculinity’ video that went viral a couple of months ago. While some brands (much fewer than expected) certainly try to adhere by the ideologies they propagate, most of them do not.



image source: [CigarettesGuide-WordPress](#)

customers) who threatened to boycott the brand. For a short time, I was proud of them for taking a stand and risking alienating perhaps their major customer base, but soon I realized that it was a calculated move during the era of #metoo, because let's not forget that Gillette also has an entire range of razors for women as well. At a time when feminism is preaching body positivity and being comfortable in one's own skin, Gillette literally makes money out of the age-old patriarchal notion of women compelled to be hairless. Also, most of the female celebrities who feature in the advertisements seem to be shaving off non-existent hair, reinforcing the taboo of even showcasing hair on-screen.

It's wonderful how capitalism has the capacity to diffuse anything that is controversial or perceived to be a threat to its functioning by absorbing it within its folds, glorifying and permitting its expression in a manner that is friendly to the market. There are numerous issues with femvertising. For one, it commodifies feminism and reduces the seriousness of the issues to a tagline or a hashtag.

Secondly, while femvertising does help with the visibility of feminism and spreading awareness of gender equality, it does not bring about any structural change. The advertisements choose feeling good over any boring analysis of gender equality. For instance, how many female creative directors are actually involved in writing these advertisements? In 2018, only 11% of creative directors in advertising were women, therefore it is quite likely that most femvertising advertisements are directed by men. Are these brands taking active steps to close the gender gap in their office? How intersectional are these ads? Most brands forget to feature women of lower classes and castes since they are only marketing to the section of female population that can benefit them directly. Usually 'real women' portrayed are upper middle class educated women. Nike happens to be one of the few brands that released a spin off video, *The Other Women* on their *Da Da ding* campaign by portraying rural and poor working-class Indian women with the tagline 'Been Doing It. Barefoot.' Well, points to them for finally waking up to the fact that not everybody has access to their ridiculously overpriced shoes.

The question remains, should these brands be applauded for at least getting the conversation started or criticized for reducing the importance and seriousness of the feminist movement to a commodity? To be honest, it's doubtful how altruistic the intentions of these brands actually is because slowly, even the laws are turning against them. For instance, in India this month, the Ministry of health and family welfare has proposed the Drugs and Magic

For instance, let us take the examples of the above two brands. Dove's parent company is Unilever, which also owns the men's health company Axe, and we all know how degrading and objectifying Axe's deodorant commercials have been towards women. Moving on to Gillette, I was honestly impressed with their short film. While a lot of people appreciated their calling out of toxic masculinity, they faced backlash from a huge number of men (their primary

Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) (Amendment) Bill, 2020, which bans promotion of fairness creams and products promoting anti-ageing remedies, failing which could lead to five years of jail term.

For so long, the same companies which sold ‘sex’ are now selling their disgust with sexism, to make women feel that they are ‘understood and valued’. Many have called femvertising ‘surface activism’ or ‘slacktivism’, a low effort version of activism online such as changing one’s profile picture with a social justice theme. Obviously, the brands benefit much more from these initiatives than the consumers.



image source: feminisminindia.com

It is high time these brands begin to practice what they preach. For instance, KPMG came out with a video title ‘Glass Ceiling’ in 2015, with the tagline ‘Continuing our commitment to the next generation of women leaders’. Three years later, they faced a \$400 million class action lawsuit alleging pattern of discrimination, including denying promotions to women and penalizing them for taking maternity leave. Should we expect any better? If

brands honestly want to bring about some change, they must begin to employ more women, designate them in leadership positions and not shy away from promoting them or accommodating maternity leaves in a just manner.

Furthermore, most of these brands lack the most basic understanding of what feminism stands for and appear to be least interested in trying to understand as well. Let’s look at some Indian examples. Oriflame’s *Women’s Day* advertisement actually encourages and applauds women for adhering to their ‘housewife duties’, and this isn’t surprising coming from a brand which preaches conventional beauty ideals. Similarly, in Airtel’s *Boss* ad, where the wife plays the boss of the husband at work, she is actually portrayed as feeling guilty for basically being his superior and giving him assignments, which she compensates for by coming back home and cooking his favorite dishes to soothe his fragile male ego. Biba’s *Change the Conversation* might be the worst out of the lot, because it actually encourages the reversal of the practice of dowry in India, by making the groom’s family pay instead, to ‘take the loved daughter’ from her family. For the last time, feminism is about equality and not superiority of women over men. The same problem confronts Vogue India’s *My Choice*. Proposing female chauvinism or female domination is not the solution! And please, Vogue, with its cover pages full of photo-shopped skinny models, hardly comes off as a champion of feminist rights.

Obviously, the use of feminist ideals for marketing strategies is better than perpetuating gender stereotypes- but only if they get feminism right. But these feminist ideals are being borrowed for all the wrong reasons. Andi Zeisler, in her book *We Were Feminists Once* says, “celebrating the ads themselves simply celebrates advertiser’s skill at co-opting women’s movements and selling them back to us and then rewards us for buying in”. The issue is that the choice for women seems to be either no representation or misrepresentation in advertisements. Inauthentic support cheapens the idea of women’s equality and this is dangerous to the feminist movement, as it reduces female power into something mostly good for buying more commodities.



image source: ethicalmarketingnews.com

Some of my favorite femvertisements are Organic Valley's *Organic Balance*, *Like A Girl* by Always, *This Girl Can* by The National Lottery and Sport England. These ads are groundbreaking because they created authentic, well-researched content with a diverse and realistic representation of women, focusing on their everyday experiences. For instance, Libresse's *#BloodNormal*

campaign normalizes menstruation by showing red blood and not blue liquid in their advertisements. Also, these ads resist displaying unrealistic standards of beauty, shapes and sizes in women.

The only way these advertisements can truly bring about change is if what they portray is actually reflected in the core values of the brand, such that these act as guiding principles in business decisions and marketing.

Advertisements have a huge impact in influencing the masses and can be a brilliant tool to encourage people to make small changes for a more equal world. The least brands can do while employing femvertising is be accurate in their portrayal of feminism and follow what they preach. Femvertising isn't dissent in capitalism, it is only the oldest trick in the capitalistic book: manipulation through an emotional appeal. For me, unless brands have a feminist consciousness right from the beginning, it is difficult to believe their sudden commitment to a feminist ideology.

The Reflection of an Indecisive:

Questioning Mind during the Times of Dissent.

Kasvi Bhardwaj, Sociology (Hons.), 2nd Year

Politics in India resembles the colorful umbrella politics of Indian National Congress. Congress saw discourse between the Left, Moderate and Right when it came to the creation of India. What we see in the current scenario, resembles a similar discourse, but with regard to how one should live in India. Hereon, let's analyze dissent.

The young generation seems to think that the times they are living marks the most critical point in politics. This stands similar ways the elder generation talks about "their times" and how they had to stand against the government, or the establishment when they were young. So, what one might need to pick from this and say is that "Thank God youth lives on the principle of dissent!" In trying to deliberate how the youth has the power, energy and guts to stand in opposition to an establishment, which in our country's context is a dominant state or community. They have nothing to lose, unlike the previous generations who are now a part of the system and are the working class, who might lose everything. And the youth doesn't fall anywhere in this extreme spectrum (their way of discourse makes them a political entity), helping them to be a great check on the state structure of this country.

To address the questions and rationalizations that take place while I witness all this through social media, as it becomes a part of my lived experience.

Protest is the democratic voice of the suppressed, a step to perform dissent. (Don't equate dissent and protest). A Muslim woman is placed in such a socio-political situation that she cannot equitably access institutions. The option for her is to create a disruption in the regular lives of this democratic country to make herself visible. Slogans are the voice of the weak, with immense power. Here is when the first question comes up, what are the privileged opposition supposed to do?

To a great deal, the privileged, especially in the educational spaces, don't highlight their privilege at the right time, and there is a great romanticizing of the 'on the road' protests. They follow the crowd, which no doubt is extremely essential. But it becomes imperative to point out differences between the time of colonialism, the 70's and now.

During colonialism, the mass of the subcontinent had no power whatsoever to engage with the glorified institutions. The 1970s was a period of middle-class movement, fighting against the privileged class who were a part of the institution. Now, the same privileged class (specifically Hindu upper class) is altogether not wanting to be a part of the institution. But this class helps the particular privileged ally of the dissent, who still have the link to the institutions that those who are suppressed don't have.

Why are the privileged not trying to fight on paper, which creates a mark? Why at this point they want to disregard how their position helps them with the education which helps one decipher the institutions and question it more strongly from a somewhat an equal and opposite position? It becomes important to question the romanticized, a mere tokenistic fight.

What helps privileged get attracted to this? The answer might be the capitalism of art! Prateek Kuhad- an indie singer singing in Shaheen Bagh. (Again, if you love his songs, thank your privilege for the exposure to move beyond the mainstream songs that are made for the masses.) Art, what was once a legitimate political expression, now only works on the principle of capitalism, true for street theatres, now being staged, to t-shirts commodifying the term “Azaadi”. Capitalists are not alone to be blamed, but the society too. Safdar Hashmi was killed for his work when he used art for his political expression. Do you see what privilege does here? Your convenience of watching something in safe space with money, or just your presence eliminated danger, or should I say lowered the political value of it? Privilege can change things for others too. But not using your privilege diligently can ridicule the point of movements too. Social media seems to do the latter, and when you don’t post the stories, you’ll be hauled up for it by the privileged Leftists (true event!)

I guess Marx was right, the petit bourgeoisie are dangerous to the movement. Why this might seem as an attack on the section who is fighting for a legitimate government, you might ask? The logic is in the question itself. You dissent to keep things legitimate in democracy. Questioning ourselves is important to keep things legitimate.

Not all relate to extreme views and therefore choose not to align with the Right... But Left is acting all the same. From here the second question raised is, how to attract masses? Left is failing miserably here. The Right wing is open to the Muslims like Firoz Bhakht Ahmed (Chancellor of Maulana Azad National Urdu University) who wrote in an anti-establishment newspaper that **“My dear Shaheen Bagh: There is no reason for you to fear the CAA or, if it comes, the NRC.”**

Being Left is mostly a privilege too, demographics speak for this argument, because states like Kerala and West Bengal are extremely developed and are the areas where Left somewhat prevails. This can make the Left standpoint a very exhaustive checklist, and a single strike off means you might not be a good advocate of the ideology.

Moreover, the words the Left as opposition puts across in front of the society is important in such a critical time. “We protest because we are educated” is a statement layered over the superiority complex, this education is a privilege and not relatable to most. “Modi p**** khale” is a crass thing to say, but with the principle that it’s defiling when you deal with excretion, the very principle which keeps a certain section in society, the untouchables stay where they are.

There is a fear to speak against Right. But do not be mistaken, so is true for the Left. A friend, after the Ayodhya judgment said to me that she is in favor of the judgement (her reasoning seemed very legitimate to me too.) The Hindu community is caring about a significant belief, and let’s not talk about the history that surrounds it. But, a birth place cannot be shifted to somewhere else, like a mosque can be. This doesn’t mean that she means to say that mosques are dispensable. But, that it would be unfair if we build a temple in the place of Kaba and ask them to move away because now it’s done.) But she was scared to share this.

Now when one is dealing with a dominant community of Hindus, and from the likes of it, it’s not the leaders in power who are making them do this, not the leader alone is evil, but the people who brought them to power in great majority too not have any person in position

of power questioning their radical approach to exoneration. The Hindu community is living in contradictions. You have to deal with this group which is extremely xenophobic (won't let any religion enter the land but will cry when USA decides to do so against them), Islamophobic, and a terrorizing group with no human value but land value (they don't care about Kashmiri Muslims living on the Kashmiri land, they care about the land. They don't care about the racism against north easterners, they care about having the land under the Indian Union). They have killed people from every religion, and believe that they are Sanatan (Well do we need to elaborate much on Muslims? For Sikhs, there was 1984 riots. For Christians examples like Rani Maria are there. For Tibetans, they have racism. For the converting Buddhists, again caste based killings.)

So even when a member remotely becomes centrist, celebrate that. When your Instagram stories accuse someone to not criticize the government on social media actively, they will be disenfranchised, because to be on your side they have to say the exact same things as you, post the same stories like you, and question the government just like you? When we say that "Pakistan Zindabad" doesn't equate to "Hindustan Murdabad" in the same way, if they choose to be silent, at least on social media, doesn't mean that they are siding with the other side. It may mean that they are privileged but might be questioning in silence. It's critical.

What matters is if the principle of democracy survives, the element of questioning should be there. This is to say that even if you choose to say be a supporter of Obama, but there is a difference between being a blind supporter and a questioning the leader you still support.

This doesn't mean that those who are the opposing minority, as a whole need to take this burden of neutrality. But the privileged Hindu upper class ally shouldn't let the movement be compromised. They need to engage with neutrality as well as relevant radicalism. They have the power to mobilize. They should be more active in the institutions, because the intention is not to make them the messiahs of the movement, but to make someone accountable needs more tangible engagement. Deepika Padukone supporting a movement by turning up at JNU is not a success, because the main question even the opposition is asking is that what have you achieved? Work on your form of achievement like the educated Dalit Panthers did through their writings, while the other half protested. Indecisiveness comes to mind when no two sides seem to be inclusive enough, when the opposition in their process of questioning, loses its legitimacy.

Mixed Media Parallels

Smiley Nadar, Sociology (Hons.), 2nd Year



Image by Earle Jabes

With the print revolution of the 15th century, communication transformed. People's interaction with knowledge and information reconfigured their relationship with institutions and authority.

Media thereby evolved through time into a pivotal social force. It sought to bridge and bring the mass interest of certain specifics and functioned as a collective institution of the

social. However, its pyramidal process increasingly concentrated power.

Media through the years, therefore, came to be used as a tool of transforming social consciousness through techniques of knowledge manipulation and informational propaganda by the power elites of the ruling class.

The digital revolution of the 20th century, however, fundamentally altered media practices. It shifted realms from the collective to the individual with the advent of the internet and social media. Thus, the political and economic powerplay of collective media found another dimension in the social influence of individual media.

Such a structurally parallel dichotomy of collective and individual media, in simultaneous existence between the formal and informal segregation of institutional society, established a webbed and woven paradigm in sociological discourse.

Consequently, the rise in global right-wing forces in the last decade led to an increasingly concentrated politicization of collective news media. The individualized character of social media, thereby, rose in momentum as the dissenting voice of democracy against the controlled and manipulated news media of the collective, with its individual accessibility across the stratified spectrum of subaltern society.

Such an interaction between the two versions of media reinforced the institutional facade of a detached parallelity between the formal and informal media of society, when in truth, the interaction between the two, had potentially revolutionary repercussions.

Social media's critique of news media provided perception into public reality. Individual media materialized the ideas of collective media and therefore, debate and dissent between the parallels contributed to a certain sociological depth to perception.

The creative expression of content within social media was the essence of its popularity among the individuals. Knowledge and information have largely been communicated as

satires through memes, gifs, and posts. Such an expression, while harder to conceptualize and capture within codes of law, and sharing an audience wider than ever, has proved to be a social force to reckon with against structural forces of power and exploitation.

It is this influence of social media in individual public life that has thus helped to hold on to the voice of democracy. It proved to be a powerful force of destabilizing fascist regimes with its speed and efficiency to share and mobilize on global grounds by keeping in check the manipulated knowledge and informational propaganda put forth at large by the power elites of the ruling class through news media collectives and subsequently providing a strong critique with the facts and faces of truth and accuracy.

This speedy connectivity of the globalized world thereby puts governments at the ‘risk’ of transparency and public accountability, which consequently chips at the concentration of power in the hands of the governing by establishing lines of mass connectivity in maintaining democratic checks and balances.

The fascist right especially suffers the consequences of modern media as the collective news media, that historically subjugated under and for its power purpose, is now being crippled with the increasingly influential individualization of social media.

However, the formalized institutional structure of collective media accumulated through bureaucratic procedures of archives and reserves develops into memories made accessible through passages in time. The informal character of individual media, on the other hand, evade social structuring with its fluidity and rapidity of flow. Thus, an array of subaltern voices escape conceptualization in the historical media of society.

Regardless, governments continue to pursue and pressure in order to keep in check the knowledge and information circulating in media, by enacting laws such as Article 13 of the European Union, that under claims of copyright violations, attempts to condition and filter the social discourse by restricting the creation of memes, gifs, posts and similar other widely consumed content in social media. This law thereby structurally eats away at the intellectual resources available to the subalterns to creatively express their individual voice on social media platforms.

Thus, while governments have attempted to restrict individual liberty to free speech on one hand, governments have also attempted to structurally filter the content in circulation across social media platforms by picking and choosing the templates of information to formalize into their collective media memories by means of office. Social media too, therefore, is being exploited by having its memory systematically manipulated and/or saved and erased by the powerful under the formalized institution of media.

Therefore, modern fascist governments while still aiming to further strengthen their command of collective news media, are also subsequently attempting to seep into forces of social influence of individual media forums to try and alter the public voice of reason from within the subaltern discourse.

This relation between the collective news media and individual social media of modern societies is thereby a webbed interaction of mixed media that push and pull at forces of power and persistence, debate and dissent, but still, manage to hold on to the facade of an institutional parallelity of a formally and informally segregated society.

Alumni Speaks



"A society that presumes a norm of violence and celebrates aggression, whether in the subway, on the football field, or in the conduct of its business, cannot help making celebrities of the people who would destroy it."

Lewis H. Lapham

-Untitled

Rebecca Varghese, M.A. Sociology DSE 2020

A metro ride away,
A bus journey away,
Yet so far that I can
Go on with my life.
I hear the screams
At midnight,
In the depth of my sleep.
Yet not in the mornings
As I hear the busy streets.
Children playing in parks,
People going for walks,
While a baby a bit far
Is burnt in her sleep.
I feel hopeless and scarred
But, I can still sleep
For no one will torch me,
As I walk down the street.
My religion or identity
Isn't a concern to any.
But the day isn't far
When they will come for me.
So I wait and I wait,
I wait in despair,
For the devil's in saffron,
My blood-thirsty beasts.



JNU and its Protests: A Journey from Theory to Praxis

Srijana Sidharth, M.A. Sociology JNU 2020

This article was almost in its final form on the evening of 5th January 2020, written with a careful distance from emotion in order to avoid the skepticism that social scientists are viewed with when they assert their subjective experiences. However, a deep tragedy struck my university that evening which has now gone down in history as an episode that seeks to usher in the 'new normal' of the 'New India.' The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) was attacked by a masked mob on the evening of 5th January who entered hostels and terrorized students, teachers and workers of JNU.

There have been a plethora of articles noting the events in a composed fashion, most of them being comment pieces. However, while these carefully worded articles highlight many important factors regarding the uproar of dissent that India experiences today, the emotional distance in these writings is also capable of painting the picture of a distant land for those who are somehow still making their peace with the ideology that threatens to swallow India's democratic spirit today. They refuse to acknowledge the 'here' and 'now' of the state of affairs. I recently read an anthropological novel called 'Return to Laughter' where the author has chosen to call it a novel because she felt a mere anthropological account, when trying to meet all criteria of science, would compromise with nuances of everyday reality of the very real people she studied and consequently reduce them to mere data. My choice today is somewhat similar when I have let go of a position that would only identify me as a sociologist and I rather insist that you acknowledge the emotional journey I make today as a student between fear, uncertainty, reason, and hope.

JNU's resistance in the #FeesMustFall movement has been on since 28th October 2019. We haven't seen insides of classrooms since then or faces of examination sheets. The latest addition to what we have put on stake is the very presence of our names on the university rolls by boycotting registrations. The JNU community in these times has been resolute to extents that the university's famous history of politics had not seen before. This famous history of politics is also what unsettles the layman along with many other universities all too often. JNU does not shy away from dissenting what most willingly or passively accept as status-quo and as much as counter ideologues would like crediting this to us being the last bastion of the Left in India, the truth of JNU's dissenting spirit lies in its emphasis on praxis. Departing from the popular belief of newly enrolled JNUites magically turning to leftists, the essence of a student's new found voice lies with JNU's focus on praxis teaching them that being apolitical is not keeping your hands clean from the dirt that politics is considered in popular notion, but it is in fact betraying your training as a social scientist.

This is my second degree in Sociology and even though the most essential sociological texts were absorbed by me in three years of graduation, it is now that I find myself to be a better student. Not many additions are made in the list of texts that one must read to complete a master's degree. I still read Bourdieu and am fascinated by his arguments, except now I also see forms of capitals that extend beyond economic, playing out in my JNU classroom and so I can also conceptualize that forms of marginalization, too, are beyond economic. It is tough to remain apolitical when your university has an impeccable system of deprivation points that ensures a student community composed of individuals hailing from not only different parts of the country but also free in making visible their subjective caste, class, religious, regional, gender and ethnic differences. JNU does not dismiss difference callously under 'unity in diversity' but rather values difference because it is the pivotal reality of how all of one's experiences are shaped.

It is, therefore, that even today when JNU sees unbelievable amount of support pouring in from across the world, a JNU student is of course grateful but at the same time questions why a similar coverage was denied to almost identical violence unleashed on two minority institutions in the past. It is owing to the ethos of this university, that questioning does not leave us. When you are encouraged to engage in praxis and not just theoretical learning, unlearning constitutes a larger part of the tendencies that shape your future actions. This unlearning is absent in coursework of those institutions that today have put figures like Faiz Ahmed Faiz under the communal lens and seek to verify whether or not he was antagonistic of a certain religion. Now, these bodies, too, are raising questions but when they make the mistake of treating all occurrences as abstracted and culturally isolated, their conceit is highlighted which is never challenged in their theory ridden coursework. They would not want to acknowledge the years Faiz spent in Pakistani jails owing to his relationship with his religion being doubted or the friendship he enjoyed with the atheist country of Soviet Union.

Finally, returning to the long history of protests in JNU, let us also recognize the wider notion that insists 'JNU students protest for the sake of protesting.' Some add to this train of thought and say we protest owing to the abundance of time that students of a social science university are blessed with. Often compared with those paying hefty for their education at IITs and IIMs, a JNU student is accused of not knowing the value of education on account of our subsidized fees. Not only does such an attitude reiterate the belief in a rickety hierarchy of sciences but also, it presents a classic case of what Hannah Arendt had called the 'banality of evil.'

Obsessed with towering structures and figures denoting currency, we often forget that those are not synonymous with a nation. While the oppressor hides behind these structures, dissent focuses on preserving the social fabric which must be the essence of a nation. This social fabric is of course systematically attacked time and again but just because it bears dents of oppression-making the evil seem banal-it does not have to be the new normal for us. This new normal is what JNU fights to resist and it is precisely because we know the value of education which allows us to problematize this new normal. Which is also why we insist that education must remain an accessible necessity and not a luxury.

It is not difficult to see why JNU in particular and social sciences in general are attacked. If engaged with on terms of praxis, they would not let you conceive an oppressive hegemony. It is the same logic why minority institutions are attacked and support for them is found in either minced words or nothing. For those who imagine a dichotomy between studentship and being forefronts of dissent, I urge you to reconsider what you see as nationalism and how right is it to exclude a demand for social justice from your definition of it? It is difficult to shun caste-class loyalties of course but JNU makes it easier by making one share an intimate space of subsidized hostel accommodation, cheap dhaba meals with those whose everyday reality is what one reads indifferently as newspaper articles on marginalization. The learning of empathy, then, becomes foundational in one's time at JNU, making it a thriving environment for social sciences and a threat to those who wish the imagination of a nation was limited to concrete structures, cash inflow-outflow and a convenient hegemony.

Conversation Café



Teaching, Writing, And Dissent: A Conversation with Prof. Susan Visvanathan

The Editorial Board of *Meraki* had the opportunity to interview Prof. Susan Visvanathan, one of India's leading Sociologists and a renowned fiction writer, on 13th September 2019. She was invited by the Department of Sociology to deliver the Semester Inaugural lecture on the theme 'Methodological Questions in the Analysis of Religious Experience'. The subject of the interview was on the idea of 'dissent.' The compelling conversation ranged from political issues to public intellectuals, and universities, and most importantly, the impact of the generation gap on ideas and acts of dissent.

Prof. Susan Visvanathan joined the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in 1997, where she is now Professor of Sociology. She is well known for her writings on religious dialogue. Her first book *The Christians of Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakoba* (Oxford University Press, 1993) is a path-breaking work in the field of sociology of religion. Some of her other significant sociological works include *Friendship, Interiority and Mysticism: Essays in Dialogue* (2007); *The Children of Nature: The Life and Legacy of Ramana Maharshi* (2010); and *Reading Marx, Weber and Durkheim Today* (2012). Her works of fiction include *Something Barely Remembered* (2000), *The Visiting Moon* (2002), *Phosphorus and Stone* (2007), *The Seine at Noon* (2007), *Nelycinda and Other Stories* (2012) and *Adi Sankara and Other Stories* (2017). She was recently awarded the prestigious Research Excellence Fellowship from the Central European University (CEU), Budapest (2018-19) and the Distinguished Alumni Award from Delhi School of Economics (2018). She is active on her blog 'Writing Tomorrow' (<http://writingtomorrow.blogspot.com/?m=1>)

Avita Singh: As a public intellectual today, what does dissent mean to you? Who decides what constitutes dissent and what doesn't?

Prof. Susan Visvanathan: For me, the idea that I'm a dissenting intellectual would be problematic primarily because if one accepts the history of the Indian National Movement and the sanctity of the Constitution, then they are dissenting. So, if one is dissenting against a political party and their statements, surely that is a democratic right that I have. Dissent is really in terms of what is the framework and vocabulary of those who see themselves as legitimating institutions or being in power. Then the right one needs to be different from them in whatever ways one sees as appropriate- It is surely a right of citizenship itself. So, having been in positions of authority myself, I would say that it comes very easily to me. I don't have a problem because I know what the rules are, I follow those rules, and I apply those rules. So that obviously makes me personally unpopular because it could be seen as a space in which there is a generation gap as well as that authority and power are claimed by women equally when they have the status context in which they may do so.

AS: As evident by the recent case of Hani Babu, where he was arrested and his house searched because supposedly Marxist books were found, teaching and writing today is being considered dissent by the present government. How do you identify with this position?

SV: So, the vocabulary of the political parties is not acceptable to me. It's been legitimized by the consensus of the corporate and the upper-middle class, and in some sense the poor are also implicated within right-wing ideologies because within it is the *jagaran* and the *puri-halwa*. So, for the very, very poor people, the right-wing has offered them a sense that

they are party members. The question is not about the citizens' rights; it is about acclimatizing to a new work world and to a new space where the NRIs and corporates have fully provided legitimization. But I don't think that is a legal space where citizens of India are identifying their own sense of worth. So, between the legal and legitimizing, there is a huge abyss.

AS: Since you're proud of being a dissenting public intellectual, this brings me to the question about the roles that universities play in the idea of dissent. I think universities are very important centers, not just for teachers but also for students. In our everyday lives, as university students, what role do we play in dissent?

SV: I think the spontaneity of youth is your greatest asset. So, the fact that at your age, you are instinctive, you are tactile, you have a sense of your own worth, you believe in what you're doing. There is conformity in terms of JMC in particular, I would say, in terms of the order that is demanded of you but your thought is free. You are actually in a space where you may negotiate with your identity in relation to that instinctive freedom- which is really about biology, a stage in life and it is a lovely space where you actively believe that you are free individuals. But it is socialization; because you belong to a particular urban class which has access to education in a particular way. But I travel very often in local buses in Kerala and in Tamil Nadu and they are always packed with university students, in the trains also. And I see the same exuberance. So, I think that's the freedom that you have, it hasn't been taken away from you. But should you try to represent dissenting individuals, as the average and as role models, and then it would fall heavily on you. So, I am always very anxious to say that I am not the role model. If you're going to follow the path that I take or my peer groups take, then in some sense that is a personal choice and will always end in some personal difficulties because it is not the conventional space that people occupy. So, I am very clearly saying that dissent is an individual experience, it is a very individual form of valor, it is something that you want to do, find useful for you because that promotes your temperament. But don't imagine that's what everyone wants from it, it is not.

Avantika: In a space where the state's fear is prevalent, parents are not very encouraging of their children dissenting in university spaces or any other spaces for that matter. How do you suggest that we as students maneuver around this problem that we face often?

SV: So, honor your parents- which is the primary requirement. I think it is something that doesn't come instinctively because of the generation gap, but it is a learned exercise and technique. And I think that if they fear for your safety, if they fear for your security, then it is a wisdom that they have as parents because they like to cordon off their children in order to be sure that the children would be safe. So that is the first response. The second response is that you are where you are because you are what you are. So, if you find that you're not in the position to accept the objections of teachers and parents and you have a voice which is different and you recognize it, then try to persuade them. This is how they feel and this is how you feel. I think once you have those boundaries clearly demarcated, the dialogue is actually being set forward, and dissent would emerge but with the democratic freedom on both sides. So, it is a fearful space for them as well, but once you domesticate it in terms of just the conversations that are possible between parents and children, then it is a possibility. But I am not saying that it will never happen because children do what they do and their parents pursue them and they try to protect them. They do it all their lives.

Parents do have a dialogic space with their children in this decade. But in the 70s, the intensity of closeness to the mother allowed conversation to be possible but distance with a father was a given. You were not actually supposed to engage in a conversation with him, so there was naturally an avoidance relationship.

But for this generation, socialization is such that they feel closer to their fathers than their mothers, if they are willing to admit it. So already a change is happening. This closeness to the father is associated with the Electra complex, in the same way that men may conform to the Oedipus complex. I think it is common socialization. And it is quite antithetical to the way that we grew up in terms of the collaborative space that we had with our mothers.

AS: It is evident that dissent will always evolve from identity politics as we can see from the example of the Ravidas temple which was recently demolished, leading to massive protests by Dalits or even the abrogation of Article 370. So how do you, as a sociologist, view these two - dissent and identity- in relation to each other?

SV: If once one has been marked as 'outside the system' then one has no rights, one has no possibility of survival. That is very clear. As I said, the RSS experienced it for 70 years- they were underground, the Communists have experienced it very often. So let's not just say that it is what the average citizen or the Kashmiri or the North Eastern really experiences, whoever occupies the oligarchic formation of power in terms of delegation and representation, these are the people who control wherever they are. So, if we look at how Advani and Sheila Dikshit were handled with love in photographic imagery, we know that there was some transaction that took place, right? So, it is evident to us through the photographs that we see that the so-called opposition between one party and another is only evident for electoral purposes, but otherwise people are supporting each other. That is why Congress is always described as being similar to BJP because Hinduisation is also the grammar within which they work. So, I think Kashmir is experiencing what it does because there is the conventional statement that Kashmiris are Muslims and therefore, they are suspected, because Muslim has now become another word for terrorist, so vocabularies are being clubbed together. And North India is able to percolate it to South India so we've had hate speeches everywhere, even in Bangalore, for instance. So, this has been going on for the last 20 years. It is nothing new which has come to us. So, within that space itself, the recognition that the state will recognize who belongs and who does not actually take away what was the cultural ethos, which was that of co-existence, no questions asked.

So, I think we need to negotiate with what these borders and these identities mean in terms of new languages of belonging to camps. Being part of displacement as a given grammar, and we have to be able to analyze what it means in terms of the everyday politics of existence and identity, there's no solution to it.

So, India always had multicultural, diverse vocabulary because people were always crossing over and representing it as their home so nobody thought of time as significance. What they accepted was assimilation and community. So being Indian was not about physical appearance, it was about a space of coexistence and non-violence. I think these were the two basic idioms within which the Indians have lived. And I believe now is when the real question starts because Gujarat's vocabulary cannot be the vocabulary for all of India. So, Gujarat's vocabulary is very clear about development and about modernization and about sanitation, about transforming public places, which brought about confusion. As sociologists we need classifications in order to bring order to reality.

Problem of heritage is always our problem but we have to go beyond that and learn from that small exercise that fear of this fleeting reality cannot be the basis of our discipline.

AS: The freedom to express also emerged through some protests. Even if we look at sociology and its evolution as a discipline, gender studies as an important category was only considered after a long time. So, these categories which, either be gender studies or minority studies, they too evolve from some sort of protest which is again related to some people identifying more with their identity. With the evolution of various branches in sociology, what trends have you noticed in academia, in terms of a change of expression of dissent over the years?

SV: I personally did not need to dissent because of all the freedom that had been given to me by my father. The very basis of being a free intellectual, is already in place. I never really had to struggle for anything. If I say that I had to struggle for at all, it was that I would use the library, but I would have to run out to pick up the kids from the bus stop on time. That is also a struggle.

Working modalities of the right to be part of an institution is understood in terms of the institution also giving us these privileges. Now they're taking it all away from us. When women in academia are expected to be at the university from 9 to 5, that space to be able to nurture children is completely disrupted. So, your challenges and struggles will be very different.

Our struggles arose from the fact that we were socialized into patterns of freedom and intellectual work from a very early age, because that was the environment in which the nation state saw itself. So, I would say that it was when like a fisherman's wife wanted to be like god, she kept wanting more and more. My intellectual abilities were such that my family recognized it, my mother in law as well. They recognized that I was doing something which needed protection. In this sense, I was lucky. Not all women have it. I just wanted to go higher and it was not economic mobility I was looking for, rather a space where I could teach as I thought, which I have been doing now at JNU for the past 25 years.

So, you're right, for 13 years in Hindu college, I was restricted to my syllabus but students went with me in terms of the idea that the real world was very interesting and they didn't question me whether it belonged to the confines of the syllabus or not. If you want to study sociology, then you have to see theory and application in everyday reality. And only when you apply theory to everyday reality do you generate new concepts in modern sociology. That was fortune. College did not impose on me in any way. I was left free. So, my students are now in their forties and in various places. I think that my part was essentially fortunate because I had a goal and I wanted to meet that goal. I'm still in pursuit of that goal. Nothing stops me.

I can't say it as a general statement. Each one of you have to understand your challenges and have a definition of space from where you meet those challenges. But I'm saying that having a livelihood is important, having a family is important. How do you do it altogether at the same time? And the new generation is saying that they don't want to go to work. We have evidence of this. They much prefer to stay at home and let their husbands bring their money, they don't want to be in a situation where they have to look after everyone equally because with the demographic impetus as it is, the one child family, the girl child is responsible for her in-laws as well as for her parents. So, I think all your work roles are going to change in terms of how society sees your roles as being formed by the political processes which are in place. And how you negotiate with this will be your domain. For us,

the support systems were already there and we were encouraged. And we were in some sense seen as having the opportunities that the previous generations did not have.

AS: You said that nothing stopped you, but I believe that you didn't let anything stop you. At every point in life, you faced questions and problems that all of us will encounter eventually. How we deal with them will then decide the rest of our life. How do you look back at those struggles now?

SV: One gets a bad name for it, when one doesn't do all that leading to professional visibility, which I didn't do, till my children were three and four years old. Then I actually embarked on my professional career which was not limited to earning a salary. Till then I was seen as someone who never wrote, who was at home, never came to conferences. I just didn't see how I could go to any of these events because I had obligations at home. So, the nuclear family actually limits itself to mother and child. Mother and child become the basic unit of the family. You become responsible for the life that you have generated. Legally you're responsible. So, I think we are very clear, that yes, men do have occupational drives, they do what they do, they have utmost respect for women but they do not stop in terms of how they see their career trajectories. We're expected to take care of everything. And there should not be a scandal, there should not be a sense of anxiety for anyone. So, I'm saying that if I succeeded, I've succeeded only through consent.

It did not diminish me as a person or as an intellectual, but the physical space is very difficult and I see my daughter going through the same now. I know that it's something that we as women do - the prioritization of our children that we see as something significant to us. Prioritization of children is made possible only if the working conditions allow us. If the working condition does not allow us to prioritize children how can we possibly proceed?

It is a class situation and not the same for everyone. JNU is also very protective towards me. I mean, I had a stroke exactly one year after I shifted to campus to pursue my career, I shifted in 1999 to a warden's position, very well looked after. It was just wonderful. My students were there, the support staff was there in the hostel. They were so great and I never had a problem. But the fact is that exactly one year after I shifted out from my home, I just completely, you know, dismembered. So, I had to relearn everything. I couldn't speak for six months, what I spoke was not recognizable. I had an excellent physician, an excellent homeopath, and a yoga teacher. I was just lucky. So, I think that the idea that women keep their jobs with difficulty, for its so hard to get a job, but to keep a job is harder.

21st century women are saying that they don't want to go to work, or they're saying they will not get married. What I am saying is that your fight for institutional recognition or the right to bear children to nurture them or the right not to marry, not to bear children will continue. These are rights which you said have been fought for over 40 years. This is not a battle for a week or a day.

When it comes to syllabus, they didn't want to engage with feminism because they saw feminism as volatile, creating problems. But Gender studies as a discipline was accepted, institutionally.

AS: Your article, 'Through a Glass Darkly' (*The Wire*, 2018), was a detailed account of the aftermath of JNU protest march that happened, right from the atrocities of the police, to the insensitivity towards the students. You wrote the article with immense emotion.

Times have changed since you started teaching. My question is what did you learn from this experience?

SV: I shrugged it off! One must have faith. One must believe in institutions. One must believe in the Constitution and in the rights we have. One shouldn't give them away. So, something happened. I was horrified it happened, but I just shrugged it off. I don't think that's how Indians are. I don't think that's how they see the world. If there is pathology, we recognize it. So, there's one occasion when I had gone out to pick up some homeopathic medicine, I was buying some vegetables from a local vendor when the police came and started taking fruits and vegetables from everybody. I told the policeman they can't do this. So, then the vendor said, "*nahi nahi, ye aate hai, le jaate hai*". But then I got a phone call every day, I'm talking about 10 years ago, every day from that policeman. And he just phoned and then I would just put down the phone because there was nothing to say. But that's how they are. That's how they've been institutionalized and motivated. Either they will be on this side of the criminal system or on that side. Later I went to a book fair and he was guarding a booth there and we laughed at each other. He had tried to terrorize a man and it had become a joke and yes, the matter ended. I can't say that we can do away with the police and the army and the legal institutions. They exist.

The person who works in an institution and the manner in which he or she works is equally of significance to us. So, the individual within the structure, how we look at the relationship between individuals-that's what Durkheim's sociology said. How do we look at the ways in which his grammar of shared vocabulary comes into being?

I don't expect that writing sociology brings honors. I think it brings a sense of an appeasement of curiosity. So, you're curious about something and therefore you have a question and you try to answer that question. And it is an establishing position. It's just that the political party has changed so we're getting beaten right and left. We don't expect a political party now to have anything to do with our lives really, but when it comes to pension, or the retirees, forty and fifty of them who are targeted and they want us all to leave. So, the professorial positions can be made available to their henchmen. It's only a matter of time.

I think we as sociologists should know what is happening. We should understand it, we should explain it. But if it is a question of hegemony or of how ideology causes people to take a particular position and work with that position and only know that position-as sociologists, we should be able to document it.

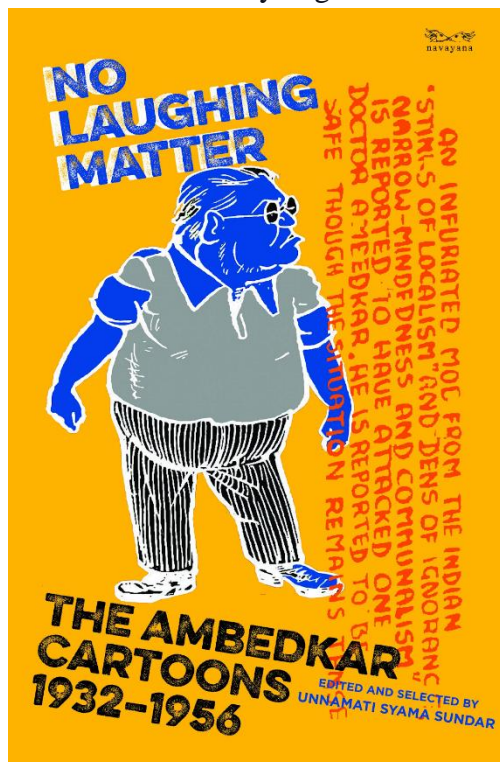
AS: Thank You Prof. Susan Visvanathan for talking to us on various aspects of 'dissent.' We think that talking is also an act of dissent.

Cartoons and Dissent: A Conversation with Unnamati Syama Sundar

The Editorial Board of Meraki had the privilege of interacting with scholar and cartoonist Unnamati Syama Sundar, over the idea of ‘dissent’ conveyed through his book *‘No Laughing Matter: The Ambedkar Cartoons 1932-1956’* (Navayana, 2019), wherein he decodes the casteism and sexism which plague the cartoons made on Ambedkar by numerous savarna cartoonists. This book is a much-needed intervention into the politics of the power of laughter. In the introduction, Sundar mentions that such compilations have been made on Gandhi’s and Nehru’s cartoons but unsurprisingly, Ambedkar has conveniently been ignored. Sundar methodologically maps out the major events in Ambedkar’s life through their representation in the cartoons which undermine all his achievements and humiliate him. What sets the book apart are the subsections called ‘Scratching the Surface’ which accompany each cartoon; these are sections full of dry sarcasm and witty comments by Sundar, highlighting the hypocrisy and castiest nature of the cartoonists. Instead of delving deep into explanations, Sundar leaves the reader with just one statement on each of the cartoons which make the reader sit and ponder. This is just one of the many things which make the book stand apart.

Unnamati Syama Sundar is currently finishing his PhD from the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University on the art featured in *Chandamama*, the popular Telugu children’s magazine founded in 1947. Syama Sundar writes regularly for roundtableindia.co.in.

Anisha: Was analyzing cartoons on Ambedkar, as a medium of power play and stratification, an act of dissent for you? Considering the fact that you mentioned that similar books have been written on Gandhi, was choosing to do this kind of a book on Ambedkar an act of dissent?



Unnamati Syama Sundar: Yes, definitely. It’s an act of dissent because Ambedkar’s portrayal in cartoons does have certain biases attached to it. There is one incident that stands out for me- Lady Irwin College in Delhi once invited Shankar, the cartoonist, to their convocation ceremony. While he was distributing prizes, he observed the students wearing very thick lipstick. So the very next day, there was a cartoon in Hindustan Times with the caption, “Lipstick service station opened at Connaught Place,” where these Lady Irwin College students were actually applying lipstick. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, a women’s activist of that time, found the cartoon shockingly misogynistic and problematic. She went to Gandhi and

complained about Shankar, demanding an apology from the latter. But Gandhi found nothing wrong in the cartoon. However, as researchers and scholars, it is we who have to engage with those cartoons. I see that there was definitely dissent from the students of Lady Irwin College and women activists at that time because it was clear that the depiction was an oppressive one...

So, when we look at all these cartoons, on Ambedkar or Gandhi and do a comparative study with the cartoons on Nehru, whom do we find being favored? Why is Ambedkar seen as dissenting from the cartoonist's point of view? Since Ambedkar is always critical of Gandhi's and Congress' policies, cartoonists see it as dissent because their ideologies are completely opposite to those of Ambedkar. But when the NCERT included a particularly humiliating cartoon, like the one on the delay of the Draft Constitution issue, the snail cartoon, it cannot be considered an act of dissent. There are several cartoons on Ambedkar, particularly when it comes to the Draft Constitution, but they randomly selected that cartoon and interpreted that Ambedkar is responsible for the delay of the Constitution.

Avantika: Do you think that the cartoons included in the NCERT school books tend to deliberately ignore this unfair depiction of Dalit in Savarna art? and since the syllabus also refuses to address this issue, how do you think that affects the political understanding of students who have just started shaping their opinions?

USS: Well, the NCERT curriculum of 2005, it's a very good idea to include some visuals as part of the textbook so that students can understand easily. Visuals do play a major role. But the visuals can sometimes be deceptive. There are cartoons which aren't very well researched and have been just randomly selected, which itself is a bit problematic. So in that way, I feel that some research should be done, before inserting cartoons in textbooks. Otherwise, events like the Ambedkar cartoon controversy can happen- that could be the result.

Anisha: The basic line of argument of the book is that laughter is influenced by powerplay. So, it can be cruel at times, and at the cost of minorities. We are in an age where most people express themselves through these mediums and there is content which evokes laughter but is actually a means to humiliate those who supposedly diverge from majoritarian sentiments?

USS: I think the form has changed but the dissent has not changed I guess, because it just went from cartoons to digital kind of trolling. Earlier drawing cartoons was also a kind of trolling, but from what I've seen in social media, trolling has become more of a fun thing. But definitely, I would say that this is a good sign, because it could reach people very quickly. Now slowly the interest has changed from cartoons to social media memes. Memes are getting more popular. But inherently, I feel they also have a point to say. Especially the memes they are making on the government, the central government now. I am very much sure that they too have an impact on this, just like the way the cartoons had.

Anisha: What is the purpose of a cartoon?

USS: Cartoons, when taken together as a narrative will take a different story than a solitary cartoon will. For example, if we look at the nature of world war II cartoons, it will actually make fun of the very nature of the freedom struggle. These cartoons generally rate the different contradictions in different groups. Suppose, when India was fighting for freedom, at the same time, Indian corporates, Indian mills, they paid a high amount of taxes to the British government; so, these cartoons definitely have an alternative story to tell you about what exactly was happening on the ground. Also, when the freedom struggle was going on during the war period, princely states were giving support to the British government. What I mean to say is that side by side these contradictory things were happening- like one side the freedom struggle was going on. On the other hand, these corporates and princely states

and the other big business people were giving support to the British government for war efforts. All these go side by side. This trajectory is being depicted through cartoons.

Avantika: While reading your book, we also felt like there was a moral responsibility that needs to be handled very carefully because cartoonists have certain perspectives and biases within themselves. How do you think such biased perspectives influence opinions, especially today when political parties have taken over certain media and are thus constantly influencing mass opinion in their desired ways?

USS: I'm just trying to focus on that part where personal issues can influence a cartoonist's personal ideologies and personal interests. Majority of the cartoonists of those times were usually Gandhians. As I mentioned in the book also, these cartoons are by nature Gandhian cartoons. Like they depict Gandhi as a kind of demigod in their culture, like a saintly figure. When it comes to Ambedkar, they very negatively show him like a dwarf, short, pygmy or devil kind of thing. Certain interests by nature supported Congress, which is why they used to depict Ambedkar in certain ways. Also, the other point we discussed, cartoonists by nature were misogynists at that time. Women's movements were parallelly happening at that time. But cartoonists used to make fun of these things very badly. Say Kamla Devi Chattopadhyay or Shahnawaz Begum, who were women activists of that time. Whenever there used to be a meeting or program for women's movements, the very next day you could see a misogynist cartoon in *Hindustan Times*. They casually made fun of these women's movements. Even when Nehru would make statements on the women's movements, cartoonists would make fun of him. They had these stereotypes because of which they made fun of the opposing sections. Say, when Ambedkar demands something for the scheduled castes, that again, the very next day, was made fun of. So, these cartoonists were basically casteists and misogynists. So, what kind of cartoons can you even expect from them?

Anisha: As you said, cartoonists have their own biases. But when such biases are so widespread in the media, how can the audience maneuver around this top-down or bottom-up lens that the media uses to depict politics?

USS: I will tell you one thing, the kind of people these cartoons are catching are from particular sections. Suppose, when Gandhi started a magazine called *Harijan* it was in English medium. You can imagine who the audience of *Harijan* were. How many of those would actually read that magazine? Although he named it *Harijan*, he used to talk about cows and ghee and the importance of ghee in the *Harijan* magazine. So, as we mentioned earlier, these cartoonists depicting all these kinds of cartoons, who are they trying to catch? Say, Shankar's cartoons in the *Hindustan Times* in those days. One interesting thing is that they never lampooned or made fun of the Viceroy. That itself is a power play. Why were they not making fun of the Viceroy? They were the ones who are responsible, they were the ones who these guys fight against for freedom. So why can't you draw Viceroy like you are depicting Ambedkar, and how as a misogynist you're depicting women? That itself is a power play. If you depict a viceroy as a dog or anything, that will give you power over them. So, to whom they're catching. I heard that the Viceroy used to like Cartoonist Shankar's cartoons very much and asked for their original copies, because he depicted the viceroy as Kali, who is seen as one of the most powerful deities in the Indian context.

Avantika: So, you do think that political cartoons can be used as a medium of dissent by the downtrodden. In that case, what do you think that an ideal cartoon made by the Dalit cartoonist will look like? How will this then change the power of humor?

USS: That's a very difficult question to answer. Well, once somebody raised a point, 'In all the major cartoons, in the anti-caste cartoons also they say, a brahmin is depicted as a pot-bellied kind of thing'. But then again that itself is becoming a kind of casteist stereotype, no? So, to counter these cartoons, we will again be falling into the trap of becoming casteist. So, to answer this question, as there could be some cartoons to counter these cartoons in this line is not a healthy thing, not a correct thing, but definitely, there must be a limit to what we are depicting, what we are drawing, you know? Somebody once made a point also that if you want to depict somebody negatively, you depict him like a dog or some animal. Meaning animals too have a role, as if animals are bad. But as you say, what is an ideal cartoon? An ideal cartoon can never happen. Are we not in an age of dialogue? So, I don't think any ideal cartoon can happen, only they can create a dialogue. Artists should be independent to draw.

Avantika: As young students and budding artists, we also would like to hear your opinion on when we are dealing with oppressed communities or when we are commenting on them, where do you think that we can draw the line between humor and humiliation because the title of your book itself suggests that some things are 'no laughing matter'. So, these cartoons made by savarna cartoonists are not funny and the laughter here is used as a tool of power to repress a Dalit leader, so it is difficult for us to understand how we draw that line?

USS: First of all, the point is, not all cartoons are bad, even in the book. Some are good cartoons also, say there is this cartoon on Ambedkar where he forms the labor party and his party's manifesto is very much close to the Communist and Socialist party. There were some good cartoons even when the Hindu Code Bill was going on. Here Ambedkar is holding a banner called Equal Rights for Women. So, what I mean to say is that not all cartoons are completely bad, some good cartoons are also there especially on the constitution, you know? So, depending on the context in which they are diverting the issue is what's problematic, say when the Draft Constitution is submitted to the Constitutional Assembly, the very next day, the newspapers highlight it. The headline is like 'more praise than criticism' but when you see the cartoon, Ambedkar is being depicted as a cook for the Constituent Assembly and the Assembly is complaining 'it is chilly, it's very salty, too old' and all. So, if you see, the cartoon itself is misleading but if you see the entire newspaper, it tells you a different thing. I mean to say that when you look at a cartoon, you should look into the background as well in which they are. How they're misleading through cartoons, how they're subverting the issue and understand the context behind it.

Anisha: Thank you so much for talking to us on your extremely important work. We have learned much from your book and from this conversation.

Parting Words from the Editors...

The process of creation and production of this feature has taught each of our editorial board members some important skills and values that they would like to share-

Akshita Taneja: While the learnings cannot be fit into just a few sentences, the two most important things I take away from the extensive process are – firstly, the value of incorporating and making room for diverse viewpoints and secondly, the trends of expression of dissent may change over time but one's expression is valid as well as vital.

Ananya Kaushal: Creating a magazine requires a lot of time and effort. It gave us the opportunity to interact with scholars who are well acquainted with the idea of dissent, and that allowed us to expand our own horizon of understanding. Any and all views are important and deserve to have a platform for expression.

Anisha Maini: Perhaps the most important thing I learnt during the process of working on Meraki is that dissent is very personal. What dissent means to me and how I decide to show it may be very different from what it means to someone else. Working on the magazine taught me to accept and appreciate this difference.

Avantika Jhunjhunwala: Creating and producing this feature of Meraki has truly been an exhilarating experience. The theme, specifically, was central in getting us all involved as dissent is something each of us has within us. Working on this theme has thus been a cathartic experience in letting us bring out our personal ideas on what it is to dissent.

Avita Singh: We had the opportunity to interact with some of the most eminent intellectuals, who have an independent and sharp mind, that comprehends much beyond the surface. Talking to them about pertinent issues that concern us as young adults, has been an extremely enriching experience. I also learned to appreciate the immense 'behind the scenes work' that goes into interviews- good topic, question formation, question order, multiple revisions, tactful interrogation, transcription and editing to mention just a few!

Gayatri Sarin: Being a part of the process of producing a magazine from scratch is invigorating. From interaction with eminent people from the discipline to brainstorming with our team, we found great insight in each space. The beauty of the process lies in our differences. Not only do we each have something to say, we have our own ways to convey it. While this may seem irksome at time, the output is something we'll all cherish.

Jhilam Gangopadhyay: As students of Sociology, we are exposed to ideas and means of challenging hegemonic notions, but it wasn't till I started working on this year's Meraki that I realized what a powerful force dissent is. As I read through the articles contributed to the magazine, I learnt how dissent can manifest itself in the most unexpected and beautiful ways in our everyday life.

Kaavya Jacob: Working with various members on the editorial board, each with their own viewpoints, was a challenging task. However, finding our synchrony and coming closer to completion was always gratifying. Moreover, getting to read some truly scholarly work with its critical pre-eminence was undoubtedly enriching as well.

Smiley Nadar: Creative expression in academia is a realm of chaos captured. It was both fun as well as frustrating to navigate, as a team, through all the content and controversy that came with this creative dimension of sociological work without compromising on artistic thought and ability.

