

Violence: Event and Structure

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Editorial

The concept *violence* is often used and understood in terms of physical assault and injury, and this sense continues to be used widely. Restricting the term violence to physical violence and ignoring the other forms of violence often leads to the understanding that violence is eruptive and intermittent and otherwise the normal situation is peaceful. This view pays no attention to the violence that is enmeshed in the conditions that are constitutive of what has been understood as normal and peaceful times. Burdened with subjugated identities, individuals and communities are constantly met with both physical and non-physical forms of violence. In many cases, the existence of those identities is inseparable from the violence they face in everyday life. It is also possible to suggest that there is a constitutive violence involved in marking certain identities as more worthy than others; certain lives as more precious than others. Therefore, it is important not to think about violence as merely a phenomenon of intermittency in the otherwise peaceful/normal situation. This is possible by way of configuring violence as not just a physical phenomenon but as also present in situations where physical violence is completely absent. This would allow a broader understanding of the violence that is constitutive of normal and peaceful situations. In addition to physical violence, vulnerable social groups are faced with many other forms of violence reproduced and sustained by state and society.

In countries like ours, the state machinery, such as law, judiciary and police, often protect the relationships of subjugation and domination in the name of law and order. Society reproduces the subjugation by creating and maintaining norms, values and beliefs through various discourses, images, representations and ideologies. Subjugations and dominations are sustained on various axes such as sexuality, gender, caste, region and religion etc. Riddled with ideologies (not of mere ideas but of systematically cultivated, reinforced, reproduced and preserved material practices) of patriarchy, casteism, homophobia, elitism and islamophobia, our societies continue to demonstrate and ensure the subordination of specific sections of the society. All these ideologies sustain themselves and reproduce each other. In such a scenario, it is imperative to have an understanding of violence by

which physical violence is part of a larger matrix of violence that operates in the level of discourses, images and representations on the one hand and the conditions that place some as privileged and others as vulnerable on the other hand. Violations of egalitarian social norms and values by the subjugated communities are often treated as violence and state machinery is often put to work against those communities whenever they protest against or violate those social norms. In many ways state and society work hand in hand to perpetuate the violence and maintain the hierarchical orders that are inherently undemocratic. Draconian state policies and actions are often rationalized in the name of development and welfare of the society, while they displace, stigmatize and push the minority groups to unlivable conditions. An understanding proper of violence is possible by evolving mechanisms not only to grapple with the manifest physical violence, abuse, hatred etc. but also to seriously engage with the conditions, relationships, and institutions that are central and fundamental in producing such violences. Modern institutions of state and bureaucratic institutions often exercise violence not in physical form but in non-physical forms. Similarly, societal norms, governed by beliefs, values, and practices regarding everyday ways of conducting life or the ways one organizes life events often take non-physical form of violence. Nevertheless, there is no denial that often such forms of violence work on human bodies and discipline the ways in which human beings carry themselves to suit the acceptable norms both in private and public. Understanding and acknowledging this necessitates a move that does not restrict and reduce violence to physical actions.

Having noted the inadequacy of the restricted usage of the term violence as physical action, it is also important to see what is the rationality that governs and signifies meaning to such an understanding and what is the ideology that tries to establish violence as strictly physical act of assault, injury and damage etc. This is not to suggest that broader conceptions of violence are an attempt to escape the ideologies of meaning and signification. Indeed, every meaning of the term is inescapably mediated and determined by specific ideological and political persuasions. It is also possible to suggest that within the spectrum of understanding that considers only physical

assault, there could be varied dispositions. While police killings, firing pellets and state repression are always presented as governmental mechanisms to maintain peace, law and order, the pelting of stones by students or minority communities is treated as violence. State violence is justified in the name of law and order and journalistic writings often assume that the state has the legitimate power to use force in the interest of whole society whereas other groups involving in resistance is condemned. What is implicit here is an understanding that there are certain violences that are legitimate and the others illegitimate. To put it precisely, it is the legitimacy that determines what is violence and what is not. Since the state institutions are understood to be legitimate agencies in using force and involving in violence, those actions are considered as not violence but legal actions against violence.

While this shows how the meaning of the term is ideologically determined, it also reveals that the same ideological acts determine what is also not violence.

In an interesting way, the identification of an alterity to violence is also taking place strictly within the realm of ideology. Condemnation of violence, without making distinction and the nexus between other kinds of violence and the violence one is condemning, is unproductive and often serves to legitimize the existing socio-political order. First step towards critiquing violence necessitates an understanding about different kinds of violence and their implications. These observations are crucial especially in India where non-violence is upheld both historically and intellectually as a viable alternative against violence as if the meaning of both violence and non-violence are self-explanatory. It is important to note that non-violence is another kind of violence and no imagination of politics exists, or even could exist outside the realm of violence. In many instances language—by extension, discussion and deliberation—is understood as an alternative to violence. This could be seen on arguments that often condemn violence (physical) and propose dialogue or discussion as an alternative to violence as if language, is free of violence. It does not need much effort to remember khap panchayats often produce cruelties that are often outcomes of discussion, deliberation, and talks. It should also be noted that there are conditions that structure the domain of rational discussions and deliberations in such a way that it excludes specific sections of the society though everyone is free to participate in the deliberations. While it may not be easy to suggest alterity to violence, one should be

hopeful that violence could be confronted with certain kind of politics. Such politics, we might be aware, may not be free of any semblance of violence though.

Perhaps first step towards a politics against violence involves acts of naming. Naming something as violence is in many ways a dual act. On the one hand it is done against the authorities that are legitimized to name what is violence and what is not. It is against such authority and its refusal to acknowledge something as violence, that naming what has hitherto been unacknowledged as violence becomes a political act. On the other, *a fortiori*, naming something as violence also entails that a specific condition, relationship or a practice being named is something produced by history and not natural or normal. This act can only be done from an extraneous position whereby the one who names locates herself outside the logic that so far has governed and maintained something as normal, natural and acceptable—therefore non-violent. These acts are also in a way un-naming or re-naming — that these acts refuse to accept the names given and re-signify the meaning of those practices, conditions and relationships etc. These acts are political because they are contestations of (and are also always contested in return by) dominant practices of signification. While state invokes law and order to exercise and justify its brutalities, the dominant groups in any society invoke tradition and culture to cover up the violence. Practices of subjugation and domination are often executed and vindicated in the name of cultural practices. Often the underprivileged groups, particularly women become bearers of the values of tradition and culture of any society. It is always important to break the sanctity of those cultural and traditional practices exposing and naming the violence involved in those practices.

In this volume of the broadsheet, we bring together a set of essays and an interview to discuss significant issues of violence that are otherwise not given much importance in the discussions on violence. We also acknowledge that the issues discussed here do not completely exhaust the different forms of violence that are present in contemporary world. The scope of the broadsheet, in addition to many factors, has been limited by human sources. It nevertheless hopes to be a tentative step towards a broader understanding of violence.

Guest Editors

Parthasarathi teaches at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad and can be reached at sharathisharathi@gmail.com.

Samata teaches at Bethune College, Kolkata and can be reached at bsamata@gmail.com

A short summary of a few pages from Slavoj Žižek Violence:

Six Sideways Reflections, New York: Picador. (2006) 2008

Subjective, systemic and symbolic violence form the triumvirate Žižek writes about in his 2006 book on violence. Systemic violence is the consequence, often catastrophic, of the 'smooth' functioning of our economic and political systems, while symbolic violence is the violence inherent in language, in its 'imposition' of a certain meaning. Both these forms of objective violence work to maintain what is deemed as the 'normal', 'non-violent' state of things, against whose backdrop, subjective violence is then perceived to take place, recognisable by the obvious signs of crime, terror and the like.

The same lens however, cannot make both subjective and objective violence perceivable. Systemic violence is the counterpart of subjective violence, against whose complex and extensive mechanism the 'sudden', 'irrational' outbursts of subjective violence need to be understood. One needs to keep in mind that that humanitarian responses to instances of subjective violence do not depend on the magnitude of violence, per se, but are mediated through cultural, ideological-political and economic considerations. To prove this, Žižek cites the example of a 2006 cover story of *Time* magazine, documenting the death of 4 million people in Congo over the last decade, as a result of protracted political violence. But the magnitude of this humanitarian crisis failed to elicit any of the expected responses from the reading public, and Žižek reads this lack of a response as being clearly politically mediated. A mediation that ensures who is an acceptable victim (the victims of 9/11, Muslim women etc.) and who is not.

Žižek further illustrates that the horror of a violent act and empathy with the sufferer, inevitably acts as a lure away from a dispassionate engagement with the typology of violence. In fact, even in the recounting of a violent experience, the associated trauma makes the recollection more 'truthful', believable, as it is unexpected and unacceptable that the victim will be able to recount her experience of horror in any

coherent manner. "The problem here is part of the solution: the very factual deficiencies of the traumatised subject's report on her experience bear witness to the truthfulness of her report, since they signal that the reported content "contaminated" the manner of reporting it."

Then, Theodor Adorno's famous saying, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (published in "An Essay on Cultural Criticism and Poetry"), would no longer hold true, as the rational, cold realism of prose would tend to be suspect, and inadequate, while perhaps only the evocative sensibilities of poetry would succeed. This, Žižek claims, might hold the key to the Left-Liberal urgency to 'do something', about the horrors of violence. The urgency can both be witnessed in statements like 'A woman is raped every six seconds in this country', and be exploited by capitalist enterprises like Starbucks that urged their consumers to have coffee because a portion of the proceeds would go to Guatemalan children, from where they source their coffee. The urgency to act, to react, can then be a recourse of only the post liberalization rich, incapable of seeing beyond their immediate surroundings.

Žižek would, quoting Marx, resist the temptation to react, opting instead in favour of sustained critical engagement, one that would refrain from knee jerk reactions to subjective violence, and bring back to view both other forms of violence and our own active participation in it.

Invoking Picasso and the modernist chaos of Guernica, Žižek writes: "According to a well-known anecdote, a German officer visited Picasso in his Paris studio during the Second World War. There he saw Guernica and, shocked at the modernist "chaos" of the painting, asked Picasso: "Did you do this?" Picasso calmly replied: "No, you did this!"

This anecdote, brings back into focus the systemic violence that engenders subjective violence, and the task now, Žižek claims, is to focus on the two less visible aspects of the triumvirate of violence, i.e., its symbolic and systemic forms.

On the study of riots, pogroms, and genocide

■ Paul R Brass

Excerpted in good faith and with gratitude from <http://faculty.washington.edu/brass/Ripogen.pdf>

The study of the various forms of mass collective violence has been blighted by methodological deficiencies and ideological premises that are as endemic to the contemporary social sciences as are riots in many of the societies we study. Indeed, it often seems that, as with so much other social science work, our purpose is to display our theoretical skills rather than to expose to view the dynamic processes that produce the phenomena we study. Our work then becomes entangled—even through the very theories we articulate—in the diversionary tactics that are essential to the production and reproduction of violence.

Labels

The diversionary process begins with the issue of labeling, which itself is part of the process of production and reproduction of violence, and the post-hoc search for causes. We must know what we are studying before we can make the necessary generalizations, so the argument runs. So, we must distinguish clearly all the different forms of violence, from quarrels, feuds, vendettas, and other local manifestations of violence to the larger forms of riots, pogroms, and genocide. However, the producers of violence are themselves engaged in the same process and they continually outpace and outwit us, producing new and varied forms of collective violence, new “repertoires,” to use the Tilly-Tarrow term, that lead us into the game itself rather than providing us a site for a distant gaze. Pogromists insist that the violence that has just occurred is nothing more than a riot. Genocidal acts are labelled by their perpetrators as merely spontaneous revenge and retaliation by justly and excusably

outraged members of a group, acting spontaneously against an “other” group whose members have misbehaved.

Of course, once immersed in the observation of forms of collective violence, we social scientists must decide for ourselves whether we are witnessing something better labeled a pogrom than a riot, a massacre of innocents rather than a fair fight between groups, a genocide rather than a “mere” pogrom. We then, unavoidably, necessarily, become embroiled within and take a position upon the events we study. But this should be done knowingly and purposely without hiding behind the veil of the neutral social scientist searching impassionately for precision and for causation. Our main job, however, should be not to classify and to label precisely, but to expose to view the dynamics of violence and the ways in which each new large event of collective violence is, in fact, different from all others that have preceded it because of the very fact that its producers know very well what it is that they do, what has happened before, how to displace blame from themselves to others.

Riots and pogroms

Consider first the production of riots and pogroms. The first carries the appearance of spontaneous, intergroup mass action, the second of deliberately organized—and especially—state-supported killings and the destruction of property of a targeted group. In fact, however, no hard and fast distinction can be made between these supposedly distinct forms of violence, since pogroms masquerade as riots and many, if not most, large-scale riots display features supposedly special to pogroms. Rather, it is necessary to examine the dynamic processes of the production of such violence and to note how the act of labeling enters into it.

I have argued that, in places where events labeled as riots are endemic, they have, in effect, become a grisly form of dramatic production in which there are three phases: preparation/rehearsal, activation/enactment, and explanation/interpretation.¹ In these sites of endemic riot production, preparation and rehearsal are continuous activities. Activation or enactment of a large-scale riot takes place under particular circumstances, often in a context of intense political mobilization or electoral competition in which riots are precipitated as a device to consolidate the support of ethnic, religious, or other culturally marked groups, by emphasizing the need for solidarity in face of the rival communal group. The third phase follows after the violence in a broader struggle to control the explanation or interpretation of the causes of the violence. In this phase, many other elements in society become involved, including journalists, politicians, social scientists, and public opinion generally.

At first, multiple narratives vie for primacy in controlling the explanation of violence. On the one hand, the predominant social forces attempt to insert an explanatory narrative into the prevailing discourse of order, while others seek to establish a new consensual hegemony that upsets existing power relations, that is, those which accept the violence as spontaneous, religious or ethnic, mass-based, unpredictable, and impossible to prevent or control fully. This third phase is also marked by a process of blame displacement, in which social scientists themselves become implicated, a process that fails to isolate effectively those most responsible for the production of violence, and instead diffuses blame widely, blurring responsibility, and thereby contributing to the perpetuation of violent productions in future, as well as the order that sustains them. In this phase also, the issue of labeling becomes decisive. Was it a spontaneous mass action between ethnic or religious groups locked in a web of mutual antagonisms said to have a long history or a pogrom organized by known organizations or the state or both, with the help of the police?

In my work on India, I have argued that what are labeled Hindu-Muslim riots have,

more often than not, been turned into pogroms and massacres of Muslims, in which few Hindus are killed. In fact, in sites of endemic rioting, there exist what I have called institutionalized riot systems," in which the organizations of militant Hindu nationalism are deeply implicated. I believe that such riot systems exist and have existed in many other places in the world, at least for the past two centuries, including in Russia, other parts of Europe, and the United States. In such sites, persons can be identified, who play specific roles in the preparation, enactment, and explanation of riots after the fact. Especially important are what I call the "fire tenders," who keep intergroup tensions alive through various inflammatory and inciting acts; "conversion specialists," who lead and address mobs of potential rioters and give a signal to indicate if and when violence should commence; criminals and the poorest elements in society, recruited and rewarded for enacting the violence; and politicians and the vernacular media who, during the violence, and in its aftermath, draw attention away from the perpetrators of the violence by attributing it to the actions of an inflamed mass public. When successful, as it most often is, the principal beneficiaries of this process of blame displacement are the government and its political leaders, under whose watch such violence occurs. Here also, in the aftermath, social scientists become involved when they draw attention to the difficulties of "governance" in societies where interethnic and intercommunal animosities are allegedly rampant. They themselves then become implicated in a political discourse that, as Baxi has well put it, concerns itself with "the agonies of governance," rather than with the "suffering" of the victims of misgovernance, and thereby normalizes the violence against its victims. ²

Genocide

Genocide studies too suffer from several defects that compromise the systematic study of its origins, the dynamic processes by which it is produced, contained, or prevented. These defects include excessive argument over labeling, a narrowed focus on uncovering previously unknown or little known sites of genocide, and forms of causal analysis that involve little more than heavy-handed laying

of blame upon a particular or general source: the state, a leader, a whole people.

The argument over labeling is the most debilitating. It is really a struggle for territory, for the right to make a claim of utmost suffering and victimhood for a people, or to extend the claim to encompass a wider range of sufferers. It is to that extent a political rather than a scientific struggle—for attention to one's cause—in which historians themselves become enmeshed.

The narrow focus on exposing to view particular sites of genocide previously neglected has merit and is necessary, but it often gives the appearance more of a prosecutor's amassing of evidence for a jury, in this case world opinion.

Causal analyses that focus upon the German or Turkish state, Hitler or Pol Pot, the German people as a whole and their accomplice peoples in Eastern Europe either narrow the gaze too finely or extend it too broadly. The same considerations apply to the arguments over the responsibilities of Roosevelt or Churchill for failing to prevent, to save, to destroy. Too often such analyses provide a halo over the head of the analyst who never asks himself or herself what, where, how he or she would have, could have behaved differently.

It is certainly necessary to strive for as accurate a determination of responsibilities as possible in each case, to distinguish among murderers, accomplices, and the merely silent observers or those who say they did not know. It is also appropriate to note the falsifications in speech and hypocritical acts in practice that are part of the process of producing violence. But there is a difference between establishing responsibility for a specific action or non-action—identifying it, delimiting it—and blaming. Although, of course, blame involves fixing responsibility, when it comes to broader social processes it does more in practice: it frees others from responsibility. So, with regard to the assignment of responsibility, it is obviously the task of scholarly observers to be precise and careful. In contrast, the assignment of blame is something rather to be observed as part of the process of production of violence, which

takes place after the fact and, insofar as it blames others, justifies the non-actions of those not blamed, and frees from responsibility individuals, organizations, groups, even multitudes whose degrees of responsibility are thereby missed.

Genocide, like riots and pogroms, takes many forms, of which the Holocaust, though the most extreme in history, is unique not only in its extent, but in its form. Excessive quarreling over whether such and such a people deserve to have their misfortunes rank with those of the Jews of Europe divert attention from the analytic task of discerning how, even now, genocidal acts are produced as a regular form of mass killings. In fact, I have argued that there are other forms of genocide that deserve particular notice, particularly of the mutual and retributive type,³ a form of violence that develops in stages that constitute clear danger signals. They include the following: 1) the use of categorical definitions to define a population as entitled to dominate a particular politico-geographical space; 2) the consequent disregard of the interests of interspersed populations not included in the definitions, who may find violence their last resort; 3) the breakdown of inter-communal or interethnic linkages, especially political ones, and the consequent communalization of politics, followed by political polarization and political stalemate; 4) the rise to leadership positions of persons who, in euphemistic terms or openly, espouse violence against a rival community or ethnic group; 5) the deliberate use of violence to achieve political ends, including premonitory, planned riots and pogroms, sometimes coming in waves or covering a large territory; 6) escalation in the brutality and scale of violence and in its forms, including, sexual abuse of women and sadistic violence perpetrated for the sheer joy of it; 7) attacks so extensive and extreme as to lead to displacement of tens of thousands of people, turning them into refugees; 8) increase in the ratio of killings to injuries; 9) deliberate use of violence as a mechanism of ethnic cleansing; 10) transgressing of traditional boundaries by targeting women and children, whole communities of people; 10) use of rape, as a substitute for killing, as a device to

reproduce one's own in the body of the other and deny to the other community the prospect of reproduction; 11) intensification of group solidarity and intergroup division produced by the violence, leading to increased mass participation for defense and revenge and retaliation, that is to say, a complete release of passion; 12) increasing partiality of the police, their aiding and abetting of one side or the other or both, presaging a complete disintegration of all external restraints upon the illegitimate use of violence.

In short, in all cases of large-scale collective violence, we need to be attentive not only to the action taking place, but to the discourse about it. We need to note the phases and stages of production of collective violence and the deliberate testing of boundaries that takes place in their production, the actions that confound our labels, the transgressions that signal the movement from one extreme form of violence to another, even more extreme form. We need finally to pay attention to the talk that takes place afterwards, including our own, that obfuscates rather than enlightens, that seeks precise definition and "causes" rather than exposure of what is concealed, that contributes to the persistence of violence by hiding more than it reveals.

Notes

¹ The theoretical framework in this essay is elaborated more fully in Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997) and *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

² Upendra Baxi, "The Second Gujarat Catastrophe," *Economic and Political Weekly* [epw.org.in; hereafter *EPW*], August 24, 2002. See also my own remarks on the uses and misuses of the term "governance," in Paul R. Brass, "India, Myron Weiner, and the Political Science of Development," *EPW*, July 20, 2002, pp. 3031-35

³ Paul R. Brass, "The Partition of India and Retributive Genocide in the Punjab, 1946-47: Means, Methods, and Purposes," *Journal of Genocide Research* (2003), 5(1), 71-101

On the Beemapalli police shooting: state, violence and community in Kerala

■ Ashraf Kunnummal, Sadique PK & Ubaid Rehman

Beemapalli, a small seaside coastal town, whose population is predominantly a Muslim fishing community, is situated in the Trivandrum district of Kerala. About six years ago, on 17th May 2009, between 2.30 pm and 3 pm the police shot and killed six Muslim fishermen, also injuring 52 others. It was the second largest police shooting incident in the history of Kerala state since 1957. However, compared to the importance given to other such political events in the history of the state, Beemapalli received little attention in the collective memory of political struggles in Kerala.

The shooting incident in Beemapalli involved the residents of Cheriyaathura, a neighboring area dominated by Latin Catholics, a prominent OBC (Other Backward Classes) community among Christians. Latin Catholic and Muslim fishing communities have lived in their respective neighbourhoods for quite a long time. Instances of past conflicts that occurred between them have been described as 'communal riots'. The dominant narrative of Beemapalli killings always tried to portray the police shooting as yet another episode of communal violence.

The report of the Judicial Commission Report headed by Justice Ramakrishnan on the incident was shelved by the V.S. Achuthanandan led Left Democratic front (LDF), until 2011. The subsequent United Democratic Front (UDF) government also did not want to discuss the commission report in the legislative assembly. Moreover, two years ago, the police crime branch approached the Trivandrum first class Judicial Magistrate to drop the existing cases against the police officers who were involved in the killings. Besides this, many who were injured

in the police shooting have not been paid any compensation, and are also being regularly harassed with fresh cases being filed against them.

Mainstream political organizations maintained a convenient silence over the killings in Beemapalli. Six years after this incident, only a few Muslim organizations, such as the Solidarity Youth Movement (SYM), the local branches of Muslim League, the district committee of Samastha Kerala Sunni Student Federation (SKSSF), Popular Front of India (PFI) and Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) spoke up about the rights of Beemapalli residents and also in support of their struggle for decent livelihoods.

There was very little coverage of the incident in the print and visual media. *Madhyamam* and *Thejas*, which are owned by Muslims, were the only newspapers that covered the incident extensively. Both newspapers conducted investigations of the killings and published a series of reports about it. These reports and other legal and political issues related to the killings appeared regularly in these newspapers. As a result, the editors of both newspapers came under threat of being branded as 'communal/fundamentalist' from the state and society.

Meanwhile, prominent newspapers in Kerala reported the police version of the killings according to which, the 'violent mob' of Beemapalli entered the Cheriyaathura area with 'explosives from Naggur' and tried to attack the Latin Catholic Church in an attempt to kill the small Latin Catholic community there. The police thus claimed that the shootings happened in an attempt to rescue the Latin Catholic community. Almost

all the newspapers, including the English language ones, such as *The Indian Express* and *The Hindu*, as well as Malayalam newspapers, like *Malayalam Manorama*, and *Mathrubhumi*, reported and thus reaffirmed the police version of the incident.

Different fact finding teams led by civil rights organizations, such as PUCL (People Union of Civil Liberty) and NCHRO (National Confederation of Human Rights Organizations), found that the shooting took place in a Beemapalli residential area and there was no evidence of any attacks targeting the Cheriyaathura residential area or the Church. The minutes emanating from the all-party meetings just after the police shooting also point to the fact that after the incident, the church authorities did not in any way claim that it had been attacked. Even the Latin Catholic Solidarity Committee's Bishop Susapaakyam did not claim that 'communal violence' had happened in Beemapalli. However, a few days later the church authorities began to follow the mainstream narrative of the alleged attack.

Paying attention to the politics of 'naming' of the Beemapalli incident will help to unpack the police and dominant media versions. In the days following the incident, the police and the media referred to it as the 'Cheriyaathura firing'. This falsely indicates the misconception that the Muslim fishing community of Beemapalli entered and attacked Cheriyaathura, when the journalists and fact-finding teams who went beyond the police version found that there was no such thing as church attack or any Muslims entering into the area of Cheriyaathura. But in order to refer to it as a form of 'communal violence', the police had to construct this false story that Beemapalli residents attacked Cheriyaathura residents. Using this framing, the police made it appear as a legitimate condition of shooting at a 'communally motivated violent mob', and that they were trying to protect a weaker Christian community under attack from this 'violent Muslim mob', in the process restoring communal harmony. This 'naming' of the incident as the 'Cheriyaathura firing' by the Police gained consensus in Kerala through the media reports. After this fabrication by the police, media personnel told us in many personal interviews that they had decided not to report this particular incident because it was just 'communal violence'. Journalists argued that if they reported it by speaking

about the injured, it would cause further communal divisions and they feared spreading communal violence to other parts of Trivandrum.

Beemapalli means the habitation around the Masjid of Beema the famous and beautiful masjid (and dargah shareef) built in the name of Beema Umma. According to local oral historians, the Masjid's name came from the name of a Muslim woman saint Syed Unnisa Beema Beevi who was the mother of Shaheed Mahin Abubakar. Mahin Abu Bakar came from Arabia in the 14th century and fought against local upper caste landlords and was eventually murdered. After forty days of the departure of her son, Beema Beevi also died. According to Fatima, an old woman in Beemapalli, most of Beemapalli's residents converted to Islam from lower castes like Nadar (now a Hindu OBC community). Beemapalli Muslims today are predominantly lower caste converts to Islam.

Most of the Beemapalli residents we interviewed mentioned two important developments that have created increasing tensions with the state, including the police. The tensions arose when local residents migrated to the Gulf in the eighties, which in turn led to an increase in their wealth and resulted in the independent growth and prosperity of the informal Beemapalli market. And finally, there is the successful shrine festival they conduct every year.

According to the Mahallu Jamaat committee (the higher body of administration which is elected by Beemapalli residents), there are around 28,000 Muslims currently living in Beemapalli. The shrine festival is the main life center for them. The main issue behind the May 8-17 conflict was a clash between some of the Beemapalli residents and a few people from outside over the control of the local market. Beemapalli residents viewed this as an attempt to stop the shrine festival and to sabotage the informal market related to it.

The Beemapalli market is famous for its 'informal economy' and people from all over Kerala visit it to get 'foreign' goods. Thus, Beemapalli is a place that resides within this negotiated space of legality and illegality from the viewpoint of the state. According to some shopkeepers in Beemapalli, famous Malayalam movie directors are constant visitors to the market to buy the latest

('illegal') pirated DVDs/CDs of movies. Our interviews with Beemapalli residents showed us that it is the flourishing informal market and autonomous life they had after the Gulf migration which had an impact on the attitude of the state and police. The police and state want to control this market and it was, according to the words of one of our interviewees, their 'jealousy' (*asooya*) towards Beemapalli that led to the clashes. In this sense, the social mobility acquired through Gulf migration and the prosperity of the new non-corporate market had an impact on the attitude of the police and state.

Recently, there has been an increased presence of police in Beemapalli and there are attempts to establish a few more police outposts in the area. Beemapalli residents have questioned this move, and suggest that instead of building more police outposts, the government should concentrate on advancing education by building more schools, since there is only one upper primary school that was established in 1981. The residents wonder why they are building a police station before building a good high school or college in Beemapalli.

It is evident that the incident of the police shooting brought the issues of society and development in Beemapalli to a wider audience. The residents are taking the increased attention from the state as an opportunity to negotiate governmental intervention to improve their livelihoods. Our recent visit shows that amidst the tragic killing of six of their people, the residents of Beemapalli are active in building and sustaining their community's life.

[Translated by Ashraf Kunnummal. Excerpt from a field report in the Malayalam edited volume *Beemapalli Police Vedicpepu : Keralam Marakkunnathum Orkkunnathum* (Beemapalli Police Shooting : What Kerala Remembers and What Kerala has Forgotten). Edited by Ashraf Kunnummal (Calicut : Thejas Publication 2012)]

Ashraf Kunnummal studies at University of Johannesburg and can be reached at ashrafk497@gmail.com.

Sadique PK studies at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad and can be reached at sad3mpd@gmail.com.

Ubaidurrahman works at Media One TV and can be reached at ma.ubaid@gmail.com.

Smuggling and the BSF: a case study of violence at the Indo-Bangladesh border

■ Dipyaman Adhikary

"Ki korbo dada? Jani to beaini . Ato dekhle ki ar pet chole?" (What will we do sir? We know it's illegal. Abiding by the law won't feed us).

This is the confession of a smuggler. He further states, *"Are dada amra ki ar bonduk ba boma pachar korchi. Jacche to goru. Ete kkhotti nai."* (Are we smuggling firearms or bombs? It's mere cattle, there's no harm in it).

This could be the confession of any one of the 90% of the people living in a village near the Indo-Bangladesh border. If we see the West Bengal map we will find a number of districts where the Indo – Bangladesh fence is situated such as the North 24 Parganas, Nadia, Murshidabad, South Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar etc. Smuggling has been widely prevalent in this stretch for several decades, with smuggling contents varying across districts. Murshidabad border is well known for cow smuggling and N-24 Parganas border is famous for Phensedyl (a cough syrup banned in Bangladesh, yet popular for its high alcohol content). Most of the smuggled cows are not from the local area but are brought from Punjab and Haryana. So, the question is how do these cows manage to travel across inter-state and inter-district guards and arrive at the border to be smuggled across? The cost of each cow is between 5000—7000 INR. After delivery into Bangladesh, the price of the same cow will go up to anywhere between 17,000 to 20,000 INR as it is exported to Saudi Arabia. With 200-250 cows getting smuggled across the Indo-Bangladesh border on any given day, one can easily imagine the extent of profit to be made.

Two kinds of people participate in smuggling. One, those few who arrange for the cows to be brought to the border from different states, have connections with both state police and the border forces, make away with the maximum amount of profit to be generated and are never found at the border when their cows cross them.

The second group, larger in number, paid 500 rupees to take a bunch of cows across the border safely and to come back, consists entirely of the villagers on the border. Since 1970s, these villages have been victim of river erosion where the changing course of the rivers leaves the villagers with no agrarian land and often their homesteads too get destroyed. Even though the number of documented hunger deaths in the region is the highest in West Bengal, they hardly ever get any assistance from the government schemes and programmes. These villagers have two potentially feasible livelihood options: one is to migrate to Kerala, Delhi and other states in search of jobs, but such migration requires a significant amount of money that most are incapable of raising. The second, is to smuggle herds of cows across the border, for a paltry sum of INR 500 per day.

Our organization, Banglar Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM), has been working closely with people residing in border areas for two decades now. As mentioned above, the large-scale smuggling that goes on in the region is not possible without active collusion between border forces, state police and the others who control the smuggling businesses. It is well documented that the BSF knows exactly what is being smuggled, when it is to be smuggled and through which *ghat* (point of crossing) it would occur. However, we often hear and read about unarmed 'smugglers' being gunned down by the BSF, invariably for 'self protection'. Those villagers not shot to death are often beaten up brutally, denied medical help and incarcerated for long periods, for the smallest of crimes. The following is the report of an incident of BSF brutality that MASUM intervened in, where several BSF jawans beat up a villager with complete impunity.

Sariful Islam lives with his wife Papia Bibi, and minor children, Sahin and Sadikul at the

village Char-Majhardiar adjoining the Indo-Bangladesh Border. Despite being extremely poor, Sariful did not get any help from various schemes of the government meant for the underprivileged and has not been enlisted as Below Poverty Line (BPL). He worked as a daily labourer and supplemented his meager wages by being part of smuggling across the border.

On the morning of 24th December, 2013, Sariful was trying to smuggle some cosmetics and bottles of the cough syrup Phensedyl, some distance away from Border Security Force (BSF) Out-Post no.4 under Harudanga BSF BOP. Two or three on-duty BSF jawans of that out-post noticed him with those goods and started to chase him. They caught him with the goods and brought him to the outpost and started to assault him with their wooden batons. Then at about 6.30 am, another (unknown) BSF jawan, of the same outpost took him to Harudanga BSF BOP Camp while beating him severely. Then BSF officials Mr. Abhinan Kumar Singh and Mr. Birendar came up holding batons in their hands and asked something from that unknown jawan, and together they started to beat Sariful again. The victim was shouting and screaming in pain and people living near Harudanga BSF camp rushed there, upon hearing the screams. Among them, Kalam Seikh, identified the victim and noticed the incident of brutal physical torture upon him and he informed Rabban Seikh (father of the victim). Rabban Seikh and Rubel Seikh (his brother) immediately reached the main gate of Harudanga BSF camp but were forced to leave the place. They stood a short distance away from the camp and started to cry, seeing the torture of Sariful.

After beating him for more than six hours, at 12.30 pm, the involved BSF personnel wanted to take Sariful to Raninagar Police Station and ordered him to get in to their car. But he was unable to move due to severe pain. The BSF personnel lifted him on their shoulders to put him into the car. The victim had several hematomas on his legs, waist and back.

On the same day at about 2 pm, the involved BSF personnel took him to Godhonpara Block Primary Health Centre for a medical examination and the doctor issued a certificate to the effect that no injuries were found on the victim, as alleged. After that the victim was handed over to Raninagar Police Station at 3 pm and a complaint was lodged against him. Based on this complaint the

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Kunan Poshpora: an emblem of women's struggles against state violence

■ Sherin B S

The Kunan Poshpora mass rape does not occupy a significant space in the narratives of struggle in mainstream Indian feminist discourse. The army enjoys the greatest level of impunity in India, a nation tinged with patriotic jingoism, which celebrates the army as the defenders of national pride and hides the brutalities that army men commit on women in militarized regions, both in the Northeast and in Kashmir.

History of army occupation and women's protests

Army atrocities against women in occupied zones came to public discourse in India after the custodial rape and murder of the Manipuri woman Thangjam Manorama in 2004. Her family said that she was picked up from her home by the Indian paramilitary unit, 17th Assam Rifles on allegations of being associated with [People's Liberation Army](#). Her bullet-ridden corpse found in a field the next day had semen marks suggesting rape and murder with 18 bullets piercing her body including the genitals.

In spite of the report of an Inquiry Commission, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act of 1958 (AFSPA) protected the Assam Rifles and the case was handed over to central jurisdiction. This led to widespread protests in Delhi and Manipur against AFSPA. Five days after the killing, a group of middle-aged women in Manipur marched naked to the Assam Rifles Head Quarters shouting, "Indian Army rape us too, we are all Manorama's mothers." This image later became the iconic face of Indian women's fight against AFSPA.

The idea of nation as *mata* and the honour of women

The idea of nation as mother draws particularly on the patriarchal imagination of women's vulnerability. There is a strange coagulation of cartographic and spatial conceptions with abstract notions of feminine virtues in the motherland imagery. The allegory of the violated woman that stands in for any violation on spatial/cartographic boundaries thus inflicts pain on the soldier/male/protector of this imagery. But this is a

double bind. Any population that falls on the fringes of this mainstream imaginary of the nation thus becomes accessible to retributive violation. Further, to disgrace a community, a people or a territory, the territorial encroachment also extends to female bodies. The drastic violence on women's bodies in Gujarat or Muzaffarnagar thus is not a momentary mob anger taken out on women but a logically pursued persecution from this historical imagination. On the contrary, as Mridu Rai points out, a large majority of Muslims find it difficult to identify with a nation imagined in a cartographic space as the Hindu Goddess (Rai, 254.)

When the nation is imagined as a woman, the army becomes 'her' protector. A virulent masculinity protecting the mother-nation becomes the national symbol. Defending one's nation thus becomes the greatest virtue for a male. When popular culture perpetuates this image it is not just the foreign intruder but any identity that falls outside the frames of this imagination begins to occupy this hazardous position of alterity. Anyone who challenges the statist version of history, could be the state-labeled terrorist, the protestor, and the 'anti-national'. Women in places of insurgency thus are turned into tools to silence a people who fight against the state. The archetype of Hindu women jumping into mass pyres to escape the violation is perpetuated to justify violence on minority women. Violation as a tool to punish and to avenge thus penetrates our cultural imagination.

The army in occupied zones, including Kashmir, uses sexual violence on women to crush a rebellion. 'Rape as reprisal' prevents men from joining armed struggle. Seema Kazi reports an ex- JKLF militant's agony on seeing their women violated for vengeance. Often, they have to choose between freedom for Kashmir and the rape of relatives. She further argues powerfully that the sexual violation of women in Kashmir moves beyond being a mere political instrument to being a cultural weapon to inflict collective dishonor on Kashmiri Muslim men (Kazi, 155.)

Kunan Poshpora, the night of February 23rd 1991 and the subsequent fight for justice.¹

From 1989, stories of violation of human rights in Kashmir have been rampant, with impunity guaranteed to perpetrators. Women have been raped in front of their families "as spoils of war", giving the army a confidence backed by the state with reports suggesting army, bureaucracy and judiciary coming together.

The twin villages of Kunan and Poshpora faced the crackdown around midnight on this day. Men were dragged out of their houses to the interrogation camps. In their chilling accounts men narrate various methods of interrogation including dipping their heads in buckets of water with chillies in them, electrocution on the private parts leading to permanent impotence, rolling heavy logs of wood on legs with soldiers sitting over them leading to permanent disability. Women were gangraped with six to seven army men attacking every woman including minors. Women report that rape as a term is not adequate to explain what happened to them that night. They were tortured, kept at gunpoint, pushed against walls and raped by drunken soldiers. The rape of a fully pregnant woman who gave birth to a disabled child two days later and the rape of a girl with hearing and speech impairment are among many other heart rending narratives. About sixty women got raped, ranging from the age group of thirteen to eighty. About thirty women gave testimony before the District Magistrate, which was recorded with great difficulty after several days of protests. There is a long history of battle fought by the survivors of this mass rape to make the culprits accountable for the crime, even though no evidence was legally missing in this case. From the District Prosecution that reported "indiscrepancies" in the "stereotypical narratives of women" to the police who were ordered to close the case in 2013, there is a long history of negligence by authorities in attending to this crime.

Fight against obliteration by women of Kashmir

If memory is the weapon against oppression, women of Kashmir have fought this battle against forgetfulness for 25 years. In 2014, a group of young women from Srinagar filed a PIL before the High Court to reopen the investigations. They formed the Support Group for Justice for Survivors of Kunan Poshpora (SGKP) in 2014, launching a campaign along with the legal battle, commemorating the anniversary by naming it Kashmiri Women's Resistance Day. In spite of the Indian army's constant intervention in the reopening of the case and the repeated adjournments by the legal machinery these

women engage in a longer and stronger battle, etching the history of Kunan Poshpora in collective memory.

Justice Verma Commission and the demand for repeal of AFSPA : The army enjoys impunity of the highest level, especially with AFSPA protecting them in Kashmir and the Northeast. The much-publicized case of the rape and murder of two women at Shopian in Kashmir has not so far, in spite of wide protests and repeated appeals from human rights agencies, met with any kind of legal redress. AFSPA protects the army personnel implicated in crimes from being tried in a civil court. In the wake of the Delhi rape in 2012 and the wide range of public debate on violence against women, the Justice Verma Commission recommended bringing sexual violence against women by members of the armed forces or uniformed personnel also under the purview of ordinary criminal law.

Women's plight in militarized zones

Women in militarized zones, ranging from Kashmir to Palestine, fight to survive in a space occupied by cultural patriarchy, national exclusion and state violence.² In cultures where the word 'rape' is taboo, they have risen in mass protests against rape and built up support groups and resources for the survivors.

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police registered one criminal case vide Raninagar Police Station Case No. 751/2013 dated 24.12.2013 (G.R. no. 3932/2013) under sections 188/379/411/414 Indian Penal Code and under section 12 of Passport Act and section 227 (b) (ii) of Drugs and Cosmetics Act. The victim was also tagged in another old pending criminal case vide Raninagar Police Station Case No. 685/2013 dated 16.11.2013 (G.R. no.3566/2013) under sections 143/188/379/411/413/414/333/307 of Indian penal Code and section 27 (a) (b) (ii) of Drugs and Cosmetics Act. It is relevant here to mention that in the written complaint lodged by BSF in connection with Raninagar Police Station Case No. 685/2013 dated 16.11.2013 (G.R. no.3566/2013) it was admitted by BSF that the victim was subjected to "preliminary questioning". It is also worth noting that the victim was apprehended at about 6.30 am on 24.12.2013 by the BSF and he was handed over to police at about 3 pm. The police produced him in court on the next day. Such prolonged detention of the victim obviously deterred the victim from having early access to justice and paved the way for the perpetrators in the BSF and the police to manufacture documents that would justify their actions, while undermining the victim's rights.

Women's histories entangled in military insurgencies have opened up a new terrain of responsibility for feminist scholarship.³ To culturally, socially and politically engage with the sexual violence by state personnel upon women who have a fraught relationship with the nation, feminist politics needs to undertake a severe re-assessment of the idea of individual rights, civil

liberties and a revision of legal framework to take account of such actions. Today we lack the language, the tools and often the freedom to engage with such histories.

Sherin teaches at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad and can be reached at sherinbs@gmail.com

Notes

1. Most of the factual information on Kashmir and Kunan Poshpora are taken from Do you Remember Kunan Poshpora? The Journey Man Picture's Video, Rape of Kunan Poshpora (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBAfN27MYmg>) and also reports of Human Rights Organisations, support the facts and figures presented in this book. The authors cite interviews by army and police officials in many journals including the Illustrated Weekly where sexual violence against civilians in Kupwara is justified as a strategy to curb militancy.
2. Women of Kashmir have shown immense strength in addressing this violence. Kashmir now has women's organizations representing the

mothers of lost children (Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) started by Parveena Ahangar is one of that) as much as there are organisations for "half widows" who struggle for justice against stigma, ostracism and loss. The term half-widow shows the strange and traumatic plight of women whose husbands have disappeared in the conflict, chiefly custodial disappearances. Clerics in Kashmir have recently ruled that women whose husbands go missing can remarry after waiting for 4 years.

3. Zubaan Series on sexual violence and impunity in South Asia is an attempt to historicize sexual violence as a weapon of war in South Asia. Ever since 1970s mutilated, tortured and raped bodies of women floating on water are symbolic of army/paramilitary tactics to suppress the LTTE uprising in Sri Lanka. The severely mutilated and sexually assaulted body of Isaipriya, the LTTE reporter and actress, during the final days of the elimination of LTTE by Sri Lankan army, evoked international attention.

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On 25.12.2013, the victim was produced before the Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Court, Lalbagh. On the same day, one advocate defending the victim filed a complaint in the court stating the brutal physical torture of the victim by BSF personnel and also requested that medical assistance be given to the victim. The advocate also filed two bail petitions on behalf of the victim in connection with the aforesaid two criminal cases in which the victim was implicated. The bail petition was rejected but the medical treatment was allowed. Sariful was then sent to Lalbagh Sub-Correctional Home for judicial custody till next production in the court. On 22.01.2014, he got bail.

On the same day, a fact-finding team from MASUM spoke to an unnamed BSF Sub Inspector from the Harudanga camp who denied that any incident of torture had at all taken place. Protecting the border from unarmed villagers and a herd of cows may not be a very difficult task if the BSF puts their mind to it. However, border protection and the stoppage of smuggling becomes an issue only when the security personnel do not get their promised share, or become trigger happy. Often, they claim to have shot at

smugglers with AK 47, for self preservation, when the said 'smugglers' are 100 metres away, armed only with sticks.

Till date, MASUM has lodged thousands of complaints to the National Human Rights Commission, and in 17 cases monetary compensation has been awarded to the victims or their families. But never have BSF personnel been pulled up for their acts of violence. Like the armed forces, the BSF too has its own court, where civilians are not allowed. In case of complaints, personnel accused of willful brutality, are rarely awarded the maximum punishment of suspension. At the most, a BSF jawan accused of murder, will be transferred to another border, or else, the victim is given some monetary compensation.

The discourse against smuggling does not take into account the poverty and destitution of people living in border areas who are forced to take part in it, neither does it question the impunity with which armed forces are encouraged to kill, maim and torture.

Dipyaman works with Banglar Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM) and can be reached at adhikary.dipyaman@gmail.com.

Muslim images

■ MA Moid

Few years back a young German woman researcher landed in Hyderabad to conduct a study on a topic related to Hyderabad's Muslim women as part of her academic requirement. After a stay for a couple of months and completing the project she was about to leave. At this stage I was feeling curious about her experiences and opinions about Hyderabad's Muslims. I wondered how a foreign researcher handles her research and her relationship with her subjects in the context of the existing stereotypes about Hyderabad's Muslims and the old city. I decided to ask her a few questions. "Did anybody offer any opinion or advice before you started your field work?" She replied, as I expected, "Yes my host (Hindu) did. When he came to know that I will be visiting old city and interacting with Muslims he felt nervous. He advised me to be extra careful and warned me that Muslims are violent and unpredictable, quarrelsome and illiterate, backward and ill-mannered etc. and the old city is the place where frequent communal riots break out". I asked her, What happened did this advice influence you? She said, "I became really nervous and hesitant at the beginning. I thought that this is a new country and I will be interacting with the people of Hyderabad for the first time so I thought it is better to be cautious". I asked, "Well, now you have successfully completed your project after spending so much time in old city among Muslims, what happened to your caution?" She said, "I already had the experience of working with Turkish women in Germany. I knew a bit about Muslims. This helped me in overcoming my apprehensions quickly". I asked her "then how did you find the Muslims of Hyderabad?" "I found them to be exactly opposite to the fearful characterization of my host! It was so easy to interact with them. I was very comfortable with the people of the old city except for the traffic, chaos and the irritating salesmen who keep insisting on visiting their shops. I found the women well-cultured and friendly. A few of them invited me to dinner, family functions and even gave me gifts" she replied. "I have become friends with so many. I would love to come back again to Hyderabad if I could".

I always remember this conversation while thinking about perceptions and realities of

Hyderabad. I try to think about the 'host's' perceptions and opinions, (this host was also an old resident of Hyderabad) and wonder how and why people develop such opinions about Hyderabad. I realize that the negative opinions about Hyderabad's Muslims are of four types. According to the first the Muslims are aggressive and violent; second, they are backward, i.e., ill mannered, outdated and living in past; third, they are unreliable and unpredictable and lastly they are communal.

Thinking about the history of Hyderabad, I felt that five phases of violence can be noticed that were intimately linked with Muslims and influenced the opinion about them.

Things began in the turbulent decade of 1930 and 40s when people started thinking communally on Hindu and Muslim lines, as the new political developments made them see each other in new light. The old perceptions and opinions, which look so innocent and naive now, gave way to new perceptions about each other. The Seventh Nizam—the last ruler of Hyderabad is now being seen as unjust and biased, and the Muslims are seen as communal. With the Razakaars activities in 1947-48 the Muslims began to be seen as aggressive and violent. This was the first phase of violence that has influenced the opinion about Muslims for many decades to come. It is still used to taunt and pressurize Muslims.

The second phase of violence came in the form of the Police Action which was completely one sided and against Muslims. However, surprisingly in popular memory it doesn't find as important a place as that of the Razakaar atrocities.

In the third phase that followed Police Action we see internal quarrels among Muslims. The rise and presence of rowdies, pahalwans, bhais, and other criminals and their mutual fights on the issues of land grabbing, assertion of their hegemony and revenge for nearly three decades created negative impression about Muslims and the old city. Domestic violence too was common in this period. As it is clear the Muslims themselves were its biggest victim. This aspect created the image that Muslims are quarrelsome, violent to their own women and families and

old city is a place where undesirable elements live.

The fourth phase of violence can be associated with election related situations and communal riots. Mobilizing the votes of the community to win the elections became a compulsion for both Hindus and Muslims. The communal riots and electoral violence were merged and used for both purposes. The communal conflict has long existed but the active rioting period was between 1978-92 i.e., for fourteen years. These riots mostly occurred in the old city and as usual Muslims were always arrested, creating an image of the old city that it is a dangerous place and Muslims are communal and rioters.

The fifth phase began after 9/11 (2001) when the terrorism became a big issue all over the world. The agencies suddenly started finding all kinds of terrorist and sleeper cells belonging to different extremist organization, ISI agents, al-Qaida sympathizers and now ISIS supporters, conspirators who were planning to kill top politicians etc., in the old city of Hyderabad. The arrests that were made were highlighted so much in the media that the locals too started fearing the old city.

Now going on to the second image of Muslims that they are backward, illiterate, ill mannered, rude etc., I find a strange contrast. Till 1948 Hyderabad was the most desirable place for poets, writers, intellectuals, academicians, experienced administrators etc., from all over India. The Nizam's government, its education department and especially the Osmania University was the biggest employer of such people. There was a brain drain into Hyderabad State. But after Hyderabad was acceded to the Indian union the Muslim percentage in government jobs was reduced to a minimum and there was a huge drop out of Muslims at all educational levels as most of the Urdu medium schools were closed. The other economic changes made it impossible for Muslims to invest in cultural and educational activities resulting in a sharp decline in Muslim cultural traits and habits.

The third image of Muslims as unreliable emerged soon after the Military administration took charge of Hyderabad State after the Police Action. The new administration assumed that the Muslim employees and the populace may not cooperate with the new administration as their loyalty will be more with the Nizam or Pakistan. It is likely they thought that it was safer to suspect Muslims in order to succeed in their mission rather than trust them and

fail. This led to the removal of Muslims from responsible positions and the suspicion among populace that these Muslims may secretly be organizing themselves for a revolt or revenge. These suspicions in the administration crystallized into a tradition that influenced the perceptions and understanding of old city and Muslims.

The image of Muslims as communal has a longer history, but when Muslims started supporting the local Muslim political party MIM after its revival, and avoided voting for other political parties they were considered communal. The communal riots too contributed to this image significantly.

Now the question is how local Muslims look at these images, how they explain it to themselves? I found the answer to this question to be interesting and informative. On the one hand, the Razakaar episode and the accession of Hyderabad state to Indian union is seen by Muslims as a conflict between the moral and the political sense. Hyderabad patriotism is seen as a moral responsibility and thus struggling for separate Hyderabad was highly legitimate. On the other hand, the one who supported Hyderabad's accession was seen as driven by a new vision of a unified Indian that had great potentials for all its citizens. In this

framework, the internal violence within the community is seen as a result of collapse of all value systems that governed Muslims lives. It is recognized as arising due to the neglect of the government to the Muslim predicament and a case of aggression turning inwards.

The communal riots were seen by Muslims as an attempt by right wing Hindu forces to further subjugate the Muslims and prevent their conditions from improving, thus perpetuating Hindu dominance. Muslims' own resistance to riots was seen as self-defense and a means not only to protect life and property but also to save their self-worth in their own eyes and as an opportunity to create unity among themselves. Similarly, the electoral violence was recognized as a means to consolidate the Hindu votes (and scare the Muslims away from voting) by the Hindu oriented party. Against this, it was necessary for Muslims to force themselves into the mainstream, take charge of their own lives, and become part of the democratic system so that their own rightful share can be acquired. Also, the threat of violence made them present oriented and encouraged them to confront their existential challenges head on. Indulging in escapism was suicidal and unavailable. They felt that through the rout of

resistance to the imposed violence, if they could take charge of their present then so be it, as they realized keenly that the terms of survival are set by others and not by them.

Similarly, the accusation of being communal is rejected by Muslims. Muslims of the old city strongly deny that they are communal. They blame the mainstream for failing to understand the individual and collective insecurities Muslims are thrown into since independence; the collective responses of Muslims to their predicament has through specific demands of better services by government, need for security, need for protecting their identity. Though these are central features of the popular politics, they are termed as communal.

Thus, the subject of the stereotypes of Hyderabad's Muslims and their own reaction to them provide an interesting insight into the recent history of the region. It also reveals the structure and extent of violence the Muslim community of Hyderabad faces in the present time and the options available to them to deal with it.

Moid works at Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies and can be reached at moidma@gmail.com.

Violence to jihad: a summary

■ Madhurima Majumder

[This is a summary of an excerpt from the chapter 'Islam and Violence' in the book Jonathan Lyons (2014). *Islam Through Western Eyes: From The Crusaders to the War on Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp 117-122.]

Jonathan Lyons in his book *Islam Through the Western Eyes* (2014) grapples with the underlying reasons for the Western understanding of Islam as inherently violent and hence a legitimate target of corrective violence. He argues that this is not a present-day phenomenon and can be traced as far back as twelfth century Europe where such anti-Muslim sentiments were aggressively propagated during the first crusade. Post September 11, 2001 attack on New York, the West saw a repackaging of this old sentiment

that pre-supposes an Islamic world which is incapable of having any rational world view other than religious fanaticism. In the chapter titled "Islam and Violence" Lyons tries to show a link between the Western understanding of Islam as inherently violent and its discourse of the war on terrorism. The author does this by bringing in examples from popular opinions, media and social commentary on the phenomenon of contemporary terrorism.

In fact, President G W Bush's constant reference to the word *crusade* in relation to the West's prerogative to wage 'war against terrorism' instantly hit a nerve, especially among the conservative right. This rhetoric has aided in writing off the Islamic world as perpetrators of wrongful violence, with the

secular Christian West taking upon itself the position of the protector of humanity. It has afforded the West the choice of aggressive tactics and advanced weaponry in its wars, permitted it to dismiss civilian deaths as "collateral damage" and in the same breath pronounce attacks like that of September 11 as an attack on humanity.

The question that was reiterated in the speeches of political leaders and became a staple in public opinion was not "What led to a group of people to attack?" Rather, it was the rhetorical catchphrase "Why do they hate us?" This question does not impose any serious inquiry but foregrounds the assumption that the Muslim East must hate them. Bernard Lewis's commentary on Islam is symptomatic of this unquestioned belief. Lewis pronounces that the East has forever hated the West when he writes in *What Went Wrong*, "They have been hating us for a long time... and it's very natural that they should. You have this millennial rivalry between two world religions, and for now, from their point of view, the wrong side is winning." In fact he goes on to place the Muslim world as the losing side and places this hatred beyond

the realm of doubt, as, “you can’t be rich, strong and successful and loved, particularly by those who are not rich, not strong and not successful. So the hatred is something almost axiomatic.” (2000)

This line of argument negates the possibility of any other explanation for the anti-Western sentiment among Muslims such as the rejection of Western interpretation of modernity, resistance to colonial hegemony, dismissal of life goals set in a capitalist culture and so on. Lyons in *Islam and Violence* demonstrates how appropriation of terms like *jihad* and *shahid* and locating them as central religious tenets has been pivotal in giving leverage to the organic connection that is drawn between Islam and violence (of the non-righteous kind!). Convenient selective focus and omission run throughout in the Orientalist tradition of scholarship on Islam. Despite having complex and multivalent meanings, a religious concept like *jihad* gained sudden focus and popularity and assumed one fixed meaning—that of aggressive warfare (against all non-Muslims) in the Western discourse which saw further intensification post 9/11.

A bombing of the US embassy in Nairobi gets referred to as a “*jihad* mission” with the assumption that the meaning of the term is universally understood and shared, even by a Muslim believer. Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon in their bestselling book, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (2002) do not even include the term *jihad* in their otherwise detailed glossary. The interpretation of *jihad* as “holy war” has been so wholly adopted by the popular understanding that even the contemporary Muslim militant groups have often embraced a similar interpretation of *jihad*. This goes on to show that not only the West but even these groups find it useful in their political and religious mobilization. This has come at the cost of overlooking literature that could possibly provide an alternative to this militaristic interpretation. Though alternative readings of the concept of ‘greater *jihad*’ that refer to the believer’s internal struggle to overcome her/his base human nature and be a better Muslim find mention, they are often dismissed as apologetics of Muslim scholarship.

The case of such selective focus can be demonstrated by looking at the glossary entries provided by Benjamin and Simon, which present an inconsistent mix of classical

and contemporary interpretations of Islamic scholarship to argue the significance of violence in the Islamic faith. A concept like *dar al-harb* which means “abode of war” but essentially refers to the non-Muslim world, gained much attention despite being absent in Qur’an or the prophet’s sunna¹. In fact the term *dar al-harb* was discarded by classical jurists and yet it finds prominence in Benjamin and Simon’s writing as it aligns with their viewpoint.

To strengthen their argument of Muslims being under the religious obligation to resort to militaristic force, they refer to Lewis’ reading of the term *jihad* which they claim has “modern scholarly consensus”. Interestingly, this “modern scholarly consensus” strategically bypasses any actual representation or engagement with any Muslim scholar and instead prefers to see them as a unified whole. This in turn helps in ascribing definitive reading of Islamic texts devoid of any context, which may or may not reflect in the everyday lives of Muslims.

It is perhaps not so surprising that any other kind of reading that challenges their theory of the connection between *jihad* and violence is quickly dismissed e.g., the idea of spiritual or “greater *jihad*”. This is demonstrated by the author who refers to Benjamin and Simon’s endnote in their book, *The Age of Sacred Terror* as an example.

“The last century has seen a trend towards the interpretation of the so-called greater *jihad* as the more genuine form of Islamic struggle... Until recently, however, Muslim scholars were unanimous in insisting on the priority *jihad* had as warfare against the unbeliever. Bernard Lewis made this case most famously, but modern scholarly consensus on the matter is summed up by the new edition of *Encyclopedia Islamica*.” (Benjamin and Simon, 2002)

Ironically, according to Lyons, Benjamin and Simon refer to *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Tyan 1991) which is a standard Western reference work that is edited by Bernard Lewis. To strengthen their argument, they also cite an essay on *jihad* by Douglas E. Streusand (1997) who in turn draws his understanding of the term from Lewis’s work, thus making the cycle complete.

In sum, the underlying reason for the long-standing monopoly of West over the discussions on legitimate use of violence in conflicts with the Muslim world relies heavily on the Orientalist interpretations of the Muslim East as the “other”, the perfect anti-thesis of the ‘modern’ and ‘rational’ Judeo-Christian West, thus discounting the possibility of any rationale behind their actions.

Madhurima Majumder is a fellow at Anveshi Research Centre for Women’s Studies. Email: madhurima.majumder89@gmail.com

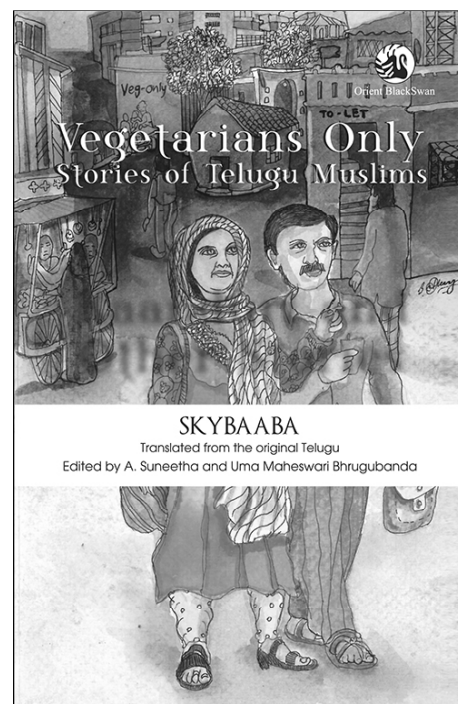
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Who is a woman and who is a dalit?

■ Sowjanya T

Gender justice ends with women!

In several cases, the category 'women', excludes Dalit women in India. The notion that 'all women are white and all blacks are men' becomes 'all women are upper-castes and all Dalits are men' in the Indian context. (Rekha Raj, 2014) A case in point relates to the protests around the 2012 Delhi gang rape. The media, while projecting the upper-caste middle class woman figure and invoking the 'sexual purity' of the rape victim, overlooked the endemic caste based sexual violence against Dalit women. In this case, the innocence of the rape victim was not overtly asserted, but through projection of the rape victim as an upper-caste/middle class woman whose purity had to be guarded by the caste groups or even by the state. This was also asserted by the upper-castes after the Chunduru caste atrocity. In 1991, Dalit men were attacked and killed by the landowning Reddys in the village of Chunduru in Andhra Pradesh. Reddy men have justified the atrocity against Dalit men as a punishment meted out to them for sexually harassing Reddy women. Though there was no truth in it, the Reddys along with the other upper-castes organized protests which not only took an anti-Dalit tone but also criticized the state for failing to protect the upper-caste woman's chastity from the Dalit men. The protests around the Nirbhaya rape had also taken similar tones in that it is the state's responsibility to protect woman's purity. This signifies merely the upper-caste woman's purity because the category of Dalit women falls outside these constructions of caste and sexual purity. The silence of mainstream feminists on the Khairlanji caste atrocity against a Dalit woman is a prime example of

the feminist movement's exclusion of Dalit women. (Rege 2013)

Violence against Dalit women is generated by the caste system which constructs a 'graded patriarchy' for women along with the 'graded inequalities' of castes. Therefore the sexual violence against Dalit women is so normalised in our society that the rape of a Dalit woman is not considered rape at all. Sharmila Rege writes

In almost all regional languages in India the word for 'rape' is equivalent to the phrase 'stealing the honour of' and since lower caste women by the virtue of their double oppression have no 'honour' to speak of the right to redressal is often denied. (1995)

In several cases, upper-caste males have casual access to Dalit women's sexuality which is not considered as rape or sexual violence. Instead, the Dalit woman is considered 'impure', lacking in sexual/caste purity.

Dalit women who take up political struggles often face character assassination as it happened in the case of Rohith Vemula's mother Radhika. At the height of protests against the involvement of the right-wing leaders in discrimination against a Dalit student Rohith Vemula, questions have been raised about his Dalit identity and the onus of proving his caste identity has fallen solely on the mother of the victim. When Vemula's father announced that he does not belong to the SC community and he has no idea how his son has become an SC, the media and the right-wing took this as an opportunity to discredit Rohith Vemula's victimization.

However, the life of Radhika has been that of a Dalit woman who experienced caste discrimination not only within her own family, which had adopted her as a child, but also within her matrimonial family. This is a significant opportunity for feminists to rethink the patriarchal family system and to challenge the state's patriarchy which frames children into the father's caste identity even in an inter-caste marriage, more so when the father's caste identity is inadequate to protect his family from caste discrimination. Similarly, it is important for the Dalit movement to rethink Dalit family because inter-caste marriage is politically asserted by many Dalit ideologues as a way of annihilation and diffusion of castes.

However, as we have seen, feminist intervention has been minimal in the case of Radhika with regard to rethinking the family as Radhika's vulnerability at the intersection of caste and gender is different from that in a middle-class woman's position in inter-caste marriage. On the other hand, if at all Rohith Vemula's mother had given birth to her children out of wedlock, would the Dalit movement have supported her side, is the question. Can the Dalit movement re-imagine Dalit woman without touching upon her sexual or marital history is another question that deserves an answer.

Many Dalit ideologues have practiced inter-caste marriage in their lives as part of their political struggle. Whether these ideologues or indeed the Dalit movement has thought about the position of Dalit women in inter-caste marriage remains impalpable—reinforcing the sense of the saying 'all the Dalits are men'. While the upper-caste woman's marriage with a Dalit man gains more respectability within the Dalit family by the virtue of her caste position, Dalit women end up being exploited by upper-caste men and not given the position of a wife. In several instances, Dalit women have committed suicide after being exploited by the upper-caste men even in the name of 'love' and 'ideology'. The case of Sunita, a post-graduate student who committed suicide on UOH campus, after being exploited by a Reddy male student is an example of such violence against Dalit women. On the other hand in cases like those of Chandra Sri and Radhika, Dalit women faced caste discrimination within the family itself.

Chandra Sri has written how she had been discriminated in her matrimonial home due to her caste position. (Gogu Shyamala 2002) Therefore, the acceptance an upper-caste woman receives in an inter-caste marriage by the Dalit family may not be independent of the caste and patriarchal structures. However, the way the upper-caste families perceive their women as the 'gate ways of caste purity' (Uma Chakravarti 2008) leads to violence against Dalit men who marry upper-caste women.

The Dalit ideology on inter-caste marriage today has to rethink the Dalit family based on the conditions of Dalit women. The inheritance of caste identity from the father figure is the result of patriarchy. However, casteist patriarchy makes the children of Dalit women unacceptable to the upper-caste families in inter-caste marriage. The argument that the children of Dalit women who marry upper-caste men should not use reservations because they inherit the property of the upper-caste father or that such Dalit women have acted against the interest of their community is based solely on casteist and patriarchal attitudes (Rekha Raj, 2014). Dalit ideology on marriage, therefore, should not only be free from caste but from sexism and patriarchy as well.

Sowjanya teaches at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Hyderabad and can be reached at sowjanya.tamalapakula@gmail.com

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Interview with members of Ambedkar Students Association, University of Hyderabad.

■ Kavyasree Ragunath & Manasi Mohan

After Rohith Vemula's institutional murder at the University of Hyderabad (UoH), the members of Ambedkar Students Association (ASA), UoH were at the forefront of protests demanding justice for Rohith, condemning state sponsored atrocities on students. The following are excerpts from interviews conducted with ASA members, highlighting the experience of symbolic and physical violence faced by marginalized students in university spaces.*

Q: Though Rohith Vemula's institutional murder is singular in the way it conditioned a nationwide protest and consolidated a movement both inside and outside the university, don't you think the violent experience undergone by Rohith, from the social boycott to everyday forms of violence is a common factor many marginalized sections are facing due to the structure of the university system?

Umesh Bujji: All Indian educational institutions are established on the foundations to protect the secularism, to be anti-casteist, to promote democracy, to have a freedom of thought, etc. so that it can build inclusive and knowledge based society. But the casteist and brahmanical mind set and arrogance of owning knowledge by particular sections, could not digest the entry of marginalized sections in higher educational institutions. These caste proud people ruined the structure of university system by implementing and practicing caste visibly and invisibly.

Agnes Amala T: The growing intellectuality among Dalits and other marginalized sections, is not tolerated by the upper caste. Since their voices are there wherever there is an injustice, attempts are made to suppress them by just filing some false charges on them. Suspension

or rustication of Dalit scholars is seen as an easy and normal course of action in the universities. The violence undergone by Rohith is one such example of violence undergone by thousands of Dalit students in universities. To stop this day to day violence, Dalits and marginalized sections need to have a stronger movement in the long run.

Vijay Kumar: We can say that there is systemic or institutionalized harassment that exists, which is not only faced by Rohith but by many students from marginalised sections who join the university. Only when our students take such kind of extreme steps like Rohith did, these kinds of issues are noticed and discussed. Before Rohith, Pulyala Raju, Madari Venkatesh lost their lives and we had protested against such violence happening to our students and the administration then accepted their mistake.

Dontha Prasanth: When it comes to the suicide of Rohith Vemula it is not only caste discrimination and caste based exclusion but also political victimisation because the incident clearly depicts how the voices of Ambedkarites were deliberately suppressed through the punitive mode such as social boycott. In villages, we can see that someone who violates the dictums of caste, who questions these caste hierarchies, who surpasses caste boundaries, will be punished in utmost brutal manner by the existing panchayats of the village. In a similar manner at University of Hyderabad, we five dalit research scholars chose to voice the concerns of Dalits, of minorities and the larger sections of Dalit bahun masses of this country. We tried to talk about Dr B R Ambedkar's ideas, his idea of nation, his disagreement with capital punishment which were clearly echoed in the Constituent Assembly, and our

attempt to defeat RSS agendas of trying to appropriate Ambedkar. Then we were viewed as a threat by the RSS, BJP and ABVP. Thus, they have in a full-fledged manner planned and executed this entire episode. Their involvement is clear: starting from MLC Ramachandra Rao, Union minister Bandaru Dattatreya, local MLAs Raja Singh, Kishan Reddy—everyone has come and played their bit in this incident. Ministry of Human Resource Development itself had sent five letters, hence, we could see a clear plot of political victimisation. When social boycott sort of punishment was given against us, we could see from the minutes of the executive council that it has clearly reflected that the punishment was given as instructed by MHRD and not in accordance with principles of justice. Hence we believe that this is a selective and specific targeting of Ambedkarites consisting mostly of Dalits, a political victimisation of them in accordance with the agendas of RSS and BJP to make this nation a Hindu Rajya. So in this case of Rohith Vemula we can see the angle of caste as well as political victimisation. If you look at other suicides like Madari Venkatesh mostly the reason is the caste discrimination that is pertinent in the department, the non allotment of supervisors for dalit students irrespective of the merit of the students .

How do you perceive the systemic operation of violence in a university space from the entry to exit? What are the sites of such violence?

Umesh Bujji : From day one till you as a student leave this campus, your caste is open to all in this university. At the time of sending admission letter/on the day of declaring results student's caste is disclosed. For instance; in admission letter the selected candidates are listed out based on the caste: for each caste community they give one mark—for all SCs they put *(star) mark before their name; for STs they give **(two stars); for OBC they give # (hashtag); *** (three stars) to PWD/VHD students. Hence, students can easily recognize who is what. Moreover, if the students belonging to SC/ST or OBC communities clear their exam in the general category, they will still put these caste marks before our names. They directly criticize reservation policy and the reserved students because we are thought of as getting our degrees easily. Many faculty members are not happy with the introduction of Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship (RGNF),

Maulana Azad National Fellowship for Minority Students (MANF) etc. as if they are giving the money from their own pockets. This administration will not simply sanction this fellowship as they do it to the JRF/CSIR fellowships. A few directly tell us that we are getting all these facilities as beggars. All these humiliating and provocative activities are done by individuals in the departments, or in the schools. There are a few schools where Scheduled caste, Scheduled Tribe students repeat their courses twice.

Vijay Kumar: Every semester when the registration to the new semester begins we have to fight with the administration because the university doesn't release the scholarships on time and if our students don't receive scholarships they will have mess dues and wouldn't be able to register for the new semester. Ultimately sufferers are Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims. The system fails to understand the social and economic background of the students, that they depend solely on their fellowships because their parents are not able to support them financially. Even the state government doesn't release the scholarships on time. The university is not considering these things even on humanitarian grounds and fails to support students. We cannot show any hard evidence to prove these kinds of atrocities or point at some person and say that this person has committed this. It is being normalized and made part of the system.

Coming to academics and classrooms, when a student from a village background joins the university we cannot expect him to suddenly reach the levels of the professors who have completed their studies from prestigious institutions, their way of teaching will be different and our students find it difficult to cope with this. In my department when we approached our professors saying that we are not able to cope with their way of teaching and requested them reduce their level of English so that we can also follow it they replied that it is a central university and it is we who have grow up to their expectations. These kinds of reactions are another kind of atrocity and here also we cannot show a single person as responsible for this. University should take the responsibility to understand the aspirations and dreams of the students and support them in difficult times whoever he or she is, whether from upper caste or lower caste. Due to these kinds of atrocities they are not able to pursue their

courses and many of our students are leaving the courses in middle and some are made to pass securing a very low percentage of marks which will not be of any use in the future for higher studies or jobs.

Agnes AmalaT: Victimized them and giving minimum pass mark or fail marks in the degree level and in PhD level delay in allotting research supervisors, not signing in the fellowship forms at the needed time, making the students meet [the supervisors] at frequent intervals without any reason... In a larger context, since all the key and high positions are with the upper caste faculties they do not allow Dalit students to finish their course on time whether it is PG, M. Phil, Ph.D. These make them emotionally weaker and academically make them to lose interest. This is a systemic discriminatory practice, which is being followed in all universities and institutes.

Would you say something about the strategies and activities that ASA as a formation has undertaken to counter the institutional violence?

Agnes Amala T: ASA as the oldest organization in the Hyderabad university campus [has been the] forerunner for many new organizations. ASA being the first organization started a help desk for [new] students during their admission to solve admission related doubts and queries. ASA organizes many lectures on contemporary issues relating to democracy, caste, atrocities etc. apart from that many protest rallies condemning various acts of violence on Dalits and other marginalized sections.

Umesh Bujji: ASA organizes nearly 40 lectures in an academic year by inviting the available scholars across the country, conducts political classes on Dr. B R Ambedkar to make them conscious how caste prevails in the campus, the forms it takes, and recent trends in caste atrocities, harassment and violence too. Mostly, we organize lectures on democracy, freedom, caste atrocities, and institutionalization of caste, on Ambedkar, on liberty, on secularism, on communal violence, on caste discriminatory practices, on education, and on recent issues in debate. We have representatives in each hostel and in each department, so that, identifying the students who are facing problems is very easy and we will take up issues and solve them. If administration is not

ready to solve the problem we organize protests, rallies, dharnas, hunger strikes etc. We also fought and led many struggles related to undemocratic policies, or decisions related to the freedom of thought or student rights etc. In my ten years of experience in the campus, ASA has dealt with hundreds of issues on the rights of students and has fought to establish the democratic atmosphere, and we have democratized the university. I am not saying this as an ASA member, it has been said by many professors in the Campus. ASA has contributed a lot to make this campus more democratic.

Vijay Kumar: From its inception ASA has started its fight against the brahmanical attitude within the university. Even today the university is operated by a handful of brahmins only, majority of the professors belongs to upper caste that too from the brahmin community. So ASA was started to help the people, the students from the marginalized section. From its inception till today ASA is fighting with the motive to help people in terms of their academic as well as in solving their financial problems within in the campus, in making them aware of their political status and to bring all the students belonging to marginalized section under one political umbrella and give an answer to the administration, they are striving for it. When I say strategies, it includes political strategies like ASA contested in the elections with left organizations and all the other Dalit organisations like BSF, DSU, TSF. For the benefit of marginalized sections some of its strategies worked and some we lost like SFI and some left organisations at times turned against ASA and these became obstacles. So still there are many obstacles for ASA and other organisations for marginalized communities to reach out and achieve its goals.

How does the logic of casteism work in a university space? How do you see them in relation to the blatant caste practices outside the university?

Agnes Amala: As our voices in villages are being suppressed by the dominant castes as they own land, when it comes to daily wage or atrocities [we] could not raise our voices, we were not able to mobilize, to gather and assert our voices and fight for our rights. Think of how they kept our forefathers ignorant without awareness of their rights. In the same way, in educational institutions also though majority of Dalits get high cutoff [marks] and get

admission in general category once they come to university all the oppressive attitudes of the caste people are showered on our students, destabilizing them and projecting them as incapable of doing their studies. If we mobilized together and assert our rights by educating ourselves this is not tolerated by these casteist people. And that results in filing false allegations and ruining our lives. Since they cannot democratically do anything they use all the possible undemocratic methods to curb our rights and voices—which is a traditional caste system being practiced in villages. i.e. suspension of Dalit students can be directly equated with the a Dalit family that is being isolated from the main village for a period of time if they enter into caste Hindu household, drink water from the common well, enter into the temple etc. In the universities, it happens if raise our voice against Hindutva forces and question our loss of rights etc.

Dontha Prasanth: ...but the only difference is that there in the village it comes through direct violence—like if anything happens the person will just be killed. Here psychological violence will be more. Violence will be inflicted on the minds. The torture will continue on a day to day basis. That fellow may not beat you but he will torture you every day with extra assignments and tough things. That is how there is a difference in the functioning of the caste system.

Vijay Kumar: Outside we can clearly find out what are the ways in which caste is being operated, but in the universities it is much more difficult to find out how caste operates. As in this case we cannot say Apparao has directly killed Rohith and we cannot ask the government to book him under SC/ST Prevention of Atrocity case although he is directly involved in the case, but outside it is operating in direct way, a person might directly perform an atrocity on the Dalits or Adivasis but here [it is] not like that. Here it functions through its own systems like the academic system and administrative mechanism, and in their operation atrocity and untouchability is being practiced. They are making and directing our lives to end up like Rohith, Raju and Venkatesh or otherwise leave the courses as it is happening in Mathematics department. Whenever a Dalit gets admission in that department he will leave the course within two or three months, most of the MA students who left the course from Mathematics department are Dalits. Why only Dalits are leaving, that is the indirect way of operating untouchability.

Umesh Bujji: Actually, the dominant caste people don't like to lose their social hierarchy, therefore, on whatever thoughts they come here to the campus, they will continue the same casteist mind set with no respect or esteem for the Dalits. They are not ready to change their mind set [because] it may result in the loss of their social power which is related to economic, political, cultural dominance. So, literally, they follow brahmanical attitude and show their caste domination here in the campus. So, whenever there was a voice from the suppressed section they cut it off. I think this educated brahmanical, fundamental, conservative mindset is more dangerous rather than the village brahmanical mindset. If it is in village, if they boycott us, we will leave that place and go somewhere and live. But, here, we can't leave because of degree, we can't lose our future, here there is no way to except fight back to solve the problem to reach the Dr. Ambedkar's aim or to survive. They feel that whole knowledge is their own, all our lives are in their hands, so, whatever they do is accepted. But, as Ambedkarites, we realize that constitution is ultimate and freedom of the people is more important. Freedom from the caste system is important.

Manasi Mohan and Kavyasree Raghunath are M Phil students in translation studies at the University of Hyderabad and can be reached at manasi.mohan23@gmail.com and kavyasurumani@gmail.com.

***Notes**

The term 'institutional murder' is a widely used critical re-signification of what have so far been dubbed dalit student "suicides" in institutions of higher education. It has been used by Mayawati (BSP leader and the ex-CM of UP), widely by the English media, by the writer Satchitanandan very soon after Rohith died, and by several other activists and thinkers. This term has challenged the casteist naming of these "tragic exits from social death" as occurring due to fatal personal flaws (weakness of character, failed love affairs, etc.) in individuals who cannot cope. This powerful renaming is reminiscent of the way in which the death of young married women in the 1970s which were termed suicides, were renamed 'dowry deaths' in the 1970. In both cases, the critical renaming has brought out the truth of these deaths as the ultimate step out of unbearable circumstances.

Resident Editors

On Radhika's side

■ Gogu Shyamala

From the sea came a tsunami and carried away a child building castles on the shore. The child's name was Rohith Vemula. But why would nature attack him so? He was a person who loved nature!

[A mother's question]

It is indeed a travesty to his memory that he has been painted as a traitor. Some examples of what, as a PhD scholar, as an intellectual, a patriot, Rohith wrote on Facebook: valuing women and men who reaped harvests and how they protected national food security; remembering the families of the soldiers who were the protectors of the distant national borders; focusing on how in the villages, many children do not have water to drink—if they had, that it was dirty; etc. A traitor?

Institutionalized domination

We know that institutionalized dominant forces—patriarchy, caste, religion always try to dominate the foundations of civil society and terrorize its members.

Today the dominant forces have intensified their brahmanical attack on educational institutions. If we ask what happens when government itself attacks institutions with their undemocratic practices, the answer is: People like Rohith Vemula die. The vice chancellor, the government and the administration together became the cause of Rohith's death. It seems as if their determination was to put a stop to Rohith's strong attempt to succeed as a scholar. Had he pursued ordinary employment writing various competitive exams; had he resigned to his failure in the university and become an activist or politician; or had he worked as a daily wage labourer in the city or village; nobody would have found it a problem. The only problem was that Rohith made an effort to stand up as a scholar and Ambedkarite intellectual. This is why the university closed access to the entire infrastructure (library, canteen, fellowship, class room access, etc.) that Rohith needed for his attempt. This

institutional ostracism is clear from his first letter to the VC. The message to Rohith that becomes clear in these actions is "Die! Or leave the university!"

Rohith's predicament was not unique. This has happened to several students: some died, many languish even today. All these occurrences have remained untold as minor incidents in the everyday life of the nation. The important thing is that Rohith's unnatural death became the focus of a movement that brought critical issues to public debate.

Polarization

The student world accepted Rohith's desires, thought, experience of discrimination and his life practice as its own. This is why they joined the movement as a wave of commitment with crystal clear demands.

Rohith was a mirror to society. There was a complete polarization. If on the one hand, the administration and the HRD ministry tried to categorize Rohith as a non-dalit, and his death as a suicide due to depression, on the other, the students were certain that his was an institutional murder.

If the students' embraced Rohith, the local (Andhra and Telangana) BJP, the administration and some news channels (like Bharat TV) ranged against Rohith, descended to a new low and subjected his memory to indignity and humiliation, calling him a traitor. Did they not seek to murder the dead Rohith a second time?

What was depressing through all this was that Rohith, such a great soul, had to end his life. The act of suicide is completely against the spirit of Ambedkarism and self respect. In spite of having such wisdom and education, was Rohith trapped in the university's web of deception? What does it mean when one who belonged to the historically conscious Ambedkar Students Association commits suicide? In spite of

Rohith having many options and avenues to stay alive, why didn't he use them? In the past, ASA students who were rusticated struggled against their rustication for long years and succeeded in building a career for themselves. Shouldn't today's ASA members learn from the experience of failure, struggle and success experienced by their predecessors? On the other hand, had the ASA had taken Rohith's mother Radhika's support perhaps the thought of suicide may not have entered his mind.

Radhika and family

It is worth stepping back and examining the life his mother Radhika lived. We see that she swam against the current from birth. Her birth-parents of the Mala caste (SC) informally handed her over to her adoptive parents of the Vaddera caste (BC) without her consent. Though her adoptive mother looked after her food and clothing, she did not get Radhika educated as she did her own children. Radhika who studied in an ordinary government school had to drop out and work as a servant in her adoptive mother's house. Again, without her consent, the adoptive-mother (as her own responsibility) got Radhika married to a man from the Vaddera caste. The husband got to know within a few days of the marriage that Radhika belonged not to the Vaddera community, but was a Mala. With this, Radhika's in-laws humiliated her. The husband beat and abused her saying "I have been burdened with a mala bitch!"

She withstood it all and stayed her ground, bearing three children. Her condition was known across the village. However, when Radhika saw her husband beat up his own mother, she decided that the influence of such a violent and cruel man on her children would be very harmful. She left his house and moved with children to the Malawada. Her new neighbours embraced her arrival saying that their child had returned. Raja, was barely two months old. The two elder children too were toddlers. She rented a room and subsisted as a tailor. She sent the two elder children to a nearby school. She got a caste certificate and brought them up as Malas.

With this minimal shelter and support as a Mala woman, Radhika worked incessantly to ensure her children's future. All the children studied well, but Rohith was exceptional. Seeing how the children came up in life,

Radhika forgot her own troubles. Thus was Radhika, with no support from childhood, the mother who overcame obstacles at each step, the woman who gave birth to our Vemula Rohith Chakravarty. Rohith's hardworking and honest nature came from Radhika alone.

She would make it a point to tell her sons each day, "Live among all with love and responsibility, my precious ones. But most important, have responsibility to your family. Only if you see of your mother with love and tenderness will you learn how to take care of your wife with love. You should never become like your father who beat his mother".

Neelima the eldest finished her intermediate, Rohith entered the PhD programme and Raja finished his Masters in Science. With her children's encouragement, she enrolled in the Ambedkar Open University and completed a degree. The process of Radhika getting her children and herself educated, nurturing her family and protecting it from violence are all crucial.

Absconding father

The father had no role. He showed no responsibility to the children Radhika bore him. He was a patriarchal despot who destroyed his family. Despite being born to the Vaddera community, he inherited neither their philosophy of community labour, nor their civic responsibility and instead manifested a dominant caste masculinity. The fact that his wife was a Mala woman, disturbed him, and he took it out on her. What then was his children's crime that he abandoned them? If he was so nauseated by Radhika being a Mala woman, why did he have children with her? After these children were born, he married yet again and led his life apart from Radhika and her children. From that point on, even until the moment Rohith died, he did not consider Radhika's children as his own.

Having lived for so long as a complete stranger, he suddenly surfaced in the media claiming to be Rohith's father. I wonder what the ethics of the religion that embraced him was, that tutored him to conduct himself in such a manner! Why did the media and the BJP find his irresponsibility so attractive? "Rohith was my son. We are of the Vaddera community. Rohith is not an SC", he declared. The BJP publicized this relentlessly.

Caste and patriarchy

The BJP located and brought the hitherto unknown father for this single purpose. Why did Radhika who bore Rohith, nurtured him and brought him to the university remain invisible to the BJP? This may be our, or at least my, naïve question, because the BJP's Hindu brahmanism values the father and devalues the mother so much that they brought this absconding drunkard on the media stage atop a bottle of 'dollar whisky'. Everybody knows that they did this to have key officials at government and university levels, and important politician escape the provisions of the SC/ST Atrocities Act. Clearly, the BJP has tried to use its authority to get a certificate that Rohith was not an SC and used this technicality to escape laws that have been the hard won outcome of dalit struggles, and further to deny the democratic community rights of Rohith and his mother.

Why did the local TV channels ignore Radhika and foreground the useless father? Had the channels focused on her story, it would have been an inspiration to so many single mothers, dalit, non dalit and those in inter-caste marriages. Television's modern casteist and patriarchal values can be seen in the case of Radhika if we contrast her invisibility with the publicity and recent fanfare around INFOSYS Narayanamurthy's letter to his daughter. In this letter, he says that it is her mother (his wife) who took the great responsibility of instilling qualities in her. Is it indeed not a shame, that the story of the struggles of this mother, Radhika to instill values in her children and nurture them, have been silenced by the media? Is it not the fact that Narayanamurthy was a member of the successful brahmanical elite that gave his absolutely mediocre letter of parenthood such praise, and that the intense life struggle of Radhika a poor dalit mother was ignored?

Dalit student struggles and the community

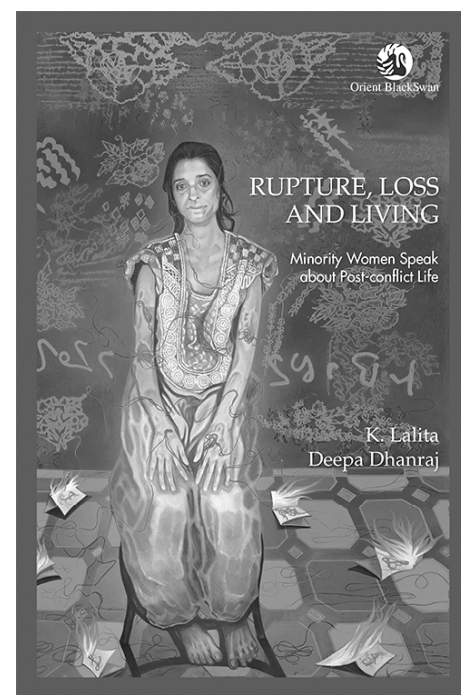
It is in this context that we should understand the establishment of a 'veliwada' in the university campus by the ASA in opposition to the anti-dalit acts. In hindsight, I think it was critical for the veliwada students to have kept their parents, and especially Rohith's mother Radhika, informed of events. It was equally essential that these students involved different organizations in their own communities like the Ambedkar Youth Organizations, Phule Youth Organizations, etc., and thus extended

the struggle. Perhaps Rohith did not tell his mother that the university effected a social boycott on him and were harassing him, fearing her ability to withstand the shock. This was the first mistake. Absorbing the humiliation himself, and committing suicide was his fatal mistake.

If these students were not of the ASA, it would be possible to think that they were not aware of dalit struggles against humiliation, not aware of Ambedkar ideology, not aware of other democratic movements in the Telangana and AP States. This was not the case with either Rohith or the ASA. Had the parents and communities been involved, they would have joined the students in their veliwada protests. Dalit communities would have come together. Would not the events would have taken a different turn? This is not only a problem of the ASA. Most dalit and left movements have functioned on the basis of male leadership and individualized participation. The ASA has simply followed this trend.

Perhaps there are some lessons to learn from this.

Gogu Shyamala works at Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies and may be reached at gogushyamala@gmail.com.



Structural violence and the trans struggle for dignity

■ Gee Imaan Semmalar

"For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of the human personality". – Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Structures of oppression like caste, class, patriarchy and racism function through creating inequalities that are maintained and perpetrated through institutional support. And hence structural violence often, is carried on for so long that it invisibilises and often legitimizes itself and its operations to even the very people on whom the violence is inflicted. Rather than an individual acting out an oppressive behaviour, it then takes on the form of an entire edifice of oppression operating in subtle as well as direct ways to violently exclude, oppress and dominate.

Existing scholarship or popular culture on transgender people in the Indian subcontinent pendulate between depicting us as phantasmagoric beings who don't belong to either gender (linked to myths and monsters in Hindu epics), or freezing us in narratives of victimhood. This paper attempts to look at the kinds of structural violence faced by trans people in order to make the machinations of power more visible. Relative protections and vulnerabilities of course, depend on factors like caste, class, whether you were disowned when you were young, which region you live in, whether you have transitioned into manhood or womanhood, whether you can 'pass' (be socially recognised as binary gender) etc.

It is a known fact that there is a high dropout rate of trans people from school. The reasons may be many, including constant ridicule, discrimination in marking systems, sexual

harassment from fellow students and teachers, punishments for gender non conformity etc. A lot of trans people are also disowned by their natal families due to the notion of shame which originates from caste patriarchy. Trans women or gender non conforming youth raised as boys are disowned at a higher rate than trans men, partly because femininity is culturally seen as a sign of weakness rather than masculinity which is seen as a sign of strength or courage.

The lack of education and homelessness at a young age are partly reasons for most trans women across caste engaging in street based labour like sex trade or begging. The other major factor being brutal and deliberate exclusions in employment which close off all other options. In fact, Living Smile Vidya in a conversation titled "Transphobia as a type of brahmanism" talks about how begging and sex trade have almost come to be like fixed caste occupations for trans women/hijras.

The only employment options for trans people apart from sex trade/begging and traditional roles like badhai are the lower rung positions in NGOs that receive HIV funding. Since trans women/hijras are engaged in sex trade, they were identified as a 'high risk' groups and subsumed forcibly under the category of MSM (men having sex with men) under HIV intervention work. Though the top down structure of these NGOs retains feudal power relations, a section of trans women/hijras for the first time, managed to get jobs as community

mobilisers to distribute condoms and encourage people to undergo screening and treatment for HIV. Later, when some of the HIV intervention networks expanded to include a rights based discourse, some of them were promoted as spokespersons of the NGOs in media advocacy. Though the NGOs give a semblance of dignity during work to this section of trans people, the pay scale remains low and their decision making power, negligible.

The exclusions faced by trans people in employment result in a high rate of vulnerability. It is a well known fact that violence during sex trade is faced by all women engaged in it. Police violence is also very high against trans communities with almost no recourse to legal protections available to us in case of crimes against us. In fact, there is a high rate of hate crimes, rapes and murders against trans communities. Even when cases are registered, they are done with great difficulty following which no investigations, let alone convictions take place. For instance, there was a concerted effort led by trans women in Hyderabad recently, demanding one trans murder case to be investigated after almost 30 non lethal physical assaults went unheeded by police despite FIRs being filed.

On November 26th, 2014, more than 47 members of the transgender community were picked up from various places across the city of Bangalore and illegally detained at the Beggars' Colony, an infamous 'rehabilitation centre' for people engaged in begging. They were detained under the Karnataka Prohibition of Beggary Act, 1975 although any trans woman who was in a public place was randomly picked up regardless of whether she was begging or not. The Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act, the public nuisance and indecency provisions are also routinely used to criminalize trans women occupying public spaces. The Karnataka Government in April 2011 amended section 36A of the Karnataka Police Act to criminalize the hijra community, giving police stations the authority to keep a register of hijras and their details like place of residence etc.

The laws used to criminalize trans people are informed by a caste based morality of

keeping public spaces free of the 'polluting presence' of all people engaged in begging, including hijras. It is significant in this context of understanding the attempts to keep public spaces caste puritanical, that religious mendicants are exempted from being criminalized under the Beggary Act. So, we see that while begging and sex work are fixed occupations for the hijra community, similar to imposed caste occupations, they are highly stigmatized, offer no dignity and are criminalized. The same caste morality is in play when trans women are denied housing in all residential areas except the slums. The residents of the slums, mostly from lowered caste and working class backgrounds, along with trans people across castes, face issues of access to water, right to food and nutrition, healthcare, sanitation etc.

The exclusions in the field of health care, as we know, are stark when it comes to low income families from dalit, Adivasi and Muslim backgrounds. Trans people across castes face difficulty accessing health care. Medical practice categorizes trans people as having a 'gender identity disorder'. Though the latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association replaced the diagnostic term 'Gender Identity Disorder' with the term 'Gender Dysphoria,' it is still listed as a "disorder" in the International Classification of Diseases of the WHO. So, to access trans specific health care like hormone replacement therapy or gender affirming surgeries, it is mandatory for the person to get a certificate after psychiatric counselling stating that they have a "gender identity disorder" (most Indian government hospitals follow the ICD of the WHO). The process of medical transitioning is a long and arduous one with the struggle to identify the few hospitals that provide the service, navigating a difficult and insensitive bureaucratic process, lack of medical knowledge in medical community about trans specific health needs, poor quality of services provided etc. Due to the fact that breast augmentation is a procedure perfected for cis women under patriarchal medical practice, trans women are also able to access only this particular surgery with relative ease. But as a whole, since the trans community is not a socially powerful group,

no funds are sanctioned for new research on trans specific health care which results in no improvement to the poor quality of health care provided. The private clinics have begun to identify this population as a vulnerable one that is in desperate need of accessible services and have begun catering to a growing clientele at a prohibitive price. The poor quality of surgical interventions in private as well as government medical practice show an apathy to the trans community which is enabled to a great extent by the impunity from legal action for medical malpractice. The inaccessibility of the justice system to trans people greatly reduces the possibility of medical negligence cases being filed. The recent death of a 25 year old trans woman, Alisha, in Peshawar, after receiving delayed treatment as the doctors were determining her gender during emergency treatment, shows that accessing general medical support which is not trans specific health care is also impossible. The situation is the same in many parts of the world including in India. Last year, we lost a 22 year old trans man in a private hospital in Delhi due to a problem related to the administering of anesthesia before a hysterectomy. The hospital had no records of his admission and refused to provide even a death summary.

The Supreme Court on April 15, 2014 ruled that trans people could change their legal gender markers without surgery or hormonal interventions. In spite of what was widely celebrated as a progressive judgment, there has been no implementation of the judgment and trans people are still routinely being denied the right to change their legal gender on identity documents without fulfilling some arbitrary criteria of surgical interventions. When persons are denied basic identity documents that match who they are, what is in fact denied to them, is a whole gamut of citizenship rights. Without documents that reflect who you are, everything from accessing the Public Distribution System or the educational system to get employment becomes tedious, if not impossible. Unemployment even among the few trans people who have accessed formal education is often due to the fact that gender markers on school pass certificates and educational degrees cannot be changed. The violence is enacted by the very

act of erasure of the selfhood and allied citizenship rights of trans people. Many would ask, but why do you want to be legible to the state to enact its oppressive governmentality on? Such a question comes from a position of immense privilege of citizenship rights and fails to understand the relationship of subaltern communities and the state. There is no doubt that all subaltern communities bear the brunt of brutal state violence. But most subaltern communities often, work towards accessing full citizenship rights under an imagined welfare state with its attendant protections and benefits.

Trans women/hijras are often referred to as 'eunuch' by state policies, judiciary and media. The word 'eunuch' finds mention in The Hyderabad Eunuchs Act, which is based on the Criminal Tribes Act Amendment of 1871. The British, in 1871, included 'eunuchs' among other tribes, castes and social groups considered criminal at birth. In 2005, the central government introduced an E category in passport application forms where E stood for 'eunuch'. There were protests from the trans community at the use of the word and it was later revoked. The linguistic violence/erasure runs deep. It is symptomatic of, and leads to further structural exclusions/violence against our communities.

Structurally, trans people face exclusions in language, history writing, medical care, housing, employment, legal system and education. When the exclusions are so grave, indeed, the very act of living is a revolutionary one. I believe that when the lowered caste trans woman engaged in street based labour receives full citizenship rights under a welfare state without discrimination, the struggle for social democracy and justice would have made a serious headway. Currently, the issues of trans people are yet to be taken seriously by groups engaged in transformative, democratic struggles. Meanwhile, this many centuries old struggle for the reclamation of human personality continues to inspire many younger trans persons like myself.

Gee is a writer and artist based in Bangalore and can be reached at gee.ameena@gmail.com

Violence against choice marriages: locating the patterns and exploring the ways ahead

■ Rani Rohini Raman

An 'honour' crime as an act is not new in India. There is much folklore on the violence being done to young people who assert their choice in having relationships/marriage. Narayan (2003) represents an old tale of Chuharmal and Reshma. Chuharmal was a Dusad (Dalit) boy and Reshma was a Bhumihar (landlord upper caste of Bihar and U.P). They were in a relationship with each other and were killed in an attack by Reshma's brother and father. For Dalits of this area this folk tale plays an inspirational role and every year a carnival is organised in some areas of Bihar by the Dalits to celebrate the heroism of Chuharmal. At the same time the play based on their story has been banned by the Bhumihars who see this play as an insult to their caste. One can find several other such examples in several other folk tales. Although such acts of violence have been practised from a long time, the nomenclature of 'honour' killings/crimes given by western media, made several scholars categorise these forms of violence as such. It has also merited more media reporting, which is very visible in the rise in the number of reported cases of 'honour' crimes. One can say that now the reporting of 'honour' crimes has increased, which is to an extent, true.

While discussing the rise in the reporting of 'honour' crimes in media, it is also necessary to discuss how the cases of 'honour' crimes are being discussed in the media. Earlier, cases of 'honour' crimes were being reported from Haryana and Western UP, where *khap panchayats* had visible role to play. However, one should note the over simplification of 'honour' crimes in media reports, where several times, 'honour' crimes have been equated only with *khap panchayats*. This sketch tries to present existing patterns of 'honour' crimes being reported in India, with the help of a few cases. In this exercise, the attempt is to present 'honour' crimes as a form of structural violence, which occur because of

the several inequalities existing in the Indian society.

People who tried to break the barriers

This year on 13th March 2016, in broad daylight, V. Shankar and Kausalya were attacked by some people on bikes. The whole incident was recorded in a CCTV camera as the place happened to be a busy bus stand in Tirupur, Tamil Nadu. Shankar was from a Dalit community while Kausalya was from powerful Thevar community. Shankar succumbed to the injuries and died while Kausalya survived serious injuries. Later Kausalya's father surrendered in front of the police and took responsibility for the murderous attack. In 2012, upper caste girl N Divya and Dalit boy I Ilavarasan married, things started getting complicated when Divya's father committed suicide following disturbing remarks from his community members. Divya's father's death led to attacks on Dalit houses in Dharmapuri, Tamil Nadu. Also, PMK leader S. Ramados, allegedly made remarks against Dalit boys "who marry upper caste girls for short lived marriages". After the situation became tense and volatile, Divya left her husband's house and returned to her mother's house. She also declared in the court that she wanted to stay with her mother and not with her husband. After a few days of Divya's deceleration, Ilavarasan's dead body was found on a railway track. In a similar way, Rizwanur Rehman's dead body was found on the railway tracks of Kolkata, after his marriage to the daughter of a big business man. Md. Abdul Hakim was shot dead by his wife's relatives after several years of their marriage, when they had tried to come back to their village after being in exile for a long period. The way in which Monika Dagar and Gaurav Saini were harassed by Monika's family members and UP police, which led to Monika's death and Gaurav's torture in police custody, presents the nexus between police and hierarchical structures of the society.

Cases of Manoj-Babli, Ravinder-Shilpa are such where on the one hand, *khap panchayat's* diktats had led to Manoj and Babli's death and continuous torment of their families. Ravinder's parents were asked to sell their property and leave the village. These two cases reflected the assertion of strong political and structural power by *khap panchayats*. In both, police and local administration did not take resolute actions against *khap panchayats*, as their regular meetings and venomous attacks on these families continued. It was only the orders from the local or High courts, which helped the victims get some respite from the violent ordeal.

Many Deaths, Many Unanswered Questions

The above mentioned cases represent commonly followed patterns of violence against marriages or relationships of choice between girls and boys. On one hand in areas like Haryana, Western Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, where *khap panchayats* are present, most of the cases do involve the provocative role played by *khap panchayat* members, where they force girl's family to take action against the couples. Having said that, it should not be implied that in these states, all 'honour' crimes happen only after the *khap panchayat* gets involved. There are several cases where father, brother or any other male relative kills the couple in fit of rage. Prem Chowdhry, in many of her works has argued that maintaining caste hierarchy and to maintain the hold on land for economic reasons are also crucial factors behind controlling women of the community. In one of the cases discussed with film maker Nakul Singh Shawney, the political ambition of a local leader appeared to be the main reason behind the instigation of the mob to kill the man whose marriage was 'problematic' in the eyes of the *khap*.

Moving ahead, to the other form of violence, which is entirely committed by the family members, the notion of loss of 'honour' becomes the focal point. The cases discussed above are only few of the cases of violence which happened on the couple or on one of them. One can keep adding to the list several such cases of suicides/murders of young couples who had successfully managed to get married but later became victims of violence of hatred. From the states like Punjab and Haryana, almost every day news reports of such killings appear. During my research on such cases (which included collecting news reports on 'honour' crimes spanning a decade), I had found several cases reported in

newspapers, where parents or relatives had killed either one or both after many years of their marriage. In such cases, as mentioned above, primary reason of killing was either continuous provocation from community members or sudden feeling of loss of 'honour'. By mentioning this, the point which I want to make is that, the notion of 'loss of honour' or loss of 'control over daughter/sister', is so deeply rooted among the patriarchs of the houses that even after several years of marriage of their daughters, the goal of regaining their 'honour' emerges as the main reason behind many of such killings.

Structures behind such forms of violence

Such forms of violence, which are done to control women's sexuality so that caste and religious hierarchies can be maintained, cannot be seen in isolation from larger unequal societal structures of India. A form of violence, where family members, community members, *khap panchayats*, police and judiciary are equally involved, needs to be analysed to understand its structural roots. Whenever couples elope, to get married, to escape from series of violent 'instruments' pointed towards them, they struggle to be safe from the hands of angry family members and conservative police machinery. But at the same time, when eloped couples are from different castes and especially if boy is from Dalit community, then not only the boy, but his entire family is forced to go through the structural violence being instigated by *khap panchayats* or other such community collectives. Such practiced forms of violence against marginalised communities, in the name of 'honour' is one of the most neglected areas that needs to be focused while searching for answers against 'honour' crimes

Rohini is a fellow at Anveshi and can be reached at rohini.redstar@gmail.com.

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Interview with Nakul Singh Shawney, Documentary filmmaker, "Izzat Nagri ki Asabhya Betiyan"

Excerpt (with minor changes) from Trina Nileena Banerjee, "Kanhailal's Draupadi: Resilience at the Edge of Reason"

Published in Theatre of the Earth: Clarifying the Trajectory by Kanhailal Heisnam (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2016)¹

Mahasweta Devi's short story "Draupadi" appeared for the first time in a collection called *Agnigarbha* in 1978 post-Emergency Calcutta. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's translation of the same appeared in the winter issue of *Critical Inquiry* in 1981:

Draupadi's black body comes even closer. Draupadi shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand. Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. Draupadi wipes the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is as terrifying, sky splitting, and sharp as her ululation, "What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?" She looks around and chooses the front of Senanayak's white bush shirt to spit a bloody gob at and says, "There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do? Come on, counter me—come on, counter me-?" Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid.²

Twenty years later, in 2001, while still in college, I watched Manipuri director H. Kanhailal's play *Draupadi* performed in Kolkata at the Academy of Fine Arts at a festival organised by Nandikar. During the climax, veteran actress Sabitri Heisnam appeared in the nude on stage. Describing the climactic section of the play as it appears in Amar Kanwar's film, Deepti Misri has written:

In the segment of the performed play included in Amar Kanwar's 2007 documentary *The Lightning Testimonies (Roushan Bayaan)*, Sabitri, her back to the audience, advances menacingly toward the soldier, initially holding together at her front the single length of cloth that has been handed back to her after her rape. As she approaches the now cowering soldier, she opens her cloth all

at once with a bloodcurdling scream: "Confront my body!" Swirling the cloth around to almost completely cover the soldier, she stands naked over him.³

In July 2004, a group of Manipuri women stripped naked in front of the Western Gate of Kangla. The 17 Assam rifles personnel had picked up Thangjam Manorama from her house and shot her dead on 11th July. The possibility of rape was acknowledged, there was evidence of bullet wounds on her private parts⁴. Manorama was a little over thirty and suspected of insurgency. I quote from a news report that appeared in *The Sangai Express*:

Following the naked outburst of anger and bottled up rage, the district administration of the two districts of Imphal acted swiftly and imposed an indefinite curfew in Greater Imphal areas from 11 am today.[...] Policemen who rushed to the site found themselves in an awkward position not knowing how to deal with the women who had bared all. The women folks raised a number of slogans, questioning, how long they have to suffer, while their sons and daughters are being trampled, tortured, raped and killed by the security personnel.⁵

From the evidence and interviews I have gathered so far on the field during the course of my research on the subject, I am fairly certain now, that the women who participated in the protest at the gates of Kangla in July, 2004 were not aware of the existence of Kanhailal's *Draupadi* as a play. Hence with great and almost uncanny force, the complex interface between theatrical performance and political action comes to the fore when we think about this strange time lag between theatrical performance and political reality.

When I interviewed Sabitri and Kanhailal Heisnam about the production of *Draupadi* in Imphal in March, 2011, I wanted to know their views on the connection between these two events. Their subsequent statements elucidated what seemed to be a strange,

strictly non-empirical, reverberation between two discrete, yet significantly 'historical' moments in their milieu. Ima Sabitri said about the experience of her performance: "I had for all my life heard stories of women who had been raped. I had felt their pain. When I heard the story of *Draupadi* from Ojha⁶, it seemed like our story. In the rehearsals I felt I needed to release my whole spirit, my whole soul. It is a question of the soul. With clothes I feel it is not real. It is a trick. At that culmination, I am fully authentic when my body is bare. My energy is released, it vibrates. If I do not go through all of *Draupadi*'s pain myself every time I perform, my acting would not succeed." And in the course of the long interview, Ojha Kanhailal said: "As far as I know, there is no direct connection. The *imas*' who protested in 2004 did not have any relationship with the play. They probably don't see plays. They are old, some of them not very educated. But that is not the point. Things *just happen* historically at a juncture. They have the spirit inside, the spirit of the times. There is *no conscious* connection. The spirit of the real life and the spirit we try to create through our theatre are synchronised. That is the point."

The excerpts from the interviews, I would like to believe, speak for themselves. Kanhailal's point about the *zeitgeist* seems an important one. What seems to pervade both narratives – the theatrical and the political- is the willingness, the ability and the felt necessity of engaging with pain as an embodied practice – pain as, in fact, an imperative to the process of bodily intervention in the public space as actor/ protester. Both speak of activating a kind of energy, a body language, where the spirits of past pain – not technically the actor's own⁸ – may be mobilised in the crisis of the present moment through a willing, renewed and ritual engagement with that pain. The question is not one of effective representation, a mere achievement of which (as Sabitri Heisnam felt) would be 'a trick', but on what Saba Mahmood calls "the affective and embodied practices through which a subject comes to relate to a particular sign – a relation founded not only on representation but also on what we can call attachment and cohabitation"⁹.

In Sabitri's performance, a moment of surplus or rupture is created - where theatre and politics spill over into each other, allowing women's political and performative voices to find intimate connections with each other. These voices then manage to escape (in protest and in performance, as well as in the

spaces where the two overlap), in productive ways and even for short periods of time, the dictates of (sometimes claustrophobic) community or state-driven narratives. *Draupadi*, therefore, mirrored with a strangely proleptic voice the very body language that the *imas* chose when they brought themselves out on the streets to protest Thangjam Manorama's death at the gates of Kangla in 2004. Though the event has been severally called the *Ima's* (mothers') protest, the women at Kangla were, for once, not protesting only on behalf of the Meitei community – as mothers, sisters, daughters or bread-winners of the family; they were protesting on behalf of their own violated bodies, a novel twist in the 'resistance' narrative which cannot perhaps be fully contained within the logic of Meitei community identity. Although there have been subsequent attempts, both by scholars¹⁰ and the people of Imphal (some of whom I spoke with at length during my visits to the city in 2009 and 2011) to reclaim the event at Kangla for the community and place it within a history of bravery of Meitei womanhood (especially the *Nupi Lans*¹¹), there are serious ruptures within the seeming continuum. A moment of surplus (or escape) had been created and witnessed. It would not be easy for conventional narratives of either the state or the community to appropriate and subsume this political moment in its totality. But the *imas* of Kangla were preceded by another *hanubi* who had stripped herself naked in protest on a Calcutta stage in 2001. She was performing, these women were not: or is it really that simple? What are the elements of theatrical spectacle operating in a public political event? What is the political potency, if any, of a purely theatrical event? Perhaps we can here begin to map a tentative syntax for examining how ideas of 'what is political' travel from and between these seemingly separate zones of theatrical politics and political theatre.

Trina Nileena Banerjee teaches at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata and can be reached at trina.banerjee@gmail.com.

Notes

¹Trina Nileena Banerjee, "Kanhailal's *Draupadi*: Resilience at the Edge of Reason," in *Theatre of the Earth: Clarifying the Trajectory by Kanhailal Heisnam*. (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2016), pp. 153-165.

² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Draupadi by Mahasweta Devi" [Critical Inquiry 8.2 (1981): 381-402]. The translation was reprinted in *Writing and Sexual Difference* [Ed. Elizabeth Abel. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1982].

³ Deepti Misri, "Are You A Man?" [Signs, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Spring 2011), pp. 603-625].

⁴ Deepti Misri, "Are You a Man?" and Namrata Gaikwad, "Revolt Bodies, Hysterical State: Women Protesting the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958)", [Contemporary South Asia, Volume 17, Number 3, September 2009, pp. 299-311(13)].

⁵ 'Women give vent to naked fury in front of 17 AR at Kangla', July 5 2004 (Imphal), in *The Sangai Express* <<http://e-pao.net/epRelatedNews.asp?heading=12&src=150704>> [last accessed 14 October 2005].

⁶ The word 'Ojha' in Meitei means 'teacher' and this how Sabitri Heisnam usually refers to Kanhailal Heisnam.

⁷ The word "ima" in Meitei means "mother".

⁸ "We are Manorama's mothers!", the *imas* have been recorded as stating. [Cited in Misri, "Are You a Man?", pp. 614].

⁹ Saba Mahmood, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (1 January 2009): 836-862.

¹⁰ Walter Fernandes, "Limits of Law and Order Approach to the North East" [Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 39, No. 42 (Oct. 16-22, 2004), pp. 4609-4611].

¹¹ The history of the two 'Women's Wars' or *Nupi Lan* in colonial times is associated almost entirely with the women's market. These wars were waged, on both occasions, against the policies and orders of the colonial administration. The first *Nupi Lan* took place in 1904 when the residence of the British Political Agent Major Maxwell was burnt down by unknown persons and Maxwell ordered a supply of free labour from the Meitei people in order to rebuild the house. Women gathered in thousands and protested against the orders of the government until it was finally withdrawn. There was a similar organised protest by women in 1925 against the imposition of a water tax by the British Government. The next major *Nupi Lan* took place in 1939 (when Manipur was almost facing a famine) against the official policy on the unlimited export of rice from the valley by Marwari traders. [See Soyam Lokendrajit, 'An Artist's Response to Contemporary Reality: A Case of Two Directors' in *Seagull Theatre Quarterly: Theatre in Manipur Today*, (Calcutta: The Seagull Foundation for the Arts, June-Sept, 1997), p. 26 and Manjusri Chaki-Sircar, *Feminism in a Traditional Society: Women of the Manipur Valley*, (New Delhi: Shakti Books, 1984), pp. 34-37.]