



# THE LIGHTHOUSE

2016-2017

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
MIRANDA HOUSE**

*"It's time to lighten up your minds, hearts and bodies with the dual meaning of "lighthouse" - Sharing of knowledge and igniting the mind as well as shedding the burdens on our shoulders through sharing. That's the way I would look at the path to progress.*

*Let the hidden talent be exposed!"*

*-Dr. Dinaz Mirchandani*

*Former Head of the Department of Sociology, Miranda House*

**TEACHERS INCHARGE: Dr. Reema Bhatia, Mr. Sharib Zeya**

**CHIEF EDITOR & COVER DESIGNER: Ayndri, Part3**



## FOREWORD

---

Congratulations to the Department of Sociology on another successful edition of The Lighthouse. As always, the magazine has been designed and conceptualised by the students. Our aim is to encourage creativity of thought among students so that they may learn and grow in every aspect.

In this publication, we offer a wide variety of articles under categories such as humour, fiction, poems, and other contemporary content. A common theme that runs through and binds together all these contributions by the students is their sense of social responsibility which has motivated them to pen down their ideas in forms that The Lighthouse presents to us.

This edition of The Lighthouse also provides a glimpse of the activities that have happened in this academic year. These include movie screenings, seminars, and the annual department fest and associated activities.

The year 2016-17 has been a memorable year in several ways. We bid adieu to Dr. Dinaz Mirchandani on 30 August, 2016. Her journey has been a long and eventful one. She has been the architect and mentor of the department for 39 years. A special section is also dedicated to her.

I convey a word of thanks to Ayndri for her editorial efforts and the cover design. Mr. Sharib Zeya's inputs and his contribution also deserve a notable mention.

My best wishes to all.

Dr. Reema Bhatia

Teacher in Charge

# C O N T E N T S

## **Education:**

- Development: Rethinking the Obvious- Examining the Rhetoric of Disability
  - Silent Voice
  - Sociological Perspective of Cinema: A Brief Account
- 

**Fiction:** I Had an Epiphany

---

## **Gender:**

- Born Sick
  - Letters of Apology
- 

## **Gallery 2017**

---

**Humour:** Is Cousin Red God's Gift?

---

**People:** Simply a Perspective

---

**Politics:** In Pursuit of a Utopia- a Study in Political Sociology

---

## **Yearly Events:**

- Reflections- Democracy, Citizenship And Its Impact On The State Of India
  - Reflections- Labour And Gender
  - Movie Screening- The Gods Must Be Crazy
  - Sociology Of Science: Emerging Frontiers
  - Utopia 2017 Day 1- Information Technology & Society
  - Utopia 2017 Day 2- Information Technology & Society
  - Ethnographia- Filmmaking Workshop
- 

**Farewell**

---

# DEVELOPMENT: RETHINKING THE OBVIOUS- EXAMINING THE RHETORIC OF DISABILITY

What Is 'Normal'?

Pragya Mahajan, Part 3

According to Disability Act 2005, disability is defined on the basis of substantial restrictions of a person's capacity to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the state or to participate in social or cultural life in the state because of permanent physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment. It includes visual impairment, hearing impairment, movement impairment, language impairment, and psychological disorders. Disability can be visible and non- visible. **There has been a marginal increase in the number of disabled persons with the figure rising from 21.9 million in 2001 to 26.8 million in 10 years** -2.13% to 2.21%-as per the figures released by the census data. There are 14.9 million men with disabilities as compared to 11.8 women in the country with the total number of disabled people over 18 million in the rural areas and just 8.1 million enumerated in the urban setting. The percentage of men with disabilities is 2.41 as against 2.01 in women.

The disabled are not 'disabled' only because they are physically or mentally 'impaired' but also because society renders them so and is built in a manner that does not cater to their needs. Disability is understood as a biological given. Whenever a disabled person is confronted with problems, it is taken for granted that the problems originate from the person's impairment. The disabled person is seen as a victim. The very idea of disability suggests that they are in need of help. In India labels such as 'disability', 'handicap', 'crippled', 'blind' and 'deaf' are used synonymously. Often these terms are hurled at people as insults. In a culture that looks up to bodily 'perfection', all deviations from the 'perfect body' signify abnormality, defect and distortion. Labels such as "bechara" (poor thing) emphasizes on the victim status for the disabled person. The roots of such attitudes lie in the cultural conception that views an impaired body as a result of fate. For some people in society destiny is seen as the culprit, and disabled people are the victims. The common perception views disability as retribution for past karma (actions) from which there can be no reprieve. It is thought that giving birth to the disabled children is a big sin. Even till today, millions of parents of the disabled kids do listen to these comments and murder the babies like the girl child or get rid of them or put them at homes, separating from the mainstream society. This tells us that separation or isolation of differently- abled kids starts from the birth.

On the other hand, my parents showed utmost compassion, care and love to bring me against all odds. That is why my parents are the richest couple in the world and I am the luckiest girl. Compassion is the way of showing somebody to live, to show somebody an opportunity to thrive and make them rich. The dominant cultural construction in India therefore looks at disability as essentially a characteristic of the individual. The very term 'differently abled' challenges each of these assumptions. Terms such as 'mentally challenged', 'visually impaired' and 'physically impaired' came to replace the more negative terms such as 'retarded', 'crippled' or 'lame'. The social construction of disability has yet another dimension. There is a close relationship between disability and poverty. People who are poor are also considered as disabled. Malnutrition, mothers weakened by frequent child birth, inadequate immunization programmes, accidents in overcrowded homes, all contribute to an incidence of disability among poor people that is higher than

among people living in easier circumstances. They have poor health outcomes, lower education achievements, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities. This is largely due to the lack of services available to them and the many obstacles they face in their everyday life. Disability creates and aggravates poverty by increasing isolation and economic strain, not just for the individual but for the family; there is no doubt that disabled people are among the poorest in poor countries. It is only recently with the efforts of the disabled people themselves that some awareness is building in the society on the need to rethink 'disability'.

**The recognition of disability is absent from the wider educational discourse.** This is evident from the historical practices within the educational system that continue to marginalize the issue of disability by maintaining two separate streams - one for disabled students and one for everyone else.

In the fast developing world, lot of favourable things have happened and are still happening at a much faster pace. Aesthetics and technology has come hand in hand, creating barriers in the environment around. The category of barriers faced by the disabled includes physical barrier, policy and perception barrier. Physical barrier involves difficulty in performing physical activities like familiarizing oneself with new buildings, accessing transportation independently, etc. There are some policies which do not allow persons with disability to claim their benefits equally as others do. Some policies prevent people with special needs to use services such as bank policy, vehicle- license. This is because there is lack of awareness and study about the needs of persons with disability. Many people are hesitant in coming forward to interact with the disabled. They view such persons as a disgrace, humiliation and shame. This is what stops the disabled to enjoy life. They are excluded and out casted by the public because of their impairment.

Lack of information is another major barrier faced by the disabled people.

Communication is another area where there is not enough focus paid upon. People having communication barriers are the ones who face a lot of hardships in socialization. Major communication barriers in the society include lack of readers, Braille materials/ manuals/ magazines/ newspapers for people with visual impairment, lack of sign language and sign language interpreters for people with hearing impairment which hinders a huge amount of human resource in contributing towards the development of the country. Access to communication in the widest sense is the access to knowledge, and that is vitally important for us.

We do not need pity, nor do we need to be reminded that we are vulnerable. We must be treated as equals, and communication is the way we can bring this about.

The real issue behind these barriers is the disability insensitive attitude of the society. Even a stringent law can do very less unless there is a change in the mind set of people and a willingness to accept and respect disabled people. There is an attitude of relating a disabled person with his or her disability and not to his or her abilities. The society should be dynamic enough to accept all differences, as the world exists only because of its differences and the natural balance among them. It also becomes the duty of each member of the society to respect individuality and mutual rights of any disabled member of the society. The society should develop a natural tendency to provide equal opportunities to disabled people, whereby they can enjoy their rights and can as well contribute to the society. All citizens should have the attitude to value the contribution of disabled people as they do their own. For such an attitudinal shift to happen the society should believe in disabled people and that they are like anybody else. Sometimes, persons with disability underestimate themselves and believe that they are misfit for the society and incapable of being productive. This is because they feel that they are neglected, their efforts are not acknowledged, etc.

As far as education of the disabled is concerned, the main stream schools have never felt it to be their responsibility to include persons with disability. Even if they are given admission in accessible institutions, their needs are not taken into account and hence, the curriculum is not disabled friendly. Very few reach up to 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> standards and to college education. Some disabled are very fortunate to receive education and should be thankful to their families because generally, least priority is given to the education of the persons with disability which implies that by and large schools and colleges are not accessible for the disabled. The washrooms are too far off and many a time people with physical disability avoid drinking water to avoid using the washroom. The disabled often miss classes. One man's joke may lead to another person's humiliation. This includes mocking at people with disabilities, talking in a baby voice, or talking to them as if they cannot understand basic concepts or forms of communication, such as a friend asks a disabled person "Who am I"? Apart from this, other problems include visiting the canteen area, library, departments, so on and so forth. As far as the accessibility aspect is concerned, persons with disability have difficulty to enter buildings and navigate around buildings. Ramp and tactile is very important. After all it is the right of everyone to be included in all walks of life, and is not possible without a barrier free environment. The reasons include firstly, the preconceived notions regarding disability which include connotations like wastage of time, money and other resources. One would imagine an argument against treating people with disabilities as equals would be non-existent.

**Discrimination, intolerance, and ignorant disrespect are all silent problems that infiltrate in our society.** Other misconceptions seem to foster these problems of discrimination, intolerance, and disrespect. These are a few of the common myths that continue to exist today. We are made disabled by the perceptions and the stigma of the people. When there are other siblings of the disabled child, the disabled child gets the least priority in education compared to his or her siblings either due to poverty or the attitudinal barriers in society. Even if they are educated, they are not given a chance to be a part of co-curricular activities such as sports activity, dance, music and other cultural activities. Quality education for all citizens of the country should be extremely necessary because it teaches intellectual, moral, physical and social values for the all-round development of an individual. **It socializes a child to play responsible roles in society.** A child through education learns the basic rules, regulations, norms and values of society. It helps in maintaining and perpetuating the society and its culture. It also helps in promoting change by instilling new ideas and values. It provides the necessary knowledge and skills to an individual to be a productive member of society. It goes on from birth to death. There is no particular stage or age for this. Students with disability are often the victim of social exclusion. They have always been rejected without any valuable reason at workplace, class, social hangouts, and others. This is the time when the disabled feel that they are the poorest in the world because this is not due to lack of money; this is rather due to loneliness. Given an opportunity, the disabled would like to be a part of social gathering and can be equally efficient as anybody else. Even if the disabled is socially included, they perhaps cannot interact because of physical barrier. On the academic front the disabled works as hard as others. They are equally competitive which develops the spirit of working harder. Studies have proven that the disabled has more concentration as compared to those who do not lack any impairment. Visually impaired students require more time and effort because they require assistance for reading course material to them in spite of technology being so advanced. Disabled people are not



given a chance to be a part of sports activities because the equipment to fulfill their requirements are not available and they are treated with sympathy, that is, they are exempted from such activities in schools which deprive them from all these rights. There are very few places which offer special tools for them. For them their room is their best friend which is the only place they can exercise safely. Persons with disability are perceived to be weak, incapable, they are thought to have some defect, and no respect is paid to them. They are considered to have low

intelligence. This perception can be seen at public places, offices, shops, educational institutes, etc. Usually, in job interviews, persons with disability are not given a chance to work as a cashier, research assistant or do other responsible jobs. This kind of discrimination is shocking. They should also be treated as human beings and should be included in our social lives. Persons with disability require motivation, encouragement to join in social activities, entertainment, meetings, group study, etc. We can educate the society and raise awareness. We should inculcate sensitivity. Besides, we should provide a good accessibility to the building by installing tactile ramps. In class rooms, there should be efficient study medium. There should be adequate facilities to enable them to use all the services in an easy and safe way.

As far as mobility of the individuals with disability is concerned, they require help because the infrastructure of India does not permit them to walk independently. **Delhi Metro is perhaps India's first public transport system with adequate features for differently-abled persons. It is a dream come true because it has made travel for the differently-abled persons very convenient and comfortable.** Signages at prominent locations are provided for differently-abled persons and mobility restricted passengers. Seats in trains have been reserved for the differently-abled persons and senior citizens. There is train door closing audio and visual indication. Announcements are also made for the next station and arrival with correct side platform. In addition, station staff constantly monitors passengers movement and provides personal help to any differently-abled persons who need assistance.

We are unequally placed, therefore we have unequal opportunities. Nature only provides us or presents us with potential differences. But what happens is that we as human beings start evaluating and comparing these differences. Once we start evaluating and comparing these differences, **we present these differences as inequalities.** This means that inequalities are socially constructed. With human beings, these differences do not become inequalities unless and until they are selected, marked out, and evaluated by the processes that are cultural and not natural. A part from this, everybody has equal calibre, equality of opportunity is the right of all human beings, and access to resources should also be provided as per the needs of people with different abilities.

We should not look down upon these persons as social burdens. They must be encouraged to face life boldly and to feel that life still holds charm for them. They can achieve great success if they are given enough opportunity. We can take the example of Helen Keller who was visually-impaired; hearing-impaired and could not speak but discovered new horizons. They need fellow-feelings. We should have a soft corner in our hearts to acknowledge their position in society. It is our common thought, or probably our nature, to fear people who appear different from us. They have the same rights as everybody else and want dignity and respect from every individual. A friendly handshake, eye contact and a caring smile can go a long way. Even saying "hi, it is good to see you" can brighten up someone's day. Making an outward, friendly gesture can do wonders for



someone who desperately needs it. We need to be patient and accept the differences. Instead of focusing on disability, one should rather focus on personality. It is not a person's fault if he or she is disabled. Disabilities are just a part of our lives, but making it an issue and calling someone "handicapped" or "special" is what makes them feel inferior.

**The disabled are no lesser those who do not lack any impairment. We are neither especially blessed nor especially cursed. We need opportunity, social acceptance and equal treatment. We want to be treated like everyone else. We do not want special treatment. We want the chance to compete.** We cannot get that chance unless others are willing to accept us and our differences. So, we can do everything and we should be treated as others. The attitude of pity causes the bar to be lower for performance and this cannot and will never be helpful. This must stop.

What is "normal"? We all have different abilities, talents, interests and personalities. People with disabilities go to school, get married, work, have families, play, do laundry, go shopping, eat out, travel, volunteer, vote, pay taxes, laugh, cry, plan and dream- just like everyone else that's patronizing. People with disabilities don't need pity. They need access to opportunities.

People should not make generalizations about people with disability. For instance, they say people should not use terms such as "handicap" and "slow," for individuals with disability. People should not assume that a disability defines a person's identity. In fact, people with disability do something that non-disabled people cannot do, bringing their experience and focus to key aspects of a task. Individuals with disabilities are able to bring work ethic skills to complete an assignment or project, allowing them to make a contribution to society. It has been found that the disabled (whether autistic or visually-impaired) have a faster typing speed than those who do not lack any impairment. People who have disabilities must be treated with kindness, openness, and respect. They should be accepted for who they are. They are strong individuals who learn differently and can be role models to others. They should not be considered a danger for the public. Disabled people should be given opportunities in life to pursue their passion and should be happy. Be wise in interactions with disabled people.

Individuals form social norms through an assumption that self-identity should be perpetuated to all members of society. Society has the power to overcome the prejudice of disability. The ideals that are formed because of cultural assumptions must be made with more leeway, and people with disabilities should be treated according to their individual desires and needs.

In a nutshell, there are many issues and challenges faced by such people in daily life which are real. We should help these people, instead of ignoring them. In order to become a developed community, holistic values like appreciation towards the capabilities of such people are very important. The lessons we learnt are to show compassion and make people rich by removing loneliness from our lives. To create better world, we need to make people happy so that we can create a fairer and cleaner world to live in and do something good.



Source: [unitetheunion.org](http://unitetheunion.org)

# SILENT VOICE



We have seen sociology in dance but dance in sociology is yet to be given a thought about

Anoushka Deo, Part2

To Dance Is Human.

Dance as an art has always been present in the lives of humans. To dance is to unite. There are hundreds of forms of dance all over the world; from classical to folk and tribal. Historically, it had a very significant role to play in communication and has been a major part of socio-cultural aspect of humanity.

Dance has a very unique relevance in the discipline of sociology. **It is a part of many cultures and societies, making it an important dimension of study for sociologists.** Theories of the founding fathers of sociology can also be applied to the world of dance which indicates the possibility that an art form and an academic discipline grouped together can lead to a brilliant combination. Now that the connection has been built, let us go through some creative instances of it.

**Dance is a form of expression which is subjective and emotional; hence, it is understood by the masses.** It teaches us empathy. This characteristic can be used as a tool to raise awareness amongst people for example, through flash mobs. For instance, flexing has been a popular mechanism for protest in social movements. This is a street dance style that is performed to dancehall and reggae music, originating from Jamaica in the 1990s and developing on the streets of Brooklyn, East New York. It has since evolved into a protest movement - an avenue for "flexors" to rally against social injustice, state brutality and racism. Considered by many as A form of political expression- part-protest, part-advocacy - flexing gained momentum in the era of unrest following the police killings of two black men in the New York City. Flex confronts issues of social injustice through the exploration of personal narratives; dancers perform as individuals and groups, articulating their stories of inequality, poverty, violence, death and hopelessness in hard-hitting descriptions.

In numerous Indian festivals, marriage ceremonies and, certain religious practices, rituals dance has an important role to play. Sufism as well as Bhakti involves many dance movements used by performers to showcase their love for the almighty.

In fact, all the seven classical dances of India have their roots in temples. Natyashastras was an extensive book authored by Bharatmuni which prescribes rules of dance postures, facial expressions and other form of conduct.

Interestingly enough, as a dancer myself I have noticed that even gender at times is overlooked in dance. Classical dancers depict each character from mythology or folklores and a woman can depict a male character irrespective of her own gender like, Maya Rao, who is a famous Kathakali dancer and a theatre personality depicts male protagonists of Indian mythology through her dance. But at the same time it was woman who danced and entertained the Indian monarchs in their courts or temples which has made it complex to analyse the gender roles within the realm of dance. Overall, it can be said that all genders are treated in a courteous manner in the classical dances of India today. Still in many dance forms like Ballroom or Salsa, men are the ones who lead their ladies in the dance which suggests that norms of patriarchy have trickled down into this aspect of life as well. Thus, it can be said that social norms and institutions also influence dance.

We have seen sociology in dance but dance in sociology is yet to be given a thought about. For that there are many famous theories like that of Subjective interpretation of social action by Max Weber. One of the inspirations of Crowd theory, Emile Durkheim said that dance might be necessary to sustain the collective effervescence of crowd. Then a

major perspective of micro sociology – Interactionism, also studies about the facial expressions, gestures, postures and other components of body language which is all heart and soul of all dance forms around the world. For that matter even a sociological school of thought called Structuralism involves theories that can be confirmed and applied to dance which is that the bases of all the forms is one, which implies that irrespective of visible differences the core structure is the same.

With the changes in the society also came the changes in the dance. With emergence of new issues and eras of society the meaning and the content of the dance changed as well rather many styles like flex for instance were created. Dance helps us to appreciate diversity and spread love, peace and it is one thing that unites the world.

---

## SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF CINEMA: A BRIEF ACCOUNT



The large variety of audiences, counted along with their pre-conceived value systems, education, rationality and training automatically forms a base for cinema to confirm or contradict their notions of life

Rajendrani Sarkar, Part 2

More than fifty per cent of the world today –children, adolescents and adults alike attend cinema performances at least once (the figures are considerably high in First world countries). Most are aware of latest releases, the actors, the performances and critical reviews as published in newspapers, magazines or the Internet. The question arises that why do millions go to cinemas and what effect films have on minds of the people.

Psychologists offer an answer that most of the **modern population today seeks escape from dreariness of mundane lives to live and enjoy a few hours in ideal situations.**

However, the same set of questions asked by social scientists would produce a different answer. It is evident from various sociological studies of audience reactions that films, feature films to be precise, exerts the most powerful influence in our lives, which is, in all sublimity, greater than the influence of print media or radio.

The nature of this influence, according to author J.P. Mayer, in his book “Sociology of Films: Studies and Documents”, is spread over all the classes of the society, without much of a difference in the audience reaction, is one of morality. Philosophies of millions are today influenced by films, if not made out of them per say.

The sociology of films can be understood firstly, by focusing over the genres of films since the dawn of cinema. Since the creation of the film industry, films have universally been classified into six genres: Gangster, Hard Boiled Detective, Western, Screwball Comedy, The Musical and The Family Melodrama. All these genres have the sociological aspect embedded within the course of the films. It is the responsibility of the screenwriter to incorporate the sociological aspect specific to the plot line of the film to reach out to the wide range of audience within the span of two hours (mostly). The sociology of a film, according to **some scholars, is created essentially off of the audience** being catered to and their respective situations.

Mayer in his book discusses the **sociological presuppositions of the film influence.** Mayer argues on similar lines as George Wallas to point out that as the art of medieval drama

that catered to needs of visualization as means of artistic and spiritual education declines, the craving for the element of myth provides a plausible explanation to the contemporary purpose of cinema. The large variety of audiences, counted along with their pre-conceived value systems, education, rationality and training automatically forms a base for cinema to confirm or contradict their notions of life. Contemporary men relate to fantastical characters and situations of the films, in the backdrop of a society of apparent alienation.

In conclusion it becomes necessary to draw attention to the fact that sociological studies of films must continue irrespective of whether the film industry is administered by monopolists or by the state bureaucracy.

**FICTION**

## **I HAD AN EPIPHANY**



The Universe Knows

Tanya Rose Rao, Part 1

I had an epiphany. As I lay awake at night, hoping that sleep would soon lure me into its trance, I had an epiphany-the universe knows. A few years ago, as I was safely tucked underneath the warmth of my covers, while cries of the old owl echoed on the panes of my window, my grandfather told me a story.

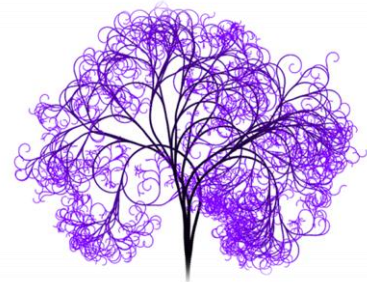
"It was the way he smiled" grandfather began, "when she first felt it; a little pang in the pit of her stomach. Initially, when the air carried the scent of summer and crickets sang at night, the two of them were perhaps too shy or too genteel to be acquainted with each other. But as leaves began to change colour, and the air more crisp, she would be seen teaching him the squares of a's and b's, while he would insist that she be there for every match of his. From mere acquaintances, a beautiful friendship had blossomed. Each enjoyed the other's company and the laughter that accompanied. He carried her books after class, and she did her best to hide the slight scarlet on her cheeks. They would often take walks in the woods which were sprinkled with yellow blossoms, all the while fantasizing about the adventures that life was going to unravel. The conversations that once started saw no end, eventually followed by heated arguments. While one believed that religion divided people, the other chose to see it as a beautiful way of unification, or sometimes, simply if scones tasted better with or without tea. She encouraged him at trying times and he did the same. Spending uncountable and unaccounted days with her, he knew that her favourite colour was orange and that she looked even more beautiful on days when she parted her hair to the right. And when at night, he lay awake, thinking of what a beautiful friend he had found in her, she craved for more, just a touch more. If only he knew.

Days and months had sped and blended into one but the two still stood strong. Standing healthy and firm to their beliefs at nineteen, the two, fresh out of the school room, were intoxicated by their youth and went in different directions in pursuit of what they wanted. It was with pride and patriotism that he went to serve the army, at a time when war was

brewing, while she went on to pursue her love for acting. And when lonely days would pass without even the slightest hint of his laughter, she found herself watching the leaves fall, all the while, closing her eyes and remembering that last waltz; the way his hands found the small of her back, while her fingers were secured around the masculinity of his shoulders. And when she laughed as he twirled her, he promised to return, if only to listen to her as she did that night. Aching hearts didn't often bleed. If only he knew. She would often write to him at length, describing her several failed endeavours in pursuit of her dream and of her determination to still move forward, never forgetting to mention how proud his parents were of him, and how greatly they missed him. But not once did ink tell paper of her ache, and how she was drowning in it. Fallen leaves were now covered in snow, but the pain of his absence was still fresh.

He wrote back to her whenever he got the chance, filling her in on how difficult life in the army was. And when the war had come to an end in '45 and camps were liberated, her heart tugged; he was finally returning home. He, too, was happy to return. The familiarity was a welcome and peace was a new strange, but most of all, he was happy to see her, to hold her and to laugh with her. He told her of his finality in defence and his need for a break, a change of air. She understood. The next month he moved to Paris, his return unknown and vague. The pain had resurfaced, but promptly shifted as she made her big debut in Hollywood. Even though the beginnings of stardom had started raining on her, he was never far away. She still wrote to him as she did before, only this time, her letters remained unanswered. It wasn't the weaving of fate's hands that brought the two together. All he did was smile at her.

While rain lashed outside her window that night, she was still awake, twisting and turning in bed. She thought of all those times they had argued over scones with tea, all the times he carried her books after class, the night she spent in his arms while slow and hot tears started to pour. Except for the linen on her pillow, not a soul did know of this unrequited love. She sobbed until the rain stopped, and then some more. And days later, as she took her morning tea, she was handed a letter, hoping that it was from him. And it was. She read with trembling hands the words that were strung together bringing him closer to another and away from her forever; he was getting married. "Grandfather paused to tell me that the best bit of the story was only yet come. "But what surprised her most was the day the letter was written; it was the night of the storm, the night she had cried." Oh, how the universe knows.



## BORN SICK



-Punam Murmu, Part 3

Hel-lo Society,

How long have I known you?

You have brought me to where I am,

**Shaped** me into who you wanted me to be,

Altered my **emotions** like I was clay you could **mould** me into your favourite shape,

When you didn't want to hear what you didn't write in your **rule book**,

You roared like a kitten, never meant, un-grown, *Born Sick*

I grew up under your blessings and grew out of your **hatred** for me, for the me who you never wanted me to be.

It's me speaking, the **unnatural** gift of god who you see as a **thing**, a thing with a body and no feelings, you tore me apart from my dear ones like you never knew how much they meant to me, how much I **meant** to them,

You constructed the reality just like an **alternate** dream, a dream that is a lie, a **lie** that mama taught me to never talk about,

"We were born sick", you heard them say it, my church offers no absolutes;

Religion **rejected** me, parents **disowned** me, friends did not want to know me anymore but love, love brought me back to life.

Love is the only **crime** I have committed, my existence was just one of those things that just had to happen because if it weren't for me, you, the society, wouldn't have been born.

**Love** me back like I have loved you so that the love I have for my lady love gets **accepted**, Her, I want to talk about **her** like some him **talks** about her;

If he can write what she loves then why can't she, me, **write** about her, the her I fell in love with, the her who loved me back, the us who can't be ourselves in **public**, and how!?

..holding hands, exchanging a flirty smile, looking at each other like there's no tomorrow;  
Stop and **listen!**

I want you to look at her just as I do, I want you to **believe** in her as much as I do, love her, love me, accept us and **let us be**;

We can't be if you don't let us be so **you** be and we be,

Be who we **want** to be;

Please, let's just un-complicate our lives and be **merry** because we all long for love,

sometimes, crave for life, sometimes and desire to be accepted for who we are because I was **born** sick but I love it.

**And here I say goodbye to Society!**

# LETTERS OF APOLOGY



Antara Mishra, Part 2

Dear Father,  
Sorry for not being a good daughter.  
Sorry for saying that 'All men are the same' and include you in the same category of heartless people.  
Sorry for shouting "Baap se bhi Azaadi" when your protection is the most I need.  
Sorry for being angry at you when you scolded me for coming home late at night.  
Sorry for not sharing with you anything that I share with mom.  
Sorry for always comparing your unending love with mom's eternal one and failing to understand that both are same.  
Sorry for not noticing that hidden pain in you every time I said that only Mom is my best friend.  
Sorry on behalf of the society who has given a whole new meaning to the term Masculinity where you also got unknowingly included  
Sorry Papa for everything your daughter has done to you; now you know that she doesn't really know the meaning of Feminism do you?

Dear brother,  
Sorry for not being a good sister.  
Sorry for insulting you when you merely wanted to comfort a girl by holding her by her shoulders.  
Sorry for labelling your every 'hold' or 'touch' as an insecure one.  
Sorry for misinterpreting all of your intentions.  
Sorry for not understanding that even you can be soft hearted and not always a brutal rapist.  
Sorry for shouting slogans against you.  
Sorry for always making 'Rakhi' the reason for the existence of our relationship.  
Sorry for doubting your intentions and refusing your help.  
Sorry my dear brother for everything that I have done to ruin your image. Now you know... your sister is too sensitive to demand equal rights, isn't she?

Dear son,  
Sorry for being an unsuccessful mother.  
Sorry for dividing 'work types' between you and your sister.  
Sorry for only pressurizing you to grow up and be responsible.  
Sorry for teaching you not to mix up with girls who wear miniskirts and short pants.  
Sorry for not letting you help me in the kitchen.  
Sorry for feeling awkward when you said you loved the colour pink.  
Sorry for always telling you to take care of your sister before telling you to take care of yourself.  
Sorry for everything son. You know your mamma loves you; don't you?

# SYNESTHESIA

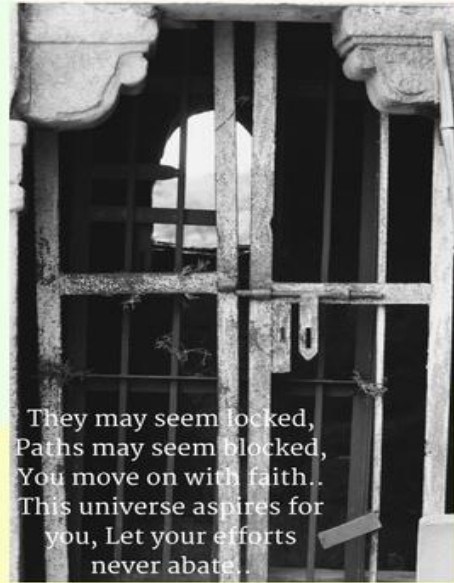




# LITTLE JOYS



# A LOOK, A PRANCE



**Ahana  
Ray,  
Part 2**

AHANA RAY, PART 2

# SIGHTS TO SEE AND PLACES TO BE





Sketch of "Young Girl With  
Roses On Her Hat" , sculpture  
by Auguste Rodin Date: 1865-  
1870; France



Thor, god of thunder from  
Asgard, undergoing the process  
of acculturation to life on Earth  
and seeming distressed about it



## IS COUSIN RED GOD'S GIFT?



Just another rant

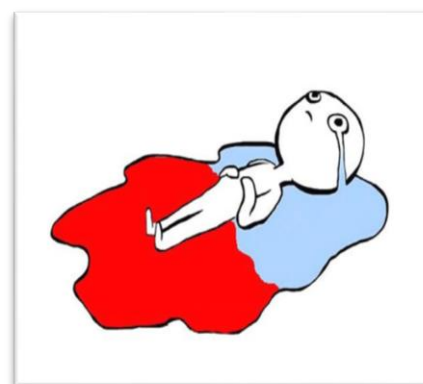
Ayndri, Part 3

Thanks to the increasing acceptance of its existence, the taboo surrounding menstruation seems to be receding. This is why I'm taking advantage of the situation to rant about it. Don't get me wrong, I like to believe menstrual experience is the primary source of bonding among all of womankind. In a world where your rump is ogled at incessantly much to your discomfort, you will gladly allow any strange lady at any strange site to check if your bottoms have been afflicted by the crimson wave, and she will readily give you an informed report. There will always be someone ready to lend you their extra sanitary napkin unless, of course, they are a heartless spawn of Mogambo. Menstruation is probably the only thread that has and always will unite us girlies - in times of drought, deluge, annexation, extra-terrestrial infringement or the classic, catfights -irrespective of race, ethnicity, and locale.

**So, what is it about shark week that unifies us?** Going by the logic that we all bleed thus we are one, is a tad bit extensive. What factually consolidates us is the downright cruelty that menstruation is, for some of us a lot more than the others. I will provide a personal example to prove my point. My routine for a day during that time of the month is as follows:

- Wake up. If my alarm doesn't do it, the body ache does.
- Moan
- Eat tons because of significant increase in appetite while simultaneously wanting to vomit
- Endure stomach cramps
- Snap at nice people
- Mention every hour to my associates my yearning to have been born as a boy
- Pretend to be a strong, mature lady who can bear the ordeal while swearing profanities in my head all day
- Escapist slumber

Trying to stay alive throughout the period while pretending to be composed becomes the first priority. Pills and hot water bags become my new mates. My gynaecologist spews technicalities- eggs, fertilization, uterus lining. I spew salty water from my eyes. If by chance one happens to be travelling during such a time and has to use public restrooms, kindly note that one has reached a step closer to decimation of the self.



Hindi movies have given the common folk several gifts, for example, skewed ways to pick up chicks (read: stalking), *sanskaar* lessons through family flicks, and Chennai Express to mention a few. Among these gifts one stands out because of its pertinence to my argument- the dialogue, "*Aurat hi aurat ka dard samajh sakti hai*", from a select movie no one remembers. Here, "dard" (pain) symbolizes menstrual cramps

and I maintain a refusal to interpret it any other way. Its insinuation is crystal clear. The mutuality of pain is what binds us together.

But isn't menstruation such a blessing? It is a vehement force of nature that sanctions the rise of new life for the perpetuation of the human race. A blossoming rose, each petal of which seeks to bring unrequited joy by producing the visage of a child. It is, oh, but a river flowing, flowing out of thy pudenda, giving thee endless torment for five days every two fortnights. It is thy companion in sorrow, and incidentally the reason for that sorrow. It is an affirmative struggle to relate to romanticized prose and poetry illuminating the "beauty" and importance of menstruation in the celebration of womanhood. Yes, the cycle plays a definitive role in the production of offspring (indirectly leaving human evolution to depend on it), but can we all agree it's slightly uncomfortable to go through it for an average of forty years? Forty years amounts to an average of 2400 days of pain. I checked. And what if a woman can't have or doesn't want to have babies? Isn't it a bit unfair to them? Shouldn't this be an optional offer?

To conclude, all I can say is this-

Your period is a faithful friend. (With friends like that, who needs enemies?).

Your period is the beauty of womanhood. (Underneath the shroud of beauty lies true ugliness).

Your period is bloody hell personified.

If Cousin Red is God's gift to humanity- it's an unwanted one. It's like expecting a pair of Jimmy Choos on your birthday and getting a wall clock instead that you accept with a fake smile. **Thanks, but no thanks.**

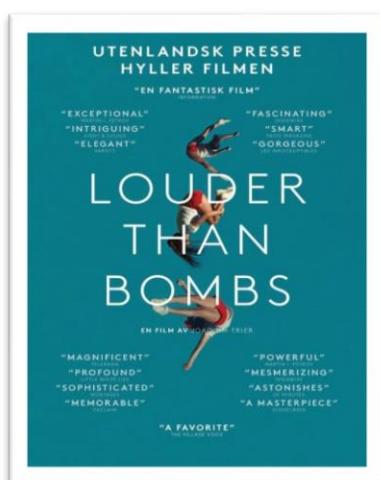
## PEOPLE

### SIMPLY A PERSPECTIVE



Putting ourselves in others shoes is the most difficult thing we will have to do

Asmaani Kumar, Part 1



I recently watched a movie called Louder than Bombs, and I distinctively remember a war photographer at work in Syria talking of how she approaches the events she witnesses and how she questions herself about whether this was simply her profession or was this a medium to talk about something beyond herself that the world needs to understand; whether she was capturing these moments in the way that these people would have if they could. And it struck.

Maybe it was her idealism or maybe it was her compassion to try and tell the story by getting attached to it as close as she could as an outsider. I write of this because as a student of sociology, I'd like to imagine **that we're outsiders looking in**. It doesn't really matter if we refer to decades of written history or if we spend a significant

amount of our time with the people, the society we wish to write about for when we do end up writing, we put ourselves into it and our partial perspective almost always. I do wonder if the British sociologists, or anthropologists as one may call them could ever write of the primitive people in terms of how this very section saw themselves for isn't using the very word 'primitive' a sign of looking down on them, of highlighting their traits not as simply an element of the diversity the world inhabits but as something that belongs to a time frame not adjacent to the current world?

This photographer I wrote of also talks of how she tries to approach the people, with as much dignity as possible for in times of war, normal codes of conduct are suspended. Treatment of people you wish to study with equality is a fundamental ideal of sociology, but is the ideal really evident when one talks of the practices being carried out in terms of comparison to the western world and bringing out the inferior elements in it. It cannot be denied that such practices are evident, that comparisons are consistently made under the realm of understanding but also under the dictums of superiority and inferiority, the magnificent present and the lacking past. Isn't dignity also not of acceptance of individuality, of a way of life that in spite of its tremendous distance from what the term 'modern' beholds, a way of sustenance? I wonder when writing of people if we ever write it in the way they see themselves because do these primitive people really consider themselves primitive and do the refugees, really see themselves as mere victims to the trauma they are faced with or do they see themselves as warriors, as fighters struggling to survive in the face of odds? We can never know truly, we will always be faced with a partial perspective of everything that we study. What are significant are vantage points, **different vantage points to understand the chaos and complexities of this world**, to gain a complete perspective or so I have read. But maybe what's more integral is to accept that we are almost always wrong in our assumptions, not completely right and **that putting ourselves in another's shoes is the most difficult thing we will ever have to do**. The most impossible, that in spite of attempting to remove biases for the purpose of study, the constant wish to better a society in terms of what 'modern' denotes development is a juxtaposition of our perspective over another's. We are, to be fair, calling our failures as attempts, even triumphs in understanding a world for scholarly means, for development, for the fulfilment of our ideas of how it should be and more precisely, how it could be. It is important to bring ideas to these diverse groups of people, to tell them of a world they know very little about but what is more important, I'd like to believe, is to talk of them, of these very different people we encounter in ways that they would like to talk of, to develop them in ways they wish to develop, to not study them but to understand, to listen and to accept that we may eventually end up telling their stories from our perspective but that it is important not to view them as a separate entity to familiarise ourselves with but as people who we're building a relationship with as much feeling as possible, as much acceptance and understanding as well. There is no space for empathy as someone once told me but compassion.

Maybe what the sociological perspective requires is not simply academic and developmental pursuits but also idealism and values in telling these myriad stories out there. Maybe what it needs is only compassion. Or maybe that is what I'd like to believe.

# IN PURSUIT OF A UTOPIA- A STUDY IN POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY



Exploring the possibility of a political-sociological ideal

Pavani Trivedi, Part 1

*One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors.*

- Plato

Let us begin by establishing that all disciplines have their roots in philosophy, for the simple reason that all study and discourse demands the prerequisite of thought.

Let us also, before proceeding further, establish what we mean by Utopia. Utopia is defined as an imagined ideal state where everything is perfect. Utopia, or an ideal state, as we may call it, is not an absolute. Let us also understand that this ideal state we envision is not universal. There is no one Utopia, there are only your and my versions of it. Utopia is relative; it is highly possible that your dream is my nightmare and your Utopia is my Dystopia. Utopia is a shape shifter, assuming different forms when pondered over by different minds. Despite its polymorphic and frankly, maddening nature, the incentives provided by it-peace, order and complete control-were great enough for thinkers and doers alike to wildly pursue this mirage of idealistic society throughout history, giving birth to the two largest and most widely discoursed fields of humanist study- sociology and political science.

The idea behind the creation of these two disciplines was the same: **to understand the working of polity in order to refine it; to understand the functions of society in order to perfect it; to take in**

**account the understanding of both society and polity, to create a Utopia.**

To understand this in its exactitude, we should travel back in time to ancient Greece in 400 BC, during the realm of one of the world's first democracies. Democracy then was yet an infant thought, not nearly as sophisticated as we see it across the globe today. The idea of direct democracy was a very literal one where everyone, regardless of accomplishment or status, enjoyed the position of office without election, on an alphabetical basis. This Athenian government was indeed an inefficient and disorderly one, rendering the nation extremely susceptible to invasion and overthrow by the neighbouring, highly disciplined Spartan empire. During these chaotic times, intellectual political insight against this ridiculous system of governance was rare, as most philosophers were too indifferent, or valued their lives too much to speak out. One of the very few who did was the famed teacher-philosopher, Socrates.

Socrates, though not against the idea of democracy itself, merely opposed its "perverse" implementation. He believed not in a government of the most popular, but in a government of the most intelligent. He vehemently spoke out in censure of the arbitrarily selected government, and even planned a revolution against it. This revolution was suppressed and Socrates sentenced to death, but the ideology of the rule of the intellectual only got strengthened in the minds of his disciples, who once only



impersonally censured the democratic government, but now hated it with a vengeance.

The most eminent of these students was Plato. After the execution of his teacher, he set out on a journey around the world, both to escape the Athenian government and to broaden his mind with knowledge from various lands far away. He at the same time envisioned a society run according to his master's vision, and tried to formulate his own system of a rule of the brightest. He returned to Greece, now a man of forty, to set up his famed institution of humanist study, the Academi. Besides teaching the most privileged and enlightened youth in all the nation, Plato spent many days forming his own system of educational, social and political ideal, of an educational aristocracy.

The following are the guidelines of the system, translated from the writings and teachings of Plato:

For the first ten years of life, education shall be predominantly physical; every school is to have a gymnasium and a playground; play and sport are to be the entire curriculum; and in this first decade such health will be stored up as will make all medicine unnecessary.... We cannot afford to have a country of malingerers and invalids; Utopia must begin in the body of man.

Music and measure lend grace and health to the soul and to the body; but again, too much music is dangerous as too much athletics. To be merely an athlete is to be nearly savage; and to be merely a musician is to be melted and softened beyond what is good. The two must be combined; and after sixteen the individual practice of music must be abandoned, though choral singing, like communal games, will go on throughout life. Nor is music to be merely music; it

must be used to provide an attractive form of relief from the sometimes unappetising contents of mathematics, history and science.

The elements of instruction...should be presented to the mind in childhood, but not with any compulsion; for a freeman should be a freeman too in the acquisition of knowledge. ... Knowledge which is acquired under compulsion has no hold on the mind. Therefore do not use compulsion, but let early education be rather a sort of amusement; this will better enable you to find out the natural bent of the mind.

**Plato believed that a nation cannot be strong unless it believes in god.**

A mere cosmic force or first cause that is not a person can hardly inspire hope, or devotion, or sacrifice; it cannot offer comfort to the hearts of the distressed, nor courage to embattled souls. But a living god can do all this, and can stir or frighten the self-seeking individualist into some moderation of his greed, some control of his passion. All the more so if to belief in god is added belief in personal immortality; the hope of another life gives us courage to meet our death, and to bear with the death of our loved ones; we are twice as strong if we fight with faith. Granted that none of the beliefs can be demonstrated; that god may be after all only the personified ideal of our love and our hope, and that the soul is like the music of the lyre, and dies with the instrument that gave it form: yet surely it will do us no harm to believe, and it may do us and our children immeasurable good. For we are likely to have trouble with these children of ours if we undertake to explain and justify everything to their simple minds. We shall have an especially hard time when they arrive at the age of twenty, and face the first scrutiny and test of what they have learned in all their years of equal

education. Then will come a ruthless weeding out; the Great Elimination. That test will be no mere academic examination; it will be practical as well as theoretical. There shall also be toils and pains and conflicts prescribed for them. Every kind of ability will have a chance to show itself, and every kind of stupidity will be hunted out into the light. Those who fail will be assigned to the economic work of the nation; they will be businessmen, clerks, factory workers, and farmers. The test will be impartial and impersonal; whether one is to be a farmer or a philosopher will be determined not by monopolised opportunity and nepotism; the selection will be more democratic than democracy.

Those who pass this first test will receive ten more years of education and training, in body and mind and character. And then they will face a second test, far severer than the first. Those who fail will become the auxiliaries, or executive aides and military officers of the state. Now it is just in these great eliminations that we shall need every resource of persuasion to get the eliminated to accept their fate with urbanity and peace. For what is to prevent that great unselected majority, in the first test, and that lesser but more vigorous and capable second group of eliminees, from shouldering arms and smashing this Utopia of ours into a mouldering reminiscence? Then religion and faith will be our only salvation: we shall tell these young people that the divisions into which they have fallen are god decreed and irrevocable-not all their tears shall wipe out one word of it. We shall tell them the myth of the metals:

*“Citizens, you are brothers, yet god has framed you differently. Some of you have the power of command; and these he has made of gold, wherefore they have the greatest honour; others of silver, to be auxiliaries; others again, who are to be husbandmen and craftsmen, he has*

*made of brass and iron; and the species will generally be preserved in children. But as you are of the same original family, a golden parent will sometimes have a silver son, or a silver parent a golden son. And god proclaims...that if the son of a golden or silver parent has an admixture of brass and iron, then nature requires a transposition of ranks; and the eye of the ruler must not be pitiful towards his child because he has to descend in the scale to become a husbandman or artisan, just as there may be others sprung from the artisan class who are raised to honour, and become guardians and auxiliaries. For an oracle says that when a man of brass and iron guards the state, it will be destroyed”*

[Republic, 415]

But now what of the lucky remnant that ride these successive waves of selection?

They are taught philosophy.

They have now reached the age of thirty; it would not have been wise to let them taste the dear delight too early;...for young men, when they first get the taste of philosophy in their mouths, argue for amusement, and are always contradicting and refuting ... like puppy dogs who delight to tear and pull at all who come near them.

This dear delight, philosophy, means two things chiefly: to think clearly, which is metaphysics; and to rule wisely, which is **politics**. First, then, our young elite must learn to think clearly. For that purpose they shall study the famed Doctrine of Ideas.

**The essence of higher education, to Plato, was the search for ideas: for generalizations, laws of sequence, and ideals of development;** behind things we must discover their relation and meaning, their mode and law of operation, the function or ideal they serve; we must

classify and coordinate our sense experience in terms of law and purpose; only for lack of this does the mind of the imbecile differ from the mind of Caesar

Well, after five years of training in this recondite Doctrine of Ideas, this art of perceiving significant forms and causal sequences and ideal potentialities amid the welter and hazard of sensation; after five years of training in the application of this principle to the behaviour of men and the conduct of states; after this long preparation from childhood through youth and into the maturity of thirty-five; surely now these perfect products are ready to assume the royal purple and the highest functions of public life?- surely, they are at last the philosopher-kings who are to rule and liberate the human race?

Not yet. Their education is still unfinished. For after all it has been, in the main, a theoretical education; something else is needed. Let these scholars pass down now from the heights of philosophy into the cave of the world of men and things; generalizations and abstractions are worthless except they be tested by this concrete world; let our students enter that world with no favour shown them; they shall compete with men of business, with hard-headed grasping individualists, with men of brawn and men of cunning; in this mart of strife they shall learn from the book of life itself; they shall hurt their fingers and scratch their philosophical shins on the crude realities of the world; they shall earn their bread and butter by the sweat of their high brows. And this last and sharpest test will go on for fifteen long years. Some of our perfect products will break under the pressure, and be submerged in this great wave of elimination. Those that survive, scarred and fifty, sobered and self-reliant, shorn of scholastic vanity by the merciless friction of life, and armed with all the wisdom that tradition and experience, culture and conflict can cooperate to give-

these men at last shall automatically become the rulers of the state.

This was Plato's Utopia.

The faults in his idealistic state of educational autocracy were many, but the system was rejected chiefly due to its harshness and impracticality. Besides, in order to put this system into practice, the ruler of the time would have had to give up the throne, something no ruler was prepared to do. But for all its faults, Plato's political philosophy came from a deep understanding of society, and provided an impetus to the study of human group life. Many thinkers involved in the study of political and sociological sciences followed his footsteps, and created their own ways and systems of understanding societies.

Let us now come to late post-classical Europe. Examples of various political systems can be found in medieval Europe, from the relatively apolitical Greece and Scandinavian countries to countries such as Britain and France, both facing heavy political turbulence, and the two key objects of our sociological fascination.

Despite winning both the hundred years' war against the French (at the Battle of Waterloo) and the 1812 war against the United States of America, Britain was far from stable. The capitalist monarchy-democracy, accustomed to the systems of household production, was in complete turmoil due to the first introductions of industrialisation. The structures of families were changing. Large Scale Immigration was causing urban congestion and hygiene issues. Mass joblessness was also being translated into an increase in criminality. It was not a pretty picture.

France, after losing both the hundred years' war to Britain and its steady

government (owing to the removal of Napoleon from rule), was in bad shape, both economically and socially. Neither capitalism, nor socialism seemed to be very appetising choices, as the former did not exhibit too great an example in Britain, while the latter, the French had already had a taste of, during Robespierre's reign of terror. This state was confused, wondering which direction to take and how.

**It was this international confusion that led to the first political-sociological concepts to be founded. The ideas of capitalism and socialism were described and explained at great lengths, and new ideologies were formed. This was also the era of Karl Marx, the founding father of structured sociological study.**

Marx studied both communism and capitalism at great lengths, the latter only to censure, and the former, to build upon it his ideology of the perfect state; to create his Utopia. By any objective reckoning, Karl Marx was the most influential modern thinker. He was certainly the greatest social scientist of the last two centuries. Marx is mostly numbered among the founders of the modern study of history, sociology and economics. But he is most often remembered as the prophet of proletarian revolution, for his idea of Marxism.

**Marxism is a philosophy of history. It is also an economic doctrine. But most importantly, Marxism is a theory of revolution and how societies go through the process of change.** Marx was a strong believer in socialism, and through socialism created a more intense form of egalitarian political philosophy- that of communism. According to him, all political troubles would end if the society practiced a completely egalitarian system of governance, and finally bring an end to the never-ending cycle of

inequality leading to strife and finally, revolution. As Marx put it, "Communism was the riddle of history solved".

There are two basic ideas in Marxism: Materialism and the Class Struggle.

In his idea of materialism, Marx implied that the engine that drives society is its economy. Economic forces are more complex and pervasive than we think, and according to Marx, they could even determine how we think. "Consciousness is from the very beginning a social product."

Marx extended his argument to suggest that humans do not think independently at all; rather, the great majority of people simply repeat the dominant ideas of their time in place of thinking. And since the people controlling the economy also control the political arena, it is not surprising that we begin to merely parrot the rhetoric of the ruling class. "The class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force."

According to Marx, we think and believe the way we do because we are the products of the **industrial mode of production**; in other words, we are all products of capitalism. Men eat before they reason. Marx used one historical event as an example: in 1846, a failure of the potato crop in Ireland led to widespread famine- reducing the Irish population by 20% - 20% of only the nation's poor. "The Irish potato famine killed a million people, but it killed the poor devils only; to the wealthy it did not have the slightest effect."

The second basic rule of Marxist ideology, that of **class struggle**, takes historical materialism a step further. All of human history can be explained and predicted by the competition between antagonistic economic classes, or as Marx put it, "The

history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle." The class that controls the mode of production also controls the state. Marx argued that the state exists primarily as an instrument of coercion. This meant that no fundamental change can occur in the political sphere without a social and economic revolution.

Marxism was then a combination of two ideas: everything is the product of the mode of production (in this case, capitalism) and the whole process of history is characterised by endless competition between antagonistic economic classes.

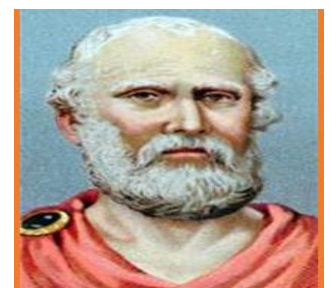
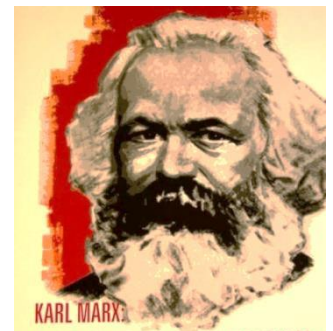
What then, would be a way to end this competition? To bridge the gap between the exploiter and the exploited? The answer, to Marx, seemed obvious. The only way to achieve this was the coercive distribution of power to everyone in equal measure. The key was to seize control of the productive process and make it work in favour of the exploited mass instead of a tiny minority of capitalists. Marx believed that any such shift of power needed to be done with force. In his words, "Force is the midwife of an old society pregnant with a new one".

This was the Marxist ideology.

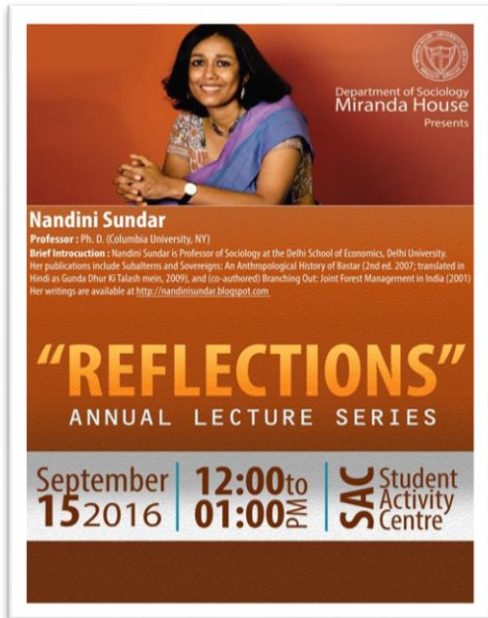
These two ideologies were some of the greatest attempts to find a land of perfection, an ideal state. But as we have seen in reality, neither of these societies could exist in stability. In fact, no political-sociological ideal is possible in reality. An idealistic capitalist society would be completely exploitative, inching towards anarchy; and an idealistic communist society would be so engrossed in bringing

about perpetual egalitarianism that it would allow for no mode of large scale production or ownership, and this society would collapse.

The sociologists of today have understood and accepted the harsh reality that a Utopia cannot exist, and to hope of any ideal state, be it capitalist or socialist, would be tremendously ambitious, and even slightly delusional of them. But does that mean that this millennia-long pursuit of a Utopia was all in vain? Not at all. **The pursuit, albeit a failed one, was a hugely important one, as it provided us with the two most profound systems of understanding humanity in all its collectiveness.** Also, the understanding would not go waste even though we are no longer aiming for perfection, for now that we've stopped trying to be perfect, we can start trying to be good.



# REFLECTIONS- DEMOCRACY, CITIZENSHIP AND ITS IMPACT ON THE STATE OF INDIA



The Annual Lecture Series '16, organized by the Dept. of Sociology, Miranda House, commenced with a lecture on 'Democracy, Citizenship and its Impact on the State of India' by Prof Nandini Sundar, from DSE. Prof Sundar, a Ph.D of the Columbia University, New York, has a diverse experience in the academic field. She has several publications on various subjects. The chief petitioner in the case of Nandini Sundar vs. the State of Chhattisgarh, Prof Sundar has won accolades for her excellent academic credentials as well as her humanitarian work.

Prof Sundar introduced her lecture with the definition of Citizenship. She agreed to the understanding of Citizenship as a sense of belongingness to the nation and community, and then drew upon T.H. Marshall's theory of Social Citizenship, wherein Marshall highlights the duties of the State towards its citizens, in securing civil, political and social rights. There are certain rights of

the citizens that the state, under whatever circumstance, cannot deny. Here, she also touched upon the social contract theory which argues that state exists because we allow it to exist i.e. the source of state authority is not divine, but earthly and from beneath. She also mentioned the Marxist theory of citizenship which considers rights associated with citizenship to have arisen from class struggle. Prof Sundar elaborated on modern Europe as an example of mass welfare citizenship.

She drew attention to the Indian state and its idea of citizenship. A recently independent nation, urbanization has led to development and this has given rise to small scale, personalized and informal networks in modern industrialized urban India. Indian economy, she explains, is a late knowledge economy, with an outburst of IT knowledge, but lack of developmental skills in other areas. She also mentions that India, according to her is much more than just an investment opportunity, it has several indigenous industries which must be brought on global platform. Here she refers to primitive accumulation (Marxian theory) and the Japanese method of just-in-time production, to avoid inventory piling.

From here Prof Sundar shifted the discussion to the meaning of nationalism and citizenship in the Indian democracy. She spoke about the interplay of regional, often parochial identities which frequently seem to pose threat to the national identity, but in actuality they are not challenges. They should rather be seen as alternative discourses to a very dominant and restrictive idea of national identity. She condemned state violence against the marginalized sections. The media should be more neutral and less under state control, she argued. Localization of media, a direct result of capitalist politics, has had both advantages and disadvantages.

Prof Sundar concluded the lecture by documenting how unequal distribution of emotions, located in institutional structures, has led to ignoring of some serious issues of the marginalized. According to her, politics should help the democracy to overcome parochialism, but unfortunately, in present time, politics is very much governed and shaped by some factional, regimented notions.

Prof Sundar also took questions from the students at the end of the session, and her answers were as intellectually enlightening as the lecture.

## REFLECTIONS- LABOUR AND GENDER

The Sociology department of Miranda House organised a lecture by **Dr Ellina Samantroy** on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2016 as a part of the annual lecture series, 'Reflections'. Dr Samantroy is a member of the faculty at V.V Giri National Labour Institute, Noida. She is also the coordinator of Centre for Gender and Labour at VVGNI.

The topic for the lecture was "Labour and Gender" and focused on gender inequality in the world of work in India, various international perspectives on women's work, the invisibility of women's work in statistical sources and understanding gender dimensions in labour statistics. Dr Samantroy also discussed the relevance of gender statistics in addressing concerns related to women's work in India, as well as the subject of time use surveys and the impact that the statistics generated from these surveys can have on the advancement of gender equality around the world. She highlighted the importance of protecting the well-being of workers.



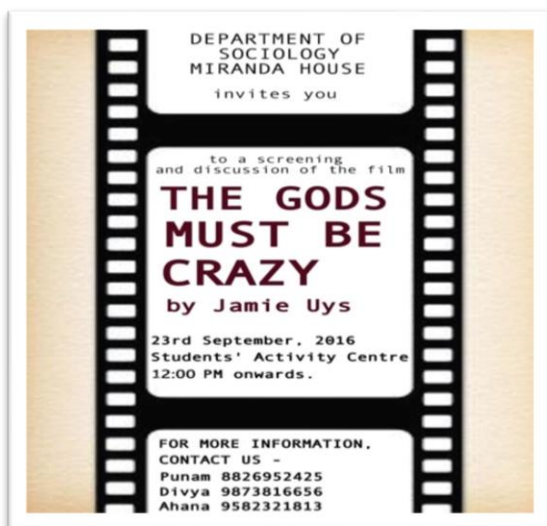
In her lecture, she also raised concerns about the problem of declining female labour force in India and the possible reasons for it. She explained that a number of women back out when they reach the prime working age, which is often the post marital age due to poor family and work balance. Many women may also drop out to take care of their siblings or other children in the house. With the coming in of NREGA, the household level of income has increased which has led to more women staying at home. The overall decline in short term and long term employment options have also resulted in this decline. The part time jobs are not protected by social security provisions. Even the maternity benefits are not extended to contractual labour. The women are also bound by various social and cultural constraints. The lack of upward mobility in jobs, state sponsored care schemes, social security, education of the children of these workers and arrangement of transportation, the absence of a parallel relationship between education and labour and the existence of occupational ghettoisation based on gender can have a major impact on the well-being of these workers.

Statistical invisibility of women workers in national markets is also problematic as these statistics give us a partial and distorted picture of the reality. While looking at these workers it is imperative to look at their social reality to develop the social situation of the workers and then develop diverse point of views. There is a need to make visible the

unpaid household work done by women as this can be a constraint since it can lead to paying work becoming a secondary option for them. Even though according to ILO, there has been an expansion of the organised sector in India, there has actually been an increase in the creation of informal jobs within the organised sector.

Dr Samantroy concluded the talk by proposing two ways to improve the female labour participation rate by using gender statistics viz. gender mainstreaming of labour force survey and using the time use survey. She also took questions towards the end of the insightful and enriching lecture.

## MOVIE SCREENING- THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY



The Department of Sociology, Miranda House organized a screening of the movie "The Gods Must Be Crazy, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September, 2016. The screening was attended by students as well as professors and was followed an interactive discussion on the sociological significance of the film.

The film, which comes under the genre of comedy, was viewed from a sociological perspective. The movie involved two different worlds- a primitive Xhosa-speaking tribal society on one hand, and the modern, technologically advanced industrial society on the other. The film shows the juxtaposition between these two worlds, of the simplistic way of

life of the 'Bushmen' to the complex, fast paced monotonous life, of the modern society. The movie centers around this Coca-Cola glass bottle which was thrown by man flying a plane, and seen as an object from God by the Bushmen, since it came falling from the sky. Here too, we see the juxtaposition that we mentioned earlier. For a person belonging to the modern society, a normal glass bottle may not be of much importance. However, it is a foreign article for the tribesmen, given to them by God, and they use it in different ways that would be useful for them. And when they notice that there have been conflicts due to the bottle, they decide to get rid of it. This displays the interference of external forces of the modern world in the lives of the primitive tribal societies.

The film highlights various themes such as ownership, cultural differences, technological advancements, modernism, and so on. It has portrayed various serious issues in a humorous, comedic form. For instance, it shows war and violence in a slapstick comedy sort of fashion. All these points were raised during the discussion that





took place after the screening. Students and professors engaged an active interactive session and brought out the afore-mentioned points.

## SPECIAL LECTURE ON 'SOCIOLOGY OF SCIENCE: EMERGING FRONTIERS'



The Department of Sociology, Miranda House organized a special lecture on the 'Sociology of Science: Emerging Frontiers', on 6<sup>th</sup> of February, 2017. The lecture was conducted by Dr. Madhav Govind, who is an Associate Professor at the Center of Studies in Science Policy, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He also holds the post of Dean of Students at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Trained as a sociologist from his early career, he has specialized in the field of

Sociology of Science and Technology, and has been teaching and doing research in this field as well. He also published works related to the area of Science and Technology, and Scientific Knowledge.

The lecture presented by Dr. Govind focused on the emergence of the Sociology of Science, its major studies and approaches, and the contributions made by Robert K. Merton. As rightly said by him, science, being a major dynamic force in society, has not been a focus of study for sociologists. It was never thought that science could be amenable to sociological analysis. Sociology of Science emerged as a sub-branch of Sociology of Knowledge. Some of the first works on the Sociology of Science include the 'Science of Cross Road' by N I. Bukharin and 'Sociological and Economic Roots of Newton's Principia' by Boris Hessen. These works have further influenced other thinkers to study the scope of Sociology of Science. Dr. Govind highlighted on the various aspects which broadly illustrate the emergence of sociology of Science. He elaborated on the kinds of literature- interactional and institutional. He also spoke about the relationship of scientists and the society, and how they contribute to the social/cultural capital in the development of knowledge.

Before concluding his lecture, Dr. Govind also spoke about Robert K. Merton, an American sociologist, who is known to be the founding father of Sociology of Science. He raised important question regarding the common sense and self, and the relationship between religion and science in his dissertations, and has made significant contributions to this field of Sociology.

The lecture was following by a round of discussion between Dr. Govind and the students and professors who attended it. This lecture gave students a new perspective on scientific knowledge and introduced them to a new field under the discipline of Sociology.

## UTOPIA 2017, Day 1- PANEL DISCUSSION ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

14.2.17

“Are we citizens of Facebook? Is Facebook a nation? Is a nation a social network? Should a citizen be reduced to being a node in the network?” All these and many more questions were addressed in Utopia 2017, themed ‘Wired: Decoding Tech, Encoding Society’.

Every academic year the Department of Sociology organises its annual fest Utopia for budding sociologists from different colleges and participating in the various competitions to showcase their talents. This year Utopia commenced with a Panel Discussion on ‘Information Technology and Society’. The panel consisted of eminent speakers like Khetrimayum Monish, Vidya Subramaniam and Rajiv Mishra. Khetrimayum Monish is from a Political Science background and is an independent researcher in the Centre for Internet and Society. Vidya

Subramaniam has a background in Chemistry and is a journalist with The Hindustan Times. Rajiv Mishra hails from Sociology background and is a faculty member of the Sociology Department, Miranda House. He was the moderator of the session.

Khetrimayum Monish focused on what citizenship actually meant in terms of infrastructure like AADHAAR or NRC (National Register of Citizens) in Assam and how technology influences the way we look at ourselves and how these agencies aka Government look at us. He said that government agencies were trying to understand who is a citizen and who is a beneficiary and so infrastructure were made to understand who is a citizen and who is a non-citizen. Khetrimayum Monish also elaborated on the meaning of an infrastructure in defining “who a citizen is, who you are and how you go about proving that you are a citizen.” He also touched upon the “materiality of infrastructures”, “prejudice of design” and Timothy Mitchell’s *Rule of Experts*.

Vidya Subramaniam did a thesis on cricket in which she saw how ICT (Information Communications Technology) shaped cricket and the politics behind it. She also studied the ways in which technology enables the making of our entertainment platform which also includes sports. She then proceeded to discuss the ways in which we are shaped- as human beings, as citizens, as consumers- by the “big data”. She then explained these



roles and the ways in which they shape what that “big data” is and how this “big data” then in turn shapes all of us. She also spoke about Psychometry and cited the conflict theory propagated by some conspirators who showed that Brexit and Trump’s votes in the Swing States were influenced and modified by Facebook in a subtly clever fashion by tracing the likes and shares of Facebook users and isolating their psychological traits.

The discussion did not follow a structured format but was rather spontaneous with the faculty members and students contradicting the arguments stated by the speakers and the students also stating their own views which were again refuted by the speakers or the audience, making the discussion lively and interesting.

When the House was officially opened for questions, several interesting questions were asked like, Whether AADHAAR is similar to the Social Security Number of the USA, or if hierarchy is present in the internal functioning of the social media platforms? All questions were answered -AADHAAR and Social Security Number were diametrically opposite as the Social Security Number was similar to a birth certificate and served the notion of being a non-beneficiary. However, the AADHAAR was sold as a Social Security Number by the Indian government but it changed when they added biometric information to it and also linked it with people’s bank accounts.



Mr. Rajiv Mishra mediated the discussion smoothly while interpolating his own views, especially regarding the dichotomist current of inclusion and exclusion of citizens in accessing technology and also in terms of citizenship, and the layers of politics present between man’s contacts with machines. He enriched the discussion by mentioning/quoting eminent people like **Nandan Nilekani**, Chairman of Unique Identification Authority of India, **Pranesh Prakash**, and Policy Director at the Centre for Internet and Society, and **Thomas Hughes's** *Technological Systems: New Directions in Sociology and History of Technology*. He beautifully wrapped up the discussion by seamlessly linking all the questions asked into one coherent answer which left the audience speechlessly enlightened.

# UTOPIA 2017, DAY 2- PANEL DISCUSSION ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

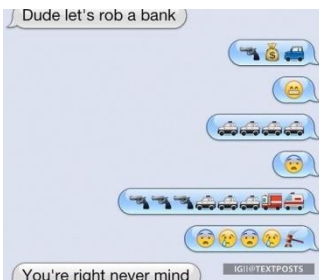
## 15.2.17

Information technology has transformed our lives. It has changed the language we use to communicate-

We , we  it, we , or we .

For the technologically challenged reader, this is the translation: we 'tweet', we 'google it', we 'Subscribe', we 'like'.

Here is another instance of how emoticons achieve what words can, with a lot less effort-

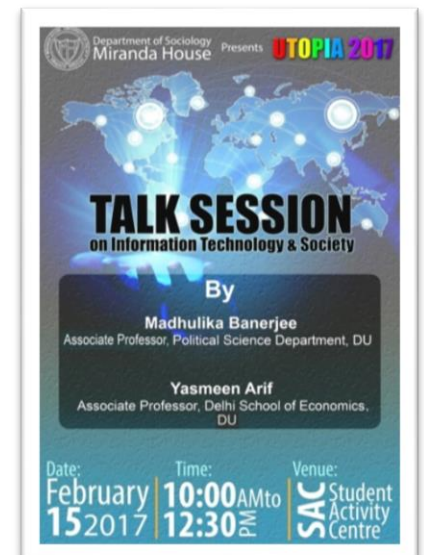


Science and technology, therefore, do not just exist in laboratories but also in our everyday lives. Technology shapes us and is in turn shaped by us. Its use and utility is culturally defined. Despite the numerous advantages this poses, technology seems to have invaded every single aspect of human life. We are wired and connected to one another across physical, geographical and social boundaries. The creation and existence of big data whether through the Aadhar card, facebook or other portals has security and privacy issues. Personal and confidential data can easily be accessed by anyone with some computer skills. Everything that is uploaded onto the cyber space, be it the simplest of tweets or pictures, is accessible to anyone. Sensitive information and identities can easily be misused. The discussion on the first day 14 March 2017 focussed on this new society with new norms of interaction.

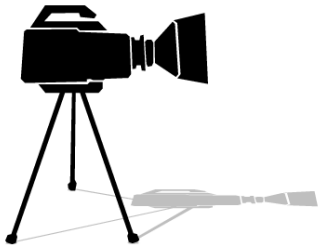
The discussion on the second day of Utopia 2017 centred on the emergence of this new social world.

Rukmini Sen of the department of Liberal Studies, Ambedkar University, Delhi, spoke about how technology and social media have changed the way intimacy is defined. The boundaries of the private sphere are breached by the public sphere; they intermingle and a new sphere with complex boundaries ensues.

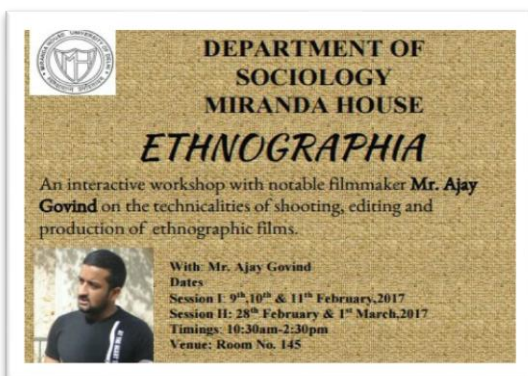
Madhulika Banerjee, Associate Professor, Political Science Department, University of Delhi, discussed how the government employs the use of IT for development of the standard of living of the citizens of the country through various schemes. The panel also discussed the accessibility of these schemes among all segments of the Indian society.



Yasmeen Arif, Associate Professor Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, went on to examine the future of technology and its consequences. Instead of contemplating the positive and negative upshots, her focus was based on the anthropological aspect of technology and media.



## ETHNOGRAPHIA



A picture is worth a thousand words, and a film is worth several more. Since visual anthropology is an inherent part of sociological research, a workshop on ethnographic filmmaking was organised to help students learn the basics of filmmaking. The workshop focussed on various aspects of film making like conceptualising the 'story', shooting and editing films. Different kinds of shots, angles, editing and filming techniques and setups were also discussed through films and documentaries.

As a part of the workshop the students watched and analysed films from a technical perspective. In order to learn the practical aspects, students also made films of 1 minute, 3 minutes, and 5-8 minutes each. Their films were analysed from all aspects of film making- the visual, the technical and the creative.

The reports of these films can be found with the creators and the student research compendium published by the department.



# FAREWELL



On 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2016, the department bid farewell to a very popular and favourite teacher, Dr. Dinaz Mirchandani. She retired after 39 years of working tirelessly at Miranda House. She has made a seminal contribution towards shaping the department as it is today. She has shaped several generations of Sociologists. She was also the Bursar of the College.

Dr. Mirchandani's has numerous research projects and publications, for several of which she has won awards. She was also the Shastri Indo Canadian Fellow.

Her farewell ceremony was an emotional affair for all those present, including her colleagues and students. We will miss her and her smiling presence!

"Simplicity at its best. If there's one way to describe Dr. Mirchandani, it's this.

Ma'am, with all her grace is the epitome of a kind heart spreading joy wherever it goes. With the innate ability to bring a smile on anyone's face, she shared not only her immense knowledge of her subject, but also spread love with just as much élan as did her beautiful aura."

-Divya Mathew, Part 3

