

# Broadsheet on Contemporary Politics

## Sexuality and Harassment: Gender Politics on Campus Today

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This image was on the invitation issued for the Midnight March on Jan 5, 2013. It was borrowed from the internet reproduction of a poster used in the US for a 'Take Back the Night' Event. Gratefully reproduced here...

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# Editorial

We present this broadsheet on “Sexuality and Harassment: Gender Politics on Campus Today” as a small step towards thinking about gender relationships in universities. In this collection we are working with positions and tendencies that seek to diverge from the beaten track, and at times jostle against each other. The decision to focus on life in our universities today was prompted by the sense that they have emerged as a uniquely pertinent ground where many of our concerns and conflicts (of identity/equality and difference, of administrative control and the freedom to grow, of normative privilege and lack, of love and hurt, of friendship and violence, etc.) are articulated. Addressing these matters has led us into embattled terrains that flank the university today: caste assertions and conflict, ‘efficient’ hostel administration, ‘criminalization’ of student politics and, of course, apathy and antipathy towards gender justice.

The idea of this broadsheet came up in early January 2013 after we participated in the Midnight March in Hyderabad to focus attention on women’s right to unrestricted and safe access to public spaces at any time of the day (or night). We began conversations with students, teachers and staff members of the English and Foreign Languages University about issues of security and harassment—only to realise that these discussions invariably drew us into larger ongoing debates on gender politics on this campus. Our ideas took a more concrete form a few months later as we prepared for the visit of the UGC Task Force on Gender Sensitization 2013, appointed following the public outrage over the gang rape of the paramedical student in Delhi in December 2012, to four universities in our city: Osmania University, University of Hyderabad, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, and the English and Foreign Languages University. This task force had been mandated to suggest measures for improving the safety, security and of equality of women on university campuses. Anveshi Research Centre for Women’s Studies had been requested to coordinate this visit. Hence to get a sense of the specific contexts we had many meetings with students, teachers, and administrative

staff in these universities before the team’s visit. After this visit, as we thought through the contents of this collection, we were a bit bewildered by the enormity of the questions raised—hurriedly and half-heartedly introduced curriculum of the undergraduate courses, the deplorable lack of facilities for medical aid, problems of counselling and grievance redressal, the invisibility of Gender Sensitization Committee Against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH), etc. We soon realised that we needed to limit the scope of this broadsheet, but without ironing away the complexities and blurs pressing in at the edges. So our first decision was to retain focus and continue our discussions largely within these four universities, and thematically restrict ourselves to exploring the intersections between the politics of equality/freedom and the everyday experiences of sexual harassment. This broadsheet, therefore, does not seek to provide a comprehensive survey and diagnosis for all the problems affecting our institutions of higher education, but concerns itself with a restricted field of analysis dealing with the issues of urban, university-going, middle-class, career-oriented young women in Hyderabad today. Hopefully, this does not erase the possibilities of others finding resonances in places beyond Hyderabad.

Issues related to sexuality are always difficult to resolve due to the divergence of interests and stakes they hold, the ways in which these are articulated, and also the fact that the university campus becomes a site of conflict between the two tendencies of disciplinary regimentation and desiring subjectivities. Balancing these depends not only on administrative judgement in specific cases but in the institutional ability to involve various sides and create an atmosphere where difference can exist with dignity.

As we begin to think of sexuality and the politics of equality/freedom, the hostel becomes the prime location of interrogation. There is no doubt that women’s access to university education has been possible due to the availability of hostels and that hostels, as A. Suneetha, a friend and comrade, pointed out over several conversations, are spaces for experimentation and exploration: be it

acquiring one’s first pair of jeans or shorts, cutting or colouring one’s hair, taking part in heated political debates at midnight, watching second-show films, or living the thrill and trauma of romance. But we also know from our experience that the women’s hostels are seen as the most sexualised of spaces, caught in the double-barrelled gaze of policing and projected fantasies. More often than not, hostel rules require the early return and locking up of women in their hostels in the evenings, while the men’s hostels remain free zones where such restrictions are deemed unnecessary or impossible.

It is clear that universities have opened up in the last ten years or so to newer groups of students but there is a complete absence of meaningful debates, conversations and cultural activities which has caused a breach between the “natural claimants” of higher education and these new constituencies. Some of these groups are viewed as misfits in the academic space and are blamed for their violence and skewed sense of politics. We found students’ groups formed on caste lines, mainly for the Dalits and Adivasi students, as well as other student groups committed to a left or right ideology—but one striking common factor in almost all these organizations is the near-total absence of women in executive positions. This has resulted in students’ politics becoming a very masculinist business. There is no meeting point for the sexes to work together on issues. Women complain that crucial decisions are taken late at night in men’s hostels, and women are urged to accompany the male leaders while meeting the authorities or the media to press these demands, as if to prove the democratic credentials of organisations! The situation is further complicated by many middle class women opting to keep away, impatiently or despairingly, from what they perceive as “over-assertive” (read: unruly, non-gentrified) forms of political mobilization. Mediating between the “in-difference” of the urban middle class (women) and the anger of those who have waited long enough for their share and are also losing patience with the apathy of individuals and the system is a formidable task. Some of these tensions might ease out by putting in place informal and semiformal bodies with students, teachers, and administrative staff as members to act as buffer between students groups and between students and administration for much better functioning of the university. Otherwise there is the danger of further ghettoization of students in same class, caste, religious or linguistic groups.

Over the past couple of decades, the empowering effects of feminism—subtle yet pervasive—for a generation of young women students on Indian campuses has meant that universities need to think beyond protecting “our” women in public spaces. We must recall and build upon the gains that have resulted from the feminist struggles of the 1970s and 1980s: the setting up of women’s hostels, scholarships and amenities for women, participation of women in student politics and administrative bodies, the substantial increase in the number of women in teaching and non-teaching positions, the new courses in women’s studies and the influence of gender debates on most disciplines, the mandatory requirement of anti-sexual harassment committees, and the like. How do we hold on to the gains of the feminist movement and at the same time fight conservative administrative interpretations of the new regulations? For instance, many students and university employees told us that GSCASH is potentially an important body but in most situations, this committee mostly sticks to its mandate of functioning as a punitive body disregarding the more important task of gender sensitization which could curtail harassment to a great extent. At one level, the need is to figure out, in a carefully contextualized manner, questions such as the following: who is harassed? By whom? How do we best describe the nature of the offence and what is the just resolution for the problem at hand? From a “conspiracy of silence” at home and in public, we are now faced with a context of street protest and an explosion of reporting on gender violence. Women are assertively refusing to take the blame, and are exercising their choice and freedom in ways that make sense to them today. However, we are also left grappling with gender questions enmeshed in issues of class, caste, religion, and location.

We hope that this broadsheet generates some fresh thinking and discussion on campuses and beyond about how equality and freedom can be thought in the new context of the universities, not just in terms of gender divisions but also in terms of the differences within these larger groups. We also hope that the poems, the collage, and the articles point to the fissures in thinking about university in general and gender relations in particular, and also encourage conversations.

*Madhumeeta Sinha and Asma Rasheed*

October 2013

The guest editors of this issue teach at English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad

# Charting a History: Women’s Organizations across Three Campuses in Hyderabad

■ **Asma Rasheed and Madhumeeta Sinha**

(In discussion with **K. Lalita, Rekha Pappu, Suneetha A., Kavya Krishna and Swathy Margaret**)

Our understanding of “sexual harassment,” protests and agitations against violence/injustice or concerns over safety for women surely comes to us from all that has been said and done earlier, and shapes our continued struggles. While we have all vaguely heard or read about earlier attempts by women on campuses to raise gender concerns, it is always instructive to learn about how (far), if at all, we have journeyed in our attempts to raise issues and rally support for our causes.

In one such attempt, we spoke to individuals who were actively involved as students in movements across different campuses over the last four decades: K. Lalita, (Progressive Organization for Women, Osmania University in the 1970s), Rekha Pappu (Women Students’ Forum, University of Hyderabad in the early 1990s), A Suneetha (Progressive Students’ Forum, University of Hyderabad, mid to late 1990s), Swathy Margaret (Alisamma Women’s Collective, University of Hyderabad, in the early 2000s) and Kavya Krishna (Samvad, EFL University, Hyderabad, 2010s) to get a sense of the challenges they faced and the hurdles they could (not) overcome.

## Beginnings

Usually, it is some minor or not-so-minor instance, sometimes a friend or even an incident that involves a friend that sparks off our involvement. So the first question we asked was about beginnings.

K. Lalita recalls that the POW on the Osmania University campus in the 1970s began as a Study Group, which read early feminist socialist texts such as Betty Freidan, Shulamith Firestone, Germaine Greer, etc. along with other political, Marxist and Maoist literature which influenced their discussions on sexual harassment and politics. Less than half a dozen

women, among some forty-odd boys, these “English-speaking” girls who dared to go to the Canteen to drink chai or played table-tennis were branded “radical,” “notorious,” “advanced” and “modern.” They also acquired higher visibility, even though, points out Lalita, the girls only dared to walk around in a group.

A similar backdrop of readings and discussions amongst friends around the early 1990s, recalls Rekha Pappu, fuelled them to take a position when the election posters of a woman candidate during Students’ Union election were targeted. Obscene graffiti on the woman candidate’s posters, in an already inflamed campus scenario where security guards had made remarks about “prostitutes in hostels,” led to calls for a general body meeting of students where the group decided to introduce themselves not as individual students alone but as members of the Women Students’ Forum. The active core group came from the Department of English, but also included research scholars from Social Sciences and Sciences.

A. Suneetha talks of her lack of exposure to politics or membership in any organization before she came to the University. She says that though she’d heard about the WSF, it was by then largely inactive; moreover, her academic location in the social sciences and the teachers around her led to her involvement with human rights issues/organizations. There was an incident when some girls, students of the sociology department, were harassed and teased by their own classmates as all of them were watching a match in the LB stadium. A discussion organized thereafter about the incident in the Ambedkar auditorium made her think, she says, in terms of women and the harassment they faced. Suneetha was appalled by the language and the ideas that men,

“decent men,” her own friends and acquaintances used and this spurred her into involvement with the Progressive Students’ Forum.

Swathy Margaret: “An upper-caste feminist politics that sees itself as already emancipated from the politics of its caste needs to look closely at its caste capital . . . in order to comprehend the multiple dimensions of ‘violence.’”

Swathy Margaret, on the other hand, traces two distinct strands that fed into her discomfort in a central university during her Masters’—her caste as a fundamental aspect of identity while growing up, and the readings and discussions of Dalit and feminist publications in Telugu during her undergraduate days. However, the University of Hyderabad of her MA days did allow for space and friendships that supported her efforts to articulate her unease, to think in particular ways. The campus itself, with Dalit students’ organizations, was a space where Dalit women like her could express themselves and their problems. The Dalit male students saw them as “our women” and the women could approach them for help, etc. Nonetheless, Swathy is vehement, Dalit women were not regarded as intellectuals or thinking women. The men would come over to talk to their upper-caste women friends, about issues or even about writing something, but neither the upper-caste feminists nor the Dalit men saw Dalit women as “important enough.” It was, she says, a “troubling alliance.”

Kavya Krishna traces the coming together of “Samvad” on her campus as a result of various hostel-related protests against the University administration as well as reading sessions that most of the core members, seven or eight research scholars, participated in, around gender and caste.

Kavya Krishna, on Samvad’s decision to work on “gender” and LGBT issues, and the reaction across the campus to this stance: “. . . [they] didn’t understand what was being raised, probably, and had no issue, only a suspicion . . . .”

They were clear that they would focus on “gender” rather than “women’s” issues, on sexuality, LGBT issues, etc., through academic rather than activist means. Their inaugural efforts were hugely successful, says Kavya, but they soon got involved in various cases of domestic violence, harassment, etc. on campus which after prolonged, intense months of emotional and other engagements, began to take its toll on the core members. The response to their focus on sexuality and LGBT issues

was largely silence, Kavya feels, as maybe no one really paid attention to or understood what was being raised. On the other hand, there was a lot of pressure, she feels, to appropriate these articulate women into and by other student organizations who had their own agendas on different issues.

### Space of Campus and Hostels

K. Lalita thinks that the political context of the 1970s was such that all student groups, whether left- or right-oriented, worked with a strong, moral sense. The usual ideas of women as ‘sati’ or ‘savitri’ prevailed and safety for women alongside certain values about how women were different was accepted. Lalita remembers that they achieved some notoriety for their travel on public transport buses, mobilizing women from the different affiliated colleges of OU over issues. Still, she thinks, the majority of girls were reluctant to travel outside their campuses into the larger public domain; a notion of the campus as a home away from home was strong. The differences over the decades she feels are, one, the sheer numbers of women coming out into public spaces has increased dramatically, and, two, there have been cultural changes in terms of how women are largely regarded. The idea of romance, for instance, she pointed out has shifted hugely.

Rekha recalls that the UoH campus did largely feel like an island far away from the city during the 1990s. She suggests that some incident or perception of harassment leads to women coming together, but there is a way in which politically active women attract a certain amount of hyper-visibility. For instance, she remembers that middle-class men without moral issues still didn’t like WSF working with groups such as the PSF, which maybe was part of a discomfort with talking about Dalit issues. Perhaps, she suggests, the “radical-ness” of POW came from its alliance with left organizations, and by the 1990s had to be retrieved with a “mainstream” radical-ness.

Suneetha remembers that the campus was a space where many girls could also experiment, whether in terms of clothing (wearing jeans, etc.) or in terms of the friendships that they could explore. There are a lot of individuals who come from suburban locations too, she says, and the campus is a cherished space to test and challenge themselves across many dimensions. However, it does require constant discussion and talking about what is appropriate as well. One cannot just assume a right, but also talk about what is involved in the whole process. While we are caught up in

classes, assignments, etc., we have to remember that there is a world outside and we do need to negotiate with the logic and rationality of it too.

Kavya Krishna feels there is a perception, largely false, that there are no women’s issues on the EFL campus and women are “free” and “safe” on a “gender sensitive” campus. She disagrees, saying that at the time Samvad was formed, there was no properly functioning GSCASH. Neither student organizations nor the administration were invested in women’s issues. For instance, she recalls that the then Warden admonished women against hanging washed under-garments on clotheslines outside their rooms, inside the hostel, and advised them that women need to learn to “adjust,” given that they would be getting married eventually. The need, she feels, is to investigate ways of making the entire campus safer and not merely by locking up the women’s hostels. One cannot simply “punish” a person who may look at you for about five minutes, she says, but we need to enter into discussions about what every woman has to negotiate with in the public space of the campus. It cannot arbitrarily belong to men.

Swathy, on the other hand, remembers her hostel as being ridden with casteism of one kind or the other. On a day-to-day basis, there would be women who felt appalled at having to see the “inauspicious” face of a dalit woman first thing in the morning while queuing up for bathrooms. They would avert their faces, Swathy recalls, which may sound amusing now but most definitely was not; or, there were issues of food. Swathy remembers a very close friend, an “apolitical” dalit woman, who was a very good cook and made fish but was targeted for the “smell” of the fish. Her friend in retaliation took on these “other” girls about the bad smells of cabbage, etc. We were not really cooking something that was not edible, Swathy points out, and life is, actually, really really smelly. The problem was not with non-vegetarian food as such, she muses, as she remembers some Russian students being around who brought all kinds of foodstuff into the hostel. It was caste, she says, which was the issue.

A different dimension of casteism that Swathy picks up was the usual acceptance of only upper-caste women as thinking women, and Dalit women as “add-ons” which came out time and again on the campus. The most dramatic event occurred when there was a

move to reserve seats for women in the Students' Union. Dalit women suggested reservation for SC/ST and other minority community women (by rotation); the idea was put to vote and did not get the requisite two-thirds majority. Nonetheless, there was a sense of moral victory, since Dalit women did manage to push the issue onto the table. However, Swathy recalls a strong sense of resentment that she and her friends were advised, "strategically," that since upper-caste women were anyway supporting the idea of reservation, such a demand would be perceived as more "valid" if it was voiced by upper-caste women. Since the issue was to be up for voting, they were told, it was all about numbers, a numbers' game. Didn't the demand for reservation have value on its own terms? she asks. Was there any commitment to a different kind of politics? In fact, these Dalit women were also not involved in the EPW write-up which came later. It is not all good-heartedness, she asserts—the relationships between women are deeply, deeply political. The alisamma women's collective was formed, she notes, in the aftermath of these events.

## Violence and Safety

In the context of recent emphasis on safety, violence, etc., Lalita wonders aloud about changing the system, which is one thing, and protecting oneself, which is quite another. She recalls a field trip to rural areas, where female colleagues wore shorts and their local guides, young men, tried to interact with them and at the same time not "look." The dilemma of not restricting oneself and yet at the same time being sensitive to the context in which one

finds oneself, she says, is something that requires a great deal of thought. However, both Kavya and Lalita pointed out that one doesn't know how to talk about this to both the men and the women. Rekha points to the differing contexts and times: a protectionist mode may not be politically correct any longer, but we need to find ways of not getting into a panic mode of "danger," while ensuring the safety as well as autonomy of women. The university is after all not an ivory tower but rather, a microcosm of the world and we need to balance individual tastes with local sensitivities. Suneetha points out that the increasing number of co-educational institutions, visibility and acceptance of friendship or light-hearted flirting or banter (over FM radio channels, for instance) between men and women and sexualisation of the culture around us have all led to a greater idea of "togetherness." A mismatch between the increasing and shifting demographics on the one hand, and the infrastructure and staff on the other has increased pressure on administrations, feels Rekha. Staffs remain cut-off from these emerging new cultures and youth. The pressure on funds, the demand to "deliver" has increased the burden to "administer" and hence crackdowns are that much more ruthless. The need to experiment, it was pointed out by all of them, must be balanced with mediation on how to think, talk, etc. about the complexity of issues such as friendship, etc.

K. Lalita, "it is no eve-teasing, it is not a tamasha, it is not a sexually-loaded issue ... it is harassment ... it is attacking ... it is violence. . . ."

Swathy notes that violence against women gets discussed when incidents involving certain people take place. It is "sad," she says, that the entire country is shaken to the core at murder, rape, etc. but everyday violence does not figure in discussions. It is not that the former ought not to be discussed, but why is the latter so under-discussed? Swathy recalls a poem by Challapalli Swaroopa Rani about work in a kitchen and points out that the poet's own mother does not have a kitchen.

In other words, different women have different problems, rooted in structural and historical issues. Swathy's concern is that the feminism she met in the hostel saw no problems with itself; it did not question its assumption of being emancipated from casteism. The problem with a feminist and Dalit alliance, she points out, is that certain privileges are masked, and the politics which are shaped by that privilege are also masked. "Upper-caste feminist politics needs to examine its caste capital: what are the many forms in which it manifests itself, impacts the quality of life or the choices one makes, what one achieves, success, etc. need close, honest examination. It is only after all of these issues are laid out for examination and discussion that we can begin to comprehend the multiple dimensions of 'violence'."

*The Editors would like to express their heartfelt thanks to all the discussants for generously sharing their memories, thoughts as well as their time; Swathy Margaret could not join the discussion with the others, but nonetheless made time to speak with us.*

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## Broadsheet on Contemporary Politics

### Nizam's Rule and Muslims

Truth and Fairy Tales about Hyderabad's Liberation

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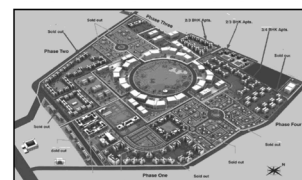
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## Broadsheet on Contemporary Politics

### SEZ Policy, Economics and Politics

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# Sexual Harassment Committees: Treading the Murky Waters of Intersectionality

■ K.C. Bindu

The context in which we write today is the context of mass urban mobilizations around cases of rape that are aired incessantly in the electronic media, with an endless parade of “perpetrators” with covered faces. The spectre that was raised from our own (in a sense, feminist) incessant chanting of sexual violence seems to have actually flooded the streets of Delhi (and now Bombay), crying for blood (or, at least castration) of the “brutes” who could violate a person so.

For a feminist movement, it is difficult to be dismissive of these mobilizations. Yet, it is equally difficult not to be wary of them. How does one not simultaneously welcome and at the same time be suspicious of the (otherwise lethargic) legal apparatus lashing swiftly out? How does one not deal with problems of masculinity? Yet, how does one not problematize the fact that the only masculinity in question here, iconized in its pure and “brutish” form seems to be lower class? How does one not stand with the victim? Then again, how can we escape the observation that the femininity in “fearless” confrontation (Nirbhaya), normativized increasingly in English media narratives at least, is the “agential” urban, savarna woman (not always empirically, but very often in media constructions)?

Arundhati Roy, speaking against the general euphoria around the “mass mobilisations” around gender, pricks the bubble with an introduction of the structure which she sees as framing the problem. Without taking into account large scale migration into cities and the indignities faced by the lower classes in the hands of institutionalized economic and community onslaughts over them, she feels, one cannot even understand the problem of “these” rapes.

Basically, that idea of criminalizing the lower classes immediately comes up, that these are the violent people. Whereas actually they are the ones against whom tremendous violence is perpetrated in the cities . . . They are the

victims of slowly having the oxygen pressed out of their lungs, of having lower and lower wages, of having to pay more and more because prices are rising so fast<sup>1</sup>.

One has to read the violent masculinity of the lower classes unleashed against the innocent, helpless upper classes (this indeed is the subtext of most of the English newspaper reports) against the background of masculinities of the powerful, which rape and kill with impunity, and use the legal system to justify these.

In addition, I would add to Roy’s formulation of “violence”, the systematic absorption of large groups of people into governmental welfare programmes (like reservations, for instance), that actually bring different worlds into contact in particular institutional spaces such as an urban university. In various discourses, such meetings are sexualized, and sexualized violently alone.

## Reviewing Sexual Harassment in Workspace: The Context of the Campus in 2013

This is also perhaps the right moment to review the law against sexual harassment in workplace—not the written law, but the practice of it, especially in educational institutions. Hailed as a symbolic victory for the feminist movement, Vishakha vs State of Rajasthan stands as a testimony to the feminist struggles against the erasure of gendered violence in institutions of work. The Committees against Sexual Harassment which were subsequently instituted in many educational institutions at least circulated the term ‘sexual harassment’ thus naming and giving form to a hitherto largely nameless malady.

Today, what do we do in practical terms if, as feminists, we are called upon to adjudicate cases of sexual harassment in workplaces? Increasingly, we are “not ready” to deal with the contradictions that very often confront us as feminists: what has the notion of intersectionality (a useful, though, increasingly inadequate theoretical concept) done, empirically, to understand situations of sexual

harassment? A sweeping change in demography on campuses has made a situation—always already existing—stand out in relief: i.e., the almost equal number of men and women in most campuses. Also evident now are the huge differences in caste-class compositions between the women and men in Humanities and Social Sciences that have also been noted by so many ‘watchers and interpreters of social change’.

Such shifts have opened newer opportunities for interactions between “different” young people. However, the only tools and skills of interaction available to them seem to be the ones provided by the media: urban media globalizing in a particular way and regional media in another. These opportunities and inadequacies are paralleled and multiplied in the differing modes of interaction of youth with families; and also between the increasingly globalized, mall-trotting urban youth and the aspiring mofussil and rural youth who might be excluded from this march of consumerism yet are affected by it. There is a meeting firsthand, of urban and rural India, along with the dominant and dominating castes, on Indian campuses. In the Humanities and Social Sciences streams, it increasingly seems to be a gendered meeting—in this heterosexist world staged necessarily as “(hetero)sexualized.”

In the context of sexual harassment, why are we, as feminists, so paralyzed by this particular encounter? Is it because we, coming mostly from urban and upper caste locations, feel theoretically powerless to deal with the institutional ways in which lower class/caste women from the margins are getting written into such a narrative? In fact, sometimes we seem to contribute passively to their invisibility and the violence that happens on their bodies, through our blindness or silence. When sexual harassment is reported from these marginalized locations, not read as either “agential” or “feminist,” there is a general distrust of the savarna feminist voice. Reciprocally, the latter does not know how to handle “community sentiments” which we read as expressing sexism and cannot deal with the complexity of negotiations that marginalized identities have to go through. How does one speak without hearing our own enemies of decades ago, the sexist groups, speaking?

What is also interesting is the extreme silence into which we all fall when “true” power raises its head. We do know that if the male (read dominant caste) higher echelons of power are involved in harassment of “woman” faculty/student/non-teaching staff, committees themselves can never work without sustained student or staff protests to support them. This also proves that there is no “pure” institutional solution through committees. The emptiness of the sexual harassment committee’s mandate

of “consciousness raising” in the face of massive institutional silence around powerful men harassing/demanding sexual submission<sup>2</sup> from powerless “women” (and sometimes, men) is quite disturbing. In case after case, we have seen the “autonomy” of sexual harassment committees torn apart when the top person holding power is directly involved. Finally, punitive measures work only when there is institutional dissent within offices or when there are political mobilizations around issues, rather than just having a ‘Committee Against Sexual Harassment’, which might or might not contain politically sensitive persons.

Due to all this and much more, our response to sexual harassment in the workplace seems to be paralysis, as a group, or silence. In committees, even when feminists chair them, the limits of rights-based punitive actions are revealed. What might be happening under the garb of feminist experience is that hated and condescending act of ‘counselling’, i.e., of looking down upon human beings, with an “I-know-better-than-you-about-yourself” expert attitude!

Given all of the above I can only conclude with another set of questions that come up for me: is there a “feminist counselling” possible within institutions? Is there a politics of simultaneous privilege and victimisation that is even articulable? What are its contours? What is the language which is not righteous yet moves towards action? Is there a language of care possible which patriarchy has not appropriated? What is the challenge of doing a politics of difference yet of understanding stand-points? How can a universalizing law even contain this? Yet, how can one leave it to the right wing, castiest ideologues who now occupy feminist spaces? Can we only occupy the space of the specifics, and the everyday, that is increasingly experienced as fragmented? Is there even a politics of hope in these confusing times?

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#### Notes:

1. Arundhati Roy interviewed by David Barsamian. “Corporate power, women, and resistance in India today.” <http://isreview.org/issue/90/corporate-power-women-and-resistance-india-today> accessed on 17 August 2013.

2. Sexual submission can include and range across the following: the actual demand for sex, a taken-for-granted demand that you be submissive intellectually, having to accept passively informal situations where sexist jokes circulate, being silenced in public, being laughed at, being compared for bodily “assets” (or lack thereof), never being allowed to expect to be treated “seriously” like your male colleagues etc.

# Gender and the Academia

■ K. Suneetha Rani

Gender, like many other important and practical issues, is kept out of serious debate by the academic world. Disciplines, other than those that focus on gender issues specifically, either ignore or condemn the gender factor in their deliberation and teaching. It is worth thinking about this absence of, or more strongly, contempt for, gender in academia.

Thanks to the Supreme Court of India and the University Grants Commission, educational and other institutions are compelled to have an anti-harassment mechanism in place. However, implementation of this policy, constitution and functioning of such mechanisms pose major challenges. There are Universities where male vice chancellors head anti-sexual harassment bodies, despite strict guidelines about women chairs for such committees. There are Universities where these mechanisms are non-functional. There are Universities that have made the head of centre for women’s studies, warden of the women’s hostel and chairperson of the anti-sexual harassment committee synonymous terms with one functionary. There are Universities where anti-sexual harassment bodies have been functioning as mere complaint committees. In all the above instances, one can notice the interference of authority, biased notions about women’s identities and the silencing of raised voices.

Functioning of Committees Against Sexual Harassment (CASH) is beset with problems as they face a number of impediments, both ideological and administrative. The first challenge CASH faces is its status in the University. CASH does not have the visibility and familiarity of other university bodies because its objectives and ideals are unfamiliar, they are seen as insignificant or as inapplicable.

Since CASH is looked upon as a complaints and punishments committee, it is suspected, feared and held at a distance by many. Others make fun of it because it is concerned with sex and the domain of the sexual. It is often considered a stigmatised space prohibited for

“decent” people. Thus, one has to be wary of the possibility of CASH turning into a police station or a court, not only because of the bureaucratic delay in solving the problems, but also because of implicit stigma it carries.

Its status as part of the university administration also automatically associates CASH with authority. Although such a committee has function autonomously under no administrative pressure and no influence, its position in the university distances it from the campus community. There is suspicion among the students against the committee constituted of teachers and non-teaching staff, who for them, represent university authority. They fear that they will take the side of the group they belong to. Similarly, the presence of students creates certain tension among the teaching and non-teaching representatives who fear that student representatives might pressurise or influence the committee and its decisions. Thus there is a constant questioning of the identities and the ideologies members represent. This distrust, suspicion, discomfort and reticence are because CASH focuses on gender issues only when there is a complaint and only when there is a need for trial and punishment. Here, gender is not an introspective, educative and consciousness-raising issue but is one that is debated only in a crisis.

CASH faces double scrutiny: on the one hand, if it responds to complaints and acts, there is a protest that CASH is overreacting and victimising the accused. Suddenly people become sensitive to the language and tone CASH uses towards them, and allege that CASH is becoming tyrannical. On the other hand, if CASH takes time to ponder over the complaint before beginning the procedure, there are complaints about its non-functioning. While both allegations may be correct in different contexts, both haste and delay have their advantages and disadvantages based on the specific issue. However if CASH faces these reactions every time it receives a complaint how does it function? This pushes CASH into a counterproductive defensive position.

Quite often, institutionally powerful parties step into the inquiry and begin directing CASH. In such situations, the University administration could turn hostile as well because it does not want any disturbances on campus due to the action taken by CASH. How would change set in if there is no disturbance of the status quo? Thus, CASH is both owned and disowned by the University administration. The lack of money, space, infrastructure and staff for such a complex and continually alert mechanism add to the problem. There is also a lack of coordination between the administrative departments and an ambiguity over the provisions related to CASH.

There are apprehensions that complaints might increase with the presence of CASH, and that false complaints might victimise innocent men. While men feel targeted by gender divisions, women feel embarrassed by open discussion about sexual harassment<sup>1</sup>. Suppression of information, delayed decisions and hostile treatment towards the complainants by CASH would also affect its credibility.

Campuses bring together various cultures, religions, regions, castes, languages, beliefs, identities and lifestyles. While such interactions can be enriching and learning experiences, they can also become sites of shock and conflict. If one carefully observes the complaints that are lodged with CASH, one notices a pattern in most of them: sexual relationships turning into harassment. The reasons could be cultural and other kinds of diversities that affect understanding between people. Women who step out of smothering isolation and deprivation feel suffocated in a relationship when the man they have accepted as a companion starts controlling their mind, body and life. This control is no different from other kinds of control that a woman is subjected to

and for her it is like moving from one regime of control to another. Abuse results from both this strain and from men's power leading to oppression and exploitation of women.

Any discussion related to gender is considered unnecessary, excessive and as drawing unnecessary attention. In addition, educational institutions are seen as purely academic and the focus is seen to be exclusively on education. CASH activities are considered to be non-academic, distracting and trivial. In one university an attempt made by CASH to organise a self-defence demonstration programme for girl students was thinly attended. Moreover, teachers seemed unhappy about such a session because it was not academic work and that time given to such programmes would be a waste. This raises crucial questions: what should universities teach? Why does university teaching cause such isolated, disempowered and restricted identities for students?

Thus, the profile of CASH as merely a complaints committee has to change. It has to become a committee that thinks about proactive initiatives to make the campus harassment free. Emphasis should be more on this part of the programme. Having gender sensitization programmes, conducting discussions, counseling sessions, mentoring groups, support systems and introspective deliberations could become a constructive part of such initiatives.

In the given general environment in which CASH functions, one can imagine the condition of disciplines that teach and research gender. Their status, respect, credibility are all questioned constantly. However, it is precisely with the help of such disciplines that discrimination towards gender and gender related

discussions has a chance of being challenged. Some thoughts about these directions follow:

While gender awareness has to be discussed as a basic issue in specific courses, there is every need to integrate gender into disciplines through their curriculum. This gender approach should not be one that sees women as helpless, victimized, suffering, deserving and waiting for protection from men. Rather it should try to liberate a healthy, positive and mature interaction. Specifically, segregation on the basis of gender will not eliminate sexual harassment. Rather it is the realisation that all genders should be treated with dignity that will lay the foundation for a harassment-free atmosphere in educational institutions or for that matter anywhere, including in society as a whole.

There are several discourses that focus on decolonising the classroom/pedagogy of the colonialist tendencies towards race, caste, class, language, and region. There are discourses on teaching different disciplines in a democratic and liberating manner. However, not much has been discussed as to how to decolonize classrooms and students with respect to gender. Making the disciplines gender sensitive and aware of their hierarchical nature will not only help in establishing a better campus atmosphere but will also help the disciplines liberate themselves from the implicit burdens of masculine hierarchies and patriarchal hegemonies.

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#### Notes:

1. One non-teaching staff member of a University suggested that the term sexual harassment on CASH posters and circulars does not look decent.

## The Vishakha Guidelines

On 22nd September 1992, 50+ year old social worker, Bhanwari Devi was gang raped by a group of upper class, influential men, because she had tried to stop the insidious practice of child marriage. Bhanwari Devi was determined to get justice and lodged a case against the offenders. However, the accused was acquitted by a trial court, because everyone, including the village authorities, doctors and the police, dismissed her complaint.

This appalling injustice, together with the fighting spirit of Bhanwari Devi, inspired several women's groups and NGOs to file a petition in the Supreme Court under the collective platform of Vishakha (Vishakha and others V. State of Rajasthan and others, 1997). They demanded justice for Bhanwari Devi and urged action against sexual harassment at work place.

The Supreme Court defined sexual harassment as any unwelcome gesture, behavior, words or advances that are sexual in nature. The court had, for the first time, drawn upon an international human rights law instrument, the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to pass a set of guidelines known as Vishakha guidelines

Here are some Vishakha guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court:

- It is the onus of the employer to include a rule in the company code of conduct for preventing sexual harassment.
- Organizations must establish complaint committees that are headed by women.
- Initiate disciplinary actions against offenders and safeguard the interests of the victim.
- Female employees shall be made aware of their rights.



# Equality on All Fronts

■ **Salma Ahmed Farooqui**

University campuses today are a training ground for tomorrow's young generation. Not only do they instil academic rigour and make the student self-sufficient in facing the world and attaining good employment, they also need to carve out the personality of an individual. There are students who come from various backgrounds, castes, religions, locations etc which form the basis of a heterogeneity which we should recognise and respect. We should recognise various aspects of this heterogeneity and diversity and respect them. It's not just young women who face discrimination; it's even the young men. It has often been seen that those who come from rural areas into an urban set up often lack the confidence to talk to persons of the opposite sex. They remain confined to themselves or to small groups of friends from the same village/town or linguistic group until they are successful in breaking the ice with other peers with whom they would be spending a considerable amount of time in the coming days. Until these bonds of friendship develop, there is a teeming insecurity, lack of confidence, a sense of deprivation and a feeling of restlessness. Apart from the interim period public places can have hostility and discrimination of all kinds: young women often become the object of ridicule and of male jokes—they are treated as an inferior sex; young men feel

hesitant to talk freely to girls; junior staff feels threatened by insidious remarks made by seniors and women staff members quietly clamour treatment on par with their male colleagues. In recent times, the formation of anti sexual harassment committees at workplace has definitely helped in curbing these feelings to a large extent.

The Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) upholds the dignity of every employee working in the institution and fosters growth through creating a positive and congenial work environment. Sexual harassment at workplace has been identified as one of the areas by the university where the employees need to be protected for her or his personal and professional development. The University has played a dynamic role in stimulating an amiable and cordial atmosphere by taking a positive step in this direction with the formation of PADASH (Prevention against discrimination and sexual harassment), the anti-sexual harassment committee that has been constituted at MANUU. The Committee consisting of seven members comprising both women and men has representation of the members from across all staff cadres appointed for a period of three years. Soon after being constituted, the Committee members carefully drafted the policy on sexual harassment at the work place. Since MANUU has become home to a large section of Muslim community, who

come from the socially, economically and linguistically disadvantaged sections of society, the rules and regulations that were drafted had to be in such a way that it would not hurt anybody's sensibilities and at the same time protect everyone's interests. A lot of time was spent by the Committee to finalize the rules after which the document was placed before the Executive Council of the University for approval. The policy has been drafted as per the Supreme Court guidelines of the Vishakhia Judgment.

The policy is applicable to all employees (females and males) and also to third parties associated with the university. The PADASH committee formed by the institution endeavours to undertake preventive action and also acts as a grievance redressal body where complaints of sexual harassment at the work place are heard. The operational definitions of many terms dealing with sexual harassment have been defined by the committee in the document which are referred to while dealing with the complaints. Since taking of preventive action also comes within the purview of the university, efforts have been made by the PADASH Committee to undertake preventive action through conducting gender sensitization workshops, organising lectures, forming of a human chain for dignity and poster and painting competitions for employees and students at all levels. The PADASH committee found it very useful to align itself on some occasions with the National Social Service team at MANUU to bring about this awareness. The outreach of the programme and the impact it had was found to be much more.

While dealing with cases, the PADASH Committee maintains strict confidentiality during the investigation. The committee ensures that no other individuals should know of the complaint besides the applicant and the

## Extract From Manifesto Of Progressive Organization Of Women (POW), 1974

The concept of the Indian woman as an equal partner of man and as an active participant in all walks of life has never been so clearly shattered as today. We have, on the one hand, our constitution mouthing pious platitudes about the equality of women, and a few women scattered here and there as leaders, and on the other hand, the terrible conditions of the majority of Indian women..... Feudal culture preaches to women seclusion at home and restriction from active participation in public life. Increasingly, penetrating foreign culture, on the other hand, has reduced women to nothing more than decorative sex objects. Obscenity in art and literature are rampant. Aggressive male supremacy has led to the sickening practice of eve-teasing and one step further, rape. Some of us are not allowed to work for our own living, while others who work on par with men are not treated on the basis of equal pay of equal work. The position of the housewife is no better. Confined to her home, working from morning to night in back-breaking chores, she has neither independence nor dignity.

Kumar, Radha, *The History of Doing: An illustrated account of movements for women's rights and feminism in India, 1800-1990*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1993.

witnesses, if any, brought in by the applicant. Investigation is carried out within as short a period as possible. The principal of natural justice is adopted during investigation. Thus both parties, the applicant as well as the alleged offender, are given a platform to produce their respective views of the event and are given a chance to explain their sides.

To cite some specific details of where I work, I would say that it is a beautiful campus with many good people. MANUU is a university with a difference in the sense that it has Urdu as its medium of instruction, hence caters to people who are aspiring to gain higher education through Urdu medium. It is because of this particular mandate that most students and staff need to be familiar with Urdu, a language spoken in most Muslim households. As already cited earlier, there are students coming here from a specific socio-economic background as this is perhaps the first time many Urdu learners have an opportunity to attend a regular university. This is a new beginning for the families who are taking a bold step by sending the women to a university away from the sheltered confines of home. This is in itself laudable and needs to be supported. We need to empower this bold step

taken by first generation learners and their families and it is here as teachers, as non teaching staff and as university authorities we need to step in to provide the maximum comfort and safe ambience for such girls and even boys.

I was appointed as a member of the PADASH Committee two years ago; I can say that it has positively contributed to the building up of a healthy atmosphere. This cell has a special place in MANUU as it operates within a social system that is conservative and conventional and not yet completely ready to appreciate women as equal stake holders. There are situations which show that the kind of respect women deserve is not given to them. Most girls do not realise the difference between a comment and a compliment. For someone who has heard it for the first time, it can be flattering especially if it comes from a senior person. Sexual harassment does not always mean physical abuse, it can also be verbal, through gestures or veiled references to female anatomy. The more outspoken women employees of MANUU when faced with such situations deal with it directly through retort. The constitution of this cell and the sensitization programmes conducted by it at regular

intervals and solving of cases that came before it has brought about an awareness that there will be zero level tolerance towards any kind of sexual harassment. For example, the visit of the task force appointed by the University Grants Commission to the campus and the interaction of its members with various stakeholders promoted a feeling of security and seriousness about gender parity and respect among all sections of the university. This conscious wakefulness has naturally acted as a catalyst of change. The change may sometimes not come from within; it may be forced as it fulfils the mandate for all central government organisations and institutions according to the Supreme Court directive. But the level of security it has promoted within the female students, staff of teaching and non-teaching sections is immense and positive in many ways. Above all, MANUU's authorities believe firmly in treating women on a par with men, and this is the biggest silver lining on the cloud. This philosophy has seen many women teachers being appointed to high positions which earlier were restricted only to men.

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## Safety for women and sexual harassment always starts with a notion of security

### Statement by Dalit Adivasi Bahujan Minority Students' Association (DABMSA), EFL University Hyderabad

Concerns about sexual violence (especially towards women) seem to be motivated by a certain notion of 'security'. One of the obvious implications of such a notion is the need to "vulnerablize" and "protect" women. While such notions already, always presume women as 'inferior', they also raise significant questions about our imaginations of who perpetrates violence on whom, the spaces where such violences may take place and our "need" to acquire a "secure" space for women, when sexual violence is not something that is solely directed towards a singular gender or sexuality. One must therefore be willing to confront questions of caste, class, culture, religion etc. that complicate the issue of 'women's safety'.

When displaced on to realms of administration and institutionalization, regulations and actions taken in order to prevent sexual violence take on repressive forms. Prominent among these are the confinement of women with regard to time and space. The central issue here seems to be the occupation of certain spaces by women. Then, if the resultant solution is to eradicate this presence, then further questions may be raised about established ideas about women, public spaces and work. In spaces such as a Central University, where the dissemination and practice of education is meant to be egalitarian, can such spatial and temporal regulations produce conditions of equality?

A second concern relates to moral dictates on the woman's body as bearer of tradition; in the form of norms and rules about how a woman should 'ideally' dress, especially in public spaces. Are we then to believe that only certain kinds of clothing provoke violence. Actual instances would prove otherwise.

About the coping mechanisms, none of these episodes of harassment happened due to lack of security mechanisms, in the sense that the attitude of society in general to women and especially to the rape victims are at the core of the issue. Whenever a sexual harassment issue is voiced by the media, the responses always induce a certain idea that it was her fault, one way or the other. One of the possible solutions is to bring about a very carefully constructed awareness within the academic spaces along with co-ed mechanisms rather than segregative methods. The active participation of both men and women alike in various academic realms including gender sensitivity is one of the possible long term solutions for this. An important step would be towards the sensitization of men, a need that hardly excites our imaginations.

We need to take in to account the larger social context where factors such as religion, caste, patriarchy are mired in a volatile mix. We need to be able to rethink our existing understanding and mechanisms in order to apply a form of civility that does not imagine women or men as sites of affiliations—cultural, social, religious etc.— that need to be violated or secured; an understanding that produces modern public spaces as sites of egalitarian occupation.

# Manu in our midst

■ **Mirapa Madhavi**

**W**hat is the status of Dalit women students in the University of Hyderabad? What do they want it to be? What is their position in the Dalit associations on the campus and how do these associations treat them? Before we begin to answer these questions, let us get to know a little about the conditions in which the Dalit women students enter this particular campus.

Compared to fifteen years ago, the number of Dalit women students on the campus has increased substantially. Then, there would be only five or ten in the whole university. Now, three to five women join each department and discipline. In a year, anywhere between a hundred to two hundred Dalit and Adivasi girls are entering the University of Hyderabad campus. They come from different parts of the country. Some are from urban areas while others are from rural hinterlands. As everyone is aware, once their 'caste' is known, behavior towards them changes. A few students understand this discrimination while others don't. Those who understand discrimination suffer mental agony. As the discrimination is not direct, it takes a while for them to understand its form and workings. Dalit women students face gender discrimination in the hostels, departments and vis-a-vis other students. In addition they face it from Dalit male students too.

## Hostels

In the women's hostels it is rare to find Dalit and non-Dalit students living in a friendly atmosphere and treating each other with mutual respect. There is a tendency to accuse Dalit students of pilfering or creating disturbance. There are many ways in which non-Dalit students ill-treat and even exploit their Dalit roommates: for instance, refusing access to cupboards meant to be used by both roommates, and not allowing the latter's friends to enter the room. Moreover, the non-Dalit students often push the responsibility of keeping the room clean onto the Dalit students.

In all such situations, Dalit students often take the support of their seniors in dealing with them.

Major differences between Dalit and non-Dalit students often do not come out in public. However, seemingly insignificant issues and also those which cannot be made public keep surfacing in the hostel on a regular basis. There are many instances where, whenever things go missing, non-Dalit students suspect their Dalit roommates of either stealing them or giving them away to someone else. Such suspicions and allegations come up among non-Dalit residents only with respect to their Dalit roommates. When two non-Dalit students live as roommates, issues get settled between them. Non-Dalit students don't get accused as quickly and as often as Dalit students do.

What do Dalit women students do when they face sexual harassment in the departments?

Dalit women students face harassment from both Dalit and non-Dalit faculty members. In case of harassment from non-Dalit faculty (supervisors), they first try to keep the issue under wraps in order to complete the course. When it becomes unbearable, they informally complain to the heads of departments, who face the predicament of protecting the students while keeping the matter away from the rest of the faculty. Usually, the heads recommend other faculty members to take on these students or decide to supervise them themselves.

When the harassment is from the Dalit faculty, Dalit women students are faced with a difficult dilemma – there is an inability to face the harassment but also a reluctance to seek support from others. Someone who has to complain about sexual harassment from a Dalit faculty member feels immensely hesitant. She fears that such a complaint would harm the career prospects of the Dalit men who have just begun to enter the higher education sector. They take the onus of protecting the community men from possible harm and punishment

from their non-Dalit colleagues. In other words, Dalit women think very deeply about the community. But, how are they perceived by the Dalit men on the campus? While the Dalit male students jump to support their women colleagues when there is harassment from the non-Dalits, they refuse to even discuss or respond – internally – when the said harassment is from the Dalit students or the faculty. There are instances where some male students supported their male colleagues and faculty involved in such harassment. Such unnecessary extension of support has led to a wrong perception among the University community that Dalit students and Dalits in general support sexual harassment. Thoughtless support by some students for unbecoming behavior of one or two students or faculty becomes an excuse for non-Dalits to blame the entire Dalit community.

When it comes to relations among men and women students in the University, there is a lot of tension and conflict around friendship and romantic relationships. Quite a few Dalit men turn their back on their girlfriends when it comes to marriage after a long relationship. Some marriages have occurred under pressure from the Dalit women and even under the threat of a police case. Dalit men don't normally behave in this manner when the girl friends happen to be non-Dalit. They fear the consequences. Though it is not necessary that all relationships should lead to marriage, these conflicts and tension do have a huge impact on the careers and lives of Dalit women students who are just entering the portals of higher education.

Dalit women experience sexual harassment from both from Dalit men and non-Dalit men. While the former readily lend support in case the harassment is from non-Dalits, Dalit men are yet to recognize that dilemma and agony caused by Dalit men who harass Dalit women. Instead, these men look down upon women complainants.

The participation of women in Dalit associations is very poor – usually in the ratio of 1:3. The decision-making power lies in the hands of the men. Such unequal participation demonstrates the extent to which Dalit women are discriminated against in the Hyderabad University campus.

Dalit men and women enter the campus with dreams of a wonderful future. Once they enter the campus they are sure to get influenced (positively or negatively) by the different culture they see on the campus. The question is how these men and women who come from different Dalit cultures in India perceive the

campus culture? Non-Dalit students have the wherewithal to deal with any negative influence. When the Dalit students do get influenced negatively, there is a tendency on the campus to see them only as representatives of their specific communities, rather than seeing it as part of the general trend. In a similar vein, there is a tendency to attribute their mistakes also to their community. Non-Dalits (and sometimes, Dalits too) ignore the fact that it is natural for Dalit students to change once they join the university and get influenced by the culture here.

In our society, both Dalit men and women are waging the battle between received caste culture and the new Dalit consciousness. No one has yet come out of this battle unscathed. Both men and women get badly injured. When they come out of the villages and families, they develop the consciousness to think of social change and question caste oppression. Dalit women and men compare themselves and each other with non-Dalit men and women. In the process, women also acquire the ability to take decisions on their own. But, the men are not able to accept their growth and their ability to question social norms. They complain that women are bent upon always questioning what they do. This triggers many questions in the minds of the Dalit women: On what basis are these complaints being made? How do they

imagine women should be? What kind of boundaries and limits are being imposed on Dalit women? Thus Dalit women and men enter the university as equals in the same manner and with similar capabilities. They learn the same subjects and get similar marks. But, when it comes to working together, a situation of mutual blame arises. Why have such conditions arisen? Isn't there a need to discuss this predicament? Why do Dalit men forget that their women colleagues have inherited the legacy of working alongside them in the fields? Do they have objections to the entry of women into the fields of knowledge and education? If they had, they wouldn't have fought for reservations for Dalit women in the university, would they?<sup>1</sup> Have they not noticed that Dalit women are waging a lonely battle in the University?

What has led to this situation? Is it the Manu in our midst? Or is it conformism to the existing social norms? Do they also feel that Dalit women should follow the laws of Manu? We are burning the Manusmriti on the ground that it denies any rights to women and to the 'lower' castes. But how do we bury Manu's ideas which have entered our heads without our knowledge?

Dalit women are reaching the University challenging all kinds of violence in the society.

When they are denied the freedom and position to articulate the harassment and discrimination that they face on the campus, their identity and existence still remain problematic.

Questions of Dalit women's identity in HCU campus are not new. During the past 10-15 years several Dalit women scholars like Challapalli Swaroopa Rani, Jelli Indira, Swathy Margaret, Ratna, Sowjanya, and Samaanya have written about, theorized and challenged existing ideas about Dalit women. The questions that they raised in their unique ways still trouble their younger counterparts today. They are yet to enter the 'public' discussion in the Dalit community on the campus. I hope that such a process begins at least now!

Translated by A. Suneetha

*Madhavi is a short term fellow at Anveshi*

#### Notes:

1. Joint Action Committee, "Negotiating Gender and Caste: A Struggle in Hyderabad Central University", in Economic and Political Weekly October 28, 2000, 3845-48.

## The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

### Background and provisions

According to the Press Information Bureau of the Government of India:

The Act will ensure that women are protected against sexual harassment at all the work places, be it in public or private. The Act uses a definition of sexual harassment which was laid down by the Supreme Court of India in Vishakha vs. State of Rajasthan (1997). Under the Act, which also covers students in schools and colleges as well as patients in hospitals, employers and local authorities will have to set up grievance committees to investigate all complaints. Employers who fail to comply will be punished with a fine of up to 50,000 rupees. It has come into force and has been published in the Gazette of India, Extraordinary, Part-II, Section-1, dated the 23rd April 2013 as Act No. 14 of 2013.

### Major Features

The Act defines sexual harassment at the work place and creates a mechanism for redressal of complaints. It also provides safeguards against false or malicious charges.

The definition of "aggrieved woman", who will get protection under the Act is extremely wide to cover all women, irrespective of her age or employment status, whether in the organised or unorganised sectors, public or private and covers clients, customers and domestic workers as well.

While the "workplace" in the Vishakha guidelines is confined to the traditional office set-up where there is a clear employer-employee relationship, the Act goes much further to include organisations, department, office, branch unit etc. in the public and private sector, organized and unorganized, hospitals, nursing homes, educational institutions, sports institutes, stadiums, sports complex and any place visited by the employee during the course of employment including the transportation.

The Committee is required to complete the inquiry within a time period of 90 days. On completion of the inquiry, the report will be sent to the employer or the District Officer, as the case may be, they are mandated to take action on the report within 60 days.

Every employer is required to constitute an Internal Complaints Committee at each office or branch with 10 or more employees. The District Officer is required to constitute a Local Complaints Committee at each district, and if required at the block level.

The Complaints Committees have the powers of civil courts for gathering evidence.

The Complaints Committees are required to provide for conciliation before initiating an inquiry, if requested by the complainant.

Penalties have been prescribed for employers. Non-compliance with the provisions of the Act shall be punishable with a fine of up to INR 50,000. Repeated violations may lead to higher penalties and cancellation of licence or registration to conduct business.

### Penal Code

Upon the act's presidential approval, section was added to the Indian Penal Code that stipulates what consists of a sexual harassment offence and what the penalties shall be for a man committing such an offence. Penalties range from one to three years imprisonment and/or a fine. Additionally, with sexual harassment being a crime, employers are obligated report offences.

*Excerpted and edited for the Broadsheet readers from Wikipedia site: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Sexual\\_Harassment\\_of\\_Women\\_at\\_Workplace\\_\(Prevention,\\_Prohibition\\_and\\_Redressal\)\\_Act,\\_2013](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sexual_Harassment_of_Women_at_Workplace_(Prevention,_Prohibition_and_Redressal)_Act,_2013)*

*The\_Sexual\_Harassment\_of\_Women\_at\_Workplace\_(Prevention,\_Prohibition\_and\_Redressal)\_Act,\_2013 (Accessed on 12th October 2013)*

# Dalit women in Osmania University hostels

## ■ B. Sathamma in conversation with A. Suneetha

**W**hat is the social and economic background of women students who join Osmania University?

There are students from all castes and classes but the majority of women students belong to Dalit, backward castes and minority groups. Their families are into daily wage labour in agriculture and are poor. These students themselves work for daily wages during their vacation, to earn money for their university expenses. In the hostel too, they try to fend for themselves by giving home tuitions before and after the college hours—six to eight in the morning and evening. Some others also offer beautician services to other hostel-mates during their free time to earn a little. I know many who survive on a bun, tea and biscuits when they run out of money.

Women who have taken a divorce due to harassment, widows and those who have stopped education due to marriage and children re-join the stream with hopes for themselves and their children. There are many women students who have taken up the responsibility of the family. For these women, returning home without a job is out of question, so they often stay on and continue with some course of study while looking for a job.

*What kind of hopes and expectations do women students come with?*

They come with different sorts of hopes and expectations. Some have heard that the quality of education is good at this university and join it for that quality. Some have heard about the great people who came out of Osmania University and want to inherit that legacy. Many join here due to their hope for employment along with education. The free

coaching offered by the University is a major attraction. Those who cannot afford to pay for coaching for employment tests try hard to get a seat here and then prepare for District Selection Committee, Banking, Group and other public service examinations.

*What are the conditions in the hostel? What kind of problems do the women students face?*

Most of the women suffer from malnutrition and anaemia. Those who study in affiliated colleges tend to miss their food due to travel time required to reach the college. The food in the hostel is not sufficient to cure their undernutrition levels. Moreover, there is lack of safe drinking water in the hostels. The filters keep failing. Fevers, jaundice and fainting are common for women students. Even though we have a lady doctor during morning hours, emergencies arise at night, and there is no one to attend to the 2700 women students during the night. I have heard that government residential schools and hostels have a nurse, but here such facility is not available. In the case of emergency, the university health centre does not have facilities to take care of the students. We don't even have an ambulance. Women students rely on 108 services to reach Gandhi hospital or go to the private hospitals around the campus where they have to shell out a lot of money. It is usually the students who care for each other during the emergencies.

*What are the general perceptions about women's hostel residents on the campus?*

In the three years that I have stayed on the campus, I came across several opinions. First, many think that even though women students are good, they get spoiled once they join the hostel. I have heard some male students say

that women's hostel residents befriend more than one male student at the same time to exploit them. Two, it is common gossip that women students become fashionable after joining campus and change their life-style. To meet their increased expenditure, they are supposed to depend either on their families or their male friends. In case, this is not enough, they are supposed to be doing 'sex-work'. Women residents of the hostel are aware of these perceptions.

I have wondered how so many male students who visit the women's hostel – with a brotherly interest in the welfare of their younger sisters, as classmates who come for class notes, as people from the same village, caste or region - indulge in such bad talk behind our backs. There are also a few women students who have internalized this patriarchal ideology and who support such talk. In fact, women students are discouraged from attending meetings by women's organizations on the campus on the ground that listening to such feminists would corrupt them.

Since these perceptions and opinions are deeply rooted, most new students, except those few who have experience of the world, learn to fear such rumours getting attached to their names. They fear that such rumours would reach the families through the male students from the same community, village and region and jeopardise their education and future. Those who are sensitive in nature are more vulnerable to such rumours. Such is the 'inhibiting atmosphere' on the campus which prevents women students from learning to think freely, imbibe attitudes of equality and learn about new issues.

This intimidating atmosphere leads to a shrinking of women students' world and their life. Some of them retain their old world views. They return with a job to their native places, get married and prefer to stay in the marriage, even if the husband turns out to be terrible. On the other hand, there are many who 'fall in love' but don't fare better. They enter highly dependent relationships where they shrink their world in accordance with the views of the boyfriends to the extent of handing over their fellowship money to them. When the boyfriends refuse to marry them after several years of such dependent relationship, they don't even know how to take this betrayal, deal with the situation or inform the family about it

and often get into self-destructive modes of thinking.

I don't think this situation and environment is going to change unless there is a widespread discussion about this predicament of women students and notions about male-female relationships. There is a need for an independent forum for such discussion. Both the students and intellectuals need to think about this. A lot of women students feel this but few want to talk. I think that as a socially responsible student, I should talk about it.

*So, do you think that the political conditions on the campus allow for such a gender sensitive perspective about women students? What kind of problems should be discussed?*

No, they don't. Women students do not have familial conditions in which they can think about themselves. University also does not provide such an environment. In my observation, the diverse student bodies on the campus also have not tried to provide such an environment. Women students participate in big numbers and actively in all the movements on the campus. However, they do not have necessary representation in proportion to their participation and numbers in these bodies, nor do they have space in campus politics, except for token representation during meetings. I think that there is a need to focus on the everyday problems of women students - in the hostels, college, buses etc. - rather than protests about violence against women elsewhere. There should be more discussion about enabling women students to tackle these issues.

Thoughtful students should focus on enabling an open and public discussion on changes in friendships, romantic relationships, brotherly love, friendships on the basis of region, village and caste and their consequences. If the diverse student groups also support such a discussion, the women students would get a perspective and control on their future. Their faith in student bodies also will return. They will get the courage to discuss their problems with student organizations. This will create opportunities to broaden the inhibiting environment of the campus.

Translated by A. Suneetha

*Satthamma is a PhD student at Osmania University*

# Reflections on the condition of dalit women on university campuses

## ■ Sowjanya

[As I have studied at EFLU for about six years, my comments on sexual harassment on the university campuses are mostly related to EFLU though a few references have been made to HCU and specified as such. The statement 'Dalit women mostly associate themselves with other dalit women who are not organized under any political banner.' is related only to EFLU and specific to the period between 2004 to 2009.]

University campus is a space which seems to be politically well aware of caste and gender issues. This awareness makes it more complex to understand the dynamics of gender and caste on campuses. There is a notion that upper-caste women are sexually harassed by men of 'underprivileged background'. There are incidents of suicide like that of Sunita, a dalit woman who had been sexually harassed by an upper-caste man. On the university campuses like EFLU, neither dalit men nor upper-caste men are outside the arena of sexual harassment. Dalits and other minority students organize themselves under the political banners like DABMSA<sup>1</sup> and others that have come up more recently. Visible 'student groups' which seem to be secular and apolitical are groups of upper-caste students. There is a vast difference between the upper-caste groups and dalit groups in terms of culture and ways of living/moving on the campus. The upper-caste groups consist of both men and women participants. Dalit organizations are majorly male groups. As with traditional structures of caste and gender, it is a visible strategy even on campuses that upper-caste women do not often associate themselves with dalit men (there is a myth that dalit men having 'access' to upper-caste women would diffuse the sanctity of the caste). Dalit men participants most often move in their own dalit male groups.

Dalit men often complain that dalit women participants do not want to carry the identity of a dalit thus they do not join the dalit organizations or associate themselves with dalit males. Dalit women mostly associate themselves with other dalit women who are not organized under any political banner. At times it is the women of same linguistic background with whom dalit women associate themselves. The category of dalit women is often inconspicuous due to the absence of a

formal political group for them. Dalit women do not readily take part in any dalit organization not only because their voice is not heard but also for the fear of sexual harassment. Once a dalit woman becomes part of a dalit organization, her identity as a dalit becomes visible. She might become the easy target to the casteism which is very prevalent in prestigious institutions of India. A woman who is a dalit is more prone to sexual exploitation or harassment by both dalit and other men.

Dalit groups do not give attention to gender sensitivity even at the level of writing their manifestos. There is no history of a dalit students' organization dealing with the issue of sexual harassment either at the theoretical level or at the individual's level. Caste is the concern of men according to these groups. How the same structure of caste operates in a dalit woman's life is always neglected. If the dalit woman encounters any kind of sexual harassment either from a dalit or upper-caste man, it is very difficult to get the support of dalit (male) groups. The entire issue will be melted down as an individual's flaw or trouble rather than a factor of caste or gender discrimination. On the other hand, dalit women are not part of elite women's groups. The number of dalit women on campuses is low and their assertion of caste identity would lead to caste discrimination at the hands of casteist people in the administration or faculty. She is an easy victim because her position is not strong even in the dalit organizations. In contrast, dalit men have strong political groups and they can get support from their group to fight discrimination.

Though a few women had complained about the sexual harassment to the Sexual Harassment Cell on campuses like HCU and EFLU, dealing with individual incidents would not ensure that women would not face sexual harassment in future. University campuses need to build up gender sensitivity as part of the culture. There should be efforts to bring gender sensitivity among all social groups on campus. Exclusion of lower castes and dalits also should be taken into consideration.

*Sowjanya was previously a student at English and Foreign Languages University*

Note: 1. Dalit Adivasi Bhahujan Minority Students Association.

# Excerpts From “Women Students Forum: A Trajectory”

■ Rekha Pappu

The Women's Students Forum, formed in the University of Hyderabad, in November 1990, grew out of an older protest tradition in which women's issues had been taken up by different individuals (women students and faculty). For elections to the Students Union, a woman student had filed her nomination for the post of Vice President. A few days later, obscene graffiti against the student concerned appeared on the walls of her department. This, along with threats of a sexual nature that she received in anonymous phone calls, made her withdraw. This incident upset many because the graffiti and the consequent withdrawal of the candidature underlined the kinds of threat could be used only against women.

A group of women students then took the initiative to call for a General Body Meeting (GBM) to discuss the issue. Their main demand was that there should be a call for fresh nominations. They argued that continuing elections would be unfair since a candidate had been forced to withdraw due to intimidation. After a scandal, a furor and much heated discussion, it was decided that a vote held the same evening would decide whether fresh nominations should be called for.

During discussion we realized that there was much confusion because students, (mostly women) who insisted on looking at the problem as a women's issue, had to identify themselves as individuals. We felt that our cause would be better served if we identified ourselves as a group. Therefore a meeting of about thirty women students decided to form the Women's Students Forum.

Following the decision that the issue of fresh nominations would be decided by a vote, members of the newly formed WSF conducted a door to door campaign in all the hostels. However, the election results announced later in the day proved to be a disappointment for us because the verdict was against our demand for fresh nominations. This result was largely influenced by fears from various quarters that the WSF would definitely contest the elections if fresh nominations were called for and that this would then affect the vote dynamics. The

predominant narrative was that the issue was raised by some women who wanted to capture power.

Though we had lost the battle, we benefited from experience. Not only was the WSF formed but our understanding of other issues was greatly enriched. Some of these issues are discussed below.

The elections of November 1990 on the campus were preceded by the V. P. Singh Government's announcement of its decision to implement the recommendations of the report of the Mandal Commission. This polarized the campus (and the entire nation) into the pro-Mandal and anti Mandal groups, making visible the upper caste biases against the lower castes.

Most of the members of the yet to be formed WSF were part of the anti-Mandal group due to our upper caste, upper class backgrounds and our lack of politicization. The liberal discourse that we were consciously or otherwise part of, provided spaces from within which the question of women's equality could be raised in a limited fashion and most of the individual members did use this space to rebel or protest acts of discrimination against them as women. An understanding of structural inequalities was absent and awareness that the oppressions of class, caste, community and gender were interlinked was a long way in coming. Therefore, notwithstanding the presence of some close friends within the pro-Mandal group (which had by then grouped together on the campus as Progressive Students Forum or PSF), most of us joined the anti-Mandal camp: variously justifying our involvement in the campus as AMCF (Anti Mandal Commission Forum, or for our own chances of employment)!

When the Students Union elections were announced, the issue of the elections was still largely Mandal. The alliances, we thought, were more or less clear. Therefore when the issue of re-nominations was raised we expected full support from the AMCF. Surprisingly, this support was not forthcoming from the men within the AMCF. In contrast, during the entire debate on re-nominations, we had to rely on the members of PSF. In that

crisis ridden period we accepted PSF support without much critical thought.

After the excitement of the elections had died out, the question of the unexpected alliance (between students agitating on the women's issue but opposed to Mandal on the one hand and the PSF who supported Mandal, on the other) once again came to the fore. This was precipitated by the fact that members of the AMCF began to treat us as betrayers of a larger cause.

Around this time, the debates within the Women Studies class where we were introduced to feminist theory, especially materialist feminism, and discussions with members of other women's organizations and pro-Mandal groups forced us out of our self-righteousness. The transition from an unthinking anti-Mandal position to a committed acceptance of the pro-Mandal ideology was an extremely difficult and painful one for most of us. This was largely because of the fact that the issue forced us to accept responsibility for casteist attitudes and thought structures which we thought we were incapable of possessing. We were forced to admit that even as we protested against gender discrimination and oppression we were ourselves guilty in complex ways of discrimination and oppression of different kind.

Moreover, the recognition that women's problems required changes at the structural and systemic levels enabled us to extrapolate the same logic to the caste problem and to understand the need for reservations there. The Mandal issue therefore marked an important moment in our political growth. Though the group, (as well as many other relationships), was on the verge of breaking up a number of times on this issue, the experience was ultimately enriching because it helped us perceive the parallels between the women's question and the caste question. In this moment, emphasis on these parallels allowed us to understand that in the fight for women's rights it was important to make alliance with Dalit groups since gender oppression and caste oppression are closely interlinked, and reinforce one another. The acknowledgement that there were a host of differences between the two questions came much later.

Therefore, for most of us, feminism provided entry into other debates and enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the patriarchal system. Such an understanding was achieved at some cost. An incident that stands out in our collective is regarding a case of eve teasing. Contrary to popular perceptions about the campus, incidents of eve teasing are frequent enough both on campus buses as well as in public spaces. The offenders, if at all, are inhibited only by the fact that anonymity (one of the prerequisites in this kind of bullying) is

not guaranteed since our campus population is a small one.

In this case, a written complaint was given by the WSF against the offender after a number of girls voiced their discomfort about his behavior. The case was referred to the Disciplinary Committee. After a brief enquiry, the Committee accepted the WSF demand that the person concerned should make a public apology and he did as much.

While we still hold that incidents of eve teasing should be condemned, and that for pragmatic reasons it is only individual cases that can be brought to book, our discomfort arises from the fact that we did not take the caste/class background of the particular individual offender into consideration. Our actions were decided entirely by the gender perspective. At that point of time it seemed to us that gender issues could be looked at in total isolation and that they spoke for themselves in unambiguous terms. We were blind to the intersections of class, caste, community and location that impinge on the gender issue.

Later discussions made us realize that we had acted on a case that was “obviously” intolerable to us because of the class framework of our thought and that the support we had received may have been because the accused was outside the upper caste-middle class framework. Our accusation seemed to draw on and reinforce stereotypical notions, of lumpen elements. It became clear that within a highly stratified society, spaces of protest such as the one we had used to complain against this particular person were coded as legitimate offerings to appease and contain individual anger while the oppressive structures continued to remain in place.

That protests could even get sidetracked became evident in the incident regarding pornographic mail. In March 1991 a few women students received pornographic mail (hard porn pictures along with some typed messages). Though the mail was anonymous, there was ample indication that it was the handiwork of campus residents. The WSF meeting to condemn the incident was attended in large numbers. As planned earlier the group of people present began to walk out in a procession with slogans condemning the incident.

When the procession reached one of the men’s hostels, the group was surprised to find posters defending sex (slogans such as “sex is not obscene” etc.) and a few of the hostel residents standing defiantly beside the display board. The posters, moreover, were signed by a newly floated group called Osho. (Osho became defunct soon after the pornographic mail issued died out). This dissenting group apart, the rest of the campus joined us in condemning the cowardly act of sending anonymous pornographic letters to girls in an obvious attempt to intimidate them.

The debates regarding pornography continue to rage and an unproblematic condemnation or defence of it is not easy. Our response to the issue was from the point of view of the recipients of the pornographic mail and the motives, while implicit, on the other hand seemed to be shifting the debate to a moral realm thereby entirely erasing the subject of the different socialization of men and women. It also hid the fact that women are constantly represented as sex objects by the media to aggressively reinforce such a notion against the very self perception of the woman, and to violate the privacy of the concerned woman.

[...]

An instance of the WSF directly opposing the authorities was when a rule was introduced in early 1991 to the effect that the residents of the women’s hostels had to notify the Warden’s office details of their travel plans. The ostensible reason was that in the event of “something” happening to the women resident of the hostel, the parent would approach the office and so the office needed to know since they would be answerable to them. Regarding movement on the campus itself, it was stipulated that women going out of the hostel after 8pm had to enter their names in a register and also sign in when they returned, specifying the time of their return. Till then unlike in most women’s hostels (both at the graduate as well as postgraduate level), there was no restriction on the movement of the women residents of the University of Hyderabad hostels ...

[...]

A delegation from the WSF met the Vice Chancellor to protest against the introduction of these rules. They were told that the steps taken by the administration were necessary because “women were like grass, men like cattle and so it was important to fence the grass to keep away the cattle!”

[...]

As mentioned earlier, we had gained experience in dealing with cases of gender discrimination on the part of individuals and the administration but were inexperienced when it came to elections. During the 1992 elections, we decided to field candidates from the WSF though we were unaware of methods of mass mobilization or election campaign strategies. Two members of the WSF contested for the posts of President and General Secretary respectively.

The main reason for contesting the elections was a symbolic one. Since in the Students Union elections of 1990 it had not been possible for a woman candidate to enter the contest, it was necessary for us to prove that women could contest elections for important posts. Apart from successfully being able to make this statement in 1992 we gained a great

deal in terms of knowing at first hand, the money involved in these elections and the alliances that are made. The part that caste and community play in affecting electoral equations was also revealing but we won in terms of our larger goals – firstly, no intimidator tactics were used against the women candidates and secondly every candidate was forced to address women’s issues on the campus because of the presence of the WSF on the campus at large and in the elections in particular.

[...]

Within the framework that we had adopted of addressing women’s problems only within the University campus, it is true that the kind of issues we addressed were largely middle class. This was a lapse. We were blind to the problems of women of other classes and did not make enough effort to acquaint ourselves with their problems. However, what was distressing was that many subscribed to the view that our involvement in an issue might hinder rather than help it. Such a viewpoint seemed to overlook the fact that voices that are oppositional to the mainstream thinking are usually dismissed as irrational, hysterical or mindlessly disruptive. So instead of working to incorporate and legitimize these voices of protest, our rejection of them would result in an endorsement of the rigid and oppressive structure already in place.

This became clear to us in a recent case (February 1994) where an incident of eve teasing was taken up by a group of women who did not want the overt involvement of the WSF for the above reasons. Since the WSF had also to an extent internalized the blame attributed to it, it maintained a low profile. However, the proceedings made it clear that women (not part of the WSF) who were articulate in voicing their dissatisfaction and who had earlier been acceptable were now accused, in terms similar to those applied to the WSF members.

Ironically, an incident in which rejection of the WSF as a group was made quite explicit was one that helped rejuvenate it in terms of understanding the process by which delegitimation works. This understanding helped us appreciate our history—we may have been politically naïve but the process of working as the WSF and the process of change and growth had definitely enriched our lives enormously. Today we feel strengthened by our experiences and given the fact that more women are ready to be associated with the WSF, we are hopeful that the fight for equal rights and opportunities will succeed.

[This paper was presented in the Women’s Studies Conference at Jaipur, in 1995].

*Rekha Pappu teaches at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad*



# Heterosexuality and Sexual Violence

■ Samia Vasa

In this short article, I want to analyse two fairly established but covertly functional components of the discourse on sexual harassment on university campuses: the victimised-villainised figure of the upper-caste woman and the secretly homosexual harasser of men. This analysis is offered as one way of interrogating our assumptions about sexuality and caste, and apprehending the limits of the discourses on sexual violence in circulation today. I begin with analysing a few cases of sexual violence on the Hyderabad campus of the EFL University to show how certain kinds of masculinist Dalit politics cast the upper-caste woman as the perpetrator of all sorts of violence, whether it is sexual violence meted out to a Dalit woman by an upper-caste man, or a Dalit woman is harassed by Dalit men, or an upper-caste woman is harassed by a Dalit man. It is these heterosexual transactions between the figure of the upper caste woman and the challenges posed to it by Dalit male leaders that further reinforce the position of upper caste men and Dalit women within caste hierarchies. I end this article with a few comments on the ways in which the campus responded to the life and death of Mudassir Kamran. I argue that heterosexuality's invisible relation to our understanding of sexual harassment structures our responses to caste violence as well as male-male harassment.

## Violent Figurations

The Dalit-Bahujan and the other left-oriented student organizations in the EFLU campus have offered trenchant critiques of the feminist movements in India that have consistently deferred the question of violence against Dalit women. These critiques and other interventions against caste violence have created a rich history of protest and reflection on the campus. While the mainstream media and political discourses focus mostly on violence against upper-caste women, student organizations of the campus have made it a point to highlight

violence against Dalit, OBC, tribal and minority women. However, this engagement has often fed into misogyny and sexism; almost, as if caste violence can be addressed by Dalit masculinity only if it involves reparative violence against the figure of the upper caste woman, thereby consolidating the patriarchal orders within and through which caste and heterosexuality function and flourish.

In 2011, an upper caste guest faculty member molested his research student, an OBC woman, in his room in the university guest house. The faculty member was arrested that evening. Next day, a number of student organizations rallied across the campus. Posters were put up that accused the then Vice-Chancellor (a woman) of having taught the faculty member to rape. Instead of focusing on the violence of the faculty member, it was the upper-caste woman that was cast as not only complicit, but crucially instrumental to the violence that a marginalised woman had undergone. It was essential for this protest to be excessive and virulent in its invocation of caste violence as the intention, pedagogy and nature of the upper-caste woman in order to be effective.

In 2012, a Dalit Telangana PhD student was harassed by five student leaders of her community when she refused to join their organization on the campus. She was repeatedly threatened and asked not to start SFI politics on campus. This political enmity was played out on the body of this woman who was claimed as one of their own, and therefore subject to their judgements. Allegedly, she was sexually harassed by one of the leaders who claimed that he was in 'love' with her and demanded that she must have sex with him. Another leader called her a 'prostitute', spied on her and informed her parents that she was having a love affair. Her parents stopped talking to her, and she still faces a social boycott in her village. A number of questions of power and ownership converged in this one

classic case of multiple kinds of violence perpetrated by different people, all at the same time. She went through several months of all this and more before asking for help from faculty members and students. A small panchayat of faculty members, Telangana community leaders, Dalit feminist leaders, and student organizations was called, in which some of us, by then organised as a gender forum, were dismissed as upper-caste women who were only too happy to villainise Dalit men. The upper caste woman was thus, once again, the reason there was a rift between "brothers and sisters" in the first place. The Dalit female student spoke eloquently at the panchayat. Not only did she outline the sequence of events, she even pointed out that though she might get a formal apology at the end of the panchayat, a piece of paper could not ever undo the violence that she had gone through. She also severely criticised the members of the panchayat that dismissed the gender forum as simply an upper-caste forum. She upheld this dismissal as antifeminist and violent.

Earlier this year, a student (an upper caste girl) lodged a complaint with GSCASH that a Dalit professor was harassing her and the professor lodged a complaint with the proctorial board that the girl had slapped him in front of the class room. Even this brief description raises a number of questions about relations of power that are structured by caste as well as class. A few Dalit students and professors, however, had no desire to engage with even the possibility of sexual harassment. For them, this was an instance of casteist behaviour: how else could a female student have mustered enough authority to slap her own professor? Though institutional procedures were followed, and a written apology from the girl was tendered, the girl was rusticated, putatively for slapping a faculty member in public, an administrative justification which should be taken with a bag of salt! What kind of anti-caste politics was this that collapsed into consolidating the stereotype of the woman who always lies about sexual harassment?

A history of caste oppression reveals the ways in which upper caste women are complicit in systematic violence against Dalit men and women; often, complaints of harassment against Dalit men by upper-caste women have been the beginning of violent conflicts against Dalit communities. Upper caste women are also notorious for feeling harassed by the mere presence of Dalit men. Stereotypes of the

rowdy, lecherous Dalit man have always been powerfully entrenched in cultural representations. However, this is also a country that has consistently and powerfully silenced questions and experiences of sexual violence. Can we then dismiss complaints of sexual harassment from upper caste women without any specific engagement? This is not to say that the experience of sexual harassment is a sacred entity and is outside of relations of caste and class. But is it desirable to dismiss claims of harassment by claiming full knowledge of the meanings of an experience and explain it away without taking into account questions of gendered power? The history of caste violence cannot delegitimise the history of sexual violence that produces and reaffirms the performances of masculinities and femininities. By consistently refusing to engage with gender as anything but a secondary or a less pervasive form of relations of power, a rich history of anti-caste movements is being reduced to a very unproductive confrontation between questions of caste and gender, as if they are neatly extricable from each other. Worse, this figure of the upper caste woman that comes to acquire meanings in all instances of sexual violence against Dalit women ensures that Dalit male leaders and their transactions with this figure obscure the meanings of sexual violence that Dalit women experience.

If anti-caste movements have not thought about gender, if feminist movements have been casteist, how may we engage with these histories of exclusion productively? Do we repeat them in our politics, or do we take the critique seriously and think of caste and gender at a much more foundational level? This is not to say that the student who slapped the professor was casteist and the professor who harassed the student was patriarchal. Such intersectional analyses tend to isolate different components of one's subjectivity, as if these are fixed components in a machine, working in the same way, producing the same effects, creating the same predicaments at all times and in all places. If acts of violence have to be analysed, they will have to be analysed with all the complexity and the contingency of our subjecthood. But even before we undertake this difficult analytical task, we have to first build a basic sequence of events, we have to be able to record testimonies of both the sides, and we have to be able to create a space where analysis can take place. Institutionally and organizationally, there are no practices of fact-finding that can establish some narrative in such cases. Indeed, this work is even thwarted

by the frenzy around taking a position on either casteism or patriarchy.

### **Politics of gayness: On the waiting list of student politics**

If these are some of the limits and some of the complexities of the discourse around sexual harassment of women, there is a complete lack of language to understand other kinds of harassed subjects. To now talk about sexual harassment of men by men would seem to invoke the prevalent debate about gender-neutral laws: that we need to have gender-neutral languages within law as well as outside of it. I suggest no such thing; indeed, gender-neutrality cannot be an adequate institutional response to gendered realities and bodies. What happens, then, when we are confronted with accounts of violence that structurally blur the possibility of distinguishing between harassment and homophobia?

Mudassir Kamran hung himself in March 2013. The immediate cause of his suicide seemed to be an emotional disturbance over having been handed over to the police by the university administration, in response to a serious complaint by Mudassir's 'close friend' and former roommate. By this time, Mudassir had several complaints against him by this friend, alleging stalking, emotional and verbal harassment, and physical assault, among other things. In my own conversation with this friend, I noticed that Mudassir's advances were also being rejected on the grounds of disgust at the possibility of homosexuality. While I would be the first to argue that harassment of the friend had to stop, I would also assert that an engagement with one's own heterosexism is required in really understanding this avoidable tragedy. My point, frequently misinterpreted as a declaration of a truth about Mudassir Kamran, is not that he was gay. Gayness is not an essence that can be embodied by the dead or the living. My point is that Mudassir was an instance of how institutions and cultural communities deal with subjects that are assumed to be gay.

Much of the following account came to light only after his death. Hours before that, an informal police complaint was lodged against him, apparently because Mudassir and the complainant had gotten into a physical fight, reportedly ending in Mudassir attempting to strangle his friend. It appears in hindsight that the complaints that were filed against Mudassir did not take the institutional course

(GSCASH referral, formal meetings with the accused, and so forth), except in a series of show-cause notices, after which he was handed over to the police and held in the police station. Students and faculty members, who had been involved at the behest of the complainant, had pointed out beforehand to the administration the significant risks of handing Mudassir over to the police. He was a Kashmiri Muslim, after all. Afzal Guru had just been hung, and Muslim youth had just been falsely implicated in the Dilsukhnagar blasts. It was observed by these students involved that the Proctor, who normally thus far had been reluctant to take a stand against the 'offender' seemed quick to hand the matter over to the police. He rejected repeated requests for arranging formal counselling for Mudassir. Indeed it seemed as if the complainant claimed that all he wanted was an end to this ordeal. What the ordeal was for Mudassir is now irretrievable. All we have is a newspaper report that cites three letters that Mudassir had written to the administration in response to the complaints filed against him (TOI report, March 14, 2013). It is true that student organizations managed to get Mudassir released from police custody in barely an hour, but the damage was done. Or so we can conclude, because Mudassir hung himself the next day.

That the administration recognised none of this complexity was not surprising. What was really the stunning moment of reckoning with Mudassir's death, was that the student protests did not mention Mudassir's 'crimes' or the possibility of homosexuality being an issue for at least a week of intense protests. In fact, the administration's claim that this was a "homosexual issue" was interpreted by the students as an attempt to "malign the dead". The document that was written immediately after his death called this a scuffle between two friends. Other documents used the word "conflict". One student went so far as to call this 'problem' an instance of "brotherly love". Some students even claimed that an allegation of homosexuality fed into the stereotype of Muslim men being homosexual, thereby confirming that being called homosexual was an insult one could never hope to recover from. It was only on the fourth day that the protest documents mentioned homosexuality as an issue that "now" needs to be addressed, in spite of members of the protest insisting that homosexuality was not an issue at all.<sup>1</sup>

That the protest documents were more politically (and poetically) correct did not

signify any major political breakthrough. Thus, throughout the student agitation for "justice" for Mudassir, he was compulsively framed as the Kashmiri Muslim man who was treated unfairly by a nationalist, casteist university administration. The denial of any possibility of homosexuality became the grounds on which the "struggle" was mounted. Language failed the protest documents when they mentioned the "friend" who was stalked by Mudassir. For both the administration as well as the student protests, Mudassir could either be understood as a harassed Kashmiri man, or a violent homosexual.

It is important to understand the many ways in which the failure of language marks this event. The term homosexual became a polyvalent term, which gave rise to completely paradoxical dispositions among those who surrounded Mudassir's death. His complainant felt distress, annoyance, irritation and fear; the proctor felt enough discomfort to hand him to the police rather than think about less violent possibilities like counselling; the police used the term as a license to incarcerate him, (a killing incarceration, even though in objective terms it was hardly for an hour); like the police, administration sought to excuse its conduct under the seemingly omnibus crime/sin of Mudassir's homosexuality; the stunned and guilt ridden community sought to blame and escape it by evading the possibility of its existence altogether.

While a discourse, that claims to describe, understand and explain violence committed by men against women cannot be expected to illuminate the murky terrain of Mudassir's life and death, one at least hopes to glean some insights about violence, institutions and cultures from it. Sadly, even that is not available. My argument, then, is not to develop discourses that can describe and include even these 'special' cases. What is clear, instead, is that an attempt to explain away sexual violence by simply pointing to caste or class or nationalism or desire, will necessarily privilege certain kinds of narratives and meanings over others. At the very least, we need the political desire to engage with sexual violence in a way that interrogates our own locations and limits in understanding it and responding to it. At the very least, we need to read acts of harassment, homophobia and institutional procedures as barring our access to any neat narrative. At the very least, we need to ask questions about heterosexuality and its foundational relationship with the way we

articulate sexual violence and structures of caste.

*Samia Vasa was a student at English and Foreign Languages University*

#### Notes:

1. On 6th March, the protest document said, among other things: "The administration, along with the police has been hinting at the sexuality of the student and what could be its expression as the cause behind the conflict between him and his friend. We believe that Mudassir's friend with whom he got in to a fight is being forced by the administration and the police to give statements that frame Mudassir in a particular manner and to give his character an "unnatural" colour. We strongly believe that these rumours spread by the administration uphold its homophobic attitude and its use of homosexuality as a pretext for abuse and discrimination. Even in attempting to engage with the aspect of sexuality that this situation now brings forth, one finds a severe want of nuance in their language" (emphases mine).

On 7th March, a cartoon poster was published which had "Homophobia" written across the poster with the following words: "Just think we stumbled upon an important clue regarding Mudassir's death" (emphasis mine). The protest document that was published on Facebook on 11th March says: "We have decided to shed our organizational affiliations and come together under the united front of the Struggle Committee for Justice for Mudassir Kamran. This committee will not stand for any kind of discrimination based on caste, class, gender, region or sexual orientation. For a long time, this campus has been consciously blind to the voices of marginalized students. We clarify today: So what if Mudassir was homosexual? So what if he was a Kashmiri Muslim? This campus, members of the administration, the faculty, student body have failed to nurture a space that allows for a language other than the 'normal'". (emphasis mine).

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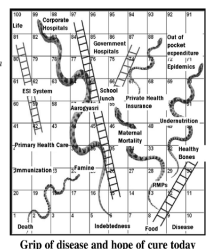
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# Gendered Violence and the Hall of Mirrors

■ Parnal Chirmuley

A very young man, who should have been cheerfully devouring the world of ideas over samosas and tea from the canteen, tries instead to hack an equally young woman, his classmate, to death. With an axe, some say. Tries to shoot her too, but the pistol is too stubborn, they say. Then turns the blade and the poison on himself. There he sees success. Succumbs to both.

This leaves behind rivers of blood in the classroom and gashes in the minds of those who witnessed this, bravely intervened, or ran away from it. It leaves everybody entangled in a sea of Gordian knots that are just questions.

It's like a cardiac event for absolutely everybody on this campus. I don't have to tell you that. It's a cardiac event for me too. But we all try to 'come to terms', and 'try to understand'.

In trying to 'make sense' of what happened, all that is kept hidden in the folds of the deft academic mind comes pouring forth. If anything, it is confounding the incomprehensible even further. I quieten my mad monkey mind and try to listen because I too hunger for words that will help me 'make sense'. All I can see is a shadow-dance in the hall of mirrors. And this is why:

There is shock all around because this happened here (at the JNU Campus). It's as though this was the last bastion of women's safety and now that too has been toppled. Somebody even said 'that sweet bubble burst' (and I think, well, you selfish fool, you never saw life on a campus as a way to make the world right for everyone, you only wanted it to be YOUR little bubble of fun. But I don't say this aloud). You hear more such things: they start with 'back in our day', or 'what is happening to people nowadays', or 'it's the first time such a thing has happened on this campus'. And there is suddenly so much nostalgia as a first response! Faculty who came as students with green bones and grew roots here, others who made a

space in the world 'outside' and even those who 'hung out' here and still do. They are saying that this could not have happened back in the day. We all know it did. All the time. Are we behaving like there was a golden age – which there never was, all our historians will tell you that – because we want to put ourselves in an artificial space where nothing of this kind happens? Why do we do that? Why do we disown the times we are living in to claim the mythical ones that are no longer there? Because we are subconsciously aware that we are in a space where we run the risk of colluding and condoning, and we probably actually do that every single day. The golden age idea helps us to brush off this blame, which can otherwise cling and bite. But it can also spur you into honest and sensitive action. This we often forget. Besides, there was no golden age – violence happened and people trained themselves to engage, fight, be sensitive, whether their childhoods carried these lessons or not.

This nostalgia makes me angry not only because it's a tool to absolve oneself of blame, but because it is a dangerous kind of blindness that makes us believe that we can speak in terms of 'back in our day', ignoring or denying the truth about violence against women even on this campus. The easy after-effect is that you imply that this particular kind of violence has its own spaces, far away from your sphere of operation. More importantly, this is blindness to the pervasiveness of patriarchal / masculinist cultures. You don't even know you are sipping from the stream. And if in spite of long years of training we are suggesting we don't know that we are easily implicated in this mire, we are doing all women and men a disservice by being yet another person who can't fight the right fight because we have all sorts of temporal and middle class excuses.

Then there is much talk of this being against 'campus culture'. This campus is a campus, not a cult or a religion. Why should we just have

ONE campus culture? This campus and generations of incredibly sensible people who went out, always saw themselves – and this campus – as being of a piece with the rest of the world. Really, what the hell is campus culture? What this campus is known for is engaging with different world views to arrive at a consensus on ways to change the world for the better, for everyone. They never felt the middle class anxiety to define a code that marked off this little gated enclave from the rest of the world.

In fact, this dirge on the passing of 'campus culture' is making many like me angry, because we have started to witness how it has become a stepping-stone to talking about MORALITY. One venerable (actually, NOT so venerable, and you will see why) colleague said that students have no moral values, they are incapable of respect – 'I mean, they don't even give way when you pass them on the staircase... they act like demigods' he frothed – and that this was the reason why 'such things' are happening on campus. All right, I know, this does not merit a response. But what do you say to a more subtly worded statement that says that charas and alcohol are causing these problems? Why, some of the world's most radical and highly effective, impactful movements were not conducted with republican sobriety. In fact these are only a small part of the toolkit that helps people break out of class determined shackles – it's a toolkit that also contains music, books, food, love, solidarity, humour, and hope. And, let me remind you, women too have partaken of the sweet furl of the leaf, like, forever, but have rarely tried to bathe men (or women, or anyone else) in acid, rape them, axe them. How quick the transition is from being the flaming radical to being the ossified paternalist castigating 'these kids' for being immoral. This is not stupid, its not even the guaranteed characteristic of aging, as some tend to believe (I know many people whom some might call 'old', but who will put all of us to shame not only because they are energetic and full of hope, but because they have not become cynical, because they are unwaveringly sensitive and principled). This is a dangerous confounding of the word morality. It's not a particularly useful word to keep in your pocket. It leaps out only to restrict people's freedom. Especially women's right to an autonomy about themselves. My blood boils to see the bandying about of the word 'morality' when what has happened is the most mind numbing violence against a woman. If anything, being moral has to do with standing up for people's rights.

I don't want to hear the phrase 'these kids'. What this does is to rob them of the category of gender, it clubs the perpetrator and survivor in this undifferentiated basket. This is dangerous too, because it takes us one more step away from recognizing that gendered violence is such a part of society that we need to recognize gender in its living form. Everywhere. Even 'kids' are gendered – like, real people called children, not the adults in the hostel or classroom or dhaba (you got the point, they are not kids), but the ones in your own home (Now that makes you think, right?).

This event is also a crisis of kindness in my mind. Yet, thankfully, we learnt the value and social utility of kindness. No, really, it's a useful thing to have. But we apply it in a very creative gender blind manner. And I know I am in near-virulent disagreement on this with my kinder colleagues who are at pains to tell me that 'of course what he did cannot be condoned, it's the most horrible, despicable kind of...' and that yet, we must talk of humanity. We must try to understand why someone would do such a thing, and that we are all to blame, because he had problems which needed tending to'. I must add that I don't feel I am to blame. No thank you. I am a

woman who raises these issues and I want no part of the blame for patriarchal violence against another woman. In that sense, I am NOT part of the SYSTEM. There was even talk of a condolence meeting for the young man called for by the dean of the school with the understanding that though we condemn what he did we should also mourn his 'sad demise'. I am feeling disturbed that I find it difficult to 'try and understand'. I have no doubt that the young man who did this could really have used help of a serious and engaged institutional kind. My personal kindness is, however, not my default. Because I find the category of 'human being' yet another reprehensibly gender blind way of looking at the world. There are no 'human beings' here: there are those who no one has the right to box into M or F, and there are women, and there are men. And gendered kids, and older, much older people, also gendered. I cannot help pointing out that the quick psychologization of a criminal act, even accompanied by politically correct statements, is inevitable when it comes to violence against women. We all try to understand – this means we try to take that subject position. As a strategy of thought, it has implications for how we see gendered violence in the real world. We have enough people to

try to get into the minds of the perpetrator, sympathetically almost. My politics tells me something else. I am that kind of a mutinous, cantankerous woman, I choose to take the subject position of the other, the survivor, of the one brutalized, excluded, violated. Just as it is possible to choose to axe someone even if you are, in a way, a victim of patriarchal culture. It's that simple and that crucial. Kindness will only dull the edge.

So what is the point I am making? I am arguing that all these mirrors of morality, psychologization, of campus cultures, into which we are looking, are only giving us a picture of ourselves. They are telling us something very important – that they are all structures and tools of blindness to gender and to violence against women. So if you want to look at reality, don't stand fondly in front of a mirror. Go step outside and look at the world anew.

*Parnal Chirmuley teaches at Jawaharlal Nehru University , New Delhi*

(Appeared in [www.kafila.org](http://www.kafila.org) "Gendered Violence and the Hall of Mirrors"  
AUGUST 4, 2013)

## Voices From MANUU

### Ambili

As a new student in Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) I wanted to know what other girls think about it. The girl's hostel timing was the most talked about topic. The undergraduate girl students are supposed to reach the hostel by 7 PM and the research scholars at 8 PM. Rasiya (Names changed) responded "The timing of the hostel is all right but it looks unfair since it restricts the use of library. The girls leave the library before 7 whereas the boys can continue to study till 12 O'clock". Geeta's views are different and she says "Hostel always makes me feel at home. We all have restrictions at our homes which is required for proper functioning". Umaiza added "We are more secure and safe in our hostel and campus because of efficient security and strict rules".

The other problem was the timing of health centre. It works like normal office hours i.e. 10 AM to 5 PM in the working days, two hours in the morning on Saturdays and Sunday it is closed. The lady doctor is available between 3 -5 PM only. Aisha said "the services of health centre are not available when it is most required i.e. early in the day or during the day on a holiday". This opinion is voiced by many girls of MANUU.

Purdah/burqa with a facial veil or head scarf seems to be preferred by the Muslim girls here. I wanted to know their experience about it. One student said "The girls who do not wear purdah get easily noticed, they are stared at and also face comments", whereas non Muslim girls do not face such a problem in MANUU. Sereena says, "A few girls wear only headscarf without a proper purdah, and they are watched in the classes and stared at in the library. Some students watch them in wonder". The girls at MANUU found that the purdah discourages the men and that makes them feel comfortable.

The University conducts many cultural and sports events. The women are also encouraged to participate in it. But Mariya said, "When we participate in such programs the boys pass remarks on us, also the play courts are common for boys and girls. Many girls do not like to participate due to shyness and fear of vulgar comments and glances. The attitude of sports department officials is also against women." On the other hand it was found that despite the facilities of table tennis, tennis, and a gym in the girls' hostels, no one plays. The reason could be their unfamiliarity with such games. As one student commented, 'the university should find out the likes and dislikes of the girls and then provide the facility accordingly. Just imposing unfamiliar and manly games will not encourage girls'.

Though MANUU has provided security to the girls it doesn't seem to be enough. The perspectives of girls and the officials need to be simultaneously expanded. This will help in overall development of the girls at this university.

*Ambili is a student at Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad*

# Towards more inclusive initiatives for gender sensitization: a critical reflection on the functioning of Students for a Gender Sensitive UoH

■ Anu K. Antony & Greeshma Justin John

## Introduction

University of Hyderabad is a campus spread over 2300 acres with a population of over 5000 students.

The student profile is a varied one constituted by differences in class, caste, gender, sexual orientation, region, language and other such categories. The used spaces - public and other - constitute a small percentage of the total area. Even though there is no curfew on the campus, the roads are usually deserted at nights save for days of festivity (like DJ nights, the Sukoon annual festival, Diwali etc.). This situation cannot be viewed apart from incidents of harassment of varying degrees – reported and unreported – occurring on the campus. However, these incidents are not restricted to nighttime, they happen in broad daylight as well. This can happen to anyone irrespective of gender. Contrary to the claims of the administration these occur not only in the densely forested areas of the campus and at ‘rave’ parties. Most shockingly, a majority of the reported cases happen on the main roads, in the shopping complex, in classrooms, labs, departments and so on.

The response from the campus community—the administration, CASH<sup>1</sup>, the students union and various other students’ political groups—towards various reported cases of harassment has been disheartening. This indicates a failure in developing a gender sensitive atmosphere even after three decades of establishment of this so-called progressive and highly ranked university of the country. It is in this broad context that we place ‘Students for a Gender-Sensitive UoH’ a group that was active for a few months in 2011-2012.

We first give a brief history of the group and its activities. After that, we focus on a particular initiative by the group called ‘Reclaiming

UoH: Safety without Pins’ organized on 9th March 2012. By illustrating the peculiarities of the initiative, we intend to look back and reflect on it. In the process, we try to think about more effective and inclusive ways of making interventions in orienting a space like this university’s towards gender-sensitivity.

## Brief History

The immediate circumstances that led to the formation of the group were provided by the silence of the students’ union, political groups and GSCASH in response to a circular issued by the administration<sup>2</sup>. Some of us wanted to do something about this when the Students’ Union elections were round the corner. In the annual University General Body Meeting (UGBM) prior to the elections, we noticed that no one had raised questions about the circular. The General Body meetings in HCU are severely undemocratic and questions of import are usually drowned in the din of accusations among various political parties. Thus nothing about the circular could be raised in the GBM.

This led to the creation of a poster titled ‘Stay Home, Stay Safe?’ in which we discussed the circular, urging all political parties to take the gender question seriously during the upcoming university elections. We called ourselves “Students for a Gender-Sensitive UoH” and sent the poster to all political organisations. As a result, almost all candidates mentioned gender issues in their manifestoes, in a manner unprecedented in the previous five years.

In another register of our activism as a student body we found that GSCASH did not have a constitution we could access. As a result, in early February 2012, the group filed four RTIs requesting access to the GSCASH Constitution, and other information (statistical, etc.) pertaining to its functioning. We heard from GSCASH

only by April that year after the semester had ended and most of us left the university completing our courses. Those of us who remained began to think of alternative strategies of getting the administration to do something about GSCASH.

## Reclaiming UoH – Safety without Pins

By this time, most of us in the group had come to think of the limitations of addressing gender issues in the campus from the security point of view that most political groups and the administration had. It is true that security is the most practical and immediate step towards ensuring safety for all. However, the clamor for security made by the student community was not thoughtful, and the administration granted it in a patronizing and gender-insensitive manner. An article on the situation in Mumbai by Shilpa Phadke<sup>3</sup> which argued that more than asking for more legislation (against potential risks), it was necessary to assert the right to take risks, reinforced our convictions. The group wanted to address sexual harassment on the campus in a gender-inclusive manner. At the same time, the group was conscious of the fact that the first step in this direction is to focus on achieving the minimum requirements to live and move about safely on the campus.

What do we mean by minimum requirements of safety? We feel that easy and fearless mobility through the main roads of the campus (both south and north campus) that connect places such as hostels, library, 24/7 reading room, labs, computer center, department reading rooms/labs, gates, ATM, health center and canteens would constitute minimal requirement on an academic campus. Places like libraries, reading rooms, labs, and canteens function round the clock. We would like to make it clear that this in no way intends to underplay the needs of the campus residents to venture out to spaces other than those listed above, or for needs that may qualify as leisure. However, the group considered the right of access to the public spaces mentioned above as the most pressing need of the hour.

As mentioned earlier, most incidents of harassment happened in these spaces rather than in deserted areas and forests. Basic facilities such as well-lit roads were absent. Forget about harassment, we couldn’t see a snake lying on the road or a cycle/ person coming from the opposite side. The environment on the campus at nights is not friendly,

so even those who want to be out at night prefer to stay indoors. Those who want to make use of these facilities are severely restricted by the lack of the basic and essential requirements. We organized the campaign "Safety without Pins - Reclaiming UoH" in this context.

The campaign was planned to be such that we get the students of the campus, irrespective of their gender, on to the streets and public spaces on one night to begin with. A day would be marked for this on which students would be requested to wear a badge – a newspaper heart with a safety pin on top - all through the day in solidarity with the cause. Students were asked to deposit these badges at midnight at assigned spots on the campus as a mark of solidarity and as a way to reclaim that space. We chose March 9th as the day. As a culminating gesture, an event would be held at the shopping complex where students would be invited to drop their hearts and take part in singing/ dancing or any other activities. We also organized a few programmes of dance and poetry recital. The event at the shopping complex was attended by around 200 people.

We now revisit the campaign to reflect on the ways in which it could have been more inclusive and effective. It is true that the event at the shopping complex saw a huge turn out; but the other public spots we had marked for our activism were as deserted as on any other normal day. The midnight event in effect became a spectacle where firstly only a portion of the campus community attended (some critics commented that these were the students who were anyway already mobile at nights, and that such spectacles could alienate people). Secondly, those who attended it were the normal audience for programmes organized at that place. This could possibly imply that this event did not motivate most of the students on the campus to participate in this campaign. More than these, we think that filling up the public spaces without the celebratory event at the shopping complex would have been more enabling. In this context, we the event failed and was reduced to a spectacle. The focus of the campaign was about reclaiming the public spaces on the campus fearlessly by each individual at night. The event at the shopping complex overshadowed the campaign as indicated by the very small number of badges recovered from other spots.

What we would like to say here is that in spaces like this, movements for gender-sensitisation have to be inclusive. Groups

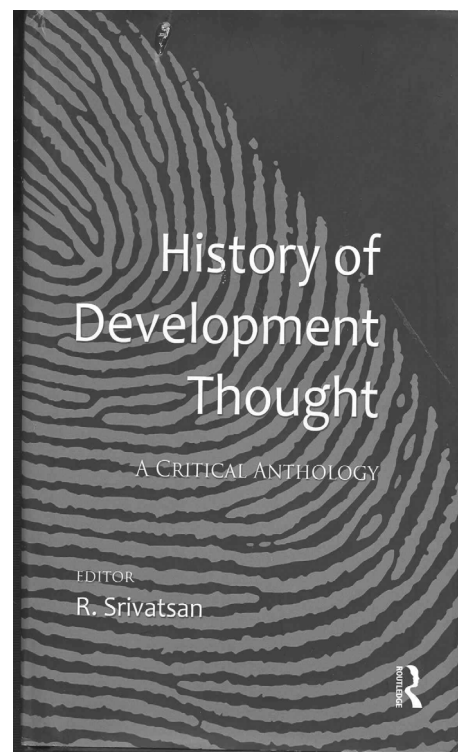
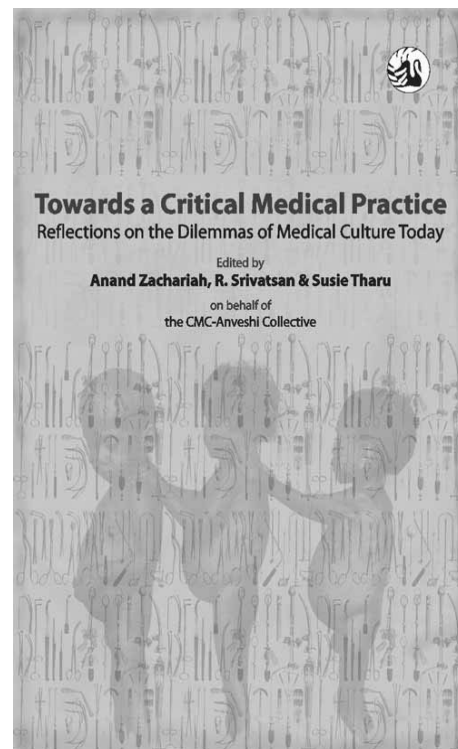
should act as pressure groups facilitating conscious agency and individual participation. For instance, reclaiming the public spaces in UoH was to have been a political act where participation could have been ensured by strategies like door-to-door campaigning, explaining the programme to each individual and coaxing them to participate. Secondly, gender sensitivity is not a sensitivity which is separate from sensitivity to class/caste/religious and other experiences. In our opinion, the group failed to represent and include these and for all these reasons, the campaign which ended as a spectacle, failed to meet the needs of everyone's safety. (When there is a cultural spectacle, e.g., a temple festival, women go out with their families to watch it even in the most conservative of villages).

What we fought for, perhaps unsuccessfully was the right of an individual to walk alone; it was a question of basic needs as the first step, which went unaddressed. It was fundamentally a question of normal nights and basic needs.

*Anu Antony and Greeshma John are students at University of Hyderabad*

#### Notes:

1. Later renamed as Gender Sensitisation-CASH (Committee Against Sexual Harassment) henceforth called GSCASH.
2. A circular (UH/RG/2011/1384) dated 16th May 2011, was issued by the Registrar, on the subject of 'Security on the Campus'. It followed an incident in which a girl was attacked by a group of men earlier that month. The tenor of the circular may be grasped in this extract, which reads as follows: "... it is brought to the notice of the authorities that some students including girl students are venturing out late at night to isolated areas on the campus. It is also necessary to (sic) for students to maintain the certain minimum dignity while on the campus..." This circular, issued during the summer break of 2011, had not received much attention from the campus students.
3. Phadke, S. (200) 'Dangerous liaisons: Risk and reputation in Mumbai', Economic and Political Weekly. We thank Prof. Sujata Patel, Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad, for alerting us to this article.



# Notes on Some Expressions of 'Concern' for Gender Justice

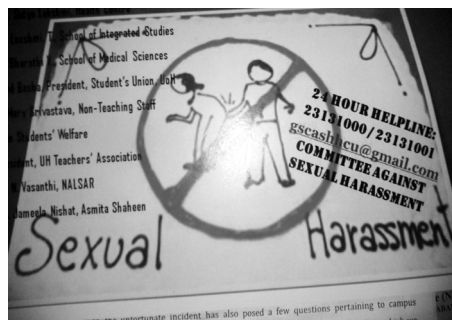
■ Chanthu S

There are a series of incidents relating to gender on the University of Hyderabad (UoH) campus which are taken up and discussed by “concerned” individuals, groups and organizations. I find this very notion of “concern” problematic. People who voice their concern have a wide range of ideas, preconceived notions and imagination—logical or illogical—informing their actions on sexual violence, sexual harassment and other gender-related issues. What makes me reflect on this issue is first, a series of incidents I have seen, heard and experienced in the University of Hyderabad campus; second, I was intrigued by the way the campus community handles such issues; and, third, I am puzzled by the mode of functioning of the Gender-Sensitisation Committee against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) in UoH.

In my opinion, sexual harassment and gender issues apply equally to women, men and sexual minorities. Therefore, how do I understand a campus community which in most cases expresses its concerns only about issues related to women? Is it that issues related to men are taken for granted? Is there a scenario wherein sexual minorities are not accepted in the campus community? Is it because organizations in the campus believe that addressing women's issues attracts more electoral votes (during Student Union elections)? Is it because gender issues and sexual harassment will be addressed only on the basis of the caste and class identity of the survivor? Is it because organizations and independent groups believe that issues outside the heteronormative gender order are fundamentally upper class issues? Is the campus community sensitive/reflective about the nuances of gender, some of which are mentioned above?

It is true that in the society we live, the agency of men in patriarchal oppression is more than that of women. There is indeed a long history of women's victimhood under patriarchal oppression which had its agents as men more

often than women and sexual minorities. However, it appears that the historicity associated with women's suffering under patriarchy leads to an overlooking of both men's oppression under patriarchy and oppression of sexual minorities. This blindness and amnesia, among other things, act against the articulation of the victimhood of men and sexual minorities under patriarchy. It tends to dominate a seemingly collective notion of “concern,” which in most cases is extended only to women-as-victims as it plays



out at physical and emotional levels. This is a framework against which many events in this campus can be placed. Moreover, if we look closely, the categories get more and more rigid over time. Thus narratives on domination of men and sexual minorities, even if they were ever articulated, are erased from history. Retrieving these narratives from the past thus becomes important and is a process. GSCASH as an agency for gender sensitisation should be sensitive to this missing element in the past practices of analysis of gender.

Against this background, how do we understand a campus community where the explicit is identified more easily than the inconspicuous? And what are the hurdles in the way of identifying the invisible agencies of harassment/violence within the institution of redressal of gender violence (e.g., GS CASH)? If we notice the pattern of formation of such laws and committees in history, most of them draw invariably from instances of violence against women. More often than not, only horrifying incidents of gender-related violence

that pertain to a certain class-caste group attract the attention of the middle class media in contemporary India. It may result in enquiry commissions and Supreme Court verdicts, but, sadly, requires another horrific incident to revive the ‘discourse’ albeit without any deeper implications. This is repeated at a micro level in universities.

Let me explain, using an example, how a redressal mechanism disseminates gender-insensitivity to the extent that certain facets of the problem do not receive the concern it warrants. If we closely observe the sensitisation programmes of GSCASH (UoH) we find that the Committee itself is gender-biased and misleads the campus community. For instance, in July 2012, GSCASH came out with posters where “sexual harassment” was printed in yellow with the letters “men” in “harassment” in red (HARASSMENT). (Why was this red used for “men”?) This year, 2013, the Committee has come out with much more innovative posters featuring charts and images. The image in the 2013 poster has the figure of a girl bending down and a boy poking her from behind. This image is in the background of textual content on information related to sexual harassment.

Where then is the bias? The bias here is not with the poster but it is in the absence of posters which alert the viewer to modes of harassment other than those by men of women. For instance what about men and women ridiculing another man because he is feminine; or a woman because she is “boyish”? Why are posters addressing homophobia missing? Why is there only a male perpetrator here? The problem with posters of male perpetrator/female victim is that it reinforces stereotypes of the same. This image, though intended to sensitise the Campus, ends up confirming stereotypical imaginaries of a male perpetrator. Equally important in this context is the choice of the form of harassment displayed in the poster: Do only explicit forms of harassment/violence (and not covert forms of violence such as ridicule) inform the economy of popular imagination?

When I explain this all as an individual, I do not expect the institution to interfere with the choices I make with respect to sexuality, which are fluid in nature. On the one hand, there is enormous social pressure to maintain gender roles as is clear from the observation of the process of upbringing of an individual. On the other hand is the fluidity of sexuality which can be traced from the childhood itself and which is suppressed by the rigidity of gender



discourse.

This fluidity makes it possible that an individual will encounter dilemmas at different points of one's life in varying intensities. Therefore the interventions that an institution makes in this regard must be sensitive to these fluctuating realities. An individual therefore will never expect the institution to encumber one's sexual choices. The enormous social pressure one might encounter at this juncture might stop a person in question from sharing and addressing these confusions. Under such situations, sensitisation programmes can act as an agency to break this silence without interference of individual choices.

Also to be kept in mind is the fundamental principle that in a case of sexual harassment, the redressal mechanisms must concentrate on the action and intention of the persons involved rather than their gender identities. This will ensure more objectivity and gender equality.

Other than introducing more security guards, surveillance networks and CCTVs we need proper sensitisation programmes which will initiate a healthy discussion on gender and sexuality on this campus. Since we are placed in a university system, awareness programmes and sensitising of the redressal mechanism itself should begin from the administrative level to the student community as well as to the teaching and non-teaching staff on the campus, thereby initiating a discourse on the equality of women, men and sexual minorities.

An environment should be created where the campus community is sensitised through different means like posters, slogans or wall paintings in public spaces. Also, rather than obstructing the freedom of movement of students at night by not opening night canteens, more night canteens should be introduced so that the administration and the student community will overcome the fear of harassment at night. It will definitely bring alive the public spaces in the campus. Such sensitisation programmes will definitely bring down the inhibitions to talk about gender, sexual harassment/violence and institutional homophobia. This will instil confidence among all the sections of the campus which come under the category of gender. This will create an environment in which anyone can live free irrespective of considerations of their gender, in a way that does not interfere with anyone's individual choice.

*Chanthu is a student at University of Hyderabad*

# Untouchable Rape

■ Challapalli Swaroopa Rani

This is untouchable Sunitha,  
the once-upon-a-time girl  
you all forgot, speaking:  
I address myself as untouchable because  
in this land  
just as there are untouchable hunger,  
untouchable loot  
there are untouchable (atma)hatyas\*  
and untouchable rapes too  
You might be surprised  
but I swear by my love for Yogishwar Reddy  
that I am an untouchable suicide..!  
Otherwise, I too  
would have sizzled like something spicy from  
a tandoor  
on the dining tables of parliament  
instead of being buried behind the newspapers  
...!  
Here, because education,  
love and marriage too  
smell and taste of caste  
our Nirmala's death a few days ago  
was also attributed to 'natural causes'  
Talking about the recent issue of our Chanti:  
as soon as she learnt a few letters,  
the pantulamma\*\*, afraid that her caste-less  
eyes  
might shine forth with new knowledge,  
demanded her tantalizing eyes  
as gurudakshina  
Do we need  
to talk about the lowborn nurses in the  
hospitals?  
She, with sleepless eyes lit with love  
tends to tumours, day and night,

but instead of commending her  
for being as self-less as Florence Nightingale  
they creep into her 'sisterly' heart  
as cancerous cells  
Here, for loss of honour and life  
we are, once in a while,  
compensated in cash  
But the surprising part is,  
even after (murder) death  
we don't get a fistful of honour;  
moreover, we're subjected to  
lance-like comments—  
'who asked her to sleep around' or 'who asked  
her to die'—  
that pierce our souls  
and kill us again  
Now tell me  
in this land  
are even murders and rapes  
free of untouchability...?

(In memory of Sunitha)

*Translator was not identifiable.*

Translator's note: My translation of the Telugu poem "anTaraani atyaachaaram" by Challapalli Swarooparani (from the collection of poetry "daLita kavitvam – 2"). Sunitha, in whose memory this poem was written, was a student of the University of Hyderabad (in the nineties) who had committed suicide. Nirmala and Chanti (not the victim's real name; "chanTi"—or "little one" in Telugu—is a term of affection used to address a child) refer to other Dalit victims of violence. Chanti, as far as I can remember, was a schoolgirl who was so badly beaten by her teacher that she lost an eye.

# alisamma women's collective manifesto

*[alisamma women's collective was started in March 2002 as a dalit feminist challenge to the caste blind perspectives of upper-caste feminism. Some of the issues that led to its formation can be traced in Swathy Margaret's contributions in "Charting a History" in this volume.]*

University of Hyderabad, 8 March 2002

Statement of Dalit Women

Non-dalit women! Caste Matters!

Dear sisters,

We wish you happy women's day.

There are many reasons for us, dalit women to raise our voice on this particular occasion. Given the class-caste variations of patriarchal practices and their diverse histories, it is important to think about difference and spaces, in order to construct an adequate possibility for traversal politics. We, dalit women want Hindu women and other non-dalit women to recognize that Indian female community is stratified by castiest patriarchal system. Caste system, both as hegemony and political structure works against the unity of Indian women. For centuries this scene is not altered. For instance Human Rights Watch, 1999 observes "Singularity positioned at the bottom of India's caste, class and gender hierarchies, largely uneducated and consistently paid less

than their male counterparts, dalit women make up the majority of landless labourers and scavengers, as well as a significant percentage of the women forced into prostitution in rural areas or sold into urban brothels. As such they come into greater contact with landlords and enforcement agencies than their upper caste counterparts. Their subordinate position is exploited by those in power who carry out their attacks with impunity."

We, dalit women, therefore request you to recognize that it is not just male domination but castiest patriarchy which is at force in India. We ask you to rethink. We want you to acknowledge the political importance of 'difference,' i.e. heterogeneity that exists among Indian female community. That you are made whereas we are mutilated. You are put on a pedestal, whereas we are thrown into fields to work day and night. You were made Satis, we were made harlots. Dear sisters, do not take this as an emotional, parochial supplication made by a few privileged dalit women.

Recognition of difference is fundamental to any democratic politics. Our subordinate positions are constituted and represented differently according to our differential locations within casteist patriarchal relations of power.

Within this structure we don't exist simply as women, but as differentiated categories such as scavenger women, peasant women, "professional" women etc. Each description reflects the particularity of social condition. And real lives are forged out of a complex assertion of these dimensions.

The objective of any stream of democratic feminism is to change the social relations embedded within all dominant power structures like gender, caste and class to mention only a few. Dalit feminism obviously belongs to this stream of thought.

Democratization of consciousness is necessary to make this world an amicable place to live. We, unhesitatingly claim that dalit feminism has already started its voyage towards this direction. We do heartfully admit that a considerable number of dalit men and non-dalit women and men have been making concrete efforts to talk and rethink about differences and alternatives. We hope that this wonderful occasion of women's day would further bring us closer to initiate a dialogue about both commonalities and also differences.

Apart from dalit women, alisamma women's collective welcomes dalit men and non-dalit people, both women and men to come and join its politics. It is premised on dalit feminist-centered theory and practice. We have named ourselves in memory of Alisamma, the witness and subsequent witness of Karamchedu dalit massacre, and her glorious struggle.

Thank You,

For alisamma women's collective  
Sowjanya Raman, Ratna Velisela, Swathy  
Margaret Maddela, Indira Jalli.

## Identity Card

S. Joseph

In my student days  
a girl came laughing

Our hands met mixing  
her rice and fish curry

On a bench we became  
a Hindu-Christian family

I whiled away my time  
Reading Neruda's poetry;  
and meanwhile I misplaced  
my Identity Card.

She said,  
returning my card:  
'the account of your stipend  
is entered there in red'.

These days I never look at  
a boy and a girl lost in themselves.  
They will part after a while.  
I won't be surprised even if they unite.  
Their Identity Cards  
won't have markings in red.

*Translated from Malayalam by K. Satchidanandan*

Ed: Susie Tharu and K. Satyanarayana, *No Alphabet in sight*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2011 (Page 454-455)

# SAMVAD

## ■ (Excerpt from note about its goals and objectives)

*[Samvad is a gender forum started in October 2011 in response to the complex issues related to gender, lgbt and queer politics in the EFL University campus. Kavya Krishna's contributions in "Charting a History" in this volume provides some picture of the circumstances of formation]*

The task of introducing Samvad stands at the intersection of various histories, ready to be invoked, tentatively perched: the history of various struggles in this university, the history of failed attempts to run lgbt groups and gender forums on this campus, the history of the feminist political movement in this region, in this country, and the personal histories of individuals who have organized this forum.

[...]

We have been asked if Samvad will deal only with the issues of women. We have been asked if we will oppose purdah. We have been asked why we need this forum on campus, when we already have so many other student organizations in an already over-crowded campus space. A feminist organization can mean various things. What is the kind of feminism that Samvad aspires to practice and work with?

These are obviously very complex questions and they all come to us from different locations. At this stage of Samvad, we can only make some tentative remarks that will probably gesture towards some answers. To begin with, Samvad is not a women's group, but a gender forum. We make this distinction to emphasize that we are not working with a feminist framework that sees women as the only objects of their intervention. Instead, we want to work with the objective of destabilizing established notions of gender and sexuality. And in this sense, as bell hooks has put it, feminism is for everybody.

We see the Gender Forum as capable of playing a crucial role in naming and negotiating with the varied networks of power in our societies and in our campus. From the casual essentializing remarks that circulate within our hostels to the various kinds of sexual harass-

ment faced by participants to the silence regarding alternative sexualities, the Gender Forum has a complex field to intervene in. This intervention can be in terms of sensitization, mobilization, debate and discussion, as well as initiating change through procedure and protest. In the face of various caste, class, regional and cultural struggles that are waged inside this university and outside of it, some of us have felt an acute need to have a feminist organization that would provide an enabling critical lens to analyse these complex and intermeshed formations of caste, gender, class, culture, identity. While Samvad will function in the space of the university, we see it as working in solidarity and even sometimes in continuity with various other struggles in the region and the country, for example, the struggle for Telangana, and especially the role of women in this struggle, from Sharmila's struggle against AFSPA, land struggles against corporate, capitalist forces in various parts of the country, the currently ongoing Maruti Suzuki Employees' struggle in Manesar, among many others.

Samvad intends to take up a range of issues, through various modes of intervention. We plan to have academic readings and discussions, film screenings, workshops, cultural activities like theatre, information-sharing and sensitization campaigns, each month. Along with all these activities, we will take up individual as well as general issues that are brought to our notice by the participants of this university. To begin with, we plan to focus on three issues:

1. GSCASH: In spite of UGC regulations, GSCASH is not active on this campus. In the event of sexual harassment, we have no phone numbers to contact the concerned authorities, we have no information about the sexual harassment policy. In fact, a lot of us don't even know what constitutes sexual harassment... We hope that Samvad can play a role in the revival as well as the sustenance of GSCASH in this university.

2. The second issue is related to the women's hostels. The Baichanda hostel that

houses BA students, among many other students, closes its gate to visitors at ten. The ten o'clock rule has been enforced since August, and has been enforced only on this hostel. The other hostel for women, the Akka Mahadevi Hostel, continues with the old eleven o'clock rule... What we want to do is facilitate discussions among the residents of the Baichanda hostel about what they think is desirable for them. As a gender forum, we do not wish to occupy any moral high ground and attempt to enlighten people about their rights and violations. Instead, at all points and levels, we wish to pay attention to the choices that men and women make, in spite of being framed within powerful structures. And that is precisely why we have decided to call this Forum, Samvad. A word that is common to several Indian languages, Samvad means dialogue, discussion, exchange, debate.

3. Finally, we wish to emphasize the urgent need to have student elections on this campus. Not only do we need democratic processes and a legitimate platform for students, we also need to regulate the procedures and systems that sustain this university.

Among the various other issues that we have in mind, We would like to talk about one more extremely pertinent issue that Samvad intends to address in the near future. This is related to the absolute inadequacy of basic facilities for the non-teaching staff on this campus. Women workers do not even have a place to rest, especially in case of health problems. There aren't adequate bathrooms, and the bathrooms that exist are often non-functional - sometimes, they are not repaired for months, and mostly, there is no running water. We do not see these as simply administrative failures. These are also ideological decisions, and we wish to crucially challenge them at that level. What kind of a workspace is this university for the non-teaching staff? We want to take this question seriously, and work with various sections of the university to make a difference to the state of affairs.

[...]

I know that the picture is still fuzzy. But I also hope that this open-endedness can be made productive. More than anything else, I hope that this tentativeness can be utilized into creating dialogic spaces on this campus.

# A 'Conversation' between a Daughter and a Mother

■ Leila Gautam and Gita Ramaswamy

GR

My university education was in the early nineteen seventies on the Osmania University (OU) campus, at a time of some change. The large numbers of Muslim girls who had earlier come here for higher education had dwindled rapidly, and the upper caste Telangana Hindu gentry that was now sending its sons here was not sending its girls. In my Department of Mathematics, we were three girls to maybe fifty boys.

It was not easy to be a girl on the campus. Parents at home and the ruling masculine ethos at college meant that the girl was responsible for any issues. She had to always move in a group of her own gender, she had to walk without meeting anyone's gaze, she should not have male friends, she should never stay beyond college hours and she had better study hard. If she faced sexual harassment or what was called, hatefully, "eve-teasing"—the very term demeaning and patronizing—it was no doubt her fault for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, wearing wrong clothes, with the wrong people and most of all, behaving inappropriately.

LG

My first response to my mother's idea of what constituted sexual violence was a feeling of disconnectedness. I have never been molested or harassed in Delhi—beyond catcalling on the roads, I have never been pawed or groped on the buses or the metros—and I have travelled on these on a regular basis.

College [for an undergraduate student in Delhi University (DU) is illiberal. I do not know if it is the case all over India, but it was certainly the case with me. We are treated like children, our views not respected or considered. The students asked for an "open campus"—a demand that encapsulated a great deal. Girls were not to be interrogated endlessly when they wished to take "night-outs"—a permission letter from their parents ought to be enough (a contradiction, really, because, needless to say, this was never a requirement for a boy who wanted to spend a night elsewhere). Nor were the girls to be locked into their blocks after ten pm. In hindsight, I wonder how such a demand could have been implemented in the first place—it was so full of contradictions.

The girls' blocks are something akin to a "zenana." A brick screen shuts us off from all sides—hiding our verandas and open spaces from public view. We have two entrances—both guarded all day, unguarded only when they are locked from ten in the night to six in the morning. These external, "visible" differences are complemented by internal ones. The girls' blocks have a warden, whom we apply to for night-outs, for leaves. She is the intermediary between us and the college which "cares" for us.

GR

We learnt to survive in that atmosphere [OU] because education was precious to us, and also learnt to fight, because personhood, even if one was a woman, was no less important, and these were the heady days of the feminist movement. Heady, because it was really only in the head, one had to be so careful outside there. My heroines when I was in college were Satyamma Srinath because she drove a scooter from her house in Tarnaka to Reddy College where she taught and Vanaja Iyengar who taught maths in our Department, and smoked with ease in the staff room. A little later, they were joined (as heroines) by Veena Shatrugna and Rama Melkote because they wore sleeveless blouses. Writing this, I sense how funny it may seem today when women drive scooters and cars and wear a whole range of clothes, but in those days, these were women who were different and proclaimed their difference in public, not inside the four walls of their homes.

LG

It is true that being a girl requires you to maintain/display your body in a particular way—you need to "work" on it. College

## Inaugural Meeting of the Savitribai Phule Adhyayana Vedika

Dear Friends,

Savitri Bai Phule was the first woman teacher in modern India. Challenging the ideological diktat of Manu that women should not step out of their homes, she worked alongside Mahatma Jotirao Phule as his companion. She set out to educate not only the widows abandoned by the Brahmin society but the Dalit and Bahujan girls who were explicitly prohibited from getting education. She refused to take a back seat despite facing public humiliation and social boycott. On her death anniversary, to continue her legacy, we, the students of Osmania University want to inaugurate Savitribai Phule Adhyayana Vedika on 10th of March 2013.

This forum will take up activities after examining the problems being faced by the women students in the university in all their complexity. It seeks to strengthen the students' mental capacities and improve their English language skills. Along with social awareness, it wants to cultivate individuality, values and mental strength among them. It will encourage students to aim high in employment, i.e., for civil services, junior lecturer posts, Banking services, Central services, rather than smaller jobs such as police constables or teachers. It will seek to create the required academic environment in the university where the Dalit Bahujan students can realize their ambitions and goals.

It will seek to further the feminist ideas and analyses proposed by Mahatma Jotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Periyar and others. Let us confront and challenge the Hindu Brahminical ideologies that are poisoning the Dalit and Bahujan cultures today and fight against those practices affecting our women - dowry system, domestic violence, discrimination, violence and subordination of Dalit women in public places.

doesn't leave much space or time to "work" endlessly on being hairless and slender and all the other different things society's images of the beautiful woman demand. I am engrossed in my studies, and ambitions, and am (usually) blithely unconscious of the beautiful actress on the billboards and on televisions and magazine covers, simply because I encounter her so little.

Our argument for an "open campus" was liberal in that it rested on the basic premise that students, having attained adult age, deserve certain autonomy and certain freedoms—and that these apply equally to both boys and girls. It withered. Partly, perhaps, due to the contradictions of the society we were living in - the girls in Stephen's certainly do not all belong to one class, and more importantly, have parents who entertain no illusions of the importance of "liberal values" over those of getting a good job and making money. Anything that hinders such a goal is not to be stood for.

Women in the university are controlled to a terrifying extent. They have no flexibility of movement—wishing to stay away from your hostel at night requires endless letters of permission from your parents, your local guardian—to be approved by the warden, and the dean of residence. There is absolutely no question of men being allowed into these sacrosanct spaces; girls with boyfriends are reduced to shameful exigencies, from courting in public spaces to making out in the bushes, exposing themselves to even greater trauma. Girls have been asked where they are really going—why they are going where they are going; one friend of mine was even told to produce the brother she claimed to be leaving with. Like the violence in the streets, this is another way of controlling women. And it produces good results. Women, in my college at least, are largely politically inactive. In all my years in DU, I have never smelt even a whiff of a female candidate in all your powerful student unions.

GR

When I heard about the Nirbhaya rape and assault, I was staggered and distraught by the violence against the girl. At the same time, as the mother of a 19-year-old girl, I was also horrified to hear that Nirbhaya had climbed onto a bus with tinted glasses late in the evening. The bus had five young males in it, and she had probably thought her boyfriend a safe enough escort. Did Nirbhaya have no self-preservation instinct?

Leila studies at St Stephen's, where only the girls' hostels are locked up at 10 pm. While I supported their struggle to break down this discriminatory rule, I also understood that

many mothers of girls studying in Delhi would feel reassured if their daughters were not roaming Delhi's brutal public spaces late at night.

In the matter of clothes (as with women smoking in public), it is in today to show cleavage, to reveal all of the leg openly or in tight leggings. In a class-caste riven India where the poor, on the one hand, are systematically deprived of their entitlements, but can easily and visibly see—on cinema, on television, on the roads of metros, in the top-end cars, malls and shopping centres—how the rich live and spend, what do clothes signify? Both middle and rich men and women are complicit in a system that keeps the poor down.

Clothes have the added dimension of a Western notion of femininity thrust upon us – the clean-shaven legs, arms, underarms and upper lip, signifying the infantile unnatural absence of hair, the hour glass figure and both cleavage and legs marking a come-hither stance.

LG

A wide-spread claim is that violence against women is somehow a class phenomenon. That upper-class women dress "provocatively." Of course, the justification offered this time is far more nuanced than what is usually offered. It is that working-class men are constantly exposed, through cinemas and hoardings and television, to images of women—and that these women's bodies become the site where class-antagonism is manifested (this is separate from the critique that upper-class women are bound by Western notions of femininity and beauty). I see my fight against such popular culture the same as the fight against an illiberal college space.

I agree that popular culture in India goes a long way in re-enforcing patriarchy. But who produces these cinemas? Who produces all these images that objectify women? (I have watched Bollywood movies in theatres that have an audience composed exclusively of working-class men. Both the images and ideas that appear on screen, and the responses, shocked me. Women are never displayed as anything other than sexual objects. Or the butt of sexual jokes and innuendos). Who are these actors? Who are these filmmakers and producers? Who are these people sitting on the censor boards?

A professor of mine, one whose intellect and erudition I held in awe, told me how much the demand of an "open campus" would cost the college. Just imagine, he told me, boys from "rowdy colleges" would flood the campus if

the girls are not locked up, the cost of maintaining guards and CCTV surveillance cameras would shoot up. Can you expect girls, he asked, to pay for this extra cost of the safety? Freedom, for girls, therefore, comes at a prohibitive cost—that was the most "liberal" argument of all, I encountered. It is all relative of course: we had our Principal say in an address at a student general body meeting that girls and boys are as different as eggs and stones, or apples and oranges, how on earth can they be treated the same?

GR

War has always been fought on the bodies of women. Girls feeling comfortable, expressing themselves in shorts and low necks, forget the war zone outside. Are they forgetting self-preservation? Am I implying that one can step over patriarchy's boundaries inside four walls, but not in public space? If clothes were a matter of froth and not substance, why did I, when I was 19, admire those women who wore sleeveless blouses?

LG

I understand my mother's view better now. Going out in public is dangerous if you are a woman, period. For a rich, privileged, upper-middle class woman, freedoms and opportunities are far greater than those of a working-class woman, and, in a place like India, far greater than those of working-class men as well. How could I compare the "violence" I face—if any—to that of the rickshaw-puller who takes me to and fro, who is forced to use his body to ferry me from place to place for a mere pittance, simply because he had the misfortune of being born into the wrong class.

Curiously, however, I have never felt disadvantaged or violated in the public sphere—like I mentioned earlier, I never encountered any harassment while out on Delhi's roads. Even less so in other "public" spaces: like the classroom, for instance. Not once have I felt that my sex works against me.

In my most private space—my room—I experience this every moment. My room, and my hostel, while I am in Delhi, is effectively my home. It is the place I retire to, the place that is my refuge when I am upset, where I study and sleep and think. And in such a space, I am constrained almost unbelievably. I accept that there are rules that one needs to follow while living under an institution—like a college hostel—and I abide these rules, sometimes reluctantly, but I have grown to accept that rules enable smooth functioning. But what I am confronted daily with, instead, is the reality of my male counterparts who face NONE of these rules.

Is it good that women are locked into their rooms at night to prevent “incidents” from happening? Is it good that women aren’t allowed to bring men into their rooms? It isn’t good. These may be small freedoms—but these are greatly valued by their male counterparts who have no such rules. And the taking away of these apparently small freedoms is yet another way of controlling and subjecting a group that already has few choices to begin with. Your hostel room, the small space you inhabit: it is important to feel yourself to be in control of that.

There are six hostel blocks. Three of these are screened, locked, and closely supervised. The other three are open, free, and if any rules exist, these are only on paper (they are never enforced—how could they be?—when the boys’ blocks lack wardens altogether, and all the close supervision that goes with it). This state of affairs is taken as being “natural.” The Principal lauds it, the Professors I respect the most laud it, the Administration lauds it.

I think the most traumatic and scarring things happen from sources very close to home. Aren’t the rapists mostly known to the victim beforehand? Leave rape. Talk about any kind of sexual oppression. Don’t women face it from their husbands or their family or their friends? Where then did this spectre of the stranger jumping out of the darkness to rape you come from?

There is something else that is very curious—the balance of power. When I overshoot my ten o’clock curfew by even a minute, or bring a guest into my room—bringing a non-resident girl is forbidden, as is bringing a boy (why, I believe a girl who dared bring a boy into her room would face the equivalent of a lynch-mob)—all the usual power relations are overturned. Suddenly, a warden who is poorer, less educated, has the power to shame me and hurt me. A guard who earns a pittance everyday has the right to rebuke me and shout at me. It is not that they cannot shout at boys as well—it is just that when it comes to these matters that differentiate “good” girls from “bad,” they have the power to actually make you feel shamed and hurt.

This is the contradiction I face—as an upper-middle class person, who has all kinds of privileges and advantages. I thought my version of reality contradicted my mother’s, but it doesn’t, not really.

[This ‘Conversation’ was composed by juxtaposing two articles written by LG & GR separately—Editors]

*Gita Ramaswamy runs Hyderabad Book Trust.  
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# Midnight March- Hyderabad Report

■ Maranatha Wahlang and Tejaswini

## Genesis

As people who face sexual harassment, we have been taught that keeping out of certain spaces at certain times is the only way to deal with this issue. The silence about sexual harassment has been society’s way of propagating this problem. The ethical and moral question has always been on the woman’s freedom and not on the man’s behavior. Hence, we have followed these rules for our safety and because we have been taught to do so. The education, the opportunity, the achievements and the self-confidence dissolves at the moment of such vulnerability. We felt this one night while we walked back towards our office in Barkatpura. It was around 11 pm. An SUV with 3-4 men inside approached us and stopped next to us and lowered their windows. They started the usual hurl of abuses that men employ. Our initial emotions were anger and fear and although we tried to react, we ran away on the deserted road. The feeling of fear and helplessness, which most women feel in this situation was overpowering. However, that night, we decided to fight back the humiliation and silence. We realized that one of the reasons that women are harassed in some spaces and at some times, is that most women don’t naturally occupy these spaces and times. We hoped that a large gathering of women, a normalizing of women being out at night, would perhaps start a change.

The discussion that night crystallized to “find 10-15 people, to gather a few friends and just walk”. Once we discussed the idea with individuals and groups, the idea gathered momentum of its own – a kind of ‘spontaneous planning’. The shock and anger after the Delhi gang-rape incident was the immediate catalyst for the midnight march. Groups, organizations and individuals working in very different

fields, volunteered to think through, plan and mobilize for the event and contributed their time and energy over several weeks. Our concept note ‘Night Monologue’ was translated and published in a newspaper by a known feminist journalist Vasanta Lakshmi, along with the pamphlet. A Facebook page for the march which had been created a couple of weeks before the march reached 800+ membership on the day of the march. Even though organizations played a key role in organizing it, we thought it was necessary that the space to be owned by everyone and decided to request organizations not to front their banners. Secondly, we also felt that the march could not be confined to ‘women’ alone as there are several people who are vulnerable due to their gendered identities whose participation is crucial for the march. LGBT community and groups that worked with male sex workers, child rights joined in. Muslim women’s groups in the city and a few Dalit organizations too joined later. The placard writing workshop was held at Anveshi just before the march where over 200 placards were made, in Urdu, Telugu, English and Hindi, discussing gender equality, gendered differences, vulnerabilities created through combined workings of gender with other inequalities such as caste, minority etc. gave us clarity on the various issues related to the false notions associated with sexual harassment.

## The March

On Jan 5th, people started to assemble around 10:00 PM at KomaramBheem statue on Tank Bund. We were expecting a crowd of 500 people and had 15 volunteers to help where required. Several TV channels were present even before the march had started. The crowd was thin at the beginning – around 200 people. The volunteers were requesting women,

transgender and children to lead the march and men to walk behind. The slogans charts were distributed and people started with 'Azadi' slogans. The March only started at 11:00 PM. This was the first time for several women to walk on the streets of Hyderabad at such an hour and they were visibly moved or elated. The numbers kept soaring as the march progressed. There were over a dozen TV channels who interviewed hundreds of people in the march. When the clock struck midnight, women started to chant "Ardarathri swatantram- Maahakku, Maahakku"(Freedom at midnight is our right). There were singers like Vimalakka, who wrote songs exclusively for this event, singing as the procession kept moving. Around 12:45 a.m there were at least two thousand marchers who crossed the Ambedkar statue and walked to Lumbini Park, where the march concluded at 1:00 a.m. The marchers were very diverse, though middle class Hyderabad seemed to be the majority. There was an interesting tussle over the slogans. We had anticipated and planned to scuttle slogans focusing on punishment, justice, mother-sister-daughter's honour etc and decided to use the Delhi/JN university women's students slogans around azaadi in Hindi, Telugu and English. So, whenever the unacceptable slogans came up, a volunteer (one of many dispersed throughout the March) would walk in to raise the slogan around azaadi. The slogans caught on and were then chanted throughout the march.

The march ended with a lot of inspiring speeches by several well-known women's activists and feminists who recalled different historic moments in women's movement including protests against the rape of Rameeza Bee. For the scores of young people gathered there it gave an opportunity to connect the Midnight March with the earlier and existing women's movements in the state/country.

### Media and the March

The march got huge media coverage in both print and electronic media, which, we think, enabled a lot of 'first timers' to turn up for the March. Many marchers were interviewed by Telugu news channels and the march was given live coverage during 'prime time'. Some newspapers such as the Hindu and Namaste Telangana gave special coverage to the marchers. While the level of coverage was good, the quality was uneven. Several report-

ers covering the march had difficulty understanding the concept of the 'women claiming public spaces' and continued to harp on laws, punishment and violence. Visual media focus on the individual, or rather the visual media's proneness for individual symbolizing a larger movement also created the problem of 'representing' this March as a collective activity.

But, more insidious was the problem of co-option. One TV channel brought along a banner with text suggesting that that march was organized under their auspices. They had already called beforehand requesting permission to bring the banner along, which was denied. Organizing committee members dissuaded them each time the employees held the banner up, but this was repeated throughout the march. Later other organizations too brought along their banners.

### Follow up

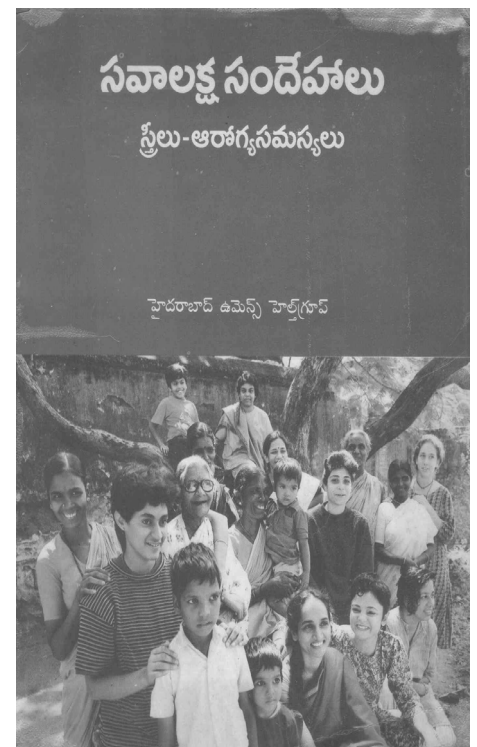
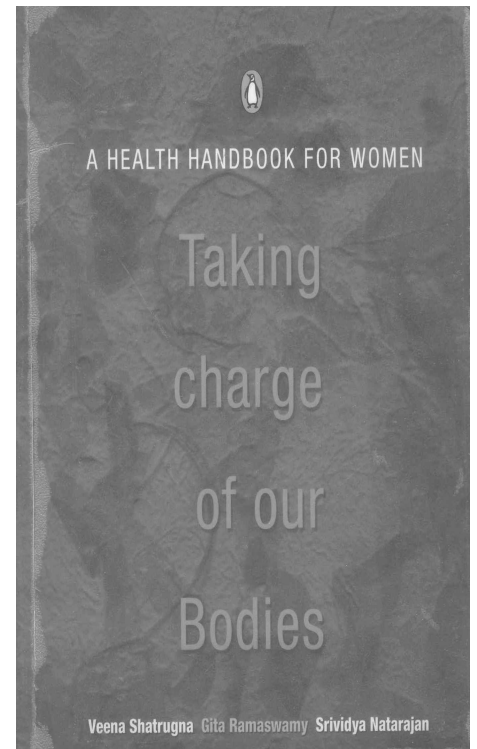
Few months after the march, some of the younger people who took part in the march got together and formed a Facebook-cum-meet up group called Hyderabad for Feminism. This group aims at promoting ideas of feminism and gender equality through discussions and creative action on issues concerning women, queer and other minority communities such as occupying public spaces, local media coverage on, harassment and discrimination in daily life.

### Conclusion

After the Delhi gang-rape, everybody is in prescriptive mode. They are primarily engaged with the question of women's safety. Police & judiciary reforms, enhanced punishment as a deterrent, loss of ancient Indian values, education, depiction of women in popular entertainment etc are the lines on which discussions in media and society are running. Public spaces for women haven't been adequately addressed, and we hope this march put that to the forefront.

It is important to note that the Midnight March was not just awareness raising alone but an action in itself, to take back spaces from male domination.

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# Messaging Harassment

■ Janani

Harassment can happen in many different ways. One subtle yet dangerous and disturbing way is through SMSs. Though women in general do not report such incidents in the hope that they would stop one day or another, some persist. Thus ignoring obscene SMSs does not put an end to the offence in itself. It is to be remembered that sending vulgar, obscene and defaming messages on mobile phones amounts to sexual harassment. In India, it is a non-bailable offence and is punishable with imprisonment for a period of two years.

Harassment through SMSs is an offence which seems very easy to commit, with the offenders' identity being hidden behind a mere 10 digit number. Thus the cell phone is increasingly used to commit variations of sexual harassment offences such as accosting, stalking, defamation etc. The most interesting aspect of this practice is that most offenders are fully aware that it is an offence, and that they continue to commit it in a fond hope that their victim wouldn't report them.

The motive of sending such SMSs could be even something as inconsequential as a teacher admonishing her students for coming late to the class as I did on one occasion. The next day, I received a couple of vulgar and defaming hate messages from an unknown number in the name of a woman student who I also taught. Not only were the messages filthy and insulting but they had an intimidating tone asking me to either stop scolding students for coming late or face dire consequences. I was disgusted with the SMSs and shocked by the sender's nerve in shirking anonymity. I did not delay reporting the incident to the university authorities. The girl, under whose name these messages were sent, was gently given notice. She was dismayed and shocked that her name was used to send these SMSs and she, in turn, complained to the University authorities to initiate action against defamation and misuse of her name. Therefore, our culprit was guilty

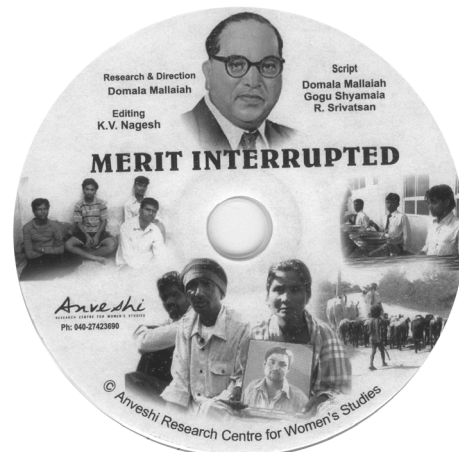
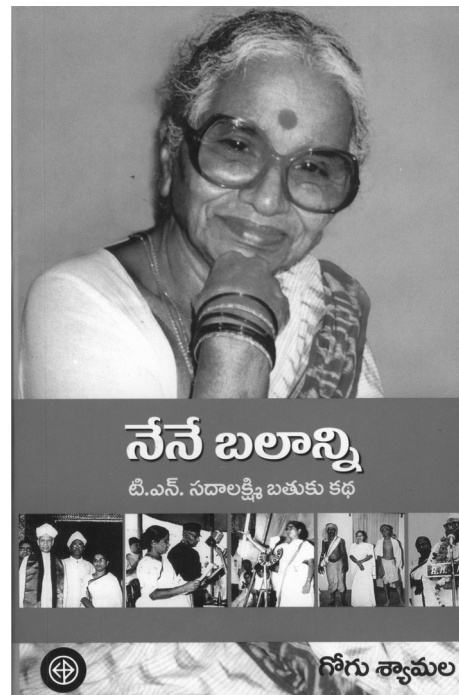
of two offences: sending obscene SMSs and defaming another person by adopting her identity to commit the offence. The messages continued for a few days afterwards while the University contacted the Cyber Crime Cell. A week later, the culprit was identified and the mobile phone and SIM card used to send the messages were confiscated. To my disbelief and shock it happened to be indeed a student of mine and the girl's classmate: A 17/18 year old boy! He confessed to the offence in the presence of the Cyber Crime Police as well as the University authorities. The University then decided to expel the student on grounds of misconduct.

Assuming that my admonition was what provoked the SMSs, I would, in the least have expected the student in question to have come late to the class. The student concerned was usually on time for his classes including the day on which I showed annoyance that a few of his classmates turned up very late. In fact, the student had never been unpleasant or difficult. I am puzzled by the motive behind the obscene messages this student sent me. I cannot expect anyone to go to such lengths to show displeasure/ disrespect to a teacher who was just doing her job. The tragic moment for me was coming to terms with the fact that young men are very early imbued with stereotypes about women: be it that working women in general are promiscuous or that women would rather suffer in silence than make public the insult and seek redressal. I am inferring these stereotypes from the content of the SMSs, which I would not like to disclose in this public discussion.

In a society known for harassment and victim blaming, even educated colleagues are indifferent to the pain of receiving vulgar messages. Honestly, this was the hard hitting reality for me when I received many direct and indirect, unpleasant comments relating to age and appearance. One teacher went to the extent of saying that the cause of the SMSs was

that the boy was terribly infatuated with me and that it was wrong of me to take it so personally. Another teacher in effect justified sexual harassment by suggesting that it was an occupational hazard I needed to take cognizance of (aspiring women teachers beware!). Yet others suggested that I take leave, go home and get the whole episode out of my system. There were also a few who felt that reporting of such an incident and its getting publicized might not be in my best interest! Such comments just bowled me over and made me realize how the community of educationists actually throws a protective blanket over the culprit and justifies the offence. The seriousness and the extent of sexual harassment are written off with these pat answers and responses thus endorsing a sexist society which harasses women.

*Janani teaches at English and Foreign Languages University*





# Naga Students in Hyderabad and Campus Politics

■ Elika Assumi

We look different, we dress differently, and there is also a slight hesitation in the way we build relationships with people especially outside the community. One wouldn't be wrong in labelling some of us insular. And yet, in my opinion there are underlying reasons to the way in which we live within the university and in the city which we consider to be outside of our 'home.' There is always the sense of being an outsider and this has more to do with the way we look, coupled with our experiences from our native hometowns. This experience of being the outsider is embedded in the gazes, the pinches, the gibes of forever being addressed as "chinky" and jeering phrases referring to the way we look. Recently, a friend of mine from Nagaland mentioned how she feels that men don't stare at her as much when she wears salwar-kurta, be it in the university or in the city. And I couldn't help but agree with her.

Having lived in Hyderabad for about a decade now makes me an elder of the Naga community in the city. However, when I first arrived in Hyderabad, there were not more than 100 Nagas (including the members of the families settled here) and most of us were university students. It is a fact that the population of the North Easterners has been steadily increasing in the South Indian cities. Just as well, the number of Naga students coming to Hyderabad for higher education has seen a rise in recent years<sup>1</sup>.

In CIEFL, our initial introduction to campus politics was rather awkward (in retrospect), the reason perhaps was a difficulty in identifying with certain causes represented through the existing minority group – Dalit Adivasi Bahujan Minorities Students' Association (DABMSA). As Scheduled Tribe (ST) students, by default we were members of DABMSA and

were expected to subscribe to its politics. However, I believe that as Nagas by origin, our specific politics is shaped by our history with India. We failed to respond to some of the causes presented by the representative body and most often the difficulty lay in accepting the DABMSA mode of politics in the university. Nonetheless, another reason lay in our failure to politically mobilize the North Eastern students. Our exposure to students' politics back home, at least for the Naga students, has only been at the level of community building (student events, seminars, etc.) and policy making (adhering/allegiance and abiding to apex students' body constitutions) or negotiations and talks to resolve students' issues. I would say that it was only after coming to Hyderabad that we were able to define what it meant to be a scheduled tribe student, and the different issues one faces in institutions of higher education. However, we were not fully equipped to confront the new problems we were faced with. And although, there were student bodies in the university that represented our issues, the modes of confrontation with the administration were very new territories for us. We still had to learn the political ways of working as ST students from the North East in the university outside of our 'home.' And therefore, we morally supported the SC, ST and minorities group in the campus, yet over time our participation also waned as most of our problems inside the campus as well as in the city were addressed through the Naga elders' council and through the Naga Christian Fellowship (NCF).

There are many instances when the elders' council stepped in to settle students' issues, be it academic, personal, or legal. A recent incident was the rape of a Naga student from Osmania University. As soon as the elders' council was informed of the incident, the girl

was moved to a safer location in order to protect her identity. It was also through the timely help from some Anveshi members that she was able to receive further medical aid. At that time, there were many organizations and groups that wanted a statement from the Naga community, however, the elders' body acted on the fervent request of the family members for anonymity and to prevent the issue from the confrontations of public gaze and "morality." The case was initially registered at the local police station by the girl along with some of her friends. During an interaction with the girl, she seemed very strong in her statement and wanted to take the matter to court. However, without her family's support, the case was eventually 'abandoned' in spite of the North East Forum agreeing to undertake the issue. At that point, the elders of the Naga community took a step back from further involvement in the matter, given the pressure from the girl's family who wanted to withdraw the case. It seemed futile that although the girl had mustered enough courage to register a complaint, her plea for undertaking the legal path for justice was silenced by her family. No doubt that the family acted in the way they believed to be in her best interests and no reasoning would change their minds, but it seemed very clear to me why they acted in this manner, and that there is a resounding familiarity of such narratives from several other women.

According to a recent finding released by the National Crime Records Bureau's "Crime in India Report 2012", Nagaland is the safest state in India for women. A total number of 23 cases of rape were reported in 2011, but reduced to 21 cases in 2012. Nonetheless, we ought to keep in mind most rapes and acts of sexual violence, humiliation, etc. go unreported. Furthermore, in Nagaland, the stigma of rape is augmented given the social 'benchmarks' for women, notions that are largely influenced by Christian morals. In a society where sex before marriage is considered a depravity, rape is definitely a taboo – no one even talks about it, such that the discourse of rape is practically absent. There are many cases in Nagaland that I have heard of where victims of rape were sent away to live with relatives in other cities to 'hide' them for some time, while cases go unreported as the family chooses to conceal the incident. And

even if the incidents are reported, most of the time the matter is resolved between the two parties outside of court. In addition, several criminal cases, including murder, are undertaken in the local village councils through customary laws where perpetrators often get away with a lenient fine, or written/verbal apologies<sup>3</sup> and the most extreme punishment amounts to being exiled from the village or tribe for some years. Therefore, to account for the low rate of crime against women in Nagaland as a triumph seems to be a shrewd mode of subterfuge to suppress the discourse of rape in the state itself. Keeping state apparatuses aside for the moment, we have begun to realise that it is more difficult to talk about the issue of rape within the ambit of civil groups, most especially in a religious group like the NCF (an entity that is an active participant of civil society in Nagaland politics) in a city like Hyderabad. This brings to the surface the difficulties of the NCF working as a representative body for the Nagas. In the light of such complications presented by the changing modes of functioning in Hyderabad, a resolution was passed last October to bring about an association of Nagas in the city. This association's main objective is to undertake such cases for and on behalf of the Nagas in Hyderabad – be it welfare, crisis management, issues relating to students, legalities, etc. Clearly, the politics of home is not very different from the politics of the city we have decided to call our 'new home.'

Perhaps in Hyderabad, the Nagas have had an informal way of resolving certain situations, unlike in Delhi where an organized network of North East support centres and helplines exists. There is also the matter of keeping things under control where specific issues are not publicized, while some have said that the Naga students in Hyderabad ought to politicize our issues more firmly or perhaps even articulate our views in the public domain<sup>4</sup>. However, circumstances call for different approaches towards resolution. And that has been the strategy so far for the Nagas in Hyderabad, but it definitely will change in time when one considers the arrival of more Naga students in the city and with the new association in place. Undoubtedly, with more people, our issues are bound to alter. Therefore, I believe the next step for the Naga students' community in Hyderabad would be

in strengthening relationships and working together with minority students' organizations who would understand the issues we face and the fears we have because of our position as Naga students outside of Nagaland. This is not just for the Naga community alone; there have to be spaces in the universities wherein the varied issues of the North East are discussed widely, and an interest in our politics is created beyond the fetishization of our music, food, urban style or fashion.

*Elika Assumi is a student at English and Foreign Languages University*

#### Notes:

1. This increase was significant with the introduction of Bachelors and the Integrated Masters programs in the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) and the University of Hyderabad (UoH) respectively, and admissions in to the colleges of Osmania University. Apart from these universities, a recent welfare scheme initiated by the All Assam Students Association (AASA) and the Eastern Naga Students Federation (ENSF) under the Free Higher Professional Education Scheme for National Backward Minority Students has ensured that annually 300 seats would be reserved for students from Nagaland in engineering colleges and nursing schools around Hyderabad. Most of the students of these universities live on campus (in hostels) or in rented apartments around the city.

2. See <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/shame-map-of-india-states-with-highest-rate-of-crimes-against-women/416615-53.html> (accessed on 9th November 2013)

3. See <http://thohepou.wordpress.com/2008/05/27/settlement-of-case-as-per-naga-customary-law/> (accessed on 9th November 2013). Also, <http://www.thesundayindian.com/en/story/rarest-of-the-rare/34/5391/> (accessed 9th November 2013) for account of a settlement by the Naga customary law.

4. After the recent rape incident of a Naga girl from Osmania University, the elders' body chose to screen the issue from media exposure. No formal press release of the incident was given. Some have remarked upon this action/decision rather critically.

## WORKSHOP ON TELUGU CINEMA: HISTORY, CULTURE, THEORY 13th – 16th August, 1999



Organised by  
**Anveshi**  
research centre for women's studies  
Hyderabad

&



Centre For The Study Of Culture And Society  
Bangalore



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## TATAKI WINS AGAIN & BRAVEHEART BADEYYA

Braveheart Badeyya  
Gogu Shyamala  
Illustration  
Puja Vaish

Tataki Wins Again  
Gogu Shyamala  
Illustration  
Rashmi Mala



# Invisible and Harassed: Perspectives of a Visually Impaired Woman

■ Reem Shamsuddin

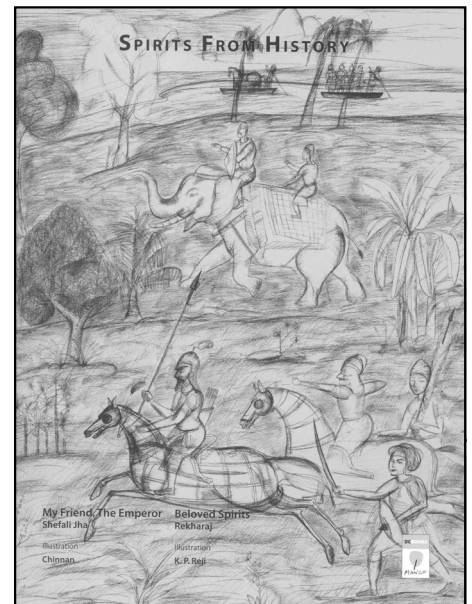
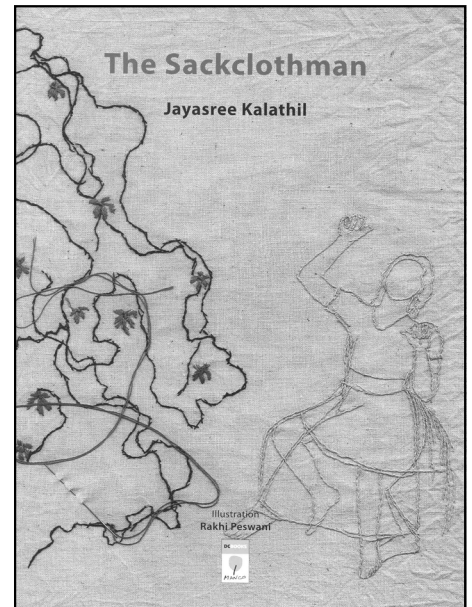
A place where different cultures hold their hands together; a democratic place that manures new ideas, and ideologies; a place where budding relations happen; all these dreams come true in a student friendly healthy campus. Being a participant of a campus, I feel it is important to maintain the friendly atmosphere on a campus. If things go otherwise, naturally there is a kind of tension. The frictional atmosphere that causes one such kind of a tension occurs when instances of insecurity happen on campus; especially in the form of mental and physical harassment.

Being a visually impaired person, particularly when I talk from a woman's perspective, I feel that this community is more cautious about their security on the campus, in the work place, while traveling and so on. Personal experience on campus unfolds the sense of being vigilant about the approach of strangers; especially when the campus is unrestrictedly open to outsiders. To cite a personal instance, a friend and I were about to be cornered by strangers, who do not belong to the campus community, in their car. It creates a sort of perplexity in a visually impaired person, if someone comes and talks to the person without introducing himself/herself. This attitude from the part of the non-disabled community is very common in public places including on a campus where you expect to meet a sensible and sensitive community. Anonymous calls and messages on mobile phones, interruptions in private affairs without any kind of self introduction on the social websites like Facebook raise a fear of being followed. This kind of threat is very natural even otherwise; so it can be double in the case of a visually impaired woman.

I have had several surprising experiences of the denial of our rights from the various authorities' side when I am supposed to avail them. At certain places I was even asked to produce the clause as the proof which says that I can avail a particular right, when the authorities in position are really supposed to know them. No disabled person questions them about their attitude—rather they obediently produce the available proofs. A visually disabled woman has to take a lot of strenuous effort to be a part of the mainstream; socially, culturally, academically... For her it is very hard to be acknowledged, and be included as part of the progressively upward moving society.

Visually impaired girls, especially, are often challenged by the derogatory remarks suggesting they are incapable, and imperfect in performing daily affairs such as domestic work, cleaning, child rearing etc. Moreover this community is often labeled as weak, ignorant, and naive, as if the group does not have any kind of exposure to the surrounding world. Unfortunately, these sorts of comments are generally made in the public implicitly, or explicitly. No exaggeration: the humiliating comments in these lines are even made by the male group who belong to the same community! Here it is evident that certain allegations can be arrowed only at woman as certain kinds of duties are expected to be exercised by her. Like any other woman, a visually challenged woman is also generally targeted by the fake promises of relationships, and marriage. Speaking unbiasedly, it is very pathetic when this community falls into such traps alike.

*Reem Shamsuddin is a student at University of Hyderabad*



# Revisiting Kuch Kuch Hota Hai

■ Anjali Pathiyath

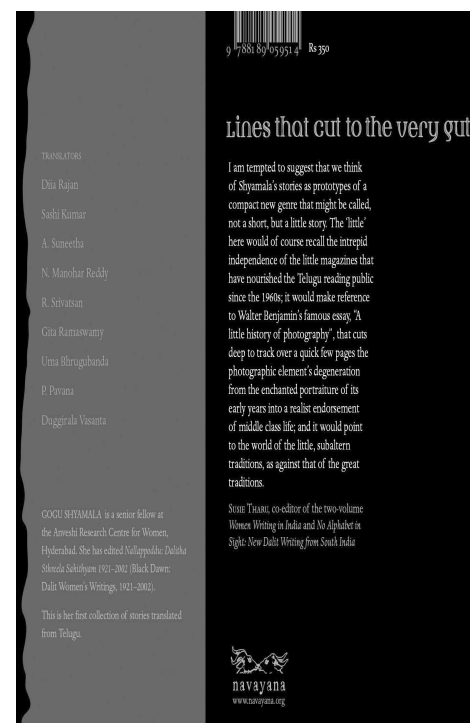
**K**uch Kuch Hota Hai (1998) is a romantic Bollywood drama, written and directed by Karan Johar, starring Shah Rukh Khan, Kajol, and Rani Mukherjee. The movie narrates the triangular love story between three youngsters – Rahul, Anjali, and Tina – and follows their lives through the years of college and beyond.

Karan Johar was the first of many directors to make a foray on a hitherto unexplored path of cinema-making in the 90's, which later came to be termed as the “new-age” cinema of Bollywood. Typical of all Johar movies, this too is characterized by exotic foreign locales, an urban cosmopolitan culture, and an upper middle-class “young generation” who, largely sporting western wear, are still “desi” at heart, when it counts. To begin with, a girl and a boy are “best friends”, apparently overthrowing conventional gender roles, and that too despite the Indian definition of friendship immortalized by filmmaker Barjatya where a girl and a guy can never remain “just friends”. Anjali, being a tomboy who prefers jeans rather than skirts, and basketball over the knitting basket, is not seen as a romantic possibility by our urban protagonist Rahul, until she goes in for a make-over and graduates from jeans and t-shirts to chiffon saris and long hair. This provides us an interesting take on the gender norms in our society; more so because it is coming from a director who unabashedly wears the medal for being the pioneer of this genre of the so-called “progressive, modern, and liberal cinema” in the Hindi film industry today. The friendship between the college-mates Rahul and Anjali is completely devoid of any sexual tension, owing to the explicit lack of any heteronormative feminine sexuality displayed by Anjali. But years and makeovers later, their friendship as fully grown adults is fraught with sexual tension; the mutual desire and attraction is overtly emphasized by external

factors like rain (and subsequent rain dancing), slipping saris, and chilly breezes that function as catalysts to underscore the “romance in the air”, as if the long looks and awkward silences between conversations weren’t enough to drive the point home. Moreover, whether in college as youngsters or years later as mature adults, despite having their own individual agency, it is interesting to note that the man is unfailingly always the one to make the first move in the act of courtship.

As a young woman revisiting this movie years later, I cannot help but see that the moral one is asked to take home is that social conditioning and years of dominant mainstream notions of “romance” and “love” will inevitably lead to women becoming “friend-zoned” (the current popular term for not being romantically attractive), if you venture out of your confining boxes of normative gender stereotypes and don’t try to fit in with the rest of society. In other words, nice women who are not normal in their culture of sexualization and gendering are likely not to find love or get married. In the movie, things only end happily when the subverted notions of gender and relationships are brought back into order and above all, the “Indian tradition” is kept alive and thriving, this despite the movie being the story of urban, liberalized young adults living in post-colonial “modern” India. The movie may have been “modern and westernized” for its times, but in some ways, it is also regressive in the sense that it reinforces certain traditional and orthodox ideologies about gender and relationships in our country.

*Anjali is a student at English and Foreign Languages University*



# What makes a man or woman on campus? Reviewing the stakes of desirability, agency, and power in the movies *Sye* (2004) and *Happy Days* (2007)

■ Vennela

The word 'Campus' today means 'the grounds and buildings of a university or college. It has interesting etymological antecedents and associations with the words camp, champion and campaign. These associations are not neutral. They signal the inherent meaning connections of 'campus' to a battlefield. Campus, among other things, is a field where identities are actively made, remade and made-over. Presently there is sudden interest in the question, what a campus is? It is because the meaning of campus changed with time, and the way we perceive a man and a woman have also changed. Campus has become a place where the dynamic of power between the students and the administration and between students of different genders has become problematic. Today the attitudes and behaviours that germinate in a campus go beyond it.

Many popular Telugu films right from the 1950s to the present day have made campus a recurring backdrop for political intrigues, epic love sagas, heart-warming bonds of friendship, and search for social equality. This article will analyse the gender dynamic that many movie-campuses depict, and how far they are usable in real life. The specific focus would be the politics of gender that two popular Telugu films show *Sye* (2004) and *Happy Days* (2007).

*Sye* means 'Yes'. *Sye* is the story of a campus divided into two rival groups – 'Wings' and 'Claws'. The tale turns on a crisis when Bikshu Yadav, a gangster, chooses to occupy the campus illegally. How the protagonist Pridhvi

from 'Wings' and Shashank from 'Claws' put their rivalry aside to defeat Bikshu Yadav in a game of Rugby and defend their campus forms the main story line. The female lead is Indu, a transfer student who joins the same college as Pridhvi. Their courtship lends the film a lighter vein amidst the serious episodes of conflict between the students and the gangster.

The film opens with the narrators telling the viewers that campus is a battlefield for both the 'Wings' and 'Claws' and that "it is an open secret". Having established that the campus is not just for academic activity but also to settle personal scores, the story opens to show the female-lead Indu. She tells her friend how her father is scared of co-education colleges because she might fall in love with someone. A girl studying in a co-education campus might have to face the policing of the parents too. Indu's fear of her father forces her into making a choice between accepting unwanted advances from Pridhvi and confronting her father. She chooses to withhold information rather than communicate with her paranoid father.

The movie depicts how Indu unwittingly becomes a prime figure in the age old feud between 'Wings' and 'Claws'. In a titillating scene which involves a bus-chase and a lot of swearing, the film shows Indu being dragged into an empty classroom even as she cries, begs the students of 'Wings' to leave her. Even as the 'Claws' group tries in vain to defend their claim over their potential female member, Indu is administered with what is popularly known

as the tramp stamp – a permanent tattoo on the lower back. Apart from being painful, a permanent tattoo is a degrading punishment when enforced. Ironically the tattoo is not referred to in the film again. Even as Indu is sobbing after getting a tattoo, Pridhvi taunts Shashank – "Don't shout at us now. Your goods are adulterated. We are brave men. That is why we could put a mark on her". The act of using a woman's body to exhibit traits like physical prowess or bravery is an appalling product of this and more scenes to come.

In the movie *Pridhvi*, repeatedly comes off as a naughty, ingenious man, Indu is depicted as a slow-witted, sex-less, childlike figure. The stereotype of a female-lead who is sexually evocative but sexless, desirable but innocent, womanly but childlike is reinforced in this film. The forceful romantic blend presents the viewers with troublesome suggestions regarding the ideal girlfriendhood. Any woman or girl who is as desirable as Indu must be willing enough to look past a degrading, violent form of abuse or two to attain romantic involvement. Campus becomes a place of manufacturing passivity towards abuse in any form. Men should perform the act of acquiring a woman to show what it is to be a powerful man on campus; and the women must be strong to brace an insult or two if they choose to have romantic attachment.

The courtship enters troubled waters when Indu falls in love with Pridhvi. The leader of Indu's group, Shashank orders Indu to like someone within the home group and says that he cannot approve of her dating a boy from rival 'Wings'. This well-trodden trope of women as boundary markers in films is not new. But when this trope is brought into the social space of a campus, it interferes and dictates the notion of what is desirable, powerful and enviable on campus – possessing a woman. To have or to be able to have a girl is portrayed as an enviable, resourceful quality. Not only does this turn of gender dynamic make the female identity a mere mediator in the making of the ideal malehood, but also it dictates what it is to be a man, a hero.

*Happy Days* (2007) directed by Shekar Kammula presents the viewers with a different campus. It is the story of a group of friends

who study at an engineering college. The story depicts how campus life begins and unfolds over the period of four years. Happy Days shows the familiar themes of ragging by seniors and the academic parlance of an engineering campus. The story takes the audience through freshers' parties, examination pressures, sacrifices, anger and betrayals between the group of friends. The formation of an individual on an engineering college campus over four years is the theme of Happy Days.

Happy Days show us a campus that brings together subtle forms of gender stereotypes. There are three girls in the main roles with Madhu as the female lead, Appu (boyish with short cropped hair, who dresses up in trousers and shirts) and Shravs (an attractive senior depicted as sexy and hot for dressing up fashionably) as her friends. Madhu and Chandu, the hero, come together at the end. Appu and Rajesh discover their love at the end of the movie. Shravs is courted by her junior Tyson, but she already has a boyfriend from the senior student group. She dissuades Tyson throughout the whole movie. The story revolves around how they find love and friendship, how they learn to handle the more complex aspects of a relationship.

The first day Appu comes to the college she is ragged by the seniors for dressing up like a boy. She is made to write an imposition – "I won't wear pant and shirt". Even if ragging can be written off as harmless fun, the film alerts us to the extant rules of female dressing. What should a female wear? Appu's seniors suggest

a saree. What happens when a woman wears pant and shirt? She ends up looking like a boy. Madhu, the female-protagonist is also ragged on her first day like the rest of her friends. She is asked to wear a half-saree. The requests/orders which tell women what/how to wear have an inherent connection to what she should look like to an unknown audience. Here the unknown audience is not just men. It is the sum total of women, men and a mass of societal stereotypes. At a later point in the film, Appu becomes jealous that Rajesh is dating another girl. In order to look more desirable, she tries to take her spectacles off and apply lipstick. Halfway, she breaks down crying. The underlying message that a society sends permeates even the strongest minds. How can a teenage student withstand these overpowering suggestions of desirable femininity? The movie shows the viewers how Appu persists in her attire.

The flipside of the coin is Shravs who wears western clothes most of the time. Her fashion sense invites comments on her character. A male-student remarks that because Shravs dresses 'like that' she is open to 'more things' (referring of course to sexual intimacy). This brings us to a difficult question. What are the options of dress for a girl student? If a girl does not want to be called boyish or of loose character, it is advisable to stick with conventional wear.

Like Sye, the campus in Happy Days is also a site of claim, where a few male students want to police the female interaction. Who should the girl be friends with? Should a girl date?

What would she become if she dates a member of the opposition group? When a male-senior tries to badger Madhu about who she chooses to make her friends, Madhu retorts saying that it is her express right to choose anybody to be friends with. This leads the viewers again to the age old trope of boundary markers. Madhu becomes the symbol of prestige to be won by the senior group. The campus-film culture of deciding a girl's love life on her behalf brings us to a great sociological impasse. What would the girl's agency be in choosing a lover, or a friend on a campus? What happens when she seeks a lover by herself? Is that normal? Will such an autonomous action be condoned by the Telugu-campus film culture? These are a few questions that are worth reviewing in every campus related discussion.

The above films are the tip of a larger iceberg. The tendencies and gender stereotypes mentioned above are only a sample of more dangerous and provocative attitudes towards male-female interaction in Telugu campus films. Movies like Siva (1989), Master (1997), Chithram (2000), Dil (2003), Kotthabangaru Lokam (2008), 100% Love (2011) provide knotty stereotypes involving females on campus and the extent of female agency on campus. The campus-space is a dynamic social corner where individuals are actively formed. Rather than copying the existing gender (im)balance a campus must be a field open for voices that have been previously unheard.

*Vennela is a student at the University of Hyderabad*

... [T]he assumption that sexuality and disability are mutually exclusive also denies that people with deviant bodies experience sexual desires and need sexual fulfilment. I personally found my growing years as marked by this belief As I have shared elsewhere, "There were times when guys on the street would whistle and make some remarks, which in those days was thought of as harassment (no one could have anticipated the real meaning of the term). Where my feminist friends would protest, I could never share with them that I wanted to soak in every lustful look. In fact, along with my only other disabled friend, I would literally savour every obscene word".

Excerpt from Anita Ghai (Dis)Embodied Form: Issues of Disabled Women, (New Delhi: Shakti, 2003).



# Mapping Desire and Violence on the University Campus

■ **Aparna Nandakumar**

The recent tragic incident at JNU where a young woman was violently attacked by a young man who felt rejected in love, and who killed himself immediately after inflicting fatal injuries on her, was just one in several recent cases of violent attacks on women. However, it shocked the nation precisely because the violence occurred on a central university campus known for being a radically progressive space. The issue generated frantic debates, one instance being an episode of the NDTV talk show *The Social Network*<sup>1</sup>, where the panelists included research scholars Shivani Nag, Mohan Dharavath and Sumathy Panicker, and therapist Reena Nath. Apart from the JNU tragedy, the show also discussed the lack of debate around suicides of students from marginalized social backgrounds, the case of Kashmiri student Mudassir Kamran's suicide in EFLU Hyderabad and the attendant questions of administrative culpability, sexuality, and counseling. However, in this article, I will only focus on certain ideas within this debate that help us think through a few pertinent issues: (1) the notion of the "culpability" of popular culture in instigating everyday violence on women, (2) the contrasting notions of obsession and romance, and (3) the campus as a special kind of space where gendered social selves and gender relations are fashioned and played out in conjunction with other criteria of self-fashioning such as caste, class, region, etc.

## Desire and Violence in Popular Culture

Popular culture seems to be the first casualty in the debate on gender violence. Immediately after the Delhi gang rape case in December 2012, there was an attempt among the outraged middle-class to ban the performances of the Punjabi rapper, Yo Yo Honey Singh, and to prosecute him for allegedly singing/composing pornographic and misogynous lyrics. After the recent tragedy at JNU, many fingers pointed to the Hindi feature film *Raanjhanaa*, which had released recently. This also happened in the episode of *The Social Network* mentioned above. *Raanjhanaa* (Beloved, dir. Anand L. Rai, 2013) is the story of Kundan (Dhanush), a street-smart Benarasi

boy who is also a Tamil Brahmin and the son of the temple priest, and his obsessive pursuit of Zoya (Sonam Kapoor), a middle-class Muslim girl, which ultimately ends in tragedy. Even before the JNU incident, many online reviewers had slammed *Raanjhanaa* for encouraging stalking and romanticizing obsessive, unrequited love. The reviews assume that popular culture in general, and film in particular, has the power to influence people's actions and interactions in society. My attempt is not to exonerate popular culture of all accusations of misogyny and patriarchy. However, it is worrying that in the case of every real-life tragedy, our first response is to point fingers at a particular popular cultural text – usually a film text – and demand either a ban or a more positive representation. Many of us would be uncomfortable supporting a ban or censorship, but we tend to consider the demand for positive representation a just one. The impulse to create better representations is itself of interest, not for its effects on society, but rather as indicative of certain lacunae in the social sphere, something lacking or warped in the existing social structure, which the cultural realm is desperately seeking to fill by imposing cultural values from without.

*Raanjhanaa* draws upon a framework associated with Tamil films starring Dhanush, a framework that has a clear stand on the social relations between the hero and the heroine, and which locates desire and violence in the matrices of these social relations. The dark-skinned, lean, small-built Dhanush's screen persona is built up mostly by portrayals of street-smart, underprivileged young men with a violent streak and intense, complex relationships with heroines who are a few rungs above him in the social hierarchy. From *Kaadhal Konden* (I Fell in Love, dir. Selvaraghavan, 2003), an early film which catapulted Dhanush into stardom in the role of a psychotic orphan obsessed with his upper-class classmate, to the lyrics of the single "Why this Kolaveri di" from the film 3 (dir. Aishwarya Dhanush, 2012) which went viral on YouTube and earned the actor nation-wide fame and the lead role in *Raanjhanaa*, we can see a clear pattern which posits Dhanush's character in a relationship of intense obsession

and violence with a fair-skinned, privileged caste/class heroine who is (at least initially or in part) unresponsive to his attentions. *Raanjhanaa* is unable to translate this complex framework of social relations on to the terrain of Hindi cinema. Here, it seems that violence and passion, desire and frustration, are all individuated and that the social position of the characters has nothing to do with the tragedy being enacted. This lack of complexity in *Raanjhanaa* leaves it vulnerable to accusations of encouraging misogyny and gender violence. But beneath its superficiality, the stories of the different, sometimes conflicting, desires and passions of young men and women encountering each other clamour to be told.

## Obsessive versus Rational Romance

Sumathy Panicker, another participant in *The Social Network*, went on to talk about how men should move on from stalking women, or assuming interest on the latter's part, to creating spaces of interaction and getting to know each other. In theory, this sounds like an excellent proposition, but how easy or difficult is it to actually work this out? The term "stalking" is often used as a shortcut to talk about a vast spectrum of activities, from the awkward embarrassment of a boy furtively eyeing his first-time crush to the borderline psychopathic or the blatantly criminal, and this complicates our discussions on "stalking". In an informal conversation, a friend of mine once complained about a boy who had followed her into the library on a central university campus and asked her to be his friend, a euphemism for expressing romantic interest. "How could he not understand how creepy and scary I found it?" She said later, "If he really wanted to be my friend, why didn't he approach me in a more public place? Why did he have to corner me in that dark, isolated place?" Looking back on this incident now, years later, I feel that (a) many boys tend to genuinely not understand when and why their expressions of interest become discomfiting to girls and are even perceived as threatening, and (b) many girls find it difficult to conceive of the pressures on boys from their peer group in terms of how their manner of "proposing" to a girl and her manner of responding determines the boys' worth in the eyes of their peers. In co-ed colleges, a familiar ritual in mild ragging was to ask a junior student (usually a boy) to "propose" to a person of the opposite sex under the gaze of a large, heckling audience. In such a context, does "rational" love, or a relationship which starts off based on mutual understanding and liking, become a luxury that only the most confident and privileged of young men and women can initiate? Added to this is the fact that centuries of sedimented meanings have accumulated in the figure of the woman, putting this figure at the centre of

narratives of success, masculinity, social mobility, etc. into which young men are interpellated. "Possession" is too simplistic a term to cover the range of possibilities such a figure compels. A young man's worth is judged by his peers, not merely by his possession of a young woman, but in his ability to draw her gaze, to make her laugh, to catch and hold her attention amidst a hundred other things vying for it. This, along with academic and career-related pressures, puts an enormous burden on young men who are first-generation entrants to this new space. (The pressure on homosexual men is even greater, and needs an entirely different discourse to pay justice to the issue.)

### The Campus as a Gendered Space

Gendered violence provokes a variety of responses. An opinion which seems to circulate strongly is that cases of gender violence or fraught gender relations occur everywhere, and that there is nothing specific that the campus community – especially teachers and administrators – can do about it. Other debates position themselves around criticizing/defending a "campus culture" considered too free, progressive or promiscuous. There are also narratives of nostalgia for "the good old days" when such incidents simply did not happen<sup>2</sup>. In The Social Network discussion, Shivani Nag voices the opinion that "nobody is suddenly going to become progressive as soon as they enter the gates of JNU". This utterance evinces exasperation with such narratives of nostalgia, but holds the implication that the university campus is a progressive, democratic space into which individuals bring in the excesses of patriarchy and misogyny. Staging the conflict in terms of "progressive" versus "regressive" ideologies puts us at a disadvantage in our attempt to understand the complexities of everyday violence that layer the visible and tangible outbursts of violence. Commentators agree that the campus is located firmly in the social, but attempts to understand the dimensions of the social somehow fail to go beyond intersecting notions like patriarchy, male entitlement, possession and the romanticization of obsessive desire, which are too vague and over-used for productive discussion<sup>3</sup>.

The commonsense about incidents like the recent JNU tragedy seems to be that these are triggered either by a patriarchal sense of entitlement and control that men hold towards women, or by a pathological quirk of the individual mind. Both these frameworks seem to imply that individual men can and should enlighten themselves and come out of the patriarchal mindset. These arguments do not help us get to the root of the most important question such incidents pose: What are the factors that make a young student believe that

being rejected in love renders his own life worthless, and that his humiliation can only be countered by drawing the blood of the woman who rejected him? When young men and women from different social locations, many of them rural or suburban, migrate to the spaces of urban universities, they are leaving behind the habitats in which they grew up with all the structures that held their world together. These structures might include patriarchy, feudalism, etc. and the social relations typical of each of these. The new urban campus spaces seem to promise the fulfillment of new desires and aspirations. Love can also be understood as an expression of desire, through which the individual subject tries to redefine him/herself and to imagine a new world to position him/herself in. However, the new spaces provide only incomplete social and ideological structures which are unable to support or give proper expression to these new desires.

Over the last few decades, feminist movements in India have worked hard in order to bring about a sense that women have the right to speak out regarding harassment they face – whether on the campus, in the workplace, in the family, or anywhere else. As a result, most campuses have created committees to address incidents of sexual harassment and gender violence. These committees are often not functional. Sexual harassment laws are sometimes insufficient to ensure justice, and frequently result in the punishment of men from socially marginalized locations while acquitting socially and culturally powerful men from similar charges. The situation is further complicated by the fact that allegations of sexual harassment have also become a tool to be used by male leaders from patriarchal student organizations to threaten each other, effectively rendering the question of actual violence faced by women invisible. However, the solution is neither to dismiss sexual harassment laws completely, nor to put the onus squarely on those subjected to harassment by asking them to "understand", or to consider the perpetrator's background, future career record, etc. Yes, it is necessary that individual women (and men) make sense of the matrices of power within which their everyday interactions are shaped. However, the policy of silencing and settling issues that is largely followed by institutions and the society at large does not ensure justice to anyone. "Settlement" or punishing both parties "equally" thus becomes a mere short-cut for resolving the immediate problem.

In such a context, why are university administrations being asked to take up responsibility for instances of gendered violence? What can they possibly do?<sup>4</sup> "Efficient governance" seems to be the keyword of university administrators these days, according to which policies are implemented mechanically – including

reservations, fellowships, welfare schemes for disabled students, setting up cells against ragging or sexual harassment, counseling centres, etc. – without any attempt to understand the rapidly changing student constituency or to bring about structural changes in pedagogy and policymaking. Thus, the campus – instead of being a space where individuals from different castes, classes, genders, regions, sexual orientations, etc. could interact with, discover and come to understand one another – becomes a space where these individuals are "frozen" into manageable administrative categories for easy governance. Governance anxieties on many college and university campuses are typically expressed through rules that attempt to restrict the movement of women on campus in the name of safety and to restrict interactions between men and women outside class hours on the common spaces of the campus. This reluctance of administrators to treat students as mature or maturing individuals who need to learn from interacting with each other, and their reliance instead on imposing social norms from above through rules and regulations, is one of the important disabling factors stunting our university spaces.

*Aparna is a student at English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad*

### Notes:

1. Aired on 1 August 2013 and titled "Equal Victims, Unequal Spaces: Gender Violence on Campuses".
2. As an instance of a response from JNU which tries to engage with nostalgia and discussions of "campus culture" to some extent, see Parnal Chirmuley, "Gendered Violence and the Hall of Mirrors", 4 August 2013, Kafila: [www.kafila.org/2013/08/03/gendered-violence-and-the-hall-of-mirrors-parnal-chirmuley/](http://www.kafila.org/2013/08/03/gendered-violence-and-the-hall-of-mirrors-parnal-chirmuley/). (Accessed on 9th November 2013, reproduced in this broadsheet).
3. See Shivani Nag, "Unrequited love or simply 'self-love'? – Reflections in the Wake of a Campus Tragedy at JNU", 3 August 2013, Kafila: [www.kafila.org/2013/08/03/unrequited-love-or-simply-self-love-reflections-in-the-wake-of-a-campus-tragedy-at-jnu-shivani-nag/](http://www.kafila.org/2013/08/03/unrequited-love-or-simply-self-love-reflections-in-the-wake-of-a-campus-tragedy-at-jnu-shivani-nag/) (Accessed on 9th November 2013)
4. Pratiksha Baxi, in the last paragraph of her article, "The Affective Claims of Violence – Reflections on the JNU Campus Tragedy", details some steps that can be taken to counter and prevent gendered violence on a university campus. <http://kafila.org/2013/08/04/the-affective-claims-of-violence-reflections-on-the-jnu-campus-tragedy-guest-post-by-pratiksha-baxi/> (Accessed on 9th November 2013).