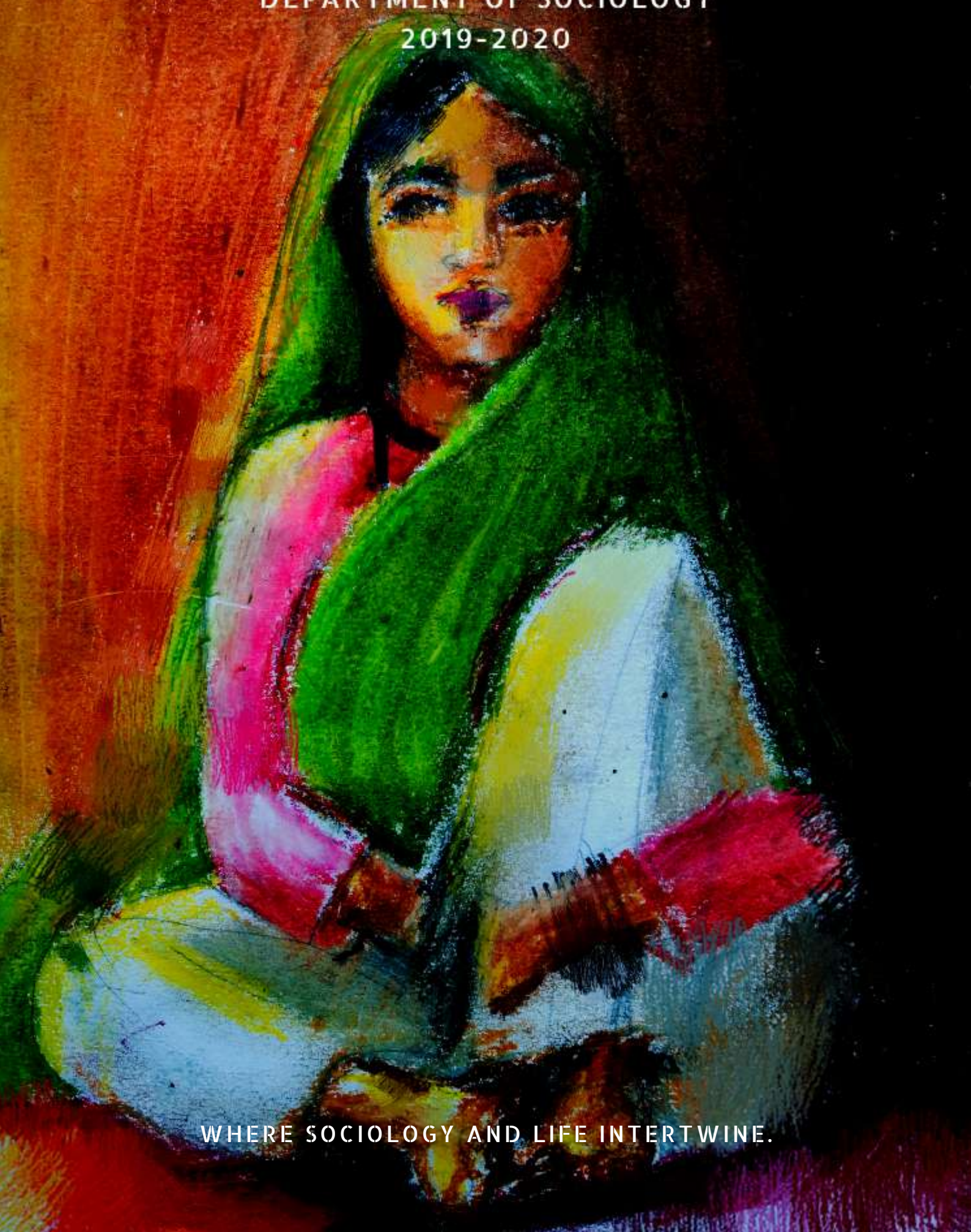# THE LIGHTHOUSE

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
2019-2020

WHERE SOCIOLOGY AND LIFE INTERTWINE.

FOREWORD

by Dr. Reema Bhatia, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology

A foreword is an introduction at the beginning of a work. It introduces the reader to the work at hand. But writing a foreword in these challenging times is a challenge in itself. We have been in a state of siege and in a lockdown since 25 March 2020. It has made us think about the world that we have created. This foreword is my wish list for all:

Without My Mask

I want to live in a world without masks

Live without masks forever

I want to live in a world where I feel safe

Where I am heard

Where I can love without fear or shame

Where I can walk in the night holding hands with
 the one I love

Man or Woman or the Intersex

I want to be loved for who I am

And not for what they believe I am

Where I can wear what I want and not be called a slut

I am sassy!

I am sexy!

I am beautiful and gorgeous!

Where I can say NO and be heard and believed

Where I don't care about "What will people say"

After all who are they?

I don't know them!

Do you? Who cares?

I REFUSE

I Refuse To Shut Up!

Just because women are only seen and not heard

I refuse to be a good girl

Being bad is so liberating

I hate being domesticated

What am I? An animal to be tamed?

I refuse to be a princess

I'd much rather be an *unprincess*

I don't want to be rescued

I want to fight off my own dragons

It's so much more fun!

I refuse to titter "like a lady"

Just because ladies don't laugh aloud

I want to guffaw loudly

I want to laugh a belly laugh

I want to Cry and Shout

And Rave and Rant

And not be called PMSing or Menopausal or Hormonal

I am Me! Unapologetic and Fierce!

No more Silence!! No More masks!!

Source: Pinterest (mayweather.hoccam.net)

CONTENTS

REVISITING HOME: REFLECTIONS FROM THE ALUMNI

Photographed by
Shefali Bhatia, Third Year

WHERE TO NEXT?

Source: Pinterest (@Culture Trip)

Education, Enthusiasm and Enlightenment: The Academic Year in Retrospect

compiled by Abhija Chatterjee, Third Year

August 20, 2019

The Department of Sociology, Miranda House, kick started its academic session from July 20, '19. The first academic event organised was a talk by Dr. Peter Doak (Urban sociologist, Professor at the University of Leeds) and Katusho Bento (Professor, University of Leeds).

Dr. Doak talked on "Sociology in and of the city: A case study of 21st century Leeds". His talk touched upon the history of Leeds, an industrial town, highlighting the implications of various social changes therein. He asked a very crucial question, which his fellow urban sociologists are also asking. He said, that one of the most crucial characteristics of industrial towns that sets it apart from pre-industrial towns is that the former is characterised by the 'alienation' of the working class – from each other and, from the means of production. This has prompted urban sociologists to ask- "Is this the death of the community?"

Katusho Bento talked on "Hashtags and Social Impact". Her talk touched upon the impacts of various new social interactions ranging from awareness about social oppression, recognition of minorities and how trending hashtags on

Twitter enable greater awareness on the same. Some of these trending hashtags which she talked about were #blacklivesmatter, #sayhername, #metoo, etc.

September 20, 2019

The second event of the academic year was a seminar-cum- interactive session on "Conversations on Sex and Power in Academia: Knitting tales of experiences", organised under the supervision of Assistant Professor Shivani Rajput. The speakers for the event were Dr. Shifa Haq (School of Human Studies, Ambedkar University) and Rukmini Sen (Professor, School of Liberal Studies, Ambedkar University.)

The session made us raise crucial questions, like should one view instances of sexual oppression in heteronormative university spaces as singular incidents of deviance or, as symptomatic of a structure. The speakers talked on how does one conceptualize 'consent' in the context of sex and power in academia and whether the available methods of knowledge production are adequate for critiquing universities as spaces of oppression.

Sept 24 - Sept 28, 2019

In the midst of these academic talks and seminars, the department also hosted an insightful as well as enjoyable field trip to Dharamshala. More than 30 students accompanied by three professors of the Department, namely Dr. Srirupa Bhattacharya, Shivani Rajput and Dr. M. Kamminthang, travelled to the magnificent location, and conducted research on topics of their interest; ranging from music, art, medicine, the institution of marriage, women's roles, travel and tourism to even politics in light of the Tibetan population of the area and their associations with Buddhist culture and practices. In addition to fieldwork, they also explored the elysian place as much as they could.

October 30, 2019

The third event was a guest lecture organised – with appreciable efforts by Assistant Professor Tahiba Banu – particularly for the students of final year who opted for 'Sociology of Work' as their elective. However, it was an open event where the whole department could participate.

The speaker for the day was Dr. Nikita Kaul (PhD, Delhi School of Economics) and the topic at hand was "The work of Craft". The talk was centred on Dr. Kaul's fieldwork in Srinagar on walnut wood carvings in a *'karkhana'*. She led the students through the complex issues which make the handicraft industry what it is. She provided an outline before initiating her talk and led the

students through the meaning of handicrafts, the nature of production, role of the social milieu, apprenticeship, division of labour, gender dimension in the production process, alienation of workers, and finally, the idea of shame that's increasingly becoming attached to the narrative of craft.

February 26 & 27, 2020:
UTOPIA- Annual Fest, Department of Sociology
Keeping in mind the general political atmosphere in the country, the department organised its annual fest in a way which was geared towards initiating conversations around *"the nation and its making"*.

On February 26, the day started with a talk by Wildlife filmmaker and presenter Suyash Kesari. His unique method of story telling using snapshots of wildlife led the audience through an enthralling journey, which was not just limited to photographs but also touched upon the politico-economic angles of forestry and governance.

Safari with Suyash was followed by an ethnographic film making competition – an event open to students across Delhi University. The last event for the day was *"Koun Banega Hazaarpati?"*- a fun quizzical event centred around questions related to sociology.

On February 27, the day started with a panel discussion on "The Nation and its making". Panellists included Dr. Ghazala Jamil (Assistant professor, Centre for Study of Law and Governance, JNU), Kishalay Bhattacharjee (Journalist, author), Avalok Langer (Journalist, author, film maker) and finally our faculty member, Dr. Binu Sundas (Assistant professor, Department of Sociology, MH).

In the context of the ongoing national crisis, the department felt the pertinent need to analyse and discuss the pillars of what democracy means in the truest sense; thereby holding a conversation on what hurdles India needs to overcome in the pursuit of re-establishing the values laid in the Constitution. The paper presentation event that followed was widely participated in by students from the department, as well as those from other colleges. Some of the crucial issues these papers focused on were *migration and diaspora, healthcare and education, civil rights and social movements, ethnic culture, etc.*

The day came to an end with an open mic event.

May 15, 2020

The department organised a webinar on "Cultural labour and social hierarchies" with Dr. Brahma Prakash, who shared insights from his book-"Cultural Labour: Conceptualizing the 'folk' performance." An important concept discussed was that of 'cultural citizenship'. Dr. Prakash also threw light on issues such as the harsh line of divide which is drawn when it comes to the evaluation of labour and how, local cultures are appropriated in order to fit them into Westernized tastes.

In all, it was an engaging and enlightening event which made sure that it gave a space for students to interact, and help them develop a fresh perspective even in trying times as these.

Photograph courtesy Yameena Zaidi; Shefali Bhatia; Akansha Priya; Rishta Prasad and union, 2019-2020.

SECTION ONE

Stimulating your sociological nerves:
From the Team

Room

by Akshita Pegu, Second Year

"As long as we have our rooms, we can live normally, eat, sleep, pray silently, look for a silver lining in all that burns around us unless we ourselves burn. I've realised now that what is normal is no longer natural, it is constructed by us, and what doesn't affect us directly becomes normalcy."

My room is conveniently located, right next to the bathroom, beside the hall and kitchen. It has all the furniture, cozy and suited to my taste and convenience, where I can be comfortable in being vulnerable. This place, the bed, the table, the chair, the mug, the old books collecting dust, things that are bare in themselves yet ingrained in the daily routine of a life lived, unnoticed yet inseparable. This is continuity, the activity ushered and catered to by the assurance of the constant.

From my room, I'm just an observer, a mere spectator.

Sometimes I'm so consumed in my own life that I don't even notice anything and everything that happens around me. A cat climbed a tree to hunt down a squirrel; this is nature, food cycle, it is natural. A vendor hawking his wares in the afternoon sun; I look through my supplies, if I need anything, I'd just reach out my hand from my window, transact money in exchange for the things I need. Children playing in the field nearby; a boy fell down, he's crying, a bloody scratch on his left knee, his friends teasing him, asking him to man up because "Come on, you are not a girl, so stop behaving like one". I sigh in disapproval as the boy gets up, wipes away his tears, tries to normally run like he never fell. Nearby, women are talking about how they're distrustful and suspicious of somebody's new neighbour because she likes other women, not in a "sisterly" way but in a way only husbands can love their wives. I'm appalled by their regressive notions but thankfully, for now I'm not that "other" woman. There's always something happening – the birth of a girl child next door, another girl groped on her way to the nearby store, street dogs starving and shivering during winter, a person walking his dog to the vet, a nearby restaurant disposing leftovers in the overflowing garbage dump, a beggar scavenging through the same dump to somehow survive, the good and bad, everything that I cannot be held accountable for. I remind myself I'm just a fragment, I don't matter and whatever I do, wouldn't matter too. I can't keep track of the world, I need to let it be. I continue living the way I do in my room.

There was a fire that day, some more fires the next day and many more that lit up the streets and burned down "other" people's homes. It was their neighbourhood; no family member, friend or acquaintance of mine lived there. I read it in the news, I condemned it and I went back to living like I used to, because I still have my bed, comfortable pillows to rest my head, my mug to

gulp down any fear, shelter to seek refuge. These bare things, anonymous and easily replaceable, sometimes, are the only assurance you need of normalcy when the world around is in unrest. This is safety, this is home, this is privilege. I return to this constant space, a space I can claim as my own. Here, the fires burning down bodies, skin, flesh and blood, lives that were scattered away with the ashes as though they didn't matter, didn't have the privilege of seeking refuge in. Their rooms, their homes were burned, destroyed, demolished and wiped off existence. They are no longer bound to their roots – they are uprooted, displaced, like shifting sands, wandering.

And it's no romanticized wanderlust, it is when you have nowhere to go and wherever you go, you will always feel like a stranger- too alien and alienated to fully belong. We document their pain, in language and visuals, debate, discuss, engage in civil discourse. There is a contestation of differing ideologies; the left, right and centre. In this greater power struggle, their pain is central and yet the people are forgotten. They are now anomies in themselves, nameless and precarious.

Source: Pinterest (@ourfoodstories)

They aren't bound anywhere and yet they aren't free. Real freedom is when you have assurance of rights, of something constant, like a room of your own where you have the legitimacy to own your identity and place.

Those charred remains provide evidence to the horror that was

unleashed, the concrete stability surrounding it remain their witness and yet those who are to be held accountable are never found. This place is dead, it is a bad omen, a reminder that even the safest of places can be reduced to rubble. People avoid it, turn away their faces for they cannot stand to face the truth; their guilt or the fear that they may suffer the same fate. But with time, the lost people who once lived there would never return and it would be cleaned and reconstructed into something new. This is continuity, to rise out of the ashes while we nurse the fear of it happening again, and it happens ultimately and we continue fearing and praying for it to not happen to us. As long as we have our rooms, we can live normally, eat, sleep, pray silently, look for a silver lining in all that burns around us unless we ourselves burn. I've realised now that what is normal is no longer natural, it is constructed by us, and what doesn't affect us directly becomes normalcy.

Continuity is not about going with the flow, it is not in the absence of resistance. To resist is not to disrupt but to question, re-evaluate and rethink the circumstances that we live in. Resistance is when I walk out this room, the safe space that I must hold on to, to not abandon it but to move out of it, to understand that this safe bubble that I exist within, is only temporary now when the world is burning. We need to go on living but we also need to understand that to live in this world, we must *belong* to it first, to all the people and places, to shed off this privilege and offer it to those in need, to those who matter, to everyone who's living and has the right to.

Featured image source:
Pinterest (@BMH with the inspiration)

Hindutva Masculinity

by Naina Yadav, Second Year

"Another key feature exhibited through images of social violence, and integral to a culture of masculinity, is the belief that 'real men' bear the onus of sustaining moral order."

Jack nee Judith Halberstam explains masculinity as the cultural, political and social expression of maleness. The discussions around Sex and Gender in Sociology agree to gender being a social performance – a division based on the natural distinction of sex, existing as a hierarchical relationship of power. There are certain elements in society that establish, shape, define, prescribe and produce the normative patterns of behavior assigned to the gender roles; sustained through interaction between individuals. The generic idea instilled in the society is that men and women fundamentally differ and that a distinct

set of fixed traits characterize the archetypal masculinity and femininity. Girls and boys are socialised through certain agents into their respective standardised, naturalised, socially appropriate, and validated roles or behaviour patterns. These roles are much cultural and locally specific, based on the historical and cultural discourse of a civilisation. Gender shapes power, from the 'private' relationships of the household to the highest levels of political decision-making. Gender shapes and divides power. Inequalities between men and women are one of the most persistent patterns in the distribution of power. The gender roles may also be dynamic; responding to the external stimulus of the larger order, adapting and transforming itself to reinforce the elementary distinction between masculinity and its anti-thesis, femininity. On a deeper analysis we may also say that 'power equals masculinity'. *It explains why powerful people often demonstrate dominance in gendered ways.* Most political and economic institutions, historically dominated by men, are tailored to (upper class/caste) men's experiences. They idealise 'masculine' forms of behaviour and rely on men's power over women. Therefore, these institutions tend to 'lock in' two types of power – men's power over women, and the power of the most 'masculine' men over everyone. Gender is what teaches and instils in us an understanding of what 'power' is in the first place.

In the context of our country, religion has been one of the most essential factors in ascertaining the system of beliefs and practices. Hindu religious scripts and texts are instructive in nature, and does so by narration of stories involving great ideal leaders and their biographies. They particularly talk about '*Dharma*' – the code of behaviour. The mythological texts, namely

Ramayana and *Mahabharata*, set a precedent for *men* to stick to, and well, since women aren't biologically enabled with the acumen to decode the wisdom in these holy texts, the men can always tell us our life's purpose.

The *Paurush* (masculinity) of Rama depicted as ideal, is ascertained by his name '*Maryada Purushottam Ram*'. Rama's story is one of perfect devotion to Dharma despite the harsh tests he came across. His picture is painted as one of a supreme man and an iconic king to his subjects. His character is a true hero, saving the day with the help of his devotee Hanuman. While Rama takes the limelight, Hanuman in the supporting role, was always characterised as a playful and mischievous monkey, happy to be serving. He is powerful, but does not display it to intimidate. But this was all before the Hindutva iconography. The birth of a distinctive view of Hindu supremacy is traced in the historically violent yet short period from 1919 to the mid-1920s. It was in 1923 that V.D. Savarkar's founding statement on Hindu identity was published. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was formed in 1925, and Savarkar's Hindu Mahasabha of 1916, the central organ for promoting Hindu demands during the Indian independence struggle, was strengthened. The idea of the Sangh Parivar, a family of Hindu nationalist organizations, took root during this period.

By 1938, Savarkar began drawing comparisons between Hindus and ethnic Germans and between Indian Muslims and German Jews. He repeatedly stated that an ethnically sound Hindu nation "should be inhabited only by pure-blooded Aryans." Whereas Savarkar's previous notions focused on race and territory, his subsequent ideas stressed the role of militarism and war.

Scholars have drawn attention to the fact that ideas of masculinity are tied less to the body and more to socio-cultural ideologies and practices. Manhood is not naturally given but is a goal to be achieved. To be born a boy is a privilege but one that can be lost if one is not properly initiated into masculine practices. Besides, male adults must maintain this privilege by regular performance. Among the list of must-have-character-traits-to-be-manly-enough, aggression is deemed natural and desirable in men. It is uncharacteristic of men to adopt the point of view of others, show empathy and sensitivity, gentleness and compassion. Another key feature exhibited through images of social violence, and integral to a culture of masculinity, is the belief that 'real men' bear the onus of sustaining moral order.

Source: Pinterest (From INQUISITION)

We can observe these symbolic allegories in the interactions that went on between Krishna and Arjun, or the self-righteous standards of Rama. But the imagery was still that of subtlety and clemency. Contrastingly, the contemporary times have metamorphosed the mellowness of Rama and Hanuman into warriors - characterised by hostility and a lack of mercy for 'rivals', leading a path of combative destruction and rage, to seek vengeance. This image got further crystallised into the 'Rudra Hanuman' sketch by Karan Acharya from Mangalore. The perceived threat to an imagined ancient

Hindu manhood is being countered, through a variety of modern symbols. Deities like Shiva, Rama and Hanuman are created as weapon-wielding bulky muscular men, radiating ire. The politicisation of the religious figures is a much deliberate camouflage tactic, to evade all that has gone wrong in the nation. It appeals to majority of the masses, diverts their attention, and offers a sense of immediate control; a restoration of power. As the author Amish Tripathi commented, *"all Lord Hanuman had to do to revive his strength was to remember it. It was that simple. India is just like that. We are actually a very powerful country. And yet, we behave like we are powerless"*. The idea of becoming a global superpower is a long-standing aspiration of the middle-class individuals. They are the ones who are most persuaded by ideological propagandas, fuelled by the consistent construction of a hegemonic masculinity based on constantly creating the idea of an "other". The current instability on socio-economic front results in feelings of discomfort and weakness, thus a reassurance through manufactured Hindutva identity is lucrative.

The roots for this relentless desire to assert control can be traced in the historical discourse of our country. Savarkar's notion of cultural religious nationalism implied domination over specific sections of society, propagating the misplaced beliefs of supremacy and authority. It was anti-minority at its core. The myth of Vedic origin allowed Savarkar to undermine all external forces. The essentials of the Hindutva landscape, blood ties to India's territory, and a caste system founded on the purity of upper caste (Aryan) blood, contextualized much of Savarkar's critique of the British and Muslim eras. Savarkar's disdain for Mughal rule has made inroads into the BJP's rhetoric, a major agenda for Hindu communalists is to set framework for how the majority could be made to fear the minority.

Professor Sanjay Srivastava discusses that the Imperial forces 'effeminized' the non-European cultures. It resulted in the self-image of effeteness being widely accepted by the 19th Century Indian Hindu Intelligentsia. The perennial past of foreign rule granted an 'emasculated' status to the Hindu men.

The recent recurrences of social violence being continually reproduced in a democracy is symptomatic of a pathology that has blanketed the entire country. Democracies are meant to encourage the not-so-masculine values of consultation, negotiation, discussion, compromise; being inclusive and making space for the 'others'.

Source: Pinterest (@bdc-TV.com)

The country's leadership under Modi's right-wing regime has seen quite a few expressions of this typical form of masculinity, incorporating discussions around technological development, nationalism, militarism. Be it the jingoist activism appealing to the Gandhian ideologies as that of the Swadeshi movement through *Make in India* and *Swacch Bharat Abhiyaan*. However, they deviated from it soon enough by overtly creating communal rifts and *'other'ing* the Muslim community. With huge investments directed towards gaining military might, and 'striking' exhibits of brute force, they have shut down many opposing voices. The Prime Minister's election campaigns strewn with images of him with his family and being the perfect son, along with slogans like *Main bhi Chowkidar* ,*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*

demonstrating him as the toiling self-righteous saviour; the team responsible for the optics was able to create the image of a classic Indian king. Ring any bells, yet? Also, who are we saving the daughters from? The patriarchal hyper Indian masculinity, I would guess!

His campaigns manifest the perception of male protectors, rendering the women, youngsters, non-Hindus as subordinate beings. His term also has seen a sudden rise in 'Netizens' who are now being called as 'Internet Hindus'- passionate supporters of the Sangh Ideologies. Social media today, has become the breeding grounds for these 'traditional patriotic Hindus', who enthusiastically choose to act as vigilantes online and offline, suppressing and silencing dissent, criticisms and divergent ideas. Their approaches are often gendered, sexualised and communally targeted acts violence. This reeks of certain anxieties peculiar to the Hindutva Masculinity.

We have to keep directing questions and criticisms, and demanding accountability of this majoritarian regime, which acts to uphold the traditional, patriarchal, hegemonic Hindutva Masculine ideals, which obstructs and neglects the rights of its vulnerable citizens, suppresses them and is frightened of their liberation and aspirations.

Featured image source:
Pinterest (@makerbhawan.com)

Covid 19 and women

by Ishika Roy, First Year

"When women have less decision-making power than men, either in households or the government, then needs of the women during a pandemic are less likely to be met."

It's been a little over a month since India has been under a nationwide lockdown, and as much as it hurts me to say, looking at the way things are going, it doesn't seem that we would be let out of our homes anytime soon. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the novel coronavirus spread as a global pandemic, and the world is quite shaken up - maintaining social distancing and sanitizing at the drop of a hat. 2020 is off to a rocky start, and the future it holds isn't the most promising either; especially for the gendered diaspora.

Now that workplaces and educational institutions have shut down, people are cooped inside, working from home and attending online classes, the burden of care usually falls on the women—not just for children in the face of school closures, but also for extended family members. As family members fall ill, women are more likely to provide care for them, putting themselves at higher risk of exposure as well as sacrificing their time. Women are also more likely to be burdened with household tasks, which increase with more people staying at home during quarantine. This unpaid caring labour falls on the women, because of the existing patriarchal structure of the society.

Photograph by Classic Stock/Alamy
Source: Pinterest (@food&wine)

We are on the verge of a terrible upcoming recession and with the world economy on the rocks, it is most likely for the part-time and casual workers to be laid off or given shorter work hours; among which women make up the largest group. Migrant women workers, nurses and domestic helps experience double discrimination where their wages are halved or frozen, with the thought of unemployment looming above their head, and they get limited access to healthcare and essential items.

It is important to ensure that economic investment during and post-crisis is not just focused on certain sectors of the economy. There is a need to dedicate funds towards the empowerment of women-whether healthcare workers, casual shop workers,

Source: Pinterest (@grandbox)

small business owners who have managed high-load unpaid and low paid work roles during the crisis. Few incidents have been reported where nurses have been harassed and abused during duty, xenophobic and racist comments have been passed against them and they have been reduced to objects of ridicule and mockery. The Social Distancing advisory issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare "encourages" working from home but falls short of mandating corporations to ensure support in the form of paid leaves to women involved in urgent care work.

In India, where women's income is an abysmal one-fifth of their male counterparts, the COVID-19 pandemic has adverse effects on their economic participation and employment opportunities. Currently, some of the hardest-hit industry sectors include aviation, hospitality and retail which are also some of the biggest employers of the female workforce. The

Source: Pinterest (@matadornetworktravel)

female workforce also figures predominantly in vulnerable jobs where they are bereft of social and health security benefits and are prone to come in contact with the virus themselves.

Women, children and members of the LGBTQ+ community in self-isolation or quarantine are vulnerable to domestic violence and

harassment. Not all homes are safe, and increased periods of lockdown will put many at risk. Travel restrictions have dire consequences since people are exposed to spend more time with their potential perpetrators. Stress, alcohol and financial difficulties are triggers, which also increase in the quarantine period. At a stage where the public health system is burdened, it would make remedial access to medical and mental health support challenging.

Health resources normally dedicated to reproductive health are diverted towards emergency response. When women have less decision-making power than men, either in households or the government, then needs of the women during a pandemic are less likely to be met. It's a vital need to ensure that sexual and reproductive services are prioritised in the crisis so that women have access to maternal care, to prevent unwanted pregnancies and for survivors of gender-based violence. This is being jeopardized by concerns about shortages of contraception as a consequence of supply chain disruption.

Past epidemics such as the Ebola and plague have revealed that gender roles have a marked impact on exposure, transmission, and outcome patterns of an outbreak. Since women bear an unbalanced risk of infection, the preparedness to the COVID-19 outbreak requires a reorientation through a gendered lens. India urgently needs sexual and gender-sensitive mitigation and health recovery strategies if it is to come even closer to combating the novel corona virus disease pandemic.

Featured image:
"The light in this photograph" by Bas Uterwijk
Pinterest (@imgur)

Resistance

by Shefali Bhatia, Third Year

Shaheen Bagh
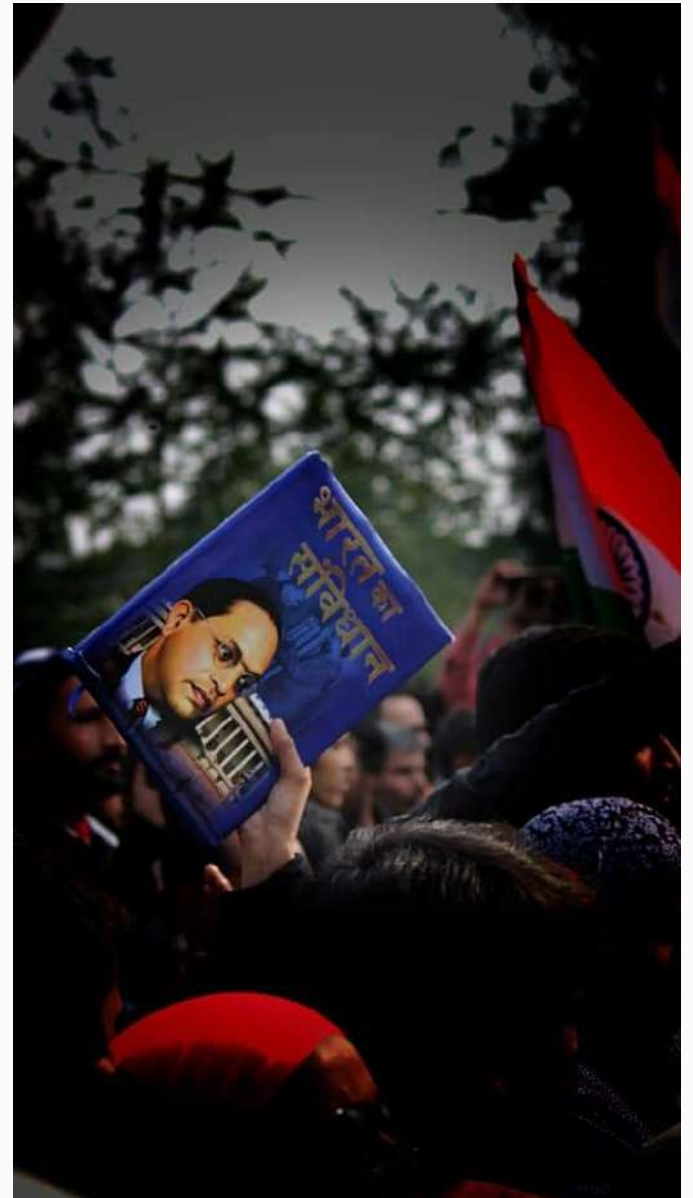
Jamia Milia Islamia

Jama Masjid
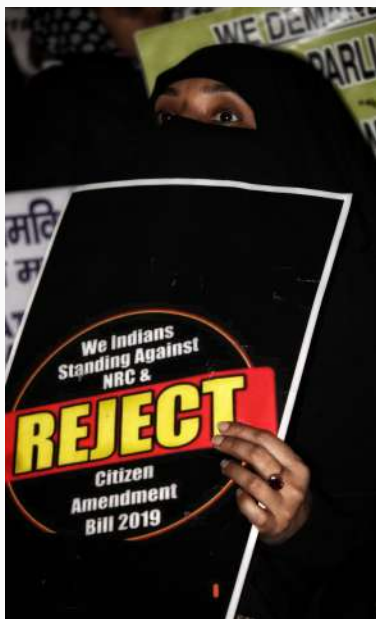
Miranda House

Revisiting Indian Mythologies of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*

by Ayushi Soni, Third Year

"… when it comes to telling of a mythological tale, it matters where and by whom the story is being told. This is because every story has different versions and people choose whichever version fits with the narrative they want to be propagated in their society, and abide by it."

Myths are an integral part of our lives; they are so intertwined into our ways that the distinction between the reality and fiction becomes blurred. They can be partly true or completely false but they continue to shape and direct our lives as cultural beings. They are usually seen as reflecting the social structure and social relations; sometimes they are also seen as providing outlet for repressed feelings, as discussed by Claude Levi-Strauss. These stories are usually told as being from a distant past, yet they are timeless.

But when it comes to telling of a mythological tale, it matters where and by whom the story is being told. This is because every story has different versions and people choose whichever version fits with the narrative they want to be propagated in their society and abide by it.

Two such mythological tales of Indian subcontinent are the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The first is about a king *Rama* who was sent to exile for a period of 14 years, and during this time, his wife *Sita* was abducted by the demon king *Ravana*. Rest of the story is about his rescuing *Sita* and killing *Ravana*. The latter story is about the rivalry for kingdom between two brothers *Duryodhana* and *Yuddhisthira*. But this rivalry is intensified when the wife of *Yuddhishthira* (and his four brothers) *Panchaali/ Draupadi* is publicly raped by the associates of *Duryodhana* and this becomes the cause of the greatest war in the history of subcontinent.

But here's the thing: though there are different versions to these stories prevailing in different parts of the subcontinent, the storytelling has mostly been from an androcentric perspective. Only those things were looked at which were considered worthy by men, only those problems studied whose solutions men needed for the smooth functioning of the society. Women were seen as victims who could not stand up for themselves, as also said by Sandra Harding in the Feminism & Methodology: Social Science. More so, as in most mythological tales, that the figures are considered as personified abstractions, divinized heroes or fallen gods; in these epics also, the main women, along with men, are considered divine. Sita is considered as Goddess *Lakshmi*, the consort of Hindu God *Vishnu,* and *Draupadi* is shown as being born out of fire.

And that these women took birth to help change the course of history, which they seemingly did by assisting and also provoking men emotionally. But nowhere in these stories, the viewpoint of women have been considered, nowhere their feelings given appropriate seriousness and nowhere have they been considered without their husband(s), as an individual with a unique identity.

Only a few people have studied these women in their own right, in their individuality, and significant among them is Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. In her novels "Palace of Illusions" and "The Forest of Enchantments", she talks about the life of *Draupadi* and *Sita* through their own point of view; she gives them a voice. They talk about things which were unimportant and therefore paid little attention in the male-centered versions of the two epics. Sita even calls her version as *"Sitayan"- story of Sita.*

At one or the other point of time in their lives, usually in northern India, most women are told about Sita and expected to be virtuous like her in their wifely duties to their husbands and to hold their husbands in reverence. And more so, they are given their examples to be good women, to live by the norms traditionally defined, and to follow *Sita* and *Draupadi's* version of femininity. But Divakaruni has drawn upon the lives of these 'other-worldly' women to show that they were uniquely feminine, defying or sidelining the norms of patriarchal society. They learnt things like statecraft, weaponry, archery, mental self-defense exercises, healing powers of herbs and philosophical things when most of them were restricted to men.

द्रौपदी

Image source: Pinterest (zayplay.blogspot.com)

Women (especially princesses who were to be clad in silk clothes and jewellery) were made to learn things like cooking, painting, rangoli-making and weaving flowers into a garland, etc.

At the time of their marriage (swayamvar), these women spoke up publicly when the need arose to preserve their own as well as their parents' dignity. *Draupadi* intervened when her brother was invited to fight by a man of unknown lineage, *Karna,* during *swayamvar* (literally, choosing your husband yourself) to prove his caste/varna. She refused to fall into the hands of destiny and resisted when she was made to marry five brothers simultaneously, before she had to give in. When a sage defined the rules of this polyandrous marriage and gave a boon that she will be a virgin every time her husband is changed in year wise rotational manner (and therefore keeping the norms defined for women intact), she desperately wanted to be able to forget about her intimacy with her other four husbands while being the wife of one husband for one year at a time.

Similarly, *Sita* spoke up when there were some obstacles during her wedding and felt that she and her parents have been betrayed by *Rama* (by not telling earlier that all four brothers will take their wives at the same time) and advised the way out of the dilemma. All this at a time when women were expected to be docile and silent at their wedding.

Both of them were also aware about their unique identities separate from their husbands'. *Draupadi* loved to be referred as *Panchaali*: the beloved princess of *Panchaal*. *Sita*, too, considered and pronounced herself as the daughter of Earth and daughter of Fire. They actively took part in administering the kingdom, not just by privately advising their husbands but also publicly carrying out administration activities, mostly for welfare and upliftment of women.

The novels are full of incidents where *Sita* and *Draupadi* fiercely spoke out their bitter feelings to their husbands and whenever the situation demanded, publicly too. Their stories are not of submissiveness. Rather, they show that these women did not accept their fate as victims. They worked as agents in their own destiny, making required choices and decisions, sometimes even in defiance of their husbands' will. It's high time we stop seeing only androcentric versions of these stories and stop seeing these women as goddesses or incarnation of some goddesses. Rather, we have to begin associating ourselves (which are multiple, according to G.H. Mead) and realize that some part of our 'self' and reflects the self of these 'not-the-ordinary patriarchally non-subservient' women.

Featured image: Pinterest (Cover of "Sita: Warrior of Mithila" by Amish Tripathi)

I dream of Disneyland!

by Naina Yadav, Second Year

"Do you know why exactly the villain utters these words against marriage? Because, as a society, we were made to believe that spinsters were too busy building their business while their biological clocks ticked away and now, she's upto snacking on little puppies to satisfy herself."

"They say if you dream a thing more than once, it's sure to come true", said our dearest sleeping beauty, Aurora! The gorgeous, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, petite-figured princess has bestowed this wisdom on most of us as young girls, urging us to follow our hearts and believe in our dreams. Dreams entailing happy endings, which involve being wooed by a heart-throb prince, who, however slow-witted, will traverse through oceans for us. The only thing we got to do? Look like a billion dollars! We women have it so easy, ain't it? We don't die in battles, we don't run kingdoms, we don't strategize the next coup, we don't labour outside in the gruelling sun.

We females, have the 'privilege' to sit at home, slather on delicate make-up and pout when our demands are not being met.

A wonderful woman named Chimamanda Adichie recently commented: *"Stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity."*

So, that is what I choose to do here. Disney has, since long, garnered the approval and viewership of billions of people, leveraging on the adages about the banal life of a woman. A simplistic movie or a story can have several problematic connotations on different dimensions. Even progressive and seemingly modern remakes at certain levels just rephrase the entire narrative.

Let's talk about Mulan, Pocahontas and Frozen – they were lauded by many since they portrayed women in a light unlike their former productions. Mulan is a badass warrior but she got to give up her femininity; because who will obey the commands when uttered from the mouth of a woman? While Pocahontas' story depicts how a woman has to choose between her love story and her life in the public sphere. It still perpetuates the idea of a domesticated woman. In Frozen, when Elsa is supposed to take over the throne, she has a nervous breakdown and in her panic, brings the entire kingdom to a standstill, bereft of happiness. This tells us that we, women can't be good leaders because we are always overwhelmed by our emotions. If you think, it's just overanalysing, 1) you already are gaslighting and 2) read up on the historical correlation of hysteria to women, before calling in the ad hominem.

Does anyone recall 'Cruella De Vil' from 101 Dalmatians' or 'Ursula' from the Little Mermaid or the 'Evil Queen' from Snow White? The character of Cruella is so gripped by her fantasy of creating a genuine fur robe, she's giving the devil a competition for its place in hell. My mind wanders to that one particular scene where Cruella, while appreciating the talented designer Anita, asks her not to

Illustration by: Claire Hummel
Source: Pinterest (@BURN BOOK)

give up her ambition and remarks, "more women have been lost to marriage than have been in war or famine". Do you know why exactly the villain utters these words against marriage? Because, as a society, we were made to believe that spinsterswere too busy building their business while their biological clocks ticked away and now, she's upto snacking on little puppies to satisfy herself. It's fascinating to notice how these ambitious, independent, opinionated and powerful women are always pitted against the cheerful, naive, pie-baking woman. Apparently, if our existence is not validated by a man's love, we turn into unstable, lonely, radical, angry witches.

"Masculinity is a hard, small cage, and we put boys inside this cage."
— Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, We Should All Be Feminists

Coming to the male characters, the handsome hulk Gaston from Beauty and the Beast is the epitome of masculinity, or should I say hyper masculinity?! He's supposedly what young belles of every town and city dream of! He's young, handsome, rich, overly-confident with just the right amount of ego to

put a girl like Bella in her place. He tells her girls should not be reading, lest they start thinking! Because duh, it's the job of the man in the house to do all the fancy thinking. Jokes apart, the physical attributes of men like Gaston impose a certain standard of beauty on boys too. (It constructs a self-imposed ideal of hegemonic masculinity, the strive to be more and more androgynous.

Movies are the most accessible forms of media. They inspire ideas and introduce one to realities of the society which people might not have come across otherwise due to their social location. How do we contain and battle the lessons that are very subtly implanted in all those movies? When casual sexism is laughed off, when glorification of harassment is shrugged at, or when girls try emulate weeping women conspiring her revenge against her home-wrecker women, what is it exactly that we are teaching our young girls? That, it is okay to be sexualised and objectified because it contributes to validation of their physical appearance by social standards? What happens when littles girls imbibe toxic traits of elusive racism by being ashamed of their skin colour?

In our world when women are already second guessing themselves, when we portray women as dependent, emotionally unstable, unintelligent beings, we are just carving out a longer tunnel for them to crawl out of; riddled with misogyny, discrimination, exploitation, subjugation and domestication. It's time that the writers and producers learn to be politically correct and rewrite those stories without appropriating the women's struggle and romanticising it. I think, the world is about ready for the truth and a mirror.

Source: Pinterest (First Time User)

Featured image source: Pinterest (steventhompson-art.tumblr.com)

The Mantra of Unlearning

by Shefali Bhatia, Third Year

"To be aware, in the truest sense of the term, would mean to unlearn several things we are taught by the society. Sometimes, it's one's worldview itself that needs questioning."

"You are being too radical." "Why are you against every damn thing?" "Then, why are you living here, leave India!?" "Stop writing all this shit, just read the texts prescribed by your university." "You speak a lot for them; tell me your caste first."

Have you ever encountered such questions? Have you ever had to delete a Facebook post/comment/reply or edit your article three times because, apparently, it was challenging the existing power structures way too much? Well, if yes, then congratulations! You are on your way of unlearning years of

presumptions and ideas that were made intrinsic part of your thought process through socialization. In this article, keeping the process of *unlearning* at the epicenter, the resultant significance of tremors felt on the power structures and their counter response will be highlighted.

Let us begin with instances of verbal and physical attacks faced by those who dare to simply 'unlearn'. It is not difficult for any person with a basic source of national-local news to observe a series of recent attacks on academicians, poets, writers, artists, students for what they speak/write/resist. In 2015, Huchangi Prasad, a 23 year old student and author of a book *Odala Kichuchu*, which speaks against the caste system, was allegedly assaulted and threatened. Recently, a complaint was also filed against celebrated Pakistani poet, Faiz Ahmad Faiz's *nazm – HamDekhenge –* alleging that it "attacks Hindu belief." How can one forget the murder of senior journalist Gauri Lankesh, who was known for being a critic of right-wing Hindu extremism? It won't be very surprising now if I mention the annual analysis of Risk (an international advocacy network based at New York University which tracks incidents that violate the academic freedom or human rights of scholars or students), which documented 324 verified attacks in 56 countries from September 2018 to the end of August 2019. Pardon me, for bringing here, my personal experience on similar grounds when I wrote an article, *"Countering the demon in Good over Evil"*, which attempted to critically examine the mythology behind the celebration of Holi. Not surprisingly, my inbox was colored with comments like, *"one should not write on such sensitive issues"*, *"this is against Hinduism"*, and *"you feminists have problems with everything."* One friend who has recently attained Nirvana, confidently enlightened me with his well-researched fact -*"Hindu mythologies are not myths."*

With such instances, the question here is surely not just about verbal/physical attacks on people who are critically vocal on issues that concern them or their communities or the country at large. It is more about the uneasiness and intolerance generated among those whose hostile actions symbolize only their attempts at what Pierre Bourdieu has called *cultural reproduction of dominant classes* and thus, *social reproduction of their power and privilege.* It is nothing but the privileged positions this

section of society possesses by the virtue of their ascribed status in the form of caste, religion, sex etc. that has provided them an insane amount of cultural capital which helps them in smooth upward social mobility. And, if by any means, this privileged position and their dominant culture is questioned, it becomes a source of intolerance and hostility.

"Mind the birds" by Chris Riviera
Source: Pinterest (@digitalartsonline.co.uk)

Since socialization is the means by which social and cultural continuity is attained, our education system – which Talcott Parsons has called *'focal socializing agency'* – itself becomes the key tool to impose and legitimize the attributes of the dominant culture. And,

when a person attempts to come out of this agency and begins the process of unlearning, s/he is countered with comments/attacks as discussed above, by those who are either holding the dominant position

or identify themselves with the dominant culture or, are not yet ready to unlearn what they have learnt and to recognize their privileges.

To be *aware*, in the truest sense of the term, would mean to unlearn several things we are taught by the society. Sometimes, it's one's worldview itself that needs questioning. The process involves not only making oneself open to new knowledge and acknowledging counter cultures and their narratives, but also being reflexive in terms of one's own social location and privileges thus associated. It would also involve developing what C. Wright Mills called the *Sociological Imagination*, which deals with a certain way of thinking and asking questions. It leads to the awareness that an individual's personal life is shaped by the society in which s/he lives and the historical period to which s/he belongs. This process will bring the power structures to the forefront – open to be subjectively interpreted and critically questioned. But here is one caution. When you unlearn, the facts where inequality is latently justified, the figures of death toll in riots, or the stories of resistance that you would find in news or political speeches will not remain mere data anymore. They will become highly subjective in nature – they will be interpreted from historical, political and social lenses. They would encourage posing questions at larger structures and formulating an opinion. And in the process of questioning these power structures, if these structures counter attack you with all their might, don't be afraid, just recall the words of Malcolm X: *"When your mind is a weapon, you are never unarmed"*.

Featured image:
Photo Manipulation by Phuoc Nguyen
Source: Pinterest (@Downgraf.com)

Hearing Kashmir

by Nureen Iqbal Shah, First Year

> "When Kashmiris want to raise their voice in protest, and you tell them that this is something that is going to benefit them, basically means telling them that they are incapable of thinking for themselves, that their lived experiences do not matter."
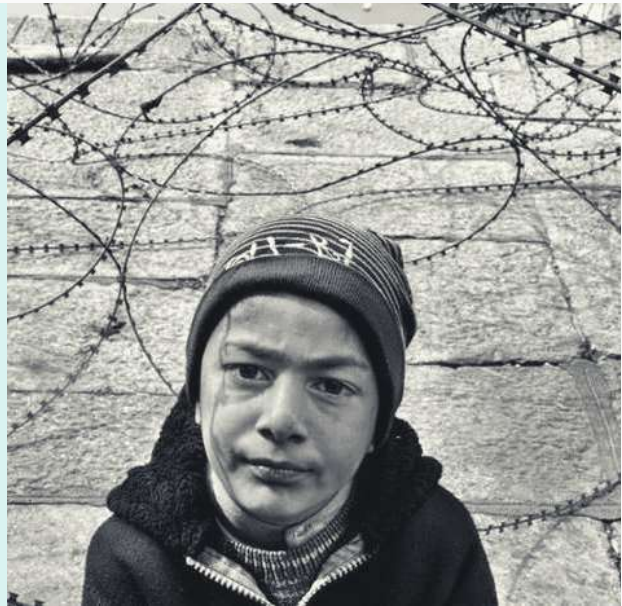
Kashmir lockdown has reached the ninth month now, since August 5 last year, when the government unilaterally revoked Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which gave the state of Jammu and Kashmir certain special rights. The government also decided to bifurcate the state into two Union Territories - J&K and Ladakh. This is the first time that a state has been reduced to the status of a Union Territory.

Going back a few years to the partition of British India in 1947, the British abandoned their suzerainty over the princely states and they were left with the options of joining either India or Pakistan or remaining independent.

J&K, a Muslim majority state was ruled by Maharaja Hari Singh who indicated his preference to remain independent. However, in October 1947, the Jammu region of the state witnessed a mass massacre of the Muslim population. An estimated 20000-100000 Muslims were massacred. Following this, some Pakistani tribesmen entered Kashmir. Fearing the clash, the Maharaja asked for help from India, which they agreed to give on the condition of accession to India. The instrument of accession specified only three subjects on which J&K would transfer power to the government of India which included foreign affairs, defence and communication. The state was to retain its autonomous status on everything else. Article 370 allowed it to have its own constitution, a separate flag and freedom to formulate laws. However, it was decided by the then Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru, that once the situation normalised, a plebiscite would take place which would determine the will of the people.

This promise of plebiscite however, was never fulfilled and over the years, the autonomy given to the state was reduced significantly. Article 370 and 35A did nevertheless prevent direct Indian control. It would then follow that the revocation of Article 370 is a breach of contract. Studying here in Delhi University, I have heard many shades of opinions regarding this issue. Some who do not support the move of the government seem to believe that after the revocation, it is occupation by the Indian state. While I, a Kashmiri myself, do agree with the latter part of the statement, I would urge people not to forget that Kashmiris have been asking for independence for 73 years now. Let's see it for what it is. It was occupation then and it is occupation now. However, the revocation of the special status of the state hit people more because now it means that whatever little autonomy the people had is gone.

Speaking about it, the process by which the article was removed was very undemocratic. The state, at that time, did not have a legislative assembly as former CM Mehbooba Mufti's government had been dissolved in November 2018 and hence, the state was under Governor's rule. This means that no elected representative of the state was consulted before passing the bill when the constitution clearly mentions it needs the concurrence of the state. The governments' answer was that since the Governor (which is an appointee of the Central Govt.) represented the state, his concurrence sufficed.

Few days prior to the revocation, thousands of paramilitary security troops were sent to the Kashmir region on the pretext that there was going to be a terror attack from the side of Pakistan. All the Yatris and tourists were rushed out of the valley. Satellite phones were distributed to the security officials.

Image Source: Pinterest (@Flickr) DalLakesrinagar_079

Thereafter, on August 4, the government ordered a total communication blackout, shutting down everything- landlines, cable TV, cell phones and internet. A strict curfew was laid out throughout the valley and section 144 was imposed in various places prohibiting assembly of more than four persons. Politicians, separatists and anyone who was seen as capable of mobilising even a handful of people were put in jail. Finally, on August 5 the government announced the revocation of Article 370. Clearly all this preparation was done beforehand to keep any cry of dissent from coming out. And anyone who managed to do so was brutally silenced. People were caged inside their homes. Schools, colleges and universities were closed down. Some government schools were made into army camps. People were not even allowed to go to the hospital during the curfews. Where people managed to come out on the streets, they were violently silenced. Army used brutal force indiscriminately, killing many. But people outside the state would not know that because it was made sure that no voice could be heard. All you could hear were statements of Indian politicians and media channels, claiming that there was absolute peace in Kashmir. Kashmiris being put under a complete communication blockade were not allowed to put forth their narrative.

Lately we have been witnessing police brutality at JNU, AMU and other universities. Horrific pictures of the same were shared on internet and thousands of students came out in solidarity with them. But let us not forget that this mobilisation was only made possible because we have the means of sharing our suffering. Now, imagine the situation in Kashmir. Human rights violations accompanied and strengthened by the communication blockade.

"Exhibit A has a single argument on behalf of the Kashmiri people- Let them speak."- Avani Rai

However, it must be noted that this situation is not new for Kashmir. I am, on behalf of all Kashmiris, without a doubt grateful to all the people who are now standing up for Kashmir. But it's unfortunate how people did not realise this before and have only woken up now. Kashmiris have been asking for an end to occupation for 73 years. The communication blockade that is making news, and is making people stand up for Kashmir and demand an end to it, is also not new and certainly, should not be the only reason for your protests. Do we expect that once the communication blockade is lifted normalcy will return to Kashmir? There is no 'normalcy' in Kashmir. People need to be more sensible to the demands of Kashmiri people and perhaps getting a small reality check would not hurt. It is not an end to the communication blockade that Kashmiris are fighting for, but an end to occupation. Occupation since 27 Oct 1947 when Indian forces settled in Kashmir and never left.

There have been communication cuts before. There have been curfews. There has been violent suppression of protests. The soil has witnessed innumerable human rights violations by the army time and again, including mass rapes, disappearances, killings, ransacking of houses and what not.
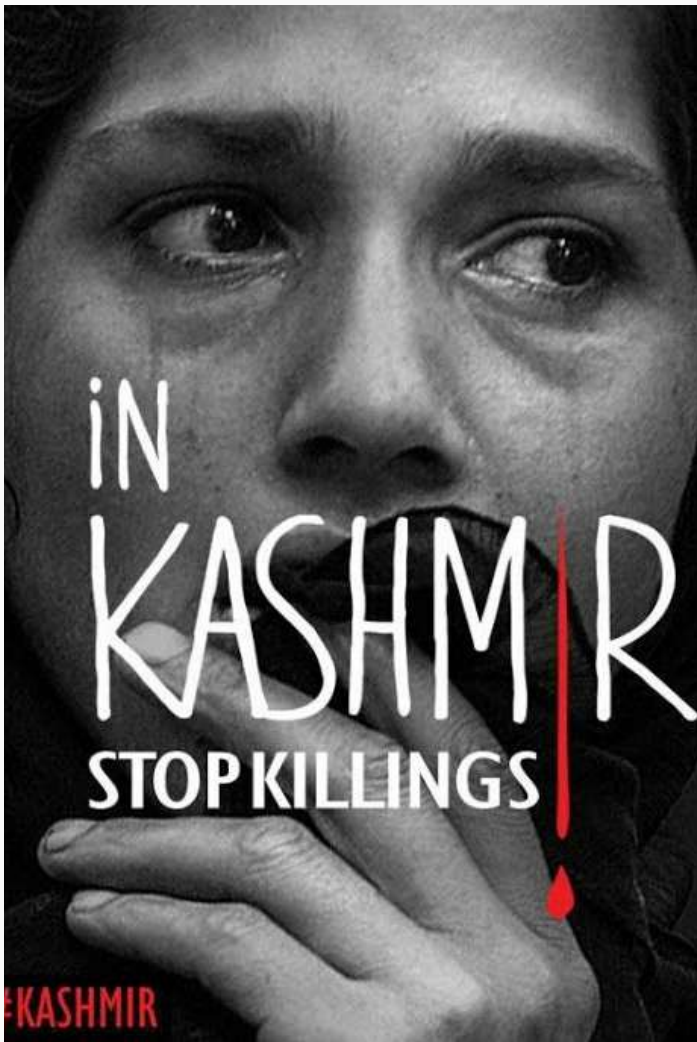
Image source: Pinterest (Monje.ir)

To give you an idea, there have been over 95000 killings, over 8000 enforced disappearances, 12010 cases of rape and molestation, over 7000 mass graves and 7116 custodian killings (UN Report of Human Rights Violations in Kashmir since 1989 to Oct 2018). The same report also notes that between 8 July 2016 and 27 February 2017, 6221 people had been injured by pellet guns among which 728 had eye injuries with many resulting in partial or complete blindness. Section 144 and internet ban have been the go-to-tools for the government. Kashmir being the most militarised zone in the world has over 600000 army personnel. The justification given by the government is that of militant presence in the region. But when compared to the number of militants which government figures claim is 300, one begins to wonder if that number really is required.

Coming back to the revocation of Article 370, I want to address a problem that I see in the attitudes of many Indians. After August 5, what surprised me, was how everyone had an opinion on Kashmir. Even people who knew nothing about it were praising the government and explaining to me 'how this will be good for Kashmiris'. Telling a person that something is good for them in the face of all evidence pointing in the other direction, speaks for itself.

When Kashmiris want to raise their voice in protest, and you tell them that this is something that is going to benefit them, basically means telling them that they are incapable of thinking for themselves, that their lived experiences do not matter.

To conclude, I think, we need to grow out of this obsession with this abstract idea of a nation and really try to understand and give priority to the hard core realities. Being patriotic should never translate into being bystanders of oppression. The lockdown certainly has cost Kashmir a lot but it is very less compared to the years of occupation that it has seen. People have, and continue to die. Kashmir longs for the dawn of freedom- freedom from all kinds of oppression and the freedom to determine its own fate.

Photograph by: Liisa Toomus
Source: Flickr (prayforthewildatheart.blogspot.com)

Featured image: "Exhibit A" by Avani Rai
Source: Pinterest (@homegrownin)

Parasite: A Crude Manifestation of the Dark Reality

by Lakshmi Padmakumar, Second Year

"In this structure, everyone is a parasite to each other. The whole structure itself is parasitic as it builds upon the roots of exploitation."

'Parasite', directed by Bong Joon-ho, became the first foreign language film to win the 'Best Picture' award in the history of Academy Awards. Along with three other academy awards, including best director, best screenplay and best international feature film, Parasite also became the first South Korean film to win the 'Palme d'Or'. While receiving international critical acclaim, it also won accolades back home and became the highest-grossing South Korean film. It won the Golden Globe Award for 'Best Foreign Language Film' and the BAFTA Award for 'Best Film Not in the English Language'.

Parasite revolves around the lives of three families. The first family is of the Parks' who are rich and the second, of the Kims', who are poor. The third family is of the old housekeeper at Park's house and her husband who lives in the basement of the Parks' without their knowledge. The plot of the movie is set in South Korea enrooted in neoliberalism. Though the story is set in a particular space, both west and east can relate to it as the movie rolls around capitalism which has already covered most parts of the globe, ideologically and operationally.

Parasite challenges the functionalist perspective that says the distribution of rewards is based on merit. Also, it contradicts the idea that capitalistic approach rewards people with talent without considering their economic status. The members of the Kim family are skilled, but are underprivileged and are devoid of opportunities. The skills of the underprivileged are devalued and their chance of upward mobility is thus restrained. For instance, the elder son of the family is academically qualified; but, to attain employment, he had to take help from a friend who is privileged. After that, the son gets at Parks' using false identity and he helps his whole family to work at the place.

The landscape of the movie symbolically talks about structural inequality. Three types of housings are shown belonging to each family depicting their standard of living. The Parks' live in a huge house which is designed by an architect who used to live there. Their house is spacious as well as aesthetically pleasing. The Kims' live in a house which is half beneath the ground - cluttered and congested, with a partial view to the world outside. The old housekeeper's husband secretly lives in the Parks' basement.

It is a dark place, with no view of the outer world. The details of these three houses play an important role in the movie. The availability of sunlight to each house is used to symbolise the standard of life. The one who gets more sunlight is shown to be more privileged. Similarly, the stairs connecting the houses are metaphorically used to show social mobility. The Kims' climb up the stairs to reach at the Parks'. They come back home climbing down the stairs. The Parks' house stairs up to bedroom, whereas the Kims', to the toilet. Where the housekeeper's husband lives is stairs down the Parks' house. That is, the lower class ascends the stairs towards the upper class.

The patriarch of the Park family repeatedly says that he does not like people crossing the line. He says "that smell crossed the line", when he smells Kims at his house. Even in a tragic birthday party sequence with the Kims, Park covers his face and runs instead of helping. The story here shows how the privileged blindfold themselves to seeing societal malfunctions. The smell of the Kims signifies the odour of poverty, and Park's attempt to stay away from that odour reflects attempts to maintain the status quo. That is, when Park says he does not like people crossing the line, it signifies how people at the higher strata do not welcome upward mobility of the lower strata.

The major twist in the movie happens when it rains heavily to flood the Kims' house with sewage water; the same rain which comes as a blessing for the rich as it brought them clear sky and less pollution. The Kims and the Parks live in the same society, they get the same rain. But this portrays how natural disasters have such starkly different meanings for people belonging to different classes.

The class struggle in the movie is not just between the rich and the poor. It is also between the poor and the poorer. The name 'Parasite' signifies that everyone is mutually exploiting whatever little benefits they have. None can be called a protagonist or an antagonist in this movie. The social structure which the characters are stuck in, is the villain of the story. This structure is designed just for the rich to get richer. There are no opportunities for the poor to climb up the social ladder. This creates competition among the lower class for the limited resources left for them. In this structure, everyone is a parasite to each other. The whole structure itself is parasitic as it builds upon the roots of exploitation. The director has effortlessly portrayed the problems created by the structure and the uneasiness to find a solution out of it.

This 2 hour 12 minute movie does not easily end, as you are left with so many questions. Has the class struggle of the working class failed because of no mass mobilization? Or has it failed because of the antagonism within the proletarians? Was there really a class struggle? Was it only class conflict? Does this movie say that a working class revolution is only a day dream in neoliberalism? Well, I'd like to believe that there will be a day when all the disparities in the society will be wiped out.
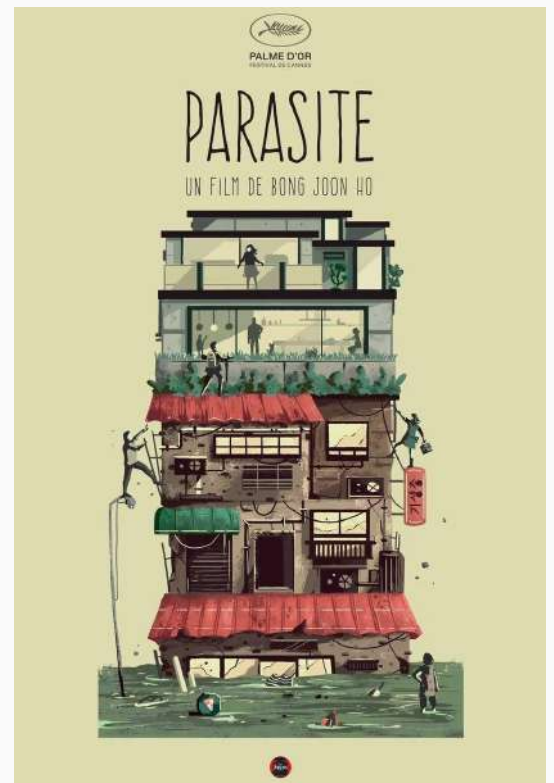
Poster by: Palme D'or Festival de Cannes
Source: Pinterest

Featured image: Art by Andrew Bannister

Source: Pinterest (@mubi.com)

Dating Apps: Commercialization of Love?

by Ishika Roy, First Year

"An 'oh there's plenty of fish in the sea' mentality creeps in and thus, the chase for the perfect becomes a necessary evil in this paradox of choice."

If you were born in India, and like me, grew up with a television in your house, it is next to impossible that you missed out on the biggest cultural phenomenon known as Bollywood! And one of the most lucrative aspect of any Bollywood blockbuster was its romance – the furtive meet cutes, misogynistic heroes saving damsels in distress, wooing each other in exotic locales with love ballads crooning in the background and finally defeating the villain to secure a hand in marriage. Happy ending!

But reality is harsh, and there are no hot dishy dudes stretching out their arms in the middle of sunflower fields, strangers quoting 'Don' in the picturesque island of Corsica or royal princes willing to break off their engagement and play paintball to win over your heart The 21st century has somewhat progressed from the patriarchal clutches of time-tested chauvinist romance, where the women were reduced to mere objects of male entertainment, doting on their partners and looking after their happiness while sacrificing their own. However, modern women are taking their lives in their own hands, and why should their love lives be any different?

We've all heard of dating apps here and there, in radio or television advertisements, social media or even the newspaper supplementary. Such a wonderful genius concept, allowing you to find love at the swipe of your fingertips! But doesn't having so many options at your beck and call take away the focus from our actual intention? That's the thing about possibilities, it makes one complacent and vain. Having an infinite number of potential partners eventually compromises the quality of our choice. Partners are reduced to mere candidates based on their bios, and every imperfection is scrutinized under a magnifying glass- people become perfection hungry in a sense that they forget the person on the other side of the screen is also human, they too have feelings. An 'oh there's plenty of fish in the sea' mentality creeps in and thus the chase for the perfect becomes a necessary evil in this paradox of choice.

The lack of face to face interaction takes a toll on the chemistry and intimacy so important in gauging the quality of a relationship.

Also, this supposed anonymity lends a sense of uncertainty and is a double-edged sword in the long run. A lot of cases were reported where people have been ghosted by their partners- an act of disappearing altogether, erasing all evidence of their existence from the app. While these apps have normalized polygamy and encouraged women to make the first move (case in point Bumble), it has also catalyzed the rise of a hook up culture which leads to an impersonal detachment from the pursuit of 'the one'.

Romance has been commercialized in a way never seen before. Hallmark cards pushed aside, relationships are being compared to a market, where people are available as commodities to be shopped by one another, their values dependent on external qualities rather than their innate traits. Premium features and subscription offers have economized the whole deal. In a world where everybody is looking at everybody, people think that they know what they want, whereas it all boils down to what they believe they know what they want. So the next time you download tinder or hinge, just keep in mind that honesty goes a long way and conveying your intentions upfront can save you a lot of trouble.
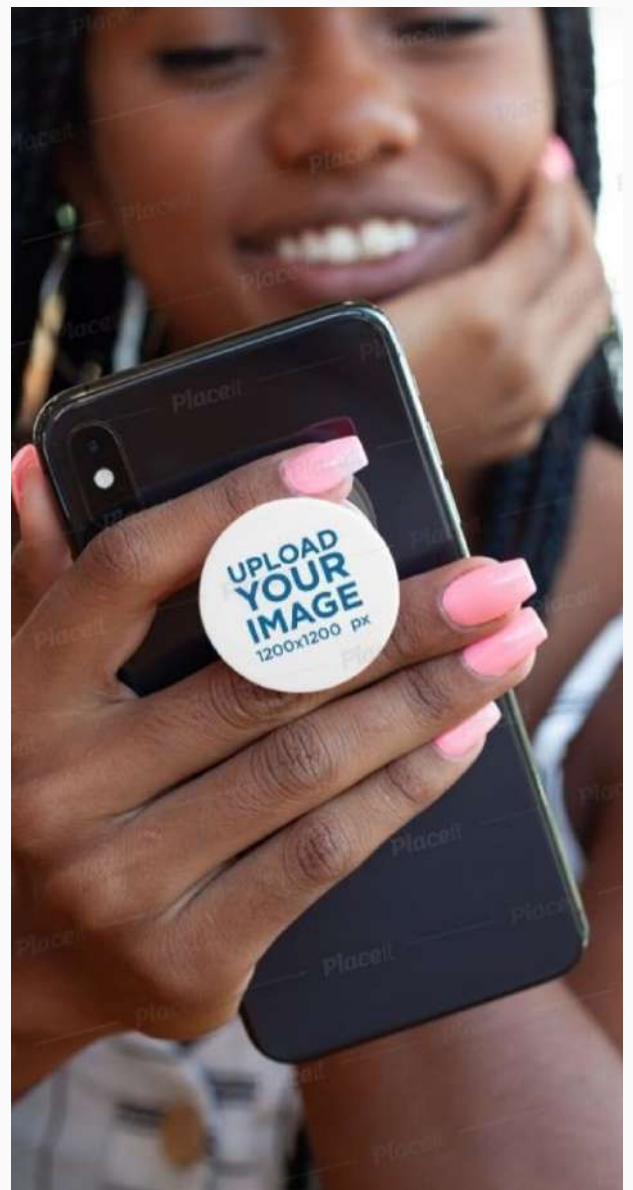
Source: Pinterest (@Placeit)

Featured image source: Pinterest (@wau)

Beauty: A Mark of Culture

by Mridula Lathan, Third Year

"Notwithstanding the differences across cultures, there's one thing that is universal and that is, the burden of beauty on the female."

Beauty is more or less considered as one's personal matter. It is believed that it is a matter of individual choice how one wishes to look like. One usually prefers the kind of clothes, ornaments, hair and other aspects of physical representation according to his or her conception of beauty. But, the role played by society in forming these beauty concepts cannot be neglected. Most of us will find beauty in those features which are commonly considered as "beautiful" in our culture. Some kind of values are associated with beauty in each society. With the socialization process, these values are imbibed and internalised.

So, the way one wants to look like and the features they find attractive in another person depends on the inbuilt beauty concepts within a person, the source of which is the society.

Time and place both have a relevance on the building of ideas on beauty. That's why each culture has its own unique beauty definitions. The physical features admired in one culture may not be considered worthy of admiration in another. For example, long necked women are considered beautiful in the culture of Myanmar. These are the Karen women belonging to the 'giraffe' tribe. From their childhood, girls are made to wear metal rings on their neck and the number of rings will increase with time. Another noteworthy concept is the stretched earlobes and a shaved head as a mark of beauty in Kenya and other parts of Africa. Some kind of sport tattoo on lips and chin of Maori women is considered beautiful in New Zealand. This tradition is called 'Ta Moko'. Another one is the stretched lips for women in parts of Africa and South America. Avoiding the sun tan is also a part of the beauty consciousness of many Asian women. Indian women putting henna on special occasions is an enhancement of beauty according to the Indian culture.

However, while talking of India, we need to take into account several regional differences in beauty concepts. Each bride chooses an attire depending on their culture and region. Women from Bengal wearing 'banarasi' saree and women from south India wearing 'kancheepuram' saree serves as an example of this regional variation. Moreover, in many Indian states, parents put kajal (kohl) on the eyes and eyebrows of newly born kids as a mark of beauty, to distract negative energies and to shape their eyes and eyebrows in a specific manner.

These are some of the many examples of how beauty conceptions are intertwined with cultural significance.

But, these conceptions are not rigid in a sense that they are permanent. They undergo changes with time and other influences. An example of the latter kind of influence would be how, with globalization, a standardised conception of beauty has started emerging worldwide. Given the close relationship between globalisation and westernisation, it is no surprise that these new ideas of beauty are inclined towards western standards.

The more nations and societies get connected, the more is the exchange of culture at all levels. Working women all over the world today generally prefer western formals for office wear. The accessories are also of a particular kind. There is a similar standardised dress code for men as well. Not only in their offices but also in casual events, people have started preferring western style, since it is more comfortable as well as popular. Even though this is the picture of the world today, for any cultural function or for some special events such as weddings, people still prefer their traditional attire. An amalgamation of western and traditional culture has started attracting young people in recent times. With the rapid globalisation the country is witnessing, Indo-Western outfits have become a widespread phenomenon.

Artwork by: Chandan Maisnam, Batch 2016-19

Indian kurti paired with jeans is a common sight. Ethnic wear has also become popular again and old beauty concepts have started reviving. Notwithstanding the differences across cultures, there's one thing that is universal, and that is, the burden of beauty on the female. Women are supposed to look beautiful in every culture according to their accepted standards. Most standards of beauty are patriarchal; it is the male gaze which is the determinant of what is beautiful and what is not. There always exists a social pressure for women to look a particular way, and women are expected to put time and efforts in it. Capitalism is also selling these ideas through mass media and thereby creating a market for their products.

Therefore, irrespective of all the differences, one thing remains universal – someone is considered more beautiful than someone else. And it is precisely what needs to change – the attachment of value to somebody's physical features and judging them on the basis of it.
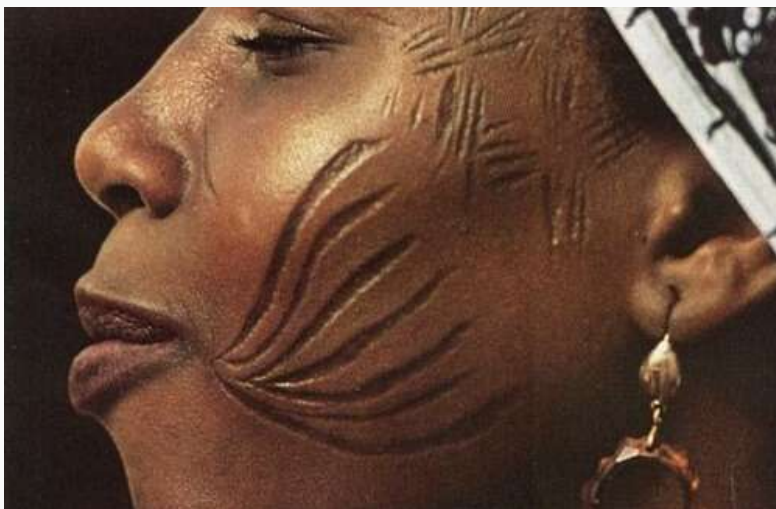
Source: Pinterest (blkcowrie.tumblr.com)

Featured image: Pinterest (VICE magazine)
Photography by: Steve McCurry
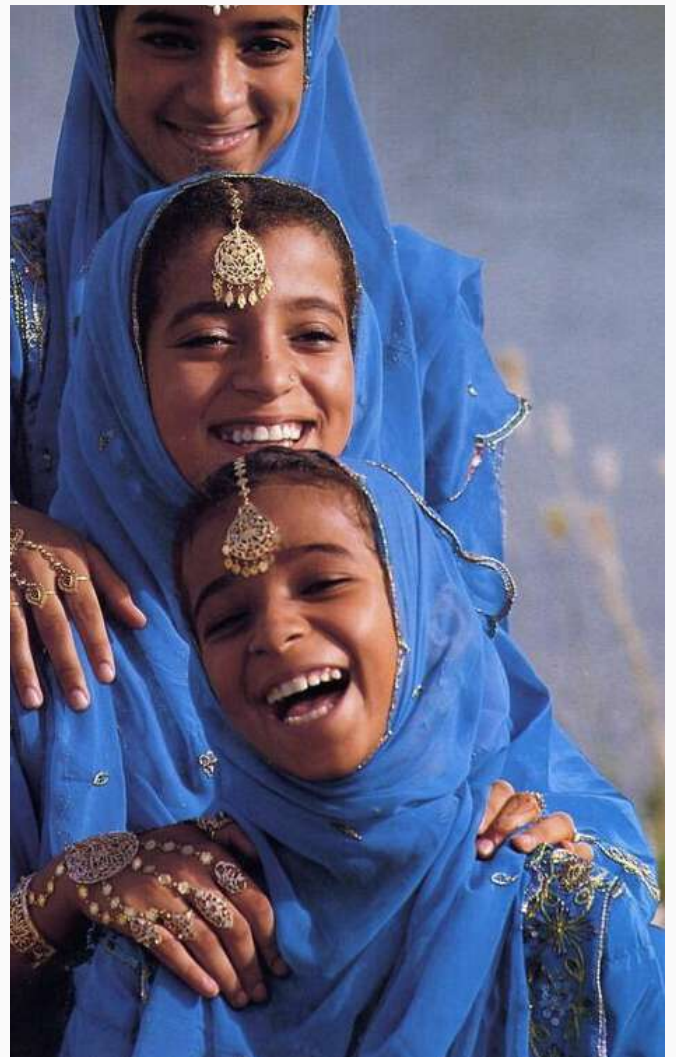
Photography by: @Bellasecretgarden
Source: Pinterest (@Raheem3)

The best journey takes you home!

by Tara Tejaswini, Third Year
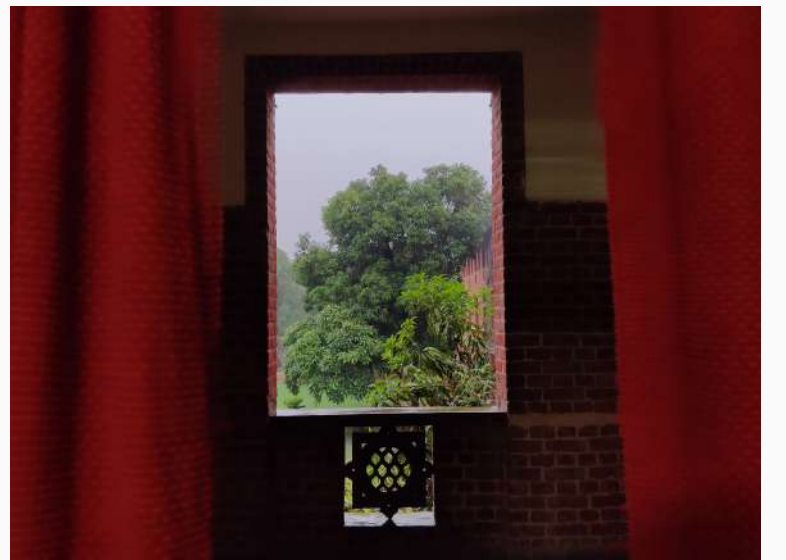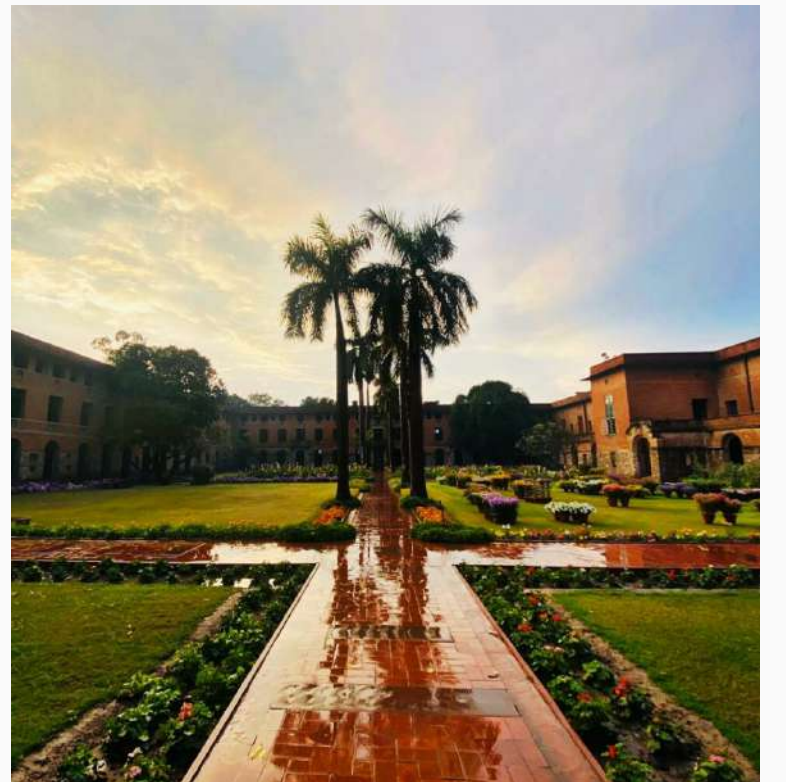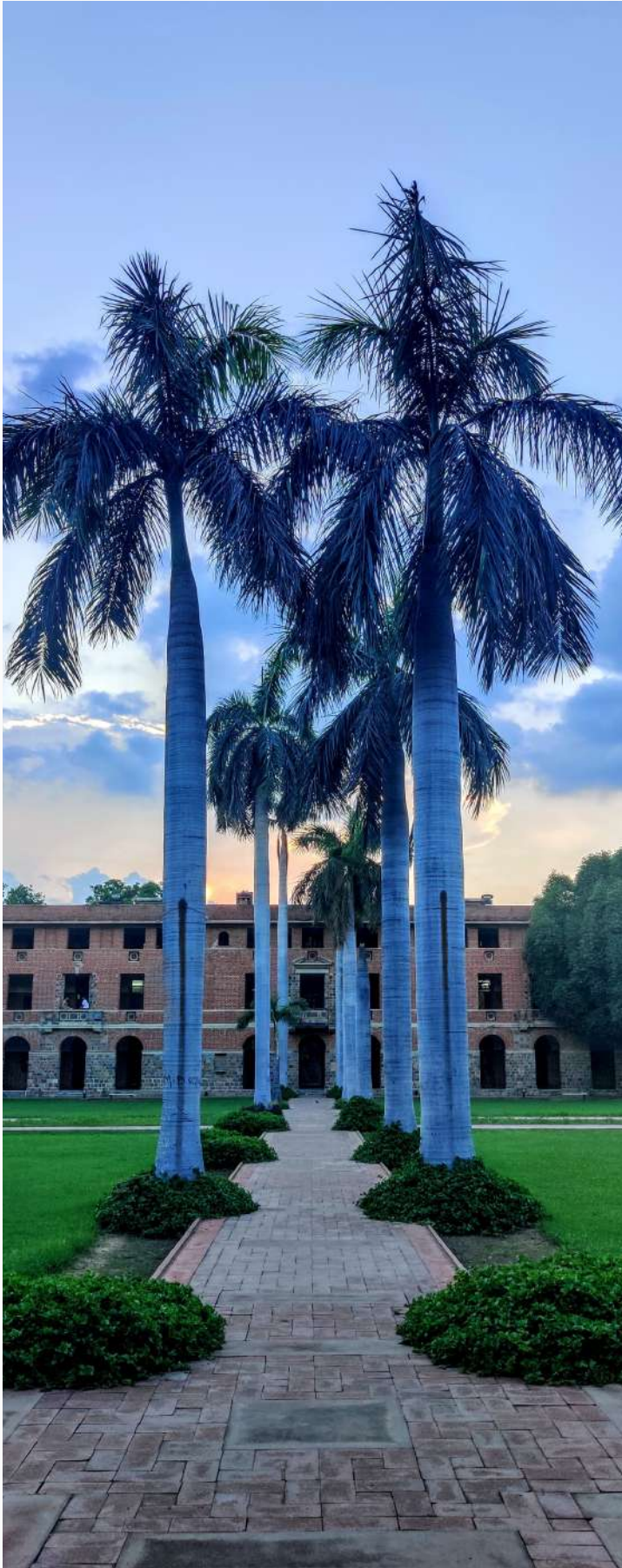
It's said that a picture is worth a thousand words but even that won't suffice to express how much this place means to me. I can only thank Miranda, for being my safe haven, for making me fall in love with sunsets, for showing me what true beauty is, for teaching me the true meaning of friendship, sisterhood and female solidarity, and giving me countless memories that I'll cherish forever.

This is basically the essence that I've tried to capture here. I hope that, when you go through these moments of tranquility captured in a world of chaos and uncertainty, you feel the same love, awe and wonder for this beautiful place we call home, as I did when I took them.

খিলঞ্জীয়া // *khilonjia* Indigenous

by Arundhati Nath, Third Year

The term খিলঞ্জীয়া (khilonjia), meaning 'indigenous', is used here in the context of the common use of the term to distinguish indigenous Assamese Muslims from Bangladeshi immigrants.

Sixth grade in school,

Some boys call my best friend "Bangladeshi",

she is not allowed to get angry -

It's acceptable between friends.

It's funny.

"মই খিলঞ্জীয়া মুছলমান বুজিছ'?"

("I am a *khilonjia* Muslim, do you understand?"),

she retorts,

playfully.

November 2008,

Talks of the blasts at the bus stop -

an eight year old says

all Muslims are terrorists;

another replies,

"নাই নাই,আমি খিলঞ্জীয়াবোৰ নহয়।"

("No no, we *khilonjias* are not.")

A December afternoon last year,

I go to Ali daa's shop to buy groceries

and two men come by.

Assam only talks of CAA then.

One of them asks -

his face coloured with a nefarious grin -

casually as if

questioning Ali's identity

was a right that came with his own:

"কি হে আলি, কানি-কাপোৰ সামৰিবলৈ হ'লেই আৰু ন'?"

("It's almost time to pack your bags, isn't it, Ali?")

Ali da answers in a second,

as if proving his identity

was a fundamental duty -

"নাই নাই, দাদা, মই খিলঞ্জীয়া; NRCত নাম আছে মোৰ।"

("No no, brother, I am a *khilonjia*, I have my name in the NRC.")

"Indian streets" by @Wo0dman
Source: Pinterest (@deviantart)

So *khilonjia* is not a word,

it's an identity -

an identity that blurs the stereotypes a little,

an identity that proves they are not immigrants,

Because for some reason,

immigrants represent all things bad

and *khilonjia* brings them closer to the majority.

Featured image source:

Pinterest (@ipadwpgallery)

Of Mountains and Clear Skies
Dharamshala: An experience

by Nehal Gupta, Third Year

" Those with an endless wanderlust explored some other, less crowded places as well- like the St. John's Church, and now carry with them a story they may never let go of."

More than thirty of us, seated in a travel bus, sang along to almost everyone's playlist on our journey to Dharamshala. We were in our comfort clothes, all in jammies or sweatpants, the air filled with excitement, for our first class trip. The cheer slowed down a little as it went pitch black outside. Towards the hills, the bus ride was bumpy. More for those sitting in the back than the others but, really, no one felt troubled because we were all so stoked for our arrival at our awaited destination and all the fresh air we were going to breathe for the next few days.

With a few stops for meals along the way, we were wide awake because of the soothing rays of sunshine falling on our faces and the pleasant sounds of water flowing beside us.

Once we reached, we all stayed, moved, researched, photographed, ate and laughed in groups. Our stay, thanks to our teachers, was ensured at a student-friendly and a very cutesy hostel named Triangle Folks in the Bhagsu area. For us city kids, it was quite a climb to our rooms.

The main aim was to conduct fieldwork but of course, during the process, we took the scenery in as much as we could, spoke to new and interesting people, tried new food and bonded on a rather unique level. Despite everyone's varying preference to move around in the hilly, green areas, all the groups were held together with a rather excitable social glue – wanting to make the most of our three days outside the classroom together. Accentuating every sliver of enjoyment, groups directed their focus on music, art, medicine, the institution of marriage, women's roles, travel and tourism and even politics in light of the Tibetan population of the area and their associations with Buddhist culture and practices. It was not only interaction with people and ventures onto the streets that led most of us to be awed and amazed. The manifold attempts of the Tibetan people to preserve their culture could be reflected in the sights of the town – grand and beautiful monasteries, traditional museums, schools of primary education, art, dance and painting, and even in the expression of messages through mediums as simple as music.

Back in the hostel, the common dining area became a spot for discussion, light conversation and relaxation after a day of hard work and adventure. It was not just the students, but also the teachers who kicked back and let their hair down at the end of a tiring day. On one of the days, after dinner, our teachers treated us to a musical night. It was the perfect blend of music and magic, especially for the music lovers in our large group. Many of us walked up to the Bhagsu fall one afternoon and had an invigorating experience putting our hands into the water and looking at it hard enough to see fish. That definitely doesn't happen in Delhi. Being so close to nature, some of us actually experienced a retreat in the lap of the hills. Escaping the oppressive October heat of the city, the quaint yet welcoming town of Dharamshala gave us a stack of unforgettable memories and a break to our lungs with the chilly air there.

We ended up taking part in almost every touristy thing we could. Visits were made to the Dalai Lama Temple, Men-Tsee-Khang (an alternate medicine clinic), Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA), the Doll museum, the wood carving workshop and a painting workshop in Norbulingka Institute located in Dharamkot. Our more book-savvy companions enjoyed every bit of collecting interesting literature from the monastery bookshops and the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. Various books on Tibetan culture, history and Buddhism could be spotted along with comparatively rare translations of Tibetan texts. Those with an endless wanderlust explored some other, less crowded places as well—like the St. John's Church and now carry with them a story they may never let go of. Spiritual as the journey was, one of the rainy days brought to us not a rainbow, rather a spectacular and striking feeling of walking through clouds.

Captured by: Akansha Priya, Third Year

Photograph by: Rishav Lakhanpal
Source: Instagram(@dharamshalagram)

All of us dressed in a tad layer of warm clothes felt the pleasant weather, with our hands filled with a hot cup of tea or coffee most of the time. If it wasn't the typical chai, then perhaps it would be a soothing glass of ginger lemon tea or Po cha, the Tibetan butter tea.

It's the beauty found in a learning experience that strengthened our resolve and tightened some of our interests in being more engaged with the world, sociologically. While the aim was to gain knowledge, we all ended up gaining so much more and I, for one, am grateful for that.

Captured by: Akansha Priya, Third Year

Featured image: one of the most beautiful rooms the students stayed in
Captured by: Nitupriya Regon, Third Year

SECTION TWO

Revisiting Home: Reflections from the Alumni

The Borders We Cross

by Asmaani Kumar, Editor-in-Chief, 2018-2019

"I want to write about Jhumpa Lahiri's works because she is the one person who made me realise that migration is not a simple movement from point A to point B; it carries with it lived experiences, trauma, nostalgia for a world that was left behind."

It is a strange time to sit down and write about this, but the importance of having a home has become increasingly significant. So has the privilege of being able to move that comes along with it. Last Sunday, I was watching an Instagram live session of Jhumpa Lahiri and she spoke about the opportunities for movement that this world has given us and although its availability is seen to be on the rise, it continues to be limited. And this brings me back to the news I heard last night, about migrant workers in Bombay being denied this luxury to move, to go back home.

The ideas that revolve around migration came first to me from a history textbook back when I was in the 9th grade. We were reading about indentured labourers moving across borders, oceans to foreign lands to find themselves work on colonial plantations. Surely, this is not India's first experience of migration but it will be one of those important events which will continue to have reverberations for a country coming out of its colonial past. I want to write about Jhumpa Lahiri's works because she is the one person who made me realise that migration is not a simple movement from point A to point B; it carries with it lived experiences, trauma, nostalgia for a world that was left behind. And more often than not, out of reach.

In all her stories about Bengali people moving to the United States, we see this clash of identities taking place. And we also see a concerted effort for the preservation of heritage and even though in her book *The Namesake*, we find a conflict between assimilation and preservation, what we learn is that it is possible to balance the two without forgetting your past. If we look at *The Lowland*, it's a means of escape - this movement that people make and if you read *Hell-Heaven* or *When Mr. Pirzada came to dine*, you're never more at home than those who speak the language. In this search for escape, you're also trying to piece together these experiences, turn them into repeated habits bringing families from the same place together to serve as a reminder of what was left behind. The idea of the "immigrant" is such a significant part of her narrative and although she is talking about middle-class Bengali immigrants, her stories beg us to look at this process of migration in a different light.

There is a lesson here for us or for me, to be fair. We have to move beyond numbers, look at people making these repeated journeys and understand the different narratives that revolve around it. The singular cause-effect relationship can no longer hold. We would come to discover that there are different movements happening for different reasons, some times to the same place and each community that identifies on either class or ethnic lines have a different treatment meted out to them. And even though getting at the depth of this would not be easy, there are stories to be told in understanding who moved and who could have but didn't.

Borders, the ones we cross, have increasingly come to define us even though we live in a world that is so much more connected than before. Migration continues to be a cause of concern, carrying along with it the ideas of who belongs and who doesn't. It makes me wonder, why would any of us move away from a place that gives us our identity to somewhere where we'll always be treated as alien?

Source: Pinterest (Photograph from the Reuters)

The lessons to be learned from migration don't end with international movements and the associated practices of isolation, at times discrimination. We cry out for the sufferings of those from our country abroad but we must take a closer look at the way we treat migrants out here. Are we that different from them? In the claims for

preservation of our identities, have we too not made people feel like they don't belong? Is there a way to even be better, to understand why they moved and to come to terms with it? I don't have the answers.

And if we don't even look at national boundaries but state boundaries, have we not struggled as we move from our home state to another? Let's look further down the hierarchy. Do you feel that all of the migrant labourers move from their villages which offer a semblance of the comforts of life to the cities for a sense of adventure? No, it's the circumstances, it's this falling apart of the agriculture sector back home, the increasing trends of unemployment. And the strangest thing is even though they're living in the same country that they could identify with, so many times they are denied a sense of belonging. Look at slum eviction drives and the need for gated communities, and no voter's rights even, because they no longer reside at the place of their birth. It becomes increasingly evident with the onset of this pandemic.

For those of us sitting at homes, there are those who have been denied even the opportunity to go back, their very existence and their needs overlooked. If we are indeed going to look at migration, we have to look at the experiences of people, understand what makes us alien and what makes us belong, the trauma and the consistent conflict of identities associated with it. And we only need to look at the situation unfolding in our country. Is there a way out? I don't know. But there could be only if we take a closer look at the injustices that accompany so many trends of movement. Perhaps it would serve as a starting point for rehabilitation and bridge a gap between those who belong and those who don't on a greater social as well as material basis.

Featured image: Pinterest (theasianchronicle.com)

Why do cities matter for economic growth and poverty?

by Anjali Dhingra, Batch 2016-19

"… it is also evident from the works of notable sociologists, such as Simmel, Weber and most prominently the Chicago School, that cities are also important from the perspective of sociology."

"Like it or not, the globe has an urban future."
Peter Calthorpe (2011: 3) as cited in Alankar (2015)

Economic growth is one of the most powerful tools to reduce poverty and to improve the standard of living in countries. It seems ironical somehow, as even after rapid development and progress, poverty still exists, and every country in the world continues to grapple with it. In developing countries, extreme poverty is a significant concern as it makes the already vulnerable population more vulnerable.

Massive development efforts have indeed led to transitioning of least developed economies to less developed or developed economies, especially in countries of Asia and Africa. However, it is also true that a large population in these countries still live with income levels of less than 'a dollar a day.'

With trends of massive urbanization all around the world, and cities coming into prominence, it opens vast areas of opportunities of expansion in sectors of economic growth such as in the secondary (manufacturing) and tertiary (service) sectors. It is meaningful to note the increase in growth of the world's urban population in large cities outside the highest income nations. This trend is expected to continue. The 2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects produced by the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) notes that "future increases in the size of the world's urban population are expected to be highly concentrated in just a few countries. Together, India, China and Nigeria will account for 35% of the projected growth of the world's urban population between 2018 and 2050. By 2050, nearly 7 of 10 people in the world will live in cities" (68% of the world population projected to live in urban areas by 2050, says UN, 2018; Urban Development, WB). Most cities are growing quickly, "the world is projected to have 43 megacities with more than 10 million inhabitants, most of them in developing regions. With more than 80% of global GDP generated in cities, urbanization can contribute to sustainable growth if managed well by increasing productivity, allowing innovation and new ideas to emerge."

Cities are important for understanding linkages between growth and poverty, from both economic and policy perspectives.

However, it is also evident from works of notable sociologists, such as Simmel, Weber, and most prominently the Chicago School, that cities are also important from the perspective of sociology. Studying the city is not just about studying "urban." It is also about studying social processes. For instance, interactions happening in urban labour markets, may create a *"multiplier effect"*; it may not directly create jobs, but it will create associated employment and hence contribute to reducing poverty.

In addition, urban areas also house the many policy actors who might prove useful in achieving this. Since institutional cooperation is vital in establishing links between policies for

Source: Pinterest (must-visit-destinations.com)

promoting economic growth and reducing poverty, cities are well-placed to materialize this plan. Many of the new growth sectors (business services, finance, creative industries) are based here. Cities are 'hubs' for skills, knowledge, innovation, businesses, and jobs. Between 2014 and 2016 only, it is estimated that "300 large cities – containing only 22% of world population – drove 67% of world GDP growth" (Global Monitoring Report, undated).

Today, cities are emerging as a strategic site for understanding some of the major new trends (globalization, the rise of ICTs) that are reshaping the social order, and understanding how and in what ways these trends interact with each other. Cities are the future. "Urbanization is often perceived as a step forward, for humanity and developing countries."(Ending poverty requires more than growth, says WBG 2014). However, cities are also characterized by social segregation, poverty, conflict, environmental degradation etc. and, much too often, are centers of unemployment. Thus, the question we arrive at is that even after driving economic development, why are global cities filled with poor slum dwellers?

The needs of the growing urban population- housing, transportation, as well as employment and essential services such as education and health care, will be met with serious challenges in many countries, in the near future. Sometimes, urbanization has its effects on regions at the edges of big cities. These communities are generally not prepared for adapting to "urban lifestyle." Life becomes expensive for these villagers; most of them don't have the skill sets required for higher-paying jobs, and hence, find themselves pushed into the informal economy to survive. One of the most visible indicators of urban poverty in developing countries is the proliferation of slums. "It is striking that the number of urban slum dwellers is now nearly a sixth of the world's population — approximately 1 billion people – and that number could double by 2030."(Global Monitoring Report, undated).

The final question is then, does urbanization increase poverty or decrease it in the long term? In the urban context, it is noteworthy to see how even the place of residence is a mark of inequalities between different groups; a slum settlement versus a wealthy neighbourhood.

A large proportion of the urban poor lives in slums, due to a lack of affordable housing within the city. Given their informal nature, for instance, in India, residents are often "stigmatized and neglected by governments" (Causes of Urban Poverty in India: How to Improve Life in the Slums, 2018). This has implications on their access to safety nets and to financial resources and services. Present estimates are that "about one-third of all urban residents live below the poverty line, in India. About 15% of these have no access to safe drinking water and more than half no adequate sanitation" (Causes of Urban Poverty in India: How to Improve Life in the Slums, 2018). These problems are coupled with "poor drainage and the lack of waste management, education, and health facilities and services. Increasing traffic congestion and pollution add to the list of urban environmental problems and the degrading quality of life borne by urban residents, especially the poor. Most of the urban poor living in slums lack access to housing finance from the formal sector" (Causes of Urban Poverty in India: How to Improve Life in the Slums, 2018).

Source: Pinterest (@Flickr) Dharavi_PipelinePromenade

Economic growth, thus, must be complemented with economic, social and institutional arrangements that ensure maximum participation of the people especially the poor, who can contribute to that growth. The quality of growth also matters. 'Leaving no one behind'- the commitment by SDGs, have made it clear that "progress needs to reach the poorest and most marginalized" (Poverty Overview, undated).

Thus, it becomes all the more important for promotion of growth that is sustained and inclusive; creating more and better jobs; investments in people's basic requirements; and developing effective safety net programs that enable the most vulnerable to continue in the face of shocks. As the world continues to urbanize, it becomes crucial to sustain this economic growth by successfully managing urban growth; especially in low-income and lower-middle-income countries where the pace of urbanization is projected to be the fastest. "There are two primary ways through which growth at city level can reduce poverty: by raising wages and/or increasing employment" (Lee and Sissons, 2016). We find that the urbanization process stimulates the transition from farm to non-farm activities in rural areas. More specifically, urbanization tends to reduce farm income and increase wages and non-farm income in rural households which leads us to understand how vital the role of cities is in reducing poverty and boosting growth.

The most important lesson from studying urbanization is that it is "necessary but not sufficient on its own for global poverty alleviation" (Poverty Overview, undated). Global megacities are already struggling with widespread and devastating poverty and billions of people will continue migrating to them. Therefore, while it is true to some extent that urbanization has contributed to substantial poverty alleviation, it is the governments that need to be aware of the risks of urban poverty and they should strategize in a way in order to mitigate its risks. Careful attention to urban planning with effective regulatory frameworks is required if we assume that rapid urbanization would provide opportunities for all. Good governance, in combination with innovative approaches to urban poverty reduction, are needed to ensure that urbanization fulfils the promise of ending global poverty.

Featured image source: Instagram (@symmetricalmonsters)

Oenomel: Strength & Sweetness

Artwork by Poonam Ghore, Batch 2015-2018

THE LOOKING GLASS SELF: Anxiety and Me

by Ishani Chakrabarti, Editor-in-Chief, 2017-2018

"At times, it's enough to let the other person know you're listening and you're there. I am reading up a lot on ways to help so I am available for those who need support. Healing others heal me."
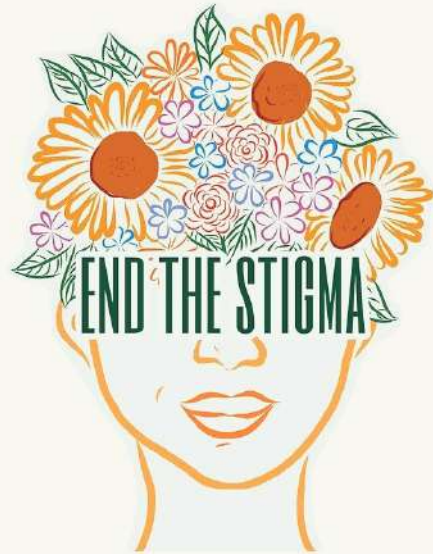
When Arundhati approached me to write a piece for the magazine, I was certain I would, of course I would, I promised her I would. I promised myself I would. She gave me weekly reminders, I put those down on my phone - scribbled a little something in my notes, put alarms and reminders. I couldn't get myself to do it, I couldn't get myself to get out of bed, couldn't get myself to start writing. Here I am typing this out telling you why, promising myself to keep this as raw and real as possible.

YOUR THOUGHTS: Ah no, it doesn't work like that. She isn't serious. We finish all our readings then write assignments. Everything is possible, ya!

Sure, but this is a little more complicated than the readings. Yes, that's a bold statement to make. But it definitely is. Let me put it this way, it's like a scramble of emotions and you're constantly adding these emotional ingredients that appear from nowhere.

YOUR THOUGHTS: Oh so she is a chef. That is why she was busy and couldn't write the article.

Actually, Karen, I have anxiety. I have chronic anxiety. I've had it for years now and I struggle with it every single day. Okay, that's a stretch, I struggle with it every 29 days a month. Let me tell you what it's like because I never had anyone tell me what it's like when I was you, Karen.

So I found this off a reliable medical page: "Anxiety is a normal reaction to danger, the body's automatic fight-or-flight response that is triggered when you feel threatened, under pressure, or are facing a challenging situation, such as a job interview, exam, or first date. In moderation, anxiety isn't necessarily a bad thing. It can help you to stay alert and focused, spur you to action, and motivate you to solve problems. But when anxiety is constant or overwhelming—when worries and fears interfere with your relationships and daily life—you've likely crossed the line from normal anxiety into the territory of an anxiety disorder."

YOUR THOUGHTS: Oh, then we all have anxiety. I was so nervous before my presentation; you know? Also the placement cell interview. God, so nervous.

Here's the difference between anxiety and nervousness: Anxiety could get messy, unpredictable, overpowering and insidious, physically and mentally. So if you were scared during presentations, I avoided presentations and had to prep myself mentally for over 48 hours, sometimes more if at all I had to present. It can get unexpectedly debilitating and I am unable to think or speak clearly.

Image source: Pinterest (@Daddy's Little Angel)

It's almost as if I don't know where I am, I don't know how to construct coherent speech. Basically, it's really messy. This could feel like an exaggeration but anxiety manifests itself in physical forms as well. Shortness of breath, sweaty and clammy palms, a pounding heart, and a sharp persistent pain in your chest. Troubles concentrating, feeling irritable and jumpy all the time, feelings of apprehension, death and dread.

It's almost as if it's this cloud of negativity, self-judgement and criticism that follows you everywhere. Instead of rain, it's just a downpour of harsh, negative, dark thoughts about yourself, about those around you, but mostly about yourself. There is this constant worry and fear that takes over the "real" you, and by now you have forgotten what your real "self" is like. Thoughts can feel so out of reach that one stops all social or external interactions. It's much different from being worried about something, it's paralysing and freezes you more often than not.

YOUR THOUGHTS: Erm, okay, so how do you know you have it?

College and, of course, my discourse gave me a lot of perspective about myself, about mental health as a real thing. I have had *"it"* all this while. Sudden breakdowns, mood swings, incessant amounts of crying, resorting to isolation. This "it" can really get to all aspects of your life. Sometimes it would affect your presentations, sometimes your assignments, your overall academic performance but mostly your social relations. That reminds me, I backed out of all the placement cell interviews because I was too scared of failing.

I never had anyone tell me what "it" feels like; so I started reaching out to people, sometimes randomly, sometimes people on the internet who I thought could get me out of this. But the only one who could get me out of this was me. I received a lot of support from my professors. Anusuya Ma'am and Binu Sir are sweethearts and you could talk to them about anything under the sun. Kids, take note but don't spam. The college counsellor really put things into perspective and that's when I started seeing a therapist. Please understand, anxiety is of different kinds (Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Phobias, Social Anxiety, PTSD, Panic attacks; to mention a few) and manifests itself slightly differently in different people.

YOUR THOUGHTS: So what do you do about it?

I am actually a lot better off than I thought I would be, especially on the nth day of quarantine. I am as shocked as you, dear reader. I honestly thought I would lose my mind or drive people up the wall. Of course, all days aren't rainbows and butterflies, most days aren't, but I am coping in various ways.

Some of which include:

Journaling: I try to pen down my days, express gratitude on a daily basis. If not, I manage to write something on Instagram which is where I maintain a visual journal.

Instagram Help: I try to reach out and connect with those who are going through the same, better or worse and help them out in any way possible. I have been advocating mental health for a while now and it's not easy because it's not commercial. It's purely born out of personal interest to help those suffering. At times it's enough to let the other person know you're listening and you're there. I am reading up a lot on ways to help so I am available for those who need support. Healing others heals me.

Meditation, Yoga, Grounding Techniques: Movement has been a major part of my life, and I am trying to re-incorporate it in terms of Yoga. Meditation always helps in being present, centered and calm. Practice is key, so I work towards it every day.

Talking to my primary circle: Ones I trust can put a stop to the unnecessary worrying.

Having said that, let's talk about what you can do. My hope is that with more and more understanding of what this really is, people might begin to have a little more empathy for others living with anxiety. Even if it's uncomfortable to interact with them. Remember that people who live with anxiety don't necessarily have some fatal flaw they're ignoring or some hidden desire to make everyone around them uncomfortable.

They are part of the society as much as you; who are going through something they don't understand, something that caught them off guard, something deep in their subconscious that they need help unpacking. A little empathy and support can go a long way.

P.S: It would be a plain white lie to say I check *The Lighthouse Magazine* social on a daily basis, but I definitely check it once in three days just to see what these talented bunch of juniors are up to. In fact, I think this has to be said – I've handed The Lighthouse over to these wizards and their top-notch magical spells, and I am so very proud.

"Reaching Out": Artwork by Sidra Ali, Third Year

Featured image: Sticker by addilim
Source: Pinterest (@Redbubble)

Coronavirus and Education: A Sociological Reflection

by Bhavya Gautam, Batch 2016-2019

"Fear of death leads to blurring of distinction between caution and paranoia.
…in a situation of uncertainty, where there is fear of death, the human tendency to divide society into 'us' and 'them' is invoked."

Coronavirus (COVID-19), a 125 nanometer particle, has killed 217 thousand people and confined 7.8 billion people to their homes (till the date this was written). This fact should be enough to shatter the "modernist zeal for human supremacy". In 2012, HIV/AIDS pandemic took 36 million lives; in 1968, "Hong Kong Flu" took 1 million lives; in 1958, Asian flu took 2 million lives; in 1918, "Spanish flu" took 40 million lives; an estimated 200 million people have died of smallpox and 4 million from cholera in the twentieth century alone (MPH online, n.d.). This figures prove that humans reign supreme only until the next pandemic strikes.

"The Human Zoo Series" by Patrice Letarnec
Source: Pinterest (@fubiz)

There are several who believe that viruses are a result of human's destruction of biodiversity. David Quammen, author of *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Pandemic* wrote in the New York Times, "We cut trees; we kill animals or cage them and send them to markets. We disrupt ecosystems, and we shake viruses loose from their natural hosts. When that happens, they need a new host. Often, we are it." (Vidal, 2020, para 9). Evidence of transmission of pathogens from animals to humans in the recent outbreak of Ebola, Nipah, Corona add value to this argument. According to Martin Heidegger, whenever man tries to master nature, "he is tossed back and forth between order and disorder, between evil and noble" (de Beistegui, 1997, p. 126). As such the modernist man, who is obsessed with order and certainty, must learn to live with nature and not to conquer it. The zeal for human supremacy needs to be sacrificed and humility embraced.

Man fears uncertainty and death. Buddha told his pupil Anand that it was man's attachment with temporal-material things that created pain/anxiety and made man fear death. This also explains man's fear of change in the existing order. According to Heidegger, existential anxiety is always present. Humans deal with this anxiety, said Krishnamurti, through domination. "Religions spring from this fear, and the politicians' compelling urge for power is born out of this fear. Any form of domination over another is the nature of

fear." (Krishnamurti, 2006, p. 16). However, this domination and need for control only leads to an intensification of fear.

Uncertainty, according to Bart Pattyn and Luc Van Liedekerkein (2001), is caused by the collective individual's lack of trust in established institutions; lack of trust in fellow beings; and increasing complexity of reality. One can make peace with uncertainty by either gaining knowledge or exercising precaution (Tannert et al., 2007). Gathering information about the source of uncertainty is important even according to Ulrich Beck, who in his book *Risk Society*, argued that a danger can be relegated to a risk through accumulation of knowledge about the danger. These techniques are also being employed by the people in tackling the uncertainty brought by COVID 19. People are educating themselves about the virus and are

exercising precaution in the form of "social distancing", maintaining hygiene, having a healthy diet, wearing masks, sanitizing exposed areas, and so on. It can be argued that the precautionary measures suggested are exclusionary, since not everyone has the financial capacity to buy masks, sanitizers or have a healthy diet. It also proves Beck's argument that *risk is distributed unevenly in a population.* In a pandemic, therefore, an individual's position in the overall stratification structure determines his/her chances of survival.
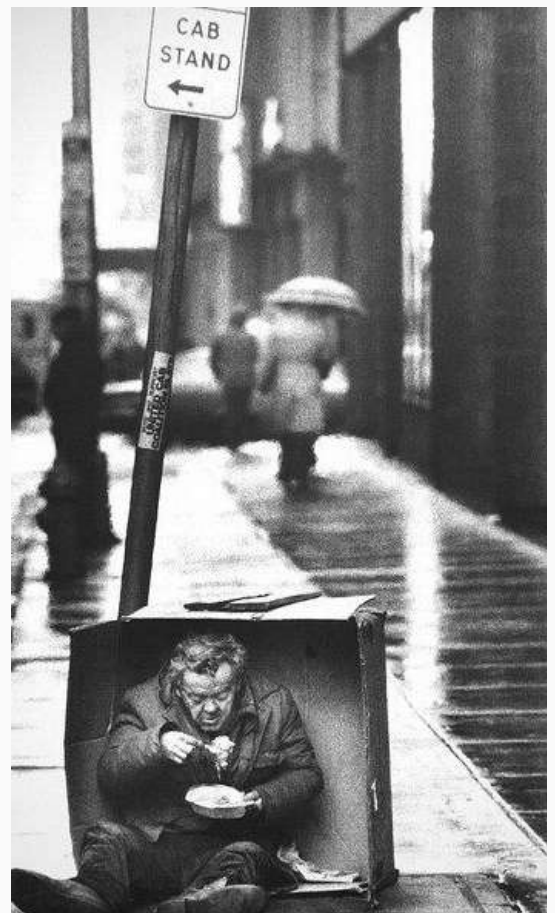
Source: Pinterest (@jeremyers1)

Fear of death leads to blurring of distinction between caution and paranoia. Paranoia is known to bring out the ugly side in individuals. For instance, discrimination against certain communities such as the Blacks in USA during coronavirus pandemic, or stigmatisation of certain groups within a country, such as Tablighi Jamaat in India; or association of a virus with a specific country, such as Corona virus being labelled as the "Chinese virus" regardless of WHO's assertion that viruses have no nationality, are all actions caused by paranoia. These examples also showcase that in a situation of uncertainty, where there is fear of death, the human tendency to divide society into "us" and "them" is invoked.

Given the dire effects of fear, preparing individuals to ethically and physically live with uncertainty and accept death as the ultimate reality acquires utmost importance. Hoping that the entire population could be prepared to live with uncertainty and made to accept death is unrealistic; what one can hope is, that the youth to be socialised to deal with uncertainty or death. Here, the role of educational institutions become important. Traditional education that encourages control, rationality, acceptance or denial will not be able to perform this role. Instead, education that encourages curiosity, allows students to make use of reason, and that doesn't take away their agency, may help them understand fear and make peace with it. As far as college students are concerned, who have already been socialised into fearing death and uncertainty, an engagement with the practise of 'unlearning' can prove beneficial. This technique of education,

that Krishnamurti called "Total Education", is practised in very few institutions today. Thus, a change in pedagogy was long overdue, and one might see COVID-19 as having hastened this process. Now the question that arises is whether the direction in which it has plummeted this change is favourable for our goal or not?

COVID-19 has enforced a nation-wide lockdown for over a month now. Schools and universities, after a brief hiatus period, have shifted to the online mode of teaching in order to cope with this unforeseen situation. While online mode of learning envisions a shift in pedagogy from teacher-centric to student-centric, wherein each student is required to find their own path to learning, the reality sings a different song. Most online classes involve the teacher speaking for an hour and a half, sometimes even two, with minimal student interaction. The issue of conducive atmosphere for studying, availability of high speed internet or devices also arise. It is highly possible that there exists only one laptop in a house that has to be shared among the children and the parents who are working from home; or some households might not have one at all. However, it should not be concluded that online learning is completely flawed. It can actually be very beneficial to a huge population as it offers flexibility of space and time, instils self-discipline amongst students, and also provides courses at low costs. Regardless, eLearning should only be viewed as a complement to face-to-face learning.

The merits of face-to-face learning are innumerable: apart from teaching students the very basics of interaction, it also offers a conducive atmosphere where everyone is treated as an equal (in most cases). Moreover, the

realisation of our goal requires a face-to-face interaction with a teacher. The teacher, by being an example in himself/herself, will not only motivate students but also facilitate the simultaneous growth of their mind, heart and body. (Krishnamurti, 2006). Growth is possible only in the absence of imposition which, again, is possible only when the teacher is able to imaginatively identify with the subjective conditions of his/her students. Imaginative identification requires interpersonal communication, thereby making face-to-face education a necessity.

Only an individual whose mind, body, heart works in tandem, will be able to accept death as a fact; for, such an individual would have successfully separated himself/herself from the culture of narcissism that regards man as the center of the universe. As Heidegger philosophised, "If I take death into my life, acknowledge it, and face it squarely, I will free myself from the anxiety of death and the pettiness of life- and only then will I be free to become myself" (Irandoust, 2012-13, p. 89).

While we talk about individual response, it is also important to discuss the role of the State in managing the pandemic. States have adopted the *policy of precaution* ; "social distancing" exemplifies it. The term *"social distancing"* is a misnomer as it

Photograph by Christophe Ena
Source: Pinterest (@thenewyorker)

refers to *physical distancing* and not psychological or emotional distancing.

So why was the term "social distancing" adopted? Many leaders around the world found that asking people to maintain a six-feet distance from each other for their self-interest was difficult. The need to ground distancing in an ethical foundation arose: "Social distancing is another name for social solidarity because, by staying apart, we are actually coming closer together in a common cause to defeat COVID-19" (New Jersey Governor, Phil Murphy). Hashtags such as TogetherApart, TogetherAtHome began trending on social media platforms. By portraying distancing as an act of solidarity, "social distancing" was made into an ethical duty that must be performed by all people. However, some people have misinterpreted "social distancing" and have engaged in stigmatisation of already marginalised communities and mistreatment of professionals who are working on the frontline to manage the pandemic. In such a situation, ensuring that only credible information gets disseminated becomes paramount. There have also been arguments that "social distancing" is a privilege that is available only to the upper and the upper middle class. Much of the poor and the lower middle class cannot afford social distancing since they are putting up in crammed localities or without any dwelling units. As such, the image of two Indias – one where social distancing is possible and one where it is not (such as Dharavi) has emerged in stark clarity.

So how has the state responded to this situation? The response of the state has been to intensify surveillance. Through the use of mobile tracking apps such as *'Aarogya Setu'*, mandating the release of geo-located selfies every hour, contact tracing, employing camera drones, the state is trying to contain the spread of the virus. While there can be debate about the pros

and cons of increasing surveillance, the fact of the matter is, surveillance has been intensified, and to such a level that it can be regarded as a "watershed moment in surveillance history as it takes surveillance from *'over the skin'* (like phones, emails) to *'under the skin'* (like body temperature, blood pressure)" (Dey, 2020), and, according to Amnesty International, these techniques will likely outlast the current crisis.

In such a situation, as responsible citizens, it becomes our moral and ethical duty to initiate a discourse that urges citizens to come together and not let their fear of uncertainty and death paralyse them into becoming mute spectators in the face of blatant infringement of their basic human rights. As Dr. Tedros said: "This is a time for facts, not fear. This is the time for science, not rumors. This is the time for solidarity, not stigma" (Chau, 2020).

"Quarantine rainbows": Somewhere in Brooklyn - rainbows painted on windows to spread hope to and show solidarity with neighbours, and to connect with humanity in testing times.

Photograph by @thisismm
Source: Pinterest (@sidewalkclub)

Featured image:
MIT Classroom, Dallas Crow
Source: Pinterest (@Don't take pictures)

Pobody's Nerfect?

by Chayanika Chaudhuri, Batch 2015-2018

"… It makes me feel my body is not so much mine as it is theirs."

I have always been conscious of my physical self. Lately, painfully conscious. Like most people in the world, I have developed a certain relationship with my body over the years. And, like most people, it is sort of like a love-hate relationship. It's complicated, like most relationships. It's the kind wherein you *can* love it and admire it, but also hate it with all your guts. I've reached a point in my life where I'm most likely to indulge in the latter. It's very easy for us to find faults in ourselves. If I look at myself in the mirror right now, I'll be able to point out at least a dozen flaws in just a minute. But ask me what I like

about my body, I'll probably have to think very deeply about it. And if I do come up with an answer, the other side of my brain which probably thinks that I'm the ugliest creature in the world, will step in and say, "Are you sure? You like your long neck? I think it makes you look like a giraffe." You become self-critical to a point where finding the good in you seems nearly impossible. And it becomes a pattern, a habit, which branches out eventually. And so, it doesn't remain a physical concern anymore – it affects you mentally and emotionally. You get sucked into a black hole of intense self-doubt and hate.
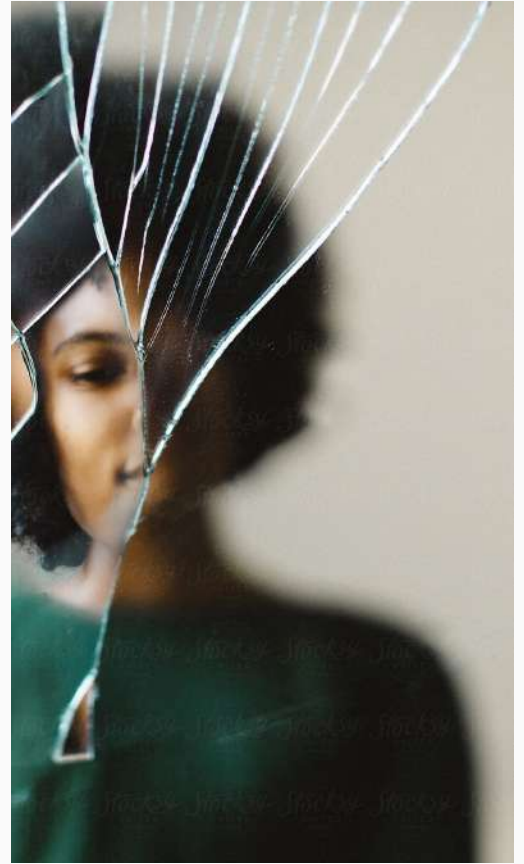
Photograph by Sadie Culberson
Source: Pinterest (@stocksyunited)

As a budding actor whose job puts a lot of emphasis on one's physical appearance, I'm at a constant war with myself over how my body is supposed to look like. There is a standard of beauty that people consider as 'ideal', or rather aesthetically more pleasing than others. If you look at the film industry today, you can clearly see a prototype that has been created, for how a female actor's appearance should be like. It almost feels like an assembly line-like production of actresses who look the same, leaving little to no space for women who do not fit their category. And what saddens me is that, because it is still largely a male dominated sphere, it is them who get to decide who fits the bill and who doesn't. They end up creating and perpetuating this ideal for the sake of appeasing the audience. But what else can you expect? Cinema reflects reality, and the reality is that society dictates

what makes one beautiful and what doesn't. And from what I've seen or experienced, they basically want us to look like Barbie dolls (which says a lot about how they look at women- nothing more than inanimate playthings). It makes me feel like my body is not so much mine as it is theirs.

Now those who don't fit the category are told to alter their appearance in order to make it 'big'. Imagine being conscious of every inch of your body. All the time. Some might argue that this encourages them to live a healthier lifestyle, be more fit. The thing is, they are not being told to be fit, they are being told to CHANGE. There is no scope for acceptance. But even if I have to consider that argument, there still lies a problem. The problem is the intention behind being 'fit'. Recently, I made a decision that I will make better, healthier food choices and be physically fitter than I am now. But it didn't turn out to be a very pleasant journey. Because my intention behind it was unhealthy itself – I didn't start doing it because I wanted to take care of myself, I started doing it because of the anxiety that if I don't lose weight, I'll never get work. So my experience was rather counterproductive – I put such immense pressure on myself that I ended up developing a terrible relationship with food, and ultimately, my body.

And that made me think. I thought how, there would be so many more like me, who do not know how to deal with the pressures of the industry, an industry which finds it so difficult to accept people's beauty in their most natural forms. Soon enough, I'll be exposed to such comments about my body, and not knowing how I'll cope with them is such a frightening thought.

Honestly, I don't know how to deal with it myself. I am trying to find ways to

make this journey less toxic. All I know is that I don't want to give in to patriarchal standards of beauty. No one can tell what I should look like. I know that there is love in me that exists for myself and my body. Once I tap in to that, hopefully the pressures of society will become a lot easier to deal with. Gloria Steinem, in her book *Revolution from Within*, said that there is a healthier self in each of us, it just needs a little

"The Optimist/Rose tinted glasses" by Lauragraves
Source: Pinterest (@Redbubble)

bit of encouragement. I know it's a very tough battle to fight. But, despite all, there is one thing I truly believe in – acceptance doesn't require an outward source. It comes from within. So, for those who might be going through the same thing as I am, hang in there. With just a little bit of patience and some gentle, caring actions towards your body, we'll all be able to create loving relationships with ourselves. We will love ourselves for who we are. And we'll own our bodies like it's ours and nobody else's.

Featured image source:
"Regrowth" by Riley Haliday
Pinterest (@refinery29)

The rise of anti-vaccine concerns in India

by Ojaswini Bakshi, Co-Founder & Editor-in-Chief, 2014-2015

"Methods of information dissemination adopted by campaigns or any health programme needs to be designed to be locally relevant, and suitable media needs to be accessed to ensure that each socio-economic strata can be reached out to."

Pop-culture, in recent times, has taken a strong stance against parents in developed countries who do not believe in vaccinating their children. Popularly known as the 'anti-vaxxers', they have now been a long-standing target of internet rage as these parents' arguments are something along the lines of "vaccines are a pharmaceutical agenda and cause autism among otherwise perfectly healthy babies". While the internet continues to roll their eyes and scoff at such first world problems, this phenomenon led to an outbreak of diseases like measles among children, in cities such as New York in 2019.

Once considered to be under control, measles has made a comeback in the region due to compromised herd immunity.

India is not far from such a behavioural narrative, even though we are still miles from wiping off measles from our plate. Measles and Rubella are both air-borne viral infections. In 2011, India had one of the highest measles-related mortality. The country also recorded the highest burden of congenital deformities among babies whose mothers had contracted rubella in the first trimester of their pregnancy. In 2013, India committed to WHO-South East Asian Regional Office (SEARO) to eradicate Measles and Rubella by the year 2020. While the measles vaccine has been a part of our Universal Immunization Programme since 1985, the Government of India reintroduced the Measles-Rubella Vaccine in 2017, to be administered to all children between the ages of 9 months and 15 years through Supplementary Immunization Activities before adopting it into the routine immunization schedule. The goal of these camps was to achieve 100 percent coverage and the main sites of reaching these children were through schools.

The first phase of the Measles-Rubella campaign in India, however, came to a complete standstill due to concerns of parents whose children were enrolled in 'elite' private schools. Concerns similar to those voiced by parents in New York City were raised. The Measles-Rubella Vaccine was thought to be a pharmaceutical agenda, alongside the complete mistrust in the public healthcare system. "We will not consent to this," they argued. But is consent necessary for vaccination? It remains a matter of massive contention but the campaign needed to carry on if it was to reach its goal of achieving 100 percent coverage and attempt at eradicating Measles and Rubella.

Studies conducted on communication processes adopted by Measles-Rubella vaccine campaigns shed light on the role of social capital and the social enabling and risk factors that affect the uptake of the vaccines. A case-control study was conducted on the impact of social capital on trust in health information, and acceptance of Measles–Rubella vaccination campaign in Tamil Nadu. The study defined *social capital* as social relationships and shared values, norms, trust and reciprocity in a society. They further classified the terminology as *bonding* when it existed within a homogeneous group or community of

Source: Pinterest (from Etzy)

people and *bridging* when it occurred among heterogeneous groups, such as different religions, castes, etc. The authors of the study further noted that it was through the process of bridging that each different group was linked in a power hierarchy, and with the larger systems such as the government. In terms of the role the two forms of capital plays, the authors stated that *"While bonding social capital increases physical and emotional support for adapting healthy behaviours, bridging provides assets and more credible information, and linking capital increases compliance to suggested behaviours such as administering vaccines."* The authors added that strong social capital (a form of bonding social capital) holds the potential to reduce vaccine acceptance because of strongly held local beliefs and misinformation.
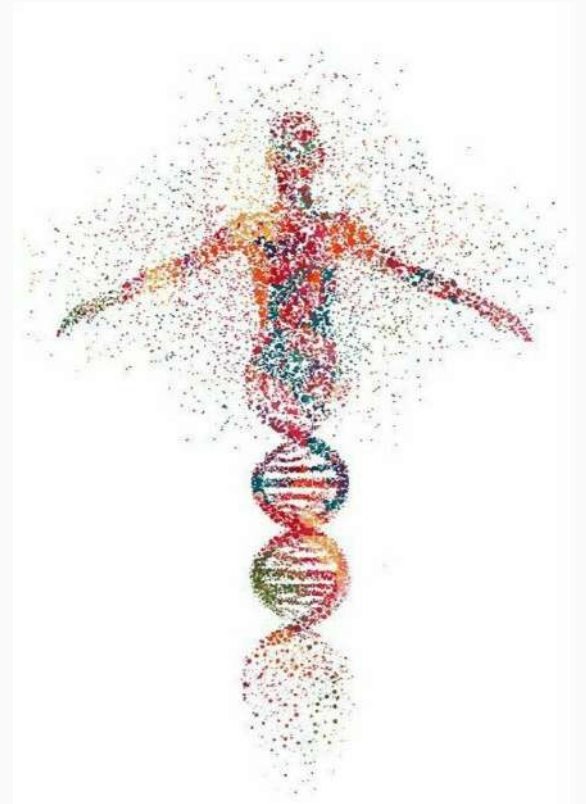
The behaviour of these parents whose children were enrolled in private schools, thus, can be understood in terms of improving standards of living, nutrition and accessibility and availability of quality healthcare. Such improvements have led to the reduction of measles-related mortality rate significantly within the group. This particular socio-economic group no longer perceives measles to be a serious threat and believes that the risks of the vaccine outweighs its invisible benefits.

This challenge was addressed in the second phase of Measles-Rubella campaign in India by forming strong intersectoral management and communication between the Department of Health and Family Welfare and Department of Education of each state. Information from teachers and schools at large, played an important role in promoting acceptance of the vaccine among the parents. In regions where school teachers have recommended the vaccine, the uptake of it has reached over 90 percent and the coverage levels have sustained.

The Measles-Rubella vaccine campaign in India also faced resistance from two minority religious groups. A qualitative study that looked at drivers and barriers of the campaign, presents that strong religious affiliation played a significant role in shunting coverage. The campaign had a strong focus on young girls, since rubella among pregnant mothers caused congenital rubella syndrome among babies. This focus on girls for the vaccine raised a concern

Source: Pinterest (@saraillamas.com)

that it was a hidden agenda of population reduction. Social media was one of the primary vehicles through which these messages were propagated.

A study conducted in a south African country regarding improving acceptance of vaccines among a group with strong religious affiliation, showed that one of the ways acceptance increased was when advice related to vaccination was offered outside of regular healthcare services. Following a similar measure, the second phase of the Measles-Rubella campaign in India designed interventions which aimed at increasing coverage among under-vaccinated populations, by increasing their understanding pertaining to the vaccine, and improving its accessibility. The campaign actively engaged religious and other influential leaders of each region to endorse the Measles-Rubella vaccine. This engagement demonstrated an increase of vaccination uptake by more than 25 percent.

Public health professionals, who have studied the communication processes of this vaccine campaign in India, strongly argue for the need to engage with the community at a large scale, such as through door-to-door or interpersonal information, education, and communication activities. Methods of information dissemination adopted by campaigns or any health programme needs to be designed to be locally relevant, and suitable media needs to be accessed to ensure that each socio-economic strata can be reached out to. Finally, inter-sector management remains key to achieving health-related targets effectively and more importantly, developing the public healthcare system in a more sustainable way.
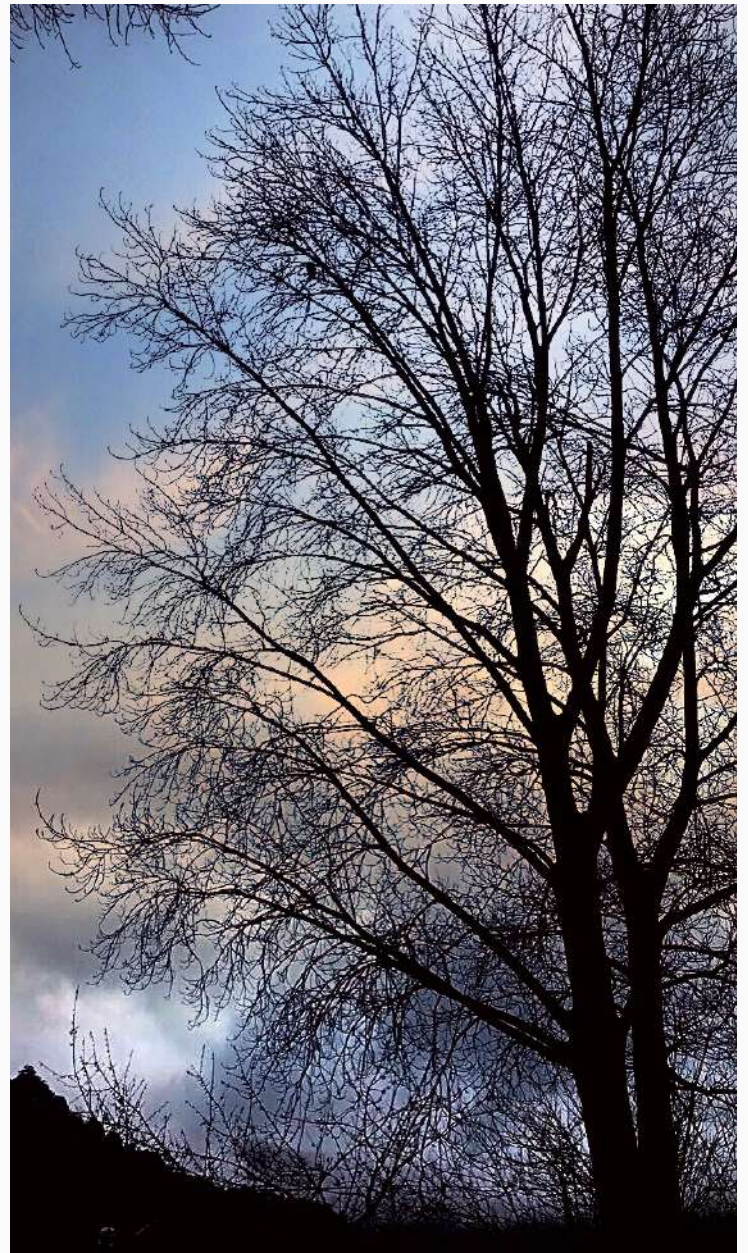
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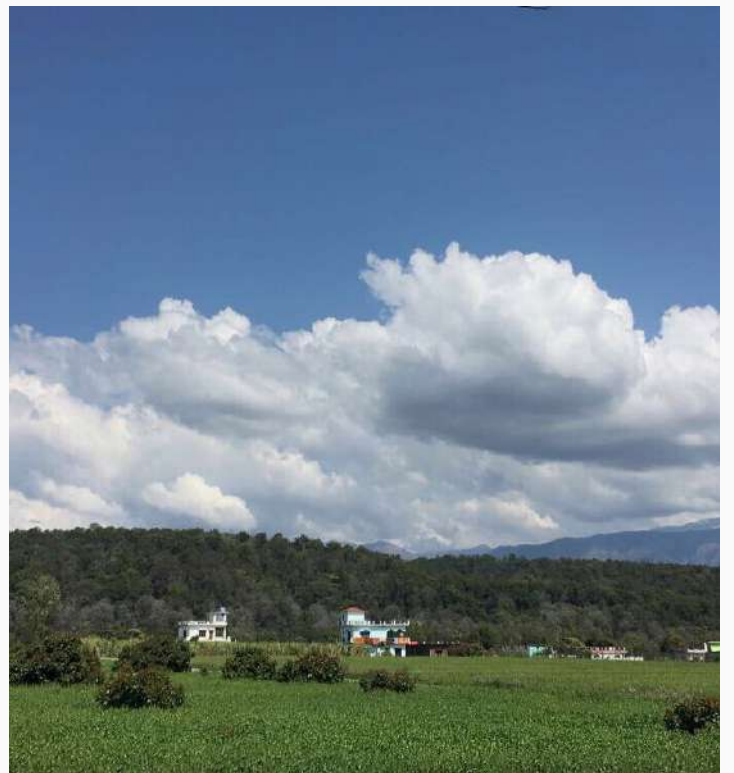Source: The New York Times

Skies and Silhouettes

by Maria Rahman,Batch 2016-2019

"Don't forget, beautiful sunsets, need
cloudy skies."
PAULO COELHO

SECTION THREE

Around the world: Insights from budding sociologists across universities

Why Sociology?

by Kangkana Shivam
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"… I realised that day how theories can be looked at in so many ways, even in ways which might not fit with the idea of the theorist."

INSTANCE 1

The other day, I was chatting with a South Indian friend in the hostel mess, when she said, "You know, when I went back to Kochi for vacations this time, I was craving for some kadi-chawal even though I had had home-cooked, traditional food after so many months. I instinctively replied, "Too much of dialectical cultural synthesis is happening then". "Too much of sociology happening in your mind these days," she laughed.

Yes, that's the beauty of this discipline! The small actions and mundane occurrences of daily life can be linked beautifully with the concepts/theories, which are not confined to those colourless textbooks. I wonder sometimes, this discipline has so much to offer to the world!

INSTANCE 2

I was studying the concept of 'alienation' as Marx talks about it – industrial workers in a capitalist system, doing jobs only as a means to an end, while feeling increasingly distant from it – until recently my professor gave a different perspective. He said, "You are yourself the living example of alienation, with no creativity left." Maybe he is right. In today's competitive and extremely rational world, not only have our ideas and talents become commodities for sale, the nature of our relationships have changed too. The intimate humane nature of it has now become market-based to a large extent, exchange being the main aim. Once we are out of the university, we will soon be hierarchized into 'ranks' in the job market, and many of us probably will eventually give in to capitalism and its ruthless segregation.

Coming back to what my professor said, I realised that day how theories can be looked at in so many ways, even in ways which might not fit with the idea of the theorist. Rather than memor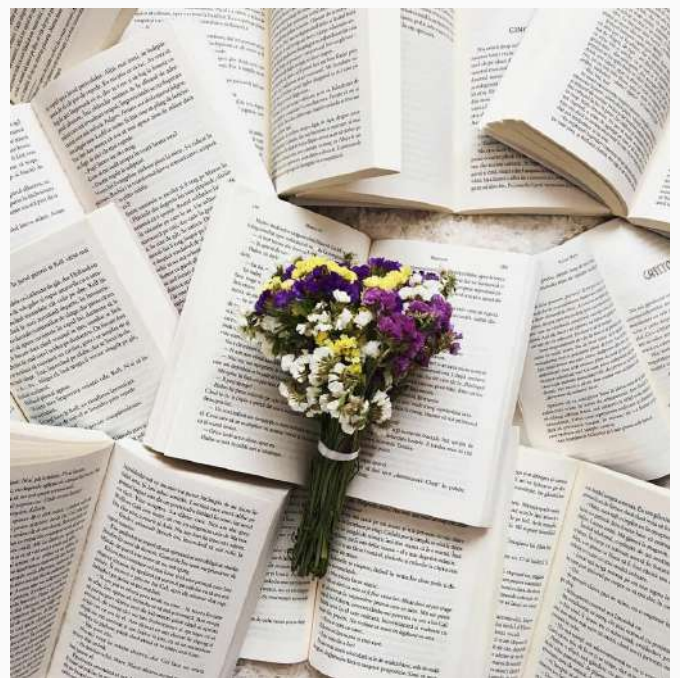ising a concept, trying to relate it to daily life and to your own self is a different kind of thrill, and trust me, these questions will lead your brain to many unexplored zones.

Source: Instagram (@Larisa)

INSTANCE 3

During one of my vacations when I was back home, I wanted to watch a movie and had to hesitantly ask my brother to accompany me due to lack of company. He negotiated that I had to pay for the tickets and buy him popcorn. I agreed, hesitantly again, and we watched Pad-man. Throughout the film, I could see expressions of curiosity, shock, disbelief on his face. He probably finally understood why I didn't go to school on particular days of the month, when those cramps disrupted my normal life, while he complained why he always had to go to school when I didn't. It was actually worth the tickets and popcorn I had to spend on, I guess! Cinema is a powerful medium, and it can be helpful for the discipline of sociology as well. It's easier to make people understand the ideas we wish to disseminate by engaging them in a story; the film "Thappad" being a recent example.

The sociological lens enables us to question things we might have otherwise accepted as given – the societal norms and regulations (taboos associated with menstruation, for instance) that have perhaps done as much (if not more) destruction to the freedom of Indian women than what colonisers did to India. However, the former is still struggling to find a proper place in popular discourse, while volumes of works have been done on the latter. Even in this globalised world, 'equal pay' remains a myth. Women are subjected to more hardships at their workplaces than men. A popular Bollywood actress said in one of her interviews, "I used to go to the set two hours before the actor, get my make-up done and wait for him to come. On some days he would come early, on other days he never shows up." And I am only giving the example of an industry which seems exquisite and fancy.

Coming to the title of this piece, 'why sociology?' Because, sociology as a discipline, encourages and enables us to be reflexive in our thought process, look at a random occurrence differently, and analyse the social world out there. I believe Sociology should be compulsorily taught in schools, because it is as important as chemistry or physics, if not more. It makes us more humane. The world would probably have been different if that was the case. However, the other day when one of my cousins declared he wants to be a chef and his father enthusiastically added, "He's good! I am planning to send him for a course. What say?", I realised maybe times are changing for the better. "You should," I smiled.

That night, before going to bed, I thought about how people are coming out of their shells, challenging their socialisation, in whatever small ways, and paving a path for the growth of individuality, creativity, and passion. I realised that may be the world is not all thorns, maybe there are roses. And maybe by the time I hit my 50s, there will be beautiful garden!

Photographed by: Federica Dall'Orso
Source: Pinterest (@fubiz)

Featured image: Pinterest (@AimfortheA)

Law: A safeguard or an instrument of violation?

by Jahida Ibtesam Rahman
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"But women confront a dual task in their human rights struggle: one, defending their rights as members of a group within a society with its repressive or indifferent state apparatus, discriminatory laws and institutions- while at the same time, questioning and resisting the static patriarchal presumptions of culture and tradition within their own homes and communities."

Incredible India, that often claims to be a vibrant democratic country and strictly advocates Human Rights, stands in contrast to its tragic failure when it comes to the heinous crimes against human beings which often go unnoticed. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution, but unfortunately, many women are still unaware of their rights because of illiteracy and oppressive traditions, where they are not even considered individuals with lives and choices of their own; instead, they are seen as the torchbearers of family 'honour'.

India attained independence in the year 1947 and in that very year Partition took place, which ruptured lives of thousands of women; there were rapes and abductions, desires and aspirations were pulled down, some were abandoned by their family members or forgotten. The government on both sides arrived at an agreement - the Inter-Dominion Treaty of December 6, 1947, to recover the abducted women from both the countries. This operation suppressed the voices of the women and indirectly or directly they faced several layers of torture. First the women were abducted and now they were forcefully taken back to their original homelands (without considering their choice). Some of them were not even accepted by their own family members because of the so called notion of 'Purity and Pollution' and 'Burden'. Lastly, there were forced mass abortions (termed *Safaya*) perpetrated by the state.

Thus, various renowned authors like Urvashi Butalia in her book The Other Side Of Silence, Veena Das in *Life And Words*, and many more authors like Kamla Bhasin, Ritu Menon clearly depict how crimes are perpetrated on women and how often they are only considered as mere objects.

Talking about 'honour', a woman's honour is considered as the 'community's honour'. Violence against women's autonomy, in all matters and especially in matters of sexuality and marriage, is of India's most widespread and tenacious forms of gender violence; and also least recognised. For example, during the time of Partition, in Punjab, thousands of women were killed in the name of saving the honour of the family. In a village called Rawalpindi, many women jumped into the well to save themselves from men of the other community.

But, when the male members of their family were enquired about such acts, they refused to accept such acts as killings and rather used the term '*martyred*' and considered it as a justifiable homicide. When some women refused to die, they were accused of cowardice.

Till date, the notion of 'honour killing' continues to prevail, especially, in parts of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. As per National Crime Records Bureau Data 2015, 251 honour killing cases were reported in India. It is also pertinent to note that honour killings are not restricted to women, even men fall prey to it. For example, Nitish Katra was killed by the sons of Yadavs as he was in love with Yadav's daughter. During the murder trial, the Session Court Judge asked his mother, Neelam Katra, how this killing can be termed as a honour crime because only daughters are killed in such cases. He also mentioned that the son was from a 'good caste'. This reveals how even courts projects the dominant caste as being 'good' and oppressed castes as 'bad'. It also shows us how these crimes are understood narrowly as a practice where daughters are killed based on objections to them marrying those 'beneath' them, rejecting the wider picture that it is patriarchal control of the daughter's sexual agency and autonomy. When that is the case, it needs to be acknowledged that such crimes can take a very wide variety of forms, including violence against daughter's partner too.

Even in the case of rape, we can see how colonial law still persists. The ways in which women's rights and choices are denied using the law is because the way the society has invested honour in women's body. In case of India, the rape victims were doubly suspects. Class and caste status, prior sexual history, time of complaint, the evidence of resistance on the body evidencing crimes, are taken into account.

Image source: Pinterest (@thefashionspot)

Even in the case of rape, we can see how colonial law still persists. The ways in which women's rights and choices are denied using the law is because the way the society has invested honour in women's body. In case of India, the rape victims were doubly suspects. Class and caste status, prior sexual history, time of complaint, the evidence of resistance on the body evidencing crimes, are taken into account. The testimonies are often rejected if a woman belongs to a lower caste; there are various assumptions like women of different social classes are expected to resist their attackers differently. A woman belonging to a labouring class, who is accustomed to hard work, is supposed to offer a good resistance. If a woman is unable to report the case as soon as the crime is committed, the statement is not taken into consideration. For example, in the Kunnan Pashpora (Kashmir) case, there was a mass rape committed by the Indian Army because of the presence of the draconian law AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Power Act) implemented by the government of India. This case was not taken into consideration stating it was 'baseless'; because, it was not reported on the very day. In context to the Northeast too, such draconian laws have resulted in heinous crimes like the Manoroma rape case.

This is how human rights are violated and the voices are suppressed by the law itself. Looking at the Nirbhaya Rape case (2012), the family members of the victims continued fighting the case until very recently, when the final judgement was passed, and the convicts hanged on March 20, 2020.

Laws are essential and considered to be transformative for the survival of the people in society, but if it turns into a regressive one instead, the overall image of the society changes. By pointing out the women as the worst sufferers, I do not mean that the other genders do not face any such crimes. But women confront a dual task in their human rights struggle: one defending their rights as members of a group within a society with its repressive or indifferent state apparatus, discriminatory laws and institutions – while at the same time questioning and resisting the static patriarchal perceptions of culture and tradition within their own homes and communities.

It is basic but I will reiterate, a woman should never be considered a property of a man or a patriarchal household in a civilized society. Human dignity and autonomy are absolute values and should never be violated at any cost.

Photograph by: Carvalhosbarbara
Source: Pinterest (@Flickr)

Featured image: Pinterest (@billfrymire.com)

Doing Sociology at Home: Engaging with the Familiar

by Shivangi Kaushik,
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> "Here the exotic village where the haughty anthropologist travels to *see* the native and write about them has been replaced with all of us – as solitary sociologists – forced to deploy our other senses to engage sociologically with the world from *within* the walls of our homes."

It is 2am, the 25th day of the lockdown. Having squandered away the entire day, I make a last ditch attempt to read and scribble something and finish a draft for my thesis. However, I sense that my here and now is overwhelmed by the various coeval events unfolding across the world; so I cannot focus on Bourdieu or Malinowski anymore, and I turn to Facebook (soon to realize that it will be a mistake to do that!). A lot of people I follow on Twitter or Facebook write motivating captions like: *"Quarantine time, trying to get some work done"*. I then ponder to myself: How is it that they are able to achieve this impossible feat especially in such overpowering times?

Is there a guidebook to be academically productive in times of a pandemic? However, it did not take me long to decide that productivity in times of a pandemic is a myth; at least for me it is.

It is 2.30 am now. Since I realize that productivity is now a social construct and will depend on how individuals themselves subjectively interpret it, I give up staring at my laptop and instead decide to pace in the lobby/living room. However, before I reach my lobby (which seems to take a long time) something else grabs my attention. I take a detour and walk towards the dresser in my room. I then pick up my watch; I realise there is something timeless about it. Even though I can see the hand showing the ticking of second move seamlessly, still there was an inexplicable timelessness about my watch. I then look at my *kajal,* my lip balm and my perfume; they almost resemble relics of a time when I used them and which is slowly ebbing away from my memory.

I see my abandoned backpack lying nonchalantly on the bed and then turn my eyes to the shoes; a thin layer of dust has settled on both of them. All of these "relics" are perhaps signs of commodities that helped me navigate mobility in a city where I conducted my ethnography, a city where I was, nevertheless, a migrant student. A mobility well taken for granted. Having sulked enough, at around 2.45 am, I pick up my phone. I sift through the thousands of pictures on my phone gallery. Pictures of the Delhi Metro, the small tea shop crowded almost at all times by students and passer-by's, the various 'anonymous faces' on the streets.

As conceited millennials resolute on "exploring" everything, it has become a ritual or a *rite of passage* for us to capture the "hidden/unseen" aspects of a city like that of Delhi – especially for migrant students like us. We then come back to deeply reflect upon the pictures and then complement them with a well thought out, cerebral caption and upload them to Instagram or other social media platforms. I then realize that I haven't clicked any pictures in a long while. Do you think we *look* for pictorial clues or engage with diverse milieus only when we venture outside of the private sphere?

Source: Tumblr (@aries sun)
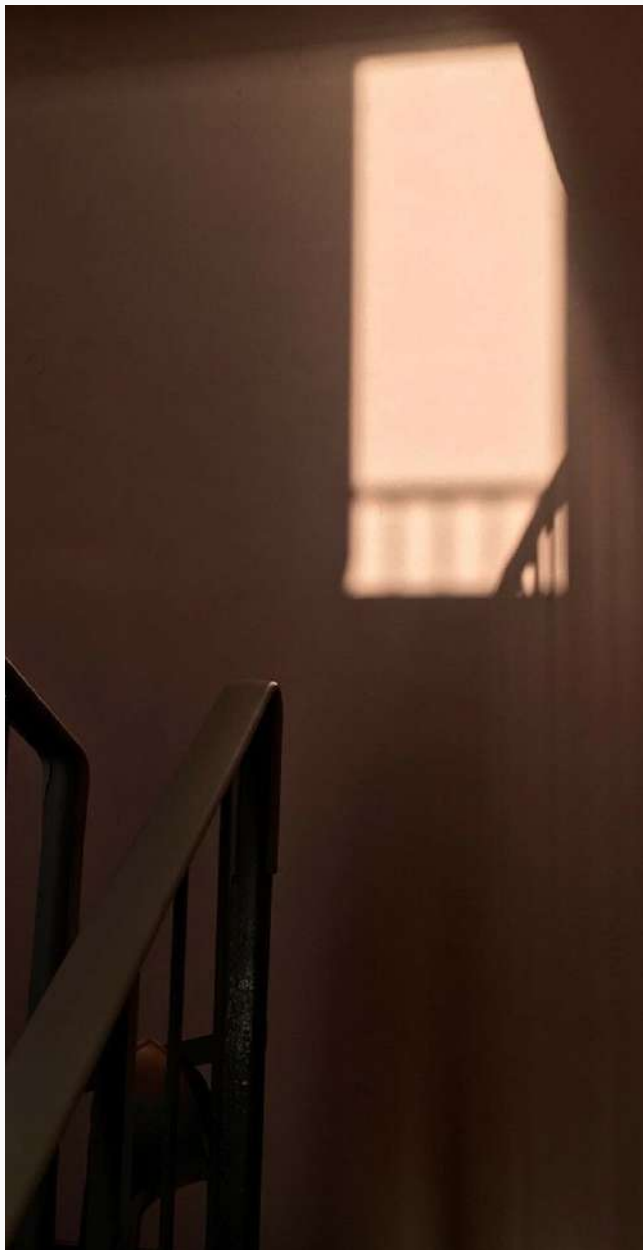
I finally take the long stride and walk towards the living room; I notice there is pin drop silence. I start to pace from one end of the room to the other. My mind becomes a quagmire of thoughts: thoughts which are no longer unique because they are distinct. They are distinct because they all now overlap; I cannot pull them apart from one another. Even Professor X from X-Men would find it hard to read my mind at this moment! I keep pacing; pacing and thinking become one. I no longer *hear* my footsteps; I can only *hear* my thoughts. Thoughts of what the world would have been *sans* the pandemic and how there isn't anything normal any more. I keep pacing.

I discover that one of the walls in the living room, which I *cursorily* thought was red in colour, is not actually red but is of a very distinctive crimson hue. Or maybe, not crimson hue but actually, it is because of the light that plays on it that it appears of a crimson hue. I observe that the flower design motifs on the adjoining walls are arranged in a line of fours.

All of these intricate details I missed out in my everyday life because I realize that I am able to cast only cursory glances at them as I am always in a hurry to leave. Time and its consumption is now open to interpretation, its *timelessness* now impinging on me more with every passing moment. No more do previous *normal* routines of waking up and sleeping hold any substance or meaning now.

It is 4 am now. I hear the (grown up) children of my landlords squabbling for the TV remote. What started as a lively banter now is bordering on an extremely aggressive exchange as the brother is now going an extra mile and threatening his sister, *"Arre remote de, warna maa ko sab bata dunga"* (Give me the remote or else I will tell everything to our mother). To which his sister retorts, *"Tu kya batayega, main sab batungi"* (You don't tell, I will tell on you). The timelessness is important here because I did not know that they too were up until 4am, perhaps sleep eluded all of us. This short banter was so loud that it echoed across every corner of the building. However, the sounds faded

Photograph by MiChaeng
Source: Pinterest (@wattpad)

out soon and all my attempts at eavesdropping failed miserably. *Listening* to this conversation somehow reminded me of patriarchy and how soiling the character of a woman and listing all of the exploits in her lifetime becomes an important weapon to upend or gain an advantage over her, even though it might have been merely for control over the TV remote.

This reminds me of another conversation I recently had with a family member, back home in Assam. Almost all private, commercial and government establishments in Guwahati are shut down due to the lockdown imposed to control the spread of COVID 19. Despite these overwhelming circumstances, my aunt told me that her husband insisted that he goes out for work and she was instantly disheartened when she came to know that he applied for a security pass for the same without her knowledge. Despite pleading him a lot of times, my uncle did not budge and went out to work. He was *not* willing to *listen*. My aunt then remarked that men simply do not want to stay at home, they are bored. In a way, I grew up **seeing** the way gender relations function within upper caste Assamese families, and as a child I perhaps did not question it much. However, it took **listening** to one telephonic conversation to reflexively introspect the position that women within upper caste Assamese families and households actually occupy. Men taking over the role as breadwinners for their families and becoming habituated to working *outside* and therefore *naturally getting bored* when asked to stay at home, and hence the need to venture outside even in times of a pandemic reflects the power yielded by men within upper caste Assamese households, which allows them to simply defy what their female counterparts have to say. This realization makes me even more melancholic and then my attention is vied for elsewhere.

Source: Pinterest (@studiovonne)

It is 5 am now and I hear the bells of the nearby temple ringing. I noticed that the bell rings everyday twice, once at 5 am and then again in the evening at 8pm. This was something I had not realized before or something that I may not have *listened to* before. I wonder how the tenants of other religions felt about it. I know for a fact that a lot of students from different ethnolinguistic or religious communities who follow Christianity and Islam also stay in the same neighbourhood. I wonder if, under the garb of secularism, they are also forced to *listen*? Sleep finally embraces me and I abandon all thoughts momentarily.

The next day at around 11 am, I am woken up by the *sounds* of a vegetable vendor pushing his cart and shouting in the hope that he will be able to sell something today. After all, not all of us can afford stay home. His voice constantly reminds the people in my neighbourhood of his presence, few of his kind who decided to stay back and trudge along, rather than returning 'home'. The rest of us then start to shake off our lethargy and wake up. At around 12 pm, the next thing I *hear* is the whistling of a pressure cooker in my neighbour's kitchen, accompanied by a cacophony of familial banter between women and men of our neighbourhood. Given the fact that in many of the neighbourhoods of Delhi, houses are literally sandwiched to one another with only the liminal walls separating them, conversations of everyday life

which are usually ignored become really distinct and audible. Sometimes, I am led off to to believe that walls do not really separate us but may actually act as an interface of invisible contact between different households, thus challenging conventional notions of portraying walls as markers of boundaries. In a way it is through *listening to* these sounds and engaging with these conversations, contradictorily from within the walls, that we are to make sense of the world around us today. This is what I would call '*sociology from within*'.

Here the exotic village where the haughty anthropologist travels to *see* the native and write about them has been replaced with all of us – as solitary sociologists – forced to deploy our other senses to engage sociologically with the world from *within* the walls of our homes. Here power relations have been turned as we try to engage with the familiar and explore power relations within the four walls of our homes. In Durkheim's world this may have been called 'pathological' or 'anomie' to denote something pathological or an aberration- a derivation from what is normal or mass behaviour. Staying at home, one can argue, is not an aberration; but reflexively engaging with the power relations within the so called "familiar" is indeed novel and a unique sociological enterprise. This pandemic will give us the opportunity to do this.

Photograph: Ellen Koneck
Source: Pinterest (@katea)

For many of us, it is uncertain when we will get an opportunity to engage or explore the outside world and forge friendships over *chai* with strangers. However, we do have an opportunity to engage with what we consider familiar. As women, we do have a standpoint vantage to do this. Bourdieu, in his analysis of Kabyle households, starkly distinguished between the so-called private and the public, and devises a dichotomous framework to satisfy the structural inhibitions of sociology. However, he implies that men are able to transcend the divide between the private and public as they are able to access the sitting room and the mosque, whereas women are relegated to just the living quarters. For instance, Lipstadt (2003) in her article reiterates that Bourdieu was nevertheless sensitive to the gendered consumption of space. In her article, she quotes Bourdieu who notes that *"the symmetrical and inverse spaces are not equal"*. Bourdieu concludes: "The orientation of the house is fundamentally defined from the outside, from the point of view of men, by men and for men."

As students of sociology, we are particularly well disposed and equipped to be critical of our own kinship ties and how we as women negotiate patriarchy within the four walls of our homes. Deniz Kandiyoti, Hamsa Rajan and Lila Bin Lughod maybe a starting point.

Lastly, another reason why I chronicled a typical day in my life during the lockdown by giving a timeline of my erratic routine is also because of the fact that I wanted reiterate the need to *listen* more. In a way there is a need to challenge the hegemony of the eyes in engaging with the world around us. As the sociologist's notebook or diary is now replaced by telephonic conversations or zoom meetings, there is the need to engage our

other senses as well for observation.

Ash Amin in his article *The Remainders of Race* (2010: 8) writes:

"In weaving together phenomenological and affective states, the regimes simultaneously structure popular judgement and feeling, they assume 'racial instincts' to be inherent and 'natural', and such 'instincts' become the tools of everyday practice. Thinking along such lines invites

"Listen" by Joe Kennedy
Source: Pinterest (@artlimited)

consideration of the history of certain senses coming to the fore, in the way Cornel West (2003) has attempted by arguing that the rise of modernity privileged the eye, through its emphasis on epistemology and the knowing subject, which allowed Western racism to emerge once this ocular sensibility came to impose Hellenic standards of beauty and humanity."

In a way, Amin writes about how the 'eye' as a tool of ethnographic research and observation has always been overvalued whereas the senses of listening and feeling have been misjudged to merely accompany what we see. Amin reiterates the fact that the way bodies have been racialized and have been at the receiving end of racialization in different historical contexts is owing to the fact that they are *'seen'* that way and are not *'heard'* or listened to enough. There comes the need to do sociology where we listen more to one another and *feel* more. Perhaps the revelation may take us in for a lot of surprise.

I will stop here, enough of my gutted rantings. It is evening now; I hear plates and other utensils being banged in the balconies and suddenly realize that it is Sunday today. Productivity is still a myth for me and, like sleep, it continues to elude me. I listen to Kali Uchis and her song *After the Storm* seems to be the perfect fit to suit the sombre mood, especially when she sings:

So if you need a hero (if you need a hero)
Just look in the mirror (just look in the mirror)
No one's gonna save you now
So you better save yourself
And everybody's hurting
Everybody's going through it
But you just can't give up now
'Cause you gotta save yourself
Yeah, gotta hang on, baby
The sun'll come out
Nothing good ever comes easy
I know times are rough
But you just can't give up now
'Cause you gotta save yourself
Yeah, gotta hang on, baby…

Photographed by @Magnum_Dynalab
Source: Flickr

Featured image:
Instagram (@iamjesshunter)

Analysing Social Citizenship in India through a Gendered Lens

by Anushree,
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"Be it the Muslim women of Shaheen Bagh or the Dalit women who are resisting, these movements are seeing the intersection of different identities, making this resistance not only about a fight against the citizenship law but also making it about the inherent structural problems present in the society."

The recent protests on CAA and NRC, which have surfaced in India around the questions of citizenship, have pushed us to take a step back to analyse the contestations of the meaning of citizenship as a *concept*. One of the most accepted definitions of citizenship was given by T.H Marshall who defined citizenship as *"a concept which gives full and equal membership to a person in a political community."* We take this universal understanding of citizenship forward to examine how feminists have contested this definition and how, an understanding of these contestations hold a great deal of relevance in our present

times. This study becomes even more imperative in times when most of the protests in the nation are being led by women.

As Anupama Roy puts it, feminists of all strands have challenged the dominant conception of citizenship on two grounds:
Firstly, they argue that viewing citizenship from the principles of uniform and equal application is a *gender blind approach* which does not take cognizance of the fact that modern societies are built on highly patriarchal institutions. By generalizing citizenship across social structures, the notion of 'equality' as the dominant understanding of citizenship remains elusive.
Secondly, feminists argue that this universality and generality have produced dichotomies, and where the space for citizenship has increasingly been identified with male and the public sphere, this identification not only categorizes men and women into rigid spheres of public and private, but also pushes the other identities of caste, class, gender to the private realm.

Thus, in a community of *"full members"*, as defined by Marshall, lack a social and political understanding of differentiation that makes citizenship, as a concept, hierarchical. The feminist understanding of citizenship, thus, tries to examine how both the ancient and modern concepts of citizenship have either excluded women or have unequally distributed the services of citizenship to them. This is the latter understanding of the unequal distribution of services of citizenship which we'll take forward in the Indian context.

Source: Pinterest (@refinery29)

The loudest voices which have dominated the countrywide protests against the amendments to the citizenship law have been raised by women. The scenes coming from all across the country show how, women in India, are reclaiming their public spaces in a patriarchal country. These women are not only pushing the structural hierarchies of the state but at the same, are challenging the structural hierarchies of their families.

There's a lot to infer from this when we try to understand the citizenship debate in India. Firstly, women have either been understood as passive citizens by the state or have been pushed to behave like one. Rajeev Bhargava defines *passive citizens* as *"those who are provided with protection and basic necessities and liberties, but in turn there is no involvement expected from them in the public sphere."* "Passive Citizens" as described by Bhargava, have been relegated to the private sphere. Feminists argue that state and family, as social institutions, try to sustain this passive citizenship of women and want them to be relegated to the private sphere.

The countrywide protests led by women, therefore, hold significance not only because it pushes these boundaries but also because they take up the form of *active* citizenship. Women are engaging with the state and the ruling elite to negotiate for their rights and at the same time, challenging the status quo.

Secondly, the recent protests also push us to take recognize the fact that

the debates on citizenship cannot only be understood by a set of rights and responsibilities, but also needs to be understood from the parlance of *identities*. Be it the Muslim women of Shaheen Bagh or the Dalit women who are resisting, these movements are seeing the intersection of different identities, making this resistance not only about a fight against the citizenship law but also making it about the inherent structural problems present in the society. Women across

Las líneas de Richard
Source: Pinterest (@camionatica.com)

India are challenging not only patriarchy as it is for everybody, but multiple patriarchies based on the structures of caste, class and ethnicity are being challenged.

 This emerging intersectionality of caste, class, ethnicity and gender does make us question that even if citizenship is available to everyone, are the services of citizenship equally distributed? Nirja Jayal argues that *"the economic disparities and inherited social inequalities such as class, caste, gender, ethnicity and language are major factors that restrict the full enjoyment of citizenship rights."* This also makes us question whether the citizenship rights of women in India are framed within the social structures of caste, class and ethnicity?

To answer these questions, we need to understand the multifaceted reasons why women have taken to the streets. On a pragmatic level, proving citizenship on the basis of documents, remain a problem all across India. However, if we move our focus specifically to women, women generally tend to have less or no documentation, and don't often have their names on property documents. Women have frequently moved away from where they were born once married, and are less likely to have their births registered. Women from lower socio-economic strata are more vulnerable and are more likely to be excluded from the administrative process of documentation. When we try to see the implications of the recent uproar on CAA and NRC through a gendered lens, it is imperative for us to understand that it puts both women and the trans community in a more vulnerable spot.

Source: Huffpost

But, is restricting our understanding of the recent protests only to the questions of citizenship justified? If we examine the concerns that have emerged, we will see that they have exemplified the women's experience of citizenship rights in India. The feminist analysis draws our attention to the fact that "the state might grant citizenship to women but it is the nature of the society which will determine the extent to which citizenship can, in fact, be exercised. Experiences of poverty, discrimination and social exclusion undermine the benefits of citizenship."

Thus, as Karuna Nundy pointed out seeing the recent protests, *"being a woman in India feeds into the experience of resistance to oppression. Women in India know what exclusion means, and they know it because it is ingrained in them."*

Thus, feminist understanding of political citizenship in India cannot only be restricted to our access to it. It becomes imperative for us to also understand that the benefits of citizenship should be made available to everyone through the ethos of social equality, liberty and justice. It is also important for us to understand the idea of *social citizenship* where political citizenship is made socially available to its citizens. Thus, when the present times are viewed from a gendered lens, it does put the actions of the state under scrutiny- of understanding the patriarchal nature of the state; of understanding whether in an effort to cure hostile sexism, the state is reinforcing benevolent sexism? Of understanding whether, in the name of 'empowerment', the state is trying to maintain the status quo? And in lieu of the present scenario we need to ask difficult questions of who is a citizen in India? And more importantly, who can *claim* to be a citizen in India?

Featured image:
Two women engaged in some discussion during a sit-in protest in Shaheen Bagh.
Photographed by Shefali Bhatia, Third Year.

SECTION FOUR

Society and Structures: From the lenses of our professors

Communication in the time of Despair

by Dr. Binu Sundas, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Miranda House

"News anchors gradually became agents of the representational culture, denying space to alternative thoughts and dissenting voices. Students thus, became anti-nationals, doctors fighting the system to save the lives of numerous children became criminals."

Human society has witnessed catastrophic events in the past destroying the social order beyond repair. The World Wars human civilization witnessed, the crash of economic system during and after the Great Depression completely annihilated the social order. These events together destroyed the social, political and economic processes but brought to the forefront a lifeworld that was never commonly shared by the diverse human race of the world. The social system and the lifeworld was in sync, which thereby facilitated a communicative action that was rational and served as a basis for reconstructing the social order.

One of the very important aspects which facilitated this reconstruction was the absence of mass media which proliferated representational culture. This made it easier for people to make validity claims in their interaction and communicative action. These validity claims were either accepted or challenged. In case it was challenged, actors contested, criticised and debated the validity claims forcing the actors to revise their communication. Such communicative action was therefore responsible for ascertaining progress and development that was less oppressive for the society.

In the last three or four decades after the World War and the economic crisis, the destruction and despair brought about by it was overturned by strong communicative action. But as technological and economic progress started getting rapid, a new economic order was sought by the powers of the world. The new liberal policies began to be implemented across the globe, and interdependence among culturally diverse societies became the dominating feature of the new world order. This interdependence was further strengthened by the growth of telecommunications. The world became a global village. The telecommunication revolution brought home all the global events. The final end to strong communicative action was brought about by the '24x7' news channels.

News which till then had been more or less unbiased and objective now tended to be determined by political ideology. News became more of a propaganda tool in the new political and economic order. People were gradually transformed into a one dimensional man, devoid of any critical thinking and rationality. Reality soon became what these news channels constructed and propagated it to be.

All ideologies in the political spectrum started using television and news channels to propagate their ideas and only representational culture was given space in the news. News anchors gradually became agents of the representational culture, denying space to alternative thoughts and dissenting voices. Students thus became anti-nationals, doctors fighting the system to save the lives of numerous children became criminals. The absence of the health infrastructure and facilities was not held responsible for causing deaths of children; rather, the doctors who were fighting to arrange for oxygen were charged for negligence.

In the situation of complete absence of communicative action, television channels were busy using strategic action to meet their desired political and economic ends as driven by the market. But all these bonhomie suddenly seems to have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This disease has the potential, yet again, to

Image source: Pinterest (@9GAG)

destroy the existing world order – social, political and economic. However, it will be difficult to restore the order like in earlier times as the medium of communication is totally one-sided, offering us only representational culture and suppressing all the challenges that are posed to the validity claims they make.

Until and unless we create an environment where validity claims of all are allowed a space to challenge and to be challenged, and debates and discussion are allowed to take place, this virus will do more damage to the social order than the deaths we have experienced.

Featured image: Pinterest (istockphoto.com)

(How) Will the Curve Flatten?
The Indian Middle Classes and the Pandemic

by Anasua Chatterjee, Assistant Professor of Sociology
at West Bengal State University
(Former Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Miranda House)

"As sociologists and social anthropologists, we have been trained to look into the minute patterns of the everyday life, for it is often where the key to existing structures of power, privilege and deprivation of any society lie."

Over the past month or so, people around the globe have been struggling to make sense of the mayhem unleashed by the Novel Coronavirus. The COVID 19 has brought forth a situation 'unprecedented' in the collective memories of societies through the past century.

We, here in India, moved quickly from a heady nonchalance to aggravated panic within the mere span of a week. As the numbers of those infected began to rise steadily, by the middle of March, schools and colleges around the country were closed, conferences and seminars were cancelled, and people were advised to stay at home to the extent possible.

The virus evidently displayed no regard for these measures. Things went from bad to worse. The Prime Minister called for a *'janta curfew'* – we stayed indoors for fourteen hours as a challenge on a balmy spring day and rang bells and beat drums to honor the doctors and cleaners who were at the frontline fighting for us. Soon, the glimpse of life offered by the ceremonious *'janta curfew'* was to become a way of life for us. India went into a nation-wide lockdown within the next couple of days; indeed within a notice of a mere few hours.

For the self-regarding middle classes, the inconvenience of the matter couldn't be more. Nothing seemed *'normal'*. The dictums of *'social distancing'* and *'home quarantine'* seemed to have brought the whole of social life to a standstill. The maid, the cook, the uber ride, none were accessible. The malls were shut, so were the cinemas and the restaurants. As more and more offices encouraged 'work-from-home' that allowed for flexi-time at last, there was precious little to be done with that time. After all, how long can one stay at home? Or, talk over the phone, or watch a new series on Netflix, maybe rerun an old favorite? Enduring loneliness, or anything else for the matter, doesn't sit well with this group.

For some of the more mindful, the lockdown spelt a period for the healing of the earth; the birds were back in the trees, the smog had lifted and the Yamuna sparkled in a way it had never done in decades. It was also a window to slow down, and heal oneself just as the earth healed.

Wishful as this may sound, there was certainly not much to be excited by in the alternative world of news and numbers. It just spiked one's anxiety, with a foreboding sense of loss of control.

The 'government' was surely not doing enough. Even if it were, there were the migrants on their long walk home, *"spreading the virus like wildfire"*. And then, of course, there were the Tableeghis.

"Why did they not follow the orders against large gatherings..look at the numbers."
"Why isn't there enough testing? That would solve the matter to some extent."
"Why can't they put on masks and wash their hands?"

How will the curve flatten?

As the barrage of middle-class versions of the 'normal' and the 'needful' assault us from every direction, we perhaps need to take a little while to locate it within the overall concerns of wider society. As sociologists and social anthropologists, we have been trained to look into the minute patterns of the everyday life, for it is
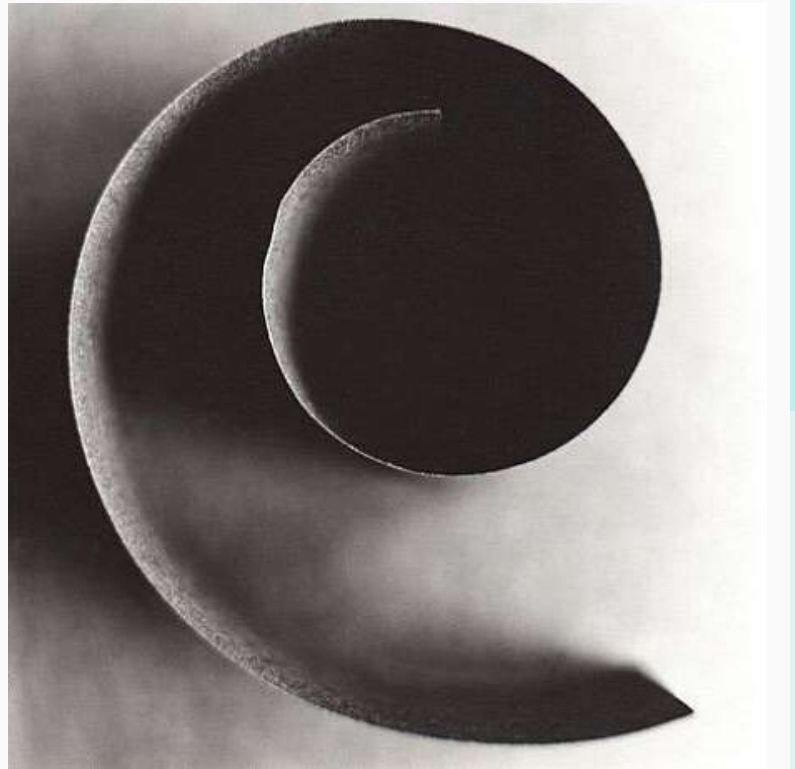

Image source: Pinterest (@gallery339.com)

often where the key to existing structures of power, privilege and deprivation of any society lie. The Coronavirus pandemic is real – its symptoms similar, but the reality of it for differently located social groups could not be further apart.

The pandemic-induced misery of the African-Americans in the USA, the images of dead bodies of corona victims lying unattended in the streets of Ecuador and Bangladesh, the heart wrenching tales of people losing their loved ones for the lack of social security in the so-called developed nations of the world, vividly throw light on the vast social distances between people whose

different histories ensure that they remain fundamentally apart from those they share close physical spaces with.

In India, where society is fragmented on the basis social class and other ascriptive identities of caste, gender, ethnicity and religion, which in turn, become bases for deep-rooted social inequalities, and where everyday life is rife with situationally produced common sense and its associated senses of 'right' and 'wrong', it is perhaps easier for dominant social groups to cast the 'culprit', to identify the 'expendable'. Thus, it is the innate lack of civic sense of the migrants that gets highlighted. That, these are men and women without assurance of either food or income or, for that matter, any source of sustaining themselves in cities where they work in the large unregulated informal sector, conveniently gets overlooked. It is the acute and 'mindless' religiosity of all Muslims that gets reinforced. It is the callous lack of compliance to rules of hygiene of the pizza delivery boy that gets focused upon. After all, so many families had to be quarantined because of him. That the spread of the virus might have been the other way around, to the delivery boy – who did not have the option to spend the lockdown in home quarantine with an assured pay – from one the many families he delivered to in a posh urban locality is discounted. Perhaps it was, perhaps wasn't. But, the extant structures of power and the moral evaluations they engender aid quietly yet relentlessly, in the production of expendable bodies, where blames can be easily fixed; where systemic failures in addressing a disaster can be readily attributed.

Drawing attention to mainstream middle-class discourses on the pandemic, and placing them against alternative possibilities carries the purpose of highlighting the specific social locations on which such evaluations are built.

This is not to say the middle class is not warranted making its views on the pandemic known. With its vast social capital and informed standing, the middle classes have the potentiality, among other things, to influence decision-making and policy implementation through constructive criticism and local level participation, instances of which have been many in India.

But perhaps, it's time for the 'citizen-consumer' – the elusive category which today comprises a very large part of the Indian middle-class, to employ their position of entitlement, and access and participate in countering a pandemic that has, within an alarmingly short period of time, turned into a cause of suffering and loss for millions across the country.

Notwithstanding the dreariness around, one hopes and dreams that the chain of COVID 19 will be broken. There will be no new cases of the infection around, a vaccine might become available. Across societies, the curve will finally be flattened. But, such a desire cannot be built around readily expending the usual 'costs' of the battle.

Image source: Pinterest (@My Modern Met)

Featured image: Flickr (@yu+ichiro)

Unprecedented yet Inescapable: A final goodbye

As we sat down to write this, in two different parts of the country, both of us failed to put our thoughts into words the first two attempts. It's silent yet chaotic; life has come to a standstill yet it's supposed to go on. These paradoxes have further disrupted the normal way of being. In such a situation, working for the magazine was not easy. Nonetheless, it also disenthralled us from the tangled thoughts and debilitating emotions to a large extent. The line between sociology and life is a fuzzy one, so using Sociology to comprehend things around us and reading works of the very talented people who have done so in varied ways has kept our minds at work. Now when we are immured in our rooms with nothing but our own thoughts, channelling them in a healthy way becomes important. For that, working towards bringing this publication to you has been a cathartic experience. We have put our heart and soul into it, and we hope you enjoy reading it.

Having said that, it is important that we acknowledge all those without whose contribution, this publication would not have been what it is. We'd like to extend our warm gratitude to Dr. Reema Bhatia for taking out her precious time and penning down the Foreword for our magazine. We would also like to thank all our teachers, batchmates and juniors, for being a source of constant encouragement.

Sidra Ali, our classmate and a very talented artist, rightfully deserves a special mention for making the cover(s) of this session's 'The Lighthouse'. We also appreciate every person who sent in their intriguing work, which makes this publication worth a read.

Photographed by Nehal Gupta, Third Year

Coming to working with each other, it has been a cakewalk. Guess that's what happens when you get to work with your best friend; your thoughts eerily synchronise even on things as minor as choosing a template or a font for the magazine and disagreement is almost wiped off the plate. The comfort we share with one another in our personal lives, translated professionally and made our journey as co-editors congenial. There certainly were moments of worry and of doubt, but the fun in simply working together and brainstorming ideas together, always overpowered.

We wish this happened in a different way, the *normal* way - printing the magazine at Patel Chest and rushing to the Department to show it to the faculty - but maybe the definition of normal has been challenged now, and that's okay. We will hopefully come to terms with it soon.

Seems like it is just about time that we pass on the baton and move on. We are extremely glad to announce Anannya Sharma as the Editor-in-Chief and Ishika Roy as the Sub-editor for the academic session 2020-21.

This journey was one filled with iridescent colours, and as surreal as the friscalating windows of Miranda House on a beautiful spring afternoon. Here's to a rewarding journey that is forever to remember.

Signing off,
Arundhati and Abhija
Editors-in-Chief,
2019-2020
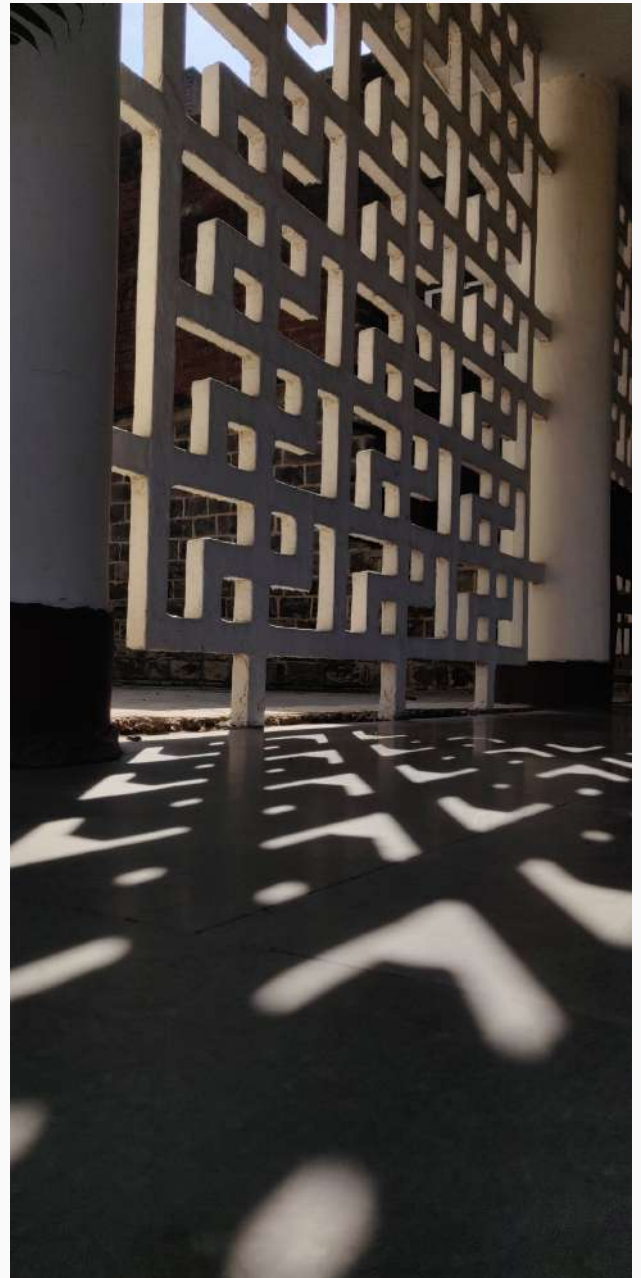
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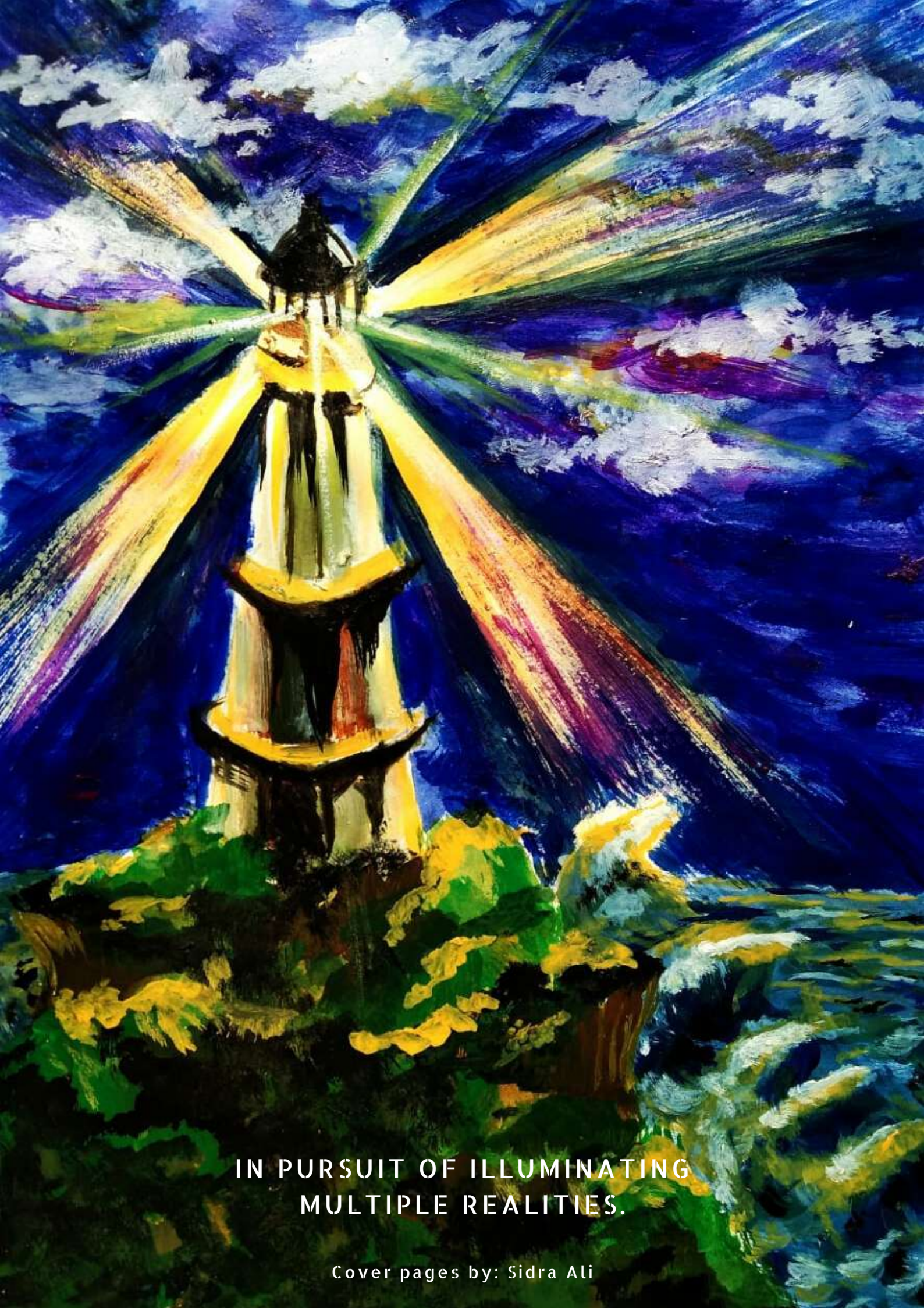
IN PURSUIT OF ILLUMINATING
MULTIPLE REALITIES.