

*The Need for Judicial
Diversity*
Pg 5

*Fashion &
Postmodernism*
Pg 37

HINDU COLLEGE GAZETTE

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2021

*Analysing Natalie
Wynn's Contraponits*
Pg 35

*Interview with Padma
Shri Dr. GN Devy*
Pg 24



DISPELLING THE ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL INIQUITIES
OF OBESE IDENTITY: *From Genesis to the Quotidian*
Pg 58 / Vibhuti P. & Souvik B.

HINDU COLLEGE GAZETTE

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2021

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HINDU COLLEGE GAZETTE

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2021

2. GUEST WRITERS
3. COLUMNISTS & CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

LAW & POLITICS

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-----|---|
| Akshay T. & Himanshi Y. | 5. | SYMBOLIC SOLUTIONS AND INTERSECTIONALITY:
<i>The Need for Judicial Diversity</i> |
| Aftab Ahmed | 8. | SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE:
<i>An Escape Route from Brexit</i> |
| Rishav | 11. | A FAÇADE OF ANONYMITY:
<i>Grindr's Breach of User Privacy</i> |
| Muhammad Luqman | 14. | CASTE CENSUS:
<i>The Conundrum of Counting Caste</i> |
| Srijani Datta | 18. | GREENING POLITICS:
<i>Opportunities and Barriers</i> |
| Meenakshi Senan | 21. | THE POLITICS OF THE NEW VOGUE ON YOUR PLATE:
<i>Veganism</i> |

SOCIETY

- | | | |
|----------------------|-----|---|
| Rajeev Anand Kushwah | 24. | NATALIE WYNN'S CONTRAPOINTS:
<i>Humor, Drag, and Philosophy</i> |
| Samarth Singh | 30. | REQUIEM FOR A PANDEMIC FORGOTTEN |
| Arjun Tandon | 34. | POSTCOLONIAL PREFERENCE FOR SOCIALISM:
<i>How Anti-Imperialism Came To Shape Modern South Asia</i> |
| Saeesha Pandita | 37. | READING BETWEEN THE THREADS:
<i>Confluence Of Fashion & Postmodernism</i> |
| Abdullah Kazmi | 42. | AMIDST GRIEF AND UNCERTAINTY:
<i>Perspectives on Stoicism & Values</i> |
| Ananya Bhardwaj | 47. | TALKING GENDERED AND STATE VIOLENCE IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S
'DRAUPADI' |

HISTORY & CULTURE

- | | | |
|------------------------|-----|--|
| Ritvij Ratn Tiwari | 51. | GUPTA AGE:
<i>Was it Really Golden?</i> |
| Seethalakshmi KS | 55. | PARTITION AND PATRIARCHY:
<i>The Story of Thoa Khalsa</i> |
| Vibhuti P. & Souvik B. | 58. | DISPELLING THE ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL INIQUITIES OF OBESE IDENTITY:
<i>From Genesis to the Quotidian</i> |
| Aryan Pandey | 64. | THE LANGUAGE TALK:
<i>Interview with Padma Shri Dr. G.N Devy</i> |
| Melekwe Anthony | 69. | FLYING AFRICANS:
<i>The Igbo Landing Story</i> |
| Samya Verma | 74. | MAHARANI TARABAI BHONSLE |

80. MASTHEAD
81. THE SYMPOSIUM SOCIETY

GUEST WRITERS



Akshay Tiwari is a second year law student pursuing a B.A. LL.B. (Hons.) course from National Law University, Jodhpur. He is interested in the field of Constitutional Law.



Himanshi Yadav is a second-year law student pursuing a B.A. LL.B. (Hons.) course from National Law University, Jodhpur. She is interested in the field of Constitutional Law as well as **feminist and queer theory**.



Muhammad Luqman is a 2nd year Political Science student at Hindu College. He is a person of multiple contradictions who sometimes speaks like a shrewd outspoken politician or acts like a calm mystic Sufi. He loves quizzing, public speaking, and wandering. Sometimes he can be seen teaching children. He will talk about anything and loves to listen to anyone so long as he is offered a plate of Biryani & a cup of coffee.



Rishav is a final year law student at Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab. His interest areas are Human Rights, Gender Laws, Intersectional Studies, and Feminist Jurisprudence.



Ritvij Ratn Tiwari is a II-year student at the National Law School of India University, Bangalore. He likes to read the Law, both for work and for leisure. He has a keen interest in the critical study of the humanities, particularly history. In his idle time, he likes to watch gritty films and the UFC.



Samarth Singh Chandel is a second year history student at the Hansraj College, Delhi University. He is interested in exploring trends of socio-cultural change.



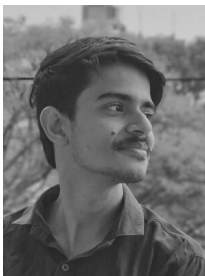
Souvik Biswas is a Second year student of History Department from Hindu College. He hails from Darjeeling known as Queen of Hills, West Bengal. He started writing articles in The Statesman newspaper from 2016. Currently he is the coordinator of The Statesman. He also writes poems in LiveWire. Being marked as a bibliophile and cinephile, Souvik states that he hates billionaires and dreams of a casteless and classless society.

COLUMNISTS



Rajeev Rajeev Anand Kushwah (He/They) is a Queer Bahujan Independent Researcher pursuing an M.A. in Women's Studies at TISS, Mumbai. His research interests include queer experiences, feminist ethics of care, and pop culture. As a writer, he extensively weaves words on gender, sexuality, and queerness. He writes for The Reclamation Project, Gaysi, and Feminism in India. He is also a participant in the International Writing Program's Summer Institute 2021 by the University of Iowa.

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



Abdullah Kazmi is an undergraduate student of Psychology and Journalism based in Bangalore. His areas of interests are behavioural health, philosophy, media, culture, history, journalism and sports. In his interludes, he is a content curator and a short-story writer as well.



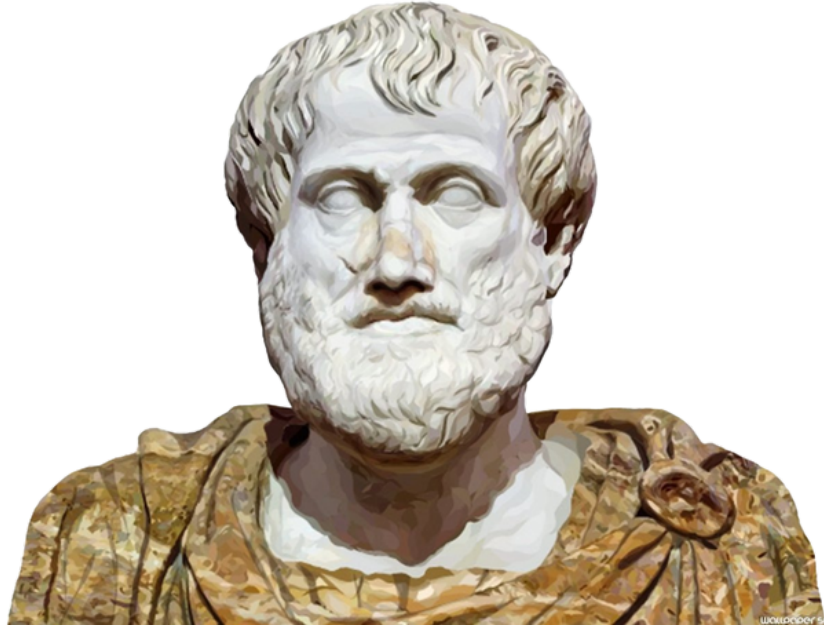
Melekwe Anthony is a fierce writer with many published works across North America. He recently appeared on the cover of Dark Moon Digest's Issue #44 for his piece titled "Shadows". Melekwe currently writes for Dead Talk Live, USA and Varemeng Network, Netherlands.



Saeesha Pandita is a first-year English student at Hindu College. She takes a keen interest in all things pop culture, and is a Korean-drama fanatic. She loves to learn about the nuances of food and fashion. Always eager to learn new languages, she hopes to speak fluent Korean someday!



Arjun Tandon is a budding economist, with a primary focus on monetary and public economics. He can usually be found driving karts, doing research, reading philosophy or playing football.



LAW & POLITICS

IN THIS SECTION

<i>Akshay T. & Himanshi Y</i>	5.	SYMBOLIC SOLUTIONS AND INTERSECTIONALITY: <i>The Need for Judicial Diversity</i>
<i>Aftab Ahmed</i>	8.	SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE: <i>An Escape Route from Brexit</i>
<i>Rishav</i>	11.	A FAÇADE OF ANONYMITY: <i>Grindr's Breach of User Privacy</i>
<i>Muhammad Luqman</i>	14.	CASTE CENSUS: <i>The Conundrum of Counting Caste</i>
<i>Srijani Datta</i>	18.	GREENING POLITICS: <i>Opportunities and Barriers</i>
<i>Meenakshi Senan</i>	21	THE POLITICS OF THE NEW VOGUE ON YOUR PLATE: <i>Veganism</i>

SYMBOLIC SOLUTIONS AND INTERSECTIONALITY: *The Need for Judicial Diversity*

BY AKSHAY TIWARI AND HIMANSHI YADAV

The article begins by setting a background for discussion on the representation of women in the Indian judiciary and refutes certain previously held notions regarding gender disparity in courts. The article then considers possible hurdles in the way of meaningful gender equality in courts, and concludes by suggesting a way forward.

The Chief Justice of India, N.V. Ramana, made headlines with his speech at a felicitation function organized by the Lady Advocates in honour of the CJI and the Judges of the Supreme Court on 26th September, 2021. The CJI utilised the

occasion to draw attention to the lack of female representation in the judiciary of India. Altering the words of Karl Marx slightly, the CJI called for the women of the world to unite, asserting that they had nothing but their chains to lose. The Chief Justice advised women to demand a 50 percent reservation, not as charity to womankind, but as a matter of right, in order to end the suppression of women that has gone unquestioned for thousands of years.

Although three women have been appointed to the Supreme Court only recently, bringing the current number up to four, the total number of



women ever appointed as judges in the Supreme Court is still a meagre 11, compared to 245 men! The Supreme Court's first female judge was appointed in 1989, 39 years after the court was established. Only ten women have been sworn in as judges in the Supreme Court since then, including those sworn in recently.

With only 4 out of 33 (12%) judges of the Supreme Court being women, and the representation of women in the High Courts being no better, and only 11% of the judges being female, the words of the CJI have struck a chord with those who wish to see women represented more appropriately in all pillars of democracy.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE DISCUSSION

Although the Chief Justice's call for better representation is the most prominent one in recent memory, the subject of women's underrepresentation in the higher judiciary has been under the microscope for a long time.

In December of 2020, Attorney General KK Venugopal advised the judiciary to ensure better representation of women across all courts in order to ensure that the justice system is more sensitive and empathetic towards women's issues and cases involving sexual misconduct perpetrated on women. The AG gave this advice in written submissions to the Court, which had requested his aid in a petition challenging the Madhya Pradesh High Court's grant of bail in a case of molestation in August 2020 in which the culprit was granted bail by the high court on the ludicrous condition of getting a rakhi tied by the victim.

Venugopal emphasised that *"This initiative must come from the Supreme Court itself, considering that the power of appointment rests almost exclusively with the Supreme Court Collegium. The goal must be to achieve at least 50% representation of women in all leadership positions"*.

Venugopal urged the bench that "old school" judges who may be "patriarchal" in perspective should be sensitised so that they do not give orders objectifying women in cases of sexual abuse. He also advocated for mandatory gender sensitisation training for all lawyers.

Additionally, the Supreme Court Women Lawyers Association (SCWLA) filed a petition with the Supreme Court in April 2021, highlighting the abysmally low representation of women in the higher judiciary and requesting that meritorious women lawyers practising in the Supreme Court and the High Courts be considered for appointment as judges in the High Courts. The application was filed in the case of *M/s PLR Projects Pvt Ltd v. Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd* in which the Supreme Court was debating the subject of unfilled High Court judge vacancies. In response, the then CJI SA Bobde said that *"Chief Justices of High courts have stated that many women advocates, when invited to come as judges, declined the offer citing domestic responsibilities about children studying in Class 12, etc."*

Trickle-up Hypothesis: Does it still stand?

A reply that comes to mind easily upon hearing the discussion on the lack of female representation is that since the number of female law professionals in India is low, women's underrepresentation in courts can simply be attributed to a scarcity of skilled women in the workforce. Although there is truth to the claim that women form a smaller section of the profession, and that does play its part in the discrepancy, this explanation is not satisfactory.

It goes without saying that a shortage of women in the workforce is a result of the prejudice that women suffer in the legal profession, as well as the patriarchal origins of the profession, which contributes to the gender imbalance in the judiciary. However, there is also evidence that even when the proportion of women in the profess-

ion increases, there is no corresponding increase in the number of female judges.

Beverly Blair Cook, a prominent political scientist, who investigated the proportionality between the number of women lawyers and judges, found that between 1920 and 1970, US states differed in terms of whether women made up 1% to 5% of lawyers and 1% to 10% of trial court judges. With the increase in female lawyers post-1984, the gender disparity widened further. This led to Cook setting aside the "trickle up hypothesis" that suggested that women would rise to the bench in proportion to their numbers in the legal profession over time. Through her findings, Cook found a 50% discrepancy between the number of female judges expected based on the number of female lawyers.

According to regional data, the proportion of female lawyers to male lawyers increased considerably from the pre-collegium to the post-collegium period. Women made up 3.12 percent of all lawyers who registered in Uttar Pradesh between 1962 and 1997. However, women made up 12.3 percent of the lawyers who registered between 1998 and 2005. We see a comparable surge in the number of female lawyers practising in Delhi. Women made up only 8.1 percent of lawyers between 1981 and 1990, but they made up 22 percent of all lawyers between 1991 and 2000. Despite a rise in the proportion of female lawyers to male lawyers over the collegium period, the proportion of female judges to male judges has remained quite constant.

This made it clear that it wasn't possible to simply attribute women's underrepresentation in courts to a lack of qualified women in the labour pool, nor can we assume that as the number of women lawyers grows, so will the number of women judges. This serves as evidence for a systemic disadvantage that women face, which must be discovered and uprooted.

TRICKLE-UP HYPOTHESIS: DOES IT STILL STAND?

In her farewell speech on her retirement from the Supreme Court, Justice Indu Malhotra opined that she did not believe in representation being merely symbolic on the basis of gender. *"We don't want meritless tokenism. I believe in meaningful gender parity and not symbolic parity"*, she added.

The concept of tokenism is often discussed in feminist theory. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, in her book *Men and Women of the Corporation*, talks about how organisations would often hire a few women simply to show the world that they are modern and avail opportunities fairly. However, these women often remained isolated and were seen not as individuals but as a stand-in for her group. In this way, the same patriarchal status quo was maintained, with minimal change in the system, and yet a large part of the public that demanded fairness was pacified. This tokenism can be seen in the Indian judiciary as well, where women judges are not allocated cases related to PILs and Social Justice issues as often as they should be, even though these issues require a representative and gender diverse set of perspectives.

As we see a transition to a more gender-diverse bench, this same tokenism that acts as a safety valve, pacifying the people by throwing them a bone in the form of the tokenized person, must not be allowed to take hold. The solution is not a certain number of women on the bench just to meet an arbitrary bar. Instead, the aim is to achieve genuine and organic representation.

The real, underlying objective behind the appeal for more female judges is the fact that a democratic judiciary fails to fully serve its purpose if the perspective of half of the population goes unexpressed. Women are needed on the bench because the experience of living life as a woman must be factored in when a judgement that affects women is given. It is not that a male judge is incapable of comprehending the subtle and often imperceptible, yet never insignificant mindset of a woman and deliver a judgement that is considerate of the same. However, for a man to do this requires effort but for a woman, it is her natural perspective, always permeating her judgement. As Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg famously said: *"In her experience, Justice Coyne said, "a wise old man and a wise old woman reach the same conclusion." And so they do. But it is also true, I am convinced, that women, like persons of different racial groups and ethnic origins, contribute to the United States judiciary what a fine jurist, the late Alvin B. Rubin of Louisiana, described as 'a distinctive medley of views influenced by differences in biology, cultural impact and life experience.'"*

INTERSECTIONALITY: THE WAY FORWARD

The need for diversity arises out of the immense complexity of the problems that our immensely complex society faces. Not only does a diverse bench help us to fully comprehend the effects of these problems and to consider the perspectives of a larger number of people, but it also widens the range of possible solutions that may arise when the court is faced with these problems.

Although the representation of the female perspective is an urgent need in the judiciary, so that the female perspective is given the power it deserves, we must also strive for a judiciary that simultaneously considers the perspectives of as many sections of society as possible. The unfortunate trend in the current system is that the few positions in the higher judiciary that are held by women are dominated by women from privileged backgrounds. In order to make the justice system more effective, perspectives of women from all castes, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds must be considered.

The lack of gender parity in the institutions of democracy, including the judiciary, is one of the most significant hurdles to the ideal functioning of our democratic system. If a more diverse bench with a wider range of perspectives is not achieved, and women judges are not given the position and power that they deserve, the nation as a whole will suffer by being inefficient, corrupt, and unsuccessful.



Source: Hercules-shop

SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE: AN ESCAPE ROUTE FROM BREXIT

BY AFTAR AHMED

The victory of the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) in May, 2021 for the fourth consecutive term has reignited the call for independence in Scotland. Scotland and England became a single state – The United Kingdom of Great Britain – in 1707 when The Acts of Union were passed in the parliaments of both during the reign of Queen Anne of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Since then, the union has always been based on consent and not compulsion.

The issue of Independence of Scotland started gaining ground in the 1970s and 1980s, in part because of the rise of SNP and in part due to various unpopular policies of Margaret Thatcher, the then Prime Minister of the UK. The surfacing demand for greater autonomy led to two referendums being held on devolution of powers from Westminster to Edinburgh. The first Scottish Referendum on devolution was held on 1st March, 1979, wherein the Scots voted in favour of the devolution by 52% to 48% – however, only 32.8 percent of the electorate had joined the majority,

which fell short of the 40 per cent threshold set by many backbench Labour MPs. The second and successful Referendum on Devolution was held on 11th September, 1997, which led to the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. The devolved Parliament had powers in the Agricultural, Education, and Health Care sectors, while Westminster managed Immigration, Foreign Policy, and Defence.

The Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) gained electoral victory in 2007 and secured an absolute majority in the subsequent Scottish



Source ; Financial Times

Parliament elections in 2011 and promised to call a referendum on Scottish independence. With the consent of David Cameron, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the Referendum was ultimately conducted in 2014. Scots rejected the referendum by 55% to 45% and the very next morning PM Cameron declared the issue settled for generations. The issue of Independence would have been settled for generations had it not been for Brexit. One of the major reasons Scots voted against the 2014 referendum was the UK's longstanding membership in the EU. However, the 2016 vote on Brexit changed the calculus as 62% of Scots voted against it.

SCOTLAND AND BREXIT

In 2016, the United Kingdom conducted a referendum on its membership in the European Union (EU), with 52% of Britons voting to leave and 48% voting to stay. However, the scenario in Scotland was considerably different, with 62% of Scots voting to stay in the EU, but they were outvoted because they only account for 8% of the UK population. As a result, Scotland's first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, claimed that the country was being dragged out of the EU against its will, claiming that this was a "substantial and material alteration of the conditions in which Scotland voted against independence in 2014." So, Brexit has reinvigorated the desire for independence in Scots.

Boris Johnson chose a hard Brexit, which had devastating effects on Scotland's economy. Scotland is being kicked out of a single market worth €16 billion in exports to Scottish enterprises, all against its will. Scottish Government modelling estimates that Brexit could cut Scotland's GDP by around 6.1% by 2030 compared to EU membership. Because of new tariffs and border procedures, all good sectors will now face higher expenses of trading with the EU.

As a result, some industries, such as food, manufacturing, agriculture, and forestry, may be more vulnerable. Boris Johnson also spurned the membership of Erasmus, an exchange programme for the Scottish students, as a result of hard Brexit. In the midst of Pandemic and economic recession, a hard Brexit left Scotland's economy in shatters.

For Scots independence now has become an escape route from Brexit. A breakaway from the United Kingdom would lead to Scotland facing similar challenges Britain faced after Brexit. The first minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, said that they can avoid such challenges and learn from Britain's errors. However, because the union has existed since 1707, Scotland is significantly more entwined with Britain than Britain has ever been in the EU. Tax collection, immigration, electricity distribution, and other aspects of daily life must be untangled. It would have to open negotiations on the fate of Nuclear weapons,

oil and gas reserves, sovereign debts, etc. Scotland would also have to follow a legal path to independence in order for other countries to recognise it. The first step would be to call an independence referendum with the approval of the UK Prime Minister.

IS A 2ND INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM POSSIBLE?

If Scotland were to gain independence, it would need to follow a legal process to guarantee that the rest of the world recognises its independence. Following Brexit, Scotland's first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, began campaigning for a second independence vote. It is usually referred to as indyref2. The Scottish govt has also published a draft legislation for a possible second Referendum. But can the Scottish Parliament hold an independence referendum on its own? The answer is No, it can't. According to The 1998 Scotland Act (which created the Scottish parliament), matters relating to the 'Union of the kingdoms of Scotland and England' are reserved for the UK Parliament. Thus, the Scottish Govt would have to seek the assent of the UK's PM to hold another referendum.

Boris Johnson, in January 2020, refused to grant Nicola Sturgeon permission to hold such a referendum, claiming that the 2014 referendum was a 'once in a generation' event. The Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) and other nationalists say that Boris Johnson has no moral or democratic reason to refuse another referendum.

SNP, which is in power in the Holyrood Parliament, says that if Boris Johnson continues to deny the permission, they would push ahead with passing the referendum bill in the Edinburgh Parliament and the Johnson would have to go to court if he decides to challenge it and if not then it would be a legal vote. Some even argue that the referendum bill would be within devolved competence of Holyrood.

Sturgeon has stated that she wants to take the legal route to independence and that she does not want to conduct an illegal vote, citing the example of Catalonia which unsuccessfully declared independence from Spain in 2014 after the referendum was ruled illegal by the Judges.

CHALLENGES ON THE ROAD TO BRUSSELS

Scotland, as a constituent of the United Kingdom, has been a part of the European Union (EU) for over a half century. However, joining the bloc as an independent state would bring its own challenges. For Scotland to even have a chance on EU's membership, it would have to ensure that it gets its independence through constitutional and legal means. But before plying on the road to Brussels, Scotland would have many challenges at home. It would have to set up new institutions, regulatory bodies, and laws to set up things which were earlier done from London or at the UK

level. It would have to set up the foreign ministry, a central bank, etc and would have to ensure that they meet EU's standards and are robust and resilient.

Another major problem Scotland can face on the road to Brussels is Public Finances. According to a recent study conducted by the UK based Institute for Government think tank, an independent Scotland could have a much higher deficit than EU rules normally allow. The EU would also make sure that Scotland becomes a net contributor to the EU budget rather than a fiscal or economic burden. Choosing a Currency for Scotland would also bring in a lot of challenges.

The SNP has suggested that they would continue with the British Pound even after Independence. This can prove challenging for Scotland as the EU would expect Scotland to use - Euro and would not be happier with a member state using the currency of a non-member state.

The continued wrangling over the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland also raises issues on the border between an independent Scotland (within EU) and the rest of the UK (outside of EU).

Scotland would also have to find a way to bridge a gap between leaving the UK, thereby also leaving the UK-EU deal, and joining the single market of EU as an independent country. It would have to come up with some solution to maintain trade between both the EU and the rest of the UK.

IMPACT ON THE SECESSIONIST MOVEMENTS ACROSS EUROPE

Scotland's independence would have ramifications not only for the UK, but also for the rest of Europe. If

Scotland gets its independence, a light at the end of the tunnel will shine on various secessionist movements across Europe, such as Catalans and Basques in Spain, Flemish in Belgium and Northern League in Italy. These movements will be bolstered by Scottish independence.

Scottish Independence may also strengthen those who oppose the constitutional stipulation that France, Italy and Spain are indivisible. It may also trigger the 'demonstration effect', even if many pro-independence movements lack the political momentum or popular legitimacy to accomplish their goals in the near future.

Scottish independence will have an impact on separatist movements across the United Kingdom. It is anticipated to rekindle the fight for independence in Wales, while Northern Ireland has already been trying to secede from the United Kingdom and join the Republic of Ireland. Scottish Independence will be the final nail in the coffin for the UK's demise.

CONCLUSION

The prospect of Scotland's independence appears to be closer to reality than at any other point of time in history. It is no longer an issue on the periphery of UK politics, but rather at its core. Scottish Independence has, undoubtedly, become an escape route from Brexit. Scotland, being more Europhile than the rest of the UK, has made every effort to remain close to the EU, as seen by the introduction of the 'EU Continuity Bill' by Holyrood.

For Scotland, the road to independence will undoubtedly be arduous. But it appears that Scots are prepared to go down this route. Whether Scotland comes out of the independence as a prosperous and thriving state or not remains to be seen.



A Façade of Anonymity: Grindr's Breach of User Privacy

BY RISHAV



The article extrapolates upon a lack of stringent privacy and verification policies in various dating apps. It further illustrates privacy concerns in apps targeted towards LGBTQIA+ community. Lastly, it analyses how India lacks a comprehensive data protection law, and loopholes in the current regime governing such platforms.

The recent outing of a priest through a data leak of the app Grindr has highlighted the safety concerns surrounding such dating apps. The location enabled algorithms that apps such as Tinder, Romeo, Grindr, etc. utilize have been previously criticised for their flimsy security systems and susceptibility to being hacked. The study also showcased the transnational nature of hacking that is possible in such apps and how they can be utilised to trace the locations and social modalities of a user with just a few alterations. Illustrative research has also shown how such tracking is possible even after a user switches off the location feature. Such issues have been pitched against Grindr, but no concrete action has ever been taken in this regard. The anonymity that many of these apps tout is just a ruse for marketing.

Data privacy concerns have always plagued dating platforms. This is a harmful and serious concern for the LGBTQIA+ community that faces real life ramifications upon breach of privacy and leak of personal information. The case in point can be illustrated via the famous dating app Grindr. Grindr was launched in 2009, with gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people as its primary target-base. The app boasts of anonymity and confidentiality for creating a safe-space for people of the community to interact with each other. Though it has been seen in surveys that LGBTQIA+ people, especially teens, feel safer online and are more open about their identity therein, yet concerns about data privacy are enormous. Firstly, the issue of an under-age userbase has been raised against Grindr owing to its faulty and flimsy regulations around the same. Young teenagers find it relatively easy to circumvent an insubstantial age verification process.

Furthermore, a lack of a stringent sign-up verification process allows for easy access to sensitive data, such as location, pictures, preferences, and even HIV status. Anyone could sign up and create an account to access this user information belonging to a particular area. Grindr's terms and conditions do assume rights to monitor user profiles but situate all responsibility for user-generated content on users themselves. The 2018 US case of *Herrick v. Grindr* portrays how there is rampant misuse of individual's data on the application coupled with a pandemic of fake profiles. Herein, an ex-boyfriend had created a fake profile using their former partner's pictures and information, where they had encouraged individuals to sexually assault their former partner. It holds evidence of the platform's negligent safety features/measures, data verification mechanism, and advent breach of personal data.

The rampant misuse of user data and a ubiquitous presence of underaged users may have numerous consequences. Firstly, it puts underage users at risk of being contacted by sexual predators and sexual assault. Secondly, they stand a risk of being outed by potential bullies. Such potential outing of LGBTQIA+ teenagers can have such drastic impacts as social out castings, familial breakdown, and even conversation therapy. Thirdly, there is incessant exchange of illicit pictures amongst the users which is largely unregulated by Grindr. This, more often than not, may lead to revenge pornography.

What puts user's data at risk is not only the primary anonymity policy of the app but also the various accusations of third party/actor interventions it has faced in the past. The application contains a bevy of location data, messages, and even sensitive

health related data including HIV status of its users.

This sensitive data, if put in the wrong hands, could be dangerous. It may lead to direct targeting and identification of the LGBTQI+ users of the platform; some of which wish to remain anonymous or might have not come out yet. In January 2021, Norway's Data Protection Authority had imposed a fine worth 11.7 million

million users in countries like India. This would however, put it under the ambit of the Intermediary Guidelines. Thereby, not requiring it to comply with numerous safeguards and due diligence requirements provided for under the guidelines.

Grindr's lack of stringent verification process and laxity in taking a step towards the same can be attributed towards the profits it might be



USD for selling user data to third party actors. It had also warned of dangers of the app in countries where homosexuality is still illegal or is socially unacceptable. While users in European countries still possess more stringent protections against misutilisation of their data owing to the GDPR regime, users living in a country like India, which currently lacks a comprehensive data protection law, have very limited recourse.

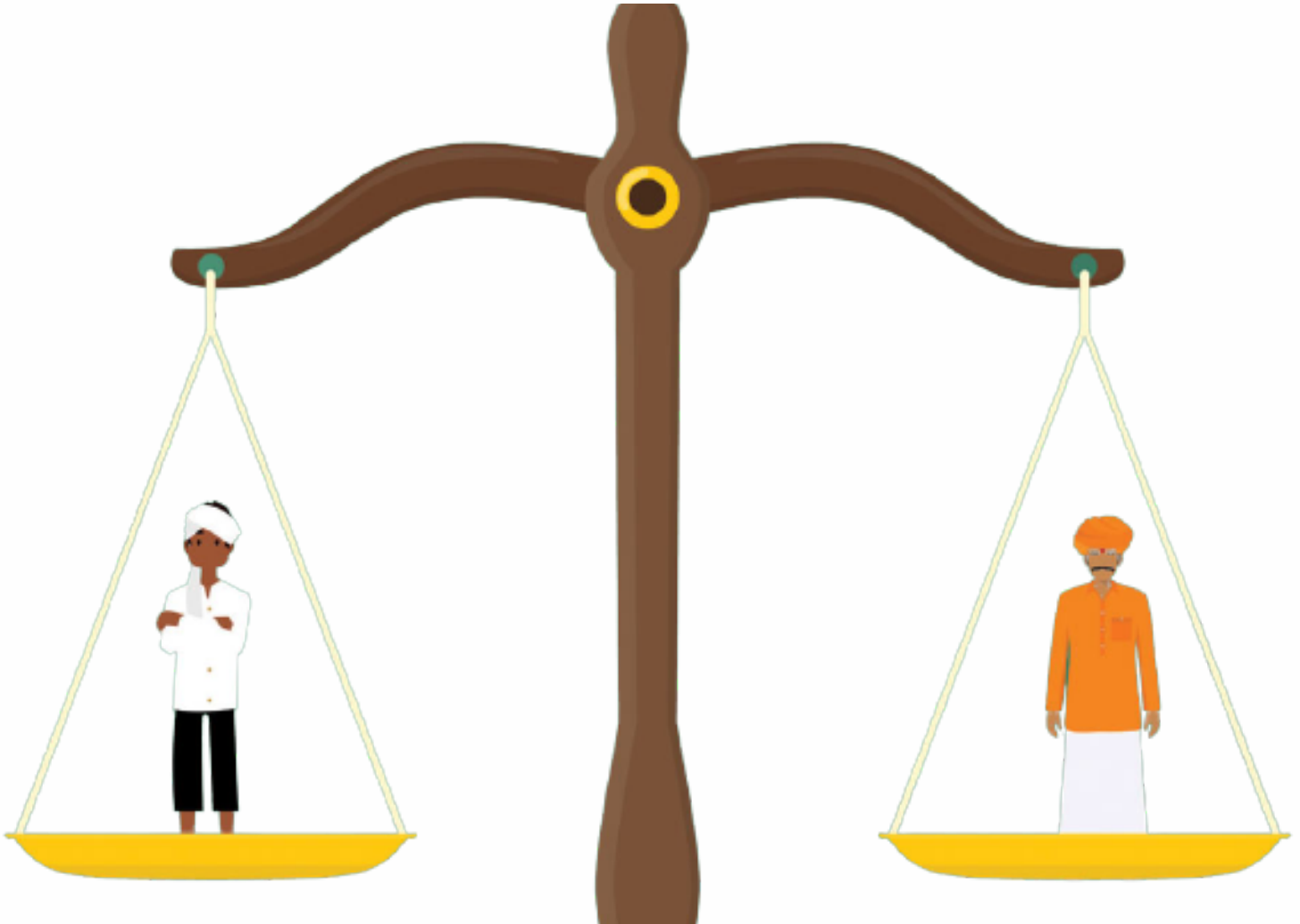
The Intermediary Guidelines, 2021 under Rule 4(i) recognises a significant social media intermediary as being one that has “more than 5 million registered users.” Although there are no specifics stats available, the app has previously claimed having almost 4.5

million users in countries like India. This would however, put it under the ambit of the Intermediary Guidelines. Thereby, not requiring it to comply with numerous safeguards and due diligence requirements provided for under the guidelines. Grindr's lack of stringent verification process and laxity in taking a step towards the same can be attributed towards the profits it might be earning due to the current system in place. 75 percent of the revenue that the company earns comes from the subscription services and 25 percent from advertisers. The dependence on a large user base for revenue might explain the company's inaction in filtering possible illegal users and against major data leaks. Its insubstantial data protection safeguards are consequential for the LGBTQIA+ community. Privacy on online platforms is important for these individuals, for safekeeping their health/ medical information, for ensuring a safe working environment which might get ostracised in case of unconsented release of their gender or sexuality.

CASTE CENSUS:

The Conundrum of Counting Caste

BY MUHAMMAD LUQMAN



With the decennial census at our doorstep, the demand for a 'Caste census' has also intensified. Let us analyse the historical trajectory, the pros, and the cons of a caste-based enumeration.

The Telangana state assembly recently adopted a unanimous resolution, becoming the fifth state to seek for a caste census as part of the general census of 2021. It is the latest episode in a recurrent demand raised by major regional parties and even BJP allies like the Janata Dal (United) and Apna Dal, urging the Union government to conduct a national caste based enumeration. The clamour over a complete caste census resurfaced now when the Centre submitted an affidavit on September 23rd in Supreme Court in response to the petition filed by Maharashtra government asking Social Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 raw caste data and gathering of information on Backward Class of Citizens (BCC) in the upcoming Census. In the affidavit, the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment clearly stated that a caste-wise enumeration other than that of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes “would not be feasible” and it has been given up as a matter of policy since independence.

CASTE CENSUS IN THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

The synchronous decennial Census of India, world's largest enumeration exercise, was begun in 1881 by the British as a means of comprehending the complex social realities of Indian society to better administer the erstwhile colony. The British undertook this arduous task in order to identify and classify the Indian population on the basis of caste from the very first Census itself. Some scholars even claim that ‘caste’, as conceived in contemporary academic writings or within the policies of the State, is a new idea produced because of the census operations of the British and cannot be equated with either varna or jāti. The origins of this notion lie in Bernard Cohn's work on the role of census in codifying jāti and on the role of Brahmin native informants in shaping the British imagination of Hinduism. The colonial caste census carried on till 1931, brought in the idea of numbers as a critical variable in the local imaginations of caste

communities and helped depressed classes to emphasize the need for affirmative action. Counting caste in the census was discontinued by the British with the 1941 Census, citing financial constraints because of World War II. After independence, the full-scale caste census was given up and limited only to the enumeration of SCs and STs.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE CASTE CENSUS

The demand for a caste census is not something new; it always resurfaces at the juncture of a new census. When the First Backward Classes Commission submitted its report in March 1955, it suggested undertaking a caste-wise enumeration of the population in the census of 1961. Following the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendation of 27% reservation for OBCs, the claim for a caste census intensified, as there was no proper statistical data to determine the exact number of Backward Classes and their share of resources. The supporters of caste census argue that it provides a concrete source of information on social and economic discrimination in society and will help the Governments to formulate policies for inclusive development. It is also crucial considering that courts always ask for ‘quantifiable data’ to support the current levels of reservation.



SOCIAL ECONOMIC AND CASTE CENSUS (SECC) 2011

The Social Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 was the first major exercise after 1931 in which the caste of every Indian was asked. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA II) government commissioned SECC along with the 2011 census due to constant pressure from different political parties and leaders.

along with the general census stating that a caste based enumeration is “administratively difficult and cumbersome”.

It points out logistical and technical complexities involved in accurate calculation of castes, given that the SECC-2011 showed 46 lakh different castes at the national level, whereas the total number of castes as per the last caste census of 1931 was only 4,147.



Source ; Swarajyamag.com

As it was not conducted under Census of India Act 1948, the information disclosure was voluntary for citizens and not mandatory.

Though the union government revealed data collected on poverty and deprivation, the caste part of SECC was never brought out referring to the flaws in it. The data's shortcomings stem primarily from the fact that no caste registry was prepared prior to the 2011 caste census. As a result, enumerators made mistakes, spelling the same caste in multiple ways and messing up caste with sub castes and clan (gotra).

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE CASTE CENSUS

The Union government has ruled out conducting a Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) this year

Moreover, the government at the centre and different state governments have separate and varied OBC lists unlike the uniform SC/ST list.

The Office of the Registrar General was quoted during a parliamentary debate on caste census that adding an additional question of caste can jeopardise the whole exercise of census itself as the preparatory works for a census begins three to four years earlier. Apart from these operational hindrances, the government stresses on the policy decision taken after independence not to count caste as it may give wrong messages regarding its purpose. Organisations like RSS oppose caste census saying it will divide Hindu community on the basis of caste and fear that political parties committed to the politics of social justice (with their base in particular social groups) will gain from it.



Source ; Swarajyamag.com

CONCLUSION

Different empirical analyses, reports and sample surveys have shown growing disparity between social classes of Indian population and its resonance with caste divisions. Thus, moving ahead with a caste blind approach will only help in cementing substantial privileges and dis-privileges associated with caste identity. The lack of solid data covering the dynamics of a caste ridden society is an impediment to initiate equity measures and it is unfortunate that the existing affirmative policies are based on age old statistics and assumptions. The allegations such as a caste census will promote casteism and affect the unity of society are equally redundant like the claims of caste being a 'British construct' born out of colonial census operations. But, the administrative and logistical complications linked with data collection should be addressed. The counting of caste though necessary not necessarily be included in haste with a pandemic-hit, already-delayed general census. Instead, it can be an independent exercise invested with sufficient time, preparations and advanced technology aiming at reducing structural inequalities rather than electoral benefits.



GREENING POLITICS: OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS

BY SRIJANI DATTA

Recently, Germany and Canada had their elections. In Canada Justin Trudeau returned to power, even as the Liberal Party failed to claim the majority in the Parliament. However, it's not just the liberals who had a disappointing run, but also the Green Party of Canada. Their performance declined in terms of both seat share and vote share; in 2019 they secured 3 seats and polled 6.5% of the votes, while this time they won only two seats and polled about 2.3% votes (a substantial decline). However, on the other hand in the German Bundestag elections, the German Greens Party led by Annalena Baerbock pulled off a major victory by winning 118 seats in the Parliament and capturing a vote share of 14.8%. In 2017, the German Green's Party had won 67 seats and had a vote share of 8.9%. For a matter of fact, in the run up to the elections, Annalena Baerbock was being viewed as a probable chancellor in line. Even though traditionally, the candidacy for chancellors has only seriously come down to either the center-right Christian Democrats (Angela Merkel's party) and those of the center-left Social Democrats.

She has been challenging Germans to deal with the crises that Ms. Merkel has left largely unattended: decarbonizing the powerful automobile sector and weaning the country off coal.

The rise of green politics was also witnessed in the European Parliament elections of 2019. In the cities of Brussels, Dublin and Berlin the green parties won the highest number of votes. In total they polled 11% of the votes, coming in fourth in the EU Parliament. Despite coming in fourth, due to the fractured nature of the European Parliament which was thus formed, any of the larger groupings would require support from other blocs to pass legislation and appoint commissioners. The Greens were part of a cohesive and powerful bloc called the European Free Alliance. Earlier the Greens parties in Europe were seen as nothing less than idealist, tree-hugging protestors who were out to destroy the economy. Spending years as part of coalition governments nationally and regionally have given the Greens more credibility, which received the popular mandate in the

elections. Nevertheless, it's not just this hard-earned credibility which has drawn young voters towards them but also the fact that they have included policies focused on human rights, social justice and democratic governance in their manifestos. The Greens did particularly well in western Europe—Germany, France, the UK and Ireland. However, their presence in eastern and central Europe is quite dismal. It's quite evident that the European Greens parties have benefitted hugely from the youth climate movement started by the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. In the UK and other European countries, the highly political and visible protest methods the 'Extinction Rebellion' used to oppose investors, oil and energy companies which are blocking climate action also helped increase the sense of urgency to act upon the climate crisis among voters. As the movement rapidly spreads to other countries, it would be interesting to see how it benefits the Green parties there.

In the 2019 European Parliament elections, youth voters were at the forefront and the voter turnout was at the highest in 20 years. Thus signalling that more people, especially the youth, wish to articulate their demands, and elect candidates who take the climate emergency seriously. Thus, the youth wasn't just involved in civil society movements related to climate activism, but also converted it to electoral success thereby effectively being the kingmakers in the European parliament where there were no clear winners. This 'Green Wave' played a crucial role in the Commission announcing, within the first 100 days of the von der Leyen Presidency, the European Green Deal forming the framework under which all EU environmental legislation would sit, including the EU's 2050 climate neutrality target.

Despite the growing influence of green parties in international politics, one needs to understand why within the span of a few months, green parties in Canada and Germany performed so differently in 2021. One also needs to examine what factors play a role in the relative success of green parties in different countries. In a research paper, it was found that Green parties tend to perform better in richer countries that produce more nuclear power and worse in countries with high levels of unemployment. In particular, national elections fought in decentralised systems tend to see greater vote shares for Green parties. It seems likely that mainstream parties will find it easier to 'steal' a Green party's market niche (environmentalism) when the Green party is new. Once that party has survived a few elections, further mainstream accommodative strategies are self-defeating as they simply raise the salience of environmental issues. Thus there is little support found for the idea that Green parties are

affected by mainstream party positions on 'their' issue, and certainly nothing to suggest that major parties can undermine Green parties through co-opting 'their' issues. According to Martin Dolezal, who compared 12 western European green parties, voters for green parties are significantly younger than voters of other parties.

Keeping these variables in mind, we can now turn towards the state of green politics in India, its history and scope in the future. Before that, let's examine the principles upon which green parties function all over the world. Environmentalists and peace activists in erstwhile West Germany came together to form the political party "The Greens" on 13 January 1980 and adopt the "Four Pillars of Green Politics" — social justice, ecological wisdom, grassroots democracy, and non-violence. These were the four accepted pillars of green politics worldwide.

The four pillars were expanded to six principles in 2001 at the first Global Greens Congress at Canberra. The additional two principles were sustainability and respect for diversity. These pillars represent the social movements in which the green party found its inspiration— the environmental movement, labour movement, the civil rights movement, and the peace movement. Almost all Indian political parties seem to espouse the principles of social justice, grassroots democracy, non-violence and respect for diversity. However it is sustainability and ecological wisdom which has failed to create space for itself in the mainstream political discourse. Many peace movements and environmental movements in the West were influenced by the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi who often expressed his opposition to rapid urbanisation, industrialisation and a growing consumerist culture. Further, he believed in decentralising governance where villages could function as self-governing units, capable of managing their natural resources. Undoubtedly, Gandhian values and principles have had a major impact on our politics and social movements. Then one is forced to wonder— "What happened to his ideal of a more sustainable, locally sourced lifestyle?"

The answer lies in the path of development undertaken by the newly formed independent Indian state in the first few decades of our independence. Gandhi's vision of a simple village lifestyle was rapidly overtaken by a push for modernity coupled with industrialisation as big infrastructure projects in the form of power plants, steel plants, manufacturing units and dams were built across the country.

These Gandhian values were revived by some very prominent non-violent environmental movements such as Narmada Bachao Andolan and Chipko movement. Environmental movements in

India, unlike the West, have been led by the marginalised sections of our society- fisherfolk, farmers, forest communities, etc. This is because most environmental movements in India have emerged in opposition to specific developmental projects threatening to displace and destroy the livelihoods of the most disadvantaged sections of our society. Despite the backdrop of massive citizen-led environmental movements and Gandhian principles of sustainability, green parties in India haven't been able to gain vote share or influence the functioning of the mainstream political parties. There are several reasons for this failure. First one right off the bat is that the way our parliamentary system works, it discourages any new parties from becoming serious contenders. Moving beyond this perspective on our political system, one needs to assess the motivations of the Indian voter base. The green parties have failed to capture, and will probably for a while be unable to find support in the growing Indian middle class. It is because the Indian middle class is an aspirational, upward looking section of society, which places immense faith in science, technology and rapid industrialisation as the pathway to better lives for all.

Environmental issues from the point of view of the voters can be categorised into three types- local environmental issues, linked to resource distribution and those with global impacts. The Indian middle class voter believes most of the local environmental issues such as sewerage, waste management, water supply etc can be fixed by the pre-existing political parties which have increasingly started including these issues in their manifestos. Thus, eliminating the need for a separate greens party. When it comes to resource distribution, lack of media coverage and climate literacy makes it difficult for people to connect the irregularity of water supply, shrinking cultivable land, expansion of unplanned slums with larger climate change processes and the destructive developmental policies undertaken by the government. Even in the cases where unfair resource distribution becomes very apparent, such as in the case of the Sardar Sarovar Dam, which would benefit a large number of urban based people of Gujarat by supplying electricity at the cost of displacing lakhs of people, public sentiment still remained in favour of building the dam, along with making sure a proper rehabilitation and compensation policy was implemented. When it comes to views on environmental issues with global impacts, most Indians align themselves with the government's stance that India's per capita Greenhouse Gas emissions are much lower than the developed countries, and the treaties need to be

formed keeping in mind the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility'. They believe having binding targets on developing countries such as India is unfair because historically, these countries haven't contributed as much to the climate crisis as the developed countries. Thus, even on this front they are not looking for an alternative.

Speaking of the marginalised sections of our society, the missing link is the conscious awareness of all of their life chances being hampered by climate change. Which leads to no conscious need felt for voting for a green party. There is a major dearth of climate change related risk perception studies among Indians working in different sectors of our economy. This would help one gauge the extent to which people in different jobs understand how much their livelihood and other connected parameters are affected by climate change.

Recently, there were reports on the protests by tribals of Chhattisgarh against mining in their homeland, Hasdeo Arand forest. The entire area of Hasdeo Arand forests has been carved out as 18 coal blocks to be awarded to different companies for mining. On 2nd October in Fatehpur village, villagers invoked Gandhi, launched a 'forest satyagraha' and two days later, on 4 October, they set off on a 300-km march to the state capital of Raipur to oppose mining in their villages. While mining companies have been supported by the Congress and Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) alike, the adivasis have continued their struggle for the past decade.

Everywhere we look, one finds existing social justice and environmental movements. For example in June 2021, there was massive uproar over the proposal of cutting down 2.5 lakh trees in Buxwaha forest of Madhya Pradesh for building a diamond mine. While on the other hand, farmers have been protesting since the past year against the corporatisation of agriculture. The farmers' movement has spread rapidly across various states and now represents a pressure group which is anti-corporate, fair price and has a direct interest in mitigating and adapting to climate change. Declining crop productivity due to soil degradation, decreasing water table, and increasing attacks of pests are few of the issues Indian farmers have been raising for a while now. Many environmentalists believe farmers' could play a major role in forming a pro-environmental political front.

Thus, there is considerable scope for expansion of green politics in India, not just among the urban elite environmentalists but also among farmers, tribals, fisherfolk and workers. In the next edition, we will be speaking to Mr. Suresh Nauityal founder and President of the India Greens Party.

THE POLITICS OF THE NEW VOGUE ON YOUR PLATE: VEGANISM

BY MEENAKSHI SENAN

As concerns regarding climate change and environment protection have been rising, Veganism is becoming the new vogue. With celebrities and social media influencers taking up a vegan diet, there has been a significant impact on the public that is now challenging itself to follow the aforementioned diet and explore new, eco-friendly food options available to them. However, there are several debates surrounding the plant-based diet's efficiency, necessity, and even origin.

Social media has played an enormous role in the projection of veganism as a trend against animal cruelty, which also comes with added benefits of health and wealth. Though it is moving towards countries within the Indian subcontinent, vegan influencers are mostly white. The culture is said to have been appropriated by them in such a way that the roots have been made invisible. Social media has not been able to do justice to the indigenous vegan culture despite the "trend" having been practised in ancient Indian and West Asian cultures.

The first mention of a vegan diet was in a poem titled "I no longer steal from Nature" by blind Arab poet Al-Ma'arri, which is around a thousand years old. Jainism, which originated in India, also preached non-violence and complete avoidance of meat and animal products. The religion has been practiced since the 7th century BCE. The Black Hebrew Israelite community, which was established in the late 19th century, also adheres to a strict vegan diet, believing it to be the secret to eternal life.

In the US, many non-white Americans complain of the whites appropriating Veganism and vegan foods which are sometimes Asian or African recipes. They say that veganism seems alien to them; even when there are conferences of vegans it is the whites

who come to dominate podiums. Meanwhile, the reality is that people of colour, especially Black people, are more likely to adopt veganism than white people. A 2016 Pew Research Center Poll found that 3 percent of people in the U.S. follow a vegan diet, but the number jumps to 8 percent for Black people. In fact, Black people make up the fastest growing vegan demographic right now. However, this should not be a reason to not choose veganism as a lifestyle choice, argue vegans.

White veganism is shifting unethical food production from meat to plant-based foods. Veganism, which was initially perceived as a left-wing phenomena, is not turning anyone against their ideological leanings. Socialists argue that it is colonialism and capitalism which brought in meat industries and squeezed life out of animals, dumping them unceremoniously when they were of no 'use' anymore. In *Beasts of Burden*, a vegan-socialist pamphlet which came out in 1999, a section says that, the difference between humans and animals in factories is that humans are expected to work for the maximum time, while animals are fattened to slaughter in the minimum time possible. Leftists argue that veganism is deeply rooted in socialist principles. But at the same time, there are debates within the left about whether veganism is the option.

Vegans are attacked by people for disregarding human rights. The comparison of African slavery with meat and dairy production has been pointed as racist. This mere comparison shows how they do not value human lives much. However, the counter-argument that arises here is that they understand and empathise with African slaves and are against apartheid, but at the same time they believe that animal lives are equally important. They argue

that this comparison is valid as animal lives are as significant as human lives. Non-vegans are also attacked by vegans for not adopting veganism and accused of being traitors who contribute to environmental imbalances and climate change. They often refuse to acknowledge how expensive vegan commodities are and thus inaccessible to a large portion of the world. The vegan diet is not for EVERYONE. There are also areas known as 'food deserts'. The perfectly dressed vegan salad is not available to all. Food deserts are areas where there is limited access to affordable and nutritious food. Most vegans consume other tablets and costly food products which provide them with nutrients. However, these may not be accessible to all, especially to those living in food deserts. These predominantly affect low-income communities, again making veganism a luxurious lifestyle. To adopt an idli-sambar diet in your routine and become a vegan might seem easy, but to be able to afford nutritious food which can replace dairy and meat products is not possible for everyone. Celebrities including Liam Hemsworth and Anne Hatheway have given up veganism as they started feeling unhealthy. Some people have to go through severe health conditions due to the absence of animal protein in their diet.

Vegans very often share posts on how many lives you can save by going vegan. Trends show that veganism is on a rise in the world. However, the 2021 edition of OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook projects the global meat supply to expand over the projection period, reaching 374 Mt by 2030. Growth in global consumption of meat proteins over the next decade is projected to increase by 14% by 2030 compared to the base period average of 2018-2020, driven largely by income and population growth. Protein availability from beef, pork, poultry, and sheep

meat is projected to grow 5.9%, 13.1%, 17.8% and 15.7% respectively by 2030. The numbers of growth in vegans and growth in meat supply and consumption may appear contradictory. What is to be understood here is that, in a capitalist economy based on perpetual growth, both vegan and non-vegan industries can grow at the same time.

Ethical consumption is an extremely tricky concept. For instance, Haagen-Dazs, a popular American ice cream company, is originally owned by Nestle, which usually sells dairy products. Nestle has been criticised much for its water privatisation in California. The chocolate that the company uses is made from cocoa harvested by children who are forced to work like slaves. This is just one example among the many.

Another argument that can be put forward is that one person going vegan might reduce the demand but will certainly not reduce the supply of meat. As long as capitalism thrives, the companies will outsource and make working conditions worse for the slaughterhouse workers. For instance, an article published in *The Guardian*

says that, "US meat workers are already three times more likely to suffer serious injury than the average American worker, and pork and beef workers nearly seven times more likely to suffer repetitive strain injuries. And some fear that plans to remove speed restrictions on pig processing lines – currently being debated by the government – will only make the work more difficult."



Illustration by Morocho Estudio

Vegan lifestyleists also advocate for it arguing that if the whole world switches to a vegan diet, world hunger can be eliminated. The argument is that when the food grains fed to sustain animal agriculture are transferred to humans, there would be more than enough food to feed the whole world. This is a myth. Assessments show that there exists a surplus in food production. There is wastage of food grains because of surplus, which can be made available to the hungry. Yet, global hunger persists. This is because corporations look at food as a commodity to generate profit rather than as a basic human right.

A book named, 'The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory' explains the relationship between patriarchy and animal-meat consumption. Carol J. Adams, in her book, explains how female reproductive organs are abused for . She coined the term feminized protein for eggs and dairy products. Feminized protein is taken from living female animals, whose reproductive capacity is manipulated for human needs. She argues that production of meat is an example of male dominance. She has also written another book named *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals*. The prominent argument made in both the books attempts to make links between patriarchy and meat and dairy production. She argues feminism and veganism go hand-in-hand. In 'The Pornography of Meat' she refers to examples of anthropomorphology--that is the sexualizing and feminizing of an animal. Protests against women being treated like animals have to understand that under a patriarchal structure women and animals are treated alike, is what Adams opines.

A pressing issue during the pandemic is how vegans refuse to get vaccinated. All the vaccines produced so far have been tested on animals. Hence, they are not cruelty-free. But the argument that this practice is condemnable is being put forward, as it is violating the social responsibility of every individual. Another problem associated with this is that anti-vaccination campaigners are now pretending to be vegans. Animal Aid, an organisation fighting animal abuse and promoting a cruelty-free lifestyle urges all vegans to take their jabs.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that veganism contributes to lesser carbon emissions and a better balance of the climate. However, there are several issues tied to it. The appropriation of veganism by the whites has to be called out. Veganism can be intersectional. Veganism can be adopted by all, but cannot be forced on anybody. It is not about one's choice of food, but about one's health conditions and financial stability. Debates on the intersectionality of feminism and veganism also have to be encouraged. To go vegan will definitely not help in saving the world altogether. The fight against capitalist structures is inevitable in the endeavour towards a safer and sustainable earth.



SOCIETY

IN THIS SECTION

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----|---|
| <i>Rajeev Anand Kushwah</i> | 24. | NATALIE WYNN'S CONTRAPOINTS:
<i>Humor, Drag, and Philosophy</i> |
| <i>Samarth Singh</i> | 30. | REQUIEM FOR A PANDEMIC FORGOTTEN |
| <i>Arjun Tandon</i> | 34. | POSTCOLONIAL PREFERENCE FOR SOCIALISM:
<i>How Anti-Imperialism Came To Shape Modern South Asia</i> |
| <i>Saesha Pandita</i> | 37. | READING BETWEEN THE THREADS:
<i>Confluence Of Fashion & Postmodernism</i> |
| <i>Abdullah Kazmi</i> | 42. | AMIDST GRIEF AND UNCERTAINTY:
<i>Perspectives on Stoicism & Values</i> |
| <i>Ananya Bhardwaj</i> | 47. | TALKING GENDERED AND STATE VIOLENCE IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S
'DRAUPADI' |

NATALIE WYNN'S CONTRAPOINTS: Humor, Drag, and Philosophy

BY RAJEEV ANAND KUSHWAH

The article reviews the work of trans YouTuber Natalie Wynn (who runs the channel Contrapoints) as a public intellectual of gender, sexuality, and trans experiences; a representative of Left-wing Youtube who discusses the aesthetics and optics of politics; a misunderstood de-radicalising agent on YouTube; and a figurehead well-versed in the nuances of cancel culture. It addresses the complex role of Wynn as a representative of the trans/queer community thriving in the time of attention economy and celebrity culture. Lastly, it also decodes Wynn's performance of 'contrapoints realness,' using drag and theatrics to explain philosophy in a simplified manner.



BREADTUBE - THE LEFTWING YOUTUBE

In her video, *The Aesthetic*, Natalie Wynn asks her viewers, "What matters more, the way things are, or the way things look?"

The question defines her work in aesthetics, politics, and optics which form a large part of how video essayists work through YouTube. Wynn is a part of BreadTube— a section of video creators who focus predominantly on left-wing perspectives and

progressive, queer feminist notions. Natalie Wynn has been described 'the Oscar Wilde of the internet,' 'the transgender-populist fighting fascists with face glitter,' and 'a stylish socialist trying to save YouTube from alt-right domination.' She runs the channel Contrapoints (an abbreviation for 'controversial points'), a mix of humour, drag, and philosophy, supplemented by iconic characters, distinct style with campy lighting, make-up, and wig styling. She has been a part of Youtube's Atheism for a long time now. However, after Gamergate, she started using

YouTube as a political tool to promote progressive ideas against the hatred that was becoming common, specifically against S.J.W.s– Social Justice Warriors, a term used to target feminists or movements advocating for social justice inclusive of Black Lives Matter, LGBTQIA+, Muslims, and Immigrants.

AESTHETICS AND PERFORMANCE

“Reason is a very powerful aesthetic if you are a man.”

-The Aesthetic

Contrapoints lies at the intersection of performance, political activism, and personal confessions. Through drag, Wynn performs Contrapoints realness, embodying a particular type of academic aesthetic. Her early videos also featured sexual innuendo, over the top characters, and self-deprecating humour, primarily driven by the mode of ‘Socratic Dialogue’ in which philosophy has been conceptualised initially. There is also the notion of a Heteronym–the literary tradition of inventing characters who display different traits of the writer’s identity and unique styles. Wynn defines political reality through drag and amazingly detailed and colourful set designs.

The Aesthetic presents a debate between two transwomen where Justine says, “Politics is Aesthetics.” Justine is described as a feminine, passing transwoman focused on the aesthetics (read: politics) of passing and assimilation. The Aesthetic primarily revolves around identity, desire, and womanhood, asking the questions– what does it mean to pass or represent? On the other hand, Tabby is portrayed as a caricature of how people see leftists–

a communist, non-passing trans cat girl who wants to smash TERFs (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists). Viewers might identify more with Justine due to her appearance and aesthetic, while Tabby has progressive politics albeit in violent ways–reflecting how Antifa is perceived. Tabby notably says, “People on the left are never gonna be “cool,” because anger and emotion are rational responses to injustice.” Although Wynn received flak for seemingly supporting Justine, she is not wrong and says that anger and emotion can also have aesthetic appeal.

Wynn also debunks alt-right politics and notions while discussing how reason, genius, and intellect have been male-coded as concepts. While doing so, she analyses right-wing culture’s appropriation of signs and memes like the ‘OK’ sign of Pepe the frog meme. While it seems ridiculous, the optics and the politics conveyed through these cultural acts significantly impact the proliferation of anti-progressive ideas. Dubbing this as an aesthetic century, Wynn referred to America as a circus where the President is a reality T.V. star. In terms of her work, anti-capitalist sentiments are a more prominent theme. She does not do endorsements or advertisements but does make jokes on her own complacency with capitalism. In Beauty, she says, “I am contributing to corporations out of the goodness of my heart.” There is a more considered analysis of culture through decoding concepts like cringe, beauty, and envy.

On humour, Wynn wishes to emote some laughter out of the things leftist discourses discuss (trauma, oppression, etc.) as it is so grim. One of the



funniest aspects was when Wynn used milk in her videos because she found it funny. However, the audience on Reddit thought it represents semen, also white and a marker of white supremacy, making its usage by Wynn an act of reclamation of the symbol. She also uses paper cutouts of Jordan Peterson or Ben Shapiro in her videos, calling the former Daddy. There is also the idea of rewatchability present within her content, highlighting the rise of video essays as informative articles. However, she has been criticised for not addressing cultural differences, which her later work has improved upon.

content. Caleb Cain started his channel by discussing his story of Descent into the Alt-Right. However, this runs the risk of re-radicalisation as people go from far-right to far-left and not just complacent centrism.

The idea of debating politics also refers to the nature of politics as always being antagonistic and tribalistic. However, social media puts us in isolated information bubbles. We do not just disagree on politics. We disagree on reality in very fundamental ways. A significant part of her work has been theorising upon how marginalisation and oppression works. Wynn's 'double bind,' the concept theorised by the



DE-RADICALISATION OR RE-RADICALISATION?

"Fascism is the aestheticism of politics and the aestheticism of militarism. And Communism responds by the politicisation of art."

Wynn has mentioned that through her work she wants the viewers to question why they believe the things they believe in the first place. She understands that people believe in things for emotional and psychological reasons, and calling them out through logic will not work. Wynn's videos also involve people who used to be transphobic before their horizons broadened and minds changed by consuming her

seminal feminist scholar Marilyn Frye is the choice to distance herself from rigid adherence to external feminine beauty norms and risk violence or buy into the norms and give in to the dominant systems that dictate them. Wynn is her most honest, reflective, and personal about her relationship to the norms, and such introspection is followed by the audience in the comment section.

A PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

As Wynn's channel is about sex, drugs, and social justice, it is vehemently against the traditional YouTube content about sports, music, and comedy. Wynn's channel is also very personal as it covers her journey of transition, making her a female public



intellectual dealing with self-representation in an attention economy. The generation of interpersonal, communal reflections on complex issues around gender and sexuality may give rise to changing beliefs, highlighting its importance in expanding rights around gender and sexuality. She also addresses systems of dominations (heteropatriarchy and cisnormativity) through accepting, rejecting, and subverting language used to oppress and decompose trans bodies and embodiments.

Edward Said's *Representations of the Intellectual* (1996) defines the public intellectual as someone who has "a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public; [She] confronts orthodoxy and dogma, representing people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. An intellectual here is the outsider, amateur, disturber of the status quo, but Wynn is more than that. Furthermore, performativity becomes a considerable aspect when we try to analyse the impact of any public intellectual as Wynn performs her life on multiple levels- through rhetoric strategies, literary devices, and public performances. Traditionally, women are thought to be less interested in being visible, less

intelligent, less genius than men who are also public intellectuals. Wynn being the representative of BreadTube as a transwoman shatters these strict norms.

The works that feature the themes of gender, sexuality, transmedicalism, trans women's sex lives, trans identity, and its social impact are *Shame*, *Gender Critical*, *J.K. Rowling*, *Autogynephilia*, *Incels*, *Are Traps Gay?*, *Transtrenders*, and *Pronouns*. Her work critiques transphobia, transmisogyny, misogyny, and gender roles. In the work *Men*, she also unpacks the Men's Rights Movement, fairly evaluating their concerns and calling for a positive men's rights movement. In *Beauty*, she discusses the details of her cosmetic surgery and experience and then the dominant, complicated relationship between feminine beauty standards, saying, "beauty is power, that beauty is political." She addresses the systems of domination and how specific physical markers for women are valued more. There is a relation of these markers to privilege, access, and capitalism.

Wynn's discussion on gender and sexuality also briefly discusses the language and vocabulary, which falls under the purview of Feminist Science Studies. She discusses how



Science has constructed our bodies supplemented by the ideas of racism and eugenics. In Gender Critical (a term used by TERFs), she emphasises Germaine Greer referring to transwomen as 'it,' asking viewers if a feminist scholar uses 'it,' then what would a man be on the steps of a man liquor store would call a transwoman. While doing so, she also parodies popular shows like having The Freedom Report segment, which mocks The Rubin Report.

Wynn's work represents trans embodiment by a trans woman composer. She has been critical of TERFs (authoring an extended, engaging, informative essay about J.K. Rowling, bigotry and transphobia), cultural appropriation, pick-up artists, and pop feminism. During her discussion on Ben Shapiro's claims that pronouns are biological inherently, she showed how the discussion of biology during pronouns shows the authoritative power of Science. Shapiro frames a matter of language using biology, and since one cannot argue with chromosomes or genetics, the discussion around the rights of trans people are fixated upon biology. We do need intellectuals, but they cannot reach many people like musicians or YouTubers do. She also promotes using 'Trans Liberation Now!' instead of 'Trans women are women' as the former is about rights while the latter is fixated on biology debate and omits transmen and non-binary trans folks.

REPRESENTATION AND 'CANCEL CULTURE'

The idea of representation is crucial as Wynn is the most famous representative for left-wing transgender creators on YouTube. In addition, by being able to pass as a woman, she embodied an inspirational figure and envied one, which she discusses in her latest video, Envy. She thought-provokingly highlights how oppression, marginalisation, and envy are linked to each other intrinsically. The platforming also makes some audiences doubt whether she is an ally or a celebrity, pointing to the lack of trans presence in media.

Even representation from the LGBTQIA+ community predominantly consists of rich, white, non-disabled, privileged gay men. In general, YouTube does not have a lot of traditional gatekeeping, which works in favour of trans people as no one wants to give them a platform. Furthermore, the traditional gatekeeping that existed in politics and commentary is also gone. This means that anyone with enough confidence, charisma, and a camera can be a political commentator, suitable for LGBTQIA+ people and transgender people.

This also brings in the notion of parasocial

relationships that hugely impact her work. The term 'parasocial relationship' is used to describe the feelings of affection and sustained connection individuals develop for people they have never met, like celebrities. When Wynn shares her personal experiences, her audience becomes emotionally invested in her, increasing the risk of them being disappointed and feeling a sense of betrayal if Wynn ever does anything they feel as morally reprehensible. Wynn says that she is being treated as a moral brand of community, and the audience does not consider that as a collective; they have terrifying power, which brings us to the idea of 'cancel culture.'

Cancelling highlights how minorities are much more affected by the threats of their audience abandoning them, adding to the minority stress. Cancelling highlighted the inability to take criticism constructively on social media, again pointing towards binary thinking. There is binary thinking of people as either good or bad, but also hyper-morality, followed by vigilante justice. Cancelling stands apart from the rest of her work without any elaborate set design, characters, or make-up. She gives the instance of cancelling of James Charles, who identifies as a homosexual, where homophobia directed against him resulted in him being given labels of racist, a sexual predator, and a transphobe who at the time of the cancelling was a teenager. With regards to her controversy with Buck Angels, cancelling would seem to follow the logic as detailed below,

Natalie worked with Buck Angel → I do not like Buck Angel because they are a TERF → Natalie works with TERFs → Natalie must be a TERF → She must be de-platformed

In her XOXO Festival video, she also discusses how associations are so quickly marked based upon one photograph. When Twitter cancelled Wynn, her friends, most of whom are also queer and transgender people, were also doxed, insulted and harassed. Wynn rightfully calls 'cancel culture' *the guillotine of the 21st century – "the bringer of justice and people's avenger but also a sadistic entertainment spectacle."* Even intending to make the world a less ignorant place, there are elements of toxicity that collaborate with patriarchy to double down on women and gender minorities, leading to disproportionate instances of bullying, harassment, doxing, defamation, and double standards against women and gender minorities. Instead, she promotes a cancel culture for constructive criticism and consulting facts, leaving space for growth and improvement.

ACCESSIBILITY ON THE INTERNET

Wynn is what Habermas would call *an avant-gardist*

instinct of the public sphere. Habermas, a normative theorist of the public sphere, identifies the citizen as a private one, engaging with matters of general interest that lead to the formation of a public sphere. Habermas conceptualised the internet as a public sphere, shifting towards the idealised participatory model of the public sphere.

Habermas also tweeted, "It is true that the internet has reactivated the grass-roots of an egalitarian public sphere of writers and readers." While discussing the structural transformation of the public sphere, Habermas emphasises free speech and freedom of space to have a space to hold public opinions, citing the public sphere as a fundamental feature of democracy. In their book *The Permanent Campaign: New Media, New Politics*, the authors argue, due to lesser central nodes, gatekeepers, and agenda setters, the internet has become more accessible. Nevertheless, features like images, solitary nature, and speed polarise and limit rational discussion.

However, the normative model put forward by Habermas does not guarantee the participation of women and other minorities. The public debate on the internet advantages established actors due to gatekeeping through technical aspects. This seems to be absent to an extent from BreadTube, where trans and queer creators have found a space. The video essay format separates academia from YouTube and provides a more accessible space to engage with political discussions. Further, there is also a sense

of community where creators have been there for each other during hard times. Wynn studied Philosophy, and now she explains these complex ideas in a simplified, engaging, fun manner.

However, despite wide accessibility, the media has failed to cover Wynn's work on trans issues. It sees her as a rehabilitation centre for de-radicalising white men. While creators like Wynn provide entry points, we need to learn on our own and listen to the people speaking. Through her lived experiences and social location, Wynn provides a much-needed queer, radical, inclusive, and feminist perspective. She introspectively asks the viewer why they believe in certain things. It also becomes crucial to look at Wynn's work at a time when 33 states in the U.S. have introduced more than 100 bills to curb the rights of trans people. It is a year where 28 trans and gender non-conforming people have been killed, primarily black and Latina transwomen.

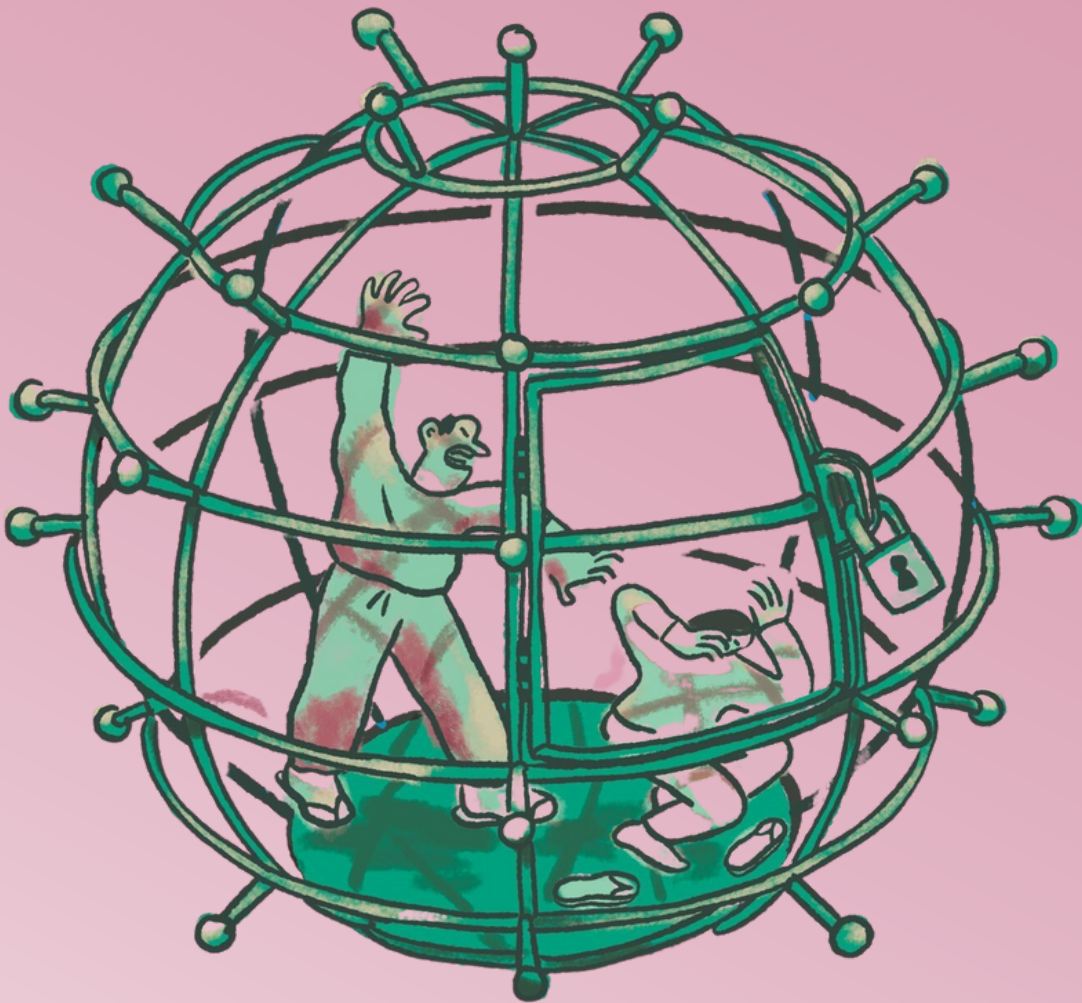
Ultimately, Wynn's style of persuasion is intelligent and nuanced but engaging, relatable, and entertaining. What makes her unique is her bodily presence, sympathetic and critical address of systems of dominations, call for co-authorship in comments, and conversations about bodies, embodiment, gender, and sexuality. However, Wynn is also a part of the predominantly 'white' Left Tube. Kat Blaque, a black trans-YouTuber, has also criticised prominent LeftTubers like Wynn for not addressing white nationalism through their work.



REQUIEM FOR A PANDEMIC FORGOTTEN

BY SAMARTH SINGH

In light of a surge in domestic violence cases during the pandemic, this essay interprets the Covid crises through a gendered lens and attempts to understand domestic violence as a social phenomenon with specific factors. It traces links between these factors and the pandemic to explain the rise in such cases.



In the first half of that tempestuous year - 2020 - phrases like “*shadow pandemic*” and “*pandemic within a pandemic*” exploded into the public consciousness even as the world transitioned into an unprecedented epoch of lockdowns due to the Covid 19 pandemic. But what was intended to be an antidote instead worsened the “*shadow pandemic*” and jeopardized the safety of countless women across the world. In a moment of anticipated epiphany, the boon also turned out to be a curse; in a matter of a few days, countries began witnessing an alarming increase in the number of domestic violence incidents. While governments desperately struggled to handle the biological assault of the new virus, civil society organisations, women’s activists, and authorities from China to Canada, and from Spain to Singapore frantically raised red flags over the worsening symptoms of the pre-existing disease of gendered violence within the domestic sphere.

In India, where a nationwide lockdown was imposed on March 25, a distressing pattern of increasing violence soon began to unfold. Within a fortnight, the National Commission for Women (NCW) registered a tidal surge in complaints. It received a staggering 23,722 complaints pertaining to crimes committed against women in 2020 - the highest figure in more than half a decade - out of which roughly a quarter incidents fell in the domestic violence category. Complaints about domestic violence shot up from 2,960 cases in 2019 to 5,297 cases in 2020. Apart from this, numerous complaints were registered against other categories of offences that occur within the familial-domestic milieu, like dowry harassment, honour crimes etc. This trend has stubbornly persisted as the country stepped into the second year of the pandemic, with the commission receiving 1,463 complaints in the first three months of 2021 itself.

A GENDERED PANDEMIC

Addressing domestic violence requires us to shift and deepen our perception about it, the current pandemic, and the interaction between the two. To achieve this, the pandemic first needs to be contextualised within the framework of existing gender inequalities. Studies demonstrate a simple fact hidden in plain sight: that disruptive events like wars, economic crises, and disease outbreaks have gendered consequences with women having to bear the brunt of these events. Entrenched gender inequalities have

always played a major role in giving rise to deeply disproportionate experiences.

For women, the Covid pandemic poses greater health risks as they constitute roughly 70% of the workforce engaged in frontline sectors like social service and healthcare; in addition to greater economic vulnerability and insecurity of employment due to increasing care work at home, shutting down of women-run enterprises etc.

Familial abusive behaviors directed at females constitute another sinister fallout of such crises situations, but are often glossed over by governments. Epidemics bring with them mental, financial, and health-related stressors that can exacerbate “violent, abusive, impulsive, compulsive, and controlling behaviour and aggression” towards one’s partners. This is often accompanied by a surge in marital conflict, a drop in quality of parenting, and so on. Lockdowns also isolate women with their abusers inside homes, who now suffer from “increased rates and intensity of threats, physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, humiliation, intimidation, and controlling behaviour.” It further enables violent family members to cut off women from their support systems and restrict their access to educational and economic opportunities, healthcare etc.

It goes without saying that all this takes an immense toll on women’s overall wellbeing, adversely impacting their physical, mental and reproductive health; and diminishing their capacity to participate in the recovery of societies and the economy. Its economic costs are equally great, estimated at a hefty amount of US\$1.5 trillion.

THEORISING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE ERA OF LOCKDOWNS

Seen in retrospect, public perceptions of domestic violence serve as its life source: survivors often find themselves powerless in a society where they, and not their abuser, are the subject of prejudice and stigma. Cultural ethos plays an important role in normalizing domestic violence as a natural status quo, only encouraging the perpetrator to see their act not as deviance but as part of normative behaviour. First conceptualised by the American sociologist George Herbert Mead, and elaborated by subsequent symbolic interactionists, the community or “the generalized other” plays a vital role in how individuals view and define themselves.

In patriarchal societies, where wives

are seen as property, violence is justified by both males and females. Satisfied that by beating his wife, he is not violating any cultural norms, the likelihood of violence increases exponentially. The abused on the other hand often consider themselves to be deserving of it, having internalised the same patriarchal norms. The demarcation of women's sphere of operation within the household means that they are not exposed to knowledge of legal rights and help-seeking behavioural patterns.

For bystanders, which includes us and our legal institutions, social acceptance of domestic violence as a private and/or natural facet of life is intrinsically linked to non-interventionist behaviour and apathy, which also has the power to cancel out the effects of legislation and policies against domestic violence. One needs to look no further than the gaping ravine between the view of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 - which elaborates domestic violence as any act that "includes causing physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and emotional abuse and economic abuse" - and the public's opinion of it. Normalisation of such abuse is rampant in our everyday lives, so much so that even High Court judges excuse cases of blatant and targeted abuse.

This calls for an alternate understanding of domestic violence: that it is a complex and systematic social phenomenon rather than an event of individual pathology. It occurs at the intersection of numerous factors which 'enable' the perpetrator to carry out the violence. More importantly, many of these pre-existing factors have been further aggravated by the pandemic conditions.

Deprived of social support systems and faced with increasing medical and economic uncertainties, anxieties gradually began mounting in houses as the pandemic raged on. Research clearly identifies that harrowing conditions - marked by insecurity and mental stress created by unemployment, financial burdens and disruption of routine activities - create a perfect storm for controlling, abusive behaviour behind closed doors. Problems are only compounded by alcohol consumption.

Quarantining measures also separated women from virtually all possible avenues of help and pushed them into isolation with their abusers. For many women, their natal families are the first and the most accessible source of support. However, travel restrictions prevented them from contacting their families or taking shelter at their natal home. Dipping incomes have also affected the ability of natal families to support their married daughters. A survivor of domestic violence in Delhi, for instance,

decided to stay for a few days at her natal home. However, she was beaten up by her brother as he saw her as a "financial burden."

Taking note of the communication challenges posed by the pandemic, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, issued a statement iterating that "the current circumstances make reporting even harder, including limitations on women's and girls' access to phones and helplines and disrupted public services like police, justice and social services. These disruptions may also be compromising the care and support that survivors need" adding that this gap also "fuel impunity for the perpetrators." Indeed, a surge of complaints received by NCW is only a cause of distress in a country where reporting rates are as low as 14 % and only 38 % of women have access to mobiles.

The success of legal and community protections in India is retarded by the general dearth of formal support systems like the police, NGOs, Protection Officers etc. and the fledgling communication lines between them and the survivors. Suspension of court proceedings and overstretching of law enforcement forces meant that any reprieve remained suspended in the coming future. Other formal support sources in India - like women's organisations and counselling services - have made efforts to provide assistance, but they struggle to provide tangible assistance beyond telephonic and web counselling.

Loss of livelihood translates into a loss of financial autonomy for many women across the world, leading to a contraction of resources that women otherwise draw upon to rescue themselves from violent households. Women belonging to lower economic brackets are worst struck, as civil rights activist Brinda Adige observes, women living in slums or pavements live in cramped conditions with their abusers. In addition to piling care work, they have to bear the brunt of their husbands' arbitrary bouts of anger. Moreover, they cannot seek any help via mobile phones or postal services. The loss of their daily casual work, which once afforded them some distance from their abusers, only adds to their helplessness.

EPILOGUE: SOME AFTERTHOUGHTS

The Coronavirus outbreak has only brought into limelight the hardships women have faced for generations. Pandemic or not, domestic violence already constituted one of the widest forms of violence perpetrated against girls and women. In 2019 alone, some 243 million women and girls (aged 15-49) across the world had fallen victim to sexual or physical violence by their partners. The 2015 National

Family Health Survey revealed an Indian domestic space riddled with domestic violence, with a frequency of one case every 4.4 minutes. Experience from the 2013-2015 Ebola epidemic already furnished ample evidence for how lockdowns combined with no gender-sensitive policy efforts can wreak havoc on the safety of women and teenage girls.

At the same time, a robust response from the state is found lacking. Thus, for instance, duties of Protection Officers, as mandated under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, were not recognised as an essential service during the lockdown. The swift and much publicized imposition of the nationwide lockdown in India appears to be marred by sheer insincerity and lack of nuance given the governments' hebetude in taking steps to actively address the gendered consequences of this necessary evil. Despite being lauded for its "holistic response" by the United Nations Gender Response Tracker, the experiences of survivors speak of a different ground reality. The inadequate reach and efficacy of these measures continued to persist, as amply indicated by a protracted rise in the incidence of domestic violence.

At this juncture, the narrative begins to fragment into incoherence as our sources gradually begin to run dry. After the initial

news coverage on the rising incidence of domestic abuse, the storyline all but died down in 2021. A simple google search of "domestic violence" or "domestic violence in India" yields some odd articles popping up in intervals vis a vis the richness of material one can source for the earlier months of last year. No comprehensive reportage on, say the eventual efficacy of government efforts to deal with domestic violence, could be found. If reports estimating a death toll vastly exceeding government estimates are to go by, they provide a starting point for us to think about the state of women's safety in the last few months.

The pandemic has uncovered the many contradictions that our society embodies, its capacity to inflict structural violence and the profound vulnerabilities of human experiences in routine life. These proved to be trying times for the cause of gender equality across the world, requiring a robust partnership of civil society organisations and the state is needed to battle the shadow pandemic. And when the state finds itself overwhelmed, the moral responsibility of the citizens to unlearn and break patterns increases all the more. The outbreak of this pandemic brings with it many challenges, but all upheavals also carry the potential for decisive change. Till then, only a requiem for a pandemic forgotten.



Photo by Liv Tønnessen



POSTCOLONIAL PREFERENCE FOR SOCIALISM:

How Anti-Imperialism Came To Shape Modern South Asia

BY ARJUN TANDON

The descent into, and eventually out of, post-colonial socialism has been a very common sight across the cracked vistas of 20th century South Asia. Countries coming out of colonial rule are often economically very weak, and in the process of

re-establishing a stable political system with a sound welfare policy for its citizens. During this precarious period, a free market economy only threatens to further widen the gap between the social classes, and steepen the hierarchy of income distribution.

After a period of draconian and forceful governance, a state-owned setup of the economy does not seem like a bad idea to the poor, hoping that their fellow freedom fighters would possibly be governing the newly independent nations, and thus keeping the interests of the common man in mind.

African countries like Ghana came out of colonial rule, and were led by prominent peacekeeping leaders like Kwame Nkrumah. He was one of the founding fathers of the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War, and was heavily in favour of 5-year plans leading the country to a path down the road of economic progress. He was also aware of the significance of the Cocoa trade, and how his country could contribute and benefit from it, and therefore kept a check on cocoa exports. The first president of Tanzania after independence, Julius Nyerere, was also in favour of state dominance in the economic sphere, and was therefore responsible for collectivized land reforms in the country.

Egypt, which was led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, another leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, was responsible for nationalizing the Suez Canal. Its importance then, and even now, cannot be overstated as it stands to be one of the most important infrastructure projects aiding international trade. The Canal has reaped great economic benefits to Egypt, apart from being one of the primary sources of revenue as a tourist site.

The aforementioned leaders and countries have mostly been part of the NAM, but very clearly chose one economic ideology over the other. This either might be due to political leaning towards the Soviet Union, without publicly announcing it (a common indication of which was neutrality during political turmoil), or a genuine belief that the newfound government would have the people's best interests at heart, and could therefore be given the responsibility of controlling the country's assets.

As seen in post-colonial African countries, socialism has been the prevalent form of economic governance, although politically these countries have been democratic in choosing their government leaders (no matter how crude the initial process of election may have been). However, these countries were led by populist leaders, who mostly had a strong international presence as well.

The United States has come under heavy criticism for using Latin American economies as production houses, for exploiting



Kucie kos by Wojciech Fangor

their natural resources, and meddling in and altering their political landscape. That is why foreign interference is heavily disliked in the region. Venezuela became a victim of mismanaged socialism, with any attempted reparatory changes making the situation worse for the common man. Inflationary pressures, joblessness, and public agitations fuelled by political chaos have ruined the country's economy. The country stands to be one of the biggest examples of the failed socialist experiment, after the Soviet Union.

Looking at countries in Asia also provides ample evidence of the economically left-leaning ideology preferred by newly formed governments. Countries like Vietnam, China and India, all saw spells of socialist control over their economies, with Vietnam splitting into two, based on the difference of popular opinion to organize economic life, apart from political tensions between the Northern and Southern parts of the country. China, whose economy was excessively state-controlled, turned towards a more free-trade approach by identifying certain areas, known as Special Economic Zones, where integration with the international economy and minimal state intervention would propel the nation's economic presence to an unprecedented level. This shift away from a sort of pure socialism, after decades of state designed policies which made things from bad to worse for the Chinese economy, a state-run capitalist system was designed in a way to create monopolies in numerous global supply chains.

India, or rather its political leaders in the



period leading up to independence, were fascinated with the idea of socialism. Jawahar Lal Nehru, the nation's first and longest serving Prime Minister was heavily in favour of a state controlled economic model, akin to that of the Soviet Union, who had been a great ally to India, despite India leading the NAM during the cold war.

An eminent Indian economist Swaminathan Aiyar stated "India was perhaps the only country in the world where improving productivity was a crime", referring to the period up until the late 1980s when the country was said to be under 'License Rule'. Industrialisation and capitalist goods were opposed by the common man and many in the cabinet, fearing the opening up of borders would quell any growth of the local industry and put the control of output and employment into the hands of foreign firms. Even today, one of, and possibly the most important reason why nationalised banks continue to exist in the country is due to its irreplicable quality as a welfare institution.

What is mostly observed across the nations that have adopted a socialist way of life after independence, has not been simply due to a fondness for state control, or trust in the government that there will be a mutual understanding of development and progress. It is due to a deep-rooted scepticism of a free-market economy, living under the impression of disproportionate asset allocation, oppression, and imagining it to be a form of modern-day serfdom for the inherently disadvantaged.

An eminent Indian economist Swaminathan Aiyar stated "India was perhaps the only country in the world where improving productivity was a crime", referring to the period up until the late 1980s, when the country was said to be under 'License Rule'.

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Reading Between The
THREADS:
CONFLUENCE OF FASHION
&
POSTMODERNISM



By SAEESHA PANDITA

While jumping from channel to channel as a bored-with-fifty-reruns-of-a-cartoon kid, I remember accidentally stumbling upon a TV show that aired runway shows back-to-back. I vividly remember chuckling at the absurd pieces the models donned as they walked in sky-high heels, and wondering how no one would ever wear these. And boy, oh boy, was I wrong! With descent into my teen years, came the ascent into the world of Fashion, with a capital F.

I came to realise that it was more than walking in front of five hundred people with a pillow held against a bedhead. It was more than just enormous, flowy gowns on the red carpets. The more I looked, the more I realised that Fashion is a force. A force so out-there and up-in-your-face, yet so intimate... one to surely be reckoned with! But taking a looking glass to identify the nuances of this world raises a question: What drives fashion?

Of the gazillions of things that drive the inception and production of couture, 'rebellion' is the most striking; the defiance of conventions, of society, of archaic norms, and ideas. It is non-conformity that has driven a whole tribe of designers spanning generations to express themselves in the wearable medium. Aimed at challenging the roots of maxims that govern modern society (and oftentimes, taking jeers at the past evils), Postmodernism, as a movement, gave a name to this mindset that mastered the art of ironical narratives, blurring the lines of what is original or not, while also attempting to abolish the hierarchies of high and low. The core intention of Postmodernism has been to invalidate the idea that a piece of art- whatever it may be- only meant one thing, which was determined by its creator.

By the grace of the movement, the viewers were put on an all-new pedestal like never before. As now, they were an integral part in determining the gist of a work- which also led to the rise of performance

pieces that allowed the consumer to participate too. The viewers, now, were a very important piece of the whole puzzle.

Along with invalidating the pursuit of finding the exclusive meaning of a piece, it validated a whole range of new canvasses, ideas, and interpretations. Art could be anything you want it to be. Art became a newfound weapon to topple age-old institutions, and to provoke the ones prevailing in the current age. It is evident in the fact that in an age where the art of dressing was regarded as a lowly, feminine art form (quite peculiarly), while architecture (majorly partaken by men) was a higher art form, Postmodernism scrapped the so-called manual that evaluated how an art form should be judged.

The movement that defies definition is recognised by some recurring themes in each work: Postmodern art is eclectic and inventive; anyone is an artist, and everything is art.

There are a couple of ways in which the two realms of Postmodernism and fashion converge, such as Bricolage and Pastiche.

Bricolage, a French term meaning 'an object constructed out of what is around or available', is a common practice in postmodern art. An artist may construct pieces out of a deconstructed composition, or just from pre-existing pieces found in and around their workspace to produce something totally unexpected, miles apart in thought and creativity from the used materials' functionality. In punk culture, where style pioneers self-expression and non-conformism, bricolage is a prevalent technique. Punk artists make use of fabric patches to construct garments that speak of their one-of-a-kind heterogenous personalities- signifying their relationship to the world and how they are a sum of diverse ideologies. Each patch has its own role in the dialogue, the story that is the piece of apparel. Apart from being cheap and accessible, patches are also great canvases for personalisation- to

pay homage, to speak for themselves, and to flaunt a sense of community. Punks who don jackets full of patches are wearing their personality in a world that strides closer to suppression of self-expression and minimalism.

A great example of bricolage in punk culture would be the 'Anarchy Shirt' by Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren, which was featured in the 2013 exhibition, Punk: From Chaos to Couture, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Akin to a DIY aesthetic, the shirt was distressed to look old with stripes made with bleach, and appliqued with slogans saying, 'Only anarchists are Pretty!' 'Dangerously close to Love,' 'We are not afraid of Ruins,' and 'Chaos'. A blue silk patch sporting a Karl Marx portrait, which McLaren found in Chinatown, also found its place on the shirt after being marked with a swastika by its finder. The shirt, with 'violent dyes and patches containing inflammatory slogans', stood the test of time as a postmodern creation made with materials that had no prior relation to the sentiment its creators infused it with. Bricolage creates new meaning from material that held almost no meaning before.

In contemporary understanding, one may even deem the five-looks-with-one-scarf videos an attempt at bricolage as it morphs a mere scarf to a variety of other clothing items- all while being inexpensive... and sometimes risqué! Oh la la!

Pastiche, 'an exhaustion of creativity', is another inventive technique of postmodernism. It conspires when a designer directly refers to any other designer's work, piece(s) of art, or just pop culture phenomenon. In my opinion, Moschino's current creative director, Jeremy Scott's body of work is an extremely fun display of pastiche; a Vogue article rightly remarks that '(Scott) never throws anything away.' The spirit of Moschino is pastiche, and it has been amazingly embodied in its collections. It is parodic and



Malcolm McLaren & Dame Vivienne Westwood's "Anarchy Shirt"



"Anarchy in the UK" T-shirt by Vivienne Westwood

wholly made for the consumers to consume. To comment on the rapid speed of production of fast fashion, and juxtapose high fashion against the consumption of fast food, Moschino's 2014 Autumn/Winter collection took inspiration from the red and yellow fast-food monarch (a gleaming symbol of globalisation, too!) and put forward a McDonald's capsule line. The message is derived from the fast-food chain's unstoppable impact on the world, and at the same time mocks the painstaking process of how a high-fashion garment is made. Although the collection was laden with criticism after its roll-out, the sentiment it was made with was flawlessly conveyed to the public, even with its highly ironical black-and-white photoshoot. The monochrome added an Audrey Hepburn-esque class to a line of clothing that directly referenced something that was the epitome of accessibility.

Moschino's Spring/Summer 2015 line was also a parody of the famous Barbie doll. The famous children's doll is inherently also a symbol of the Euro-centric beauty standard with its perfect body, perfect life, perfect boyfriend, and a more perfect house. Barbie has everything she wants, and Barbie is everything she wants to be. Being exceedingly tacky, the collection still sold out in minutes, and even led to a foray into the children's toy market with a collaboration with Mattel later that year. The television commercial for the campaign featured two little girls and a little boy playing with the 'fierce' Barbie dolls- which led to the two brands being praised for breaking and blurring gender stereotypes (read: breaking the boundaries with art). The two aforementioned Moschino collections highlight how demolishing the demarcations made by strict conventions can lead to, simply put, magic!

A peculiarity that separates the core of art history as a profession between the 20th Century and the 16th Century is the presentation of femxle artists – There is virtually no mention. The history of art as a subjective description imbues biases that have traditionally conferred creative genius to masculine performance. This essay deals with the lens of gender performativity to locate femxle body politics in crucial artistic movements across modern capitalism. The lens of an exaggerated masquerade is witnessed in critical gaze theories in film and the culture industry, whereby crucial departures from traditional Foucauldian power relations are reinterpreted.

Hence, postmodernism highlights and invites individualistic expression that is free from the shackles of rules. It advances fashionable articulation by giving it a whole new push of innumerable possibilities. It opens gates, and empowers the artist to concoct; it acts as a Willy Wonka's candy for the viewer- satiating the heart's desire to see, alluring the consumer, and providing a once-in-a-lifetime experience. More than a movement traversing innumerable genres, I perceive Postmodernism to be a mindset that seeks explanation from the past, and offers amendments for the future. For something that is inherently derivative in nature, the end-product of Postmodernist work is often extremely out-of-the-box. It is experimental. It is ambiguous. It is a misfit. Most importantly, it is an engine that drives fashion forward.





Photo by Juco/Paper Magazine



Photo by Jean Paul Goude

Amidst Grief and Uncertainty:
PERSPECTIVES ON
STOICISM & VALUES

BY ABDULLAH KAZMI



The year 2020 began with celebrations for the dawn of a new decade replete with our individual and collective aspirations. Right from new year resolutions, travel plans, and a rejuvenated self we were ready and excited to see what this new decade had in store for us. Little did we know, there would be very little to celebrate, few get-togethers and a laughable amount of travelling, if at all possible.

For quite a while now, we are slowly bearing witness to realities such as global warming and climate change. The year 2020 had something very drastic and different in-store to shake us. What a span of 100 years had in common, between the budding Industrial era of the 20th century and the ultra-modern 21st century was a Global Pandemic. The horrors and chaos inflicted by the Spanish Flu returned to haunt the global consciousness at large in the form of novel CoronaVirus. Rapid industrialization and its impact on the Global-Climate have always been a matter of public discourse, but we couldn't envisage a mini-apocalypse hitting us this soon. We were not at all ready for this.

Suddenly, the whole world was united in grief, loss, uncertainty and suffering. The lack of physical touch and space, bore heavily on our minds and actions as we faced never-ending lockdowns and the concept of containment zones. In the face of a global pandemic, one could not escape grief and news of someone close being affected or succumbing to the virus. The rising covid cases and a crumbling healthcare system affected the morale of the common public. Anxiety and mental health issues grew significantly, stemming from the fear of death, uncertainty, and the situation itself being out of our immediate control. Our faith, perspective towards life, and belief systems have been duly tested in these turbulent times. It is in this light that I believe Stoicism as a philosophy and school of thought is absolutely relevant to the global pandemic situation.

In the last 18 months, we have looked at the scientific community with a sense of optimism and hope. Digital mediums kept us glued to their content, providing information and insight into this lethal virus. In the present circumstance, when we are actively looking at solutions (that are mostly, large-scale and global in nature), one can bring up the question of "How does Philosophy help us in navigating through such a catastrophic present and uncertain future?"

The origin of such a question/thought has more to do with how people understand and look at philosophy (rather than the application and its uses). Over time, Philosophy has become so academic in nature that the subject is approached and relegated to only college and university libraries, with very little presence and application in our day to day actions. However, in the present context where our actions and behaviour is of paramount importance, philosophical thought can help us gain perspective in our lives and reclaim the very purpose of philosophy and in particular the Stoic thought.

For a long time, Stoicism has been confused with the internet friendly term stoicism. Although it may seem like a difference of mere letter case, both the terms convey two absolutely different meanings. For example, Stoicism is an ancient Greek school of philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium, The school taught that virtue, the highest good, is based on knowledge; the wise live in harmony with the divine Reason (also identified with Fate and Providence) that governs nature and are indifferent to the vicissitudes of fortune and to pleasure and pain.

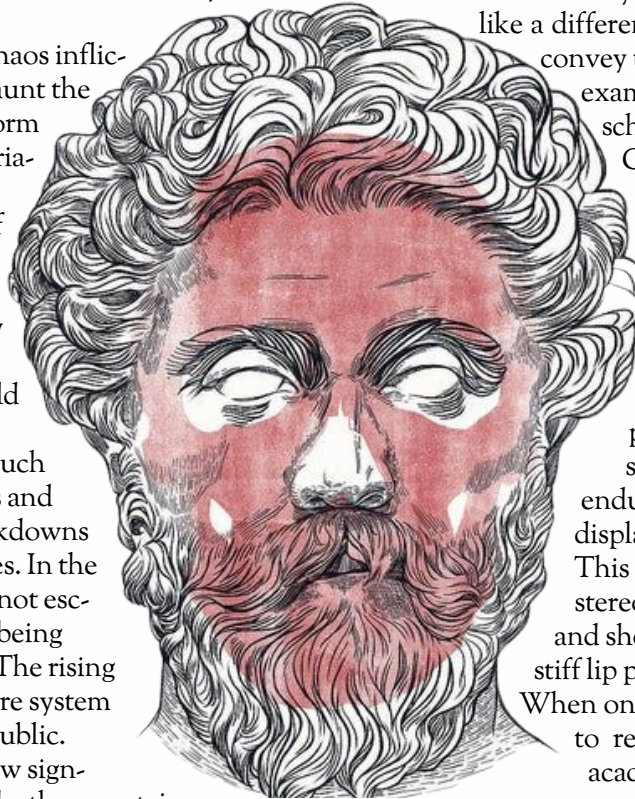
stoicism on the other hand is the endurance of pain or hardship without the display of feelings and without complaint. This term has taken the internet by storm, stereotyping Stoics as relentlessly rational and showing no traces of emotion. A sort of a stiff lip person.

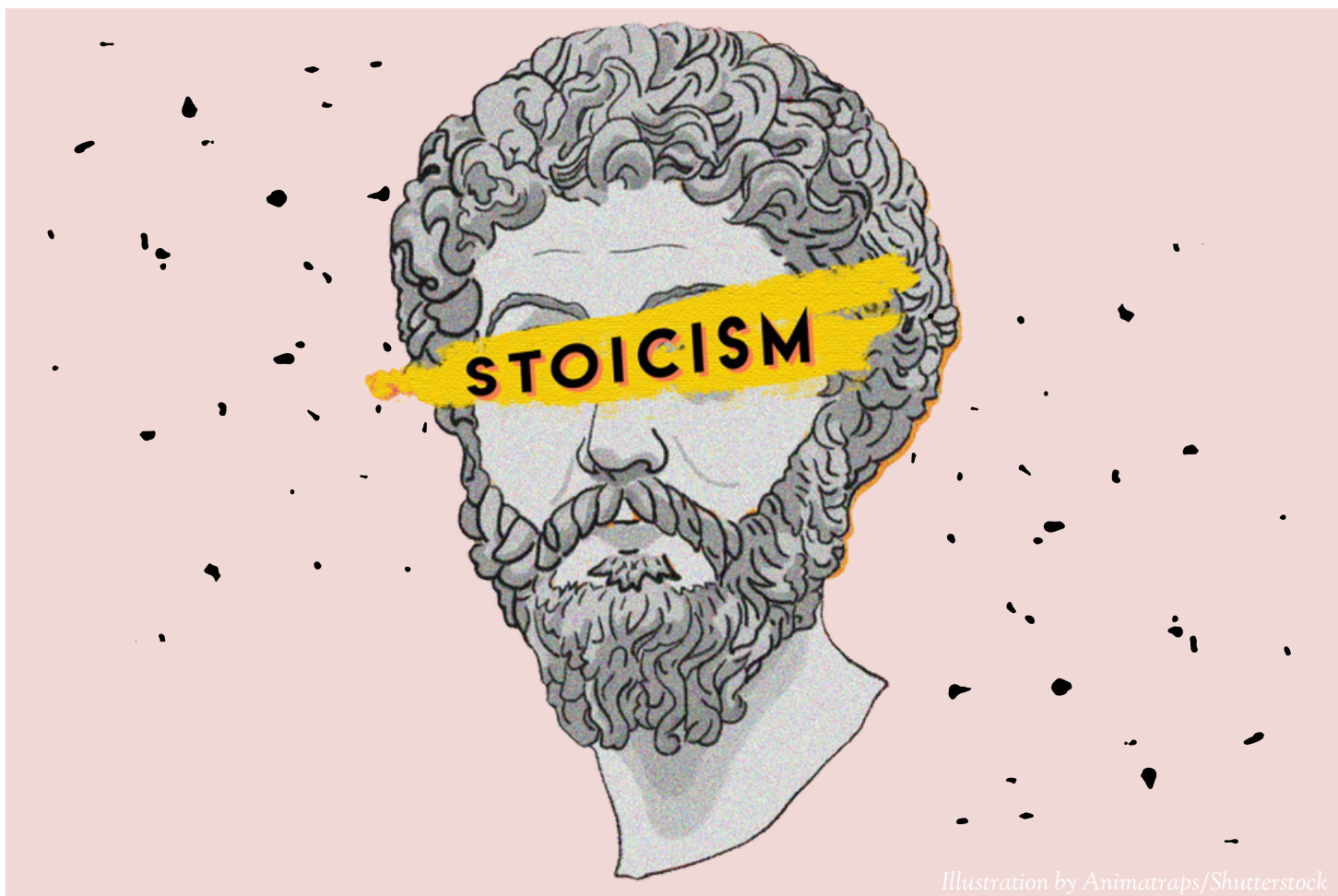
When one engages with Stoic thought we come to realise that Stoicism is not merely an academic exercise rather a way of life, a education of character.

Although we do not have any form of single compiled or completed works of the founders such as Zeno of Citium in Cyprus (344–262 BCE) the works of the later thinkers have been gaining popularity in recent times such as Lucius Annaeus Seneca's (Letters from a Stoic), Epictetus's (Discourses and Selected Writings, Enchiridion) and the Philosopher King Marcus Aurelius's (Meditations).

NAVIGATING CONTROL DURING COVID 19

Stoicism at an in-depth level engages with human actions and ideas surrounding the fundamental question of what constitutes a good life. Stoic thinkers, especially Epictetus, have expounded on the tenet of control.





"The chief task in life is simply this: to identify and separate matters so that I can say clearly to myself which are externals not under my control, and which have to do with the choices I actually control."

— Epictetus. *Discourses*. II.5

This Stoic concept is known as the *Dichotomy of Control* (DOC) *understanding what is within our control and what is beyond our control*. The pandemic situation has taken a toll on us emotionally, mentally and physically. We are constantly glued to the developments and the changes happening around the world. *This constant influx of information has brought about phases of existential anxiety and feeling emotionally overwhelmed.*

In this regard understanding the Stoic principle of control can help us gain clarity and insight, *as individuals we cannot prevent a natural disaster or a global pandemic from occurring*. What we have in our control is how we can devote our attention and energies to becoming better individuals. *In order to strive on this path of betterment and a good life, one must work in accordance with the four virtues: wisdom, justice, courage and self-control.*

"You have power over your mind - not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength."

— Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

The great Stoic philosopher and Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius reigned over his empire during one of the deadliest plagues in European History. His widely-read journal *Meditations* contains the moral and psychological advice he gave to himself, in face of a deadly pandemic. His applications of Stoic principles and holistic approach towards life helped him gain perspective towards pain, illness, anxiety and loss and build emotional resilience.

Even on his deathbed during the plague, Marcus's years of training in Stoicism helped him face death calmly and gracefully.

"We're told this was what Marcus was thinking about on his deathbed. According to one historian, his circle of friends were distraught. Marcus calmly asked why they were weeping for him when, in fact, they should accept both sickness and death as inevitable, part of nature and a common lot of mankind. He returns to this theme many times throughout *The Meditations*."

"All that comes to pass", he tells himself, even illness and death, should be as "familiar as the rose in spring and the fruit in autumn".

Interestingly, the lives of the Stoic philosophers and their inspiring works are closely intertwined with the tumultuous times they lived in. Ranging from exiles, epidemics, loss of a loved one, suicides and

slavery, the experiences of these Stoic thinkers are very similar to what we are witnessing now. Today, a world ravaged by a global pandemic can look for solace and hope in the letter Seneca sent to his friend Lucilius after the death of his friend Flaccus.

"For I have had them as if I should one day lose them; I have lost them as if I have them still. Therefore, Lucilius, act as befits your own serenity of mind, and cease to put a wrong interpretation on the gifts of Fortune. Fortune has taken away, but Fortune has given. Let us greedily enjoy our friends, because we do not know how long this privilege will be ours."

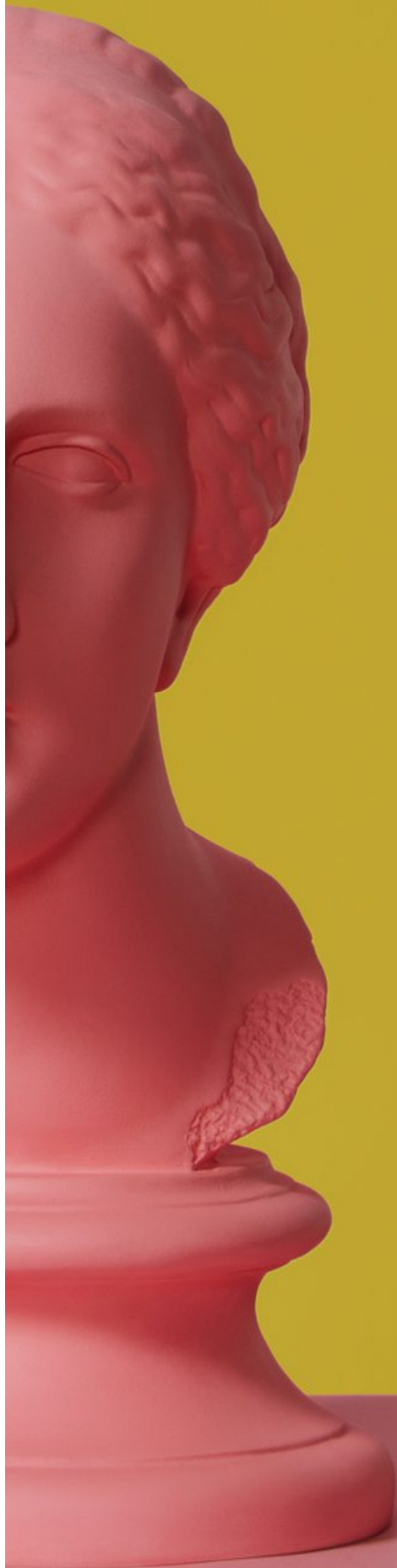
In this letter, Seneca offers his condolences and advises Lucilius to not grieve more than what is fitting. ("Let not the eyes be dry when we have lost a friend, nor let them overflow. We may weep, but we must not wail "). This may come across as a piece of hash advice to many, but Seneca acknowledges the privilege of having and enjoying the company of friends in the first place. Stoicism has a deep reverence for the Latin phrase *Amor Fati*: translated as "love of fate" or "love of one's fate." It is through this Seneca advises his friend to see the sudden passing of a dear friend as what fortune had in store for us.

Seneca considers himself as someone who was once overcome by grief in the past, ("I understand that the reason why I lamented so greatly was chiefly that I had never imagined it possible for his death to precede mine.") It is in this regard he urges Lucilius to appreciate and adore the living around us, with a conscious acknowledgement of their humanness and mortality.

"Therefore let us continually think as much about our own mortality as about that of all those we love... Now is the time for you to reflect, not only that all things are mortal, but also that their mortality is subject to no fixed law."

Death has been a recurring theme in classic Stoic texts (*Memento Mori*: Latin translation for 'remember that you [have to] die'). Philosophers have time and again have called on people to remember and embrace human mortality. Embracing death or pondering over such reality can be a depressing thought in our





modern society especially during a global pandemic when we are unable to say Goodbye to our loved ones!

But what this mini apocalypse has made us realise is how short or fleeting human life is. It is in this light we should value and understand the Stoic perspective on grief, life and death. Meditating on the idea of death can bring more purpose, perspective and energy to our lives. For we shall try to live a life of virtue and purpose NOW and not wait for sometime later. Marcus Aurelius wrote that “You could leave life right now. Let that determine what you do and say and think.”

STOICISM AS THE WAY FORWARD

Renowned Psychotherapist and Philosopher, Prof. Donald Robertson makes a case for Stoicism as one of the most impactful ways of living a good life. He points out that even though there has been very little quantifiable research on Stoic exercises, therapeutic measures and practices of the ancient Philosophers. His implementation and guide to certain Stoic mental exercises have been helpful with his clients. Robertson argues that classical philosophy can be assimilated within modern psychotherapeutic practices and discourse.

“Never let the future disturb you. You will meet it, if you have to, with the same weapons of reason which today arm you against the present.”

— Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

On a personal note, Stoicism has been a glimmer of hope and optimism for me in these dark times, not only was I able to gather courage from the teachings of these philosophers but also made me realise the sacred nature of time and how much of it goes by unnoticed. It pushed me towards working on my present self and not giving in to worries about the future. In the end, I would like to conclude that Philosophical thought can be really pivotal and integral to human change and growth, what matters is how much importance and deliberation we give to the task itself. Stoicism can be a major tool that can help us handle ourselves both now and on the road ahead.

TALKING GENDERED AND STATE VIOLENCE IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S 'DRAUPADI'

BY ANANYA
BHARDWAJ

Not long ago, the University of Delhi dropped Mahasweta Devi, an extremely significant author whose works challenge the larger oppressive structures like family, religion, and the State, from its undergraduate syllabus. In such a time when dissent has been moulded into a crime, questions pertaining to the idea of belonging, or the inherent burden of patriotism that comes with holding a passport, or the question of identities of marginalised people in a nation which is on its way to align a religious identity to the State identity, become ways in which we understand the larger dynamics of fear, control, and violence. Thus makes it potent for us to discuss what Mahasweta Devi wrote in her short story, Draupadi, that made it so dangerous for state apparatuses to function.

'Draupadi' is the story of a girl from the tribal areas of Bengal whose journey takes us into the real picture of the brutality of State violence inflicted on these tribal groups as a means to control them and their activities. Dopdi Mejhen, as her name is spelled in the local dialect, is hunted down, beaten, and raped by Senanayak and his men from the armed forces. Even after being raped continuously for days, the story ends with one of the most powerful images of women in Bengali Literature: Dopdi drenched in blood, naked, and fierce, claiming through her body that those men of power, even after having taken away everything that their masculinity could take away from her, couldn't break her indomitable strength.

Moving ahead with the idea that women's bodies have historically and culturally been seen as sites of war and been equated with territories to conquer, Draupadi raises further questions into this analysis. When wars take place, we see a manifestation of two kinds of direct violence; men who die in the battlefields at the hands of each other, and the subsequent raping of the women of the losing community or clan. It is assumed by the Victors that raping the women of the losing side is equivalent to ripping them off their lands or properties that they once possessed. The burden of this rape falls on women, again in two ways. Masculinity doesn't allow men to believe that they were incapable enough not

be able to protect their properties from being defiled so a lot of narratives claiming that women wanted or invited that sort of violence is very prevalent since they did not do much to prevent it. Secondly, the children born of these rapes become constant reminders of the loss of the territories; both the land and the women. Therefore, these mothers along with their children become the site where violence in the form of domestic and verbal abuse is meted out. Rape is also justified as a means through which men in the army, who have been at war or away from home for months altogether, can release their frustration. This is another way through which, the similar idea of reducing women to the status of a piece of land meant to be conquered and ruled over, is passed on in popular imagination.

In this framework, Brahminical Patriarchy exposes women to different kinds of violence because of certain beliefs inherent in the system. First is that which arises out of the idealisation of women as the State. This happens in cases of women like Draupadi from *The Mahabharata* who are upper castes. Women belonging to the upper castes are portrayed as the image of the Protector or Defender of the State, a very typical example could be the popular use of the slogan *Bharat Mata Ki Jai*. This idealisation lifts women up to a category that demands certain duties out of them by the virtue of being females- they are expected to be caring, kind,

And sacrificing. Second are women like Dopdi, who are lower caste tribals, seen as an abhorrent representation of femininity and who need to be annihilated for the protection of the image of the pure virgin feminine figure. That is why instances of structural violence by the State towards these communities are never questioned because it takes place under the garb of upholding the unity of the Nation State which is shown to be under constant threat if the activities of these "separatist groups" are not checked.

The kind of violence that is inflicted on these tribal women then becomes not only direct and structural, as it is sanctified by the Indian State and mitigated by the armed forces, but at the same time, cultural. I use the word 'culture' here as just a representation of a way of life which has to be upheld. This way of life is something that the upper castes have formulated and laid down as the guidelines to a dignified and codified life. It is this culture that dehumanises untouchables, homosexuals, and women. And because it reduces them to a position below what humanity can incorporate, it is made acceptable in the society to deny them their basic human rights. This is also the reason as to why violence against these underprivileged communities was hardly ever talked of, until recent times.

Foucault, in the book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), talks about the nature of Power and how it is

manifested. He talks of the Panopticon (an idea which he borrows from Jeremy Bentham) which is a design of an overarching prison structure where a guard can stand in the centre and be able to see all prisoners in a 360 degree angle vision but the prisoners cannot see him. Foucault says that this is an ideal situation since it ensures a three level check on the prisoners: surveillance, normalisation, and examination. This would help keep prisoners always in check since they would constantly examine their behaviour for the fear of being caught doing something undesirable. With time, they would normalise this state of living under constant fear and would behave in the way the system wants them, without even intending to. By the end of the book he says that the structure of the Panopticon can be applied to a lot of institutions and not only prisons- like a university, a mental asylum, or even factories. Power is not only in the hands of that guard but also in the hands of all of us, because we have internalised the standards of how to behave.

It is through this structure of the Panopticon that we can understand the reason behind the constant patrolling of citizens under a democracy, some more than others. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act is meant for nothing but this; manufacturing and normalising fear in the mind of any person in "disturbed areas" who don't identify with India. It is because of this reason that we hear news of tribals in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh-



Sabitri Heisnam as Dopdi Mejhen in "Draupadi"

arh, Bengal, etc. being hunted down and executed. This is also why rape becomes an acceptable form of punishment for a woman who tries to step out of her boundaries. By pinning her down and violating her, she is shown her position in the society, which is always below men, and this position is normalised in her conscio-usness through the use of force and systematic violence.

There is another dimension to how violence is portrayed by Mahasweta Devi in her story. The name of the story, 'Draupadi', comes from the name of the female protagonist of the Hindu Epic, The Mahabharata. It is the story of a feud between two groups of cousins over the kingdom of their fathers, and this also involved the disrobing of the common wife of the Pandavas, Draupadi. Popular belief is that the disrobing was unsuccessful since Draupadi prayed to Lord Krishna for help and he extended the cloth of her saree till Dushana was tired of attempting to violate her. It happened in a courtroom full of courtiers, all of them being their family elders. Even today, Draupadi is blamed for the battle

of Kurukshetra along with the issue of the dispute over their kingdom. Mahasweta Devi, through the character of Dopdi, shows us the other side of the picture. Dopdi embodies all those lower caste women who haven't found a voice in the midst of the men of their own caste as well as the high end officials and police personnels. She is shown in contrast to Draupadi, who had five husbands, thus making her a complete woman with desirable men who had all the qualities of the Uttam Purush combined. Dopdi, on the other hand, was raped by several men for a stretch of many days, thus rendering her voiceless. This story shows us the dichotomy between the violences that occurs and how power relations and stature in a society play important roles to determine the kind of vulnerability one is exposed to. But even after being defeated in body and mind to the core, Dopdi rises in protest and uses that same body to register this defiance of authority which was used to violate and dehumanise her. This is her empowerment. This violence then becomes her means to rise again.



HISTORY AND CULTURE

IN THIS SECTION

Ritvij Ratn Tiwari

51.

GUPTA AGE:

Was it Really Golden?

Seethalakshmi KS

55.

PARTITION AND PATRIARCHY:

The Story of Thoa Khalsa

Vibhuti P. & Souvik B.

58.

DISPELLING THE ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL INIQUITIES OF OBESE IDENTITY:

From Genesis to the Quotidian

Aryan Pandey

64.

THE LANGUAGE TALK:

Interview with Padma Shri Dr. G.N Devy

Meleke Anthony

69.

FLYING AFRICANS:

The Igbo Landing Story

Samya Verma

74.

MAHARANI TARABAI BHONSLE

GUPTA AGE:

Was It Really Golden?

BY RITVIJ RATN TIWARI

*All that glisters is not gold
Gilded tombs do worms enfold.*

-William Shakespeare



The Gupta Empire was an ancient Indian kingdom that spread almost all over the Indian subcontinent from approximately 320 to 550 CE. It is in the Gupta years that the Indian intellect is reckoned to have reached its high-water mark in almost all branches of art, literature, and science. The Indian civilization is said to have reached a unique stage of development under the Guptas, the deep impression of which is incumbent upon succeeding times. The beauty of Ajanta's frescoes, the idyllic dramas and lyrics of Kalidasa, the astronomical discoveries of Aryabhatta and Varahamihira, the miraculous iron pillar at Mehrauli amongst others are wondrous illustrations of Gupta excellence. Several architectural marvels were constructed during this time.

Ergo, the period is termed as the "Golden Age of Indian history".

However, categorizing a time period as golden entails eulogizing every aspect of life at that time, and this leads us to our first departure point: Did the Guptas really excel in every regard of life? Furthermore, it is apposite to question the veracity of the historiography that calls this period a Golden age. This leads us to our second question: Is there, in any way, a chance of an intrinsic bias in the interpretation of the historiographers?

This essay will try to explore these two questions and sieve out some abominable realities of Guptas from the existing scholarship by virtue of discussing and analysing the conditions of slaves, Shudras, and women under the Guptas. The article will further analyse the Hindu favouritism of the rulers and the atrophy of Buddhism in the age, before analysing the impetus that led to the Gupta years being called the Golden age.



Source; Wikipedia

BRAHMANS IN GUPTA AGE

The Gupta period was marked by a revival of Brahmanism. Gupta kings and Brahmans had a symbiotic relationship. Brahmans legitimised the authority of the kings. They did this by praising the kings amongst their yajmans. In return, they got swathes of land as gifts called Brahmadeya. Subsequently, the Brahmanas switched from their priestly roles to managerial roles. The administrative and executive functions of the lands began to be done by the feudatories: the Brahmanas. They collected taxes and employed slaves on their lands. The nature of labour was often forced. Inscriptions talk of prevalence of forced labour called Vishti. Narad Smriti thoroughly discusses the institution of slavery in the Gupta age. The condition of slaves reached a nadir in the Gupta period. They were treated as property, ready to be inherited and only to be freed by the process of manumission. They were reduced to serfs.

CONDITIONS OF LOWER SOCIAL ORDERS

Social stratification became more rigid. As discussed earlier, the growing domination of Brahmanas crystallized the Varna system. Fa xian's accounts tell us that there was an increase in the number of untouchables, especially chandalas, and the convention of untouchability began to be practiced more vigorously. A puranic text from the period connects different colours of the skin with the four varnas. This further indicates pronounced distinctions on the basis of varna becoming rampant in the Gupta age.

WOMEN IN GUPTA AGE

Like slaves and untouchables, the condition of women in the Gupta age was also deplorable. Kamasutra, written in the Gupta period, that is otherwise considered to be the vade mecum of love, has in it a repressive code of conduct for women that justifies and elucidates their subordination. It propounds that women lead an extremely restrained life necessarily centered around their husbands. Kamasutra seeks to legitimise heterosexual relationships between upper caste men and women of any caste. The Gupta period also saw the first self-immolation (sati) of a widow after the death of her husband.

Kamasutra seeks to legitimise heterosexual relationships between upper caste men and women of any caste. The Gupta period also saw the first self-immolation (sati) of a widow after the death of her husband. This has been discussed in the Brihaspati Smriti. Women were regarded as items of property

that could be loaned or given to anyone. Interestingly, women of higher varnas were subordinated to a greater degree.

BUDDHISM IN GUPTA AGE

Buddhism flourished in the Gupta age. Various architectural developments took place in this era. The greatest achievements of the Gupta sculpture are from the three schools of Buddhist sculpture namely Mathura, Varanasi, and Nalanda. Buddhism, however, experienced a downward trend as the Gupta age advanced. Its elimination accelerated just after the decline of Guptas. This can be attributed to two factors. First, the growing camaraderie between the Brahmanas and the Gupta rulers curbed the growth of Buddhism. Buddhism was no longer the recipient of patronage by the rulers. Second, though in a restricted fashion, the Shudras in Gupta age were now allowed to worship Hindu gods and read scriptures. This led to the resurgence of Hinduism and a decline of Buddhism in the hoi polloi.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND ITS ROLE

The social set-up of the Gupta age hints that the Gupta empire was certainly not a Golden age for some sects.

Why is then the Gupta age modelled as the Golden age? This takes us to the second question of this paper i.e. was there a bias in interpreting the Gupta age? The theory put forward by the Marxist school of historiographers is that nationalist historiographers, back in the days of freedom struggle, wanted to draw an implicit moral and didactic lesson for contemporary India. It was an attempt to awaken and instil a spirit of nationalism in the masses, an archetype to follow and learn. Their interpretations of Gupta history are heavily emotional and tend to push us into a reverie of nostalgia.

A much stringent version of this reasoning is propounded by contemporary Marxist historians. As per them, since the Gupta era was a period of Brahmanical revival, labelling it as a golden age would legitimize a lot of things including Hindu totalitarianism. This theory, however, can be questioned as the Gupta age was not the only time of Hindu revival. The reason for choosing Guptas over other Deccan empires could probably be the antiquity of the Guptas. A clean slate offers a lot to write. The slate, in this case, was a bygone empire. The Gupta era gave nationalist historiographers a lot of room to employ their imaginations and construct a golden age in early history.



CONCLUSION

True, the Gupta age was golden for the elite masses as can be assessed from the art and literature, but this could never have been the case for the working masses. With the bondage of peasants, a caste system more rigid than ever before, and the steadily deteriorating position of women, it can hardly be considered a golden age for lower orders. All ages are

golden for the elites. We should seek golden ages in the future rather than trying to decoding them in the past. The most dangerous aspect of the implanting of the Hindutva version of history across Indian society is that the divide between professional history and the version of the past used to legitimize Hindu majoritarianism is increasing.

Partition and Patriarchy: *The Story of Thoa Khalsa*

BY SEETHALAKSHMI KS



On 3rd June, 1947, the last Viceroy of British India, Lord Mountbatten, announced the Partition of India into two independent nations on religious lines triggering a gruesome cycle of violent upheavals and absolute horror for millions of people. It led to one of the largest displacements in human history as millions of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs migrated over to either Pakistan or India.

The Partition of India is incessantly discussed with respect to its socio-political implications only. Gandhi, Jinnah, the two-nation theory along with its bloody legacy are the only emphasis. These are served with rough statistics on the number of people displaced, killed, brutalised, or abducted.

However, we frequently overlook accounts of genuine tragedies that were inflicted upon millions of people who turned into refugees almost overnight, fleeing across borders with barely their own lives. Nevertheless, it was women who faced a terrible predicament during this time. Many of them got “fortunate” since they did not reach the enemy hands but were killed by their family members or killed themselves to “protect” the honour of their community. There is a legion of such horrific stories on both sides of the border which reflects the deep-rooted patriarchal mindset of Indian society where women are treated as mere objects of honour. A small village of Thoa Khalsa near Rawalpindi in Pakistan has such a painful story to tell.

THE TRAGEDY OF THOA KHALSA

...About a month ago, a communal army armed with sticks, tommy guns and hand grenades surrounded the village. The villagers defended themselves as best they could... but in the end, they had to raise the white flag. Negotiations followed. A sum of Rs 10,000 was demanded... it was promptly paid. The intruders gave solemn assurance that they would not come back.

The promise was broken the next day. They returned to demand more money and in the process hacked to death 40 of the defenders. Heavily outnumbered, they were unable to resist the onslaught. Their women held a hurried meeting and concluded that all was lost but their honour. Ninety women jumped into the small well. Only three were saved-there was not enough water in the well to draw them all.

The gruesome incident mentioned in The Statesman report of 15th March 1947 expounds what happened in Thoa Khalsa. These women took their own lives in a desperate attempt to protect the honour of their family and community, to escape abduction, rape, and religious conversion. They chose death over all these possible dreadful consequences.

This mass suicide by almost ninety women is perceived as an act of bravery on the part of Sikh women who “sacrificed” their own lives to preserve the honour of their community. The survivors of the partition kept the story of the sacrifice of their sisters in their memory and celebrated it. Pamphlets were distributed glorifying their sacrifice, gurudwaras had special remembrance rituals on their memory. In Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India, Historian Gyanendra Pandey, provides one of such pamphlets distributed by the Sikh community in July 1947.

THE DEATH-DEFYING
SISTERS OF RAWALPINDI –
THE PRIDE OF POTOHAR –
THOSE BRAVE
DAUGHTERS OF GURU
ARJAN – WHO PREFERRED
VOLUNTARY DEATH –
SELF-INFLICTED OR AT
THE HANDS OF THEIR
DEAR ONES TO AN
IGNOBLE LIFE. THEY ARE
PHYSICALLY GONE. THEIR
SPIRIT IS AN UNDYING
FORCE.

Their sacrifice is painted in letters of glory but in retrospect, it is imperative to ask a certain question about this ‘mass suicide’. Was it done by the choice of these women or was it a result of a patriarchal consensus imposed upon them? It is often difficult to find answers for questions associated with such past events which are not even properly documented. All we have is memoirs of the survivors which consequently was mostly men who always remember such instances with great pride in the sacrifices of their women. Hence, we are unaware of what exactly those women were feeling.

THE QUESTION OF “HONOUR”

All the deaths in Thoa Khalsa during the partition cannot simply be viewed as voluntary sacrifices made by some hundred women but a result of

deep-rooted patriarchal notions ingrained in our society. Women either were not given much of a choice in the matter or they considered taking their own lives as how a woman performs her duty towards her community. In either way, this would still be the result of a community-orchestrated decision, rather than the individual decision of a woman.

Urvashi Butalia in her book *The Other Side of Silence* provides accounts of those who managed to survive the bloody partition. Mangal Singh was one among them who reached Amritsar after an arduous journey. He also was familiar with a story where women became martyrs for the sake of honour.

After leaving home we had to cross the surrounding boundary of water. And we were many family members, several women and children who would not have been able to cross the water, to survive the flight. So we killed - they became martyrs - seventeen of our family members, seventeen lives... our hearts were heavy with grief for them, grief and sorrow, their grief, our grief. So we travelled, laden with sorrow, not a paisa to call our own, not a bite of food to eat... but we had to leave. Had we not done so, we would have been killed, the times were such.

In his story, those women “offered” themselves for death since that was preferable to rape and conversion. And according to him, those women never were afraid of death. *“The real fear was one of dishonour. If they had been caught by the Muslims, our honour, their honour would have been sacrificed, lost. It’s a question of one’s honour... if you have pride you do not fear.”*

According to his recollections, the biggest threat to their families, and indeed for entire communities, was the loss of honour as a result of conversion to another religion. There were indeed very high rates of forced conversions on both sides of the border during the partition. But women were denied the chance to live in the angst of possible conversion.

According to this, women’s sexuality constituted a serious threat because they were more “susceptible” to conversion, and the idea of these women being impregnated by men of other religions was a very real possibility, destroying their family’s honour. So they killed their mothers, wives, daughters and sisters to protect their honour. That was all left for them. And women who were grown to be faithful to their family and community offered themselves to die. Men could die fighting but women are unable to defend themselves and therefore death was the easiest way out. Most of them preferred it by the hands of their kin rather than enemy men. This whole narrative showed how ‘vulnerable’ women were perceived and how they considered themselves inferior to men.

THE WELL OF SACRIFICE

Basant Kaur was a survivor from Thoa Khalsa, not because she chose not to jump the well, but because the well was already full of dead bodies to drown her. *“Many girls were killed. Then Mata Lajjawanti, she had a well near her house, in a sort of garden. Then all of us jumped into that... I also went in, I took my two children, and then we jumped in... the well filled up, and we could not drown...the children survived. Later, Nehru went to see the well, and the English then closed it up, the well that was full of bodies.”*

Men usually instigate war or violence but women, in the end, would be the worst victims of any such upheavals. The heart-wrenching tragedy at Thoa Khalsa manifests the gendered violence of partition. It also demonstrates how a woman’s sexuality threatens everything that patriarchy stands for. However, It would be wrong to conclude that all these women were forced to commit suicide. Women themselves might have decided to end their lives. As Urvashi Butalia remarked, the lines between choice and coercion must have been blurred. Seven decades have passed since the partition, it is almost impossible to find the truth about what exactly happened there.

India’s partition should not be restricted to history texts. It had been a long, drawn-out process with several ramifications. We missed the vital lessons that partition had to offer—the undeniable outcome of communal hatred and conflict—by disregarding the voices of survivors. More than at any other point in history, India today requires such lessons to remind us of what would happen if we continue to embrace communalism.

Partition also illustrates one of the most horrendous forms of gendered violence. It gives us a lens through which we can assess the extent of influence that patriarchy holds in our society. Some of the survivors’ experiences serve as a reminder of contemporary women’s issues. Some of the partition survivors were women who were kidnapped by ‘others’ and struggled with their identification as members of the rival community. Some of them were abducted as Hindus, married as Muslims, and were eventually reunited as Hindus after going through a series of cruel and agonising “choices.”

The struggle between women’s individualism and the honour of the community is still going on now. The rising number of honour crimes reported in India demonstrates the patriarchal mindset’s growing influence in our culture. Violence against women is still pervasive in the country as well as in the world. This isn’t likely to change anytime soon. Not until every woman understands how everything and everyone around her is conspiring against her.



DISPELLING THE ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL INIQUITIES OF OBESE IDENTITY: *From Genesis to the Quotidian*

BY VIBHUTI PATHAK AND SOUVIK BISWAS

— “ —

“But let me, even in my sorrow, eat. There is no thing more shameless than the belly; however tried we are, whatever pain assails our heart, the hateful stomach claims its right to be remembered.”

— ” —

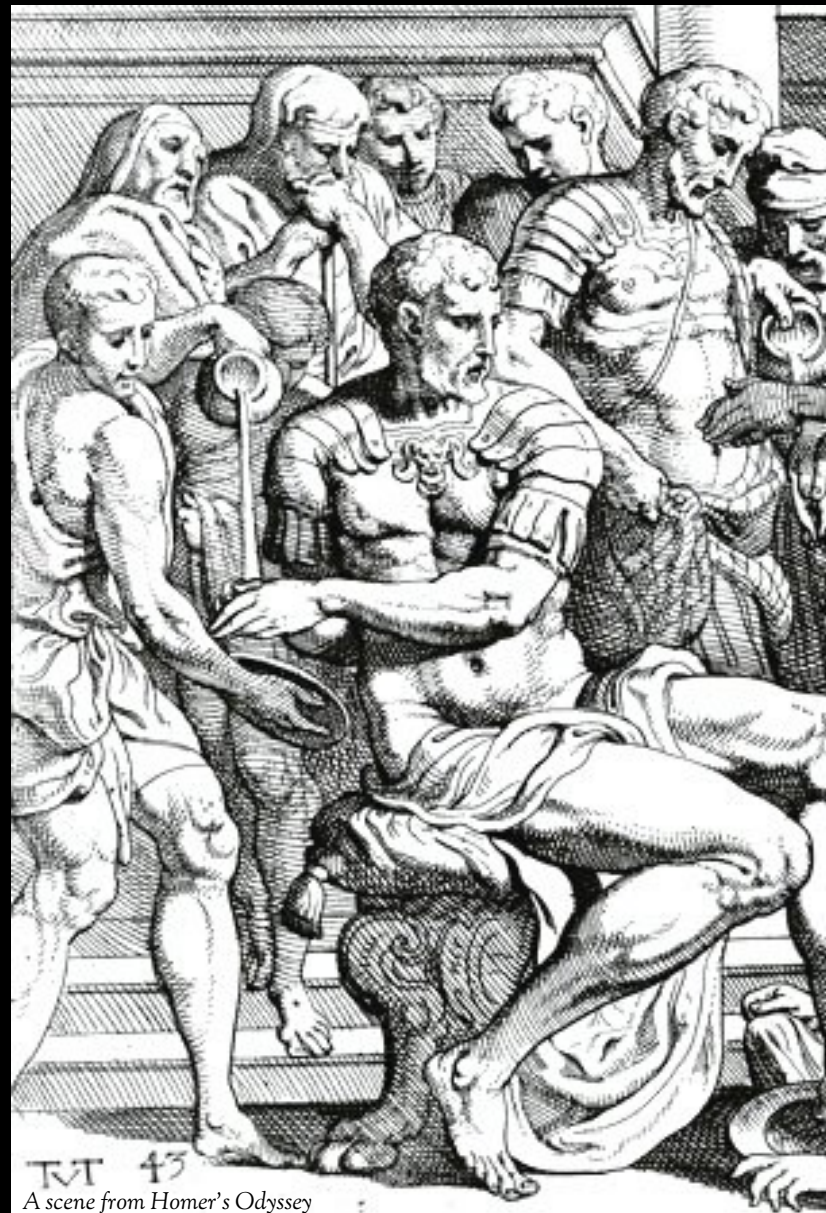
In the lines above, Homer chastises the pernicious craving of Odysseus — the ‘brilliant’ protagonist of his saga the *Odyssey* — for which he desists, at least temporarily, his awaited homecoming. Composed sometime between the eighth and seventh century BCE, this vignette pinks the bromide that surrounds the stigmatised notion of “obesity”, and also, perhaps, the tandem sophistry which associates moot moral negligence with the same.

Over time, as the society evolved from nomadic and semi-nomadic encampments to sedentary dwellings, so did gradually materialise the contemporary human dream of access to unlimited food and delicacies from across the globe, with minimum energy expended to attain them. However, claiming that this transition from hunter-gatherer societies to an urbane culture is what merely gave genesis to the omniscience of the words 'fat' and 'obese' will be an oversimplification, an attenuated truth. Obviously, the smirch befalling someone who is fat is more complex than a simple paradigm of available food and the effort spent to obtain it, as will be evident from a study of its cultural history.

EVOLUTION OF OBESITY IN ART

One of the earliest instances of attaching aesthetic and cultural connotations to an obese body comes from female figurines dating more than 20,000 years ago found across Eurasia. Venus of Willendorf, one of these figurines, featuring a 'squat body', with 'bulbous contours, pendulous breasts, and prominent belly', offers evidence of prehistoric goddess worship centred around fertility, femininity, and motherhood. The female fat body was, therefore, adulated affirmatively in prehistoric times and linked with sexual attractiveness and fecundity. Several similar figurines, called 'the fat ladies of Malta' unearthed from Maltese islands, have been found buried with the dead. In contrast to the dross corpses, they allegorise a desired bodily form, associated with a 'perfect' afterlife. The Egyptian God Hapy, the divine representation of annual flooding of the Nile river and, thus, the harbinger of prosperity has also been depicted with 'sagging breasts and large belly, which were meant to represent his fecundity.' The scarcity of resources, during this time, certainly had a deteriorating impact on health, making an obese body a symbol of affluence and beauty rather than a miasma.

At the dawn of the first millennium, with the spread of Christianity, arose a condemnation of 'gluttony', a term often confused with obesity. In Christianity, gluttony became a shameful and sinful act that could have the grim consequence of inhibiting



A scene from Homer's Odyssey

the very possibility of an individual's salvation. This is reflected in Philo's (of Alexandria) description of Eve's inability to spurn the temptations of the snake leading Eve and Adam "out of a state of simplicity and innocence into one of wickedness" marked by an inability to refuse earthly temptations. From a tousled desire, the definition of gluttony became linked with abject overindulgence and rapaciousness; there, however, exists no sin in corpulence or a fat body.

Parallel to the castigation of greed in medieval Europe, religious authorities in medieval Japan viewed the lending of money at high interest (a sign of selfishness) as a moral fault that was vigorously criticised. A picture frame from yamai-zōshi, picture-scroll of illnesses of medieval Japan, portrays an obese woman money-lender who suffered moral downfall due to the misbegotten abundance and wealth. Her



degrading physical health was seen as retribution. Thus, an obtuse trend is observable: to a visually aesthetic and affluent image of an 'obese' body was added the egregious blot of moral religious innings.

However, till later times, a 'beautiful' female body continued to be conceived in phrases like "fat, white, and tender"; even the "gentle, beautiful maiden" of the *Romance of Rose* — a French poem of the later middle ages — is "rather big". Similarly, full and rounded women in paintings of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1643) gave rise to the adjective 'Rubenesque' for plumpness and female sexuality rather than a 'stigmatised excess'.

FROM BAD TO UGLY

"My waist is monstrously wide, I am as square as a cube, my skin is red, speckled with yellow."

In one of her letters from the end of the seventeenth century, Elizabeth Charlotte, the Palatine Princess, gives the reader this image of herself.

The increased attention to physical traits now came to be accompanied by a more pointed criticism of size. Literature from the fifteenth century onwards also began to mock gourmand individuals in great detail — greatly dilated faces with small eyes, heads hunched into slumping chests, round shoulders, and prominent stomachs. For example, Commynes mocks the English king Edward as he dies in 1483 for being "choked" by his own weight: "He took pleasure more than one ought, fearing no one, became fat and full, and at a young age his excesses overtook him and he died suddenly of apoplexy." Noticeable here is a metamorphosis in beliefs as not only is the notion of an obese body assimilated to the deadly vice of gluttony, but is also ridiculed as a dangerous falling.

Beauty, though not openly expressed in correlation with a slim body yet, was gradually budging towards the same through indirect inferences. The sixteenth century, for instance, witnessed a development detrimental to the image of the obese as the 'corset era' era commenced. This 'flagrant' fashion trend that jeopardised health compelled women to sport a tightly laced attire, presumably, to get a slender, 'attractive' waist. Anne de France, a French princess, wrote of a young woman who is "so tightly strapped into her clothes that her heart gives out." More importantly, new adjectives like slowness, oafishness, laziness, and ignorance came to describe fatness from the Renaissance period onwards. Hence, we see formation of an identity of the obese that somewhat resembles contemporary anathemas and connotations of 'the sinned, the ugly and the unfit'.

INIMITABLE OR INIMICAL?

Instances like these point to ossified inferences of undesirable, rather 'displeasing', imagery that now surrounds obese people. Making humiliating or derogatory comments on someone's physique and body weight or size have come to constitute a culture of 'body shaming'. Unintentional and even jocund remarks on diet and eating habits may invigorate deep-seated atrocities and make the person self-conscious.

Souvik Biswas, a second year undergraduate student at Hindu College, shares his traumatic experiences of being an obese student:

"I have been a healthy child. It was smooth sailing as I was the cutest child, and grabbed everyone's attention and affection. As I grew older, this affection turned into repugnance as the tag of 'being fat' was attached to my body.

School should be a reformatory space. But during my school years, I faced a lot of harassment in Physical Education (P.Ed) periods. In class 4, as I was running a round of the track my classmates began to mock my manoeuvres and started calling me names like 'small elephant'. I was vexed and embarrassed at the same time. The weighing machine is what I dreaded the most. In secondary school, I was asked to stand on the weighing machine in order to calculate BMI. The entire class laughed and ridiculed my weight, calling me pregnant. Consequently, I avoided all school fests or picnics. This was when I realised that being fat cannot coincide with beauty.

As an obese boy, I always get advised to hop on to the gym. Whenever I visit a doctor in case of illness, I get harshly criticised for not losing weight. These stereotypical societal wisdoms have sadly been planted into our brain. Body negativity started entering my life through the PED period."

There are, however, many cultures and traditions ubiquitous in small communities across the world, which stand in conspicuous dichotomy to the stigmas attached to the fat body. An ancient African custom called 'Leblouh', still prevalent in Mauritania and some other Saharan countries, involves force feeding girls from a tender age and making them fat to gain 'prestige' in the community. Strenuously obese and 'tender' women symbolise beauty, wealth, and high stature, while their slim counterparts are cast out of social and conjugal stature. They believe that body size equals the space a woman occupies in her husband's heart! Petite women are considered a disgrace. Nauru, a tiny island country in the South Pacific, boasts of the highest rate of obesity in the world. Apart from feminine beauty and fertility embraced in obesity, rotund men are preferred in the Nauru society for strength competitions. Similarly, the French Polynesian Island of Tahiti practices 'Haapori' (lit. 'to fatten') where young women are plumped and presented to the chief for fertility and beauty inspection. More recently, the Korean 'mukbang' trend has attained global viewership and imitation.

From an outsider's perspective, this significant reversal in the attitude towards obesity may appear enticing in contrast to a society that denounces fleshy



Venus of Willendorf by Jorge Royan

and fuller bodies. But what value does this 'alternative' society hold if all this comes with the deprivation of one's liberty? However one may perceive these traditions, they reflect nothing more than an untoward and prejudiced behaviour based on one's body size.

THE CAPITALISING TENDENCY

If we talk about urban and suburban areas, it is the capitalist players who have made the most out of the deadly 'vice' of 'gluttony' and the extravagance of both inexpensive and pricey food items. Fast food joints, international chains, and full service restaurants selling packaged food in an attractive manner, at relatively low cost and quick delivery become a habit, especially in young people. In India, a similar trend is evident from the growing success and competition of food joints like Subway, KFC, Wendy's, Burger King, and so on. This novel culture has received a greater impetus during the pandemic with 'work from home' scenarios and reduced physical activities. Increasing consciousness about health led to leapfrogging



Elizabeth Charlotte, Duchess of Orleans (1652-1722) by Pierre Michel Guillemard.

Scroll of Diseases and Deformities (Corpulent Woman), shihon chakushoku yamai zōshi (himan onna) (zanketsu)



demands for 'slim shakes', another adroit strategy benefitting international brands. The USA has, thus, been able to exercise enormous soft power through its consumer network with companies filling their pockets from both sides, i.e. food joints and slim shakes.

Another discomfiting addition to the identity of the obese has been the phenomenon widely known as the 'fat tax'. The fashion industry conventionally practices ebullient discrimination against body types that don't fall in the 'normal' category; this normal is more 'aspirational than factual'. Plus-size customers are charged an extra fee on clothing for monetary benefits and for the 'acceptance' of their body types by the fashion industry, in the guise that "Okay, well, you're bigger so it takes more material" — a form of 'inclusivity' practiced exclusively for the plus-sized. The stigma of being fat follows a person even after death, as oversized caskets cost more.

IS THERE A WAY OUT?

The answer to this question is simple. There is no 'way out'. The scorn and mockery detailed above has persisted despite tremendous endeavours and movements advocating body equality. The obese have metted through social, cultural, and professional stigmatisation, and bullying.

Plus-sized models are now seen walking on fashion show ramps, an exemplary reminder of social acceptability. But unfortunately, the biases and stereotypes still faced by the obese in their everyday lives raise the question of whether they have actually traversed far enough to surpass these challenges. Apart from this, even cultures that see beauty in 'fatness' and associate a slim body with disgrace are no different than a society where the slim body is rejoiced. The 'accepted' body types in both these social formations have to undergo equivalent perils — be it through forceful eating or through deliberate skipping of meals to lose fat.

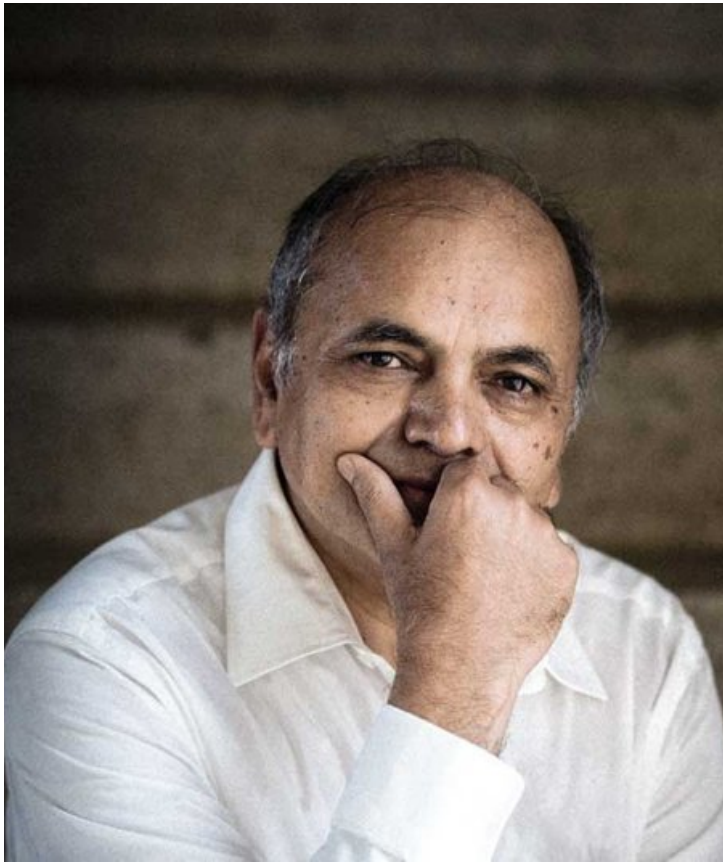
The solution, therefore, to this seemingly sisyphian task is the 'way in'. Souvik shares his epiphany:

The Corona pandemic came like a blessing in disguise for me. I got time to think about myself and understood that obesity is an acquired trait. I drifted away from hating my own body and gradually developed a feeling of positivity within myself.



Helene Fourment, Oil on canvas by Alte Pinakothek

A positive body attitude firstly comes through the acceptance of one's own body. It is only then that one becomes capable of appreciating other body types, thus, creating a socially acceptable environment. Secondly, this can be instilled through proper educational attainment and awareness. Even the adoption of a people-first language can have a profound impact. Rather than calling someone "an obese person", a more inclusive and positive image can be created by referring to them as "a person with obesity". American singer, rapper, songwriter and flutist, Melissa Viviane Jefferson, known professionally as Lizzo, stands as a strong symbol of a positive body image. She states that self-love for her was not a choice, but "literal survival" and how she had to find a way through her teenage years to normalise her own identity to herself. "I'm going to continue to live in this body and survive in this body and be happy and actually enjoy life, I need to find a way to like myself." Fat, curvy, slim, chubby, paunchy, lean, stocky, stout, lanky and slender people, among others, have existed and will continue to do so. Instead of 'normalising' a particular body type we should strive towards 'sensitising' the society towards all of them.



Q&A

The Language Talk

INTERVIEWED BY ARYAN PANDEY

Padma Shri
DR. GN DEVY

It is a matter of utmost pleasure for us and for the entire team of Hindu College Gazette and the Symposium Society to host Padma Shri Dr. GN Devy with us for this conversation. I Aryan, on behalf of Hindu College Gazette and the entire team of The Symposium Society, offer my warmest welcome and greetings to Dr. Devy. Although you all must be familiar with the great work of Dr. Devy and his activism, the prestigious contributions of Dr. Devy to society is not just in the field of linguistics. His contributions also expand to social equality, tribal justice and so on. He is the man behind the People's Linguistic Survey of India, which is the largest ever survey of languages in history. The survey was carried out by 3000 volunteers, and was published in over 50 multilingual volumes. He has also been a professor of English for about 15 years. Among dozens of international and national awards that Dr. Devy has received includes the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award, which Sir also returned in protest against attacks on the Indian intellectuals. He was awarded the SAARC Writers' Foundation Award in 2001, Prince Claus Award in 2003 and Padma Shri in 2014. In Hindi there's a saying, 'kos kos par paani barse, chaar kos par vaani'.

Sir, I read one of your surveys stating that about 50 languages die per year in India. So in such a nation where diversity is basic to our identity, history and y society, how is it to see the languages and cultures dying? Before delving into these details, I would request you to please enlighten us regarding the PLSI and the root cause of all this.

In human history, there has been a trend that wherever there is enough water and the soil is fertile, people who came 'out of Africa' thousands of years ago, settled and survived without having to move ahead in their migration.

Now, for any language, to be a language, to remain alive and to allow

that language to grow in all its domains, a certain minimum number of speakers or listeners are necessary. Not just two, but several hundreds. In this process of migration, because people did not necessarily have to move ahead, many of them settled at one place and developed large families. I'm going back to the time that's roughly 40,000 years before our time. These large families, in linguistics, are called, 'Population Knots'. They become the basis of a new language. In the Indian subcontinent, because of the availability of large rivers, fertile soil and plenty of animals to hunt, these many languages started growing side by side. That is how, as you described, 'kos kos pe pani badle, chaar kos pe vaani' happened

in this country. We became a civilisation, a subcontinent of great language diversity. There are three most important language diversity spots in the world. They are in Asia and the Pacific. One is India, another is Indonesia and the third is Papua New Guinea. The maximum number of languages are in Papua New Guinea, followed by India and then Indonesia. This is the historical context.

Now, I move to the 21st century, that is our present time. At the beginning of this Millenium (2000 AD), we did not have a clear idea about the number of languages spoken in the country and the number of languages that are actually alive. There was earlier a

survey carried out by a very dedicated Irish scholar, George Grierson, a century ago; but that survey was old, the map of India at that time was different, and Grierson had not been able to cover all of it. So, it was there, but it was not complete. Similarly, there was the Census of India giving a list of languages claimed by people as their mother tongues; but the census data, as disclosed to people, was very often truncated, compressed and inadequate data.

When I was your age and if somebody asked a question regarding how many languages India has, there was no easy answer. I would have said at that time that "there is a certain number of languages included in the 8th Schedule, but there are also others. There are languages for which the Sahitya Akademi gives literary awards, but there are more." So, there was no fixed count of languages. Because there was no fixed count of languages in the country, developmental activities were not brought together with the linguistic reality. Often people were given such development projects, which would induce migration out of their own language zone. Suppose some people who speak the Asuri language and are forced to migrate to Delhi, there they become quite helpless, their children suffer in schools, they feel alienated in society. All of this happening with one language can happen with hundreds of other languages. (I found in the PLSI, the People's Linguistics Survey exercise, the presence of over 700 languages) So if it happens to those 700 languages or most of them then the cumulative effect on the society would be enormous. It is a disturbing effect. It involves a great human tragedy, because people's mother tongues (matra bhasha) are denied. People's developmental opportunities are minimized.

In order to overcome these difficulties, I decided to start that language survey. That survey is now published in book form. Volumes are already available in libraries and to members of the public.

Yes, sir. I was reading some of your statements, and I found an interesting perspective of yours that literally links this linguistic diversity to contemporary society. It says, "in order to protect our democracy, we need to keep our languages alive." Sir, how exactly can we relate languages to our democracy on a national forum?

When the idea of democracy started developing in Europe, it took two distinct paths. One was a democracy wedded to the idea of nation, as in Italy, and Germany. There was a second idea of democracy that was wedded to the idea of freedom, as in Ireland, or in Spain. There were also other models of nations enjoying democracy. One was the British model. The other was the American model. We chose a model of democracy which is wedded to the idea of freedom. We became a democratic country through our freedom struggle. We do not call it our 'national struggle', we call it 'freedom struggle'. There's a vast difference between these concepts. Similarly, we did not become a unitary country, we became a federal country. If you open the Constitution of India, in the very first part you will find a sentence which says, 'We the people of India, that is Bharat, which is a Union of States'. India is a Union of States. So, India does not precede the union of states, the union of states precedes India. This means that the idea of India presupposes the existence of many states. Similarly, the idea of our democracy presupposes a republic, a federal structure and a philosophy of freedom. Quite obviously, when you put all this together, we find that we have rested our Constitution on the cornerstone of diversity. If our diversity goes down, then to that extent, our democracy suffers, the federal structure weakens and our nation suffers. I will add that those countries in Europe which went for democracy, along with the idea of nationalism, particularly Italy, and Germany, in the 19th century, ended up inviting fascistic rules in the 20th century. The logic is that if there is excessive nationalism, it will automatically pave the way for an autocratic rule; and the Indian Constitution just does not have space for any autocratic rule. If such a rule comes, it means it is a rule or regime far removed from the spirit of the Constitution.

Sir, I was reading an article that stated that around 40% of Indians are migrants within their own nation. P. Sainath sir also argued that the indigenous skills that have thrived for millions of years, such as the weavers, the toddy tappers, etc, are dying; and the poor people who practised them are migrating to cities and are becoming labourers. And we're calling this as Skill India! how ironic it is that the skills that were millions of years old and exclusive to your own country, those skills are dying and on the

contrary, you're calling it a skill India. We say that bade shehro ko bahubhashi banna hoga, i.e, the big cities need to be multilingual. But we cannot see it happening in our own nation at least. So, can we link the urbanization of the country to the death of indigenous cultures and languages? Or can we say that the migrants in the city serve as a representative of their own culture in the cities?

Well, I will split your question into at least two parts if not more. First, let me speak about migration and then about multilingual cities. The last report on global migration that I have seen was of 2018, prepared by the United Nations experts. The report mentioned that more than 36% of the human population has now become daily migrants. And there's a definition given that if you're to travel more than 60 or 70 kilometres every day for your work, you're counted as a daily migrant. That is, one-third of humanity, out of 900 crores humans, 300 crores have become migrants. Today, the sedentary people, the settled people, landlocked land bound people are moving into a new kind of life. And we cannot expect our country to be an exception to that.

Traditionally in our country, the tribal people, and when I say 'traditionally' it is 'over the last 150 years'... because over the last 150 years the tribals became increasingly indebted to private moneylenders ever since their land was taken away by the British government; and therefore, they had to migrate during some part of the year. Now, we're very close to the Dussehra. The tribal migration begins at Dussehra, and it continues till Holi. After Holi they return back to their villages to do agriculture, because traditionally they've cultivated only for one season.

The other kind of migration is of nomadic communities who are unfortunately branded in our country as criminal communities. There are nearly 330 such communities in the country today. There have been perennially migrants. People like Banjaraas, Saasi, people like Pardhis and so on... All those kids that you see at the crossroads of cities selling balloons, mark my words, they belong to these communities perennially migrating.

The third migration is of middle classes moving from whatever their places are in hope of jobs, better

education and they naturally land in cities. But there is a caveat here. Even though India has seen a hugely increased migration, there was a tradition in the past, where a city and the surrounding villages were seen as a single unit, a single habitat. When the districts were created during the British times-- the administrative districts-- they invariably included a city or a town and a large number of villages. If there is a single town, maybe 200 or 300 or 400 villages belong to a district. That entire district at that time was a unit of production, distribution and labor processes. Today that picture has changed because the producers and the users of the produce, the consumers, have moved at a great distance. You see Aryan, if we talk of integrating our village and city today, we cannot talk about that if we keep using jeans produced somewhere in Texas or t-shirts produced somewhere in Australia. We cannot, because if we do that, if we practice consumption of goods produced over a very long distance, then we cannot hope to bring back this close-link between village and city in our country. The most we can do, unfortunately,-- and this is the second best option--- (point not completed)

The first best option is to rethink our ecological zones, where cities and villages like Harappa and the surrounding villages were one. There was a model of that, we will have to think of eco-cultural zones and think of very systematic development of the entire zone, not just the towns or not just villages in that zone, but both, because Indian civilization has been a village civilization as well as an urban civilization. We cannot leave one and only think of the other as Indian civilization. It is the organic link that mattered. And if we want that organic link again, all of us will have to change our ways of life. But if we cannot do that, because it is not easy to do, we may have to go for the second best option.

And the second best option is to develop villages, at least to the tune of small towns, i.e., they should have colleges, public libraries, proper drinking water facilities and transportation and vehicles. Therefore, they will need a petrol station or a gas station, they will need electricity and so on. So, the facilities that the village is getting should be available in the villages. At the moment what we are all doing, to whichever party we belong, to

whichever state we belong, is to go for this second best alternative that we have. But please remember that this second best alternative is not a sustainable alternative in the long term. After 50 years or 60 years, we might all think that we made a big mistake in going for that kind of urban development for villages as well. We obviously cannot turn a city into a village. We should not turn a village into a city; and therefore ultimately in the long run, we will have to think of an organic link of production, distribution and labor practices that covers villages and cities alike. That is as far as the migration problem is concerned. It is then that the migration will become less dangerous, less risky.

The second question you had was about multilingual cities. The Indian cities have been multilingual all along. In Kalidasa's plays, there are four or five languages. If I go to Delhi or Bombay I easily hear 100 or 200 languages if I walk a distance of about 3-5 kilometres. All that we need to do is to recognize that the cities have always been multilingual. While the cities are multilingual, our policy still imagines a city like Bhopal to be only Hindi, a city like Chennai to belong only to Tamil speaking, a city like Guwahati to be only Assamese speaking. It is like when a child grows up, parents still keep calling that child Chintu, Pintu, Pinky, Rinky; but in reality, the child has grown. So we have to have a very realistic attitude to our cities and recognize their multilingualism as a source of strength rather than as a problem.

Sir, we have been independent for about 75 years now. But I still can't say that we are now free from the effects that colonialism had on us. The cultural slavery somehow still exists; and you also talked about it. Wearing clothes made in Texas and all is destroying the local production chain. In this context, I was reading a book by renowned environmentalist Shri Anupam Mishra Ji. The book was titled 'Saaf Maathe ka Samaj'. I am quoting from it, "mai yah manta hoon ki kisi ilaake ki jo bhi samasya mein hai, wo uski bhasha mein hi samne aati hain, aur uski bhasha me hi uske hal nikalte hain. Antatah bhasha yani kewal zubaan nahin hai, zubaan ek ang hai. Lekin jeebh ka sanchalan dimag se hota hai. To ek bhasha wishesh ka dimag bhi banta hai. Wah dimag wahaan ke paryavaran aur uske samaj se banta hai. Usmein us samaj ki safalta aur asafalta bhi

shamil hoti hai. Usmein uski thokron se bhi dimag banta hain. Safalta ke phool wa phal ke sath, asafalta ki bhi pattiyan girti hai patjhad wali. Wah bhi samaj ko, uski bhasha ko dubara khad banakar deti hai. Apni galtiyan se bhi samaj seekhta hai. Bhasha aur samaj ka is tarah se main rishta dekhta hoon." We say that we are now a modern society with developed infrastructure. But our national capital is flooded within two hours of rain. So, can we say that all this is happening because we lost the treasures of knowledge and wit in the native cultures, languages and tribes is now literally lost? Can we link these two things?

We can, but the question is should we? We certainly can. Now, let us look at this. I fully agree with Anupam Mishra. I agree with every word of what you read out and more that you did not read out. But let us look at this question slightly differently. And it is, did we have those languages before the British arrived here? The answer is "yes, we had those languages" Do you think that we had found answers to some of these problems before the arrival of the British? So we'll say "no, we did not." Then somebody might go further and say, "but because the Mughals were there, the Turks were there, or the Arabs were there," etc. Let's, in imagination, go beyond that period also. Had we found answers to many of these issues? And we have to return from that question with a degree of disappointment.

Yeah, I mean, we did not actually figure out how human life can be happy for everybody, not just for some. And therefore, if we keep going back like that, trying to see if we were happy at any time in the past, was everybody happy in our society at any time, we come up with an observation. Unmistakably, we come up with the observation that it is the caste system in our society, which is at the root of many of these evils. It is the caste system which ruled out minimum human comfort for a large number of people. The caste system controlled education in such a way that women were kept out. And as a result, women who are an important part of the production chain of a society, could not bring their knowledge to the field of knowledge. What we called knowledge, prior to the British, prior to the Mughal, prior to whoever you want... I mean however long back, you want to go into the history of the last 3000 years, i.e., from the

beginning of the Vedas till today. We ill treated women in this country. There are names of Vedic rishis; But where are those Vedic Rishinis? There are none. I mean, there is an occasional exception. But that exception is found in a market that is in a math, i.e., in a codified, branded, qualified, canonized small group of scholars. There are occasional women scholars, such as some mathematicians and physicists, somebody who composed Sukta and all that.

We kept women out, and we kept laboring classes out of anything that we thought was of value. As a result, metaphorically, we kept nature out of culture. For culture, the Hindi word is sanskriti. So, those who have Sanskrit, have sanskriti. We thought this is culture and women, the Scheduled Castes-- today we call them Scheduled Castes or dalit--, and other castes, laboring classes are unfortunately kept 'outside' culture. So we have drawn a deep wedge between nature and culture a long time back. And in all the succeeding eras, whenever a new force came to India and dominated it, we took only those things from that force, which allowed us to keep nature and culture away.

The brahmanical sanskriti and the rest of India remained separate. We did it during the Mughal times too. We did it during the Colonial Times. Our Brahmins, and I'm not talking about a Brahmin caste but Brahmin Mental mindset, our 'cultural Brahmins', I thought they were like the British Lords. They acquired every good thing that the British had for themselves only. Ambedkar had to struggle against this, battle against this. People like Gandhi had to struggle against this. Gandhi brought women to the social presence and Ambedkar brought the Dalits to social presence. I agree that colonialism was bad and so were the other foreign rules, I do not deny that. But worse than colonialism and other rules was our internal colonialism. We accepted external colonialism because we were internally colonized. Our people started calling the British government "Maai baap Sarkar!". You know, at the height of the British colonial rule in India, there were not more than seven lakh British soldiers in India as against about 30-40 crores Indians. Indians could easily overwhelm them physically, but they did not do so, because we were internally colonized. Colonization has been a long term mental condition of the Indian way of thinking. And

we need to change that by bringing in new forces from all over the world. So let us blame ourselves as much as we blame others for where we are. There is a lovely sentence in one of Shakespeare's plays. And the sentence says, "it is in us that we are underlings, Dear Brutus, and not in our stars." The colonial experience was terrible. I don't justify it, I condemn it. But I cannot say that all that is evil here is because of that. A lot of it is homemade. Indians have made this internal colonialism, hatred for women, hatred for dalits for a very long time; and now we are doing it again.

Sir, it was a very good answer. Thank you for that. One more question. There is an ongoing national debate over what should be the national language of the country, and even some school textbooks mention Hindi as the national language and children memorize it. I am a Bhojpuri speaker, my mother tongue is Bhojpuri. But there is no script of Bhojpuri, but it has its own ancient culture and words. There's a statement, and I'll just ask that upto what extent do you agree with it. "Angrezi Hindi ke sath jo karti hai, wahi kaam Hindi Bhojpuri, Awadhi aur anya chhoti bhashaon ke sath karti hain"(Whatever English does to Hindi, Hindi does the exact same thing to Bhojpuri, Awadhi and other small languages). What are your views on this?

I would like to tell you three things here.

The first thing is that Angrezi is not doing anything to Hindi. Hindi is doing something to itself. And the second thing is Bhojpuri was claimed in the last census (2011) by more than five crore and several lakhs as their mother tongue. It is today the world's fastest growing language. You will be surprised to know this. There are two languages that are the fastest growing languages in the world. One is the Basque language in Spain and the other is Bhojpuri in India. It has got its music, cinema, theater, oral traditions, literature, graffiti, newspapers everything. So Bhojpuri's star is a rising star. As a speaker of Bhojpuri, I would like to assure you that the star of Bhojpuri is the rising star and not the declining star.

But your other question is about Hindi. Can Hindi be the Rashtrabhasha(National language)? Our courts, our Constitution and our governments have given a very clear

answer that it is at best a Rajyabhasha and not Rashtrabhasha. People often confuse Rajyabhasha as Raaj karne ki bhasha yani Rashtrabhasha. And, you know this confusion is of greatest interest to me sociologically. The interest is that Indian people have never thought that the government is all for them. Indian people have believed in feasts, festivals, dances, music, of their own, myths, dreams, legends of their own. The state plays a very minimal role in the life of Indian people; and that's how the Indian state should be.

So when people think that Rajyabhasha is Rashtrabhasha, they're confusing between the two. In India, which is made of many language groups, every language should be the language of our Rashtra. Tamil should be a Rashtrabhasha, Malayalam should be a Rashtrabhasha, Hindi should be a Rashtrabhasha. That is what our Rashtra is all about. We need two or three Rajyabhashas, that should be enough. And if Hindi serves that purpose, I have no objection. My only objection is to the kind of Hindi used in sarkari correspondence. It is beyond my comprehension. I just don't understand the words they use. It will require very super brainy Indians to understand what the government writes to people or what the government writes to itself. Nobody knows, even people in the government don't understand what is written in that kind of Hindi which the government uses. In any case, people of the country use a loose kind of Hindi, jo Hindi cinema me milti hain, geeton mein milti hai, and everybody's happy with that. Thus there are two Hindis: One is the Hindi of the people, jo rashtra ki hai. And second is Hindi of the government, which is Rajya ki Hindi. The government has accepted that Hindi as Rajyabhasha. I wish it Good luck, I hope it survives. Rashtra ki jo Hindi hai, which is spoken everywhere and about which people don't grumble at all, because the Indian people are multilingual. The Gujaratis speak that Hindi, but they speak Gujarati as well. Marathi speakers speak that Hindi but they speak Marathi as well. And there has never been a battle between the two. This bogey of Hindi as "the language" is now and then raised when employment in UP and MP goes down. When there are frustrated young people with no jobs, then some leader comes along and says, look, your language is the language of the nation so you have reason to feel proud. Uske jeb mein paisa nahi hai. Jaise ek Hindi gaana

hai, it says "Chin-o-Arab hamara, Hindostan hamara, rehne ko ghar nahi hai, sara jahan hamara!". So it's a false pride which is generated. In India, we will be happy with its many languages and many speakers of many languages, only because India is a Union of States and not a nation imposed on those states.

I just have one last question. Sir, every period in the past, whether it be any civilization, has had a language of intellect. In India, at some point maybe it was Prakrit, or Brahmi, or even Persian language has also been the language of intellectuals at some point in history. So, according to you, at present, whether it be India or the world, which language can be called that it's the language of intellect of today's time?

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Computer languages, they are doing most of our intellectual work, because most of our intellectual activities are happening in silence. Teaching is through a medium which is silent. It doesn't allow a human kind of interaction. Publications are happening in silence without voice. And increasingly, we're moving towards languages, which are visual languages, more than oral languages. All over the world, in the process of evolution, big changes are taking place. But in the past, at least for the times, during which we know something about our languages, which is 4000 years from the times of the Harappan Civilization, we know something about their scripts if not about their speech.

There was a presence of several languages in that remote time. Similarly, when Sanskrit arrived here, there was a proto-Assamese language, that is the mother of the Assamese, or there was a proto-Prakrit, there was a proto-Pali, the predecessor of Pali. There were many languages. Even in the classical Sanskrit period, scholars were talking about the Yavanika and the Parasika, the Greek language, Persian language and so on. When Persian became the dominant language in India, some of the best writers in modern Indian languages started emerging such as Mira, Kabir, Tulsi, Tukaram, Bhashweshwar and so on. So, India has always been multilingual in its intellectual discourse. The nature of the intellect that India has nurtured and developed is multilingual intellect; and to make it monolingual, to think of a particular language as language of intellectual discourse, is not a good idea for India. My idea of India is India with multiple languages, traditions of multiple languages, the conflict and collaboration between those languages, emergence of new languages out of that conflict and collaboration, and that's how India will go on. India is a case of human civilization which is not founded on the idea of duality- 'us' and 'them'. It is founded on the idea of plurality- 'us as well as them'. That is the premise of Indian civilization, that is how it is predicated. 'Us as well as them', not 'us' or 'them'; and I think that is India.

Even the name of this country is not one but two names, India, that is Bharat. It has at least two anthems, songs, Jana Gana Mana and Vande Mataram. It has several religions,

several languages, and different climates. I think we are beautiful people, because our gods are many, our languages are many, our food cultures are many, our textile traditions are many. We are blessed as they say in classical English, in manyfold ways. Ultimately, if we think of mono-cultural India, monolingual India, we will soon be-- because we have ideas of heroes, and we love hero worship-- we can run into the danger of accepting autocracy as a normal condition of Indian politics. It can be there as an aberration once in a while, but it should not be normalized. And therefore, plurality is the best way to protect our democracy. Diversity is the best insurance for Indian democracy. Mujhe Angrezi bahut achhi lagti hai, Hindi se bhi mera pyar hai, Bhojpuri mujhe bahut pasand hai. Dekhiye, mai teen bhasha me likhta hoon, and there is no conflict. Today morning I did one article in English. I'm now working on an article in Marathi and I don't think I'm two people. I am one person who is happy writing in Marathi as well as in English. Lekin Angrezi aur Hindi ka jhagda mat lagaiye. Love English, learn it, master it. Love Hindi, learn it, master it. Only thing is don't forget your own mother tongue in the process.

Thank You Sir! towards the end I just want to read these two lines by Firaq Gorakhpuri. It says that,

“सर-ज़मीन-ए-हिंद पर अक्वाम-ए-आलम के
'फिराक़'
क्राफ़िले बसते गए हिन्दोस्तॉ बनता गया...”

Thank You so much Sir for joining us. It was a pleasure to host you.

Flying Africans: THE IGBO LANDING STORY

BY MELEKWE ANTHONY

"The water spirit brought us here; The water spirit will take us Home..."

This story has been told over and over again for the past two hundred years. It has become a local legend, televised into movies, a subject of many novels, a folklore, and an unsolved mystery surrounding the stubborn conviction that Africans were not created to be slaves. A conviction so strong, it was worth ending 75 lives over in what we know today as the Igbo Landing. Nobel laureate Toni Morrison puts it best in her 1977 novel 'Song Of Solomon', as she writes, "Never mind you born a slave, never mind you lose your name, never mind your daddy dead, never mind nothing. Here... is what a man can do if he puts his mind to it."

It happened in 1803 during the grim years of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A shipload of captured West Africans had just arrived in Savannah, the largest city in Georgia, USA. They had survived a deadly voyage of the Middle Passage. Unlike many ships before theirs, these slaves hadn't died of malnutrition, shortage of drinking water, atrocities perpetrated by the British crew, or even the diseases spread by the vice of an overcrowded deck. They were to be sold off as hard laborers to plantation owners, rail men, and tobacco merchants. And the most sorted after amongst them were the Ibos.

The Ibo people were known for their hard work and excellent farming techniques in those days. Where they originally lived in today's Nigeria had scarce water supply for farming; yet they had the most flourishing harvest seasons in the region. Two plantation owners, John Couper and Thomas Spalding, therefore hoped to put them to use on their farms and bought 75 Ibos from the sailors to the East for about \$100 each. But as history would show, these slave owners had forgotten that the Ibos were also known throughout the American South as fetishly proud and stubbornly independent.



Jun Lee, a Catholic from South Korea, prays in front of an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe at St. James Cathedral in Seattle on March 12, 2020. On March 11, the Archdiocese of Seattle became the first in the country to announce the temporary suspension of all public Masses to help prevent the spread of coronavirus. Places of worship in the archdiocese are still open for prayer. (CNS photo/Jason Redmond, Reuters)



These 75 slaves were 'transferred' off the ship into another vessel headed down the coast to St. Simons. Having been kidnapped from their families, survived a deadly voyage aboard the bigger ship, and suffered the brutality of 'the white men', these Ibo slaves were met with one advantage on this smaller vessel called 'The Schooner York' – they outnumbered their captors. A plan was formulated and in a matter of hours the white overseers were either jumping overboard or being drowned by these black slaves. These black slaves that were believed to have no culture, no unifying language, no literacy or even human capacity of thought, committed one of Georgia's most successful mutinies of that time together, despite being chained together.

While some myths say they didn't wait until the ship arrived at St. Simons before jumping overboard, others claim they were transformed into birds after drowning and flew back to Africa. Most historical accounts ascertain that they did get to the shore and decided against joining other African slaves in the fields, but opted to drown themselves as free people rather than breathe as captives. They were led by a Chief priest among them singing in their native tongue "The water spirit brought us here, the water spirit would take us home." According to Roswell King, a nearby slave overseer at the time, they continued this march until all 75 of them could no longer walk and drowned in the Dunbar Creek.





turned
around
and walked
into
the
beam

The Legend of
IBO LANDING
St Simons Island GA

Despite many portrayals of this mass suicide, reviewers say none quite does it justice and gives it picture. Amongst these is Beyoncé's music video 'Love Drought'. The multi Grammy award-winning singer is seen marching ceaselessly into the water with other bound African women, deeper and deeper until they can go no further. And right before drowning they raise their hands to the sunset as if in reverence to the Igbo sun god Chukwu. These women are seen leaning backwards, resisting the pull of the ropes they are tied with. The video clearly depicts slavery as these women are pulled towards the beach in chains, ropes, and white robes against their wishes. But the question remains, Did they really fly?

In an interview with a former slave born around that period, Wallace Quartermann of the Federal Writers Project may have furthered the myth in accounting that "Mr. Blue he was the overseer and ... Mr. Blue went down one morning with a long whip to whip them good.... Anyway, he whipped them good and they got together and stuck that hoe in the field and then ... rose up in the sky and turned themselves into buzzards and flew right back to Africa." Some folk tellers today, especially those who tell it to children, have come to pad this event with the fallacy that it was the knowledge of African magic that made them do what they did.

While that may or may not be true, it still does not draw attention away from the fact that these 75 people risked literally everything for their freedom. They were unwilling to wait for the chance that their situation would change – like it did 63 years later, when the United States Congress finally passed the 13th amendment that abolished involuntary servitude.

But would they have even lived that long?

This event was one of the many revolts that abolished slavery. African slaves could no longer take the humiliation and harsh labor their ancestors were exposed to over and against the long-drawn onslaught of centuries. In the Baptist Slave Revolt of 1831, for instance, about 500 slaves were killed and more than half that number hung afterwards. The Nat Turner's Rebellion of the same year and the German Coast Uprising a few years earlier, all show that African slaves had gotten tired of forceful servitude and were even willing to put their lives at risk to end it.

However, even in today's world of private transport vessels, deep pocket smuggling, online cryptic connections, and e-money transfers, cases of human transport for exploitation and human trafficking are on the rise. Horribly, according to the United Nations Office For Drug and Crime, the most common of this new forms of slave trade are Sexual Exploration of Women and young girls which ranks 79% and Forced Exploitation at 18%. That said, "almost 20% of all trafficking victims are children... However, in some parts of Africa and the Mekong region, children are the majority (up to 100% in parts of West Africa)".

Is it not strange that these Igbo slaves, despite surviving horrors across the Atlantic to reach their destination, would prefer drowning to suffering harshly at the feet of fellow human beings? Is Igbo Landing not an everlasting symbol of self-worth? These Africans weren't comfortable in Slave-day America, so they asked the water to take them home.



Photo via Orlando K. Romain

MAHARANI TARABAI BHONSLE

BY SAMYA VERMA



"The warrior queen who told the Peshwas, 'Hold up ladies, I was kidding you!'"

Only kids from the 1760's will get this joke: One of the last Mughal emperors, Shah Alam 2, ruled from Old Delhi to Palam (that is, roughly, from Red Fort to The Indira Gandhi International Airport).

Alam-Palam's misery might have been alleviated somewhat had the historical tussle between the Marathas and the Mughals fared a different outcome.

Alas, some 30 years before, at a time when one branch of Chattrapati Shivaji Maharaja's progeny was 'lavishly' imprisoned and the other had succumbed to wasteful malaise of the lungs, making the score: Mughals: 2- Marathas: 1, a warrior queen arose from the ashes, single-handedly manoeuvring the reigns of Deccan and settling all scores before being forgotten under centuries of dust. This was Maharani Tarabai Bhonsle, and this is an attempt to gauge the world through her eyes.

At the dawn of 18th century, Maratha family politics was helmed by the powerful matriarch Maharani Tarabai Bhonsle. A masterful stateswoman and a formidable warrior, now largely forgotten by a mainstream history knee-deep in masculine perspectives, she was not unlike a Game-Of-Thrones-Esque figure emerging from the broiling artifices of the period. Those were the days when the great Shiva

Ji Maharaja's steadily debilitating progeny vied for power over the Deccan, and not infrequently transgressed into the steadily shrinking territories of what history termed 'Later Mughals'. During her short but eventful life, Tarabai witnessed the peak of Maratha power and their gradual decline in the later Sardars who passed on their authority to influential ministers in exchange for a life of peace and ease that had evaded the lineage for nearly a century.

The strategic genius and martial virtuosity of Tarabai was born in the playpen of the Mohite clan. She began being trained in the finer-points of war-craft just as soon as she could walk. To the little Tarabai, the sword and the stirrups became additional limbs, and the subtle conniving at the court, an extension of her mind.

As the fashion of the day warranted, she was wed early on into the Bhonsle family, a child bride of all but 8. Her betrothed was Rajaram, Shivaji Maharaj's younger son. Thence she got swept along with the intrigues of the period.

In 1680 itself a muffled turbulence behind the curtains had successfully installed the young Rajaram on the throne, but his older step brother Sambhaji, his popularity uneclipsed, eventually sidelined him to become the Chhatrapati.

Shortly afterwards, he defied an attempt by his stepmother

Sorayabai to poisonhim.

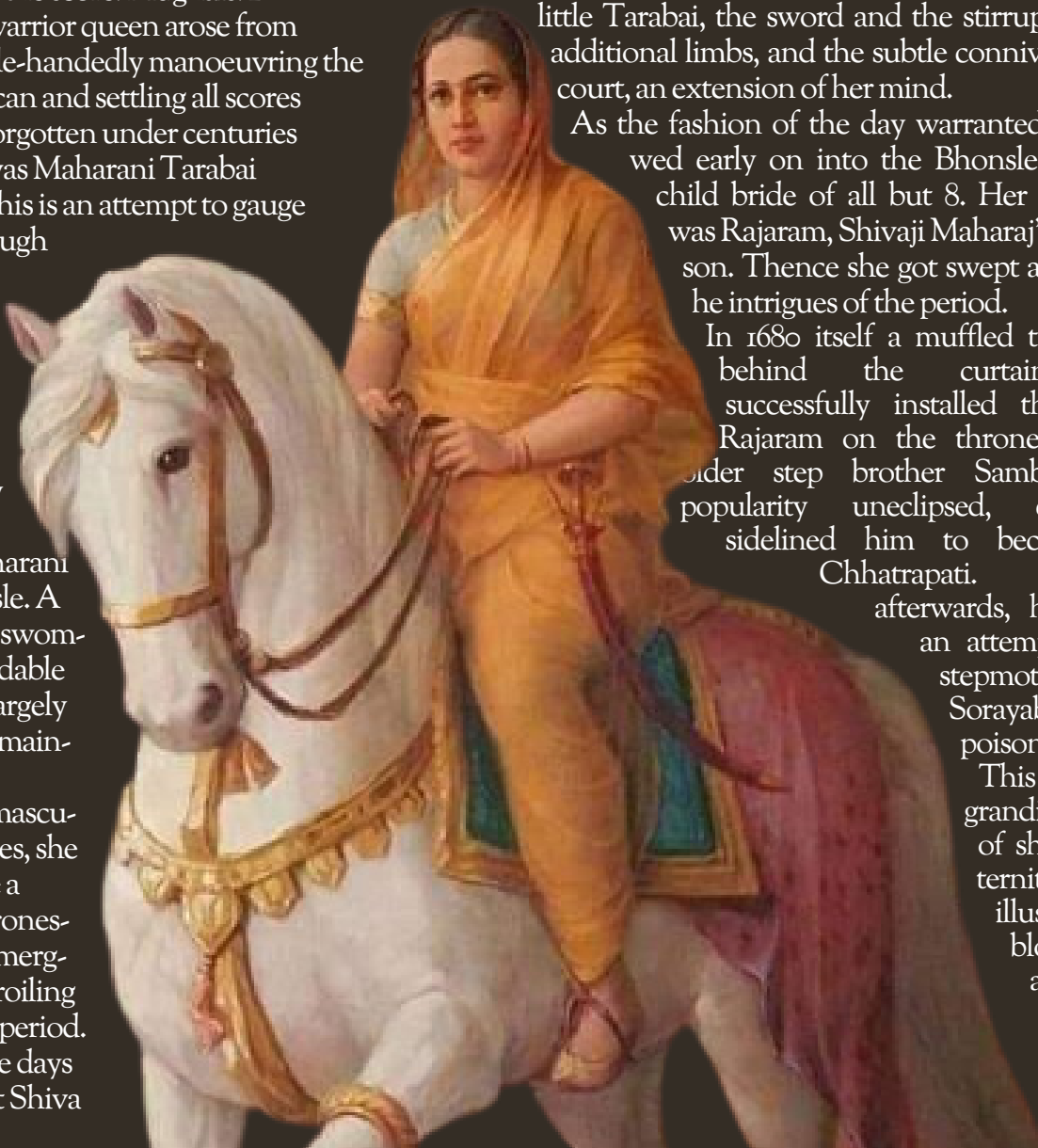
This was the grandiose world of shifting fraternities and illusionary.....

bloodties

abound

that

Tarabai



acquired in her marriage.

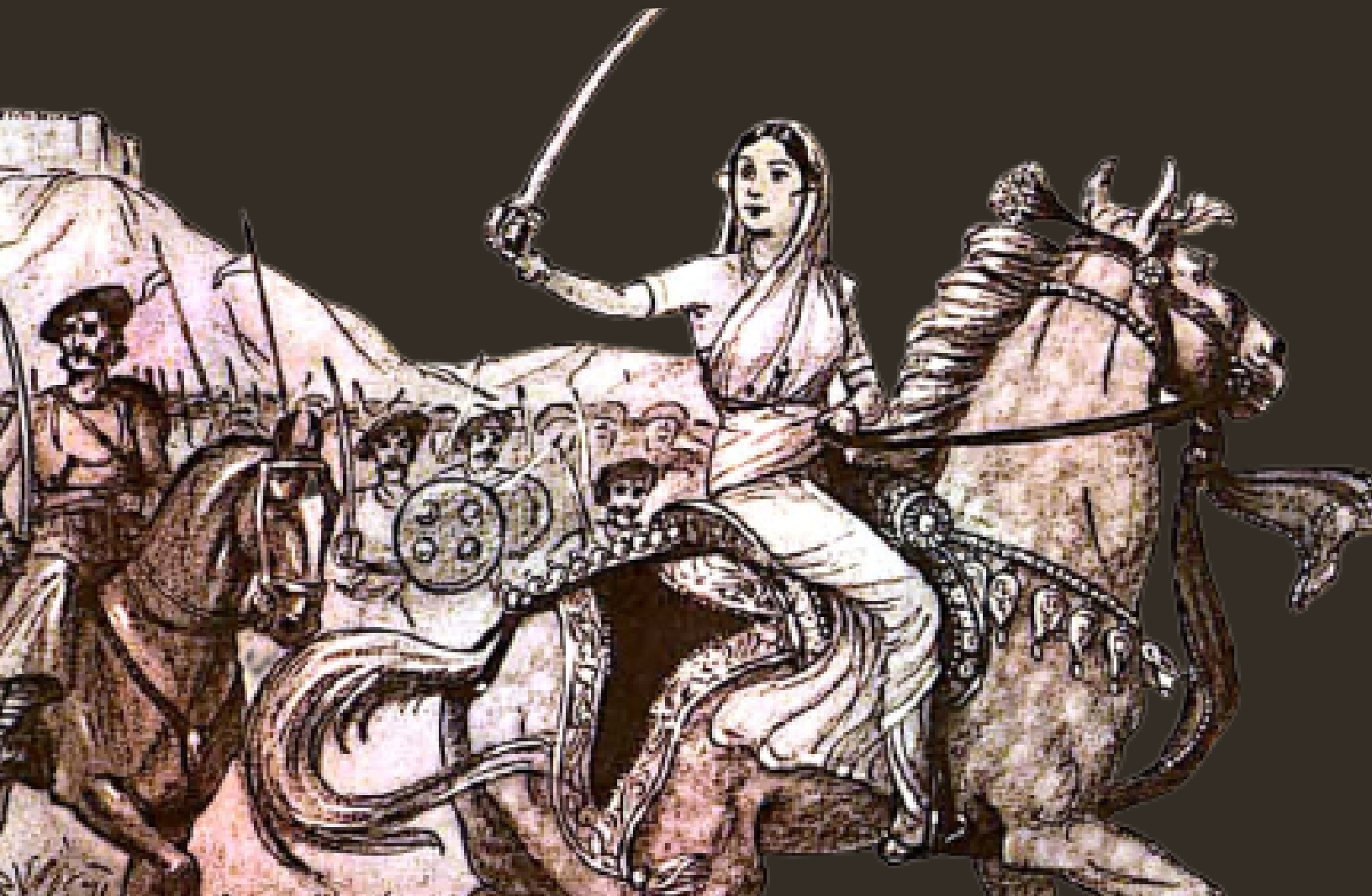
It is difficult to reconstruct the lens through which the infant might have appraised the transience of the court at Raigarh. One can only imagine the youthful years of the young bride within the palatial halls, red with blood spilled in the name of power. But history is a witness to the fact that the child, crouching in the shadows of those well-versed in the underpinnings of statecraft, was yet to come into herself.

Clearly the influence of Sambhaji was all pervading, and so too did powerful courtiers play the newlyweds. But the young couple wasn't hard pressed to find affection at the court, either. Though Sorayabai was executed for treason in 1681 itself, yet there was Yesubai, Sambhaji's wife, who fostered the two children. Time carried on its slow march and soon enough, Rajaram was married once again to Rajasbai of the Ghatge clan. Rajasbai came to be more or less of an arch rival to Tarabai's ambitions of dominance over Maratha polity in the coming years. Their game of cat and mouse, upon which I'll shortly elaborate, has amused centuries of historians. Deadly politics notwithstanding, the detached world within the Raigad fort was largely a more secure place for a growing child than the world beyond its

battlements. The sudden tragedy that then struck Raigad when Tarabai was all of 14, may be hailed as the true end of her childhood.

The Battle of Sangameshwar in 1689 was what brought the ill tidings. Aurangzeb's advancing army captured and tortured Sambhaji to death on charges of war crimes. In those black hours, when ruin peered over the Maratha threshold, Yesubai had a slightly older Rajaram crowned Chatrapati. Barely 12 days later, the Maharaja and his young wives fled the capital under the protective wings of a myriad of loyalists, just as Mughals flooded into the city. Yesubai, her son Shahu and other family members were taken captive. Though a beacon of light in Rajaram had been sent South, yet deep uncertainty prevailed: no one really knew what the future held in store for the Marathas.

So began Tararani's arduous journey southwards, deep into the heart of Tamil country. She was never to return to her place of birth. The queen had beheld loss and gain way beyond her years: precociousness, indeed, was the norm of the day. Acclaimed court poets have sung in passing of the unsaid but enervating epiphanies she must have buried in her heart, even as they tirelessly waxed eloquent the virtues of Rajaram.



But even if they had attended more closely to her misgivings and unspoken yearnings, they could have only guessed. We, too, can only guess. The endless intrigue might have embittered her or sowed a newfound regard for life in her heart.

The Mughals led the chase right up to the gates of Keladi, where 'The Pepper Queen of South India' Keladi Chenamma granted refuge to the Chatrapati. Having drawn the wrath of Mughal forces in order to protect complete strangers, the Pepper queen now fought back so enigmatically, that the Mughals were forced to concede defeat and retreat. In the heat of the battle, however, she encouraged the youngsters to flee again, lest she lose. They left hurriedly, with little time spared to celebrate their newfound friendship with the matriarch. This much, however, is attested: the diplomatic and charismatic older queen proved an indispensable figurehead of emulation to the younger queen. Tararani would forever hold close the wisdom she had gained at Keladi.

The long road eventually brought them to Jinji, where Rajaram set up his court, and finally became the Chatrapati in practice. Tararani found little time to dwell over the loss of her home: after all, a court needed running. Besides, for perhaps the first time in her young life, she wasn't overshadowed by those wizened in years of intrigue. Though, admittedly, Rajasbai still posed an impediment to her designs. It was in Jinji that Tararani truly shattered her manacles. It doesn't come as a surprise then that Home was reduced to a distant memory on the horizon.

An apprehensive peace, then, volatile and short-lived. The Mughals are said to have 'imprisoned' an infant Shahu and his family in utmost luxury, nursing perhaps the belief that this 'affection' would buy Maratha loyalty when Shahu came of age. Just as well, to the benefit of Tarabai, who was zealously forwarding the cause of her own son, Shivaji II, as the rightful ruler.

1700, however, hit hard, as dark clouds of Rajaram's untimely demise gathered overhead. The Mughals pounced upon the weakness of their old enemies and resuscitated war. Again, Tarabai had little time to grieve. Ignoring the bruises that life was fond of dealing her in, she thwarted the artifices of Rajasbai, and installed an infant Shivaji II on the throne, before charging into battle as his regent.

Her proactiveness in this period bespoke indomitable will and courage. Loss and gain had acquired a colour of indifference in her life. Only the fight mattered anymore. Her finesse at war-craft and oneness of being with the weaponry came as a shock to the enemy who had been expecting an easy surrender. All alone in the face of innumerable odds, Tarabai

turned around the tide of history and saved Maratha polity from complete annihilation. Her command meant a narrow save and history stands witness to her role in generating possibilities for Maratha revival and peak by 1761. Much has been written of the troubles Aurangzeb faced in the Deccan: defeating the unvanquished Marathas became such an obsession that the emperor didn't return home for 25 years, and then, too, only in death. But Tararani's role in this remains forgotten.

When Aurangzeb died in 1707, The court at Delhi saw only one means of cutting the Maratha onslaught: release of Shahu in order that the enemy may be coerced into infighting. History took its predicted course: Shivaji II and Shahu's claims were pitted against one another. Tarabai alleged that the strong Mughal influence in Shahu's upbringing rendered him unfit for the throne and tried to delegitimize his claim. There was a head on collision at Khed in 1707, and Tarabai finally met her match.

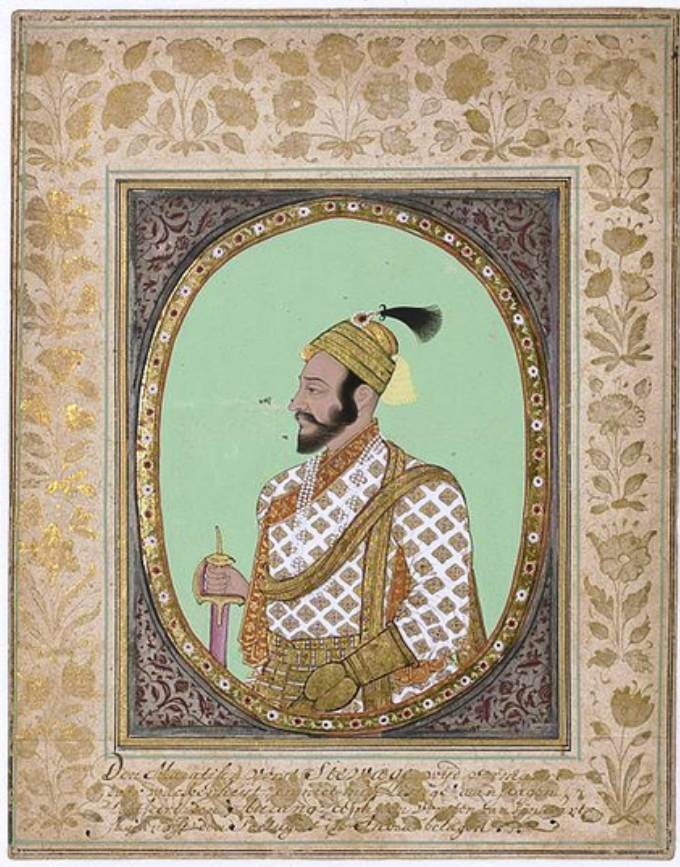
The mother and son were soon packed off to Kolhapur where, devoid of their titles, they set up a small court. Fortune abandoned Tarabai now. Rajasbai had them imprisoned and her own son crowned. There is no historical record of the ordeals she faced for the next 20 years. In 1726, her son succumbed to mental illness. At last, she was a mere cipher, and her rivals mocked her state. But a life this vibrant, headstrong, and cunning go out so deprecatingly? That wasn't to be.

Attacking Kolhapur in c.1730 A.D., Shahu released Tararani and brought her back with full honours. The matriarch repaid him in the art of illusions that she had mastered. Perturbed by the growing influence of Peshwas (the ministers to the Chhatrapatis) in the polity, Tarabai planned most ardently. Shahu had more or less become a nominal head and increasingly the real power was vested in Peshwa hands. Moreover, he had no heir. Shortly before his death in 1749, Tararani completely reconciled with him and presented her grandson Rajaram II, who had been hidden out of fear for his life. Shahu was so overcome with affection and guilt, that he unquestioningly named the young man his heir and embraced eternal sleep.

Soon enough Rajaram II began to lean towards the Peshwa instead of his grandmother. But Tararani still had a role to play in history. When he refused to heed her advice and disband Peshwaship, the Rani first warned him of the consequences and then did something that makes her deviousness the stuff of stories:

She laughed.

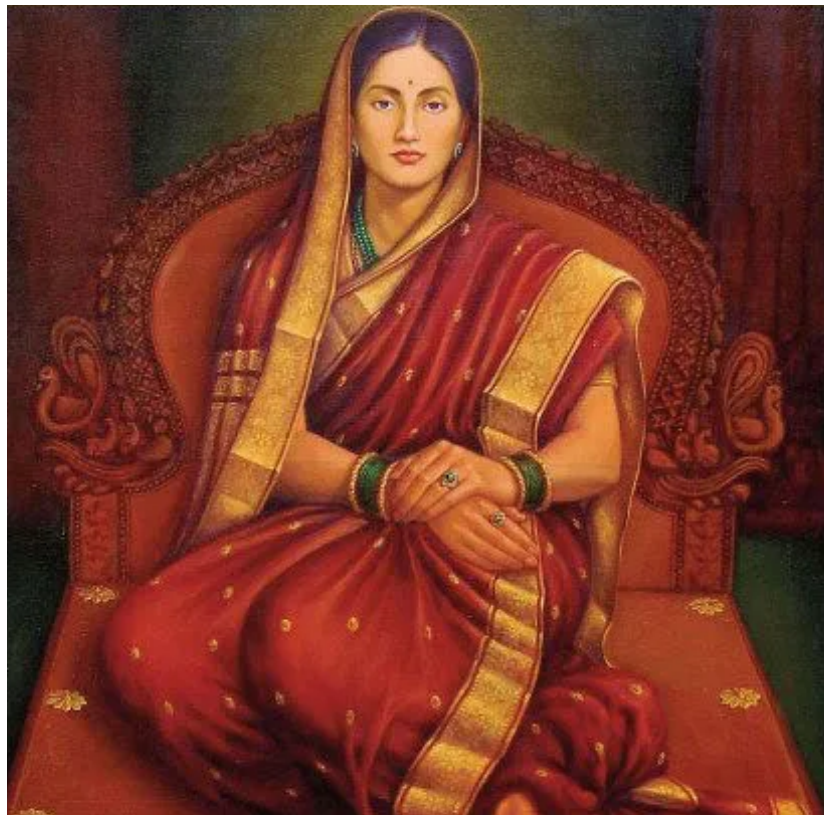
She laughed a chilling laugh that still echoes through history.



Chhatrapati Shivaji Raju Bhonsle's portrait in Rijks Museum.

Source: Wikimedia Common

Maharani Sai Bai Saheb Raju Bhonsle, first wife of and chief consort of Chhatrapati Shivaji Bhonsle.





And then she told him that he was nobody at all to challenge her authority because he was an impostor: a child of the bards, whom she had picked up as a means of consolidating her own power.

Needless to say, the entire kingdom was appalled. The Peshwa, a seasoned warrior and political master, had been embarrassingly deceived! Many long-drawn battles later, the Peshwa himself defeated the old Rani, still a formidable warrior even at 70. Even then she swore that the king wasn't her grandson. The Peshwa, exasperated, couldn't care less: he had stumbled upon a puppet ruler. A treaty establishing peace with the Rani was signed and at this point she goes out of history.

Finally, in 1761, the same year that the Marathas faced utter ruin in the third battle of Panipat, the Rani died.

And with her went out the last of the Greatest Marathas.

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PUBLISHER Amirah Sajad

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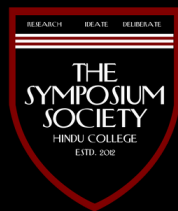
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FOR COLLABORATIONS, INQUIRIES & FEEDBACK

symposium.amirah@gmail.com

SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

symposium.samya@gmail.com

CONTACT US

The Symposium Society, Hindu College

+7006374008 | hinducollegegazette@gmail.com

Hindu College Gazette is issued by The Symposium Society
Hindu College, Sudhir Bose Marg, University Enclave, Delhi, 110007

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