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Resistance and Beyond

June, 2021

EDITORIAL NOTE

CHINMAYEE BABBAL AND ANANTA JAIN
EDITORS-IN-CHIEF, KÖN

Art and Literature are powerful tools of expression. History is a testament of the agency Art and Literature hold. These mediums of representation have shaped and reshaped narratives, influenced movements and served as important tools of dissent and resistance. Speaking truth to power remains a crucial role of the artist in the face of political and media rhetoric designed to obscure and manipulate. Through this theme we aim to explore the various ways in which Art and Literature become important mediums of showcasing resistance as they expose grim truths, raise consciousness and build united fronts as well as solidarities.

Through this edition of Kon we attempt to explore the power art and literature hold as tools of social, political and cultural resistance. With the imposition of a national lockdown, people all over the country have been finding it difficult to come out on the streets to protest, and to show their resistance against acts and bills that do more harm than good. All over the world, the pandemic is being used as an excuse to quash the anger of the people. It is in the light of this fact that people are finding their own ways to display their rage, through mediums like art, poetry. Varying art forms have emerged as strong statements of dissent as a result of several protests. During the time of CAA-NRC protests in Delhi, several local poets and artists used sit-in and protest sites to display and share their rage in the form of poetry, songs, posters, paintings and much

more. Within and outside of protest spaces, the power of art and literature beams through the oppressive forces of a Brahmanical, ableist, and heteronormative system.

We would like to thank Rahee Punyashloka (Artedkar) for taking out time to answer some of our questions regarding his work and giving some insight into his creative world. Furthermore, we would like to thank our Staff Advisor, Dr. Pia David for her support and guidance and the Gender Studies Cell for always believing in us and making this newsletter possible. We are extremely grateful to our contributors for sharing their work with us!

Through Kon, we hope to create a safe space that allows for people to share their lived experiences, not just as individuals but also as communities at large. We believe that it is our duty as a collective to share narratives that speak out against inequality, socio-political discrimination, rising fascism, and religious hatred around the world. We hope that you find the solace and comfort that we did in this edition of Kön.

To end, we would like to remember what revolutionary German playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote,

**“In the dark times
Will there also be singing?
Yes, there will also be
singing
About the dark times.”**

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**lazim hai
ki hum bhi
dekhenge**

THE ECHOES OF HUM DEKHENGE

BY SUYOG RAGHUVANSHI

In 1986, a lady clad in a black saree recited a nazm resisting the authoritarian regime in her country in front of a large audience. It was the time when there were sanctions against both protests and wearing sarees. Her act of defiance was celebrated. In December 2019, the same nazm was recited by multiple people at various locations in a nationwide movement. With women and students at its forefront, this movement opposed the legislative decisions of their government. While the former act of resistance took place in Pakistan, the latter happened in India; two countries that are historically united yet are at odds with one another due to the politics of the time.

This revolutionary piece of poetry is Faiz Ahmad Faiz's 'Hum Dekhenge,' which loosely translates to 'We Shall See.' The poem was written in 1979 as an expression of protest against the tyrannical regime of Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan, the year when he ordered Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to be hanged to death.

Zia imposed martial law in Pakistan in the 70s, wielding the constitutional powers into his own hands. He is credited with Islamizing Pakistan. During his atrocious rule, those who dissented: artists, poets, politicians, intellectuals, were jailed. Yet, they stood united and resisted his tyranny. One such performance was by Iqbal Bano on 13th February 1986 in Lahore.

Laws were being implemented to root out anti-Islamic elements in the Pakistani culture; wearing a saree was one such element. Iqbal Bano's recitation of this poem in a saree was an apparent symbol of opposition to tyranny. She melodiously performed this nazm about the doomsday when everything and everybody will be questioned. Even though Faiz died in 1984, his poem continued and still continues to have relevance.

Faiz pearls together in this nazm: the claims to power which one makes in the name of God even though they are aware that God is the ultimate power; the uprooting of oppression on the day of the judgement when all oppressive forces shall be held accountable and the ones burdened with their oppression shall be brought to justice/honoured the omnipresence of God in each individual; the establishment of an ethical and egalitarian order. Faiz used concepts particular to Islam to question the very administration which posed itself as a defender of the religion.

In 2019, when the Indian Government passed the Citizenship Amendment Act in the parliament, people took to the streets in various parts of the country. In the national capital, Delhi, students protested vociferously. Universities were attacked, and students were subjected to brutal forces when the protests became violent. Women protested in large numbers in Shaheen Bagh. Over time, this area became the focal point of resistance.

Support came from artists all around the country. Faiz's Hum Dekhenge became an anthem that was recited time and again by students at various universities, at rallies, at strikes. This poem, that was written in a different country, in a different period, about 40 years ago, fitted perfectly in the political environment of India. Some lyrics were selectively picked out of the nazm, misinterpreted, and used as a tool to label the protestors as 'anti-national.' But this only showed how prominent was the impact of this piece of art that even the state felt vulnerable. The fact that art is immortal and traverses across the boundaries of nations, religions, communities, times, and cultures, became evident.

The two countries whose bilateral relations can never be described as amicable at any point of time ever since they gained independence were united with a poem. It was a woman who resisted the establishment in Pakistan and it were the women who were spearheading the resistance in India. I can not hold myself from mentioning that Iqbal Bano was born and raised in Delhi, and I feel that the women of Shaheen Bagh combating the anti-Islamic policies, with the lyrics of Hum Dekhenge invigorating their resistance, can be seen as paying homage, though unintentional, to Iqbal who countered the anti-India regime of Zia with her act of defiance.

Art has always outlived the artists; it has always acted as a medium of communication for generations. It has been used to please oneself, to aesthetically enhance one's surroundings, to entertain, and as mentioned before, to resist.

The establishment will always attempt to silence the voice of dissent, it will attack physically, and may even antagonize the art by deeming it as divisive and 'threatening' to the unity of the State(as happened with Hum Dekhenge), but the art will survive. All material records of Hum Dekhenge may be destroyed, but this art will thrive as an idea, a force, fuelling up the resistance which the posterity will carry forward.

To end with the lines of the nazm:

"Jab zulm-o-sitam ke koh-e-garan
Rooi ki tarah ur jaenge
Hum mehkoomon ke paaon tale
Ye dharti dhar dhar dharkegi
Aur ahl-e-hakam ke sar oopar
Jab bijli kar kar karkegi
Hum Dekhenge"

(When these high mountains
Of tyranny and oppression
turn to fluff and evaporate
And we oppressed
Beneath our feet will have
this earth shiver, shake and beat
And heads of rulers will be struck
With crackling lightning
and thunder roars
We shall see.



With likeness taken from Onake Obavva, a Kannada warrior from the 18th century, who fought the forces of Hyder Ali single-handedly with a pestle, the artwork is a representation of women breaking the glass ceiling, essentially a term used for women excelling in their professional lives, despite the many structural barriers that affect them due to gender discrimination. Women in India may be faced with inequality and oppression but have fought through those to be trailblazers, rebels and an inspiration to girls everywhere.

–Artwork and Caption by Miriam Mohan

DOCTOR, YOUR TURN

BY CALLISTINE JUDE LEWIS

"doctor, your turn"
scribbled on syrian school walls.
torn out finger nails and bruised cheeks,
met these teenage graffiti artists.
art was inflicted with batons in uniform.
discontent raged.

like the tunisian cabbage seller,
the flames of the revolution
were sown through spray paint,
at the hands of an artist barely thirteen
fanning the arab spring
from tunis to da'ara.

under the watchful gaze of street CCTVs
a sea of masqueraded masked artists
cloaked in the cover of night
sprayed the broadcast of the subaltern
on shopfronts and pavements
when national TV didn't CC these stories,
"didn't fit our target demographic" they said
or the source of their coffers.

from handprints by neolithic cavemen
to spray-painted new york subway trains,
the artist and their art held steady
as the regime's boot trampled upon it.
the search for the self.
the dissent of the voiceless.
the outrage of the aggrieved.

the dictator-doctor laid his eyes on the amassing crowd,
fortifying his borders and regulating the sale of spray cans.
rulers wary of unruly art threw comics in prison,
while a terror-accused sat in parliament.

why must art be reduced to sanitized gold-framed pieces,
but not include the graffiti on the same art gallery's walls?
why must the price of art be sky-high in auctions,
but the price of unauthorized art be torn fingernails for daring teens?

in ancient pompeii, the graffiti sang odes to friends of dorothy,
in turkish mosques, it announced the visit of vikings,
in minneapolis, it clamoured george floyd's last words,
in the hands of the destitute, the spray-can became a weapon
unbound by property laws.

opulence of the masses, colouring the favelas in brazil
the pigments created a world for those who didn't belong.
mobilizing. expressing. destabilizing.
from kashmir to palestine,
it spoke the language of the masses.

the syrian dictator-doctor felt the undercurrents churn
and surrounded himself with his secret police
to fight a few teenage boys with a spray-can
for the graffiti was a not just a war cry
but also, a celebration.

O
SHIKARA
TELL ME

O
SHIKARA
TEL

TEL

O

SHI

TELL ME



PHOTOGRAPH BY NANDINI SINGH

O SHIKHARA TELL ME

BY NANDINI SINGH

O Shikara tell me,
When you trace the tresses of Jhelum,
When the brittle chinar greets you,
When the warmth of kehewa summons the air,

O Shikara,
Does it ever remind you of peace?
O shikara tell me,
When the moon glistens over Dal,
When a lonesome Pashmina rests inside you,
When saffron paints the tranquil sky,

O Shikara,
Does it ease your aching heart?
O Shikara tell me,
When they turn the snow crimson,
When the sound of Azaan becomes feeble,
When all azure eyes are put to sleep,
O shikara,
Does Khusrau wail from above?

REVOLUTION IS THE ANSWER COMRADE

BY MALEK

“Revolution is the answer, comrade”
I believe that it is forthcoming, righteous.
That it shall be just.
That it shall smash,
All those power structures that be,
And build new relations,
No oppression, ethical creation.
But, what of me constantly saying maadarchod?
“Revolution is the answer, comrade.
In a new society, it shan’t be a problem.”
Right you are.
But, my mother,
She expects no payment and cooks and cleans
Everything, while I sit writing this.
Am I not complicit if I not do anything?
“Revolution is the answer, comrade.
She won’t have to, once we build anew.”
Right you are.
Yet, when I see skullcaps,
I feel scared. Their eyes seem menacing
And their foreign tongue sinister.
What about that?
“Revolution is the answer, comrade.
Once the opium is eliminated,
That won’t be a problem.”
Right, perhaps, you are.
But, on the train,
Whenever I see them, begging
As if entitled to what’s mine,
With no job of their own,
Big bangles on their hands,
My heart hardens at these,
Forgive me for saying so, freaks.
Is that not wrong?
“Revolution is the answer, comrade.
When all are equal, such emotions shall pale.”
Are you right, though?
Am I right, though?
Or is this my own opium?

Is this not me
Absolving myself
Of my own role in exerting violence
By my unchallenged existence?
And then, If I am aware of this,
If I am aware of my complicity,
And I do naught,
What makes me better,
Or even different,
Than those ignorant
Of their role in tyranny?
It doesn't.
My conscience haunts me,
For it knows that what is required
Is not sexy or attractive.
It is not one spectacular explosion,
But rather the everyday washing
Of clothes, dishes, of cooking,
Without expecting anything in return.
It isn't sloganeering in a mass rally, for now,
But rather, of losing power, and accepting it,
And giving it in the hands of those deserving.
It isn't gearing up to fight dictators,
But stomaching in my internal hatred,
And realizing the farce in my upbringing,
That my reflexes are wrong,
That my thinking is wrong.
It is one that involves
Shutting up, laying bricks, no direct reward,
Loss of power, mental discomfort,
Agony over own role, helping the social outcasts,
Taking a back seat, building solidarity.
The answer, then, is actually unchanged,
For what is ultimately required,
Till we reach that culmination point,
Is in each and every individual,
a personal revolution.

an interview with ARTEDKAR

Rahee Punyashloka is a writer, visual artist, and experimental filmmaker from Bhubaneswar, India. His works have been exhibited in numerous venues including the International Film Festival, Rotterdam and Tribeca Film Festival, New York. He makes anti-caste art under the moniker 'artedkar'

What does your creative process entail?

I try to create my artworks almost entirely on the basis of Ambedkarite and anti-caste iconography. The resources to draw from are simultaneously very rich (in that anti-caste iconography and image-making has been persistently employed throughout the history of South Asia, across centuries if not millenia) and very sparse (in that there has hardly ever been an ideal synthesis of this unique strain of image-making with the tradition of what we commonsensically assume as "classical Indian Art"). The lack of a broader, mainstream visual language vis-a-vis anti-caste image-making means that I cannot wholly dedicate my craft to what I would ideally like to work with: abstraction and minimalism. I am thus invested in gradually producing sparse, minimal, and yet, figurative and agitprop-ish artworks. Hopefully, there will be a "mainstreamization" of visual language in the anti-caste vein in the near future, and I could then go on to dedicate my creative process entirely to my more innately experimental tendencies.



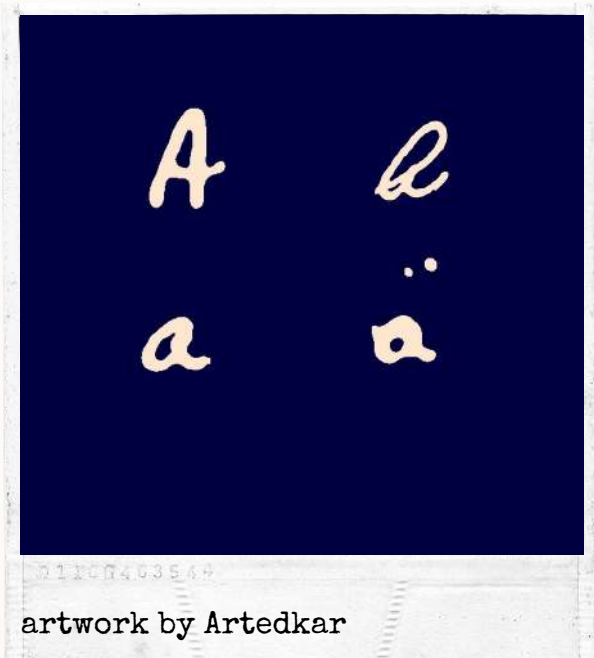
artwork by Artedkar



artwork by Artedkar

You use the colour blue in your artwork, which is symbolic of dalit resistance and the Ambedkarite movement. What led you to make this choice?

To tie in with the previous answer, in an ideal world, I would like to work with minimalism and abstraction, focusing more on the conceptual aspects of art and not the figurative, "realist" mould. My "idol" to that effect is someone like Zarina Hashmi or Pierre Soulages. So the most obvious conceptual element that I could draw from within the Ambedkarite movement, while sticking to my personal interests as stated above, was to focus on the recognizable blue and white template. I maintain that sooner rather than later some artist from our community would have picked up on this template to extensively work with. I'm lucky to have been the first who could capitalize on this historical inevitability.



In one of your posts you talk about developing a font type entirely based on Babasaheb Ambedkar's handwriting. What inspired you to think of this very innovative and unique idea? How is the project coming along?

Dr. Ambedkar's signature is perhaps the most famous handwriting that exist in the public imaginary. A substantial portion of this country's population is not just familiar with this signature, but it has been elevated to a piece of artwork. It is seen as a poster in many Dalit people's drawing rooms, as embedded jewelry, as a design on car windows, and so on and so forth. If we take the Dalit gaze to hold equitable affect as the Savarna one, an argument could be made that this "one signature that changed millions of lives" is a more recognizable work of Indian art than any Ravi Verma or Sher-Gil painting. My idea was to extrapolate on this premise. The project is a long way from fruition but, thanks to my online presence, I have found incredible Dalit lettering artists who are gracefully and keenly helping me at each step. I'm taking my time with it because the scope of such a project is truly immense.

In a world of government censorship and the dictation of what art should and should not be, what do you think is the role of creators like yourself in furthering the democratisation of art?

I think the primary issue is that those who have conventionally wielded all the power and access in the art world have more or less caved in to the narrative of governmental censorship too much. I'm not saying there is no artistic dissent from the conventional elite quarters. But that there is an exaggerated emphasis on this facet of the government's tendencies and valorizing of their roles as dissenters, all while carefully curating art whose content and aesthetic is easily palatable. Simultaneously, with newer, diverse voices such as those from our, hitherto marginalized communities finally emerging, there ought to be an overzealous sharing of resources and access with us, but what we see is quite the opposite.

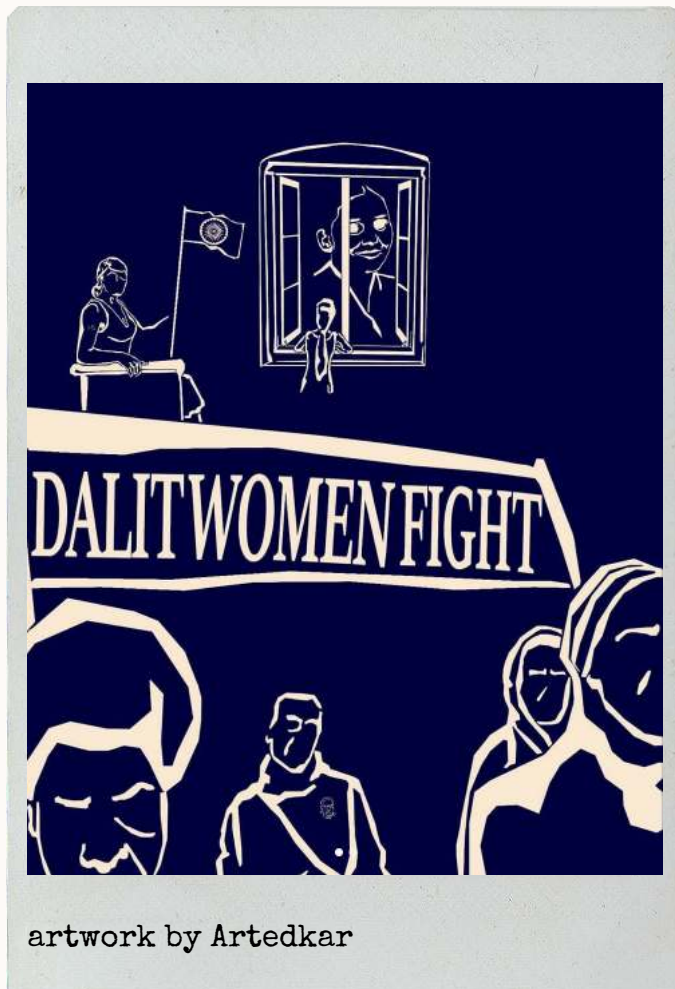
The role of creators who have belonged to the marginalized sections has always been an attempt to insert ourselves into the domain of a democratic public sphere. And it is the same now. Our very existence as creators qualifies us, rightly or wrongly (who is to say), as dissenters.



artwork by Artedkar

Often at times, your artworks offer a counter narrative such as Ambedkar pulling down a statue or a post about the Poona pact not being signed, how do you think this helps in reclaiming the narrative that has been wielded by the oppressors and what is the role of artists in countering that?

I mean, I am offering speculative alternatives to what has been an astonishingly persistent history of cruelty and oppression for Dalits. I do not know how else I, or my people would be able to survive, if not by suspending reality and believing in the elsewhere and otherwise



Your work is signed as “Artedkar”. What is the significance of this name?

It's a portmanteau of "art" and "Ambedkar".

Art about social justice can at times fail the desired purpose especially in circumstances when such artwork (or stories) is either appropriated by the oppressor or the artwork being created is heavily romanticised, reduced to trauma porn, etc. How, according to you, should one tackle such issues so that lived experiences are not reduced to mere content?

There can be a complicated answer to this but I suppose the simple, golden rule is to not create works out of the community that you do not belong to. If you belong to a background of oppressor communities, focus on representing your own as the oppressors that they are. Let the oppressed speak on their own behalf.

educate
agitate
organise

"aaj rang hai he ma rang hai ri moray mehboob ke ghar rang hai ri"

On the cusp of spring (or the closest we can get to it really in Delhi), at the shrine of Nizamuddin is celebrated Sufi Basanti. During this time folks flock to the dargah dressed in yellow, armed with mustard flowers and marigold, to celebrate and commemorate the ending of winter, the eternal bloom of love that synthesised between Khusro and his Nizamuddin Auliya.

The tradition takes root in a very (not-so-)curious story. It goes that on his nephew's death, Nizamuddin was deeply distraught, utterly inconsolable, and spent all his time next to the deceased's resting place. His disciples tried everything to comfort their Khwaja but only in vain. Then one day, Khusro saw a procession of women, donned gold, singing and dancing to the beat of their dhols on the way to their temple to celebrate Vasant Utsav. Struck with inspiration he employed their help and slipped into a ghagra, covered his face with a chunni, and decorated his body with garlands of gendaphool and sarson, heading immediately to where his Khwaja, his Mehboob-e-Illahi was. And then he danced. He beat on his drum, sang ecstatically, and danced for his love.

Overwhelmed, Nizamuddin was instantly cured, sad no more.

Delhi holds within its embrace several such stories of love that have transpired and continue to do so, within the foundations of its five thousand year-old ruins. In his book "Jinneology: Time, Islam, and Ecological Thought in the Medieval Ruins of Delhi", Anand Vivek Taneja begins with one such ruin – Feroz Shah Kotla – where every Thursday people from all over Delhi congregate to write appeals for djinns to grant. You see, their parliament is not so different from ours, one need only visit the site to notice how the wishes are noted down in a very administrative format – in accordance with the all pervasive-dimension transcending bureaucratic requirements complete with passport sized photographs and laminated pages. At night the djinns gather, going over the pleas, settling on which ones to grant.

When the world was created so too were angels from light, humans from clay, and djinns from fire. They live in this same world of ours and even form societies like we do, except their lives are considerably longer. Taneja uses these djinns to form a connect to the past, perhaps best illustrated through the story of Shah Waliullah. It goes that while he was praying at the mosque in the Kotla he, in shock, struck dead a snake that chanced upon him. That night, in his sleep, he was spirited away to the djinns' court, appearing before their king, accused of murder. You see, the snake was the King's

son, he had merely taken the form of a serpent. Shah Waliullah, in his prompt defence, put forth a hadith of the Prophet – it was perfectly legitimate to kill a dangerous creature that approaches you while you're praying, he said, if only he had known the snake to be a djinn in disguise, he would never have killed it. An old djinn present, a sahabi or one who has seen the prophet, vouched for him saying that he had heard it himself from the Prophet's lips. And so, through his interaction with the sahabi, Shah Waliullah achieved the stature of one of the Tabi'un or one who has seen a sahabi. It is Jinneology by which Shah Waliullah overcame a thousand years between his life and the Prophets to join the ranks of the Tabi'un.

Dalrymple in the introduction to his "City of Djinn" explains why he has christened Dilli so. Its shrines and monuments, despite ASIs best efforts, have continued to remain the city's flesh and blood and have, for at least me personally, served as spaces of queer affirmation and rebellion. Cue Jamali-Kamali, the tomb of two lovers buried next to each other, not-so-far away but definitely not-as- well-known as the famous Qutubh complex. Scholars are certain of Jamali, a famous sufi poet in the courts of Babur and Humayun, but a thick cloud of uncertainty distorts the identity of Kamali – there are speculations that they were the formers wife but the version of events that us queers prefer to go with is that Kamali was in fact a man, Jamali's lover. In Karen Chase's "Jamali-Kamali: A Tale of Passion in Mughal India" we get to hear Jamali's voice call out to his love:

'In the plump dusk, I
hear/ a peacock
screech,/ eye marks
on my lover's neck.

Kamali, let's go/ to
the lake/ to moisten
our love scars.

I will wash mud from/
your muscled legs.

My secrets rest/ in
the wedding/ hut. I
visit another/ man as
the moon/ circles
down.

Come my protege,/ my
Kamali, to bed./ I
will show you/ moves
of a new/ planet as
no/ astrologer could.'

Here too, there are talks of djinns. That the two raise from their graves in the dark of the night, protected by the shadows from the prejudice that springs from India's neo-conservative, predatory morality, and dance to tunes of their passion.

Some 2 kilometres away from Jamali Kamali, a 20 minute walk, there is yet another spiritual site. Hijron Ka Khanqah, literally translating to "a spiritual retreat for the hijra community", a 500 year old dargah with approximately 50 hijra folk buried there. The monument is preserved and tended to by the hijras of Turkman Gate. The tombs are prayed to, it is believed those buried there have special powers; not-so-different from Feroz Shah Kotla but also nothing alike in the least. It's said the most prominent tomb belongs to Miyan Saheb, the sister of a beloved sufi saint during the Lodhi Era. On her death, the structure was built to commemorate her and her kin and has since then become sacred. A safe, warm space where, even alone, you feel sheltered.

But there is more to these monuments than stories. Come sundown several transform, borrowing from Foucault's Heterotopia, into spaces of queer lust and/or being; an unavailability of space to unite in sex sees these ruins turn into cruising spots or, to those of you who are unfamiliar with the term, public places where people fuck. A carnal fulfilment of want, transgressing heterosexual ideals of modesty, sexuality, and desire. Mary Nandini Garg in "Towards the Queerest Insurrection" says 'In the discourse of queer, we are talking about a space of struggle against this totality – against normalcy. By "queer," we mean "social war." And when we speak of queer as a conflict with all domination, we mean it'.

Our aim is not integration, it is revolution. We do not accept the monogamous, patriarchal arrangement of kinship where sexuality is reduced to genitalia and the body is de-sexualised. Nor will we settle for its corporate counterpart, the commodification of libidinal desire used to further chain us and whisper in our ears falsehoods of equality through machinations of advertisement and PR. No, what we want is freedom. Freedom to practise our politics of decadence, of desire and filth. Freedom to enter trance dressed in our ghagras beating on our dhols and singing to our lovers, freedom to dance and fuck and love and rage. And here, perhaps, Jinneology comes back into play – these spaces within the city are where my anger is temporarily subdued, in respect and homage rather than a lack of hope. These spaces where djinns roam and talk to us about the centuries past, connecting us to love and revolt that has diffused itself within walls across time, giving us strength, power, freedom. Small bubbles of fresh air within Delhi's suffocation.



Mazhab

ARTWORK BY SASHA SARIN



Period

ARTWORK BY SASHA SARIN

FORGIVE ME, RAMEEZA BEE

BY SOMYA SINGH

forgive me Rameeza Bee,
they called you a whore.
there were riots in the street,
but the court said
it's not rape.
and it makes me think,
what if you were?
or what if I was?
what if among all the hundreds
and thousands of victims
one was a whore?
when did we,
how did we,
make men so powerful,
that they could tell us who we are,
or what they could do to us.
and what is the state,
but a man.
terroursing you,
silencing us,
forgive me Rameeza Bee,
I didn't know your name before.

they say laws have changed,
but laws of who?
laws of the man?
the man of the world,
the man who defines equality.
the oppressors definition of oppression
those laws?
they tell me times have changed,
times how?
they still kick,
they still abuse,
they still find music in our screams.
but now they apologise,
apologise for what,
when they still do the same,
and apologise how,
the perpetrator's definition of an apology?
forgive me Rameeza Bee,
monsters still breathe,
the same air as you and me.

men come in two categories,
either to tell me to keep quiet,
or to tell me they are sorry for the other half,
the left liberal man,
the pretentious moron,
the cis het woke.
he will also ask you to shut up,
but he will do it with a heart.
he abuses the government,
so he can abuse you too,
his activism burns out when he reaches patriarchy,
he is the same as the others.
both ignorant,
soaked up in the blood they have at their hands,
of their own privilege,
forgive me Rameeza Bee,
nothing has changed.

it happened again the day after,
and then the next,
and then every day till today,
and it will happen tomorrow as well.
it happens the way it happened to you,
it happens in a thousand other ways as well,
it happens every second each day,
it happens even after we leave,
it happens in streets and sheets,
then it happens in courts,
forgive me Rameeza Bee,
your pain doesn't end.

I can't fight always,
sometimes I feel done,
sometimes I let them get away.
sometimes when I should feel rage I only feel pain,
sometimes when I feel rage but I can't act,
sometimes I silence myself before,
they can silence me.
forgive me Rameeza Bee,
sometimes I am weak.
forgive me Rameeza Bee,
that I write this to you,
for I don't remember all the names.

forgive me Rameeza Bee,
even now, the world is different for them and me.
forgive me Rameeza Bee
nothing has changed.

A PHOTO ESSAY

Navigating the Politics of Self-Care

By Anushka Maheshwary

Photography by Maria Reji

Editing by Alex Gabriel

Reworked version of a photo essay originally published in Feminism In India, find it here
<https://feminisminindia.com/2019/09/19/in-photos-navigating-politics-self-care/>

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." Audre Lorde in her book *A burst of light*, written after she was diagnosed with cancer for a second time and published in 1988, speaks of the act of taking care of oneself and understands it as a central tool for political warfare that identities under attack are engaged in. In Lorde's conception of this exercise of taking care of the self, the emphasis is on asserting one's personhood and reclaiming the pleasure that is denied in a world where people from marginalised communities have consistently had their experiences invalidated.

Mark Fisher recounts the mental health crisis as one of the three aporias, a paradigm instance of the operation of capitalist realism, "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it." As such neoliberal capitalist forces have monopolised popular conceptions of self-care, posing it as a concern merely at the level of the individual while glossing over the social contexts that delimit distress as well as recovery.

The visualisation of Self-care on social media platforms, expressed in variations of the hashtag #butfirstYOU, conveniently builds on these ideas in employing the rhetoric that essentially ties the process of care of the self with a necessary moving away from the realm of the social, and therefore also the political, rendering that radical act of survival that Lorde spoke of completely apolitical. This understanding of the process inevitably reinforces the binary between the personal and the political insofar as it juxtaposes them as

these two irreconcilable spaces. One of the most violent effects of this capitalisation of self-care, then, is that it has filled the popular imagination of this act with narratives centred around the self and the self alone, and fails to acknowledge that these concerns themselves are grounded in interlocking systems of exploitation and marginalization.

"Completely unconcerned with what's not mine" is then both a common caption and symbolic of the mainstream imagination of self care. The imagined agent at the centre of these individualised, and increasingly privatised, rituals of self care is one who can comfortably access them without problematising this individualisation of psychosocial distress.

In this essay then, through the use of the visual medium, one seeks to offer a critique of this capitalistic conception and appropriation of self-care. Self-care tied to one's social-political self is in turn perceived as necessary resistance to systemic oppression. Focussing then on community-centred ways of taking care of the self, aside from being a central tool to bridge the large care gap that exists in the area of mental health, reveals the multifaceted conceptions of self-care and the ways in which they correlate.

It is with this hope of rediscovering a sense of resistance to systemic injustices that runs deep in the act of truly caring for the self that one turns to the opening lines of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*:

"that the order and quietude of everyday life would be violently disrupted by the chaos of the needy dead; that the hereculean effort to forget would be threatened by memory desperate to stay alive."



1.1 Toni Morrison's seminal work *Beloved*, here, stands as symbolic of the idea of comfort sought in voices and words other than one's own; locating solidarity within alternative discourses as central to self-care.



1.2 Representation of the self remains hazy in the image, a parallel to existence before one begins the process of understanding and exercising boundaries, grounded in the larger claim of self-assertion of identities that have been denied the right to validly set such boundaries of personhood.



1.3 Understanding self-care in one of its manifestation as an act of learning and assertion of the self.



2.1 The shift in the position of *BeLoved* represents a shift in the understanding of self-care, moving away from its narrow individualistic conception toward normalising the idea of asking for help.



2.2 Bodies existing side by side, creating the possibility of asking for a shoulder to lean on.



2.3 Bodies almost in contact; appear to be much closer than before, bridging the previously perceived distance when perceived from a different standpoint.



3.1 Juxtaposing the aforementioned two ways in which one stands in relation to the idea of self-care, simultaneously widening the ambit of self-care to speak of the personal as not so removed from the political.



3.2 Individuals existing together but located in a scattered manner in the same space.



3.3 Navigating through/ stepping into unfamiliar spaces and groups of individuals; moving towards an understanding of the self and its concerns as a socio-political question.



3.4 Understanding self-care as also consisting of building communities of solidarity and healing; communities as channels through which one can seek institutional accountability for psychosocial distress.



34. The possibility of discovering many other ways of taking care of oneself, ways that are not grounded in the rhetoric of individualism, in the cracks that exist as one puts together the aforementioned ways of understanding self-care.

DALIT MOVEMENT IN CINEMA

BY ABHAY MAJHI

Created by Rajesh Rajamani, *The Discreet Charm of Savarnas* (2020) is a sharp parody of "woke" Savarnas whose activities constantly propagate casteism. The short movie is produced by Neelam Productions, director Pa Ranjith's foundation—to advance the counter rank development with confidence, in film for social change. In the film, Rajamani features the tokenistic and belittling mentalities among the Savarna characters as they look for a "Dalit-looking" entertainer to play a Dalit character in their upcoming film. While it pushes for Savarnas to introspect on their messianic perspectives towards Dalits, it likewise entertainingly sharpens the others on the Savarna mentality by representing their double-dealing "wokeness".

The caste framework in India, which was made as a huge venture more than 3,000 years prior in the Hindu Varna framework, is enduring and flourishing even at this point. The situation denies essential common liberties to an enormous part of the general public - quite possibly the most significant among these rights is the privilege to knowledge and education. Craftsmanship, culture, education and film fall directly into that knowledge classification.

All gratitude to the social developments embraced by any semblance of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, and Periyar E. V. Ramasamy - a part of the Indian culture like Dalits, Tribals, Shudras and Ati Shudras, who generally avoided the bank of knowledge, experienced strengthening through schooling and work

through reservations and modern mass movements.

Recently while this truly minimized segment encountered some strengthening and representation in government areas, where the reservations were set up, there exists no such comparative framework in expressions of the theatre or film industry. At the end of the day, these creative spaces, like the film business, are still "immaculate" by Dalit issues, accounts or stories. Indian film has either been unable to address Dalit life and worries on the big screen, or has energetically decided not to do as such.

From one viewpoint, there are the Savarnas (Higher Castes), those with a customary foundation of ceaseless training across ages, and then again, the efficient avoidance of Dalits from education has brought about a true authority of film spaces by the Savarnas. That has normally prompted Indian Cinema to be 'casteist' even from a pessimistic standpoint and 'caste blind' at any rate.

The Indian Cinema industry has now finished 100 Years - making lakhs of movies. Be that as it may, in this 100-year-history, in what number of cases would you be able to describe where the lead entertainer/entertainer has been depicted as a Dalit character? It should be conceded that a few motion pictures, in the Parallel Cinema Movement, which was generally motivated by the Left-Marxist idea, do depict Dalit characters as focal figures in their movies, on certain events.

These Dalit characters depend on Harijan comprehension of booked standings, coming from a Gandhian structure, rather than 'Dalit' understanding, drawing from a Phule-Ambedkarite viewpoint. An illustration of this sort of film is 'Achyut Kanya'.

A staggering number of Indian movies, at their centre, depict metropolitan and Savarna sensibilities, which at that point prompts the glorification of Brahmanical culture and qualities with the help of movies. A similar endeavour is made in Marathi films - the ideal models are the movies made by Umesh Kulkarni and Subodh Bhave. The high caste and upper-class Indian movie producers have been ineffective to grow their artistic creative mind past their own special social real factors. That is one significant motivation behind why Indian Cinema isn't considered among the world's ideals.

At some point back, the English paper 'The Hindu' had distributed a report on 'Hindi Cinema and Dalit Representation'. As indicated by this report, Bollywood between the years 2013 to 2015, 300 movies were made, however, just 5 of them had Dalit legends or courageous women in them. Another report published by 'Birmingham City University UK' in 2017 brought up significant issues in regards to the portrayal of reverse classes in the Indian entertainment world. Calling attention to the portion of Dalit and Bahujan (SC, ST, OBC) populace in India, which is 85%, yet their portrayal in the film is just 0.1%.

In general, the Indian entertainment world is to a great extent in the possession of upper caste, high society elites from large urban areas. In any case, having said that, today there are movies/producers who not just depict Dalit characters unmistakably in their movies, yet additionally depict Dalit worries through the Periyar-Ambedkarite-Periyar philosophical view point, and not through Gandhian-Harijan narratives. The three most conspicuous movie producers on this rundown would need to be Nagraj Manjule of the Marathi entertainment world, Pa Ranjith of the Tamil entertainment world and Neeraj Ghaywan of the Hindi entertainment world (Bollywood). These three have practically without any assistance made a space for the explanation of Dalit worries in India's first-class entertainment world.

Film is a vital instrument with regards to building, forming, supporting popular assessment and insight. In India, film and media have been utilized to sustain Brahmanical culture and qualities, it has in this manner, prompted the propagation of the position framework.

In any case, every one of these signs point towards the way that Dalit-Bahujan film rule the Indian entertainment world. And afterwards, we can trust that Indian films, which would mirror the worries, thoughts, goals and lived realities of a more extensive range of Indian population, and will get noteworthy appreciation as well as acknowledgement from the individuals who set the benchmarks of world cinema.

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